

DIARY 2026

## September 1<sup>st</sup> – Tuesday

You can instantly tell that the holidays are over: the wind dropped and the sun came out; blue skies, fluffy white clouds and mermaids frolicking on the rocks, no doubt. Last week and before, during the morning twenty or thirty people would be gathered around outside, dropping in for breakfast goods or going in next door to have it made for them. We now have a few groups of five or so milling about. It is a new world.

It is a world where there is more opportunity to have a little fun to make the day run along in a more delightful way. Well, it does for the grumpy shopkeeper; the customer may feel differently. For example, a lady approached the counter with a punnet of mushrooms that she did not expect to find in our little backwater store. Delighted though she was, she felt it necessary to query why they had to come from Poland. Eager not to stray into such a political territory I told her that they were not, in fact, from Poland. The signage indicated that there were our very finest mushrooms and I had taken care to ensure that each individual mushroom looked its best. The label merely indicated that they had polish.

We move swiftly along to an errant shower of rain that swept through The Cove in the middle of the morning, just as things were beginning to bump along quite nicely. I was blissfully unaware of it until a bunch of very wet people pressed into the shop. The shower, while brief, had been unexpectedly heavy and had caught a number of people out. It produced an unexpected flurry of activity in the shop which dissipated as quickly as it had formed.

It was not the last flurry of activity but all the others we had during the day were not rain induced. It was nowhere near as busy as the same time last week, even in poorer weather, but for an 'out of season' day, it was reasonably respectable. What was not respectable was the level of pasty sales (sorry, MS) that have dropped through the floor. I have noted before just how difficult the transition to quiet is and pasty ordering is one of the hardest things to achieve.

Over the last six weeks or so ordering 50 to 60 pasties a day is normal. Any less and the world comes to an end. It is very hard to switch to ten pasties a day and be convinced that it will not. With minimum ordering, the pasties now need to be ordered every other day, which makes it even harder.

With customer visits turning sporadic, I was able to have a good geek at the big beach during the day. Midway into the afternoon, under a bright sky, the beach, still showing off its spring tide sandbars, was busy at both top and bottom. There was a small host of paddlers, swimmers and surfers roughly in the middle, doing what those respective parties do in the water. Up by the dunes, quite a few more than yesterday, was a sprawling collection of camps stretching out as far as The Valley.

Down the middle of the beach was dotted with several perambulators widely dispersed. It was certainly that sort of day.

Business petered out after about four o'clock. By five o'clock our end of The Cove had gone peculiarly quiet. The only thing to shatter the silence apart from the occasional passing car or motorcycle was the incessant cry of a young herring gull. I do not know if it was a distress call, but it was certainly distressing me. It has been having a go for the best part of a week. Because only my right false ear is operational it has given the effect that the squeak from coming from one of the chillers at the far end of the shop. It was only a chance conversation this morning that confirmed it was the gull. If it carries on, it will be more than bleddy distressed.

Part of the silence was the absence of any waves breaking on the rocks or the shore. We had gone from waves breaking over the Harbour all 24 hours ago to hardly a ripple on the bay at all. There must have been some underlying swell still because there were some surfers having a good time on the waves breaking slightly offshore on the main beach. There were also a few more, lower in the tide, around the sandbars. A couple of hours before high water, they had nearly all disappeared.

We all sat down to tea, a roast dinner at that, for the first time in six weeks. Very pleasant it was too as we gazed out over the bay. There were still a couple of wall jumpers, stalwart until the end and, the Missus noticed, two boarders paddling out to the northwest. As we watched they kept going and then going some more. Probably nothing to it as they looked confident, but I sent a message out on the crew gossip page for an eye to be kept.

They eventually stopped around a quarter mile off the north of Cowloe and started handlining. Slowly, they drifted back into the bay when I called off the watch. It did not look like they had caught anything which was an awful lot of effort for an empty dinner plate.

The Missus went back up to The Farm after she had taken Mother home. She was back again before half past eight as the light was failing and it can be a bit spooky up there in the gloom. It underlines the shortening of the days, and the end of season will be on us before we know it. It also meant I did not have to take the girls around last thing, so I took myself off to bed instead.

## September 2<sup>nd</sup> – Wednesday

There was mizzle this morning when we set out. It looked like it had been raining more heavily during the night or perhaps it had just been mizzling for a long time. It was no trouble at all for us and no rain jacket was required. After we got around the

Lifeboat station corner and halfway down the slipway, we were sheltered from any wind that I think had gone around to the southwest.

The mizzle came and went in heavier waves during the morning and completely removed any likelihood of any decent trade. Customers were coming out of necessity for bread and milk. It is the difference between in and out of the main season. During the peak, a bit of mizzle would have slowed things down a little not removed business altogether.

It did at least allow me a worry free trip to the gymnasium where I resumed my normal length blistering sessions. In previous years I would have gradually worked back up to the full session. I guess that I really had not clipped the sessions by that much as extending the session did not bother me at all.

So much so that I took the girls for a spin as soon as I got back. I took them down to the Harbour beach that we had almost to ourselves. We had avoided it during the season so as not to annoy the various other users down there. Earlier, we had gone down in the dark with my headtorch. It was more intensely gloomy than proper dark and I was able to track the girls by the reflective strips on their harnesses. That became a little tricky when they did their normal thing of wanting to be at opposite end of the beach.

The quietness ended around the middle of the day when the mizzle cleared a little, and the cloud seemed to break up a bit. It remained dry, sort of, for the rest of the afternoon but the mist came back and sat above us like a big warm duvet. It really was the last thing we wanted as the warm, wet southwesterly brought humidity that eventually had us feeling like we were walking through glue.

Into this arrived our hooded sweatshirts. I had asked that the delivery be deferred until the first week of September when I might have more time to process it. As it turned out, I had plenty of time to process it; I had nothing else to do. I do not know how long it took but I was able to devote most of my time to it with very few interruptions.

The deferment did not introduce too much of a delay to the normal delivery time but even so, I still managed to sell an unexpected number of one size that has now left me short of 2XL garments in that colour. It may not matter as it could be weeks before we sell another hooded sweatshirt in that size and colour but there again ...

Towards the middle of the afternoon, I had given up trying to fill the empty hours with any meaningful work. Over the last few days, I had completed several orders that will see us into next year. Our man from our main beachware supplier called to tell me he will be coming next week to show me the new season's custom gifts. These will be emblazoned with the name of The Cove so all those little mites who have been named after it can have lots of goodies with their name on it. Trouble is that we will need to do a stock check of all the custom goods we bought last year.

The buying of Cove named goods for children named after The Cove has been going on for some while and some of the little mites must be getting on a bit. Perhaps we should be looking at more grown up gifts with the name on, such as Cove beer bottles and Cove steering wheel covers – surely dads still get them for Christmas. I really think we should be planning ahead with Cove Zimmer frames and Cove incontinence pants.

Quite amazingly, we had a five minutes to closing rush after being quiet all day. Last minute presents for the children you left at home and, having been enjoying yourself without them, suddenly remember you should take home gifts before you leave, I can sort of understand. Why you suddenly need flip flops at six o'clock defeats me.

I watched some television in the evening for the first time in six weeks. I discovered that I had not missed it. I also had tea on my lap instead of at my desk and only realised later that I forgot to place an order. Unlike the summer rush, it will wait another day.

The girls required a last run out in the evening since the Missus had not been up to The Farm late. I think the likelihood of that is now gone for the winter. The mizzle had returned in a very light way and the mist was getting thicker. I have no idea what the forecast is for tomorrow but, with the wind staying in the southwest, I imagine some more mist to come.

### September 3<sup>rd</sup> – Thursday

We must have been later to the beach this morning because it was much lighter than yesterday. It was also foggier. The returning mist had closed in from every quarter, and we could scarcely see the top of the cliff. It was also not advisable to look up because it was drizzling harder than it had all day yesterday. When we got back, I had to hurriedly find a towel with which to wipe down the girls before I let them back up on the bed again; the mizzle soaked their coats as much as it did mine.

There is far less to do in the shop during the morning now. During the season it was a fairly consistent amount of work that I could allocate the same time to each day. Now, some days will require more effort and time than others. Quite fortuitously, today needed little time or effort which put me in good position to respond to the Lifeboat pager going off at twenty past eight o'clock.

A Newlyn fishing boat had lost its steering and was essentially adrift close by the Runnel Stone, a semi-submerged rock pinnacle off Gwennap Head, windiest place in the universe. Skipper had the added advantage of being pals with most of the local crew being a family raised in The Cove. This would explain that when I got to the station a few minutes after the pagers went off, most of the Boat Crew were dressed and waiting to go out.

We launched with just two crew in quick time and other very excellent Shore Crew not far behind. Assuming the likely outcome to be a tow to Newlyn, we closed up shop and started heading for the door. It then became apparent that the fishing boat skipper thought that he could fix the problem, and before we could entirely retire, we had the message that the Lifeboat had been stood down.

By this time, we had a full complement of experienced crew to hand and set up the short slip just ahead of the boat coming back into the bay. Of course, we only had the Coxswain's word for that as we could see no further than the end of the Harbour wall. We could not even hear the boat's engines, muffled as they were by the fog. It loomed out of the mist almost in the Harbour to be brought up the short slip in what was clearly a textbook recovery. It was something of a surprise that I remembered what to do having been absent for the last six weeks. We are, after all, a very remarkable, very excellent Shore Crew.

The Missus had covered the shop in my absence, although she had very little to do, I did not want to miss the pasty delivery (sorry, MS). As it happened, we did not as the driver services St Ives first and comes to us late. It did not really matter; there was very little doing pasties or otherwise for the whole of the morning.

We had to wait until the middle of the day before we saw any serious action. Today was a pasty day. It is exceedingly difficult to manage the supply of pasties on a daily basis. One day we will hardly sell any and, like today, we will sell more than we might expect of a dull and misty day out of season. It is impossible to predict numbers, so the best we can manage is a rolling two day supply and hoping the average works out. And as for ordering for the weekend, forget it. That is pure guesswork.

I was asked in the morning if the mist would clear later. My assumption was that as long as the breeze was in the southwest, it would persist. Radio Pasty had already told us that it would be warm and humid from last night and they were not wrong. They had also said that the afternoon would be clear and sunny, and they were wrong about that.

I had not heard any of the predictions for the day, so I told the customer the mist was with us all day. An hour or so later, the mist promptly lifted and sat above us, letting in some bright sunshine. I was actually rather pleased that it came back again an hour later on and was just as thick as it was in the morning, otherwise I would have looked dafter than I usually do.

The second time the mist cleared at around four o'clock, I could see enough of the beach to note that there was a host of surfers sitting just off the shallows in the middle. At the time, there were a few waves closer in and the occasional surfer occasionally caught one. The rest could be more accurately described as bobbies. The ones out the back were probably waiting on the tide and the sea to build up. I

never did get to find out because I ran out of time – or interest – to watch them any longer.

What I have been watching is one of those expensive water bottles people carry around with them or, in this case, someone not carrying it around with them; it was left behind more than a week ago. It is not the first time. I think this is the fourth this year. This one is worth between £12 and £20 depending on where you shop for it, so it is not cheap trinket. I left it in a prominent position on the counter; customers can easily see it when they leave and it is clear that I can see it too. Despite that, every other customer seems compelled to tell me it is there. It has happened so often now it has surpassed irritation. If one more person tells me it is there, I will feel compelled to heave it over the sea wall.

I managed to contain myself for the remainder of the afternoon. We had been relatively busy on groceries and there were orders to place. I got these out of the way early because I had to go straight off to Lifeboat training after we closed.

Since I had already performed my head launcher role once in the day, I allocated myself to the winch operation. Earlier, we had some issues with the turntable not raising and we were tentative about how it might perform in the evening given that it would be another short slip recovery. We would test it when the boat was out and also train the newer members on the emergency procedures for the turntable.

Without the weight of the boat on it, the cradle lifted and turned without issue. The emergency procedures involve using the buttons on the hydraulic pump mechanism rather than the remote controller. It was during this process that we spotted a leak on one of the seals and thus the root of the problem.

The boats returned at around eight o'clock. With rather less fog about than earlier in the day, we were able to see it come in across the bay in the fading light. From my vantage point in the winch room, it was abundantly clear that we carried out a textbook recovery up the short slip, followed swiftly by a washdown and a haul back onto the cradle. We were lucky that the hydraulics held because as the pump kicked in to push the boat up to level on the cradle, a fountain of hydraulic fluid spouted from the leaky seal. The station mechanic will look at it in the morning.

Having released our collectively held breaths, we strapped down the boat, closed the doors and made ready for the next service. We are, after all, a very relieved, very excellent Shore Crew.

## September 4<sup>th</sup> – Friday

Well, that was a bit unwelcome. As usual I poked my head out of the door first thing ready to take the girls for a spin and noted that there was still some mizzle floating in the air. I was in two minds, because it did not seem that heavy, but discretion won the day and I stopped to put on my light rain jacket. We were halfway down the

slipway when the light drizzle got a little heavier, but it was still not too bad and bound to get better in a minute, I thought. A minute later and the rain was lashing in, charged with a bloody geet squall of wind behind it. We were all drenched in seconds while we made a bolt for home.

The culprit was a pencil thin line of rain heading southwest across us and was gone almost before it arrived. Ten minutes either side and we would have avoided it. As it was, the girls suggested that we go down again because their run out had been so brief they had not had a chance to run around. We were not there for long, but it was a far more enjoyable experience the second time around.

The rain was not the only thing to stick the boot into an otherwise unremarkable morning. The milk had arrived just ahead of the shop opening and I had milk bottles strewn across the floor in front of the fridge when the first customer came in. I left the milk where it was to go and serve the lady only to find out that the card machine was not working for the lack of a wireless Internet connection.

As a stop-gap, I connected the machine to next door's wireless signal and was about to return to the milk when the pasties (sorry, MS) turned up. They had been late all week and the one day when being late would have been helpful, they were early. I stopped to help bring them in and then left them while I returned to the milk.

I was fortunate enough to be able to finish putting the dairy away when the next customer turned up. Again, the card machine failed to process the payment. It had reverted to our own, not working, network because it was the stronger signal. It took a few moments to sort that out after which I had to go and sort out the pasties. That done, I went off to reset our main router which would normally resolve any glitch, but the wireless was still not working after that.

Since there was still the greengrocery to pack and weigh, I settled on that to rest my brain from trying to work out what might be causing the issue. Our wireless signal is provided by a matrix of small access points arranged up high around the shop and store room. We also connect to it in the flat above and usually it works well providing a strong signal throughout the building. All units had working lights indicating that there was no fault, indeed, I had signal from them, there was just no Internet in the signal.

In the end, I traced it to the master unit that connects by wire to the router. Once I had replaced that, the wireless Internet sprung back into life – just in time for me to head off to the gymnasium for a major blistering session.

I returned to the shop. There was no running the girls out again as the Missus was heading off to The Farm straight away. It will not be too long before I can get up there myself and start with the long and getting longer list of tasks and projects.

Being change-over day again we were faced with another round of goodbyes with people who had been frequent customers for the last week or, occasionally, two. One of the departing groups were led by a lady we have known for some years. Her pals were first time visitors, hailing from somewhere transatlantic by the sound of it. They had obviously brought their smarts with them because they won last night's quiz in the OS and were most chuffed about it to. It had fetched them a handsome purse which they very kindly donated to the crew comfort fund. Thank you very much.

Change-over day was one of the reasons it was quiet today and I imagine that the weather was the other. It was a cheerless and dull day with nothing much to commend it. The surfers would have been happy with some swell in the bay, but I had to warn off a gentleman and two young girls from fishing in the early morning. He had already worked out that the Harbour wall would be off limits but asked about casting off the beach. At near high water, the waves were quite merrily thumping in on the sand and standing anywhere near it would have been fraught. I sent them to Newlyn and Penzance to the harbours there which would be more sheltered and much safer.

One of the advantages of not being busy behind the counter is that I have time to keep the shelves topped up. I set to along the grocery aisle in the late afternoon filling all the gaps. It took about ten minutes. That is the other thing about not being too busy: we are not selling anything.

There were, however, enough gaps to warrant thinking about a cash and carry order which, if we follow the pattern of the last couple of months, is due next weekend. There are now two considerations, the first being would there be enough of an order for a delivery. The second, which is far more tricky, is that from now we need to be running down our perishable stock while still keeping enough to avoid disappointing our remaining customers. I suspect that we will either skip a week or send the Missus out for a shorter list of essentials.

I had plenty of time to consider that too because we were quiet for the rest of the afternoon until around five o'clock. It was around this time we started to see arrivals though many fewer than in previous weeks. Despite that we still managed a bit of a five minutes to closing rush, so how about that, then.

It is still light enough to sit and watch the beach as we gather for tea with Mother. There were, even at that time, plenty of people on the beach and more still enjoying the delights of the sea. Where these people were during the day, I do not know but I shall be asking questions when I see them, that is for sure.

The other thing that is certain is that there was no one to ask any questions of when we went for our last walk. There were a few less lights on in holiday lets, although it might be that people had not arrived yet, and there was more of that out of season feel. I shall have to restrain myself from being too demob happy over the coming

weeks as there is much to do – including replacing our benches across the road. I can do that now as the Pavement Licence arrived last thing.

The much maligned council even managed to mess that up. I was sent a message telling me that the licence and its conditions were attached. They were not and I had to go back and ask for the documents. I should be impressed, though, that there was someone there to ask at near six o'clock. I bet that will cost me.

## September 5<sup>th</sup> – Saturday

The weather was a much kinder on us this morning. There was enough light not to need further illumination on the beach when we went down, and we only needed to go there the once. The tide was further out than yesterday and there was plenty of room for us and the blanket of weed that had been delivered on the previous tide. Again, on the western side there was also a field of shingle, which I am convinced is connected with the arrival of the weed.

There were only a couple of deliveries to the shop this morning and they were of little concern apart from the usual Laurel and Hardy Newspaper Company issues that will seemingly be with us forever. Some of our bread was not delivered because the baker had problems of his own with a broken down oven to contend with.

I was very happy to know that I was not suffering alone, especially when the network failed again this morning. The first card payment did not go through and even attached to our secondary wireless access point, I could not get it to work. It sent me scurrying around for a fix and I discovered that there were two problems working in harmony to fox me.

We have a cable that runs from the router upstairs to the switch in the shop. It is a single point of failure and if it is not working, near enough everything stops. I noticed soon after our building work was completed that the upstairs end had a dickie connection and had to be treated with care. I had obviously moved it when I pulled the matrix unit away yesterday evening to see what was wrong with it. Jiggling the wire got it working again.

The root cause problem took a little longer to resolve as it was far more elusive. I had thought it to be the dodgy wire but when it was not just that, I was a bit dumbfounded. It took a while but when all that is impossible is eliminated, it only leaves the improbable, which was turning off the broken matrix unit which I did this morning. It seems that although the unit was not serving up the Internet, it was still talking with the other units in the matrix and by turning it off, the others went on strike in sympathy. Plugging it back it fixed the problem.

I will leave it until we do not need the downstairs network so earnestly to remove the unit via the software option before turning it off again. I will also get our friendly local

electrician in to help me wire a backup cable between the floor and to fix the existing one. I have the tools to do it myself but there are around eight wires of subtly different colours which confound me rather.

Did I mention that it was sunny. We had largely clear skies above us and big white fluffy clouds out to the east. The breeze, such as it was, started in the northwest, and veered northerly before backing all the way around to the southwest and then on to the southeast later in the day. There was a fearsome ground sea running that kept the fishing fleet on the slip and the hardier of surfers out on the water. There were some very good waves either side of high water at eleven o'clock and I spotted more than a few have a good run in from quite far out the back.

Just into the afternoon, the Missus arrived and told me that I was going off to The Farm. She entreated me to go hence and hook up the flail mower to the tractor so that she could take it to her farmer pal so that he could have a look at it. If you recall, dear reader, the offer to have a look at the flail mower was extended before the commencement of the season. I could not hook the flail up then because the jack on the tipping trailer was broken and thus, I could not remove the tractor from it.

Since then, the Missus had propped up the trailer on blocks and moved the tractor to be close by the flail. We will have to be sharp about putting the trailer on some firmer footing as the wood is likely to rot and collapse if we leave it too long. That aside, the tractor was free to hook up to the flail – my job, apparently.

On the face of it, attaching the flail mower should be fairly straightforward and in the world of farmers and the average Joe, it probably would be. We, however, are talking about The Boathouse Farm and the grumpy shopkeeper doing it. It was never going to be easy, now was it.

For starters, which is a very appropriate phrase, there is an issue with the ignition switch. It needs a bit of love, care and a fair bit of jiggling to get it to start the engine. We have both become reasonably adept at it, but it can still take multiple goes at getting the tractor to start. Multiple goes at getting it to start tend to be a bit harsh on the battery and since the tractor had been barely used over the summer, the battery was not in the best condition to start with. It was not long before it became very apparent that the battery was not up to the job and the needed a bit of help.

I had taken the girls with me. It was not the best move when I had intended to move the tractor around a bit, but they needed to get out, so it was a compromise. With them hacking about here and there, I was loathe to move the truck, so in the first instance I went and fetched a spare battery from the cabin. It was not one that we keep on charge, so I was dubious about its effectiveness, but it was worth a try. Actually, it was not, because it did not help one iota.

There was nothing for it but to move the truck into position to jump start the tractor off it. This meant moving the girls, well, ABH anyway who had decided to rest in the

shade under the truck by the back wheel. I managed to coax her out and with BB already deciding she had enough and was back in the truck while I laboured, I moved it into position.

In short order, I got the tractor started then had to move the truck out of the way again. With enough room now to manoeuvre the tractor into position, I set about lining the lifting arms up with the corresponding docking bars on the flail. That part was easy enough after some fine tuning, but the problem then was that the flail was too low for the arms which would go no lower. It was high enough when I left it there on a wooden pallet but that was six months ago or more. Time and weather had weakened the pallet which collapsed under the weight of the flail.

Not to be defeated so early in the game, I thought to push the flail back so that the back end slipped off the pallet a bit and the front therefore would rise. Unbelievably, that worked and I was able to slip the lifting arms under the bars and slot them into place. Having attached the top bar all that was left was to fit the PTO shaft that drives mechanism – when it is working.

Given that the flail was sitting in amongst a bed of nettles I thought to move the ensemble to somewhere rather less nettley. The easiest solution was to put the tractor nose first back into its shed, leaving the back end out and accessible for the fitting operation. The PTO shaft is heavy and needs to be held level with one hand while the other slides it onto the shaft. It is a practised skill to make it work and one I still need to practise. It took longer than attaching the arms.

Last, I felt it sensible to test the PTO drive to see if after leaving the equipment alone for six months had somehow fixed it. For this the tractor engine needs to be running, so I turned the key and discovered that despite the engine running for half an hour, the battery was still flat.

Since the tractor was now nose first into the shed, no amount of positioning the truck would allow our jump leads to span the gap between the batteries. I understood that the battery would need to be charged, so I thought to remove it from the tractor and take it up to the cabin where I could attach it to the solar panel array. That would work very well if only I could have found the spanner that we use to move the batteries around. It was in none of the usual places, although I just remembered that I did not look under the sink in the cabin where the charging batteries are kept.

Time was marching on a bit, so I called the Missus and we agreed that I would leave everything and come back to the shop. She would be able to start the tractor from our booster pack – probably – when she needed to move it.

Typically, the girls had decided that sitting in and around the truck was not so much fun anymore and that running about the place and hiding from me was much more entertaining. Once I had started the truck, they magically reappeared and we saddled up and made to go home. If I had any notion that my tribulations were

finished with, I was of course mistaken. As I went to close the gate behind us it occurred to me that I was still wearing my steel toecap wellies which, during the summer, are kept in the barn, which was exactly where I had left my shoes when I changed earlier. Cue, go and unlock the barn again to change footwear.

It had been very warm and gloriously sunny for all the time we were up at The Farm. I had, naturally for such a venture, changed into DIYman winter overalls – which proved sensible in as much as otherwise I would have been nursing nettle stings all weekend. However, I was uncomfortably warm, with my exertions making me hotter still, and was very pleased to change back into grumpy shopkeeper shorts and shirt when I got back.

We had been busy, I was told, and we remained busy thorough what was left of the afternoon, which was most gratifying. In fact, we were busier than we had been all week selling goods from across the spectrum of our stock.

Many people are amazed by just how wide that spectrum is and feel it necessary to comment upon it when they arrive at the counter. This happens with some frequency so it was with some bewilderment that one of the five minutes to closing rushers earlier in the week told me that he expected to see more “nick-knacks” in the shop.

I had observed his progress down the grocery aisle and a brief dalliance at the posh food section by the drinks fridge, so I enquired has he looked down the gift aisle, perhaps. He expressed surprise that there was a gift aisle, telling me he had not seen it and promptly wandered off in the direction of the newspapers and surf jewellery, narrowing missing the top of the gift aisle by mere feet. He left without making a purchase, which included the energy drink he had in his hand which, in fairness, I could not vouch that he had not brought in with him.

We closed the shop on a very successful out of season day with the bay still looking splendid in its glorious coat of slowing setting sunshine and blue sky. It was still dark when I took the girls out last thing but at least it was not raining and nor were we shrouded in mist. I say that on balance, that was a good day for grumpy shopkeeping and Boathouse Farming.

## September 6<sup>th</sup> – Sunday

There was a bit of cloud overhead when we stepped out this morning. It is remarkable the difference it makes to the light available on the beach. At the same hour yesterday, I needed no headtorch whereas today, I did.

The cloud did not amount to very much and by the middle of the morning the sun was splitting the hedges. The only difference from yesterday was the presence of a very noticeable easterly wind blowing through and keeping the temperature down. Otherwise, it was a perfectly reasonable day and by and by we saw gatherings on the benches across the road. Clearly, with ours newly licenced, sitting at them would

be a much more satisfying experience than sitting at the other, yet to be licenced benches. It was still quite slow in the shop, and we would have to wait into the afternoon to see and serious action.

There had been numerous visitors slipping in and out of the shop during the morning, but the traffic was light. It gave me the opportunity to slip upstairs in the middle of the day to refresh my water bottle. On my way out, a length of rope lying in front of the counter caught my attention.

We have a ring attached to the front of the shop just by the doorway for the purpose of tying up big dogs while their owners' shop. For a long while I had a sign there that said it was for errant children which caught quite a bit of attention over the years. I had attached a length of rope with a spring clip at either end to make the process of attaching a dog easier – or, indeed, a small child.

The rope that caught my eye as I went out was this very rope I had secured on the ring some years earlier. The only difference with it, and the thing that really got my attention, was that the spring clip was missing. Having already been victim, a few weeks ago, to some light-fingered yob nicking the cord off our wheelie bin, I immediately feared the worst. What irked me most was that the thievery was done under my very nose.

I considered this affront to our security while I filled my water bottle. It was then that I recalled an incident earlier in the morning when a customer had tied his older Labrador dog to the rope before he came into the shop. I had not realised that at the time, thinking that the dog was just obediently – for a moment – sitting there. That opinion was reinforced when the dog, having none of that separation nonsense, shot into the shop to be closer to his master. I concluded later that the dog had pulled the knot out of the rope and wandered off with the spring clip attached to his collar. It was a very old spring clip and a loose knot. Mystery solved.

Our ridge of high pressure that gave us such a stonking day yesterday eventually had its way with the sea as well. There was a bit of surfing going on low in the tide but as it pressed in, the waves ironed themselves out and the sea became a millpond again. At the top of the tide and for several hours after, the only people in the water were a few bathers enjoying a dip. We also had a few more camps set up along the tide line which is a bit further down the beach after the tide jumped today.

I was reading earlier – I have time now – that air from the continent, where they are having a bit of a heatwave, would be driven up for us to enjoy. It would last until the cold front that is due to pass us tomorrow sometime, would bring the temperature back down again. Fair do's, the temperature did indeed increase a little bit up to the early 20s. It prompted a little flurry of swimsuit and swim shorts buying which was all rather jolly. As we have no facilities for people to try things on, it is always a bit of a worry that we will get items returned. We advise people to leave the labels on just in case they want to bring them back. It does happen but happily the incidence is low.

Today I had one lady come back and tell me how well her costume fitted, which was good of her.

Our little bit of understated busyness evaporated in the latter part of the afternoon, and I was very much set adrift to twiddle my thumbs. It gave me time to fret about whether we should do a cash and carry order next week or leave it until the week after. I know there are some things that we could do with, but I think that we would struggle to make a minimum order. Oddly, we have had a big rush on toilet rolls. We have sold more in the last fortnight than we did at the peak of the summer holidays. I suspect that our current visitors, in smaller groups, did rather less shopping at Tesmorburies and decided to be more reliant on us, which is comforting.

I distracted myself by looking at the sales pages for a van to replace the truck. There are some alluring examples but when I look closely, the mileage is a bit high, the body is too low on the wheels or it is perfect and in Hull, which I fear is north of Camborne. I do not think there is any future in agonising too much about it. The purchase will be something of a lottery and all we can hope is that the salesman has not got a porkpie hat and a sheepskin car coat.

We might have to wait until the shop is closed, which is a bit of a nuisance because the weather is likely to be deteriorating. Arranging to pick it up while the shop is open, however, is a logistical headache particularly if it is some distance away. The other option is to really trust to fortune and buy online and have it delivered. The only reason to see the van in person is cosmetic; we are not mechanics and probably could not spot a duffer anyway. In the meanwhile, there is no harm in looking – other than the frustration.

I had to curtail my fantasy van buying in favour of a proper five minutes to closing rush, which after more than an hour of quietness was most welcome.

Mother is on holiday for a few days before an appointment in Truro on Wednesday. We sat around the table and watched the beach activity of which there was still plenty. It is very pleasant to have time to stop and stare while we still can. It will not be that long before all we will see is our own reflections, although that may be not until after the clocks go back. Come on, it was a year ago. Remembering what happened yesterday is a struggle.

## September 7<sup>th</sup> – Monday

We could easily have been caught out again with a brief spell of rain first thing. It was almost identical to the one that soaked us. It was just half an hour earlier. The wind was battering at our windows which alerted me, and I had to check because it was the sort of howling wind that was most unlikely at this time of year.

It was all over by the time we did go out which was much earlier than I had planned. For the last few days, I have been able to lock both girls in the bedroom while I carry out my gruelling morning exercises without additional assistance. Unfortunately, BB decided to sleep in the living room last night and I had all the help I really did not need while doing a three minute plank.

It also means that I am compelled to take them both out sooner. I would normally avoid the beach in the dark but today I capitulated when they both pulled me down the slope. It was very much a case of tracking the reflective strips on their harnesses or I would have lost them completely.

The progress of the daylight was somewhat hampered today by the arrival with the weather front and its attendant cloud cover. It was a cold front that passed through and it knocked a couple of degrees off yesterday's temperature. Despite the lack of sunshine and slight reduced temperature, the day still seemed warm and comfortable. It did not seem to affect the numbers walking about, in fact, there appeared to be more perambulating about today.

We probably had the addition of all the people who were on the beach yesterday. There were precious few down there today and the tide being in for much of it was not helping very much. The surfers, however, were happier, certainly at lower reaches of the tide in the morning, because we had waves again as the low pressure system crept a little closer.

I avoided the gymnasium this morning. One of the peculiarities of the season is that my body has no time to rail against the punishment that I hand out to it on a daily basis when we are hard pressed in the shop. Once my spring is unwound my body seems to think it has carte blanche to object to things like lifting 12 kilogram cases of water out of awkward positions. For the last couple of days, my back and shoulders have registered their disapproval, and I was forced to make an appointment with the bone cruncher or more accurately, my pin cushion supervisor.

On one hand, getting an appointment the afternoon I made the call is a happy circumstance and on the other, it might point to the bone cruncher having a lack of business. I would be entirely lost without their occasional services.

The other uplifting news was the return of my not working false ear. Unable to conveniently get to the optician that does ears, I sent my broken false ear in via the Post Office – tracked and signed for. They had already said that no one would get to have a look at it until today, so a call from them was the last thing I expected. The very pleasant lady told me that they had sourced a replacement and that they would courier it to me, paid for by the fiver I had posted along with the unit. Given the abysmal service I had from the other shower, I was most amazed by service at the other end of the scale.

I provided some service of my own today to the veritable hordes who turned up for a pasty today (sorry, MS). I had placed an order yesterday with the grand plan that the stock would last two days. I did not want to be concerned with not making minimum orders because we had not sold very many. Even before the middle of the day, it became very apparent that pasty demand was in the ascendant and that my two day stock was unlikely to last the day. Just half an hour before the deadline I reached for my telephone to place another two day order for tomorrow that may or may not last two days.

Our army friends magically find themselves in our environs around the middle of the day and croust time. The first of them, a big strapping lad, asked for a steak and stilton pasty that had me cringing a tad. I considered a caustic comment but demurred on the basis that I do not think that our home-made anti-cheekiness screen would be effective cover if I upset him. I explained that such aberrations were more likely available in shops whose main purpose was the provision of pasties. Shops such as ours had little scope to widen our offering.

Our boy at first complained that he was fed up with eating the same type of pasty day after day and left. He was back two minutes later having presumably come to the conclusion that there was little alternative. I am sure he will either get over his disappointment or learn to love the one true pasty.

Not half so fussy were the next two military men who arrived at the counter. Emblazoned upon his fatigues were the words U.S. Marine Corps. I made the rapid and life preserving decision not to enquire if the US stood, as it does over here, for UnServiceable. Instead, I told him that I was not expecting to see that on a shirt today. I asked if he had invaded. He said, probably not as no one had shot at him yet, which I thought was a friendly riposte. I joined in and told him that there was no shooting the last time we were invaded, either, (I did not think he meant arrows) but it did not stop it happening.

It is, however, good to see that we are still occupied with holiday makers making merry with their time here and the season in not done just yet. Only yesterday did I meet with a party intent on having a pub crawl in The Cove. I admired their optimism that they did not let the fact that there is only the one pub and a bar spoil their fun. I learnt today, closing in on midday while they still languished in bed, that they had given it their absolute best and done some thinking outside the box. They commenced by procuring their first beverages with us in the shop, proceeding to the chip shop for a couple more before not only drinking but dining at the Surf Bar. Not content with that, they went on to the OS where they went for more drinks and second helpings by ordering roast dinners.

It was a valiant effort. Next time it might be worth considering starting at Land's End hotel and taking in the F&L if I were considering the thing properly.

Mind, perhaps they were right to be cautious. One of the Diary's ears to the ground reported that the 'Portaloos' that had been installed in The Beach car park were removed today. In truth, I had no idea that Portaloos had been installed in the first place – nobody tells me nuffing. I assume that they were procured by the Parish Council to supplement the woeful lack of more permanent facilities at that end.

Apparently, the wrangle continues between Parish and the much maligned council. The land is owned by the much maligned council, leased by the family that operate the car park, and the Parish own or have responsibility for the toilets. The much maligned council are reticent about releasing the land to the car park operator who has offered to build new facilities on that basis. The Parish has similar issues and are stuck with expensive operating costs and a dilapidated building. It should never had been taken on by the Parish in the first place but that is another story.

We, on the other hand, had few issues with our business day, still enjoying the benefits of a delicious weekend. As I mentioned, there are still numbers about but we are now reliant upon good weather for good business: sun good; rain bad.

Talking of which, there were spots of rain in the air as we closed the shop after yet another five minutes to closing rush. It took its time, and it was getting better at proper raining when we took our last walk. I am sure it will get the hang of it eventually, after all, it had been a while since it has done rain properly.

## September 8<sup>th</sup> – Tuesday

The little bit of rain that we knew was coming along with the second cold front was a tad larger than we thought. The system covered a third of the country and rained through the night. When I had a geek at it in the morning there was no option but full metal jacket waterproofs when I took the girls out in the morning. We did not tarry.

The rain was not going to let up in time for me to get the shop ready but at least it eased off a bit. I wore my light rain jacket but really did not need it as the main bulk of the heavy rain had already passed through. It did save a final fling for when the shop was open, and I had to hurriedly close the first electric sliding door in The Cove to stop the rain piling in.

The rain was very swiftly followed by largely clear skies and sunshine accompanied by a robust northwesterly breeze that tousled many a curly lock. We subsequently made a killing on hats, hair bands and bandanas throughout the rest of the day. I honestly cannot see what the fuss is about.

It was not just hair that was having a bad time. The sea was in a tousled state as well. Big waves were rolling in with their tops white and flicked by the insistent tailwind. It was apparently not big enough for the Lifeguards to red flag the beach

and even near high water both surfing and swimming flags were out. Despite that, no one seemed willing to take them up on the invitation.

I had cruised through a very quiet morning as the Missus went off for her bone crunching turn. She does not like to be outdone. While she was gone, I contemplated the replacement of our greetings card stand. It was probably not the best time to do it, but the existing display had long ago overstayed its welcome and was started to misbehave by letting cards drop down the gaps on the shelves into the drawers below. The thought of its replacement had been on my mind for some time and the nagging was getting too hard to ignore.

The existing stand had been there when we arrived 23 years ago, and it was old then. I had a look on the Internet for replacements and it seems that such items are no longer in vogue; replacements were all second hand or made to order and very expensive. Several years ago, having seen the writing on the wall, I replaced half our magazine shelves with a set more suitable for greetings cards. I was rather hoping that I could extend the wall shelves along and use a similar arrangement to replace the card stand. The only thing then would be to replace the drawers that I would miss terribly if they were not there. I might just upcycle the existing ones.

So, I had a vision in my head of what I was after. All I needed now was someone to supply it. Over the years we have predominately used one company for our replacement shelving, so it was my first port of call. I sent a message describing what I was after and sent photographs of the existing arrangements including the newer greetings card display. They replied near immediately with a message telling me that they could almost certainly supply what I was after. It required a bit of enquiry on their part, but they were very confident. They had been equally helpful in the past, so I have high hopes.

The reason that it was not the best time to do this was that the existing display and the current wall will need to be dismantled which I cannot do with the shop open. It means that if everything works out, I cannot really ask the company to wait until the end of October and we will have to find somewhere to store the new unit until we are ready.

What I should have been doing instead of floating off on a flight of fancy was the cash and carry order. I had agonised about whether we should do it this week or next. The state of the toilet roll stock and the current demand eventually made the decision for me; we would likely run out before the week after. By the time I came to start the list we were starting to get busy and eventually I had to park the task and serve customers instead. We are not pressed for time just yet, but this order needs especial consideration because it is likely to be the last before end of season and some of the items will need to last until the end of October but no longer.

Despite the fearsome blow, trade was quite brisk, especially in the afternoon. It was a much better day in the end than it looked like it might be first thing. We even sold

out of pasties again (sorry, MS). That is the second day running we have had the numbers exactly right by accident, erm, I mean meticulously planned. You know how I do not like to blow my own trumpet, dear reader. I ordered slightly more for tomorrow as the weather will probably be fair from the outset. The wind, however, is likely to persist for a while.

We closed on another five minutes to closing rush. Just ahead of that a car parked so close to our newspaper bin, half on the pavement, that the occupants struggled to get out. I was waiting for someone to complain to me about it but fortunately they did not. I was trying to access the newspaper bin at the time, so I stood at watched them struggle with *meaning* written all over my face. I suppose it is a pet hate of mine but I cannot see why people insist on parking so far up the pavement it is impossible to pass comfortably and a wheelchair would have no chance. It is pure irony when a disabled badge holder parks in such a manner.

Looking out across the bay while we had our tea, you would never have guessed that earlier in the morning we had a guts of rain passing through. You would definitely have believed the wind if you, like me, had to endure standing at the top of the slipway while two nosy girls nosed around in the weeds for ten minutes. My, it was breezy and chill, too.

## September 9<sup>th</sup> – Friday

I meant to mention yesterday that the weed on the Harbour beach had rolled up into a few big piles. I was not paying that much attention and was more keen to be getting away than making notes about the weed.

This morning, it was lighter for one thing, and we had more time to examine our surroundings and yes, the oar weed was indeed sitting at the bottom of the slipway in roughly three big piles – ain't nature tidy. The western side of the beach was almost entirely clear, which is always an oddity. Where the weed was, it blocked any launching of fishing boats as it was in exactly the wrong place.

When I closed the shop in the middle of the day and took the girls down, the Harbour tractor had been at work and had gathered and pushed the weed off to the eastern side alongside the Lifeboat short slip. In doing so it had made the rest of the beach a fair facsimile of The Somme battlefield shortly after the battle. I had to pick my way across it as we headed for the sea to save falling into a geet hole.

After the busyness of yesterday, it was hard to contemplate it being quiet today. It had looked a little dark in places above us during the early part of the morning and one local lady commented that she felt that she had been lucky to get away with it. I think that we were all lucky as earlier when I had looked at the rain radar, there were patches of rain about which had missed us entirely. I had thought that they had all gone by the time I opened the shop and the dark clouds were actually harmless.

Whatever the reason – perhaps it was a St Ives day – we were relative quiet throughout the whole day. It would have suited me well in the morning when I had agreed to meet a salesman from our beachware company but, of course, we had some of our busiest moments while he was here.

He came the same time last year and we made a list of a number of custom novelties that we could have The Cove's name on. This year, the list has expanded and we shall have at least a dozen new and exciting alluring gifts to attract and entertain our customers – half of which will be complete duds and we shall have them forever.

It is an exercise in concentration and mental arithmetic. Decisions need to be made almost instantly regarding each item, the margin needs to be calculated, or at least reasonably accurately estimated, and a mental tally needs to be kept to make sure I am not spending too much. There is the opportunity to change my mind, but I have two weeks to firm up the commitment, which, of course, will be gone in a flash. At least one of the items needs some further work. I need to select one of our photographs that will translate well into a poster painting, like the old railway posters, in portrait format. It sounds like it should be easy, but all my photographs are landscape and many too detailed for the task. I think it could take some time even though our salesman offered the use of their graphic designer.

So enthralled were we in our work that two hours had gone by and we scarcely noticed. He had a very thick book that he was leafing through and much of it was of no interest to us. I would say that I had chosen items from around a quarter of it. Every now and then I had to stop to see what we had ordered last year or to note a price or to see what was left on our shelves. There was also an increasing number of customers coming and going and at one point, I had a queue with some serious gift buying passing across the counter.

Even when I thought that we had finished, he told me he had another book of early buyer deals. All the companies would prefer to know in advance what they have to order for their customers. With a previous company, now long ago, we were compelled to place our entire year's order at the start of the year and commit to it. This is the same process with our current company except they prefer to persuade us to place advanced orders by offering cheaper deals on bulk orders. We are not compelled to take it at once, although from a space point of view, I am sure they would like us to. Since we have storage and it suits us to take the stock while we have less to do, we will take the stock early in the calendar year.

Since I was now pressed for time, I selected some 20 items that we sell in abundance and placed bulk orders for all of them. It was very much going in blind and not knowing current stocks, although I had some idea and could always back out of some if needed. It is unlikely, though; most of the items will sell come what may,

so to have overstock is not that important. I made sure to add plenty of parasols, too, which will guarantee a poor summer next year.

I really was quite exhausted after such a lengthy period of concentration and mental exercise. It did not help that it was so quiet after he went and I had nothing to occupy me. The only thing that I had to do was the cash and carry order which required more concentration and mental exercise. I did it anyway as it had to be done.

It had felt a tad chilly on the beach in the morning despite having a thicker rain jacket on – my lighter one was still in the shop. Later, in the shop, I had felt it again for the first time in a number of months. It continued to halfway through the afternoon before I felt compelled to turn on the fan that had been my constant companion since the start of summer. I checked the temperature at Land's End, about the only bit of its weather station still working, and we had lost five degrees since Monday. In the middle of the afternoon when I turned on the fan again, I noted that the temperature had only increased one degree. I surmised that the temperature increase had only been in the shop as a result of the wind backing to the west and rapidly diminishing.

It was this kindness in the weather that convinced the Lifeboat powers to move our normal exercise night back a day. A training launch of both boats was penned in for half past six o'clock which meant cramming an early tea in the shop. This Missus had stopped by, on her return from Mother's appointment in Truro, at the store of a friendly saint. There she had procured some of their finest comestibles for me to indulge in. What she had not vouchsafed was time for me to consume it.

At around half past three o'clock in the afternoon we went from quiet abandonment to manic shopping frenzy. It lasted all the way through to half past five o'clock when a five minutes to closing rush took over. In fact, we also had an exactly on closing rush when two gentlemen in a passing car screeched to a halt outside as I was sliding to the first electric sliding door in The Cove. I stayed my hand while they came in and purchased some beer, foodstuffs and a lot of maps.

I had arrived at the mission briefing just in the nick of time and thereafter dispersed to our various duties. I had allocated myself as head launcher on the Inshore boat but, having done that, joined everyone else setting up after the big boat launched.

We were slightly hampered by the presence of the weed on the Harbour beach. The tide had flattened the geet pile the Harbour tractor had pushed up and had also removed much of it. The rest had been more thinly spread across the eastern side of the beach and dictated where we launched the Inshore boat from. Unlike the summer, there were few people to scream at to get out of the bleddy way. I had gone down in advance of the launch to prewarn those down there. A few, resting on the raised part of the old slipway, I told to remain as they were perfectly safe there. I hesitated and then qualified that by saying that it depended on who was driving, which raised a giggle.

For the first time in a while we were able to sit around and discuss matters of great import and drinks cups of coffee. It was hugely disappointing that our cake lady was not present and neither had anyone thought to provide chocolate biscuits. Words will, no doubt be had.

Both boats returned roughly at the same time, although the Inshore was slightly ahead as they wished to practise docking on the cradle with some more inexperienced crew. It meant that by the time we had put the inshore boat to bed, a very much textbook recovery up the long slip had already taken place. We joined the rest of the crew in the final stages of a washing and strapping down ahead of the next service. Being a day early, has bamboozled us into wondering what day of the week comes next. We are, after all, a very confused, very excellent Shore Crew.

## September 10<sup>th</sup> – Thursday

The tide had changed without me noticing and we were forced to go around the block this morning. We stepped out when it was so gloomy it was close to needing my torch and by the time we reached Coastguard Row on the back nine, it was daylight. I do not know if we were inordinately slow going around the block or the sunrise was inordinately quick and rising.

It was pleasant enough to be out for a stroll, so I did not agonise too long over the philosophy of the natural arrangements. It was only after we went that I remembered hearing something about rain in the forecast. I had not paid much attention and since we did not get wet, it did not matter. I did, however, note the grey skies when I could see them, the lack of wind and a more temperate ambient temperature. When I looked later, the temperature had started rising at four o'clock in the morning and had picked up a couple of degrees by mid-morning.

By and large it was a quieter day even than yesterday. Today I did not have the cash and carry to do but I did have the lists I made yesterday from our salesman's visit to convert into electronic format. That took some time and I noted that we had some checking to do. I was also able to dismiss some items that I has a chance to consider overnight that perhaps were not for us. The Missus went up to The Farm in the afternoon where she did a bit of counting but there was not much up there that I had not already discounted.

The other distraction from my boredom this morning was that I managed to acquire some replacement benches just ahead of ours collapsing in a heap of splinters. Having already established that the benches outside the café next door were of superior build quality, I managed to drop by this morning and find out who the supplier was. It turned out it was small concern that happened to be very good at turning out such things as well as a whole lot more.

The owner and I had some difficulty coordinating our simultaneous free moment to discuss the matter, but when we did, the deal was very swiftly done. He was asking a reasonable price for the benches and the delivery of them and did not ask for payment in advance or a deposit. I do not know how long it will take and neither did I particularly care. If the current ones disintegrate before the new ones arrive, it is not the end of the world.

What might have been pretty close in magnitude of disaster was the absence of any message from our fish supplier to say that the order we placed last week was ready for collection. Seeing the tide in on the beach this morning made me realise that the next spring tides were upon us already. I found some time to send him a message in the middle of the morning just to prompt him. It was the right thing to do because he had clearly forgotten. It was just in time, as well. When I checked the table for the next few days we are in for some very large tides. I had the message back quite quickly that our order will be ready tomorrow morning, just in time for Mother to get a bit of haddock for her tea.

I think that business today suffered from a poor forecast more than poor weather. At points during the day, we had patches of mizzle float through the Cove but most of the day was dry and reasonably warm. The total cloud cover did not make it look particularly pretty and as the day went on, the swell in the bay increased making the bay look very untidy. I do not even think it was that good for surfers. I only glanced the once and a string of surf schoolers were marching out in a line between two of the sandbars. There might have been a wave or two there for a while.

At some inconvenient moment in the day, our chutneys and preserves turned up. We had fair motored through the last top up order in the middle of the season and were fast running out of nearly everything. We were not the only ones. I had the message early on that we would not get raspberry jam or blackcurrant jam now or for the foreseeable future. It appears that growing things was a bit fraught this year and if the professionals are having trouble, I think we might be in for a hard winter and into the new year for food generally.

We did our bit to save the world by not ordering anything but dairy produce. I have not had to do much in the way of topping up the soft drinks in the last few days and even the beers have taken less of a beating that we have been used to. We are selling more red wine than white, too, which is probably indicative of something that I am not going to think too hard about.

The only other order I placed was for bread and largely only because I had picked up an order during the day. For the last week, our customers have been ignoring our sourdough bread in favour of everything else. Today, having reduced the amount we had on display, everyone wanted bleddy sourdough. I resisted the urge to order in too much more as bread sales on Friday are traditionally very slow.

I was lucky to recognise that it was Friday tomorrow as I had spent the entire day thinking that today was Friday after Lifeboat practise yesterday. Forcing myself to think about the Lifeboat reminded me that we had left the slipway lights on last night when I went to lock up the station after running the girls around last thing. I should hopefully be back on the right track tomorrow.

## September 11<sup>th</sup> – Friday

I was about half an hour earlier than yesterday taking the girls around this morning. I could not see it, but I could hear the water splashing about at the end of the slipway. There was just about enough light to see our way around and I fancied that our cloud cover was probably thinning or breaking up that let through a little more daylight.

The half an hour earlier translated into me being finished usual preparations half an hour before shop opening time and left me wondering what I should be doing. It did not take long to remember that the postcard fudge boxes needed topping up, so I set to with that. There are three items: a small box of fudge; a large box of fudge; and a big box of fudge and biscuits. Try as I might to order quantities of each that will run out at the same time, I have yet to be successful. I thought I had it cracked last time and ordered an obscene quantity of the smaller box. No, just ran out of those this morning with plenty of the other two left.

There was a shower of rain just before I walked out with the girls last thing yesterday. I did check before we stepped out this morning but there was no sign of rain on the rain radar, but it did look like we might have had further rain in the night. Radio Pasty was adamant that the day would improve in steps throughout the day and, to their credit, they were spot on. The grey overcast of the morning slowly gave way to bright overcast with a few blue patches by one o'clock. By the end of the afternoon we had blue skies and bright sunshine shortly before it set.

The sea state had changed dramatically from yesterday, too. The swell had been building all day yesterday and at high water, the ponderous waves were lopping over the Harbour wall. Today, at low water, it was flat as a dish. At high water it was not much better for our surfing friends, who had to make do with much bobbing about. There was fishing off the Harbour wall today without the anglers getting their feet wet.

Talking of fishing, I despatched the Missus to go and collect our fish order from our supplier in Penzance in the middle of the day. I had to give them a poke yesterday and I was a little dubious about the timing, so close to spring tides. I said that I thought he had forgotten us and I was right. I had also left it a little late to remind him and when the fish order arrived it was light again and totally devoid of hake. There was, however, a compensatory and unwanted over-abundance of pollack. They did that last time, and we had only just sold the last one. It is a good job I enjoy a bit of pollock as I will be eating it all winter.

We will have to place another order next week for the hake and also haddock, of which there was also a deficit on what I had ordered. Both the haddock and the pollock will have come from day boats, which is why it was available. The scallops, on the other hand, were of sublime quality, which was some compensation.

I had escaped to the gymnasium for the first time in a week, which is probably why I was feeling quite chipper despite the fishy disappointment. As the Missus was going to head into town as soon as I was done, straight after I had completed my blistering session, I took the girls down to the deserted Harbour beach.

The tide was close to being fully out when we got down there. There was a band of oar weed at the top of the beach, remnants from a few days earlier but also there was a carpet merging the bottom of the beach and the tide line which was close to the end of the Harbour wall. BB insisted on going out belly deep in the weed to have a mooch around. When it came time to clamber out, she seemed quite uncomfortable and reticent to come out. Eventually, I persuaded her out to discover she had a starfish stuck to her bum. No, of course I did not laugh.

Like a few days ago, we were busiest in the later afternoon. You know, roughly when I was trying to bag and price the fish delivery. Occasionally we have customers who are concerned about the amount of sand they are carrying or whether they can come with wet or barefoot. We are in a beach resort; these things go with the territory and are not a problem.

Today, a lady was most concerned about her sandy feet and also on her clothes. I told her not to worry, although she might want to wipe her feet on the way out. I have mentioned before that we are very lax about sweeping the aisles. I did eventually get around to doing the food aisle and, more recently, the gift aisle that was in a dreadful state. I told the lady that once upon a time, we brushed the aisle on a near daily basis but as the years went by, that is more once at the start of the season and, if we can be fagged, once at the end. It also gets brushed if the sand and such is so deep you cannot safely traverse the aisle, which was roughly what happened with the gift aisle. Thankfully, she was most understanding and she did indeed wipe her feet on the way out.

We were very quiet in the run up to closing, in fact, when I looked outside, the whole street appeared to be deserted. We just about managed a pitiful five minutes to closing rush, but I am certainly not writing home about it – oh, perhaps I just have. It left me to close the first electric sliding door in The Cove without any fear of excluding or upsetting anyone – which was a shame.

During the morning our cash and carry people telephones to ask if we would mind terribly if they did not do the delivery until Monday as one of the drivers was off sick. It does not bother us one iota which day of the week it comes – although we are close to running out of toilet roll – as long as it comes. It means I am let off the hook

tomorrow morning and will have to flex my considerable muscles before the gymnasium on Monday, instead. Maybe I will use the time constructively doing something important. There again, there is always the option to stand around and aimlessly scratch my behind.

## September 12<sup>th</sup> – Saturday

We had our cloud cover back first thing this morning. Obviously, I did not know we had our cloud cover back first thing, I had to wait until second thing when there was enough light to see it. By around nine o'clock, there must have been a breakthrough up behind us because we got much brighter for a while. It was a perfectly pleasant morning regardless.

The fishing boats must have thought so because the three regulars were out early doors. They were then back and forth bringing in the last of their pots, signalling the end of season. Out off the beach, the early surfers were having a go. There was very little in the way of apparent swell, but they had found a few waves in the gap between two sandbars, and all sat in a group bobbing until they found one. Otherwise, the sea and The Cove sat in placid contemplation of another day watching the season slip away.

I had avoided standing around idly when I had run out of the normal routine tasks this morning. Instead, I had a poke around in the drawer of spare greetings cards and refilled the card shelves – including with those that had fallen through the gaps and into the drawers. As I reversed out of the gap where the cards stand, I brushed by the surf jewellery display and noticed that it too could do with a top up. I made a note to do that next just as soon as I had opened the shop and enjoyed some breakfast.

For the first time in a week, we started to see some busyness during the morning period. Much of it was going home gifts and snacks to consume on the journey home. If I thought that I might be given a free run at filling up the surf jewellery stand, I clearly had another think coming. I had done well to get one side of bracelets finished but found myself increasingly called back to the till to serve customers when I started on the other side. In the end, I had to abandon it.

It was in the middle of our busyness in the middle of the day that a gentleman decided to enquire whether we might purvey a such a thing as a lamb pasty (sorry, MS – I think). Those present said later that my initial response reminded them very much of Dame Edith Evans' delivery of the famous 'handbag' line from The Importance of Being Earnest.

After I had collected myself, I explained that such aberrations might be freely available in the big city, such as our nearest, Penzance. There he would probably find that the high standards we adhered to were not so highly prized. He told me that

in Wales where he had visited, lamb pasties were commonly available. I referred him to my previous comment regarding standards and informed him that here in Cornwall, Cornish pasties were the item of choice.

Our man further embroiled himself in controversy by going on to ask if we had brown sauce to have with his pasty. Recognising a challenging case when I saw one, I pointed out to the gentleman that these were 'world champion' pasties, as indicated by our signage outside. I suggested that he must be mistaking our pasties for one of the Welsh ones or perhaps one of those others available in the Duchy of such inferior quality to our own that they demand some intense flavour to disguise the lack of flavour inherent in the original product.

It took me some time to recover my equilibrium after such a fierce debate and robust defence of our pasty provision. Fortunately, I still had some anklets to transfer to the new surf jewellery stand. Again, I had not started on this venture when we started to get busy again and again I had to abandon the effort. I will pick up the pieces tomorrow, perhaps.

Much to my surprise, our lamb pasty man returned after a lengthy walk on the beach. He hedged his bets, however, and asked for a sausage roll. He said that he was mindful of my earlier advice and would not ask for brown sauce this time. I told me he was welcome to do what he liked with the sausage roll, but we still did not have any sachets to offer him.

He had clearly taken our earlier conversation in the jocular manner in which it was meant because he did not return with a bunch of thickset pals brandishing clubs. He returned again after he had finished his sausage roll to tell me how good it was and how he understood my advice not to mask the flavour with a sauce. He was a most friendly sort, and I learnt that he was here from a place called Canada which is apparently very far west of Camborne.

He was looking for budget accommodation which is in short supply hereabouts. I suggested the Youth Hostel Association, but he said that he had called their advertised number only to discover that they did not work at weekends, which seemed somewhat unhelpful. He decided that he was best off looking back in Penzance, which I said was a good idea but could offer no further help in that regard. It is such random meetings that make grumpy shopkeeping almost worthwhile – sorry, most worthwhile.

I also get asked all manner of random questions from time to time. Many are related to directions or the availability of services and some a bit more off subject, as it were. Today, a young couple approached and asked if I had a copy of a newspaper from Tuesday. It was not such an odd request; they had become engaged and had only just thought of the idea of keeping a newspaper from the day. Since all newspapers are sale or return, unsold copies are sent back at the end of the day for a credit. I

suggested that they contact a newspaper of their choice and request a back copy which I am sure is a regular service offered.

Bolstered by their success in gaining useful information from me, I suppose, they felt it a good idea to ask what they might do for the remainder of the day. It was four o'clock in the afternoon on a Saturday and I could not imagine for the life of me what a young and newly engaged couple might do to entertain themselves for the remaining hours of the afternoon. I suggested a walk on the beach followed by a pintine or two in a local hostelry until time had no further meaning.

They could, of course, have tried some surfing. The understated swell from low water transformed near the top of the flood into some pretty decent – and large – waves just offshore. There were probably less than a dozen out there – surfers, that is, the waves were far more numerable, I imagine - and I saw one or two have good runs in. I am reasonably sure it was down to the sandbars because an hour or so before high water, the waves diminished as the sea got deeper over them. It was good while it lasted, if you ignored the red-flagged beach, and it was still decent after, just not as good.

Towards the end of the afternoon, we lost our clear skies as a small warm weather front moved over us. It introduced a bit of a haze across the bay as well as clouding us over again and the breeze increased from somewhere in the west. The temperature had continued to climb all day and by the end it was very temperate indeed. It did nothing to keep people wandering about in The Cove and by five o'clock, the street was nearly deserted again.

It was possible that they had all gone off to read the newspaper they bought. For some reason that I could not think of we sold a great number of newspapers and ran out of some of the more popular titles. After the volume I had left over the week before last, I reduced the number of weekend papers we had delivered. I have no intention of reversing the numbers this close to the end of the season.

Again, two weeks ago, I finally had another pop at the Laurel and Hardy Newspaper company about messing with my volumes. We had gone the whole summer with practically no magazines because they had cancelled them all. I had complained previously but had no response other than a brief period when someone checked my newspaper volumes.

This time I had a message from the company – eventually. It read that they had finished their investigations and had the following feedback: “The store is now on TSO”. I had to laugh because I had absolutely no idea what that meant. I sent a reply asking for a translation. That was over a week ago and I have yet to even receive an acknowledgement that I asked. I suspect that is the much maligned council and the Laurel and Hardy Newspaper Company swapped roles, no one would notice.

I do believe that we had a very minor five minutes to closing rush when a group of middle aged ladies dashed in for groceries – all these moments seem to blend together now.

We sat and had our tea to the backdrop of heavy waves thundering in on the rocks. The waves were not breaking until very close in. Despite their apparent size, they only managed some minor flogging over the Harbour wall where a couple of youngsters were tumbling off. A dad and young lad were keen to go angling earlier in the day but had missed the tide. They were going to wait until this evening, but they would have been disappointed again. I think the current sea state is set to continue, so if I see them tomorrow, I shall advise one of the south coast harbours.

Advice to my own self was to give up trying and head to bed – so I did.

### September 13<sup>th</sup> – Sunday

It was one of those mornings when nothing happened. In fact, quite a lot of nothing happened. So much nothing happened that if I wrote about it all, it would not fit on the page. For example, there was the thumping of the waves on the rocks that was my earliest recollection of the day, followed by watching the white water from a bit of flogging over the Harbour wall. It stood out in the darkness and caught my eye.

We stumbled across the car park in the dark that was much darker than the previous day and were grateful for the lamplight at the end of Coastguard Row to see us up the slope. I try not to use my headtorch at the near end of the Row because it is hard by the lobster pots store at the back of the car park. The proliferation of flies there is legion, and they gather around my forehead in a very intimidating manner. I would rather flail about in the dark.

Even more nothing happened in the shop all the way up until the late morning. Our new arrivals presumably were lying in their pits after an exhausting journey and the few who did venture out, bought a newspaper and little else. It took a few hours to gather a bit of momentum and see more than a few customers at a time turn up, even then I had time to provide assistance to some enquiries.

Now that the tourist bus to St Just and St Ives has finished its six week run, we are seeing more inconvenienced people unable to get about to where they want to go. St Just is the second largest town in West Penwith and our closest. Why the only links to it are from the largest town in West Penwith, I regard as a bit of a mystery and leaves The Cove somewhat isolated if you do not have a car.

So, when my next customer announced that she wished to travel to St Just during the week, I gave her the bad news. Undeterred, she insisted that she still intended to go even if it meant doing so through Penzance bus station. I told her that I would be happy to write out an itinerary with the available choices of connections, but I probably would not have the time to complete it until later in the day.

As it happened, she went and perused our wares and in the absence of any other shoppers, I quickly looked at the various timetables required to complete the journey. It was fraught and lengthy.

A traveller leaving The Cove on the 10:11 bound for Penzance arrives at the bus station at 11:13. The connection to St Just on the number 4 bus leaves the bus station seven minutes later arriving in St Just at 11:56. Allowing for just short of two hours in St Just, the most reasonable return arrives in Penzance just five minutes ahead of the connection leaving for The Cove. The weary traveller will, in the best case, arrive back in The Cove four hours after they left.

The most concerning factors of the journey are the seven and five minute connections at Penzance. Here you must expect the bus you are on not to have been delayed on its journey and, if by some miracle you arrive at the bus station on time, you are expected to find the other bus in the unfamiliar surrounds of the facility in no time at all.

I added some alternatives to the schedule I had written down including the next bus to leave in the very likely event that the connection be missed. Here, the journeys become even more fraught because in every case the next bus along is the slow one taking in a longer route with more stops. The fact is that you do not even have to be that unlucky; there are roadworks – again – on Chywoone Hill that will almost certainly delay the bus incoming to Penzance. The worst case is arriving back in The Cove six hours after you left for one hour of shopping in St Just. We do wish our lady traveller well.

My ability to investigate and write down the various bus times adequately demonstrated just how desperately unbusy we were today. It might have been the weather, or indeed the forecast, which had us accurately down as being overcast all day. I had early reports of there being drizzle in Penzance, but we stayed dry all day. It was also humid and warm, although the temperature started to dip in the middle of the afternoon.

There appeared to be a hearty swell in the bay when I walked the girls around in the morning. It was more difficult to tell at low water, although there was some good surfing it appeared, courtesy of the sandbanks dotted about. During the morning, all the action was over towards North Rocks. It still looked good as the tide went on the flood with surfing groups centre and north. When I looked a little later, they were still at it, although the waves were getting a little more robust as the tide went on.

As always seems to be the case, we were busier in the afternoon than the morning. I stand by my theory that the accommodation in The Cove is beyond many people's pocket and at this time of the year, there are many unoccupied properties. I spoke with a regular visitor who has stayed at the same place for several years in a row and watched as the price has crept up. She said that the owners have now placed it

with an agency, so she expects that the price increases will continue apace. Being a regular to that property she also benefited from not having to find a security deposit.

I can see this only getting worse, particularly if the bed or tourist tax is introduced. One respondent on Radio Pasty when they were discussing it said that a high percentage of overnight stays were, in fact, Duchy residents, so we would just be taxing ourselves, which I did not know. Another said that while the money from the tax would initially be ring-fenced for tourism related spending, he believed, which I do too, that it would soon be sequestered for other non-tourism related spending and would in short order provide no benefit at all for the industry.

We have a few weather fronts coming across us over the next day or so to look forward to. If we were quiet today, it will be desperate tomorrow if the expected weather comes to pass. At least it will give me time to get the cash and carry delivery sorted. Always look on the bright side, he said without conviction.

## September 14<sup>th</sup> – Monday

There was no need to worry about nothing happening this morning. My schedule was pretty much filled for the first hours of the day to the degree that I had noted the drinks required to top up the fridge last night and filled my trolley accordingly. I was hoping that my other deliveries would be timely so that I could get them out of the way ahead of the cash and carry arriving.

As it happened, the deliveries were all over the place, but I still managed to clear most of them. All had gone reasonably well up until the pasty delivery (sorry, MS) which arrived just moments ahead of the geet lorry carrying our groceries. I had to do some fancy footwork to get the pasties out of the way before we started bringing in the cash and carry boxes.

We were faced with a very thick fog when I could eventually see what I was looking at in the morning. A warm southwest breeze laden with moisture was keeping us under wraps for most of the day. Since both the pasties and the cash and carry came after we were open, this worked in our favour because we saw no customers at all during the unloading. It was not quite so welcome to see no customers after we finished unloading but fog at this time of the season has that effect.

It was cold comfort that it did not appear to be raining or mizzling through the day; it was still deathly quiet during the morning. When we had stepped out in the morning, I had realised too late that it was drizzling. I would have stepped back for a rain jacket, but the girls were halfway down the steps, and it did not look that heavy. I think my hooded sweatshirt is still drying out on the back of the chair where I left it when I came back.

The Missus came down to the shop not long after all the deliveries were clear which allowed me to head off to the gymnasium and my blistering session. While I was

gone, the frozen order arrived, which she dealt with. It pleased me greatly that I had missed it as I was just about fed up with deliveries for the day. I returned, invigorated and full of vim and set to almost immediately on clearing the store room of boxes. I set myself no target, only to clear the boxes one at a time until I was finished. If that overlapped into the next day, so be it. We are under no pressure now and there were no glaring gaps on the shop shelves to fill.

Somewhere along the way, my replacement false ear arrived. It came with mixed blessings. It was all ready to go and I erm – did I insert it, put it on or did I fit it, who knows. Immediately, I could hear the fan working and the background rush of air, which was marvellous. Unfortunately, it meant that if I could not hear those things already, the right false ear was not working.

I had my suspicions over the last few weeks, but it is very hard to tell. If I am keen to test it, I try listening to the electric clock upstairs, which I can only hear with the false ears in, erm, on. As the false ears are kept in the shop and the clock upstairs, I usually cannot be fagged to go and get them, and when I am wearing them, I mostly forget. I might wait until the end of the season and go and have a chat to see if there is an alternative brand I can get that actually bloody works for more than a couple of weeks.

We had started seeing customers in the early afternoon. Not many, but enough to make opening at all worthwhile. There were more bemoaning the lack of a bus service along the North Coast from here and I will have to get used to that over the coming weeks, because the body of people wanting to use it will be numerous. There were, in the most part, people buying groceries and snacks for walks or asking for taxi numbers because there is no bus. What we did not get very many of were people asking for pasties (sorry, MS).

Quite early on, I surmised that we could probably get away with not placing an order for tomorrow. Quite late on, I thought that too but by then I had already chickened out and placed one. I reasoned that we might have a big late rush, which is not unheard of, and I would be left without pasties for tomorrow. That never happened and I will now have too many pasties for tomorrow.

The mist also started to clear in the middle of the day. I do not know exactly when it cleared completely, but I looked up at half past four o'clock and there it was, gone. I also do not know what brought about the change, but I did notice the barometric pressure dropping away all day. The wind and the direction had stayed constant throughout the day. One thing for certain was that the temperature and humidity were making lumping boxes about most uncomfortable. No wonder I did not clear the store room by the end of the day, which is a wonderful excuse, and I am glad I just thought of it.

Given that the store room was still pretty full, I left the ordering I would have done for another day. Gone now are the days when that would have mattered and an extra

day is not going to hurt anyone. I did do quite a bit of shelf filling, largely to create space on the shelves in the store room for the delivery, and we are in pretty good shape if you discount those little handy packs of tissues.

One of the first customers of the day purchased nine of them. He would have had an entire box, but his partner restrained him. He had been in over the last few days as well and had bought larger amounts eventually clearing our entire stock that I had estimated would last until the end of the season. We get them from the cash and carry and there are no alternative sources, so unless the Missus makes a special trip, we will be without.

We bumbled through the rest of the afternoon. The fog clearing did not make much of a difference to our customer visits and although I did not have long periods of quiet, the sporadic visits I did have were very small beer indeed. Things are not that desperate yet because we did have a very light five minutes to closing rush.

One of these was a young lady walker looking for somewhere to pitch her tent. I suggested Trevedra which was apparently back the way she came. Quite understandably, she said that she was not going to retrace her steps, so the only two campsites I knew of were the caravan park and the top and the glamping site next to it on the approach to Land's End. I looked up the number of the glamping site for her – the caravan park does not provide one, preferring to make its applicants use an online booking system which is not at all helpful if you are still on the trail. I also gave her directions up Stone Chair Lane to get there.

It is a service that we offer as a matter of course. Many people ask many sorts of questions of us during the day, and we are happy to help if we can. So, it was some surprise to see a message from her later in the evening in our inbox. She had taken the trouble to look up our contact details and send a note thanking us for the help we had provided. It was not at all necessary but quite a lovely thing to do. We wish you well, young lady.

Well, if that does not give me a peaceful night, nothing will.

## September 15<sup>th</sup> – Tuesday

Well, that upset the apple cart. Two cold fronts passed over us this morning. I do not know if that means that we should be twice as cold, but the temperature did dip a bit and the wind freshened having veered to the northwest. They brought a few light showers across us just as the shop opened. It is unlikely that many people noticed as there were few people abroad at that hour.

The change ruffled the bay and filled it with choppy waters. Gone was the obvious and ordered swell and gone too were the chances of any decent surf. We had blue skies first thing which seemed like they had gone too but an hour after the fronts had passed, they made a welcome return.

I had deferred most of the deliveries that I might have had so I was able to get stuck into the cash and carry delivery instead. With the absence of customers and other interruptions I steamed through some of the cash and carry boxes and cleared some more space in the store room. I carried on after we were open since we were quiet and by the end of the day had finished it off. Now what will I do to pass the time.

Again today, we were quiet during the morning. However, with the sun making an appearance and the northwesterly moderating, we saw numbers of visitors gathering ahead of the middle of the day. It was turning into a real street café culture opposite with little groups milling about frequenting both the shop and the café next door. It was all going swimmingly until a small cluster of showers blew in from the northwest and caused utter mayhem, scattering people in all directions.

One of the directions that these people scattered in, was our own. While the shower only lasted several minutes, we were busy for the next hour with bedraggled customers. It was the busiest we had been all day, which was rather pleasant and proof that a little well-placed shower can occasionally play in our favour.

Shortly after and toward the tail end of our little rush, my attention was diverted to the heavy chop of helicopter blades thumping the air. When I looked out across the bay there were four chinook helicopters flying in formation about 1,000 feet up following the cliff line. They turned and swept in towards the airport and disappeared from view. I suspected some sort of training exercise, although seeing chinooks is unusual. Of course, we shall never know for sure.

One of the Lifeboat crew posted a little later that they were all parked up on the apron. Another crew member, a pilot at the airport, got to have a sit in the hot seat. Apparently, the chinooks were being refuelled before going on elsewhere. Obviously, your diarist, having signed the Official Secrets Act, can divulge no more – well, not until Saturday night and the cost of a pint. Around here, that means I do not come cheap.

After our little rain rush, business dropped off again. It was still busier than yesterday, but it gave me time to unpack and put out a fresh fishing tackle delivery.

At the weekend, I had been called over to where we display the tackle by a customer needing my assistance. You know the sort of thing: big hook, big fish; I think you will need a few of those, sir; yes, I know that is quite dear but look on it as an investment. It was then that I noticed that our lures of which I had only recently ordered in fresh stock, had almost run out. Since I had sought advice from the very good company supplying us, we have done very well with it all. So well, indeed, that we had run out of lures in very short order. They must be very good lures because I have known people catch fish with them. I very much doubt that the same is true of my advice.

Of course, as soon as I got to open the box and start unpacking the tackle, we started to see more customers. We were running into the end of the day, so it might have been a five minutes to closing rush, I really was not paying attention. I know that it delayed me because I was keen to get our orders done before we closed. Having put the orders off for a day or two, they needed some work. I managed to do most of them but one I had to do after I went upstairs.

I had noticed that at low water, there were some waves for the surfers who, even this late after the holidays, are still quite numerous. Again, most of the waves are courtesy of the sandbanks all over the lower reaches of the beach. When I went up to tea, the swell and ground sea was back giving us a few flosches over the Harbour wall. It really seems that it is having trouble deciding what it wants to be and is changing on a daily basis.

Today it kept the fishing fleet in Harbour as it was quite fresh as well as lumpy. I took the rise out of one of them who came in for a pasty, pointing out two racing kayaks in the bay which did not seem to be having any trouble. They were very sleek machines, too, carving through the waves effortlessly with clearly some experienced hands driving them on.

The Missus had her very important – and long - Lifeboat meeting in the evening, causing us to have a rushed tea. The girls and I then had an unrushed evening of doing nothing at all, which was pleasant. It was also the first evening in a long while that felt a little cool. Autumn may be arriving.

## September 16<sup>th</sup> – Wednesday

Somebody must have said the wrong thing; the sea was mightily upset first thing – well, as first thing as there was light, anyway. It was roaring into the bay, flecked with white until it got near the beach where the outlying sandbanks turned it into a frothy mess. Despite its lack of form and its general hugeness, there were some surfers out there, giving it a go.

The Harbour beach was a scene of ordered cleanliness when I took the girls down there in the darkness of the early morning. The sand had been scrubbed clean by the previous tide and only in the upper reaches where the waves had not been was there any weed or detritus. We were being pressed by the advancing waves, but they were far enough away not to be threatening. The dark, however, gives the girls the jitters and they were barking at shadows again – I hope.

Wind forward a few hours when I took them down again. The new tide had come and gone and where a few hours earlier the sand had been pristine, it was now strewn with weed, torn from the seabed by the vicious waves. It was as yet only a thin layer, but the likelihood is that subsequent tides will not only bring more but roll it up into deeper piles.

I had enjoyed, or possibly endured, a rather manic morning. The trouble is I cannot remember for the life of me why. I had ended up fifteen minutes late calling up the Missus to come and relieve me so that I could go to the gymnasium. I am pretty sure it was not a big rush of customers. I did have quite a few deliveries, but I was exceedingly efficient in dealing with them and they were all out of the way before we opened. I shall, no doubt, think of it at some point and in the meanwhile, hope that it was beneficial in some way.

I know that my blistering session was. It seems to iron out the various aches and pains that I wake up with. I have mentioned this before, and I had come to the conclusion that our mattress is to blame. I had intended to purchase another, the same as we had for the spare bedroom which is very comfortable but had not had the time. Now that I do have the time, there is nothing holding me back other than half a dozen other priorities that jumped to the front of the queue.

Once the tide had gone out, the mood in the bay changed. We spent a long time looking at the grey and uninteresting – apart from the sea, which was doing a lot of heavy lifting by being a bit spectacular. Into the middle of the afternoon, the skies brightened a bit while still some heavy bottomed cloud hung about over the northern side of the bay.

I took a glance at the weather forecast after someone told me that it would rain in the afternoon. At the time I looked, neither forecast was showing rain in the afternoon, but both agreed there would be rain overnight. A little later on, someone else told me that it would rain at precisely four o'clock and, when I looked at the the forecasts again, they were showing rain at four o'clock – although one suggested it would start at three o'clock – which it did not. It did not start at four o'clock, either.

Whether it was the threat of rain or not, it is impossible to determine but after three o'clock, our visitors made themselves scarce. We were left with waifs and strays, parties of two or three dropping in for snacks and essentials and the occasional going home present. It was not exactly how I saw the afternoon going especially as it looked at one point like it was ramping up a bit. I did, at least, manage to order the mattress.

The store room floor is a bit untidy still. There were a couple of boxes from the cash and carry that just had nowhere to go and we took in some cases of big water bottles in the morning that are similarly homeless. They came early enough that I could get two in the fridge, so that helped. The delivery also came with a box of damaged shortbread boxes.

I have a feeling that the company that delivers such things and many others from suppliers who use them to supply their goods, hire a lot of low wages staff. I can think of no other reason why we get so many boxes of goods that are damaged in some way or that are just plain wrong. One time a box of chocolate bars had a boot

print on it and was crushed. This morning I had a box of fudge delivered when I had asked for Fairings. As they are roughly the same price, I did not bother to call it in.

The company must know because they are very good about taking things back. What they are not good at is processing the credits. If an item is sent back and replaced, I am immediately invoiced for the replacement but usually have to call up to chase the credit a week or so later. It is irritating but the company has a bit of a monopoly in the region.

Still, we made it through another slow day and successfully dealt with another five minutes to closing rush. I will sleep peacefully on the strength of that – or at least I might after the new mattress arrives.

## September 17<sup>th</sup> – Thursday

I woke up to a very poorly timed power cut in The Cove. In fact, according to the electricity board's website, it covered quite a bit of our bit of the peninsula. We had a 'brown out' a couple of days before. The only reason I knew about that was that the electricity board had sent me a message after to apologise. On that occasion, the computer was off but everything else was working. Today's lasted the best part of half an hour and was due to a fault in the high voltage cable, we were told.

Whatever the fault was it must have closed the road out of Penzance because we were frightfully quiet all morning. What probably did not help matters was a robust northwesterly that made the already depressed temperature feel even worse. I do not recall it being quite so blustery when I took the girls down to the Harbour in the morning but then again, I probably was not paying much attention.

The promised rain did arrive overnight and had not long finished when we went out. As expected, the oar weed on the beach had increased and rolled up into geet piles. It had wrapped around the painter line that runs the length of the beach and raised the line a foot above the sand. It would not be clever to be running around down there in the dark. I could not see any face impressions either side of the rope, so I assumed there had been no incidents.

As we ran up to the middle of the day, there were some breaks in the cloud showing off patches of blue sky. It was all very encouraging particularly as Radio Pasty had told us in the morning to expect sunny spells in the afternoon. We did get one sunny spell but that was still in the morning, so it did not count. Although we did see a small upturn in the numbers of visitors, the weather did nothing much to encourage trade.

What might have helped a little was our brought forward Lifeboat launch. We were scheduled to go out on training in the evening as usual but with an unpredictable sea state, it was deemed sensible to go out earlier so we could guarantee a recovery on the long slip at low water. Ordinarily, we probably would have cancelled the launch

but one of the crew was being passed out on his navigation examination, so we were keen to get the boat out whenever it was possible.

When I had looked at the cover we had for the launch, we looked quite thin on the ground. However, at the briefing, there were rather more than had signalled their intentions. I therefore stayed for the launch and left the more than ample and capable crew to finish the recovery and returned to the shop. This pleased the Missus greatly who felt it necessary to run off into town shortly after I got back.

During my brief absence, the shop had been transformed from retail wasteland to a thronging centre of commerce. There was all manner of gifts, groceries and novelties leaving the shop including those being paid for. We even made a very respectable dent in our stock of pasties (sorry, MS), clearing us out ahead of the weekend delivery coming in the morning. In fact, with the skies brightening and wind dropping a little, for the next two hours things were going swimmingly. It was, perhaps, a good thing that I had come back.

Talking of which, the Lifeboat returned to the bay coming on half past three o'clock, dancing on a lively blue sea. This was a good indication that our trainee navigator had passed his examination. They paused on the moorings next to a large flock of gulls who were probably sitting on a shoal of fish – I notice these things. I stopped to have a geek as the nominated bodies performed what was clearly a textbook recovery up the long slip in choppy conditions. We are, after all, a very dispersed, very excellent Shore Crew.

It was not that long after the boat came back that business started to tail off again. Luckily, in my earlier absence two parcels had turned up. One of them contained some handmade, custom novelties that we had been missing for a month or two and the other, some of our postcards that we asked to be printed. I attacked the latter as our postcard stand was looking a tad thin in places. The price of postage has clearly not completely put off the custom of sending cards to friends and relatives as we had sold rather a lot. Even foreign nationals are still buying postcards and for them the postage is astronomical.

It took a little time between customers to complete emptying the box and putting the excess away. I also managed to put out on display the very popular keyrings that are a string of blocks. On each block is a letter that spells out the name of The Cove. I also replenished the stock of bumper stickers with The Cove name on which we ran out of quite recently and prompted this particular order. It may seem strange to be making investments in gifts this late in the season, however, if we do not spend the profit made during the strong summer season, the taxman will have it. Nothing personal but I would rather he did not. It also saves me the fag of ordering in the new season when I will have plenty more to occupy me.

The unpacking took me through to when I needed to be concerned about wrapping up for the day. In the meanwhile, we had seen some of our current visitors say their

farewells, which is always a time for reflection on the transient nature of things. There is always also a benefit, which in one case is that L&L get their grandparents back carrying with them our very best wishes.

As we settle at the table for tea with Mother, it was plain that the Lifeboat launch at lower tide was a good plan. The big seas returned with the tide and recovery, even on the short slip, would have been tricky. While it looked blown out, a few surfers found some sport in the chaos of waves running into the beach and I saw them occasionally get a good run here and there. My, it looked big, though.

A number of people today told me that the weather looks much better next week. Quite how we can believe a forecast that far ahead when the weather people struggle with what the weather is tomorrow, I do not know. I will look ahead when we get there, erm, if that is possible. We have a weekend to get through first. One day at a time.

## September 18<sup>th</sup> – Friday

It had all the hallmarks of being a good day when I cracked open the front door this morning; it was dry and we were not blown off our feet by the wind. Fair enough, at that stage, I could not see that we had a blanket of grey cloud, it was a bit misty, and the sea was still in a state of flux; perhaps I would have modified my opinion had I known.

I still maintain that the quietness of the out of season mornings is down to fewer residents in The Cove and the high cost of staying here. The weather will have had an impact – someone told me it was breezy up the top – and the fact that it was a change-over day but in truth, it is very hard to determine what drives the beast that is the shoulder season visitor. That is the \$2,249,552.84\* question. Another similar day and we could be flooded with customers. A veritable mystery.

We had to wait until after I came back from the gymnasium to see any busyness at all. No wonder I felt absolutely no guilt about taking the time to execute my blistering session. I was down to the Harbour beach again not long after I finished, to give the girls a run before I returned to the shop. The state of the weed had not changed much from the previous day, but it was mainly off to the western side of the painter line – as well as wrapped around it. BB was in ebullient mood and was making athletic leaps over the raised rope. You could almost see ABH slapping her forehead with a hairy paw in frustration.

As I mentioned, it was busy when I got back. It did not last very long, I suspect the effects of change-over, but for a while it was fast and furious. There was some quick-fire pasty buying (sorry, MS) that had me worried for our weekend volumes. The written down 85 on the board looked like a big number when I wrote it there. Seeing 85 pasties in the fridge made me wonder what on Earth I was thinking – it looked like enough for a day. Hopefully it will be enough; it was last week.

The sea maintained its fierce persona during the day. It did not look much at low water, but the waves were breaking early and running in on the beach in long foamy stretches. Every now and then a plume of white would rise against the cliffs at Aire Point, and even at half tide when the girls and I were on the beach for the second time, there was some flossing over the Harbour wall. Where the surfers were making something of it yesterday evening, today even the boys at the back did not last long before retiring from boredom.

I know how they felt. It was so quiet in the afternoon that I had time to write the Standing Operating Procedures for operating the Lifeboat cradle system. We had discovered we did not have one when we discovered the hydraulic leak the other week. It did not take long to sketch it out - I once did such things for a living - but I was hampered by not knowing the Institutions' documentation standards or policy. I am sure someone over at the station can sort it out but at least I have completed my action from the last very important Operations Meeting.

I came back to reality with the last smattering of customers for the day. These were largely arrivals for the coming week or however long they were staying. Amongst them were familiar faces and quite a few ones that were new to me. There was plenty of free space between them which allowed me to do some basic fault finding on my dodgy false ear.

When I had the new left ear back, the clarity of sound was astounding. I put it down to not being used to it but after a while, the performance difference to the right ear 'ole was so marked that I made the assumption that the right one was wrong and no longer operating. I had gone to the lengths of calling the optician that does ears who put me off rather by hinting strongly that they did not approve of the devices being sent in the post, tracked and signed for or not.

Anyway, I put the whole thing on the back burner until today when I shoved my right false ear in and switched it on, I got the distinct impression that it was actually working, just very quietly. I thought no more about it other than to consider very carefully whether I followed up my intention to take it in for mending or not.

The whole thing came to a head when the Missus told me that she was going to Camborne tomorrow to the head office of the optician that does ears to get Mother's false ear mended. She offered to take mine. It rather forced my arm into conducting some more rigorous tests before I handed it over to the Missus to take for repair.

For some reason I thought that I could not swap ears with the units but I quickly disabused myself of that spurious information and swapped the tubes over so that I could test the left in the right ear and vice versa. I did it twice to ensure that I had not mixed them up on the first attempt, convincing myself that I had tested the units in the same ears. Sure enough, both units are working perfectly but it would appear that my right ear 'ole is not. I shall have to conduct some remedial work, the details

of which I am sure you will be better off without, dear reader, and experiment further. I will, of course, keep you apprised of developments.

I had hake for my tea. The Missus is still managing to find the odd bit salted away in our upright freezer. I am not surprised; the thing is packed – mainly with our own food. I tried fitting in the butcher's delivery a few days ago and had to crowbar in in. I have asked our fish supplier again for a delivery of hake and more haddock having been shorted again on the last delivery, I now worry, of course, if we will have space for it when or if it arrives. Anyway, my fish was delicious, and Mother's haddock looked the business too. The Missus had cod roe; the Missus hates fish – but will eat fish eggs!

\*\$64,000 adjusted for inflation.

## September 19<sup>th</sup> – Saturday

Well, that does not happen very often, thankfully. The delivery van despatched to us with our order placed last night, arrived without the delivery on board. This is the company that acts as a transport company for a fair few of our suppliers – boot marks on the chocolate box, if you recall. They played an absolute blinder today.

Last thing yesterday, we had a customer requesting jars of the rather toothsome peanut butter we sell. It used to be made in Cornwall, but the company moved. The product is very good and very popular, so I saw no reason to stop supplying it just because they moved out of the Duchy. As if to underline just how popular it is, we had run out of the extra sea salt variant which was the very one our customer was after.

I had not planned to replace the peanut butter immediately. The company has a £50 minimum order and I had not long had a delivery from them. I told the customer that I would see if I could manufacture a suitable list of other goods to make up the value but for him not to hold his breath. As it happened, I added a couple of cases of fudge and some water and there we were.

Or, there we were until the van arrived – without the order on board. He was not even delivering to the café next door; we were the sole reason for the van coming down to The Cove. I realise that the company's procedures are a bit lax but that really is exceptional. Fortunately, they were able to put the order on the second run that comes out in the afternoon. Even more fortunately, they were able to do it without re-invoicing and issuing one of their illusive credit notes – and yes, I did spell illusive right.

What was elusive was a decent bit of weather or a bit of decent weather, indeed. I am sure someone was promising an improvement in the afternoon; maybe I misheard. It was quite reasonable, I felt, when I stepped out with the girls in the morning. I felt, largely because I could not see very much again. It was remarkably

mild, of that much I am certain, and while a tad breezy, not as breezy as it became later on. What it also became later on was misty and occasionally mizzly, which just got thicker toward the middle of the day and kept our customers locked up inside.

Alright, they may not have been locked up because enough got out to prove that the volume of *Daily Telegraph* newspapers that I had maintained since the end of May, was suddenly out step with demand. I mean, really. How is a grumpy shopkeeper supposed to know that this weekend out of 17 Saturdays, I should have increased the volume. Perhaps it is not as clear cut as that, and I should shoulder some of the blame. Since the end of the school holiday and the main season, some titles have increased sales. The *Saturday Telegraph* was not one of them; we sent back three out of four delivered last week. Even then, I should have up the numbers a bit. I have done so now just ahead of sales collapsing next week.

The sea state, the bits of it we could see, was just as upset as the day before. In fact, it was pretty much the same as the day before in most respects. The messy state of the near shore did not deter the surf schools or the surf club from going out. When I looked, a few of them were getting a bit of a run in, too. With high pressure building, we are likely to see an end to the upset for a short while during the coming week. That too may quickly be shoved out of the way by a huge low pressure system up behind it. How very exciting.

As promised, the weather made a remarkable improvement in the later afternoon. The mist got much better at being misty and the mizzle promoted itself to proper rain at times, although not quite achieving heavy status. The only thing not playing along was the wind which diminished a little into the later stages of the day.

The improvement, ahem, did little to promote customer attention and we were quiet to the point of standstill through the afternoon. I had almost forgotten all about it, but the missing delivery got delivered at half past four o'clock. Now all I needed was the instigator of it all, the customer who was seeking his peanut butter. I could have guessed it, really, but I was still looking out for him as I slid the first electric sliding door closed at the end of the shop day. It was not a problem or even an irritation. We needed what I had ordered anyway, and he had not made a firm commitment to buy some. It is just that if I knew he was not coming back, I probably would not have ordered it so soon is all.

Mother came to tea after her trip to the optician that does ears at Camborne. It reminded me, not that I needed reminding – one ear is not working - that I had failed to sort my ear 'ole out. Since she was going to come to tea again tomorrow, she will stay overnight. I will not hear a thing.

September 20<sup>th</sup> – Sunday

The trouble with time on my hands is that I find things to do with it, occasionally. This is not necessarily a good thing.

I am still getting up at silly o'clock in the morning. It is part habit and part fear that I will miss a delivery or run out of time to do something that is easier done before the shop opens. It is why I found myself on the beach in the dark and mizzle with two frightened girls barking at what, for once, was not a shadow but a person lurking by the wharf wall. One of the fishermen was waiting for the right moment to launch into the somewhat less upset sea. It did not help one iota that I told them who it was, they were having none of it and would not be mollified.

My sitting down for a cup of tea and the morning administration on the computer – yes, even on a Sunday – was later than planned because I had to pause on the way back from the beach to towel down the girls. It was not heavy mizzle but enough for their coats to ruin a perfectly good bedspread – or whatever it is that covers beds these days. I was therefore anxious that I had slipped beyond my usual time for going down to the shop.

It is here that I really need not have worried. The soft drinks fridge needed no attention whatsoever and the beer fridge very little. With the social category of people with have in The Cove now, it is mainly wine that needs topping up. It takes very little time. With no other deliveries and the newspapers cleared – including claiming for the shortages again – I was at something of a loose end. Even topping up the groceries did not take that long.

I have been aware that our supply of batteries has been dwindling for a while. We do not sell that many, so a reorder was not urgent, and I have to wait for a big enough order to avoid paying postage, which can be costly because of the weight. I felt we could probably get away with an order now but while I was doing the list I noticed that the books on the carousel were looking a bit thin.

Usually, I would not be looking to top these up, but in the new order of things, our books are no longer sale or return. Having the stock will last through the beginning of the new season and be one less thing to worry about, although they will be one more thing to count for the stock take in January. Swings and roundabouts, I suppose.

The making of the list of books takes me down the middle aisle where the stationery is. Here my eye was drawn to the display case containing all the pens, erasers, sharpeners and pencils. It is made of acrylic and hangs off a slatwall underneath all the hangers containing packaged stationery goods. The acrylic is no longer see-through because it is covered in marker pen graffiti.

Recall, if you can, one of those images of a New York subway train covered in graffiti and you will have an exact point of reference. I had seen it before, of course I had; it was impossible to miss. What I had not seen was the little urchins – I am assuming a

small hand at work – had started on the slatwall, presumably because the acrylic was full.

I am sure if I were progressive enough, I would surely understand that the little darlings are just expressing themselves and I should be proud to have been a part of their development. I am all for that provided that the parents fully understand how I like to express myself if I ever catch the diminutive angels at it. I have now removed the marker pens to behind the counter, something I should have done at the outset, and placed a suitably pithy notice in their place.

I will finish my list of books another time.

Our day at eleven o'clock in the morning was a completely different beast to the one I stepped out into at six o'clock. There was light, for one thing, which I was quite pleased about and quite a lot of it at that. The heavy, grey cloud that we had been accustomed to over the last few days had been replaced by a thin veil of cirrus and the bay was transformed. I was told that it was warming up, too, a feature that had not yet seeped into the shop which is artificially warm all the time in the summer anyway. It was a day for short sleeve shirts and t-shirts, except one chap who was clinging on to his long puffer jacket – just in case, I guess.

Not only did we have good weather, but the sea had organised itself a little better today. It was less wild and the waves it was sending into the beach were formed well for much surfing. There were surfers and bodyboarders spread right across the beach front enjoying what was probably the last of such perfection for at least the next few days. It lasted through the various stages of tide and into the evening.

Now, to paraphrase Dropsy Bunnytall, I think, in the Enid Blyton book about those farm animals getting all political: sunshine good; rain bad, in terms of our shop days at this time of year. We had a marvellous time of it today with customers crawling out of the woodwork all over the place. I had a brief moment when I feared that the volume of pasties (sorry, MS) would be insufficient to see us through to the end of the day, but I need not have worried. It seems 85 was just right for the weekend that had one duff day in it. Of course, I knew that.

We had to wait until late in the morning for things to start moving but after that we started seeing a reasonably consistent flow of customers coming and going throughout the rest of the afternoon. We even sold a few beach goods such as beach mats and towels. When I looked later, there were indeed a set of small camps down on the tide line at the back of the beach. With the cirrus cloud even thinner than earlier I expect to be selling some aftersun lotion tomorrow.

Later on, we watched from the living room window as the light mellowed and the tide receded down on the big beach. There were still plenty of surfers plying the rather convenient waves and still quite a few milling about on the beach. After the rather poor days we have had, it was very encouraging to see a return of what was

reminiscent of the last days of the summer holidays, albeit with somewhat fewer people.

It was still mild when I took the girls around last thing and the air clear. I had been hearing all day how much better the coming week would be. I will stick my head out the door in the morning and decide from there, thank you very much.

## September 21<sup>st</sup> – Monday

I stuck my head out the door first thing and decided that as the air was thick with mizzle the chances were that the reports of a last minute resurgence of summer were exaggerated. Came the light and I could barely see beyond the railings opposite. Resurgence of summer, my hairy dunky.

The most irritating thing was that there was a patch of blue sky above us, it came and went and the mist swirled about. By the middle of the day, it was breaking up and doing all those arty clinging to the cliffs things that it does. A time lapse sequence of it on repeat would have me mesmerised for ages.

In fact, I had ages in the morning had someone been kind enough to provide the footage. With a blanket of mist crowding the bay, no one was particularly interested in stepped out to be part of it and the street was largely deserted for much of the first half of the day. We had seen a few newspaper buyers and a few pints of milk and packs of butter go out, but that was about it.

It gave me time to finish my book list and send it off. Then I had plenty of time to scratch my behind until the Missus came down to allow me to go off to the gymnasium and my blistering session.

Since I had recommenced my gymnasiuming after having my dickie knee replaced, I have not yet recovered my enviable rowing time. I did not know that it was enviable at the time but now that I am not achieving it, I am definitely envying it. I had lost two minutes off my pre-dickie knee operation time. Truth be told, I had already lost some seconds off my pretty consistent time when I moved location. I put it down to the change in altitude. After the operation, the seconds turned into minutes.

I really had not concerned myself with it during the summer. I was doing a shortened session, and the time was immaterial. Having got a bit more serious about it after the crowds had left, I decided that I had better try and get the time down again. I concentrated on my posture and the pull and almost immediately shaved twenty seconds off the time. I am now down to forty seconds off the shameful time I had slipped to. Looking at it realistically, I do not think that I will get back to where I was, although there is oxygen in the casualty care kit at the Lifeboat station which might be worth a try.

It was not that much busier in the shop when I came back, close to the middle of the day. Half of the mist was trying to break up while the other half was trying to come back. We alternated from mist clinging to the cliffs to mist half filling the bay several times during the day. It was very obvious – I was going to write ‘clear’ but I fear that was the last thing it was going to be – that the mist was not going to go away at all today. The only consolation was, with the breeze being westerly, the mist affected both coasts equally and I heard reports of mist in Lamorna and St Ives. Anyone wishing to tell me that the sun was blazing down in Penzance would face exceedingly short shrift.

While I may not have been very busy, the Missus definitely was. Having been priced off the drone show at half term she is pursuing a harvest auction instead. She is asking for food donations from food suppliers, and I reasoned that the local boys would be more than happy to help out for the Institution. I could think of, maybe, a dozen without thinking too much. Of course, with the Missus there is no such thing as a local constraint and on her list was Harrods and Fortnum & Mason. She has already heard back from many of the local contacts but as yet Harrods’ response is pending.

The mist really was not helping us with a last hurrah week in September. There had been a few people floating about but we had been busier yesterday and not far being off it on Saturday. I have always said that the rain kills off trade, but the mist digs a hole and buries it.

Not that it does anything for trade but the surfers had a whale of a time, which is probably not the best metaphor to use. Again, there were decent waves throughout the tide and plenty of surfers to enjoy it. I cannot imagine where all the surfers have come from. Surely, they cannot all be on holiday or we would expect to be busier in the shop – would we? I know that the newspapers tell us that none of the Generation - whatever letter at the end of the alphabet is – work anymore. Perhaps they surf instead. It is a mystery and I am happy to leave it as one.

What was no mystery at all was why I did not have pasties (sorry, MS) ready for a lady who had pre-ordered some for a Minack evening. I forgot, as simple as that. I was mortified. We had run out as well, and there was no time to cook frozen ones; no backup plan. I think had we been busy, I would have remembered but being deathly quiet, I had fallen into a slough of idleness and my mind wandered off on a journey all its own. I could not apologise enough, which of course was no help at all.

I should not have left this until last, but you will have to suffer along with me, dear reader, the departure of dear friends from their frequent Cove dwellings. The much maligned council’s master plan to chase off second home owners with excessive charges on their properties has claimed a victim. If the master plan is to free up property for local use, it is ill thought through.

Most of the second home properties are well out of the price range of any part of the local housing market. The effect therefore is to exclude from our market, people who used to frequent the shops and business and add value to the economy. I grant you that is not true in every case, but it will be in many. I rather think that is not the master plan at all - much as I might jest about the intelligence in the ivory tower – it is more likely a soft target cash cow.

The people who purchased the property in question are simply replacement second home owners, just ones with rather more disposable income. They and their friends and family may spend as much in the local economy, but equally they may not. We will see our friends and their family again, I do hope, but far less frequently, which is a sadness. Perhaps it is what I deserve but it is quite a stiff penalty for forgetting someone's pasty order.

## September 22<sup>nd</sup> – Tuesday

I stepped out this morning into a day that was almost a repeat of yesterday. No, not forgetting pasty orders bit (sorry, MS) but the weather bit. The air was full of mizzle, the water droplets reflecting the light from my headtorch and making it very hard to see.

I could plainly see the Harbour tractor at work pushing one of the fishing boats out into the gloom. In the darkness and the mist, everything was shadows, outlines and vague shapes with the edges blurred. It was the sort of scene – without the tractor - that I recall watching Magwitch meet Pip for the first time in several television adaptations of Great Expectations when I was small. I have not yet fully recovered from the terror they brought. Needless to say, we did not tarry long on the margins of the water.

The weed is still a major issue on the beach. It has been shoved aside to let the fishing punts through. Most of the beach whether churned up by the tractor or naturally malformed by presence of the weed is a trial to walk across in the dark. There are lumps and troughs, big stones strewn about and great piles of weed to negotiate around; it would be ill-advised to try and walk over them. So, if anyone was watching, they would have seen some drunk trip and stumble across the strand in the dark, dropping into furrows and reeling sideways down unseen slopes.

Things did not look much better in the daylight. The day was less bright and much greyer than yesterday. The mist had risen so that it was sitting like a duvet over the bay, resting on the clifftops to hold it there. It was far less aesthetically pleasing and was probably the main contributor to a day far less appealing and far emptier than the day before it. I settled in for the long haul.

One of the first things I did was to book the accommodation for my sojourn to see the Aged Parent. I had intended to go on the second week of November allowing me a

week to decompress after a busy season. This, it seems, was not to be because my preferred accommodation was not available for all the dates I required. I shall be going on the first week instead.

The day remained grey, but the mist lifted. This seemed to provide some encouragement to our visitors, and we started to see a few return to shopping. I know that the café next door was busy by the number of people coming to us to ask if we did tea or coffee. With the kiosk next door closed, seemingly reaching the end of their season, the café is the only show in town – at least this end of it. We saw some action too, but it was concentrated into a short period between the end of the morning and the middle of the afternoon.

I took the decision early to bake off some of the frozen pasties we had. It was the right thing to do else we would have run out embarrassingly early. It is exceedingly difficult to guess the volumes at this time of year and correcting them can often take two days. By that time the demand will be entirely different anyway. In short, we will have enough pasties two days from now for today but that will probably not be right for two days time. Oh, that was in more long. I would say that on average, we were doing alright and that very few people will be disappointed – unless, of course, I forget their order.

I was collared by a surfer dude this morning – I fit right in and understood him perfectly, of course, as I speak fluent surfer dude. He was asking about the waves because he had seen them yesterday and had assumed some more of the same today. He came to me late in the tide just as the last of the swell was disappearing. It has been a few days coming but eventually, at high water, the bay turned to glass. Judging from the small lines of white water along the cliffs, there was a little swell left, so it was possible the sandbars would produce a few waves at lower tide again. I suggested he come back late in the afternoon to have a look.

I felt very smug when we sat having tea, watching some very fine waves run into the shore topped by a surfer or two.

One of the fishermen dropped by for a pasty in the middle of the afternoon. He told me to expect a bit of lump tomorrow in the bay; a four metre swell on Seven Stones is predicted. If it is the deep low pressure system behind the current high causing it, the waves will be coming from a long way out.

We muddled through an increasingly quiet afternoon. It was only when a long time visitor and now children's book supplier arrived in the later afternoon that things changed. As if proof of the existence a higher being was needed, the small gods of grumpy shopkeepers really showed their hand today. I settled in for some serious negotiations with our lady when we were deluged by a sudden surge of customers who preceded and followed her in. I spent the next fifteen minutes serving them while our friend waited outside for the rush, the only one for hours either side of our meeting, to subside.

This year we have seen a good many customers from foreign parts. We used to see the main visitations during the shoulder season but more recently, the visits have been all year. The change was hard to fathom until today when a lady arrived from the country of Switzerland, which is some way south of Camborne we understand. I always understood the Swiss to be neutral, but she looked quite vivid to me.

She said that she had read The Diary while researching her holiday destination. After reading tales of what a hotbed of vice, political unrest and social turmoil The Cove was, I said that I was surprised she was here at all. I am pleased, of course, that The Diary is playing its part in supporting and maintaining the tourist industry in The Duchy.

Not only that, but I am also very glad to know that The Diary is back in favour on the European mainland again. It used to be instrumental in teaching Germans to speak English – oftentimes you would hear them talking of a ‘geet guts of rain coming’ – but I had a notion we had slipped out of popularity. I will keep a close eye on the New Year’s honours list this year, somewhere near the top, I would imagine.

### September 23<sup>rd</sup> – Wednesday

I was very pleased that the street appeared dry first thing and I would not have to reach for my rain jacket when I took the girls out. I was less pleased that they still feel it necessary to shout at imaginary threats hanging about in the Harbour. Partially due to that and the fact that the seaweed had been on the beach long enough for the flies to mature, we left. The girls had woken the flies up with their bawling and they made haste for my headtorch. It was time to walk around the block, I decided.

When we could eventually see it, the day had turned out an absolutely splendid morning. It was very much dressed in its Sunday best, despite being a Wednesday, blue skies and the rising sun turning the very air on fire. Clouds of fine spray from the churning waves had filled the space above the beach and up into The Valley and each droplet captured a speck of sunlight. Together they formed a golden mist that filled the air.

While looking about the wonderfulness of the beach and foreshore during a particularly quiet spell of the morning I spotted a bunch of sea birds down by the end of Lifeboat long slip. Since I had some time on my hands, I thought to have a closer look with my binoculars. Do not fret, dear reader, they were not on this occasion common terns, but after consulting my Boys’ Own Book of Good Terns (and other Seabirds) – sorry, I could not help myself - I discovered that they were black-headed gulls in their winter, non-breeding plumage, which obtusely gives them no black head at all. Sitting in their midst, blending in quite well, was an egret.

I confess that I always thought egret was something a Yorkshireman put at the bottom of a budgie cage. It is, of course, a heron-like bird with bright white plumage.

We have seen a single one here each year for many years. I discovered from my enquiries that they are often seen alone because they are highly territorial. Clearly, the twenty or so black-headed gulls gathered closely around it knew this and were taking the Mickey. Still, they all looked happy enough.

There was not much doing until the Missus came down to let me off to the gymnasium and another blistering session. It was starting to look a bit busier in the street, but, in the shop, we were yet to see much of it. There was a bit more going on when I stopped by after the gymnasium, but I went off to walk the girls shortly after that.

The beach looks a completely different place in the daylight. I was no longer stumbling over things. We headed down to the waterline that was a good way down the beach and had a potter up and down. I had seen that there was a lady swimmer not far off, but the girls had not. While we tarried over by the wall, she emerged from the water, setting off the alarm barks all over again. After they confirmed it was a person, they waited to meet and greet when she came ashore.

The shop day kicked into overdrive when I go back to work. It was the busiest day, probably since the summer. I was kept occupied with customers for most of the day and some of the spends were significant including multiple hooded sweatshirt purchases. The surge came out of nowhere, apart from a good looking and temperate day and here is the weird thing: yesterday, we ambled along with only one major rush for the whole day but ran out of pasties (sorry, MS) midway through the afternoon; today, we were busy from just before the middle of the day with far more people about than yesterday and ended the day with a third of the pasty stock left. Go explain that one to me.

One of the highlights of the day was the arrival of a particularly special fish order. Our ladies are back. They come regularly but, I think missed last year. When I could order fish on a regular basis they would take advantage of the supply several times during their holiday. These days, with the fish orders being a little more tricky, they treat themselves to a bit of hake and some oysters. I have, hopefully, improved my oyster shucking over the last couple of years but the girls had to bear with me while I practised the art. I think I am much better now, but they will let me know tomorrow, I am sure.

The oysters come in dozens, and I checked that was alright with them before I placed the order and they said that it was. When it came to delivery – to them – they told me that they only wanted six and I was to have the other half dozen, which was rather good of them. I had my six after they had been and the day calmed a bit.

I must have refined my shucking because it only took ten minutes and that with serving customers in between. I am sorry to report that the eating took rather less than that and they were bleddy 'ansum.

I once had a fleeting desire to own an oyster bar. I knew exactly what it would look like and I believe that it would have gone down a storm in The Cove. Several years back, I took a trip to Dublin to see the rugby and on the following day took the Dart – the suburban train service – up the coast to Howth, I think. There, on the waterfront, was the very thing I had in my mind. All chrome and stainless steel, black marble counter top and all very Art Deco. The oysters were fabulous with a glass of Guinness. I had a look on the Internet, but I fear the place is no longer there.

Our busyness tailed off into the later afternoon. We had a bit of a last hurrah at five o'clock and then a very minor five minutes to closing rush. The cloud had moved in a bit during the afternoon, and the day no longer looked as clean and sparkly as it had done earlier. I heard that it was cooler, too.

The Missus had spent the day making cakes for a charity event up the top tomorrow. When I retired for the evening, the kitchen was full of rock cake, bread pudding and white chocolate cheesecake – an old favourite of mine. It reminded me of my youth. The Aged Parent would spend hours making highly delicious things for school fetes. The thing I remember most is that we never got a bleddy look-in. We were lucky if we got to lick out the bowl. All that very desirable cakery and not a sliver for us. If we wanted any cake of our own, we had to go to the fete and buy it with pocket money we never had.

The Missus, bless her, made a separate cheesecake all my own. I think. I am now nervous that it is Lifeboat training tomorrow and it might not be for me after all. Oh, calamity.

## September 24<sup>th</sup> – Thursday

It really is a wonder that I do not have a broken nose by now. Our first pasty customer (sorry, MS) of the day asked if he might have a cold pasty to take away. I told him he would have to wait while I blew on one out of the warmer. Fortunately, on this occasion, he found it amusing.

Well, I can hardly be held to account for such behaviour; it has been very slow these last few mornings, in fact, for more than a week. We cannot blame the weather for that; the last couple of mornings have been absolute blinders. Today, was not quite in the same league as yesterday with a little more cumulus cloud out to the east than we would have liked. Nevertheless, the sun was finding a way through somehow and the beach was lit up in portions.

I spent the morning waiting on the hordes to arrive just like they did yesterday. It maybe was not quite the day we had yesterday but there was much to commend it. Nevertheless, my waiting was in vain. On Tuesday we had no customers and sold all our pasties. On Wednesday we had lots of customers and sold only half our pasties. Today we had no customers and also sold only a few pasties. I am now wondering

what will happen tomorrow because we have had all the permutations this week. Oh, yes, lots of customers and lots of pasties, which will be useful as we now have too many.

It was not quite as drier as all that, although not far off it. Around the middle of the day, we had one of our regulars in again. She likes to have a new posh mug or two each year mainly because, she said, her daughter nicks them when she comes around. She had come in initially for one of the few pasties we sold today but she told me she would be in later to peruse the posh mugs.

I had passed by our posh mugs once or twice recently and had decided on each occasion that they needed some attention. The shelves in the store room were full of posh mug boxes but there were gaps on the shop shelves that really needed to be filled. The visitation was enough to spur me into action, and I set to opening boxes and selecting mugs to fill the gaps on the shelves. By the time I had finished, I had emptied eleven boxes of mugs. Not all the contents went onto the shelves; I rationalised about half of them. It took some time between the few customers we had but it was worth it for the free space it gave us in the store room. On top of that, we sold several mugs today, which was even more worthwhile.

Toward the end of sorting the mugs out the postcard fudge order arrived. This is the one I took a bit of a gamble on, playing with the ratios of box sizes. Quite astoundingly, all the small boxes I ordered, nearly 100, fitted perfectly on the store room shelf after topping up the shop shelf first. The other box sizes, of which there were few, also fitted into their respective places but this time with room to spare. What a lucky boy am I.

The unpacking and putting away at least passed the time during a very slow afternoon. It was very difficult to fathom what was going on. Perhaps our visitors had swapped Wednesday for Thursday to go to St Ives. I was gratified that in the later afternoon we had a small surge of going home present buying that included several of the postcard fudge boxes I had not long put out. We do like it when a plan comes together.

I was not the only one with a plan. Someone had organised a Lifeboat training exercise to coincide with a complete drop in the swell in the bay. We launched both boats at around quarter to seven o'clock and set up the long slip for recovery later. In the meanwhile, we retired to tea and cake and to ensure that great matters were discussed at length. We were cut short by the early arrival of both boats in the bay.

On the shore, we were a bit thin on the ground, and we had asked that we stagger the recoveries so that we could optimise the crew that we had. That was all agreed and ensured that both boats came back at the same time. I held the big boat on the moorings for a minute or two, hopefully giving us a small overlap, then signalled for engagement to commence.

It was the first recovery in darkness since the other end of the year. Even so, we still remembered where the end of the slipway was and met the boat there after it steamed astern from the moorings. Here, we executed what was clearly a textbook recovery in the stern light from the boat and my own red light headtorch. From there it was a long drag up the slip where we were joined by one extra from the Inshore recovery for a wash down and fuel up and a reset for the next service. We are, after all, a very lucubrating, very excellent Shore Crew.

## September 25<sup>th</sup> – Friday

It seems that our days of glory have now passed. To be honest, I had expected it to be much worse this morning. Radio Pasty had insisted the morning before that I was to expect to get a bit wet as I took the girls around under some irritating mizzle. I had worn a rain jacket against it. I discovered, after I had opened the front door, that there was nothing of the sort. Instead, it was dry and just as temperate as it was the previous evening. Then, I had not bothered with a jacket and wore a t-shirt as I took the girls for their last walk and was perfectly comfortable. This morning, I was a tad over-warm.

Just to save the egg on the faces of the Radio Pasty weather presenters, some wet blew through the bay shortly after we came back. It did not last long as was gone before I went downstairs to prepare the shop and the ground was not even damp by then.

One of the first things I did was to bundle the excess pasties (sorry, MS) from yesterday into the freezer. Having been distracted by some frivolous annoyance, I had forgotten to place the pasty order until almost the last minute the day before. In my haste and panic to place the order, I did not take time to consider the stock we already had and blundered ahead with the numbers as if we were starting from scratch. Consequently, we find ourselves over-pastied for the weekend but at least we will have spares if we run out during next week.

Our visitors today tried their best to make a decent dent in the pasty supply, bless them. I was really quite impressed for a change-over day and all. It helped that the weather had stayed reasonably pleasant, which is more than could be said for the sea. On the turn of a card, it had gone from flat and benign yesterday evening, for running the Lifeboat out, to loud and brash today. I could hear it thundering in the darkness when we went out in the morning. By the middle of the afternoon, it was charging in on the big beach and running to foam in the last 50 metres. The Lifeguards quickly red-flagged the beach but it is unlikely that anyone would voluntarily want to go out into it.

The waves coming in on the beach looked quite big, but it was when I looked over at Brisons, the true scale of them became apparent. To the naked eye it looked like the waves were breaking halfway up on the northwest side, so I had a little geek through

the binoculars. The waves were indeed giving the rocks a bit of a pounding near enough framing the pair in foaming white water. Cowloe, too, was a mess of foam and the waves danced and jumped over the reef. As we pressed into high tide, the waves forming behind Cowloe looked to be above 15 feet and a big lumbering swell wallowed ahead of them toward the big beach.

It had become increasingly grey as the afternoon went on which just leant extra menace to the waves. It was presumably that which frightened off our customers who became thinner on the ground as the sea picked up, although those that were here tarried to watch the lively sea in action.

It is not so much the absence of customers that makes shopkeeping difficult but the inconsistency: one day busy, the next quiet. We have commenced the great throwing away period where loaves of bread, pasties and scones find their way to the bin with frightening regularity. Short of not ordering anything or employing Gypsy Rose and her crystal ball to determine the volumes of things, I do not stand a chance. As I reviewed the bread for tomorrow's order, there were six loaves that would go to the bin tomorrow if, as was likely, they were not sold.

We have tried, discounting them on the next day but apparently, the 'best before' date is sacred, and bread bought after this time is poisonous. Only last week I was asked if I was going to discount our rolls that had one day left. For one thing, the mere mention of the 'd' word is enough to give a grumpy shopkeeper palpitations and for the other THE BREAD IS NOT OUT OF DATE YET. "Oh, your can of beans has only two months left of its two-year shelf life. How about half price?" No, no, no and again no.

It is alright, dear reader. I am much recovered now. I placed a small and tactically formed order for bread tomorrow and shall hope for the best. Even some of the dairy that had reasonably long shelf lives I am having to order in smaller quantities. When I looked at the till at the end of the day, we were back into territory we had not seen since the start of the shop year. How very disappointing.

## September 26<sup>th</sup> – Saturday

Well, there is a turn up for the books: bright sunshine and a broad blue sky with a thin haze. The broad sands of the beach were softly lit first thing. There were a few bass anglers standing in the shallows throwing long shadows alongside their lines, taking advantage of the early emptiness of the beach. It all looked rather splendid.

We had stepped out first thing in the dark not long after high water. The waves were still pounding then and moving rocks around because we could hear them knocking around. There was also the resounding splash as waves fished over the Harbour wall. We were not going down to the beach anyway but if we had, there would have been precious little sand to run around on. Later in the morning, as well as there

being plenty of sand, the waves had reduced to a more orderly state with the recession of the tide.

As the morning progressed and the levels of tedium increased, it was clear that we had slipped into the next phase of season. We see a step change – downward – at the end of August and another at the end of September. From now until the half term at the end of the month, we shall be in the doldrums and be reliant of fine weather days, such as today, if we are to see any customers at all.

The sunshine today was really helping until it was not. Around the middle of the day, we had a very unexpected shower of rain that took everyone – including the forecasters, it would seem – by surprise. It was a small but elongated line of showers piling in from the southwest and rather spoilt our party. Our visitors who were already resembling an endangered species, became even harder to spot after that.

I was absolutely certain that I had many things that I could be doing but for the life of me, I could not think what they might have been. Even if I had known, I probably could not be fagged to do them, so it was just as well.

The Missus knew what she was doing and went off to do it at the beginning of the afternoon. It is the last, erm, afternoon of the proms at Minack theatre and the station had exclusive rights to go and shake the bucket at them. She went back later for the last night of the proms to do the same while ducking the fevered waving of flags of St Piran, no doubt.

Now here is a funny thing. We had a foreign traveller call at the counter clutching both a patch of the flag of St Piran and another depicting the Cornwall crest. He asked what the difference was. Had he not been from foreign parts I might have tried him with, one is a black and white flag, and the other is a colourful crest, but thought the humour might be lost in translation. I gave him an explanation but after he left, I thought that I had better have a proper geek at the history of each, for no other reason than to satisfy my own curiosity.

I had assumed that the crest was a more modern affectation and that the flag of St Piran had been around a fair bit longer, after all, I am sure that I have seen representations of the 1497 uprising featuring the flags being flown from the ranks. How very wrong could I have been.

The origin of the crest had been the shield with the fifteen bezzants, the popular legend having it was the ransom raised to release the Duke of Cornwall captured by the Saracens in the Crusades. In fact, it came from an Earl of Cornwall also Count of Poitou who started off the whole thing using a pun on Poitou or pois - peas. The peas on the crest morphed into bezants over time and were incorporated into the official Cornwall crest with the first Duke of Cornwall in 1337. It was not until the 1950s that then much maligned council adopted the crest and embellished it with a chough, fisherman and a miner.

More surprising, to me at least, was the flag of St Piran. It represents the darkened hearth of a fire set by St Piran in the 5<sup>th</sup> century and the melted tin, although the flag does not date from then. The earliest written reference was in a history of Cornwall from 1838, although it does not seem to have been widely adopted as the symbol of Cornish culture until the 1950s.

It was all rather a disappointment; a bit smoke and mirrors on things that are apparently steeped in centuries of tradition. I have decided that it is best if I keep this under wraps and not tell anyone about it.

The afternoon brought a bit more busyness, which was handy. It also brought some swell back into the bay and some very surfable, if very big, waves. In the middle of the afternoon, there were some twenty or more surfers spread out from reasonably close in to way out the back waiting for the right wave to come along. I watched a few of them have a long run in from where the waves were breaking on the furthest out of the sandbars. They were all strung out from around the middle of the beach where the Lifeguards could keep a careful watch.

After about half past four o'clock the surfers in the water were the majority of people in The Cove it seemed. I could look up and down the street and see no one, turn my back for two seconds to do something else and find half a dozen people in the shop. People appear out of nowhere when it is like that. I must stress, that is not a complaint. At this point in the season, every man, woman and child counts.

The Missus made a fleeting visit at half past five o'clock to drop the girls off before returning to capture the ticket holders of the evening performance. She would stay to the end to catch the drunken sots coming out – drunk, of course, on the atmosphere and stirring nationalist anthems and all that waving of ancient Cornish flags – as well as dozens of bottles of prosecco carted in for the performance.

Since the poor little mites would have had little in the way of exercise all day, I took the girls around the block after I closed up the shop. There were still quite a few vehicles and their occupants in the Harbour car park as we went through. Some of them had given us a minor five minutes to closing rush, which was good of them. It was a stark difference from the last time we walked through, in the darkness of the morning, when the car park had been almost empty. These then were trippers, a day late to see the pounding seas and spectacle yesterday provided. They may not even have been rewarded with a decent sunset as clouds had slowly moved over us during the day, eventually blotting out the sun.

It was still warm enough for me not to need a jacket, although it was going off rapidly and there was a bit of a breeze blowing in from somewhere. The Missus told me later that it was proper chilly over at the Minack and she was hooded up for the occasion. Still, she got to see the show for free, twice and did not even have so much as a St Piran sand flag on her. What a disgrace.

## September 27<sup>th</sup> – Sunday

Our spangly new benches arrived this morning. They now sit there in contravention of our pavement licence and threaten me with a fine or many years in a much maligned council dungeon. I will do the time; I am not throwing good money down the drain. By the end of the day, I will cover the old ones with the mattress we are throwing out then no one will know that they are there. I will call the local waste disposal company in the morning once the mattress has gone and arrange to have them taken away.

The forecast had threatened us with rain all day, then, a little nearer to the day, the morning. We had taken our walk around the block this morning before any rain arrived. It still had not arrived by the time I opened the shop and the new benches arrived, but it was looking a bit dower and that it might rain any moment. Eventually, we had half a shower – onto our new benches – which caused a bit of a stir, then it went away not to return for the rest of the day, although it did look awfully grey for a time, there.

We were as usual very quiet through the early stages of the morning with just a few newspaper buyers and some walkers looking for breakfast. Then, halfway through the morning, we had a bit of a rush. It sort of coincided with the café not long being open and people clamouring for cooked breakfasts. Nevertheless, we had some good sales of going home type presents and a few groceries all before it went quiet again in the run up to the middle of the day.

It was about that time that the skies started to clear from the west opening out to broad expanses of blue sky and wispy bits of cirrus cloud. It took a while longer for it to catch up with the sun and provide some proper brightness and warmth, but it was a whole lot better than rain all day which was initially forecast. Checking with Land's End weather station that has eventually been fixed, it seems that there was a bit of a westerly blow going on. It was not that apparent in The Cove to begin with, but when I got out later, I discovered it was quite robust.

I had been keeping abreast of developments up at the range for the last several weeks. Since the heath fire which razed the club buildings everything had been on hold waiting on information from the insurance company. They eventually responded allowing the club to clear the wreckage and prepare the ground for the rebuilding. What they had not done yet was release any funds or even agree to any payout. The club has done what it could with the available money in the coffers and a quick whip 'round and had arranged the purchase of timber and other materials.

Having got that far, the club secretary called a meeting to discuss the plans of how the money would be spent and a more detailed look at the rebuilding – what would go where. As I had not been able to provide any sort of assistance, I felt it important that I at least attend the planning meeting even if I could not provide any input of

value. At the appointed hour, I left the shop with the Missus and headed up to the range.

From the road, the area of devastation was quite clear. It seems that the club was just exceedingly unlucky as the width of the conflagration was narrow and could easily have missed the club with just a few degrees of difference in the wind direction. I also understand that the fire brigade had no notion that the range was there and therefore made little effort in stopping the blaze before it got there.

In the range itself, all the wood buildings had gone and so too had the two metal containers on the eastern side. Oddly, the concrete garage toward the western side as well as some of the wood staging on the northwest side had been completely untouched, although the scrub on that side and some other woodwork had been completely burnt away.

I had worn a jacket as I thought it might be a bit more breezy up there and was not wrong. The meeting, obviously, was out in the open and the wind was belting up through the entrance gap. I had not thought it cold immediately, but having sat there for the best part of an hour I was chilled to the bone. It had not helped that I do not get out much and I was very used to the excessive warmth of the shop, not the start of autumn with a 25 miles per hour wind blowing through it.

Thankfully, we wandered around a bit to get an idea of where things were going. It helped a little as we could move out of the direct wind, but I was grateful when we reached a natural end and I could get back to the warmth of the shop.

Even then I had to wait. The girls had not been around since our walk in the morning and when I went upstairs, they seemed keen. I took them to the Harbour beach where they were able to run around for a bit. It was breezy down there by then, but the sun had eventually outrun the cloud and in the direct glare, it was warm enough.

After I returned to the shop in the later part of the middle of the afternoon, it seems our visitors had seen enough and had scattered off somewhere else – or they were not here at all. It was exceedingly quiet for the rest of the afternoon and with nothing to do, I struggled to keep my eyes open. We had not many more than half a dozen customers through to closing and not a hint of a five minutes to closing rush. It really is game over.

While the sea state had looked much quieter during the low tide period through the day, it came back with a vengeance with the flood. Approaching high water, large lumbering and well formed waves were running into the rocks below the promenade. It is a particularly high tide thanks to the harvest moon and autumn equinox, so it did not need much of a push to take waves over the Harbour wall. We could hear it, just, from the living room with the windows cracked open. It was all wrong place and wrong part of the tide for surfers, but the waves were dotted with seabirds here and

there across the bay. They stood out starkly even with the surface laced with white water.

That was all rather jolly but no match for the attraction of a new mattress and clean sheets. I would let you know what that felt like, but I probably will be oblivious after a few moments.

## September 28<sup>th</sup> – Monday

There was a geet moon hanging above the Harbour car park as we went around this morning. It is starting to wane now but still looked the part and for the first time, it lit our way around the block. It was also the first time this end of the season that there had been a sharp chill in the air. The clear skies overnight had let all the warm air out and the temperature dropped to twelve degrees at Land's End. By the afternoon, it was back up to a much more respectable seventeen degrees again.

When the day eventually dawned and I could see it properly, it started to look like an autumnal rip gribbler. I was clearly not the only person to think so because our illegal tables were occupied for most of the middle of the day and well into the afternoon. I would have been happy had the shop enjoyed as much patronage as our tables but, sadly, we were about as busy as we were yesterday.

The occupation of the tables gave me some cause for alarm. I had called our local waste collection company and good that they are, they promised to come today to take the old ones away. What I should have done, of course, is at that moment gone and turned the old tables up on their end, so that it would be obvious not to use them. As it was, there seemed to be a constant churn of people who wanted to sit at them. It left me concerned that I might have to go over and evict people at any moment. I was also perplexed at the number of people who sat at the old tables by preference. Perhaps the new ones looked too posh.

The other matter that niggled away at me was the collection of the old mattress or rather the fact that it had not been collected. I had booked a bulky item collection with the much maligned council and their outsourced company had telephoned over the weekend to confirm that the collection was indeed going ahead. The very pleasant lady I spoke with warned me that the mattress should be left from seven o'clock in the morning or face the wrath and full weight of the much maligned council bulky item collection enforcers. I imagine that they were laughing up their sleeves up at the office when the big van eventually arrived at two o'clock in the afternoon to pick it up.

In the meanwhile, I had faced the ire of several customers who were deeply shocked to think that The Cove was not, as they had blithely come to believe, immune from the blight of fly tipping that we hear affects other beauty spots up country. I had to stick my hand up to admit that I was the awful fly tipper on this occasion.

As the comments increased, I made up ever more outlandish claims regarding the mattress' presence. I told enquirers that I gave the Missus the ultimatum that it was me or the girls resulting in me sleeping outside for the night. Also, it was the work of the phantom mattress tipper of Cornwall. He has left mattresses at all the major holiday destinations throughout the summer. Some say it is the work of a foreign power aimed at upsetting the British scenic idyll and is probably the work of a sleeper agent. Police say they had not seen his work for some time until this summer; they think he might have been lying low.

It is alright, dear reader. You can come out now because I am about to let you know that our day just got better and better. The temperature was soaring, and the wind had swung around to the east and had moderated a good deal. The sea state, however, had not – moderated, that is – and was providing some cracking good surfing opportunities for anyone above intermediate level of experience. Once again, it is around three hours before high water that seems to be the optimum as the tide height works around the various sandbanks dotted around the middle of the beach. One of the Lifeguards told me it had produced some problems in the lower part of the tide with powerful rips running up the middle of the beach.

I had plenty of time to watch the action as there was very little in the shop. Perhaps I am being unfair as I am still comparing the state of business to busier parts of the season. I will get used to the new order soon enough and find other things to occupy me, although I cannot remember what I might be doing. We did have our moments and at times were actually quite busy, it is just that those periods are short-lived.

If we had nothing else, the weather had been sublime. The tables across the road had been busy throughout the afternoon and from late in the morning. The café was definitely busy because they had to come into us for more milk but by four o'clock in the afternoon, it was game over and the street crowd quickly ebbed away to nothing. Our days of five minutes to closing rushes do seem to be over and we closed without a whisper.

The temperature of the day is clearly a fragile thing because it was chilly again when I took the girls out last thing. The forecasters are promising a bit of a blow tomorrow, so we have something to look forward to. What excitement. I can hardly wait.

## September 29<sup>th</sup> – Tuesday

A more drab and unwelcoming day it would be hard to imagine – although all I had to do was wait until the afternoon and then I did not have to imagine at all. I must be in tune with the visitors this week because it rather seemed that they thought it was drab and unwelcoming too and went somewhere else. Nearly all of them.

I had taken the precaution of wearing a jacket against the rain when I took the girls out first thing and then discovered that it was unnecessary. It had been raining but when I looked at the rain radar after we came back, there was no rain around at all until Bodmin. The wind was just starting to get noticeable, so my jacket had some use.

I had not expected very much of today and I was not to be disappointed. I had placed a pasty order (sorry, MS) fully expecting it to last two days supplemented from our frozen stock. By the look of sales, I will be adding to the freezer rather than using them up, which was the whole point of ordering less.

Something else I could have done with more of was the fish we ordered. I am getting a tad frustrated with our thus far very helpful supplier. The order I placed at the start of the summer returned far too small a volume of fish. That was my fault for ordering in the middle of a huge spring tide. The order I placed at the start of September was carefully timed to miss the springs, but it did not get turned around when I expected it and, once again, it arrived without hake and very little haddock. That was his fault.

I ordered again, very carefully timing my order at the end of a spring tide that would give the best part of a week to get the fish together. It seems our man had forgotten the order and when I reminded him, it was far too close to the weekend and some large spring tides again. I was told that he would put the order together on Monday which then turned into today. I was dubious because few netters would have been out, and I did not think I would get the volume and what I did get would be expensive.

It turns out that I was right to be concerned. I was told in the morning that the fish were available, and I planned to pick them up in the afternoon. I asked for the invoice to be sent ahead and when it arrived it was for half the volume I had asked for. I had a check with our man's number two when I collected the fish later. He understood and has a cunning plan and I will talk to him direct next time. I still have to place another order now, which is irritating.

Much more irritating than that is that my newly refurbished left false ear is once again deceased. What is that, two weeks operation before it died. A new record. It has been difficult to be certain, but I am now pretty sure that the right false ear stopped working shortly after I had the left one back. I had been tempted to look at privately purchased ones, trading in an arm and a leg for two false ears but as the Missus said, there is no guarantee that they would be any better. If they started playing up, then I would be *really* upset.

Why stop now with my grizzling; I am on a roll, here. The Laurel and Hardy Newspaper company is back on form again. Well, they have never really been off it; my newspapers continue to arrive mashed up and not matching the volumes I asked for. Today it was the magazines again. I had sent a complaint to the customer services department which, of course, is a contradiction in terms, asking that they

desist from delisting my magazine orders. The cryptic message they sent back said how sorry they were and they had put us on "TSO" which I assumed meant that they would not change the numbers again.

Today, they recalled our three remaining women's magazines. I had expected new ones to replace them, but when I checked, the order had been cancelled. It seems that TSO actually means "Try Sodding Off". I shall fire the company a parting shot, after which, off I shall indeed sod as we are far to close to closing to worry about it.

Oh, that is disappointing: I cannot think of anything else to complain about.

The appalling weather forecast for the afternoon had clearly been taken note of because the beach was broadly deserted. When I looked in the middle of the day, when it was merely grey and misty, there were no more than a dozen souls down there spread out as widely as they could possibly be. If they were intentionally avoiding each other, they were doing a very good job of it. Mind, they had plenty of space.

As I let slip earlier, I made one of my rare trips out of The Cove in the afternoon. I needed to pick up the fish, but I also had an appointment with our accountant. It is the annual meeting after the end of year – last year – accounts have been drafted. It makes sure we both agree the results and discuss highs and lows. Last year it was mainly highs since we had good weather through the summer holidays. It also demonstrated, for the first time, the effectiveness of the solar panels on our electricity bill which outstripped expectations.

I had been bang on time for the appointment which was more by chance than design. I had to stop at Tesmorburs on a soap powder errand for the Missus. She had been very specific about which product she wanted but I had trouble finding it. First, I had trouble finding the laundry aisle, cunningly disguised under a big sign that said 'Laundry'. It seems the whole world has moved on and uses pods rather than powder because having gone around twice, I eventually found the last two boxes I was after, face down at the back of the bottom shelf.

That had delayed me along with the queue at the tills then the traffic through town was slow and busy. The much maligned council had introduced enforcement cameras to stop people cutting through the town centre and spoiling their grand plans for a street café culture. Actually, the plans have been spoiled by there being no street cafes, but it is probably rude to mention the facts. Anyway, it might have been that which upset the traffic a bit.

I had decided to circle around in the hope that there was a free parking space outside the accountants. I needed to approach on the correct side of the road that took me longer to get there but, if I was lucky, would save time parking. I was particularly concerned after the much maligned council had decided to remove the cash option from its parking ticket machines.

If your card chooses that moment to ask for a pin, it will not work contactlessly forcing you to use the dreaded 'app' that not only charges you extra but are notoriously fraught with pitfalls, such as having a mobile signal. It all would have used up too much time and I would be late, which I abhor. As it was, I was very lucky and was able to park for free right outside the accountant's door right on time.

It was the most excitement I had experienced since the last time I did something exciting. I am very sparing with activities as otherwise I might expect them all the time and that would never do. It was just as well then that I took over from the Missus in the shop where the most exciting thing was vacuum packing the fish I had brought back. I had already taken an order for two hake and two haddock, so that was even less fish I needed pack – except I did because they look better sold like that.

The rain, promised by the forecasters at three o'clock was timely but very light and hardly worth the jacket I had taken on my trip with me. It was trying very hard to be heavier when I came to close the shop but largely unsuccessfully. It did manage to throw some very menacing black looking clouds at us and darken the day earlier than it should, but we had to wait until after dark when the real rain came along. Even then, it was on the wane when I took the girls around. The whole day, it seemed, was just full of disappointments. We must hope for better.

## September 30<sup>th</sup> – Wednesday

Our approach to the end of the world is accelerating by which I mean, of course, the end of the world as we know it, by which I mean, of course, 'the end of the world' is the shop closing at end of season and 'we', the grumpy shopkeeper and the Missus. Of course, I could have just said that the shop closing at end of season appears to be getting closer at an alarming rate but where is the fun in that.

It felt like we were already closed this morning. Apart from the early morning visitors who are staying close by and getting their newspapers and milk, we had precious few customers. This extended right into the early afternoon and was hugely disappointing.

It was not like it was a poor weather day, in fact, quite the reverse. We had beautiful blue skies from the outset, when we could see them, and brightness shone all about. The wind had moderated from its stormy condition last night to a much more reasonable 20 miles per hour from the southwest. Down in The Cove we felt nothing of its ferocity last night although I spoke so someone from the village this morning who told me it was raging. We could not feel much of the southwesterly today, either and the temperature, after a shaky start, increased to 18 degrees.

Despite the gloriousness of the day, it did not seem to stir much enthusiasm for the beach which was just as empty as it was yesterday. Crikey, if I had the chance, I would have been down there like a shot. It will be interesting to see if the lifting of the dog control order tomorrow makes any difference to the daytime population down there. Of course, I am not counting the half dozen dogs down there today.

The big tides are starting to go off now and the sandbanks are exposed a little less each day. There is, though, still enough room to safely access Gwenver beach as amply demonstrated by one of the Lifeguards who drove his quad around there shortly after low water. I did not see him come back, so he might be around there still.

I slipped away to the gymnasium in the middle of the morning. Even if the Missus had not taken the reins, I doubt that many people would have noticed; it was awfully quiet. The Missus was going to run off to The Farm straight after I came back but Mother reminded her that she had an appointment, which scotched that. It therefore fell to me to take the girls for a spin, and we headed for the Harbour beach. The only other people down there were the girls wot swim, and they had a small hound with them. BB made a beeline for them and the small hound and for twenty minutes they chased each other around the beach. ABH played old maid and stood around looking bemused. She is only three, for heaven's sake and should be running around with them.

After things calmed a little, BB headed for the tide line. She likes to have stones thrown for her. She will not chase a ball but stones, no problem. We have been blessed with very odd dogs. I had to clamber over a line of weed to get to the stones to throw for her which left about two feet in front of the slapping waves. They were not slapping very much but being unable to step back because of the weed, it was just enough to slop into my shoe. I can attest that the water really is not that cold still.

I would ordinarily have gone to change before I went back to the shop, but with the Missus' appointment pressing, I had to go back with one wet foot. I tried not to squelch too much.

We saw few more people in the later afternoon; it would have been very hard to see fewer people. Stories began to circulate of some very heavy showers that had crossed the Duchy from the beginning of the morning. One couple said that they had been caught heading down to Kynance, which is about a mile on foot. With nowhere to shelter they had been properly drenched. I looked at the rain radar later and we had definitely dodged some heavy showers. They were piling in from the southwest and one long line had narrowly missed us and got everyone else up to the Tamar. We never felt a thing.

While the sea state looked benign for most of the day, at high water it was still coming over the Harbour wall. I did notice it dancing up Aire Point at one point in the afternoon, revealing its hand under the otherwise reasonable looking surface. There

were precious few surfers about to enjoy it – they were, no doubt, out visiting elsewhere and getting wet while fully clothed.

The day may not have been busy with customers, but they saved themselves for an amusing five minutes to closing rush. Bless their hearts.