

DIARY 2022/23

August 31st – Wednesday

Alfred Hitchcock had nothing on me this morning. There were three or four herring gulls stalking me when I came down to prepare the shop this morning. One approached with menace in its eyes while its beefy henchman lurked in the background. I am clearly being held solely accountable for the demise of their mate, which was absent from the scene this morning. I shall be looking over my shoulder for a few days, I think.

It is just about getting light enough to take the bleddy hound out before I start in the shop still. It is, however, mainly dark when I wake up and take some exercise. Despite the downturn in trade, I am still getting up at an early hour. I will maintain that for a while because trade has not downturned by that much and it will afford some flexibility to take the bleddy hound out later and still get the chores done.

A less frantic start to the day is just the ticket and allows me to enjoy the things like a stunning colourful sky first thing and the brightening of the day. Today was indeed bright and remained so all the way through to the evening. There were a few cumulus clouds floating by, all white and fluffy, which just added to the summery feel, which is all the more pleasing for being on the brink of autumn. That east wind hung in there and was quite strong in the morning but by evening had moderated somewhat.

The crowds, such as they are, tried their best to populate the beach by spreading out in a bunch. Sadly, that did not work, and it still looked pretty sparse down there. It is a wonder every year just how dramatically and quickly we go from full on to full stop. It makes a bit of a mockery of our pasty ordering because the volume of custom will be inconsistent for a week or two yet. It means fine tuning orders for the next day based on a best guess of sales for the day to come and addressing errors the following day. It happens every year; I should be better at it by now.

Two ladies came in for fish in the afternoon and I told them that there was an abundance in the freezer at the far end of the shop. They returned with four portions of hake and told me that they were the last there. I think I shall have to give our man in Penzance a call for a bumper delivery next week, which hopefully will come when I have some time to devote to vacuum packing and pricing. If I get the numbers right, we will sell this delivery through and have time for another order that will see Mother and me through the winter.

I have a feeling someone keeps adding invoices to the bottom of the pile on my desk. I keep doing them and not getting to the end. I wish someone would do the same for my malt whisky.

August 30th – Tuesday

The day of the sick gull, or morning at least, which was dominated by the poor animal. The bloody hound and I had bumped into it at the top of the slipway, twisting its neck around in all directions. If that were not indication enough that something was wrong, it did not make a swift exit when the bloody hound made a move toward it. Fortunately, she was on her lead.

Matters were worse later on in the morning. It had managed to get to the Harbour beach, which was busy under the sunshine, and was being tormented by small children and dogs. It would try and fly, flapping its wings to gain a foot off the ground before collapsing in a crumpled heap. It was pitiful to watch. After about fifteen minutes of this I had enough and telephoned the Cornish Wildlife Trust, as I did with the dolphin. I had no response about the dolphin, but someone called back about the bird and the Missus took it. 'Leave alone', was the message, no matter how cruel that seemed. Trouble was the assumption it was avian flu, which I was not sure that it was. One of the crew telephoned DEFRA and even with seven options not one of them was for sick seagull.

We had to give up, but it seemed quite tragic there were no options to recover it or put it out of its misery. I could not even do that myself as it is a protected species, which might now be a burden.

Our deliveries started early today but it seems that we cannot have it all. Last time it was late and we had man mountain to do most of the heavy lifting but early, it turned up with just the driver. We still did it in record time and the Missus arrived just in time to help out with the frozen order that arrived toward the end of us finishing with the grocery delivery. It had started to get busy with customers, too, which all added to the normal mayhem of our operations.

As if that were not enough, my Lifeboat pager went off again, calling for the big boat to be launched. A kayaker, apparently in trouble in Boat Cove, next to Portheras beach had been spotted by a walker in the area and called in. Just as we launched, another Lifeboat was speeding across the gap between Brisons and Cape Cornwall, on passage to somewhere up the coast. It arrived on the scene first and our boat took over shortly afterwards.

There was, actually, nothing to take over from. The kayaker, if he had been in any trouble at all, extricated himself and was spotted heading up the Boat Cove slipway. Our boat conducted a quick search to ensure that there was no one else in trouble and that it was the kayaker, the subject of the call. The boat then was stood down.

As with all local inshore shouts, we hung around after launching. This is when we spotted the injured gull again and its treatment. We kept tabs on the Lifeboat operation over the VHF traffic and set up on the long slip on a falling tide. It was a beautiful day to be down at the bottom of the slipway waiting on the boat. There was plenty of sunshine through some wisps of high level cloud and the crystal waters of

The Cove were lapping around just below our feet. We broke our reverie for just enough time to conduct a textbook recovery up the long slip and to give the boat a bit of a washdown before tying it up until the next time.

I returned to my station behind the counter while the Missus piled through the deliveries that had accumulated in the store room. It is, of course, her forte and she finished most of it by the middle of the afternoon before heading off to The Farm to do the watering. She left me with the confectionery, which I managed to complete between customers and before she came back with a truck full of stock.

We had spent most of the day without a spade in the place. For a bucket and spade shop that we are, this was not a good look, but the groceries needed putting out too and so the spades waited. The Missus was late enough that much of the stock will have to wait until tomorrow to be put out.

I could have done it after we closed, an hour earlier than the night before. It was bliss and did not need to be spoilt by putting in excessive extra work after we closed. I settled for topping up some of the more urgent drinks in the chiller, which was when I noticed that I had not changed the turn off timer. I had thought about it yesterday but then promptly forgot about it again. It happens to me quite a lot, that.

Just as I was closing up, a more senior lady approached me carrying two soft toy monkeys that she found on the beach. It happens to me quite a lot. She asked if we could display them in the shop, which we could have done if we were open, and she was rather afraid some small child would be distraught at bedtime, if not already.

She was right, of course, but I rather think that the parents would be more so and so it transpired. In the first happy ending of the day, we were called to the door while we were having our tea by a mother holding a small weeping child. I went and fetched the monkeys and you have never seen a child so happy all at once – transformed, she was. Mother was shedding more tears and I will never know whether it was happiness that her daughter's favourite toy had been recovered or relief that she no longer had to put up with the screaming. We will settle for the former, for the purposes of this tale.

August 29th – Monday

Bank Holiday in Cornwall where the banks are part of the very few businesses who actually regard it as a holiday. For the rest of us it is just another day but this one just happened to be a bit of a rip gribbler but for the fierce easterly it would have been, which would have been quite handy yesterday.

We were not exactly mobbed for the beach but we sold a number of windbreaks on account of that bit of wind and, it transpired later, a lot of buckets and spades. There was some busyness down on the sand during the day but as we are used to, the crowds thinned out towards the back end of the afternoon. The car park at the far

end still looked pretty full at the time, so I have no idea where everyone was. They were definitely not in the street as that emptied at about four o'clock and did not recover.

I had busied myself during the day with the target of clearing space in the store room for the fairly mammoth grocery orders that I placed last night. It had taken a while between customers to ship some drinks down to the chiller and move some boxes around only to make the smallest of dents in it. The Missus appeared in the middle of the afternoon, took it by the scruff of the neck and forty minutes later it was clear. That's my gal.

As predicted – and why we should have been closing at six o'clock – everything went dead as a Cove dolphin. Oddly, I did not get any reports today so maybe it has been moved or the people that care have gone home. We stumbled along in the final few hours of closing with a dribble of business here and there. Just as a last hurrah, we did have a five minutes to closing rush. The shop was full for about half an hour with people who I trust will remember to be filling the shop for half an hour an hour earlier tomorrow.

I retired to do a few more invoices – yes, these are the invoices that accumulated after the last big wedge of invoices I finished – but my heart was not in it to continue after my tea. I will have an extra hour to do them tomorrow and will wonder why I did not leave them all until now.

August 28th – Sunday

Cor! I clearly was not joking about it being a long day today. Busy, too. The only thing missing was a bit of sunshine. The stuff we were promised for the afternoon never materialised and we spent the whole day under a blanket of cloud.

I had started early doors and did not stop until after the shop had shut and the topping up done, and the Missus started a little while after me and did not finish until well into the evening. I have already remarked that she had been suckered, erm, volunteered of her own free will, poor naïve child, into helping on Lifeboat Day and spent the whole of it running around doing things from setting up the flags on the railings to buying the boys beer in the evening. I should make clear, along with many others running around doing things, too. As predicted, there was a bit of food left because the population of Greater Manchester did not turn up as she anticipated. I suspect that the Lifeboat station will be a popular place tomorrow and probably until the edges of the sandwiches turn up.

The day had looked pretty successful to me and no one I spoke to did not think that it was a happy day. The boat launched twice, crowds gathered and a small succession of hapless crew found themselves volunteered to be dunked in the skip full of water outside the station. Joyous youths lined up to throw balls at a target and if they

dropped it in the hole the crew person was tipped from his or her seat. I understand that it was most popular.

The popularity of the event rubbed off into busyness for the shop and we were rammed from mid-morning until gone six o'clock. It was supposed to be the last day of extended hours but I messed up my dates on the open notice and will have to do it again tomorrow. Being occupied, the day flew by, although I confess that the last few hours were a bit of a struggle and closing the door seemed an elusive dream that kept slipping away.

I had managed, through the early part of the morning and the scant quiet bits of the day, to top up the grocery shelves and get an understanding of what was required to be ordered from the cash and carry. I still had to complete the task after the shop shut and sat at the computer in the evening with a spot of tea placing the order online. Our new cash and carry had vouchsafed that our direct debit would have been set up last weekend. Not that I did not trust them ... alright, I did not trust them and placed a single item through the system to make sure the direct debit prompt came up, which it did not.

I waited until I had completed the order on the original cash and carry supplier's website and then sent a message to the new one telling them exactly how much they had missed out because of their sheer incompetence of not carrying out a simple task. I am sure that it will not make a hoot of difference but it made me feel better.

It what should be classed as a national outrage, after my hard day at the tin stope, it was the Missus who beggered off down the OS. She came rolling home singing 'Molly Dean' and kicking her last beer can down the street – well, she might have done if she drank at all. She is the holder of the beer tokens for the boys and girls who, like her, had put in a full day organising and taking part in the first Lifeboat Day in a couple of years. She was gone long enough, so there must have been some jollity and on her way home she took down the flags and banners that she had put up earlier in the morning. What a day.

August 27th – Saturday

I did think that I had got away with it this week. The milk was relatively early, and I had just finished that when the newspapers arrived with plenty of time to 'build' them and put them out before opening time. I was all done and ready for the pasty delivery by quarter past eight o'clock. Then we opened.

There must have been a dozen people leaning against the door waiting for me to open it so they could rush in and fall on all manner of goodies in the shop. It was at the zenith of this invasion that the pasties arrived, on five full trays with the driver fighting his way through the morass of bodies. Even if I say so myself, I expertly managed to balance putting away pasties against serving the customers so that both waited excessively for my attention. It was a manic fifteen minutes or so and after the

pasties had eventually been put away and I could focus on my shop counter, the customers begged off. It was clearly a conspiracy.

We had started the day with clear blue skies and although Radio Pasty said that it would be warmer than yesterday, I am not sure but there again I was not out in it. Whether it was or no, there was a fair crowd gathered on the beach and they were not pressed for space until around four o'clock when the tide started making things uncomfortable. The swell diminished just as the breeze went offshore. How is your luck, surfers.

It looked later like our luck was not so hot either. High level cloud drifted in through the afternoon and blotted out the blue skies and dimmed the bright sunlight. It perhaps did not make much difference to business which alternated from mad busy to quiet throughout the day, with the usual switch of visitors as old gave way to new and going home presents gave way to provisions for a new stay.

The day would not have been complete without a dead dolphin report. The thing must be humming by now and before long, if not already, a health hazard. It does not surprise me that the much maligned council has done nothing about it. The website promises a response within 24 hours but does not say within 24 hours of what – 24 hours of the spring tide doing the work or 24 hours of the first human getting something nasty from it and threatening to sue.

The Missus scooted into town early doors. She is involved in setting up the Lifeboat Day, presumably for her many sins, and apart from all else she is making some croust for the boys and girls on the day. It is intended to be dinner but if everyone starts at breakfast and works really hard at it, they may have finished half of it by teatime. She had started in the middle of the afternoon and still had not finished by the time I was heading for my bed. It will be a long day tomorrow, I can tell.

August 26th – Friday

It was raining when I first got up, which was a bit of a surprise because I do not recall anything said about rain on Radio Pasty. Maybe I just missed it. I looked on the rain radar and the rain was not showing, so it might have been my imagination but it sure felt like rain when I went out in it.

The bleddy hound has decided to let me go about my normal chores in the morning first for the last couple of days. It is probably because it is darker in the morning, although she still insists on getting out of bed with me. I took her down to the Harbour around an hour later, after I had done the milk and the beers and she seemed quite happy with that. The beach is now fully back to normal, by the way, apart from the dead dolphin further along, which continues to be reported to me on a daily basis with an increasingly macabre photographs to prove it.

My luck must be improving because my own rowing machine arrived before I headed for the gymnasium today. Indeed, it arrived before the shop opened with just about sufficient time to bolt the legs onto it between customers and to do it again once I worked out that I had them on the wrong way around and upside down. It was also fortuitous that it had arrived on a Friday before our commercial bin man came so that I could dispose of the prodigious amount of packaging that came with it. Needless to say, the machine aided a proper blistering session in the heat of a humid morning.

After the initial rain, the skies brightened and gave us another pleasant, sunny day. There was considerably more cloud involved out to the east but overhead, the skies remained clear and blue. It was difficult to say if the sea was as crowded as it was yesterday because I did not really have time to look at the appropriate time. The beach was certainly more sparsely populated, although it was still quite busy down there.

We see many people in the shop, too. Sometimes, people are minded to provide some feedback on our services or products; we are very used to praise regarding our pasties. The feedback is generally good, some is enthusiastic about our range of products, although, of course, occasionally we do get a poor one. It does give you a warm fuzzy feeling when someone is happy with the service they have been provided with but never has one been such jolly fun as the latest.

Given a two week stay, some regular visitors made a final late foray into the shop. They have been staying in the mews behind, so they have not had to plan much about shopping visits. The culmination of their experience – not only this holiday but for the many years previously was distilled into a single word, *convenient*. Nigh on twenty years of planning, being reactive and proactive about customer perception, trying different new products, leaning on quality, maintaining reasonable pricing, working long hours and going the extra mile on many occasions have resulted in us being *convenient*. Not only will we now adapt our strapline accordingly, The Old Boathouse, The *Convenient* Shop but I shall have it engraved on my tombstone - "Here Lies The Grumpy Shopkeeper, He Was *Convenient*."

August 25th – Thursday

It did not take long as we move toward spring tides for the Harbour beach to sort itself out, well, nearly. Most of the weed is gone and the shingle banks are being eroded again. It does appear to be the presence of the weed causing the problem but I will probably never know for sure as they did not cover that in 11+ geography.

We were told to expect a bright and cloudless day in contrast to yesterday's poor performance. Clearly, no one had told the sky. It did get the message eventually and produced a very pleasant day for us including a bit of a bluster from the northwest. It gave us a much fresher day than the mugginess we had the day before.

The slightest hint of sunshine kicks off a day of beach frenzy. What our visitors had not purchased before they got on their way to the beach they dropped in and bought today and then some more of them did the same and then some more. As morning slipped into afternoon, purchases of beachware and breakfast became purchases of pasties – we cleared through a whole host of pasties, which was handy as I had quite a build up – and snacks. As the afternoon rolled on, there was some waking up to the idea that people had best get their going home presents organised, too. In all, what a busy day.

It was busy on the beach as well, with quite a bit of the day without water, the beach filled and small camps appeared above the high water line and on the high water line, it transpired. With the tides increasing in size and a bit of swell running, the high water line was pushed back almost to the dunes squeezing what was left of the assembled company up towards the Valley. Earlier in the tide, the sea was swarming with happy revellers and although there were some surfers out there, they were the over-optimistic ones with an onshore breeze. It did look very much like everyone was having the very best of times.

It was shortly after that I became somewhat distracted from what was going on down on the big beach because the Lifeboat pagers went off again. Again, it was both boats and again it was just around the corner, a swimmer in difficulty holding on to an inflatable, which is never a great idea on the coast. A small number of us got the boats away in good time for an urgent shout, scattering people on the Harbour beach to get the Inshore out. The big boat launched from in the house.

We do not get a good deal of information about what happens as we can only hear one side of the conversation. Around that area of coast, there is no communication at all. The initial caller had to climb to the top of the cliff to get a mobile telephone signal and the rescue teams, when they arrived, cannot make contact with anyone but each other by VHF radio. Once again, the Lifeboat acted as communications hub, relaying messages to the Coastguard at Falmouth. We understand that the casualty was taken ashore and taken away by the Coastguard Rescue Team.

The very excellent Shore Crew, light in numbers, did a fair bit of hanging about at first, trying to establish how long the boats might be. In the end, I sent everyone home or back to work including myself to await developments. We had already done most of the setting up on the short slipway for recovery, which was helpful when we heard that the boat had been released a short while later.

We had very little time to finish off our preparation, the boats only being a couple of miles away, before we saw them both arriving at roughly the same time. Because of the crowds on the Harbour beach, I dispatched one body down to help with crowd control as the Tooktrak recovered the Inshore boat. Meanwhile, a skeleton crew – albeit fairly chunky skeletons – set to with what looked to me very much like a textbook recovery of the big boat up the short slipway. There was a bit of a washdown and a brief debriefing and we all went on our merry way.

The shop was not overly busy when the shout came in, which was useful, but shortly after opening the first electric sliding door in The Cove after I got back, customer numbers increased suddenly to the point I was pinned behind the counter for the next couple of hours. It was so intense that I did not get the chance to top up the drinks fridges or put out any of the afternoon deliveries. I hope it was not a swansong.

Working late, I missed the preparations across the road for the forthcoming Lifeboat Day on Sunday. I generally always do but this one is a bit special giving that it is the first in a couple of years. The Missus went down to the shop after tea to do the drinks topping up, bless her. I confess I could not even raise a finger to do the small number of remaining invoices on my desk. They will have to wait but I am ahead of the posse.

And so commences the beginning of the end – of holiday season, in case you were worrying, dear reader. Just the end of school holiday season.

August 24th – Wednesday

It has been a while since I had heard any derisory comment about the OS. The last were about the arrangements for eating, sometimes inside and sometimes outside that seemed unfathomable to the casual observers. We suspected that this was something to do with the limitations they had with kitchen staff.

The latest report, from two parties, was, perhaps, a little less explainable, though quite why it comes to us, I cannot tell. Apparently, the OS shut early to provide private entertainment for the departing temporary staff. The diners who complained to me said that they had been refused puddings as time had expired, which upset the children especially.

Of course, I cannot vouch for who said what to whom, but signage can easily be missed. We will probably face the same problem when we lop an hour off our opening on the ban holiday, albeit for slightly more prosaic reasons of being old and knackered at the end of the season. It was not that long ago that the hospitality trade was up in arms that it had been forcibly closed down for the dreaded lurgi. I can see how the general public might not take too kindly to it doing so voluntarily for a knees-up. On the other hand, there are difficulties attracting staff to the industry, so keeping them sweet is important. Hard to tell, which came first, the staff or the customers.

I had learned yesterday that today would be grim and horrible, not because all the staff at the OS would be nursing hangovers and being brutal with customers but the weather would be so inclement it would be best to move to a different country. Those of us made of sterner stuff, or who simply just did not believe the forecast, stayed to endure the worse that the sky could throw at us, which, in the end, was very little indeed. It was not until the middle of the afternoon that the skies looked anything like

as gloomy as the forecast had predicted and rain only set in close to our closing time.

We had been relatively busy all day, although not really pressed. I must have been some distracted because it was very late before I managed to get the fruit and vegetables that had arrived in the morning out to the shop fridge. We also had a sizable delivery of stationery and toiletries that I had no chance of getting done. I am also not sure where they will all go in the store room when I have processed them. I may have to enlist some help from the Missus for that. She is good at that sort of thing.

The bleddy hound had her least favourite journey today to the veterinary doctor in town. She has an uncomfortable routine procedure and has done for several years, so she cannot be blamed. More recently, we have discovered an injection that helps greatly with the arthritic pain in her front left leg joint to make her a bit more comfortable with it in her old age. We were a bit late with it this month because of the shop but it appears we are now on more relaxed footing and a bit more back to normal.

She seemed unfazed when she came back to a largely empty Cove. The burgeoning dark clouds had frightened off all but the most stalwart visitor and our six o'clock rush was much diminished. A German family were among them who bought body boards that should see some use in kinder weather over the next few days. They came back not long after and closing in on our closing time to seek shelter from the storm outside. It was raining quite heavily by this time and I told them that they could wait until we closed up, which should dovetail reasonable well with the last bus on which they were waiting.

I had to go and fetch a waterproof to bring in the display from outside and engaged the first electric sliding door in The Cove to keep the rain from soaking the bleddy hound's bed and under the welcome mat. Given the usual end of season state of our floor in the shop, our mat says 'wipe your feet on the way out' instead of 'Welcome'.

You will be pleased to note, dear reader that I am on the last few invoices on my desk to key into the Making Tax Difficult system. The collection in the shop and on our printer that have arrived by electronic mail are not of scary proportions anymore, either. I am victorious and master of the invoice – this time.

August 23rd – Tuesday

The mornings are getting darker. The bleddy hound was keen to get off the bed this morning before the alarm went off but that was more to do with the heat. When it came to taking her out, although by that time it was much lighter, she was not interested. I had to do the shop morning routine first and it was very helpful that the milkman had already been.

When the morning finally flexed its muscles, it started showing off with broad periods of sunshine mixed with a bit of cloud. There was more sunshine in the morning and more cloud in the afternoon, which is exactly the right way around for grumpy shopkeepers because everyone heads for the beach and buys lots of beach goodies on the way. By the time they realise that they have been had, it is too late.

The beach is a curious place. I refer, really, to the Harbour beach because that is the one I get to see day after day. The oar weed there seems to have quite a dramatic effect on the normal dynamics of the tidal ebb and flow. The effects tend to vary, although my assessment is purely observational rather than scientific, and sometimes just a little shingle builds up. Today, there are great piles of shingle off to the west and where the weed is rather less but all on the sea side of the clumps of weed. The Harbour tractor has got in on the act as well, moving piles of rocks out of the way of the path of the fishing punts and piling them up in cars. It all looks rather messy at the moment and the tides are not big enough to clear it up. We could be stuck with this for a week.

As alluded to earlier, we had moments, nay, long periods of busyness right across the day. It was not until going on four o'clock that the crowds began to thin and I could see the beach for the people. Well, I might have been able to had it not been mainly covered in sea. High water sits in the middle of the afternoon and takes no prisoners. Small though it may be, it presses the assembled beach dwellers, legion that they were today, up against the dunes and into the mouth of the Valley. It was hard to tell, but I imagine many were displaced altogether and large groups decamped to the Harbour for a more perilous jump from the harbour wall. Surfing is postponed on the big beach, even with the moderate swell, due to the reef of rocks that sit at the high water line.

We had just gone through another six o'clock busy spell and I was just serving a late customer with beer and evening snacks when the pagers went off asking for a smart launching of both Lifeboats. By some fortuitous chance, our Tooltrack driver was on the scene already and the Inshore boat duly launched first, taking the urgency off the big boat. By the time I had opened the doors, more of the very excellent Shore Crew had gathered and we launched the boat in the normal manner from the top of the slipway into the remains of high water.

The boats had been called to a casualty on Porth Chapel beach close by Porthcurno. There was some talk of extracting the injured party by Inshore boat but since the Coastguard team were already there, it was felt better to stretch up the cliff and whisk the person away by land ambulance that by some miracle had arrived.

Both boats remained in place for the duration. For an area synonymous with international communication, it is notoriously poor for radio signal there. In fact, it led Marconi to famously say, 'Begger that, I'm off to Poldhu', where he went on to successfully make the very first radio show. The Lifeboat acts as a communications

hub where it can relay messages to the Coastguard at Falmouth (or wherever it is pretending to be at that moment) from the Coastguard Rescue Team on the ground.

It was around half past eight o'clock when the boats returned to The Cove. The Inshore came first, which was a happy coincidence as it needed to be refuelled whereas the big boat did not and save some time for weary volunteers. The big boat came back a little while later when a fully complimented – you think complemented but a lot of people say nice things about us – very excellent Shore Crew awaited on a falling tide to bring the boat back in house. It was a textbook recovery and I should know as I was at the end of the long slipway and as close as you could get to it actually happening.

Before you knew it, the boat was back tucked away in the boathouse, a team of experts working like a well-oiled machine – well, it was after six o'clock – its parts working in union with one another but pulling in different directions. We are, after all, a very complicated, very excellent Shore Crew.

August 22nd – Monday

That dolphin has come back to haunt me; perhaps I am mistaken and it is an albatross instead. Apparently, it is still there and a bit worse for wear. I had another look at the much maligned council website and after several attempts at different search terms, 'dead animal' came up trumps.

I had to key the address into the browser and it brought me to a form, the first page of which was a map on which I might indicate the 'precise' location of the animal. Here I had to be a bit careful lest the slippery shoulder brigade deemed the location I had chosen to be outside its remit. Having selected a spot with a degree of license I was alerted that the place I had chosen was coastal and was this correct. Given that I was reporting a dolphin I would have been most surprised were it not, although I toyed with the idea of placing on Cove Hill to see what reaction it might excite. I have no idea what happens after this online report and will let you know if men with white coats and a crane – or, indeed, a chain saw and a bucket – turn up in the next couple of days.

There was a very uncharitable spell of weather during the morning. I had escaped it when I visited the Harbour with the bleddy hound in the morning and, at that time, the skies seemed benign though a tad grey. It was proper rain too, with attendant low cloud that came and went until the middle of the afternoon when it cheered up considerably. Later, the Missus told me that the IBCs (really?) fed from the cabin roof are threequarters full now, which is testament to our collection system.

It was hardly what you might call busy, and I slipped away for my proper blistering session at the gymnasium in the morning. Given the importance of the rowing machine in my life and the absence of them now in the gymnasium, I have gone to the lengths of purchasing my own. It should be here this week and I shall install it in

the gap where the others used to be. I am hoping it will be covered by one of the clubs' insurances as it will certainly be used by other people and I do not think a simple disclaimer sign on it will cover me. However, it has a major advantage succinctly put by George Gershwin who knew all about rowing machines - no, they can't take that away from me.

I have expounded my theory that the weather this year has seemed one month behind. The unseasonably hot spell earlier in the month might properly belong to July and it had been that way since April. In the last week or so, I have had to rethink my hypothesis as the weather we have been having is definitely August's own peculiar blend of poor. I have also said to anyone who would listen and quite a few who did not particularly want to, that this year seems to have return to a more normal feel compared to the last two. The normal people, who have been absent for the last two years or who had been forced to come outside their normal weeks are back as well. Because my years tend to meld together, I am often mistaken as to who has and has not been absent and when. "Gosh, welcome back. We haven't seen you for ages."

"Er, we were here in May."

"Ah, yes, I remember it well."

The weather became a little brighter towards the end of the day, although it did nothing to improve our busyness situation. We had a late delivery from one of the beachware suppliers who had a late arrival of something we ordered at the start of the season. I had to add to the item to make it worthy of delivery and had ended up with windbreaks and some other items on special offer. I had to flag down the Missus on her return from The Farm to load it all into the truck. Obviously, we had got busy just before she arrived and she had to load it by herself.

You will be most delighted to learn, dear reader, that I am now at the tail end of the second pile of invoices. We are up to number 306, sitting on my desk and although the pile continues to be added to in the shop, I am ahead of it now and the numbers increase at a decreasing rate. I shall be very happy when I can come upstairs and do none at all. That day is soon upon us but does mean our customers have largely gone home. The end is nigh.

August 21st – Sunday

It was a very disappointing start to the day in The Cove. The grey sky had tried very hard to rain on us when we visited the beach first thing and later it did a better job of soaking everyone else. Two forecasts, broadcast in the morning, pointed to a day of grey and mizzle, so when the skies brightened and the cloud broke up a little halfway through the morning, I was not in the least surprised.

Our trade followed the weather, as it nearly always does, and from a very slow start, we grew to be quite busy. The dull and wet morning had permitted me to clear the store room of the stock the Missus brought down as well as top up the beer and the

soft drinks fridges. I even went further and replenished the stationery wall with the aim to make up an order from the supplier later in the day. I was aware that there were gaps in the grocery order last week that could be filled from our stationery company. If I only ordered clothes pegs it would be something. I had forgotten last time, under the impression that we had plenty. Having been plagued by requests for them I am determined that we should get some in even in the very likely event that once we have them no one will ever ask for them again.

The day undulated along between grey and bright but no one seemed to care very much; it was better than the mizzly forecast we had at the start of the day. That came back to haunt us in the later afternoon but by then everyone had enjoyed a pretty decent day. The rain set in properly at around seven o'clock, which was ideal for a smart closing time.

A casual enquiry that came via the Missus reminded me of an incident yesterday that I forgot altogether to convey in yesterday's Diary. It was not altogether savoury, but a lady came to the shop – because I get all the exciting jobs – to tell me that there was a dead dolphin in the high tide wash just in front of the chip shop and she showed me a video that she took on her smart telephone. I had a notion that we used to have a contact point on our website but then I remembered that the rules had changed and that only live animals could be reported to the Marine Divers or the Wildlife Trust. I seemed to recall that it was probably the much maligned council but first, it did not have an easily findable number on the website to call and secondly, getting someone at the much maligned council during the week is a Herculean labour let alone at the weekend. I left a message and hoped someone might call me back at some stage.

Fortunately, one of our fishermen dropped in for a newspaper shortly after the report and I told him about it. He told me the Harbour Master was down on the wharf and would let him know. I told myself that I had properly discharged my duty in the matter, and it was no longer my responsibility. If it was still there by the middle of next week then the chip shop would probably have a greater urgency to do something about it – if they had not already battered it and sold it off in lumps with chips.

I managed to price the last of the fishing gear that turned up in the middle of last week. The place where the tackle sits is hugely not fit for purpose and it is a struggle both to fit everything in and to make it look anything like organised. It came to me when I could not put out the last of the lures that a better solution needed to be found. In fact, a better solution needed to be found about five years ago, but it had only just occurred to me to do something about it.

Naturally, it cannot be straight forward as the unit that goes there needs to have two sides therefore impinging on the tower of baskets that contain the crisps and snacks. There is also the matter of the pasting table on which I build the weekend newspapers. This resides between the current two displays, slid into the gap useful

for the purpose. I reasoned that by having an extra long base on the crisp side I could accommodate the crisp baskets pushed forward to the edge and slide the table in behind. However, the fishing tackle side would need a standard size base so that it did not protrude into the aisle. People already trip over the sweets stand that is there when it is empty, so that would only make it worse.

Happily, the company that provided the units down the gift aisle earlier in the year, can meet our peculiar and non-standard requirements. They are a good crew and even responded to my query on a Sunday. It will have to wait until we are closed, or at least much quieter, but I am quite looking forward to this minor project and having somewhere to hang all my fishing tackle at once. It is likely to be most alluring.

The time I needed to do my measurements for the project evaporated pretty quickly as business gathered pace for our five minutes to closing, which is currently happening an hour too early. It seems that six o'clock is a good time to go shopping, which will be a disappointment to many when we return to six o'clock closing a little over a week hence. I suspect that one of those disappointed will be me when I fail to close the shop because of the volume of people shopping.

With the weather beginning to turn into the evening, I had no problem at all closing the door on a turbulent day. The weather looks a little tricky over the next few days, which is a shame for the last week of real busyness but as ever we shall look out of the window in the morning and see what it is actually like. If my bed did not look so attractive I might say that I can hardly wait.

August 20th – Saturday

It was a bit grey for a day that had been forecast as sunny spells only the day before. Luckily, I had not set my heart on seeing the sunshine and had relied on what the weather looked like when I threw back our virtual curtains in the living room. It was, at least, light grey out there and in all, not a bad day at all. People turned up later and not one complained about the weather. It must have been a bit chilly because we sold an awful lot of hooded sweatshirts during the day, which reminded me that we really ought to check the stock fairly soon.

We started the day in a fluster that is fast becoming a Saturday tradition. The newspapers were late and turned up shortly after the milk and just before the surplus of pasties and all just around opening time. I had started packing the weekend newspapers when the pasties arrived and had to switch my focus to those as the trays that they come in have to go back with the driver. As the first electric sliding door in The Cove was open for the delivery, the shop was deemed to be open by happy shoppers who need no further invitation even though it was not officially opening time. Mayhem ensued.

We continued to be busy through most of the morning which ensured that some of the delivered items such as scones, biscuits and fudge bags remained unattended

for some considerable time. This included my breakfast, in case you were concerned, dear reader, which I eventually consumed closer to dinner than breakfast. I attacked the deliveries piecemeal through the ensuing hours and we now have a well-stocked vegetable fridge as well as biscuit and fudge shelves.

We said farewell to many of the early August weekers and later welcomed in the newcomers. These will have a week of high tides in the middle of the day and will have to vie for space above the high water line if they wish to dwell for long on the beach. Towards the back end of the afternoon today it was looking rather splendid as the cloud broke up at last and shone some brightness about the place. There were a few waves for the surfers and a few more in the surf for the boarders and swimmers larking about. There was not much of a camp above the water line but I had not particularly looked earlier before people would have made their way off for their teas.

There was a fairly sedate run in to the end of the day where I could have cleared the rest of the store room of the delivery remnants from earlier. Sadly, my get up and go had got up and gone and I really could not be fagged to do it. Never do today what can easily be put off until tomorrow one of the old lags at my school used to say while we were sewing mail bags. This came home to roost later when the Missus showed up from The Farm with a truck full of stock that I had asked for and some that I had not. Naturally, she arrived in the middle of the five minutes to closing rush and thus we have an even fuller store room to be worked on in the morning.

I am going to have to gird my loins tonight, or more specifically my calves because last night one of them was subject to a rather vicious attack by mosquitoes and it has been plaguing me all day. With beer in my system they are likely to party. I just hope they keep the noise down.

August 19th – Friday

We all think that we have some power over what happens in our lives. Great philosophers have even written about free will, but all goes to cock when the small gods of grumpy shopkeepers decide to throw a pilchard in the crumble.

The Missus has family in the locality on a visit, a huge pile of them of various ages. Quite how it came about, I do not know but some bright spark decided a jump off the Harbour wall at high water today would be a wizard wheeze and, blow me, the Missus said that she would join them. So intricate and important was this arrangement that the Missus set her alarm clock for early o'clock to let me slip way to the gymnasium before the big event. Yes, that was indeed the plan.

On a couple of occasions over the last few months, the Missus has had a bit of a tooth problem. That is rather an understatement because each of the incidents has been exceedingly painful for us – painful for her and painful for us watching her rolling around on the floor screaming and clawing at the carpet. It is a little longer

than a fleeting thing, but the pain goes after a while until the next incident. Those had become increasingly frequent to the extent that I put my mind to make a dental appointment for her.

For many of us, making a dental appointment is picking up the telephone to a dentist and asking for a date and time. Here in Cornwall, this involves bribery and corruption on an industrial scale, promises of wheelbarrows full of used notes, you know, the usual black-market activity and that is if you are registered with a dentist. If you are not there is a whole new level of soul selling required to crowbar yourself into the helpful arms of the medical professional. Many people have resorted to DIY dentistry, doors and lengths of string, pliers – you know the kind of thing.

None of the private clinics – there was no point in approaching the NHS ones unless you like the sound of derisive laughter thrown at you like buckets of iced water – were going to let the Missus join their club but a couple were of some help. One would let her join a waiting list on the event of a cancellation and the other could provide an assessment appointment in a few weeks, but a further appointment would need to be made to actually do the fixing. Neither were ideal, but better than a trip to the emergency clinic at Bodmin, which is somewhere east of Camborne.

Today, you will recall, dear reader, that the Missus had made plans with other people to jump off the Harbour wall at a specific time, setting her alarm early so that I might go to the gymnasium – just in case you had quite forgotten where we started this sorry tale. Today, also, the small gods of grumpy shopkeepers decided to play games with the Missus of the grumpy shopkeeper and create an early cancelled appointment at the dentist.

It was a bit of a rush; the Missus had 45 minutes to get ready and get there. She made it with minutes to spare only to be told that the dentist had been delayed in traffic and would not now be there. Ah, those naughty small gods. The practice did manage to fit her in at two o'clock (no, not two thirty) – presumably another very fortuitous cancellation because they could not possibly fit her in previously – and so she returned home.

She returned home with plenty of time to make her appointment with a long walk of a short pier. I, on the other hand, had to sacrifice my gymnasium session for the second time this week. The small gods of grumpy shopkeepers are clearly intent on disrupting my blistering sessions and are taking very circuitous methods to do so. I will fight back next week, as much as I can with a half working rower, and in the mean time become a couch potato for at least an hour a night over the weekend. There will much blistering on Monday, I can assure you.

I can also assure you, dear reader, that the weather was a much better day than the previous two. We had started out with a clear sky but some high level cloud contrived to spoil it a bit before the show started for the day. It was bright, dry and warm enough to drive a host of merry visitors down to the beach for the day and

bring a few more customers to the shop counter. It was a big pasty day, too, rather more than I anticipated and we may not have quite enough for the weekend but with poor weather forecast for Sunday, who knows.

Busy though it was, I did manage to catch the Missus plopping into the water. She had cheated and gone off the ladder to shorten the distance between her launch and the water. She said later that when she had agreed the challenge, the tide was six feet from the top of the wall; the tides, heading towards neaps, are much smaller and the drop much greater. In the indefensible position of not considering going onto the wall in the first place, I let the matter slide.

There was not a great deal of time between getting wet and heading off to the dentist again. In the meanwhile, Niece decided to beggar off home leaving the fishing tackle delivery unpriced and a drinks fridge needing a top up. It had been a luxury for us to have someone to do the background work and do it well. She worked very hard while she was here and we are very grateful. Just do not let her know that, dear reader, lest she become complacent and not try hard enough next time – plus she might actually demand payment and that would never do.

The Missus returned toothless, well, not completely. The dentist had removed the offending peg, which had split in half. It had the root the size of a mammoth tusk, apparently and had put up some resistance at being removed. It was the size of the root that had cause such dramatic and intense pain. It was a happy outcome and as soon as gappy is fully recovered we shall have her back at work – so, tomorrow, then.

Just to prove that normal service had been resumed, we had a traditional five minutes to closing rush. Fortunately, they were not browsers and we closed on time, although I had to stay behind to fill up my own fridge. Bleddy part-timers.

August 18th – Thursday

It was a greyish start but with some broken cloud out to the east that allowed for a bit of a pretty sunrise. The forecasts had spoken of a better day today but wherever they expected that to be, it was not here. Soon after opening, a weather front passed through, shrouding the bay in low cloud and drenching the ground with heavy mizzle. The grey and the low cloud stayed with us for the rest of the day and it became humid as the temperature increased. It was just as well had had not placed a big order for pasties based on a brighter day forecast.

Niece has excelled herself to the degree that there is nothing left for her to do. Had we been busier, the shelves would have been emptying before our very eyes. As it is, things are staying put. It was timely visit that has us back on track for the remaining – gosh, just over a week – of full on summer trade, providing the weather improves. Next week, we will be sliding back again but at least we will be starting from a good place to slide from.

Not being busy, of course, is contextual and we would be delighted in the middle of March with such a catch. High summer, it is a different dish of purple geraniums and while the shop was not empty at all from two o'clock until gone five, busy it was not. There was some buying of beachware too, such as tents. This could have been viewed as a sign of optimism for the coming days of hot sunshine but I rather think it was just to keep the rain off their sandwiches. That and a little bit of five minutes to closing rush was it for the day and most disappointing.

I would draw a veil over today, poor that it was, but I fear that the weather had already done that for us.

I am sure we have done this one before because it is one of my favourites, but I have to say it suits very closely how I am feeling at the end of such a glum day. It is a bit of Mr Keats.

*O soft embalmer of the still midnight,
Shutting, with careful fingers and benign,
Our gloom-pleas'd eyes, embower'd from the light,
Enshaded in forgetfulness divine:
O soothest Sleep! if so it please thee, close
In midst of this thine hymn my willing eyes,
Or wait the 'Amen,' ere thy poppy throws
Around my bed its lulling charities.
Then save me, or the passed day will shine
Upon my pillow, breeding many woes,—
Save me from curious Conscience, that still lords
Its strength for darkness, burrowing like a mole;
Turn the key deftly in the oiled wards,
And seal the hushed Casket of my Soul.*

August 17th – Wednesday

The wind had been howling all night, so I believe. I would not really know since I slept soundly through it. It was still howling a fair bit in the morning and prevented me from deploying our fading fads at the front of the shop. There had been rain too as there was evidence of it on the Harbour beach but it seemed like it had been lighter than the previous day as there were no ravines in the sand.

There had been some change in the shape of the beach overnight with a geet pile of sand built up in the western corner. There was a sizeable shelf in line with the western slip and sweeping slope away from it. That is a lot of sand moved in a short space of time and the sea was not even that rough. A similar move on the big beach at the southern end would be most welcome, if a little late.

Radio Pasty warned that there could be rain today but we did not get any in The Cove, or at least none that I saw. It was grey throughout the day with just a five minute splash of sunshine that broke through the cloud at one point. It kept everyone indoors for the duration of the morning but I suspect that boredom or frustration turned them out from the middle of the day to make the best of what looked like improving weather.

It will be a poor pasty day tomorrow because for the first time this year, I missed the order deadline. I was busy when they called, then completely forgot to call back. They even made a last ditch attempt at five minutes to the cut off time to call again but I missed that too. It could have been done on a worse day; I think that we will have sufficient pasties to see us through without the delivery tomorrow.

The afternoon turned a little more upbeat and later on, the cloud broke up a little more. It became quite busy at times as the threat of rain subsided and eventually was forgotten about completely. The beachware order that I only placed yesterday turned up by surprise today along with the postcard fudge boxes that disappear at an alarming rate. Niece piled through both and we now have a store room full of discarded cardboard instead and again just a day after emptying it to make room for the grocery delivery.

At ten minutes past four our Lifeboat pagers went off, just as I had started to serve a customer. Fortunately, the Missus had decided to avoid The Farm today and was able to take over and I headed across the road. I found myself doing a solo launch again as my colleagues were clearly tied up elsewhere. It was a swift launch from inside the house to a body or paddleboarder down at Porthgwarra who had been spotted going offshore and then lost sight of. It was a precautionary investigation to make sure he was alright.

As it transpired, our man was spotted returning to Porthgwarra before the boat got there but the crew were asked to continue to make sure it was the same person. Since it had not been long since launch I was still on my Todd and had to recruit some raggle taggle spare bodies hanging about the station to lend a hand setting up the long slipway for recovery.

As if by magic a couple of very excellent Shore Crew turned up just as the boat was coming astern onto the long slipway. They were just in time to witness what was clearly a short-handed textbook recovery in the brightness of the afternoon. At just past low water there was very little movement in the water and certainly not enough to disperse a prodigious amount of spaghetti seaweed that collected on the boat's propellers. Along with the tardy crew, we washed down the boat at the top of the slip and refuelled for the next exciting episode. We are, after all, a very just in time, very excellent Shore Crew.

There was a sudden flood of customers in the evening when I returned but not enough to make it even a fairly good day. There seemed to be a lot of early going

home present buying and I hoped that it was not a sign of despondence at the weather. There was a couple in earlier in the day for whom you would have thought we had suffered a summer of foul weather, asking if it was ever going to improve – we only had two days poor out of cracking weather for the last three weeks.

I consoled myself in the evening by starting on the new, bigger pile of invoices. Made it, Ma! Top of the world.

August 16th – Tuesday

Today, we got the weather they forecast yesterday with added rain.

The rain, having practised yesterday, actually got the hang of it very early this morning with some spectacularly heavy downpouring that carved its presence onto the Harbour beach in deep ravines. I had to close the window above our bed in a bit of a rush as I started to get wet soon after it started.

By the time the bleddy hound and I stepped out, the rain had gone leaving a grey sky but brighter out to the west. We heard tales of heavier rain flooding at Newquay later and Truro yesterday and there were still other heavy downpours here and there ... well, less here and more there, really. The afternoon brought more persistent but lighter showers and a dour appearance to the sky with thicker mist to the northwest.

Unsurprisingly, there were no little camps out of the beach but the swimmer and surfing areas drew the regular size crowds we had bene getting for a few weeks. Also meeting expectations was our business, cut down in its prime, as we entertained the brave and those with little else to do or go.

In the shop, we did a lot of waiting, mainly for the cash and carry van to turn up which it eventually did halfway through the afternoon. We were plagued with cars parking opposite the shop and when the first of our supplier vans turned up, he largely ignored the big 4x4 parked opposite and parked close into us on the pavement. There was just enough room to get a car through but this did not stop a driver pretending she could not and started to remonstrate with our delivery man. I pointed out that the real offender was the 4x4 driver and that perhaps she should ask him to move instead. I even pointed out where he was at the restaurant next door, but remonstrating with us seemed preferable. Perhaps we were smaller.

Several hours later, when the main grocery delivery turned up, the same 4x4 driver again parked opposite the shop. This time I sought him out in the café and asked him to move. Happily, he must have seen the error of his ways and moved his vehicle without a fuss. With a man-mountain on board as co-driver of our van, it was probably the smart move. Our big man moved most of our order into the shop in geet piles loaded into his Popeye-like arms. He was the sort of man you could happily have watched all day – as opposed to doing it yourself. We did help, of course, and we were done inside fifteen minutes.

The Missus and Niece took over at this point and cleared most of the stock to the shelves in record time. If it was indeed the last of the major deliveries this year, it was a fitting end to it.

It was a pretty dire day all told, we got a little busier towards evening when the rain dried up but it had become very cool and windy with the least inspiring sky imaginable. All those who were about were wrapped up in hoodies or those big dry coats, which are apparently Super according to the label.

The evening after half past five took a further nosedive. If I could have closed the doors early, I doubt that anyone would have noticed or cared too much. As it is I am a consummate professional and such behaviour would see me kicked out of the grumpy shopkeeper guild and my already tattered and worthless reputation would be, erm, tattered some more.

I would not normally drink on a school night but, hang it.

August 15th – Monday

Misdirection of the day: “they said it was going to be cloudy all day.”

It was a forecast that did us hardly any favours at all. The only benefit I can recall is the lady coming in to purchase sun lotion because she had assumed she did not need it. Everyone else went to St Ives, a theme park or a museum. In fairness to those forecasters, the mist was still in evidence and it was a bit grey overhead first thing for about an hour. After that you would have been hard pressed to notice the difference between the weather today and that of the last week. It was hot, it was sunny and it was most definitely a beach day of the rip gribbling variety.

I downrated my pasty order for tomorrow accordingly. If the forecast is to be believed, we are scheduled to have apocalyptic thunderstorms tomorrow heralded by four dodgy looking characters on horses and we are advised to put up Anderson shelters in our back yards that we do not have – oh, and build an Ark. The weather actually rained in the morning, just to try out that it remembered what raining was like. It was not very good at it and will have to try much harder. I have never seen heavy rain drops fall so sparsely, one drop here, one drop there. It was weird.

More odd than weird, we had a CV-22 Osprey messing around up at Land's End airport in the middle of the day, I could feel it at first in its vertical drive mode, thumping the air and sending vibrations across the bay. It came low over Gurland Cliff or thereabouts and the next time I saw it was in aeroplane mode, striking out across the bay. It is an American aeroplane, but I believe the RAF have a few out east somewhere. Quite what one was doing here on its own will forever be a mystery.

Obviously, it was not a mystery as to why we were so quiet today. Those dickie forecasters wiped 30 percent off our bottom line for the day for no good reason. I would have taken the opportunity to replenish a shelf or two of stock but all that has already been done by Niece several times over. I have never seen the stock room so empty, and it has highlighted some shortages. I was on top of the surf jewellery and did that order last night over a bit of pizza. Tonight, I will have to look at sun lotion, balls of various sizes, sunglasses and parasols over a spaghetti vongole, which I will probably spill over the invoices that are there. I will tell the accountant that the tomato stains are where I sweated blood doing my Making Tax Difficult.

I was cajoled into keeping a case of world award winning cider for a lady who had spent a long weekend here. We are open more than ten hours a day but had such full days that she could not see us while we were open. I warned that I would look poorly on any arrival after eight o'clock. When she and her friend arrived at quarter to nine o'clock, I looked on it poorly but not half as poorly as I looked on the request from her friend that I open the shop at that hour so she could buy a £1.99 fridge magnet. She was most put out when I gracefully declined.

I did not have to tarry for long in the shop after we closed. Niece does a cracking job of topping up and, since we were quiet, I managed to do the ordering before we shut. The store room floor is near enough empty and we are in a good position to receive the big order from our original supplier and its £50 delivery charge. The new supplier, after three months has still not set up our direct debit and though not impossible to pay by credit card, our limit makes it difficult. I decided that withdrawing a significant order because it still was not set up might provide them with some incentive. They got the message and it will be set up from next week. Sadly, they missed our last big order for the year.

It was looking a lot less summery by the end of the day and, while still very warm, the temperature was noticeably dropping. Hopefully, this will give the bleddy hound, and consequently the Missus, a better night's sleep. I confess to not noticing; I have slept heavily through it all.

August 14th – Sunday

The bleddy hound and I walked around the block for the third day running. That is the thing about the lowest tides of the year: they also tend to be the biggest. We were caught up by the bleddy hound's best pal yesterday as we traversed the car park but we were mainly on our own today. There was still enough cloud left from overnight to stifle the sun as we went around, that and it had not properly risen above Escalls Cliff at the time. It was still quite warm but not uncomfortably so. That would come later.

Later on, it became uncomfortably warm. The fan we have behind the counter is good, but it is not that good. I did fancy, though, that it was less uncomfortably warm than it was yesterday even if it did look exactly the same as yesterday once the

cloud had melted away. I could not see much of the beach for most of the day because some buffoon had parked his bleddy geet camper van right opposite the café, impeding their ability to service the tables opposite and more importantly my ability to describe the beach to you, dear reader.

We had a late run on pasties. I was beginning to fear that we would be left with a surplus and I had already called in a fairly large order for Monday, anticipating that we would sell through most of what we had. The run caught me by surprise and left me playing catch-up, baking off several trays one after the other. The trick is, not seeing how quickly we can bake as many pasties as possible but knowing when to stop. The risk is, of course, that the run on pasties ends with too many waiting to be eaten in the warmer.

It is all part of the rough and tumble of grumpy shopkeeping, which we have come to know and love, along with fully grown and educated adults thinking that having a second item worth £1.20 will get them above a £3 card limit. This still causes consternation among our shoppers who do not seem to be able to get past the 'cash only' phrase on a notice that continues with, 'under £3' but we persevere.

I alerted the Missus, halfway through the morning, to the fact that our visitors were systematically clearing our shop of everything beachworthy. We had started from a position of being poorly stocked and it was getting to the stage that urgent action was required to fill our widening gaps. She formulated a plan with Niece to head up to The Farm where they would work in unison pulling the stock from the store, pricing it there and loading it into the truck. They headed off in the early afternoon.

We fell into a reasonable cycle of busyness after they had departed without being too pressed at any point. There were also moments of quiet where I was able to replenish some stock and make my list for our upmarket food supplier. We decided to use this company when we were unable to get many items from our regular suppliers. It has been some success and we have slowly grown a premium range that sells quite well among some of the more general groceries that we have. I also found the time to order stamps that I had been meaning to do for some days without success.

The Missus and Niece returned in the later afternoon, the truck stuffed to the roof rack, though not actually including the roof rack. They jointly unloaded and rushed everything into the store room while I catered for the typical rush that we have whenever we try and deliver anything into the shop. It will be great fun trying to get the huge dairy fridge in next month – we can hardly wait.

We remained busy until the end of the day including a traditional five minutes to closing rush. Niece topped up the soft drinks fridge best she could, but we had exhausted the stock that we had called in on Saturday designed to last the weekend. Later, I had a call from the local cash and carry telling me they had no large bottles

of water left. They expected a delivery on Monday but were being rationed by their supplier. No wonder everyone is drinking beer.

It was when I opened the first electric sliding door in The Cove again after finishing off the ordering post closing that it was clear there was a change in the air. A thick mist had formed along the top of the cliffs at Carn Glouce and along to Cape Cornwall and appeared to be spreading. This did not bother the host of youngsters in the Harbour having the time of their lives at high water, jumping off the wall and turning somersaults off the long slip – the naughty soldiers. There were whoops and cheers and games aplenty. You had never seen so much joy and laughter concentrated in one place at one time – what a delight.

It was not quite such a delight to find that we had to do our ordering and administration work sitting at a screen while eating our tea. Still, it is probably the last big order before the end of the shenanigans and with a change in the weather on the way we may see a downturn in business. Since I was sitting in the window, there did not seem to be much downturn on the day, let alone the future week; the street was heaving. Oddly, there was not one hint of regret that we were not open into the later evening. I must be weakening – or just plain worn out.

August 13th – Saturday

The heat generated in the last few days has been building, probably made hotter by all those additional bodies that have been hanging around in The Cove. It was warm through the night and hardly diminished at all by morning. When I opened the first electric sliding door in The Cove for the first time, the heat flooded out. This was going to be a warm day, I could tell.

It was also a busy day, which was first hinted at by the number of people falling in when I opened the first electric sliding door to the public. It was late opening, too, due to late newspapers and a timely delivery of pasties in abundance. It was very helpful having the pasties arrive so early, thanks to this particular driver preferring to start early. Another half an hour and they would have arrived in the middle of the melee that was the morning rush and it would have been exceedingly stressful.

There was enough of a lull after the initial half an hour of rush for me to eat a bit of breakfast, piecemeal between customers. Another advantage of the early pasty delivery is that it allows me to respond positively for requests for hot food that have become earlier and earlier over the last few weeks. I had set them up in the oven as soon as they arrived and turned the oven on for the required twenty minutes as soon as we opened. Twenty minutes later we had our first order. Pasty for breakfast – madness, I tell you. A miner might have once done the same but only because he probably did not know what time of day or night it was.

We have our summer visitor here again, Niece, sans dog or boyfriend. She has come at this time for the previous few years and makes herself useful about the

shop, stocking shelves and helping with the grocery order. Her visit is quite timely on two counts, the first being we do have a grocery order this week and the second is that our shelves were beginning – no, have for a week or more looked like they have been stripped by locusts. They required a concentrated effort of time, which they did not get with the two of us and by the end of the day, we started to look like a proper shop. It is a work in progress, as the stock that is kept at The Farm is looking a bit thin. That will be tomorrow we hope.

In the middle of the day, I retired upstairs for a break. I took time to gaze out across the vista we have from our windows and the scene was sublime. It was also the epitome of a British seaside scene, possibly, with glassy still waters, paddlers and people exploring the rocks of Cowloe on one of the lowest tides of the year. The air seemed clear and a little hazy at the same time, which was odd. I would suggest it is a sign of rain coming ... or possibly not.

We remained bust through the day again with a little remission during the middle of the afternoon. The beer drinking onslaught seemed lighter than of late but the soft drinks suffered considerably. Not only are we finding it hard keeping with the restocking of the fridge, our suppliers are finding it difficult to keep us restocked. We are having to range around to find replenishment and will have to find space for stock if we need to order from our fortnightly cash and carry order. Things are getting tricky.

Niece came back at last knockings to refill the soft drinks fridge as I inflated some balls for our denuded stand, so we were in a good position to start the day tomorrow. The cash and carry order is already done and we are streak ahead of the posse, which only points to the fact that we could use some help during the summer months from someone who knows what they are doing – not an easy find.

My beer was, though, and I did not have to leave it half way through tonight, either.

August 12th – Friday

I tell you, dear reader, who would not be a grumpy shopkeeper. I would wager it is not many of you who get told you are a ‘good man’ by a trio of small people under 4 years old for looking after shopping for them while they go for a stroll with dad. It is also a fair bet that I will get a ‘thank you, old boy’, when they come and pick it up.

We pretty much hit the ground running again this morning. There was a lot of preparation to do before we opened what with the beer fridge being empty and all. I also remembered that there were some scallops in the fish fridge – it is a couple of degrees lower than normal fridges – that needed packing and freezing. The going home biscuits and postcard boxes also needed topping up as they took a bit of a beating yesterday, despite getting some attention in the middle of the day.

The jewellery stand has also taken some punishment over the last few days. I did get it to a point where it was pretty full a few days ago and it is still looking reasonably fit for purpose now. However, this did not stop a young lady from telling me that we had 'no anklets at all' on the stand and that all we had left was bracelets. Alarmed, I went to the stand and perused the twenty or so anklets adorning the hanging pins. Confused, I pointed this out to our customer who conceded that, yes, there were 'a few' anklets but none with only one or two shells on.

She had me bang to rights, I could not deny that of the twenty or so anklets on display only one had shells and that one was all shells, not just one or two. I have no idea how I could have been so remiss and sought to redress the situation by running to the store room – first, to beat my breast in supplication of forgiveness – and second to get the jewellery overstock bag. Therein, very thankfully, were two anklets with one or two shells as part of their decoration. It must have been my lucky day because one of the products found favour with our shopper. I asked for £3.99, the price of the item. "Are you sure, I thought it was £2.99". I do hope what I gave was a benign smile as I corrected her expectations.

It was another hot one, of course. There was a bit of breeze here and there in the morning but by the afternoon it had given up entirely. It looked like there might have been a wave or two out towards North Rocks as the tide pushed in during the middle of the afternoon. All the other many oiks out there had to make do with a bit of surf breaking on the shore but there seemed oblivious to their condition and once again, the beach was packed.

The Missus made a mercy dash to the cash and carry at Hayle in the afternoon. I had made it to the gymnasium in the morning but severely curtailed the session to give the Missus more time. This was somewhat aided by the gig club removing the last fully working rowing machine. There is one left without a monitor, which makes the process so much harder. Fortunately, I have been doing it so long I can determine my pace without it but the timing function is still necessary. The session was more of a blist and I shall have to catch up with the erring later.

When the Missus returned in the later afternoon, we were still busy and brining the large delivery in was a bit of a labour. There was a wealth of additional beer to see us through the weekend and many things that we cannot get from our alternative cash and carry supplier. The Missus stayed around for most of the rest of the afternoon putting it all out and filling the soft drink fridge before she went to prepare tea.

This was most helpful as I did not have to hang around too long after closing and managed to consume half my tea before our Lifeboat pagers went off calling us to duty.

Someone had spotted a paddle boarder off Cape Cornwall signalling for help. Both boats launched in a bit of a hurry to the scene to discover that our man on the board

waving his hands around was handlining. He was also drifting a fair bit and after some advice both boats returned to the bay. On their way back the Inshore was called to a casualty on the big beach. A young child was suffering probably heat related effects and was given first aid by the crew. The ambulance had been called but we gave advice that it would probably be quicker for the parents to take their child, who had improved a small measure, to the hospital themselves.

A very depleted very excellent Shore Crew had initially set up on the short slip, which would have worked out fine had the boats not been redeployed. We switched to the long slip on the rapidly falling tide, welcoming home the boats some time later after the sun had set and darkness looming. As you might imagine, with such experience at hand, we conducted a textbook recovery up the long slip and tidied the boats away in their respected houses. We are, after all, a very slimmed-down, very excellent Shore Crew.

August 11th – Thursday

There was a 'ansum breeze blowing about the place when we first stepped out in the morning. It was there too when I sat down for my cup of tea a little later, blowing in through one of the front windows and all through the living room. I am sure that it would have blown through the jasmine in my mind had there been any. Indeed, had there been a mind at all.

That breeze disappeared sometime during the morning and made matters incredibly sticky all around. I was not too badly off in front of the fan behind the counter, despite the pasty warmer not being too far away. It was when I went into the store room or some other part of the shop it got a little warm. This still has a few days to run and I think that we are talking a proper rip gribblerwave, here.

I am feeling very conflicted. Radio Pasty was telling us all to conserve water as best we could; I would share a bath with a friend if I had one – bath, that is ... or friend. In the next breath they are telling us all to drink plenty of water. They are also telling us to avoid alcohol, which I am also struggling with as I work next to a beer fridge. I have to go all the way around the shop to avoid it.

After our 'day off' yesterday, our visitors came back in numbers to prove that they had not gone very far. I suspect that they went somewhere to regroup and adjust their strategy to ensure maximum grumpy shopkeeper impact. They achieved this, first by emptying the soft drinks fridge. I managed to get a few minutes during which I replenished some of the large water bottles and a case of small bottles. Any further topping up would need to wait until after we were closed.

Next, our body of happy and thirsty visitors went after the beer fridge. We were still being mobbed at half past six, which was testament to our visitors' best efforts to avoid alcohol during the heat of the day. By late afternoon, clearly all semblance of resistance had been broken and a free for all – just a figure of speech, you

understand – ensued, emptying the beer fridge completely. There was no hope of replenishment largely because I was too busy selling beer to put any back and the beer fridge turns off at half past six o'clock.

The Missus is going to have to journey out to Hayle and the cash and carry their for additional supplies as our two week plan has fallen short a few days ahead of schedule.

I was little more use than a damp dishrag by closing time, so I avoided joining our hearty Lifeboat crew for an exercise launch. They had all been assembled a half hour before due time thanks to a visitor who had fallen ill on the Harbour wall. A member of the public had, quite rightly, called the Coastguard and in short order our end of The Cove was filled with an urgent mix of Lifeboat crew, Coastguard cliff team and Lifeguards hot foot from the beach all impeded because of the camper van and three cars parked opposite the shop on double yellow lines.

I was still working when the boat returned towards nine o'clock. It skirted around the two yachts that had arrived earlier in the afternoon and moored not far off the Lifeboat launch channel. My expert eye discerned that this was indeed a textbook recovery up the long slipway. We are, after all, a very supportive, very excellent Shore Crew.

Assure that the boat's launching and recovery are in safe hands during my absence from the training scene, I allowed myself a small but excellent malt whisky before bedtime. It will fortify my soul against the next onslaught tomorrow.

August 10th – Wednesday

It was probably the last time cool happened when we were on the beach first thing. It was a fleeting moment, but it remained with me the rest of the day.

The bleddy hound suffers so in the heat and boy, was it hot today. Apparently, it is going to get hotter towards the weekend and drop like a stone Monday. I have kept this from the bleddy hound as it will only upset her – the getting hot bit, not the getting cool on Monday. She has no concept of Monday but she is rather keen on Wednesday.

The surveyor, the one we need to make drawings before the planning consultants and make plans and take them to the much maligned council, arrived unannounced today. He had made this arrangement with our project manager who failed to plan to tell us. Indeed, he also failed to carry the plan that he did not do out. I told him of our surprise. "We are surprised," I told him. He then announced that his clever laser measuring tool could only be used if people did not get in front of it when it was measuring. We would have to stop people moving around in the shop for the best part of an hour for it to work properly.

It took me a few minutes to find exactly the right words to express just how that was not going to happen in the middle of a sunny day in August. I think that I managed to convey my sentiments quite successfully. The problem, of course, is that we are already tight for time and a further delay may affect the start of the work. Fortunately, he was happy to come back on Monday before we opened (I did not ask if this meant double time or unsocial hours rates) but I gave him a free pasty and hoped for the best.

We let him loose in the flat for today and he did the outside as well. He was gone for hours, so I imagine the drawings will be very detailed. It will be good to see the finished article but quite what we would do with them, I have no idea.

As rip gribblers go, this was definitely one of them. It steadily became warmer as the day drew on, which displeased the bleddy hound immensely. She was even more put out when she had to stay in the shop with me for several hours while the Missus went on an errand in town. After trying out outside, the bed by the door, under the counter and back to the bed by the door she eventually settled for the bed by the door, which was more a relief to me than her.

When the Missus returned and had dispersed the groceries she returned with to their respective locations, the bleddy hound and I went upstairs for a quick cup of tea – the bleddy hound had water; she does not drink tea, only coffee. Usually, the front room remains reasonably temperate and often collects the slightest breeze. In the late afternoon it was baking hot in there and most uncomfortable, so much so that I cut short my break and went back to the shop.

We were nowhere near as busy as yesterday, although busy enough. We went through sixty pasties yesterday so I called in seventy today. We sold about forty but because we have to order early for the next day we have another sixty coming tomorrow. I always aim to have zero at the end of Thursday so that I may better plan numbers for the weekend. That is not going to happen this Thursday, I am willing to lay bets.

I had asked the Missus to bring back some more stock from The Farm on her return from shopping. Unfortunately, she did not have all the keys with her so could only bring back a subset of my order. Never mind, the very pleasant people from Doing Parcels Dreadfully brought some more boxes instead. These were from a company that should have sent us these boxes back in April. They said that they had been victim to poor timing as their order to China, from where all good things come these days, had coincided with an attack of the dreaded lurgi. When their order arrived China had a notice on the door saying 'Closed. Please try later' and consequently our delivery was delayed until now. I am sure we shall sell some of it but the rest will wait until next year.

There was not quite so much of a hole in our soft drinks fridge today. I managed to plug the gaps sufficiently that the Missus did not have to come back down in the

evening this time. I should have time in the morning to complete the rest. I note that we are running out of our best selling lager and because we can no longer get cans of coca cola that fit in our fridge – they changed the shape of the can – we will have to take some action before the weekend and running out.

What a hectic life. Time for a beer.

August 9th – Tuesday

Customer: “Is this the only lip product you have that has a sun protection factor?”

Grumpy Shopkeeper: “Yes, madam. The only one we have.”

Customer: “What about this lip balm on the counter. Has that got sun protection?”

Grumpy Shopkeeper:!”

It was still breezy in the morning but by the middle of the day we were looking into the teeth of a proper rip gribbler. Even when I came down to open the shop just after eight o'clock, the sun was warm and the breeze, such as it was by that time, was warm also. It set the benchmark for the day from which it just got hotter and more glorious, if you like that sort of thing.

The thing about glorious weather, at least for the first few days of it, is that it brings out the crowds. The beach fills up and the sea becomes the general playground even if there is not a hint of a wave to be seen anywhere; people improvise.

They also buy things, from things to do on the beach to keep them occupied to things to eat and drink. In the later part of the day, the focus turns from drinks that stop you being thirsty to drinks that make you fall over. Unlike the previous days, there was no let up in the buying from the middle of the morning until close to closing time, although we got away lightly on today's five minutes to closing with a gentleman wishing to choose a sun hat just as the sun was going away for the night.

I confess that most of the day is a blank. I can tell you that I was laid siege to behind the counter with the only forays out being those of utter necessity. Topping up shelves was a distant aspiration, and it was not until after we closed that we were able to attempt it. That kept us occupied until long after darkness fell, although we did it in shifts so that we would not have to bring down the bleddy hound.

There is a certainty that the day was much more exciting than that - a small child that I mistook for a girl child leaving the store with a hat of ours on that it had not paid for and returning later under better scrutiny – that sort of thing, that a better Diarist may have taken time to comment upon. Sadly, this Diarist, ran out of time somewhere along the line. Better luck tomorrow, eh.

August 8th – Monday

The morning air was quite cool, aided and abetted by a firm northeasterly that had persisted for a day or two. It went around to the north a while later, just to be different. I looked up to the clear blue yonder and it was clear blue and definitely yonder with not a cloud or contrail to spoil it. We will definitely have one of those, I thought.

It was the sort of day when a grumpy shopkeeper knew instinctively that he had not ordered enough pasties. He knew that yesterday when we used up all the pasties from the weekend. Grumpy shopkeeper's expectation was that at best he would run out in the early afternoon and running out in the early afternoon was indeed the best he managed. A hefty uplift in the numbers has been arranged for tomorrow when everyone will have had enough of pasties for a day or two and look for something else to eat instead.

I have explained before how our fickle customers lead me astray on my ordering by purchasing increasing number of white loaves until I have a surfeit in anticipation and then suddenly switching to brown. Well, clearly that is now an old game to which I have become wise. I have a store room shelf filled with plain scones that had been the focus of a feeding frenzy over the last fortnight. This week our customers have favoured fruited scones all of a sudden. We have a fruited scone shaped hole on our shelf currently.

We seem to have hit a regular pattern of busy mornings and quiet afternoons. The afternoon today was particularly deserted for a while that allowed me time to do a bit of filling in here and there. I had often compared keeping the shop stocked to the circus act, spinning plates. It is easy to focus on the popular items like the body boards and buckets and spades but then there is an almighty crash as the grocery aisle plate stops spinning when the ketchup runs out.

I discovered such a broken plate today when I took a look at the non food grocery that includes the medical and cosmetic items. Shower gel was depleted to almost empty and we are short sudocrem, which we sell a great deal of. It is less an epidemic of nappy rash and more wetsuits rubbing on necks that is the problem there, I think. I managed to get a few holes repaired and we now have toothbrushes and toothpaste on the shelf but the store room is so crammed, it takes as much time extracting the desired item as it does transporting it to its place on the shelf. It is not long before a renewed rush of customers crushes the master plan altogether and then it is forgotten until the next crash of plates.

I am not so sure it is forgotten as not properly thought through in the first place. Our new streetlamp remains stoically dim, I discovered when I joined the Missus taking the bleddy hound out for her last run. I had gone down to take the rubbish out and the only light we had came from our own daylight sun floodlights at the front of the shop. Power to the light used to arrive by overhead cable from the house opposite. That solution, Heath Robinson that it was, is deemed no longer appropriate and will not be reintroduced. The only solutions on the table at present are a digging up of

the road to deliver a new cable underground or nicking it from the Lifeboat station. It seems a bit rash of the much maligned council to press ahead with a new pole when a better solution might have been siting it somewhere else. We await developments.

I had a very late five minutes to closing rush today. People were piling in through the door like their lives depended upon it. At the end there was one gentleman of advancing years left in the shop down the back somewhere. I had seen him come in through the crowd but I closed the first electric sliding door in The Cove after the last of the rest of the customers left to prevent a further influx.

The gentleman emerged soon after asking if we had a mirror in which he could assess the suitability of the straw hat he had chosen from our now sparse collection. He was a gentleman we had the pleasure of entertaining before, although usually earlier in the season and shortly after the event he puts on every now and again further up the line.

I welcomed him back and suggested that he had chosen a particularly busy time in The Cove when he could have selected a quieter time, now he is retired. He gave me a generous smile, one that his face is clearly used to, and he asked if I recognised him. I said that he did have rather a famous face and we fell into conversation about his festival at Glastonbury, you know, dear reader, the big one with music. I told him that it was quite a legacy and that he should be particularly proud of the dreams he had fulfilled and the memories he had created. He told me that it was 50 years long and around 3 million people had been there. We could have chatted a while longer but we both had places to be. He looked on with a bit of a question in his eyes as I pulled aside our heavy portal. I smiled back and told him that it was, indeed, the first electric sliding door in The Cove. I think we both parted better men than we met.

August 7th – Sunday

It was an 'ansum sunny morning, the temperature pinned down by a more than robust easterly again. There was no one else around this morning to enjoy it, so I enjoyed it twice as much to compensate.

It did not take long for our visitors to mobilise. I had anticipated their every move today and got my breakfast in before the fight started. If they get any earlier, I will have to have my breakfast the night before – no flies on me, thank you. Once the ball had started to roll it was difficult to see it stopping very quickly; we just got busier and busier. There was much gearing up for the beach despite the beach diminishing as the minutes went by. High water has slipped into the afternoon and the beach will not reappear until late after that, although the tides were one of the smallest of the year, I noticed from the swathe of dry sand on the Harbour beach in the morning.

With no beach and nso swell, what is a poor boy to do? It seems that paddleboarding and jumping off the Harbour wall were the prize alternatives today

judging from the crowd lining the wall for much of the high water period. I do not know if the breeze was a factor, but there did not seem to be much in the way of paddleboarding past some initial interest in the morning.

Perhaps they were all too full of pasties. I had put a bit of a dent into our prodigious stock during the morning. We were down on our uppers for cheese pasties as I had simply underestimated the demand for such a thing. When I came back from a break in the middle of the day, the Missus had ploughed through most of the rest. I had not counted the pasties we had available at the start of the weekend, but it would have been more than 150. We ran out completely at around three o'clock, so we were not that short of the finish line but it was still frustrating to turn business away however small.

While one branch of our business withered another bloomed. It is the way of it. However, on this occasion, I began to suspect something was afoot when half way through the afternoon I sold our fifth tube of super glue. I asked the sixth person if I should expect to see a number of people hanging off the St Ives bound Coaster by their foreheads in some protest or other. They denied everything, of course, but six tubes of super glue in a day cannot just be coincidence – there were another two after that. I await the next news broadcast with bated breath and if anyone starts asking awkward questions about where the glue came from, I too will deny everything.

It was heading towards four o'clock before there was any action in the water off the big beach. Stepping in off the high water is uncomfortable with rocks and stones at the moment and not very clever for surfing either, even when there is surf. There was quite a crowd in there bobbing about for about an hour after which it thinned out along with the density of tent city. As everyone else was leaving, the wind surfers and a solitary kite surfer took over. I had expected to see them much earlier but I guess they were waiting for it to become a little quieter out there. They too were not there very long but the beach was occupied for some while into the evening as people enjoyed the fullness of the day and, perhaps, the beach they did not get in the morning.

They were most welcome to it because I had my thoughts on my sofa (which, I discovered yesterday, does not bloody work in a power cut!), legs up reading a book. Even then I was late home because of the big dent in the soft drinks fridge which needed topping up. There was so little time after we closed that I only managed half a dozen invoices keyed in. It is like trying to empty a bath using a bucket full of holes with the taps turned on. Oh, the frustration of it all.

August 6th – Saturday

It was not the best start to the weekend. The milk and the papers were late and as I was just finishing the tail end of the newspapers moments to go before opening, the pasties turned up. While I was helping to ship them into the store room and put them

away, the sandwich man arrived and customers started to come in. Just after we opened, the power went off for a few moments causing mayhem with the card machine.

Otherwise, the day had started out well. The bleddy hound and I patrolled the beach as the first of the early bird snorkellers padded into the water and the first of the early bird photographers ventured onto the slipway to record it for posterity. I also recorded it because it struck me that we were just as early as we were normally but the sun was getting behind with its shining. Only the top part of The Cove was sunlit as the morning rays struggled over Escalls Cliff.

It is not only snorkellers and photographers who are early birds, it seems this week's contingent and those about to leave also wanted to get a march on the day. We were busy almost from the moment we sort of opened the door, although I had only done that to let in the pasty man. They gave no quarter and the breaks between them were few and far between. I abandoned my breakfast as my bread was going hard it had been left for so long. It was clear that the flow was unlikely to change.

I had noticed last night that the spades and buckets in our first aisle were looking a bit sparse. I told the Missus that we would need an early run up to The Farm if we wished to maximise our sales and not disappoint any little cherubs after doing a bit of digging and sandcastle making on the beach. I had managed to slip some spades from the back of the truck which was a delivery earlier in the week that the Missus had not yet taken out. The rest needed to be gone and got.

She was gone and getting for ages and arrived back around the middle of the day with the truck stacked to the roof. I was there when we made the list and it did not seem like that much at the time. We were still busy in the shop when she came back and thankfully was able to park outside. Ferrying the goods into the shop between customers we just threw it into the already packed store room brimming from the morning deliveries that I had no chance to process hitherto.

The water company sent me a rather pleading note yesterday, but I only got around to reading it today. Apparently, the person employed to go around and read the meters is too busy to go around and read the meters – could we do it for them, please. I am reasonably certain that this happened last year as well with the same outcome. It is somewhat more than irksome that a company that has someone specifically employed to do the job feel it needs to ask me, someone who has a different job that currently is consuming all my time, to do the job for them. I was not able to do it in time last year and it is highly unlikely I will be able to do it this year either. The outcome is an estimated bill, which I probably will not look at.

The Missus did the vast majority of the putting out of the stock that she had brought down and returned near the last knockings to replenish the soft drinks. There was a period during the afternoon that we were comparatively quiet but do not ask me when that was. It always makes me smile when people tell me that I am lucky having

an office with such a view. The view I enjoyed the most of today was the couple of square feet of counter in front of me while I was serving people. The occasional glances I did get of the beach showed that it was crowded, even after the tide had receded and offered a little more space. I am not sure what the surf looked like but we had an easterly blowing in varying amounts all day, which would have helped.

The power failure in the morning had been quite severe. It had not lasted very long but it had taken several minutes for all our computer equipment to come back online. The two drinks fridges are controlled by it too and did not come back on at all and the main computer upstairs needed some serious TLC to get it working again. I thought that there might have been more to it than the electricity simply stopping, possible a spike or something more sinister.

We had a second chance to consider it in the evening, although it was kindly timed to coincide with the end of our closing routine. We even had salad for tea so that was not affected by the second outage that arrive at around quarter past seven o'clock. We reported it as more widespread but when I was asked to double check I found that the houses in the mews behind us had power and two door along to the east also. Strangely, these must have been affected later because we had calls from distant owners an hour later when the visitors must have complained from the very houses I checked.

We came back on around nine o'clock, which was useful because I was just losing sufficient light to read my book. That would really have ruined my day.

August 5th – Friday

There was no mistaking the north wind this morning. It was in our faces as we headed to the Harbour for our regular run out first thing. We were quite on our own on the beach and were it not for the wind I suspect it would have been entirely peaceful. At least it was not raining, nor was there any sign that it might, and it did not, which was helpful.

The beach day did not really get going until late in the morning due to the tide not letting go of the beach. It is reasonably typical that we eventually get some beach weather but then no beach to go with it. Despite that, we were busy from the off again and my breakfast was relegated to sporadic bites between clumps of customers. There was no real let up in the flow until much later in the afternoon with a mix of purchases from breakfasts and going home presents to things for a beach day ahead.

It is the end of the first fortnight when many of the families that we have known longest leave for home. It is still quite scary seeing the children we have known since they were that high are now a lot higher. We used to give them 'care packages' of sweets for the journey home but it is difficult to know whether they are a bit old for

that now. Of course, they now probably think we are proper grumpy shopkeepers for not asking.

Our beer fridge is not being emptied with the same voracity that it was a few weeks ago. It makes a lot of sense since there are predominantly family groups here now and the small children do not drink as much beer as the adults. The soft drink fridge, however, is being emptied on a daily basis and it is quite hard keeping pace with that. We have now almost completely switched to getting all our soft drinks from our local cash and carry. This is a bit of a price penalty for doing so but it is more than compensated for by the fact that we can get replacements six days a week. If the local boys ever went out of business we would be in a whole heap of trouble, so we use them as much as is practical.

Like yesterday, we were busy through to the end of the day, so sneaking in a bit of topping up in the last hour is out of the window for now. I spent about half an hour after we closed doing some of it because there would have been too much for the morning alone, especially as it is a Saturday with additional things to do and big newspapers. It makes the two hours left before bedtime somewhat sacred and woe betide anyone crashing that space – even if I have had to use some of it for Making Tax Difficult and inputting my invoices. I have some special words saved for the person who came up with that bright idea if ever I meet them.

I shall no doubt dream of buckets, spades and bleddy postcard fudge boxes again tonight. It is a wonder that there any vestiges of sanity still visible in this grumpy shopkeeper. Perhaps there is not.

Only another four weeks to go. [FX: sound of manic laughter fading into distance.]

August 4th – Thursday

It was another wizard day in the offing as we headed to the Harbour in the morning – well, apart from the rather suspicious inky black cloud out to the northwest. I considered it a little too far off to be of concern and, anyway, it was not going to rain today, surely.

I was knee deep in topping up the drinks fridges when the newspapers came and only noticed when I glimpsed the van through the gap in the curtain when I headed to the store room for more supplies. I had thought it was the milkman so I diverted my attention to going outside to collect the delivery, which is when I found out that it had just been raining quite heavily. It was here and gone before I discovered it, and the day brightened subsequently, just like it should.

We were busy all through the day today. It seemed like someone dropped a mini coach load early on in the morning and it looked like they were part of one group. They filled the shop for fifteen minutes and were joined by other parties. We were a hive of, erm, milling about not buying very much for a while there and then they were

gone. They were but the vanguard and arrived in the very slim window in which I cram my breakfast. Consequently, breakfast was a very long, drawn out affair today.

It took a while for the beach to clear after the high water of the morning but after it did a fairly substantial township of tents and windbreaks popped up above the tide line. The windbreaks were a very necessary accessory today with an increasing blow coming in from the northwest. I hardly felt it when we were down on the beach first thing but by the middle of the day when I took a break upstairs, the wind was fair whistling through the front doorway. I fancied that it eased a bit during the later part of the afternoon but it was chilly being exposed to it out of the sun. I wondered how the beach was so crowded with the wind so brisk but I suspect it was the last day for many and despite the wind, it was one of the better days this week.

The Missus disappeared off to The Farm for a good part of the day. While she was gone the Doing Parcels Dreadfully lot delivered the shoes and rash vests that we had been waiting for on our newly 'upgraded' service. So special was this service that they had to deliver the three medium sized boxes in two separate drops, two hours apart. Gosh, we now know how the upper crust feel about the services they get.

When the Missus returned at half past five o'clock, she brought back some much needed bodyboards that had at last been selling well. The shop was jumping still, even at that time, so she leant a hand and topped up the near empty soft drinks fridge. Fortunately, she was not cooking tonight as, once again, we dined off the evening menu from next door. It continues to be an enormously popular affair but because it is the same staff as were there all day, they can only do this once a week. The food is truly professional class and the portions legion, the two of those normally being mutually exclusive. Frankly, we are blessed, even if it is only once a week. My hake was perfectly cooked (like the Missus cooks it, ahem) on a bed of roast baby potatoes. The Missus had something else; the Missus hates fish.

August 3rd – Wednesday

That weather is a naughty tease. Our view was completely blanked out when I looked out of the window first thing. We could not see the beach let alone the cliffs or Cape Cornwall. A few hours later and the sun was splitting the hedges. Had it been the other way around, there would have been trouble, I am sure.

Due to it being sunny and the first nice day for a while, we were busy, which did not exactly dovetail well with the arrival of our biggest grocery delivery of the year. In an ideal world we would close the shop for the half an hour that it takes to ship it off the cages and into the store room. It is, of course, the real world where small children jump into your path when you have close to 30 kilograms of beer in your arms and customers crowd around the entrance oblivious to your plight. It takes a little longer and before you know it the store room is a no-go area because you simply cannot go in there.

It really was a glorious day again, not quite a week since the last glorious day and I am sure it was much appreciated. As you may imagine, the beach was the place to be and it was heavily populated for a good part of the day. The sea was just as crowded and later in the afternoon, all those patient surfers were bowled over by some pretty significant waves rolling in. They did not look particularly useable with the westerly breeze behind them and any action at all was to be had out the back. However, if you like a face full of water with several tons of weight behind it, today was your day,

The Missus spent the day in the store room and emerged victorious after battling packing and polythene to put goods on the shelf. I had spent some time earlier crowbarring cases of beer into the cupboard reserved for the purpose. We call it the beer cupboard but that is just our way. It was fortunate that another beer delivery had not materialised due to the beer having not been canned. It will arrive at the end of the week and we shall hope that we have shifted some of the others by then.

At some point in the day I had sufficient time to send an electronic mail to our provider of large numbers of shoes. I explained about Doing Parcels Dreadfully missing out our delivery and I had a reply by the end of the day from both the supplier and Doing Parcels Dreadfully. The supplier apologised profusely and assured us that the problem had been resolved. Doing Parcels Dreadfully sent a message telling us that we had been 'upgraded' and that our parcel would be delivered tomorrow. I cannot express just how privileged we feel.

The surf jewellery that we were expecting did arrive on time, by a different courier service, and I managed to get some items out and to stop our display looking quite so sparsely populated. As with all of our best intentions at this time of year, the slightest change in busyness upturns the apple cart and the job will now have to wait for another time. It is not a quick job either as each pack needs a bit of preparation before being hung. I have long since omitted to price individual items as it is very time consuming and the price tag falls off all too easily. Judging from the discarded packaging I find about the shop from time to time, the price does not matter anyway to some people.

The day remained pleasant well into the evening. When I stepped out on an errand at gone half past eight, the Harbour was still busy with revellers splashing about and jumping off the Harbour wall. Yesterday, we entertained one young lad in the shop for whom jumping off the Harbour wall was to be the absolute highlight of his holiday and was very keen. I explained that it might be advisable to wait until there was some more water in the Harbour as it looked a little low just when he asked. My sage advice took a bit of a knock when the distant sound of a splash made it clear some clever Dick had jumped off at that moment. I stood my ground and explained it would be much safer later on, for which at least his parents sounded grateful.

Shifting 30 kilogram cases of beer does take its toll of an aging body, so I suggested the Missus get some rest. Ahem. You can never be too prepared, and after that, I think I might need to be.

August 2nd – Tuesday

I do not know how our visitors feel about it. They seem to be putting on a good show of enjoying themselves and very few, so far have complained much. It must be more than a little disappointing to once again realise that the vista you will see all day is a grey and somewhat dull one. To be optimistic, it is an improving picture each day but only by margins and those margins are extremely narrow.

It was quite early on that our cash and carry company telephoned to tell us we would not get our big delivery until tomorrow. They had suffered a power failure that had interrupted the flow of operations. The feeling was that of having a painful dental procedure put off for a day. Mind, there are not that many around here who remember what that was like. Getting a dental appointment in Cornwall is like, well, pulling teeth, which you have to do yourself if it is required. It was something the ancients talked about around the campfire at night, how they used to go to a special place and a person in a white coat would root about in your mouth with special tools to fix unhappy teeth. Oh, those halcyon days.

Never mind, we had plenty of other deliveries instead. They just kept piling in except for the large order of shoes that Doing Parcels Dreadfully decided not to deliver today despite telling us that they would. Soon, we were neck deep in even more cardboard and wrapping including those awful nylon straps. When I (hopefully) eventually pop my clogs, I am going to ask that I be carried off in cardboard packaging wrapped in shrink wrap plastic just to make me feel at home. I might ask Doing Parcels Dreadfully to do the delivery as that might give me an extra few days, but on reflection, they might also drop me at the wrong place.

We did not quite get the brightness that we had yesterday, although, when I looked, the beach seemed to be just as busy as it was yesterday. I thought that we were busy as well, until at the end of the day when it transpired that we were not. There was hardly a soul in the shop before the middle of the day and then we had a rush for an hour or so. I think that our busyness came in short blocks altogether that made it look busier than it was, that and the fact that I was trying to juggle clearing the deliveries while serving.

The Missus managed to head off to The Farm in the absence of our big grocery delivery and came back near last knockings with a truck full of stock to put out. Naturally, as soon as she arrived, we got busy again, so she stopped by and helped put out the stock she brought down and filled the drinks fridge for me. We are a pretty good team as long as we do not think about it.

August 1st – Monday

Oh calamity. Another day not fit for purpose.

It was not really that bad and it all depends upon your standpoint. If you were after blue skies and a blistering skin, it was not your day. It was however, after a bit of a shakey start, dry and warm and perfectly pleasant. It was good enough for a host of people to descend upon the beach and set up camp, even in the tide zone with no tide being expected until much later in the day. The waves so prevalent yesterday, eluded our surfers today, although it was not completely flat calm for them.

When the bleddy hound and I first went down to the beach, the mist was still clinging to the tops of the cliffs all the way along to Cape Cornwall. Pictureque as it was, it was hardly the sort of thing that would foster a blindingly good day at the till for a grumpy shopkeeper in his seaside shop. I was very happy that it dissipated half way through the morning and I am sure most of our visitors felt so too.

Today was 'clear out the store room' day to make ready for the mammoth order we have called in for tomorrow. Naturally, the frozen order that we tried so hard to make for a different day is also coming tomorrow – hopefully at a different time – and I have just had notification that the large shoe order – that is a large number of shoes not a number of large shoes – is also coming tomorrow but, as yet, I do not know what time. My guess it will arrive in the middle of the big grocery delivery, just for fun.

We had a reasonable day on the visitor shopping lark. There are plenty of families around looking to entertain their children and older children wishing to come and buy sweets, more sweets and anything else sugary they can get their hands on. It brings me to my annual observation of just how many parents have a sense of utter trust in their offspring that suggests that they may wonder the aisles of the shop unsupervised. It is also my observation quite often just how misplaced that trust is.

Little Tommy Not-His-Real-Name – it is surprising just how common that surname is; you hear it on the news quite frequently – was a case in point this afternoon. His very trusting parents thought it no matter at all to wander off down the shop leaving him behind to peruse our collection of balls in the rack at the front of the shop. Perhaps they felt that their grumpy shopkeeper was doing little else and could look after little Tommy in their absence.

I did indeed look after him as he took a ball from the rack and almost immediately lost it under the ice cream freezer. He was a little shaken when he realised that I had seen him do it but not so much that he did not return a few moments later to repeat the offense. I fleetingly wondered if grumpy shopkeepers playing the surrogate parent role were permitted to clip little Tommy across the ear 'ole but I demurred on the basis that I probably would struggle to edit the evidence from the cctv footage in the event that I was not. I suspect that educating parents is the solution but me learning about photo editing is probably more likely.

By the end of the day, I had managed to clear the store room sufficiently that our order should slip in quite easily. It is only three days since we had our waste cardboard collected and we already have another five boxes awaiting disposal. If you think that is a good indicator that suppliers are using less plastic in their wrapping I also have three large refuse sacks of mainly plastic wrapping in the bin outside.

It is hard to know what the solution is because the production of cardboard is just as damaging to the environment as the disposal of plastic, I have read. Probably our best larger in world that is in our fridge that does not sell very well has been repackaged to reduce plastic. The cans are stuck together in fours with a spot of glue. Unfortunately, the glue breaks down in the cold leading to the packs falling apart with quite disastrous effects when they are picked up. I have had to put a warning label on the fridge not to pick up the cans by the handle. We might get it right one day but I cannot help the feeling that we should have started an awful lot sooner.

I hesitate to say 'quiet' but our not so busy day ended as it has for the last few days with a bit of a rush toward teatime at around six o'clock. It seems that our visitors are clever enough not to have to do five minute to closing rushes and do all their buying in the last hour. It suits all parties it seems and helps that I can clear away the outside display unhindered. It is still exceedingly pleasant to flop down on the new electric sofa at the end of the day even if I do have to discipline myself to do at least ten invoices before bedtime. I think I am just about ahead of the number of new ones arriving each day. It does help me to sleep at night knowing that. I am, after all, a grumpy shopkeeper of simple pleasures.

