



'Life Bites'

Gill tries to make herself useful as husband Ged restores the Preston Mayoral chain.

Ged-the-husband has been hogging the media limelight this month after he was awarded the commission to restore the Preston Mayoral chain. He's been spread all over the newspapers and had a very entertaining chat with John Gillmore on BBC Radio Lancashire this week.

"You look very calm, darling," said I, as we arrived at the Radio Lancashire studios. "Should I be nervous?" asked Ged.

"Well, I'm always terrified whenever I'm interviewed on radio or TV."

"That's because you make things up as you go along, Gill. The difference is that I know what I'm talking about."

Fair point. Ask Gill-the-chef how to make some obscure French dish and I'll just blag it rather than admit I've never heard of it. 'Langue du chat'? Of course I know how to cook a, erm, cat's tongue.

Anyhow, Ged posing for photographs and swanning about to radio shows took up much valuable work time. The Mayor needed the chain back pretty sharpish for the Guild events so Ged decided to close the shop for a week and work around the clock with Sarah-the-daughter to get it finished.

As you can see from the picture, the Preston chain is a bit of a mad affair. It was designed by Alfred Gilbert who also designed Eros at Piccadilly Circus. The chain was made in 1888 but by 1900 it was already showing signs of serious damage. A magazine article from the time shows parts of it crushed or missing. Some of this damage had not been repaired until Ged and Sarah got their hands on it, 112

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Ged using his cyanide

later.

So while Sarah set to with re-creating silver scrolls and wings and Ged re-set the diamonds, rubies and sapphires, I contributed to this momentous event by doing a spot of cleaning up.

"This place is a tip. I don't know how you can work in such a mess."

"Please don't start cleaning Gill, it's too dangerous."

"Don't worry, I'll be careful not

to Hoover up any diamonds." Ged looked unconvinced.

After vacuuming ancient dustballs from

the workshop floor I moved on to the stock room, armed with a bin liner. Now I knew Ged's shop used to be a bank but I had no idea that it must have been a pet shop at some point. Why else would there be a whole shelf packed with cuttlefish bones? I filled the bin bag, keeping three for Sweetie our cockatiel.

Then I was drawn to the casting room by an evil smell. It was not the familiar almond aroma of cyanide which is ever present in the plating room (Ged uses cyanide to gild the chains with 24 carat gold). This was a rotting vegetation foulness that my chef's nose tracked down to a glass of white liquid. I interrupted Ged to ask what the heck it was.

"Japanese radish juice. Don't you dare throw it away. We need it for colouring the black panels on the chain. We have to strip them back to the base metal, cook them in a Japanese compound and finally dip them in radish juice until they show the correct depth of black. And what the hell are you doing with my cuttlebones?"

It turns out that cuttlebones are used by goldsmiths to cast small objects. It's true, I



Ged and Sarah

looked it up. It even mentions this strange fact in the Wikipedia entry for 'cuttlefish'.

You know that old saying, 'Behind every great man stands a great woman'? Well, I would love to say that I was that woman and take a little credit for the fabulous job that Ged (and Sarah) did on the Preston chain. But all in all, I have to admit I was probably more of a hindrance than a help.

And finally... Ged sent the Hoover bag off to be weighed in at his metal refiners and got £600 for it. Like me, you may think that's a good result but no. Apparently, all those gold bits from the workshop floor should be picked up and melted down by Ged for him to use again instead of paying the metal refiners to burn the Hoover bag then separate and weigh all its metal content. I am now officially banned from ever picking up the vacuum cleaner.

Gill now has a blog

gillwatsonlifebites.blogspot.com where readers can register their e mail address to receive regular updates.