

DIARY 2022/23

December 31st – Saturday

I will refrain from any commentary regarding the new year honours list, particularly with regard to the absence of grumpy shopkeepers on it. I shall hold out for the Nobels. I must draw attention, however to one name that stood out from the honours list this year or rather the reason why he won his MBE. Mr MD from Bude has been recognised for his services to recycling. In Cornwall this requires extraordinary dedication, patience and fortitude so, no doubt he deserved his award. I am quite surprised that he was not sainted as well.

The promised rain started within an hour of the shop opening, which rather put an end to things. It had been grey from the outset of daylight and probably before if we could have seen it but at least I got away with taking the bleddy hound out first. The only other fly in the ointment was that our milk order was not delivered for some reason. I made some effort in trying to find out and as I did so, he turned up. He had caught a dose of the lurgi that is going around which slowed him down a bit. It was good he came out at all to be honest. I kept a distance, just in case.

We had a few callers through our rainy day, who were most welcome. They were scattered sparsely which left me plenty of time to complete the shop stock take. Even now there are a few bits I am conscious of missing, and I will pick those up tomorrow. I spent some of the evening inputting the data onto the inventory system as there is a time constraint that I am aware of with one of our suppliers which is awaiting an order from us. This must be completed by the end of the first week in January or we are likely to lose some of the price advantages available for early ordering.

The grey of the day never left us but the rain cleared up at around two o'clock in the afternoon. It was too late really to see a resurgence in custom but despite the rain it had not been too bad. I had no doubt that the weather had affected our business, but I rather thought that it would be detrimental. Imagine my surprise, therefore, when I cashed up at the end of the day and discovered we were up 25 percent on the day before. I do no hope that is not fate's consolation prize for knowing what is coming up.

It was probably a blessing in disguise with regard to our pasties as I have no doubt we would have been cleared out had it been a good day. I still need to cook some of our frozen stock for tomorrow, but at least we will have some. It will be a day of saying Happy New Year a lot.

So, I may as well get some practice in. Happy New Year, Blydhen Nowydh Da, dear reader.

December 30th – Friday

The sound of the sea was still rumbling through our windows this morning, but we discovered later that it was much more sedate than it had been yesterday. In fact, not long after high water it looked remarkably peaceful, although it still crowded the beach for a good time afterwards.

I had clearly not looked closely enough at the rain radar before I went out. It was plain that the large lump of heavy stuff had passed in the night and to a quick view, it looked clear. What I had failed to see was the swirl of light blue surrounding our peninsular, which wet my trousers through when I went out with the bleddy hound. The wet was aided and abetted by a sharp breeze still hammering in from the west somewhere, which I could have truly done without, especially as my other trousers that got wet the other day were still in the wash – delayed, waiting on the application of gaffer tape to the washing machine.

Out of the breeze, it is still quite temperate in the flat and my trousers soon dried – or I just got used to the feel of damp. At least I was not alone in my dampness. The mizzle came and went through the rest of the morning leaving a damp, chill feel to it but in the afternoon it dried and brightened. This was clearly the signal to come and and play and once again, we saw a good show of customers vying for a dwindling supply of pasties. I would need to husband the available resources to last out until the end of Sunday trading.

I had already embarked on the heady task of cataloguing the shop's remaining stock by counting the postcards a couple of days ago. Yesterday, I progressed through the greetings cards and some of the gift shelf. Today I continued down the gift aisle and completed the clothes – swimsuits and shorts, mainly – which is a painful part of the process as there are different sizes and type within size. All this data still needs to be input onto the inventory system, a task that will be an utter joy to perform, I am sure – along with checking the contents of the store room and the rest of the stock at The Farm.

Interrupting my state of rapture, the replacement payment card machine arrived. This one came with a SIM card, which is an optional and chargeable extra and allows the machine to communicate via the mobile telephone network should the fibre connection stop working. We opted not to have this arrangement, mainly because the mobile signal is so flaky as not to be worth much as an alternative. I sincerely hope that they do not start charging for this as I will be having words should they try. After a quick call to set it up we are now operational again for the remaining two days of our short Christmas session.

Mother turned up for a bit of fish tea. We are very blessed to have such wonderful suppliers and a grumpy shopkeeper who takes steps to ensure we have an adequate supply of prime hake and haddock through the winter months when they are generally in short and expensive supply. The Missus had the last of her squat

lobsters, the Scottish delicacy which are far too fiddly for me; the Missus hates fish (that does not come in shells).

December 29th – Thursday

The wind upped its game during the night and so too did the sea. We could hear it roaring and thundering even from the back bedroom. When it is like that it forms a constant background rumble behind the double glazing of the windows. I did not see anything of it until gone eight o'clock when I rushed down for the pasty man who arrives early doors when he is on shift. Much of bay was floating white foam with white-capped waves charging in on the shore. Columns of spray were dancing up the cliffs at Aire Point and Creagle and to a lesser extent all along the cliffs out to Cape Cornwall. The wind also scat our memory tree sideways and the Missus had to run around and collect the spilled memory labels but happily most of them remained in place.

Today gave us the best weather we have had since the weekend and it was reflected in the amount of business that it churned up. We already had been getting a good trickle of customers through the morning, then approaching the middle of the day, the pasties started to disappear. I had a surplus from yesterday, which was lucky because I went through all of those and the pasties that had arrived for today. I just hope that we now have enough for the weekend because I placed my order before the main bulk went out.

The other reasonably predictable sales have been hats and hooded sweatshirts, although the latter was more of a bonus. The wind has been keeping the temperature down and while out in it I would say that it is probably quite chilly around the ear 'oles. While we were extracting the Christmas decorations and clearing up the barn, I noticed some woolly bobble hats that I thought we had run out of. I made sure that they were on display when we reopened on Christmas Eve and they have been selling steadily since.

I was a bit miffed to discover that our card payment people had only just raised an order for a replacement machine today. They should have done that first thing yesterday, so we will now probably not have a working machine until Saturday at the earliest. The investment we made in our backup machine has paid for itself several times over, I would say.

There were a few showers blowing through The Cove during the afternoon, but they did not seem to bother anyone or slow the level of business. While the wind diminished a bit, the sea was still dancing over Cowloe even at low water and the waves were still running in white to the beach. Bits of sunshine lit up the beach from time to time that gave the day a much better feel than it deserved. Those wishing to have a run out on the sand had to wait quite some time for the waves to stop pushing long enough to let the tide out. Judging from the numbers out there at three o'clock in the afternoon, many had given up the wait.

When I shut the shop at four o'clock and retired upstairs, the Missus had been busy taking down the Christmas decorations. While not quite the twelfth night, we also have to dismantle the trees across the road, and it would be quite an effort all at once. We also have to move out of the garage we borrowed in the mews behind us and some of the decorations boxes are lodged there. I noted this morning that someone down our end was not to be foxed by the much maligned council's announcement that it was not collecting trees this year – there as a tree stuffed into the public bin at the corner of the slipway. I suspect that it will not be the last.

With no hope of a training launch, there was no Lifeboat training in the evening, that and it still being a bit Christmas. It was just as well that I was able to finish off fitting the new wall heater and we needed a bit of chill taken off the room as the cold from the day had filtered in. I shall have to wait until next month before I can dispose of the old heater. Under the ridiculous much maligned council rules I may only visit the tip, sorry, Household Waste Recycling Centre where my rubbish is tipped, I can only go once a month because of the type of vehicle I drive. We have a truck and therefore we are dodgy characters intent on tipping illegal contraband. Mind, I still have a permit for Somerset somewhere. Now, there is a thought.

December 28th – Wednesday

The rain was rather less fine first thing and I took the precaution of dressing up in full metal jacket waterproofs. Because of the rain the bleddy hound decided that it was not worth walking very far and headed back home before we even got as far as the corner of the Lifeboat station. She then thought it perfectly acceptable weather to sit outside the shop for ten minutes, so I took advantage and put the shop display out. I still had to drag her away at the end of that to get her upstairs. She is a very odd dog.

I had to check the time when I came down to open the shop as it was considerably darker this morning than the one before. I know that the mornings will get darker for a while in that strange phenomenon that I cannot now remember but I think that the weather played a big part this morning as well. It was truly unpleasant with a strengthening wind making it worse. The wind stayed with us but, thankfully, the rain cleared up and we even had some ragged shapes of blue amongst the cloud.

As long-time readers will know, it has irked me for some time that we could not find a form of words that indisputably conveyed to our customers that payment cards were only to be accepted in the shop over a certain amount. There are costs associated with accepting card payments and for a small retailer, they are significant, particularly if the retailer has a predominance of small value purchases, as we do. "Cash Only under £3" elicits the response "Oh, you only take cash" before the customer is gone forever after only reading the headline of the notice. "Card Only over £3" prompts an equal and opposite response from the cash buyer. We have both notices up and more, but customers remain confused.

I cannot recall exactly when, probably at three o'clock one morning, waking white and sweating, it came upon me, the ultimate form of words to fix my dilemma. How about, "We Take Cash Anytime, Cards too if Over £3"? the Cash and Anytime along with the Cards and Over £3 are in bold and paired colours. No one ever again ask to pay for a 50p packet of cigarette papers on a card. Completely infallible.

The postlady delivered a whole heap of goodies and she fair staggered into the shop under the weight. It included the books that should have arrived on Saturday, so I shall be able to read a proper book again but at least I know that I can fall back reading them on the tablet computer should the need arise in future. By courier, the replacement wall heater arrived nearly a fortnight late. I was not there to ask to driver what had happened and I doubt that it would have elicited a straight answer anyway. Even if it had arrived on time it would have come after the cold snap, although it would have been useful with Mother here over Christmas. There is no hurry to install it now, so I started by taking the old one off the wall after the shop closed so that I could copy the cable end lengths in the shop on the new one tomorrow.

The thing that should have turned up today, did not. Our payment card machine is still not working and was due to be replaced today. I actually do not hold out much hope that a replacement will work, either, because I suspect that the issue is not hardware. I tried emulating the machine not having any Internet and it gave a different error message to the one it gives while ostensibly connected, which suggests that it is indeed communicating up the line. I await developments with eager anticipation.

There was rather less eager anticipation for me rolling around on the floor putting some tape over the hole in the washing machine when I retired after a hard day at the tin stope. I also had to unwire the existing wall heater from its connection on the wall. I had to stick the tape on the washing machine hose while it still issued water. I used some insulation tape overlayed with gaffer tape (of course) so it may hold for a wash or two – hopefully until our man can get here with the spare part. I think he will not be back until next week, so we had to do something, even though my underclothes are probably good for a week or two yet. I mean, they still do not stick to the wall when thrown there, the acid test for such things.

The wall heater offered far less resistance and will be replaced by the same time tomorrow. Not that it is needed at present as the weather has turned quite temperate. For the first time in a while, we did not bother with any heating at all in the evening, not counting my coveted electric blanket, of course. I have still not found one that I can control via an 'app' on my mobile telephone, which means I have to get up at the appointed time and walk the ten yards to the bedroom to switch it on. A simple timer will not suffice as the controls default to warp nine for 30 minutes when it is first turned on rather than last used setting. Had I known that before I purchased it, I would have purchased another make. As if life were not hard enough.

For times such as these, there is beer.

December 27th – Tuesday

I had best summarise the last two days else there will be an Agatha Christiesque gap in my timeline when they come to write my biography. It might look a lot but I promise I have written more in a single day on occasion, so do not be too alarmed, dear reader.

Christmas Day

The bleddy hound gave no quarter for it being Christmas Day. She had me up at five o'clock and quite concerned that I might bump into a belated Santy. Not that we have a chimney, or stockings for that matter – I stopped with those a while back when the rubber on those hold-ups kept snagging on my leg hairs – but you never know. Anyway, I kept her waiting for a bit, and she went back to sleep on the bedroom floor, thankfully.

I do not open the shop on Christmas morning as I am not allowed to, by order of the Missus. I suspect that it would probably be quite lucrative, especially if I could get organised and do some hot drinks and food. It is, of course, the Christmas swim, which has been going on down here for some years, certainly pre-dating us by a margin. The whole cold water swimming thing has gathered some momentum in recent years which was reflected in the sheer numbers of people joining in for this year's event.

Earlier, I had excused myself to head up to The Farm. There were a few things missing from the shop that I felt probably were worth while collecting and I thought that both our compost bins in the kitchen were full. In the event, only one was but it was still worth going for the stock, I felt. While I was there, I called the Aged Parent to wish them season's greetings as it would be quieter up there and I would not disturb our Christmas guests who were busy making their own calls.

As I left The Cove, the regular volunteers were putting out the traffic cones as they have done for the past few years. Strictly speaking, they should have been unnecessary because the lines this year are no longer seasonal, but the Parish felt they would be helpful to reinforce the message. It has got to the stage previously where people had parked like complete eejits and near as darn it, blocked the road with haphazard and nose to tail parking. Emergency vehicles could not have traversed it and the Lifeboat would have been seriously delayed if we had a shout. Even today, drivers were moving the cones so that they could park.

When I returned from The Farm the hordes were gathering and the top car park was filling up nicely. There was mayhem at the bottom of the hill as cars disgorged their swimming occupants so that the poor dears would not have to walk more than a few yards to get to the beach. I would have thought a bit of a stank would have warmed

them all up a bit. As it was, we were nearing low water on a spring tide and the swimmers had a bit of a run to get to the water.

Those of us who know better, hung around at the shop end to watch and do a bit of meet and greeting of the cold and blue on their way back. I provided a beer or two and we had a bit of a chinwag as the crowds passed by. One couple that we know came by and reported that the OS had put one person behind the bar when they had looked in and quickly reassessed their plans. Given that there was probably in excess of 600 people down that end at the time and maybe a quarter of those might wish post-swim, Christmas Day libation, I would say that barperson was in for a spot of bother.

Boxing Day

Sometime during Christmas night, the temperature took a bit of a dive and it was quite chilly for our step out in the morning. The bleddy hound was a bit kinder this morning and waited until just before my alarm was due to go off. Since she likes to sit outside the shop on our return, I have taken advantage and set up the shop's outside display while she waits, which is a great help. I may not feel the same in a howling gale and lashing rain when we are not open but for now it suits quite nicely.

We did get a bit of rain a little later in the morning but by and large it was quite decent weather, if a little chilly. The sea was churning in the Harbour at high water first thing but looked to be moderated by the time low water came along in the middle of the day. The beach looked busy by then with dozens of wandering groups wondering what else was to be done in the middle of a Boxing Day when you really did not want to drink or eat any more.

I wondered, too, when business did not take off and I closed the shop in the middle of the day and retired into the warm. It had been cold in the shop, so I was grateful for the early closure but had begger all to do after that, the same as everyone else. I would have sat and read a book, but I have run out of my supply and the Post Office strike in the run up to Christmas scotched the delivery of the next batch.

I turned to the Internet as I believe there is a wealth of books available that can be read on the computer or, for convenience, on a tablet computer that can be held like a proper book. I had avoided such things in the past really with the thought that I would have a preference for the traditional but had not really tried out the concept. The problem being that I would not wish to spend money on the experiment and the only books available for free were those published prior to fifty years ago when the copyright expires. The choice of anything other than the classics being frugal.

Caught between a rock and a conversation with the Missus, I resolved to have a closer look at the available books on a website that promised a better selection than anywhere else and not just the classics. Having perused their list for a few minutes I began to doubt the integrity of their assertion so, with time progressing I selected an

Arthur Conan Doyle title, *The Mystery of Cloomber*. I must report that not only have I found it quite comfortable reading the pages on my tablet, I have also discovered the book to be quite captivating and not at all dated as I had imagined. I have nearly finished it, which means finding another but this time I would not be averse to spending a couple of shillings on one.

Today

Yes, you are right. I may as well have published the Diary over the last two days rather than sending it all out today. I did write Christmas Day's on Boxing Day, so I would still have been one day behind.

I might have imagined it, but I did think that I had seen a weather forecast that suggested rain in the morning today. Happily, it was not raining when I stepped out with the bleddy hound, and neither was it as cold as it was the previous day, although it was cold enough hanging around in the shop all day. We are not usually bothered at that time in the morning and in the dark by other people being around but this morning it seemed that the world, his great aunt Betty and their dogs were abroad for a walk, and we bumped into most of them. One of those was the bleddy hound's best pal who we had not seen for a while, so that was good to have a catch up.

Our meeting was disturbed by the milkman, which turned out to be handy because it meant that I could whisk the milk straight into the shop again. I left it there until after I had fed the bleddy hound, but I was not pressed at all in the setting up the shop as there is not a great deal to do on mornings during this period. It was busier again than I anticipated and had to call the pasty people a second time to up our order for tomorrow. What I had expected was that business would drop off completely in the afternoon when the rain started but it was remarkably busy despite it.

The rain was reasonably heavy, and I am sure we would have been twice as busy without it. Open for eight days and two of those are wiped out because of the rain – we are due a bit more in the morning tomorrow. I was not too badly off until we closed when I had to step out to bring in the outside display. That was not so much the issue as having to plug in the power packs for the Christmas tree, which takes a minute or two and then to discover that the two batteries I charged two days running are shot. The rain looked like it had eased a bit before I went out, but it had merely turned to fine rain that soaks you through in seconds. Seconds later I was soaked through. I resigned myself to be wet for a while and took the bleddy hound out for her pre-dinner spin before I retired upstairs to get changed.

Bored to a certain degree, I took to counting our postcard stock in the last couple of hours of opening. It is one of the most laborious parts of the end of year stock take and takes a while. At least I have a crib list to work to, so I only have to write down the numbers and not the name or code of each card. The numbers will have to be transposed onto the stock system later, which is just as laborious but very necessary

and is only the start. I have to do the whole shop, hopefully, before we close at the end of the week and the Missus has to do the stock up at The Farm, that is her domain and she knows where everything is.

I got the impression that the Missus did not fancy cooking tonight. Our guests departed in the afternoon, she ones that she cooked Christmas dinner for and the cold meat and pickles etcetera the next day and the day before all that. This may have had some bearing on it. I might do a stock of the freezer tomorrow to see what we have left for January.

December 24th – Saturday

We have seen a few people swirling about over the last few days and a few more maybe yesterday that provided some indication that it would not be a complete waste of time opening the shop today. And so it was. We had a family breeze through at the outset as well as a neighbour's dog, the bleddy hound's best pal, who decided to bring herself down to wish us luck on our inaugural day. The rest of our open day proved quite upbeat, which is unusual for the start of this week of business but probably was due to it being a Saturday.

It was still dark as pitch when the bleddy hound and I got out first thing. I had set my alarm for a little earlier to include the getting ready for work bit but the bleddy hound had clearly got ahead of that and woke me up five minutes before the alarm. If she does that tomorrow morning, she can take herself out.

Naturally, we were quiet for the first part of opening. If we were selling newspapers for this period we might have seen a few more early risers, so I was not overly surprised. I was overly surprised by the volume of pasties we sold through the day. It was at least double my estimate and put into doubt pasties for Tuesday. I was going to do them Boxing Day, but I will sink that idea and save them all, for Tuesday instead.

We sold other things, too, and in quite some abundance. It was probably our busiest Christmas opening day ever and we will not be too disappointed if the remaining days show similar effort. By the look of it, many of our visitors will be going home before the following weekend so it is just as likely we will have a renewed influx toward the end of the week for the following weekend on which we close.

You might have thought that following the postponement of our building works, the hole in the washing machine hose and a wall heater packing up that the small gods of grumpy shopkeepers might have had their sport with us and moved on. Perhaps they felt that we had not suffered enough because the first transaction on the card payment machine failed in such a way that it was clear that the problem was bigger than just one customer's card. I was not able to get through to the support people until well into the afternoon by which time we were very busy and trying to fault find was traumatic alongside serving customers.

Everything at my end was working. The machine was talking to the wife and was connecting to our router without issue. The first person I spoke with had taken me through some basic fault finding but when he tried to transfer me to a more expert agent, I was cut off. On my second attempt I was put through to a very pleasant lady who insisted on trying everything again, which failed again and then told me that the port numbers on the router were not open, which they were but was also nonsense and she did not believe me, anyway. We tried everything and some of those twice to make sure. At last, to placate her more than anything else, I said that I would restart the router largely because we had tried everything else. It was just as I pressed the 'go' button that I remembered that we have an Internet telephone and that we would be cut off in seconds, so I wished her a Happy Christmas.

I decided that it was probably worth waiting until after we closed before trying again, which I did. I spoke with another very pleasant lady who, given that it was one hour before shift end on a Christmas Eve, decided to send replacement terminal after I explained that we had done an hour of fault finding with her colleague without finding the fault. In her place I would have done the same, even if it was not the terminal at fault. The replacement will not arrive until Wednesday now, or possibly the following Friday as it is being delivered by Doing Parcels Dreadfully.

It was getting dark at our appointed closing time and properly dark an hour later. It had been a wizard day with lots of our regulars and locals dropping by. The Highly Professional Craftsperson came by and an hour later his brother too. We rarely see each other now since we stopped going to the quiz and evenings out to music events are sparse. He may well drop down for an al fresco beer outside the shop tomorrow, which will be pleasant.

I hear report that the OS was heaving during the mid and later afternoon. This is much the way it was in 2019 before the dreaded lurgi, so perhaps some normality is creeping back into life. Of course, if they all succumb to lurginess inside a week, I may revise my opinion and thank my stars I was not there but in the meanwhile I will enjoy the thought of it.

Well, there is only imbibing in a glass of Christmas cheer left of the day and, of course, to wish both my readers a Very Happy Christmas.

Have a bit of Tennyson on me.

*Ring out, wild bells, to the wild sky,
The flying cloud, the frosty light:
The year is dying in the night;
Ring out, wild bells, and let him die...*

*Ring out false pride in place and blood,
The civic slander and the spite;*

*Ring in the love of truth and right,
Ring in the common love of good.*

*Ring out old shapes of foul disease;
Ring out the narrowing lust of gold;
Ring out the thousand wars of old,
Ring in the thousand years of peace.*

*Ring in the valiant man and free,
The larger heart, the kindlier hand;
Ring out the darkness of the land,
Ring in the Christ that is to be.*

As usual, there will be no Christmas Diaries because you should all be opening your presents and over-eating instead. We will meet again after Boxing Day.

Nadelik Lowen, onen hag oll. Happy Christmas, everyone.

December 23rd – Friday

The shop opening took on its final phase this morning with the arrival of the orders I had placed yesterday. I had just got back with the bleddy hound when the first of them arrived and it confused me slightly because I thought that it was the milkman. I knew that if the second arrived, I would have to go down because the first delivery would have filled our voluminous box, which indeed it had. Then the milkman arrived, which had me out of my seat in short order, because I had assumed he was the first. It is always good to take the milk order straight off the van as it goes into the trolley and straight down to the fridge and makes life a lot easier than staging it.

The pasties arrived while I was in the middle of sorting out the dairy and I suddenly remembered that I had not prepared the fridge in advance. I had to do it on the fly but fortunately there were not that many, and the driver does not press in any case. That meant that everything was through the door by half past eight but it still took me until gone ten pricing, putting away and breaking up the boxes they came in. I have also had to redo the shelf labels, primarily because we have new shelves for the bakery section and secondly because since we closed at the end of October, the prices have gone up – again.

This means that our pasties have increased in price by 15% in the year over three increases. All our other bakery goods have increased by similar amounts and while we are following the increases handed to us, we are not making and more profit from it. It is costing an absolute fortune in labels, and I am considering an electronic system that can show different prices on the fly. I will be able to change them hourly then.

With all the new stock priced and out in the shop I was free to go and make arrangements for supply of our logs and kindling. I had initially thought that they were a good bit cheaper than they had been from our cash and carry supplier but on closer examination, the difference in price is marginal. It was quite efficiently done because while I was arranging the account, someone was amassing our order at the back of the truck. Had I left it open I am sure they would have loaded it as well. At least we now have a regular supplier of logs and given just how many we go through and all year at that, it is just as well.

The mopping of the shop floor is left until last. It also gives me a chance to have a last look around and make sure everything is in place. That was a complete waste of time because after I had mopped the main bulk of the shop I remembered the wireless timer on the drinks chiller at the far end of the shop had not been set.

It was a while ago now that a visiting electrician suggested that we shut down all the fridges we could overnight because it would save a fortune. He was right and we reduced the electric bill by £400 that first year, which is better than £800 in current prices. To save me having to remember to turn the chillers on and off, I fitted remote controlled timer on them, which work very well after I had installed a wireless extender in the shop. Recently, I had changed the extenders so that they all have the same name and thus we do not have separate zones in the building – if I move from one to another in the middle of a telephone conversation, the line breaks up. Anyway, having changed the name, the remote devices stopped working and had to be reset, which meant walking to the end of the shop over my newly mopped floor.

The floor is in a dreadful state anyway and mopping does little to improve it. Unfortunately, to renew the floor, the entire contents of the shop and storeroom would need to be removed and if we are doing that, we may as well refit the whole shop and I have not won the lottery, and neither do I have the fortitude to do through an extreme operation of such magnitude. It only has to last another 20 years (at a push and extreme medication) and it will be someone else's problem. They can bury me under the new one then with a nice plaque on the top, me behind a counter with a till and a bleddy hound at my feet, to encourage brass rubbers to take facsimiles of. Job done.

December 22nd – Thursday

We were sprinkled a little bit with rain as we headed for the ultra-smooth sand on the Harbour beach this morning. By the late afternoon, it was getting another scrubbing by some lively waves that themselves were getting a battering from others coming over the wall. The heavy ground sea was not too obvious at the lower tide but was still making a bit of a racket, nonetheless.

By the time the bay lit up in the eventually risen sun, it was properly raining and that continued until the middle of the day. It was just as well that I was buried in the shop, placing orders and trying to track down an alternative supplier for logs and kindling.

Our usual greengrocery supplier does supply logs but only in 20 kilogram nets. I had meant to weigh the bags that we have before I called as there is no indication of the weight on the packaging, but I forgot. I was not sure that they were 20 kilograms though and when I did check, they were only eight, which I had guessed earlier. Our kindling is more like 3 kilograms.

Drawing a blank with the only other likely supplier and one that delivers daily, I tried my luck with one over in St Just. They do exactly what we need but can only deliver once a week. It will take some managing but if the worst comes to it, I can always despatch the Missus on the twenty minutes round trip, while the shop is open. I suspect we will only need the one visit for our forthcoming opening, and I will go over tomorrow to set up the account.

I had called in the pasty order earlier, also remembering to call our neighbour who has a regular order of the multi-seed loaf they do. We will have 'plastic' bread from the milkman for the weekend because the bakery's next delivery is not until next Wednesday and their bread will not last that long. The plastic bread is so full of preservatives it will be good until at least Easter. I left it until the late afternoon before calling in the milk order as it was the least time critical.

We had a delivery of soft drinks toward the middle of the day, and I spent some while filling the chiller at the end of the shop. By the time I had finished that and cleared up afterwards, the rain had cleared, and it was time to take care of a few of the bigger items and that necessitated a trip up to The Farm.

We have largely ignored The Farm in recent weeks as we were too distracted with all else going on. It has not suffered for the lack of attention but needs an awful lot of effort to get it back up to scratch for planting in the new season. Now that we are released from any effort on the roof, we can concentrate on getting The Farm sorted but I fear with only really two months left and with getting the shop ready for the new season, it may not be enough.

Today, I had to drop some of the larger items not needed in the shop up to the barn for storage and I was under instructions to harvest the remaining Brussels sprouts from the growing area in the field. As a growing area, it has done rather well but much of what has grown there is weed and will need a lot of effort to de-weed. The Brussels stood out as the area they are in does not seem to have suffered the same overgrowing as the rest of it. Since the Missus prepared the area in the tradition of her guru, Mr No Dig Gardening, with cardboard laid out to stop the weeds, I might take issue as to its effectiveness. I left it with a bucket full of Brussels sprouts trees knowing I would be back and fairly shortly at that.

It is disappointing that the fellow we said could dump his hundred tons of topsoil at the bottom of the field left the entrance and route down there in such a mess. Everywhere else grows over with a thick layer of green something in pretty short order, but for some reason the tracks of his vehicles remain stalwartly muddy and

difficult to traverse even with four-wheel drive engaged. It is not as if we can avoid them either as they lie between the cabin and the barn, a well-used path. Only time will fix this particular issue, I fear.

I left with the sun dipping in the southwest. It would be gone inside the hour and darkness would come on pretty quickly after that, especially with the return of the dark clouds we had earlier. I had to divert attention to the battery providing the light in the store room before I went. The usual battery that is in there lasts the entire summer. We had problems with the first alternative battery we were using in that it lasted no more than a week before being exhausted, I switched that one with the other that normally sits in the cabin and that one has lasted a bit longer, perhaps two months but still not as long as the usual one. I suspect that I would have done better to rotate the batteries more frequently, as I think the other two have spent too long full charged and not being depleted. It is an expensive lesson learned as out of three leisure batteries, two need to be on permanent charge to be of any use.

The Missus was elbow deep in sausage rolls and cheese straws in the kitchen when I returned. I definitely picked the right time to evacuate the area as I would no doubt have been in the way had I stayed around. Much of the output is for the Christmas period and judging from the volume, we clearly have a regiment of infantry and their spouses turning up for a week. I am sure they would not miss a sausage roll, so I nicked one. They are very good.

I had a few more when we gathered at the Lifeboat station for a jolly before the Christmas weekend. The Missus had done an extra batch of sausage rolls, cheese straws and potato wedges, which would have fed the entire crews from out flanking stations as well. Fortunately, some of the youngsters in the crew have ravenous appetites and what they did not eat there they would take home for later.

Many retired to the OS for the quiz after that and I was invited but declined. I just cannot bring myself to resume the Thursday night event having become so used to not going. I seriously covet my early nights due to my constant early mornings and then there is the small matter of the cost of a pint there, which I would resent. It seems that old and grumpy have crept up on me in the last few years and I am quite enjoying it. The next stage is being sharp and rude to people and it being dismissed because of my age. Who knew it would be such fun.

December 21st – Wednesday

Well, Happy Winter Solstice one and all. It was such a short day that it was over before it began almost, and I must say that I was not that unhappy about that.

We had awoken with hope in our hearts and great confidence that all was well with our little part of the world, especially the getting on and doing building bit. It was the sort of overt joy and delight that attracts too much attention, and the small gods of

grumpy shopkeepers are quite adept at pulling the world out from under the feet of such revellers and so it was today.

Our new builder, the fifth in three years along with two structural engineers, which I think must be some sort of record, brought with him a coup de grâce for our roofing project. It appears that our erstwhile builder, number four, failed to secure his workforce for the project and they ran off to find other work. Furthermore, the new builder ran through a number of things that would demonstrate that the timescale that builder number four had committed to, was probably not achievable. We agreed that we would have another crack at it at the end of 2023 and allot an additional month to it. We are left with cancelling various things, not least our kindly provided accommodation and postponing our additional suppliers of windows and solar panels.

The solar panel people came back a little while later with much sympathy and told us that they were seriously considering our big switch idea, which is most heartening because I told them I would not countenance an installation without it. Further to that they suggested we also look at wind power, which is a jolly good idea if we could get away with it. This would be an addition to the solar panels and is much more expensive but certainly something to consider when I have had time to win the lottery and fancy doing battle with the aesthetics brigade.

One of the most important things to cancel was the achingly difficult move of our fibre cable, which turned out to be achingly difficult to cancel as well. It would seem that fate had intervened for the supplier not turning up on the last booking and the cancellation happening before they came back again. We would have been in a right pickle had they done the work. I think they may have kicked up a bit of a fuss had they done it only to be asked to reverse it a month later and do it all again at the end of next year. Just because they had not done the work, however, did not stop them from charging me, though. It took half an hour to arrange the cancellation and a further fifteen minutes to explain why I needed a refund and another ten minutes after that to arrange it. I will have to do it all again but at least that is the best part of a year away.

On the bright side, and I can only think of one, is that I will be able to finance it over two financial years, which has a tax benefit. I just hope that the scaffold man does not turn up on Wednesday just into new year as I have been unable to contact him – not that it should have been down to me because I did not contract him.

The small gods of shopkeepers clearly do not abide by Queensbury rules – whatever they might detail – but I am sure one of them must be not to kick a man when he is down (mainly because he might get back up again). We had noticed the day before that the washing machine had sprung a leak. We were relatively certain that this was down to one of the Missus' underwired brassieres that emerged from the machine no longer underwired. It amazes and alarms me that ladies can walk the streets wearing underwear bearing such lethal capabilities without some sort of licence.

We have a very efficient washing machine engineer locally who turns up in very short order and is most reasonable with his fees. I am sure that he must be joy to the heart of many a housewife (see, even grumpy shopkeepers can be awake, erm, awoke, erm woken?) because of his rapidity and effectiveness – which unfortunately sounds like the tag line of a 1970s ‘confessions’ film*. Anyway, he was no less rapid and effective as he turned up today after only being hailed yesterday. He spent two minutes with the machine and confirmed our assumption and announced there was a hole in my hose that was letting out water. I thought that would make very good lyrics in some psychedelic song but was soon distracted when he told me he did not carry such hoses. It will rely on the openness of the vendor and the operational status of the Royal Mail for its delivery time, and we will not have a working washing machine until after Christmas at the earliest and very possibly next year.

It was not all doom and gloom today, thankfully. Although we did suffer a small shower of rain near the middle of the day, the weather was quite perky for the time of year and exceedingly mild. I did not think that earlier because I omitted to slip on a pully when trying to cancel the fibre cable move and let the chill get at me. I soon warmed up as the day got going and I actually started to do some work. Before that, however, I sat and had some breakfast and watched the sea misbehave. A decent ground sea had established itself and with some clean waves on the flood, it had attracted a few surfers to the near end of the bay. Further over, at Aire Point, fairly large columns of spray were launching up the cliffside and, later, clouds of spray looking like mist, hung in the air above Gwenver and along the cliffs towards Cape Cornwall. Actually, the latter could well have been mist clinging to the inlets and valleys.

Having collected a bunch of goodies for the shop yesterday, it was time to get them and some of the existing stock onto the shelves. I spent most of the afternoon doing that and pricing things and generally cleaning up as I went. By the time I had finished, all the shop furniture was in its proper position and only the till area remained a bit of a mess. I will arrange for all our dairy, bakery and local produce to be delivered on Friday so that I do not have to run around in a panic on Saturday morning – I can run around in a panic on Friday morning, instead. That and because the bakery are not delivering on Saturday at the moment, which I am very glad I found out last week and not this. I placed an order for soft drinks yesterday that should arrive tomorrow and that will complete our opening readiness – I hope.

Our postie lady has clearly been working hard and we have had cards delivered for the last few days now. Among these were some from regular visitors and friends whom we have known for years, probably close on twenty of them, years, not friends, we are not that popular, contrary to common belief. And among those was a special one from L&L, from north of Camborne (by a ways, och aye), who are clearly growing up in leaps and bounds and we wish you both Happy Christmas and New Years in equal measure. It was just the tonic we needed on a day such as this that was mercifully short.

*The appearance of Robin Asquith in the recent detective drama, Strike, on television rather spoilt it for me (actually that was only one of the things that spoilt it, but that is another story) as all I could think of was Confessions of a Window Cleaner – which I heard tell 'cos I never saw it, honest guv, was a saucy 1970s comedy film containing nudity and adult themes.

December 20th – Tuesday

It seemed blacker than ever on the ground this morning as we struck out for the top of the Harbour. This was odd, as the sky was clear and growing pale with the arrival of the dawn. Hanging on the edge of Mayon Cliff, just behind the houses up on Maria's Lane, a crescent moon peeked through. I do love a good crescent moon and I have no idea why. A cracking good day followed on, the blue skies continuing throughout. The sea, however, continues to build into a stormy mess, which is incredible when you consider that on Sunday it was flat as a dish.

Assuming builders get up in the early hours I wasted no time in calling the new man. He seemed quite confident but only got the news shortly before we did but at least he seems game. I set up a meeting for early o'clock tomorrow with him and the structural engineer who rearranged appointments to be there, bless him. I will know more then.

With that out of the way I was keen to get on with the day and the bit I could control to a certain degree. The shop will open come what may this coming Saturday, and it would be helpful if we had some groceries to sell. I had spent some of yesterday trawling through the current stock and made a list of the things people are likely to want. The days have fallen kindly this year and we do not have to open until Christmas Eve, especially now we are not doing newspapers.

I am reminded by Radio Pasty amongst other commentators that there are only five sleeps left until Christmas. I find it expressed that way quite irritating and somewhat childish and seems to be a recent innovation. When I get the chance, I like to have a little zizz in the middle of the day. Does that mean my Christmas Day will come twice as quickly as everyone else's who only sleep once in 24 hours. So, can we please use the grown-up term days, or nights if you prefer, to Christmas like we always used to. I will make an exception for those living in Bodø.

Anyway, I digress. Now, where was I? Ah, yes, getting ready for shop opening on Saturday required me to make a list of all the things we need and head off to the cash and carry in Hayle. It is now our only cash and carry since the local one has closed, which is a crying shame. We had also loaded the truck with the items we no longer required that were residing in the loft for years. These were to be taken to the dump, sorry, Household Waste Recycling Centre, where they will be dumped because although some components could be used again most of it had to go into the 'general waste' pile because they were not separate.

For the first time ever I had my ticket clipped by the man at the, erm, Household Waste Recycling Centre. They had clearly bought a surplus of those ticket clippers they used to use on the railway, or perhaps they had just waited until the railway people brought all their redundant ticket clippers to the Household Waste Recycling Centre to be dumped so they did not have to buy them at all. Genius.

Having cleared the truck, I was able to proceed to the cash and carry. I managed to fill three big trolleys, which looked excessive and much more than the small amount on the list. It took quite some time to accumulate everything as there are always one or two things that are well hidden from view and some things you spend ages looking for and are just not there. The end result was a complete truck full including the back seats that I just this minute remembered that I forgot about when I unloaded and the Missus has taken them back into town again.

She had to take the poor bleddy hound to see the veterinary doctor for her regular appointment. The bleddy hound goes into meltdown if we deign to drive anywhere in the direction of town, even when we are not going there – mind, I sympathise as I feel the same going beyond the top of the hill. On Sundays we have to remind her that I am going shooting as it is roughly in that direction, and she starts shaking. I really cannot blame her as I think I would be somewhat anti if every time I attended the doctor someone stuck their fingers up my bottom. I do hope you were not at your breakfast, dear reader.

Since it was a late appointment, the Missus suggested that she stop by our revised favourite curry house and come back with a take-away, which was an excellent idea. We normally buy several and freeze them for future consumption without the sixteen miles round trip. Cue another beer, I say, it is almost Christmas, after all and we have had a tough week and it is only Tuesday.

December 19th – Monday

The day started well enough. There was not any rain and it was remarkably temperate outside, so much so that I wondered if I might not be a little overdressed. It did not matter overly because despite it not raining and being quite warm, the bleddy hound was not eager about any of it and returned to sit outside the shop, as she does. Her arthritic limp has reappeared, which might have much to do with it and she is booked in to have her injection refreshed tomorrow. She did not have a lot of choice about sitting outside the shop for a while because I took some time collecting the battery packs that needed charging up indoors.

I left her and the Missus to it after I had run the bleddy hound out and fed her. I had an outstanding appointment with the gymnasium now that I could get there without freezing to the rowing machine. It was still cold in there when I opened the door and colder than the outside air, so I opened both windows to let some air through. It was a good plan anyway because it was also decidedly damp in there. It was wholly disappointing when I got to the rowing machine because it was clear that someone

else had used it since last Monday as the foot straps were tightened. I was lucky that they were not there, else they might have taunted my cowardice for not turning up during the remainder of the cold spell. Anyway, I bet whoever it is does not have blistering sessions.

After I returned and had some breakfast, we launched ourselves into the next phase of our readiness programme for the approaching building work. This phase we call, clearing out the loft and is the scariest part of the whole process. Who knows what we had put up there during the years. The only certainty being, of course, that ninety percent of it was destined for the tip, sorry, household waste recycling centre. Anything that can be put away for more than a year and very possibly six months, is pretty much not needed to sustain life or even provide a modicum of pleasure. To be honest, we had been pretty good and had previously cleared out a lot of unused gear a few years back. We studiously avoided adding to it since then mainly because it was much easier to take it to The Farm, which is much bigger.

We did pretty well. Because of the timescales involved we only separated out anything obvious at first sight that could be dumped. Whole boxes that might contain keepers and throwers would wait until we moved it back. Once again, we are hugely lucky to have access to the garage at the back of us to store all this. I was making numerous trips and the Missus laboured in the loft and handed things down to me. All told it took us into the later afternoon and had only one section left to clear. Then the 'bombshell' dropped, the balloon went up and we fell into despair.

We had stopped for a cup of tea, which was a bit of a mistake because we did not want to get back up again. It was during this extended break that a message came in from our builder. He explained that he had been offered a job, something of a job of a lifetime and really could not turn it down. The application had been a while ago and because he had not heard back, assumed he had not got it – until now – and it started immediately. He had been in touch with a pal, another builder who '*should*' be able to take on the work and '*hopefully*' everything would proceed as planned and '*hopefully*' at the same cost and schedule.

One *should* and two *hopefully*'s did not exactly fill me to the brim with confidence that our work would go ahead. It is due to start in two weeks, our fibre is being moved next week at huge inconvenience, deposits have been paid and teams have been scheduled to deliver solar panels and windows. Much has been moved to the garage and we had worked all day today clearing the loft. This was not good and rather took the wind out of our sails.

Clearly, we have no recourse to any remedy and must rely on our builder's pal being up to the job and available. There are many worries, one of which is if he has other jobs will he be able to do ours justice and if did not have any other jobs he is probably not a very good builder. If the work does not go ahead, there will be an awful lot of cancelling going on an the possibility of losing deposits not to mention having to bring back all that we have moved out.

On a personal level, we really cannot blame our builder for not giving up a dream job for us. On a practical level, we could be up the creek without a paddle or a canoe.

What a proper wonder life is.

December 18th – Sunday

It was enting down in the morning at the time I was to take the bleddy hound out. She is a strange old girl. She was not keen on hanging around at the top of the slip and pulled me back to in front of the shop where she decided to look up and down the street for ten minutes. I was alright, I had floor to ceiling, full metal jacket waterproofs on. She needed a good towelling down when she got in.

The rain persisted through the rest of the morning and all through the Christmas shoot up at the range. Our clever organiser had thought of everything and had a plan B for such occasions that did not include too many paper targets that would last only two minutes. The event was well attended and the shoot went smoothly, involving some lever action, pistol and .22 rifle target shooting. There was also some interesting shooting at clay pigeons that lifted and fell and veered in the gusting forty miles per hour southerly that was thrown at us along with the rain.

The Missus arrived with the pasties just into the early afternoon and that marked the end of this year's club season. We will start it all again in the new year, although it remains to be seen if I can still keep my guns safe with the building work or have to lodge them at the Helston gun shop.

Naturally, it stopped raining at the same time that we stopped shooting. The mizzle lingered into the afternoon and the onset on darkness demonstrated that I should have charged at least one of the Christmas tree batteries during the day.

We had a house full when I returned from the range. The remnants of the visitors and Mother stopped for tea after which the Missus took them all off on a tour of the Christmas lights from Mousehole and Newlyn to Angarrack out east. The lights at Angarrack have assumed legendary status and have perhaps challenged Mousehole for the top spot. I have heard more recently that the usurper may be set for a fall as there are fewer and fewer permanent residents in Angarrack each year and they are struggling to find help with the display. I am sure there were plenty at all the places they visited to make the trip worthwhile. Sadly, there was no room left in the truck to take me, so I stayed at home to look after the bleddy hound.

I shall be taken one day, I am sure, most probably when some well-meaning helper pushes my bath chair into a van saying, "Come on, don't be such a grumpy ex-shopkeeper. You'll enjoy it when you get there." and I am too old and frail to put up much of a fight. "Naw, I bleddy won't."

December 17th – Saturday

Our guests stayed overnight and the morning was filled with cups of tea and toast. I had taken the bleddy hound out at the usual time, having guests will not interrupt her routine, and we discovered that we were at least a few degrees better off than we had gone to bed with. We also had rain. The street was wet from a shower that we had clearly missed and the showers held off for a further hour. We only had a couple and they went away for the rest of the day. Later, it was quite the reasonable day and the sea had not been quite that calm for some while.

Yesterday, we had dolphins and today we had seals to entertain our guests – well, it saves having to talk to them. The fishermen had gone out early to ply their trade. We are still not entirely sure whether they are catching mackerel or squid. It could, of course, be both but not at the same time as the squid ink would spoil the mackerel or at least necessitate a lot of washing down.

It was near the middle of the day by the time we were left to our own devices. The Missus declared it a day off, so that was that and I spent most of the rest of the day watching a couple of films. I treated myself to some Oh! Mr Porter with Will Hay, because it was just that sort of day and I could watch the film forever to be honest – clean and wholesome humour with no agenda.

If there was ever a better way to waste a day, that was it, and there were plenty of work things to be done and to feel guilty about not doing later. To salve my conscience just a little, I prepared tea, another of my signature dishes that I had not done for at least nine or ten months. It was a shame that I could not get the shin beef that is best for it but the skirt that replaced it took less time to cook.

I had hoped that the wall heater would have turned up today but that was not to be. Strangely, there was no post either after two days of strike. It used to be that the volume at this time of the year stretched the Royal Mail to the limit and was a good source of student earnings. I suspect that if it is still the case, there will be one almighty backlog in the sorting offices all over the UK. If you did not get my Christmas card this year, dear reader, I am sure that is the reason and nothing at all to do with the fact that I probably did not send you one, alright.

December 16th – Friday

I had clearly settled into a false sense of security with the much maligned council. They had been quiet for a long time, so quiet they once again did not send a bill for my alcohol licence. I cannot help feeling that will come back and bite me on the behind at some point but am loathed to poke the beast while it is asleep. That, however, was not the reason that the much maligned council has come to prominence once more.

There have been rumblings up the top amongst certain selection of folk that it would be the thing to do to have a 20 miles per hour limit through the village. It appears to be most fashionable across the refined neighbourhoods in the Duchy and even has its own catchphrase, Twenty's Plenty. With a school sitting on the main road and young kiddiwinks apparently prone to launching themselves across it with gay abandon – despite the speed humps and a lollipop person, the proposal clearly found some traction with the Parish Council.

The whole thing made little difference to me, and I would not be averse to a 20 miles per hour limit through the village, so I kept my head down. It was last night as I walked the bleddy hound around that I noticed a consultation poster hung up on our decorative lamppost – I knew it would find some use. There is probably some reason why the much maligned council cannot apply a 20 miles per hour permanent speed limit on an 'A' road, however, they were not to be deterred and instead applied it to the road down from the main road into The Cove and Maria's Lane.

During the summer, Cove Hill and Cove Road are so busy it is unlikely any vehicle could achieve greater than 20 miles per hour anyway and during the winter there are so few vehicles or people for that matter, that an expense levied on the cash strapped much maligned council to implement it seems an utter waste. It will also increase the length of time it takes to launch the Lifeboat, although I suspect over the length of road we are talking about, that is probably marginal. I am yet to consider whether this matter is worthy of a response but given the greater need is the main road, where they will implement a variable speed limit outside the school, it does seem an utterly pointless act and a waste of money.

I have no idea how much it costs to come around and collect our Christmas trees at the end of the season. I also have no idea what benefit is derived by their recycling. I do know that it will be a pain in the bottom for us this year given that we have three trees to get rid of, two of which are fairly large, which is probably why the much maligned council has decided not to provide the collection service this year in order to save a few shillings. I accept the point that if you can be bothered to go and get a tree you should be bothered to get rid of it yourself afterwards. For a council that acknowledges a 'climate emergency' I think that they might have thought through several thousand extra car journeys and suggested a nominal charge for the collection service instead and collected some green brownie points along the way.

If I were giving away brownie points, the weather would have one today for dropping the irritating northeasterly draught. It was still cold, mind, cold enough to deter another trip to the gymnasium, which was also helpful because I had a bit to do today. For some reason, the bleddy hound was less keen to hang about outside this morning and I managed to encourage her up the steps without too much of a fight. The new arrangement of heating the living room seems to be quicker than the static wall convector heaters, which of course means that it is much more expensive.

Whether it is or no was going to be academic as we had guests arriving and the heating would have to be ramped up for Mother at least. The promised replacement wall heater did not turn up, but we did have a notice from the more efficient courier company, which is definitely an improvement on Doing Parcels Dreadfully, even if the result was the same. We had intended to use the fan heater to warm Mother's room so at some point the living room will have to miss out.

For the past few years we have facilitated the supply of hot pasties for the shooting club's Christmas shoot, which happens to be this weekend. I had agonised a bit whether I should call the pasty delivery in for today or leave it for tomorrow and tomorrow won. I telephoned our pasty company this morning and discovered that they had stopped weekend deliveries for the winter but had failed to let me know. There were many apologies but unfortunately the apologies do not deliver pasties and I would have to go up Scorrier to collect them. I arranged to do so at midday, which seemed reasonable, even if such a long journey was not.

With visitors arriving, I was also tasked with a spot of shopping which I accomplished though visits to good quality independent shops with the exception of two items. The only reason for that was the list I had been given expressly mentioned own brand items, else I would have substituted. I also had to drop into the town centre to visit the bank and the butcher but with every visit to somewhere new I had to dip into the back of the truck where the warm pasties were. It was quite a wonder that they all made it back home.

The other wonder was when I did get home the assembled company of visitors had assembled and there was much ooing and ahhhing going on. I had thought that perhaps someone had ventured a daytime fireworks display off a barge in the bay but instead, the awe and wonder was reserved for a large pod of dolphins. It has been some considerable time since the last dolphin visit, to my knowledge, although they do have a habit of appearing when everyone else is watching and not I. They must have known their absence had been regretted so because they put on the most incredible display of oceanobatics – yes, just made that up – making big splashes as they launched out of the water turning somersaults and whatnot. Mother had the binoculars and my long sight glasses were in the truck so I had no chance of seeing what type they were but they were bigguns, for sure.

As entertaining as our guests might have been, the rest of the day could only be an anti-climax after that, so we sat in a circle and twiddled our thumbs. For some added jeopardy, we occasionally twiddled each other's thumbs which adequately passed the time until tea. We know how to live down here in the bleak mid-winter evenings, I can tell you.

December 15th – Thursday

A day of about the same stamp as the day before lay ahead of us with a bitterly cold northeast breeze reducing the ambient temperature by another four degrees. The

skies were clear all day after losing a bit of cloud to the south at the very first thing. There was a bit of snow further up but we were not going to get any, not today at any rate.

I lifted the smart new fan from the shop that does hot as well as cold and installed it in the living room to give the remaining wall heater a boost. I chanced my arm and called the wall heater company at half past eight o'clock to see if they could suggest a solution to our heater replacement and the out of stock situation. They were very quick to tell me that a new consignment had arrived just last night and we now have a new heater on the way, hopefully not by Royal Mail – and discounted at that.

It did take a while for the room to warm up under the new scheme but by the middle of the afternoon it was more than comfortable and I had to turn it down a bit. It probably helped that the Missus was doing the ironing, although I failed to get much benefit as I was downstairs trying to get the shop clearing moved forward. It has surprised me that the shop has seemed warmer than the flat all this time. After being in there for a couple of hours and I started to lose the feeling in my toes, I wondered where I got that idea from.

I came up to take the bleddy hound out for a spin and returned to the flat for a cup of tea and an inadvertent zizz. When I awoke, I had been dozing for nearly an hour, which gave me a bit of impetus to get my finger out downstairs. I did admirably well and tomorrow I just need to sweep the floor where the freezer had temporarily sat and move the furniture back into its proper, shop open places. From there I should be able to define what we need to open with over the Christmas week and also start on the stock take, which is long overdue.

When I was out with the bleddy hound, I bumped into the Lifeboat mechanic who let me know that because the weather was so perfect for such a thing, that they were about to organise a training launch in the evening. If ever there was a night for finding as many thermal layers that would fit under Lifeboat breeches and jacket tonight was it. I planned to arrive looking like Michelin Man and not do anything other than Head Launcher on the grounds that I would not be able to move.

Despite all that detailed preparation, insufficient crew turned up for the launch. I know that the notice on the launch was late coming but it was a disappointing result nonetheless. We have not had many launches during the last six weeks and there are now few opportunities left before the end of the year.

I returned to the flat to discover a couple of relative visitors or rather visitors who were relatives of the Missus. I have many fewer relatives than the Missus and they are much less inclined to visit. One day I must find out if the lack of attendance is because I am remote or I have been excommunicated and no one has told me. They had arrived to watch the launch that never happened and stayed, nevertheless. I suppose it may have appeared rude to leave straight away and I should tell them we are thicker skinned than that lest they make the same mistake again.

I have been informed that our new wall heater is on its way via a reliable courier, which is a relief. We have a house full of guests arriving for the night, so the timing could not have been better. It is quite refreshing to have something go right for a change.

December 14th – Wednesday

I thought that it may have been me, especially after yesterday, but when I checked, the temperature had taken a bit of a dip and the more robust northeasterly was penetrating the flat a bit more efficiently than yesterday. Even then, I had fully intended to give the gymnasium a try and see what transpired but then the customer service man from our telecommunications company called and that scuppered everything.

He had called at a most inopportune time and the signal where I was in the house was poor. It flummoxes me completely that the company that provides my very advanced telephone system insists on calling on my mobile telephone and then proceeds to tell me the signal is poor and will have to call me back. The news could not have been worse. I had endeavoured to organise the moving of the fibre during the time the shop was closed – they had two months, after all. It will now be done in the only week during those two months that the shop will be open, and we will not be able to take card payments. I told him how much money the company's incompetence would cost us at which point he told me that the line was breaking up and he could not hear me. He would call back but oddly did not. I did not make it to the gymnasium after that.

The temperature in the living room refused to increase even after I had turned on the heaters. Usually by the end of the day, it is warm enough to entertain Mother but it stalwartly refused to get any better than survivable today. We are hoping that post our works, the insulation will have improved but will have to wait for next winter to find out if it has.

While the cold was plentiful motivation to get cracking it also sapped my enthusiasm to do so and it took a monumental effort to get my behind off the computer chair. I was not entirely idle in the chair and had organised the replacement of the failed battery for one of the set of lights and cleared a few business messages that had been outstanding from yesterday. I just needed to get up to get the blood flowing, which happened next.

With the bleddy hound off her throne which sits on the window seats, I was able to get to a couple of tool boxes under there. These contain some old tools belonging to the father-in-law and a heap of decorating equipment that had sat there since we last did some decorating. Given that I do not recall when we last did decorating, it had been there for a very long time.

I set to separating the tools from the consumables and the decorating equipment. Naturally, the bleddy hound chose this time to want to sit on her window seat throne and I had to stop everything to put the cover back on the window seat and replace her throne. It was a job outstanding for many years and there was absolutely no reason for any of it to reside under the window seat. There is a lot more in the window seat that has no reason to be there and that will be coming out next.

Since the tools belonged in the tool shed at The Farm, I resolved to run up there and take the bleddy hound for a run at the same time. There were some additional items in the shop that were best out of the way and I loaded those up to take with me. The Missus wanted a prescription collected, so I stopped at the shop at the top on my way through and immediately fell among thieves as soon as I went through the door.

I had not seen the Village Elder for some time, although I have on occasion spoken with Chum as she passes through The Cove from time to time. We had an enjoyable – it was for me, at least – ten minutes catch up before we had overstepped our welcome. It then took me a few minutes to remember why I was in the shop in the first place, so it was fortunate that the shopkeeper knew. We muttered some farewells and I will probably see him again in another couple of years. It is a shame that we live so far apart – and uphill.

It was actually far more pleasant at The Farm than it was in The Cove, being a bit more sheltered. I ran the dog around and unloaded what was required and then paid some attention to the CCTV camera. We are having a bit of an issue with it locking up randomly during the daytime, which is proving difficult to fault find. The symptoms present as the power failing but checking the solar feed to the batteries and the batteries themselves, there have been no outages because it is monitored.

That only leaves the feed to the camera, which is not monitored and harder to test. Ideally, I would need to be there when the camera had failed and as luck would have it, it had failed about ten minutes before I arrived. I needed to check at the camera end, which would prove the cable was or was not included in the lack of power ... if there was one. This means climbing a ladder higher than the third rung and filled me with trepidation. Well, it would have filled me with trepidation had there been any room left alongside the abject terror that was already there. I made it nevertheless and proved that there was indeed power at the end of the cable. The fault is somewhere in the camera logic, so that is back now with the supplier.

I had a few pots to return to the polytunnel that I had taken away with tomatoes in them. It did not occur to me that there would still be tomatoes there to harvest but there was, just a few. We still have Brussels sprouts and cabbage to harvest from outside that the Missus is saving for Christmas dinner. I also think that there must be potatoes there but will have a geek next time I have some spare minutes up there.

For now, however, my aim to clear the shop up for opening was not advanced very much by today's action. I shall make a supreme effort tomorrow and see how far I

get. Given that it is about five degrees warmer in the shop than the flat, I have plenty of incentive. Tonight, however, I shall go and have a dig for my tartan blanket I have had since childhood but I think it may be up at The Farm. The next stage after that is a bath chair. Oh, my dear life, how has it come to this.

It was not long before we went to bed that I discovered that one of the living room wall heaters has ceased to function. I looked to have a replacement quickly delivered but they are out of stock and only supply direct. A dilemma.

December 13th – Tuesday

It felt much colder today mainly in the living room. The fresh easterly did outside no favours either and wearing wind protection became essential, although I did try and not spend too much time outside at all today.

The moving out of the heavy sideboard loomed large as one of the main jobs of the day. We had agonised over how this was best to be done but as with many things like that just getting on and doing it is often the best plan. It was still sitting in the middle of the living room floor when I left to collect Mother in the middle of the day. When I came back there was no sight of it. The Missus had shoved it by herself into the bedroom to be close to the back door there.

We fortified ourselves with a cup of tea and set to with the last phase of moving, which was getting it out of the back door, over the low wall there and onto a dolly to be wheeled to the garage. All that went as unbelievably smoothly as if it had been meticulously planned for weeks. It is a good job that the Missus has muscles as well as everything else.

The cold of the living room during the morning had seeped into my bones. The moving the cabinet and getting up to get Mother had injected some warmth and I was a little more animated in the afternoon, although not by much. The additional batteries, waterproof junction boxes and all else I needed for the remaining outside lights had been with us since the end of last week. It was high time I did something with them. I did not get very far, as preparing the holes in the waterproof junction boxes and connecting up the spare ends I had nursed for over a year, took far longer than I anticipated. I then made the mistake of trying to connect the lights outside in situ.

To be fair, some of them were so intricately wired into the fabric of the railings, removing them would have been difficult. The lanterns, maybe not so much and it would have been easier doing them indoors, but only in hindsight. The wind had ramped up during the afternoon increasing the wind chill and it took a long time to strip the wires, identify the positive and wire them into the connectors which are designed for much thicker wires. On reflection later, I suspect that was the root of the problem and soldering the connections would have been more effective.

As a result, only one of the strings found current, leaving the other to burn more brightly than was good for it. The process was also hampered by one of the new batteries being faulty, I think. I will have to look at it more closely but that will wait until tomorrow.

By the time I called it a day outside, I was cold through to the bone once again with no cabinets to go humping about to get the blood flowing again. Fortunately, the living room had warmed up considerably aided by the now closed window that I had discovered was slightly ajar since Mother had observed the carol concert from it on Friday. I had not noticed. It is as well that they are being replaced as they have become difficult to open and close.

I had a meeting at the Lifeboat station later in the evening by which time the rain that had been in waiting for much of the day came in to get us. It was not so wintry in nature but it was cold rain. It stopped for a while to let me get across to the station unbothered but got me on the return.

For a while I watched the trees opposite rattle and dance. They may need some attention in the morning I feel and I need to attend to the lights again. Oh, deep joy.

December 12th – Monday

Before we start today, I note that we have received a complaint here at Diary head office. Apparently, I have been too laissez faire about our six or seven degree temperatures while the rest of the country is suffering under the yoke of a deep freeze. It seemed like I was rubbing people's noses in it, which is probably small beer as in some parts of the world they rub their noses and roll the rest of their bodies in it without clothes on and beat each other with birch twigs. Nevertheless, I shall endeavour to be more respectful and make no reminder of our six or seven degrees for the whole of today's Diary.

I am sure that it must have been colder in the hut with a tin roof, the gymnasium, at some point in the last six or seven years or so that I have been going but I cannot rightly remember it. All I can say is that today felt like it was the coldest and it was a hard struggle getting through the session. I got down to a t-shirt toward the end of the rowing session, about 40 minutes in, and that was after some weights and fifteen minutes on the cycle. It went straight back on again after I finished the row. I was glad to end the session and come away. I do hope that this redresses the temperature imbalance a little.

All done, it was not a bad day for weather. It refrained from dumping any more hail and was bright and blue skied some of the time. The temperature picked up a little and rarely changed while I covered some ground on the peninsula. We have a thermometer in the truck that provides some warning should the temperature dip to potentially dangerous levels. I kept an eye on it as I drove around from home over to St Just, across the moors to Penzance and back home again on the direct route. It is

fair to say that the results from the onboard temperature gauge had me in sixes and sevens because through most of the journey it was quite temperate, even over the moors. However, as I came back via the A30 the gauge dropped to nearly nothing in the dip by Lower Leha. Just there and nowhere else. I have to admit it knocked me for six.

I had some errands to run today, which occasioned my run around to various locations. At first, it had only been a trip to the builders' merchant on the Newbridge road between St Just and Penzance but this was extended after a conversation with the Missus. Thinking of my lack of breakfasts I thought that a detour into St Just itself to collect a pork pie from our local butcher – he makes his own, you know – but I suggested to the Missus that since we were both engaged in work today I would get something for tea that was quick to make. I ended up with gala pie because they had no pork pies and the chicken kiev's, which should probably be called something else now, were not available either. We ended up with sirloins, gala pie, as mentioned and hogs pudding as I could not resist it. I had also wanted some shin for a meal later in the week but had skirt instead because they had none, which on reflection was a poor choice but never mind.

From there I headed to the builders' merchant. I noticed the two cars that I had heard about on Sunday still overturned and in a mess at the side of the road. Where they were I could guess at what happened. There is a long, straight stretch just before a sharp right bend on which you can probably drive six or seven times faster than you rightly should. At first, the bend presents as not too sharp but continues longer than you think. You should be breaking long before it and accelerate through it from a relatively low speed. Touch the breaks on the way around it, as you surely will when you suddenly discover how sharp it is and how fast you are going, and with the slightest slipperiness on the road surface, you are in the ditch exactly where these two cars were.

I was quickly away from the builders' merchants and onto Penzance. I have mentioned that we are having to vacate the living room and take all our shackles with us. I thought that it might assist us to have some big storage boxes that could stack and therefore make efficient use of the space in the garage we have been lent the use of. The plan was to purchase six or seven of these, but we ended up with ten as you can never have too many storage boxes. It is a big out of town store with a large range. Having accumulated the ten boxes it occurred to me that perhaps I should have brought a trolley with me. I had noticed six or seven of them out by the front door, but I reasoned I could not leave my pile in the middle of the aisle and did not want to put them back. I carried them to the till, after all I had curtailed my full gymnasium session in the morning.

I met our neighbour at the till who works there. She suggested that she go and get a trolley for me from the six of seven still outside. I kindly pointed out that I had already carried them from where they were situated in the shop, some six or seven aisles

away, which was further from the truck than I was at that moment. I declined her kind offer and hefted them to the truck.

We discovered that they were just the ticket when we shifted the first consignment of bits to the garage behind us. It is conveniently situated not 30 yards, about twenty-six or twenty-seven metres, from our back door. The boxes stack very well and lean over no more than six or seven degrees in one direction or another. We have plenty more to go and the last of the furniture will go down into the shop at the last minute just after we close from the Christmas opening. We are open for just six or seven days this year.

There is more shifting to do tomorrow but in amongst that work today, the Missus managed to put up the Christmas decorations in the living room. She has kept the display deliberately understated this year because of having to clear them up quickly afterwards and has used just six or seven strings of lights. The living room is still a war zone, and we hope to have that clear tomorrow.

Well, I do hope that you will be pleased, dear reader, that I have avoided any mention of our warmer temperatures down here. I am sure the forecast increase in temperatures for next weekend will be most welcome if they are accurate. We are lined up for some rather inclement weather tomorrow, which I am sure may give you some heart as it is reserved for us alone. I might have to abandon any other plans and start the shop stock take, instead – a sort of karma if you wish.

December 11th – Sunday

I made very careful note of what to wear today when I was up at The Farm with the notion that it would be a test bed of warm clothing for the range. According to the Meteorological Office forecast we would reach the blistering heat of seven degrees, something the rest of the country could only dream of. Since it was eight degrees on my way home from The Farm yesterday - yes, swimsuit weather - when it was only supposed to be six, I shall take that with a pinch of salt.

It was just as well that I did. When I first got up, which was a good half an hour late thanks to the bleddy hound, it did not seem that cold. Even when we headed for the beach, the fishing boats just leaving it when we got there, it was not as cold as yesterday, so I took heart. I did not waiver, however, from my decision to wear as many layers as were convenient and still be able to move about because I was mindful just how different it was between The Cove and St Buryan, some 120 metres higher. It was the right move. No sooner had we set out on the St Just road, there was thick frost on the tarmac and iced up puddles on either side. This was amplified as we turned onto the road leading up to the range. It was bitter cold.

Oddly, I did not feel that chilly and my hands remained fully functioning throughout the morning. This I was very happy about because there is nothing worse than trying to load .22 rounds into a magazine with hands like ice blocks. As the day

progressed, the sun chose to shine and in its benevolent glare, the air was comfortably temperate. Sadly, the range firing point is in the shade, and we only got into the sunshine while setting up and patching targets.

Unsurprisingly, it was not a terribly busy session as many would have been put off by the road conditions getting there. There were reports that a couple of cars had accidents on the Newbridge road between Penzance and St Just, so conditions had been pretty poor overnight. Our afternoon session was even thinner as people chose to head off early and I think there were just half a dozen of us there until the end. Given that I had missed so much of the sessions recently, there was no way I was going home. Despite that and because of the low numbers, we were finished by half past two.

Mother came visiting from early in the day, soon after I was dropped off at the range. In the early afternoon she was keen to get home, mainly as she feared the weather would close in again. I think that was a thinly disguised code for not wanting to be stuck with us overnight. I was going to reassure her about the weather but shortly before we left the range, it hacked down heavily with hail. This persisted for the next hour or more, so perhaps Mother had a point.

It was verified when the Missus took Mother home and had to detour via Lamorna to get there. A vehicle had overturned just outside the village, though quite how it had managed to do so just outside a 30 miles per hour zone on a straight bit of road will forever be a mystery.

I must say it was quite pleasant to get home for a rest. That lasted five minutes before the Missus suggested that we move all the living room paraphernalia that will not be needed for Christmas to the spare room. She had spent the morning packing it. The idea is that tomorrow we will shift it to the garage up behind us that we have very kindly been given access to for this purpose along with some of the furniture. I can hardly wait but it is very wise to get as far ahead of the posse as we can, while we can before our building work starts.

Just before I slip away for the day, the Missus and I would like to give our heart-felt thanks to our reader – no, not you, the other one – Mrs PC for the lovely card and generous donation to the crew fund. The card had a very kind message that fair near brought a tear to my eye, a lump to my throat and a curious limp in my left leg. Mother, who was also included in the greetings was mightily chuffed, too. You may not be able to see from there, PC, but my cap is doffed and my forelock (imaginary) is firmly tugged in your direction, ma'am.

December 10th – Saturday

I think it was fair to say that we are both fairly worn out from the last couple of days. The Missus from all the effort she put in and me because I stayed up way past my

bedtime last night. I think that the bleddy hound felt a bit of it as well because she gave me an extra half hour of shut eye this morning.

Still, we cannot sit around all day letting the grass grow under our feet; it seems such a waste of a day. I had already decided that I would head up to The Farm to make a go at starting the raised beds and the Missus elected to stay at home and clean the living room ahead of starting on the decorations upstairs. While that sounds like the soft option, the living room had taken the brunt of all the preparations for the outside decorations and the Carol concert as well as the Lifeboat Christmas do. There were remnants of things scattered all over the place.

It took me until the middle of the day to be ready to leave as there were Christmas tree light batteries to charge first. The powerpacks we have top up the batteries via the solar panels but because we get no direct sunlight into The Cove at this time of year, we have to top up the powerpacks by plugging them in occasionally but not as frequently as we would do if the solar panels were not there.

I was also delayed leaving by the time it took to load my entire suite of power tools into the truck. Even then, I forgot my workbench and had to come back for it. I had got to The Farm by the time I remembered it, too. I managed to bookend that faux pas by forgetting to turn off the gas when I left later on and had to go back to do that too. In my defence, I was pretty much worn out by that time.

The day had started off cold but not as cold as we might have imagined after seeing the frost forming up the hill later last night. The Cove was wet in the morning, which I do not think was rain, but we certainly did not have any frost down here. There were threatening clouds around all day, but we had to wait until late in the afternoon for the first of the showers to hit us. According to Radio Pasty other areas had not got away quite so lightly and heavy, wintry showers had blighted many of them all day. Several sporting events were cancelled because of frozen pitches and the ice had caused problems on the roads.

By the time I arrived at The Farm, the day was warming up nicely. The cabin, that had been very toasty the previous evening while I waited for the wood to arrive because it had the sun on it all day, was not quite as welcoming today. This was probably just as well because I may have been tempted to sit in the sofa and drift off.

As it was, I decided to start with fixing the decking that someone had put his size nine through during the summer. Actually, he is a big chap and more like, size twelve and the hole in the decking was commensurate in size. Two panels needed to be replaced. To be fair, even when we put those planks down, we noticed that they were not quite up to scratch. We had used them anyway as we did not have spares. It was probably the intention to replace them at some point but the size twelve got there first.

It took far longer than I anticipated trying to raise the remains of the old planks. Some of the screws had rusted and others were just not playing the game. I ended up using a crowbar and nail extractor, which worked on all but three of the screws which, of course, were in the most awkward place hard up against the cabin. I used the multitool to slice them in half and a big hammer to scat off the heads.

Part of the problem was that we did not install enough cross member supports making the planks span too wide a gap. I tried to remedy this before replacing them by slotting in a short length of support. This proved hard work as the clearance was tight and even with a lump hammer the supports only shifted half an inch at a time. By the time I finished all that, there was precious little time left to start the raised beds.

Since I had gone to the trouble of taking the new circular saw with me, I did feel duty bound to at least give it a go. I decided to cut the six sides first by slicing in half three 4.8 metre lengths of 8 x 2. I find it very curious that while the lengths are in metres the dimensions of the wood are still generally referred to in inches. Anyway, the circular saw went through most of the three planks I had set side by side before puttering out on the last two inches for some reason.

I had been meticulous in making sure that they were evenly balanced on two workbenches so that they did not fall away when cut. I made a mental note that it would be useful to have an additional couple of clamps, which would stabilise the wood as I suspected some movement had brought about the puttering out of the blade near the end. Also, I shall only do two planks next time.

On reflection, I should have cut and run when I had finished the decking as it was getting cold and I was more than tired. It was probably the reason why I forgot the gas and had to go back. I would have been quite grateful for that to be the end of it, but I have a full day of shooting tomorrow thanks to some cover being available on the Lifeboat and needed to get my gear together and make some dinner for the break.

The Aged Parent was fearful that I might come to some harm whilst wielding a circular saw. I made sure I was most cautious in its use, especially as it was the first time that I had used one. Clearly, I had exhausted my caution in the use of dangerous tools by the time I got home because I sliced a hole in the top of my ring finger while gutting a pepper – the Aged Parent never said anything about knives and peppers – we shall be having words.

Earlier, before it got dark, I had fitted the charged up powerpacks and all the lights were working in splendid harmony. Just before going to bed, I noticed the Memory Tree had gone out. I am struggling to keep up with this. I shall have to write a schedule so I can get ahead of the posse.

December 9th – Friday

Incorporating bit of Thursday 8th.

The Carols in the Cove event was a blinding success, thanks to the Missus' innovation and single-mindedness and the efforts of a lot of other people who pulled together to provide the music and singing, man-power to move things about, refreshments poured and handed out and memories hung on the Memory Tree.

Doing Parcels Dreadfully eventually delivered the powerpacks that were required for the complete light display, but it was too late for the evening. Nevertheless, the trees glistened and glittered and the displays between them twinkled. The Missus had even dressed the Lifeboat that was dropped down onto the slipway and provided a moment of awe for the assembled company.

I was concerned that given the forecast for rain, that I had not expected in the middle of a deep freeze, that people would have stayed away in droves. Turning up in the cold is one thing but cold and wet is a bit much to ask people to put up with. In the end, there were more people than shaking a stick could count and they all stayed until the bitter end. The weather did its utmost to be unkind with a small squall at the very outset of the event and a downpour at the end. The small gods of grumpy shopkeepers clearly decided to open a small gods of carol singers department for the night.

The only other disappointment was that the streaming of the event to a wider audience via the Internet did not prove very successful. It had been a late idea and had not attracted the attention is probably needed to be a success. It was also not easy to test before the event but in the end something got out and the second half, despite a shaky start, was also recorded for posterity – or for 30 days, at least.

Much clearing up had been done the evening before but there was still some evidence of the event on the street the morning after. The robins, of which we suddenly seem to have an abundance in The Cove, were having a field day on the crumbs of mince pies scattered around the place. We had been bothered by a mister and missus tag team in the shop both the day before and during the last preparations for the event. They were very bold and one, then the other took turns in coming in for a warm. If we had a brasier, I am sure they would have stood around it with a mug of tea. It took a little while at the end of the evening to evict the male, who decided to make a last-ditch attempt to stay the night.

I did not have to make a special effort to be up early for our fibre cable move but it was still galling to have to hang around and wait when they did not turn up at the earliest end of their attendance window. I had hoped to get a good run up on the day as it would take a little time to reconfigure our internal wiring for the new arrangement.

It might have been the bitter cold that delayed their attendance. It certainly delayed mine and it took a great deal of determination to actually get cracking in the morning. Of course, if you are reading this in one of those lands north of Camborne, you will be wondering what all my fuss is about while you fend off temperatures several degrees lower than ours. Well, let me tell you, people of north of Camborne, we do not have temperature this low. We have a Gulf stream and a sub-tropical climate. This is just not us and we are not having it.

Neither was having to wait in for five hours and the company to move our fibre not to turn up. I employed a chat session to enquire as to the missing engineer and was told that there was a lack of resources. They also clearly lacked the resources to send a text or some other message to say that they were not coming. I asked the person on the end of the chat session about whether the £130 plus VAT that I would be charged had I not turned up for the appointment was mutually applicable. I asked with my tongue firmly planted in my cheek but, of course, the respondent could not see that and told me that some compensation would be due for my wasted time. I am hoping for minimum wage, at least. The work will be rescheduled but not until Monday, when they might have some resource in the rescheduling department.

In the meanwhile, during the morning I washed and polished all the remaining pots and pans in the shop, and picked up the litter remaining in the street. I also dismantled the gazebo that did such a magnificent job of keeping the keyboard player dry last night. We had to splint two of the roof supports when we put it up and that took some time cutting away copious amounts of gaffer tape to bring it down. I managed to get the top two thirds back into its bag but could not work out why it appeared too short for the feet. I suspect there is a knack to it and will ask the Missus later.

I actually gave myself some time off during the later afternoon. The Missus had gone into town to get some flowers for the table decorations for the evening – she seems to be tireless these last few days. Not content with the Carols in the Cove event, she has organised with the Land's End Hotel to put on a bit of a Christmas bash for the Lifeboat community in the evening in a sort of two for the price of one deal. The additional time I had in the afternoon allowed me to dust off my dancing shoes and polish my white sequinned jacket for the occasion. I shall have to see if there is someone there who can wear them for me.

The event was a marvel and whatever a person might say about the Land's End attraction, the hotel knows how to throw a party. The food was excellent – we had negotiated a bit of a cultural downturn from the initial quail's eggs en croute and lark's tongues in aspic to something a little more traditional. It was quickly served and hot when it arrived and cleared at a respectful time later. A discotheque ensued, which I ducked due to the French musket ball in my kneecap that still gives me gyp on cold nights.

As cold nights go, this one was cold. We watched the temperature descend very quickly from three degrees at Land's End – you could still hear them singing when we left – to minus temperatures as we headed inland. I had to leave the party early to pick up the bleddy hound who we had lodged with Mother in St Buryan. We made a stop at the St Buryan Inn who had called a few days earlier to tell us that Mother had won a raffle prize in the Christmas lights 'pick a square' game that they wanted us to pick up. When I emerged a few minutes later, I noticed that a thick frost has already formed on top of the parked cars there.

I returned home and the Missus went back to the event to square up at the end of the evening. I had expected it to finish with everyone keen to get home at eleven o'clock but the Missus rolled home at half past midnight after the hangers on had remained until the very end.

I am sure the Missus is due a long lie in tomorrow and a day off. I, on the other hand, am very keen to get up to The Farm as the timber for the raised beds arrived at last knockings today. I had hardly wait.

December 7th – Wednesday

We were treated this morning to a nigh on full moon setting out to the northwest. It was a warm orange colour as it descended through the bits of stratosphere that do that to a thing and set in a deep blue sky. It was attended above by Mars and further up still, Capella kept an eye on things. Sadly, without the right equipment, a photograph was pretty useless. We were treated again in the evening to a moon, slightly fuller, rising above Carn Barges but not quite as colourful.

I also had a slightly less aesthetic moon rising in the east earlier while I was on the Harbour beach. One of the lifeboat crew emerged from a refreshing dip and proceeded to change on the old slipway in a changing robe that could possibly have been a tad longer. I am quite surprised that it was not blue given the chill we had today.

I have taken to wearing DIYman gear throughout the day, whether I am DIYing or not as it is a particularly warm bit of kit. I decided it probably was not ideal, though, for my trip down to the gymnasium that I approached with a fair bit of trepidation today, given the temperature. Happily, it is not that breezy, but it did not seem to matter all that much in a very cool room in the hut with a tin roof. It does encourage a blistering session, though, and I set to it with some enthusiasm right from the outset. I kept my woolly hat on today, which was just the right thing to do it transpired.

The man who was fixing our dining room chair called yesterday to announce that the chair was ready to collect. I told him that I would be there today to pick it up as I suspect he would rather like it out of the way. We would struggle to come any other day this week, which was another good reason for going sooner. I waited until I had

breakfast and the Missus had dropped off the crew beverages for tomorrow night at the Lifeboat station and headed off.

It was a superb job. In fact, the chair is much more stable than it was when we first had it. He explained that the front legs had a much better fixing mechanism than the rear and he was not sure why the manufacturers would have done that. He also said that he had noticed it was stained and had cleaned it for us. I told him that there were three others and it was probably worthwhile letting him have them all, which he was most happy to do but not until at least January.

He was about to comment before I launched it into the back of the truck but stopped after I had already done it. It only occurred to me later that he probably looked into the back of the truck in horror at the mess, especially having just cleaned the chair. I now suspect he was going to advise putting something down for the sparkling chair to lie on. Oh, well.

The Missus had launched herself into the next phase of preparation for Carols in the Cove by the time I returned. There were tables to be set up, notices to be laminated and the shop entrance to be cleared and cleaned. The latter was assigned to me because I am so good at such things, ahem. Rather, perhaps that the Missus was doing everything else and that was the only job left.

I was part way through doing this when some further instructions filtered down and these were a bit more up my street. The coin box for the Memory Tree needed to be set up and a cover fashioned for it. Both needed holes drilled in them so that they could be strapped to the fence and the coin box, that was an old strongbox or cash tin, needed a slot carved into the top for coin insertion.

All of the previous parts of the instruction seemed fairly straightforward but the cutting a slot bit, I worried about. The Missus suggested that I use the multi-tool metal cutter, but I was dubious; there is a reason why it is called a strong box. I did give it a go, but the multi-tool cutter was way off being man enough for the job. I momentarily considered using the angle grinder but there probably would be more hole than box left if I had tried that.

I was also not entirely sure how I would get on with drilling holes in the base for the cable ties to slot through to attach it to the shelter. My drill bits are starting to look a bit thin, and I am regularly regretting not keeping a set up to date. I selected the biggest metal bit I had, which was not that big and then regretted not having a proper punch. I used an old screwdriver head instead and mostly managed to avoid my fingers when I thumped it with a hammer, but it did the job.

The drill went through the metal remarkably easily so I considered that I might use multiple holes in a line to make a slot in the top. This also worked, perhaps not so remarkably well, and while it made a hole big enough to post a coin into, the donor would probably lose a fingertip or two on the jagged edges. I did have a notion that

somewhere in an old toolbox in the flat there was a small hacksaw and a file that the Missus' father used to escape Wormwood Scrubs in the late 40s. As I recall, they still had bits of cake attached to them.

I found the items exactly where I had expected to, much as the coppers had father-in-law, and applied them to my cause. It took a little work and innovation, but we now have a coin box with a hole that will not take your fingers off, the components to keep the weather off it and the means to attach it to something substantial, albeit with something that can be sliced through with a butter knife. Not to worry, it will be emptied regularly, hopefully by us.

We had waited all day for the spare powerpacks to arrive so that we could apply them to the rapidly fading lights in the display ahead of the main event. They had been despatched by the supplier but had been placed into the hands of Doing Parcels Dreadfully for the delivery. It was most irksome that they did not arrive, mostly because I had paid extra for an express delivery, and especially because when I tracked the parcel in the morning, they were registered as being at the Roche depot and labelled as ready for delivery today. The supplier will, of course, assure me that they did their bit, and the delay was down to the courier. My response to that would be that it was the supplier that elected to use a notoriously unreliable courier – so have that, my 'ansum. It still means that we did not get the parts on time, darn it, which is hugely frustrating.

We were pretty much benighted towards the end of our labours. The bleddy hound was shivering but had stalwartly refused to get into her bed and under a blanket. She consequently slept for the entirety of the evening when we eventually went upstairs.

Despite several attempts with the laminated signage for the Memory Tree, the Missus reasoned that it would be far better to use one of the old cupboard doors that were last seen under the pasty warmer in the shop and paint the signage on that. This kept her busy for the rest of the evening and into the night while I supportively read a book and went to bed. I am helpful that way.

(I should explain that father-in-law's incarceration was entirely in jest and he was never in Wormwood Scrubs ... it was Wandsworth.)

December 6th – Tuesday

It seemed a tad less cold this morning both in the flat and outside. It might have been that the easterly breeze had gone a little more north but having seen the forecast last night for what to expect over the next few days, it will go further north again. I should have done it sooner, but it gave me a nudge to turn off the outside water supply, just in case, which I did last night after eventually finding the extra long screwdriver kept for this sole purpose.

There was still a fair amount of cloud around in the morning, which made it seem quite a bit darker than it did yesterday morning. We came out at about the same time, so that was nothing to do with it. As the day progressed there was some proper brightness as the clouds broke up but during the morning it did its very best to rain a bit.

My intention was to head into town during the morning to drop the invoices off with the accountant and collect some waterproof junction boxes for the Christmas lights arranged along the railings opposite. With the solar panel and power packs on their way, I thought to be prepared for their arrival and make up the leads as well. When I told the Missus she told me back that she had already made the executive decision to go into town herself to pick up the tasty morsels for the helpers on the Carols in the Cove night. I handed over my errands so she could do those as well and that just left me making the leads for the powerpacks.

I had to run up to The Farm first as I had returned my spare 12 volt cable up there. I took the bleddy hound as well to give her a run else she would not have got out much at all during the day. I am not sure why I am so concerned because she would probably not care too much anyway. I think her days of wanting to get out and run around are long gone.

It took the best part of an hour to make the leads and heat seal the connections. The testing came next but the solar powerpacks only start to work when it gets dark. I tried putting the pack and solar panel up my shirt, but I could not get any voltage recorded at all. There was only one set of lights that I could try in the live environment and I had to wait until dark to see if they came on. They did not.

There are a few things that could be wrong, the powerpack that I used might be duff, the joints I soldered may be dry or broken or the polarity wrong on the cable. Also, the lead I tested on was a run of 300 lights and the powerpack might have been a 100 light powerpack, I could not tell. There is a warning on the company website that states that a 100 light powerpack should work on a 300 string but not for very long. However, it warned not to try using a 300 light powerpack on 100 lights as it might damage them.

Keen not to make more problems for myself, I contacted the company to ask how to distinguish between the 100 and 300 powerpacks, as we had both and since we disconnect them from the lights to charge them sometimes, they might not have gone back on the lights they came from. I entered a 'chat' session with a very pleasant lady, who seemed to know what she was on about, so I asked the question. Now here is a daft thing, there is absolutely no way of telling the difference. I was truly appalled, especially if it is a safety issue.

I resolved to label all the powerpacks as soon as possible with indelible pen. It worried me slightly that we had just ordered three 300s and one 100 from the

website. I do hope they have put them in separate boxes or labelled them – of course, as long as they knew which was which on the point of sending them.

There was a happy ending to my day. Just as the Missus was leaving to take Mother home, she noticed that my test lights were actually working, just not very brightly. It was clearly a 100 powerpack on a 300 string and that was the outcome. Success! I shall sleep content tonight.

December 5th – Monday

It is definitely hard getting out of bed on these colder days. Even the bleddy hound had an extra half an hour and she does not have a blanket over her. I tore myself away from the nice warm covers about five minutes later assuming it would have been churlish to make the bleddy hound wait longer when she had already given me half an hour. It was still early, mind and still dark outside.

Once again we found that we had coordinated with the fishermen, although we beat the tractor to it today. The breeze from the east had reasserted itself and I could feel it around the legs this morning. Happily, the bleddy hound was not for hanging around and I also found it relatively easy to get her up the steps, whereas she normally baulks and pretends she cannot do it. It is a game of attrition, will against will. I usually win but it takes time and standing out in the cold is on her side.

I had plans for today and so did the Missus. First came a blistering session down at the gymnasium. It was an entirely necessary blistering session too because although it was out of the breeze in there, it was still pretty chilly. Kicking off with a brisk cycle session really helps, after which I can get on with the less cardio exercises that perhaps do not warm as rapidly. I was still carrying my inner glow all the way back home.

It has got to the stage that I have succumbed to putting the heating on, which was very pleasant until the bill comes and meant that I did not have to put my hood up for very long this morning. It is a case of experimenting with the level of heat at the moment, just about sufficient without toes dropping off is what I am aiming for. We are hoping for a step change in efficiency after the work is complete – we better get something substantial out of it after all that.

I had been putting off a task that the Missus had set me for the Carols in the Cove event, which is now only a few days away. I was roundly chastised for not completing it earlier and spent a good hour or so at it today. Hopefully that job is now done but it awaits third party approval before it gets a tick in the box.

My finishing that off coincided with the Missus being ready to put a bit more effort into the lights across the road. We are having issue with some of the older lights that are solar powered. The panels are not good enough for the un-sunlit Cove and the panels need to be replaced with the ones that the newer lights come with. The

panels and batteries are available separately, but I have been waiting on the Missus to tell me how many and what sort she wanted. That information had been slow coming and relied on her finding out what lights she was using today. I eventually ordered them in the evening, but they will not arrive until the eve of the event, so I will have to work quickly to get them wired up after they get here.

As I have mentioned earlier, I have been hankering to mow the grass up at The Farm to facilitate easier walking around the bits we use most. I was concerned that the rain yesterday might have scuppered the opportunity today but I went up and had a look, just in case. It did look moist, but I decided that since I was there I may as well give it a go.

The flail mower was already attached to the back of the tractor, which was very handy. I was a bit concerned that the battery may have suffered from lack of use and sitting around in the cold. It started straight way, which was just as well because I had forgotten to bring along our very neat little charging unit. It took a few minutes to familiarise myself with the controls and then set about positioning the tractor to make the first cut.

The first thing that I discovered was that it mattered how high the revs were and the second thing I discovered was to let the mower stop before trying to engage reverse. It makes a terrible noise if you do not wait, so I only did it once and, believe me, you would too, dear reader. The first cut, which was probably not the deepest because I did not know how far down to position the mower, did not look as impressive as I had hoped. Once I worked out that the mower ran on skis and would not drop lower once the skis were on the ground, I was away with it, or would have been if the kill switch did not keep cutting in.

It took a few minutes to work out that it was the kill switch and not me stalling the engine. After that it took quite a bit longer to fiddle with it so that it did not cut the engine out. When it goes in for a service, I will ask our friendly garage man if he can disable the switch. We do not use it anyway and it is no good if it is unreliable.

Soon, I got into the swing of it and having addressed the limitations, got the tractor into position to cut all the bits that needed cutting. We will need to get busy with the strimmer to finish the job off, but I do not think I will have time to do that this week. It will rather depend on when the wood for the raised bed experiment, which I ordered this morning, turns up and what else needs to be done for Carols in the Cove.

It was going on dusk by the time I left The Farm. It did not help that it had been overcast and very grey all day long. Before I left, I dipped into the polytunnel where there are still some tomatoes coming to fruition. I picked what I could to take back with me. Even though it was not much help for us in the shop this year, we have had quite a harvest of various things out of The Farm for ourselves over the year and it still keeps coming.

By the time I got back to The Cove, the Missus was still labouring with her lights. There are quite a few more set out now but we discovered later that they do not last very long and will benefit from the new solar/battery units that will hopefully arrive in the nick of time for the concert. I was going to hardwire them in but I have come up with an idea that means we can swop the lights about to use the same units but different lights if required. It will mean I can do much of the preparatory work tomorrow and will only need to strip back the wires on the lights and connect them on the day.

Once again, we had not considered tea but the Missus is very adept at selecting ingredients from the freezer and making something from it - a bit like the television programme Ready, Steady Cook on steroids. She informs me that she still has not finished the lights across the road. She better hurry because it will not be long before they need to come down again. She has not started in the living room yet, which I thought we might escape from this year with the building work due first thing in the new year but apparently not. Oh, deep joy.

December 4th – Sunday

The cold seems to have slowed things down rather. There have been fewer people milling about during the day and we have certainly been less active. Yesterday was pretty much a day off and today seemed to be going in the same direction. We will have to pull our fingers out next week as jobs are starting to pile up and time is getting short.

The fishermen seem to be the only ones taking advantage of the reasonable calm in the bay, but you can hardly blame them after effectively a month of being weathered in to port. They were busy launching when the bleddy hound and I went down this morning, which meant keeping her on a lead. It was probably unnecessary as she does not range any longer and at the speed she goes she would have been make a concerted effort to get run over. Still, there was no harm in being careful and means the tractor driver does not have to be wary.

It was cold again certainly, but I fancied that the breeze had eased off a little. It came back stronger during the day, but it gave us some small respite for our saunter down to the Harbour. It was also a good bit cloudier than yesterday and there was no sign of rain around, which is a good thing. After a few trips to The Farm, it was clear that running the mower over our usual walkways would be useful. We make frequent trips between the cabin and the barn, and it is amazing how much energy it uses up walking through long and thick grass. I had thought to do it yesterday but after procrastinating all morning, I did not have the time. Today would have been tricky as we both needed use of the truck at different times.

As it was, I would not have had the time today either. The Missus had been invited to go to church to see the rehearsals of the choir for the Carols in the Cove event. It is as well that I did not go as crossing the threshold of a church which would be

tempting providence, or more likely retribution. I was instructed to go and collect Mother and while I was heading that way I could go and pick up a cold cure from Tesmorburys for a neighbour. She had called during the morning and had sounded particularly unwell. She had a request for a specific 'max strength' item that I was to get.

There are three Tesmorburys stores in Penzance and I visited two of them, mindful that I was under the clock to get back to get the Missus to the church on time. Given that I could not get myself to the church on time the last time we went together and had to be extricated from the nearest hostelry by the priest, I thought that I had better not be late this time, lest it seem like a habit – or reticence.

I was not helped by the first store only having one cold cure product on its entire range of shelves for such things. We have more in our shop, and we are only little. It was also the wrong product. I picked one anyway just in case I had the same problem at the next store I intended to visit. The store was relatively busy, so I went to the self-checkout which only a few people were using. The machine immediately went into error and advised that I should await assistance, which I did. None was forthcoming and neither did there seem to be anyone present to provide it, so I went to the next terminal which did exactly the same thing. I waited again and this time a very flustered young man appeared but said he was helping someone else and that I was not next on his list of people to assist. With time pressing, I left the product at the till and went on to the next store.

The next store was markedly quieter, had marginally better choice and had a checkout operator doing nothing but looking at her telephone, which she immediately put down when I hove into view. She served with good grace and a beaming smile, which was commendable given that she was probably bored rigid. Both the products I had purchased were not what had been asked for but were gratefully received by our neighbour. I told her that next time she felt like having a cold she should get one first so she would be ahead of the rush for cures. I also arrived back at home with just enough time to whisk the Missus off to church. What a happy result.

There was not much time between coming back and getting ready to go shooting clays up at the range. I had to be there at a specific time because today was the Annual General Meeting, which as a committee member, would have been rude not to attend. Now, what was it I was saying about it not raining? It was not listed on any of the weather forecasts for today, so it was obviously stealth rain but wet nonetheless. It rained, though not exactly in a downpour, for the rest of the afternoon and will call into question my mowing up at The Farm tomorrow.

It did not bother us much for shooting three rounds of clays and I did reasonably well by actually shooting a few and not hitting anything that I should not. We timed it immaculately, as it was just getting dark when we started to wind up and put everything away. I arrived back home just in time to see Mother and the Missus finishing off their tea.

Tonight is the lighting up ceremony of St Buryan Christmas lights and Mother has attended each year she has been there, however many years that is now. It was the best thing bringing Mother and father-in-law to St Buryan as they were close enough for the Missus to look after and far enough away for independence. Since Mother has been on her own, the community there has looked after her and served her very well. Attending the Christmas lights turning on us just part of all that. I stayed behind and looked after the bleddy hound, who does not appreciate such things but is quite happy watching me eat my tea in the hope something might fall off my plate. It never does but it might one day. She is a very optimistic bleddy hound.

December 3rd – Saturday

I definitely had trouble with my days this week as any sharp-eyed Diary reader will have noticed but at least we have now arrived at the day I thought it was on Tuesday. It is probably a function of not seeing newspapers every day, the cold or my befuddled brain not getting enough exercise. Yes, definitely one of those or, perhaps, something else.

If it was the cold, today did not do it any favours. As soon as we stepped outside the door, the brash northeasterly got a hold of us. I had wrapped up warm on top anyway and my legs do not tend to suffer in shorts. Oddly, it feels colder when wearing my rough work trousers, which I tend to put on most days. It was a bit more sheltered on the beach anyway and we had it to ourselves having beaten the fishermen to it today.

Whether it was the cold or just a day for general laziness, I do not know but I spent much of the morning on my behind responding to things and drawing logical wiring diagrams. I also wanted to get an order in for extra solar battery chargers for the lights that had old chargers attached. This was difficult to do since I still do not know how many we need, and they are not cheap. I had thought to buy a selection and use what we needed but a quick look at the price scotched that idea. I was also going to order the timber for a couple of raised beds but got around to it too late; the builders' merchant closes at midday on a Saturday.

It was by this time that the cold in the flat had started to make itself apparent. I had sat at the computer with my insulated hood up but even that was insufficient eventually. I definitely needed to get up and do something, which frankly was what I should have done a few hours before and then I would have completed a lot more today and been warmer into the bargain.

The wetsuits downstairs had been begging to be done pending arrival of the hangers I had ordered. The Doing Parcels Dreadfully company had advised that these would not arrive until Monday but this morning they change their minds and decided to deliver in the middle of today instead. It dovetailed nicely with my desire to get off my backside and do something and I was wetsuit in hand when the van arrived. I spend

a good part of the rest of the afternoon printing labels and inserting hangers into wetsuits, 25 of them to be precise.

I had only done three when it came time to take the bleddy hound around. We were not gone long and returned to the shop where I carried on my business. The bleddy hound, who clearly does not feel the cold, elected to sit outside the shop for the next 45 minutes at which point she stuck her head around the door to indicate that she had enough. I collected her lead to guide her to the steps but she ambled by and headed back in the direction of the slipway. She is a little old lady now and you do not argue with little old ladies I have found – arguing with slightly younger ones is a risky business, too. I let her lead the way.

It was not a fast walk. We ambled every bit of the journey but went around the Round House and traversed the Harbour car park. This is the same bleddy hound that I had to forcibly drag past the Tinker Taylor cottage at the head of the slipway when the tide was raging in the Harbour and we could not get down there. We continued past the end of the car park and up to Coastguard Row, which has just reminded me that the water main that runs up there seems to be leaking again and I should report it – Stop the Drop, we are told.

As we crossed the car park, I noted that some work had been done to the old Coastguard office in Betty's garden and I wanted to have a better look from above. When I looked down on it, the corrugated plastic roof punched through with weeds, had been removed, the brambles and Japanese knotweed cleared and the building shell has been cleaned out. There is a planning application in for its development, which I suppose must have been passed. It is not a universally held view, but even if it becomes a holiday let, which it surely will, it will look better than it has these past fifteen or so years after Betty shuffled off, bless her.

The bleddy hound kept her own council on this exciting development but that might have been because she could not see over the hedge. We continued back through the RNLI car park on a route that we commonly took when the tide prevented us from using the beach. I am not sure why today felt like a good day to revisit this path at a random time of the day, perhaps she just felt nostalgic, but it was a pleasant enough jaunt.

I returned to the wetsuits and she decided the walk was enough outside time and went upstairs. It must be cold because the Missus, who has resisted putting up the heavy curtains that insulate the living room from the front door draft and the rest of the flat, had hung them unbid while I was downstairs. It was warm as toast in there later in the evening but if it gets any colder we will have to put the heating on, too.

December 2nd – Friday

There was a noticeable drop in temperature in the air this morning, but it did not matter because it was utterly glorious. There was no more than a few mare's tales in

the sky, slightly lightened by a pre-dawn glow, the air was crisp and clean and all was well with the world – well, our little bit of it, anyway.

The fishing boats were heading out when we arrived at the beach, so me made sure we kept out of their way. That swell was still in evidence and even more so come high water when it was still launching itself over the Harbour wall. It did not bother the cold water swimmers who were down there in the middle of the day taking full advantage of the loveliness of it all.

I enjoyed a blistering session at the gymnasium again. The cold has not quite inveigled its way into the bones of the building, and it was still slightly warmer in there than the outside air. Once again, I took to the cycle to warm myself up and this time made sure I knew how long I was on there for. The cycling to start was slightly more necessary than it was on Wednesday and I was nicely set up for the rest of the circuit after that.

We waved goodbye to the in-laws who were in the shop when I came back for the gymnasium. I am hoping that the Missus frisked them before they went on their merry way. It was shortly after that the Missus launched into action on tree two, the memory tree, which has been promoted out of quotation marks. The boys from the Lifeboat station lent a hand moving the unsightly fencing panels that have been up against the railings since the roof came off the station in February. I have my eyes on these for use when our skip arrives to prevent any unauthorised use.

We moved the unwanted ones to the RNLI car park – the Missus used some for the backing decorations behind both trees – but when we arrived we noticed that a cable from a nearby post was down. At first I thought it was telephone cable but it was power as well and lower than the height of the metal fencing we were carrying. We gingerly moved away from it. The Coxswain took some appreciating photographs and called the electric board to make it safe. When I returned to The Cove a couple of hours later, it had been fixed.

The reason that I returned to The Cove was that I had ventured out of it on an errand in the middle of the day. One of our dining room chairs had suffered a broken leg and a replacement, two replacements because they only come in pairs, would be extortionately expensive. We discovered a furniture repair shop in Hayle and that is where I ran my errand to having made arrangements to be there at the appointed time. The man was most affable and told me, on examination of the article, that he would most likely be able to affect some sort of fix and hopefully before Christmas. I think we can manage at Christmas even without it, so I told him not to worry overly if he had more important projects to complete. I just hope that when it is completed and I go to collect it that I am not supposed to burst into tears and tell him how my dearly beloved ancestor who had a photograph of a similar one from 1823 handed down father to son, would have been so proud.

I indeed returned to The Cove a little while later where the Missus was piling through putting decorations on the tree and hanging various sorts of lights from the fencing behind it. She did say last year that she would ramp up the glitz this year and she has been true to her word so far. The memory tree has not quite the level of decoration as the other but there again, people need somewhere to hang their devotions and memory messages. The hangers will be available from the night of Carols in the Cove and thereafter by honesty box.

There was not much for me to do after the initial preparation was done and acted as tea boy for the rest of the day. I did, however, set to with the repair of a set of lights that had a broken wire. Unfortunately, it is very difficult to test them as they will only come on in total darkness and only then if the battery is charged. Since the battery is sealed and I cannot apply my multimeter to it and even if I managed to manufacture some darkness, I will not be able to tell if it is not working because the battery is dead or the wiring knackered. A conundrum I shall work on.

I spent some considerable time researching a potential solution to our solar panel issue where half the panels allocated to business and domestic use are insufficient. The ideal solution, well, other than having a roof three times the size, is to use all the panels in concert and switch them between the business in summer and domestic in winter. I asked this at the very outset of this endeavour and was told it was not possible. Having been through the logical circuit diagrams, I cannot see why this cannot be achieved with a geet switch in front of the inverters.

Having looked at the theory and convinced myself, I impressed upon our installers that this is what we want done. The only thing to stop it really should be if there is a technological, legislative or safety issue. At their request I have searched the Internet for similar examples but, in reality, I cannot think that there would be many people in the same position as we. If the company's only issue is that it has not been done before, I will have to twist their arm and ask them to be frontiersmen, a feather in their cap that they can truly point to and tell other customers that they are innovative. Let us hope that it does not go wrong, then.

Must be time for a beer. Everything will be possible then.

December 1st – Thursday

December 1st, it must be Christmas tree day and will be why the Missus was out of bed with the lark, well, a lark that gets up a bit late, perhaps. I had already run the bleddy hound out and had some breakfast. My only contribution to the tree was helping to put it in place and to make sure it stayed there. Last year, as I recall, we had a big of a blow during the night after we put it up and learnt a few lessons about securing it. Hopefully, we have done it right first time this year.

We may not find out for a little while as there is no major wind forecast for a day or two. We, or at least the Missus, was blessed during the day as well whereas last

year she was putting the decorations up with a bit of a breeze from somewhere in the north as I recall. We did not quite have blue skies all day, but it was bright and chilly. I had wrapped up to go help with the tree and wished that I had not after a while. I had found it quite comfortable in shorts earlier taking the bleddy hound down to the beach.

We also beat the fishermen to it this morning. I noticed later than one of the boats that had slipped around to Newlyn earlier in the autumn to try his luck there came back today. It is the squid season and word must have got around that pickings are good – at least that is my supposition.

While the Missus laboured with the Christmas tree, I carried on with labelling the wetsuits. We need to clear these out of the shop as they will be in the way else. I managed to clear another box or so, which was probably around twenty wetsuits – who is counting? – and then ran out of hangers and had to stop. I had a thought that there might be some up at the barn and since the completed wetsuits needed to go up there and the bleddy hound needed a run, I would go up and have a look. While there were no hangers up there, the bleddy hound had her run and before I left, the Missus called asking for more baubles for the tree.

There is a sizeable container in the barn for decorations. It is made of very thin steel and completely useless. The doors stick and the construction so flimsy if you lean on it, it dents. With so many decorations already shipped down to The Cove already I was surprised that I could not get the doors open because of the boxes remaining in the container had fallen against them; the unit was still two thirds full. When I eventually squeezed in, there were plenty of baubles to choose from, so I brought a further boxful down with me.

I had no further purpose down in the shop when I returned, so I came upstairs to the waiting in-laws and Mother who had arrived during the morning to watch as the Missus laboured away outside. I am sure they were delighted to come all this way not to see us – actually, that was probably a relief for them. Mother likes to watch the tree come together, anyway.

As ever, it took the Missus twice as long as it might due to constant interruption from members of the public asking what was going on and neighbours being friendly. The Missus takes the job very seriously and the end result is just as serious. She is very good at such things. The lights were the last thing to go on but we had to wait until proper darkness before they automatically start. It was then we discovered that the three sets of lights were working on different sequences of pattern and required some synchronisation.

This is not quite as easy as it sounds. I was despatched to do the job and discovered that I was not sure which controller controlled which sets of lights and even when one was changed, I needed to stand back to see whether it was the bottom, middle or top that had changed. I identified that the middle controller was the bottom set of

lights and I had managed to synchronise its pattern with the middle set. I was now not sure which of the two remaining controllers controlled the top set. With a choice of two, I picked the wrong one. Eventually, with two sets in tune I had to stop as tea was calling and was then berated for not finishing the job properly. The Missus had at it later and we are now all very happy.

With cold setting in and the solar panels that charge the batteries not seeing direct sunlight, the batteries may not last as long as we hoped but they can be easily charged during the day from the mains if it becomes necessary. The 'memory tree' goes up tomorrow and we do it all again.