

Greenmount – November 2007

It was already half way through the month before I had a free moment to put finger to keyboard. That's what retirement does for you.

We have been somewhat preoccupied with the kitchen refit and finding ways of coping with personal hygiene without any facility for washing clothes. The real test was managing for a week without a cooker.

The first milestone was the completion of the removal of all the floor tiles on 1st November. Not on the plan was the removal of large chunks of floor.

The following day saw the wall tiles disappear, all the wall units removed to the garage and the cooker hood comfortably tucked up on the top bunk bed in the spare room.

Matthew paid us a visit on 4th November and helped me remove the dryer, the washer and the dishwasher into the dining room in preparation for the floor tiler, due the following day. We also moved the fridge into the conservatory (thank goodness it's winter) and, after emptying the upright freezer contents into the chest freezer in the garage, we moved that into the garage.

As luck would have it, the tiler telephoned to say he could not start work until the following afternoon, so Jenny, Rachel and I moved the cooker into the dining room and the sink into the garage on the Monday morning. The kitchen was then completely empty and the rest of the house resembled that of one, Albert Steptoe.

Chris, the tiler, arrived on Monday morning with the floor tiles, his van straining under the weight of 19 square metres of porcelain. He returned in the afternoon to commence the preparation work and, doing my share of the work, I sat down and ordered the new radiator.

The planned two and a half days' tiling extended to three and a half days, since the floor was far less level than expected, after removing the old tiles. Since there was little I could do, I turned my attention to the production of the book on a history of scouting in Greenmount, in time for Christmas. For those of you not following the plot, this is a project totally unrelated to the kitchen refurbishment.

Having overrun the planned time and cost, the tiler left us on 8th November, promising to return on the 26th to re-inspect the walls prior to tiling those. He advised me to seal the grout lines on the floor and left me some very expensive liquid, resembling someone's sample, with which to do this. I trust he hadn't extracted the proverbial.

I spent the best part of the next two days on my hands and knees, a picture of which I leave your vivid imagination.

There were a couple of electrical sockets hanging loose, on wires jutting out of the wall. These had previously been installed in the bottom of cabinets. I mounted these in the wall, ready for the plasterer.

The plasterer arrived with two mates on 10th November. They dry lined the bare parts of the internal walls, undercoated where necessary and skimmed all the walls and ceiling. This they managed without plastering the floor, for which I was very grateful.

Getting my priorities right, I refitted the old range on the Sunday, followed by the old sink on Monday so the old cook could, one again, feed the old man.

On moving the washer, I discovered that the rear rollers had disintegrated and I decided to order some new ones from Dyson. Once again, Dyson arranged for these to be shipped to me free of charge. I asked about fitting them and was advised, due to the weight of the machine, to arrange for a service engineer to call, at a cost of £85. On the basis that all the repairs so far had cost me nothing, I thought I might as well fork out for the engineer so he was booked for Monday 19th.

I also checked with Comet that the new fridge-freezer was scheduled for delivery on the 19th, as arranged when I ordered it. It wasn't. They had forgotten to telephone the order though to Bosch. I waited while a most apologetic assistant corrected this oversight.

While waiting for the plaster to dry on the walls, I took the opportunity of giving the ceiling two coats of white paint, which was a pain in the neck.

The kitchen fitters telephoned to ask if they could start earlier than planned, on the 15th instead of the 19th. I had no objection so long as the walls were ready.

Early on the 15th, three fitters arrived and commenced work. The first problem was that one of the light switches was in the way of a wall cupboard. They telephoned the electrician I had arranged and he moved it to one side. While he was here, they also told him that some of the sockets were in the wrong place so he arranged to come back the following day.

On the 16th, our neighbours must have thought we were throwing some sort of party. Four fitters turned up, followed by the electrician and then the plumber to inspect the fitting of the new radiator. The kettle was on all day and we nearly ran out of mugs. Meanwhile, I was still working on the Scout book.

The fitters told me the pipes for the sink were not quite in the right place and said they would deal with them. This they did, although not very neatly. Still, since it is all hidden under the sink, it matters not.

The electrician set about rerouting the ring main wiring, through the wall, into the garage and installing sockets in cupboards. All of the new wiring is inside the garage in trunking. He also installed the 100 amp isolation switch so I can now turn off the supply to my consumer unit, which means I can, at last, replace it with a modern RCD split unit to meet current standards. He also wired up the lights under the new kitchen cupboards, which is just as well because that is what I had originally asked him to do.

The electrician finished on the Friday, his bill having shot up considerably from the original estimate and the fitters returned to finish off on the Monday, having taken delivery of and installing the fridge-freezer for me, pointing out that the floor on which it stood was far

from level.

Over the week end, I moved the dryer and dishwasher back into the kitchen and reconnected them.

The man from Dyson had also arrived on the 19th and was busy fitting the new wheels as the fitters waived goodbye. In the process, he had dropped the hoses on the dining room carpet and they, in turn had discharged their liquid contents. He said I should have drained the hoses when I disconnected it. I thanked him for his advice and for washing my carpet.

The engineer then ran a limited range of tests and found that the readings on one of the motors was low, so he removed it, cleaned it and put it all back together. To my surprise, he then offered to help move it back into the kitchen, connect it up and complete his tests. This resulted in another fault. The only problem was that the fault code shown did not exist in the manual. It turned out to be a loose connection on the logic board, although he fitted a new controller board, just in case. The washer back in its place, I was waiting for the bill. After all, all of the work on the washer to date has cost me nothing so I thought £85 wasn't so bad. As it turned out, there was no charge at all.

I can't help thinking it's a pity Dyson doesn't make other kitchen appliances.

We collected the new radiator and looked at some wall tiles on the 20th. We arranged for the tiler to re-inspect the kitchen walls on the 23rd and subsequently placed the very expensive order using his estimate of the quantities required.

On the 25th, I finally decided to tackle the leaning fridge-freezer. The plan was to install a pre-levelled plywood plinth and, having failed to obtain any adjustable feet, I improvised, cutting an old piece of plywood, using plastic wedges, small pieces of plywood and bits of old cork tile. Getting the unit onto the plinth was a bit of a challenge and I was extremely pleased with the result, except that I discovered that the front right foot is offset and further forward than that on the left, so it overhung the front of the plinth. More plywood and cork pieces resulted in packing under the protruding foot and a level device. At last I could turn on the power and we could start to use it.

There are two snags.

First, the packing underneath is unsightly. That is not a problem, because the arrangement is only temporary and now I know the technique is successful, I can build a more professional-looking plinth out of a new piece of plywood, cut to the correct size, with proper adjustable feet – when I find some. At the moment, I haven't got a leg to stand on.

Second, it isn't big enough. We can't get everything we had in the old upright fridge into the fridge section of the fridge-freezer, so we are using the old fridge in the garage for the overflow essentials, such as beer.

The last week of the month has been a sort of odds and sods week, tidying the garage (or at least moving the junk around), painting the door jambs, tidying up one or two electrical bits and filling in a couple of holes left by the electrician before the wall tiling starts.

Unfortunately, this has been delayed a week due to the delivery of the tiles.

The plumber arrived on the 29th to install the pipework for the new radiator and I asked his advice about replacing the central heating control unit with a wireless one, since the old one is directly above the sink and contravenes the regulations. A wireless one obviates the need to rewire the old one.

And so another eventful and fun-packed month draws to a close.

Once again we, here in Greenmount (Jenny, Rachel and myself) send our love and best wishes to all, particularly for Christmas and the New Year. That's just in case, having paid for the kitchen, we can't afford to send any cards.