

DIARY 2024

August 31st – Saturday

I was wondering, as I watched some tumbleweed roll down the street, exactly when this downturn in trade might occur. It should have been the Tuesday just passed, as tradition demands but we had just been through the busiest week of the year, which definitely was not right.

The sky was clear again first thing when ABH and I visited the Harbour beach. Again, there was a bit of a chill in the air and like yesterday, the cloud came in but earlier and without the sunshine. Alright, it was not like yesterday at all. It did not seem to stop a desperate several from coming through in the late morning and buying things for a day on the beach. It did make me think that there was life in the old dog yet, but it turned out to be nothing than a muscle spasm.

As is always the case at this time of year, I become unwound. Like a spring that has been kept charged all summer long that suddenly snaps I end up as a pathetic pile of spent energy. My eyes were trying very hard to close during the quiet of the post breakfast rush and it took some fairly regular business to snap me out of it. As with most things thrown at us, the human body can adapt to change quite quickly. I dare say I shall be fine by Christmas.

I rallied in the afternoon as we had more frequent customer visits and I drummed up sufficient enthusiasm to fill a few shelves and write a few lists. One of the lists was for our preserves and chutneys which had been whittled away almost to nothing. I know that I should have done it earlier as the turnaround time is not very quick but there were other things to do that distracted me. I am also aware that we are short of windbreaks, have run out of some spades, the sunglasses need topping up, there are gift cards in the drawer than need putting out, the postcard fudge boxes need ordering and the extended lead time products from the cash and carry should have been ordered on Friday. I should really do the newspaper vouchers as it has been more than six weeks since I did it last and I risk losing some of them if I leave it much later. Other than that, there was little to worry about unless you include having to clear out the back of the store room for the solar inverter installation, what we are going to do about the poly tunnel which the longer we leave it the worse it gets, clearing out the barn which is piled high and in a pickle and finishing off the building works which is waiting on the scaffolding coming down which we have been waiting a month for.

The Missus was not idle either. She had 55 thank you letters to write which she had largely done by hand, which is probably a nice touch for those who donated prizes for the RNLi grand raffle, especially as she has near calligraphic handwriting. People are still turning up to collect prizes, hampers and tickets and vouchers for one thing or another. A fellow turned up in a van wearing a Trinity House polo shirt yesterday. He told me he had come to collect some tickets or other. I told him that was a great

relief because I thought he might be delivering a lighthouse, and I really did not have the space for it. No, he did not find it especially amusing, either, but he was very pleased with the voucher for whatever it was.

The dive boat that was here yesterday was here again today. Having been asked by several other people and had the opportunity to discuss it, the notion that it was recreational was probably incorrect. It is far more likely to be surveying the international fibre cable that runs out where the boat was going up and down. I seem to recall a similar boat came last year for the same purpose and if I had a half decent reference system for The Diary, I would be able to put my finger on it straight away.

The boat and divers would have had an easy time of it these past two days. High pressure is in charge and the sea was as flat as a dish. There had been an easterly breeze today, around 30 knots that was introducing a bit of a chill but generally it was a warm day. The breeze, being in the east, was coming through the doorway of first electric sliding door in The Cove and saving me the electricity of using the smart fan that I have had on every day of the summer so far. It dropped off in the late afternoon but came back again an hour or so later. I am not sure where it went but perhaps it was having a breather.

The Missus also returned in the later afternoon. She had been over to see Mother who was back from her hols. She had spent the last couple of weeks in North Devon, which was not her fault, but she seemed well on it, I was told. I had given the Missus a list of things we needed from the Farm; we had run out of spades again and I had been embarrassed the day before by the gaps we had in our wetsuit display. She came back with both and a few other things besides, which I spent the majority of the rest of my time putting out on the shelves.

There was time to do all that in the afternoon as our busyness really has dropped off. There were fewer children about and many of those that had come in to buy sweets and snacks for journeys home. It means that the big delivery of little sweet packets that arrived at a minute to closing is likely to last a bit longer than the week and a half that the last one did. It also means that I will be busy in the morning putting them all out.

The street was largely deserted when I closed the shop. The weather that had brightened in the later afternoon was starting to deteriorate again. That easterly breeze seemed warm to me, but I was not out in it for very long. I missed the opportunity later as well when the Missus decided to take ABH down to the beach for a run after tea. I gave in to my post busyness collapse and fell asleep on the sofa.

August 30th – Friday

That is customer number three who had told me I have not aged, bless her. My story that I have a monk in Katmandu who does all my aging for me, for a fee, is gaining

traction. I had been dreaming of how much I could make through referrals until I remembered that he was not actually real.

Perhaps it is mornings such as the one we had today that keep me young and beautiful. Alright, I know no one mentioned beautiful specifically, but I can read between the lines or, in other words, make things up. It was a tad cooler down on the Harbour beach first thing than it had been the morning before. There were still clear skies that showed off a rather alluring crescent moon hanging almost directly overhead. One fishing boat had already launched and we occupied the space in the middle before the next two went out.

There was much to do in the shop before we opened, and I was still doing some of it after we opened. The milkman and the pastry man (sorry, MS) did not quite arrive together, but they overlapped making for a tricky juggling of priorities. At least I had mild cheddar today as opposed to anything else. I had placed a large order for greengrocery but even by the middle of the morning it had not arrived. Later, when there was a break in the traffic, I called the company who at first denied they had the order. After I told them the exact time I had placed it and how long it had taken, they suddenly found it but had no reason why it was not delivered. It is unlikely that we suffered great sales losses because of it and, frankly, given disposals and thin margins, we probably only break even on it anyway.

Today's weather was more than a little odd. It was both sunny and cloudy at the same time for a while and misty on occasion, too. It was disconcerting looking up at a cloudy sky while the sun lit up the street and the beach. There were plenty of people down there taking in the rays and quite a few dotted about the shallows, splashing about. I am sure the northwest breeze which did not seem insignificant would have taken the edge off the day.

The swell had diminished again and there was precious little for any surfer worth his salt. I looked again in the middle of the afternoon as the tide pushed in and the crowd had thinned considerably. I wondered what that was all about until I saw that it was lightly raining. Soon after that, the street emptied too, and we were left drifting again. The sun returned a little later, but the main bulk of our visitors did not, which was no surprise as many were heading home today.

Presumably not caring too much about the rain, a dive boat sat out in the bay for most of the day. They may well have been visiting Beaumaris as it is about the only feature worth exploring out there unless they like looking at fish. If they did they may well have been lucky as judging from the number of gulls gathered there, a big shoal of something was lurking below. The helmsman did not appear to be involved at all and sat at his wheel for long hours of the day. I do trust he had a good book with him - wreck of the Mary Deare, perhaps and hopefully not Titanic or Jaws.

We were reasonably steady throughout the day but not exactly pressed. I had establish early on that I had over-ordered cheese pasties (sorry, MS) but my fears

over a shortage of steak pasties again look likely to have been unnecessary. It is a turning point weekend and we have to be careful now about what we order. It is exceedingly hard making the transition from 'it will sell tomorrow if not today' to having the numbers of anything more or less right or face throwing them away.

There were still some goings on in the Harbour when we closed but everyone had disappeared by the time ABH and I got there late in the evening. We had the beach to ourselves until a border collie turned up and its owner gave hand signals and a few whistles to have it running about the whole of the beach. Not that it took any notice of her, but ABH shadowed him on every run, keeping pace. You could tell that it was taking a bit of effort because she gave up barking at it to concentrate. This went on for about ten minutes until and over-heated ABH took herself off for a cold water plunge and a bit of a swim around. I asked the owner of the collie if he could arrange to be there every evening to give ABH a good run. If I thought it might have slowed ABH down at all, I was gravely mistaken as she was just as energetic when she got home as she was before we left.

I am sure I will be just as energised in the morning after a good rest, ahem. It is into the unknown tomorrow.

August 29th – Thursday

I will have to improve my diction on the dairy's answering machine. I ordered six mild cheddar and ended up with six mozzarella. Mild cheddar – mozzarella; a mistake anyone could make.

There were clear skies when I headed to the beach with ABH just as it was getting light and the air was pleasantly cool and refreshing. The Northern Diver was close in and spooked the little girl in the gloom. I am beginning to think that it must be one of those spy cams. It only does some basic movement, sitting up in the water wagging its wings. It did not move at all when ABH was shouting at it and when we left, it was sitting on the shingle at the water's edge. What sort of sea bird does that. The only other possible explanation is that it left bird school before it was finished and does not know how to be a bird.

It was a tad worrying when the skies clouded over just before we opened. It had been looking very promising up until then. We had the normal breakfast crowd breeze through but as the day progressed, the sunshine returned, and we went from strength to strength as people came out to enjoy a particularly pleasant day. The beach was thronging, although we had a fair number leave when the high tide made it a bit squeezed at the top. It was still crowded even after a bit of weeding.

More than that, though, the swell had returned and by high water it was fair banging in. It was not the biggest swell as it was not even coming over the Harbour wall, but it was proper ground sea and giving the surfers a bit of a run for their money. It was

also noisy, I noted, when I stepped outside to refill the ball stand at one point in the afternoon.

I suppose I should have noticed the swell when we went to launch and recover the Lifeboat in the early afternoon. Originally, the Lifeboat was going around to Mounts Bay to 'swing the compass', a term used to describe checking the validity of its readings. For some reason, the Coxswain changed his mind and decided to launch later than planned and do the swinging in the bay here. They also planned to be back at two o'clock but one of the crew came to fetch me when the boat suddenly appeared on the moorings at half past one o'clock.

It was still high water when the boat returned, just a little ahead of its highest point. I was on the winch and the swell was not noticeable from where I was standing, and the Head Launcher of the day did not look too wet after he returned from setting up the 'fishing rod' arrangement off which the Boat Crew pick up the span. In fact, from where I was, I would have said that it was a textbook recovery up the short slip with plenty of us in attendance to make it happen. We are, after all, a very numerous, very excellent Shore Crew.

When I returned, I had a message from the boss man at the dairy telling me my 'mild cheddar' was crystal clear on their machine and that the delivery driver, who is standing in for our regular man, must have had a 'blonde moment' – not suggesting for one moment that fair haired people have a tendency to get things wrong, of course. Just the daft ones. I will put them out for sale, the mozzarella not the daft blondes, and see what happens. If they do not sell I will make a lot of lamb burgers as I like them with mozzarella in the middle.

The most momentous event of the day was notice that the National Grid has signed off our solar installation, the more powerful inverter and the switch that allows us to divert solar energy to the shop or the flat. I wrote back and thanked the team for the sheer energy they put into making it happen.

When I first asked for this, it seemed very logical and no great challenge. It is a switch, I kept repeating. Although it was not quite as technically simple as I imagined, it seemed that the greater stumbling block was some entrenched mindsets at National Grid. The team at Naked Solar worked long and hard for a year chipping away at the repeated setbacks. We are most pleased. We now just need to agree a date for the boys to come and install it.

I have suggested that the middle of September may be a good starting point as we would expect a certain drop in busyness by then. I had expected it to drop like a stone after the bank holiday like it has every year for the last twenty but, obtusely, it has the busiest week of the year with days registering the sort of business that I would have expected each week for the last six. It has been a long time coming and is most welcome. In fact, it will have made an important difference provided we can be smart with costs from now on.

A couple of people we met in July told us that September was looking good for weather. A few more have repeated it recently, too. Quite how anyone can have any confidence in weather forecast that far ahead when they cannot forecast the day ahead accurately, I fail to comprehend. It would be exceedingly good fortune if they were right.

Despite having had a launch during the day, we met again for Lifeboat training and announcements for our usual time in the evening. I had been alerted earlier that the top brass wanted the Missus over there when we started but I decided not to tell her as I thought she might do a runner or suddenly find that she needed to shampoo the goldfish. At seven o'clock, just as we started, I called her over, so she had no choice and the boys presented her with a big bouquet of flowers and a card signed by the crew in recognition of her sterling efforts in making Lifeboat Day probably the biggest collection yet. She was embarrassed, of course, but she likes a good flower.

I did not hang about long after that myself. We are still busy in the shop and even then it will take a week or two before I wind down as the majority of our visitors vacate. At the moment, I am hoping they carry on what they are doing because I will carry on as long as they do even if I have to strap myself to the counter like a seaman to a mast. Perhaps I should buy a mast. I will think about that.

August 28th – Wednesday

As not terribly pleasant mornings go, this was definitely one of them. Low cloud covered the bay to sea level and, after it stopped raining heavily, decided to continue being wet with heavy mizzle instead. It stopped being not terribly pleasant for me to take ABH to the Harbour beach in the relative dry and made me wonder why I chose a phrase that did not look right making a negative of. The mizzle continued until the middle of the morning when it just became slowly rising mist and awfully damp.

It was not the only bad news by the look of it either. The front page of almost every newspaper had the same awful news plastered across it. I mean, I was not a fan of Oasis the first time around.

We had a cracking weekend with business about where we would expect for the time of year to now having two dour days with business scraping the bottom of the barrel. It put me in mind of a joke I heard many years ago about two tinnies walking home from the OS in the days when tinnies could afford to buy a pint or two there. Ignoring the fact that they would have been in the F&L to be passing the graveyard at that hour, one said to the other, "let's take a short cut through the graveyard."

The other replied, "we might meet the devil in there. It's alright for you and your hunchback, but I got a club foot and can't run fast."

So, the hunchback says, “Gisson, that’s only a tale to frighten the young ones. You go on then. I’ll, go on my own.”

The two men parted company and hunchback proceeded through the graveyard. He had got to the middle when the devil popped out from behind a gravestone.

“Ere, where you going?” Asked the devil.

“I’m going ’ome, your worship,” said the hunchback, not quite knowing the correct etiquette for addressing the devil in a graveyard after midnight.

“Wass that on your shoulder, then,” noted the devil, rudely. He was, after all, the devil and not renown for his politeness or sensitivity.

“It’s my hump, your worship. I had it since I was born,” replied the hunchback.

“Well, it doesn’t look right on you. Ere, I’ll have it,” and, puff, the hump disappeared, and the hunchback was amazed – but also slightly concerned.

“That’s very comfortable, your worship,” he said, “but I suppose you now want me to sign away my soul to you when I shuffle off.”

“No, not at all,” smiled the devil, “it happens I am in a very good mood, and you can have that for free.”

The man formally known as hunchback hurried home. He could not wait to tell his chum. They met again the following evening and the man formally known as hunchback told his mate he would have to go through the graveyard on the way home to tell the devil about his club foot. The man with the club foot readily agreed and found himself walking through in the darkness as he left his pal by the gate. Sure enough, the devil popped up to confront the man.

“What you doing, coming through my graveyard at this hour?” Asked the Devil.

The man, almost delighted that his moment had come told the devil that he was on his way home and meant no offence. The devil looked him up and down and asked, “What’s wrong with your foot?” As we have already established, the devil is not shy about asking such indelicate questions.

The man, sensing the impending end to his lifelong impairment, almost gleefully showed off his leg. “It is my club foot, your worship,” he replied having remembered what the man formerly known as hunchback had told him about addressing the devil.

The devil looked at his foot, smiled and said, “That doesn’t look right on you. Ere, have a hump to go with it.”

The morning definitely identified with the man with the club foot but, toward the middle of the day, we lost our hump altogether. The sun broke through the cloud and before very long, there was no cloud above us at all and we basked in the warmth and started selling sun lotion again. The renewed sunshine brought forth customers in abundance, although not on the scale we had at the weekend, and it was most refreshing to have them.

Down on the beach, what there was of it now we are in neap tides and high water falls in the middle of the day, there was a fair crowd for most of the afternoon. At least half of that crowd was in the water enjoying some gentle waves now that the booming swell of last week has at last diminished. What there was not an abundance of was surfers, who had clearly retired with hurt feelings now that there no waves to play with.

Between the madly busy sessions that we had in the shop there were also small periods of quietness that I did not let go to waste. There are now baked beans on the shelf where previously there were not and the self raising flour and the pasta sauce that I managed to replace without dropping. Most important of all, I emptied my stock of surf jewellery onto the stand. The stock of surf jewellery was not small but the surf jewellery stand was very empty.

It was one of my big red flags because I can see it from the counter, and it had been looking like an elm in winter. It sat there irritating me for the last few days, but I have been unable to get out to it, even yesterday. I emptied nearly all of the stock from the store room which luckily was enough to give me a few days to get an order in. I had thought that I would need to do one immediately but there is sufficient stock on there now to give me some leeway. This was a matter of some relief because the last few items I had to put out between customer visits as it started to get busy again.

There was a cloudy moment late in the day which I thought possibly signalled the end of our busyness. While trade did drop off naturally toward closing time, the sun came back with a vengeance with its warmer hues for the closing of the day. It had been a cracking afternoon and just seemed to be getting better. I had high hopes for a good showing on the till at the end of the day as we had enjoyed some significant sales here and there. Sadly, the morning weather had put a big dent in proceedings.

I had pulled back our bread orders as we were getting overrun and even the breakfast run had not significantly changed it. Naturally, it was after bread ordering deadlines that all our customers decided that they needed bread from across the spectrum of our offering and cleared us out. Of course, had I pre-empted this with a bigger bread order, it would not have happened. Ah well, they will have to eat cake – although I think we might be a bit short of that, too.

It was not the only twist of fate of the evening. I took ABH down to the Harbour beach in the evening where a group of regular visitors had gathered for a family party. Another group lined the Harbour wall for the sunset that would have been magnificent, no doubt, had some thick cloud not gathered on the horizon for the entire duration of the sequence. Still, ABH was not disappointed as she found a dachshund willing to give her a bit of a chase around the beach. There clear are no small gods of small bleddy hounds to plague them.

August 27th – Tuesday

The morning was shaping up quite nicely with a bit of brightness and some early blue sky and although the cloud was apparently thickening all the while, I was perfectly happy in my ignorance until someone mentioned that the forecast was for rain this afternoon. At that point I forced myself to look at the online weather forecasts and discovered the completely opposing views from the Meteorological Office and the BBC.

This wound me up no end and I had only just arrived at a plateau of equilibrium after a particularly intense morning of shelf stacking and delivery management, the latter having once again conspired for two of the bigger ones to arrive together at opening time. The small gods of grumpy shopkeepers who have delivered havoc throughout a grim season are pulling out all the stops by giving with one hand and taking away with the other three. The forecasts alone will have scuppered the day let alone the weather itself turning.

We enjoyed a little busyness in the morning but nothing on yesterday's scale but, as noted, we were not expecting it. It allowed me time for breakfast, which I got nowhere near yesterday, and while I was eating that I was able to price the rest of the greengrocery delivery that had arrived in the morning's melee. I progressed onto unpacking the wet shoes that were the last part of the stock I brought down from The Farm yesterday. The Missus had offered to do this balls aching task for me because I had been so busy but unfortunately after the rain started, I had plenty of time to do it myself.

Yes, the rain arrived, so well done to the BBC for getting it right and yah boo sucks to the Meteorological Office who either did not get it right or could not be fagged to update their website, which to someone seeking accurate information amounts to the same thing. The rain started around the middle of the day and continued on and off until we closed and well into the evening.

It gave me plenty of time, after finishing the shoes, to move onto the wine that arrived in the middle of the afternoon. I had missed out a delivery at the end of last week as the red wine had hardly moved at all and the white was in plentiful supply. That was until someone bought out a whole case of one type of wine just before the weekend and a new arrival bought out one of the lines of white. For all the good it did, I had a very industrious afternoon.

I had already mentioned that the RNLI raffle had been a thorn in my side all summer – or maybe I had not as I now cannot find where I mentioned it, gosh, that is worrying. I had been tripping over the bleddy A frame that was more often than not in the store room and the back of the truck seemed to be constantly full of tables, banners and flags that stopped it being used to convey stock from The Farm. At last there was a benefit as all day we had happy winners coming into the shop to collect their prizes, some of whom bought things as well. The other benefit of course was selling near 500 tickets and making £2,400.

For a drab day after a weekend where our visitors had excelled themselves in their jollity and near wiped us out of beer, pop and pasties (sorry, MS), we were still quite busy today. There had been a bit of a surge in the better weather of the morning but most of the action happened after the rain started. Were that all wet days brought such rewards.

One such reward was being able to take ABH around in the evening in one of the cessations and coming back mildly damp. Another was finishing at six o'clock without having to stay behind to do anything I was not able to do during the open hours. I do not think that the novelty of that will last long until I realise how I miss the busyness of the season, but I will enjoy it while I can.

August 26th – Monday

Today we went back to sunshine again, after a shaky start. It was a day so full of stuff that it was a wonder that we managed to find our way through it to find the end.

The day started a little cloudy and misty with a breeze blowing in from somewhere. There was plenty of beach to run about on and the only boat to go out before light, had gone before we got there. He probably would not have gone if he could have seen the sea state. The next boat to go out waited until after high water when the swell started to diminish a bit.

It did not take long into the morning for the sun to break through and the stirrings of our new visitors trying out the new day became a little more obvious. Our morning deliveries had arrived all together, well, three of them did, which set the building block for a rather difficult day. Even at that time, the impending doom was not obvious. I set off to the gymnasium for a blistering half session, oblivious and leaving the green grocery undone behind me for which I had no time earlier.

I should have seen the light when I had a call from the Missus halfway through my half a row concerning the arrival of the lobsters. These had been hard won. Initially, it did not look likely that the fishing fleet would be going out, so I agreed to get some from our crabmeat supplier. They called this morning telling me that lobsters would only be available from tomorrow, so I had to look for plan B or cancel the whole order. As luck would have it, having already seen one of the fleet go out first thing, I saw one of our usual suppliers of such things drive by in his work van. I called him and he agreed to bring back some live ones at some point, which just so happened to be in the middle of my blistering session. I had to call back to agree the price before he went off and it rather ruined my continuity.

I came back earlier than planned and ran ABH around the block. I had in mind that we had a somewhat urgent requirement to order pasty bags (sorry, MS) as we were getting a little short. They were supposed to turn up in the cash and carry order but had not. By the time I returned from our short run around the block, I had also

remembered that we had run out of beach towels in the shop and a trip up to The Farm would be required.

With the pasty bags momentarily forgotten, I rushed around the shop that was getting busier by the minute, making a list that was far longer than I had expected with all manner of beach goods missing, like shoes and windbreaks. Because of the Missus's still dickie arm, we decided I would go and as I went to get the truck, I remembered again the pasty bags. I took note of what we wanted with the intention to call when I got to The Farm. Five seconds down the busy street, try to dodge absent minded visitors and as I lunged into the road without looking, the pasty bags were forgotten again.

The Missus has done a super job in the store at The Farm and everything is reasonably located in logical sections and easy to find. It still took a while to load the truck, especially as the truck was still full of uncollected raffle prizes from the previous evening. That bloody raffle has done our business no favour at all this year and has been in the way one way or another at every turn. Thank heavens it is a one off.

I had left my mobile telephone in the truck while I loaded and my pager in the shop so I was blissfully unaware that there had been a Lifeboat shout in my absence. It was probably a good thing, as I would have felt compelled to leave what I was doing and return when I would not have made the launch anyway. I had unloaded half the truck before the Missus had time to tell me as the shop was full and she was serving customers at the counter one after the other as they prevented me from getting the stock into the shop.

I had a chat with one of the very excellent Shore Crew who had also turned up late and the job was a tow of a casualty fishing boat back to Hayle. Our boat would be gone until the middle of the afternoon. Armed with such knowledge, I was able to return to unloading the truck and dumping the stock into the store room to process when I had time.

After putting away the truck, I went and changed out of my gymnasium gear and had a shower. With my mind briefly released from pressing matters it left room for a reminder that I had yet to place the order for pasty bags, which in turn reminded that I had not yet placed the order for tomorrow's pasties and given the deadline is one o'clock, we must be nearly upon it. A dash to the kitchen and the cooker clock – not to be confused with a cuckoo clock that has a cuckoo coming out of it, this one comes out of a cooker – confirmed that I had missed the deadline by one minute. When I had tried in the past, the company's answering service automatically cuts in on the hour. I decided to try anyway and – obviously being my luck day! – one of the call agents answered. We will have pasties tomorrow.

Dropping down to the shop again, it was every bit as busy as it had been as I tried to unload the truck, and it stayed that way well into the later afternoon. I took over from

the Missus who had valiantly clung to the bridgehead until I got back and took over repelling all boarders. How do you repel all boarders? Stop changing the bed linen. You can have that for free, dear reader as it was that sort of day.

With one hand busy working the till the other hand calculated the return time for the boat and to organise a Shore Crew to meet it. Given that it was unusual for us to drop vessels in St Ives – the tide was too low to get the boat into Hayle – it was a little more uncertain of the arrival time and I had two bites at it to get it right. Kindly, the available Shore Crew set up the slip without me which meant that I only had to turn up, fine tune the arrangements – only to justify my existence, but do not tell the others that – and carry out a textbook recovery up the long slipway, which I duly did.

Given how busy we were in the shop, standing at the tow of the slipway in bright sunshine and a light cooling breeze that only just took the edge off the heat of the day, it was exceedingly pleasant and peaceful. The Harbour beach was thronging with happy revellers and the water full of young children safely splashing about around a completely unconcerned Northern Diver.

I left the crew refuelling the boat and returned to the shop. We are after all, a very supportive, very excellent Shore Crew.

The busyness continued right through to the new, earlier end of the day. Closing the shop around a flow of customers seemed a little obtuse, but in truth, the earlier closing will soon become comfortable for them and of little impediment to most visitors. I had still not done the green grocery from the morning and only the most pressing items and those easiest to put out, were done from the beachwear delivery. I stayed behind after school to do all the grocery items and the normal orders. All the shoes still need to be done and the Missus said she would come down to help with that in the morning. So much for closing an hour earlier and having an evening to ourselves.

If today's Diary seems rushed, dear reader, it is because it was. Perhaps it conveys the utter mayhem of such a day when nothing got done because we were so busy. When fifty percent of being a grumpy shopkeeper is actually serving customers then devoting 100 percent of our time to it leaves many things behind. I still have not ordered the pasty bags but that was partly because that is one of the few companies that does not work on a bank holiday. We will hopefully resolve that tomorrow.

In the meanwhile, we will contemplate the three days this summer when business actually met expectations. Look what we could have won.

August 25th – Sunday

It is one thing having a gale of wind when the sun is shining brightly and quite another when the clouds are a miserable dour grey. It was probably par for the course for Lifeboat Day and at least the wind was in the southwest but for a half hour

show of brightness, it was a pretty grim day, especially if you are being dunked in a tank of cold water.

The boys were out early putting up the bunting. The Missus did a run down The Cove putting up flyers and popped into the OS to secure a table for later in the evening. A local radio station Coast FM arrived to set up its stall and this year it seemed to be refraining from broadcasting to the wider Cove through its loud speakers, thankfully. National Coastwatch Institute and the Lifeguards set up next them and the fire brigade arrived a little later and set up shop somewhere else.

After her early work of helping to set the day in motion, the Missus disappeared off somewhere. I heard that she was alternating between selling raffle tickets and helping out on the hog roast stand where they were selling their buns like, erm, hot cakes. I had surmised that the hog roast would save my bacon even if it did not save the pig's. For every hog roast sold it was very likely a mitigation on the sales of my pitiful supply of pasties (sorry, MS). By the end of the afternoon, I was still in pasty credit, and no one would have guessed how close we were to running out. It was, of course, all meticulously planned, honest guv, and there was never any danger at all of running out. I mean, what do you take me for, dear reader. Ahem.

One unforeseen pilchard in the apple soup was a cloud of mizzle that swept through The Cove at around half past one o'clock. It had the unfortunate effect of clearing the event area very rapidly and because for every action there is an equal and opposite reaction, the shop filled up with damp shoppers keen to rid themselves of a few pounds. Quite unusually, the day recovered again about an hour later and we all enjoyed another wave of busyness that went on into the later afternoon.

Also going on into the later afternoon was the radio station placed across the road. I had clearly tempted fate by announcing earlier that they were not broadcasting to The Cove. I endured the thumping bass of muffled music and interviews with various people here and there for some hours. To use a phrase coined by a very good friend some time ago, 'it was driving me deaf ear mad'.

The whole party was all wrapped up by four o'clock. It had been a blinding day for all even with the less than ideal weather. There had been two launches during the day, neither of which I had anything to do with, indeed, I was only vaguely aware of them happening as I was far too busy in the shop to pay much attention. One launch was at eleven o'clock and recovered up the short slip and the other later in the afternoon and for longer and that was recovered up the long slip. I was assured later that both had been textbook recoveries at the end of which the boat was washed down and made ready for its next job. We are, after all, a very consistent, very excellent Shore Crew.

There was more trouble with the bus disservice during the afternoon. Since it is a two hourly service, dropping one bus out makes the whole point of a bus service untenable, really. In my humble opinion it is an utter disgrace and would make me

think twice about planning any trip using one. I had already had one potential traveller come to ask regarding alternatives after they had waited for a non-existent bus in the early afternoon. Another lady who had found the following bus had also been cancelled called in to ask for cash back to pay for a taxi and she and her partner had given up on the service. Worse than no information at all, a bus driver headed in the other direction assured her that a bus was on the way, which it was not.

While some struggle to find their way in life, particularly if they are using our bus service, others breeze through without a care in the world. Such a couple, I and E – I think A, O and U were waiting for them - arrived at the last knockings, almost, to see what luxury they could indulge in from our humble supplies largely based on the healthy diet of the average working person. They selected two bottles of our excellent prosecco and a packet of plain crisps - the sheer decadence of it. Alarmed at such a glaring lack of diversity in their diet, I jokingly suggested that they have some strawberries with it. They would have done too had we not been cleared out. If that were not blatant enough hedonism for one day, they came back for another bottle of prosecco five minutes later.

Fortunately, we have the ordinary Joe as customers in the main. I am sure they are not all called Joe, really. They had a good time clearing us out of just about everything else on our shelves from groceries to gifts and I will have my work cut out in the morning replacing it all.

Our last late closing could not come soon enough for me or ABH who the Missus had left behind when she headed for the OS to conduct the calling of the grand raffle. The weekend had exceeded expectations and had been the busiest of bank holiday weekends that I could remember. It was probably due to me suggesting that bank holiday weekends are never much to write home about in The Cove.

ABH had endured a bit of a day of it for a young lively pup but had been exceedingly well behaved through most of it. I took her down to the empty Harbour beach after we closed and before my tea for a good run about, which she duly enjoyed. I will not find out how the evening went until tomorrow as I firmly intend to be fast asleep by the time the Missus comes back. I think even if I had not firmly intended it, sleep would be upon me anyway.

August 24th – Saturday

By quarter to eight o'clock this morning I had already filled the drinks fridge, cleared the bread order and shifted a ton of groceries into the store room. I then cleared the newspapers and filled the beer fridge all before I opened the first electric sliding door in The Cove. It would have been nice to think that I had done my bit by then but there was the day job after that, and it was busy, far busier than I imagined – or indeed planned for.

I had already taken ABH down to the Harbour beach, which is now available again after nearly a week of being push off by the tide. All those crashing waves and swirling waters have had their effect on the shape and condition of the beach. Much sand has been eroded from the top western corner where the rocks are once again exposed. Also on show is the repair at the bottom of the western slip and most telling of the power of the sea is the huge boulder that was left at the bottom has been turned 90 degrees. For some reason, as there was little in the way of weed left on the beach, the whole area was plagued with dive bombing flies. We came away pretty smartly after a bit of a run about.

There was no polite ramping up to the day of complete mayhem - it started that way from the outset with someone already asking for pasties (sorry, MS) almost the moment we were open. The lady was in a party heading off on the Coast Path and wanted something for the journey. I think I might have been inclined to ask in advance rather than make an assumption that we would have some ready at that hour.

Hopefully, the lady was the only disappointed customer of the day. I certainly do not recall letting down anyone else but, in truth, the day passed me by and much of it was a blur in my memory. Even halfway through the day, three of the key busyness indicators, the fridge magnets, surf jewellery and the small sweet bags, were all displaying bald spots and far more of those than I was happy with. It was no surprise then that a lady toward the end of the day asked when I might be topping up the bracelets because her daughter had a number to take home later in the week.

The other major source of concern were the pasties. I knew yesterday that we were looking extremely thin on the Cornish pasties front, and I had hoped for some respite today, which we certainly did not get. It was just as busy today as it was yesterday and it was very clear that I would have to bake the ones in the freezer and even then, we would be short. It should have been a warning when one of the call agents at our pasty supplier called back after I had placed the order for Friday to check that he had not made a mistake. I wish I had upped it instead of thinking I had enough. I have deployed our frozen stock for tomorrow that will only serve to delay my embarrassment.

The Missus had left early in the day to go around and collect the last few raffle prizes from kind donors. I had intended to plough into the cash and carry delivery and start chipping away at some of the quick wins that visibly reduces the large pile quickly. It gives the humble worker a psychological boost or would have done had I got very much further than a couple of boxes. One of those I had to abandon because people were waiting at the counter. I gave up after that as it was far too busy.

When she returned an hour or more later, she went upstairs to split her baps in readiness for tomorrow, but she promised that she would come down afterwards and give me a hand with the rest of the delivery. This she did and because she is very good at that sort of thing finished it in a couple of hours. She did leave the few things

that I could do from the counter but given the time, I will do those during the course of tomorrow – probably.

Early in the day, a young couple had asked about the likelihood of the beach being red flagged today. I had to tell them that I had not a clue. I had not particularly noticed because I was busy then too, but the beach had been red flagged all day yesterday as well as the day before. Much of the swell today had diminished but when I spoke with a Lifeguard this morning, when the tide was still in, he thought that they would red flag the beach again today, mainly because of the number of rips across the bay.

As the tide retreated, it looked a lot more user friendly and the Lifeguards opened the beach, or they had been overrun by a horde of fed up surfers. Whichever way it happened, the sea was full of happy revellers and there were enough waves to keep a number of surfers happy for a few hours.

It looked glorious too in the sunshine that seemed to have been with us all day. The edge was taken off by a stiff breeze blowing in from somewhere westerly and was bring a bit of a chill with it. There were certainly a few jackets being worn and hats, some against the sun and some against the chilli, it seemed.

The exodus of visitors seemed lost in the busyness of the day. I was certainly aware of it because we had said farewell to a few who were either regulars or had used the shop frequently over the last week. This included a Spanish family (probably) whose son I had confused with a girl early in the holiday – whoops – when they came in for a wetsuit. They had arrived by bus and were returning to the station the same way. They were lucky enough to be leaving early in the day because another family which also had to use the bus were let down when it was cancelled. They consequently missed their train service.

It has been a common occurrence over the last few weeks. I have heard reports of several bus services being cancelled with no reason forthcoming. When the best service we have is hourly, the effect is severe. One couple reported two sequential services cancelled that left them stranded and needing to call a taxi. I have to say that the bus service and its complicated timetable have been exceedingly shoddy this year. It is no wonder that people cling to their cars in rural environments because public transportation is just not a viable alternative.

We ended the day with our shelves fuller than when we started which belied the busyness of the day but gave me a freer ride for tomorrow. I shall be down early again to top up the drinks but in the knowledge that it will be our last day of extended opening, which comes as some relief. It is quite remarkable the difference that one hour makes. I shall have my evenings back again. Yee hah.

August 23rd – Friday

Friday morning deliveries have the potential to be a little fraught. All it needs is for two to turn up together and a customer come to the till at the same time and the whole dung cart comes before the donkey. This morning might have been even more complicated as the Missus' baps for the hog roast were delivered today alongside the normal delivery. Fortunately, we had the foresight to split the weekend pasties over two days to avoid overloading the van today, which meant a much reduced normal delivery today.

Also in our favour was the comfortable gap between each of the deliveries that permitted us to move gracefully from one to the other, including serving customers in between. You might have noticed, dear reader, the use of the word 'we' in the preceding sentences. Where normally I would have dealt with all the morning deliveries on my own, I rather insisted, since it was the Missus' order of baps that was the root cause of the large fly in the spokes, that she attend to give me a hand.

As the Missus had come down early, I took the opportunity of escaping to the gymnasium soon after we had settled the deliveries. Returning after a reduced blistering session, I took ABH down to the Harbour beach that had recently been vacated by the tide. There were a couple of neighbour's dogs there that she played with while I went and questioned an avid photographer taking pictures of our assumed Northern Diver which was riding the waves close in to shore. He told me that although a member of the Wildlife Trust, he was new to it and had not yet done his Wildlife Trust Recognising Divers Badge. However, he too thought it was a Northern Diver and very possibly a juvenile due to its size and colouring. I think we can now be assured that it is indeed a Northern Diver by weight of opinion at least.

I do not recall much of the day. It seemed to pass in a mixture of quiet and busy throughout. There was a tailing off in the middle of the afternoon and a return to busyness as we rolled in towards the end of the day, which was a combination of last minute shopping by leavers and explorative shopping by arrivers.

My main aim, other than serving customers and ensuring their delight at having spent more than they intended, was to clear the store room floor in readiness for the cash and carry delivery arriving early in the morning. That was all going splendidly, apart from the huge pile of baps, apple sauce and raffle ticket accoutrements that had been there since morning and, I was assured, were going upstairs dreckly and honest guv. Just when I thought that all was settled, the large bone china mug order arrived in seven large boxes.

Imagine my joyousness at watching the seven fragile boxes unceremoniously dumped by the ice cream freezer in the shop in the full knowledge that they would have to be moved to the store room. Not only that, moved to the store room and placed on the bone china mug shelf where the spaces left from sales of the stock had been used by various other items. All the mugs needed to be priced and once again they have gone up and the energy surcharge applied to each one added.

While domestic electricity supplies may be capped and have fallen considerably, commercial rates have remained high and mug making uses rather a lot of it.

It took some effort, especially as we seemed to get busier while I was doing it, but I managed to get as many mugs as I could out on display and the rest stuffed onto the shelf in the store room. The cardboard, which comes with staples that need to be removed with pliers, needed to be shipped outside for collection next week and after all that, the normal end of day clearing up and ordering done.

I only just remembered to do the newspapers just as I was finishing off and I put them out with the three bags of cardboard to be collected. Our newspaper man is an affable chap. He complains good naturedly about collecting the cardboard and I rag him rotten about it telling him how much he will get the next day when he has missed a day because he only had his small van that day. He likes to stop and have a geek at the sea when he arrives and this morning I joined him as we watched the heavy waves bury the Harbour wall. It really was quite a severe swell.

The swell stayed with us all day. I did not look but someone had said that the beach was red flagged again, which was not a surprise. However, I saw some surfers out there at the lower reaches of the tide and the waves did look quite handy, but still huge and certainly not for novices.

One customer in the morning came looking for fishing gear. We discussed some options, but I said that he obviously would not be fishing today and he asked why not, which raised at least one of my eyebrows. I suggested that if he tried he probably would not be on dry land for very long as the big waves might take umbrage at him standing so close. He said that he would go to Porthcurno where the sea would be calm, being on the opposite coast and he assured me that he would not be going anywhere close to the waves. I had to assume in which case he had a very long rod.

I was a little too busy in the evening to gaze out on the sea state. I could hear the boys across the road preparing the 'crew dunk tank' for Sunday's Lifeboat Day event which the Missus is heavily involved in. She is so involved that she thought it necessary to test the dunk tank and came back soaked. Someone took a moving picture of the happening, the naughty things. Sadly it is not mine to share and I have far too much respect for my soft parts to do so, even if I could.

August 22nd – Thursday

I slept in a tad late this morning, so a wind blown mizzle was just the ticket to wrest me from my sleepiness, like being slapped in the face with a wet haddock. ABH was not in the least impressed and had to be cajoled to the point where going forward was quicker than going back again.

The day started clearing around late morning at roughly the same time as we started seeing some visitors moving about. Breakfast goods buying had been particularly slow and there was no rush for newspapers. The beach was not attracting much attention and just to make it even less appealing, the Lifeguards red flagged it. They maintained the restriction even at low tide when the waves were so distant that a surfer would be too worn out after arriving to want to go surfing anyway.

As seems to be usual, we started getting busy in the early part of the afternoon and stayed that way until late in the afternoon, which was a comfort. I do not think that ordinarily we would have been that busy on quite an unremarkable day but since no one was on the beach, it was the penultimate or possibly last day for many, and there was nowhere else to go, we got lucky.

We sold going home presents but not especially so; people were happy to come and pick and choose from across our stock. I had taken the precaution of topping up the postcard fudge boxes yesterday and some of the other key going home presents. This morning, a large greengrocery order arrived as we had sold quite a bit. What was not coming, I realised, was the beer order that yesterday's shout had diverted me from. By the time I came back to it, the deadline had passed.

This order would have furnished me with Skinners' very popular beers in bottles and cans, some local cider and an energy drink that sells very quickly. I cast around our shelves and reckoned that we stood a fair chance with the bottles, but I had already been close to being out of the cans. I had also decided against a wine order as it had been slow going all this week and we had a good stock, based on current usage, of all the options.

Enter the Great British public with all its fickleness who proceeded to empty the beer and wine shelves, concentrating on the most at risk choices first. Nearly all our customers will purchase a few beers at a time but on this occasion we had one couple buy half a case of each of the beers I was short of and half a case of one type of wine along with several of the last remaining cans. Another customer bought an entire case of another sort of wine. It was as if they knew and were sent to test me. I have very limited choices to relieve the situation and we have an additional case of canned beer arriving tomorrow. I am more frequently asked these days for no or low alcohol beer and can now offer low or no beer at all.

There is always a lot of panic about the August bank holiday, and it can be infectious. We start getting messages from suppliers and would be suppliers telling us that there is 'still time' to place an order for the weekend – sadly not the supplier of beer, however. With all the hyperbole a grumpy shopkeeper might forget that it is only three days and, in our case, it is not especially busy – particularly if the weather is not with us. What is more, is that for most of the suppliers in Cornwall, bank holiday Monday is just another day and will be delivering anyway – including the beer supplier, thankfully.

We will hobble through, I am sure, although it will be disappointing if we run out of beer, it is not an economic disaster. Our beers are predominantly local ones and do not have the margin we might expect from the cheaper national brands. We will still have groceries and snacks of all sorts and hopefully some buckets and spades will sell, which is why I asked the Missus for a second time in a week, to go to The Farm and get some more.

We were well into dusk by the time I took ABH around the block for her last run. My beer woes were forgotten for the moment, and all was reasonably well with the world. The sea was still stretching its legs, thumping over the Harbour wall long after high water and swirling around the bottom of the slipway that we had been avoiding for most of the week as the big spring tides have their way. There is a line of weather fronts waiting in the west and a gale of wind was expected. It was just warming up as we went around having abated during the day. Hold onto your hats till morning, I reckon.

August 21st – Wednesday

It looked like a day that was unsure what it wanted to do and indeed that it is how it turned out. Cloudy to start, followed by a good deal of warm sunshine with the breeze that had abated from last night. As the afternoon wore on, the cloud returned, and the wind picked up a little. By that time the beach camps were established and they were not going anywhere.

My fate was rather different, and I was destined to go on a short journey across to the Lifeboat station in response to my pager going off. It was ten o'clock and the day had not really got going. I had just made a cup of tea but at least I had eaten some breakfast. It set me up nicely to prepare the boat for a fast launch from inside the house ably assisted by the off boat duty Coxswain.

A group of kayakers had found themselves in difficulty in the swell and the chop the other side of Longships and one had ended up in the drink. Some might say that it was ill-advised to go out at all, but the group were well equipped and had some experience on board. The boat made a speedy run out to the area and hooked the casualty onto the Lifeboat along with his kayak and made its way back to the bay.

We knew almost immediately that the shout was not going to be a long one. Unfortunately, I was still Johnny no mates on the slipway, and it requires at least two people to recover the boat. By and by I was joined by three of our latest recruits. What they lack in experience they make up for in enthusiasm, which is not always a good thing. Nevertheless, under some guidance, they set up the bits of the long slip that I had already done by myself, chiefly, taking the cable down while I manned the winch. By the time the boat hove into view, I was still the only qualified person on the slipway. I had considered letting two of our more experienced new recruits run with the operation down at the toe of the slipway while I operated the winch but in the end I asked the Coxswain to do the winch while I went down to the toe.

I do not recall what time the boat returned or when we finished up, but I can report that it was a textbook recovery up the long slip in reasonable conditions. The recruits, under a watchful eye, delivered a seamless service and we had the boat in the boathouse and the casualty decanted in no time at all. We are, after all, a very quick-learning, very excellent Shore Crew.

We had busied up considerably by the time I got back. I had abandoned the shop, but the Missus came down and reopened at some point after I left. Since she was in full flight when I came back, I took ABH around for a spin as I would have done had I gone to the gymnasium. The beach looked deserted, but after I slipped her off the lead I discovered another couple of dogs already down by the water line near low water. One of the dogs was happily exploring out of reach of its owner near the end of the Harbour wall but the other was more accessible and ABH decided to pester her. The dog was much more interested, sorry, only interested in her ball but it did not bother ABH who clearly knew that the dog running after its ball was really running so she could chase it. This continued for a while until the dog had enough of being pestered and let ABH know as much. We left shortly afterwards but at least ABH had a decent run about even if it was not reciprocally enjoyed.

Despite the retirement of the sun, we had a pretty decent day. It was still warm outside, I believe, although the Missus retired a little chilled after several hours sitting across the road, selling raffle tickets. The shop stayed busy throughout because it was not a full on beach day and many people preferred to wander about. It made it very difficult and slow to complete the cash and carry order and the Missus found herself keying it in the evening because I could not do it during the day.

We were selling a cross-section of goods from hooded sweatshirts and beach toys to going home gifts. I am particularly pleased that our grocery section and Cornish speciality foods are selling well but sometimes combinations are intriguing. When someone came to the counter with some of Mr Old's very good locally made sausages and gaffer tape, I made some facetious comment or other, as I occasionally do.

I am not often at the forefront of fashion and am frequently well behind the curve on trending goods, which often pass me by completely. Small children plaguing me for 'Prime' had me very confused until one enlightened parent told me it was a popular soft drink selling for fortunes in some places. We also missed out on Pokemon, and if it were not for some insistent salesman, sloths and llamas would have passed us by. Therefore, when the second person of the day arrived at the counter with sausages and gaffer tape I had to ask if I had missed some Jamie Oliver cooking suggestion that I should be aware of or a dangerous Internet challenge. Thankfully, it was just a random coincidence as I shuddered to think what could be done with the combination.

Again, we were busy through to the end of the day but, this time, no beyond it. I took ABH out a little earlier than was usual in the evening and while there was still plenty of light. There was also plenty of wind as we stood in the far corner of the Harbour car park watching the full tide wash the Harbour wall and crash about over the rocks below the sea wall. I explained earlier in the week that we were to expect some weather this end of the week and it looks like it may have commenced.

August 20th – Tuesday

Oh, what jollity we had this morning. I do declare that I have had a smile on my face all day because of it.

First, there was the weather. Let us get that out of the way first of all. You will know, dear reader, that I am no weather professional but that dark and menacing cloud in the west that met us first this morning did not look like the sunshine and brightness that the professional weather forecasters had led us to believe we might enjoy today. In fact, the rain that fell from it a little later rather confirmed my suspicions. There was, though, a happy ending to this tale. The sunshine followed the rain, and the gusting westerly wind was exactly the sort of thing favoured by windbreak vendors the world over.

Having been forced into a corner by the much maligned council and its failed recycling collection yesterday, I had taken executive action with our waste. The much maligned council had explicitly stated that it would not be able to respond very quickly to our missing collection report and strongly implied that we should set our expectations at the end of the week. So, it was a proper hoot to see a small recycling van turn up this morning and the driver look about for our piled-up bags of recycling.

I spoke to the driver and explained our predicament and that of everyone west of the bus turning point. He was not a happy person, not with me for getting shot of my waste but with his bosses and the regular recycling team for ignoring their duties. He was unimpressed that he had been sent to empty the bay with an egg cup. Given the enormity of the task before him, the three-quarters of The Cove that had been missed yesterday and the fact he had only a van of limited size, he elected only to collect from the few who had registered a missed collection. Given that one of those no longer required his services, he left having only collected from one household. What a stunning display of communication skills and efficiency.

The day turned rather glorious after that and by the mid-afternoon we were seeing a proper influx of visitors. The beach had filled up earlier with a strong line of little camps from the OS end right across the mouth of The Valley. The spring tides are revealing the shape of the lower reaches of the beach again and it has not changed much all summer. There is the long finger of sand that reaches out from the Beach car park area where most of the surf schools take the learners and the less experienced can surf. Out towards North Rocks is a sand bar that forms an island at low water. It looked like walking across to Gwenver was entirely possible, too.

The swell that I wondered about yesterday, showed its hand as the tide pushed in during the afternoon. Aided and abetted by the wind, it pushed in hard against the upper parts of the beach and tried its hand at thumping around the rocks at the bottom of Aire Point. It had only got to flushing over the Harbour wall, but it provided some sport for the youngsters who dived in with the waves as they came over. Looking back at the big beach at high water, the tide line was being absolutely pummelled by waves where they met the sharp incline in sand at the top of the beach.

Early in the day, when my expectations of busy day were limited, I started the list for our big cash and carry order. I abandoned it halfway through as I could not get down the aisles to see what we were missing. If only I had thought of doing it when I had nothing better to do yesterday – oh. Instead I managed to help carry in the minor 'farm shop' cash and carry delivery when the Missus turned up on her way to taking ABH out for a run at a timely moment. I also managed to get that out on the shelves and tucked away in the store room, which was helpful. The drinks that remain on the store room floor will go out tomorrow when they will have time to chill before customer start buying them.

We were busy through to the last hour when it all went quiet again. Then, just as I was about to close the first electric sliding door in The Cove, a lady ran in to do a spot of shopping. Thankfully, she was feeling a bit chilly and purchased a hooded sweatshirt and a number of other items to make the lateness worthwhile.

That westly wind had become a little chilly in the afternoon and might well have been responsible for several hooded sweatshirt sales. I was certainly wearing one when I took ABH down to the deserted Harbour beach late in the evening and while there was still some light to see by. While we were down there, and to ABH's delight, she was set upon – alright, she set upon them – two of the loveliest golden retrievers you would wish to meet. They were exceedingly gentle with her and obliged her by giving chase in a very non aggressive way and both came to see me for a smoothing. Unfortunately, they were distracted by another larger dog more their size and ABH was sidelined. She had enjoyed a good run, though, so she came away happy, I think.

For the first time in weeks, we closed the living room windows against the chill air coming in. We just hope this is a temporary arrangement while we try and squeeze the pips out of these last couple of weeks.

August 19th – Monday

Do I really have to start the day with a moan about the weather forecast. Once again, anyone looking it would have imagined Armageddon was imminent and it would be necessary to skulk away indoors. Or, worse still, go to St Ives so that they could come into the shop tomorrow and complain that it always rained in St Ives. Of

course, the weather was much softer than advertised and the rain, at least during the main part of the day, was light and sporadic. Those who had come out because they did not look at a forecast or just did not care, were not overly inconvenienced, although it was obviously not a beach day.

The other thing that rattled my cage today was the recycling collection. One recycling truck came through The Cove early doors and completely ignored the domestic bags left out. My guess is that this was the much maligned council's commercial waste collection that it woke up to after it had told all the holiday letters it could identify to go get a commercial waste collection rather than using the council collection. It decided to offer a commercial service of its own just after everyone had gone to the established ones. It does look like it picked up one or two customers, nonetheless.

We had to wait until I came back from the gymnasium and a blistering half session until the council recycling collection came along. Having gone to some trouble to collate and separate our recycling plastic, cardboard and glass – for which we still have no box – I was dismayed to see the recycling lorry turn around at the bus turning point and begger off up the hill. It can only have collected from half a dozen properties in The Cove.

Incensed, I turned to the much maligned council website and its missing collection service, which I duly used. A standard response message was sent to my inbox which explained that ordinarily, a missing collection report file before midday would result in a same day collection. However, in West Cornwall "it is taking us longer to return to collect waste we have missed" and they would be here on Sunday to do the job. Sunday: the day before they would be coming anyway to pick up my festering food waste that had sat there for two weeks annoying passers by and attracting flies and rats – all supposing they could be bothered to turn up to do it. We are instructed to leave the recycling out for collection all week in case they get here sooner. It is in the way, sitting on top of our commercial bin.

For all the bluster about the weather, we were relatively busy throughout the day. The only people on the beach were surf related, I suspect, as there were some decent waves at low water and as the tide pushed in. I have not heard, but with some low pressure up to the northwest, I imagine we will see some bigger seas over the next couple of days. The wind is set to move around a bit too and today had been in the south and increasing all the while.

Come about four o'clock, the mizzle closed in around us and effectively cancelled business for the day. Of course, the sensible thing to do was to peruse the shelves and do a bit of topping up, so I did not bother with that. It also seemed a good idea to start making the order for the big cash and carry delivery at the end of the week. No, could not be fagged with that, either. Instead, I imagined an innovative solution to our recycling problem and resolved it. We no longer have to wait a further week for the much maligned council to forget that they were supposed to come and collect it. And no, I will not be providing details.

I was not entirely idle. Oh, alright, I was as I do not think inflating five footballs counts as being very industrious. It is not my fault. Any grumpy shopkeeper will tell you that the absence of customers and the peace it brings is infectious. It would take a better man than I to rail against nature like that. I am sure that all the things I put off can wait until we are busy again when I will not have time to do them.

We have pretty much given up on this season now as there is no point in flogging a dead 'oss. All we can do now is control costs as much as possible and hope that winter is kind to us. Just for the sheer idiocy of it, I looked at the synoptic pressure chart for the next few days and it did not look terribly encouraging. However, the Meteorological Office do not let such things influence they hopeful little sunshines they have painted all over the rest of the week, so we will go with that instead. There is a bit of wind involved but when is there not. I will be on the blower tomorrow morning, sharpish, ordering in extra sun lotion and swimsuits.

August 18th – Sunday

We begin today with one less neighbour in The Cove after a tragic accident on the beach on Friday, I think it was. Rumour had circulated that it might be she, but it was confirmed to me today by her ex-husband. She was a lovely, quiet and unassuming lady and we used to have little chats when she came to the shop. She wore a hat that I told her made her look like Annie Hall, which she already knew, of course. Best we have a quote from Annie Hall, then – *“but it was great seeing Annie again. I... I realized what a terrific person she was, and... and how much fun it was just knowing her.”*

We still had cloud cover when I could eventually see the sky in the morning. It was disappointing, of course, but I can be optimistic when I want to be and there seemed to be some potential for a better weather day than yesterday, even if there was a chill in the air. That came from a northwesterly breeze that hung about all day. Judging from the number of people on the beach later, I would say that it did not matter too much.

The day started at a plod and went on that way until just into the afternoon. During the intense bottling up I had done during the morning, I had noticed that we were devoid of spades and very short on buckets. I asked the Missus, when I had extracted myself from the morning rush, if she could go up to The Farm and get some. She did not get downstairs until one o'clock by which time my list had extended somewhat to include bodyboards and various other beach type gear. Her arm was not good today, so I offered to go up while she manned the till, which she accepted.

I was gone less than half an hour I would suppose but by the time I came back, the shop was heaving. I could have guessed that it would be, given how busy the street had become as I drove along it and up the hill. We seem to be having trouble with

people thinking that parking all along the double yellow lines is acceptable again and no leaving any gaps for passing. I am very glad I do not have to be driving around at this time of year.

Unloading the truck when I came back was a lengthy process as I had to wait until people thronging the doorway and making a fuss of ABH had come and gone. I had chosen the busiest run of the day to go and collect the stock and it took a while to get the buckets and spades out on their shelves and hooks. I left all the other things until later on when it had calmed down quite a bit which, as it turned out, was close to five o'clock.

The weather deteriorated during the later part of the afternoon. We had some sunnier spells during the day and it was roasting up at The Farm while I was there but as the afternoon wore on the cloud cover became thicker and it got misty. Eventually, the street cleared again as it had last night. This is most unusual, as there are normally a few people milling about having finished their tea or, indeed, having been to the fish shop, sat outside on the benches eating it. There was no evening sunshine, but it was still warm and dry and perfectly pleasant for sitting about in. Most odd.

I closed the shop up without any complaints or last minute dash and proceeded with my ordering. We had taken quite a hit on groceries, which is pleasing as it means that many people are shopping with us rather than calling it in from the fleets of Tesmorburys trucks that flood the place every day. At least I remembered to do all the ordering today and avoided waking in the middle of the night to call in the milk order that I had forgotten yesterday.

Taking ABH around in the last of the light we might hardly another soul as we ran around the big block. I had only intended a short run out as my bed was calling but she was insistent. It is hard to believe we just have one busy week left. If it had not been for being inundated with visitors during the afternoon, I would say it feels like everyone has gone home already.

August 17th – Saturday

It was not quite the day of sunshine and white fluffy cloud that two forecasts had predicted not twenty four hours previously. Perhaps they were referring to another Cornwall. I know that there is one in Canada and one in Tasmania. Maybe they are having a sunny day instead of the total cloud cover we had here.

Having said that, it was not such a bad day. It was warm, at least, and bright all day. It was just such a disappointment having been led to believe – again – that we would have a sunny weekend in the penultimate weekend of the holidays. While I know that there is another two weekends of August month to come, we generally see a sharp downturn after the bank holiday weekend.

My prediction about running out of cheese pasties (sorry, MS) was far more accurate than the weather forecast and we duly sold the last one in the middle of the day. We also used up most of the Cornish pasties, which was no surprise having sold two days' worth yesterday. At least I have a freezer full of spares of those, which I took out early in the day so that they could thaw in the fridge.

The Cove was increasingly busy as the day worn on but the showing in the shop was not a patch on yesterday. I had some time to gaze at the beach on a couple of occasions, and that was not busy either. Lower in the tide there was hardly a wave to be seen. This changed later, but in the meanwhile the fishing fleet had a quiet time of it out in the bay, shadowed by private punts and kayaks. Later, the waves were breaking along the bottom of the cliffs opposite but absolutely pounding the sand along the beach.

The later afternoon was decided better than the other three quarters of the day both in terms of the weather and the amount of business going on. Even then I had time to top up the fridge magnets, feeling like I had done it not that long ago, and I also finished off the surf jewellery and the fishing lures. Finding that I still had more time between customers, I went down the grocery aisle and picked off priority items that were close to running out.

We are always keen to help our customers with questions they may have many of which we have answered multiple times before. It was refreshing therefore to be asked something well outside my comfort zone by a young foreign mother who wanted to know the difference between plain and self-raising flour. I had a whale of a time finding out that self-raising contains a raising agent and then discovering, if that was so, did a pizza base no longer require yeast and then what about pancakes? Happily, the Internet provided the required answers and the customer left satisfied.

It was refreshing, therefore, to be asked later if we had capers upon our shelves, which we do not. We were also unable to help when the same customer asked for anchovies. I assure them that the pickled wren's wings would be coming on Monday and hoped that it was not too much of an inconvenience to wait.

The last hour of our shop opening was a dreadful disappointment. The Cove became sullenly quiet after about six o'clock. There was hardly a soul on the beach and just a handful of surfers in the water. The street was deserted and there was not the slightest hint of a five minutes to closing rush.

August 16th – Friday

Another rebound day of glorious sunshine, no doubt to be followed by two days of mist and rain. I should not be so ungrateful as these are the only days that are paying their way at the moment, and we were suitably busy throughout, although not exceptionally so – except for a bit in the middle when no one could be bothered coming out.

The day very quickly developed into a helter skelter, barricaded behind the counter with no way out sort of day. I had no hope of getting out to service the aisles even when I knew that there were things running out. Although I had started early with a brim full of pasties (sorry, MS) in the warmer, these very quickly were consumed and I found myself unable to get to the oven to heat more. In the end I had to halt the queue and get some pasties going or no one would have had any.

That might have solved my problem later of selling too many – against the order I had placed – and I will have to carefully manage the remaining stock. We have plenty of traditional pasties to fall back on, but we sold an unexpectedly huge number of cheese pasties that we are woefully unprepared for. I had modified the number from the previous week because we had far too many.

The pasties and the milk were late in arriving and I was in dire straights trying to get the orders away and serve a growing number of customers at the same time. There were two grocery orders to boot and while I managed to get one sorted out, my bananas and apples got put in their proper place at around five o'clock in the afternoon.

Of all the people arriving, and it is a change-over day after all, we knew many of the faces coming to the counter. There was not a great deal of time for in-depth conversation and I hope that we can catch up with some of them in more detail later in the week. One lady in particular, noted that in the five or more years that her family had been coming to The Cove, I had not aged at all. In jest, I told her she should see the portrait in the attic but, in truth, it is clean and healthy living and maintaining a blameless existence. Not me, of course. I have an arrangement similar to those big companies that claim 'net zero' by paying someone else to plant trees while they pump carbon into the air with gay abandon. I have a monk in Kathmandu who helps little old ladies across the road and other good stuff while I drink, gamble and play footloose – and, it seems, maintain my boyish and stunning good looks.

None of that helped with replacing stock on the shelves, getting pasties in the warmer or serving the continuous line of customers circulating in front of the counter. It was the sort of day that grumpy shopkeepers dream of and are elevated to when they eventually hang up their brown housecoats in a permanent sort of way. What happened outside the first electric sliding door in The Cove eluded me, I am afraid to say, so if you are looking for detail on events on the beach or in the bay, dear reader, they will not be forthcoming from me.

I can tell you that at six o'clock or thereabouts, there was still a reasonable party collected on the big beach. The sea was dotted with surfers, but the waves were less pronounced than they were a couple of days ago but at least there were some. There had been a bit of a northwesterly breeze blowing through all day that was not all that noticeable until later in the day. There was enough of it to ripple the bay and toward evening it increased. It did not seem to bother the temperature any, although

the Missus said that it was chilly in the shadows when she took ABH down to the Harbour for a run.

I did not step out into the world until it was almost dark again, which is where I started out in the morning. I am beginning to understand how vampires must feel. I am having to delay taking ABH out in the morning which will soon mean modifying the early work schedule. That may well coincide with the end of hostilities as the holidays come to a close and I do not have to start so early.

When I closed the first electric sliding door in The Cove last thing, I did so on a scene of devastation that will need some effort restoring in the morning. Despite being run off my feet for most of the day, the till did not reflect any records today and the outcome was slightly disappointing should I be honest – which, of course, I always am. With the possible exception of Tibetan monks.

August 15th – Thursday

A few people have asked how I know when the Lifeboat is coming back and when to muster a crew to recover the boat at a given time, especially in the middle of the night. My predecessor stayed up all night but with the advances in technology, that has become unnecessary and also, I was not going to do it with a shop to open in the morning.

A tow without complications is fairly easy to calculate, using speed and distance, assuming some take up and drop off time and the return from Newlyn. Sometimes, hanging around is necessary, such as assisting the Cliff Team with an indeterminate finish time or, like last night, where the tow is complicated by sea state and tide times for recovery.

Last night, we knew how long it would take to tow the casualty vessel to Newlyn from Pendeen where it had run out of fuel due to a hole in its fuel tank. The complication was the expected sea state in The Cove at the time of return and it was decided to wait for the tide and the light, a decision that could not have been made earlier. This information was relayed to me at twenty minutes past three in the morning when the boat was almost at Newlyn. It came with an expected arrival time in The Cove of quarter past five which would mean muster at quarter to five o'clock. I could go back to bed for half an hour before getting up to call around the crew to wake them from their slumber, rather than send the message out immediately, because I am good like that.

We duly gathered at the appointed time to discover that the boat had only just left Newlyn and we would need to wait a bit. It is what cups of tea were invented for, so we had one until we tracked the boat coming around the corner. We had previously set up the long slip, so we deployed to our stations and watched the mast light traverse the bay. By the time the boat came onto the moorings, light was beginning to soften the darkness. I had left it to our training head launcher to go to the bottom

of the slipway and I could see them clearly in the growing light of dawn and the coverage from the slipway lights. We had a clear view of what was obviously a textbook recovery up the long slip approaching low water in reasonably benign conditions.

After such a long trip in uncomfortable seas, we spent some time washing down the boat and setting up for refuelling. The latter operation used to be almost interminable and one of us had to be left behind long after most of the others had gone home. The pump has been recently modified to run at a much faster pace making the process a little less of a chore. We are, after all, a very speedy, very excellent Shore Crew.

I returned home to start my usual morning routine about half an hour later than normal. This included, first and foremost, a run down to the beach with ABH. Light had broken fully by this time and the cloud cover we were under was abundantly clear. The mizzle, however, had cleared from earlier when we were on the slipway, which was a blessing. It was pleasantly warm, too, although not particularly alluring. The recent stirred up seas had presented a good deal of oar weed to the beach and it was littered all along the tide line which was halfway down the beach in this tide.

The day remained warm and dry, which was its saving grace. Otherwise, it was grey and more than occasionally misty and had little else to commend it. The sea state looked remarkably better than it did the day before, which was unexpected, with the better waves for surfing at the lower reaches of the tide. There was no particular beach party, which really was no surprise, but the street was much busier than I imagined on such a drab day.

We survived on going home presents and a fair amount of rock pooling gear being sold. I had reduced the number of pasties (sorry, MS) in anticipation, and we are in a better position with excess than we were this time last week. Mind, that worked out very well and we ended the weekend with very little waste. I am still amused by when we sell our pasties. As you might imagine, we sell a few in the middle of the day, traditionally dinner time, but many sell during the morning and again in the latter part of the afternoon. It also seems to be the thing to have after a hard session surfing for many older children and teenagers.

I realise that I am setting myself up for some future jolly japes here, but when ordering your pasties avoid asking what 'flavours' we do. They are not flavoured; they are the real thing. They are also not 'warm' but hot; I must sell them according to the food laws at a temperature above 63 degrees. I think we have successfully covered the addition of ketchup and brown sauce – it is illegal.

Purchasing a quantity of frozen gluten free pasties has been quite successful. We will not make our fortunes from it, but we are pleased that we can offer these on a reasonably reactive basis within an hour of a request for those health condition forbids eating the real thing. It used to be a day's notice. We still do not do vegetable

pasties, and these do require ordering the day before as we have done twice this week. The first occasion came with an additional request that still sends a chill down my spine and has me waking, white and sweating in the middle of the night in sheer terror and shame. My hands are now quivering as I write, someone asked for an apple and custard pasty.

Oddly, our normal crystal clear telephone quality broke up when I placed the request, it went dark outside and the birds stopped singing. I could just make out the voice at the other end telling me that, on this occasion, they were not available. I felt much relief.

I must confess that I struggled a bit through the final hours of the day and was quite relieved to close the shop. We had enjoyed a bit of a rush towards the end of the day and I had not managed to clear the fishing tackle, the jewellery or the wine order that arrive late in the afternoon. I am not so sure that was because I did not have the time but rather the inclination to do it.

In a turn around of ancient roles, the Missus went off to the OS after tea. She has been putting much effort into selling the RNLi raffle tickets in recent weeks. Yesterday, when it was sunny and busier in the street she sat across the road for hours with her A board covered in bunting and stickers. Tonight, she repaired to the OS to capture the crowd who had turned up for the quiz. I will find out how she did tomorrow as I had fully intended to be asleep when she returned. It had been a long day.

August 14th – Wednesday

It was quite encouraging to see that we had some clear skies when I first got up. It meant that it was lighter, too, but had still not encouraged ABH out of bed, primarily because, I think, because she had got me up at two hours earlier for the call of nature. Everything seemed well with the world at half past five o'clock if you ignored the force six breeze blowing through the flat from the windows that we leave ajar overnight to dispel the previous day's build-up of heat.

It was not until I got outside that I noted that the wind was coming from the northeast, which would explain why it felt quite so chilly in flat first thing. I had closed the windows, which I would regret later because I forgot to open them again and it became quite stuffy and hot in there during the day.

By the time I came down to open the shop, the breeze had almost completely dropped off. As is usual for such things, a good day following a poor day prompts an equal and opposite reaction from our visitors that probably complies with some law of the universe or other. Briefly put, we were flooded with customers from early on with only the merest hint of a cessation in hostilities in the middle of the afternoon.

The beach was packed for most of the day. It looked even busier because the tide, that jumped last night, was pressing hard near the top of the beach for most of the middle of the day and well into the afternoon. The pressure was only really off as we approached four o'clock and the receding waves gave the green light to an army of junior boarders and swimmers of all types to commandeer the shallow sections of the shallows from The Valley to the OS slipway.

As indicated by the rescheduling of Lifeboat training, the sea state had deteriorated overnight and as the tide pushed in, some grown-up size waves started to inhabit the bay. These waves persisted with lesser intensity as the tide diminished and gave over to some decent surfing waves and some very active play in the shallower regions.

During the relatively quieter times of the day, I managed to get some of the fishing gear delivery out on the shelves. I had dumped it out of its box so that I could get as much cardboard and rubbish out of the store room as possible for collection today. It was in the way after that, and it was preferable to put it out than find somewhere else for it. While I was doing that, the surf jewellery order arrived which encouraged me to drop the tackle for the more important stock. I did not even manage to finish that before it started getting busy again but there is enough of both out to be useful.

I ceded all effort on Lifeboat training to my comrades on the very excellent Shore Crew for the training launch that was scheduled for half past six o'clock. It drew quite a crowd along the railing opposite and gave me the opportunity to pull in some of the outside display. I was quite grateful because up until that point it looked like I could not fit it in between customers.

I did not see the boat launch because a van stopped to look at it at the moment the horn sounded to release the slip hook, blocking my view. There were no such problems when the boat returned later while I had having some tea. It had been scheduled for low water to avoid most of the big swell earlier in the tide and my stand-in on the tow did an excellent job in tricky conditions as the boat did not make it into the keelway. It was clearly a textbook recovery on our part, up the long slipway for a washdown and putting away for the next launch.

Clearly, the small gods of grumpy shopkeepers were not going to let me get away with evading my duties on the Lifeboat and our pagers went off just fifteen minutes before the end of today's Diary. A small fishing boat, en route from Swansea to Penzance had sprung a leak in its fuel tank and had consequently stopped going from Swansea to Penzance as it reached the waters off Pendeen. Strictly a St Ives shout, we were called for the lack of mooring at St Ives and, I would imagine, better facilities to pump out the spillage and fix the problem at Newlyn.

Having launched the boat into the inky black night, we retired to our beds for the expected five hour duration of the tow. We are, after all, a very fleeting, very excellent Shore Crew.

August 13th – Tuesday

We had a rather pretty sunrise over Sunny Corner Lane and Escalls this morning. It was also warm and pleasant when I took ABH out at five o'clock and again, down to the Harbour beach at seven o'clock. I had heard that it was supposed to be raining from early on today but when we went out there was no sign of it.

We had to wait until the pasties (sorry, MS) were being delivered at eight o'clock and the delivery driver announcing that the rain had started, a little too gleefully for my liking. I got him back by telling him that we had placed an order for 250 baps for the following Friday for Lifeboat Day's hog roast. I had placed the order yesterday along with our regular order. We ended up having baps delivered instead of our normal granary rolls. I think that the call handlers are feeling the pressure along with everyone else. Thankfully, we only had the normal number, not 250.

As expected, the rain killed business off for the duration of its tenure, which was basic all day, it and its aftermath. The skies brightened for a short while at around one o'clock and we had a sudden flurry of customer visits. I really think they must be hiding around corners waiting to come out the second the weather looks kind. The uplift lasted half an hour before the brightness evaporated into gloom again and we were busy no more.

I used the time purposefully, too. What a good grumpy shopkeeper I am. The sunglasses that I had hoped to get to yesterday, or was it the day before, are now fully stocked. I got to the fridge magnets yesterday, or was it the day before, as well. They are both things in my eyeline, so at least they will not be annoying me by looking empty for a day or two and the small sweets I did this morning. That only leaves the postcards and now that I have mentioned them, they have immediately started to irritate me.

You can tell that business is drier when we have time to restock the shelves and have something to sell to people who are not there. It is a paradox because when we are busy, we have no time to restock the shelves and therefore have nothing to sell to the people who are there. I managed to stop philosophising long enough to put the postcards out. Among them I found a couple of packs of our picture of the three amigos. One of our very excellent Shore Crew took a photograph of the three bruiser dogs of The Cove, Tilly, from next door, Tyson, head Launcher's dog and Lifeboat security and Bo, the bleddy hound from soon after we got her. They had not been on display for some time and after I put a pack out, I realised why.

The gloom that followed the brightness that followed the rain had not done us many favours. People had been momentarily lured in by the brightness but had soon discovered it was short-lived. As if such poor performance was not enough, a thick mist rolled in just to add to the misery. It lifted eventually but by that time most of the

day had been not exactly conducive to beach holiday enjoyment and we suffered accordingly.

When I could see the beach, it appeared that the only people down there were surfers or players of the water generally. As is the way with poor weather, there are usually some waves to play with as there were today. The numbers, however were pitiful and reminiscent of the sort of activity we see on good days in the shoulder months. If we were to look for something kind to say about the day, we might comment that the wind had gone around to the west somewhere and was not so keenly felt in The Cove.

Late in the day, the fishing tackle order arrive which, had I been in the mood to do so, I might have put out on the shelf. Instead, I satisfied myself by updating the stock list and prices so that it might be more easily complete tomorrow when I shall find some other priority has got in the way of doing it.

On the bright side, all our building work has stopped until the scaffolding is removed, which means we have stopped leaching money when we are not earning it, which is a good thing. The roof is complete and there is just some cladding to finish, the launders on the eastern side and a coat of paint on the newly rendered bits of walls. The latter will mean that we will have to paint the rest of the wall or just wait until the new paint looks as old as the old paint – which is a course of inaction that I favour. Then it is just the cameras, which will spoil the clean lines at the front of the building and a VHF aerial to stop the Missis moaning about poor reception of Lifeboat communications when the boat is out. It will not stop her moaning about it, or indeed resolve the problem, but at least I can point to the efforts that I went to in order to try and resolve it.

By the end of the day, I was just about done. Slow days are longer and more tiring than the busy frantic ones. We, once again, hope for better tomorrow but given that the Thursday night Lifeboat launch has been brought forward because of expected poor sea conditions, hope has been given a kick to the goolies.

August 12th – Monday

I am very pleased to report that after a very disappointing start, the day turned into something quite glorious.

Talking of ugly ducklings turning into swans, a concerned lady dropped into the shop halfway through the day to tell us about the 'cormorant' in the Harbour. She asked if there were any RSPCA people about here as the bird was obviously terribly ill and was not feeding. Having thought so myself just a few days ago, I explained that it was a diver of some sort, probably a Northern Diver, and we had discovered that it was perfectly hale and had been hunting and feeding successfully.

I really must work on my believability, and I think that my honest shopkeeper face needs some practise because I was told that it definitely was not feeding. The lady said she had watched it – for an unspecified length of time – and it had not fed once. Luckily for me, the Missus was with me at the time and assured the lady that we had seen photographic evidence of the bird feeding. Although this did not elicit the sort of reaction that might have been expected on a fully accepted resolution of a query, the lady did retire – quite possibly to ask someone who would give her the answer that she required rather than the factual one.

Our business day had, quite understandably, started out quite slowly. It is possible that others were somewhat more optimistic about an improvement in the weather than I was, especially when the rain stopped and the cloud cleared a little. It prompted a rapid increase in customer activity, and we were very soon dancing to the merry jingle of the till ringing out. It heartened me no end, dear reader.

From that moment, the day improved by and by and we were seeing a regular flow of customers through the shop. While we were still relatively quiet, I was keen to get away to the gymnasium having been only once last week. The Missus duly came down to the shop top relieve me and I headed down leaving her to the increasing crowds of shoppers. I was less than ten minutes into my session and before a hint of any blistering, I took a call from the physiotherapist attending to the Missus. He asked if he could bring their appointment forward to the late morning and less than an hour hence from that moment.

I returned to the shop almost immediately as I would need to be about my ablutions before facing my public, even without any blistering. ABH also would not understand me returning from the gymnasium and not taking her around the block, so I did that also before heading up the stairs. I will try again on Wednesday, but it seems fate is not on my side as far as gymnasiuming goes.

The Missus came back to the shop a little while later and set about the store room to do what she does best. When I looked again a few hours later, it was almost clear, and the shelves were bursting. I will never find anything again, but at least it is off the floor. What I also did not witness, because I would have stopped her from doing it, was to move the prodigious quantity of water from the middle of the floor to the back of the store room. The woman obviously has a death-wish concerning her arm as I could have moved the cases later.

I did do a fair amount of shifting later anyway. Our postcard fudge box order arrived and needed to be put away. I have refined the ordering for this such that we are not overwhelmed with stock in one go and over just above the minimum carriage paid order level. Today, this paid dividends because as I was salting away the different sized boxes, the small sweet bag order arrived. Even though we endeavour to maintain only a small amount of over-stock for these too, it is still a large quantity of small bags to deal with and takes a lot of time to put out on the hooks while dodging small children taking them off the hooks you have just filled.

The unpacking took me through to near closing time. We had been deluged with evening shoppers a little earlier and I had some relatively quiet time to indulge in the sweet bag putting out. The tides are significantly different this week and high water is not pushing beach dwellers off in the late afternoon. I presume as a consequence of this our shopping profile has changed a bit. Instead of the late afternoon rush we had a proper five minutes to closing rush that took me off-guard and while I was attempting to do the daily ordering and newspapers. We closed late.

The pleasantness of the day extended into the evening and probably gave over to a much watched sunset. The late closing evening mean that most times I do not get to run ABH around after tea as the Missus has done it before tea. Tonight, we finished tea particularly late, and the Missus decided to shear ABH. She was still finishing off by the time I needed to retire, so I left her to it.

It is probably not before time as I understand that the rest of the country is basking in very warm temperatures. While we are fare behind that here, it is still warm enough, thank you, and her fur coat was getting particularly thick. Not that she showed any concern, but I am sure she will be more comfortable after the initial shock. I will find out in the morning.

August 11th – Sunday

I watched the fishing fleet head out and disperse into a fairly calm bay at around half past five o'clock this morning. It was the last I saw of the bay for a while. By the time I headed down to the Harbour with ABH a little later, we were shrouded in mist again but at least it was just cooling and damp and not raining wet.

We met up with a regular visitor down there, just about to head out in his kayak. While chatting, I noticed the Northern Diver back in the Harbour again bobbing about. It turns out that our friend also thought that it was not well, but he had been in close proximity to it while snorkelling on a precious occasion. It was diving down and herding small fish, probably sardines, so that it could pick them off. Our man told me that it was looking a little odd in that it had winter plumage or, he thought, it might be a different species of diver. Later, in the shop, he showed me the underwater footage he took of the bird looking like a dart, circling a ball of fish, which was most impressive.

The sun tried hard to break through and for a while there was a tug of war between the blue skies in the west and the mist in the east hugging the cliffs. It was touch and go for a while but eventually the sun and blue skies won the day and by late morning, we were on the way to a half decent day. It would have been a wholly decent day but for a robust wind that picked up from the east, or just south of it, that had us selling windbreaks for much of the middle of the day.

I had a look later and it appeared that the wind was being dragged in from the near continent which would explain its balminess. It was like having our very own Sirocco and made us all feel very Mediterranean not to mention a blessed relief when on occasion it wafted through the first electric sliding door in The Cove.

We were busy, of course. It is the phenomenon of a sunny day after a poor day or string of them. Everyone behaves as if it is the last sunny day ever, tearing through the shop for snacks and drinks, buckets and spades and, of course today, windbreaks. I had noticed that the custom windbreak stand was a good deal lighter over the last few days and had it in mind that it needed to be topped up. I had not expected to need to do it quite so urgently.

I had already decided that I would not let the Missus go and get them. They are heavy in numbers and cannot be reasonably manhandled with one hand. When she came downstairs to shift some of the delivery, I left for The Farm.

Leaving The Cove in August month always feels a little illicit, especially on a sunny day when the shop is busy, the street thronging with people and road chaos. The main road was busy when I got to it, so it was a pleasure to turn off down the lane to The Farm. The hedgerows are all various shades of green now, with hardly any colour to them at all. They are also growing back quickly and so to is the grass leading up to the barn that it seems only a few weeks ago I had asked our friend to trim. In an ordinary year, the Missus would have been up there most days and the grass would be neatly trimmed across the whole field. We have some major works ahead of us for the winter, the most difficult and costly being repair of the polytunnel, which at present I would prefer not to think about too deeply.

I collected the windbreaks and a few other things that I could think of, off the cuff. Of course, when I got back, I thought of a few more. I parked outside the shop to unload and when I had finished, the Missus decided that she would finish off preparing the remainder of the wetsuits. She is really quite determined to do some heavy duties each day and not given her arm a rest, although I concede that the wetsuits needed doing and would have played on her mind had they been left. Instead, they played on her shoulder.

We got very busy after I got back and I had to juggle printing off the wetsuit labels for the Missus, serving customers and making sure we had a steady supply of pasties (sorry, MS). We had finished the day yesterday – and, indeed, started it today – with me thinking that I had again over-ordered, as the fridge was looking a mite full. In own defence, and justifiably so, it was a very difficult order for the weekend because we had so many left over from the previous day. We had a very busy day on the pasties today, which is unusual for a beach day, and by close of play we had very few left.

There was enough cloud in the west by five o'clock to make our day look a little dull after the bright sunshine we had enjoyed throughout. I quite neatly shut the day

down and allowed an orderly closing of the shop after and extended five minutes to closing rush. The day had not allowed me time to do my jewellery order and I only just managed a beer order before the deadline for delivery tomorrow. The store room us still packed, although there is a geet pile of water in the middle. I had ordered a lot because I could not risk running out and leaving the Missus to collect more.

It was something of a relief to close the first electric sliding door in The Cove at seven o'clock and retire. There was, of course, an exuberant ABH to keep occupied when I went upstairs, but she was sparko on the sofa until after tea. She spent an extended time on her seat in the shop today and all that meeting and greeting customers must have worn her out. We will have to try it for longer tomorrow.

August 10th – Saturday

Today's Diary is dedicated to those many people who told me what a wonderfully warm and sunny weekend that I had in prospect, and I could stop going on about the customer unfriendly weather and not be a miserable tuss for a change.

I thought that something might be slightly amiss when ABH and I went down to the Harbour beach first thing. Were hot sunny weekends generally announced by full cloud cover and spots of rain, I wondered, but at that stage I could still see Gwenver, so there was some potential for improvement. By mid morning it was clear that the forecasters were again lying through their teeth and their acolytes had been sorely misled. The wetting had turned to fog of various thicknesses and drizzle when it decided that being dry was just too yesterday. I would love to tell you how the beach looked today and what waves were available for our surfers but for most of the day I could not see it.

The most excitement that I had all day was the arrival of the big cash and carry delivery, the biggest of the year. If we had forgotten something in this order or ordered too little of something, it would forever – for the holidays at least - be not present or in short supply. There were four cages to our normal two or two and a half and they were all brim full. An early casualty was an own label large bottle of lemonade. Every expense must have been spared in the manufacture of the bottle as the knock it received was minor. Certainly, they did not skimp on the amount of CO2 in it because the bottle ejected its contents in an impressive jet about a yard long.

On the credit side, I managed to put all the lasagne sauces on the shelf without breaking any of them. Since I am writing this while there is still plenty of potential for things to be dropped, I do hope that I am not holding myself hostage to fortune.

We were busier than I imagined we might be for such a poor weather day, but I still had plenty of time to work my way through the delivery one package at a time. At the end of the day, there was about half left over that I will tackle in the same way

tomorrow. The driver told me that there was just under one ton of stock, which is a reasonable workout at half past seven o'clock in the morning.

The expected issue that we will have is that we built a margin of overstock into the order based on what we ran out of over the last two weeks. We will have to find space for it in the store room, which may be a longer term arrangement than we planned because we know that the things that sold quickly over the last fortnight will be completely different from the things that will sell over the next.

Although the Missus stated her intention to plough through the rest of the order during the afternoon, I diverted her to The Farm for more stock. She had been working on labelling and hanging – that is a word now – the wetsuits but had taken all the completed ones up to The Farm with the excess of the beachware order we had last week. We also needed wetshoes in abundance and a few other items for the busy weekend I had imagined we might have.

By the time she had returned, and we had managed to put everything out, it was too late for her to start working on the delivery. Her arm is still not better and will not be the more wetsuits and wetshoes she retrieves from The Farm, the teas she cooks and the other necessary chores she undertakes to keep the whole operation going. Much as we try for her to avoid strenuous activity, it is the middle of our crazy season, and it just does not work with one of us crook. It brings home quite vividly the fragility of our business model and is the only weakness we have no contingency for. She could always man up, of course.

Just before I get beaten with the blunt end of a frying pan in comic book style, I said that in jest about a small child who was crying about something or other – after he had gone, witnessed by the next customer. Immediately afterwards I nearly caught my finger in the till and customer and I both laughed our socks off at the immediacy of 'karma's' revenge.

I cannot say that the latter part of the afternoon was unpleasant, despite the fog. I had stepped out a few times because even in the airflow from my smart fan, it still felt humid and uncomfortable in the shop. There was a pleasant breeze blowing in from somewhere all day and it gave some relief every now and then. Just after six o'clock when I stood outside again, the breeze had gone completely. I was most disappointed.

Even a robust five minutes to closing rush and some significant single sales, the day failed to bring any cheer to a grumpy shopkeeper's visage. I even stayed open late for a couple who had come late and not been inclined to hurry when the fridge and display lights went out. I had nothing on particularly, so it was not a problem of any sort.

The Missus had gone to collect some vouchers from a mobile food stall up in the village and my tea along with it. Someone these additional food offerings have

evaded mention in The Diary until now, probably because I did not think that they were too permanent and certainly in the case of the one the Missus went to, I had not heard of it.

There are now at least three, the Pizza van that sits in the Beach car park each evening, Naughty Boys, the one I had not heard of, does various burgers from a van in the village and other that pops up at the back of the Community Centre from time to time. Although that last one might be one of the others moving about. They provide a welcome alternative to long queues at the chippy and the somewhat off-putting booking procedure at the OS.

Since the Missus had not returned by the time I had finished in the shop, I took ABH around the block. It was busy enough with people milling about but I know that many of these had only just arrived and there was a certain amount of leg stretching going on and pleasure at just being here. We shall see if that survives a further day of poor weather, although I have been assured by several people that tomorrow will be the sunny day that everyone was talking of about today. Yes, well ...

August 9th – Friday

It was not entirely plain what weather was on offer today. The clouds always look a little more menacing in that time between dawn and the sun breaking cover over the cliffs at Escalls. I had hope as the clouds were cumulus rather than cloud cover and it could hardly have been worse than yesterday. I could see Gwenver for a start.

I should not have been so sceptical because it turned out to be a fine, proper beach day. The empty sandy acres of yesterday were once again populated with beach tent, windbreaks and sensitive sacrificial skin being burnt to a crisp under the harsh ultraviolet rays of the sun. I have noticed that this year for the first time we have sold more Sun Protection Factor (SPF) 50 sun lotion than the SPF 30. It is difficult to determine for sure that is a change of heart because last year we did not have the SPF in a spray bottle, which seems the preferred option. I suspect that it is because the SPF 30 has hardly moved since I topped up the shelf a few weeks ago.

There were still some waves for the surfers to play with. The sea state last night near high water was certainly rough. At low water today, the waves looked very surfable in varying degrees of difficulty right across the shore front. There must have been some good paddling and general water malarky too because the shallows in the swimming zone were packed all day. There had been a good amount of sand dumped at the top of the Harbour beach, so I am guessing that there were some changes down on the big beach, too. There was a sizeable pool to the west of the reef that sits at the bottom of the OS slip. I image that the water there was comfortably warm after a few hours in the sun.

Naturally, we enjoyed a busy day in fits and starts – mainly fits – with only a few quiet moments to regain my composure, what little there is still left to me. I quite

rightly anticipated such busyness and did some major shifting about of things in the store room before we opened so that the floor was mostly clear for the delivery tomorrow. The fact that by closing time it was littered with boxes again is neither here nor there. I had plenty of time in the morning. After such a dour day yesterday, there was little in the way of topping up of drinks to be done as no one had wanted any.

Unlike the last few days, I had very little to distract me from solely serving customers, so I made some of my own. The lures that the man at the fishing tackle company recommended to me last year have been selling exceedingly well. So much so that the display was looking a little sparse when I passed by a day or two ago. Since it was just lures we needed, I had a bit of trouble making up a minimum carriage paid order and it is that which took the time. When I had started the process I thought that it would take a few minutes, easily done between customers.

It scuppered my plan to do a surf jewellery order, which in truth I should have done first. I had a message from the company saying that they had just received a delivery of stock and since I struggled to find the bracelets I wanted last order, I wanted to get in quickly. I shall have to hope I get a little time to do it tomorrow or I will lose the advantage.

As usual on a beach day, we had seen a drop in customer numbers during the early part of the afternoon. It was not quiet by any means as it was a busy day throughout and the flow of customers was fairly constant. We were overrun at some points in the later afternoon with last minute going home present buying and the desperation to spend the last of the holiday money the children had been given. For the girls and some of the boys, this translated into buying surf jewellery, hence my desire to get some more in.

After we closed, I had to take some boxes to the truck to store out of the way of tomorrow's big grocery delivery. The tide was pushing in which made it look busier but even so, the Harbour beach was alive with frolicking children and encamped adults enjoying the last of the day.

One thing this summer has promoted is to enjoy the sunny days while you can. You never know when the next one will be.

August 8th – Thursday

ABH was not overly keen about getting out of bed when I roused myself early in the morning. When she eventually got up, she was even less keen to head outside for the first walk of the day and I could hardly blame her; it was raining. I assumed that it was laid on by the builder to test the effectiveness of the new roof. I do not know about the roof, although we did not have any raining dripping on us in bed, but the launders above the entrance steps certainly work.

After all the joshing about the flags at the front I discovered this morning that one of the flag holders is the wrong size. There were originally four across the front, but we only used the two outer ones. Three were attached to the old cladding and got thrown away before I had a chance to save them. I had a bit of a job sourcing another with the right size diameter hole but found one eventually on a market place website from somewhere unpronounceable. I would say that China does not need to be militarily aggressive to beat the West, it just needs to stop sending us things.

The rain left us a little way into the shop opening this morning, but the low cloud and occasional mizzle stayed with us for most of the rest of the day. It was not cold by any means, but the weather was sufficient to effectively kill off trade for the day. If it were not for going home presents we could have closed up and no one would have noticed. Unsurprisingly, the beach was deserted and there was only a poor showing of the die hards milling about on the street and there were not many of them, either. As rubbish days go, this one was pants.

The lack of impetus would normally have me collapsing in a soggy heap of idleness, even with so much else to do to keep the various spinning plates of shopkeeping from crashing to the ground. Somehow, today I managed to kick myself hard enough in the behind to move a few items onto shelves and put hangers onto the shorts that we needed out. I even managed to get all the new, older child shorts out, the ones that had arrived yesterday, labelled and on hangers. One of my least favourite jobs. Gosh, I am good.

Those jobs took me through to near the end of the shop day and had saved me from a mountain of tedium. This was good because even sitting down and gazing aimlessly out of the window would have been wasted as for much of the day there was not much to see. When the mist lifted a little there were waves through some of the lower reaches of the tide for the surfers but as the tide pushed in, they disappeared again.

The pasty order (sorry, MS) for the weekend was monumentally difficult to compute. We had an abundance of pasties from the day before, which I had every expectation would sell through when I ordered another day's worth. The order for the weekend then needed to compensate for the pasties we were likely to still have left and, assuming pasty sales today would be negligible, I shortened the weekend order considerably. It will be immense fun, I am sure, finding out just how close to reality my carefully considered and calculated order, formulated with the help of a crystal ball, a fag packet and the stub of a blunt pencil, will be.

The Missus concluded putting in the big cash and carry order for me. It is probably the biggest of the year and will need a clear store room floor to put it on. If you could see the store room floor currently, you would know just how amusing that prospect is. I will need to spend the day finding space for things knowing that there is no space to find. I will have to pile it high and sell it as soon as possible before it all topples over.

In stark contrast to the previous evening, the street and the Harbour car park were largely deserted when I took ABH out for her last spin. For the past couple of days there has been what looked like a juvenile Northern Diver in the Harbour. It did not look very animated, and I guessed it was either lost or not long for this world – or possibly both. It was not there when we passed by the swirling waters at high tide tonight.

We did not get wet as we walked about but there was moisture in the air, and it was reasonably but not uncomfortably cool. ABH's ears were still soaking wet when we got back but they do spend most of their time dragging on the ground and through the grass as she sniffs her way around the block. How she can do that and still spot a bird or a cat on a wall will remain a mystery, but it keeps me on my toes even if I am sleep walking by that time in the evening.

Things can only get better, surely.

August 7th – Wednesday

If we thought that we were a mite pressed yesterday, today was much more intense and if I had chosen a day to give up drinking, biting my toenails or licking behind my ears, this would definitely not have been it.

The grey day that we had been handed was not exactly the sort of day to drag people here to the beach, but it was dry and warm. The beach was far less populated than we had seen it over the last few sunnier days. It is usual that our visitors choose such days to visit other places such as St Ives, but today it seems that many were happy to come here and promenade.

It was very difficult to tell just how busy we were because we were distracted by several deliveries, one of them unexpected. It certainly felt busy and with half a dozen competing priorities – after taking the money – it was hard to know which fire to put out first. We had scallops delivered, much later than I anticipated, which someone was waiting for. Therefore, when he turned up for the second time asking for them, I felt duty bound to drop all else to weigh some out for him.

At some point during the morning, or possibly the early afternoon, the beachware order I had placed on Sunday or possibly Monday, arrived in all its seventeen boxes. This immediately clogged the area around the ice cream freezer and some of it had to be accommodated outside. At the time it arrived, the Missus was keen to go shopping because we were running out of essentials. This scuppered her immediate plans and sent her up to The Farm to get rid of the boxes we did not need. This in turn shifted my priority from doing whatever it was I was doing at the time to sorting out which boxes would stay behind while serving customers with my left foot and right elbow.

It was while we were doing this that the drinks arrived. I had been unable once again to complete the bottling up process in the morning and the drinks cabinet was looking exceedingly light on the most popular bottles. I have explained before that the local cash and carry delivering drinks has a refrigerated van, which is very handy. Having despatched the Missus – in the nicest possibly way – to The Farm, I looked for a break in the traffic to whizz down to the end of the shop with the trolley full of the required bottles. I managed to get the Coca Cola, the bottles of water and a case of fizzy pop cans out separately without being diverted, which was close to miraculous.

This still left the remaining boxes of beachware to deal with. Customers were by then coming through the shop almost constantly and breaking away to try and disassemble the boxes was next to impossible. Since I had already achieved that once today with the drinks, it was looking unlikely that I could do it again. The boxes were still staring at me at gone four o'clock. With absolutely no prospect of sorting them out before closing time, I had to pile them into an already stacked out store room until the morning when they would all need to come back out again so that I could do the botting up again.

The most pressing priority still remained and that was to do the main cash and carry order. I had not even started it before late afternoon and since we were running out of a lot of things and any reorder would have to last two weeks, it required a bit of thought. By half past four o'clock, thinking was a little beyond me and I was operating on muscle memory and routine. I crunched through it anyway in the hope that I would get most of it right and finished making the list just short of closing time.

With the roof works drawing to a close over the last week or so, I have been ragging the boys about the launders over the steps because we get deluged when it rains and also that other top priority, the flag holders for the front of the shop. Today, after topping out the last ridge tile, they surprised me by putting up the launders then surprised me some more by asking for the flag holders. One went up without issue but the plastic on the other had turned brittle over the years and the screw holes had broken. It would be difficult to replace because it came with the original flags from Rodda's Dairy and was a non-standard size. Not wishing to submit to defeat, our builder modified it a little and fixed it to the new cladding.

I am toying with the idea of not putting the flags out now for a few days for a jolly jest but I fear they might have a better sense of humour than me and find them turned upside down one morning.

August 6th – Tuesday

From a bit of a shaky start, we ended up with a proper rip gribbler of a day. By the middle of the afternoon, there was hardly a cloud in the sky – those that were there hung around the edges of our bit – and the breeze from the southwest was only moderate. After the thunderstorms last night, the air was fresher, too. With the tide

pushing in, there were some reasonable waves close in to the beach and an army of surfers and bathers using every facet of the water.

The beach appeared to me more crowded than ever today. The little city of campers stretched down from the dunes well into the tide's way and all the way along past the entrance to The Valley. As customers, they gave us no peace until into the early part of the afternoon and even then, we only noticed a minor downturn in trade as people settled into their beach afternoon.

It was a particularly busy day. This is clearly just not enough for a grumpy shopkeeper and the Missus, so we found some additional duties to perform as well. The Missus continued with the emptying of the truck, including pricing the various items as they emerged. After she had finished that, she migrated onto labelling and putting onto hangers the wetsuit stock that we had purchased earlier in the year. Obviously, it was far too quiet to do it then and having one of our busiest days to do it in was far more convenient.

Of course, to stick the labels on, the labels needed to be prepared and printed first. That was my job. There were a lot of them, which I fitted in between serving customers, putting out the remaining stock from the truck and refilling grocery shelves here and there. We ramped this up a notch in the later afternoon when the 'farm shop' cash and carry stock arrived. This was not something that could be put off until tomorrow as I wanted to get rid of the large amount of cardboard that the process would generate. There were also gaps on our grocery shelves that some of these products would fill.

Much of what is wanted out and available were the various drinks that came with the delivery. I had no hope of getting down to the end of the shop and even less hope in spending twenty minutes putting the drinks into the fridge. This will have to wait until tomorrow.

We are still not out of the woods as far as the soft drinks go. We might have had the delivery that I thought would be a day late but it was short and I only noticed this when I went to refill the Coca Cola bottles with the second case, except the second case was not there. There were other deficiencies, too, which I listed. I wrote to the company, acknowledging that they had computer problems but asking what I should do about the missing items. I did not get a reply, so I ordered again at the end of the day and hoped for the best.

That reminded me that I had a response from the much maligned council about our missing recycling box for glass. I had placed a request for one on 12th July and by last week had not received it. I sent a second request asking for information about the first and had a response yesterday. I was told that the box was delivered on 25th July, which it patently was not or if it was, it was not to here. The agent responding was not expecting a conversation about it, clearly, because I was simply told to order another.

If ever there was an organisation in need of change management, the much maligned council is it. To drive down costs and save money, everyone from the top boss to the lowliest clerk need to have a cost saving mindset where, 'just order another one' is not the correct answer to 'I did not get the bin I ordered'. They will continue to whinge about not having money and while continuing not doing anything about it.

The street has normally emptied by the time it gets around to our closing time. This evening, however, there were hordes still milling about, sitting eating their take aways and generally enjoying the view off the railings. That view was a made a bit more interesting by the sea state that had got a bit rowdy in the later stages of the tide. It has been up and down in the last few days and tonight it was clearly up. The waves at low water had looked a bit useful to more experienced surfers and, when I ran ABH out after we closed, were big enough to floss over the near end of the Harbour wall.

A few dark clouds had gathered by the time we ran around the block. The tide was swirling about around the bottom of the slipway when we went past, so we carried on through to the car park with one of our regular visitor friends. The car park was still rammed and busy with people even at that time of the evening, although the unhurried flow seemed to be towards the exit. It was a relief to saunter back along the peace of Coastguard Row and to watch the melee from above.

I spent the rest of the evening playing tug and play-fighting with ABH. She had spent the entire day tied up on her seat or in the back of the truck or upstairs alone with few walks out while the two of us were busy. For all that she did very well, so giving up my hour evening rest before bed while the Missus attended her Lifeboat meeting assuaged my guilt somewhat. Perhaps we ought to engage the services of a dog walker on occasion, although I do not think that the Missus will approve – of ABH for that matter.

August 5th – Monday

I had ABH waking me up at around twenty past four o'clock this morning. She must have known that my Lifeboat pager was about to go off. Some clever, that dog.

The boat was launched to a dismasted yacht some 12 nautical miles south of Penzance. Strictly, this was Penlee's patch but since they collected a boat off Wolf Rock last week, I expect that the Coastguard thought it only fair. It was very plainly a tow that would take a few hours, so we closed up the Lifeboat station and turned out the lights. I would have gone back to bed had it not already turned my normal getting up time when I came back.

There was absolutely no doubt that it would be a tow, although we have had lengthier ones, and the other dead certainty was that it would drive a horse and

carriage through my plans to have a blistering session at the gymnasium. I was ruminating on this while at the computer in the morning when I heard over the radio that our boat had suffered a blown turbo hose. Had they been unable to fix it, then the boat would have limped home to be recovered and fixed. I might still have made it to the gymnasium.

Fortunately, for the Lifeboat at least, the mechanics on board managed to put in a temporary fix and proceed to the casualty. They were halfway through the tow when the Coastguard advised that they were sending Penlee anyway to take on the tow, 'just in case'. There was probably a very good reason why Penlee were not tasked to it in the first place, but they finished it while our boat went ahead to Newlyn to assess the repair. It also gave pause to wait until the tide had reached a suitable condition for a recovery in The Cove.

All that waiting and pausing gave me time to clear the morning deliveries, some of which were substantial. We must have taken a bit of a battering at the weekend, even though it did not feel like it at the time. Clearing the deliveries was not too much of a problem as our customers decided to have a lie in this morning and it was very quiet. It was quiet all the way to half past nine o'clock when I had called muster at the Lifeboat station to set up for the return of the boat that had left Newlyn fifteen minutes earlier.

The advance party – very keen, they were – had already set up the slipway, so I arrived with nothing to do but wait for the boat to arrive. As we waited more help turned up until there were enough to make me supernumerary, so I left the team to it and wandered back to the shop. I have my sources and I heard later that it was quite clearly a textbook recovery up the long slip. The boat was washed down and refuelled ready for its next excursion, just as soon as the turbo hose is replaced. We are after all a very resilient, very excellent Shore Crew.

The Missus bought breakfast baps from next door for the returning crew out of the crew fund that you, dear reader, and our other customers donate to through our counter collection. The breakfast baps and your donations are very much appreciated, thank you.

We were starting to see a bit more customer action by the time I returned to the shop. We were hardly being overrun and the Missus, who had come down to cover me on Lifeboat duties, went and brought the truck around to the front of the shop. All the stock she had brought down yesterday was waiting to be unpacked and priced. The Missus took to this straight away while I served customers and prepared the order for the things we had identified as being required. This is a bit more involved than just picking off a list as price changes need to be looked at and whether any increases make sense on our shelves.

With the numbers of customers increasing all the time, both the Missus and I were labouring a bit to keep the work going. It is at times such as these that the arrival of

two deliveries that required additional effort is really most unhelpful. One of these was the drinks that I panicked about as the ordering application I use told me that it would not be delivered until tomorrow. The driver told me that they had a problem with the system, which was giving out spurious delivery dates and not producing invoices. I could cope with the latter, but the wrong date really had us dancing.

In breaks between customers, I managed to rectify the gaping holes in the drinks fridge. The drinks arrive in a refrigerated van, so there was no issue with stocking our fridge straight away. It was a great weight off my mind as not having cold drinks on hot days must be one of the greatest shopkeeper sins.

Talking of hot days, this one was particularly warm and humid. It was helped along by almost total cloud cover all day and when the sun did break through for a moment or two, it was even hotter. Even at half past four o'clock when I went to open the Lifeboat station, a t-shirt was all that was required. Any movement at all felt like passing through glue; the humidity today was fierce. Land's End had it recorded at 100 percent, which I thought meant it was raining, and Gwennap Head, windiest place in the universe but not today, recorded 96 percent. I found it most uncomfortable in the shop and turned up the fan to compensate. Stepping outside was a blessed relief, although I did not get to do it very often.

As a shopkeeper, even a grumpy one, it probably helps to have an honest face. I must have missed out in this regard because the lady who came in and asked if we stocked nappies clearly did not believe me.

Nappy lady.: "Do you have any nappies?"

Grumpy shopkeeper.: "No. They are too bulky and the range too wide for a small shop to keep them. The nearest place is probably St Just. I think the Co-Op have them."

Happy lady.: "I thought there was a SPAR shop somewhere."

Grumpy shopkeeper.: "There is, but, being quite small, they do not stock nappies either."

Nappy lady.: [In a voice that said, 'Are you completely mad, shopkeeper. This is a SPAR we are talking about. If I was asking for pressed larks' tongue, I would understand such an omission in a rural store but a thing as simple as nappies, of course they will have them.']. "The SPAR doesn't have nappies?"

Grumpy shopkeeper.: "How silly of me. Best you go up there straight away before they sell out. Top of the hill turn right. You can't miss it. Big nappy advertisement in neon outside, I expect."

I had not expected rain as I do not often look at the forecast, mainly because if I did look at the forecast, I still probably would not expect rain. As the afternoon wore on, the cloud in our overcast sky became a little darker. I looked at the rain radar at that point and sure enough a long weather front of rain was inching closer to us from the west. It took its time in arriving and eventually we started to get wet just shortly before we closed for the evening, which was a good result.

At times the rain was torrential but was not too bad at the time I took ABH out for her last evening run. I required a rain jacket, but it appears that we got away lightly. Later on, the rain came down in buckets and just before bed, thunder and lightning struck up. ABH noticed it but did not seem too bothered, so she does not appear to be of a nervous disposition. The heavy rain was timely as the boys laid the last roof tile today and it seems the roof has just been christened. They have not finished the ridge yet but by tomorrow, we could be looking at the death knell of our scaffolding. Whoopie.

August 4th - Sunday

At first, I thought that we would have a reverse of yesterday. Blue skies dominated when I stepped out with ABH first thing, but some dark cloud moved in by the time I came down to open the shop. Apparently, it was there to tease because it cleared away halfway into the morning, and we had another decent day but for a strengthening wind that had backed to the southwest or south depending on which weather station you looked at.

As is generally the case with holiday Sunday mornings, we were busy with morning goods heading out of the door. Fortunately, I had anticipated such a thing and had called in extra bread, milk, bacon and the like. Unfortunately, I had not anticipated quite a large number of breakfast shoppers and was therefore short of bread eventually in the day. I do like to end the day with some on the shelf just in case the next morning deliveries are delayed. We shall have to hope that they are not too badly delayed tomorrow because there is no white bread in the place.

We are lucky in having our local artisan baker. Not only does he do excellent bread, he also delivers it early doors, provided that I have remembered to order it. After missing some days just before the school holidays started, I have set an alarm which has been effective and on one or two occasions entirely necessary. We have a couple of customer orders to add to our own, which is a service that I had hoped would be better used. It seems people are happy to select from the small range we offer and take the risk that it may be gone when they want it.

The same was almost true of our pasties today (sorry, MS). The cheese pasty offering looked a bit light this morning, but in normal circumstances it would have been plenty. Naturally, today we had every cheese pasty eater in the country arrive at our door. Thankfully, they did not all want a cheese pasty but most of them did. We were exceedingly lucky that we strung out our meagre supply until just after three o'clock and after that we did not disappoint too many people. It did make me rethink my order for tomorrow as one of the families has a regular order.

We must have been busy throughout the day because I did not get much time to gawk out of the window at the beach to see what was going on. The few brief times that I did, it looked pretty busy and much like the previous days that I had seen it. All

the waves were concentrated into the lower parts of the tide and by the time it was high, there was nothing much there for anyone, including any beach. Again, we had the benefit of the retreating masses and after that, the evening slowed down in the shop.

The Missus, having spent the last two days on invoice duty – which is a huge help now that she can do it – switched her attention to the shop stock. As well as being cleaned out of groceries, we had also seen many gifts and clothes going out of the door. It was time to see what we could replace them with from the stock up at The Farm and also compile a list of the stock that was not at The Farm that we needed to order in. The Missus is particularly good at organising such things and returned at the brink of evening with a truck full. We were both of the opinion that unloading would wait until tomorrow. First, it would clog up the store room for morning deliveries and secondly, we were both too spent to want to do it. Never do today what you can put off until tomorrow.

Talking of deliveries, I discovered last thing that our local cash and carry food service company is not delivering tomorrow. I had already forgotten to place the order for a Saturday delivery, so we had run out of Coca Cola bottles, that caused a bit of a stir. We were pretty close to running out of small bottles of water as well. Imagine my dismay, therefore, that when I placed the order for Monday delivery must be so busy they have had to spread deliveries over two days and that we were back of the queue. I did try and order water and cola from our other food service deliveries but will have to wait until tomorrow to see if they can help.

At some point during the afternoon, the cloud came back. With the sun gone, the wind had its way, chilling the bay to the point that I was getting comments about how suddenly chilly it was. I was blissfully unaware of it in the warmth of the shop and even had my fan blowing on me. I think I would have benefitted from a bit of chill wind blowing through the shop. At least it resulted in the sale of two hooded sweatshirts, so every cloud and all that.

Toward the end of the afternoon, I had found myself flagging a bit. A blistering session at the gymnasium is required, I think, to inject some life back into the system. Collapsing on the sofa would do in the meanwhile until a small errant hound decides to get me off it.

August 3rd – Saturday

It was still cloudy when I set out with ABH first thing. Mind, it was not that easy to tell because it was still a bit gloomy at quarter past five o'clock. Christmas will be here before we know it.

I was all set for another less than perfect sunny day but was pleasantly surprised when, a little later in the morning, the clouds cleared away. It turned out to be a day just as pretty as the days of the week previous to it but with the edge taken off the

temperature a bit. It certainly did not deter any of those enjoying their last day from doing so on the beach and they were joined by the new arrivals and by and by it was every bit as busy as the hotter days we have had.

Much of the busyness might have had something to do with the promised arrival of waves. You may recall, dear reader, that this very journal, ragged though it is, promised waves for today, through clever interpretation of the runes carved on the Meteorological Office website. What I had neglected to divine was the northwesterly onshore breeze that was not overly helpful to the surfing community. Thankfully, the breeze was a mere draft but all the same, an offshore wind would have been better.

We were busy through most of the day but not pressed. Slowly, through the afternoon, we saw some familiar faces arriving along with many new ones and day trippers from all over. It was a reminder that I needed to make sure our shelves were stocked as we never get a second chance to make a first impression, although they seem to come back again after being served by me, so perhaps that is not true.

Never minding that, I did try at least to get down the grocery aisle to fill a few gaps. It is more important now because I know that we will run out of certain lines before we get our next cash and carry delivery, having been declined one this week. As long as I can fill the gaps where we do have stock, it will not look quite so bad. I will address the volumes I order next week – and find we have far too much for the next fortnight.

There were sufficient gaps between some customer sessions that allowed me to do quite a bit, racing up and down the aisle, topping up this and that. It was on one of this journeys that I noticed that the sample squid ink gin miniature that I had unboxed to demonstrate its alluring qualities, was missing. Very often we find that items are routinely moved about the shop. We have found sweet bags next to the mood rings and Hairy Harrys among the clotted cream shortbread. I had a very good scout around, but it was not to be found. I can only conclude that some despicable cad has lifted it. I am distraught.

I did what I could with the stocking up then turned my attention to the ‘farm shop’ type order that I would normally do tomorrow. I thought that we would probably be busier tomorrow and that I could get this order out of the way. When I was done with that I had a little moment to look down on the bay at high water. The surf and the surfers had all gone but there was a fellow down there on a powered monofoil board. My word, he was cutting a lick at some speed across the bay. Most impressive of all was that he could power himself out of the water from the sunk position like some human polaris missile.

We had a good run of business through to the end of the day. In fact, it had been surprisingly good all day, but I still do not think that we will get through all the pasties (sorry, MS) that I ordered. I will settle for it being a good day and it was exceedingly pleasant to put my feet up at the end of it.

It only remains, because the Diary is always a day behind, to wish the Aged Parent (Maternal) a very Happy Birthday.

Something by Jenny Joseph

*When I am an old woman I shall wear purple
With a red hat which doesn't go, and doesn't suit me.
And I shall spend my pension on brandy and summer gloves
And satin sandals, and say we've no money for butter.
I shall sit down on the pavement when I'm tired
And gobble up samples in shops and press alarm bells
And run my stick along the public railings
And make up for the sobriety of my youth.
I shall go out in my slippers in the rain
And pick flowers in other people's gardens
And learn to spit.*

*You can wear terrible shirts and grow more fat
And eat three pounds of sausages at a go
Or only bread and pickle for a week
And hoard pens and pencils and beer mats and things in boxes.*

*But now we must have clothes that keep us dry
And pay our rent and not swear in the street
And set a good example for the children.
We must have friends to dinner and read the papers.*

*But maybe I ought to practise a little now?
So people who know me are not too shocked and surprised
When suddenly I am old, and start to wear purple.*

August 2nd – Friday

It was a helter skelter sort of morning almost from the outset. It did not help that I was wrong-footed about my expectation of getting to the gymnasium today. I had forgotten that the Missus would have to leave early to get the desperately needed beer and water from the cash and carry in Hayle because she had an appointment in the afternoon to further mend her recovering arm.

Quickly readjusting my schedule, I headed down to the shop to do the topping up, which thankfully was lighter than previously in the week but an indicator that business is slowing down. The other most important preparation was to get the pasty fridge (sorry, MS) ready for the delivery of more than 200 pasties for the weekend.

I had been mortified when we ran out of cheese pasties almost before the weekend commenced last week. I was determined not to have a repeat performance, but I think that I might have swung too far in the other direction. We already had more than a few left over from the previous delivery as we had a lighter pasty day than expected yesterday. My pasty order had been based on having half that number left over.

Since last year, I have become quite adept at loading our fridge such that it is brim full, but they do not drop out when the door is opened. Today, pushed my fridge packing expertise to the utter limit with even the door storage brought into play. As a consequence of an accident on the A30 at Penzance the delivery was also late, coming in the middle of a bit of a morning rush. I am pretty sure that it was the biggest delivery of pasties that we had ever had. It certainly felt like it and had me wondering where all the people were coming from to buy that many, especially as we were losing the weather.

While waiting for the pasties to be delivered, I thought that I had better get ahead with my breakfast or face picking at it for a couple of hours until dinner time. No sooner than I had it on a plate, the pasty delivery arrived. Having dealt with that and the fruit and vegetables that arrived midway though packing the fridge, I returned to breakfast just before the Missus arrived with a truck full of beer and water. I may not have gone to the gymnasium, but I certainly had my weight training.

The low pressure system I mentioned yesterday was on the move today and ahead of it were two cold fronts, pushing cloud ahead of them. It became increasingly thicker as the day progressed. We had started the day in warmth but as we went into the rest of the morning a breeze struck up from the southwest. It was robust enough to affect the temperature in The Cove and the first I knew of it was a gentleman after a hooded sweatshirt so that he could sit outside and have his breakfast.

It did not do much for the beach community, either, which thinned out as much as the cloud thickened. Some of that would be because many had left for home and we awaited many, hopefully, to arrive. We still enjoyed a minor rush after the high tide pushed those that were there off the beach. There was a bit of a morning melee which turned into an infrequent flow of going homers and the disappearance of going home presents in abundance.

I had not really noticed but up to today the presents have been predominantly the postcard fudge boxes and the ones that have biscuits in them. We have small bags of fudge in various flavours and sold in threes at a reduced price. These have hardly had a look in for some reason, until today. It only came to the forefront of my observations when I went to top up those postcard fudge boxes as they had been selling well, too. It was then that I noticed an evening order was required for the fudge bags and, having noticed them, saw them coming across the counter with nearly every other customer. Someone smarter than me could probably point to

some sea change in the socio-economic class of customer who arrive with the school rush. Me, I shall just buy a lot more fudge bags until September.

While we had a bit of rush after high tide passed, it was not of the same order as the previous days. The weather was changing rapidly, as well as it being the tail end of a change-over day. Quite a surprising number in the evening grocery run were European nationals, who seem quite happy with our stock of fresh food, tins and packets. They are mainly campers, which probably makes a difference, but it starkly juxtaposed the fleet of Tesmorbury's vans that flooded The Cove from about half past four o'clock onwards and well into the evening.

The in-laws are here, staying with Mother to lighten the load on the Missus during our busy period. They spent the afternoon with us and had their tea ahead of the shop closing and left before I went upstairs. They will whisk Mother away on her hols for the last couple of weeks of August up to North Devon. It is odd without Mother, but we appreciate the help.

Tomorrow, the pair of us must look to the shop shelves as we have some holes in our supply that need urgently addressing. It will be the last bigish order this season – I hope. I think that we will not be pressed tomorrow, except me bagging and freezing an excess of bleddy pasties. At least we will have something to eat with our gruel over the winter now.

August 1st – Thursday

Out to the east the clouds were thick enough to blot out the sunshine but out to the west, there were clear blue skies. We were at the joining of the two and, luckily, with the sun in the blue bit, it shone down on the beach for the important part of the day. The beach was just as crowded as it was yesterday, the tide doing what it does and providing only smallest bit of sand to sit on.

The water, however, was not quite as populated as it was earlier in the week due to the absence of any movement to appease the surfing community. I had a couple of 'where are the waves' conversations which had me giving the synoptic pressure charts a quick look. There is a deep low pressure system out to the northwest that will move in our direction before the end of tomorrow. My guess was that will bring some waves over the weekend and into next week.

The beach may have been as busy as the previous days but up on dry land we were having the quietest day we have had for a while. It was relative, of course, and we were busier than the average day in April, for which we must be very grateful. Even with a much reduced footfall it was impossible to get into gear on any of the toppings up or orders that we need to do. Each time I left the safety of the counter, a customer would come in, the telephone would ring, or another priority would take over. It was most frustrating.

Equally frustrating will be my absence from the Lifeboat Station photograph that was being taken at the same time as every other Lifeboat Station in the country. It was part of the bicentennial celebrations. There is another photograph, taken nearly 20 years ago, with the Tyne class Lifeboat on the slipway and the D-Class on the beach below it. I was in that one. This year's photograph will emulate the first and it will be possible to compare many of the faces. It is just a shame that it is happening in August with the Missus up at Land's End with the fund-raising team – actually she was on her own for the main part of the evening – selling the raffle tickets at the fireworks night. There was the small matter of looking after ABH as well.

It was late in the afternoon when we were mowed down in the rush. It was only later that I worked out that it roughly coincided with the tide squeezing the remaining sand even further into the dunes. High water had encouraged many to leave and the till was jangling continuously for a couple of hours or more. Once again, the till at the end of the day reflected a better day than it looked to be, which may have been the result of many people preparing to leave on Friday.

At the end of the day, I made a quite round of the shop listing the things we probably need on our beachware order. Once again this year we have not made a big list at the start of the year for calling off from. We pay more per item this way, but we are only buying what we will use – we hope – with not much in the way of spares sitting in the store until next year. It has probably paid off because, at least so far, it has not been as busy as we might have anticipated but it leaves us a little on the back foot and we end up buying in a panic when we realise we are nearly out of stock of this and that. My nerves are frayed enough as it is without being left without key items.

I had left ABH upstairs on her own after the Missus left just after five o'clock. When I eventually went up after I closed the shop at seven o'clock, she was in her bed up on her perch in the corner of the living room. She can see out of the window from there and bark at passing dogs. She will normally bound down to meet me coming in through the door but she was not bothered this time but otherwise seemed perfectly chilled about our absence. The bleddy hound would have gone bolo after about five minutes, so this was a welcome change.

I took her around the block before I had my tea for a leg stretch. There was still warmth in the day, and I did not need a jacket. The car park was still relatively full but there was not a huge crowd milling about as sometimes there is at that time. I assumed they were all at their tea. As usual, Coastguard Row was a haven of peace as we ambled our way back home.

While it seems we have only just started, they are now just four weeks left of mayhem to see us through winter on. We live in scary times.