

DIARY 2026

August 31st – Monday

It was not the most auspicious start to a bank holiday Monday, although perhaps a typical one. It had looked quite encouraging earlier when I took the girls around the block. The moon was still shining out of a largely clear sky and although it was breezy again, the air was still quite warm.

I had got as far as coming downstairs to start in the shop when it all went a bit Pete Tong on the weather front. Not only did the wind freshen but it brought forth some squally showers. It all looked and felt a bit autumnal and very unlikely to attract much of a crowd. As if to prove the point one of our early customers discussed with me the prospect of going to St Ives as the weather was so poor. She did not seem over-enthusiased by the idea and by the time she had finished talking with me she had decided that they would go to Falmouth instead. Sorry, St Ives. Must have been something I said.

I suppose St Ives got its own back because despite some improvement in the weather around the middle of the day, our visitors in The Cove were hardly unlikely to set the world alight. There were certainly not enough of them, and I doubt that they had a match between them.

Talking of matches, our butcher from St Just brought the hog roast back early doors and set it alight. He had refreshed the meat and made some more stuffing, which was very good of him. He said to keep an eye on it because he had to turn the flame up high because the gusty wind was snuffing it out. It was actually a bit early to start altogether as the Missus had yet to go and fetch more rolls. It was a bit worrying that she had gone through all the rolls yesterday but only used a quarter of the meat. That is either vicious portion control or a very big pig.

The military boys are here again in numbers for the mountain leaders' course. It used to be the last two weeks of August but apparently those in charge have revised it to start in September. It is probably a wise move as we cannot have too many young ladies about the place swooning and coming over all unnecessary. You could hardly move about the place without tripping over a swooned lady or two in previous times.

Our visitors had not all gone home just yet. In the belated sunshine of the afternoon, the beach was still quite busy. There were a lot of swimmers or bodyboarders down in the margins at around four o'clock and a small number of camps dotted about the high water mark. A good dozen or so surfers were out the back in the middle of the beach waiting on the bigger waves coming with the tide. When I looked again ten minutes later, all the swimmers had gone and when I looked through the binoculars it was because the Lifeguards had just red-flagged the beach. The surfers stayed put.

Around half past four o'clock, the Missus lost patience trying to get rid of the last of the pig. I put out a cry for help to the crew gossip page with very limited success. If the youngsters on the crew did not want free food, then there was no hope. I did suggest pickling the meat and using it again next year but apparently that is frowned upon. They used to do it on HMS Bounty, I read it in a book, so I cannot see the problem.

Several of the nearby crew came to help and the setup was taken down and packed away and take-aways were taken away for freezers and presumably some quick teas. Also helping out with making porky disappear were a few of the military boys who walked off with extra large, filled baps to see them through another gruelling day of exercise.

All the benches, including ours, had to be moved out of the way for all the stands on Monday. As the crew moved them back, another bit fell off one of ours leaving it swaying and a tad unstable. Our benches are twenty years old or thereabouts. I had intended to give them a bit of an overhaul this winter but – especially with renewed focus on them by the much maligned council – I think we will have to bite the bullet and replace them. As ever, the new ones I have seen advertised do not look half as robust as the old ones, so I will continue to look and make enquiries. I could make them myself, but I think they will need to go before I can get around to it.

I made a valiant effort to close an hour earlier today but our customers were having none of that nonsense. After nine and a half hours of being open, it was imperative that they started their shopping at half past six o'clock. Many were still turning up for a five minutes past closing rush and stayed through to quarter past six when I eventually managed to close the door.

Mother was here for tea again after a fortnight absence. We were to have a roast, but the Missus ran out of time with the hog roast clear up, and we had pasties instead (sorry, MS). Mother will come back again tomorrow so the Missus can have another crack at it and I will learn how to twiddle thumbs all day again.

August 30th – Sunday

Radio Coast FM turned up to set up their equipment at shop opening time this morning. They broadcast live in support of Lifeboat Day which is very good of them. Last year they played loudly and incessantly across the road from the shop all day, which is not. The main man turned up on Friday to assess wireless Internet access, using our wireless signal from the shop, which was something of a surprise to me.

They found the guest access signal too weak to use. I would not let them use the main signal which gives them – and anyone else – access to our internal network which the Missus was not happy about. In the end they found that they could use the café's signal next door, without asking them. I rather wish that I had been faster

improving our own signal; at least I could have turned them off when I reached the end of my tether – around ten o'clock. As it was, someone must have told them about the volume last year – or they are avid Diary readers – and they toned it down this year to a mere background irritation. Thank you.

So, from today – or maybe a little later - we enter a new phase of shop operation. Things that we sell will change. There will be more brown bread than white, for example, although it surprised me just how unmarked the shift was to white during the season, as still quite some brown went out the door. One the biggest surprises was just how many of the posh pilchard tins we sold, which was very pleasing. Predominantly, the rosemary and caper variant sold and the plain olive oil a little way behind. Hardly moving at all was the chilli oil one. It will be interesting to see if that changes over the coming couple of months.

The most pressing matter, however, will be to restock with fish. The number of times I have been asked in the last few days is remarkable and we have none left. I made the mistake of placing the pre-season order in the middle of a big spring tide when all the netters were resting in port. Consequently, our prodigious order turned into a disappointing delivery, and we ran out of hake and haddock with a week or so. I find myself again in the middle of a sizeable spring tide now needing to do another order to satisfy the rising demand. I will wait until the middle of the week when the first of the netters might be back.

The day had started out bright and dry. There was no need for the headtorch I had taken with me on our early morning walk around the block. Not another soul was about at that time of the morning and even the birdsong was thin and patchy. There is quite a nasty niff at our end of Coastguard Row and has been for a few days. It took me as many days to work out it is the lobster pots returned from sea for winter storage at the back end of the Harbour car park. It is unsurprising the nearby house has its windows all shut.

I did have a look at the forecast on behalf of the Lifeboat Day being set up before my very eyes across the road. They had erected a set of four matching gazebos, two for the Institution, one for Coastwatch and the last for the radio station. Looking at the rain radar, there was a guts of rain heading our way, already on the Islands and about an hour or more away from landfall and us. It was a line of very heavy rain but as it approached, there was a bit in the middle that appeared to be breaking up. I had waited to see the torrential rain outside, but it never came. Looking again at the radar it did look like the rain was right on top of us but all we had as it passed over, was some light rain and subsequent drizzle. It was quite incredible luck.

I had only just finished congratulating ourselves on such good fortune when the direction that the band of rain was moving in seemed to change and the lower part of the line of rain moved northeast and back over us. It lasted a little more than half an hour but was much heavier than before and, oh dear, drove a horde of people into the shop to get out of it.

We coexist with the Lifeboat Day quite happily. This one was not their busiest but anything happening at this end of The Cove is a boon to us. We were much busier today than we would have been had the Lifeboat Day not been on. I suspect that we will learn what today would have looked like tomorrow. We were all up against Newlyn Pilchard Festival – Fish Festival that was – that would have drawn an enormous crowd. Several people who had been said that it was very busy there and the Missus' great nephew who turned up in the afternoon told me it was exceeding difficult to park there.

The sea was a much kinder animal today than the way we left it last night. Mind, I did form that opinion at low water when it would have been less severe anyway. There certainly seemed to be some action in front of the big beach where a host of surfers were enjoying some decent surf in the lower reaches of the tide. The Lifeboat launched into it at around two o'clock and carried out half an hour of display in the bay. It was back for a textbook recovery on the long slip and was brought up into the house, washed down and secured for its next service. Even though, being busy at the time, I knew nothing of it, I was assured of the propriety of the operation. We are, after all, a very confident, very excellent Shore Crew.

The packing up operation began shortly after the boat returned. It has rained sporadically through the latter part of the afternoon and continued to do so into the evening. The hog roast had not been as popular as they had hoped and three quarters of it was left. I had not been overly worried about it in competition to our pasties (sorry, MS). It provided some choice and economies of scale prevailed meaning we sold as many pasties as we probably would have done anyway. This still left me with a surplus to bag and freeze but overall, I was not displeased with the numbers I had chosen.

As for the hog roast, the Missus said that she would run it again tomorrow and the supplier, one of the butchers in St Just, offered to take it back so that it could be kept chilled overnight. It has only narrowly produced a profit for the previous years it was run and I do wonder why they persist with it.

With the coming of the tide, the sea state reverted to where it was yesterday. There was a deep ground sea, and waves were again coming over the Harbour wall taking young daredevils with it. We even had some sunshine that produced a few rainbows in the latter stages of the day.

As the last of the gazebos was taken down – the hog roast one was staying put for now – the crowds diminished and melted away. In the shop, we still had customers coming and going, some looking remarkably like new arrivals, which was heartening. It inevitably meant some departures. These can sometimes be sad and in one case today a bit heart-breaking as, due to circumstances, we may not see the family and the smashing crowd of youngsters for a while.

There was no five minutes to closing rush today, unless you can count one person who asked a lot of questions, ignored all the answers that I was allowed to fit in between more questions and did not buy anything. No, me neither.

Mother and the in-laws had been at the flat all day looking after the girls while the Missus was hog roasting. Mother returned from her holidays yesterday, I think, and the in-laws will return tomorrow. We also had a great nephew arrive for a visit. He is head chef at a posh place in Birmingham – yes, really. I noted that he did not feel compelled to dash immediately to the hog roast stand. Instead, he ran away to Penberth for a geek with his young lady and who can blame him. They will be staying the night, which was news to me, but as they headed to the OS with the Missus and the crew, the likelihood is I will be asleep by the time they return.

There again, the howling wind which decided to come back in near 50 miles per hour gusts might just keep me from my slumber. No, I doubt it, too.

August 29th – Saturday

I made it down to the shop early doors to get ahead of the posse on the soft drinks only to find that they did not need doing. Our customers had made only a small impression on the soft drinks and it took moments to finish off. The beer fridge was much more keenly used and that took a little longer. All told I was done in a veritable trice that left enough time to explore the postcards I might like to add to the order I mentioned yesterday.

There was not enough time to finalise the order, but the shop part of the work was done. I could now do the important bits while I had my tea. However, having time to do things became a bit of a theme of the day as it turned out.

I had managed to take the girls around the block without getting wet. When I first woke up, the rain was hammering on the sky lights. It was coming in heavy showers backed by a squally wind from somewhere west. It let me off while I did the outside work getting the shop ready then returned when I went in to do the drinks and newspapers.

It appears that I was the only one likely to be lucky today. The rain persisted in blowing through every fifteen minutes or so with longer breaks between to lure people out only to soak them when they did so. It was a very odd performance because when it was not raining, people were gathering, sitting at the tables opposite and milling about like it was a perfectly fine day. As soon as the next shower blew through, they would all disappear as if in a puff of smoke.

It did absolutely nothing for business and I was able to move quite a lot of the cash and carry delivery. We had shipped it into the store room in record time. The company had sent me two strapping lads, which was rather good of them.

We waited until two o'clock for the first of some blue to appear in between the clouds. Thus encouraged, The Cove sprung alive, and we started to see customers again. A very small part of me thought this a shame as I was just about to finish off the small sweet packets putting out. I had made a proper mess in the store room with partially emptied boxes strewn about the place. Another half an hour and I would have had them all done. I need not have worried, less than an hour later yet another squally shower of light rain passed through and everyone beggered off again.

I had envisaged the small sweets to turn up as they did two weeks ago on the evening ahead of the cash and carry delivery. Happily, the delivery arrived in one of the quiet spells in the early afternoon and I was able to get it all out on display. I am always amazed at just how quickly and completely the stand is denuded. There are over 500 packets of sweets on the display, and they all went in a fortnight including the spares. That is an average of 35 packets a day sold.

From around half past three o'clock on, the weather presented a much improved picture, although it was considerably more gusty than it was at the start of the day. According to the local weather stations, the maximum gusts were around 50 miles per hour. Down in The Cove we were sheltered from the worst of it but even here it was not entirely comfortable at times.

Needless to say, the beach was empty of its usual encampments. There were, though, plenty in the sea, especially at low water when the waves were a sight more friendly and not quite as blown out as they were further into the tide. In fact, so unfriendly was it then that the Lifeguards red-flagged the beach.

The crew gathered again in the morning to do some final preparations to the dunking tank. The Missus went over to check what was what. It was only when she came back, she remembered that our frozen food supplier was supposed to supply the baps for the hog roast. They had been instructed to deliver on Friday, and she had been so distracted forgot to check. The company does not work the weekend, so it was not possible to check or remonstrate with them. There is nothing worse than a supplier that does not supply.

If it were my project, I think that I would be climbing the walls and looking to very quickly find a solution. The Missus, super cool, decided that Tesmorburys would almost certainly have the 200 rolls required and that there was so little hurry in vouchsafing that assertion that there was time to make a bacon roll and have a coffee first. She duly returned later in the afternoon with a truck full of rolls having denuded Tesmorbury's roll shelf probably much to the consternation of the computerised reordering system and the bewilderment and frustration of this evening's shelf stackers.

As the Missus settled down to slice 200 bread baps, I anchored myself behind the shop counter to serve the renewed stream of frustrated shoppers and new arrivals. It

was surprising buoyant in the last few hours of the day, which was gratifying, although with the amount of gifts and going home presents, I could only assume many of these shoppers were going home in the morning.

When the flow of customers slowed and dried up, I returned to the cash and carry delivery, although the impetus of the morning was no longer there. I made some headway with some of the smaller items just to clear them out of the way but shortly after it started to get busy again, so I abandoned it.

This busyness damped down again at around half past six o'clock that allowed me to look out over the bay. It was not like I could have ignored the background rushing of the waves crashing onto the shore. There was quite a ground sea running but the waves were only breaking when they got to the beach and the cliffs opposite. They were, of course, coming over the Harbour wall, at first flossing and then, as the tide neared its height, they came thundering over. This is natural sport for the youngsters of The Cove and there were several out at the end of the wall being washed off and coming back again for more. Happily, no one called it in as an emergency.

After I had run the girls around last thing, I went across the road to lock up the Lifeboat station. On my return, I spotted a geet moon rising above the cliff just south of Carn Olva. It was waning gibbous having just gone off full on Friday. Because I am a glutton for punishment I looked up to discover that this had been a Sturgeon moon, another new one on me. Named for the time of year that it was most easy to catch Sturgeon on the Great Lakes, if they are still called that. Yes, me too. I really wish I had not bothered especially as I had more pressing matters to attend to.

Yes, I managed to send off the postcard order. As it happened, we needed so many that we could have had a print run all our own but I would not have known that until I did all the work to discover it. Never mind, we will have all the postcards we need for next year.

Now that we have quite a collection of unique cards on our display, it would be good to see if there is any interest online. There is something that might occupy me during the long winter days when we are not working up at The Farm. I will add it to the list.

August 28th – Friday

Even before the sun started shining, it was a pretty little day. There was a bit of a draft coming from somewhere but once I had passed by the Lifeboat station corner, it became less noticeable. For the past couple of days, I have taken the girls out after my morning ablutions, and we have good light and no need for a torch. The car park was only dotted with a few cars, either all our staying guests have somewhere else to park or there are very few staying guests.

The water board roadworks in the private area at the back of the car park continue; they have dug up an extended oblong so hopefully it will be fixed permanently now.

The roadworks have much reduced the area for parking. During the winter it is a much coveted spot for residents; in summer it is still coveted by residents but usually overrun with visitors who think they can get away with it.

The bright and welcome sunshine lasted about an hour after we opened, before cloud started spreading in. There were still gaps in it up to the middle of the day and after that it clouded over completely and the wind from somewhere west, freshened. The rain that Radio Pasty had been telling us for the last two days was going to drop on us was eventually on its way. Mid and North Cornwall had already had some heavy rain during the morning but the thunder and lightening we had been promised seemed to melt away before it happened.

Sadly, our visitors also seemed to melt away during the morning. It is a change-over day, but I suspect that it will be very one sided this week as we near the end of the school holidays for many. I have to admit I have not quite understood the changes to the school holidays. I had understood that the six-week holiday was being reduced to five weeks and an extra week tacked onto the autumn half term. The children here usually go back to school in the first week of September and they are still going back in the first week of September, so where was the shortened holiday. It is all very confusing and seems to apply to some schools and not others.

We seemed to fall into a stupor around the middle of the day with just sporadic visits to keep me from falling asleep at the counter. I had already done the shelf filling that I was prepared to do ahead of the cash and carry delivery and the store room was almost ready too. It left me twiddling my thumbs, unused to having so much time spare. I was awoken from my reverie, however, when the rain arrived and sent a minor rush of sheltering wanderers into the shop for about half an hour.

I was not yet concerned about the pasty volumes (sorry, MS) although we had sold rather more cheese pasties than I had anticipated, and we shall run out of those. We put a decent dent in the Cornish pasty volume, but we still have a variable weather weekend to come.

Even after twenty or more years, I am still bemused by the whole behaviour around acquiring a pasty from us. People will tour the whole shop before coming to the counter and being surprised to find the hot pasties there. It has been suggested that they might be looking in the fridge for a cold pasty, but when they eventually find them, their expectation is clearly for a hot one. Perhaps they were looking for a cleverly concealed microwave like those available in certain petrol stations forecourt shops.

The other mystery concerns how I am asked. More than a few people recently have just arrived at the counter and said, "pasties". There is not even a question mark at the end of it. It is difficult to know how to respond to such an advance. I normally say, 'yes' which prompts a look of, what: derision; incomprehension. As if from that single word I should have divined that they meant, 'three steak and a cheese, please'.

Our afternoon rush of going home present buying started late. Families had been taking as much advantage of the beach as they could in their last day. We were continuously busy through to around six o'clock when we saw the new arrivals start arriving. It was as much gratifying and it was relief that there were, indeed, arrivals.

All this was done to the backdrop of hammering and clanking from across the road as a team of volunteers manifested the dunking game. The skip company had shown up in the middle of the afternoon to exchange the extra large skip for a more suitable one. It clearly takes some time to arrange; they were still hard at it when I closed the shop and retired upstairs. By that time the very air had turned sepia with the setting sun buried somewhere in the rain laden cloud.

What I did not need last thing was our very lovely postcard supplier asking if we needed any postcards printed. She was putting the order together this weekend if I was interested. Well, yes, I was interested because we do need some postcards printed but a little more notice would have been nice. Actually, I am not sure that even a couple of weeks' notice would have helped as I would have been busy whenever it was in August month. I shall have to see what I can do after hauling in the cash and carry delivery tomorrow.

There were still bits of light rain and a few spots here and there up to when we closed. Mainly, though, the rain had come and gone, and it was just remnants left behind, although we were playing a lottery with some heavier showers here and there – mostly there rather than here. A cold front, or rather occluded front, had passed with the rain and the temperature had dropped and so had the humidity leaving behind a much fresh feel to the air.

It had also brought in the swell we had been expecting. One young bather's dad, late on, said that he had been battered about a fair bit down on the big beach. Earlier, I had noticed some better waves for the quite substantial number of boarders in the water around the time the tide started pushing in from the middle of the day on. It was clearly building all the while, although I had stopped watching when we got busy again.

It was good to see some familiar faces returning in the run up to closing. They are people whom we generally see out of season. It was a stark reminder that the summer holiday season is coming to an end, and it will be all change at the stores. I will have to be very careful about what and the volumes of what I order from now on. It is hugely difficult making the transition even though we have been doing it for twenty years. I will also unwind like an over-wound watch spring and collapse in a heap.

August 27th – Thursday

We generally do not get a lot of grief from our suppliers – with the exception of the Laurel and Hardy Newspaper company – as, I think, the majority are small businesses and understand customer service. If we do get trouble it tends to be with the bigger companies whose staff very often treat it as no more than something that pays the wages.

One company that has had a bit of a history of that sort of thing is our alcoholic beverage supplier. They have in the past been known to overcharge and also have accused us of not paying when we patently had. The latest escapade was the delivery of a case of beer that on the outside looked in perfect condition. Sadly, on the inside, down one side, all the cans were bent and unsaleable.

As soon as I had opened the errant case, I reported the damage and the company replaced the case on their next visit. So far, so good. The beer is a popular brew, and I ordered a further case for the next delivery after that, and it was duly delivered on Monday. Upon opening the apparently undamaged case I noted that all the cans down one side were damaged. Once again, I reported it.

Wind forward to today when the dray turned up to deliver our order and replace the broken case. I had left it open so that I could show the driver and was about to reseal it when I noticed that it had previously been sealed with brown parcel tape. Not only that but where the tape had been torn off, it matched the beginning of the tape I was about to seal it with. They had sent the same damaged case I had sent back the week before. I was not overly amused.

What did amuse me was the bright sunshine and clear blue sky we had first thing. It would have amused me more if it had not have gone cloudy soon after and given us a shower of rain near the middle of the day. We had several showers of rain during the night but at least they did not have the effect of clearing the street and sending our customers off somewhere to hide from it.

Happily, our shower of rain lasted less than half an hour and the day came good after that. I had noticed right from the start of the day just how warm and humid it was, even first thing when I took the girls around the block. The shower of rain did nothing to clear the air, and it remained very warm and humid for the rest of the day.

The cloud cleared with the end of the shower and our visitors flocked to the beach. They were definitely not in such great numbers as they had been during the early part of the holidays, but they managed to cover a fair bit of sand on the beach, spread out in a bunch as they were. Down in the water, people were making the best of the few waves they could find and the paddleboarders were having the best of it. I was really quite surprised that the swell had not kicked in yet, but I hear the weekend might be quite stirred up.

I need not have spent time fretting about volume of pasties (sorry, MS). The reduced number I had for today worked exceedingly well with the ones I had baked the

evening before. By the end of the day, I had emptied the stock fridge, and we were left with only a few that did not sell. We will now have an empty fridge for tomorrow's prodigious delivery. I would congratulate myself for perfect pasty planning, but I let the cat out of the bag yesterday and now everyone knows it was a big accident. I shall have to be more discrete in future.

Preparations are going apace for the Lifeboat Day on Sunday. The skip that will be the crew dunking game that has been a regular and very popular feature for a few years, arrived in the middle of the afternoon. It caused momentary chaos while the skip lorry blocked the road to drop the skip into the Lifeboat station courtyard. There is no arguing with a skip lorry, so there was no honking of horns or obvious signs of disgruntlement. The fire brigade usually fills it for us but have demurred on the basis that there is a hosepipe ban in force. One of the crew is a fireman and has suggested that the brigade can use its pump to transfer water from the Harbour at high tide. This might take some time this year because the skip company delivered an extra large skip. We await developments.

I am sure that you will be pleased to know that we had a bone fide five minutes to closing rush this evening. In fact, the rush started an hour before with people dashing in for emergency milk, emergency sweets and emergency surf jewellery. One group asked if we had any ice and I showed them where it was. They decided that they had time for a drink at the OS and would collect the ice on the way back. I stayed open until the last minute serving the genuine five minutes to closing rush, but the ice collectors never came back. I half expected a knock on the door after we closed but clearly the draw of another drink at the OS is more enticing.

The Missus disappeared off to Land's End for the fireworks collection again. It is the last one this year. She prepared tea for me before she went and I ate alone at my desk doing the ordering. A bleddy tragedy is what it is.

August 26th – Wednesday

I had high hopes for the weather today. As I stepped out this morning, gloomy though it was, the day was much brighter than the same time yesterday. Looking up the skies appeared clear, although there was a bank of mist atop the cliffs above the beach and Gwenver. I spared a thought for those who had penned in to go to St Ives today on account of the weather and wondered how many might change their minds when they looked at the weather today.

As it happened, I need not have concerned myself. The weather turned out to be almost as pants as it was yesterday but without the light rain. Alright, it was a bit better than that but the mist that had been sitting on top of the cliffs decided to sit over the top of the bay instead. That persisted for most of the day and visibility was through a fine veil of mist all day.

Oddly, we had quite a busy day. Much busier than yesterday, for sure, and the top of the beach was crowded all the way along to The Valley. So certain was I of the way

the next two days would play out, I reduced my pasty order (sorry, MS) for tomorrow to next to nothing. I had semi-consciously allowed myself be swayed by Radio Pasty's forecast and the general chatter about the place spread by customers. Naturally, to serve me out for such arrogance and stupidity, the small gods of grumpy shopkeepers sent us pasty eaters in abundance who cleared out all the budget for today and half of my anticipated left-overs for tomorrow. It forced me, later in the day, to delve into our frozen stock and bake them in anticipation of tomorrow's demand.

Perhaps if I had not gone to the gymnasium for my blistering session, I might have seen the build-up. I should certainly have taken note of the crowds as I took the girls out after I came back. I headed for the beach because there was hardly anyone down there to annoy, so perhaps that lulled me into a false sense of calm and serenity.

It was indeed calm and serene down there, especially at the water's edge. BB took a deep paddle in the utterly still sea. It was not even lapping against the shore. Spring tides are building again, so we were a fair way down the beach away from the hue and cry. Even with the mist still present, it was bright and exceedingly pleasant down there and coming away was a bit of a wrench.

We were already busier than I had anticipated when I came back to the shop, and the business day improved as it went on. The sun broke through in the middle of the afternoon and took everything a few steps up. We were flying here and there as the busyness came on in fits and starts. We even had a five minutes to closing rush exacerbated by bus times enquiries about how a person might have a meal in The Cove and still get back to Penzance afterwards – even if it meant a walk to Land's End to get it. There is a ten minutes to eight bus that leaves Land's End for Penzance via Porthcurno. The only bus, I think, to do so without visiting The Cove first. Had the bus company not entirely based its reasoning on the results AI spat out, it might have realised that The Cove would have been a sight busier than Land's End at that time of the evening – although, it has been clear of late that the bus service is not there for the convenience of the public.

The enquiry held up some young ladies and a boy of varying ages, part of a family group. They visit every year and take an age in the shop choosing what sweets and novelties they wish to purchase. I worked out a while back that what takes the time is that they are calculating what the diverse party can afford with their limited funds. Since they all want something different, the calculation is complex, which takes the time.

Tonight, they had a collection of pennies and a note that they had pooled that matched almost exactly what they had selected but it had taken half an hour of negotiations and compromise. Occasionally, the happy result requires some creative accounting on the part of the grumpy shopkeeper but usually, like this evening, they are right on the money – quite literally.

Last on the list tonight was assisting a German couple find their holiday let. It is the thatch at the end of the Harbour car park which is where they left their car while they

made enquiries. With their English not the best and my German non-existent, I had to explain what a thatch was and then provide directions to the cottage. It was only near the end that the important detail came to the fore that they had left their car in the Harbour car park with its number plate recognition system purring away. I explained that since they had probably been longer than ten minutes, the rather inflexible system had probably already issued a ticket. I suggested that they pay a minimum charge and hope for the best. They can park for free at the cottage.

It only struck me later that the car park company probably would not pursue a ticket on a German plate, even if they could identify the driver.

I am still stuck with sitting at my desk for teatime while I complete the orders and the morning administration. I shall have to make sure that it does not become a habit as there is, even now, less of a press in the morning. Soon I will not be compelled to do the new evening ritual, which will be most welcome.

The easterly breeze that had been present all day in a much kinder degree, ramped up its performance for our evening walk. The breeze had been welcome during the day as the temperature and humidity had climbed up the scale a bit. There was some advantage to the robust blow in the evening: it kept the flies off my head.

August 25th – Tuesday

My first visitors today were our friends from last night. They were already severely intoxicated but I should not judge. It is an easy mistake to make, to reach inside your pack for a bottle of water and, thirsty from your exertions the day before, quaff a whole bottle before you realise it was gin.

They were also full of bon homie, sharing with me the secret that they were from the future, the 1940s, he told me. I discarded the notion that the date might well be from the past as he went on to tell me that today was much better than the future that they came from. I should not, however, be afraid, as I had no choice but to visit the future eventually. Even if it was in the past. They were also from Brighton, apparently.

This conversation, somewhat one-sided, circled around for a good while before he found a surprising change of direction in which he assured me that Jesus loved me. It transpired that He loved me quite a lot as I was assured of this many times before we settled back on the original script that the future was bright but not quite as bright as the past and, by the way, where could they get a cup of coffee at that time of the morning.

Whatever the case, the pair of them looked a proper state. They had clearly slept rough last night and had awoken even rougher. They were lucky that it had not rained, although I learnt later that they had slept in the Harbour toilets. You could not have manufactured two more obvious harbingers of doom and soon after they left, it did indeed start to rain. I am surprised that they did not press a black spot into my hand as they parted.

While we had very little in the way of rain today and what we did have was light, the skies were overcast and glowering all day. There was still a bit of a breeze knocking about that, certainly behind the till, introduced something of a chill to the air. It did nothing to enhance the run of business and the show was a tad disappointing after all the weeks of good weather. Off season we might see a dozen people all day with weather such as this. During the holidays, people are already here and will make any effort to just get on with it. We were still nowhere near as busy as a decent weather day, but today we had our moments.

Despite the high pressure moving away, displaced by some low pressure and weather fronts, it will take a little while for the weather change to affect the surf. Again today, the sea was as flat as a dish and the only sport to be had was some paddle boarding. Even then, there were precious few of those and the beach was largely empty for a good part of today. A few die-hards were making a bit of a splash, probably the only movement there, near high water, when I looked and I think that there were two or three camps down there supporting them.

We are still seeing quite a high percentage of European visitors about The Cove. The Germans are probably the most prolific of these, but we saw others today from Sweden, Portugal and Bridlington. One of our German visitors was paying especial interest to the first electric sliding door in The Cove. Initially, I said nothing and let him peruse the fine looking and, in The Cove, unique specimen. It was only when he brought his interest up that I told him that it was, indeed, the first electric sliding door in The Cove.

He told me that his interest was professional and that he was a product manager for a sliding door company. I told him that I did not know the name of the company that manufactured our door, but it was the first electric sliding door in The Cove, he should know. He was impressed that it had been installed for 7 years and had needed no maintenance in that time – which it obviously now will. It was a bit of a jolt to me too. I shall have to amend my reporting that not only is it the first electric sliding door in The Cove it also holds the record for being the longest standing first electric sliding door in The Cove.

The afternoon proceeded in the same vein as the morning, although perhaps a little busier. We did have some serious busyness around the early afternoon, but it was short-lived. I took the precaution quite early on to reduce the pasty order (sorry, MS) for tomorrow. In fact, I almost missed it altogether as I was distracted by some unimportant task or other. By the end of the day, I noted that perhaps it would not have mattered if we did miss it if tomorrow would be of the same stamp as today.

As ever, the weather forecast will change as each day commences. The forecasters had initially painted the entire week as wet and changeable which is, not only very likely grossly inaccurate, but very unhelpful. I spoke with several people today who had planned trips to St Ives tomorrow based on the poor weather the next day. Later

on, I heard a couple of customers say that tomorrow would be a much finer day than this.

It is also a phenomenon that the slackness of the day was more wearying than a full out busy one. The time also dragged a little, although I did fill my empty spaces with restocking the grocery shelves and planning the next cash and carry order due this weekend coming. This order is a particularly difficult one because some of the items ordered will last until the end of the season and buying too many will leave to unnecessary disposals at the end when the dates expire. Obviously, buying too few would mean buying more even closer to our closing date and make disposals even more a certainty.

I already note that there are some things we should have stopped buying earlier. The large bottles of soft drink are a case in point and are a regular source of overruns. We have far too many again this year. It is likely the result of the Missus and I sharing the ordering because I was too busy to do it all myself. Last year, I got the orders spot on for the soft drinks and we hardly had any left over. It is another sign that we have been far busier this year than last.

The end of day numbers were a disappointment after such a long run of busyness. There really is not cause for complaint as we have had sunshine since the end of May. It is just greed but one more week of good weather would have been nice especially as the school holidays are apparently one week shorter this year. The extra week is tacked onto the autumn half term, which in my view is utter madness. Surely, it would have been better tacked onto the spring half term but what do I know. Perhaps the schools are more concerned with education or some other frivolous notion.

It is now full darkness when I take the girls out last thing and requires the use of the headtorch. I had quite forgotten the disadvantage of the light at this time of year: my head ends up in a cloud of nocturnal insects. Yuk.

August 24th – Monday

The wind had kicked up a ferocious easterly when we stepped out of the door in the morning. It did not even have the grace to be gusty. It just blew at a reasonably constant 40 miles per hour even in the sublime St Ives. Down at Gwennap Head, windiest place in the universe, well, let us just say it was stronger than that.

There was no spending time topping up the jewellery stand this morning. Our customers had done a proper job on the soft drinks, and it took quite while to refill it again. A bit of topping up was definitely not what it was. By the time I had finished that and prepared the newspapers, it was time to open. Soon after that the greengrocery arrived and I was engaged with that when the dairy arrived. I had

finished both by the time the pasties (sorry, MS) arrived late by which time I had already been harangued for hot ones.

The breeze did not do very much for business at the beach. When I looked at the end of the morning, there was hardly any little camps down there at all. At times during the morning, the street was empty too and I rather feared that our bumper day yesterday would be averaged out by a poor performance today. We had to wait until almost into the afternoon before the situation improved, and it did look a good deal better after that.

I had slipped away to the gymnasium in the middle of the morning for a bit of a blistering session. I had missed Friday for one reason or another, but it is an operational hazard at this time of year when things can change quite quickly. By the time I came back, the shop had transformed from relaxed and quiet to busy and frenzied.

Taken as a snapshot it would be hard to tell the difference between that and the busyness we had yesterday. However, as the day progressed, our busy and frenzied came in fits and starts with long periods between with little going on. Although the beach became a little busier into the afternoon, the street periodically emptied leaving me customerless at times.

The Missus had disappeared as soon as I got back to the shop. She went over to Mother's to do a spring clean, despite the near onset of autumn. Mother went off on her holidays to North Devon last week as she does every year at this time. If the spring clean was to be a pleasant surprise on her return, it is not any longer; Mother gets wind of a bit of Diary now and again, especially when it concerns she.

Since The Farm is on the way back – sort of, I sent a list to the Missus of things to bring home on her return. We had been rinsed of a fair few wetsuits yesterday and had sold quite a few during the latter part of the morning. It is an oddity. The two busiest weeks of the holiday are the first two, and we sold comparatively few wetsuits during that time. We have probably sold more in two days than we sold in the whole of the two weeks at the outset of the holidays. We also sold more between me sending the list and the Missus bringing them back, so we are still short of wetsuits.

As you might imagine, we also sold a fair few windbreaks too. I rather wish that I had one myself. The wind, in the east, was verily blowing a proper hooley through the doorway and giving me a good slapping for most of the day. I could hardly shut the first electric sliding door in The Cove as business today was fragile enough, thank you very much. All I could do was stand there and look brave and not too wind beaten, so it was a tad disappointing when the wind increased towards the end of the day.

Towards the evening, we were, ahem, entertained by a couple of, erm, gentlemen who had clearly been imbibing, possibly since birth. It is exceedingly rare that the bubble of unreality that The Cove exists in is breached by agents of the outside world who do not leave their troubles at the door. Having made a brief visit to the shop for tobacco, the pair sat outside on our benches for some time, partaking in what appeared to be costly artisan alcoholic beverage. The bottle was somewhat familiar to ones we have in stock, and I did check that all ours were still in place.

The couple remained long after we closed, choosing to occupy the environs of the Ice Cream Kiosk. After a considerable time, the more sober of the two wandered off and headed down to the Harbour beach leaving his companion, presumably, still by the kiosk – very probably comatose. We continued to keep a watchful eye, particularly after our elder neighbour returned home and encountered the less than comatose dweller in his porch. Eventually, the pair packed up and headed west, where to I cannot imagine. I would watch my step in the morning with the girls for sure.

I also watched my step when I took them out in the evening and selected my route carefully. It might take ages to repair the shattered elements of The Cove's fragile aura that they left behind. I shall commence work on it tomorrow.

August 23rd – Sunday

The sun had not risen when I took the girls around the block first thing. It did not really occur to me to look at the state of the sky; there were other things on my mind as we headed across the Harbour car park. We had been excluded from the beach because we timed our departure coincidentally with one of the fishermen launching his boat.

By the time I came down to start in the shop, the sun was already splitting the hedges. I had it in my eyes while I was setting up the outside display and it was coming out of a clear blue sky. Even then, the implications passed me by.

Again, the drinks took no time at all in topping up and I did a little more surf jewellery stand filling. I was still doing that when the newspapers turned up late and I was able to do a bit more for a few minutes after we opened. After that, well, after that I do not remember the specifics; it all happened so quickly. I remember that we sold nearly all the small bodyboards that the Missus had brought down on her latest mission. When she came down to go to The Farm, I had to entreat her to make a special run up there to bring back three more boxes – that we subsequently did not need. There is no need to tell the Missus, now is there.

It was after that our day began in earnest. I was veritably flooded with customers from that point onwards. There was no real slowing down until late in the afternoon and even then, it was only a temporary cessation of hostilities. I had less than half an

hour during which I managed to leave customers to their own devices and go and fetch a cup of tea and then it started all over again.

I am sure you would not expect me to mention the extreme busyness without mentioning the pasty situation (sorry, MS). Early on in the battle, I was asked if the family needed to reserve some pasties for later on. Pah, said I, what a ridiculous notion, for I have a fridge full of pasties so enormous in quantity that even an army of pasty eaters could not chomp their way through it. Talk about holding myself hostage to fortune. Fortunately, they came back before we ran out, but it was a close run thing.

There was, indeed, a prodigious quantity of pasties in the fridge. So many that I was concerned that I would have to freeze a good number of them based on sales performance of the last couple of days. I did not have time to be disabused of my concerns because I was far too busy selling them and trying to make sure I had enough circulating through the oven on a constant roll. Even then I was unable to keep pace with the rate of buying and the volume of each of those sales. Occasionally, we had gaps of pastylessness, but they were of no more than ten minutes.

As if that were not challenge enough, with just twenty or so cooked pasties left, I made the decision to cook some frozen. I limited that to ten so that I could still use two trays to heat the cooked ones. Had I left it later so that I could cook more, there would have been an hour gap, and all would have been lost. As it was, the frozen ones came ready very shortly after I had just finished all the baked ones. We finished those off in very short order with two big orders at around three o'clock, which was reasonably respectable for such a day.

The very peak of the peak was just into early part of the afternoon when I was very pressed indeed at the till. It was a relentless onslaught as I tried to balance serving with keeping pasties going. I must have been successful in some regard because we ended with another record day only just short of eclipse day. It surprised me greatly, as I thought that target unassailable in the normal run of things.

There was one stand-out moment. In fact, it had me chuckling for a good time after. It was heading towards the middle of the second half of the afternoon, a small child and her mother came to the till with a pair slides flip flops for the youngster. The young lady in question asked very politely if I could cut the ties that bound left and right slipper together. I said that I would as it would save her from tripping over when she wore them. I had thought that to be an end to it but a little voice from lowdown in front of the counter stated, "I don't like tripping" in the manner you might say, 'I don't like the colour blue'. It was funny enough by itself, but it also put me in mind of a Hale and Pace comedy sketch – "I don't like wittering", says one. "I don't like any south coast beach resorts", says the other - that had me barely able to control myself.

Quite how I had time to observe the beach is another mystery. I recall that at the peak of the day, it was packed with beach dwellers from the car park end to the other side of The Valley. It will, of course, look busier because the tide was in for most of the crucial part of the day. There were also fewer in the water due to it being as flat as a dish again, although you might not credit that from the number of wetsuits we sold.

Which reminds me of our first sale of the day. A father dragged two young boys into the shop with the purpose of buying wetsuits for them. I sized them up and provided the right one for the smaller boy straight away. The older than was a bit more reticent – he said euphemistically – about trying his on. In fact, I commented to the father that I had never seen two youngsters less interested in getting their first wetsuit. The father told me that they were really excited about it the previous evening when it was discussed. It must have worn off overnight.

In the end, I had to recommend a shortie for the older lad as he was most disturbed about wearing a full length one. They bought three wetsuits – dad had one too – and three bodyboard which as the first sale of the day, set the theme for the rest of it. There was not much time to venture out from the till to check that we had stock on the shelves. I did manage to back fill some of the beer fridge at one point, mainly because it is in close proximity to the till and the store room. That paid off later when the evening beer rush came.

There was not much of a five minutes to closing rush; it was very muted. Neither was there any other rushing in the run up to closing but I do wonder at people who find it necessary to come running in with minutes to spare to by a bracelet.

The ordering was, as you might expect a bit more lengthy than the average, although I had made some attempts to anticipate the busyness of the weekend with larger deliveries on Friday and Saturday. We shall have to be careful now, especially with the big cash and carry order next weekend, of over-buying. Come Monday week at four o'clock, there will be tail lights heading up the hill and our visitors will be off leaving us holding the baby lotion we ordered too much of.

August 22nd Saturday

At least the blustery wind had gone. There was still a breeze and it still felt unseasonably chilly as I opened the flat door to head to the beach. It is littered with oar weed after the recent agitation in the bay and having that on the beach seems to muck up the ebb and flow. Whenever there is weed on the beach there is more shingle and it forms piles here and there. The sand is also uneven right across the beach, higher here, lower there. I am sure there is an expert somewhere who can tell me why.

Once again, I had a little free time before we opened the shop this morning, so I set about refilling the surf jewellery stand. I had expected the full display of nearly 1,800

items to last the year but for the last week it has been looking thin in many places. The jewellery sells remarkably well and there is no point in doing it half measures; I needed to refill it and quickly. I employed the services of the maid who turns up now and again to tidy and top it up, to place the order for more. I sent her photographs of the depleted stand, and she worked out what we needed from that.

We tried this last year, and I was somewhat cautious about the whole process having managed myself previously. She did very well then, so I let her at it without restriction this time and the big box arrived a couple of days ago. I waited a day, sort of, expecting our girl to tell me she was coming to put them out for us. When no message came by the second day, I sent her a message thanking her for organising the delivery – hint, hint. I should be less subtle because she replied just saying it was a pleasure and that was that.

In the absence of any offer to help, I went about it myself. In the limited time I had before we opened, I did a fair bit. I was able to overrun a little into the shop day because we were quiet, and the due deliveries had not arrived yet. By the time I had to give in and call it a day, I had made a decent fist of the worst side, making it look respectably full again. Unfortunately, it is not something that can be picked at. It takes some planning to see where each goes and if there is existing stock. I will start again tomorrow.

Business was very disjointed today. We had moments of busy mayhem, long periods of quiet, and other long periods of sporadic visits. Overall, it was not a bad day for a change-over day. We had gone through the phases of going home buying, beach buying, child gift buying and teatime buying and all of them very respectable. It was not really until gone five o'clock when it slowed down to a crawl.

Somewhere in the midst of all that someone committed the most heinous crime. I have a bit of cord strung to the wheelie bin, cut to the precise length to make it easy to lash it to the big bin so that in strong winds it does not blow away. When I went up for a cup of tea at half past five o'clock, I noticed that some begger had nicked it. Please do not tell me I need to put a bleddy note on it asking for it to be left where it is.

At three o'clock, the Lifeboat launched again; today is Cape Cornwall Sports Day. I do not know what other sports they do that makes it a sports day rather than just a swim, but the only one I know about is the swim from Priest Cove to Brisons and, hopefully, back again. It is the most tenuous sports day because the slightest ripple on the water in the wrong place and it is cancelled. Right up until two hours before the start, there was no certainty that it would go ahead and the Lifeboat launch had been arranged on that basis.

Both boats were launched and were gone for a couple of hours. The Inshore was diverted on the way back to some kayakers at the back of Cowloe. None had lifejackets on. Advice was given and the boats were escorted back to the Harbour. In

the meanwhile, the big boat was welcomed back on the long slip for a textbook recovery before being strapped down and made ready for the next service. We are, after all, a very flexible, very excellent Shore Crew.

There were no five minutes to closing rushes at any time during the evening today. Those arriving were all too weary I imagine or busy unpacking their Tesmorburys deliveries. I drew the veil over a most inauspicious last couple of hours and retired to my tea.

It was proper dark when I took the girls around later and required the use of the headtorch. It was also chilly again. Several customers noted that it was not at all warm during the day despite the sun shining and we sold several windbreaks and a beach tent. The dog days are over, I believe.

August 21st – Friday

Someone turned a bit of autumn on overnight. A blustery northwesterly was still with us. Combined with some dark rain type clouds out to east, blocking out the rising sun, it felt very autumnal indeed. It was not as dark as I imagined when we reached the beach even though we were early heading out again.

I must have had my virtual Weetabix for breakfast because I was a veritable force to be reckoned with in the shop first thing. Fair enough, the soft drinks fridge did not need the attention that it has done in the recent past and the beer fridge had seen worse but the store room was beginning to irritate me in the state that it was and needed my attention.

For the first time since we had them, some of the Cornish pasta boxes have sold. The fact that they have only sold to one family is neither here nor there; they have sold. I was able to empty the box that had sat in the way in the store room since Easter onto the shelf at last. Of all the things we have tried and experimented with, the pasta is by far the worst. The family that has been buying the boxes say it is top drawer stuff, but it has not captured the imagination of virtually anyone else. I suspect the price point is a problem; it is a little dear to risk trying.

While I was there, I also noted that the biscuits for cheese had sold rather well – they generally do – and they also needed topping up. In doing so I was able to remove another couple of boxes from the store room shelves thus freeing up space to move other boxes off the store room floor.

Not that I was able to do any topping up, but I also saw that the posh pilchards had done rather well. If you remember, dear reader, my theory was that they were an item best suited to the shoulder season. Apparently not. They have been selling surprisingly well which made me regret that we had been unable to get them for the previous three weeks.

I was quite pleased with the amount of extra things I had been able to do in the limited time available. The only thing that I was unable to do – because I ran out of time – was to sweep the food aisle. There has been an annoying build-up of sand in margins for more than a few days and every time I walk down there, which I invariably do to get to the other end of the shop, it leaps up at me screaming to be swept.

That northwest breeze kept it feeling a bit chilly all day despite a good bit of sunshine about. We had a shower of rain soon after opening but that was the last we saw of it for the rest of the day. It kept the dust and the customers down first thing and allowed me, mainly, to salt away the mountain of pasties (sorry, MS) that had come in soon after we opened. I had curbed my enthusiasm this week, adjudging that we would never be as busy as the first week - or last week for that matter. Nevertheless, I had emptied the pasty fridge and prepared for the biggest order just to make it easy to puy everything away. It still took more time than I would like, extended by several trips to the counter to serve customers.

We slowly built up trade with the going homers and lost it again as they went home. By the early part of the afternoon, I was scratching my behind and wondering what to do next – completely forgetting that it would not have taken ten minutes to sweep down the food aisle. Instead, I decided upon counting newspaper vouchers and filling out the form to send them off.

Each time I do it I get irritated that no one at the Laurel and Hardy Newspaper company has not built a spreadsheet for it. I would do it myself, but they would probably reject the form, and it needs to be updated for every price increase.

A spreadsheet would automatically calculate the values and total voucher numbers and save me ten valuable minutes with a calculator. Not that I could despatch until at least Tuesday as they have to go into a magazine box – and not that we have many magazines now that the Laurel and Hardy Newspaper Company has cancelled most of them. It did not take as long as I thought, especially as I had very few interruptions while I was doing it.

We had a bit of a resurgence in the middle of the afternoon but by four o'clock we had seen the best of it and I settled in for a long haul until closing. Also, in the middle of the afternoon, happily missing the resurgence, we had a little Lifeboat call. We had watched as a catamaran knocked along the front scraping the bottom a bit as he went. Quite what the circumstances were, I do not know, but he continued to the bottom of the Lifeboat launch slip whereupon he anchored and called the Coastguard. We were tasked to launch the inshore boat – we could not launch the big boat as there was a bleddy geet yacht in the way – but we were no sooner there and dressed than we were stood down.

The catamaran extricated itself and went and parked on the edge of Pol-an-Dre, the large sandy bed that sits in the middle of the south side of the bay. I was back in the

shop only a few minutes from when I left, leaving a couple at the door who were about to come in. The shop had been empty else, and I had plenty of warning that I would need to close. It was a good practise run.

We ambled through the rest of the day. I got some of the orders out of the way early as I sensed that we would not be likely to have a rush on any particular item I might wish to put on the list. We then had a five minutes to an hour before closing rush followed by a five minutes to closing rush half an hour before closing and finally a five minutes to closing rush at five minutes to closing. It was all very complicated, I am sure you will agree, but fortunately, I knew precisely what I was doing ... it says here.

There was still some ordering to be done after we closed. You can never be too careful with the dairy and the greengrocery. I just hope that we get a different driver tomorrow for the biscuits and water. The chap we have had all week has turned up for each delivery with either something wrong or something broken. The company replace or credit the problem item, but it is still additional work having to telephone it in to get it sorted. If I report him and he is still on our round, there are any number of ways he can get his own back, so it is not worth the effort.

The Missus went up to The Farm late in the day today. I had prepared a list of things we desperately need. I would have gone myself after closing but she was insistent that she had to do growing things that I would be useless at. She took the girls too, so I would not have to take them out by the time she comes back. We will do the unloading tomorrow.

As it happened, she came back earlier than expected and I had to take the girls out last thing. It was positively wintry compared to the weather we have been having. Other than a few cars leaving the Harbour car park, there was not a soul around. You could be drawn into thinking it was all over. It will be soon, but I do hope we can wring a little more from this season yet. I am a glutton for punishment in that way.

August 20th – Thursday

There is nothing quite like being slapped across the face by a boisterous wind at silly o'clock in the morning. It was very lively around the corner of the Lifeboat station as we headed down to the Harbour beach. There was a bit more sheltered on the beach and I thought no more about it.

Just before I proceed to greener pastures, a quick note regarding the Pavement Licence application. You know, the one that had to be in within the deadline expiring tomorrow. I had an automatic response message from both recipients of my signal to go ahead. Neither are in work until Monday.

Radio Pasty were pleased to inform us that there would be showers throughout the day and the wind, at first in the west, would come around to the northwest eventually. The news, and the weather, effectively drove most of the beach dwellers from the sand and stirred up the sea to a rough condition and sent flattened, washed-out waves heading into the bay. In response, the Lifeguards red flagged the north end of the beach and brought swimmers and surfers to the southern. The surfers were thin in quantity, but it seems that there were quite a few swimmers who wanted to be thumped around by rapidly tumbling waves.

In the shop we were not at our busiest, although there was still an irregular flow of customers passing through for most of the morning. The stocking of the drinks fridges and the making ready of the newspapers had not taken long and gave me enough time to have a crack at the boxes that the Missus had brought back from the cash and carry yesterday. We now have biscuits on the shelf where yesterday there were empty spaces and we then had empty spaces in the store room that were immediately used up by the next delivery of soft drinks.

The Missus headed for Land's End around the middle of the day, it being Land's End Lifeboat Day. The Missus had wondered if it should continue as a calendar event because it did not seem to raise much money. Apparently, the Lifeboat Guild used to set up cake stalls and all sorts years ago. A stand with a few give aways and shaking a bucket or two does not seem to pull the crowds away from the other distractions up there. The old lifeboat that was up there was also taken away. Nevertheless, the Missus would be up there all day and most of the evening for the fireworks that are now drones.

Having cut our pasty order (sorry, MS) to the bone for today, obviously we went on to sell more than any other day of this week so far. I was not that fussed, to be honest, as an empty fridge would be quite convenient for tomorrow when the weekend's pasties arrive. It was not exactly a huge pasty day, just better than the others this week. It did, however, appear to be National Eat a Sausage Roll Day. We were cleaned out by the middle of the afternoon having ordered in the same number as yesterday that were more than sufficient.

We arrived at the later part of the afternoon having had no rain at all. In fact, the sun had shone for most of the day and once the crowds had become reconciled to the wind, the numbers on the beach increased. The numbers of our customers increased as well, although we had been busy well before the beach did. There was a lot of gift buying, small children getting rid of the last of their holiday money, perhaps. They better had been; I would hate to think they were taking any home.

This year we seem to have enjoyed seeing perfectly behaved children in the main. We have had just the one breakage for which the child in question looked particularly penitent – unless it is a look she had perfected over an extended period of breaking things in shops. If it was, she probably deserved to get away with it on the basis of good acting. It does not appear that there are so many youngsters coming along on

their own, which used to be a favourite moment of the morning for us. I do not know if parents are more cautious – there is still little need to be in The Cove – or there is no buying of breakfast goods because it has all been delivered by Tesmorburys. It is a sad loss, whatever the reason.

Lifeboat training in the evening was a little earlier than usual. The plan being to perform to the crowd and Land's End to boost donations and to thank those who had already donated. I watched the launch as I pulled in the shop's outside display. It was an ideal time to do it because we had been very busy in the run up, then suddenly very quiet as the crowds lined the railings opposite. We did see some more shoppers after the boat had gone and even had a five minutes to closing rush but the main busyness was before the launch.

The big boat was not out for very long. It came back into the bay before I closed the shop. It gave me the opportunity to watch as my compatriots performed what was clearly a textbook recovery up the long slip. I missed the recovery of the Inshore boat that came back some while after the big boat was hauled up and strapped down for its next service. We are, after all, a very tenacious, very excellent Shore Crew.

August 19th – Wednesday

It rained overnight. Proper rain. I knew this, partially because it was still raining – a bit - when we ventured out, but mainly from the amount of sand washed down the slipway and onto the beach. As a compensation, the wind had stopped blowing with such ferocity and it was temperately warm out. It was also darker than the previous day because I had dispensed with the delay before taking the girls out. I could still see both them, so that worked out all right. The only disadvantage being that BB sees things in the shadows that are not there – I hope.

As quiet mornings go, this one definitely went. There was very little action right up until half an hour before I headed to the gymnasium when, inexplicably, it started to get busier. Those deliveries we did have during the morning were small and took little time to put away. We had another frozen delivery that arrived very early on and was no trouble at all putting away. I had written my order on two sheets of paper and the Missus missed the second one hence a frozen delivery two days running.

While I was away undertaking a blistering session, the shop got much busier. This was largely on account of the clouds rolling away and the blue skies letting the sun shine again. I stayed away from the shop for as long as possible without raising suspicion, obviously, achieving this by first taking the girls for a spin around the block. I also had a couple of telephone calls to make that I could not do from the shop.

I sometimes avoid taking the girls around if the Missus is heading off to The Farm as soon as I get back. Today she was on a mercy dash to the cash and carry for some

items that we had forgotten off the main order at the weekend. So, today I got to walk about in the sunshine sucking up my vitamin D – I had to check – and check the water leak that keeps giving.

There has been a water leak up behind the Harbour car park on the slope up to Coastguard Row for many years. Every now and again, someone will report it – which is a trial all itself because it is not attached to a property or particular owner and is on private land that no one owns. Every now and again, the waterboard will come along and purportedly fix it, only for it to spring a leak again in roughly the same place a day or two later. We, the closest property owners and I, had thought that perhaps it was a spring but the fact that it was still going after weeks of dry, scotched that theory. Additionally, on the latest investigation before the current one, two weeks ago, the water board had tested it were satisfied it was piped water.

It sprang a leak again immediately after the last fix. Apparently, the water board diggers who fixed it knew that it would and had arranged a second fix a few feet down from their attempt. The water board were there again today, the boys standing about the site looking perplexed. I had to laugh; the water was coming up about three feet above where the investigating team had marked the leak. If that was not bad enough, the investigation team had already been back and moved their blue X further down from their original mark. Part of the problem, I think, is that the pipe is not deep enough, only a foot or under the surface. I do not think this will be the end of it somehow.

I returned to more busyness in the shop. It was nearly the afternoon by then and I had to make a swift assessment of the pasty situation (sorry, MS). We have seen falling sales this week and I have been reducing the numbers by and by. The cheese sales are practically non-existent, and I did not order any more for today. Naturally, we saw a subsequent increase in cheese pasty sales. It is an entertaining game of which I doubt that I shall ever tire.

Down on the beach the sun was doing its thing and encouraging a battalion of beach dwellers down onto the sand. There was a small army in the swimming area which probably looked bigger that it was because the Lifeguards had reduced the width to about three feet. They were all pointed down the side of the long sandbar that runs out from the beach.

The restriction was probably the result of fear and alarm after yesterday when some swimmers needed to be rescued from a rip. The increased swell, the westerly and the sand banks had all contributed to make tricky conditions, and they came home to roost yesterday. According to my informant, everyone was ordered out of the water while the rescue took place. They are clearly a bit nervous today.

Our busy status continued throughout the rest of the afternoon and brought us a better day than we had yesterday. There was a fair amount of gift buying today but it did not look like the sort of going home presents, biscuits and the like, we are used

to near the end of the week. This was more personal gifts, and we had much out of young persons' pockets, which was most satisfying. I am very pleased that they find these things without having to ask because I must be the world's worst direction giver.

Someone will ask for toilet rolls, so I send them down the first aisle (pointing) and tell them they are halfway along on the bottom shelf. The customer will then proceed down the correct aisle (mostly) looking up at the ceiling – I must have said 'top shelf', surely. I have sent people down the middle aisle (requiring me to redirect them from heading down the first) pointing out that the item is at 'foot level' and again watched them looking at the top of the displays. As for 'the first thing you come to in the middle aisle' sees them almost at the bottom of the aisle before you can stop them. The worst offenders are those who ask where something is and are halfway down the wrong aisle before I have finished telling them. See, I clearly need some training in giving directions.

Only last night I was button-holed by a passer-by as I finished bringing home the girls last thing. He wanted directions up the hill to the main road. The starting point is to go across the RNLI car park, the one with the barrier. I must have mentioned the barrier a dozen times, but he kept pointing in the direction of the Harbour car park. I told him he would see the barrier if he looked left as he proceeded in the direction he was heading. I watched as he walked right past it and on to the Round House. I need lessons, clearly.

No one was asking questions as they piled into the shop in the last half and hour of our opening. Neither did any of those arriving at a few minutes to closing, the contingent making up the five minutes to closing rush. There was one chap who had done the same thing the evening before. He arrived just as I was closing the door. Heaven knows what he was doing for the last ten and a half hours we had been open, but he needed fifteen minutes of browsing before he found the gift he wanted.

It had been busy enough in the run up to closing that I had to do my ordering after we closed. Surprisingly, we had an unnoticed run on semi-skimmed milk and the cupboard was bare. Similarly, sales of bread that had stagnated since the weekend suddenly sprang to life and we were asked why we had so little bread on offer. I resisted the urge to over-order for tomorrow. It is as if our weekend arrivals had suddenly discovered we were there – or more likely the stocks that they had ordered from Tesmorburys on they arrival had expired and they found themselves suddenly wanting.

I consoled myself with an evening of ordering and reawakening my Pavement Licence application. I had been given a two-week deadline if I wanted to use the same application documents that I had used before. By delaying, the renewal in two years' time will now fall in September. I have no doubt that I have not heard the end of it but for now I will take that as a minor win.

August 18th – Tuesday

The difference a bit of weather makes on business is marked. I had more time on my hands than I knew what to do with this morning when I went down to the shop because the soft drinks needed very little attention and the beer fridge less.

For the first time I had to delay our trip out in the morning because it was too dark, although that may have been the windows. It did not make much difference in the grand scheme of things, and we found ourselves on a much lighter beach half an hour later. It was also quite a breezy beach, a westerly it seemed laced with damp and mizzle. We had narrowly avoided getting wet; had we gone out at the earlier time we almost certainly would have done. Lucky ain't we.

The day did not look in the least inspiring. Our customers throughout the morning asked if the weather would improve. Some had already heard but I told them that Radio Pasty had assured us of an afternoon of sunny spells and Radio Pasty never ever get the forecast wrong, not even once. They might quite often get it on the wrong day, but when that right day comes, they are spot on.

Once again, we had a very slow start to the day and for once I was quite grateful. There was a hiatus between the early deliveries and the last ones. It tempted me into starting my breakfast of smoked mackerel which I was part way through when the pasties (sorry, MS) turned up. I was some way through getting those into the fridge when the dairy arrived, and I had to abandon my pasty packing for milk moving. By the time I got back to my breakfast we were already starting to get busy but fortunately I had nearly finished.

We were really rolling when the frozen order turned up. I have mentioned before the cock-eyed way this company works. They have everyone's orders in a big pile in the truck and the driver has to find ours in the middle of it all. It takes an age. Happily, this worked in our favour today. It gave me time to serve customers between bringing in the small quantities of our order that the driver had found. It took three or four cycles to finish the whole order. By some quirk of fate, we had a lull just at the time when I was ready to put the ice creams in their respective places in the freezer.

We had a busier day than the weather suggested. Radio Pasty came good in the late afternoon with their promise of brighter weather, although 'sunny spells' might have been a rich description of cloud a bit thinner than the morning's. There was a good showing of camps on the big beach and with a few more waves than previous days. At the time I looked, the sea was heaving with surfers. I would not say that the beach was as busy as it had been but there was still a respectable showing down there.

Our farm shop cash and carry arrived in the late morning. This kept me occupied between customers a good way into the afternoon. It was still a sizeable delivery and had loosely filled the store room and even after I had finished doing what was possible, the store room was still a messy jumble of the remaining boxes. Many of

the cases of drinks will disappear in the morning when I am able to fill the fridge with their contents and I should be able to get the rest onto a shelf or two.

I rather thought we were a bit busier today, but the till said otherwise. We even had a five minutes to closing rush, a mighty one, that made up for all the previous days without one or just a mediocre showing. Earlier someone had pointed out a left rucksack by our benches. I had a look but there were no names or contact numbers. During the melee of the rush, a biker fellow turned up claiming it was his. I was just grateful to get rid of it.

He said that he had come from Marazion, where he noticed it was not with him. He told of a major motorbike accident up at the St Just turning. The police had closed the A30 at that point and at Crows and Wra for the west bound traffic. It was causing utter mayhem on the back roads. Both roads between the A30 and St Buryan were effectively closed as traffic in both directions could not get by each other. This only left the St Buryan and Porthcurno routes open, ostensibly dual track roads. Then there was Minack and Land's End fireworks traffic. I was very glad I was staying at home.

We are now clearly destined to do our morning and evening walks in the gloom or the dark. It was mostly dark in the evening when we went around and I took my head torch for the first time, although I did not need it. We do not stray far but at the head of the Harbour, we could hear people still frolicking in the waves below. There were still a few people abroad at our end at that time who distract the girls no end looming out of the dark. We had to take a bit of a detour to avoid them.

Radio Pasty are suggesting a better day tomorrow but the pressure charts suggest unsettled weather through to the end of the week. The good stuff only had to hang on another two weeks, darn it.

August 17th – Monday

It was dark this morning when I looked to take the girls out. That came very soon. It was aided and abetted by some mist hanging low on the cliffs and overhead. Later, it rained – well, mizzled heavily.

We avoided any wetness when I took the girls out for a spin in the morning. It was not as dark as it seemed. I still do not understand why it looks so dark through the windows in the flat. It is not as if they were tinted. There was next to no breeze, and it seemed perfectly temperate, apart from the fog and gloom, it was a perfect day.

It seems that I was not the only one to think so, either. While it was a pretty slow start – it can be any weather – even when the mizzle started, it did not seem to be putting anyone off. The mizzle eventually cleared off, but it had stayed misty for quite some time into the afternoon. Through the veil of mist, you could see the camps on

the big beach expanding every hour. We had been selling windbreaks and buckets and spades alongside umbrellas, which was a little bizarre. We even sold a parasol when the mizzle was at its heaviest outside. There is optimism for you – unless they thought it was a big pink umbrella.

That spirit of optimism might be quite useful for the coming week as the surface pressure charts show a bit of low pressure moving in. It may even provide some surf alongside a bit of much needed rain – provided the much needed rain appears at night. We are already getting warnings concerning the potato crop this year affecting supplies into next year and lack of broccoli in the nearer future.

Our own supplies of mixed leaf lettuce have been growing so slowly that I think we may have filled the fridge in the shop only half a dozen times this year. Last summer season we were selling around fifteen bags a day. Other growers I have spoken with report the same issue and it is generally accepted that the heat is the root cause.

We were well into the afternoon when the day showed signs of brightening up. There were patches of blue out to the northwest and the sea in places was a glorious blue reflecting the bright sky. The rest of the afternoon looked very good from that point, although the mist made a renewed incursion which lasted the best part of an hour.

The shop had been busy from late morning; the Missus told me she was very busy when I was having my blistering session at the gymnasium. Of course, she might just have been saying that, but I too was busy when I came back. It really was not until the later afternoon that we hit the doldrums. It was the first proper doldrums we have had since the last doldrums which must have been so long time ago, I could not say when. Mind, that also applies to an hour ago, so we shall leave that there. We shall have to see how this plays out.

Given the space and time, I discovered that we needed a stationery order. We had run out of sketch pads which are, of course, essential and glue and toenail clippers are in very short supply. Since I was very much left to my own devices during the late afternoon, I took the time to make a list that I would attend to at teatime in front of the computer again.

The odd thing about having a sudden quiet time after weeks of relentless busyness is that you suddenly feel quite weary. I felt more tired after the last two hours than I have after the last two weeks. How queer.

There, will you look at that. A whole Diary entry and I have not mentioned pasties once. Oh, pot! (Sorry, MS).

August 16th – Sunday

Time on my hands. What! Alright it was almost twenty minutes but even that is unheard of in the helter skelter of a morning preparation in the shop. It took me almost three of those precious minutes to realise that I should be doing something with them and pulled all the hangers out from under the counter where they had collected. There are reserved boxes for each hanger type in the store room. These are nearly all full meaning we have sold all the clothes that once hung from them.

Actually, that is a bit of a lie. There are many spares, though admittedly, we should have more clothes out in the shop than we currently do. One day I will get my act together and order sufficient shorts and bathing attire to fill those hangers in advance and hang them up in the shop. Just as soon as we get a bigger shop to fit them all into.

I am often asked by visitors staying in The Cove what they should do with their recycling. It is not often that I agree with the much maligned council, and although it goes against the grain to agree with them about anything, particularly at present, I do support their stance on waste collection from holiday lets. If the property is paying council tax, then it is down to the owner to maintain, at the very least, a bottle or glass box and a general waste bin. Should the property be run as a business and is claiming business rate status, then the owner must arrange for private waste and recycling collection. Moreover, whoever is running the gaff, whether it be business or family owner, it is down to them to not only provide and maintain the service but also adequately communicate the details to the people staying there.

As for trippers and their waste and recycling, that is altogether a different samovar of pickled herring.

By some superpower I had just managed to attain, I completed a stock count of the hooded sweatshirts. I had been increasingly aware of the stock diminishing over the last few weeks. My greatest fear being a purchase on the internet that I could not fulfil; I just have not had the time to get around to changing the online stock. Faced with an unusual lull during the early part of the morning I did not rest back on my laurels – even if I knew what they were or had any – and set to counting hooded sweatshirts. I was correct in my assessment; we had very few. With one exception, the sapphire colour we still had in abundance and in all the sizes. The once most popular colour had been relegated to the last. Conversely, the zipped heather grey garment had gone from zero to hero in just one season. Clearly, when it comes to knowing about high fashion, I am a complete slouch.

I had to leave placing the order until later as by eleven o'clock we were starting to get busy. Earlier, I had assessed the pasty stock (sorry, MS) and considered that we would easily have sufficient for the day and even probably some left over. The small gods of grumpy shopkeepers, however, have a way of dismantling such arrogance and excessive over-confidence. Over the period of the next few hours they sent the world, its grandmother, the cousins twice removed, Aunt Gladys and her pack of French bulldogs, the Walton's and their extended family and their three hamsters.

They all wanted bleddy pasties and in multiples of four upward which are very difficult to handle since the warmer only holds around fourteen steak pasties and they take twenty minutes to cycle through the oven.

As the supply dwindled, I took the decision to break into the frozen stock. These take an hour and I can fit a maximum of five on a tray. Because I still needed to warm cooked pasties and sausage rolls at the same time, I could use only half the oven, limiting me to ten frozen. That also meant limiting the cooked stock to twelve, but I also needed to heat cheese pasties and sausage rolls. It was an extremely tricky hour or so while I juggled the numbers and combinations to keep things going and not run out of anything.

Without blowing my own trumpet too much, I rose to the challenge and provided a masterclass of excellence in pasty supply management, balancing timings and combinations with expert skill and judgement. It is hard to see how anyone could have achieved a better result that saw our limited stock last until well into the latter stages of shop opening, indeed at closing I still had three steak pasties left. Gosh, I am good.

We had new, improved weather today. The wind from the north was replaced by a breeze from the northwest, which ruined our windbreak sales but made everyone a little more comfortable. The cloud we had to start the day, and it was not very much, shared the sky with the blue and sunshine, electing to come and go at obviously prearranged times. The result was a pleasantly warm day but without too much blistering sunshine. This clearly worked against our aftersun sales, although we did sell one late in the day.

We were not raucously busy, although there were periods of that when my fingers were a mere blur on the till keypad. Outside those moments we were very steady throughout the day in a very manageable sort of way. Although the beer fridge was on the empty side at the end of the day, I did not have to top it up during the afternoon. The soft drinks will need some attention in the morning but again the deficit is not exceptional.

The Missus was heading for The Farm again in the afternoon and asked for today's list. Mine was very short but I suggested she have a cruise down the gift aisle because she alone knew what, of that type of thing, there was in the store. She spent twenty minutes going around the shop and returned later from The Farm with a truck loaded with goodies. She stopped by to help put the majority of them out while I helped out between customers. We did not finish it all and we loaded the still to be done boxes into the store room where I will forget them until next year. No, I jest, the Missus will do much of it while I am at the gymnasium tomorrow, unless she gets really busy.

We coasted in to shop closing time with only minor last minute rushes for this and that our visitors had forgotten while making tea. Our bread remained largely

untouched by the end of the day. If I could have predicted that I would not have placed an order for tomorrow. What generally happens is that the shelves are cleared after the deadline for the order, so I need be careful about not ordering. It did not happen tonight.

As ever, I took my tea at my desk while doing ordering and administration. From there I could watch the local urchins jumping off the Lifeboat slip, the scoundrels. Other less renegade children confined their diving to the Harbour wall as they should. Neither activity is without risk but off the Lifeboat slip the water is shallower which is why they confined their activities to nigh on high water on the spring – which was why I knew they were local urchins.

As is becoming usual, we took our evening walk in full dusk. The last vestiges of sunset still lined the northwestern horizon but the exiting vehicles from the car park had long gone. There were a few families retuning from the eateries at the other end of The Cove, but largely, there were very few people about. It shows how advanced we are in the fleeting season. No doubt we will find it will be dark in the mornings too very soon now.

August 15th – Saturday

The air had magically cleared of its thick and cloying nature overnight. Alright, it was not magical at all, just the weather. The wind, now somewhere to the north, was a touch more robust than it had been yesterday and pushed my windbreak sales, thank you very much. The mist had moved on and there was some sunshine but appreciably more cloud than of late. It did not seem to matter very much.

There was a bit of a slow start to the customer day. I had already raced around the shop doing as much as I could before the cash and carry arrived; I was very glad that I did the soft drinks the night before because I would not have had time to do it this morning. I just about got the bread out of the way and the beer fridge topped up, which thankfully was not that empty, and had to stop to bring in the delivery.

By starting very early, I almost managed to get an uninterrupted breakfast in. We then started seeing some breakfast goods buying, then some going home present buying and then beachware buying. It is hard to say when it started getting busier, but we were ticking over nicely for much of the day and on occasions were very busy indeed.

I was particularly pleased to see our pasties (sorry, MS) take on a popularity that I had expected more of yesterday. We made a very healthy dent in the huge numbers we have in the fridge which was most gratifying. We are often asked, mainly by foreign visitors, what is in a Cornish Pasty. It struck me a while ago that perhaps we should have a card setting out the general contents in the main languages in which we get asked. German is probably the most necessary because the word *swede* is first, ambiguous and second not something that easily translates. *Steckrübe* is the

vegetable, not to be confused with *Schwede* which is a person from Sweden, although both do fit into a pasty if chopped up into small bits. We have learnt to avoid the Cornish preferred name for it which is turnip, which confuses everyone except the Cornish.

It is not only the foreigners who require explanation. A young man of middle teenage years asked me what was inside a Cornish pasty. Quite assured that I would have no trouble with needing to explain further than to name the vegetables and the steak elements, I boldly reeled them off. What I was not expecting was a blank look when I came to 'swede'. "What is a swede," he asked in all seriousness. Now, if someone has never seen or heard of a swede, how on earth is it to be described. Merely stating that it is a round root vegetable the size of a small football – well, it is in our local independent greengrocers, Tesmorburys stock ones the size of cricket balls for the same price – is hardly going to enlighten the uninitiated. I considered for a moment or two and settled on describing the taste which I suggested was a cross between a carrot and a potato. Alright, smart eye, you do better.

The lad was still none the wiser but had a Cornish pasty anyway. He came in for a drink a little later and when I asked him what he thought of his first pasty, he admitted to liking it very much – even if he did not know what he had eaten. I did not venture to ask if he knew that steak came from a cow.

It was not until gone four o'clock that we saw a bit of a slowdown. There were a few people who noted that the breeze was a little on the cool side which might have explained a bit of a surge in the sales of our hooded sweatshirts. It might also explain the slowdown as the sun clouded over a little more in the latter stages of the afternoon. I had not looked down on the beach with much interest during the day as I had other things to occupy me. When I did glance in that direction it was considerably less populated than of late, but I put that down to change-over rather than the weather conditions.

The other things to occupy me were the occasional dipping into the store room to chip away at the delivery. Really the only things I could get away with were items that belonged at the till end of the shop. I managed to clear the crisps and a good number of sweet boxes by and by through the day. The Missus assures me that she will come down in the evening to clear the rest. In the meantime, she headed off to The Farm for most of the afternoon with the girls.

She returned in the late afternoon bearing gifts, some boards and towels that I had asked for yesterday and windbreaks to replenish what we had sold during the day. It is a system that works relatively well, although we will continue to have gaps between me noticing something is missing or in short supply and it arriving with the Missus. Where it falls apart a bit is when a customer asks for something that I know we have in the store, but I cannot promise when it might arrive down in the shop. There might be two days wait or, if the timing is right, I might catch the Missus just before she comes back and the requested item is there within the hour.

With no orders and less administration to prepare for in the morning, I was able to rest my behind in the sofa earlier than I have been able to do during the week. How very pleasant it was too.

August 14th – Friday

The day started in much the same stamp as the day before but with much less fog. The mist we had this morning was clinging to the cliffs, wafting over the sea and hanging like a big white bag over the bay. It was very intriguing the way it wrapped itself around the scenery.

We were chased off our beach walk by an exceptionally high tide, so we took to walking through the car park. The girls took me to the car park sea wall as is their wont which gave me the opportunity to watch the sea swirling about on the rocks close in. There certainly seemed to be a bit more movement in it than of late. Later, I would notice a host of surfers waiting on the first rideable waves we had had in some while.

As is regular for this time of year, many of our deliveries were late. Like everyone else, the suppliers are struggling with the volume which grows exponentially. Our soft drinks supplier told me that they had their best day ever on Thursday – they would have been topping up everyone's fridges after Wednesday. Late deliveries mean trying to clear them when the shop is open, which is always difficult. Fortunately, today most of the early deliveries were small and easier to deal with.

I had bitten the bullet with the pasties (sorry, MS) and ordered in, ostensibly, more than we had fridge room for. I spent some time this morning taking the fridge door storage off and clearing every shelf. I moved the stock from yesterday into the mini fridge where I keep various breakfast goods. I went through in my mind what would go where so that I could load it up quickly without too much thought. All I needed then was the delivery.

By the time I headed to the gymnasium, the pasties still had not arrived. I told the Missus that I would do them when I came back rather than try and explain my precise pasty packing plan. I had, at that point, expected to be back in a more timely manner than I was.

I was just coming to the end of my blistering session when my pager went off asking for the Inshore boat to be launched.

There was a good turnout but little for the bankspeople to do as there was just one family and a loose dog on the beach and another in the shallows just where the Lifeboat would go out from. I led the charge again but did not have to entreat the few there gathered very hard and hardly needed to ask them to get out the bloody way at all. As often is the case we did not find out the reason for the launch until after the

boat has departed. A climber had fallen from the cliff of Pedn Men Du and required assistance, the quickest being available from the sea.

The boat launched with one of the new helms and a mainly young crew. As we listened in to the radio chatter, we were increasingly impressed with their professionalism and casualty care skills. The casualty had fallen 30 feet and has sustained a head injury and possible hurt shoulder. I believe that her fall was arrested by ropes at the last minute, which probably saved her. Time was spent assessing and stabilising and the faller was evacuated either by helicopter or the cliff team, it was not clear which. The last report was that she walked to the ambulance, so it was a good outcome.

I had decamped after the launch and returned to the shop. There were enough crew left behind to manage the recovery which they managed just before there was too little water in the Harbour to achieve it. I went back to a huge heap of pasties waiting to be refrigerated which I set about while the Missus managed the till. It took a while because it had to be done carefully but, in the end, I got them all in the fridge with room to spare. Now, all we have to do is sell them.

It had already occurred to me that last week was a phenomenon. Selling two thirds of the stock in a single day was not likely to be a regular feature of Friday or any other day but hopefully I had covered the eventuality of running out by Sunday. Given the ensuing day, my assessment proved right and I now suspect that unless the coming weekend days are busy with hungry visitors, I now fear I will be looking for space in the freezers.

We were busy again for a change-over day, which was pleasing even if it was not all pasties. We parted with a good share of going home gifts and small children parted with the last of their holiday money. We had also been fleeced of our 50 pence sweets and the day before yesterday the Missus placed an order for some more. They arrived at half past five o'clock just as I was contemplating clearing out the store room ahead of the cash and carry delivery tomorrow. As luck would have it, we were not all that busy in the closing stages of the day and I managed to crack on through it.

The Missus had scolded me for starting but she was heading off to The Farm and although she said she would come back early, it would still be late in the evening by the time she had finished. I also did not want to come down in the morning to any surprises such as the waste cardboard being in the way. So, as soon as she went off to The Farm, I continued putting out the sweets and when we closed, finished the job off. Since I was down there anyway, I also did most of the soft drinks fridge which will save me time in the morning. Last time I was nearly caught out when the cash and carry arrived early. I left the shop at eight o'clock, thirteen hours after I went down this morning.

That might be an unlucky number of hours – it was for me doing them – but it could easily have been thirteen and a half if I had done the beer fridge as well. The only thing that stopped me was that thirteen and a half might have been even unluckier if the Missus caught me.

August 13th – Thursday

This morning it was clear that we had exhausted our supply of sunny days. As someone put it, ‘you have turned the sunshine off’. Well, make your mind up, we turned it off yesterday evening for the best part of an hour and you flocked down here in your thousands. Honestly.

I was wondering where the bay had gone first thing. Where the bay was a geet blanket of fog sat and as I walked the girls around this morning, I could barely see the houses at the top of the hill. Quite remarkably, when I poked my head out of the doorway just before we opened, it had gone entirely. It tried to make a comeback in the early afternoon by sitting on top of the cliffs and edging down but was repelled by some good fortune, no doubt.

With the breeze in the northwest – hence the fog – and not enough to bother the Lifeboat flag, there was nothing much to ease the high humidity caused by the remaining cloud cover. The air was thick as syrup for most of the day. There was brightness but no sunshine for most of the day.

While the sun may have got tired of shining, our visitors must have got tired of staring at it because they made themselves absent for a good part of the day. There were comings and goings, but we did not see any real action until the middle of the afternoon when it picked up to where we might have expected to be. Of course, they might all just have been tired after staying up late to watch the meteor shower that apparently was very worthwhile staying up for. That might be as well, but it did not help my transactional expectations and put me right off my kilter.

It certainly did not help my careful and exacting calculations as to how many pasties (sorry, MS) to order for the weekend. It may have slipped your memory, dear reader, but we ran out of pasties last weekend much to my chagrin and embarrassment. I was very keen that we did not reenact the event. My estimate for the weekend did not include having pasties left over from today but the way sales were going during the morning, we would have most of them left for tomorrow. We did have a little more interest in the afternoon, but it was small beer compared to the rest of the week.

The Missus had an appointment in the morning that left her right arm a brae bit tender. It precluded her dashing to my aid up at The Farm to bring back bodyboards and footballs that we desperately needed. I had fully intended to go up there after we closed at seven o'clock, but she insisted that she work the counter while I went up there a little earlier.

I took the girls so that they could have a run about while I collected the limited number of items on my list. The sun had broken through the cloud in the later afternoon, and it was stunning up there. No wonder the Missus spends so much time up there. It was also hot; the truck was recording 28 degrees and there was very little breeze. I took the opportunity to have a look at the router that had been giving trouble. It is an outside device, but I had put it in the cabin until I could get around to nailing it to the outside. Despite a power down and reset, it would not respond. I rather think that it might have been fried in the cabin. Oops.

Since I had very little time, I did not tarry to work on it further and headed back to the shop. I was very glad that we were not doing this yesterday. I had reports that the traffic was mayhem after everybody tried to leave at the same time and it was busy enough as I drove up and down today. I unloaded the goods which did not take long and put away the truck before changing back into a grumpy shopkeeper and getting behind the counter again.

I had spent most of the day there. Today, there was not a great deal else to do save load the occasional pasties into the oven and backfill the beers when I noticed too many of one sort being sold. I could do that all day long, but it would require someone else to do a bit of shelf filling. While on the face of it that seems a jolly good idea, we would only need someone a few days a week, six weeks of the year. If it was not the same person each year, we would spend most of our time telling them what to do which rather defeats the object.

There have been two people who just 'got it' without any instruction, Big Sis and the Missus' niece who helped out a few Augusts a year or two back as part of the conditions of her stay. The likelihood of finding someone like that who would work a few hours a week for a few weeks, I suggest, is slim.

Lifeboat training, once again, pulled a big crowd for the launch. I could not see what was happening on the Harbour beach but there were plenty of people lining the railing to watch the big boat. The last time we launched the Inshore on such a day, the boat was mobbed on the way out. It was less busy this week and because it was a big spring tide, there were few people down on the slip. I had a full report from the head launcher just before we closed.

I watched the boat return at around eight o'clock while I was still working at the computer. The tide had ebbed a little by then, but it was still a textbook recovery up the short slip. After a wash down, it was strapped up and returned to the long slip for its next service. We are, after all, a very vigilant, very excellent Shore Crew.

August 12th – Wednesday

I have been bandying around the word busy for the last few weeks like I knew what I was talking about. Clearly, I did not. Today was busy.

It was also yet another rip gribbler. I mentioned it a couple of times to customers we know when they remarked on the busyness, we would normally have a few good days in a row and then a couple of cloudy or rainy days. This would allow us time to restock from whichever source and time to recover a bit. The sunshine has been shining and the days busy from effectively the end of May. Today was relentless until about three o'clock and followed a similar but kinder day yesterday.

I had already suggested that we might be a bit busier today due to the eclipse. I think the expression no merde Maigret is appropriate. I was really just talking about the late afternoon but clearly our visitors decided to make an entire day of it and started at breakfast time. Much of the focus was on 'did we have any eclipse glasses' again. There was no point in thinking what might have been, so I just steeled myself against the hundreds of enquires I batted off. Amongst it all were war stories of people who had tried and failed – like the gentleman's online pair that will now arrive tomorrow - and those who had to go into hiding because they were jealously guarding a pair they had found somewhere, and they were not telling where.

One lady told me she had waiting this morning up at Land's End three hours for a pair. Towards the end of the afternoon, after I had been asked several hundred times more and been told that a shop in St Ives had a queue stretching around the block for them, I started to think that maybe I had dodged a bullet by not having them. Yes. I would have made an 'ansum profit but at what cost. I suspect that once word had got around, it would have caused mayhem in the shop. They would have been three deep at the counter, no one would have been able to get in and out and normal shopping would have been impossible. I am glad I did not have them. That is what I am telling myself anyway.

During the remaining hours we were comprehensively fleeced of most of the contents of the drinks and beer fridges and all the eight pole windbreaks. I had topped up the beer fridge twice using the beer that the Missus brought back. It still ended up empty at the end of the day.

Somehow, the Missus and I managed to get the stock checked and an order prepared for the cash and carry on Saturday. I ramped up the beer volumes and all the other volumes to see us through the last couple of weeks of manic busyness. Happily, when the Missus did her evening stint at restocking a few evenings ago, she cleaned out the store room, so I do not have to move masses of boxes to prepare.

For most of the time I was flat out at the till. There were a couple of lulls, the first starting at three o'clock after starting soon after I opened the first electric sliding door in The Cove. The lulls did not last very long and as we pressed on to closing time, the pace just got faster and faster.

I did not see much of the eclipse. The scene the other side of the door grew dim, and the seating area opposite was packed with those that did not fancy the trek to Land's End. While they were all distracted, I closed the shop.

In the middle of the day someone pointed out a big plume of white smoke above and to the right of Gwenver. Someone came to say that they had seen a hedge fire opposite the entrance to Chapel Carn Brea car park. They said that a fire engine had arrive swiftly and put it out. Clearly, it had started again and the whole thing escalated. It was huge and the fire service closed the road to St Just and all flights were cancelled. Come evening I had a message from the shooting club. The range, right in the path of the flames, had been destroyed. There are two farms, a house at the end of the range drive and some holiday lets up there, too.

The wind that had been a little fierce from the south east all day, eased a little toward the end of the day. Our evening walk was in even more gloom than the last few days but there were still plenty of people around. Some friends passing at the time told me that the queue at the Surf Lodge was out the door and almost to the car park and the OS patio was still heaving. I was very pleased for them. We ended the day up 20 percent on our previous record. I was also very pleased with that because it certainly felt like it.

August 11th – Tuesday

As we are out before the sun rises these days, it is not overly apparent what sort of day is heading our way. If I stopped and thought about it for more than a few seconds – or perhaps thought about it at all – I could have deduced from the clear skies that we were in for a bit of a stonker. I might, however, have factored in a cooling easterly that might have tempered my assessment.

I need not have been so particular; it was a rip-roaring rip gribbler from start to finish. We were blessed with the attendant crowds who kept us busy more or less all day with just a few lulls for us to catch our breath in. We did a roaring trade in parasols - apparently the big boys in Penzance had all run out – windbreaks and beach shelters. The latter led to a bit of an altercation later in the day. A lady returned a pop-up tent.

She complained that it did not provide an ounce of cover from the sun, flattened in the wind and was not at all easy to put down. It sounded like it was not that easy to out up either. The pop-up tents are notorious for folding down and require much patience and practise. As for the other issues, we have sold hundreds of these tents over the years and have never had one back. I suspected user error and asked for a demonstration of the problem. I will grant that it was flimsy but pegged to the ground it would have been adequate even in the wind and I could find no fault with it. I declined her request to swap it for a standard tent on the grounds that I would probably have that one back, too. She had a refund.

If I were able to plan today again, I would have purchased a shipping order of eclipse glasses. If I had a pound for every time I had been asked for them today, I would be

almost as rich as is I actually had some. Heads should roll in my opinion. At the very least someone needs a stern talking to. I mean, who in their right mind would organise such a crowd pleaser during the holiday season with only four days' notice.

Only in retrospect did I realise just how busy it was today. I was far too busy doing than noticing that I was more or less pinned behind the counter for the majority of the day. There was very little in the way of topping up shelves other than in the morning before the shop opened. Because the Missus had done the drinks fridge the night before, I was free to attend to the ice cream freezer and a few of the other items I would not normally have time to get around to. That was the last chance I had for such things.

All the deliveries were late. The bread never turned up at all, due to an administrative error. By the end of the day, we had no complaints and it served to clear out the bread stock except the large white bloomers, which I noted. The greengrocery, milk and pasties (sorry, MS) had to be fitted in around customer activity of which there was plenty. I eventually managed to get everything away a good two hours after we opened.

In the early part of the afternoon the Missus left for The Farm with another of my lists on her mobile telephone. Much of it was things that we could not fit on the truck yesterday as well as the 'heavens to Betsy, we ran out of those' that I discovered late in the day. She was not gone so long this time and sensing that I would have been unable to process the order until the shop closed, she kindly did most of it before retiring upstairs to make ready for her Land's End performance.

Once again, we were very busy in the middle of the afternoon while the Missus was struggling to get around the shop with the stock. While she was doing that, my order of postcard fudge boxes arrived. I had only placed the order on Sunday, so he did well to turn it around so quickly. I was mightily pleased that he had too because we were almost out of the smaller boxes which prompted the order. Another day and we would have run out completely.

The other thing that arrived was the posh pilchards. I was able to price and put these out almost immediately, filling the space that their absence had left for far too long. It will be interesting to see if my theory about them only really selling in the shoulder season holds up. I would certainly not mind being proven wrong.

Late on in the shop day, I stepped outside to retrieve the pasty sign that sits on the newspaper box outside. It needs to come in then so I can put the newspapers away. I happened to glance at the ball stand on my return and notice that it was empty. I had noticed the last couple of days that it was being depleted but only remembered when I could not legitimately pump up the balls. The compressor makes a brae bit of racket, and I avoid switching it on in the early morning so as not to annoy the neighbours in the holiday let next door and also when the shop is full of customers. I

managed it at around half past six o'clock only to discover that I only had two big footballs in the store room. They will have to go on the Missus' list for tomorrow.

Also going on her list will be beer. Lager to be specific. Not that we have any at The Farm; she will need to go further afield. As we neared the end of the day and the last of the current stock was spirited out to be consumed, and I faced even more requests for eclipse glasses, it occurred to me that the eclipse event would probably generate a huge demand for beer from the local shop. It would be unforgiveable if not darned right embarrassing to have run out.

We get much of our alcohol stock from local suppliers. In the height of the season, I suspect these breweries struggle to keep up with the increased volume, particularly on years such as this. However, most of the lagers are national brands but the only source of supply is the cash and carry. Luckily, we can still use the closer cash and carry at Hayle and that is where the Missus will be despatched tomorrow. If we get it early enough, it will be cold for the evening rush – which will now, obviously, not happen.

Again, in the evening I was pegged to the computer sorting out the necessary ordering and administration work. Not long after that it was time to take the girls out for their last walk. I had mentioned the easterly breeze earlier in the day but in the evening, it was really quite punchy. The Lifeboat station flag was flat out and slapping around and we were fair pushed through the gap between the station and the opposite buildings. It is not often that an easterly can be described as warm but it was more refreshing than the ambient air that I imagine was quite stuffy without it.

These thoughts and others would be exceedingly short-lived as I would be knocking out the zeds not ten minutes later. It had been some day.

August 10th – Monday

There was no arguing about the state of the weather today, it was glorious from the outset. The sun was shining on the front of the shop, the only time of the day that it does, and, my, was it hot. It was probably hotter later, but I would know nothing about that.

It was comforting to have pasties again (sorry, MS). They arrived early. I would have left them while I did the beer fridge and the newspapers, but I had also ordered frozen which are kept in the freezer the cooked pasties were sitting on. It took me a while to unpickle myself, but I still managed to get the shop open with minutes to spare.

Part of the reason I was so timely – other than being the master of efficiency and organisation - was that the greengrocery order did not arrive. I questioned the driver and he confirmed that we were definitely not on the list. It took me a while before I

could get onto the computer to discover that I had efficiently organised not to press the final buy button on the ordering website.

Some of our first customers were the Italia cycling team. They were all dressed in light blue with ITALIA emblazoned down their tops and on their leggings. They came seeking pasties that were not ready yet, so they had other things to eat and drink. Some of them came back for second helpings and based upon the fact they all spoke impeccably good English without a hint of an Italian accent I decided to test his credentials. 'You are not really the Italian cycling team, are you?', I challenged. 'It's a fair cop, guv' he retorted, at which point I knew he was not the Italia cycling team because he would have said, 'Sacre bleu' but in Italian.

Coming clean, he told me that they had all decided to wear the fancy dress on their first outing some years ago for a bit of fun. He said that some people take umbrage when they discover the facts, possibly discovering that they had been duped. I told him that I found that to be a tremendous wheeze, and more people like him could bring joy to the world if they tried hard.

I had expected better pasty sales having starved the poor lambs for a whole day. Perhaps they were punishing us for not having any yesterday. We were way into the afternoon before there was any proper pasty action and for a while there, I had a rolling bake going on. After that, there was no reprise of serious pasty buying until almost closing time when a group of young lads tumbled in off the beach. We shall now have an over-abundance tomorrow and must hope for better sales.

Discounting the pasties, we were kept busy through much of the morning and into the afternoon. We were still fairly quiet when I made my exit for the gymnasium. Having missed out on Friday, I was not going to pass on today no matter what the provocation. I enjoyed a proper blistering session and returned to the shop bursting with energy that saw me through until at least the middle of the day. After that I ground through the rest of the afternoon like anybody else.

It had occurred to me that our posh, canned pilchard order had still not materialised. The last I heard was they had technical problems and production was delayed. I had looked up their contact details but had been distracted by the arrival of the Missus relieving me for the gymnasium. By the time I got back, quite spookily I had a message from them telling me the order was on its way. They apologised but the hake and pollack would not be available for the foreseeable future. They did not elucidate which left me wondering what the problem could be with fish available the year around. It is unlikely that I will ever find out.

I started again to make some forays into the shop to fill gaps here and there in the grocery aisle. The Missus was going to go down last evening but we ran out of time, and the gaps were getting a little embarrassing now. I might have furnished a couple of products on the shelves but had to give up as the busy periods were getting busier and longer.

There was no particular time that I could gaze down at the beach as I was either too busy or too distracted. I registered that it was busy down there and that the sea was flat again. For a substantial part of the day the tide is in and covering most of the beach. Thankfully a neap tide, it allows enough space above the tide line for a good showing of beach dwellers. I also noticed that the wind was a little more robust than yesterday which resulted in some windbreak sales.

The Missus headed off to The Farm in the early afternoon with my list of required goodies on her mobile telephone. She came back in the later part of the afternoon and replenished the windbreak stock, some wetsuits, suncream and cricket bats. It was not long after that I realised that we had sold the last of the beach towels, the flip flops needed attention and more wetsuits were required, so she will have to do it all again tomorrow.

We are hampered by the fact that the truck is full of RNLI stand that she will take up to Land's End twice a week. It leaves not a great deal of space for the transport of stock, which is another reason we are swapping the truck back to a van and worry about getting up to The Farm in wet weather another time. One thing we will not be investing in is an electric vehicle which in this part of the world and for our purposes is a bit like buying a garden shed to get around in.

Up until her arrival back at the shop, we had been having one of our lulls. Almost the second the Missus stepped out of truck and into the shop with the first load she heralded another substantial rush that went on for some time. While we could get some of the stock out on the shelves, much of it had to be piled up in the already piled up store room. It was not until the last hour of opening that I managed to go through it and the wine delivery that has turned up and put it all away. During that time I was also pressed at the till concluding with a five minutes to closing finale to wrap it all up with.

I went and had some tea and do the morning administration on the computer while the Missus went downstairs to attack the empty shelves. She had still not finished when I came back with the girls from our evening walk. The last of the sunset glow was still in the sky but we must have missed the car park exodus and there were precious few people about. I suggested to the Missus she should not be one of them and the remaining shelves could wait another day. I will have to start the cash and carry delivery process tomorrow – that came around quick.

August 9th – Sunday

A few weeks ago, I commended Land's End Attraction for their caution in not having fireworks due to the fire risk caused by the dry conditions. While the dry weather continues and hose pipe bans have been placed upon the region, Land's End seem to have enjoyed a different climate. I understand from this week that the fireworks

will resume because 'the hot weather is now over'. All the while I thought that their weather station was faulty when they were actually having different weather from us.

I should not be so harsh. They have almost certainly had the fire brigade around to do a risk assessment and give them the all clear. The Missus will be up there again on Tuesday, but you may be certain she will be long gone by the time the fireworks start. She is not a great fan. At home she takes tranquilisers and hides under the table.

Today we started with all the potential of a proper rip gribbler that promptly got clouded over as soon as me and the girls came away from the beach first thing. Fortunately, it unclouded again by the time I went downstairs and remained something of a corker for the rest of the day. Naturally, this precipitated a major beach day and the preceding rush for beach mats, tents and parasols. There was a bit of breeze from the west but not enough to drive any windbreak sales. By the early afternoon, the top of the beach – because that is all there was – was packed with beach dwellers thinning out all the way across to the other side of The Valley.

Earlier in the tide there were swarms of water cavorters filling the various swimming and surfing areas. There was no real need to separate the two as there was, once again, no waves to ride on and cause havoc. Nearer to high water, the water users thinned out leaving a dozen paddle boarders and a dispersed group of paddlers and swimmers closer to the shore.

It was about that time that we slowed down in the shop. The entire morning had been lively, with a regular flow of customers coming and going with very few challenging moments. It was busy enough especially as we had no pasties (sorry, MS) to draw people in or to ensure the supply of. In fact, so straightforward was it without pasties it crossed my mind not to bother again.

During the busy period, I was asked by a lady perusing our stock of new and used books if we had anything set in Cornwall. I was about to reply in the negative, or at least say I did not know when the spine of *Apocalypse Dreckly* caught my eye. Written by the inestimable, and late, Cornish author, Alan Kent, it is set in St Ives at the time of the total eclipse of the sun in 1999.

It was a rather apt find because we are about to have another, partial, eclipse on Wednesday, Radio Pasty tells me. While I am sure the event had been calculated many years ago, it was only Saturday morning that it was brought to my attention. I have to ensure in future that I am better informed, or at least informed much earlier, because it was no more than three hours after hearing about it, I had my first request for special glasses or apparatus with which to view the event.

I know that we have a bit of a reputation for having everything the most demanding visitor needs for their attendance in The Cove, but sadly this does not extend to a handy stock of solar viewing spectacles. I would not even know where to start

looking for wholesale availability of such things. Years ago, everyone would have had a strip of over exposed film negative for such a purpose. The price of progress, I suppose. Still, I have some time to address this shortcoming of mine and have until 2090 to find a suitable supplier. I will not be caught out again.

Such was the sporadic nature of our customer visits I had time between them to wander about the shop topping up shelves here and there and noticing gaps to do something about later. The one I am particularly lax with is the gift aisle. This is as far away from the till as you can get and far to far away to be visiting regularly. Because I do not get there often I am always surprised at the scene of devastation.

It takes longer to move the various items back to their correct boxes than it does listing the deficiencies and filling the gaps with new stock. Really, the only reason I went down that aisle today was that there were two misplaced items in the wire display baskets opposite the till. This is the common dumping ground for toys that met the 'you are not having that' parental control. This is usually accompanied by fits of screaming and the projectile placement of said item in the most convenient place - the wire baskets. Perhaps I should pad the baskets to reduce the risk of damage to the refused items.

Some of the gaps I was able to resolve with stock from the store room, which was helpful. There were a couple of items, such as the custom bracelets that have their own stand, I could do at the counter and take them back again. Others will have to wait until the Missus can have a crack at them or bring down the stock from The Farm. Oddly, after I had eventually managed to get back down the gift aisle, I discovered that most of the gaps could be filled from the store room and that very little was needed from The Farm.

That however did not mean that the Missus was off the hook. I had written down a list of wetsuits yesterday which she had completely missed when I sent her a picture of it. Somehow, she had read the bottom but not the top of the list. I wrote it out again today and put the wetsuits at the bottom.

Towards the end of the afternoon, cloud rolled back in. This was a bit of a shame for the local crowd who had gathered on the Harbour beach as is their habit on sunny Sunday afternoons. Some had been there for quite a while but one of them dropped by late to join the party. I had not seen him for a while, so we stopped for a chat and discovered that his latest venture was making rum. I will have to be circumspect here but what we are dealing with was the title of a Steven Stills album from the mid 70s. Apparently, he intends to go professional and very oddly you need to provide samples of your wares before you can get a licence. Since, on the face of it, you are not supposed to make the goods before you have a licence, it is a little Catch 22.

We had to stop chatting then because we had the beach crowd rolling off the beach and there was quite a number of them, which was gratifying. We remained busy for quite a while, although I could neither tell you what time it was or how long the rush

went on for. I think it must have started soon after four o'clock because I hurriedly had to do the bread order before I got snarled up in shopkeeping, although arguably, that is shopkeeping.

We went quiet again in the usual manner that allowed me time to do the newspapers and pull in the display from outside. It was then busy again through to the last half an hour, whereupon we were treated to yet another, bone fide five minutes to closing rush that saw me finish serving the last customer at ten minutes past closing time, which is a bleddy liberty, if you ask me. At least it was for a worthwhile amount.

The girls and I were once again forced to the side of the road by the mass exodus from the Harbour car park. I think we will have to negotiate that through the coming week as it is tied to sunset watching. We could go earlier, which defeats the purpose of going and later is beyond my bedtime. I am not sure that changing the time of sunset is applicable.

August 8th – Saturday

Remember the date. It is a day that will go down in infamy. Our customers will certainly have it in for me tomorrow, that is for sure.

Well, that was not going to help things along very much: total cloud cover and not a wink of sunshine. It was, however, warm and dry and did not stop a small gathering on the beach.

It was, of course, a change-over day in The Cove. For us the busyness of the beach was immaterial. Were satisfyingly busy for most of the morning only slowing down in the early afternoon as the leavers left. It was about that time that the cloud started to break up and we saw a bit of brightness. We have found that with a bit of dull weather, the leavers are less heartbroken about going home. If the weather is too attractive, they might decide not to go home.

Before they left, they cleaned us out of all manner of things including more biscuits, cheese pasties (sorry, MS) – we sold the last one at one o'clock – and many, many 50 pence sweets. Earlier in the day, a visitor had pointed to the thinness of our offering. I told him that we would be ordering for next week as I had not really noticed how many had gone until the day before. He revealed that we worked for the company that we purchase them from. I had hoped that he would say he would send someone along with the next order to fill the stand up for us, but I was to be disappointed. He took a picture of our sorry stand so he could giggle with his pals back at the office and left.

A young man came in later in the day wishing to purchase some of these very sweets. He asked me which of the packets were the most popular, so I told him the ones that were not there anymore. For some reason he found this information

unhelpful and asked again, qualifying the question by adding, 'of the ones left'. I hesitated in my response as I did not wish to sound trite on my second answer but found I could not avoid it. The most popular would be the ones that there were fewer of. He bought something else in the end.

It was a day that was busy in places and in the late afternoon, there was time to try and get some stock out onto the shelves. Despite the additional stock I added to the cash and carry list, we are still running out of some things. I can only predict so much and somethings sell when I compensated for something else entirely. The important thing is that I managed to get some out, rather than having them in the store room on a shelf. It is still very much a case of spinning plates, but I am making some progress.

Then it happened. The thing that will henceforth define me. Of all my achievements in life – pulling a pump over in Aunt Janey's back yard when I was six years old being the most notable – there is only one now for which I will be remembered. After yesterday's mammoth session, I rather saw the writing in the wall and just ploughed through today expecting the inevitable. It was a catastrophe akin to the extinguishing of the eternal flame or The Mousetrap making the final curtain: we ran out of pasties, well enough to run tomorrow with anyway.

In my defence, we could not have ordered many more than I did. They would not have fitted in the fridge and in this heat, they would not have survived outside it. We even sold the entire frozen stock, so I had no fall back, although that would have only been another twenty and quite insufficient to make a dent in tomorrow's probable demand. Nevertheless, it is the first time in 23 years that this had happened, so is a day that will go down in infamy. Unless I can come up with a solution, we will have the same problem next week.

I would console myself later with a large malt but in the meantime, I took solace in the view of the beach at near closing time. The sun had come out properly in the closing stages of the afternoon and the warm light lit up the beach and the colours of the dunes and turned the sea an azure blue. With a handy wave or two as the tide pushed in, the inner shore had a fair few surfers, but the swimming area was littered with bodies paddling or bobbing a bit further out. The thing that struck me most was the lack of movement. It looked like someone had placed a 1960s Kodachrome postcard, with its violent colours, across the doorway.

We were blessed with a five minutes to closing rush at five minutes to closing. It was the last desperate call for ice creams and bottles of wine. There was no overrun and we closed on time. The till was very respectable though not quite near enough to yesterday's bumper bonanza. The pasty situation tells its own tale of remarkable demand. I know that we are a good bit cheaper than the competition and our pasties have a good reputation among the regulars and I know that they are spreading the word. Trouble is, it is not just the pasties we are struggling to meet demand for,

which rather indicates we are busier than previously. What is confusing about that is that many people are telling us how quiet it is this year. Golly gosh I am puzzled.

There were fewer people around when I took the girls for their last run out. The sunset had long gone by then and dusk was settling in. Instead, we had a flow of cars leaving the Harbour car park that made traversing the road to the Roundhouse a little fraught. Still, there were plenty of cars still there by the look of it. I think we could be in for a busy week ahead.

August 7th – Friday

Holy hiking socks, what a busy morning. What a busy day.

It had not helped, in fact it was the root cause, that most of the morning deliveries were late and all came at once. They arrived at the outset of the shop opening and were some of the biggest of the week. We had eight boxes of steak pasties (sorry, MS) alone, along with greengrocery, an abundance of milk and big bottles of water and Furniss biscuits and Buttermilk fudge.

I was doing alright at first, then the numbers and frequency of customer visits increased, and I started to lose ground. Normally, this would have been a gymnasium day, but the Missus had an early appointment. Since she would be ready to go out, I enlisted her help to clear the build-up of stock and allow me to stack the pasties into precise positions in the fridge to make best use of the space. By the time we had finished, the day was shaping up nicely to be monumentally busy.

Same as last week, I suspect the combination of people's last day and the prospect of a bit of a rip gribbler drove the crowds wild with anticipation of an enjoyable day on the beach. How was I supposed to know that the vast majority were not only vegetarians but very hungry vegetarians.

After last weekend, I had doubled the number of cheese pasties in the order. It was as if I had not bothered. Come three o'clock in the afternoon, we have driven through most of the three-day supply.

The pasty rush had started early and soon gathered momentum. I recognised the signs early but, as ever, was unable to get to the oven to get a rolling pasty bake started. In the end I had to halt proceedings at the till and force the issue. What followed was a continual process of guessing how many pasties and of what sort to heat next. It must have lasted a good couple of hours, maybe more, and left me quite astounded at the number of cheese pasties I was having to throw at it. I would later estimate that we would run out by the end of the day and would have done had the pace kept up.

Into this melee of marauding customers came riding the heroic much maligned council licensing team ready to save the council's finances one seating area at a time. A representative sliced through the mayhem with a telephone call which I answered because it was a local number. Whether they are unconscious, unheeding or uncaring of just how busy a Cornish business is at the height of the season, it is hard to fathom. The lady asked if I had five minutes, to which I answered that I did not. She carried on anyway telling me that it was important to speak at this very moment or the world would come to an end, so I placed the telephone on the counter and served the next ten customers. I then spoke with her briefly, suggesting that she might note just how busy we were, and put it down again for the next fifteen customers.

Whether she was daft or just belligerent, she wished to continue the conversation. First, she explained that the error regarding the initial demand for a pavement licence was everybody else's fault but hers, so that was nice. I took the opportunity to point out that calling at the height of a busy day in season, and the fact that the five minutes she spoke of lasted at least an elapsed twenty, exemplified my criticism of her department's inability to acknowledge the pressures facing businesses in the Duchy succinctly. She told me she understood, which she plainly did not.

Anyway, the only purpose of calling was not to apologise, it was to inform me that Highways had changed their minds, and we needed a Pavement Licence after all and, by the way, I had two weeks to comply before the fines came. I presume that the neighbouring businesses will have the same ultimatum but they will have to jump through all the bureaucratic hoops while running flat out trying to earn a living.

Not that I had much time to stop and stare but it was hard to ignore the small flotilla entering the bay and into the Harbour at approximately the middle of the day. I noted the arrival of a gig surrounded by a selection of other support craft and well-wishers. Someone told me that the Inshore had launched earlier, something I knew nothing about and it transpired that it went out to escort the gig in. I discovered later that the gig had been rowed from the Isles of Scilly as a sponsored activity in support of a Prostate Cancer charity. My it was a busy Harbour for a while there.

We also continued to be busy until around half past three o'clock after which all went quiet for a bit. It was quite remarkable the sudden difference from running hot to running cold, so to speak and left me wondering what to do with myself.

It did not take long to work it out because as I pointed out the suncream to a customer I noticed the almost total absence of bags of sweets hanging from their posts. I had not previously noticed the rapid decline in numbers; they just were suddenly not there. I managed to get a good proportion of the pegs filled in the time I had between customers, then we started getting busy again.

Of course, the other thing I noticed when I pointed out the suncream to the enquiring customer, was the lack of suncream. It had distracted me so much while I was doing

the bags of sweets, I diverted into topping up the suncream shelf instead and while I was doing that my eye was caught by the glaring hole left by the large bars of Cadbury Dairy Milk. The glaring hole is still there because I think I got distracted by the deficiency in toilet rolls.

The tide had kept our beach dwellers pinned to the dunes for the lion's share of the day. It was only in the later part of the afternoon that there was an appreciable beach to cavort upon. Other than a surf school drifting about on the sandbar – which was also not producing any waves – there were precious few boarders of any sort on the water. We were back to flat calm right across the bay and with the sun shining down with gay abandon, who cared – other than the dyed in the wool surf types. Hey, that is what beer was made for. For all those who have been telling me it was quiet this year, even I could see that the beach was thinly populated today. Happily, the shop was not.

It was not very long into the day that it transformed into a Saturday. The papers in the morning had grounded me but as the memory of sorting them out faded, the day looked, felt and smelled like a Saturday. No matter how hard I tried to correct my thinking, my brain would have none of it. It was Saturday and that was that.

We were busy again in the last hour and a half of opening – an extended five minutes to closing rush? Perhaps not. When I checked the till at the end of the day, we had equalled the busiest day this year which was at half term. It was as well we stopped as I think the till was about to overheat – or that might have been my fingers. When it came to ordering, I found that the Furniss going home biscuits that had arrived in the morning had all gone and I had to order them again.

I had to wait to find that exciting fact as just as I was about to close, our pagers went off – twice. Both boats were summoned to Porthcurno to search for a missing swimmer. It would have been a fast launch from inside the house had it gone ahead but just as we were ready to go, the swimmer was found and we were stood down. We had a very good response, too, for a Saturday evening.

There was still ordering to be done when I returned but it did not take long. I noted the empty state of the soft drinks fridge as well and the amount of work I would have to do in the morning. It is always nice to have something to look forward to.

August 6th – Thursday

After yesterday morning, I felt like I had been completely deserted. I had not even made any significant orders last night that might challenge me this morning. The weather came out in sympathy, spreading cloud over the top of us from late morning. It had closed off the tantalising stretches of blue sky that the majority of those who were around at the time were hoping would spread and give us another sunny day. Hard lines, it seemed.

Without the orders or threat of them, I had sufficient time on hand to top up the sunglasses which was very satisfying. I think that I have said before, the things that are in my eye line from behind the counter tend to irritate when they are in need of attention because I can see them constantly. It was just ironic that I managed to fill the stand on a day that did not have any bright sunshine in it at the time.

The whole of the morning produced a lacklustre performance from our visitors. If it were not for the weekend leavers spending the last of their pocket money before they went, we would have had a very poor show indeed.

Even the pasties (sorry, MS) took a while to get going. We were lucky to have pasties at all as I had been so head down yesterday serving customers I had forgotten all about ordering for today. I chanced to look up at the clock at three minutes to the deadline and hurried an order in just in the nick of time. I had a call back from the bakery a couple of hours later: they would not have any cheese pasties tomorrow. Having been told earlier in the week that the big cheese pasty contingent was in town, I imagined the mayhem this would wreak. Rather than not have a vegetarian option at all I opted for a similar number of vegetable pasties. We would have to manage expectations and disappointment.

Late in the day, I thought that I had better try a bite of vegetable pasty. I have no idea what possessed me. Oh, dear. Oh, very dear. I could not even bring myself to waste any brown sauce on it.

We had to wait until the afternoon before the cloud shifted and the day turned into a splendid beach day. Some folk were clearly in the know because they had set up camp at the top of the beach before the cloud broke. We had sold a number of windbreaks and beach tents, so there was a fair degree of preparation. By the end of the afternoon, there was quite a group of them up at the top end of the beach. As predicted, there was not much swell or waves to speak of. A few waves were breaking on the sandbars, and it looked like the surf schools were out in force. It was not as crowded as some days recently but there was a pretty fair showing.

Understandably, most of our business was in the afternoon. Follow the sun used to mean something entirely different in my old line of work but it is a good enough maxim for seaside shopkeeping. As the afternoon pressed on, buckets and spades transformed into grocery and snack shopping. It was busy enough at times but not a patch on yesterday or Monday and there were enough gaps for me to do 'useful things'.

The chief useful thing came about because I had visited the swimming shorts at the far end of the shop earlier in the day. They were in a pitiful state with only a few of each size available. With this in mind, when I had time in the afternoon, I extracted some stock that had been lying around among the hooded sweatshirts for the want of somewhere else to place them. Between customers I was able to price them and fix hangers on and later get them out on the display in the shop.

I still had time later to prepare the wetshoes that the Missus had brought down from The Farm. This took a little while and it came close to us getting busy again. While I was out in the shop putting them on the hangers I was buttonholed by a customer. Very reasonably he wanted to know if we had a particular size in black. I explained that due to the size of the shop and our limited resources we also had very limited choice. The same is true of the shorts; you can have any size XL you want as long as its stripes and royal blue, navy or red – it says on the label. Towards the end of the season you will be lucky to get the size you want, I expect. Although, if you are a size 16 lady, we are the shop for you; we have a store full of short in that size.

Lifeboat training went off a little later this evening to coincide recovery with higher tide. An hour earlier and we could not get the boat on the short slip for the lack of water nor on the long slip for there being too much. Once again, I avoided turning up but I had allocated roles and watched the action as it was all in the bay today.

I heard the recovery because it was late and I could not get my rear off the seat I was in. I passed the station just as the crew were putting the finishing touches to a textbook recovery, I was assured later. We are, after all, a very distributed, very excellent Shore Crew.

August 5th – Wednesday

What is it that drives a busy day, I ask myself. Sadly, I had chosen exactly the wrong person to ask because myself did not have a bleddy clue. We were flat out on Friday, a change-over day and traditionally quiet in places; the weekend, though not shoddy, failed to meet expectations; and Monday, unexpectedly had me on my knees. The dip on Tuesday very likely had much to do with the weather, or at least the forecast, and then somebody ordained today a beach day and somehow everyone else heard about it.

On its own, this would have been just dandy, thank you very much. Stand behind the till, go nowhere and get my fingers running over the keyboard like a concert pianist playing a Rachmanioff piano concerto. Any eejit can do that – the till bit, not Rachmanioff. No, for added edge we like to have all our deliveries all at once and make sure that we have ordered lots from all our suppliers the previous evening.

Just to make it interesting, our customers fell through the first electric sliding door in the The Cove from the moment I opened it and did not stop coming until the middle of the afternoon. It was a little intense. So intense, indeed, I left the Missus to it at ten o'clock and went off for a blistering session at the gymnasium. I also left her with the greengrocery that I had been unable to process and later, she dealt with the butchery order that arrived in my absence. Oh, come on. A blistering session is crucial to maintain my stamina and stunning physique.

In fact, the Missus had been waiting for my return so that she could get down the shop to put the bacon and the gala pie in the fridge. After that we conducted a seamless handover and as the Missus was getting ready to go off to The Farm, the beachware order arrived.

This was the one that contained some of the bodyboards we were short of. To make up the order, we had added some other items we were running close to empty on. It was not a huge order, but it piled up a fair bit on our newspaper box outside. The crowds had diminished sufficiently for me to lend a hand unloading the van, but I had to rush back at the end as the diminishing crowds, erm, reminised again.

It was a familiar pattern throughout the rest of the day. There was quiet moments later in the afternoon, but they were just that, moments. I had every intention of filling up the sunglasses stand but as the day progressed, any hope of even thinking about topping it up faded fast. The same was true of the other things that I knew we would be running short of such as topping up the beer fridge. That too was a no more than a fanciful notion.

I would love to report just how busy or not the beach was today, it being a beach day an' all. It is just that I did not get to see it. I had a good geek as we slowed to a crawl in the last embers of the afternoon and even then, it looked pretty packed up at the upper reaches. Since there were waves, albeit rough and blown flat, the surfers were out in large numbers. I suspect that they will not be there tomorrow, so it was a one day window and they were keen to take advantage even if the play was poor. The beach itself looked splendid in the softening light. It is also kinder on the eyes for a long look.

Oddly, one of our neighbours from up the hill told me she has thought that it was not as busy this year. She said that the beach was not as crowded and there were fewer people milling about. I was feeling alright about this year until she said that, now I am worried.

We had started to slow down at around half past four o'clock, but it was two hours later that I was actually able to put away the contents of a couple of boxes from the earlier delivery. We had a second set of bodyboards, too, that the Missus crammed into the truck on her return journey and will take up to The Farm tomorrow. We were still seeing the beers, crisps and chocolate brigade right up the last minute but there was no real five minutes to closing rush. Our visitors were probably all shopped and beached out – or it is just so much quieter this year that they are just not here.

Hopefully, I will be able to complete putting out the rest of the deliveries in the morning. I ordered in some smoked mackerel and salmon which needs pricing. It will be reasonably short dated, so it is important that it goes out sooner rather than later. Another delivery needs putting away in the beer cupboard before I can use the freezer top, so I have set myself up for quite a bit of work first thing. I will not start working evenings; that way lies lunacy.

One thing I have started doing in the evening while I eat my tea is deal with messages that have arrived during the day. I can delete the detritus and respond to those that can be done with a written reply. Telephoning is mainly out of the question as that is nigh on impossible to do during office hours. I can check up and down the street and there will not be a soul around but as soon as I press the dial button on the telephone a rush of customer will come piling from around corners and down drain pipes.

One of the messages I dealt with a couple of days ago was from the lady who rocked up at the shop telling us we need a pavement licence and if we did not have one, we would get a fine. I had sent my robust letter to her, because I held her responsible for the whole mess and was unequivocal in pointing that out. She clearly disagreed. She thanked me for 'brining the matter to her attention' and passed the buck to the Licensing Team. For sure, they messed up as much as anyone, but our lady needs to carry the can because she started it.

Despite the busyness of the morning, I managed to fire off a message to the Laurel and Hardy Newspaper Company regarding the absence of magazines. I mentioned that their purpose was to sell newspapers and magazines but through their actions they had managed quite the reverse. I cannot see it doing any good but at least it made me feel better.

The company had randomly sent two newspaper titles I had not ordered. They were not on the delivery note, either. I put them out just in case I managed to sell one, but they were still there at the end of the day. They had done this before and I sent the unsold copies back. I did not include them on my paperwork but some smart eye noticed them and filed a 'returns rejection' because they were not on the 'sent' list. This appeared on the next delivery note and because I had not recorded the delivery – I could not because there was no entry on the screen for them – they charged me for them. I then had to claim them as missing to clear the charge. Thankfully, they accepted that and credited them. I will not make that mistake again.

I think the wind had reduced by the end of the day. It was difficult to tell because I had not been out in it. The channel markers appeared to be leaning over at a lesser angle, so I will take that as a yes. Gwennap Head, windiest place in the universe, still had it at 30 miles per hour or more and Land's End is not worth looking at because the weathervane has still not been fixed.

At some point during the day, the cloud we had in the morning went away and left us with a largely sunny day. Earlier, it had looked quite dark and menacing to the northeast with big black cumulus hung low somewhere over the cliffs. One of our last customers of the day told me he had spent the day in St Ives. Apparently, it was monstrously busy. After I had finished ribbing him for his choice of destination, he told me it had rained there. I think my case is rested – as indeed should I.

August 4th – Tuesday

I was awarded an unwanted break today as the weather fell apart on us. I got a little damp as I took the girls around first thing. Someone told me that it had rained heavily in the night, but the ground was completely dry as we walked around the block.

Before I did very much in the morning I reported our overflowing bin again. Once again, the emergency cleaner-up arrived in his tights and cape with a big R on his chest for 'Rubbish Man', I presume. Alright, I made that bit up, but he single-handedly cleared the detritus which took about twenty minutes while he made notes filled bags and swept up. Surely, the bosses must notice soon that this is happening way too often to be an isolated incident.

By the time I came down to start in the shop, the day was looking a much better prospect indeed. There was brightness and bits of blue sky were showing through the high level cloud with some of the sky still clouded over with thicker low level stuff. A second wave of rain came through not long into the morning and scared off the few who had ventured out at that stage. More than the weather, I think that the forecast probably did the scaring off. One look at the dark clouds and raindrops on their favourite 'app' and they were all off to St Ives.

Those who chose to brave it out were rewarded by some very fine weather between the very occasional showers, especially during the morning and early afternoon. Another band of light rain came through halfway through the afternoon. There was not much discernible difference between today and yesterday after the clouds cleared out. It took a while but by the middle of the afternoon there was quite a crowd down on the big beach up on the high tide line just waiting to get a bit damp. One of our fishermen had told me that he was rolling around a bit over by longships, so I had expected some swell to be moving into the bay. I am sure that there were a few surfers who would have been grateful for it, but there was none. The best they had were some waves breaking on another sandbar over by North Rocks.

We were busy at times and sometimes very busy. In between, we had long periods of sporadic customer visits. It allowed me time to slowly work my way through the farm shop cash and carry that had arrived in the early afternoon and was probably the biggest of the year. Quite fortuitously, the Missus was just on her way out when the delivery arrived. She was able to jump behind the till while I helped unload the truck and when she was not serving, she helped as well. The store room that was a complete mess before, was an even worse complete mess when we had finished.

I knew that I would not clear it all during the rest of the afternoon, especially as there were drinks delivered that I would not put out until the morning. I concentrated on clearing a route through to the back of the store room and to clear the top of the chest freezer that I would be using as a work surface in the morning. That all went very well until I had to move the soft drinks out of the way to get at the accumulated cardboard and put them on top of the freezer again.

There was much drifting in and out during the later part of the afternoon but no major rushes right through until the close of play. I had spotted a band of rain approaching that would probably coincide with our closing. It produced some heavy drizzle for ten minutes but never really amounted to very much. The till was reasonably respectable for such a relatively slow day, but we had a smaller number of higher value transactions, some of them most notable. I admit to having struggled through parts of today for the very reason that I was not distracted sufficiently by work to take my mind off how weary I was. It had largely passed in the last few hours run up to closing. A good gymnasium session will sort me out tomorrow.

Having not stepped outside since the morning, save for a couple of runs up for a cup of tea, I had not noticed how the wind had freshened in the latter part of the afternoon. Radio Pasty said that it would be breezy tomorrow and the surface pressure charts show high pressure building again after that. The break up of the weather, it seems, was a temporary blip and did not produce very much in the way of much needed rain.

The Missus had threatened to go back up to The Farm in the evening but at some point changed her mind. It meant I got to take the girls out last thing and this evening at roughly the same time as the last time I did it, the sun had gone and it was dark – well, very gloomy at least. The wind was still making an effort, especially as we rounded the corner of the Lifeboat station, but it was still relatively warm. A family were taking supper at the table outside Tinker Tailor at the head of the Harbour and it was busy out, once again. Something clearly defines which late evenings are worth hanging about for and which to spend indoors and the weather clearly is not a factor.

A quick run out was quite sufficient for me; I could hear my bed calling from the other side of the Roundhouse.

August 3rd – Monday

It was looking all rather bright and encouraging before six o'clock this morning when I stepped out with the girls. By the time we opened, things had gone downhill and it was not just the weather that had produced some thickening cloud all over us but our deliveries were in disarray.

The bread and the newspapers were roughly on time, although it seems that the Laurel and Hardy Newspaper Company has stopped checking my volumes. There is no longer a nice little scribble on the packing note, checked by Fred (not his real name), and to prove it I was missing a title. As explained yesterday, I narrowly avoided missing the credit as I got tied up with customers and later deliveries.

The greengrocery, of which there was quite a bit, arrived after we were open. Since we had not reached manic customer activity at that stage, I managed to get it all out of the way, bar the produce that needed to be weighed, before the dairy arrived. It

was when the milk got here that the customers pounced. I found myself going up and down the aisle to put a few litres of milk away, then returning to the till to serve and going back again.

By the time I went to my gymnasium session, there was no sign of our pasty man (sorry, MS), so I left it to the Missus to sort. We had already taken orders for pasties when they did arrive, and I fended off the usual questions of what time the pasties get here with my usual response of two minutes after the van arrives.

Even the gymnasium session was in doubt. The local gig club had arranged to have a joint exercise with the Inshore boat – or we had arranged with them. They called off at the last minute and there ensued an hour of indecision whether the Inshore would go anyway as planned or later in the afternoon. Since my gymnasium session rested on which way it would go, I had to press for an answer.

I felt a little torn about going anyway because business has started to pick up before I left. By the end of the afternoon, I was glad that I did not turn back – I was grateful for the rest.

To say that it was busy today would be like saying that light travels quite quickly. We were pressed behind the counter for most of the day and when we were not being pressed, we were being very pressed. The pasties had arrived very late in my absence and the people who had ordered had already had them by the time I got back. The soft drinks had arrived and were piled up in the store room – the Missus cleared them after I went upstairs to get ready. The water and the biscuits arrived before I went up, and I stowed those at the back of the store room. I eventually got to put the biscuits out approaching closing time. Breakfast was at half past three o'clock.

The day that I thought was supposed to be cloudy according to the people I spoke with, turned into another proper rip gribbler. I imagine that the beach was packed again, although if I did get to see it, the scene did not lodge long in my brain to be recalled later. I do remember the sea being full. At low water two long sandbars reached out from the beach proper and dissected the sea into approximate thirds. It was a most peculiar arrangement with water users spread across the three segments or pools seemingly equally. Again, there was no surf, and the bay was as flat as a dish all day.

Despite the melee in the shop, I had to make some effort to replenish our bodyboard stock. We are almost out of child boards, and the adult ones will not last much longer. When I called our suppliers when I went upstairs to get ready, they too were short on just the boards we needed. I was able to secure some stock of the children's boards, but we will just have to run out of the adult ones.

If there were any other deficiencies across the shop, they would just have to wait. Roughly the only time I came out from behind the counter was to put more pasties in

the oven or retrieve them. Any other spare moments were reserved for trying to build an order so that we could have a delivery from the beachware company who were supplying some of the bodyboards but not enough for a minimum order. Even this task I had to give up on in favour for doing it in the evening after we had closed.

I am very fortunate that I can have fun with some of the customers. It would be a very long and difficult day without some levity. I do occasionally get it wrong and there are people out there who, unbelievably, are even grumpier than a grumpy shopkeeper. Someone did ask why I still had our 'covid' screen in place after all these years and I explained as well as the function of keeping some germs at bay, also provided a modicum of protection should an offended customer wish to punch me on the nose.

The Missus headed off to The Farm before we closed, so I did not get to see her until almost bedtime. If I stopped to think about it, I might consider it a curious life with us both running at full tilt for these few weeks and maybe a bit longer here and there. We have been doing it for twenty odd years. This thing may rattle along but if it was going to break, I am sure it would have broken by now.

August 2nd – Sunday

There is nothing quite like strapping up your second customer of the day's broken finger to get the morning going with a zing. He had fallen on some rough ground up St Just was the previous evening while walking his hound. Always blame the hound; it looks better.

I was also seriously ahead of the posse by the time the shop opened. Thankfully, the soft drinks fridge had not been too badly ravaged by the thirsty hordes yesterday. I was able, just about, to reach the spare stock behind the cash and carry order without having to move too many boxes or break an ankle trying to reach the back of the store. The beer fridge had fared worse but at least I could get at the stock and that did not take too long.

Neither did the newspapers. The Laurel and Hardy Newspaper Company decided in its wisdom to short me on two of the most popular Sunday titles. Just for added amusement they did charge for them, so I had to login to their system to arrange the credit. At this time of the year that is a precarious arrangement because there is a cut off time involved. If I am busy first thing, I can easily forget to do the credit and letting the Laurel and Hardy Newspaper Company get away with it is more galling than you can imagine.

We were blessed with another dry and sunny day, this time without any attendance cloud to spoil it. I think, not that I had much time to look, that the beach was about as busy as it was yesterday. I am not sure what it was about Friday but it is unheard of to have a Friday as the busier day of the weekend, if we wish to be loose with the

term. Each day of the actual weekend was, by our turnover, a third less busy than Friday.

The other odd thing about the three days was the enormous demand for cheese pasties (sorry, MS). Up until now, including the busy half term, I had maintained roughly the same ratio of cheese to steak pasties. Friday and Saturday upset that particular wheelbarrow of ratatouille with a frighteningly large demand for the vegetarian option. There was no doubt that we would run out early on Sunday.

One customer, a regular, warned me that her extended family would be buying cheese pasties for the entire week. One day I might have thought was a blip but two looked more like a trend and I increased my order of cheese pasties for Monday by a good margin. I probably do not need to say that sales of cheese pasties, subsequent to the order cutoff, dropped through the floor and the few we had left for today lasted until the middle of the afternoon.

As a small aside, we have also been selling an unusual proportion of Diet Coke, both cans and bottles. It struck me that there might be a correlation between this and the vegetarian pasties. It is the sort of thing that I should commission a university to study, but I understand they might charge a bit for the privilege. I imagine there are probably a few blokes down the local who would give it a bash for a pasty and half a pint of lager. I am not paying out for a pint at those prices.

At quarter past two o'clock we ran out of pasties completely. We would struggle to fit a greater volume in the fridge than we had for this weekend, so we must either hope this weekend was exceptional or imagine a way of holding some more.

The Missus came down to the shop after the initial rush of the morning. She set to in the store room and cleared the rest of the cash and carry in about two hours. Obviously, I had broken the back of it with my many forays into it over the last day and a bit, but I was grateful for her efforts. We will only have one more big cash and carry delivery and then it will be all over. It is amazing to how quickly it finishes after the long period of expectation.

From the middle of the afternoon, we were more cruising through the day with occasional frenzied activity when small crowds blew through. It gave me the opportunity to look down on the vast expanse of low water beach in awe and wonder. There were probably as many in the water than there were at the head of the beach with a bit of a sparse middle in the no man's land. At low water, there was not a wave to be had anywhere not even around the many exposed sandbars. Anyone in the water was either standing about paddling or sitting on a board and drifting here and there. Through it all, the sun shone down, and sales of parasols were back on the menu.

It really was a proper rip gribbler of a day even with a bit of southeasterly keeping the temperature down. It was a departure from the normal sort of day that St Buryan

Male Voice Choir play on the wharf; it usually tips down. Actually, it usually does not. I think that we had some memorable days when it absolutely heaved down in biblical style stair rods and those are the days that stick in the mind. The choir collect on the Harbour wharf and sing a few songs to the usually substantial crowd that gathers around. The RNLI buckets are then taken around by some burley types looking menacing before anyone can escape. It usually turns up a few bob for the Institution.

Another thing that happens on choir night is that we have a five minutes to choir singing rush. Those who have come down to view the choir realise that we will be closed when the singing stops and it is time to head to the OS for some more – fuelled by beer. We were particularly busy for a good half an hour before the show started with all manner of customers including children eager to spend their holiday money.

One young lad acquired a bag of fossilised sharks' teeth which are, and have been for years, immensely popular with boys his age. He was obviously a canny lad or perhaps slightly suspicious because he asked if they were genuine sharks' teeth. I said that they were, honest guv. Still a little unsure, he asked what sort of shark they came from. Momentarily flummoxed, I remembered that they were fossilised, so I told him, a very old shark. Behind the family in the queue was a young man who suggested that the young boy photographed the teeth with his smart telephone and asked the AI facility on it to identify the shark. I said that he better not as it would probably come up with 'rabbit' which caused some merriment. (I made a note of who he was so that I could bar him later.)

We did indeed close up before the slightly rotund gentleman has started singing. I slunk away upstairs out of the way as the crowds shuffled by. With the OS calling, they would have had no interest in shopping, I concluded.

The Missus took herself off to the OS after the event so that she could finance some of the beer for the boys and the choir. She took the girls with her leaving me to do the admin I would usually do in the morning on the computer and retire which sounded like a very good plan at the time.

August 1st – Saturday

The sun had not quite broken over the cliff when I took the girls out first thing. There was just enough beach to cavort upon, so we headed down the slip which is far easier than dragging them down the road. If the tide is fully in, there are alright about avoiding the beach but if they can see a sliver of sand, they are most insistent that they go down.

We did not tarry long, I had places to go and drinks to see and was keen to get started. What I should have done is started much earlier as I was caught out just at the end of doing the soft drinks by the arrival of the cash and carry delivery. I had

checked the tracker for the first time that had told me the van would arrive at ten minutes to eight o'clock. I thought it a useful addition to the service until the van turned up half an hour earlier.

We carried out the usual, efficient unload of a delivery that was a fair bit larger than the delivery we had last time. I had ramped that up on the expectation of a marked increase in business and for this order ramped up some more. Judging from the business we had yesterday, it was still going to be too small.

I must say that it certainly did not feel that small after we finished bringing it in. It was piled high and precariously, the full length of the store room with only just enough room to squeeze down one side. There was no time to be concerned about the stability of the piles because not the heels of the cash and carry delivery came the newspapers and the greengrocery. Most of the latter could go straight out but there were a few items that needed weighing and pricing. Since the top of the freezer where I do the weighing and pricing was loaded with cash and carry goods, they would need to be processed and put out before I could do the greengrocery.

At twenty five minutes past eight o'clock, five minutes before opening, with the newspapers done, the freezer cleared of enough space to finish the greengrocery, and the bread that had arrived first, I suddenly realised that I had not yet topped up the beer fridge. Panic? Certainly not.

I would have been gravely mistaken to think that the helter skelter of the morning was over with the opening of the first electric sliding door in The Cove, although I might be forgiven for thinking so in the first hour as we were reasonably quiet. Then at half past nine o'clock, just as the first serious wave of shoppers appeared, so too did the extra large dairy order I had placed last night. Working between customer visits to the till, it took me the best part of an hour to price and secure all the items in the fridge. It was not helped that after getting my trolley to the end of the shop, I could not get back again because of people in the aisles.

Having boxed off the daily deliveries, I could concentrate on shopkeeping while trying to clear as much of the cash and carry as possible. It was a corker of a morning out there with so much bright sunshine it was hard to imagine a person not wanting to be part of it. I was, as a result, quite hard pressed and there was rather more shopkeeping than there was clearing boxes. It was gone eleven o'clock before there was enough of a break in the traffic to go and get a quick cup of tea.

We stayed busy until well into the afternoon although it was a little more sporadic than the morning's major rush. I do not think that the beach was as busy as yesterday; the camps thinned out a bit as they went towards and past the Lifeguard huts. Maybe it was the cloud that put them off. Our bright and sunny morning paled a bit from the middle of the day as cloud either filtered the sun or blocked it out altogether. It was combined today with a bit of a breeze from the northwest which

might have taken the edge off the temperature a bit. I suspect those camped out on the beach were not minded to care very much.

As the afternoon pressed on, we started to see some more arrivals, many with familiar faces, which is always pleasant – like seeing old friends. It reawakens my conversational mode, which can be eroded as I tire towards the middle of the afternoon. Sometimes others get caught in the crossfire such as the young lady who came to the counter purchasing postcard. I asked her if she had warm hands and I must commend her wit and presence of mind because she responded immediately, 'not at the moment'. I very quickly pointed to her sweatshirt, before she thought me any more of a complete eejit than she did already, and its legend that said, Cold Heart. She mentioned that her uncle had said something similar which told me that she thought that age might be a factor at play. The very cheek of it, but touché.

In the last couple of hours of opening I had enough leeway to do a few more boxes of this and that from the cash and carry delivery. I had not made much of an impact on it but the Missus, who now looks like she constitutes the night shift, said that she would power through it in the evening. I had no doubt that she would.

Except she did not. By the time we had some tea, it was too late to consider probably two hour's work in the shop. She said she would get up early, which I doubted, to do it then. Our ideas of early tend to differ in somewhat extreme ways.

When it came to take the girls out last thing, The Cove was a completely different place to the evening before. Gone were the crowds and our end was practically deserted. There was no aftermath of a spectacular sunset as the cloud had thickened a bit. At the end of the shop day it was still fairly bright, but the cloud was gathering then. The Harbour wall was lined with jumpers and there was still plenty of activity in the Harbour. They had all clearly thought better of hanging about later on. Not without cause, so did I and promptly went to bed.