

Greenmount – October 2010

I may well have said it before and, no doubt I'll say it again, thanks to Mr Alzheimer. Time seems to go so much faster as one gets older. It was the 6th of October before I had chance to put finger to keyboard to script this valuable piece of history.

I finally ordered Jenny a new HP laptop to replace the faulty Fujitsu notebook. The decision to purchase HP is based on Matthew's advice and, from talking to other people since, it seems HP has a growing reputation. I hope it's a good one.

A friend of Jenny's has purchased the spare set of pine bunk beds we have been storing in the loft and which we have been trying to sell for some months. The plan was to clear the loft and install decent insulation this summer but there is still a lot of ~~junk~~ car boot stock up there.

Jenny handed in her notice to Bury Council to end her employment at half-term. She was hoping to struggle on through the cold and damp until Christmas but this is affecting her hands and holding a metal pole doesn't help, especially during electrical storms. At least her hair doesn't need perming that often.

Jenny has also been told that snow is arriving early this year. It's obviously not being shipped in by the Post Office.

It seems I have become an honorary member of the local Scout Fellowship and on Friday 8th October, I was drafted in to escort five young Scouts round part of the village to sell tickets for the bonfire and firework display on 6th November, door-to-door. We started about 6:30 in the evening and it took longer than I expected, being 8:30 by the time we arrived back at the Old School after running most of the half-mile or so back from the last house we visited. This burst of activity on my part was necessary to keep up with the Scouts, fuelled by the fact that I had not yet had tea or a beer. Miraculously, I managed to deliver all five Scouts back intact, together with a tidy sum in ticket sales, thanks to the enthusiasm and excellent salesmanship of the boys.

On 9th October, we took the brave step of shopping for a new bed and bought the one we had seen some months previously, including an expensive mattress, from Housing Units, a large department store near Oldham. The existing bed is actually two separate, adjustable beds side-by-side and, while I find the alteration of support useful, the mattresses have a tendency to part company and one or other of us usually ends up disappearing down the gap in the middle.

In selecting the mattress, we thoroughly tested several in the shop, a spectacle that drew quite a lot of interest. I shall not elucidate further.

On Sunday 10th October we took advantage of the lovely, warm, autumn weather with lots of sunshine and clear, blue skies to take up a pitch at the Ramsbottom Car Boot Sale again. It was a very busy day from about 9:30 until about 3:30, with a lot of people looking but not so many buying. You'd have thought we were in Yorkshire. We came away just short of £100 in takings of which Bury Council is £11 richer.

On Monday 11th, Mike brought his son's (Simon's) Acer laptop for me to have a look at. Apparently, it had hoax anti-virus software called Antivirus8 (av8.exe) loaded and Simon had tried to run it when all other attempts to get rid of it had failed. It seemed it had not only deleted a lot of files, including some system files, but it had also destroyed the recovery partition.

Did Simon make a recovery disc from the recovery partition? No.

Was the PC shipped with any recovery discs? No.

I managed to remove Antivirus8 but Windows Vista would not boot properly and I needed the recovery discs.

I contacted Acer support to try to obtain the discs. These are not available online. Now there's a surprise. Instead, Acer wants £50 to supply them. You don't need a mask and a gun any more. Mike sent off the official request form and cheque and I awaited delivery of the discs.

And this is the problem with cheap laptops. They come with no media and when the software goes wrong, if you don't know you're supposed to create your own recovery discs, how to do it or you just don't bother, it costs quite a bit to fix it.

Personally, I prefer to purchase laptops directly from the manufacturer (Dell, HP, etc.) and take out the manufacturer's extended warranty, because laptops can be a pain to repair, especially in the wallet.

On 12th October, Jenny's new HP laptop arrived. I wasn't expecting it for at least another week. I was taking advantage of the nice, autumn weather to work outside in the garden and it was the following evening before I had chance to unpack it.

I spent the whole of the following two days setting it up. I had to install the operating system (Windows 7), the wireless network connection and then download all the patches from Microsoft. It came with the Norton security suite but I haven't installed it because it requires an annual subscription. I have, instead, being a Yorkshireman, downloaded and installed the free version of AVG (anti-virus software).

The laptop also came with a trial version of Microsoft Office 2007 (Student and Teacher edition), which I thought I would look at, so I installed that, with the intention of setting up Jenny's E-mail. The only snag was that there was no Outlook (E-mail) component. That, coupled with the over-complicated Microsoft Word software and the fact that Microsoft is now offering Office 2010, led me to remove Office 2007, somewhat rapidly. For the present, at least, I have installed the copy of Office 2003, Student and Teacher Edition I purchased for Jenny's old Fujitsu laptop and Jenny's E-mail is now up and running, so she is back in the land of the technophobes.

Skype was pre-loaded and I have set that up so that both Jenny and I can use it. The laptop has a built-in microphone and web cam so we can use the laptop to make video calls across the Internet. All we need is someone to talk to.

My first impressions of Windows 7 is that it is not as slick as XP and I really can't see why Microsoft wastes valuable resources trying to improve on what, for me, seems pretty close to perfection. Vista was a complete waste of time and Windows 7 looks like more of a reversion to XP, which will come as a big relief to many, albeit short-lived, since the underlying behaviour is more like Vista only even more confusing.

It would help if Microsoft had got it some of it right. I tried configuring the laptop to communicate across the network to my Canon i990 printer, which is connected to a USB port on my desktop. This worked fine from Jenny's old Fujitsu laptop running Windows XP but Windows 7 refused to find the drivers to make the connection. I contacted Canon and their advice is that the drivers are built into Windows 7. They obviously haven't talked to Microsoft. I contacted HP, since my Windows 7 license is an OEM version (issued by HP and not directly by Microsoft). Microsoft wanted to charge me for support, as if they need the money. HP's advice was to install a piece of add-on software from Canon, which I had already installed, so I sent HP further diagnostics telling them that the laptop is useless to me unless this bug is fixed.

One of the tasks remaining was to create a set of recovery discs. What was I saying about *cheap* laptops? This laptop wasn't cheap and it still didn't come with any recovery discs! I tried to create the recovery discs, requiring no less than four DVDs, using Tesco DVD-R blank DVDs. The first recovery disc failed its verification and I tried to create it again with the same result. The Tesco DVD-R discs I have used before have not worked properly, especially when writing them to their full extent and I have vowed not to buy any more. Instead, I resolved to purchase good quality media from elsewhere. Tesco's catch phrase is "Every little helps". It should be "Every little helps the company to make bigger profits."

The quality of Tesco products does seem to be falling, while prices are moving in the opposite direction. Tesco's fresh organic produce leaves much to be desired and is generally far more expensive than Unicorn in Chorlton. Unicorn's produce is much fresher and keeps longer and *all* their fruit and vegetables are organic. Unfortunately, not every town has a Unicorn.

We also recently had a problem with a special offer at Tesco, where we purchased an expensive Green and Blacks Selection and received a bar of Green and Blacks chocolate for free. Except that the cost of the chocolate bar was not deducted from the bill. After complaining at customer services, because it was an overcharge, we received double the amount as a refund. The next time we went into the store, the offer had been withdrawn. What we didn't spot on the bill was that we had been charged twice for a bag of spinach. You can't win 'em all, especially at Tesco.

I am happy to report that, on Friday 15th October, our weekly shopping day, we spent more at Unicorn than we did at Tesco and, because Tesco did not have some items we wanted, Jenny subsequently supplemented our groceries with a visit to Morrisons in Ramsbottom when she finished work.

One point in Tesco's favour is that, after several weeks and a request to customer services, both Bury and Prestwich stores have started restocking organic croissants. I have repeatedly

requested these from Morrisons during their absence from Tesco, to no avail. Morrisons is not a big subscriber to organic products and has recently ceased to stock organic digestive biscuits in Ramsbottom, a step in the wrong direction, methinks.

Unfortunately, Tesco Prestwich loses on balance for not ensuring a continuing supply of toilet paper in their loos. All I can suggest is that if you have to go there, in more senses than one, take your own.

On Thursday 14th October, the Beavers went to Bury Fire Station. The father of one of the Beavers is a fireman there and he supervised the visit. The Beavers were allowed to take turns directing a hose from a stand-pipe at the practice tower in the yard and, later, a smaller hose powered by the fire engine. Amazingly, they managed not to wet anyone. One of the Beavers was also dressed up in all of the protective clothing. I'm really looking forward to the visit to the police station and the cells in particular.

On Saturday 16th October, Jenny and Rachel went off to Bibby's Farm, near Chorley, for a day out with the Beavers. The Beavers were learning how to light fires, which should come in useful in November, how to gut a fish, a useful skill for the future, assuming there will be any left when they grow up and perform other tasks, as well as play games. Rachel and Jenny were supervising. It's one of the things women do best.

I spent most of the day sorting out Jenny's new laptop and I now have printing working across the network, thanks to a very clever chap on the Internet who has posted the instructions. Apparently, in Windows 7, you have to set up a printer across the network as a Local Printer, *not* a Network Printer. Well, we are dealing with Microsoft here. You then have to define your own Port and enter the network path to the printer on the remote computer thus: \\COMPUTER\PRINTER, where COMPUTER is the name of the computer to which the printer is connected and PRINTER is the name of the printer on that computer. Once you have done that, Windows 7 gives you a list of manufacturers to choose from and then a list of printers from that manufacturer from which you pick the one you want. If the drivers are already installed, it will be recommended you use them. If they are not, Windows 7 will install them and you have the option of connecting to Microsoft Update to download additional printers and drivers. It's all very complicated and a simple Add Printer, followed by choice of Network Printer ought to do it for you but it doesn't. This is what Microsoft calls progress.

I have told both Canon and HP I have solved the problem and sent them the web link to the solution, suggesting that they should post it on their respective web sites.

I also managed to figure out how to share files between Windows 7 and Windows XP so I can see files on Jenny's new laptop from my desktop PC, which makes moving files between the two nice and simple. Or at least it would if they weren't very large and going to occupy the network for a good hour and a half.

Sharing my media files from Jenny's new laptop to the television is a little more problematic. I have installed a copy of Nero Media Home and while the TV can see the computer, it can't see any of the shared files. This does work with Media Player, except that the sound is jerky and loses synchronisation with the picture. Yet another Microsoft challenge.

On Sunday 18th October, Jenny was too tired to go to the Car Boot sale and we had a lie-in until about 8 a.m. We decided to go to John Lewis in Cheadle to buy some new bed linen. Unfortunately, they did not have enough pillow cases in the design we chose, nor did they have the mattress protector we wanted, so we called at the Trafford Centre store on the way back while I was still in reckless spending mode. I also managed to buy a spindle of 25 Sony DVD-Rs from the Trafford Centre store for creating the back up discs on Jenny's HP laptop, a process which subsequently met with complete success. I can only surmise that Sony does not supply the Tesco-badged DVD-Rs.

On Tuesday 19th October, we spent most of the time preparing our bedroom for the delivery of our new bed the following day. There was much polishing, dusting and vacuuming, while ignoring the cracks that had appeared since we last decorated.

A very nice lady telephoned from Housing Units to confirm delivery of the beds. Not the sort of excellent, personal service one expects from retailers these days. I must shop there again.

In the evening, we attended the sixth meeting of the local village group at the carpet factory (Cormar carpets) about ten minutes' walk down the road. Apparently, they import most of their wool from New Zealand. I offered to fetch some, expenses paid.

On Wednesday, we rose early to freezing temperatures, or, at least we would have done had we not finally switched on the central heating the night before. We had to be up early to dismantle and move out the old beds in preparation for the arrival of the new one between 8 and 11 a.m. Our friend and neighbour, Mike, gave me a hand (actually he brought both of them with him) to carry the old beds down to the garage. I finished vacuuming the carpet.

The bed arrived as scheduled and the two, smartly-dressed, uniformed, gentlemen not only brought it in, but took it up to the bedroom and assembled it. In return, Jenny made them tea and coffee and gave them our last three Tesco Finest chocolate biscuits.

Jenny and I finished off tidying the bedroom and putting the new linen on the bed. I then went to inspect my credit card statement that had just arrived, on which was the purchase of Jenny's laptop, the bed and mattress, the annual car insurance and my annual renewal to www.ancestry.co.uk. It's going to take a lot of car boot sales to repair the damage.

The good news is that my gas payments are well in credit and I am going to receive a refund on 1st November. The bad news is that the refund is more than offset by the purchase of the bed linen. Easy come, easy go.

On Thursday evening, Jenny led the Beaver session in a celebration of Halloween, the children all being in appropriate costume and Jenny dressed as a witch. She would have gone on her broomstick but she needs to brush up on her flying.

On Friday 22nd, we took Matthew and Carrie to the tram station in Bury as they set off for their long weekend break in Edinburgh, including a visit to Carrie's brother, Martin and his family, who live just to the north of the city. Rachel went to stay at Matthew and Carrie's

house, cat-sitting.

Friday evening also saw the start of the preparations for the jumble sale and Jenny and I joined the organised chaos about lunchtime the following day. This took up most of our week end and Monday, the evening being the sale itself, followed by packing up all the unsold items to be sent off to a parish in Salford for the even more needy.

Jenny retired from the crossing patrol duties on Friday, showered with gifts and tears from many of the children she has come to know.

During the last week of October, I took advantage of the fine, autumn weather to sweep the leaves off the grass and tidy up the patio and Jenny postponed her ironing, to which she was really looking forward, to spend time outside tending the potted plants. Not unexpectedly, by the end of the week, the lawn was almost as bad again. Autumn is a very untidy season.

On Thursday 28th we went visiting relatives in Sheffield. My plan was to spend the afternoon in the Archives, researching family history until I discovered the previous day that the Archives were closed for building work for the best part of a year. The Local Studies Library is offering a limited service but much of what I need to research is not available and I have postponed my visit until late next year. I have plenty of other digging to do elsewhere, although not in a literal sense.

On Saturday 30th October, with Rachel's help, we thoroughly cleaned the kitchen as part of our Autumn Clean (that's like a Spring Clean, only six months late) in preparation for Christmas. Jenny's plan is to throw a New Year's Eve party for family and friends (NZ contingent please note).

On Sunday 31st we decided to postpone further cleaning until our aches and pains had subsided and went instead for a wander round Ramsbottom. Jenny had been thinking of taking a spot at the last car boot sale of the season but we were too tired to do so. Thanks to the end of British Summer Time, we managed to crawl out of bed before 10 a.m.

Although this was Halloween, Jenny did not dress up in her usual witch costume and, being a rather wet evening, the number of trick-or-treaters descending upon us was far fewer than last year. We are left with a large quantity of goodies, purchased for the occasion, which Rachel will, no doubt, feel obliged to eat.