

Greenmount – September 2007

The bedroom, I am pleased to say, was completed ahead of schedule. This must be a first.

The three main walls are a very pale yellow, the bed-head wall, opposite the window, is a very pale mushroom, the ceiling is white matt, the woodwork white gloss and the radiator a rather dark copper. This makes the room look much lighter and, with the solid oak furniture and oak door, looks very nice.

In truth, there are still a couple of minor jobs to do but since neither of these affect the appearance of the room, I decided to tackle them later, since other tasks were more pressing.

The radiator valve is leaking slightly, after refitting the radiator, though not enough to cause any damage and, since we have a contract for maintenance with British Gas, it is not a major worry. (Perhaps it should be.) The other task is to reposition the telephone point and the obstacle here is drilling a hole from inside the internal wall, through the wood support at the bottom and through the floor, to provide access for the cable. At the moment, the wire protrudes through a small hole in the floor-boarding and the socket is lying on the carpet behind my bedside cabinet, neatly out of sight.

By the second week in September, I had heard nothing about my NHS pension, so I decided to contact the Pensions Agency. I sent them an online enquiry and received a letter on 15th September informing me I had to claim my pension. Helpfully, they included an application form. Unhelpfully, they did not enclose an envelope in which to return it. Why they couldn't have written to me a couple of months ago is beyond my understanding.

I frantically completed the form, duplicating much of the information, already provided on white sheets, on the pink pages, presumably for people who have difficulty seeing in black and white. I included the various birth and marriage certificates requested and asked a neighbour to rush round and witness my signature. I reached the Post Office with 30 minutes to spare, only to find it was closed due to staff shortages.

Is this the beginning of a conspiracy to deny me my pension, I ask?

I hurried back home, jumped in the car and sped off to the next nearest Post Office, arriving at the same time as the collection van. The lady there was most helpful and ensured my letter was processed in time to drop in the collection sack before the man left. She was so efficient that my letter was on its way before I had paid for it. This is most unlike the Post Office Mail.

The application was dispatched with recorded delivery, so the NHS Pensions Agency could not deny receiving it.

Even more amazing was the return of my certificates by registered post on the following Tuesday, the 18th and my pension statement on the 20th. There was no sign of the actual cash though.

The pension estimate fell somewhat short of my expectations and it came of something of a major relief to discover the actual payment, in my account by the 28th, was a trifle in excess of the figure I had in mind. So, I think the NHS Pensions agency deserves a seven out of ten for processing my application so quickly and correctly. I deduct three marks for failing to send me the application form in advance of my retirement.

The kitchen is finally receiving some of the attention required and we have placed an order with Anglian Windows for French Doors to replace the windows at the back of the kitchen and the garage. The fitting is scheduled for 3rd October and required a good deal of plumbing and electrical work in preparation.

Matthew helped me move the sink from under the window to the side wall on 20th, albeit without hot water. This entailed some electrical work in the kitchen, moving a cupboard and moving the washer, dishwasher and dryer.

I managed to finally couple up the hot water two days later and I have commenced major rewiring in the garage to move the electrical sockets at the back of the garage and generally tidy up the rats nest of cables. At some stage, I need to replace the fuse box with a modern circuit breaker consumer unit. To do this, I need to isolate the mains supply from the box and I have bought a 100 amp switch for this purpose. Unfortunately, I need to arrange for the electricity supplier to disconnect the supply so I can wire it in and the last time I enquired about this, they wanted to charge me £60 for ten minutes' work. I was waiting for a power cut but maybe it would be safer to pay the £60!

We managed to organise a family gathering at my nephew's (John's) house in Leeds on the 29th to celebrate my birthday, John's birthday and say farewell to Sue and Wills before they return to NZ in a few weeks' time.

I have acquired my over 60s travel pass, which entitles me to free, off-peak journeys on public transport within 12 miles of Greater Manchester and, I am told, nationally in the UK from April next year.

I have also obtained my B&Q discount card which entitles me to 10% off all purchases on Wednesdays so I am now tackling all those jobs that need doing and even some that don't!

And finally we attended yet another car boot sale on the 31st. We must be getting better at this because we seem to make more money each time we go to one. If the present trend continues, I should be buying a yacht in about two years. It's amazing what people buy, even more so than what is purchased on e-Bay.