

DIARY 2026

## January 1<sup>st</sup> – Thursday

Well, there goes another year, done and dusted and never to be seen again – unless, of course, someone discovers that time is not linear and finds a way to visit it again. Quite why you might want to, I could not imagine, it was not all that interesting the first time around, although it did have some memorable moments.

So, back to the present with the stunning revelation that the forecasters actually managed to get a prediction correct around a week in advance. I had looked at the start of the weekend and today was the only one labelled as rainy. Shockingly, it rained. It was a margin call as well. As far as I could determine, it rained for about an hour before brightening up. Land's End weather station informed us that we were back up nine degrees today. They could have fooled me.

It was still busy today but not quite on the scale of yesterday, although looks can be deceiving. Again, we started earlier than we had throughout the rest of the Christmas opening and once more we were pressed for pasties (sorry, MS). I will spare you the details but if you re-read yesterday's fraught passage of pastiness, you will get the general idea. Early on in the piece, I decided that we would need to bake a good percentage of the frozen pasties we had left. This would be a bit of a gamble because if the demand suddenly fell off, we would be left with them. I need not have worried; we sold out of everything.

The weather was with us for most of the day. Me and the girls had got a bit wet when we went to the beach first thing, but the rain had stopped by the time I opened the shop. The day brightened with a bit of breeze, this time from the northwest, which came with the alleged increase in temperature. It wiped out any decent surfing, but I did not look to check. I was asked several times yesterday what time the New Year's Day swim started, which was odd; it is a Christmas Day swim here. Clearly, my word was not to be taken as gospel because I was asked again today and when I reiterated that the swim had already happened, I was told that many people had decided to do a swim anyway.

According to my witness, everyone went in at different times during a reasonably constrained period in the morning. I am minded to suggest that this was not a 'swim', merely an unusually high number of people choosing the same morning to take a randomly timed dip in the sea.

Whatever the case, I would have preferred to be on the single fishing boat that went out this morning. The fleet had been tied up for most of December, and this was the first time the sea state had been reasonable enough for a spot of fishing. I heard that pickings were slim.

Busyness did pick up during the day in very subtle ways, I presume. It certainly did not look as busy as yesterday, but we closed the day better off. In fact, the best day of our opening. It was not that long into the morning that I lost count of the number of Happy New Years that I gave out in response to Happy New Years coming in. It was also not that long into the morning when being the second of January seemed like a jolly good idea. Certainly, by the end of the day having a placard I could have raised or permanently arranged, seemed like an eminently good idea and I kicked myself several times for not thinking of it.

Much as I like being a grumpy shopkeeper most of the time, I was very pleased when I was able to close the first electric sliding door in The Cove a little more permanently on the day and not say Happy New Year again for another year. It had been a very worthwhile opening this, erm, last year. As I may have mentioned before, we are usually dormant in the run up to Christmas day; all our business happened in the intervening period between then and New Year's Day. This year, we saw some good activity in the run up to Christmas and I was please that we had opened earlier than we might have done and incorporated the previous weekend.

The first day of the new year was topped off perfectly by the shrill sounding of a Lifeboat pager going off in the distance. It was not mine; mine is currently off. My smart mobile telephone alerted me that there was indeed a shout in progress. Given that I was toggled up and just at the brink of taking the girls for a walk, I went over.

When I say that I went over to the Lifeboat station, I clearly did not. I was nowhere near the place, honest guv. I also did not go down to the crew room to make sure we had a head launcher, and I did not venture into the boathouse to unpin the doors. Nor did I make sure someone was in the winch room before slipping back out to ensure we had a head launcher and a Tooltrak driver to launch the Inshore boat. It was just as well I was not there at all because there were plenty of people about to launch both boats to a 'casualty' near the Coast Path.

It was only minutes after the launch, the big boat had not left the bay and neither boat had been tasked by the Coastguard, when the launch was cancelled. The message came through that the casualty had been moved away from the cliff, and the boats could be stood down.

I had by this time geared up the girls and was stepping out. I was able to relay the message to the Inshore launch crew as they were coming away from the beach. There was a delay while the recovery slipway was made ready and the boat had to stand by while that was set up. I did not see it but was assured by the team that they conducted a textbook recovery up the long slip before tucking the boat away. It was a bit of a false start, but we are, after all, a very dutiful, very excellent Shore Crew.

## January 2<sup>nd</sup> – Friday

Corr, it was a bit drafty around the knees first thing as I took the girls for a bit of a run down on the Harbour beach. Alright, it was not quite first thing, as after nearly two weeks of shopkeeping and getting up early, I had a lie in. Alright, I sort of had a lie in because both girls needed to be let out on the roof half an hour before I would normally have got up to be a grumpy shopkeeper. The difference today was that I was able to go back to bed again and get an extra hour or so.

The official figures had it that we were as warm as yesterday, up near 7 degrees ambient but that wind blowing in from the northwest still, brought it down to 2 degrees. Oddly, I felt colder later in my big boys' trousers and leggings than I did in my shorts. Yes, I know the answer to that, but I really cannot be fagged to change out of long trousers each time I go out. Still, it was not so bad, head to the wind and a brave look on my face.

I took my time during the morning doing nothing in particular. I had a hankering for scrambled eggs on toast, à la grumpy shopkeeper, which involves the addition of clotted cream and an unhealthy amount of Trewithen butter on thick cut, toasted seeded bread. It was a hankering not to be denied, so I did not deny it and those eggs will not last forever, so I had a lot of them.

We got all the way to the middle of the day before I got my backside off the chair and wrapped up again to take the girls out. We had some early rain, possibly the tail end of yesterday's, but we missed the showers in the early morning, and they had cleared off by the time we went out again. I went and stood in the strong sunlight down by the waterline and it felt quite warm. There was a fair amount of cloud about so the patches of sunshine were hit and miss. I decided that chasing them was a lost cause and stood in one while the girls rushed about a bit.

We took to the western slip after they looked like they had enough, and we wandered home by going around the block. On our way, we bumped into one of the crew from last night, so we stopped for a chat. Apparently, the green light that we take to the bottom of the slipway to indicate that the boat is ready to be hauled is broken. Clearly, we will have to take the boat off service until we get another. Alternatively, the head launcher could get on the radio when the boat is ready to be hauled and state, "I am showing my green light, honest guv" to the winchman. This will rely heavily on the winchman having a lively imagination.

I left him to his troubles, and we returned home. Since I was all toggled up already, I thought it a spiffing plan to go down to the shop to empty and turn off any fridges that we could. This meant predominantly the dairy fridge where there was quite a lot of whole milk, some of which I had transferred to the freezer when we closed yesterday. The over-stock was a product of our last week's customers favouring whole milk, so I had brought in extra just ahead of Christmas. When we emerged

from the Christmas break, our incoming customers were nearly all semi-skimmed drinkers - of course they were – leaving us with a surplus of whole milk.

Most of the butter and some of the cheese we will eat ourselves and will freeze down happily. There was some ham, and special cheese – brie, camembert and blue – that would freeze but unlikely that we would get around to eating them. There was also some bread, rolls and cake that, again, we might not get around to, so I packed up some carried bags and set forth to distribute to the poor and needy of the parish – or failing that, the rich with plenty.

It meant a little bit of retracing my steps from the walk with the girls and a bit of a stank up the steep bit of Stone Chair Lane. It was the most walking I had done in a fortnight and did me no harm at all – other than having to collapse in a heap for a couple of hours when I got back – I jest, of course. There were a few additional chores to attend to when I got back, but now all the fridges that we could turn off, are now off. The new freezer, that we were not using before Christmas, is now on, so it is not a perfect world, but hopefully, we will now only be taking out of the freezers rather than adding to them.

There is more to do down in the shop, doing the stock take for one, but for today, I felt that I had done enough and I should award myself the rest of the day off, which I duly did. Having just reviewed what I had done in the shop and what was left to do, I remembered that I had ignored the fruit and vegetable fridge. I sense a new distribution of goods tomorrow.

The Missus is still feeling under the weather. She no longer has an increased temperature, so obviously she is just playing on it now. I knew that turning off the heating would do her good. Anyway, she did not feel like cooking, so I turned my mind to tea and thought that I fancied some more of that toasted seeded bread this time with bacon and some melted brie and cheddar on it. I was looking forward to it for the rest of the afternoon and was quite gleeful until I went downstairs to retrieve the cheese only to remember that I had given it away.

I consoled myself by drinking heavily and watching the last episode of a series that has started nearly ten years before. I found it was really quite emotional, which surprised me – it had a bitter-sweet end. I was not sure that the tear in my eye was the result of the weepy end to the film or my growing enmity I was feeling for my neighbours tucking into portions of posh brie and camembert I should have, at that moment, been enjoying on my toast. I will try and sleep on it.

### January 3<sup>rd</sup> – Saturday

Gosh, I was a busy boy this morning. Well, that is comparative I suppose and is more accurately compared with yesterday's doing begger all rather than, say, opening the shop or building a greenhouse. It served to keep me warmer than I

would otherwise have been. It was a chill day out there, and also inside, for the most part.

Most of the chill came from the wind that is edging closer to the north as each day passes and remains quite robust. Even the very regulation compliant insulation along the front of the shop and the double glazing was struggling to cope with it. For the first time, even with the heating on, I was feeling a little cold in front of the computer screen first thing.

A good blast down on the beach with the girls helped tremendously. There was no shelter down on the beach but I, at least, was wrapped up against it – on the top half. I mentioned yesterday that provided the core is catered for, having bare legs does not seem to matter very much and so it was this morning.

My first bit of running around concerned my breakfast. I had already had to go down to the shop for additional mustard, having used what I had planned for breakfast last night. I then discovered that a third of my breakfast was missing from the pack. I split my smoked mackerel into two as there is too much for one serving. When I looked this morning, one half of a fillet was missing. The fact that my breakfast was a brae bit smaller than I expected was less of a concern than knowing there was half a fillet of increasingly aromatic smoked mackerel sitting somewhere between the shop fridge and the upstairs kitchen. I retraced my steps and eventually found it on the floor in the store room. It was two ventures outside without adequate clothing that I could have done without.

It was not the only minor disaster of the morning. A little while later, for reasons best known to the hidden recesses of what is left of my mind, I decided to clean the salad drawer of the upstairs fridge. I have done this before and flooded the kitchen. The salad drawer looks like it should be water sealed and that it can be filled and washed with soapy water. Unfortunately, the front is separate from the rest and there is a small, hidden gap through which water freely flows out.

Filling the drawer from the taps with the front slightly hanging over the edge, allows the water to gently pour through the gap at the front. It then flows down the unit doors below and silently onto the floor. It takes several moments to realise that you are standing in a widening pool of water and that the cascade down the unit doors is also seeping into the cupboard. It requires some sustained mopping and a good bit of very foul language to redress the situation. I had thought that we learn by our mistakes, which clearly is not true. Either that or this was no mistake, which means that I did it deliberately which is even worse.

Having cleaned the salad drawer and replaced it in the fridge minus the rotten and affected contents, I diverted my attention to clearing the shop fruit fridge. Here, there was rather more than I had remembered, and I should note that next time we should order fewer potatoes, onions and lemons and limes. I had assumed our visitors would need the fruit for their Christmas and New Year drinks but was obviously

mistaken. I think much of the problem is that many of our visitors simply did not expect to have a local shop open during the period and brought what they needed with them.

Consulting with the Missus, she assured me that we would get through the vegetables from the fridge ourselves, but the fruit should be distributed widely. We are clearly not healthy, fruit eating type people neither do we consume large quantities of gin and tonic that requires the use of slices of lemon or lime. I do use lime in my tomato juice three times a week but even then, I would not get through the volume remaining before it went off. I filled a bag with the left-over fruit and placed it in the newspaper box outside the front of the shop. I then put a note up on the Lifeboat message board and will wait to see what happens. If it had been beer left over, it would be gone almost before I put it out. I suspect fruit will take a little longer.

Collecting Mother from St Buryan was the last of my activities of the day. While better off than the Missus, she is also suffering the remaining effects of the influenza along with a good dose of cabin fever. I caught up with her by her front door with her suitcase and a label around her neck that asked, "Please look after this Mother." Quite the pitiful sight, you will agree. It seems we had no choice.

After I returned, the urge to be active and constructive abandoned me. There is much more to do in the shop over the next couple of days but, today, they were going to wait, obviously. I settled in and did normal day off type things such as reading and watching the remainder of another short series on television that I had started watching. It was very pleasant at the time but afterwards I felt terribly guilty about wasting so much time.

Part of the pleasantness was watching sleet run down the windows while we sat inside in the warmth. We had boosted with heat in the room with judicious use of our clever fan heater. Happily, when I had to go out with the girls, we missed all the showers which were scattered far apart.

It might have been the weather but more likely that our New Year visitors have now gone home, but it was very quiet in The Cove during the afternoon. I am always a little concerned that we have made the right choice about closing at the end of New Year's Day, especially when it runs so close to the weekend. Given the mass exodus and lack of people on the street, it seems we got it right and that it was a clear sign that the next phase of the season is upon us. January and February are traditionally devoid of life in The Cove. If we see our neighbours, it is a rarity. I feel The Farm beckoning - you lucky, lucky people.

## January 4<sup>th</sup> – Sunday

Our guest does not have a chance at being quiet during the night. The girls are onto her the minute she opens the bedroom door. Of course, that also means that I am

awake moments later. It is no matter. They would have me up at one time or another during the night.

Any further sleet or rain that came upon us during the night was gone by the time I came to take the girls out officially in the morning. I assumed the rain had not long left us since the wet on the steps had not dried in the bit of breeze that was still about. It was cold, right enough, but the strong breeze that we had endured for a few days had died down and gone back around to the northwest.

There were showers dotted about according to the rain radar, but the likelihood of having the benefit of one was very slim. Instead, we found ourselves under blue skies with, mainly, fluffy white cumulus here and there, interrupting the sunshine now and again. Also over our heads, was hanging a Yellow Snow Warning which still has me tittering in the back row like a naughty schoolboy. I can only imagine the only reason that it does not get picked up in the edit and get changed to Yellow Warning for Snow is that the editors also have the naughty schoolboy in them, too. In any event, there was no snow here, although the map shows that the Far West is also included.

I have mentioned that we get snow roughly every ten years. I checked. The last snow in The Cove was 2018 and 2010 before that, I think. Alright, that looks like eight years, so, guess what?

I threw caution to the wind, such as it was today, and took the girls down to the Harbour beach twice during the day. I had entertained the idea of putting on my boots and taking them to the big beach, but I had other matters to attend to and would not have time to do both. Given that they did not know what might have been on offer, they did not seem to mind and on both visits to the beach had a rare old time, anyway. On the second occasion with the tide out, BB had a paddle in a bit of a pool on the tide line. I swear she is frightened of her own shadow at times. Today, while paddling, she backed out of the pool sharpish after seeing something in the water she was not keen on. I had a good look – she did it more than once, too – but I could see nothing and had to assume she had seen her own reflection.

We extended our trip out with a turn around the block after the beach. It gave me the opportunity to demonstrate the rocking telecoms inspection cover that make a bit of a clunk when stood on. It scared the wits out of BB when it happened and she dragged me all the way home, even after I rocked back and forth on it several times to show her what it was. I did it again in the daytime walk and again when we went out later in the dark. She is getting better with it, but it is still a work in progress.

When I had taken them out in the middle of the day, I had to tear myself away from my work in the shop. The Missus will need the space at the front of the shop to organise the dissembled decorations which means moving everything that is currently there. I could not move the furniture without completing the shop stock take

because, having moved the furniture, it would be in my way. I had made a start before I took the girls out.

I had made good progress, too. All of the gift stock with the exception of the posh mugs was finished. The next item on the list was the clothes including the hats, socks, swimming suits and shorts. This I detest because it is a pain in the rear. As far as the grumpy shopkeeper is concerned, all that is required is the number of each size in each category. So, the number of size M men's swim shorts no matter the price, age, design or supplier. Unfortunately, so we do not end up over or understating our stock value, I need to separate out items per cost price too. So, if I have three size M shorts from different suppliers or years, I have to record them separately. It takes time. It also makes it harder to see the total number of size M I have. Still, needs must.

It is actually easier to make the record on paper. It is when I come to enter them onto the inventory system it gets more complicated. When I recorded the item's arrival I might have called them one name or number that made perfect sense at the time. Maybe more than a year later, going only on the information on the garment label, I may have written down a completely different reference. Trying to marry that up with what is on the inventory system is sometimes – often – fraught. I have yet to do the inputting, so thank you for reminding me.

The Missus spent the same time disassembling the decorations in the living room. It is now a Christmas free zone. Hurrah. The indication was, with the bit between her teeth, the outside decorations would be next, meaning that she would need the floor space in the shop. I had to get the furniture moved before I was finished for the day.

This is a job that the Missus usually undertakes. I have discovered two issues with this: first, she does it in a hurry and everything is pushed without ceremony into a big pile which makes it difficult to get to a lot of things in the aisles should I need to; secondly, she does not have to put it back so takes no note of where things were. The shop is so tightly packed, everything needs to be in a particular place, else it does not all fit in. A few inches out with a clothes rack and the knock-on effect has the sunglasses stand outside the door.

With this in mind, I took care to mark the floor where the various bits of furniture were and took my time in fitting the rest with an economy of space as the object. The result was the front of the shop was free of furniture and all the aisles, except for the gift aisle, are accessible. There is now plenty of space to organise the decorations and I will bring the truck around tomorrow, where we store the excess, and empty it into the shop ahead of the Missus getting motivated. This was quite enough for one day and I retired to do a bit of sitting down before taking the girls out ahead of teatime.

As we sat down to tea, the Missus pointed out the tiniest rim of the disc of the rising moon. Yes, I know it is a globe, but it looks like a disc, especially when it is rising

waxing gibbous, about 98 percent full, between the houses along Sunny Corner Lane. It was remarkable how quickly it rose – or the horizon sank. It took all of three or four minutes before we could see the whole, yellow thing just before it started to go into cloud.

It is a Wolf Moon, apparently, named by the indigenous tribes of Camborne at a time when wolves still roamed these shores. They would be seen by the light of the January moon as they wandered among the chimneys of the engine houses of the Great Flat Lode looking for warmth and the occasional miner. The wolves were often seen doing the same.

What do you mean you do not believe me? It is no more or less made up than the story available now on the Internet that it came from the North American Natives or some such. Absolute tosh. We never had Wolf Moons when I was a child. These were the days when we were still were allowed Cowboys and Indians. A Wolf Moon would have been top excitement. Do you not think we would have been out there, shirtless and dressed in mother's best drawers – leather loin cloths were a tough ask for a six year old – sister tied to the gate post while we were dancing around the washing-line post totem pole and howling at the rising Wolf moon pretending we were Tonto. Yes. Gisson, the lot of you.

## January 5<sup>th</sup> – Monday

I consider us very fortunate to have ventured to the beach when we did this morning. It was cold again but at least we missed the heavy and wind-blown sleet that followed during an extended period of the morning. Even sitting inside, watching it slap against the windows made you feel cold.

The morning had been utter turmoil for my intended routine. If I do not get up early enough, I stand the risk of all others in the household throwing marbles under my feet. My intention to exercise, shower and take the girls out was scuppered by the Missus letting the girls loose before I had a chance to start anything. Trying to do a three minute plank, without letting one knee touch the ground, while a small furry creature hangs off your t-shirt, ears or tried to eat your fingers is a challenge. I did get through it all but only eventually. I will have to get up earlier.

Up until the middle of the day, the temperature was well down. It had felt cold out but I had assumed it was the wind that had picked up again from the northwest. When I checked, no, it was definitely cold in its own right. An excellent day for a stank on the big beach then as we had wanted to do yesterday.

I left it until the middle of the day for no other reason than that being the normal time we go out. It coincided nicely with low water and a huge expanse of beach to cavort on. The delay allowed me sufficient time to crack on with the inputting of the stock data. I finished a page and a half, which is less than halfway but it had taken more

than an hour and my eyes were telling me it was enough. The remaining pages are all clothes and will take much longer. What joy.

Togging up to head to the beach was therefore a welcome diversion. The beach was looking resplendent under a bright sky and mostly sunshine and since I had not been down since March last year, I was rather looking forward to it. I momentarily pondered switching to little boy trousers but opted for normal ones with leggings instead. I did not particularly regret the decision, but I think it would have been easier walking in shorts. I would also get to show off my scar to full effect but since we did not meet anyone, it would have been wasted anyway.

I was also unsure of my limitations. Thus far I had confined myself to walks around the block and up and down the slipway – certainly no more than half a mile. The beach and back was more than a mile. Even then, when we got to the head of the OS slip, I considered taking the Coast Path through to Vellandreath. It took a couple of slaps across the face and telling myself not to be so daft before I gave up on the idea and headed down the slipway.

There was just one couple on the beach over by The Valley when we arrived. The rest of the wide open beach was ours for the taking, so we took it. By the time we had walked to the river and back, we had seen just two other people walking their dogs and came close to neither of them. The girls ran and chased each other all the way there and all the way back again before diving into a pool by the reef under the car park to cool off. I had been quite comfortable until then, apart from my cheeks, but splashing around in water that even looked cold was a bit much.

As it looked from the shop, the beach is much flatter than it had been for most of the year. There is no steep sandbank at the back of the beach, and the exposed rocks are limited to maybe twenty metres width from the Lifeguard huts to the OS slipway. Down just beyond the spring tide low water mark, is a huge sandbar sitting roughly in line with the entrance to The Valley. Even at low water, the tide almost fully encircles it. The flatness of the beach did not offer me any walking challenges and apart from some muscle ache, I got away with the walk unaffected. Next time I might just go up the Coast Path.

When I returned the Missus was keen and ready to head out shopping. She had said that it was just for a few bits, some fish – the Missus hates fish – treats for the girls because they had run out and to collect a prescription from St Just for Mother. Would I like to come? I have been married to the Missus for some considerable time, at least it feels considerable, and clearly in that time, I have learnt nothing. There has been no shopping trip that she has gone on that has been less than three hours but still, somehow, I managed to cling on to that “just for a few bits”.

I do not know exactly what time we left but I had a beard and my nails needed cutting by the time we got back. We had been to Newlyn on a venture for fish. I did mention that it was the first day back for the industry and they would have next to

nothing, certainly not fresh unless some of the day boats had been out. We managed to get some inshore haddock but everything else was either missing or frozen from before Christmas. I managed to pick up some St Ives Smokehouse smoked salmon at a discount because it was frozen. I was glad to see that I was not the only one who struggled with managing stock like that.

As we left, we discovered that the sleet was back with a vengeance. The rest of the afternoon had us caught in frequent squalls that came through heralded by sudden gusts of wind. It seems that we had chosen the only break in the weather earlier for our walk on the beach.

To my horror, our next visit was to Tesmorburys where we spent an inordinate amount of time and money on "a few bits" that nearly filled a large trolley. For our troubles, the Missus ended up with double cream down the front of her new coat that escaped from a torn lid on the pot she had chosen. Typically, there was not a member of staff in sight as we looked for assistance, and the Missus had to barge into the staff only area to find someone. I had expected a bit of a 'terribly sorry' at least but all we got was some blue roll and a 'how awful'. If we had expected something more solid in the form of an apology and an offer of dry cleaning like we might have had in a proper shop, we were to be very disappointed.

I was quite relieved to be heading in the direction of home under some unsavoury grey skies and the occasional wintry shower when the Missus pointed out that we still had to detour via St Just.

My intention was to empty the decoration from the back of the truck into the shop when we got back. In fact, I thought that our combined intentions were to attack the Christmas decorations today, but clearly, plans are fluid. As we were so late, the Missus convinced me that the unpacking of the decorations could wait, as the shopping needed to be unpacked and that some of the fish that we bought needed to be vacuum packed before being frozen.

That did not take very long and by the time I had done it and had a cup of tea, it was time to take the girls around the block again. It effectively drew the line under any further effort to push back the boundaries of shop or decoration organisation today, and we fell into the usual evening wind down. We have run out of days, according to convention, so the decorations will be the centrepiece of tomorrow's activity. It is always nice to have something exciting to look forward to, but I guess that will have to be another day, then.

## January 6<sup>th</sup> – Tuesday

It was a more orderly progression through the morning today. I did get up a fraction earlier, but the Missus had been up – briefly – before me and the girls had gone back to being settled for the time being. Exercised finished, I took the girls out for an

unremarkable spin on some beach that was barely enough and settled in the for workings of the day.

The Missus was up with the lark this morning. I should clarify. This is a lark that had been on the tear for a week and spent the night before in a hedge with some very unsavoury friends sharing a bottle of Buckie and had eventually crashed at three o'clock after telling a hedgehog he would love it forever. She, the Missus that is, the lark was beyond help, was ahead of me out the door, if you discount my walking the girls first thing, and was away to take down the lights along the road. I stopped back for a spot of breakfast and followed her down later.

I was not idle while I sat there, I shall have you know. I booked an appointment with my optician that does eyes. I had tried to book online the previous evening and failed. Just ahead of calling on the telephone I tried again and apparently failed again. When I relented and spoke with the receptionist, she told me that I had in fact been successful with my online attempt even though the computer had told me otherwise.

Flushed with such success, I decided to give the much maligned council a poke regarding the changes to our business rate evaluation. If you recall dear reader, our valuation had increased so much that it had taken us above the Rural Rate Relief threshold criteria – which had stayed the same – to make us ineligible. I had used the online form to ask the much maligned council if we could claim Small Business Rate Relief for which we met the criteria and would provide 100 percent relief again. That was on 5<sup>th</sup> December and had not yet had a response. I telephoned today, having spent ten minutes searching for the correct number. I then spent another ten minutes waiting to be answered. A very pleasant lady greeted me.

*Grumpy shopkeeper.*: “Good morning, I wondered if you could help with the query I registered at the start of December.”

*Much Maligned Council Lady.*: “We have a bit of a backlog. What is your reference?”

*Grumpy shopkeeper.*: “Yes, I am not surprised you have a backlog; the revaluation was a bit of a shocker, wasn't it. My request reference is [Starts reading out reference]”

*Much Maligned Council Lady.*: “No, not that one. We cannot find you from the reference we sent you when you filled out the online form.”

*Grumpy shopkeeper.*: “What's the point in providing me with a reference if you can't find my details from it? Oh, never mind. What reference do you want?”

*Much Maligned Council Lady.*: “The reference we need is on your Business Rates bill. Do you have it?”

*Grumpy shopkeeper.*: “Not in front of me, no. Perhaps it would be helpful if your system used it as the reference for my query. I would have it then, wouldn't I. Wait, I will login to your system and find it from there.”

*Much Maligned Council Lady.*: “I might be able to find it from your postcode.”

[Grumpy shopkeeper provides address while trying to login to the much maligned council system, which is taking an age. Much maligned council lady gets there first.]

*Much Maligned Council Lady.*: “Ah yes, we have received your query. As I said, we have a backlog and if you can be patient a little longer, we will get back to you.”

*Grumpy shopkeeper.*: “Erm, I know you got my query. I have a useless reference. What I would rather like is an answer to my query, please.”

*Much Maligned Council Lady.*: “I will try and help. What was your query?”

[Grumpy shopkeeper displaying a remarkable level of self-restraint, explains query.]

*Much Maligned Council Lady.*: “Yes, you cannot apply for Small Business Rate Relief because you already have Rural Rate Relief.”

*Grumpy shopkeeper.*: “I have Rural Rate Relief now, but from April my Rateable Value takes me over the threshold; I will no longer be eligible for Rural Rate Relief.”

*Much Maligned Council Lady.*: “Rural Rate Relief is automatically applied. You cannot have both.”

*Grumpy shopkeeper.*: “I do not want both. From April, I am not eligible for Rural Rate Relief, so I want Small Business Rate Relief for which I am eligible.”

*Much Maligned Council Lady.*: “Yes, but Rural Rate Relief is automatically applied, even if you are not eligible.”

*Grumpy shopkeeper.*: “That is the most ridiculous thing I have ever heard. No, wait, I am pretty sure the much maligned council has a whole box of most ridiculous things I have ever heard, so this is only one of the most ridiculous things I have ever heard.”

*Much Maligned Council Lady.*: “Well, we are waiting for all the information from Government. There might be more information later.”

*Grumpy Shopkeeper.*: “I do not suppose there is any use in asking when that might be expected?”

*Much Maligned Council Lady.*: “No. We will put it up on the website if and when we get something.”

*Grumpy shopkeeper.*: “So, there was absolutely no point in lodging a query with you because you are not going to answer it, even when or if you get the information, which you may or may not remember to put on the Internet?”

*Much Maligned Council Lady.*: “No. Thank you for your call today. Is there anything else I can help you with and don't forget to complete our customer satisfaction questionnaire after this call. Have a nice day.”

I may have paraphrased and embellished a bit on the last response, but I am sure that you get the idea, dear reader. Given that it was too early for a drink and Mother was not likely to let me vent my spleen by kicking a small puppy, I resorted to putting on DIYman overalls and heading across the road to help with the decorations.

I got across the road as the Missus was approaching the halfway mark of the hanging lights she was bringing down. The idea was that our lights man would be along later to wind them into tubs and heave them into the back of his car. The boys from the station would have to set to with taking down the scaffold poles.

I took on dismantling the memory tree the first job of which was to take off and put aside the memories. It is far better not to look at the memories whilst doing this, but it is hard not to. There were some very poignant messages, heart-felt and sometimes emotional. Many were for missing grandparents, which was understandable, and

some for loved ones that had found a favourite holiday retreat in The Cove. There were a few from small children to a beloved and gone pet and some where I recognized the names of the writer or the missed.

At first glance, the memory tree might seem a frivolous or cynical thing. From reading the messages, it was clear that the tree had become a focus for people's love and for just a moment to bring a loved one back to life in the forefront of their minds. I could not help but feel that there was an awful lot of good locked up in that tree.

It did not seem to take very long at all to take the lights and both trees down. Certainly, it took a great deal longer and with much more effort to put them up. The Missus had caught up with me as I took the memories off the one tree while she took the decorations off the other. Half an hour later, the trees were in a pile by our benches awaiting the wood cutter's axe on the morrow.

We were exceedingly luck with the weather. It stayed dry for the duration of the dismantling and again at the end when I took the girls around for a run in the middle of the day. We did pretty much nothing at all after than but try to get some feeling back into our numb fingers – it was bleddy cold our during the morning.

By the time it came to take the girls out for their early evening stroll, a geet band of rain had descended from the northwest. The rain was pretty heavy at the time we decided to go out, and we cut our walk short to the edge of necessity. We did the same again last thing because it was still raining and the breeze had increased. I am hoping for a bit more dry tomorrow when I get the saws out to cut trees down to size. The way my luck is running, it will be tipping down. Ideal.

## January 7<sup>th</sup> – Wednesday

After a couple of weeks of fair weather, it looks like things are starting to fall apart again. It was disappointing to look out of the window at mucky grey skies and a bay full of mizzle. I thought that the wet would have cleared out after that rain band yesterday, but it looked like it just left grizzly weather behind.

It was still my intention to dismember the trees and pack them away. I would have preferred to do it in the dry, so I had a quick geek at the forecast to see if there was any expectation of it brightening up any. There was not. Just an expectation that it would become less wet and miserable in the middle of the day, which I felt had to be good enough.

There were a few things to clear out of the way first and then the plan was to head to The Farm to collect the chain and reciprocating saws. Since it was highly unlikely that I would get through the work without getting wet at some point, I slipped into my work waterproof trousers and wellies. The wellies were really there in case it was muddy at The Farm, which it was not, but the wellies were still a good idea because

they are comfortable and have steel toecaps. If the work became frustrating or I met someone from the much maligned council business rates department, it would hurt less when I kicked something solid.

I was about to leave when I was reminded that the Missus had run out of her particularly type of coffee and required a new jar or two. These jars are only available at Tesmorburys, the same Tesmorburys that we had spent a large proportion of the three hours away time yesterday in. Clearly, had we done a 'full shop' instead of 'just a few bits' we probably would not have forgotten the coffee. I made a mental note for next time. It would not be a completely superfluous trip into town as Mother is going home tomorrow and wanted her heating switched on. It is halfway into town, so it came together very well.

Obviously, it would have been preferable if this extra journey took as little time as possible which was probably the reason why I got caught three times by the roadworks traffic lights in the run up to Mount Misery roundabout. Heaven knows what they are doing there that is taking such an interminably long time, but some progress is being made. We are now driving up the still unfinished other side of the road while they stand about looking at the side of the road that we were previously allowed to drive on.

It was only when I opened the rear passenger door when I got to Tesmorburys that I realised that the washing powder that I was asked to drop off at Mother's was still sitting there. I would have to go back to Mother's to drop it off. I had thought that the shopping trip would only add less than an hour to my original schedule. That was now looking rather optimistic, so I was not that bothered when I discovered that I could not find the type of coffee where I expected it on the shelf. I went and asked only to have it pointed out that for some inexplicable reason it was not with the other lines of the same brand but two bays down on its own.

It just so happened that another customer was just putting a jar back on the shelf when I returned with the assistant. (According to the sign on the shelf, we are to call the shop assistants, colleagues. Duly noted for next time.) The other customer, seeing that I was about to put a jar of the coffee into my bag, asked if it was any good. I told him that it was the very best because when the Missus had some, I did not have to run twenty mile round trips to get some more.

After much detouring and errand running, I ended up at The Farm. Despite a bit of recent rain, the lane was remarkably clear and the field in good order. Of course, we had an extended period of dry that helped. Now that I am close to getting all the kit that would enable me to install the new wifi and cameras, the weather looks like it will stop me.

In fact, having looked at the forecast to see if I would get away with dismembering the trees, I noted that a geet storm was heading our way. If I did not dispose of the trees today, it was very likely that they would have been somewhere else by the end

of tomorrow. It was a tempting thought until I considered that maybe one of those places might be inside the shop having travelled through one of our windows first. Listening to Radio Pasty on the way into town, we are told that Storm Goretti will deliver winds up to 90 miles per hour – yes, of course it will.

There is an amber alert for wind that will first come in from the southwest during Thursday afternoon before ramping up and coming in from the northwest. It will coincide with a spring high tide and not be all that good news for ports up the north coast. In The Cove we are predicted to see a wave height of seven feet but worse on Friday. Whoopie-do.

The wind appeared to be practising for the main event during the latter part of the afternoon and evening when the weather closed in as well. Happily, I was blessed with the best of the day's weather while I was attending to the trees. I discovered that I was entirely incorrectly dressed as well because our cold snap had been replaced by a warm and wet snap. I was roasting in my thick pully and heavy coat.

I also confirmed that the little chain saw we have is not really up for the job. It did not start well when I discovered that the batteries were dead and when I did find one with a charge, it really was not worthwhile. Where branches had not cut cleanly, they tended to wrap around the chain and get carried into the drive. After a few minutes of battling with it I resorted to the reciprocating saw with much better results. It took less than an hour to strip the branches and cut the trunks down to size.

In the back of my mind, I was envisaging putting it all through our wood chipper, which after a few years of trying I have concluded was a terrible purchase. I have to cut the trunk into almost pencil thin strips for it to go in and even the minor branches give the machine indigestion. It was while I was thinking about this that one of the local waste disposal trucks went by. It crossed my mind that it probably would not cost a mint to have them take the trees away and remove all the hassle I have cutting them up. I will investigate for next year.

Having finished with the dismantling, I thought it more convenient to bring the truck around that I had parked in front of the shop, to the other side of the road. I had to wait before I pulled away from the kerb as a Tesmorburys van passed me to turn around where I was just about to do the same. I waited until he was finished before moving off and when I came back, the van was parked just ahead of where I was going.

I had left the first electric sliding door in The Cove open while I turned around but decided it would be best to close it as I would be distracted filling the truck. I had just loaded the lengths of trucks when the first electric sliding door in The Cove opened to reveal Tesmorburys man standing in the entrance with a can of beer in his hand asking if we were open. There are decorations piled up on the floor and clutter all over the counter; we could not look less open. Never mind, a sale is a sale especially as the man with the beer in his hand had real cash money in the other. The words of

my pub landlord pal from way back came to me in a flash, 'smile and take the money'.

I was very glad to have finished that particular chore for another year. I will decide later whether I will take the tree up The Farm and struggle with the chipper or take it up and call in the local waste boys. We have some other bits up there that need collecting, so it seems like a good plan, to be honest. I could also take it to the tip, sorry, Household Waste Recycling Centre where it will be tipped, but then I would have used up one of my limited attendances and we have a collection of other items I need to take there outstanding from last year and very possibly the year before.

What was foremost in my mind was sitting on my backside and doing begger all. I had been at it since the middle of the morning, and it was already half past three o'clock by the time I finished. That is more than a full day's work for some, and I am supposed to be on me holidays. As I was finishing up, the Missus was heading for the Lifeboat station to rally the troops to take down the rest of the decoration paraphernalia. It might be useful to get it out of the way before the blow tomorrow.

Time for a beer, I thought.

## January 8<sup>th</sup> – Thursday

It was dark and gloomy even by late o'clock when I got around to taking the girls out for a walk. That was not down to me entirely, I was not overly late getting up but I am trying to ramp up my exercises which are now at least twice as long than they used to be. It also takes a bit longer because I still cannot get my knee to bend enough. Try doing sit-ups with a knee that does not bend enough to get the foot flat on the floor.

When I eventually got around to taking the girls out, it was a task of utter frustration. I have to capture ABH before she sees what is going on and takes flight back to the bedroom. This often means getting her harness on and holding onto her before I have finished dressing myself. Today, that meant full metal jacket waterproofs while holding one girl while the other starting jumping up and down in case I had forgotten her. It was then remembering to turn off the alarm, unlock the door and making sure I was properly equipped with things we might need on the brief walk.

The walks today were only ever going to be functional. The rain was heavy all the way through until the early afternoon by which time we had conducted two walks in the rain and two blow-dries when we got home. You would think that two girls who were clearly reticent about stepping out into the rain might have realised the imperative and got a wiggle on with things. No, now we are out, let take some time to sniff every blade of grass we see and while we are at it, every leaf as well.

Unsurprisingly, there was no sight of the team of eager crews waiting to dismantle the remaining vestiges of the Christmas decorations. They will have to ride out the

storm which had now been promoted to 100 miles per hour winds – of course they were. I had a check at around three o'clock, a good hour before the shenanigans were set to begin and Land's End was showing a southerly gusting at 45 miles per hour and Gwennap Head, windiest place in the universe, 55 miles per hour from the south, southwest.

The sea state at high water in the morning was definitely heightened and was flogging over the Harbour wall at the shore end. We were really not expecting the big stuff until the morning, after the low pressure system had passed Camborne on its way up east. It had not properly formed until the middle of the day today, unlike systems that came at us all the way across the Atlantic. The press used the term 'weather bomb' just for added scariness. A fellow member of the very excellent Shore Crew then sent a message that the Government would issue one of its mobile telephone alerts at five o'clock. Oddly, it did not cross my mind that it was anything to do with the weather and thought that it was a very odd time to send out a test.

I will say it again, in case no one was listening all the other times I have said it. Every time a storm comes along we are told to expect 80 miles per hour winds, damaging, threat to property and we are all going to die. It has happened so often now that I for one routinely take it with a pinch of salt. I really do not know if anyone else had recognised it or does everyone else except me dive for cover and bolt down anything that moves. It is the little boy that cried wolf and sooner or later we would get caught out. Today was that day.

Winds ramped up into the mid 80 miles per hour very rapidly and at the same time veered to the northwest. I was down on the Harbour beach at five o'clock and we were being pushed around then. The Missus went over to St Buryan at half past five o'clock because Mother had left some pills with us and by half past six o'clock she was in the kitchen cooking tea.

I had my headphones on watching some television programme when the lights went out. It had clearly been blowing a bit before then, but I had not noticed. We had gone from breezy, nothing to worry about, to thumping in and lashing rain against the window in the period of half an hour. I watched it out of the window as the rain smoked down the street. The wind at that point was severe and when I checked Land's End weather station, it had reached 90 miles per hour.

Our power continued to drop in and out over the next 45 minutes. A couple of years ago the electricity board upgraded the infrastructure in The Cove. They told us that it would make us more resilient in the increasingly frequent bad weather. Sure enough, we had not had any issues until tonight. Two things we may think about that: the project was a dismal failure as at the first bad weather we had power outages; the project was a huge success because we only had a limited period of disruption after which we were alright. On the basis that St Buryan went out and was not scheduled to be fixed until tomorrow morning, I am happy to go with the latter option.

My Lifeboat message network reported a few 100 miles per hour winds registered here and there but they were likely to be local anomalies. It was very likely that the wind whistling past the Lifeboat station reached 100 miles per hour as even relatively light winds can be amplified around the corner of the building. A tree – and we do not have that many – came down on Cove Hill, cleared away by local heroes. Other than that, we would have to wait until morning to see what damage had been done.

When I took the girls out at nine o'clock – just around the back of the shop – we were being pushed about by a bullying wind in the sixty miles per hour I would guess. Some kind soul had moved our newspaper box around the corner. It had crossed my mind to tie it down earlier, but I had completely forgotten. I did not even notice that our wheelie bin had gone. There were piles of thatch all over the yard at the back of the shop and hanging in the wires on the power and telecom pole there. I suspected that Tinker Taylor probably had rather less of a roof than it had earlier.

## January 9<sup>th</sup> – Friday

Well, we are all very grateful to still be here and we thank those who have been in touch to enquire as to our well-being. It was indeed a mighty wind yesterday evening. There was plenty of rain, but it was difficult to see how much because it was coming in horizontally and identifying as smoke.

Our first concern of the morning was for Mother. The power in St Buryan and apparently St Levan, too, was going to be off until Monday morning now. Another reason that we should be grateful for the upgrade for the infrastructure in The Cove. The lack of heating was the primary concern, so I toggled up for last night's weather in case it came back again and headed off to bring her back to The Cove she had left 24 hours earlier.

On the way out, I had a quick look over the sea wall for our bin. I think that there is a distinct likelihood that it is either on the big beach or bobbing on the briny on its way to the Islands. I took time to put our newspaper box back and this time strap it down. As I headed to the truck, I met up with a neighbour from up the hill who told me of some roof disasters about the place. The Tinker Taylor thatch looked worse than it was with just a corner of one end taken out. Despite that, the amount of reed about the place looked like it had been the whole roof.

I took my time driving over to St Buryan, expecting felled trees and bushes on the road. It would appear that anything big that had landed there had been cleared away long before by farmers and locals. There was, however, plenty of debris over the roads and many of the bushy hedges had been flattened here and there. It put me in mind of the first big wind back in 1987 or whenever it was. It had sounded a bit breezy overnight, but I had not heard the news and left for the station as normal. It was more than a mile, and I was perplexed at the amount of twigs and branches lying about on the route. When I got to the station and asked where the train was,

the lone railwayman in attendance looked at me as if I were mad – I have since got accustomed to that look. The end of days had occurred and I was oblivious.

I managed to fetch Mother without further issue and then had a call from a neighbour who's clever computer-controlled heating system had not reset after the power cuts. Apparently, it needs to be powered up in sequence as it is not smart enough to work it out for itself. I spent half an hour there and consulted with the son-in-law but between us, we still could not get it to connect properly. Thankfully, there was a manual override which got the heating working again. The only problem being that the thermostat would not work. I left it with the son-in-law to call out the engineer.

When I drove up to get Mother, I noticed that our rather out of date sign board at the end of The Cove was hanging on by the last cable tie. I made a note to fix it and, as usual, promptly forgot. It was my intention, after a cup of tea and some breakfast to head up to The Farm to see the state of things up there and to dump the bits of Christmas tree while I was there then come back and walk the girls. By the time I had sorted myself out, it was gone midday. Fortunately, a neighbour reminded me of the sign just before I left and I fixed it on the way out.

I set off downstairs to get the truck and was immediately waylaid by the Lifeboat Operations Manager. He told me that from next week I am back on 'light duties'. I told the other head launchers that 'light duties' meant that if it was cold or wet, I would have to go on the winch in the nice warm winch room. Unfortunately, I do not have space in today's Diary to report all the kind words they said in return.

I approached The Farm gate with trepidation. It was clear even from the lane that the greenhouse had not got away with it. I decided to clear the Christmas tree bits first, then the saws that I had brought back before heading up to look at the damage. Looking about, it seemed that we had got away without any major problems up there which was remarkable given that it would have been in the teeth of the storm.

I was pleased to see that the medieval castle doors did not show any signs of being forced from the inside. With the polytunnel, once a hole was breached, the wind would enter and force everything else out. The doors were still bolted and unaffected, so was the rest of the interior. The only problem was that the last roof sheet had been torn in two and half of it ripped off the roof. Just to clarify, one of the roof sheets, the only bit of the structure that I did not have a hand in, was damaged. The rest of the structure that I had built all by myself was completely undamaged. I am glad I managed to make that clear.

Later, I sent a note to one of my pals who helped with the roof. I said, I could not remember who it was who did the only bit of the greenhouse that did not stand up to a bit of wind, and perhaps he could refresh my memory. He said he was pretty sure it was our other pal who did that bit. I then added if he would not mind helping me repair it, which luckily, he said he would. I think the difficulty will be getting a single sheet delivered. We shall see but ideally, we need it fixed before the next big blow.

As I drove back, I caught sight of the damage done to the Mayon Chapel apartments. Half of the western side of the roof had been ripped off and the top of the entrance porch reduced to rubble. I suspect that is the worst in the village. I also heard later that several of the static homes in the Holiday Park had been badly damaged too. Hopefully, they were not occupied at the time.

It is remarkable how many roofers and builders have dived in to offer help in carrying out repairs. Before the storm, you would have been lucky to find one who would answer the telephone, let alone be available to do anything within a year of being asked. All of a sudden, they are all free to lend a lucrative hand. I am being cynical; I am sure they were all holding time in reserve just in case there was a bad weather event when they would be needed.

Before I left to go up, I met with the Lifeboat Coxswain, also up and down The Cove clearing up. I asked if he had seen our wheelie bin. He had not but caught up with me as I fixed our sign board and told me it was just by the fish and chip shop. With the rear of the truck empty, I managed to remember to pick it up on the way back from The Farm. It was completely undamaged and the lock was still on it.

I decided to call it a day after that. There are a couple of things I need to get on with in the shop – three if you include mopping up the water ingress from last night – but they will wait at least until tomorrow. I keep having to remind myself I am on holiday but unfortunately, it does not quite feel like it just yet.

## January 10<sup>th</sup> – Saturday

I am clearly getting better at this not doing anything lark. Actually, I should rephrase that. I am clearly getting better at feeling better about this not doing anything lark. I hardly got frustrated at all that I had done so very little today and that humanity probably took an infinitesimally small step backwards in the great cosmic wholeness of reality. See if I care, hey.

I even got up halfway through the day; it was nearly eight o'clock. The girls had given it their best shot, and they had given up on me before they made me feel guilty enough to get up. I then felt guilty about not getting up to put the heating on for Mother, so that is what got me out of bed first.

It is not actually that cold now. The temperature did some funny things as the storm passed by on Thursday and since then we have had temperature nearly in double digits. We had a resurgence of wind from the north, I would guess, in the wee hours of the morning but during the day, it had settled in the southwest again. The sea state that we were told was going to be very naughty indeed, did not quite get to the extremes we were led to expect. I suspect that is because the deep low pressure that gave us the wind formed very quickly and did not have time to stir up the sea.

There is low pressure to the northwest which is probably responsible for the current sea state which I agitated but not extreme.

There was a good amount of sunshine about today for everyone to feel good about. Those people feeling the goodness of it all flooded the big beach in the afternoon to wander about and feel elated. Alright, some of them may well have been wandering about and feeling miserable. I could not tell from my vantage point in the flat.

My first pretence at doing something was to put the excess mussels that the Missus cooked last night and did not consume into the freezer downstairs. It meant walking by the new toilet seat that had arrived a couple of days before and had sat there begging to be installed. I cannot now remember if I related the tale of woe concerning our toilet seat. If I did, here is an abridged version.

We have had endless trouble with toilet seats since one of the builders broke the then current one during their tenure two years ago. Gosh, was it really two years ago. The main problem with replacements has been insufficiently robust hinges and poor fittings. This time around, I enquired of the Internet the best and most reliable fittings and it duly advised a trade-marked system called sure-fix or something like that. Fed up to the back teeth with it, I bought one it suggested without much thought or further research.

The Missus had modified the fitting on the existing seat with some success. Unfortunately, the metal hinge broke through fatigue – not as fatigued as I was with it all – although it was not abused or over used. The old seat came away without too much effort, and the new one was an absolute synch installing it. The whole operation took about ten minutes and represented almost the sum total of my positive input into the day. Time will tell, but right now, the installation looks solid.

I had taken the girls to the beach in the middle of the day. The sun was shining and the Harbour seemingly empty. BB was away like a rocket and found two of our regular swimmers lurking under the wharf. One of them does not like dogs very much and BB somehow seeks her out especially, which is a tad embarrassing. It is a good job we know them.

Things, apart from that, were going swimmingly until one of the fisherman, intent on a bit of clearing out, started throwing brackish, fishy water down the western slip. To you and me, dear reader, brackish, fishy water is a rotten smelling waste product to be avoided at all costs. To a small bleddy type hound, it is a thing of great wonder and something to be rolled in, given the opportunity. We spent the next fifteen minutes with the girls trying to exploit the opportunity and me trying to close it down. It ended when the fisherman dropped one of the bongos that he was swilling out which alarmed BB so much she ran off back to the shop in a fright.

Obviously exhausted by my day of great adventure and industry, I collapsed in a heap on the sofa and put my legs up for a bit. It was during this brief rest period that

our power went off. The Missus informed that she had received a text message from the electricity board informing her that the power would be off until Monday at two o'clock, for safety reasons. I have no doubt it was also to serve me out for being smug (albeit only in my head) about having power when so many others did not.

Well, that threw the gerbil amongst the reindeer alright. We had moved Mother here because she would be warmer and more comfortable than in St Buryan, where the power would be out until Monday at eight o'clock. Obtusely, the Missus had also had a message saying that St Buryan power was back on. We now had to consider taking Mother back to St Buryan where she would be warmer than here. However, it would mean an exploratory trip out there first to make sure that the power really was on.

I had just collected my coat in order to drive over to St Buryan for a look see, when our power came back on. Now, here was a to-do. Having been officially informed that our power was going to be out until Monday, did we assume that our power restoration was temporary and continue with the plan to move Mother, or was the power back on a more permanent basis. A dilemma indeed.

A call to the electricity board made things no clearer. The very pleasant lady with a strong regional accent and a dodgy telephone line – how can a digital line be dodgy? – told me that our power was possibly permanently restored but it could go off again. If it had been on longer than half an hour, she said, the balance of probability was that it would remain on, but that was not guaranteed. When I asked about St Buryan, I was told it was off despite a local report and the electricity board's own message telling us it was back on. We decided that a bird in the hand was probably was most likely stuffed and Mother would be better off with us for the time being.

The grossly inaccurate information from the electricity board was not only worthless, but troublesome, too. On one hand I can understand them giving themselves a little leeway, but 48 hours would have meant seeking a better solution for Mother other than staying put. We are grateful that they put so much effort into fixing the issue, but they need to work on their information strategy.

Blessed with such relief, we settled back into the security of not having to do very much at all. The brightness of the day slowly melted away into a more bleak greyness and I concentrated my efforts on which books I should purchase with the rather chunky book voucher that I had received from the in-laws who stayed over Christmas – thank you very much.

I have occasionally stopped to consider what use the burgeoning infiltration of AI (Artificial Intelligence) has been in my life. So far, I have come to the conclusion that I cannot think of any application that it might assist me with in either my leisure or work. Since I was struggling in determining which books I might like to purchase, I decided to look at how AI might assist me. I had the notion that I could use it much

like a much improved Internet search facility. By providing one of the AI facilities with as much information as I could think of, I hoped that it would spit out some titles.

I started with searching which facility I should use and then, how to use it. The first AI engine I used was 'Librarian.AI' which seemed like a very good place to start. It took several goes while I fine tuned my criteria. It became very affronted at one point when I asked it for male only authors and told me not to be so sexist and misogynistic. I am probably now on a list somewhere. Anyway, I abandoned that engine which seemed only interested in offering modern day authors from the USA, which was a bit limiting.

Falling back on a more general option, I tried Mr Google's AI engine that, after further fine tuning, produced some much better results. I was a little disappointed that it only managed to find less than a dozen books on quite a wide range of criteria. I am sure that if I indulged it a little more, I would have found more. Of course, what I should have done is applied the same criteria to a standard Internet search as some sort of control experiment. Maybe I will try that next.

Armed with my list of nine books, I discovered that most of them are available on the second-hand bookshop that I use. Unfortunately, it does not accept the voucher that I have. It does not seem very sensible to me to spend additional money on buying books new when I can get perfectly good ones at a third of the price. However, three of the books are new and only available in a bookshop that does take the voucher. They are hardback, which is less than ideal. If I wait until the paperback is released, they will more than likely be available second-hand and I will be back to wondering how I will spend my voucher. The other good thing is I can order the hardback books from a local independent book shop, there is a very good one in Penzance, which is a better use of my Christmas pounds.

Quite how I managed to produce nearly 1,800 words on a day when I essentially did begger all will forever be a mystery to me. I will endeavour to actually do something tomorrow and be more economical with my script. You must be exhausted, dear reader. I recommend some immediate bed rest.

## January 11<sup>th</sup> – Sunday

Look out. I did nothing much again today. Are we sitting comfortably, children? Then, I will begin.

I thought that my clock has stopped or the power cuts had created an anomaly because it was fearful dark, this morning. I knew that because first, it was fearful dark and secondly, Mother told me it was. I had got out of bed at the usual time without any assistance from the girls – probably because it was fearful dark and they still thought that was nighttime – and secondly because I do not like leaving Mother to wander about by herself. Not that Mother is anything but self-sufficient but she

would not be able to reach the switches for the heaters, and I had not yet filled the water boiler for her tea.

It was an ideal opportunity to capture the girls when I let them out of the bedroom to greet 'Nanny'. They make a huge fuss of her while she is here from the second she is up. ABH would normally escape back to bed straight after the initial greeting, so I made sure that I was ready for her and to take them both out for a run.

The day looked bleak and horrid first thing but at least it was not raining. It mizzled all day, but it was more just being surrounded by moist air. The girls were damp when we got back but a quick towelling down sorted them out in no time. We had ventured down to a small sliver of beach, enough to run around on. I am trying to keep ABH's running around to a minimum because for the last week or so she has demonstrated a bit of a dickie back leg. It manifests when she first gets up after lying down for a while. We plan to get her to the veterinarian doctor on Monday for them to have a geek at it.

I had planned to do at least one positive thing today, just to say that I had not been entirely bone idle. There, you see, I just cannot help myself. Actually, the one thing I did want to do was package up my over-sized wool jacket so that I could send it back tomorrow. I had been looking for this article for a few years. It was not exactly what I wanted but I surmised that after such a rigorous and in-depth search, I was not going to get any closer. I had been in conversation with the supplier, and they had suggested the XXL version, but when it arrived, it was clear that I needed only the XL size.

Having managed to get myself and the jacket down to the shop, I stayed there after I had done my packaging and continued with the stock take. I was mindful that I had left it so late that it was almost time to take the girls out again, so I restricted myself to finishing off the count of the posh mugs. We had recently taken receipt of a new catalogue, and I had noted that the new shaped mugs that arrived with the last delivery had done quite well. I thought that when I had finished the counting, I might place an order for some more. By the time I had completed the count, it was plain that we had not done quite as well as we had thought on the new shape and we had plenty of stock of everything else. We definitely would not be placing another order just yet. I would not like you to think, however, dear reader, that this year had been a complete disaster on selling posh mugs. My count revealed that we had sold 125 over the entire range, which is not too shabby at all.

We hit the beach for a second time today after I came back up from the shop. The overnight rain had helped a little in washing off the mucky water from the western slip, but it was still a place of pilgrimage for the girls. This was especially true of the sand at the bottom of the slipway that had not been refreshed. The neap tide is not reaching that far up just now. I was restricting activities on the beach anyway due to ABH's dickie leg, so we took to walking around the block.

As we went up the slipway, I noticed that scaffolding had already gone up on Peter's House at the top of the cliff, adjacent to the old hotel, that lost its roof in the storm. A builder had been staying there undertaking some work when it happened which would explain how quickly the scaffolding arrived. I also noticed, which I had not before, that roofing felt or waterproof membrane was flapping about on the fringes of Sennen Heights, the newer part of the old hotel with the flat roof. I was not sure whether this was from work before the storm or the result of storm damage. It being a flat roof I had assumed that it probably would have been alright. I will no doubt be informed by and by. I might, of course, have just sewed panic into the heart of Sennen Height residents who hitherto also thought that their property would not have been affected, in which case, apologies.

It was not long after I returned from our walkabout that Mother signalled her intention to return home. We were reasonably confident that the power in her bungalow was back on and if it was not, she could easily come back again. Because I had clearly, exhausted myself with my intense efforts through the morning, I elected to remain behind and have a little zizz on the sofa. I must have been much more tired than I imagined because the next thing I knew, the girls who had also been dozing on my lap, had leapt off to welcome the Missus home. We had been zizzing for a good hour.

While the manly thing to do would have been to pick myself up, dust myself off and start all over again with the stock take, I really could not be fagged with it. Instead, I chose the softer option of emptying the flat's waste paper bins and taking the general waste out to our wheelie bin. I now have to risk untying the bin from its moorings and risking it blowing away – yes, I know it blew away despite being tied down on Thursday, but that was exceptional. The previous team of collectors would just remove the bags, but the current team are more particularly, it seems.

That was the end of my efforts for the day, unless you can include turning the pages of a book. I really need to apply myself a little more. Maybe tomorrow.

## January 12<sup>th</sup> – Monday

We seem to be having alternating days of good and poor weather and today was the good one. Not that it made a ha'peth worth of difference to my day, girls still needed to be walked and my current work, such as it is, can all be done indoors. This reminded me that the bit of work I was keen to do outside was still being held in obedience, waiting on arrival of the new CCTV cameras.

I had ordered these in the closing days of last year. The acknowledgment came through, then nothing. Before I got too animated by the delay, I felt it best to check how many working days were involved. Time bends and twists over Christmas and many workplaces shut for the duration. The supplier was one of them, but they still had five days to send a message at least, so I gave them a nudge.

I was told that they had run out of cameras with a smaller recording memory and only had the ones with the bigger memory. I thought it was a little odd as the current camera uses a removable SD card for its memory. Apparently, the memory is now internal, which seemed like a retrograde step to me but, having been prompted, they would send the bigger one at no extra cost. Hopefully, we will have them installed before the weekend, although that is quite a bit of work.

That was the only pressing matter that I had and even then, it was not that pressing. The trade show in Exeter beckons this weekend. There are a few suppliers that will be there for which having an accurate stock position will be useful. Some of these suppliers offer attractive discounts or offers for placing orders at the show, and I wanted to be prepared. Most of the shop stock had now been done. It left what was in the store room, which, as I recalled, was not as much as some years and, in fact, very little at all.

Each year, I underestimate just how long it takes to count stuff and each year, I have to go back because I forgot something. At the end of the day today, it was the buckets and spades, although I think that I had done everything else. Even that took two trips down to the shop. That was largely because, once again, I had procrastinated upstairs and by the time I went down the first time, it was almost time to take the girls out. Nevertheless, I managed to do quite a bit in the small amount of time I had left myself.

It was the middle of the day when I broke off to walk the girls. The day was much better than yesterday, but the sun had failed to make a proper breakthrough, although it was bright and dry and mild for the time of year. The sea was still thrusting powerful waves in towards the big beach but still managed to look alluring in the brightness. At high water, it was coming over the wall, but it was a bit half-hearted. The breeze had picked up again and was in our faces a bit as we crossed the Harbour car park, so I assumed it was still in the southwest. Had the tides been kinder, they are high in the middle of the day not leaving much beach, I might have been inclined to take the girls to the big beach. Maybe next week, then.

I was delayed initially with my stock taking by having to sort out our wheelie bin. If you recall, I had to retrieve it after its adventure down to the chip shop on Thursday night. When I had opened it to put the last black sack in, all looked well within but perhaps I should have looked more closely. The collection had already gone through and because it has sat there unlocked for an unspecified length of time, I checked inside to make sure that it had not been used for litter in the interim. I was disappointed to note that it had been and there was quite a bit of litter in the bottom. It took me a moment or two to realise that it was *our* litter and had not been abused by the general public who, I am sure, would have eschewed the use of our bin for the public one across the street. Ahem.

It was, for a second or two, a bit of a mystery until I concluded that the bin must have been bashed about a good deal on its journey and our refused sack inside, either broken or upturned. Having explained not a day or two ago how the much maligned council team had changed from lifting the sacks out to tipping the bin, it would appear that they had reverted to removing the sacks again. Reluctantly, I might give the operator the benefit of the doubt that he did not look into the bin when he removed the sack and did not see the litter left behind. Else, I might have to conclude that it was utter laziness not to tip the bin to empty it. I took a little time in turning out the contents into a sack and replacing it in the bin before I locked it up for the next collection in a fortnight.

In the end, it took so long to complete the stock take that I did not have time to input the numbers into the inventory system. Alright, it is a fair cop. I did have time to input the numbers into the system, but I just could not be bothered. Never do today what you can easily put off until tomorrow, as me eld mam used to say. It was something like that, anyway.

I have found that I have watched more television in the last week or so that I have, perhaps all year. Alright, maybe not quite that much, but I rarely watch more than an hour at a time and rarely do I see an entire film in one go anymore. Reacquainting myself with the library of viewing available on two streaming platforms as well as the usual online versions of the terrestrial channels, I have rediscovered the wealth of utter bilge available to me. I have lost count of the number of seemingly attractive propositions that I have had to terminate half an hour in. Fortunately, and quite by chance, I happened upon an engaging thriller in several parts, but only after wastefully watching an hour of drivel. It is quite a relief to stop and fall back on my book.

It was less of a relief to note that it was getting a bit damp out when I took the girls for the last couple of walks of the day. Rain coming, again.

## January 13<sup>th</sup> – Tuesday

It had rained at times through the night. It may well have rained all night as far as I knew but the street was not swimming in run-off first thing, so there cannot have been that much. It had certainly stopped by the time I got the girls out for a romp on the beach but even so, we did not hang about. There was still damp in the air, and it was looking a bit grey and bleak at that time.

Had it conformed to the last few days of good and bad alternate days of weather, we should have been due a poor day today. Instead, the grey largely went by and by through the day and we had a mix of cloud and blue sky, though very little in the way of sunshine. It remained temperate, too, although the wind veered around to the northwest and then the north during the day. It took until later in the day for a bit of a chill to creep into the air. Unfortunately, both Land's End and Gwennap Head, windiest place in the universe, weather stations have been out of action since what

we are now calling, The Great Storm of '26. Well, these things have got to start somewhere.

I managed to maintain my strategy of doing very little again today. Alright, it was not exactly a strategy. A strategy implies that it was reasonably deliberate or intended and it was neither, unless they mean the same thing in which case, it was just not. Also, had it been a strategy that I had adhered to, I would not have spent so much time in the shop over the last couple of days working.

Since the product of that work was sitting on my desk all morning waiting to be input into the computer, I found time to do just that. I also found the time to peruse the websites of some of the suppliers that will be attending the trade show at the weekend. The full list was a bit disappointing and at a guess I would say that they were significantly fewer suppliers attending this year than the last and last year was not all that impressive. If this carries on, it will not be worth going, which would be a shame because it is useful to meet the suppliers face to face and to see the products rather than viewing them in a catalogue. Plus, I rather enjoy my stay at The Devon Hotel. The service is that of an establishment of far greater standing but it still manages to avoid any pretentiousness and panders to the likes of oiks, such as myself.

The Missus managed to coincide her shopping trip with Mother with me taking the girls out in the middle of the day. I would have preferred to take them on a longer walk than just around the block as it must be very boring being cooped up inside all day with just twenty minutes out now and again. It is slightly better when there is some more beach. I am hoping it will not be long before I can give them a bit of a stank up the cliff. I will pick the day and give it a try quite soon.

With the walls closing in on me too, I decided that I would unpack the new pots and pans that the Missus purchased recently. They had been sitting in the box that they had arrived in for a few days and needed to be dealt with. I waited until the Missus came back from shopping to make sure that opening the box and sorting the pans out was not something she specifically wanted to do, which it was not. The old non-stick pans were starting to get sticky, and the Missus was fed up with them. The rubber on the handle of one of the pans had come off some while ago, so she included that in the replacement schedule.

All the new pans are now in the cupboard and all the old ones awaiting me taking them to the tip, sorry, Household Waste Recycling Centre. It is a trip that is long overdue. We have been putting aside things that could not go in the general waste nor in our commercial bin for probably more than a year. The problem is I cannot now remember where I put them or indeed what they were. I think there are some bits up at The Farm. I shall consult with the Missus and see if we can jointly remember.

A while ago I entreated our electricity supplier to replace our meters with shiny new smart meters. Not that I particularly wanted them but on the discover of just how much solar generated electricity we are pushing back up the pipe, it would be churlish not to claim the money for it. To do so, we need smart meters. The only terrapin in the glue factory is that the smart meters will not look so smart when they realise that they cannot phone home through our two feet thick granite walls. I am wondering if the claim that we will automatically be recompensed for our electrical contributions to the National Grid will still hold true.

We had hoped that the electricity supplier could replace both the domestic and business meters at the same time but alas, no. The man replacing the domestic meter is coming tomorrow and he telephoned ahead to ensure that we were prepared and to ask for more information regarding the installation site. He asked if I could take some photographs of where the existing one is, so he could assess how the replacement would go.

He called back five minutes after receiving the pictures I sent to say that their new meter is twice the size of the old one and would not fit in the gap left by its removal. Did we have somewhere else it could go? Well, we struggled to find space when the solar panel man said exactly the same thing. The Missus had to remove half her library to fit that in. Happily, she had not replaced what she could into the space unused by the solar equipment, so there is some free space. I presume we will have the same problem when they come to replace the business meter, so hopefully there is enough room for both. It will leave us with half a floor to ceiling cupboard, admittedly not very deep, full of electrical equipment, which seems extraordinary for a reasonably small building. If you include the equipment we have downstairs as well, it would look like one of those panels you see in power stations full of dials and switches.

Just because I really had not done half enough today and I really cannot abide sitting around idle, I did a big more stock counting when I took the old pans downstairs. I really should get up to The Farm where all this doing stuff would be a little more constructive. Or perhaps I should just learn how to relax. There must be a course I could go on. Tomorrow I will prepare a plan how I might research finding one.

## January 14<sup>th</sup> – Wednesday

The wind had dropped out quite a bit today and gone around to the southeast. It is clearly anyone's guess where it will be tomorrow. It must be lovely having a whole compass to choose from where to blow next. Where the air was originating from could have been just anywhere but wherever it was, it was bleddy cold.

It was one of those mornings of crisp coldness, dry and sharp. Had we spent too long in it I suspect that we would have shrivelled up. The girls did not seem to care and, frankly, neither did I. We had taken our own sweet time in getting out in the first place and once we were, we were in no hurry.

The Missus left us to our own devices halfway through the morning while she went off to have her nails sharpened, or something. The girls, as ever, went into shutdown, so after breakfast I let them settle on my lap which is the default position while the Missus is out. To give myself something to do while we waited, I looked up how I might keep my drill level while I drilled holes in the CCTV camera stand up at The Farm.

It was a matter that had concerned and perplexed me on and off since I thought of the idea of making the stand removeable. The stand is constructed so that it is currently screwed to a permanent block of wood attached to the cabin. The idea was to screw bolts into that block with corresponding holes in the stand. I could then thread nuts onto the bolts to hold it in place. For the stand to slide smoothly onto the bolts, they would need to be straight and so too would the aligned holes. I needed to drill perfectly level holes into both blocks of wood.

It did not take long to find several options. The simplest was a spirit level that could be attached to the drill. It was tempting because it was only pennies, but I guessed that it was prone to error. A little more research and searching brought up a drill guide that would not only guarantee a straight and level hole but also, I could accurately set a depth. Ideal. It was not pennies but not excessively expensive, so I ordered one.

I had a message that the cameras I had ordered were on the way. With any luck, the drill guide and the cameras would arrive roughly at the same time and I would be able to go to The Farm and get one installed by the weekend. Ten minutes later, I was called to the door. Doing Parcels Dreadfully were there with the cameras. Either the message I had was late or Doing Parcels Dreadfully are starting to deliver things before they are despatched. I rather wished that I had ordered the drill guide earlier as I could be up at The Farm tomorrow, actually doing something. I cursed my luck - or rather lack of planning.

We had been meaning to take ABH to the veterinary doctor for the last few days to have her dickie leg attended to. One thing or another intervened and it was only today that the Missus managed to book her in. Earlier, we had been down to the beach where she had demonstrated just how dickie her leg was by charging up and down the beach unbidden and unchased. Her dickie leg was occasionally suspended in favour of a bit of three-legged running, but it neither affected her pace nor did it paint a mask of agony upon her features. I concluded, as did the veterinary doctor about an hour later, that there was not a great deal wrong there. It was certainly not skeletal, nor tendon related, which only left a pulled muscle that will get better if she learns to rest up a bit.

While the Missus was out, the electricity man with his meter was in. It took him around an hour to replace the meter for a bigger, smarter one. He told me that it had registered across a mobile telephone data link, so it can see through our walls,

which is handy. I do suspect that it will be intermittent but as long as it tries more than once to submit meter readings, we should be alright. I now have yet another app on my smart mobile telephone that allow me to watch my hard-earned disappear on a minute-by-minute basis.

All the excitement over for the day, we settled in to doing very little. The forecast that I had glanced at earlier in the day had promised us rain in the afternoon. While we still had light, it looked as far from rainy as it could get, so it was a something of a surprise when I opened the door at the end of the afternoon to take the girls out to be confronted with a significant downpour. I quickly added some waterproof leggings to my attire and put on the girls' raincoats. It took a couple of minutes to achieve and when I opened the door again, the rain had largely stopped. That is how good our waterproofs are.

I will not bore you with the rest of the evening because it was boring. I did manage to finish my book which means I get to take a new one away at the weekend and now do not have to take a spare. We love it when a plan comes together.

## January 15<sup>th</sup> – Thursday

We had the sort of day today that improved with age. It was not that bad to start with either, just a bit of mist in the bay that might have been mizzle at one stage. It was still a bit damp when we struggled out of the door first(ish) thing. It still seemed a bit chilly, but it was early yet – the underlying temperature was on the increase, and we ended the day in double figures. The wind had chosen the northwest today to blow in from. How fickle.

The most notable feature of the day was the sea state. It was big and bouncy in the morning as we hung about low water. By the middle of the afternoon and high water, it was downright misbehaving, thumping over the Harbour wall and throwing itself high up over the footings of Pedn-men-du. The inshore bits of the bay were predominantly white foam and over Cowloe, the waves were dancing and churning white topped waves charged down Tribbens. By the afternoon, all the white bits were brilliant in the afternoon sunshine. One of our Boat Crew was all set for passing out as Helmsman on the Inshore boat. It never happened.

As usual, I procrastinated my way through the whole of the morning. There were some incoming messages that gave me some amusement and a short call to the credit card company to discuss the 'unusual activity' on my account for which they needed to suspend my card and send me a new one. This was not ideal on the cusp of the weekend I was going away. I will somehow have to find another way of paying for hotel expenses and diesel for the truck.

Eventually, I managed to stir myself enough to head downstairs to once again pack the second hooded jacket that had arrived yesterday. We had gone from XXL to XL,

what I might consider my normal size for such a garment, and still found it too large. I might have suffered with it despite the Missus telling me I looked like a scarecrow, but I wore it around the block in the late afternoon. Not only was the bottom of it hanging out from under my rain jacket, the draft was blowing up from below and coming out by my neck. It had to go back.

The necessary act of sending back the jacket is making it a lot more expensive than it already was. I am sure they are not overly delighted about the additional cost of delivering, either. It is hardly my fault as the sizing is not exactly standard. I have provided them with my measurements and did so again. I can do not more than that. I gave them the option of refunding me and left it with them.

In the early afternoon, I headed up to the post office with it. Not one to waste a trip out I decided that I would stop by at The Farm as well. The Power over Ethernet (PoE) adapter had been sitting on my desk annoying me since it had arrived last week at least. I am still hamstrung for going further until the drill guide arrives tomorrow, but at least I could get that out of the way. The difficult bit and the bit I thought I might need assistance with was connecting up the power end to the bus bars.

I had thought to leave this bit to the Missus as it would mean kneeling down to access bus bars which are on the wall under the sink unit and above the batteries. While I was looking and scheming, my eye was caught by the pile of seat cushions brought in from the garden furniture outside; the Missus spares herself no luxury for her Farm visits. It occurred to me that if I piled a few up, I could sit on them and reach under the sink. The positive is a spade connector that could be done one handed and the other is a ring and screw – slightly more awkward single handed, but not impossible. And so it proved. There were no free points, so I replaced and used charging socket, loosening the screw on the negative connection first then using the fingers of one hand to remove it and replace the connection with the new one. All I am grateful for is the lack of witnesses for my somewhat less than graceful getting up off my behind.

The coast is now clear for modifying the camera stand, installing the wifi and replacing the camera. The drill guide will not arrive in time for me to do it tomorrow and we have guests next week, although I am sure they would not mind if I disappeared for an hour or two mid-week.

It was a pity because it was a pleasant afternoon up at The Farm. The skies were trying to be mostly blue and bright, and the northwest wind had not decided to blow very hard. With nothing further I could do up there, I headed for home. As I drove down Cove Hill to observe the bay of brightly lit raging seas, my view was slightly obscured by a thin mist that hung above the sea. This was a million droplets flung into the air as waves thumped over rocks and over cliffs and pounded on the sand and over the Harbour wall. It had been at it all day. The salt laden particles will later settle on our windows and our vehicle paintwork, wheedling its way into nooks and

crannies. Unless you are prepared to wash your car and every ferrous surface daily during the winter, rust beckons.

Driving back from The Farm, evidence of The Great Storm of '26 still persists with some properties having been untouched even with temporary fixes. I spoke with one of the Very Excellent Shore Crew later who works for a local building firm. They have been effectively triaging the work requests. Where damage has not resulted in water ingress or danger, it has been noted and they have moved on. Peter's House, next to Sennen Heights, the newer part of the old hotel, where the roof had completely gone, was covered in scaffolding the next day and a week later, the waterproof membrane is on.

Sennen Heights itself – you may recall I was not sure if it was damaged or just had scheduled works – was indeed damaged. It has a flat roof, and my friend showed me pictures of how the bitumen sheet had rolled back from the western end for nearly half the roof. When I took the girls out earlier, a workman was attending to something right on the front edge, just above a thirty feet sheer drop and endured a moment of vertigo by proxy before I looked away and thought of something else.

There was no launching of the Lifeboat in the evening, but it was a day that marked my return to the fold, just two months after having my dickie knee replaced. We did however drop the boat out onto the slip to make sure it got the benefit of all the salt in the air and to test the LED search lights. We also tested the leading lights. These are the two diamond-shaped board slightly up the cliff at the OS end of The Cove. They are strategically placed so that when they look in alignment from the seaward, the observing vessel is in the correct position to enter the gaps between sandbars at the entrance to the inner part of the bay.

At night they are illuminated by lights activated either from the shore or on the boat. We used to have to go and throw a switch in each of them years ago, but technology has relieved us of the effort some years ago. One of the lights was damaged in the storm, so we tested it successfully while the Boat Crew played on the boat.

Such excitement. I had best go and lie down for a while.

## January 16<sup>th</sup> – Friday

I was going to mention this yesterday, but I ran out of room on the page. I was reminded of it today when I was looking at the predicted guess for the weather in Exeter where I will be for the weekend.

It seems the Meteorological Office has found a new source of sunshine in the form of a professor of weather they keep chained up in their basement for special occasions. The service cannot have thought that The Great Storm of '26 was quite black enough because they wheeled out the professor to add some special emphasis. She joyfully tells us that The Great Storm of '26 was merely a sample of things to come

and that the Great British public should expect more frequent events of similar proportions or much worse. Just to help things along, the experts have moved beyond weather bombs and extratropical cyclones to 'sting jets', a term possibly better placed in a 1970s puppet series. I also believe that the professor is available to add some levity to parties, weddings and bar mitzvahs for a very reasonable fee.

As if to underline the message from the Meteorological Office, today's weather was pants. We ventured off to the beach first thing in the dry but after that we were dogged by frequent showers although, thankfully, there was little evidence of sting jets about. Clearly, we waited until the worst bit of rain during the day to have our middle of the day run out. There was a bit of a break after that, and it looked like the showers were set to return later in the day, but they mainly seemed to miss us.

The sea state maintained its stirred-up condition during the day. I would say that it was slightly down on yesterday and it certainly did not look as pretty. The whites were not quite as white, but it was making a bit scene up on Aire Point and Creagle thumping up the cliffs. It was all good until we neared high water when the sea's restlessness came back with a vengeance. The swell looked pretty clean coming into the bay but fell apart into a messy white wash 50 metres from the shore. Around Cowloe and along the Tribbens the sea reserved some special treatment.

Waves were burying the Harbour wall with some regularity and any thoughts of swimming in the Harbour I would have thought should have been reconsidered. The water over Cowloe was in utter turmoil and three to four feet waves were washing over the end of the Lifeboat long slip. Our operations meeting on Tuesday night spoke of the yellow edging to the lower steps having been damaged and, in some cases, washed away. Fortunately, it is not structural, but we will still need to exercise additional caution when venturing down to recover the boat. It is why we have so many extras on the Very Excellent Shore Crew.

It is a good job that I had not made any plans to use the drill guide that I was told to expect today because it never turned up. It was not the day to be working up at The Farm anyway and consequently I concerned myself with doing three fifths and five eighths of not a lot today. I did do a little preparation for the trade show and put my badge in a place where I would not forget it. I even half packed my bag. Of course, writing in The Diary that I would not forget things did not necessarily mean that I would not forget them but if I did, at least I could wring some column inches from the event if I did.

The Missus ventured forth to do some more shopping before I took the girls out in the middle of the day. She was having to provision ahead of being left stranded for the weekend by my absence and Mother was coming back with her for the same reason. I am not sure how long she thought I was going away for or how many people she was expecting to entertain while I was gone but it was evidently more than I had considered. At least I know that if I am trapped in a snowstorm and cannot get home for the next six months, Mother and the Missus will not go hungry.

The skies were clearing gradually through the afternoon. We watched the heavy rain clouds skirt us as they piled up towards the northeast. The streets were still wet and there was a chill in the air, but we did not have to kit up again for our walk out. I did not need my head torch, either, as there was enough daylight even heading towards half past five o'clock, although it was getting rather gloomy. Must be nearly spring, surely.

## January 17<sup>th</sup> – Saturday

It was cracking morning to be waking up to this morning. We still had towering rain clouds to the north and a few fluffy cumulus dotted about, but largely the sky was clear. Just for a change, we had a sunrise in the west, the clouds deep on the horizon lit up in glorious colours. We put it down to climate change and moved on.

The Harbour beach is changing daily at the moment. A few days ago, there was a mountain of sand at the top and shingle at the bottom. Then less sand at the top and less shingle at the bottom but a line of shingle running from the western slip to the tide line. Today, the beach looked all smooth sand with very little weed about – it had been piled up a bit on the high water mark this week – but ABH was not very inclined to play today.

She had been given some medicine at the veterinary doctor's office which I think is akin to paracetamol but ten times the price, obviously. It is clearly not agreeing with her. The last couple of days she has been lethargic, among other things and yesterday I practically had to drag her around the block. Then she was up half the night. It has caused BB utter consternation that her buddy no longer tolerates her constant bombardment, nor is she willing to chase or be chased across the beach. We spent two minutes on the beach this morning before ABH decided she had enough of such things, and we walked the block instead – very slowly.

The three or so hours I had before I had to leave passed very quickly. I had various chores to complete before I left which did not help slow the passage of time. I also noticed that my delayed drill guide would be arriving uselessly today. I was, however, very grateful that the weather would be kind on the journey up.

If I thought that I would be chore free for the weekend after that, I was gravely mistaken. The cities up country have shops that we do not have west of Camborne, which adds so much to its attractiveness in my opinion. It came to the Missus' attention quite late that I would not be staying far from a big store that sells furniture with odd names and other household items that we generally would never need because we already have them. Still, clearly that is no excuse for having even more of them and I was tasked with collecting them from the store in question during my visit.

The store is in the environs of the hotel and on the way to the trade show. It seemed sensible, however, to collect the goods today on the way in. It only required a minor detour and left me approaching the hotel from the other direction. The Missus told me that I collected something for her last year, which I could not remember. If only I kept a Diary or something I could refer back to. I also did not remember such a convenient arrangement for picking up the items that the Missus had purchased online. The signs from the entrance to the estate, guide the driver to a specific parking location. This is adjacent to a lobby where, on production of a receipt, the goods are brought to you already in a trolley and it is a simple job of wheeling the transport to the truck parked close by. The whole arrangement took only moments to complete.

I have mentioned the good service at the hotel previously, so there is no need to repeat myself. Part of good service is constantly striving to improve which the hotel seems to excel at. This year a key was attached to electronic entry card which I was told was to facilitate entry from the patio side. Previously, I would have to park the truck by the patio door then walk all the way around the building to gain access to the room from the front door. Someone is obviously paying attention, although it did take a number of years to come around to it – there again, I never thought to suggest it on the feedback form.

The rest of the afternoon and evening was exceedingly tedious, so I will not trouble you with it, dear reader. If you are a regular reader and remember last year's visit, it was much the same as were my menu choices which have become a matter for amusement to the Missus. I am very pleased that I am still of some use to her.

That only left me with the perennial hope that it should be dry tomorrow. There is nothing worse than having to wear rain clothes from the truck to the venue and then have to be concerned with either dragging them around the show or that someone will interfere with them in the cloakroom – or that I lose my ticket. No doubt I will wake up white and screaming about that at three o'clock in the morning and wonder where I am and why a small hound is not jumping all over me.

## January 18<sup>th</sup> – Sunday

It was not the best night's sleep I have ever had but at least I was not woken up by marauding hounds. I also did not wake to the sound of the sea or the view of a wide bay when I threw back the curtains. I suppose, though, that I did have real curtains to throw back rather than virtual ones.

Clearly no amount of hoping had delivered the dry day that I had been banking on. Thankfully, it was only a bit drizzly by the time I got to the show, and I got away with wearing a fleece. The temperature in the hall was cool enough that continuing to wear the fleece all of the way around was not in the least uncomfortable.

Even at first glance it was obvious that the show was a mere shadow of its former self and that was on top of it being a mere shadow of its former self last year, too. This made it only a shadow of a shadow of itself and made me immediately think, my weekend away had probably been somewhat wasted. Last year there were at least a few new exhibitors and some of those were of interest to us but this year, they were all people we had seen before.

I spoke with a couple of the stand holders as I went around, old hands from several years of shows, and questioned what was to become of such events. One told me that the Exeter show was not alone in being depleted and that the Birmingham show, which used to be huge, is now no more than half of what it used to be. We used to go to that one until we worked out that the costs of going were more than the benefit we derived from it. The main problem is that people like us would never get to see the new producers on the market without a forum for them all to gather. The two last year we would never have known about and one of them was just eight miles away from us.

Speaking with the Missus about it, I may come up for just one night next year because I still need to visit the beachware supplier on the Monday. Leaving early on Sunday, I could do the show when I arrived and the beachware supplier the next day. The big problem that will give me is that I would have to decide between burger and fajitas for my Sunday night tea.

I did place one order at the show but only because they had a good offer for doing so. I would have placed another for gift cards but when I went back to the stand to deliver the order, I noticed other cards that I should have added. The photographs in the catalogue I was working from were too small to do them justice. I will go on the computer later and do it.

The card supplier was one that had supplied our predecessors in the shop. They had left us with some of the stock. I really only stopped by to share with the owner that it was only last year that we had sold the last of the hang over stock that had been on display for more than 20 years. They were cards of art deco wall tiles that he still promoted. We had a jolly laugh about such things and the state of business recently. I told him that we might give those tile cards a miss but there were other alluring cards that we will place and order for. Talking with the stand holders is one of the very useful things I will miss as they have a broader view of the business world than I do.

I was back at the hotel by one o'clock in the afternoon. Even then, I had gone around the stands one more time very slowly in case I had missed something. I had not. To rub salt into the wounds, it was still rainy when I came out of the show and made my way back to the truck. The forecast had told me the rain was going away. They lied.

Since I am sure that you really do not wish to know about the book I read or the films I watched to fill the hours before teatime, so I will leave it there. I suppose, to look on

the bright side, I had eventually managed to achieve being idle without feeling guilty about it.

## January 19<sup>th</sup> – Monday

It was disappointing to see that Exeter and much of the surrounding area had been enveloped in a thick coating of fog this morning. It was particularly so when I had to travel on a motorway, fortunately not far, but far enough to discover that the vast majority of drivers in the modern age have no idea where the fog light button is situated on the vehicle. I realise that the use of them is not mandatory, which seems odd since the fitting of a rear one is, but using them is advised when visibility drops below 100 metres. Some drivers were even struggling to determine if their vehicles were fitted with lights at all.

I will not add even more tedium to your daily Diary by detailing my visit to our beachware wholesaler. I shall merely tease you by saying that there were some new and alluring goods that we will be squeezing onto our shelves for the new season. I also discovered with grave disappointment that our alternative supplier from which we purchase windbreaks and buckets and spades at a reduced price from the one I was visiting, closed at the end of last year. The supplier I was visiting has purchased much of the stock and will now be selling it to me at a slightly inflated price. It is a shame that the alternative supplier did not contact its customers directly; we would happily have bought some additional stock.

Despite spending three hours at the trade show, the mist had only slightly cleared from the northern end but seemed to have thickened the nearer Exeter we got. We almost had to clear Devon before the fog lifted completely whereupon it was replaced with rain, some of it quite heavy. When it was not raining, the spray from the carriageway made it seem like it was. I could have done without it.

When I headed away from the hotel in the morning, the traffic was heavy. I am sure that I left at the same time as normal or thereabouts, but I cannot ever remember being in such queues. Perhaps it was the fog. It took longer than I thought to get to the supplier, but I fancy I was there for less time than previously, so it all evened out. The remainder of the journey home was not busy at all and despite the weather, I made good time.

At home I was met by two excited girls who clearly thought that I had been away months and was never coming back. It compensated nicely for the welcome I received from the other two girls of the household who clearly felt I had not been away long enough. Mother, who had stayed with the Missus in my absence, was fitting her shoes as I walked through the door. It was clear enough that she was keen to get home.

I had already dropped by on my way home to turn on the heating. It was just as well because even after just a few days it was chilly in the bungalow. I was accosted by the neighbour who asked in something of an accusatory tone what I was doing with the broken fence. I had thought that Mother had got away without damage in the Great Storm of '26 but one fence panel had been flattened against the neighbour's window.

I was advised that it was our responsibility to report it, for reasons that were unclear, as they are both much maligned council properties and, by convention, the damaged fence panel was the neighbour's fence. I did not wish to cause further offense, so I told her that I would ensure it was called in and, in the meantime, I would have a look at it.

Apparently, more wind was coming tomorrow, and the neighbour was concerned that it might break her window if it was not fixed forthwith. I did suggest that I had only just heard of the matter and that less than 24 hours notice might be a bit of a brief lead time to try and do anything about it. I moved it off the window and laid the panel closer to the ground. Hopefully that will placate the neighbour until the much maligned council contractor arrives.

When I got home, I checked the forecast for tomorrow in relation to the expected damaging winds. We are due a 25 miles per hour southeasterly that I doubt would ruffle the blades of grass on the lady's lawn let alone shift a fence panel, however loose. Had I known that I might have been better prepared for the ambush. It succinctly proves Mr Bacon correct that knowledge is power.

My arrival home preceded that of our guests, which was fortunate. It permitted me to lend a hand in some of the last minute preparations. We had not seen Big Sis in probably two years and it was much longer than that since she had stayed with us last. In the meanwhile, she had been married to a fellow, we will hence forth call him Edward, not his real name, of course, whom we had met previously. They live some way north of Camborne.

Big Sis is not a sister to either myself or the Missus. She arrived at that name because she is a big sister to her little sister both of whom we have known since they were just turning teenagers or thereabout. Big Sis lived with us for a few years after leaving university and is therefore something of an adopted niece. Oh, and Edward because his real name reminded me of a television series from long ago. The leading actor's name was Edward whose surname would immediately reveal the name of the series and thus our friend's name, so I will not provide it.

They arrived in the late evening, and we spent an hour catching up before settling down for tea. We were all unaware of the other ten guests that the Missus was clearly expecting and had catered for but at least we will have plenty to eat for the rest of the week. As it seems to be with friends of such good standing, we rapidly settled into an arrangement of relaxed comfort in each other's company.

They will be here all week unless we upset them. Sadly, the predicted weather does not seem all that attractive. I am sure we will find something to do but for now, it was time all weary travellers were in bed.

## January 20<sup>th</sup> – Tuesday

In all the excitement of the arrival of our visitors last night, I quite forgot about the quite astounding Northern Lights display – I thought I would avoid the beartrap of trying to spell Aurora Borealis – that lit up our sky. Well, sort of. To my naked eye it amounted to a dull glow in the north – I am told it was probably green. I had been alerted to the phenomenon by some vigilant Lifeboatmen who clearly have nothing better to do but look out of the window.

We are told that a digital camera is much better at picking out the detail than the naked eye, so thus armed, we stuck our mobile telephone cameras out of our window and pointed them north. Verily, the photographs taken by my own smart mobile telephone did indeed pick out the glow in the north that was indeed green.

My smart mobile telephone must be the box brownie model because the photographs put on the station Whatsapp group by the other crew members showed incredible colours and shapes in the sky. One member of the crew even managed a timelapse sequence which was quite astounding in its detail and showed the changes flashing in the sky. We learnt later that our smart mobile telephone cameras need to be set to 'night mode' for best results.

One day I shall have the same as the other boys in the class, but I shall not hold my breath. Ben Sherman shirts, oxblood 'tassels' and 'Heathrow' shoes, bell bottom trousers and Harrington bomber jackets: I was late to the party for all of them or was told they were just passing fads with which I should not concern myself. Is it any wonder I grew up to be a bitter and twisted grumpy shopkeeper writing vitriol in a daily Diary.

Clearly relieved about getting that out of my system, I can tell you that I got thoroughly soaked on my first foray into the world today. Ordinarily, I can get away with closing the bedroom door on the girls while I go about my morning routine and complete my ablutions. Today, with visitors in the flat, it was too much to ask for BB who then infected ABH with the same fervour to greet them as early as possible. The fact that they were not up at the time I left the bedroom was not important to BB who stayed long enough for me to get a harness on her. ABH has other plans and as soon as she saw there was no sport or new affection to be had, promptly returned to bed.

I took BB out alone, which was a mistake because I had not appreciated just how heavily it was raining. I suspect that had I put BB back to bed she would have waited

a while. However, I do not think that she would have waited until ten o'clock which was when the first of our visitors broke cover and encouraged ABH out of the bedroom. I managed to grab her then and take them both out. Fortunately, on the second run, the rain had diminished to a few drops. We cavorted about the Harbour beach for a while and ended with a slow walk around the block.

I had a quick look at the forthcoming weather for the week more for our visitors' sakes than my own. I must confess that since my drill guide had arrived the thought of heading up to The Farm to attend to the camera did cross my mind. I am sure I guests would not be terribly bothered by my absence, but it might look a little rude. They could come with me, of course, but I suspect the novelty would quickly wear off and they would want to come home before I had really got going. Along with those considerations, the weather was not looking terribly in my favour for outside working for all week.

Our guests had decided to support their local football team at a match that was being played against Truro City this very evening. Even the realisation that they would probably be the only supporters at the away end of the stadium, did not dissuade them. Rather like a condemned man's last meal, they had thought to spend the afternoon in the run up to the match in the various high class emporia of the city itself.

I have not been to Truro for many years. How lucky I have been. Due to this I was unable to furnish our guests with any detail about such matters as where to park or where one might enjoy a good meal. I had heard that the much maligned council had removed some of the car parks in its desire to rid the Duchy of the internal combustion engine. Let them take buses, they might have said in true Marie Antoinette form shortly before removing the buses due to budget constraints. To be fair, though, I understand that there are plenty of buses in the city, it is just everywhere else they are lacking.

The passage of time had done away with one of the multi-storey car parks I had heard, when cracks in the structure appeared. I had heard nothing since, so that may have been fixed by now. In any case, the much maligned council had fixed the supply and demand issue on parking by increasing the parking charges, so I hear.

At the same time as trying to put visitors off visiting Truro, by car at least, the much maligned council is pulling out the stops to improve the Lemon Quay area to attract more visitors in. They have been in receipt of some town improvement grants from central Government under the Town Deal. The plans included creating some better green spaces in the area, planting some trees, dredging around the harbour, putting in a swing bridge, improving biodiversity and making somewhere to lock up your bicycle.

The latest news on the project is that it had taken so long in the planning that inflation had eroded a significant amount of the buying power of the funds and it has

had to be scaled back. We look forward to seeing a couple of new bushes and some bunting in the square. In all seriousness, that large, paved area could do with some work. It had always looked like a bomb site that someone had smoothed out and concreted. I shall quiz our visitors in great detail about what it is like in the big city these days.

Since the weather had improved considerably on the morning, I decided that I would take the girls to the big beach for a bit of a stank. I elected to wear a lighter hooded sweatshirt and full metal jacket waterproofs both of which proved to be the correct decisions. I had not checked the temperature, but I guessed that we were into double figures and any wind that they might have been was coming from somewhere else. In short, it was ideal for a bit of a stroll across the sand.

We went out a little later than the normal middle of the day walk because of the morning late start. Because of this, we were a little later on the tide than I would have liked. We were only an hour after high water, but the spring tide and a bit of swell was pushing thin layers of water up the beach quite early on. It was the sort of run that moves very slowly, and you expect it to stop but it just keeps coming. It only needed to do it once and we move up the beach quite a bit. Beforehand, we had explored a bit of the southern end of the beach. There are a lot of rockpools there and knowing how much the girls like a dip, I let them explore there for a while.

Being chased a little by the tide, we walked up to where the stream exits The Valley and turned about and came back along the top side of the beach. There is a fair amount of rock up by the dunes at the back of the beach, but it had not changed a great deal since we were there a few weeks ago. The same was true of the rest of the beach, so quite how the Harbour beach has changed several times in the intervening weeks and the big beach had not, is a bit of a mystery. Of course, it may have changed dramatically several times and just went back to how it was for our visit just to fool me.

We had made it out avoiding the rain but as we drew level with the chip shop halfway along the road home, we were caught in a short, heavy shower. It made no difference to me in my waterproofs and the girls were already wet from their rockpool activities. The Missus was on hand with a hairdryer when we got back while I spent ten minutes climbing out of my boots and wet clothes.

With our guests away deep, we had a quiet rest of the afternoon doing very little until the Missus went off to her very important Lifeboat meeting. The girls went into a sulk and I read my book. I paused a little later in the evening to enquire from the Internet the score at the football match. I noticed with alarm that the visiting side had stolen a march on the home team and slotted in a goal that left them one up and halftime. I hastily sent a message to Big Sis telling her to quietly leave now or they may never make it out alive. Happily, the second half was much more lively and the teams managed an equaliser at three goals each.

I decided to retire before they came back. I am not sure I could have coped with the rattles going around, scarves being waved and the chants of 'come on you bloos' from our visiting hooligans.

## January 21<sup>st</sup> – Wednesday

Here we are again with another pants day in paradise. To be reasonable about it, the day was not quite as bad as yesterday, starting off that is, but I fancy there was more rain around than there was yesterday. On the upside, I managed to avoid getting a soaking on all but one occasion.

I had really hoped I would be able to get up to The Farm today, at least for a little while but the morning's weather was really against it and the afternoon, while brighter was a bit of a surprise, it turned out to be inconvenient. The next two days are looking worse, so unless the forecast is way off base, I will not be getting up there then, either.

I had better luck with the girls in the morning, not least by not getting wet. I was out with them and around the short block and back home all before my tea got cold. With that sort of luck, it was worthwhile buying a lottery ticket for the evening. I shall let you know how I get on.

With The Farm off the menu, the morning was particularly sedate. I seem to be the only one up and about before around halfway through the morning. It is a lonely life being an early riser. Even the girls abandoned me after that got back.

There was nothing much doing until the middle of the day when I took the girls out again. We had been excluded from the beach on our earlier excursion. There was a little sand down there but there is still a good amount of swell kicking around in the bay and the Harbour waters were all churned up and throwing waves up the beach. They were also coming over the Harbour wall and making something of a racket as they did so. It was not the place for small hounds which is why we elected to walk the small block.

There was plenty of beach when we went out the second time. Again, the upper reaches of the beach are smooth with fresh sand. The western side of the beach up in the corner has fared better in the distribution than the eastern side under the slipways. There, more rocks are exposed and although we could get under one of the arches, I had to pick my way through various boulders in the way. There is not much sand the other side, either.

Once again, ABH did not seem terribly predisposed to run about and frolic. It took BB all her effort to cajole and bully before she got a rise out of her older pal. It therefore could not have been good news for her when Big Sis and Edward came back from a trip to St Just and offered to take the girls for a walk on the big beach. Despite

having just got back myself, I thought it a capital idea and volunteered to tag along. If ABH had any disagreement with the plan, she did not show it even though we timed it precisely when a persistent shower was passing through. I reasoned that the girls would be wet through after exploring the rockpools, so it probably did not matter all that much.

I did find that I was dragging more than being dragged as we headed down the road but when I let them off the lead when we arrived at the bottom of the slip, ABH perked up a bit. It was just as well because we traversed the beach all the way to North Rocks before turning around to come back again. The rain had stopped soon after we arrived on the sand and the skies brightened making a thoroughly enjoyable outing. The girls seemed to enjoy their bonus walk. BB, who has boundless energy, ran and jumped all the way there and back again. They did collapse in a bit of a heap when we got back for the rest of the afternoon.

So, yet another day slips past with the frontiers of science and humanity hardly bothered at all by our pathetic existence. I shall not be around to press them much next week either, so I am not half going to have to pull my finger out in February else all is lost, I fear.

## January 22<sup>nd</sup> – Thursday

We appear to be getting later and later with getting started in the morning. I suppose I should not worry about it and just go with the flow; I just think that laying in bed for half the morning such a dreadful waste of a day.

Waiting an extra hour before we went out for our first walk of the day actually paid dividends. The heavy drizzle that we would have encountered and for which I had prepared two hound raincoats had gone when we stepped out. Once again, the Harbour was alive with a very rumbustious sea, very much more so than yesterday, so we avoided it. Instead, I directed the girls around the long block since it was perfectly pleasant out, temperate but with a strong northwesterly almost certainly, although I did not check.

It turned out that our timing was fortuitous. Throughout the rest of the morning and well into the afternoon, heavish showers blew through every now and again. Those, and some sunny spells, gave forth to some 'ansum complete rainbows later in the afternoon. On the face of it though, my desire to head up to The Farm was looking in doubt, once again. There was a glimmer of hope in that the Missus needed to go up as she wanted a couple of cabbages which, miraculously, are still looking good. I thought that I might tag along if only just to do a spot of measuring.

Despite the weather, Big Sis and Edward decided to have a geek at Lizard Point. I recommended that perhaps they also popped by Kynance, Mullion and/or Cagwith as there is not a great deal to look at down on the point unless there is a bit of

weather running. They left late in the morning while I was trying to eat up some time by preparing an order after visiting our main beachware supplier. The first order needs to be done quickly after the show to take advantage of the show discounts. I had almost finished when they left.

Big Sis had visited one of the shows with me once and has a good knowledge of the shop workings. I showed her some of the photographs I had taken of the products, and she recognised some of the items that had been highlighted to me as being currently popular. I was told that they were all over 'social media' by the salesman. Well, they were not all over any of the social media I look at, and I really wish I knew which bits of social media I should be looking at to learn of such things. No one seems keen to tell me. Big Sis at least confirmed that some of the items that had been pointed out to me were indeed, on trend. I added them to our list.

The Missus was scheduled to take Mother to an appointment in the early part of the afternoon and the time between when I looked and when she would have to leave was rapidly narrowing. I decided to take the marmoset by the ears and take myself off to The Farm forthwith and hang the weather. I surmised that I would have sufficient time to at least carry out proof of concept with the bolt arrangement on the camera stand, if nothing else. I could certainly not stand hanging around doing begger all anymore.

My exit coincided with the time I should take the girls out, so I took them with me. We were very lucky that the rain had stopped for a while and we did not have any at all while we were up there. I left the girls to run about and attended to my work.

I had omitted to wear my DIYman overalls, and I just hoped that the small gods of grumpy shopkeepers in DIYman mode had not noticed. It is unlikely because I was wearing my full metal jacket working waterproof including my thick orange work over-trousers. By the time I had finished I was regretting wearing quite so many layers.

Before I commenced, I thought it was best to check that I could remove the existing screws. It was at this very moment that I realised that I had forgotten to bring the correct size crosshead screwdriver. For some reason, amongst my extensive collection of tools I do not have one reasonably substantial crosshead screwdriver. This usually does not matter for putting screws in because I have my very handy power driver. I do not often have to remove them. Because these screws had been in place for some time, the use of a manual driver is useful because I can be more careful not to shred the head. I scoured The Farm for a suitable tool and in the end gave up.

Ignoring the issue, I applied myself to putting in a couple of the bolts and using my new drill guide to ensure that I drilled the holes straight. I very quickly learnt that it is not the ideal tool for use horizontally. It means holding the quite heavy tool against the surface while trying to push the drill down on the springs. The hole drilling was possible, but it required quite a bit of concentration and effort.

The other thing that was immediately apparent was that it would not drill the hole deep enough. This was not a huge problem as the screw part of the bolt would self tap the rest of the required depth. To help it along, I used the drill bit without the drill guide to go a bit deeper. Having completed the smaller hole the whole depth, I drilled the upper part of the hole again with the thicker drill bit. Then followed this up by screwing in the hanging bolt. Ideal.

I repeated the process for the upper section of the camera stand so that I had two hanging bolts in place and enough temporarily to hold the structure in place if I removed the screws. That was the next and hopefully the last part of the work today.

Knowing that I would probably never get the screws out in the traditional way, I resolved to cut through them. The upper blocks of wood were not flush, and I could see the screws through the gap. The bottom blocks did not look like I could get a cigarette paper in the gap, but I thought to try anyway. I have nail cutter blades on my multitool, so I went to that first. It was about the third time I had walked from the cabin to the barn to retrieve a tool and I had started to carve a path.

While the blade of the tool easily fitted in the gap, it was apparently having little effect on the metal of the screw. I tried it in the upper block where I could just about see the shaft of the screw, and it confirmed that it was indeed having little effect on the screw. Time to escalate.

In fact, time was not on my side at all. I had to be back home with the cabbages in time for the Missus to leave to pick up Mother. I reasoned that using the angle grinder would not take very long at all and I would have plenty of time to do the job. My only concerns were that the reach of the disc would not be long enough and the screws were in closer proximity to the new hanging bolts than I would have liked. I started on the easy ones at the top and make light work of cutting through the screws. It was a tighter fit on the bottom block and closer to the bolt, so I proceeded gingerly which took a bit of time but did the job.

The other problem I had was trying not to slip over. When we installed the decking at the front of the cabin, I used ordinary planks, not decking wood. I had not appreciated just how slippery the ageing timber becomes when it gets wet. Last year I meant to do something about it, pin down some non-slip sheets or something, but did not get around to it. I wished I had now because I had to stand on a particularly slippery bit of decking to drill the holes and wield the angle grinder. Happily, all my appendages are still attached and the job is, sort of, done.

Just before I left to harvest the cabbages, I tried to slip the stand off its moorings. Earlier, when I proposed this solution in The Diary, the other reader suggested a simpler solution to the drill guide and straight drilling: bigger holes to fit over the hanging bolts. I think he had a point, but I will need to go out tomorrow for a larger drill bit. Later, I recalled that the top section of the camera stand actually rests on the

roof of the cabin. Not only will the holes need to be bigger, but I will also need to expand them downwards so that I can lift the stand slightly to take it off. It seemed such a simple solution to save me having to go up a ladder when I installed it a few years back. Little did I know.

My woes were not yet over. The next hurdle, quite literally, was getting my false knee, still in training, over the fence to the cabbage patch. Happily, I managed – there and back - without falling on my face or backside. Having got there I realised that I did not have a tool to cut the cabbage stalks. I had fancied that the Missus kept a trowel in the patch, but it was a fork and quite useless for the job. I ended up having to pull the cabbages out by the root. I took them back home and ended up having to use a breadknife as the only thing I could find to do a half decent job on them.

The girls amuse themselves at The Farm and no intervention is required. Their condition on leaving is pot luck and on this occasion, with the exception of slightly dirty paws they were in reasonable fettle. This was just as well as the Missus was getting ready to leave to collect Mother and would not have had time to wash them. I was engaged in taking the roots off the cabbages and subsequently having to remove wellies and dirty waterproofs. When I eventually joined them in the living room, they were carelessly arranged on cushions and across sofas with little inclination to do very much. It seemed like a capital idea, so I joined them and promptly had a zizz until the Missus came home.

Our guests arrived back much later. They had not made it to Lizard point or any of the resorts I had mentioned. Instead, they diverted their attention to the Seal Sanctuary where they met the seal that I had ignored as fit and hale on the Harbour beach before Christmas. Someone else had called it in and it had been taken away. Big Sis had wanted to visit for some time since avoiding it on family holidays. Taking a family there is expensive but I do understand that restoring damaged seals no doubt costs a bit and they have to get the money from somewhere. Perhaps, a percentage could go to slippers or stoles which might support the remainder. Just a thought.

I barely had enough time to learn of our guests' antics before I had to slip across the road for Lifeboat training. Due to the sea condition, training was shore based and perhaps a little less well attended that it might otherwise have been. We engaged with the crew in practising the deployment of a beaches buoy system from the boat to the gantry opposite.

This was practised in the Harbour during the latter part of the summer. The traditional breeches buoy brings to mind the aerial transfer of crew from one boat to another or between boat and land. There are pictures around here and there of lighthouse crews being transferred to the support boats in such a manner. It was therefore something of a surprise when the way we utilise the system on the Lifeboat is to drag the transferee through the water seated in a lifebuoy with a crotch strap

fitted. This method requires the person being transferred to be relatively healthy; we would not transfer a medical casualty in such a way.

For our practise, a heaving line is thrown from the boat to us on the gantry. We take up the line and haul the main line in and secure it and its pulley to a suitably solid structure. A line runs through the pulley to the boat and another to a second point on the boat attached to the lifebuoy. One line is drawn in while the other is let out thus moving the lifebuoy to and from the boat depending on which way the lines are hauled.

To engage all the Boat Crew, the procedure was carried out several times. At the end of it, we were very good at catching the heaving line and tying off the main line. I could not think of a more enjoyable way of passing an evening in the depth of winter. I shall recommend that we do it all again another week.

I was home in front of the fire – well, I would have been if we had one – by shortly after eight o'clock. We start training earlier these days which seems to suit better as we have more time for training or, in the event we do not launch, are home earlier. It was clear that the assembled company were weary after their exploits, so I settled in to read my book while they watched a popular series on television.

They depart tomorrow and it has been lovely seeing them again. It raised again the issue that I have let friends and acquaintances travel many miles to see us rather than the other way around. Something I will either have to do something about sooner or later, or live with. I shall sleep on it.

## January 23<sup>rd</sup> – Friday

BB had already had me up a couple of times in the early hours, so I continued the tradition and got up early and went about my morning exercise routine. I was halfway through my plank when I was set upon by a couple of hooligans that the Missus had released. There was nothing for it but to get them out and get the first walk of the day done and dusted.

With the Harbour full once again although not quite as busy as the day before, we went around the big block. I stood on a granite edging stone to allow them to sniff some obviously alluring patch of grass the other side and was promptly knocked off my perch by a particularly vicious gust of wind. I would have said that it was northerly, but I discovered later that it was one of those tricky southeasterlies that bends around corners to get us.

I was mildly surprised to discover that we were expecting another Atlantic storm. Ingrid, this time. It was on our doorstep by the time I had heard anything about it and yellow weather warnings were in place for wind and rain. Oddly, it had looked quite appealing first thing in the morning as I gazed out of the window. Had it not been for the departure of our guests, I might have been tempted up to The Farm to continue

where I left off yesterday. I would have definitely felt the 50 miles per hour southeasterly more keenly there, for sure. I might have impressed you with the windspeed at Gwennap Head, windiest place in the universe, but their weather station is still out of action after Storm Grotti.

We stayed put through the morning as our guests did not depart until the middle of the day and after I had taken the girls out again. We had watched from the window as the weather rapidly deteriorated and the wind picked up to flick at the waters of the bay. We had rather fewer waves than yesterday and those that were about, were being peeled back at the top as they tried to force themselves forward against the wind. With a bit more orderly swell, it might have offered some decent surfing but there was not much doing further in towards the beach. It did not stop half a dozen hopefuls arranging themselves across the beach front.

I had already decided to head into town today to pick up a larger drill bit. The girls were fast running out of food and the Missus threw in her tuppence worth with a request for sesame seeds. Since the seeds are far cheaper in the independent shop in town – half the price, in fact, including parking nearby – I would make multiple stops ending at Tesmorburys for the dog food. I collected Mother first, because it is her day today, and took her on the excursion with me. When we have Mother on board, we also get to park in naughty places with her get out of jail for parking free card. I had a little trouble getting the drill bit but other than that we were in and out of town in half an hour.

The wind was far more noticeable in town, and the truck was getting a bit of a beating as we crossed in front of Mounts Bay. It had started to rain a bit as well and by the time we headed home, there were some heavier showers. The skies had darkened, too, and turning the day into an uninspiring gloom. It was more a day for stopping in and watching it from the inside.

I also watched it in the computer. By looking at the rain radar, the low pressure system was abundantly clear, marked out by patches of heavy rain rotating anticlockwise around a hub just to the southwest of us. It was fascinating to watch as it very slowly inched eastwards. I surmised that we were probably getting the same bit of rain coming full circle every several hours. There were not many gaps between the showers, either, although since they were quite small and discrete, it was surprising just how many missed us.

I had heard on Radio Pasty that the railway was to be closed down along the Dawlish stretch and a bus service laid on. I thought that they had ploughed millions of pounds into making that part of the railway more resilient to the weather. On the bit of social media that I do manage to find things on someone had posted a short clip of the banging sea with trains passing through the spray. It was Mother, ever with her finger on the pulse, who told me that all the work on that stretch had been scaled back through lack of funds. I do hope that the weather retreats for Tuesday

and Thursday next week as I will be passing through on my way to and from seeing the Aged Parent.

While I may miss getting a soaking as I pass through Dawlish next week, I was not so lucky when I took the girls out last thing. I had a quick peek out of the window to see that the coast was clear and by the time I opened the door a few seconds later, it was hacking down. The girls and I got a proper soaking even though we only slipped around the back of the shop. Typically, it stopped just as we got to the front door. Hooray for full metal jacket waterproofs, though do not tell the girls; I omitted to put their raincoats on.

## January 24<sup>th</sup> – Saturday

I was in danger of losing a good part of today to indolence. I required a smart kick up the backside and managed to provide myself with one halfway through the day. It was a close run thing, else.

The forthcoming weather for the day was a complete mystery to me. I had not bothered to look at any forecast and had sort of expected the storm to be on its way. In as much as the rain had moved on, I was right, but it was still blustery – from the west this time – and the sea had ramped up its mission to be angry forever. It was doing quite well, as far as I could see with a complete maelstrom in the Harbour and plumes of spray dancing up the cliffs opposite here and there.

The girls were not overly encouraged to venture out first thing. Dragged kicking and screaming, we made it around the block in one piece, but we were not happy about it. I quite enjoyed the feel of the wind in my hair; I was wearing shorts. I will grant them that it was a fair bit cooler than it was the day before, mainly due to the wind chill effect, but not uncomfortably so. I let the girls go back to bed and returned to what I was doing before, which was not an awful lot.

Had I managed to kick myself up the rear a little sooner, I might have got up to The Farm to continue my mini project. I think it would have been uncomfortable, and the gusting breeze would not have helped. Still, that did not happen and instead I revisited the card order that I almost made at the trade show.

The reason that I did not go through with the order then was because the photographs of the cards in the brochure were too small and did not do them justice. Perhaps it is just my eyes, but I thought that at least the images online would be bigger or I could make them bigger. I duly visited the company website and was immediately disappointed that the images were not that much better. I had thought that I would be able to click on the card I wanted to see in more detail and it would bring up a bigger photograph. Instead, it invited me to set up a trade account, which I did not want to do unless I had made a big enough list to want to place an order. I was not going to make any sort of list if I could not see the cards clearly enough.

I almost gave up – hard luck if you cannot make it easy for me to see your cards – but then I discovered that I could enlarge the image on the screen by zooming in. This was satisfactory enough and I soon had a list of around ten designs which are alluring and different, which is all I ask for from the cards we buy.

My next problem was how to place the order. As is frequently the case, I was referred to this company by an agent, or in this case another company acting as an agent. If I purchased my selection direct, would I be cutting out the agent? There is no advantage to me for doing so; the price is still the same. The supplier might get a better return from me and the agent might be miffed if he found out. The honourable thing to do would be to ask the agent and keep everyone happy. It meant that I would have to wait until Monday before I could clear the order. I was not in any hurry, but it would have been useful to completely tick off another task.

The kick up the backside I required was forced upon me by the necessity of taking the girls out for a walk. Having kitted up to face the breeze and the chill, I took them down to the Harbour beach and because ABH was not inclined much to run about and play, I took them around the block. If ABH does not get her moo back, we are going to have to get a playmate for BB because she is desperate to run around chasing and being chased. She is also a bully, so we cannot really blame ABH for being teed off now and again.

The getting up to walk around the block was the impetus I needed to go and do other things when I got back. Since The Farm seemed to be off the menu and I am not equipped to sort the decorations that are filling the shop and I could not go to the tip, sorry, Household Waste Recycling Centre – another chore on the list – that left me with making bullets.

I had taken the precaution of removing the heavy kit from the top shelf in the store room before I had my dickie knee undickied at the start of November. It had sat within easy reach ever since then. I had also taken care to ensure that we did not build up too much rubbish on the shop counter, which is temporarily converted into a workbench for the duration. Even with all those ducks in a row, it had still taken me until the end of January to pull my finger out in this regard. All that preparation – apart from keeping the counter clear – was wasted as I can easily reach the top shelf now.

It took a little time to set up the kit. It probably took longer to remember how to set up the kit as I had not made a round in at least two years. It then took me some time to remember how the process went and I for the first few rounds, I took my time to ensure I was doing it correctly. By the time I had got into the swing of it, I had time only to make the first 100 rounds of ammunition. It is the sort of job that is best done to a sort of rhythm as it is a very repetitive task that requires an element of concentration. Once the rhythm is broken, I need to go back to the start point. It happened just once when I was interrupted by an errant though process and I forgot where I was in the sequence. I had to unload the current round and start again. I

would be entirely hopeless on a factory floor making widgets for thingummyjigs all day long.

I had fancied that I had rather more rounds to make but another 200 of the ones I was doing and rather less than 100 bigger rifle rounds will see me finished. I do much less shooting than some of the others at the range and it takes a while to go through the stock I have made. I did discover that I am woefully short of primers – they are the bit that makes the initial bang when struck and sets off the main charge. They come from the USA and are sometimes in short supply. I am hoping that this is not one of those times as it will scupper my endeavour. If they are available, it means a trip to the shop in Helston.

With the balance of the world order restored, I felt happy to retire to do other mundane things that were perhaps less productive. There were some more walks with the girls and some sittings around doing very little, but I had done something. Hopefully, I shall be able to do something tomorrow without inflicting bruises on my behind. We shall see.

## January 25<sup>th</sup> – Sunday

On begger! Storm Ingrid has done its best to put the kybosh on my visit to the Aged Parent on Tuesday. It knocked a clearly substandard granite wall onto the tracks and had effectively stopped all traffic until they could have a look at the damage that has been done. From the photographs on BBC website, it looks like nothing more than a few rocks on the line. Heave them over the remains of the wall and all would be well, you might have thought. I do suppose they have to make sure the rails have not been bent. Obviously, had it been a Cornish hedge, it would still be there, and the sea would be looking a bit sheepish for having tried to take it down.

There has been a bit of a 'STOP PRESS' moment and I have read that the line had been cleared and a limited service has resumed. It seems the railway people paid attention to my advice – which is remarkable since I had not yet published it - and sent some burly troops to heave the rocks out of the way. Job is a good 'un, as they say this side of the Tamar.

Despite the forecasters casting a spell of doom and gloom over all the days for the foreseeable future, we had a very decent day today. From quite early on, the skies were reasonably clear and the sun was breaking through here and there. As the day progressed, it just got better and there was hardly any breeze at all to lower the temperature. It was looking very Farm day to my highly critical eye.

The only thing that was likely to get in the way was the Missus heading off to pick up Mother and potentially heading into town after coffee that I advised her she was running out of. As time advanced, I pressed her about this very issue and she told

me to go ahead and pick up Mother, after which I could head up to The Farm. The coffee could wait I was told.

Rather than waste time running the girls out first, I took them with me. They are relatively self-sufficient up at The Farm – famous last words, it turned out. They disappear frequently so heaven knows what they get up to and frankly I would rather not know. There is a risk that they would return lagged in something or aromatic in the wrong sort of way, but I got away with it last time and I was hopeful again today. There was just one moment of concern. A neighbour's dog had passed the gate which had got the girls all flustered. They had been resting in the truck and, I thought, had returned there after the other dog went. The next thing I knew, engrossed in my work, was someone calling my name. I went to investigate and found the neighbour at the gate with a white bundle of fur in her arms. BB had somehow slipped through the dog-proof gate and followed the other dog. The minx.

My previous unconcern left me time to concentrate fully on the task at hand. I was not entirely sure what that was, but I would proceed and see how far I got. I took the new cameras with me just in case I got as far as installation. In reality, having removed the camera post from the cabin I did not really want to put it back incomplete.

The first job ahead of any of the technical stuff was to finish off the arrangement for the post so that it could be easily removed and replaced. I hesitated to use the word easily. The post is heavy and top heavy at that and requires some attention when moving it about. While it sat on the two hanging bolts I had already installed, I did not wish to trust it not to fall on my head without the retaining nuts in place. I do not think that it would, but there is nothing quite like being sure, so I made sure I had a hand on it with the nuts removed.

Despite my ultra caution, it turned out that I had to remove the two hanging bolts completely to get the unit down. It rests on the roof without the bolts in place, if I wanted to be brave but I am not, so I held it with one hand. The other issue that I was aware of but had not thoroughly worked through was the power cable that was tacked up the side of the post. I had to untack this and ultimately unplug it while holding the stand in one arm. This was tricky but not too troublesome.

Drilling the larger holes and then elongating them was very straightforward especially with the drill guide being used in its correct orientation. There was only one hiccup. Once of the two original holes I had drilled, lined up precisely with the screw that held the lower block of wood to the cabin. It was so exact that I had not noticed it until I came to reinstall the hanging bolt and it bent in the last centimetre or so. Since I had got so far, I abandoned that bolt entirely leaving the stand secured by three bolts instead of four. Two would probably have done.

Given that I would need to manipulate the camera stand while drilling it, removing the old camera first seemed like a sensible idea as it would remove some weight

from the ensemble. This might have been a whole lot simpler if I had remembered to bring a crosshead screwdriver with me. After all the problems I had last time, you might have thought that it was the one thing I might have remembered. It was either a case of packing everything up including the girls – a process that would have taken ten minutes – and heading back home or trying to improvise. Luckily, I was able to use a long crosshead screwdriver bit and a pair of pliers for the screws I could not use the power driver on.

When I considered the project, which I have had a very long time to do, I would have ideally installed the WiFi first. I could have done this separately so that I did not have to do quite so much all at once. However, the mobile SIM card I was going to use was in the old camera, so that needed to come down first. Once the camera was down, it did not make much sense not to do the complete install.

Once I had disassembled the camera, I moved onto installing the WiFi which proved agreeably simple. Again, I could have done with a crosshead screwdriver to get the box open, but the screwdriver bit and pliers seemed to be working without giving me too much grief. The unit is designed to go outside, but this would mean drilling a sizeable hole in the cabin window frame. I reasoned that if the unit worked sufficiently well inside, that could be a job for another day. It did, so I left it.

There were very few issues installing the new camera. Things have moved on since I installed the last one. While I struggled to find the quick-start installation guide, the camera started speaking to me telling me what buttons to press and what to type in. Of course, I could have just been hearing voices due to frustration and tiredness, but since I was frustrated and tired, I did not care, as long as it worked – which it did.

We now have an operating camera up at The Farm and WiFi as well. We will have to be frugal with the latter because there is a finite amount of data we can use for the money each month. That needs to be prioritised for the camera – cameras, when I can get around to installing the second one.

I had finished the job at just about the right time. The girls had climbed into the truck a little earlier, clearly having enough of roaming, running and exploring. They were keen to get home as much as I was keen to finish off the mini project and have an operating camera again. It has been pleasant enough up at The Farm and I was comfortable in DIYman overalls. I even had to remove my hooded sweatshirt layer it was so reasonably temperate there. It was definitely time to call it a day, though.

The rest of the afternoon was doing nothing time. I had, for the first time this winter actually done something, which was incredibly satisfying after all those days of sitting around and scratching my behind. The weather and my recovering dickie knee have not helped but I do hope that I have now broken through my confinement and can get on with stuff. I have to say, if the forecast is to be believed, there will not be many days to do stuff in, but I think we had the same issues last year and still managed to build a greenhouse.

Just when we thought it was all over, the sheriffs parked up opposite the shop for more than an hour last night. There did not appear to be a Coastguard call-out, so the attendance is currently shrouded in mystery. Perhaps there is skulduggery afoot in The Cove. We shall make enquiries.

## January 26<sup>th</sup> – Monday

The day had commenced in relatively benign conditions. There had been some light rain or drizzle at some point during the night. I had seen it on one of the skylights and had assumed that it was raining but when I kicked the girls through the door, it was not too bad at all.

The Harbour was once again out of bounds. That sea has been coming over the Harbour wall in one state of extremity or another for longer than I can now recall. Alright, that is only a few days, but I am sure that it has been longer than that. The waves were thrashing it out on the sand, lumping in accompanied by suitably dramatic crashing sounds. I could have stayed and listened for a while, but the girls were keen to get on.

It was not long after we got back home that the weather started to close in. We started off with mizzle that just got heavier as the afternoon went on. The girls and I had ventured out in the middle of the day just before it started to get into its stride. I had worn full metal jacket waterproofs, but the girls came back soaked through. It was that sort of rain. It was not the sort of afternoon to be doing very much outside, so we battened down and did very little inside, instead.

When I scanned the news during my breakfast in the morning, I noted that we had another named storm about to come upon us. It confused me greatly on several counts. Our storms used to follow some fairly simplistic rules, the first of the season started with 'A' follow by a 'B' and so forth. As a footnote (I could not be bothered to put it at the bottom), we reached Wilma in 2005 and went round to Alpha for another five.

So far this season we have had Amy and Bram, fair dos, then we get Grotti and Ingrid – what? Whatever happened to C, D, E and F and H. I was under the impression that the country with the most at stake would name the storm, but I thought that we would at least all be singing from the same hymn sheet. Ingrid gave problems all along the English south coast. So, first, it was ours and the Portuguese should have kept their hands off it. Even if we did want to play fair and Portugal had not had a storm for a while - here have one of ours - they should have named it Hipolito to get us back on track.

Then, just when I am coming to terms with the utter chaos, we get another storm lined up to give us a deluge and they name it Chandra. Well, I just give up. I am not

going to play their silly games anymore. They can call the next one Storm Up Your Bum for all I care.

Given the grimness of the day and the desire to stay inside out of it, I did some work type things on the computer. The first of these was to finish off the order for greetings cards that I started at the show and made an effort towards on Saturday. I did tell the supplier I would have it to him on Sunday, but other things got in the way. Also, over the weekend I had finalised the show order for the discounted beach gear including our new and ever so exciting products for the forthcoming season. If you are an Easter visitor, they will be arriving in time to be on our shelves for then. If they are as good at selling as the salesman said, they will be gone by Whitsun. There is also the possibility they will still be here three seasons ahead.

As is ever the case, if something is going to go wrong, it will do when it is most inconvenient or at a time when the impact is greatest. I had two such failures today, the first was one of my ear buds, the things that I listen to music and sound from my mobile telephone and laptop on stopped working. More accurately it broken in half and after I put it back together again, it ceased to function. I spent an inordinate amount of time selecting the right device when I purchased them a few years back, and it will take time for the new ones to arrive. I will therefore be ear budless when I go off on my travels tomorrow.

Somewhat more at issue is my long serving work waterproof coat. I use it for everything from working at The Farm to trips into town on damp days. It has been exceedingly good value but over the last week, the zipper has been giving problems and after the late afternoon walk today, it gave up the ghost completely. I have ordered a replacement, but this particular brand is only available from abroad and will take a few weeks to arrive.

I fell back on my posh full metal jacket storm proof coat. It is of exceptional quality, and I use it for longer walks in poor weather or in extreme conditions if I must go out. In that regard, it was exactly the right jacket to wear for the last walk out of the evening with the girls. It looked a bit rainy outside, so I would have worn full metal jacket waterproofs anyway and I even took the precaution of togging up the girls, too. What I had not seen was that beyond the end of our steps, the rain was coming down in biblical amounts. It was propelled by a gusty wind just for good measure. When I looked at the rain radar a little later, I had chosen the exact moment of peak rainfall saturation to walk out in.

Naturally, ABH had chosen tonight to procrastinate about her business, and we were out for far longer than might otherwise have been necessary. The bits of the girls no covered by raincoat were soaked and so too were my waterproofs. My old, erstwhile waterproof shoes had clearly been no match for the quantity of water falling on them, so my feet were wet. The rest of me was alright, but my full metal jacket waterproofs, the ones that I would have to pack or wear on my journey tomorrow, were very wet. I can only hope they dry sufficiently overnight so as not to be an annoyance tomorrow.

The Aged Parent had telephoned earlier in the evening and suggested that I put off my visit. That would neither have been desirable or convenient having made bookings, but I could now see his point. It will have all passed through by the time I leave tomorrow, and I hope that rain on the tracks is not as disruptive as rocks on the track. You will have to tune in tomorrow to find out, dear reader.

## January 27<sup>th</sup> – Tuesday

When I was commuting by train all those many years ago, our trains would often be affected by leaves on the line. Apparently wet leaves played havoc with the traction and stopped or delayed many of our trains. It was a source of much frustration and eventually, much hilarity. Here in the Duchy of Cornwall, we do not muck about with mere leaves stopping our trains running. I pen this particular paragraph gazing out at the fairly mundane surroundings – they are after the best part of an hour – of Truro station. We are waiting because an oncoming train has struck a tree on the line and the driver, we are told, is heroically trying to prise it from under the bogey – or whatever trains run on these days.

Disruption to our trip was written in the stars from before the journey even commenced. When I arrived at Penzance station, the platform sign showed that the train I was to take would be delayed by 20 minutes. It was not clear whether the train standing at platform two was in fact the train that was delayed or whether that would depart, and the delayed train would arrive subsequently. I resolved to go and ask in the hopefully aptly named 'Information' office to see if they had any. Here I was told that the train I was after was indeed delayed, which was a good start. They sounded a good deal less certain that the train currently at the platform was the one that was delayed in leaving, however. Telling me that they only *thought* that it was the right train was not quite the assurance I was hoping for. It seemed my only option was to go and sit in the train and hope for the best. There was only one direction it was going to go in anyway

As luck would have it, the train that I boarded was the correct train. It was not long after I sat down that the reason for the delay was explained. They were waiting for a pilot to see them safely out of the station and through to St Erth from where they could proceed normally. I had heard of pilots for boats but never for trains. Were they to attempt to sail the train across the bay, I wondered. As we sat and waited, we were struck by the most almighty squall that blew through the bay, rocking the carriages alarmingly and accompanied by quite the heaviest downpour imaginable.

In short order we were pulling out of the station, safely under the guidance of the railway pilot. I was very soon forced to swallow my flippancy regarding the setting sail as sea laden spray washed over the train as it skirted the bay. It was unclear for the next few minutes whether we were being washed by rain or sea as we headed for the safety of Marazion where the track heads inland.

If I drew any comfort from the fact that we were on our way, it was short lived. We arrived at Truro on time and there we stayed. It was here that we had the news that the oncoming train had hit a tree and that the train crew were unable to fix it. There would be a considerable delay while Network Rail was called to the scene with appropriate equipment to clear the blockage.

I was somewhat hampered by the lack of volume and clarity of the information announcements over the train speaker system. I collared a passing steward who was most accommodating by stopping by frequently with updates. I blamed my false ears, which I was wearing for a change but the young lady in the seat opposite also said she could not hear them – so there.

As it became apparent that my progress would be severely disrupted, I started to look at contingencies and alternatives. These changed dynamically as more information became available: the train would now terminate at Plymouth; would I be able to get another train from there to Exeter? There would be no trains east of Exeter until at least the evening; would I be able to get a taxi from Exeter to Sherborne? The people that I spoke with were extremely helpful; I commend them. However, they were also working on limited and rapidly changing information. A very helpful taxi service in Exeter told me they were not running any cabs over routes they did not know were safe as many roads were flooded.

There came a time when I had to make a decision based on the available information and that very much suggested that I would be best to abort my attempt at getting further along lest I be stranded without the option. I duly got off the train and went in search of a bus. That would be a further 45 minutes wait, so I went in search of a cup of tea only to discover that the kiosk had closed at midday.

During my wait, the train log jam – in a very literal sense - suddenly cleared, and trains would once again be running in both directions. I would, according to the many station staff hanging about, be better off getting the train back to Penzance because it would be quicker. That turned out to be debatable but by the time I worked that out, I had missed the bus. I had the brief opportunity to get back on the original train as I had heard that trains were again running from Exeter east. I would however have to take my chances that I could get a timely connection from Plymouth.

Given the uncertainties and the fact that by the time I had arrived at Sherborne, it would have been too late to see the Aged Parent. I waited for the next Penzance train and headed for home.

The weather had looked quite pleasant when left The Cove in the morning. There was sunshine and little white fluffy clouds dotted about. By the time we got to the top of the hill, it looked a bit different. A punchy wind was blowing in from the southeast and the skies in the direction of Penzance looked grey and foreboding. As we came over the moor and looked again to the southeast, Penzance was under heavy

bombardment. When we came back again nearly six hours later, The Cove too had been transformed. A huge rain laden cloud was pressing towards the bay and heavy showers were sweeping in. The sea state that had looked a little more calm this morning had renewed its onslaught and the bay was filled with white water. This was not a day for the faint-hearted. It was more a day for hanging around in train carriages and station waiting rooms, obviously.

On the way back to Penzance, I reviewed my options. The good people at the train company said that they would honour all today's tickets for travel tomorrow which opened the possibility of a second attempt the next day. The advantage of this was that I would mitigate the loss of the hotel booking to just one night. I would however have to book another night. If I did not go, I would lose both nights. I hold the Aged Parent in high esteem, obviously, but there are limits. After a discussion with the Missus, I would attempt to make the trip again tomorrow.

I waited until I got home and made the several telephone calls required to make the trip possible. Had I booked the hotel directly, they may well have accommodated the change without charge. Unfortunately, I booked it through a booking company but the person I spoke with at the hotel was most helpful in arranging that I would have the same room on the new consecutive nights. I spoke with the Aged Parent who helpfully told me that another named storm was heading in and did I not want to put off the whole thing for another time – no, for the reason stated. Lastly, I had to rearrange an optician's appointment that I had for the Friday.

The Missus had asked me to cancel an appointment that Mother had at the same optician. It was only after I had completed the call that the Missus asked why I had not just swapped my appointment with the one I was cancelling for Mother. I did try calling back but they were not taking calls. They obviously did not want to embarrass me by forcing me to admit that the Missus is cleverer than me.

Happily, the rain held off for the rest of the afternoon and evening, at least for the bits I needed to be out in it. I will have dry waterproofs for my journey tomorrow. Wish me luck.

## January 28<sup>th</sup> – Wednesday

A day more different from the day before you could not imagine. There were blue skies in abundance when I looked out of the window first thing. What could possibly go wrong on such a glorious day.

We even managed to get onto the beach for our morning step out. The girls were already in a good mood it seemed when we arrived and when we were joined by a couple of early morning beach walkers, they were delighted. I was a bit more organised this morning having learnt my lesson from the day before and made my packed lunch the previous evening. I was already packed, too, having not unpacked.

It meant they had plenty of time to cavort on the beach and I had time to chat to our visitors. I understood that they had just purchased a restaurant in Newlyn and were looking forward to renovating it in time for the new season. They had already determined the likely stamp of their clientele – hairy reared fishermen. The menu was very unlikely to contain many vegan dishes – or fish for that matter.

We left for the station giving plenty of time for the various roadworks and restrictions in Penzance. I had not realised that there were so many and many of the back streets to the station are blocked. The temporary traffic lights just before Newlyn crossroads had not been set up today. They were being installed yesterday so that some of the fallen trees from last week could be removed.

While markedly more functional than yesterday, all was not exactly a bed of roses with the railways. Because rolling stock had been displaced the day before, our train was made up of five coaches instead of nine. This was not really a problem until we reached Plymouth when the seats began to fill up. I already had a seat, so it was not really a problem at all. I cleared the seat beside me but although a few people paused, no one it seemed wanted to sit next to me. I must present as a grumpy shopkeeper without having to say anything.

On the upside, we advanced beyond Truro. I sent a message to the Missus on the event. She sent a message back to say that she thought I must be exceedingly happy about it which, indeed, I was. I sent her a reply just as we were crossing the Royal Albert Bridge over the Tamar. I said that I was more than happy; I was in Devon.

Oh, please yourselves. The train had been on slow time at several stretches of the line between Penzance and Exeter. It has resulted in an arrival at Exeter St David's just minutes after the last hourly service to Sherborne had departed. Of course it did.

There is very little to do at Exeter St David's station other than have a cup of tea and wait. Unlike Truro the day before, at least the watering facilities at Exeter were open. It is a franchise called Astrobucks, presumably named after the elevated prices that it charges for things. I do not recall ever having parted with £3.80 for a simple cup of tea. It must be exceedingly commonplace because it did not even come with a smile. The other thing that I cannot recall is a look of quite such horrified derision at being offered cash for a purchase. It was even the exact money and included five pence pieces and coppers, with which I had thought to delight the serving lady. She asked me to place it on the counter while she put a glove on to touch it. There is no pleasing some people.

To be fair, it was a very good cup of tea, even if I had to make it myself. I passed the time by making observations on my surroundings. The last time I had stopped for tea at this establishment, there were comfortable seats to lounge upon. They had been replaced with wooden chairs and tables of the most basic sort. Perhaps £3.80 for a cup of tea is not providing the returns that I imagined or the place is so often busy that they do not want it so comfortable that people hang around longer than necessary.

I managed to string drinking my tea out long enough that I did not have to wait long on the platform for my train. It arrived so early at the station that I had to double check the notice board to ensure that it was indeed my train. Since there was no other, I took the risk and found myself a seat. Several chapters of my book later, I arrived at Sherborne.

The plan was to check in to my hotel as quickly as possible and head up the hill to visit the Aged Parent. It was a plan that went exceedingly well. The room, one of two in the hotel – it is really two rooms above a restaurant – is huge. To make it look a little less huge, they had installed a huge bed. Happily, it came with a map so that I could find my way around it. I chose not to explore. If the previous occupants are still snuggled up in the far side, I would probably never know.

I could go into detail about the rest of the evening, but I will not. Suffice to say, I had a pleasant meet with the Aged Parent – although woefully brief – and went from there to the Digby Tap. It is a very fine establishment, an example of a proper public house with nicotine stains on the ceiling, stone flagged floor and beer at £4.40 a pint. It is invariably busy. The price of a pint is ten pence less than it was last year because the Government reduced the tax on beer. Did your local pub drop their beer by ten pence? I know that mine certainly did not. I would move here tomorrow and go to the pub every night. Preferably, I would move the pub to The Cove and go to it every night. It will forever be a frustration to know that a pub can be run successfully with cheap beer and still look like a pub and yet very few do.

## January 29<sup>th</sup> – Thursday

I do not know if they have muted the bells on the abbey clock due to some modern outcry that the dong infringed some human right or other, or if they are just broken. In whichever case it was, there was not one dong in the night nor in the morning. Perhaps I am just more deaf than I thought. It could also be that I am confusing the bell ringing with somewhere else. No matter, I slept well and rose at the appointed hour.

I should mention the bathroom because like everything else the room has to offer, it is big. The sink is big, the bath is mammoth, and the showerhead is the size of a dustbin lid. I think that the placement of the shower controls has always bemused me, but it was only this morning that it came again to the forefront of my thoughts. Why are they always to the rear of the shower outlet? Unless they are very nimble, the operative stands a high chance of being deluged the initial rush of cold water from the hose. Once established and the temperature stabilised, unless they are exceedingly lucky that the temperature of the water is exactly to their liking, the user will have to negotiate the downpour or either scolding hot or heart-stoppingly cold water to adjust the controls. They may have to do this multiple times.

This morning, I discovered that the hot water in the hotel is extracted from a volcanic fissure in the rock below the building and comes to the tap head only slightly below the temperature of molten lava. There was no way that I was going to risk reaching

around the cascade of water to add cold water to the mix. Even the minute splashes were causing second degree burns and blisters on my skin. In the end I had to risk flooding the floor by removing the shower screen at the side of the bath to turn the controls. With the dial turned all the way to the cold side, the water was still hot enough to run a turbine. I washed very gingerly this morning.

My bravery clearly needed rewarding and breakfast seemed to be the very thing. Breakfast is included in the price of the hotel. It would have been churlish to refuse it since I had already paid. I had hoped for an eggs benedict, but it was not on offer. Instead, there was a full English breakfast furnished with ingredients from the locality including sausage and bacon from the butchers in Wincanton that we had patronised when the Aged Parent lived there. It was an admirable offering, and I quite forgave them the absence of benedict.

It is a beneficial walk from the hotel to the top of town. It served me well when I had a dickie knee and now, fully equipped with new knee, it gave me healthy exercise. While I am still trying to build muscle in the affected leg, it was more of an effort walking up the hill than it was before the operation. I noticed that an uneven path is problematic and walking in a straight line is a challenge. Well, I hope that the walking in a straight line is to do with muscle wastage and not over-indulgence the night before. Whatever the issue, I will have to carefully time the walk up and down so that I can judge when to leave the Aged Parent in order to meet my train heading homeward in the morning.

Occasionally in the run up to these visits I do wonder what on Earth we will talk about. The Aged Parent is fully up to date with the events of my life because he reads The Diary. It is much to the Missus' chagrin that she cannot tell her family any news because, generally, they have already heard it and, of course, every word written in this sorry rag of a journal is the very honest truth and every sentence a fact. Somehow or other, we bump along talking of this and that.

This visit, however, had the added complexity of sorting out some of the Aged Parent's administration. There is normally a little bit to discuss or arrange but the recent demise of the Aged Parent (maternal) has added a further unfortunate layer. I have to say that the Aged Parent managed most of the complex paperwork and communications all by himself. It should not be of great a surprise since he spent most of his working life organising administration and thus is very good at it. However, there were some things that needed to be cleared up and when I left in the middle of the day, I took quite a pile of papers to reception to request that they be shredded.

I left the Aged Parent to his dinner and a subsequent zizz and retired to the hotel room where I emulated his approach but without the dinner. Since I had been disappointed at the cheaper Italian restaurant last night, I paid a visit before I went back to the hotel to book a table for the evening.

Returning after siesta, we continued our banter well into the afternoon. I was even plied with apple pie, which was rather nice. Quite how we found so much to talk about will forever be a mystery, but it was an exceedingly pleasant way to pass an afternoon. When his toasted cheese sandwich appeared, I knew it was time to go lest I ate it for him. I retired to the Digby Tap when I reminisced on times I had spent in similar establishments when they were two a penny and regretted not appreciating them more at the time – although on reflection, at the time, it is difficult to see how that might have been possible.

As Joni Mitchell said, “Don't it always seem to go, That you don't know what you've got 'til it's gone, They paved paradise, put up a parking lot.”

## January 30<sup>th</sup> – Friday

I was up early this morning to try and fit everything in without panicking. It was still dark, so it was not until I headed down for breakfast that I noted that the sky was blue and the air crisp and clean. I had taken my big heavy full metal jacket waterproof down to breakfast and asked if I could leave it there while I hurried up the hill to bid farewell to the Aged Parent.

There had been a weather warning covering the whole of the southwest last night. Late in the afternoon, the Meteorological Office had changed its mind and reduced the area to cover west of Exeter. It still rained quite heavily in Sherborne later in the evening, but it was not heavy enough to warrant waterproof trousers which was just as well because I had left them at the hotel. The streets were still very wet first thing, but I think some of that would have been morning dew.

The previous day I had timed my ascent and descent of the main street. It gave me a fairly accurate estimate of when I should leave the Aged Parent so that I would be at the station in time for the train. I had allowed myself plenty of time as I did not want to make it look like I was eager to depart. It was the Aged Parent who nervously checked his watch every couple of minutes. Eventually, he could stand it no longer and sent me packing.

I stopped by the hotel again for my bag and coat and was at the station half an hour before the train was due. It was therefore more disappointing than it otherwise might have been that it was delayed by twenty minutes. However, it did give me the opportunity to sit and have a rest. Four stanks up and down that hill in two days had my quads singing and I was definitely feeling the burn. I think it might be time for a few walks up the cliff with the girls to keep up the training.

The rest of the journey back was uneventful save for a further delay and platform change at Exeter when I arrived to change trains. As we ventured further west, the weather closed in and by the time we reached Truro where the Missus had arranged to meet me, it was tipping it down.

As we all know, the Missus hates curry, except for one particular dish that is only available at the Truro curry house. We used to be able to get it from a sister restaurant in Penzance but that closed down long ago and now requires us to venture further out for it. Because it is so far away, we very rarely go there but every now and then, the Missus fancies this dish and makes arrangements to pick up a shipping order that will last at least half a year in the freezer. Since the trip is being made anyway, Mother and I prepare a list of dishes to add to the list and they are collected altogether. My trip up country and my arrival at Truro near the arranged collection time, dovetailed nicely.

We were early for curry collection, so the Missus suggested that we spend the time in a nearby shop she had planned to visit. It meant finding a parking space in unfamiliar territory. There is a multi-storey car park on the route which required almost a complete circumnavigation to enter. We parked in the open air bit mainly because we can use Mother's get-out-of-jail-free car parking pass. We still have to pay but can park in a wider and more conveniently placed parking bay. It also happened to be in the open air part of the car park.

Being sans full metal waterproof leggings, I was keen to wait until the rain eased a little but the Missus who had parked only half into the flooded bay so that I could step out onto a relatively pool-free bit suggested that I make rather more haste. Gritting my teeth against the uncomfortable feeling of wet trousers, I got out and made haste towards the shelter of the covered part of the car park. Here I had to make a death-defying leap across the flooded entrance way before trying to seek out a terminal where I might pay for the parking ticket. Once I spotted it I made my way over with a handful of change that we keep for that very purpose in the truck ashtray.

It is now commonplace that these machine require the user to enter their car registration against the possibility that they might grant access to another traveller the remainder of their fairly paid for rental of a car parking space. It is a travesty which seems to go unchallenged across the country as allegedly cash-strapped council try and wring every last shekel out of their citizens.

It is an additional irritation because users such as I must remember to carry spectacles with them so that they can identify the correct buttons to press on the sometimes minute keypads provided. I did have mine on my person, but they were so deeply embedded in my waterproofing – except leggings – that I chose to proceed without. Having, I think, successfully done so the machine asked that I present my payment card to conclude the transaction.

First, for the amount that the machine was demanding for just one hour of residence, it should have been wearing a mask and a stripey t-shirt. Secondly, it did not accept coin of the realm which I had ready in my hand. Thirdly, my payment card was in a similar location to my spectacles and by the time I had placed my hand upon it, the machine had cancelled the transaction. It was very fortunate that the Missus arrived

at that very moment because I had stopped looking for my payment card and was casting about for a heavy implement with which to explain to the machine my utter frustration at its lack of simplicity and choice of payment facilities.

It was still raining as I returned to the truck. I chose a different route to avoid the now larger puddle at the pedestrian entrance to the car park and went instead to the vehicle entrance that was a little better off. I tarried to see if the rain would ease which it did not. It became apparent after several minutes that the incessant downpour was increasing the size of the pool that the truck was sitting in and that pretty soon, I would either have to get wet trousers or wet feet – ankles and calves by the look of it. I opted for the trousers.

As I climbed into the truck, the Missus was sitting in the driving seat which was a surprise. In our unfamiliarity with the parking in Truro, we had chosen the wrong car park for the shop the Missus wanted to visit. We gave up and went and got the curry.

I had only been away for two nights; it had seemed much longer. The failed trip on Tuesday had not helped, I am sure. It is a pleasure to visit Sherborne; it has certain, erm, attractions. It is even more of a pleasure to visit the Aged Parent and to spend much time in his company chatting about this and that and we had a good laugh at things, too. It is a regret that I cannot visit more often but the irregularity and brevity of the visits make them more valuable. Even so, I still can feel every fibre of my body breathe a sigh of relief as the welcome arms of The Cove settle once more around me.

## January 31<sup>st</sup> – Saturday

As I was cleaning up this morning, I noted on the side of the box in which our tea came last night the motto, '*why send flowers – send a curry instead*'. I idly wondered how this might go on the forthcoming Valentine's Day. Apologies to Elizabeth Barrett Browning.

*How do I love thee? Let me count the ways.  
With pilau rice, chapati and chicken bhuna  
Tonight for tea, I will see you sooner.  
Forget chicken tikka and lamb dhansak,  
It is for you that my poor heart does lack.  
I thought to send you a rose or two  
But nothing says, 'I love you' like a king prawn vindaloo.*

There was no hurry for anything very much today, although I felt the nagging suspicion that I really should shift myself and seize the day because it looked like it might be a good one. It certainly was exceedingly pretty when I eventually got the girls to go out for a walk. We headed down to the pristine Harbour beach, looking like

it had been prepared by a master plasterer. The girls soon made light work of wrecking it as they dashed about a fair bit, stretching their early morning legs.

I spent much of the rest of the morning catching up with administration. Even right in the middle of our time off, there is plenty of nudging the business rudder to make sure we remain on track. There are also plenty of messages to deal with, even if that just means deleting them. It also meant being exceedingly disappointed that the tax man had still not returned the rather considerable sum he owes me. The Missus had hers returned to her early last month, but they have stalwartly held onto mine for some reason. Because the accountant filed the return, I cannot chase it myself. Well, it stops me spending it, I suppose.

Having finished off the necessary chores, I spotted tedium on the horizon. I would have leapt up immediately were it not for a small demon sitting on my shoulder, sent by the small gods of grumpy shopkeepers, I imagine, urging me not to. What swayed me in the end was the glorious vista of the big beach revelling in bright sunshine and being rapidly eroded by the invading tide. With a still healthy swell pushing into the bay, the gap between the rocks at the back of the beach and the most advanced waves rolling in was getting narrower by the minute. I forced myself out of my chair, flicked a rather disgruntled demon off my shoulder and went and got my hat and coat and two small hounds.

We were earlier for our middle of the day walk than we would normally be, but that was down to the tide. Spurred on by my walks up the hill in Sherborne, I decided that it was high time I took the high road and take BB for her first walk on the Cornish Coast Path. On previous excursions, I have had a singular hound on an extended lead. With the two of them, for ease of management, we switched to shorter static leads. This works well when I can arrange them to the left or right of my intended direction of travel but along the narrow bits of the path, they are in front of me. Oh my, is it troublesome.

BB will frequently and randomly stop dead in my path to sniff at some aromatic niff or other. If I am not fully concentrating, I will trip over her as I am unable to come to a stop quickly enough. The pulling in different directions, I am well used to but the getting under my feet and avoiding tripping over, is a skill yet to be mastered.

I confess that I did struggle getting up the steps at the outset of the path behind the Surf Lodge bar. The steps are high and slope slightly upwards, which makes them a begger at the best of times. I used to lead with my dickie knee foot first and with a run up. This was only possible when I had the extended lead because it was long enough to let ABH get out of the way first. With impetus, I could lead with my new knee foot but the run up was impossible because I could not get the girls far enough ahead to give me space for the run up. They are not steps for a static start and I had to pull myself up using the wire fence to my right. That worked well until the last step when the fence ran out. Happily, the foliage was strong enough to replace it.

That was my only difficulty along the path. We only met one oncoming dog walker who we squeezed past, but our progress was excruciating slow as we stopped to sniff alternate blades of grass for each of them. I was slightly concerned that the tide's progress would scupper our return journey and we would have to find a way up the dunes. We have done this before, using the path up by the Lifeguard hut. Today, we would have struggled with that. The recent churning waves have scoured the sand out at that very spot. All around the Lifeguard hut for thirty or so metres either side it is just rocks. They extend forty metres from the dunes. Further along towards the Beach car park it seems unaffected, which is most odd. Even the reef as we approach the OS slipway is largely unchanged.

It was at that latter point we met a friend and neighbour. She had not long ago been bereaved of her dog of sixteen years, but I noted that she was now in command of a small pup that she was trying to extract from a rock pool. The girls went to investigate and soon mayhem reigned with small dogs chasing in all directions. We were joined by a slightly less familiar hound not long after and spent twenty minutes chatting and waiting for the four girls to exhaust themselves. It did not seem so at the time, but it must have taken its toll as the girls slept for most of the rest of the afternoon.

We were caught by a short sharp squally shower as we walked back along the street. I believe it was the only one that we had all day. We had headed out early and thus had quite a bit of the afternoon to go. I toyed with the idea of heading up to The Farm to deploy the second camera's solar panel to let it charge its integral battery before I put the camera up. However, it requires some supplies to secure the solar panel frame to the ground and with the potential for some southeasterly winds next week, I did not want to risk it.

The alternative was to idle away the rest of the afternoon and watch a movie, which I did. It was only near the end of the film that I realised that I had seen it before. I concluded that if the only memorable bit of the film was the conclusion, the rest must have been forgettable tosh, which it was. Like the Aged Parent, I need a pastime that I can fall back on in idle hours that can easily be dropped and picked up again. Perhaps the pastime is finding a pastime. I shall consider this at length – or just drink heavily.