

The Sorry Saga of the Summerhouse

It all began one day last year when we decided to buy an octagonal summerhouse to replace our rather ugly shed-with-a-leaky-roof. We hired a builder to dismantle it, which would have been easier had it not shared a common wall with next door's shed. And easier still had there not been a low cement brick wall around the cavity underneath the floorboards.

Not to worry. Next step:- level up the cavity with 1.87 cubic metres of concrete, up to the height of the brick wall. We arranged for a contractor to come. They postponed our job because it was too hot - 32 degrees Centigrade. Then the guy went on holiday and couldn't fit us in because 'he had important customers to see to'. I didn't exactly feel affirmed, especially as I was paying 'properly'. So, I asked another company who arranged to call the next week.

Outside, on the roadway, an enormous concrete tanker disgorged its brew into a gigantic pumping vehicle. This belched out buff-coloured slurry via a pipe stretching over the top of our garage into the cavity. Four strong blokes with spreading forks waded about in wellies. All went well until the foreman pointed out that the brick wall was neither level nor horizontal. There was a six inch height difference between the top left and the bottom right corner. Oops – somebody had blundered. Next time, now I know, I'll surround the cavity with wooden planks so the concrete can be skimmed to give a level finish. But this

wasn't *next* time. It was *this* time. Whose fault was it? Everybody's, I think...

The Summerhouse supplier had insisted I needed a horizontal surface, so the workmen chamfered the concrete at the lower end. They made the best of a bad job; I paid the firm, and off they went. And that afternoon it rained. More truthfully, we suffered the UK version of a monsoon. Too much water on the surface meant the concrete didn't set properly. And sure enough, parts of the surface began to crumble throughout the winter months. I was advised later that they ought to have protected the job from the rain, but that I'd have no chance if I tried to claim compensation or to make them fix it.

Our builder made a few corrections to make sure the base was fit for the summerhouse and, in late November, three men arrived and took a morning to assemble it. Very nice, too. As they were leaving, they very kindly left us a pack of roof shingles 'just in case you lose one of them.' This seemed a luxury until Storm Ciara blew off some of the shingles they'd fitted, then Storm Dennis added to the merriment in a sort of infernal Ride of the Valkyries. 'No problem', thought we; 'it's under guarantee.' I spoke to the suppliers, who agreed to come and sort it...

In my wisdom, I'd selected a splendid weathercock to be mounted on the apex of the roof, to keep Jane's chickens company. Unlike said chickens it failed to survive the storms. The sturdy spindle to which it was attached,

snapped in the gales, leaving our proud rooster flapping pathetically in the breeze. I had to admit it wasn't suitable to cope with our new 'Climate Change' British weather but it is now available free to any good home, the garden of which is more sheltered. And I'm going to get a simple bobble instead to mount on top of ours.

This time last year I had a job and was also spending a lot of time writing. I felt very much at ease in a lab or sitting in front of a computer. At the start of this year the business closed, as did my literary 'career' as I suffered one disappointment too many. What was I to do? My daily reading took me to Psalm 122 where King David is celebrating the city that he conquered, built up and then established as his capital. He says,

'Pray for the peace of Jerusalem: May they prosper who love you. Peace be within your walls, Prosperity within your palaces.' (v 6,7)

Was God saying to me, "John, I want you to treasure your home, your 'Jerusalem', just as David did, and build it up."? Rather than being a nuisance, an inconvenience stopping me doing work of 'real' value, could it be that working on our home was God's work for me right now? I checked this out with Marion who smiled a knowing smile...

Then came The Great Lockdown. In company with many of you, Jane and I have been fettling our garden. And the summerhouse roof? Did I wait until the supplier could come to fix it, many rainstorms later? No, I gave

Jane heart attacks by nervously mounting a stepladder and replacing the torn or missing shingles. Next week you can laugh at my further misfortunes purchasing mortar on 'click-and-collect', fixing the concrete base and literally mending my fences. My favourite prayer is:-

“Lord, what on earth am I to do about *this* problem?”

John Hearson