

DIARY 2021/22

September 30th – Thursday

The inclement weather very kindly held off until I had completed all my outside duties for the day. It was not exactly the worst weather we have seen but at around the end of the morning it went a great deal greyer than it had been earlier and became wet and damp alternately as a few showers blew through. That was the other noticeable feature of the day, the breeze, and that had started before we headed for the Harbour beach in the morning.

It was particularly dark this morning. It fooled me completely when I got out of bed ahead of the alarm thinking that I could go back to bed again. The alarm went off before I could get there. I leave it as long as I can before taking the bleddy hound out, as it is more comfortable in the light, but I am having to leave it longer and longer. I suspect sooner rather than later I will be compelled to do it in the dark.

I think that it was half way through the morning when I discovered that I was not alone. I had gone into the store room to find two beady eyes looking at me. Our over-friendly robin had sneaked back into the shop at some point and had wandered into the store room. It is a begger to get birds out from there because of the position of the door. The Missus managed it when I had given up and gone for breakfast by leaving some crumbs by the door. It helped having no customers at all.

While the robin had come out of the store room, he was still of a mind to hang about and was in no hurry to leave the nice warm shop, especially if someone was going to leave crumbs lying about. The two of us combined our efforts to invite him to leave but he was having none of it, getting close to the door then slipping away back into the shop. He spent the rest of the afternoon down the centre aisle, perched on a shoe hanger with a literal bird's eye view of all around him. He quite happily tolerated shoppers passing close underneath him as they perused the shelves. I will erect a sign by the door, 'NO ROBINS ALLOWED' when we eventually do get him out, so he does not come back in again.

Things turned particularly quiet in the afternoon. It gave me sufficient time to compose a withering letter to the holiday company effectively advocating a boycott of local shops. I cannot quite understand how several customers who mentioned it today actually managed to know which company it was. I thought I had avoided that aspect of it. Unfortunately, I was unable to garner a name or address to write to as a letter on paper has so much more weight and gravitas to it, so I had to make do with electronic mail to the customer services manager. Watch this space for the next exciting episode.

Near closing time, I traversed the shop looking for our errant robin redbreast. Finding him nowhere I hoped but doubted that he had left of his own accord and headed to wrap up the newspaper returns. I completed this task and noticed a couple of

postcards a customer had left on the counter, so I went to the card stand to replace them only to be startled by the bleddy robin as it flew out in front of me.

I made an effort to usher it out of the door but he was having none of it and inches from the door did a quick turn and flew back down the shop where I left him for the Missus to return and a concerted effort to evict our squatter. When she did come back I pointed her at the bird that had taken up residence at the edge of an empty shelf in the toy section. She approached the robin, which did not move, and had a quiet face to face meeting, spurning all propriety and social distancing, I observed; she was inches away from it.

After a reasonably brief chat, to which it appeared to listen intently to what the Missus had to say, it tipped its beak and flew up the shop and out of the door with a cheery tweet as it left as if to say, 'thanks for the food and shelter for the day, cheerio', and flew out of the door and away.

No, of course it did not. This is not Mary bleddy Poppins. We each grabbed one of the big tiddler nets, tiddlers and small birds for the catching of, and pursued the darned beast until it had no choice but to go out of the door or be captured and face certain death. Alright, maybe it did not but it did not know that at the time and I would thank you, dear reader, not to spill the beans or our authority over birds and other small animals may well be compromised forever.

Naturally, we saw as many customers in the five minutes to closing rush as we had seen during the whole, miserable afternoon. If this carries on we shall have to let some of the staff go, preferably me, although some may say that I have been letting myself go for quite a long time. It is frustrating knowing that I could be much more productive at The Farm but it is also quite alarming to note that is only four weeks away now. My, where as all that time gone.

September 29th – Wednesday

There was some rain during the night because I heard it clatter on the skylight. It was perfectly dry by the time I went down to the shop in the morning, blown away by the quite sharp breeze that had followed on. It was chilly, too.

I had rather sensed that the temperature would have dropped and automatically reached for a jacket when I went out. I was not wrong and added a rain jacket to that when I went out with the bleddy hound a little later entirely to keep the wind out. The last two days must have taken their toll on the sea bed as there were geet piles of oar weed down on the beach to avoid. The fishing boats have not been out for a few days but will need to dig their way through that lot before they go anywhere.

Our day stayed bright, dry and breezy. By the early afternoon we had throngs thronging, most in thicker jackets and hats, although it is still comfortable out in shorts to which I can attest. We started selling pasties again, which for a part way

pastry shop is not a bad thing and we had brisk business. I do not think that anyone wanted to hang around in one place for too long.

There were waves in the bay but with the westerly blowing in it was not a great day for surfers. This did not stop the desperate few and there was at least one paddle boarder who I noticed spent most of his time in the water. There were even a few small encampments out to the top of the beach, which was probably quite warm and comfy once you had worked out how to shelter from the breeze.

We had enjoyed a bit of an upturn in business during the day. It could not have turned down much from yesterday. From the middle of the afternoon, however, our customers reduced to a trickle and I was left with time in between. I did a few more invoices that passed some of the time but then diverted to replace the baking sheets in the fridge after we had used the last of the pasties from there. I noticed that the small drain at the back was blocked, as it does from time to time, and the application of a drinking straw poked in the hole does the trick. This led to noticing that the shelves needed a clean, which led to the whole fridge needing a clean. That is when I discovered that I had not noticed the drain blockage soon enough and water had flooded the bottom of the fridge and that is when I wished I had not started in the first place.

Talking of first place, we achieved the ultimate accolade of being front of the queue when it came to delivery of the new gin brew from our friends at Long Rock. These are the people that brought you squid ink gin in a copper flask and a very passable whisky that would stand up to some pretty decent Scottish malts. Today they announced their new venture which is Pilgrim and Galaxy Hop Gin. Pilgrim and Galaxy are types of hop, you know, the stuff they make beer with, but these weird people have infused gin with them. It sounds very much against nature and I half expected the gin to have a head but what they produced was a well rounded gin with complex flavours and a peachy after taste – erm, yes, I did imbibe a small toothful well before the sun was anywhere near a yard arm. I expected nothing less from this crew. I would have liked to have been the first to sell one but, sadly, there were no takers today.

My last customer or enquirer of the day at least gave me something to do tomorrow. He was the last of a long line of bus times queries and I need to get to the bottom of what timetable is actually supposed to be active right now. Gosh, I can hardly wait.

September 28th – Tuesday

What have we done to the weather? Fortunately, no one asked today. Perhaps they have heard that they risk censure.

The forecasters penned this one in as the worst of the week and, for once, they were correct – so far. It had rained a bit before I went downstairs but then desisted while I put the display out at the front, minus the flags as it seemed a bit breezy at the time.

I had toggled up in my full metal jacket waterproofs as I just knew that it would be raining for our run down to the Harbour and so it was. The rain then was hardly noticeable, although the bleddy hound without a coat might argue otherwise. It did not really get into its own until the afternoon when it became more persistent, but we did get a few heavy showers in the morning just for good measure.

Naturally, the rain pretty much took trade down the drain with it. This was very much expected, although that did not mean that I had yet resolved what it was I was supposed to be doing while I had nothing else to do. We did not a minor grocery delivery in the late morning but having become accustomed to doing very little I was completely unenthused about clearing it until well into the afternoon when I thought that I better had.

It seems the rain was not the only thing trying to bring down our trade. One regular visitor and customer very kindly shared with me the advice he was given by the holiday firm through which he had booked his holiday home. The company that will remain nameless clearly has a different aspect on how businesses make a living down here. Our friend told us that as part of their welcome package the company was advising visitors to bring with them all their provisions. In mitigation, it does go on to suggest using two Cornish delivery services, which, having shelled out for one of their properties, might stretch the budget a bit.

The advice not to use local shops was on the premise of stopping the spread of dreaded lurgi. Perhaps they expect holiday makers to arrive and stay in their home until it is time to go home again. I wondered how the company might feel if someone advocated in advertised next to its own not to use the holiday lets on the same principle. I feel a bit of a letter writing coming on to see if I might change their aspect.

Fortunately, many of our visitors enjoy coming to the local shops and despite the weather not being the best, many braved dodging the showers for a quick sortie for the odd grocery item and newspaper. One couple thought taking the Coaster bus around might be the thing but got caught out in St Ives and, dripping, decided to give Penzance a miss. It appears to be a complete lottery whether the chosen bus will turn up or not due to the driver shortage, which is apparently down to illness and holiday rather than any permanent loss.

The company has issued a statement on its website, dated 10th September, to tell us that due to the shortage of drivers it has had to migrate the Atlantic Coaster service to its winter timetable with immediate effect. Unfortunately, it has omitted to tell anyone what the winter timetable is, the one on its website still very much resembling the summer or autumn one. I tip my hat to the bravery of anyone still wanting to wait for a bus.

I eventually found something to do in the long silences of the afternoon. Our invoices had built up again, unnoticed as I merrily stuffed another into the file. I spent the

afternoon inputting the large pile into the computer system and will finish it off tomorrow sometime. What joy and what a relief for my idle fingers.

September 27th – Monday

I was awoken in the wee small hours by rain splashing on my face, which is what happens when you know it is going to rain and you forget to close up the skylight a bit. At some point the patter of rain was accompanied by the rush of wind that sounded more like a squadron of jets passing over head.

Happily, most of the rain had cleared before I came down to the shop to sort out the milk delivery and to top up the drinks fridges. Quite a lot of it had cleared under the first electric sliding door in The Cove, across the floor and under the newspaper stand. Fortunately, it is warm enough in the shop to have dried it all up before I came down but if I were foolish enough to lift the welcome mat there would be a big pool still there just waiting for me to be brave enough to clear it up.

We were blessed also to have a big hole of blue sky above us when I took the bleddy hound down to the beach, alone, thankfully. Out to the northwest there hung thumping great cumulus clouds, heavy with rain on their way over St Just, which it is about normal.

It remained largely dry for the rest of the day with the occasional squally shower racing across the bay. Those big lumps of cloud, increasingly turning white, hung about to the north while over us was mainly blue sky letting the sun break through. Those who were standing in it were probably grateful for the warmth it provided given that a westerly breeze persisted after the rain left and carried with it a bit of a chill.

A few squally showers passed through during the day. The last one set up a wall of grey close into the shore and provided the perfect backdrop for a large, frenzied mob of seabirds. The water was whipped into a froth at the edge of the shower where a shoal of something had come too close to the surface. The birds, of varying breeds, were picking them out of the water with their feet and often dropping them as they quarrelled and fought off rivals. It was fascinating to watch and over in just a few minutes wrapped up by a weather dog or squat rainbow if you prefer.

I have hardly had any cause at all for mentioning the much maligned council. It has been either extremely well behaved or I have been too distracted over the summer to notice any naughtiness. Until now, that is. One of the Diary's network of people what know things came to the Diary office today to report a heinous omission and dereliction of duty.

Over the most recent years, parking along Cove Road after the relaxation of the double yellow lines at the end of September has become more fraught. More cars park along the road in every more careless and hazardous positions and last year it

came to a head. Buses could not get through and the traffic was backed up in both directions after one particularly daft driver parked opposite the bus stop and created an impasse that went on for the best part of an hour. After much lobbying by the Parish Council, the much maligned council spent hard earned cash, our hard earned cash, putting the necessary planning consents in place and creating the plan to implement the changes. Then nothing.

Our person what knows stuff reliably informs me that enquiries were made at the highest level as to when the plan would be implemented, given there is less than a week to do it. The answer came back initially as 'what plan' followed by that it seemed to have been forgotten about and that if we were lucky, it would come into force by April next year, just after the double yellow lines become active anyway. In the meanwhile, we will have to endure another few months of traffic chaos in what will be the busiest year in The Cove. We now understand the root cause of the housing crisis in Cornwall - the much maligned council forgot to build houses.

Our afternoon descended into a low season quietness that we are quite unused to. Since we have been so utterly busy since at least May, the sudden emptiness seemed even more pronounced. It has been so long since I had nothing to do, I had no idea what used to do to fill the time. Reading a book is difficult because I do tend to get immersed in the plot leaving customers unnoticed waiting at the till, which can be embarrassing. I was saved, this time, by the arrival of a few boxes of local preserves and marmalade that we had been waiting for. It had arrived at the exact moment that we saw our busiest five minutes, so I was unable to help the driver unload. I do not think that I can expect a delivery a day to keep me occupied so I still need to think of something constructive I can do to fill my time.

I could do absolutely nothing and just enjoy the rest but the trouble is that I do not enjoy doing nothing. I do that at the end of the day like I did at the end of this day just after the Missus cooked one of my favourite meals. She was keen to use her new rice cooker, particularly for basmati rice. I was sceptical – me, sceptical? – as a pan and hot water seems to work pretty well already, but I do confess that just for the basmati, it worked rather well. I have no idea where it will live as the kitchen is packed with other unused gadgets. Perhaps we will have an used gadget sale in the shop at the end of season.

September 26th – Sunday

Either this week's intake are a bunch of lazybones or no one turned up for this week. It took until the middle of the day before the sleepy Cove showed any signs whatever of waking up.

It was a good day to be waking up. We are still on the warm side of the expected weather front that is looking less and less likely to be as bad as it was painted several days ago. The bleddy hound and I shared the beach with a very young flat-coated retriever that was Tigger personified. It kept running up to the bleddy hound

and danced around her on some unseen pogo stick. It could not quite understand why the bleddy hound did not want to play and the bleddy hound certainly could not understand why the retriever was bouncing around like a looney and just looked at her bemused.

The day developed into an alright going out day and, at times, a downright gorgeous going out day. There were sizable patches of blue sky allowing the sun through for periods. Out in the bay, though, little white horses were beginning to show, indicating the promised southerly winds were building ahead of the weather front coming from the west. Still, we made it through the day with pretty decent weather, thank you very much, and I am sure it was deeply appreciated by the street café set lounged across the benches opposite the shop.

We had moments of busyness, all crowded together, but overall there was an underlying quietness and I wondered if the season was actually starting to cool at last. Although arguably a beach day, the beach was empty of any beach dwellers, just passers-by and the surf crowd of which there were also precious few. Perhaps they were all at the OS. I have it on good authority that it is now open for drinks through until about half past nine o'clock after which customers presumably turn into pumpkins.

It is entirely possible that the quietness was because people could not get here. It was reported to me later that random buses had been cancelled on the Coaster route due to the lack of drivers. This surprised me because they seemed to have been running all summer without issue. What happened to all the drivers? Did they suddenly all go off to be lorry drivers or perhaps they all went on a busmen's holiday together.

We are quite used to odd sights here in The Cove, but a small group that paraded past the shop dressed from high society of the 1920s, did raise an eyebrow or two. I have no idea what drove them to it, and I did glance at the Minack Theatre's schedule but there was nothing there that seemed to fit. It may have just been a private party as they all seemed to disappear into one of the holiday lets along from us. Earlier, one lady told me that her party were having Christmas while the family could all get together, including the Christmas swim, so it could have been them. She threatened to show me pictures of her doing the swim but said it would wait until another day. I do hope she has forgotten.

Anyway, I was intrigued by the fancy dress and now I hope you are too, dear reader. I do not wish to be intrigued alone.

Earlier, the Missus had taken Mother for her dreaded lurgi booster injection and her annual influenza one. They had come back to allow me a break before heading off to The Farm for the rest of the day to do some more burning. When I looked later in the day there was no sign of the burning going on unless, due to the southerly breeze,

they had moved it down the field, which would have been sensible. I discovered later that they were unable to light the fire, so gave up.

It all got a bit dark and biblical an hour before we closed. I thought that the rain was closing in on us earlier than anticipated but when I looked it was still out to the south of Ireland. On further investigation I discovered that it was just some particularly gloomy cloud passing in from the west. Just a tease, then.

The Missus, on her return from St Buryan said that it had already rained quite heavily there. There was a clear demarcation on the parish boundary when the rain had dared not cross into Sennen. I made a mental note to push to the bedroom skylight for when it got a bit braver later in the night, which I then promptly forgot to do.

September 25th – Saturday

Today was definitely a day of two halves. We could barely see the morning and the afternoon was so bright and glitzy you could not see that either.

The mist in The Cove was thick as a bag first thing. Being dark too, it had a bit of an atmosphere of Old London Town about it with Jack the Ripper around every corner. He was not around our corner because I checked.

The bleddy hound decided that she would get up with me at dark o'clock and thought it best to wait for me to get out of bed exactly where my feet touch the ground when I get out. She definitely knew that I had got up. She did not appear in any hurry to go out and waited quite patiently for me to finish the first chores in the shop. Fortunately, we were able to saunter down to the beach this morning as the tide had offered up a sliver of sand and the waves were not too robust. We had to mind our way down there to avoid the traffic as everyone decided to leave all at the same time.

It was difficult to determine whether the mist was going to be here all day or it was scheduled to lift. I lost count of the number of times I was asked the question during the morning as it thinned then thickened again. We were better off down in The Cove, for sure, as reports drifted in of it still being very thick up the top and down on the south coast. I cannot say exactly when it lifted but it was into the early afternoon when there were signs of brightness and at some point it turned into a bit of a corker of a day.

There were two good gatherings of surfers out in the bay, the first in the novice pool down at the south of the beach and a more experienced set out at North Rocks. Speaking to one of the older generation of surfers he told me that the surf was just right through the day. It was quite gentle and easy on the body, he said, which made a change from being pummelled.

We were not overly pressed in the shop but once again it looks like I may have underestimated the demand for pasties. I stopped them early to give us a chance of having some for Sunday, but I need not have worried too much as the demand slackened off into the later afternoon. It seems that once again there is a big party of visitors on the way as the people I spoke with told of heavy traffic on the way down here and just as much going back.

There was no particular rush at the end of the day like there was last week. The tables opposite tend to clear out more quickly now after closing as the temperature drops markedly in the evening. It was pretty enough to look at from inside and I imagine a decent sunset to gaze out upon if I could have been bothered to go down and watch it. Sadly, it is still necessary to collapse fitfully onto the sofa at the end of the day. Beer anyone?

September 24th – Friday

It became one corker of a morning, once I could see it. While I was down in the shop hauling in milk there was a line of dawn's glow resting on the cliffs, backlighting the houses on Sunny Corner Lane and across at Gwenver. There was a bit of breeze but nothing substantial and by the time I took the bleddy hound around the block, the morning was coming into its own. Strings of mist were clinging to the small valleys across from Nanjulian to Cape Cornwall but it had cleared above us and the nearer beaches.

It was the sort of morning to drive seven hours from somewhere to launch your boat out onto the briny; to collect your sandwiches for the day from the local shop and only then enquire about how you were going to launch your boat. I got the wrong end of the stick to start with because he enquired about the Harbour Master. I told him that he did not need permission to launch, just to pay the requisite launch fee in the car park machine. He told me that he had already done that and that he just needed someone to launch his boat.

He was as visually stunned as I was visually incredulous when I told him that it was self launch from the Harbour. He told me how long it had taken him to get here. He sounded quite affronted. It may have seemed rude, but I responded that perhaps he should have checked before he left. In my defence, m'lud, it had started to sound like he was making it my fault and I was keen to inject some realism into the conversation again.

He went on to ask why someone could not launch him with the Harbour tractor, so I told him that it was only used for the fishing punts and that it was not even used to launch any of local punts. I suspected that it was a matter of insurance. There was also the small matter of there being no one around to drive it even if it could be used. I suggested Penzance or Newlyn that might be better equipped and at least the harbour masters' numbers were listed.

Our rather perfect morning deteriorated into very misty afternoon and blocked out the brightness that our visitors were starting to enjoy. Nevertheless, our little street café scene that has been going on since the summer began, continued unabated. The mist brought a bit of a chill to the air, but I imagine that was quite welcome in the ambient warmth of the day. I stepped out myself at one point and found it so. I find it useful to empathise with our customers through real world experiences, which is complete nonsense but I just had to write it down because it popped into my head and made me recall a change management programme I once ran. That was nonsense, too.

Back in the real world I remembered it was the Aged Parents' wedding anniversary again. Naturally, I do not recall the wedding – I was far too young - but I was always told indirectly that I was born out of wedlock. I remembered it, the anniversary, the first time yesterday when the card I sent would have arrived on time. As it was, although not busy, I was distracted somehow and missed the post. I seem to have an uncanny knack of remembering my own, which is odd. I thought that the mind was very good at blocking traumatic events. In any case, Happy Anniversary to the Aged Parents.

It has been on the wish list for a number of years but has always taken second place to replacement of stock, until now. The shop flooring was showing signs of wear when we moved in eighteen years ago and it has eighteen more years of wear since then. Where the old counter was, the linoleum tiles have been worn through to the backing by passing feet and there are several other places with gouges in them. Today we took a step in the direction of having new flooring installed by getting a local carpet firm to come in and have a geek and measure up. We will also replace the shelving down the gift aisle as what is there has had so many coats of paint that disassembling it may prove tricky, but it needs to go. Everything else that is difficult to move will stay where it is and be floored around. I suspect that we will end up with much the same as we have already, just newer.

It had not crossed my mind but a local lady asked what colours we would have. I told he that I really did not care so long as it was not red and green, being colour blind and all that. I thought maybe the popular combination of 'smoke' and 'briar' because, after all, you cannot have smoke without briar. For the first few years I think we will have customer leave their shoes outside, after all they do it in mosques and no one seems to mind, and their floors always look spotless in the photographs.

We continued through the afternoon with busyness in fits and starts. Obviously, one group held back until the carpet man arrived to measure up when we were the busiest that we had been all day. We cleared most of the pasties and I had time to slip away and make myself a cup of tea. What could be more perfect?

The Missus slipped away as well to The Farm with Mother as soon as I had returned from the gymnasium. Her aim today was to burn lots of things. I had a quick geek at the camera up there and discovered the Missus through the fog, making more fog

with a smoky brush fire. She has been piecemeal clearing the brush and brambles closest to the hedge along from the gate and it being difficult to move, she decided to burn it in situ. It was good to see Mother in a chair, upwind of the smoke, directing operations and proving my point about smoke and briar.

We rounded off the day nicely with 'ansum bit of hake, chips and peas and Mother had haddock, which is what you can do with a freezer full of prime fish. The Missus had ribs; the Missus hates fish.

September 23rd – Thursday

At some point during the night, the temperature increased to unnatural levels. It was very warm in the flat and I checked whether we had inadvertently put the heating on. One of the windows at the front was wide open but did not seem to help very much, so I was keen to open the door to step outside. That did not help much either as it was just as warm outside and there was not a breath of breeze to be had. It was also humid and the mist that enveloped the cliffs said as much.

We even had some light drizzle a few times during the morning, but the mist started to clear out by the middle of the day allowing me to watch an ever widening patch of blue sky. It took its time pushing in from the west and by the end of the day, completely clear. It looked like it was going to be a glorious night until, at the last gasp, the mist pushed back and the blue sky and, indeed, the tops of the cliff disappeared from view.

Yesterday was surprisingly busy at times but today really seemed to hit the skids. There were a fair few people wandering about but whether, like me, the muggy weather had slowed them down there was hardly much enthusiasm for shopping. Even with the customers that we did have, everything seemed to be moving in slow motion with them. I would certainly count myself within that description and my only respite was to have the fan mounted just for me. For this soupçon of joy, I had to wait until the afternoon when the bleddy hound relinquished it.

With the generous gaps between customers, I fell into some research regarding tractor backhoes. The Missus has determined that she will need to hire the mini digger for The Farm again shortly and there is also an ongoing requirement for its use. We concluded, as we chatted on the decking last night, that buying one would be a little beyond our budget and a second hand one would require maintenance skills that we did not possess or the time for even if we did. The answer, therefore, is to purchase a backhoe which is a digger that fits to the back of the tractor.

A backhoe is very much a compromise because it is static, which is awkward if you wish to dig over a larger area than the reach of the arm. Digging a trench for example would require doing it six feet at a time and moving the tractor for the next six feet. However, they seem to be a good bit cheaper than a mini digger, although I struggled with finding more than a couple of examples on the Internet. I have

modified my search query several times and I always seem to pull up the same two items. I decided that it was probably time to call a tractor supplier and see if they could point me in the right direction but the only one I tried to call so far did not answer the telephone. I shall try some more tomorrow.

When I stuck my head outside the door at five o'clock, the street was near enough empty. There was thickening mizzle closing in making the Beach complex just a vague shape at the far end. There is nothing else that so definitively knocks business on the head other than a bit of mizzle. The hiatus gave me the opportunity to fill some of the gaps in the soft drinks fridge. We had been unable to do much about it until the delivery on Tuesday as we had run out of many of the products having decided to have an unplanned week off the grocery delivery. This week we deliberately planned for a two weekly order, so we should be alright for drinks until the next one.

After that I coasted the rest of the last hour until closing time with just the merest hint of a five minutes to closing rush. It is time to settle into this vague routine until half term and I shall have to find some constructive work to fill the increasing quiet time. There is, after all, only so much scratching a behind that a grumpy shopkeeper can do.

September 22nd – Wednesday

The day started off in much the same vein as the previous sunny days but it clouded over by the afternoon. It did not make it a bad day, just a cloudy one. It was dry and perfectly temperate otherwise and many of our visitors must have thought so too as it was quite busy again.

For the first time in a while the bleddy hound and I took a circuit of the block in the morning. The tide was in and her two pals, the ASBO girls from up the road, so called because they will bark and make a big fuss about anything that moves, were coming down the road. We followed them through to the car park whereas otherwise it might have been a bit of a struggle to get the bleddy hound to go around.

As we walked in the direction of the Harbour car park, a big full moon sat heading for the western horizon, almost due west of us. When the Missus took some photographs of it rising on her way back with Mother the other night, I had assumed it was waxing. I had rather expected the full moon a bit closer to the end of the calendar month, but it was the turn of the season yesterday, so it coincided with that. As least it was a good old fashioned harvest moon not some clever pink hamster, yellow goat or purple duck-billed platypus moon we have started to see in recent years.

It was a gently busy morning. We are hitting days now when we do not need daily deliveries of milk and the bakery order is much diminished. We are starting to get the hang of small orders now despite the up and down nature of the trade in these days

following being busy. It should get more consistent now and will start to follow the weather patterns, which will be interesting without accurate forecasts.

It seemed only right and proper that I should make my way to the gymnasium for a blistering session. It was a cracking good day for blistering sessions, so mine fitted in perfectly. I am slowly working back up to full sessions but I think it will have to wait until after we close before I can do it proper justice.

I had meant to keep an eye out for low water today, as I find the very low tides interesting to look at. In the event, I completely forgot about it but as luck would have it the Missus asked me to take the bleddy hound out and I took her down to the near empty Harbour beach. The tide was, indeed, very low but not the lowest it has ever been. There were a couple of terns down there and a herring gull picking at the weed but it was disappointingly high for a low tide. It was so not low that one of the fishing boats managed to squeeze in but that may have been a short while earlier. I will wait for the beginning of next month when it is a good bit lower but will probably forget.

The cloud started to break up in the later stages of the afternoon. It was quite handy because the Missus had suggested that we decamp to The Farm for tea, probably because she had not had her Farm fix today. There was nothing particular to do there other than have our tea and relax on the loungers she purchased for the decking. I like to think that the Missus carefully considered the loungers and one of those swing seats with a fringed canopy as a bit of an installation, juxtaposed against the backdrop of industrialised farming going on all around them. There again they might just be there to lounge around on when we one day have time to sit around during idyllic summer afternoons in the tranquillity of a field a half mile from anyone else. Like that will ever happen.

September 21st – Tuesday

It was a day much in the same mould as yesterday, filled with bright gloriousness. All this fine weather seems to be going on and on in one guise or another. As if this were not enough one of the newspapers today was talking about longer range forecasts and the likelihood of an Indian summer. I cannot see the preoccupation with the desire to continue the summer indefinitely. Surely if you wanted that you would move to some equatorial region, although many of the countries there do seem to be riven with strife. It cannot be helped but to think that there must be some connection. So, let us extend the summer indefinitely and end up knocking seven bells out of your neighbour.

The boisterous sea of the last couple of days has pretty much done that to the beach. Our friend from the other day suggested a good storm to sort out the waves and that is what he got. The crescent shaped sand bars have gone and there is just the one now, running out from the south end of the beach. I spoke to our man again this morning, dripping from a morning surf and he was beaming from ear to ear. The surf is much better apparently.

The Missus left early doors to take the bleddy hound to the veterinary doctor on a routine matter and run some errands. It left me to have breakfast in the shop and it was once again a disaster. There were better intervals between customers to allow a mouthful or two but the whole removing the mask thing was somewhat tedious. The final straw was the morsels were tainted by my frequently sanitised hands. I cannot recommend it.

There was very little action on the pasty front again today to the degree that I decided not to order any for tomorrow. It was shortly after I had placed our bakery order that the world, her sister-in-law's third cousin, twice removed, their children and the hamster, all descended on us for a nice hot pasty. We went through twenty pasties in thirty minutes – the hamster did not have one – so I called the bakery back to revise the order.

The Missus, who went to The Farm after finishing her errands in town, retired back home early, presumably having cleared the surrounding countryside of every blackberry there was available. Her stated aim was to make bramble jelly, once we had discovered what bramble jelly actually was. It is odd that something is called by the name of an ingredient that is not in it, although making something actually with the brambles might produce something quite sharp. Presumably you would have to start from scratch.

The bright and warm evening attracted the usual bunch of bench drinkers enjoying the late sunshine. Word on the street is that the OS will be flinging wide its doors to casual drinkers after its current five o'clock very soon. I discovered this after I was told that the quiz was restarting and queried how that was going to work when they did not let anyone in. Clearly, they had thought of that. I am not entirely sure that I am yet ready to lock myself into an enclosed space for an extended period with a crowd of people whose previous encounters and behaviours are unknown. Worse still, I must steel myself against the encounter with a pint costing more than five pounds.

We sat at our window again to enjoy our postponed Sunday roast with Mother that will confuse me for the rest of the week. The swell in the bay had moderated a good deal, though still robust, and that bright setting sun dropping into the sea just a scat or two to the right of Pedn-men-du. It was no surprise that there were still dozens of visitors about in and out of the Harbour car park and enjoying a quiet drink on the benches across the road. This end of The Cove is turning into a very popular al fresco dining spot. The Old Boathouse Inn on the Prom. Now, there is an idea for the long summer evenings next year.

September 20th – Monday

There was a cloudless sky when I could eventually see it and it stayed with us for the whole day. The surfers got some decent waves for a change and the breeze dropped out. It was a fine and glorious day.

It was the sort of fine and glorious day during which nobody fancied eating a pasty. It is also possible that word got around that I had ordered in an abundance not wishing to run out too early again and people decided not to have one to spite me. It had also crossed my mind that the whole world was against me today because the milkman did not deliver my milk and butter, claiming that no order was left. On top of that, the baker somehow avoided sending me any brown bread, which is our better seller at present. They only delivered my pasties, obviously knowing that everyone was going to avoid buying one.

I took my sorry carcass down to the gymnasium to vent my spleen on a few weights and the rowing machine. After a blistering session I felt much better and returned home to a healthy breakfast of grains, pulses and green stuff topped with smoked mackerel. My body is clearly a temple and no, not resembling a mosque while I am lying down. Alright, perhaps slightly. I shall have to post my smoked mackerel salad recipe as it really is quite toothsome as well as being flexible in terms of the ingredients that can be added to it.

It had taken me a couple of days to get around to it, but the Missus had blanched a big load of her spinach from The Farm and frozen it. She had asked me to vacuum pack the 200 gram blocks she had made up. From the big load of spinach she had there were surprisingly few blocks. One of them had clearly not made the weight but I vacuum packed it anyway and decided that it was best put away in our small, personal freezer in the store room.

Now, someone, no names mentioned but it was not me, balanced a full tray of blackberries up against the door. I was therefore caught somewhat by surprise when I opened the door to put the spinach in and a full tray of blackberries slid halfway out. Had the tray slid completely out, the kinetic energy would have remained with the package and there would have been a fair chance of the blackberries remaining on the tray. As it was, the tray stopped suddenly, transferring all the kinetic energy to the berries so that they were all successfully jettisoned all over the floor. (If you are a scientist or science teacher and I got that last bit wrong: yes, very probably, but it looked alright on paper and I knew what I meant.)

I doubt very much that any self-respecting scientist (except in universities where they are well known for completely pointless experimentation – erm, according to the press, sorry Prof) has done specific testing on the forces of gravity and kinetic energy, etcetera on the movement of frozen blackberries on a linoleum floor. I can therefore state with impunity that frozen blackberries defy all the rules of science and nature and cast themselves in mystifying directions and distances. I did my best to identify each location and retrieve each blackberry in such time that they were still frozen when I placed them back in the freezer. I can guarantee, however, that our

successors in the shop will be finding calcified blackberries in forgotten corners for centuries to come.

Not that I am at all vengeful or vindictive, but I placed the blackberries back on the tray carefully balanced against the freezer door.

There was a bit more cloud around as we rolled into the last part of the afternoon, but it had been a ripper of a day. It had not been the busiest of days, which is something that is looking more likely to be settling in as the normal as the season cools down. We shall have to address our ordering accordingly, which will, of course, ensure a resurgence, just like the Telegraph newspaper numbers that I reduced because they were not selling and we are now running out of.

Talking of resurgence, the swell in the bay returned with the tide. In truth it has probably just not gone away but just looked better with more tide. It was similar to this in the morning as I chatted with one of the fishermen down on the Harbour beach. We watched a couple of kayaks launch into and he told me they were heading for the Isles of Scilly. We looked out and I suggested that it did not look the best out there to be heading that far. He replied that the fishers were wondering if it was worth just heading out into the bay let alone in a small kayak, but he reported that the kayakers had said that they were experienced. I would have thought if they were that experienced they would not be taking that sort of risk.

They must have made it because I heard nothing more, and being experienced they would have notified the Coastguard of their journey and arrival time. Must have been hard work, though.

September 19th – Sunday

So, there I was gazing up at the stars through the skylight wondering why my alarm was going off when there were still stars in the sky. It is a dog's life being a grumpy shopkeeper. The bleddy hound was sleeping fitfully in front of her £200 fan and gently snoring. Hmm.

By the time I had finished downstairs and come back up to collect the bleddy hound for her morning constitutional, it was bright enough. It was looking like it had not made up its mind whether it was going to be a pleasant day or thick heavy clouds would hang about but we kept dry and relatively warm heading down to the Harbour. Here a couple of fishing boats were just heading out. They could well have been mackerelling or on the pollack where they were on the other side of Cowloe. It has taken all summer but at last the mackerel have come around to the north coast. I meant to pick some up for smoking during the week but, in truth, I still have very little time for such things.

It turned out to be a day where we were not going to get bowled over by the rush of customers. Yesterday was much busier. This was probably just as well on the pasty

front but we still ran out in the early afternoon, which is a tad early in the day for running out of things. There seemed to be good interest in groceries with holiday letters buying their provisions from us, which is heartening. It was difficult to know whether everyone was still arriving, chosen somewhere else to go or we just had fewer people about. It probably was not the weather at fault because the early clouds shoved off and left us with blue sky and sunshine, even if we did have a bit of breeze to contend with.

The afternoon business ground to a slow crawl despite there being quite a few people promenading and hanging about on the tables opposite. We picked up a bit of business in the closing couple of hours but we really could have done better. It was probably worth being out to see the bay as the sun started to decline, the cliffs all the way from Gwenver to Cape lit up in warm, bright light reflecting their different greens and browns up to the west. There was a fair amount of chop in the bay that kept any serious surfers away for most of the day but the swell that had been bouncing up Aire Point and Creagle had much diminished by evening.

The Missus returned from The Farm later. It seems the clock in the cabin is an hour adrift and she came back too late to cook a roast dinner and we ended up with noodles instead. She also brought down a big tray of rocket which will be bagged up and in the fridge for tomorrow's trade. Next year we will try and arrange it so that availability is a bit more consistent but, nevertheless, it still flies out when we do have our produce in.

Given so few people about, we had no late callers to the shop today. What did have was a few groups of people out on the benches with their pints of draft beer from next door. They are still there quite a while after the café closes, which prompts several late and jealous enquiries from newcomers wanting the same. Any more of that and I will arrange to carry next door's barrel around so I can service the trade.

September 18th – Saturday

It was not the most auspicious start to the day. The newspapers were very late in coming (due to bunching at the depot – you got to watch out for that bunching, it can catch you unawares) and as I safely predicted, they arrived at the same time as the pasties and a whole cohort of customers (bunching, you see). For the first time in living memory, we had multiple requests for multiple pasties before half past nine, which I could not fulfil because I was knee deep in newspapers and I had people lined up waiting for them.

Earlier, before the papers arrived, I had decided that when the dozens of people requiring a newspaper asked where they were I would tell them that there were none today because there had been no news to report. This was more to amuse me than to satisfy any customer curiosity because it becomes exceeding tedious having to provide the boring truth that the papers simply had not arrived. It might, I considered,

also deter the slew of further questions regarding the exact time that the newspapers would land on our doorstep and be available to purchase.

As a strategy to avoid the secondary questioning, it worked rather well, probably because it was assumed I was clearly suffering some intellectual meltdown and it was best not to push me any further. As a response generally, it was very amusing but not necessary how it might have been intended. For example, it was amusing to note just how many people do not listen to a word I say because the majority of responses were that they would come back later. A couple of customers did laugh, thank you for humouring me, and one lady gave me a withering look that said “stupid boy” all over it.

The long and the short of it was that my morning was put all out of kilter. The smooth transition from ‘closed, regular routine’ to ‘open, serve customers with everything in order’ did not happen. Instead, we went from ‘closed, regular routine’ to firefighting and trying to establish the best prioritisation to satisfy all the requirements of putting pasties away, preparing newspapers and serving customers. It took a good couple of hours to reach the ‘everything in order’ state. We love it when a plan comes together, and this morning was definitely the opposite of that.

There was a bit of a breeze blowing through The Cove from early on to the extent that I did not put the flags out first thing. The breeze was relatively warm and even in just a t-shirt it was not uncomfortable. Despite warnings of showers, I cast caution to the wind and did not wear a rain jacket when taking out the bleddy hound. I did momentarily regret it when I spotted a shower racing across the north side of the bay, but it came nowhere near us and was gone.

For the last few days, the beach has been strewn with oar weed. Happily, with a bit of movement in the water today, most of the weed has been washed out again. It has also been remarkably clear of litter for the last week or so. It was not much before that there was quite a bit down there. It was more lost property than rubbish and it is quite a wonder why the items were not retrieved. Most of it was children’s clothes and shoes, all looking quite new and representing not an insignificant investment. I cannot quite fathom how Johnny, despatched to the beach in his brand new shorts and ‘slider’ beach shoes, arrives home several hours later barefoot and shortless with no questions asked. Or perhaps it is a case of, “Oh, Johnny, that is the third time this week. Never mind, I am sure the shop will have more.”

The slew of seabirds that decided to visit today were leaving nothing behind if they could help it. They were difficult to identify because there were so many and they were all mixed up in a bunch – even seabirds do bunching. Yesterday, there was a small crew of juvenile black-backed gulls and I am pretty sure they were there again today, along with some herring gulls and possibly some common terns. I could not swear to it but there looked to be a great northern diver stuck in the midst of them all.

Also sharing the water were a crowd of surfers. They were in greater numbers in the morning, bolstered by surf schools, but by the afternoon the waves had become rather more robust and had weeded out the men from the boys, it would appear. It was so robust over on Gwenver that the Lifeguards had red flagged the beach, but it is unlikely any self-respecting surfer would have gone in over there as it was mainly white water and washed out. Even on the big beach, the shape of the sand bars is still not helpful and as one user put it, could do with a big storm to sort it out.

The day materialised into quite a bright, warm and breezy one. Our visitors were thronging by the early afternoon and into the later afternoon at that. We went through rather more pasties than I anticipated, which will always happen when I do not anticipate it. It will put into jeopardy the availability tomorrow but why anyone would want to have a pasty there I have no idea.

I also have no idea why we seem to be the natural place for people to come and ask obscure questions. Perhaps it is because I look like the sort of eejit that has a head full of otherwise useless information that once in a blue moon, is just relevant. Today's question regarded hedgehogs. A gentleman called to say that his wife had found an injured animal and had quite confidently suggested that I might know how to help.

It just so happened that I had heard on Radio Pasty, some months prior, a lady who had started up a hedgehog hospital near Land's End. At the time I regarded it as the most creative alternative to work that I had heard of, encouraging listeners who had spare money to donate it in her direction. Something about the interview – possibly its outlandishness and vague unlikelihood that such a thing could be taken in earnest – stuck in my mind and I was able to point our enquirer in the right direction, a mobile number on the Internet.

He returned a number of hours later to tell me the hedgehog lady appeared in record time to collect the injured creature. The response time suggests either a paucity of hedgehog casualties or such efficiency the person should immediately be employed by Royal Cornwall Hospital Trust to resolve their current problems with ambulance services. Whatever the case, I am sure that without the hospital so close by, Mrs Tiggywinkle would have met an early demise and we wish her a speedy recovery and many slugs to eat. Perhaps I should start a slug hospital.

As often is the case we have an enhanced five minutes to closing on the first day of the new intake of holidaymakers. Today was one of those cases and we had a bit of bunching too, close to when I was trying to close the first electric sliding door in The Cove. Twenty minutes after I had closed it, some chancer decided it a good plan to slide open the first electric sliding door in The Cove to ask if he could 'just get one more thing'. We had been open for nine and a half hours and I still had work to do after starting twelve hours previously. One grumpy shopkeeper was not inclined to provide a favourable response. There goes my Best in the West customer service award.

September 17th – Friday

Rain, or the threat of it, and generally unsavoury weather stopped play. I did toy with the idea of leaving it there and having a day off but I thought there might be hue and cry and demands for you to have your money back, dear reader.

It all started very well, meaning that neither I nor the bleddy hound got wet when we headed out first thing. In fact, it took the rain, such as it was, a little while to arrive. The forecaster on the television last night said as much, that the weather front was slow moving. Not only that but it came in many parts and saved its best for the middle of the afternoon when it tried its best to rain very hard and managed some heavy drizzle.

What it did manage to do was keep most of our customers at bay. We would have been quiet anyway, it being a change-over day, but I suspect that we might have been a bit busier with a better day. The temperature took a significant drop too, and the breeze picked up, so those people who did turn up were wrapped in coats and jumpers. Autumn has eventually arrived, it said.

Knowing that we had a store room full of postcard fudge boxes that needed to be put away and a beer order on its way I decided that a blistering session at the gymnasium might be in order. It was such a blistering session that I left the postcard fudge boxes until well into the afternoon at about the same time that a few customers started turning up. I have often wondered how the mere act of taking up a task better completed without customers promotes the almost immediate appearance of customers. However, I suspect that should I take that up deliberately as a device for attracting business, it would not work.

While I was not busy in the shop, I cannot have done much looking outside. I recall looking at the beach in the morning and in the later afternoon. Both times the tide appeared to be in. Since there is not much more than four metres between tides at the moment it might account for the illusion. It all looked pretty grey and uninspiring so much so that not even half a dozen surfers were inspired to go out on the water, although that might have had much to do with the absence of waves again.

Towards the end of the day, we saw the appearance of some of the new intake, so we are assured that some people, at least, are arriving for the new week. We also took on a fish order, the first in more than a week. These seemed to be the only people willing to brave a bit of going outside. Mind, it had started to rain again just in time to catch me bringing in the outside display. Well, I got away with it in the morning, so I guess that it was my turn.

September 16th – Thursday

Well, how about that for a fine to-do. Today pretty much died on its behind, or at least most of it did.

There was a bright and sunny day in prospect as we headed for the beach, bleddy hound and me. Contrails crossed high above in a wide blue sky and all was well with the world - our little bit of it anyway. I girded my loins for another busy day in the shop with pasties primed and ready to be sold. There was no reason for this day to be any different from the past couple, I mused.

It all started well enough. We had our usual early morning crowd in buying newspapers and breakfast goods as the day unfolded into the expected bright and sunny day, referenced earlier. However, the busy day, also referenced earlier, did not materialise as we might have expected to at the end of the morning and into the early afternoon.

There seemed to be a similar number of people down on the beach as yesterday and a similar number in the water, despite the renewed absence of waves. There was a bit of thronging going on across on the benches along the other side of the road, so, in short, nothing particular to suggested why business should have dried up so very suddenly.

It was a good idea, therefore, to fill the long gaps between customers by ordering the stamps that I had been meaning to order for a day or two. I also ordered a music album recommended by a reader who had spotted that I was a Bob Dylan fan. I was a little disappointed that it seems impossible to order a digital download of music and I was forced into buying the CDs that will be sent through the post in a most antiquated manner. I also do not want the CDs because I have nowhere to put them and they will remain on my desk annoying me until the next clear out and will become a headache all over again.

I had just embarked on another time consuming task when the postcard fudge boxes I had ordered a few days ago turned up. This was marvellous timing as I had just put the last of the store room stock out onto the shelf. Sales of them had started to pick up because they make an excellent going home present for the less fortunate waterers, pet carers and rose tenders and it is that time of the week. I made a start on unpacking them by clearing away the nylon straps that were holding multiple boxes together.

It was at this point that customers started to show up. It started with a few, then a few more and very shortly, a long stream of keen shoppers arrived through the first electric sliding door in The Cove. It had clearly been a big ruse, a tease the grumpy shopkeeper plan that had everyone staying away all day and then arriving in a coordinated crowd towards the later part of the afternoon. The trigger was obviously the delivery of some boxes that would keep me busy and take my mind off not having any customers and now could do little about. How very clever.

To rub some salt into the wounds and just to make matters more complicated, a second, much bigger delivery turned up. This was the buckets and spades that we had craved for several weeks as we slowly diminished our existing stock to nothing. It was important that I managed to take out some of the buckets and spades and get them on the shelves as the Missus would arrive near the end of the afternoon and we would have to load all the remaining order onto the truck. There would be no room in the shop for it all.

Slowly, in between customers coming to the till, I managed to pull out and dress the various types of spades and buckets. All the signage for these goods also needed to be changed because the new prices are, sadly, a good deal higher than they were before. It could also be noted that the prices for such good has remained static for a fair few years. They probably would have remained so still had transport costs not stuck a spanner in the works.

It had been warm and humid all day, I could feel it in the shop. After we closed and shut the first electric sliding door in The Cove, it became even more so. It was quite uncomfortable topping up the drinks fridges, which required extra attention because I had limited time the previous evening because of the barbeque.

When it came time to do the till, we were remarkably as busy as we were the day before. All our busyness came in the first and last couple of hours of the day. I could have closed between eleven and three o'clock and no one would have much noticed. Perhaps I will try that tomorrow.

September 15th – Wednesday

Look out! Here comes summer – all over again.

It looked pretty special when we headed for the beach first thing and it proved itself so as the day wore on. Once again, we were bowled over by a heap of customers vying to be the first through the first electric sliding door in The Cove. This must be an especially eager bunch this week because even in the busiest of times, we usually have to wait a while for things to get going.

The Missus must also have been a bit eager as she was downstairs early to usher me off on my first Wednesday gymnasium session for a fair few weeks. She had either noticed how I had let myself go in the intervening weeks or was just very keen to get me to get finished so she could head off to The Farm. I must suspect the latter as I greased my pectorals this morning and there was nothing wrong with them as far as I could see. When you are at the peak of fitness a few weeks easing off does not make a great deal of difference, someone who was at the peak of fitness told me. I will let you know when I get there.

My new paranoia led me to an even more blistering session than normal. When I got back, busyness was taking busy to a new level, for this time of the year, at least. We

should not, at the outset of the shoulder season, be burning through nearly the same number of pasties per day as we were during the peak of August. It is, however, understandable when our guests have to jump through hoops to get a sit down meal in a restaurant.

I do not know whether it is luck of the draw or simply some restaurants do it better than others or perhaps are just less busy or in demand as others. The OS seems constantly booked for weeks ahead but one couple said that they had walked in to two similar sized and quality eating establishments in the area and been found tables in short order. I think it is a case of looking around and being prepared to travel a bit.

We slowed up a little half way through the afternoon. It did look warm out there so perhaps it was siesta time. There was certainly a fair few down on the beach with a little line of predominantly blue tents and windbreaks all the way from The Beach café to the entrance to the Valley. There was also a good number with their feet in the water down on the tideline doing a bit of wave jumping.

Yes, for the first time in 20 days or so there was some surf to play with. This kicked off yesterday but did not look all that usable but today, usable or not, there were a good showing of surfers in on the break just in front of the Lifeguard huts. There were some bigger waves out towards North Rocks, but they did not look to be standing up well, although there was one surfer out there trying his luck. We will not mention the state of Gwenver but there was not a board to be seen either in the water or on shore.

The clouds rolled in again during the later afternoon and a bit sooner than they had yesterday. This was something of an irritation but completely understandable because we had settled on today to have a barbeque up at The Farm. We had one or two false starts at this already, so cloud or no, it was going ahead.

It is still just as peaceful up at The Farm as ever and no wonder why the Missus enjoys heading up there so much. The first thing that strikes is the abundance and size of growth of everything, weeds and produce alike. In the polytunnel, the tomato plants are up to the top and following up the arch. Outside, the Missus has created an enclosure, currently half cleared but containing a few corn plants and some flourishing parsnips. Pressed hard against the fence are weeds six feet high and to the south of the greenhouse, even higher.

I took a quick geek at the solar panel performance and to check that the batteries were in good condition. Some of our recent days we have generated more than one kilowatt of electricity, which is astounding and also wasted. The batteries are not taxed by what we run off them but we do have plans for next year. Just to put that into context, one kilowatt of electricity is enough to run a small town for a week or, as a quick Internet search suggests, run an immersion heater for 20 minutes, two computers for a day or do ironing for an hour but what does it know about kilowatts?

It managed to run our two LED lights in the cabin when things started to get a bit gloomy as we finished off our barbeque. The clouds had fortuitously rolled away by the time we closed the shop and headed up there. It was the perfect end to a busy day – until I got home and had to fix the bathroom cistern that had decided to get stuck open. That rather took the shine off it.

September 14th – Tuesday

All change today. That geet lump of rain passed through overnight and although we were warned that showers and mist would remain, our skies were clear of cloud in the morning when I could see it.

The bleddy hound forced a change of routine by insisting she went out before I did the milk. The light was only just beginning to illuminate The Cove and the sun some way off rising over Carn Olva. It was a very pleasing light, just enough to see things clearly without being overwhelmed by them and so, so peaceful down on the beach I would have been happy to stay a little while longer.

I have been contemplating a return to the shoulder season routine where I get up a little later and have completed all my personal chores before I get downstairs. This only really works when there is less in the way of bottling up and preparation to do and while there was on this particular morning, it was largely because of a quiet day yesterday. On balance, I shall leave it a little longer as I still cannot guarantee getting a breakfast in when the shop is open without coming upstairs for it.

Today was definitely a case in point. We were very busy from the off. Our assembled company clearly decided that they should take advantage of a bit of brightness and sunshine and make use of as much of the day as was available to them. Consequently, there was a queue when I first opened, and the flood continued for most of the morning. By the time the Missus came down to afford me time for a spot of croust and a lick behind my ears, the street was thronging and the benches all along opposite us, filling up with diners.

Our pasty orders have been more in line with orders we might place in a normal summer rather than those of the sloping shoulder season. I thought that I was being rash with my order on Monday but that proved insufficient and we have been mobbed for pasties ever since.

I am reasonably good at enquiries. We get many, so I should be. Most of the enquiries tend to be similar, such as how to get to Land's End, 'what's the weather tomorrow?' and 'what time do the pasties get here?' The enquiry today came out of left field and caught me a bit unprepared – 'where does the sun set tonight?'

It came from a young couple who had purchased a few drinks and snacks and wished to sit somewhere – possibly romantic – to watch the sun set. The young lady was most excited at the prospect to the point she was beaming and jumping up and

down. This simply added some pressure to the already challenging question of where was the sun going to set tonight. Ordinarily, I would have taken a bit of a punt and hoped for the best, but this was clearly a matter of huge import to at least one of us. I did try and set a certain level of expectation; sunsets from a clear sky are seldom very noteworthy. This cut no ice at all – same beam, same clasping of hands in eager anticipation, never mind that the event itself was at least eight hours away.

In the end I did what any self-respecting blagger would do under the circumstances. I hedged. At first I suggested that half way across the beach would be a good spot. It sounded quite precise, like I knew what I was talking about, which was good and if I was wrong, they could always shift a little further along. No way, was it setting beyond North Rocks just yet. Then I had a much better idea – ‘head to the top of Pedn-men-dhu’, I announced confidently. I could be confident on this because even on the shortest day you would still see the sun set from there – in a thick coat and hat and provided the sky obliged by being cloudless to the west.

What I had completely left out of my calculations was a geet blanket of thick cloud rolling in from the north and mist descending on the horizon. Looking at the cliffs above the big beach there was no warm glow and denoting the sun still free to do a bit of illuminating. By chance I had to go down to the shop after tea and there, at about half past seven and just to the north of Pedn-men-dhu from where I stood, was the orb of the sun struggling through the thick mist.

For one young lady that was the day saved, so if she was going to reverse convention and propose marriage, all the attendant atmosphere was there. For the young man, a wise man once told me that a batchelor is a man who never made the same mistake once.

September 13th – Monday

There were spots of rain in the air when I first came down to the shop in the morning. I put on a rain jacket to take the bleddy hound down to the beach, which of course I did not need by that time. The light rain threatened all day but never really materialised into anything. However, we remained in the grey from dawn to dusk but fortunately it did not stop a glut of visitors from getting out and about to enjoy themselves.

I made it to the gymnasium for the first time in a week. I had to avoid it on the grounds that I hurt my back – again – putting away the large grocery order from last week. It was on the last case of beer going into the cupboard and not while I was lifting, but when I was getting up again. I did not mention anything as I wished to avoid the embarrassment of a mailbox clogged with sympathy letters, donations of flowers and cash stuffed envelopes such that I might buy myself a couple of days off from the shop being expertly attended to by some dextrous maid trained in the arts of massage and muscle manipulation. Alright, I might have got over the cash stuffed

envelopes in time, but the sympathetic letters and flowers would have been just too much to bear.

Business had been fairly brisk first thing but after I came back to the shop after my blistering session, I discovered that the Missus had clearly been bored. The top of the freezer at back was laden high with empty display boxes from the shop and there were big gaps on the shelves in the store room. Her work complete, she headed for The Farm leaving me with a mountain of cardboard to flatten and rubbish to put out. Naturally, with the necessity of half an hour in the store room in prospect, we became immediately busy in the shop. Some things are just so predictable.

The fact that there were no waves again today is becoming predictable, too. There was a man on Radio Pasty this morning telling us that he had examined the wave data going back twelve years and the last 20 days were the flattest that it has been at this time of year. I am not entirely sure how that helps anyone.

Surfer 1. "Dude, flat today, ent it?"

Surfer 2.: "Yup, dude."

Surfer 1.: "Flattest it's been for twelve years, dude."

Surfer 2.: "Yup, dude?"

Surfer 1.: "Yup dude."

Surfer 2.: "Still flat today, dude."

Surfer 1.: "Yup, dude. Still flat."

The good news is that there will be waves tomorrow. I treat that much the same as 'jam tomorrow' because they said that last week.

I had plenty of time to consider how flat the sea was because we had very few customers today. Instead of turning up all at once and giving me the rest of the afternoon off, they spread themselves out across the afternoon in an irregular pattern that prevented any diversion to other tasks. It was educational, though, because I learnt that I missed the pod of dolphins that crossed the bay yesterday – again.

It had started to rain a bit more heavily by the end of the day, just when I had to go outside to bring in the shop display and wheel the bins down from the back. It was not that heavy but I was out sufficiently long that I would have been quite damp through. Now we close earlier, I catch the weather forecast at the end of the local news on the television. That was some geet lump of rain coming through. The happy forecaster told us that it was six hours later than they expected but it was coming from the Continent where being prompt is not such a preoccupation as it is here. Still, it worked in our favour as the day would have been even quieter than it was. How I thanked my lucky stars and bought a lottery ticket.

September 12th – Sunday

The forecast for today was pretty dire a few days ago. Admittedly, they were indecisive about just how poor it would be. Thankfully, I had gone ahead and ordered for a couple of good weekend days and did not regret it.

I recall that it was warm during the night. It was also fairly warm in the morning when I got around to taking the bleddy hound down to the beach. There were a couple of ladies down with their dogs too, but they had elected to swim with them. I invited the bleddy hound to join them but she demurred on this occasion, she forgot her bathing hat or some such.

We hit a fairly upbeat note for the morning, with our enthusiastic newcomers lining up for newspapers and breakfast goods. Business today was not going to set the world alight, but it was fairly steady throughout. Given that it was a pretty grey day with little in the way of brightness to colour the scene, it was about as good as it gets. For the first time since I cannot remember when this season, we decided that we could probably do without a big grocery order. While it still seems busy this is quite demonstrative of how much business has actually dropped away and the amount of excess stock that we had built up over the period. The Missus will almost certain have to drop over to the cash and carry at some point for a few items that we could have added to the list but in no way would we have met the minimum for a delivery this week.

In some of the doldrums of the afternoon I looked to the future. From time to time, I have a quick geet at our supplier websites to see if new stock has arrived. Most times I have been disappointed but today, after a break of a week or so, I discovered that buckets and spades are back. We will not have a big demand for buckets and spades until the half term at the end of October. However, I suspect that this stock will not be available forever and when the next slow boat from China arrives is anyone's guess. As expected, with an exponential increase in shipping costs, the prices have all increased exponentially. With very little choice, I will be ordering them anyway as it is something we shall all be getting used to very soon whatever we are buying.

We had toyed with the idea of a barbeque up at The Farm this evening but for Mother, pie and mash at home was too much of a temptation. The weather had turned out probably just right for an evening on the veranda, which was completely at odds with the weekend forecast. There were spots that did not enjoy quite the balmy, bright day that we had; Mother said that in St Buryan it was thick as a bag all morning. Perhaps one day I will get to visit such far flung corners of the world, or even just the top of the hill. We grumpy shopkeepers have dreams too, you know.

September 11th – Saturday

I never fail to be amazed by just how resilient small children are or the many and diverse things that amuse them. This morning, walking by at some pace, was a burly parent carrying a small girl, suspended by the bunched up collar of her small jacket.

She was laughing quite merrily, so the rather brusque method of transport was pleasing to her. Perhaps it was a case of being hoist by her own tabard.

It was an extremely pleasant morning to be transported anywhere. The skies were clear first thing but by mid morning an amount of high level cloud had drifted in from somewhere. Nevertheless, it remained a glorious day with plenty of sunshine seeping through the cloud. It was once again a beach day, although you would never have guessed from the thin showing at the top of the beach. There were some moderate waves over by North Rocks and on Gwenver, which attracted a moderate number of surfers, since they were the only waves to be had in the whole of the bay.

There were so few waves that you might wonder how two kayakers might fall out of their kayak. I am not sure that it was a question that the Boat Crew asked when they were eventually found with some help from the NCI at Gwennap Head and a very sharp pair of eyes on the Inshore boat.

Our pagers went off a little while after the Missus had left on a trip into town. Fortunately, the shop was not too busy and the few people I had to eject were very kind about the process. At least I did not lock anyone in. I had the added encumbrance of one bleddy hound who I thankfully managed to billet with our next door neighbour before finally making it to the station.

Both boats were launched, the big boat on a swift launch from inside the house although there was a brief pause waiting for a helmsman for the little boat. We do not have an over-abundance of volunteer crew and those we do have do not live or work in The Cove. We also had reports that the traffic today was as bad if not worse than at the peak of the season. The Inshore boat subsequently launched about twenty minutes after the big boat when the helmsman arrived from out of town.

We stayed at the station and monitored progress because on shouts of this type and so close to home, the boat could be back at the station in very short order after wrapping up the rescue. As we did our monitoring, my clever home telephone system rang my mobile telephone since I was not at home to answer it. The first caller was clearly corporate and I ignored it. The second was a mobile number, which are often customer calls, so I answered it and very quickly wish that I had not. It was a potential customer who told me that she spent half an hour trying to get into my shop. This alarmed me because I had visions of her trying to jemmy the first electric sliding door in The Cove. She asked if we were closed to which I replied that we were emergency working with the Lifeboat. This cut no ice at all and simply served to increase the level of irateness, palpable over the airwaves. I confirmed her suspicions that due to the fact that the door was locked shut, we were in fact closed and no further amount of trying to get in would serve very much of a purpose to reverse that fact. I told her I would be there dreckly in an effort to assuage her, which resulted in the telephone call being rather smartly terminated.

Oddly, a little later, a returning customer told me she had come when we were closed. She had been discussing whether to come back or whether we were closed for the duration when a local or regular told her that [the tight old begger] is always open, before explaining that I was probably at the Lifeboat station. The reporter did not actually mention the 'tight old begger' but I just know it was there.

As it was, one of my sharp-eyed compatriots spotted that the Missus had returned but not quite soon enough to save the day, I fancy. The boats picked up the kayakers and returned them to Porthcurno from whence they came, uninjured but a little cold. We spotted that the boats had turned and were headed back but by that time we had already set up for the long slip recovery.

We were well on the way to a very low tide by the time the boat came back. Our heaving line catcher at the bottom of the slipway had to make her way onto the rocks to catch it. The water was like glass down there and it was a particularly fine bit of day to be catching heaving lines on the rocks. As you might expect, there was nothing to stop us executing a textbook recovery and taking the very long walk up the entire length of the long slipway. The small numbers we started with had increased to a more suitable crew strength and we tucked the boat away for next time with minimal effort. We are, after all, a very accumulating, very excellent Shore Crew.

It was half past two by the time I returned to the shop to relieve the Missus. She was a little put out that she could not take an early turn at The Farm but headed up there anyway for the little time that was left. In the shop we became increasingly busy and many of our customers were returning regulars whom we know quite well. We took several enquiries for fish during the week, which was encouraging, although being spring tides netted fish will be off the menu. We also had quite a five minutes to closing rush at five minutes to closing for a change but the intake will soon learn the rules, I am sure.

We wrapped up to the backdrop of a beautiful evening. You would have been impressed if it was your first day here.

September 10th – Friday

Radio Pasty informed us this morning that it would be something of a grey day and not to expect too much of it, so I did not.

It was threatening quite nicely out to the west as I prepared to take the bleddy hound out in the morning. I was duly threatened and took a rain jacket with me that thankfully I did not need. For the third day in a row we have been forced to take a tour around the block, although yesterday, the bleddy hound decided she had quite enough by the time she got to the Harbour car park and came back again.

The tide has been swirling about at the bottom of the slipway leaving no sand at all to cavort on. I thought that the bleddy hound recognised this condition of the tide but she had been making a big fuss about not going down there this time. I am surprised because as we pass the wharf there is the heady aroma of scanky fish where all the lobster pots, brought in over the last week or so, have been stored. It is one of her favourite smells.

The car park tells a tale of a wealth of people still here on holiday and is about a quarter full of overnight parked cars. It had been some time since we had walked out this way and the changes in the flora have been quite marked. The sea daisies have all gone and have been replaced with those blue aster family the name of which escapes me just now. Everywhere is overgrown with fading shrubs and clumps of long past flowers. Except in Betty's garden where the Japanese knotweed is doing very well and has taken over in the bottom half by the old Coastguard office. Let us hope that the new owner is a bit more progressive when it comes to keeping the garden looking trim – just before they build an estate of three storey, glass fronted holiday lets all over it.

The walk around made a pleasant change, for me at least; the bleddy hound grumbled a bit about how far it was. When we got home we sat and watched the rain pass to the north of us, obscuring Brisons and Cape as it went. We did catch a little of it later on in the morning, but we were on the edge of the showers and it was hardly worth a mention for anyone who was not a Diarist looking to fill column inches.

Just to spite the Radio Pasty forecasters, we had a little brightness from the middle of the afternoon. The morning gloom did not seem to upset too many of our visitors who arrived in abundance from the middle of the morning. There was a lot of going home present buying. I am beginning to wonder if it is too late for a change of career. The number of neighbours out there getting premium bottles of spirit for looking after rose bushes/goldfish/tortoise/watering plants (delete as appropriate) is astounding. I seem to remember getting sixpence and a pat on the back, although that might have had more to do with handing back less than healthy rose bushes/goldfish/tortoise/watered plants (delete as appropriate).

I also wonder if some of our customers are actually listening when I speak. I know that the Missus has long since ceased to do so. The number of them that charge off down the first aisle when I have told them that something is down the middle aisle are legion. Some are blatantly not listening because they are half way down whichever aisle they deem fit while I am still giving directions to a particular product. They will also look at the top shelf after I have said something is at foot level – where do they keep their feet, I think – or down at the bottom if I have said top shelf. Left and right I can understand to some degree but not up or down surely. Then there is ...

Customer.: “What pasties have you got left?”

Grumpy Shopkeeper.: “We only have steak pasties left, I’m afraid; we ran out of cheese pasties a while ago.”

Customer.: “Oh. Do you have any cheese pasties?”

Grumpy Shopkeeper.: “Yes, a quarter past three!”

Customer.: [after ten minutes consultation with family] “We will have three chicken and a curried artichoke, please.”

It was difficult to tell just how busy it was or was not today as our customers strung themselves out across the whole day. I do not know where they go in between times as there were precious few of them on the beach. We get a little flurry of beer and wine buying running up to five o’clock, probably because the OS kicks out at half past four o’clock. I had one customer in who told me that the bar was sparsely populated with diners early in the evening and wondered why a few more drinkers could not be accommodated. I can understand limiting diners but it does not take much to serve a few drinks, but I do concede I am commenting with very little information to go on.

I had done all my serving by the time we closed and did not have to forcibly deter any additional customers. On a change-over day the benches opposite the shop were almost completely deserted, maybe also to do with slightly less conducive conditions including a bit of a northwesterly heading in.

A nice geet lump of haddock for tea. What better end to the day could there be?

September 9th – Thursday

It was, indeed, that sort of mist. It had returned to fill the bay sometime during the night and was obscuring everything. It was good enough to lift half way through the morning and give over to a bright, spangly day with a fair amount of cloud. We also had to suffer a brief shower at about the time our pasties arrived, which delighted our driver no end.

On the basis that I could quite easily have consumed my breakfast in the shop yesterday morning and that the damp morning provided a similar opportunity today, I sliced open some smoked mackerel that I had promised myself and broke it up into a bowl of salad I had prepared a couple of days prior. We had been getting our smoked mackerel from the St Ives Smokehouse but on this occasion I got some in from our friend in Penzance. I have a feeling that he smoked it himself because he asked me to report back once I had tried some. He had done two sorts and asked that I let him know what I thought.

The first thing I thought was that I wish I had not started to have my breakfast down in the shop. The moment that I had completed it, we started to get busy and it took a further two hours to consume. I had already tasted the cheaper of the two types of smoked mackerel and found the first had a strong smoky flavour but was a tad salty for my liking. The second, that I had today, was just right and a little less harsh on

the smoked side. It was, however, a tad pricey at which news I hope he will not take offence.

The day was once again unfeasibly warm, which flew in the face of what it actually looked like first thing. It was also very humid, which was what it actually looked like first thing. It was the sort of warm and humid that would drive a grumpy shopkeeper to have an argument with a bleddy hound about a fan if the warm and humid had not sapped the last vestiges of enthusiasm from him. I was most grateful when I could head upstairs for a cup of tea.

I think that our long-suffering surfers would be most grateful for a wave. With the approach of some low pressure I had assumed that we might see a wave or two but the sea had remained stubbornly flat as a dish. There were a few surfers out at low water trying their luck on a shore break out towards North Rocks. It might have been an act of desperation but there were a few usable waves out there by the look of it. The surf forecast tells us to expect 3 to 5 feet tomorrow afternoon but it comes with a robust onshore wind. You certainly cannot have it all it seems.

We find that when the café next door is busy, we are often not. It is an odd phenomenon, but it has played out too many times to be a coincidence. One of their staff came in during the day to rob us of all our tomatoes having run out in the café. He told me then that they were rushed off their feet and had been all day. This is almost certainly the result of ordering in an inflated number of pasties today having once again run out yesterday. I only have myself to blame or for next door to thank me for their good fortune. I suppose buying all our tomatoes helped a little.

While we were not rushed off our feet there were enough customers coming and going to make it a reasonable day of business. I have not done any factual comparisons but it certainly seems busier than a normal September might be, especially as the weather is a bit queer at present. We are still buying in stock – I refilled the surf jewellery stand yesterday – which is unheard of for this time of year. It is clear, however, that the clientele has changed as we are now burning through cases of wine rather than cans of beer, although the local beers are still show strong sales, too.

Our five minute to closing rush has turned into a bit of a five minutes to closing trickle now that the new arrivals have eased into the relaxation of their holiday, just before they go home.

Going home presents tomorrow, then. I will top up the biscuits in the morning.

September 8th – Wednesday

What an eejit! How many times have I warned not to pay any attention to the weather forecasters? So, what do I do? Paid attention to the weather forecasters.

It was still unexpectedly warm when I stepped outside the door. There had been some raining overnight but it was light stuff and not much use to anyone other than keeping the dust down. There was very little visibility in The Cove when I woke up, largely because it is pitch black these days when I wake up. There was still very little visibility when the sun did eventually decide to illuminate our part of the world, as a thick fog had descended in the night, which might otherwise have been described as cloud that had forgotten where the sky was.

There may not have been any rain that was variously promised last night, during the night and in the morning, but the weather certainly dampened proceedings. It may well have had something to do with Radio Pasty sending out dire warnings of floods and thunderstorms, although they did suggest that the hardcore stuff was heading for Sodom and Gomorrah, erm, sorry, Plymouth.

Now there is a thing. If Sodom and Gomorrah were supposed to be in the area around the Dead Sea in the Middle East how come they were called Sodom and Gomoarrah when the region today boasts names like Kerak, Raba and Gawr as-Safi? Sodom I would accept at a stretch but Gomorrah? Come on - unless the Irish got there first.

Anyway, I digress. Now, where was I? Ah yes, thunderstorms. It was quite difficult to see the exact track of the geet lump of horridness but, on the face of it, even in a worst case, we were only going to be on the fringes of it and so we waited. It was reasonably clear that everyone else was waiting too and for the first time in two months I could quite easily have had my breakfast downstairs. In the end, everyone got fed up waiting and came out to play. The rain never came and instead we were treated to yet another warm and sunny afternoon, one where sitting about on the tables of the prom, eating a pasty was just the thing. It is just a shame that certain shopkeepers had looked at the day's forecast and reduced his pasty numbers to a minimum.

It was also a shame that I had not grasped the nettle earlier and had my breakfast in the quiet of the morning. As it was, I was half way through my breakfast when my Lifeboat pager sounded off at a quarter past twelve o'clock. The boat made a very rapid launch to an inflatable out by Longships Lighthouse with an engine failure leaving the crew clinging to a rock in the fast flowing flood tide. It was a rapid rescue as well, and within around half an hour the boat came back into view towing the small rubber boat with it crew safely onboard the Lifeboat.

The boat was reunited with its crew along with a couple of our boat crew in drysuits to navigate back to the Harbour. Well, you did not think that they were there to paddle the boat, did you? Since the tide was still very low there was some concern that the small boat would have some difficulty entering the Harbour. In the event, both crews were able to manhandle the boat around the end of the Harbour wall and row to the shore.

The Lifeboat had followed the inflatable in towards the slipway, which no doubt provided some impetus to the two boys on board keen to avoid the Lifeboat bearing down too closely. I watched proceedings from my eerie of the winch room to be certain that the boat was brought up the long slip in what was clearly a textbook recovery. Given the state of the tide, it was a long haul up the slipway followed by the fitting of the sliphook and a final heave back into the boathouse. We are, after all, a very long haul, very excellent Shore Crew.

Through all our stock shortages one thing seems to have held firm and that is our multi-seed, low GI cob. The little round loaf has been with us throughout, which is a good thing because it forms the mainstay of most of my breakfasts. One unfortunate by-product of the loaf is that it sheds its seeds that adorn the outside with gay abandon. The name of it is a bit of a mouthful too, and many of our customers call it by all sorts of names. Most recently, a customer has been requesting 'that loaf with the chia seeds', which I was not sure that it had. He asked again today and I checked the label and confirmed that it did not have one chia seed in or on it. I told him I would do some research for him and if he came back at Christmas, we may well have a loaf full of good chia.

It had been threatening here and there all day. When the boat went around for the inflatable at Longships the report stated that the mist was closing in on them. It crept over the cliff once or twice during the day and as the sun took its long decline to the west, the mist took its chance and moved in on top of us. I could still see Cape and Brisons but I fancy it was just waiting for the right moment to descent properly but not before the sun made one last rear-guard action that pushed the mist back to the cliff for one last time. It provided one last cracker of an evening with families packing in on the row of benches outside the shop and café. Since the OS has been limiting numbers in the evening, this is the place to be. Given the bit of fine weather, lack of breeze and bit of blue sky, it was particularly busy tonight.

I left them all to it as I shut the shop and the next time I looked, they had all gone. The mist was still clinging to the cliff but I am certain it will be back by morning. It is that sort of mist.

September 7th – Tuesday

What a strange day we were given today. I had been joking with a customer yesterday when I told her to expect a Cornish Sirocco to blow through The Cove but that is exactly what we got and it increased its presence as the day went on.

I was down on the sliver of Harbour beach this morning in a t-shirt as that was all that was required. I suffered a little through the early part of the day partly because the bleddy hound had the fan and partly because I laboured with my pal from the cash and carry heaving in the grocery order in the heat of the morning. It was not until near the middle of the day that I managed to get away to somewhere cooler and that was after another three deliveries.

The morning was heading us into rip gribbler territory but by early afternoon it was clear that all was not well in the garden. Little strings of high level cloud started to appear and by half way through the afternoon they had blotted out the sunshine. It did not seem to bother the good peppering of people on the beach, though I fancy fewer than yesterday, and neither did the strengthening wind from the east. I think that we were very grateful for that wind as it would have been uncomfortably muggy else.

Another oddity of the day was the flow of customers that was sometimes manic with queues down the shop but with periods of total desertion. I had upped our pasties by some margin but still managed to run out but at least it was half way through the afternoon this time. It did seem odd as although the busy times were very busy, the quiet times were quite extended and it did not seem that we had enough people to see off that many pasties.

A group that must have been eating a lot of pasties is the Royal Marines who turned up yesterday in their big trucks. They came in the middle of the afternoon and had to retreat as it was too busy for them to get their trucks into the car park and as it was, after they came back later, they ended up with one in the RNLI car park. I am not an expert in military strategy but it does not seem very robust that your commando force has to retreat because it cannot get a parking space.

The Missus told me that they went out on inflatables last night on exercise and today there were more shenanigans down in the Harbour. As we sat and ate our tea with Mother, we were royally entertained by the lads doing the Harbour wall walk. I have seen them climb along the wall face many times but never at high water. This provides limited amount of wall to find foot holds and makes pouring cold water down their necks much easier.

Later, they had naming of, erm, ways to turn and right an inflatable. Four or five at a time jumped off the wall, got into the engineless inflatable and learned to turn it over before clambering back on the bottom of the boat to right it again. During the whole process we could hear shouts from the NCOs on the wall no doubt calling out gentle words of encouragement to the wet boys below.

I have never thought about it before, but I wonder where they billet for the night. One of the trucks is resident in the RNLI car park so it cannot be far off. Wherever it is, they must have booked last year some time because it is still, I have heard, nigh on impossible to get accommodation on the fly even after the main holiday season has finished.

The Missus gave up on the grocery deliveries during the day. The store room was chock full and needed some concentrated effort, so she decided to do it all after the shop closed and after she had delivered Mother back home. It would be good to

think that was the last night session either of us had to do but this year is full of surprises, so I will not rule anything out just yet.

September 6th – Monday

There are some weird crescent shaped sandbars lying across the big beach this week. They are big enough to have trapped large pools behind them on the falling tide, deep enough to paddle in bath temperature water, no doubt. The sand bars themselves are not unusual but the fact they have appeared when there has not been one single wave or eddy in the water for the last week is somewhat puzzling.

I did manage, however, to resolve the conundrum of how the water crisis in Truro affected the Skinners bottled beer. They telephoned this morning to ask if we needed to place an order, which we did not, but I thought I would ask about the interruption to supply. I was told that they did, in fact, have plenty of the beer in question but were unable to bottle it. The process requires fresh water to filter in some manner and it is also used to wash the bottles. So there. Problem solved.

The problem of the mist that stayed with us all day long yesterday was fixed by it rolling away all by itself and letting the sunshine through. The ugly duckling of a day that we started out with, which in my view was pretty decent to start with, turned into a beautiful shag – we do not get many swans down here. It was quite the prettiest day that we have had for a while and it brought hordes that I thought to have gone home, back to the beach in numbers.

As noted, they had a weird looking, wide beach for most of the day and were only chased up to the dunes by a tide increasing off the neaps at four o'clock in the afternoon. Quite a few had spilled out into the water, which had been glass flat for most of the day. It was not until the late afternoon that the Lifeboat channel flags showed any signs of animation having hung there, limp as dishrags for most of the day.

Thinking that we had entered a bit more of a quiet phase of shopkeeping, I took my time at the gymnasium, extending my routine more in the direction to where I was before we got busy. Oddly, I did not find the extended routine too much of a struggle and had considered restarting the Wednesday session until I saw how busy it was today. Maybe next week, then.

The Missus thought it such a splendid day that we ought to decamp to The Farm for tea. There was an ulterior motive being that I had found the charger for the mower battery in the morning and with a new hex nut installed, was able to charge the battery. She had been waiting three days to mow the grass and it was an opportunity that could not be missed. I am not a great advocate of slipping away up there after a hard day at the tin stope but it generally seems to work out when I actually get there.

The Missus prepared some bubble and squeak and packed the beef that we had from last night. The plan was that she cook the buddle on the rough wood fire surrounded by bricks the name of which I no longer remember. That was the plan, indeed.

It was, of course, pre-ordained that we should have the first proper five minutes to closing rush at five minutes to closing and because it had been so warm through the day. When I took stock of the state of the drinks fridges, I found them in dire need of replenishment. As we have our slightly less than super-big grocery delivery in the morning, they would have to be topped up before we went up for tea. In short, that took so long that it scuppered our plan for a late summer soaking up the warmth in the peace of The Farm.

I do not think we shall have quite as good a day again to do it. How disappointing.

September 5th – Sunday

The mist renewed its efforts to invade again this morning. It looked like it had brought reinforcements because it looked as thick as a bag up the top and I definitely could not see Brisons from down in The Cove. The blanket dampened sound quite successfully and it was completely peaceful down on the Harbour beach with just the lapping of the sea on the shingle.

I had barely opened our doors when an ambulance, first responder turned up. I bade him good morrow and left him on his way. He went over to the closed Lifeboat station so I asked if I could help. He said that he had been despatched here for a casualty at the station. I said that we had one yesterday who might, at one point, have been brought back here but he had been taken out by the helicopter. I told him I knew there were delays in the service, but I did not think that they had got as bad as 24 hours to respond.

We agreed that it could have been a mix up, but it was better not to assume too much and he telephoned the office for some clarity. It was not too much time later and after another Lifeboat crew had arrived that we established our ambulance man was required up at Mayon Point, which none of us had heard of by guessed that it was probably Maen Castle, so we sent him and the police car that came rushing up with blue lights and sirens while we were talking up Maria's Lane as the quickest route.

It was moments after that our Lifeboat pagers went off requesting the Inshore boat to the same location in support of the Coastguard cliff team. We stood by for a launch of the big boat too but discovered very quickly that was not required and we closed up the station doors again. I will not expand or dwell on this call. Suffice to say the Lifeboat and the ambulance were not required for very long and were stood down.

A little bit of mist was not going to stop the gig rowers going out. They even took their gig with them, which I am sure was helpful. It has been out a few times in the last several weeks but I have never seen them congregate on the beach. I am either always in the wrong place or they have found a way to just materialise on the water. Whatever the case, it is good to see them out and a sign of some normality seeping into our society.

Some normality also crept into our afternoon with a reasonable flow of visitors passing through. It seemed to be quite busy despite the weather and the benches outside us and the Sennen Cove Café were constantly buzzing throughout. They might have buzzed some more if we had not run out of pasties. Since it was the middle of the afternoon we did not do too badly but a revision upwards, just a tad, will be helpful for next week – when, of course, that will be too many.

The Missus headed off up to The Farm with Mother after I had finished with the Lifeboat and a bit of breakfast. For the first time in a while she left me with the grocery order to do. The summer rush always puts a boot into any sort of organisation in the store room in terms of volume of stock. We will have a run on a product and buy extra in only to find those naughty, fickle visitors have moved on to something else. This, mixed up with unstable product availability has left us with extra quantities of some stock lines that we would hope to run through if we do not buy any more of it. Sweetcorn and mayonnaise anyone?

The days of a big five minutes to closing rush are over, although there are some still trying to uphold the tradition. So too is the staying behind after closing to restock the shelves. There are so few gaps now that it can be done along with the other morning chores. This meant that I was upstairs on time for my tea, which was late, the first roast dinner for several weeks. Things are definitely back to normal.

September 4th – Saturday

There were three or four people in the morning who told me how cold it was today. Sure enough, there was quite a robust breeze blowing in from somewhere in the east but down on the beach in the morning and later at the bottom of the long slipway, I thought that it was reasonably temperate, even if it was whistling through my lifejacket.

So, now that I have spoiled the surprise, I had better explain that shortly after nine o'clock this morning our Lifeboat pagers went off. The boat was called to a fishing vessel down by Wolf Rock lighthouse with a casualty on board. The report widely suggested it could be a heart attack or a dislocated shoulder. The fisherman's condition was still no clearer after assessment by the Lifeboat crew and the paramedic winched down from the Coastguard helicopter that was despatched at the same time as the boat. The decision was taken to whisk the fisherman off to hospital as soon as possible.

As soon as possible proved to be a bit tricky. Out there, about seven miles from the nearest shelter, the sea was a bit choppy to attempt a lift even from the Lifeboat. It was decided to get into the lee of the land at Pendower and to try from there. This turned out to be a very good idea and the casualty was transferred to the Lifeboat and lifted from there. So, at around half past ten, the Lifeboat made its way back to the station.

On shore, we had been following proceedings and were waiting on tenterhooks for the boat being released. As it was so close, we had very little time to set up the slipway to bring the boat back in but were just finishing off when the boat hove into view around Pedn-men-du. I have not been down to the bottom of the long slip in a few weeks at that state of the tide – near low water – and the amount of weed that has accumulated on the slipway steps is astounding as well as being very slippery. I can assure you great caution was exercised.

We brought the boat back in using what might be termed a textbook recovery up the long slip, which was very long at the time. There was a bit of washing down carried out before we brought the boat into the boathouse and tied it down for the next trip out. We are, after all, a very fastidious, very excellent Shore Crew.

It is as well that the day was the most sedate that we have had for some time. I do not think anyone noticed that the shop had been shut for the duration of the launch. The Missus had arrived and run the shop during the recovery but even then it was not all that busy. I went and had some croust and when I came down the Missus went off on a shopping trip. She has not been for at least the whole of August and I cannot say that we have missed very much from its absence. The crux did come this morning when I found that we had run out of our favourite teabags – which are not the ones we stock in the shop – and that the bleddy hound was on her last breakfast tray. If I had not been forced to be vociferous about it, the bleddy hound certainly would have been.

The weather today was not the most awe inspiring. We started with a hazy mist that gave a little rain toward the middle of the day. The haze hung around right through the day, but we had some teasing bright spells here and there from the middle of the afternoon onwards. The wind, however, never abated from one end of the day to the other and it seemed to keep the numbers off the beach and the perambulating traffic to a steady trickle. I reminded myself it was a change-over day that made me feel better.

The day ended with as much of a whimper as it had started, although the intervening trade was respectable enough for the time of year. We met with a few of the new week contingent, old friends as well as new visitors on the block. I think, on balance, we will be toning down our orders for the coming week and I might even address my very early morning starts. One step at a time, though – you cannot hurry such weighty decisions.

September 3rd – Friday

I spoke with our Ride Across Britain cyclist again this morning on the last day before he set off. He said that he would be going up to the camp at Land's End later, so, out of interest, I asked him what the end point was. Surprised, he said it was John O'Groats, like it was a daft question. In my defence I said that it was called Ride Across Britain, which suggested side to side rather than bottom to top. He thought for a moment and said that he supposed that Ride Up Britain probably did not work that well. I think he was right.

At least it was a much brighter start to the day and in prospect for the starting stage of our man's race. It was still a little breezy first thing and while we were down on the beach. When I headed down to the Harbour the bleddy hound upset a few gulls lining up on a discarded fillet of fish. King of the heap was a great black backed gull, which was most put out that he found himself being chased off his prize to the point he snapped at an unfortunate herring gull on his flight out seawards. Another herring gull that had been stood watching in the black backed while it pecked at the fish was not going to be put off so lightly having waited in the queue so long. He took over watched by a couple of others still young enough to have their juvenile plumage.

It was very amusing to watch the power play going on especially in the lower ranks where there was the occasional feint of a peck and telling off going on. I think that it would have been quite easy to write a script imaging what a bunch of grouchy gulls were saying to eat other.

A little way into the morning I had a call from one of my favourite breweries. The Skinners family brewery is friendly bunch, the relationship is more personal and the employees most helpful. A very pleasant lady from the company telephoned to explain that there was a problem with my order and that they would be unable to deliver the Porthleven beers that I wanted.

Earlier in the week the area suffered a catastrophic failure of a water main when a contractor put a geet hole in it. The problem took a day or so to resolve and left the area with brown water which took some time to run through – including in the brewery. I suggested to the lady at the brewery that since the bottles were brown anyway, no one would notice. She agreed that it was true, but the customer may notice if they came to pour the beer out. I commended her integrity but told her that she would never make a fortune in business with an attitude like that. The long and the short of it is that we have no Porthleven for the weekend, a very popular brew.

I have to say that I was surprised. I thought that the beer took many weeks to brew and even longer with the bottling process. I am clearly not on top of my brewing game but I suspect there is more to it than meets the eye.

The weather took a turn for the warmer in the afternoon as the breeze went around to the south east, It was noted that it was also a tad more humid that recently but

what do I know; I do not get out much. I took the flags out to the front of the shop to see for myself. Yes, definitely more humid than yesterday.

As I have noted before, pasty ordering at this time of year is, at best, imprecise and very hit and miss. Sometimes it is more miss than hit and we promptly ran out of pasties at half past two o'clock. There was a fair few, not hordes, who came by looking for pasties after that and I definitely wish that I had ordered another fifteen or so. The weekend guess will be even worse with a change-over day on Saturday and no idea how many will turn up on Sunday. Welcome to the off season.

The afternoon drifted away without the hint of the five minutes to closing rush we had been having during the week so far. Just to underline that we have returned to normal, Mother came for tea. Actually, she came last night too, hot back from her holiday abroad – Devon – because we had pasties for tea. It was a welcome return to fishy Friday tonight and we had some cracking hake that only turned up yesterday. The Missus had, erm, Tesmorburys frozen breaded cod steaks “because it does not taste like fish”, which speaks volumes about Tesmorburys' fish. The Missus hates fish.

September 2nd – Thursday

I shall have to be more precise in my conversation in future. It will save me much embarrassment.

You may be aware that a bit of a bicycle race is starting from Penzance on Sunday called the Tour of Britain. It has been run before but never starting in the Duchy. It is a big deal for those towns here that it will visit, mainly as it will stop anything being on the road that is not a bicycle. I had not paid a great deal of attention to the goings on because first, it starts eight miles away and secondly, I am very unlikely to be anywhere near it.

So, it was only by way of conversation with one of the first customers of the day, who just so happened to be wearing a hooded sweatshirt with ‘Across Britain Ride’ emblazoned across the top corner, that I asked whether he was here to witness the start of the race. He told me that actually they were gathering on Saturday afternoon to begin the race and that he was in it. I was immediately deeply impressed that this unassuming gentleman was actually taking part in the Tour of Britain. I asked if anyone could join in or if there was some sort of qualification to which he told me that there was a training plan and that certain levels needed to be attained but there did not appear to be any oversight of it.

It was after about five minutes of this conversation that it suddenly emerged that he was not cycling in the Tour of Britain but in the Ride Across Britain that starts the day before. I was momentarily disappointed that I had not been in the company of a Tour of Britain cyclist but on reflection, a ride across Britain was not significantly less impressive and I told him so. He tried to downplay it a bit by saying that the Tour of

Britain cyclists were a good margin faster, he suspected. In which case, I thought, I hope they do not catch up the Across Britain guys who were leaving the day before. I just checked the route and someone, it seems, already thought of that by sending the Tour of Britain cyclists the wrong way to start with, heading west to St Just where they will most likely get lost in the mizzle.

We were not quite in mizzle territory today but it was quite grey again. Those clouds are refusing to shift, although it still remains dry and relatively temperate, compared with winter. There were still various little camps set out on the beach, so the weather was no impediment to beach going and despite the continued lack of waves, there were still revellers in the water.

The whole format of our day has changed and so too has the profile of what is being sold. The ball stand outside, which was being emptied on a daily basis, still has the balls in it I pumped up several days ago. The number of buckets and spades leaving us has diminished too, although that may well be to do with the fact that we do not have many left. The change is a bit of a relief as we were scraping the bottom of the barrel on many fronts. Hopefully there will be a bit more stock to have from the suppliers by half term at the end of October and we can replenish for then.

Our clever little card payment box that told me that we are currently busiest from four o'clock was quite correct again today. Really, it was the last half hour before closing when we are inundated with customers gathering groceries for breakfasts and beer to tea time. There is much more wine being sold than beer and there is no panic to try and restock the fridge half way through. In fact, we are barely getting through half the stock.

This is a relief on the other front that I am now ordering less and therefore having fewer invoices. Once again, after tea, I chained myself to the computer to bang in a few more invoices. At last the two big piles are complete and there is just the last few days from down in the shop and the ones from the till that the Missus is working through. For the first year ever we have had to open a second file for the quarter to file them all away with more than 550 invoices.

Quite how this is Making Tax Digital I am not sure and really I should not have so much paper since most of the invoices come to me by electronic mail. Truly, if everyone submitted invoices in a standard format they could be automatically sucked into the recipient's accounting system. I once had to design a strategy for a computer system that did just that involving many different suppliers working together. I was very grateful that we did not win the contract because I would have had to build and implement that system, but it was a very close run thing. It is good to know no one else has managed it in the twenty years since.

Thinking about such big things can wear a grumpy shopkeeper out. It must be time for bed, surely.

September 1st – Wednesday

Another sign that the season's end is pressing in upon us is the collecting of lobster pots. This seemed much earlier than last year when I seem to remember pots being collected as late as early October. I spoke with one of the fishermen yesterday who told me that they were caught out last year with some early bad weather that scat up the pots and made others difficult to find. A stitch in time this year and they would be able to concentrate on the mackerel – when they eventually arrive – and the squid.

The other tell-tale sign is that it is the first day of September again, which is a sure fire indicator that time is moving on. The breeze was making itself known first thing, too, so much so that I elected to keep the flags inside. Obviously, the wind dropped soon afterwards but you cannot reverse a momentous decision like that at the drop of a hat.

The day followed what is now a familiar pattern of being quiet in the morning and busy in the afternoon. My very clever card payment machine system tells me that we were busiest between four o'clock and six o'clock. It should know because it was there. The Missus came down to finish off the large grocery order toward the middle of the day. I had managed to do a fair bit of it myself during the morning and when I came back from a spot of croust, she had nigh on finished the lot. Just after she finished, the stationery order turned up that contained our long-awaited toothbrushes. I now predict a long period when no one wants to buy one.

Sometimes it is rather pleasant to have a little lift during the day. One came today courtesy of a local lady who stops by quite frequently. She is a very modern lady and told me that her clever watch had just announced that she had completed 10,000 steps today. It was while I was ringing in her groceries that she exclaimed that her heart rate was 110 beats per minute. I remarked that it was a little high and "I wonder what had caused ...", when it struck me. Even a grumpy shopkeeper still has 'it' on occasion. I asked her to kindly refrain from swooning in the shop as it can be quite embarrassing.

The Missus ran off to The Farm after she had finished with her groceries. There is still some salad to pick and some stock that needs to be brought down. Sadly, we are having to work through our own cucumbers as there were just too many in the fridge already. It is not always possible to get advance warning of what is coming down from The Farm, else I would not have ordered them in. I am sure that there will be enough discerning customers over the next few weeks eager to buy some of our late season produce.

We were treated to a proper five minutes to closing rush, which presumably our very clever card payment system was watching very closely. The Missus arrived back in the middle of it so we were unable to put out everything she brought down. We did sell two toothbrushes to a lady who had asked earlier in the week and I had

suggested that they should be here by Wednesday. We do love it when a plan comes together.

It still takes me half an hour at the end of the day to tidy up and refill what needs to be refilled for the morning and to do the closing orders. This is an improvement on last month and will continue to shorten. What I do not expect at the end of that is that I cannot get out of the shop door.

When I opened the first electric sliding door in The Cove to make my exit, I discovered that some eejit had parked so closely to it that I could not get out. As luck would have it my desire to exit coincided with the owner returning. I explained that, churlish as it may sound, I did like to come out of my shop and go home at the end of the day, to which it was explained to me that they thought that the shop was closed. I also asked if they expected the wheelchair user in the flat next door not to want to come along the pavement at that time either. They did not seem to care very much about that either.

I was very grateful that it was a beer night, so I had one.