

DIARY 2021/22

March 31st – Thursday

It should not really have been a surprise. After all, I placed the order and knew that it was turning up at some point during the morning. I suppose it was more the magnitude of it and it arrived while I was upstairs on the telephone to a man about solar panels.

The other thing that I had not anticipated was the howling wind that arrived during the night. I had omitted to tie the bin up and it was over on its side when I stepped down the stairs in the morning. The wind was still blowing, although possibly not quite as ferociously as earlier but while I fixed the bin and put out the display I was hailed upon. I was not expecting the wintry showers this far west and I distinctly recall the forecaster on Radio Pasty they were going to fall on higher ground. Perhaps he meant anywhere more than ten feet above sea level.

The rain and sleet held off while I took the bleddy hound down to the beach. It was bitterly cold, and she was definitely not for hanging around very long. This was convenient because I had taken overly long dealing with the milk and newspapers that had arrived while I was down first thing. Even then I did not have very long with my morning cup of tea and was straight back down to the shop as soon as I had finished it.

I wasted no time in pushing ahead with the clothing delivery that came yesterday. I was quite pleased with the progress I had made and managed to put out a whole range of girls' shorts before I had to divert my attention to the telephone call I was expecting. The solar panel man had arranged to call at ten o'clock to discuss our requirements and he called bang on time. It was during this call, while the Missus was looking after the shop, that the delivery turned up.

When I eventually made my way downstairs, there were boxes piled up outside and even more in the shop. The Missus dryly informed me that there were over 100 boxes of various sizes, some of them quite big. Just to make life interesting, a further two deliveries arrived after that but thankfully not quite so big.

We both set to working our way through the forest of boxes. Most would need to go up to The Farm but some and some parts of others would need to stay behind but since they were all jumbled, there was some work to do to sort which were which. To make matters worse, the contents of the list that the Missus worked through yesterday at The Farm were still in the truck and would need to be extracted first before the outgoing boxes could be loaded. I took care of that while the Missus sorted out the new arrivals, piling the one for The Farm outside and collecting the ones to stay inside while checking off on the invoice.

I loaded as much as I could into the truck and headed to The Farm to pick up the trailer, so we could take the remaining boxes up in one journey. Given how cold it was in The Cove, I reasoned that I would need some serious warm clothing to keep the frostbite off up at the top of the hill. Usually, with so many layers and a pile of energetic work to do, it is only a few minutes before I realise I have out on too many. Today, despite wearing five layers including my DIYman overalls, I was just about warm enough even after shifting two truckloads and the trailer full of boxes – twice. The wind was blowing so hard up there, I had trouble keeping the barn doors open.

It was well into the afternoon by the time I came back again and realised that I had missed the deadline for our pasty order for tomorrow. Thankfully, business was pretty slow today and we should have sufficient pasties left over for tomorrow.

I worked through the boxes left behind in the shop but no matter how many items I put out on the shelves, the pile of boxes blocking off the store room did not seem to diminish. I very quickly ran out of time to clear enough and had to return again in the evening. In the meanwhile, someone decided it would be a spiffing idea to launch the Lifeboat on a training exercise.

At the appointed hour, I went around to join the others and discovered a good number of very excellent Shore Crew and someone who could orchestrate the whole proceedings in the Head Launcher role. This being the case, I left the job in their capable hands and backed out to continue working in the shop.

I was busy labouring when the boat was launched, and I was still at it when it came back. I had absolutely no doubt that the assembled company brought the boat back by completing a textbook recovery up the short slip. We are, after all, a very interchangeable, very excellent Shore Crew.

March 30th – Wednesday

There was rather more chill about first thing down on the Harbour beach with the bleddy hound than there was yesterday. Today's chill was different with a good bit of moisture involved and the mist in the air was indeed mist rather than a summery haze. Things are definitely changing, although the big chill that the forecasters have been talking about since before the weekend, is still not quite here. One thing is for sure: we have all had plenty of time to find some winter woollies to put on.

It took some steely will power to nudge myself in the direction of the gymnasium a little later in the morning. That damp cold had inveigled itself into my bones and was refusing to shift. Happily, it took only the warming up session before I got my enthusiasm back and I sailed through the rest of the session, warming up all the way. By the time I had finished I was quite walking on air.

The Missus had not quite reached my level of perked-upness and was consequently late heading off to The Farm taking the bleddy hound with her. She had clearly made

a gap in her operations calendar because she took the list of goodies required down in the shop with her. Normally, she would price them up there but she discovered that the ink in her price gun had dried up during the winter and it will all have to be done in the shop now, which will slow things up a bit.

A delivery had arrived while I was at the gymnasium and I had a bunch of large boxes waiting for me in the corner when I came back to the shop. This was our clothes order of shorts and swimsuits, which is always a big effort up unwrap and price. Everything is individually wrapped in plastic with lots of packing and takes an age to clear. I can understand that it needs to be protected from the elements and knocks on its long journey from Asia but even in recent years there does not seem to be any effort to reduce the packaging or to minimise the use of plastic. There does not seem to be the urgency further east. Perhaps they have a plan.

The unwrapping and pricing took the rest of the afternoon. I had precious few customers to interrupt the process and I made good progress. There are still swimsuits and children's wear to go, so perhaps I did not do as well as I thought. At least I emptied a few boxes and all the hats are done. Well done me. Even grumpy shopkeepers need encouragement.

I do not think that I missed very much outside. There were times during the day that it looked quite bright but as the afternoon wore on it became greyer by the minute. With the sun gone, the chill set back it and I found myself taking off my fleece and putting it back on again dependent on how animated I was in my work. Certainly, the customers who were around were pretty well wrapped up, so I am guessing that it was not getting any warmer outside.

The Missus left the stock she had collected in the truck, which was something of a relief. It was gone five o'clock, so we would not be processing it at that moment and I had just lumped two large boxes of swimsuits into the store room. It would have got a bit tight in there with the content of the truck as well, although it does mean having to unload it sometime tomorrow with another big delivery expected sometime during the morning. I will look forward to that.

March 29th – Tuesday

I was under the impression that the days were getting longer but it was darker this morning than it was the day before. I have to suspect global warming.

I do not think that the temperature had changed much since yesterday but in the absence of a single breath of breeze, it seemed much more temperate. I did not feel the need for a jacket at all, although I did wear trousers this morning.

The whole morning routine is very sedate at this point in the shop calendar. There is hardly anything to do in the morning before we open other than put out the display at the front of the shops. The newspapers arrive suitably early and with no magazines

yet, they are done in a jiffy and there is time to sit down for a short while before opening time. I use this time to fire off any order emails or to deal with any incoming issues that have arrived in the afternoon yesterday that could not immediately be resolved. It is a bit more of a concern that our pasties do not arrive until later than we would like but hopefully that will sort itself out when our busy times arrive.

I am particularly pleased that the newspaper supply seems to be working smoothly. However, we have not yet delved into the world of magazines but given that they can take a couple of weeks to get going, I thought I had better do that sooner rather than later. I have always struggled to know which magazines to order. I have a look on the Internet to see which are the most popular but generally the responses are from companies promoting particular magazines and it is difficult to arrive at an unbiased view.

This time I looked, I tried asking a different question and based my enquiry on sales and circulation. This returned a response from a website for the press gazette and by some miracle had the top twenty magazine listed by sales and by category. Why in all the years I have struggled in this topic I had never come across this resource, I have no idea. In a couple of weeks we shall have a selection of the top selling magazines on our shelf and will no doubt discover that our customers will be the biggest cluster of atypical magazine buyers ever to arrive at the same place together in the same year. If I am suddenly overwhelmed by requests for *Taxidermy for Beginners* (the magazine that arrives with a new free part to stuff on the front cover each week), I will know, dear reader, and you will be invited to get stuffed.

The Missus took Mother off today to meet a friend. They had arranged to meet at a garden centre somewhere east of Camborne. I am glad that they knew each other; it was not the sort of place to look for someone with a pink carnation and carrying a copy of The Times under your arm would just get you thrown out. I am not sure what there was to do for that long in a garden centre, but they were gone for the whole day. Mother would normally come back home on a Tuesday for some tea but did not on this occasion, so I presume they must have had dinner whilst they were out. I had taken something out of the freezer earlier for my tea just in case. It was a sensible precaution.

As with yesterday we had a quiet morning and later afternoon with all the action piled into the middle of the day. As with yesterday I did not do very much to fill the gaps, so finger pulling out will have to wait until tomorrow. In my defence, I did manage to finish the postcard order, although I have not yet sent it off and will do that tomorrow while enjoying my morning cup of tea.

What I did do was to gaze out on the sublime day that had developed from its unpromising start. There was quite a thick haze around the bay and the chilli wind came back again but the sky was blue and the sun was shining through the haze. When I took the bleddy hound down to the beach in the middle of the day, having shut the shop for ten minutes, the scene could easily be mistaken for a summer's

day. There was even a couple over by the Harbour wall in their beach chairs enjoying a peaceful rest in the sun.

One of the fishing boats had been out again today and when I was down on the beach he had just got back in and was cleaning his boat for tomorrow. Another fisherman was on his boat getting it ready for sea – or his old man was while he chatted to the one cleaning his boat. The fishing will be on and off at this time of year but The Cove is slowly waking up, putting on its top hat, tying up its white tie and dusting off its tails. I sure it will all be splendid on the night.

March 28th – Monday

It was proper dark this morning. I thought that the alarm must have gone off early or I had misheard it but when I checked everything was correct. It was just proper dark this morning.

I did not let the dark deter me but waited a minute for it to brighten up before I took the bleddy hound out for a stroll. There was a fair bit of cloud around but that seemed to be breaking up in the east – or as I discovered later, the cloud just had not got to that bit yet. There was still a robust breeze from the east shooting up the legs of my shorts, keeping the temperature down. Word on the street is that it will get much colder towards the middle of the week but it is pretty chilly now outside some shelter.

One of our off duty Coastguards stuck her head into the shop yesterday to let me know that some errant youths had scaled the scaffolding from the slipway to lark about on the roof of the Lifeboat station. I am not all that comfortable while on the slipway let alone climbing up a seemingly unassailable scaffold from it, so they have bigger wotsits than me, for sure. It is still probably not such a good idea and as we are living in a world of litigation, I was minded to let the Coxswain know so that the Institution could at least put signs up telling people that falling off the roof could seriously ruin your day.

Some more youths climbed up on the scaffolding today, but I think that they were supposed to be there as they all had yellow jackets and hard hats. The work seems to be moving ahead at a blistering pace and the workers today were making preparations for the new roof to be put in place. The project manager dropped by while I was at the gymnasium this morning and explained that it was likely to get a bit noisy when the roof was being installed. They have apparently ironed out the dents in the old one now and are just looking for a big enough tube of superglue to stick it back on with. If I had been there, I would have told them to use very big nails on that northwest corner as I did not want it coming through my window, especially while I was standing by it.

The sun did not try and break through until the afternoon, when the day started to look a little bit decent. Until then it had been somewhat overcast and grey and not at

all conducive to enticing eager visitors into The Cove; we were very quiet all day. Not wishing to be too idle, I placed a few more orders for things that I had either forgotten or just put off. What we do not order this week will probably be too late for Easter, especially as some of the things will take time unpacking, finding hangers for and pricing. The Missus headed for The Farm today and I presented her with a list of things I needed from our previous orders. She told me she would consult her diary to see if she could fit me in this week. I thanked her graciously.

It was a very slow haul towards closing time. I should have been busy looking at my postcard orders, but the deathly pace was infectious and I did less onerous things instead. I will pull my finger out tomorrow, honest guv.

March 27th – Sunday

It was even less fully light when the alarm went off the morning. The sun was not yet even an embarrassed flush on the horizon and there was a definite chill in the air as I set about the first chores of the day. By the time the bleddy hound and I were setting off towards the Harbour beach, the sun was bright out to the east and shining through the gaps in the Lifeboat slipways.

It remained cold well into the afternoon and I presumed that the wind had slipped a little around to the south east as it was blowing directly through the first electric sliding door in The Cove. For as long as I can remember, our first weeks of opening are plagued with chilly easterlies and running the shop looking like a market stall trader. While closing the first electric sliding door in The Cove is tempting, the airflow is very beneficial these days and, besides, we would not want to mess with tradition, now would we.

There seemed to be a bit of a downturn in customer activity today. I know that several of the customers from yesterday told me that they were going home today, so it was plausible that we were waiting for a new contingent. I occupied my time with a bit of data input with a bunch of invoices that I had found from our Christmas opening that I had forgotten all about. There were also a few stock items that I had forgotten to count and I discovered this omission while putting together the end of year report for the accountant. This turned out to be rather more than I thought and kept me occupied between customers until the beginning of the afternoon.

Those new shelves we installed along the gift aisle are looking particularly shiny. They are also looking particularly empty and I will have to go through our delivery list to see what needs to be brought down from The Farm to fill the gaps. Because we have new shelf edging to go with the new shelves, I have done away with the old system of using luggage tags as labels and experimented with printed labels slipped into the shelf edge strips. It looks a lot neater even if I do need spectacles to read what the labels say.

I am sure that there will be plenty more I will find over the next few days to keep me occupied in the quieter times. It was the sole reason for opening a bit earlier in the season but if the first two days are anything to go by, it is still feasible now in the latter part of March. It is a bit of an experiment and so far, it is looking good to repeating it, although Easter's timing will make a difference.

One of the things that I sorely wished that we had on offer was ice creams. This was not just from scores of eager kiddies but from adults too. I know it is very sunny – we have been selling sun lotion for heaven's sake – but it is not exactly warm. The last thing we did before we opened was to empty the ice cream freezer, which we have used domestically during the winter. It needed cleaning before we put the ice creams in it but perhaps we should have done it sooner. I took the opportunity in the quiet just before closing to poke it out of the doorway and tip it up to empty it on the slope to the shop. It will be ready at some point during tomorrow, just as the weather breaks.

Family was waiting upstairs for their tea when I closed the shop. There was even more yesterday for Mother's birthday. I suspect Mother's Day suppressed the numbers of customers during the day as many people will have scurried off to special events. It was a special event here too as the Missus had killed several fatted calves and half a forest of salad. There were a couple of crabs that laid down their lives for the feast as well. We will be eating the rest of it for a week.

March 26th – Saturday

It was still not fully light when I got out of bed. The advantage of this is that the bleddy hound was not all that keen to join me at that time. The usual run of events with the shop open is that I collect her after the initial tranche of chores is complete. It is a good system and I saw no reason to change it.

I had deliberately arranged for most of the deliveries to arrive yesterday so that I was not unduly under pressure this morning to get everything done while trying to acclimatise to being in the shop all day. The only deliveries I was expecting today were the bakery order and the newspapers. I had been very relaxed about the newspaper delivery and had not double checked that everything was set up. If we did not get newspapers today, I was pretty sure that the world would not come to an end. When I looked out at eight o'clock, there was the Laurel and Hardy Newspaper Company delivery man dropping them off and when it came to unpacking them, everything was in order. I looked outside to make sure that the world had not come to an end as the Laurel and Hardy Newspaper Company getting our first day right is one of the seven signs of the apocalypse.

I was a tad tardy in opening the shop, a few minutes late. I did not think that it was going to matter too much but when I flung back the curtains and opened the first electric sliding door in The Cove – manually – there was a queue of eager shoppers

awaiting my pleasure. I told them off for ganging up on me on my first day, then roundly welcomed them all.

It was not far into the day that it felt like I had not been away at all. Nothing really changes in the world of grumpy shopkeepers, people come into the shop and they buy things or ask questions. It helps, of course, if the items are correctly priced and this was one of the first omissions in our meticulous and detailed planning that I spotted. It took most of the morning to find all the little snags that our meticulous and detailed planning had missed and I am sure that there will be a few more as the week progresses.

I was moderately surprised at just how busy it was today. It followed the usual pattern of being quiet until later in the morning when it suddenly got busy. We are, of course, more used to opening into an earlier part of March and then watching the tumbleweed roll down the street for a few weeks before we see anyone. We are helped by the weather and it was once again a sparkling looking day. It was clear from the outset, when I forgot to bring a jacket down while setting out the display outside, that there was a fair amount of chill in the strong easterly breeze. Looking at the numbers during the day, it did not seem to unduly bother people.

As first days go, this one definitely passed muster.

March 25th – Friday

Oh! Only one day left to have everything done in time for the shop to be open tomorrow morning. I think we still have two days of work, so that is alright then.

It has not helped that we have had fairly significant deliveries arrive during the week. Ordinarily, I would have put them off until next week but next week there will be even more. The boxes were waiting in the shop for us when we went down in the morning.

It was such a gorgeous looking day, too. It seemed such a shame to be shutting ourselves in the shop away from the light but needs must. Just to add a little edge to proceedings, I called in our dairy and local cash and carry deliveries as well as some greengrocery from a third. I went down early to deal with the milk order that had arrived first and some of the fruit and vegetables. The Missus and I went down together later to do the main bulk of the cleaning up and dealing with the wetsuit delivery that came in yesterday.

We were knee deep in boxes and had filled the big commercial waste bin ahead of the collection. Our supplier used to outsource us to another company, which we got on with very well. During that time, our supplier has developed its own collection resources and has now switched us back to direct collections, on a less convenient day of the week. When the truck arrived, the driver took a photograph of the mountain of cardboard we had amassed outside. The previous driver would not have

batted an eyelid at this and would have collected everything as one load. I sense that we will be charged extra for our card collection from now on.

To be fair, when we first started with the supplier, I fully expected to be charged separately for waste and recycling. It is still disappointing that now looks likely after getting away with it for a few years, but I have to admit, it is entirely fair.

We hit a point in our preparation where the Missus wanted to mop the floor that I needed to work on. I also had a last few chores to complete at The Farm, so I took the bleddy hound just to torture her some more and headed up there. There was not a great deal to do but I wanted to finish off the gas stove installation and clear away the mess I had made making all my bits over the weeks. There was also the overstock of wetsuits to put into the store room and to change the heavy battery that runs the lights in there. We have found that a newly charged battery will last the season if we install it at the very outset.

It was also necessary to move some heavy things about because after the hiatus of the morning where very little heavy work was done, my back and legs were starting not to ache. After lumping the batteries between the cabin and store room and back again, and carting off the unused timber to the wood shed, things were almost back to normal. I took a moment to appreciate it by testing out the new gas stove installation with the making of a cup of tea. I then took one last look around the field as I closed the gate. It looked sublime in the yellowing light of the sun, and I felt a small pang of regret. I have learned to love the work and the serenity of being in this little oasis of peace, the utter satisfaction of completing a physical thing – despite the attendant frustrations - and the tired feeling of having put in an honest day's work. Not that being a grumpy shopkeeper is not honest, honest guv.

The floor in the shop was dry by the time I returned with some bodyboards to put out. We did not have any last year, so I thought we had better not miss the opportunity of a single day without them this year. I then spent an hour or so making ready the shop with the absolute basics for tomorrow morning. I reasoned that we would be quiet enough in the morning to add some more touches then. I really need to take a few photographs before we move the furniture around during the winter. I could not remember where everything went. I shall worry about that some more tomorrow.

The very last thing I did was to set my alarm for early o'clock, the way it will stay for eight months. That is going to fox the bleddy hound.

March 24th – Thursday

Crickey, did we pull out a few stops today. But what a sublime day to do it on, not so good for the Missus who spent much of it in the shop but, for me, who spent most of the day at The Farm, blinding.

I had such great plans of starting early none of which came to fruition, although I did get up early in the morning but for several reasons I did not get out of the door. This did not include the bleddy hound's walk out which always happens roughly to schedule no matter what. Today, we managed to find sufficient space on the beach as we beat the tide to it.

It was not to do with procrastination or laziness that I was held back but rather some unexpected chores resulting from early messages and telephone calls. I did manage to break free in the morning just an hour later than I had hoped.

The plan was to drop the PTO shaft into the supplier over at Helston, a trip I detest because of the stop/go nature of the road. I would not have bothered but I thought that I would also be able to get the necessary parts for joining together the two IBCs by the barn at the nearby specialist store. The journey was even more fraught because of a nasty motorcycle accident around halfway. Radio Pasty had warned of queues at that point which had mainly dissipated by the time I got there. I suspect had I left an hour earlier I would have been caught in the thick of it. I was busy congratulating myself that I had got away with it when I ran into another queue, this time for temporary traffic lights which appeared to be working in favour of traffic coming from the other direction. I was waiting so long I turned my engine off and went for a cup of tea – alright, maybe not that long. In the end, the journey was somewhat wasted as the IBC shop did not have the parts I wanted.

I returned as quickly as the road would allow. I was right about the temporary lights because the queue going back was far shorter than the one coming. I had already transformed into DIYman before I went but stopped off home first to make sure the Missus did not need anything before I went to The Farm. She did not, but I collected the bleddy hound because I like to torture her by making her go someone she hates being – at least without Mother being there. I was the one who suffered most in the end because it is most distracting trying to concentrate on what you are doing while intensely bitter eyes bore into your very being everywhere you go.

Setting to with the downpipe to the water butts by the greenhouse first, I thought that if I failed to finish the gas bottle box, at least the water butts would be filling if it rained. This did not take very long and was very successful. I even managed to avoid getting the sticky silicone glue everywhere, which was just as well because I had cast caution to the lack of wind and divested myself of my DIYman overalls and surplus layers. It was scorching up there.

I worked long and hard trying to get the gads bottle box fixed. It was taking more time than I anticipated and when it was finished, it was almost too heavy to move. I had to use the wheelbarrow to take to around the back of the cabin. There just remained drilling a hole through the wall, which sounds ever so easy but is, in fact, the hardest part of the job. The problem is the insulation in the wall cavity. Get a drill bit anywhere close to it and wave goodbye to your drill bit, if you can extract it from the drill that is. The cotton wool like centre to the insulation wraps around the bit and

refuses to tear. It is almost just as hard to cut and forcing even the sharpest of pointed tools rebound.

Deciding to drill the wood out from each side was a good start but finding the exact point on opposite sides of the wall was not easy as the only reference point was a window a metre above. In the end I forced a bradawl through the hole from the inside with less than judicious use of a big hammer behind it. Even with both holes now aligned, trying to make a hole through the insulation was proving troublesome. I gave up in the end as time was pressing but went back to it with a thin knife I had found just before I was due to leave. With a few minutes patient poking with the knife and prodding with the gas hose, the hose went through. I left it then and will finish it off in the morning.

I had been alerted to the time by the timely passing of two hawk jets from RNAS Culdrose. The aeroplanes are being retired and the training squadron disbanded. I had rather thought that they would be replaced with something but perhaps the Navy has decided to stick with being on the sea. It is, after all, its core business. It had been widely broadcast on Radio Pasty during the morning that the fly past was on and at one point they issued a schedule telling me the jets would overfly Sennen at 15:50 hours, erm, Zulu. They were precisely on time, coming in low just to the east of me.

The reason that time was pressing was that the day was so lovely, someone thought it a spiffing idea to have a Lifeboat launch. The relief boat had not been out since it arrived due to the roof problem and the Inshore boat had equally not been tested in some weeks. Things are a bit more settled now that the scaffolding has been finished and the powers that be have sorted out suitably safe working arrangements for the station.

We mustered in the car park and scurried off to our various posts and had the boat in the water at around half past six o'clock. We were a bit short handed in terms of people qualified to do certain roles, so once having launched the big boat, I had to run off and launch the Inshore as well. The public waste bin at the top of the slip has been moved since I last tried this but even then the clearance is still tight and there was no vehicle parked in Tinker Tailor's drive. It served for tonight's launch in any case.

The boats were not out for long in a bay where the tide was on the push and recover set for around an hour and a half short of high water. I had discussed this with the Coxswain before they went and he said that they would not be out for long, so we elected to set up on the long slipway. The 'not out for long' turned out to be rather longer than we anticipated and given a fresh slate, we probably would have set up on the short slipway and waited half an hour. As we had already set up on the long slipway, I decided to run the gauntlet even though the water was well beyond the rollers and a moderate swell was kicking in.

It was a proper team effort, with the boat powering back onto the slipway to replace the traction of the hard slipway toe, and a shortened cable for a swift take up, the boat gracefully was captured in what was very clearly a textbook recovery. We had reorganised during the launch time and replaced the usual winchman with a practised apprentice and sent the winchman to recover the Inshore boat, which worked really well. Having not had a launch for six weeks or so and a crew that were relatively new, the operations were exceeding smooth and calmly carried out. We are, after all, a very adaptable, very excellent Shore Crew.

March 23rd – Wednesday

By the time I sat down in the early evening, the morning seemed like a long time ago and trying to recall what it was like was a bit of a struggle. I seem to remember that the temperature keeps slipping up the thermometer a little every day and when I went out without a jacket on with the bleddy hound, I was not too uncomfortable.

It was a whiz around the block again this morning as the tide is still up high on the beach. There was less sea running than yesterday but there was still some heavy swell rolling in across the bay. The waves were more lapping over the wall than thundering over it this morning.

Despite the wealth of chores piling up at my feet, I felt it important that I got a gymnasium session in this morning. I am desperate not to get out of the habit and in the last few weeks I have missed more than I have in the last few years. I kept it short, as we have so much to do before Saturday but managed to squeeze in a blistering session nonetheless.

Not long after I got back, we had a visit from ex-Head Launcher. This is a sure sign that the season is underway as we see very little of him during the winter. In fact, we see very little of anyone during the winter and given that we see so many people during the summer, that is not all bad. He caught me mid-cleaning up after the gymnasium, so the Missus entertained him until I got down to the shop and joined them armed with cups of coffee.

It was not coincidence that the Missus was in the shop. She went down early to continue putting away the grocery deliveries that arrived yesterday and to get as much cardboard and rubbish into our commercial bin ahead of the collection due today. She need not have bothered, as when we arrived outside the shop coming back from The Farm in the late afternoon, they were all still piled up outside. With the dreaded lurgi rate affecting more than one in ten people down here, we are seeing more and more services suffering for lack of staff – perhaps that is the reason it was missed.

My game plan was to head up to The Farm to complete the last of the jobs I have up there. The first was to finish the gas bottle box and install it but after gymnasium sessions and chats with ex-Head Launchers, it was early afternoon before I got up

there. Nevertheless, the box is nearly finished now. I just need to fit the hinges and the lock – which reminds me I must take a padlock up there with me. I do not know why. The gas bottle has been sitting in an open shed since at least last summer when it was used for the barbeque. It may be because when we went to get another, we were told that due to a global shortage of gas bottles – for heaven's sake, is nothing unperturbed in this crazy world – they were only refilling ones you brought in. I am not sure what happens if you do not already have one – become a club scout and learn some fire lighting skills, perhaps. Anyway, it made me think that we should, maybe, put a lock on the box – as well as advertise in The Diary that we have one at The Farm. Thankfully, both of you are honest, dear reader. You are both honest?

The other task was to get the tractor onto level ground and take a picture of it wearing the hole boring tool. I may have mentioned that the screw does not hang quite vertical and mentioning this to the supplier, he told me that it was most likely that the PTO shaft that drives it, is too long, which made much logical sense. He said to take a picture so he knew how much to shorten the PTO shaft by and bring it in for adjustment. I did not think that I would have time to drive out there with it, but I need to go to the water management company opposite for parts for the IBCs I installed by the barn, so I had may as well drop it off while I am there.

The Missus had dropped me at The Farm while she went off to take Mother shopping. We agreed that she would come back later to help with taking the hole boring tool off as that was definitely going to be a two person job. It was absolutely glorious up there and for a while that raging easterly had abated a little. There was no need for hats or coats and I was quite hot under the collar – I still kept a collar on - in my overalls but was too busy to take them off. We left again with the sun in the decline showing off its warm yellow colours on the way down. It was the sort of evening that we could quite easily have sat on the decking – which is still intact – and put our feet up. Unfortunately, that requires a bit of planning for feeding the bleddy hound and ourselves, which we had not done as we had not expected it. Perhaps we should keep a few tins of bully beef up there for such occasions and trust the mice do not like it.

It was probably as well because the temperature drops off sharply after the sun goes down. Instead, we disappointed ourselves by sticking our heads into the shop to see just how little progress we had made today. Two days left. That should sharpen our minds.

March 22nd – Tuesday

Tis done! That bleddy compost shed is a thing of the past, at least building it is – unless it falls down, of course. All that in compost week, as well. Oh, I just checked. That was last week.

The day was not quite as sparkly as the one before it but it was still bright first thing. There was just a bit more cloud and haze around, is all, and that stayed with us until

the day's end. When I stepped out with the bleddy hound, there was still some breeze around, again from somewhere in the east. We still could not get down to the beach because of the tide. The sea was also throwing a blue fit, lumping over the wall and marching large rolling waves across the bay with the tops flying out behind.

It did not make a whole lot of difference to my day. I was consigned to staying in until the grocery deliveries had come. One arrived in the late morning and the other roughly in the middle of the day. It did not take long to unload them despite the second being reasonably large for our first main order of the season.

I stopped and chatted with the delivery driver. He is an ace lad, exceedingly helpful and has a good head on his shoulders. He sympathised entirely with the position his company had put us in with its £35 pound delivery charge per delivery that we would need to pay weekly from now on. He also was incredulous that deliveries to hospitality and catering venues were free, and they only had to spend £150 to be considered for delivery, instead of £1,000 for retail outlets. He agreed that our only option, other than rolling over and paying up, was to roll two orders into one and get them fortnightly. This would present problems for us in finding sufficient storage space but more problems for the company, he thinks. During our peak season, our order alone will fill his van. If we have two weeks in one, they will need to do the run twice and tie up a van for most of the day. He told me it was likely that they would have to get another van and driver, especially if other customers started to do the same.

After he went, I had a quick look at our third option: to find another supplier. It is likely that we will need to at some point soon as it is clear that the company we are with, owned by one of the Tesmorburys mob, is trying to slip out of the retail sector and concentrate on catering. I found one recommended by another retailer locally and will pursue doing business with them on a trial basis before the summer season arrives.

It took me the next hour to run through the invoices for both deliveries to update our prices. I was quite surprised that there were not that many increases on last year, although the smaller supplier had quite a few more. The game plan was for the Missus to be putting both orders on the shelves after they arrived but because they were so late, she would not have time.

Despite it being late, I ran and collected Mother and having dropped her at the flat I went on up to The Farm. I had put on my utterly determined face after the deliveries and administration had been done that meant the compost shed was going to get finished today, come what may.

I only had three more front panels to complete, along with handles and keyhole hangers. I was putting them in place as the sun was starting its final approach to the horizon, which put a kind light on my creation for its photo opportunity. I am quite pleased with the beast, made out of my own head but it is a little on the large side. I

suspect that we will need to start compost collections from the wider area if we are to fill it in any reasonable timescale. If we have to do it on our own I think that the bottom layer will have fossilised before we get around to using it.

There is just a handful of chores left to finish for me at The Farm and a bit of tidying up to do. If all goes well, I should have them knocked out in the next couple of days leaving Friday to put the finishing touches to the shop and be there for the deliveries expected for our not so grand opening on Saturday. As you might note, dear reader, it was meticulously planned to all come together thus while all the time looking like we were skidding uncontrollably toward disaster by the seat of our pants.

I am just hearing the voice in my head telling me that there is many a slip twix cup and lip. Perhaps I should have waited to say that last paragraph until Friday night.

March 21st – Monday

I forgot to take my watch to bed with me, so I had no idea what time the bleddy hound was trying to wake me. I assumed it was too early, so I sent her back to sleep again and twenty minutes – it seemed – or so later, she tried again. When I checked the clock afterwards, it was still early but I cannot blame her for wanting to get up because it was something of a spring rip gribbler out there and demanded being out in it. It was most enjoyable taking the bleddy hound out especially as we had to walk around the block this morning.

The very first thing on the agenda after feeding the bleddy hound was to sort out the cash and carry order. Fortunately, I managed to speak with the boss who told me that they were pursuing a policy of closing all seasonal accounts at the end of the season – thank you for telling me. I did not ask why but from what he said, I should have needed to reapply. Because we were a reliable and regular customer, he would get our account reopened without further formality. Perhaps it is just me but did we not used to treat valued customers like, erm, valued customers. I was getting the distinct impression that they would prefer it if we went somewhere else – believe me, we have tried.

The process would take up to an hour, so I asked when the deadline was for submitting our order for a delivery tomorrow and he told me it was nine o'clock. I pointed out that it was eight o'clock and that gave me no chance of keying the order and meeting the deadline. For us he would make an exception but, he added, there were many staff off with the dreaded lurgi and that he could not guarantee a delivery. Despite a delivery charge being added, we still have to spend £1,000 before VAT (not including tobacco) before being considered for delivery and even then we have to sit and wonder if it will turn up or not. I am wondering what value we are actually getting from paying £1,000 per year for them to drive a van out to us - possibly.

I had to trip into town to drop my accounts off at the accountant and to pay a bill at the bank. The teller told me that it would be much easier by computer or mobile

telephone 'app', which seemed to me very much like a turkey voting for Christmas. I did not say anything, as long as they do not forcibly stop me using cash, I am quite happy but I am beginning to wonder if the corporate message that 'customer is king' has started to look a bit faded on the board room wall.

Still, I am sure that I would be treated much more professionally at the much maligned council tip, sorry, Household Waste Recycling Centre. This is where I headed next, keen to be as efficient as possible with my expensive fuel miles. I got there in the early afternoon and it was not all that busy, which was pleasing. I reversed into a bay and opened the back of the truck ready to extract the four items that I had brought with me. I was set upon almost as soon as the door was open by a clearly alert tip, sorry, Household Waste Recycling Centre operative. He asked if I had my permit with me, which I had ensured that I did after the patronising I had last time. I was just about to go and collect it from the cab when he peered into the back and ask if that was all I had. I said that it was to which he replied, 'don't bother then'. Talk about being made to feel inadequate. Good job I have a nice big, chunk 4x4 with a huge engine to compensate or I might have felt quite put out.

I span away from the tip, sorry, Household Waster Recycling Centre with my big wheels spinning and leaving in a cloud of dust – metaphorically speaking, of course. Have you seen the price of tyres these days? I dropped by Mother's on the way home to drop off a prescription and she took a while to open the door. I told her I thought that she might have been sunbathing and was about to nip around the back, hoping she was at least wearing a swimsuit. She said that she had been back there but the dogs from next door were out, so she did not tarry. Her fence is down again and I am begging to think we might be better off if I go around there and replace the fencing rather than leaving it to the much maligned council contractor who will only have to come back again after the next high wind scats it down again.

By the time I got back home it was too late to head up to The Farm. Instead, I took the bleddy hound down to the sun drenched Harbour beach. Here, one of the fishermen's boats was laid up with a team of avid local engineers working on it – one with a spanner and three others giving helpful advice. I left them to it and the bleddy hound and I took a turn around the beach and down to the placid waterline. It was such a splendid day that she could not help herself but to go and have a quick paddle. I think it was more about there being something interesting to sniff at than the actual paddle but it amounted to the same thing.

Since one of the fisherman's engineers was the Lifeboat Coxswain, I mentioned that it would be useful to try out getting the Inshore Lifeboat down to the beach without scating down the scaffolding that they had spent two weeks putting up. Having dropped the bleddy hound off at home I went to give it a go. It looked tight on the corner, especially as someone had placed the public bin there and if a larger vehicle was parked in Tinker Taylor's drive, it would have been even tighter.

A passer by stopped to move the bin into a different angle after I got hooked up on the scaffolding plastic fence as I tried to skim past it. With some effort and with the width of a postage stamp either side, I got the boat down there. In an emergency, this would be impractical. Even with the bin moved away, the clearance is very tight and for the moment we may have to run the boat down the Western slip, which means a detour through the car park. At the height of Easter, that may not be so simple and will require some traffic control and some sympathetic cooperation from the public. We will have to suck that and see.

With nothing better to do and it still being an outstanding task, I set to with the grocery stock update. This took me the rest of the afternoon and some of the evening, but it is now complete. It was probably the closest I would get to sitting on my backside and having a rest from the helter skelter of the last few weeks without feeling guilty about it.

March 20th – Sunday

I was indecisive about what to do today, mainly because I had not discussed it with the Missus and she was still asleep when I got up. I had rather assumed that I would be working in the shop because we needed to do our first cash and carry order of the season. I then recalled that did not take very long to do, so I would probably be at a loose end after it, which threw me into even greater confusion. When the Missus did announce the plans it was that she did not want me anywhere near the shop while she was working as I would just get in the way. By that time the morning had half gone.

It had not bee entirely wasted. I had taken the bleddy hound down the Harbour beach as normal and had met up with one of the fishermen going about his business. He was loading pots onto his boat and it was the first time out for a number of weeks. It was a pleasing sign for me too because I assumed the stiff breeze from yesterday had dissipated.

I had been ignoring the grocery stock that I took, all six pages of it, in the hope that it would magic its way onto our online stock list for me. It is something of a balls aching task as the order that they are written down in is not the order on the online list. I have to search for each item individually, although there are quite a few that are bunched into the same category on the shelf and on the list, which is helpful. I managed page one before collapsing in an exhausted heap on the keyboard. I reasoned that it must be time to collect Mother by then and after that I could go on up to The Farm and make another attempt at finishing the compost shed. So, I did that.

Much like yesterday, I went at it head down, which is a good position to be in because I cannot tell you the number of times I clonked my nut on the low drainpipe or one of the roof beams. If it was not that it was the clamps that I had applied and sticking out over where I was working. I am grateful that the weather required the

use of a hat, although I think it would be better to start wearing a hard hat. That may not have been such a good idea today because, up there, the wind was still howling across the field but perhaps not quite so fiercely as yesterday. Even with a bit more brightness today, it was still chilly.

The bad news is, I did not finish the shed despite working until quite late on. The good news is that the end is in view and I have just three half panels to do, no more than an hour's work – or having said that, half a day because something will go wrong. I had fretted some over how to address the front panels without having to screw them on and off each time they needed to be removed and put back. I decided to cut keyhole hangers into each of the panels and hang them off permanent screws in the frame. Surprisingly, it worked a treat right from the outset. Gosh, DIYman is some good.

It was more of a success than we had with the grocery order. The Missus went to key it in during the evening only to discover that we had been locked out of the system and will have to wait until tomorrow to sort it out. It is not a good indicator for a renewed season with a supplier we were already having issues with. Not only that but they have decided to introduce a delivery charge, which is galling when we spend tens of thousands of pounds with them each year. It is even more distasteful when you discover that the delivery charge only applied to retail outlets. If you are a pub or a restaurant or petrol station forecourt buying half the quantity, your delivery is free still. Now, that really stings.

So commences another happy year of grumpy shopkeeping.

March 19th – Saturday

I will not detain you for too long today, dear reader. It was not a particularly interesting day and I spent almost the entirety of it at The Farm on my ownsome.

With now just a week before we reopen for the season, the bleddy hound once again tried to wake me well before it was decent. I made it clear that I was having none of it but since she had already roused me from my slumber, I was up for the day less than twenty minutes later. One day I will find out what it is like to lounge in bed well after it is right and proper to be up, but I will not hold my breath as to when that might be.

It was once again a very sparkling morning and despite the wind it was not all that cold. Given that the wind was somewhere just south of east, we were reasonable sheltered from it in The Cove and definitely down on the Harbour beach that we had all to ourselves today. With free licence to wander about a bit, all the bleddy hound wanted to do was saunter back home again after only the barest minimum of time down there. It is a very long time since we had to drag her home kicking and screaming from her favourite place on Earth.

This gave me plentiful time to have a leisurely cup of tea and watch the very early scaffolders apparently putting the finishing touches to the enormous modern art installation across the road. It must be 25 feet off the beach on our side of the station and the boys were standing on thin bars while hoisting more bars up and down the structure. I have felt this before what I can best describe as vertigo by proxy, and it left me quite queasy.

Fortunately, it did not put me off my breakfast and very soon after that I was off to get the day started. Since our builders' merchant had omitted to bring the downpipe elbow joints yesterday afternoon, I drove over there first to collect them. I also added some bits that I would need for the secondary project I had started while I waited for timber, a small box for our butane gas bottle. We currently have a small gas ring in the cabin that boils the kettle for our tea. It runs on an aerosol sized gas bottle, which runs out at an alarming rate. The obvious choice was to have a gas ring that ran off a bigger bottle but that would have to sit outside – in a box that I am making.

There was no time for that today; the compost shed is nearing completion. I had been waiting on the timber so that I could put in place the supports for the plywood panels. We had hoped to use some of the sheets in the barn but when I had a look, they are OSB and would not have lasted very long next to wet compost. It was a shame to buy new for the project, but we had little choice given the time.

I stormed ahead today. Much of the storming was so that I could keep busy in the strong winds blowing across the field. Unlike yesterday, we were covered by a blanket of cloud from the middle of the morning and everything was grey and plain – and cold. I was in the teeth of the wind all the while I was there and it was extremely tiring – much of the energy expended in the act of trying to keep upright. This was even more problematic when it came to using the plywood panels. Having struggled to get them onto the workbench I had to hold them down while I applied clamps to keep them in place – sadly the bleddy hound was unavailable and had stayed at home with the Missus. She was working in the shop for the majority of the time I was at The Farm, sorting out of date stock and cleaning the shelves.

By the end of the day, I had largely finished the job. There are a few corner supports to put in place and some to secure the almost free standing posts at the front. I am still working on a solution for the panels at the front that will need to be removed every now and again. It seems quite wrong to screw and unscrew them as required; we will run out of screw holes eventually.

Hitherto, I had only carried the plywood sheets with the wind, which was tricky enough. I had not bargained for the level of difficulty when it came to clearing up and to walk with them into the wind. I very nearly took off and only managed to keep my feet by the narrowest of margins.

I arrived home just ahead of teatime. The Missus had cleared a some of space on the shop of part of her clean up operation. It left a big pile of boxes and detritus near

the first electric sliding door in The Cove. A couple of locals passing by looked in and asked if we were sure we were opening next week. I could see what they meant. We will have to pull a finger out, I think.

March 18th – Friday

I receive various industry news feeds that keep me informed about what is going on in the world that may concern me when running the shop or planning what we should buy during the season. One of these is from a very learned source at Newlyn harbour, Through-the-Gaps it is called, and he covers a broad range of topics from the local comings and goings to things that affect fish anywhere. Today, he points out that fishing is a globally connected market and changes anywhere in the world can impact us domestically if they are profound enough.

It concerns the supply of whitefish, you know, the stuff that ends up in fish fingers and many fish and chip shops up and down the country. We imported 432,000 tonnes of whitefish in 2020 to satisfy our demand for such things and nearly 50 percent of it comes either directly or indirectly from, ahem, Russia. Of the seven million tonnes of whitefish produced globally, around 40 percent comes from, erm, Russia. If we are going to try and buy our fish elsewhere there is going to be some fierce competition out there and that can only mean one thing – we all start eating beef again.

Happily, in the shop we deal exclusively in local fish. Everything our customers order comes predominantly from Newlyn, although occasionally it will be from Plymouth or Brixham. All the fish in our freezer is local too, although we do stock fish fingers, which is not.

Even then, our supply is affected by events on the global stage. We had a message from our crab meat supplier just last week advising that the price was going up markedly. I assumed that the brown crab population had very reasonably decided to make itself scarce, but the note said that the increase was due to the price of oil. The fishing boats run on the stuff – who would have thought – and the fishermen have had a 100 percent increase in the price of red diesel in recent months. This will, of course, affect other local fish producers too, especially those operating beam trawls which use up rather a lot compared to other fishing methods. Boat owners in France have already stopped going to sea and it is probably just a matter of time here when costs of going exceed profit. Crab sandwiches are expensive enough, I shudder to think the price of them this year.

Are we having fun yet, dear reader? I could leave it there, but I am on a roll and I may as well rip this sticking plaster off quickly. Eggs: what could possibly go wrong there – apart from feed, which probably comes from the bread bowl of Europe and the fuel price of delivering them? Just when they thought it was safe to stick their heads out of the coop, along comes avian influenza. Since November last year, all farming type birds must be kept indoors making them a little less free range than

they used to be. The appropriate ministry had been very kind and permitted eggs to keep their free range labels while the stocks sold through and labels – presumably – not to be wasted. Until now. One of our suppliers very kindly sent us a poster that we must display with our eggs explaining the situation as the eggs may now be mixed up with barn eggs, which will apparently have a number “2” stamped on them. Some clever, those chickens.

Sorry to spoil your breakfast, especially if it was kedgeree but despite all that, it was a rip gribbler looking day peeking at it through the window. It was not all sunshine and swallows, however, as I discovered when the Missus dropped me at The Farm in the late morning. Out of the east there was a bit of a sharp breeze blowing, which was particularly keen in the exposed field I was working in. At first, the sun beating down was winning and I stripped off a couple of layers under my DIYman overalls. The wind was not going to let the sun get away with that for long and upped its game. By the end of the afternoon, it was blowing in some fierce, at more than forty miles per hour and chilly with it.

Some of the work I was doing, installing the last IBC by the barn, was in the shelter and as a consequence very hot going. Every now and then I would have to return to where I had set up my workbenches, which was in the full force of the breeze. I spent several hours flitting from cold to hot, which by and large cancelled each other out. After I had done with the IBC, however, I worked predominantly by the workbenches, which become increasingly uncomfortable as the wind speed increased.

I had fully intended to complete the compost shed today but was hampered by the delivery I was expecting not arriving until nearly time to go home, which was irritating. I will have to get onto it tomorrow but that will be quite fraught as I will have to waft large sheets of plywood around and the wind is set to be even mightier. Perhaps I will be able to use the bleddy hound as a paperweight and sit her on the sheets while I cut them up. Just a thought.

There had not been a cloud in the sky all day and I am sure in a sheltered spot, it would have been glorious for a spot of sunbathing. I am not sure that it would have been good for a dip, but surfing might have been a different issue. The swell that has been present for quite a few days in one size or another, was lumping in again but without breaking until it reached the shore. There was a fair amount of white water over Cowloe, where the wind was flicking at the tops of the waves, and the margins where the sea met the cliffs was quite lively, too.

It was very pleasant watching it while we ate our fish plucked from the waters around the Cornish coast by Cornish boats – we had pollack and whiting. The Missus – who hates fish – had some breaded frozen fish from Tesmorburys, ‘because it does not taste of fish’, which came from somewhere else. We did not say anything.

March 17th – Thursday

Gosh, what a pretty little morning we were entertained with. The bleddy hound could not wait to get me out of bed to enjoy it but I will be getting up at half past six o'clock for eight months from Saturday week. I did not intend starting a moment sooner.

The morning was precisely planned so that I could do my chores and ablutions, enjoy my breakfast and have an unhurried cup of tea before it was time to head off for my bone cruncher appointment. With the encroaching shop opening deadline approaching I felt it was about time to have my bits aligned to predominantly standing all day rather than sitting. It had occurred to me, of course, that the predominantly sitting has not really happened for the last few years but there is still more sitting out of season than in, just rather less of it than there was. Anyway, for once the plan worked just fine apart from the unhurried cup of tea. I had to slip some cold water into it so I could down it a little quicker.

I did not see home again for several hours after I set out. The bone crunching session went just fine, although we do chat during the session and I had forgotten – as usual – to put my false ears on. I shall make a point of it next time because I could tell she was getting irritated by having to repeat herself. It happens with the Missus, too, but we do not have to be polite to each other.

The Missus had asked – and I had heard – that she wanted me to go to one of the big discount stores to collect some compost. I rather thought we had got past the bags of compost issue but did not think four bags was worth contention, so I dropped by the store on my way home. Our neighbour, she we meet with the bleddy hound's best pal, works in the store I was sent to. It has been a running joke because any time that I have been there, she has not, and I started to doubt her word about where she worked.

The compost bags were a very good price, probably for a very good reason. I noticed when I picked them up they had a marketing message on the side that stated they contained additional John Innes. I used to work in a seed merchant when I was but a lad, and John Innes was the benchmark product by which all composts were measured. Given the marketing message, I suggest that is still the case and a good indicator that the stuff I was buying was absolute rubbish.

The bags were big, probably around 20 kilograms or so. I went inside and asked our neighbour and friend, who was at the checkout, if I needed to bring all four bags to the counter. She said that if I had been some random customer, then yes, but since it was me, just the one would do so that she could read the bar code. What it is to have friends in high places – or at least strategic ones.

I picked up Mother on the way back and alerted the Missus that we were on our way so that she would be waiting when we arrived, which she was. There seemed to be a seamless flow between gathering ourselves and arriving at The Farm and starting

work. Perhaps my mind just edits out the minutiae and just looks forward to it being all over. I know what it means if that is true.

The darned compost shed still has me in thrall and I would dearly love to be free of it. The only thing remaining is the compost stalls themselves, which are proving to be tricky. I always start with a vision of how they should look, then worry about the practicalities of actually getting there. In this case the reality is that the stall sides need to be supported and there is nothing to attach the supports to. I had reconsidered the bought ones, but they really are too small. Today, I made a breakthrough and, while not perfect, should provide sufficient stability for the job. Hopefully the timber will be delivered tomorrow and I can finish it off.

Since I could not proceed with the compost shed, I turned my attention to the water butts. These we had decided to move to the rear of the greenhouse and replace them with IBCs under the barn to maximise our water collection capacity. Those butts are not small but by the time I had decanted two full ones into one IBC, it had barely reached half way. The third one was nearly empty because storm Eunice put a crack in it.

Moving the butts was relatively easy but they had been placed on door posts from the old Lifeboat station doors, heavy enough, and they were resting on concrete blocks. I can only imagine that in the manufacture of these blocks they insert a healthy quantity of lead because for an object barely a foot long and a few inches deep, they weigh a ton. There were nine of them, so I believe my weight training at the gymnasium tomorrow has already been catered for. Nevertheless, they were all moved by the end of the day and the butt stand ready for use. The job will need to be finished tomorrow because I require some elbow joints for the downpipe to make it fit the new arrangement.

As we dropped down to The Cove and took in the vista, it was plain that the sea had calmed considerably since the day before. There was still white water in the usual places and a fair amount of swell, but the raw urgency of it all seemed to have dissipated. In my view, it is still best with clear blue skies and that azure blue reflected in the ocean, but I will take it any way it comes, thank you very much. I still find it very difficult to leave it behind and I will not have to very often after next week.

March 16th – Wednesday

My early turn this morning was to allow the local medical profession to nigh on empty my arm of blood under the guise of doing me good. I have to say that I thought blood letting went out of fashion 150 years since but what do I know. It is an annual event which they joyfully call my birthday bloods, but I am not entirely sure that I like associating such a traumatic event with what is supposed to be a happy day for the individual.

The procedure was even less convenient than it usually is because I had to travel into town for it. It has been more than a year that the medical practice at St Just merged with the one in town. While the St Just clinic is still open, more and more is done at the smart new centre in town. I could have gone to St Just but I would have had to wait a further week – a week to contemplate and have bad dreams about people sucking the life-blood from me, No thank you.

The reality of it was not quite so bad. It did confuse me at first, however, as the reception had three booths overhung with a big sign of the practice that they represented. St Just was not mentioned, so I went to the middle one, which was wrong and should have been right, so I went to that one instead. The teenager they put in charge of sucking the blood from me was very good for her age and jolly with it. For the first time in the presence of someone in a white coat, which she was only figuratively wearing, my blood pressure was completely normal. It surprised me too and she took it twice to be sure. I hardly noticed at all when she stuck a big needle into my arm, which is quite a skill. I might ask for her again.

Despite the obvious risks associated with blood loss and anaemia, I drove home and was back in plenty of time to go to the gymnasium, which I did not. I had already decided that I would be too late to go and although I was not, it felt like it. Also, I determined that I had probably carried out sufficient exercise putting the guttering up yesterday and hefting big lumps of wood around. It sounded like a fair excuse to me, and I settled for it.

There was no particular plan for the day. The morning was quite dower despite both the BBC and Meteorological Office online forecasts yesterday telling me it would be lovely. Mother put me right saying a guts a rain was expected and Radio Pasty confirmed that a weather front was on its way, it being over the Isles of Scilly at the very moment of the broadcast. Sure enough, in the late morning, a bit of rain blew through. It was brief and light, so I can understand the big players ignoring it on the Internet. They are clearly after big weather, not the minor stuff.

The long and the short of all that was that we did not go to The Farm. It was not just the weather that put us off, in fact it had very little to do with it. At the end of yesterday we were both feeling a tad worn out and decided a day off the manual labour might be a bit of a plan. A complete day off everything was mentioned but there is much to do in the shop and when it is all done, we can have days off. Let us hope we get it all done before next Friday or that day off will be a very long way off indeed.

I did not get downstairs until into the afternoon. I suppose it was a bit of a compromise from full on working and taking a bit of a breather. We have had a few deliveries and I knew that the Missus wanted to crack on with the gift order that arrived over the weekend, so I unpacked one of the two recent greetings card deliveries instead.

During my visit to the trade show in Exeter, I came across a few new greetings card suppliers. One, who produced the cards as a bit of an earner for her main living, was an artist of some local renown, although I had never heard of her. The thing that drew me in was a 'mixed media' painting she had hanging on the wall of the stand. It was called 'The Bluebell Wood' and had me transfixed. If you wish to have a quick geek, dear reader, the artist is Alison Whateley and her online gallery has a picture of it. If anyone is feeling particularly generous and does not mind parting with £700, my birthday is coming up soon.

As I laboured away in the shop, the day outside was trying to improve and it was not long before it did. There was a fresh draft piling in from the northwest and as a consequence the temperature had taken a bit of a tumble. I tried not to think how lovely it would have been at The Farm – dressed accordingly – and set to with the second task I had in my mind to complete, which was the grocery stock that we had not yet done.

I was nearly done when the Missus dropped down and weighed into the gift delivery. Delving into the stock room while she did that took a bit more time as I kept finding stuff. When I got back out again the Missus had disappeared behind a monumental pile of bubble wrap and cardboard boxes. Given that she had not finished, this pile was only going to get bigger, so I started to take apart the cardboard and then the bubble wrap.

Part of the problem disposing of bubble wrap is that it takes up such a large amount of space, which is handy for packing but not so good for disposal. If it is small bubble wrap, then we reuse it in the shop for wrapping up delicate items that we sell. The larger bubble wrap, which most of this was, is too bulky for us to use. The printing on the packing informed me that it was recyclable and provided instructions on how it might be disposed of. "Pop the bubbles and pop into a kerbside bin", it suggested.

The first issue I had with it was using 'kerbside' recycle bins. Given that the much maligned council does not hold with such useful facilities, I would have to use my own bin, which would be full after throwing away the packaging from the first box. The second suggestion would have dealt with this issue had I the time to execute it. Each section of the wrap was about four inches wide and consisted of three conjoined sets of bubbles. I would estimate that there was, side to side, more than 50 feet of the sheets just waiting to be popped. I would have been there all night.

Initially, I circumvented the popping bit and took a pile of it out to our bin, which it near enough filled. It seems that I had little choice in the matter if I was to get rid of all of it and still have space for the additional. Thankfully, much of it is joined together in strips and I found that judicious – an extremely careful – slashing with a sharp craft knife made reasonably light work of it. It was a bit more tedious and time consuming with the smaller runs, but it was worth it for the bin capacity.

That was the last bit of effort for the day, after which we retired upstairs. During our absence from view – or having a view – the sea had got itself into something of a minor rage. It had been working up to it when I returned from town in the morning, but it had become quite adept at it by the late afternoon.

It is one of my preferred seascapes. The uninhibited sun, dropping away in the west, and the consequential contrast between the white surf, which was plentiful, and the dark sea. Later, of course, the sepia hue that invades the cliffs makes the perfect backdrop and the plumes of white spray launching themselves up the rock faces. Watching each wave can be mesmeric, as it cascades and crashes in tumbling turmoil – and if you think that is more alliteration than is good for a page, I am just warming up.

Alright, no I am not. It must be time for a beer, though.

March 15th – Tuesday

The day started out well, much like yesterday with its glittering sunshine and lack of breeze. I even saw half an hour less of it because the bleddy hound awarded me an extra lie in bed, which I thought very decent of her. She must want something – probably not going to The Farm that she hates with a passion. She finds it just tolerable if Mother is there but else wanders about like a lost soul, throwing longing glances at the truck door to see if it is open yet.

Due to our lateness, we missed her best pal and had the beach all to ourselves. The scaffolders have begun to be artistic with their efforts and have given us an arch to play with. There is just room underneath it to get the Inshore Lifeboat down to the beach but there is not much room for error if we are in a hurry to get it launched. I suggested to the Twitter community this morning that it was a new viewing platform and somewhere to jump off on a zip wire. That has some merit, although wild horses would not get me up there. Today, they started doing something similar on the other side. My information is that the roof experts will need several feet either side for their work.

Sorry to disappoint – you, dear reader and the bleddy hound – but it was another Farm day. I really am trying very hard to finish off that darned compost shed but it keeps throwing curved balls at me. It is scheduled to become the longest build compost shed in history – or barbeque shelter if I do not finish it by the end of next week.

Today was guttering day. I have absolutely no idea what the Missus got up to because my focus on the work was absolute. It was all going swimmingly, as well, until I got to the end of the run. My intention had been to take the downpipe across from the end of the run underneath the roof, issuing from the side opening of the shed. Having got there and eyed it up, there was not sufficient drop to take the 45 degree elbow and a long run to the IBC. I realised that I would need to turn the

corner, run the launder to the front post and take the down pipe from there. This is when I realised that I would have to go and get a 90 degree connector.

There was no point in delay. I ran out to St Just where the team are completely bemused by my now daily visits. On reflection, it would have been sensible to pick up a couple of 90 degree elbows for the down pipe but my forward planning had not stretched that far, after all, I had all afternoon and night to regret not doing so and I would have nothing to get from them tomorrow else.

Getting around the corner and maintaining the drop was not at all straightforward. I had not watched that part of the video I looked at for helpful hints for the handyman, which helpfully hinted that I run a piece of string between first and last gutter supports. It did not say anything about how to ensure the first was higher than then last by the correct amount. I assume they were thinking that all fascia boards are level – well, they had not seen mine.

Regardless, with a fair amount of trial and surprisingly little error, I finished the job off and water poured into the launder at one end dutifully makes its way to the IBC on the other. Whether rain dutifully falls into the launder without splashing over the sides is quite another matter. I will revisit at some stage to replace the 45 degree elbows with 90 degree ones. I had to improvise the connections, but it seems to work fine for now.

Flushed with this success, I took my attention to the launder at the back of the greenhouse that had ripped off in the wind that took the Lifeboat station roof off. Does this mean my amateur roofing is better made than the professional one, I wonder. Luckily, the launder came off in one piece and undamaged in the wind. The clips suffered, however, possibly because I did not use enough of them first time around. I rectified that omission this time. It took less than ten minutes to put it back, which pleased me no end.

That swansong came at just the right time and having packed away before I did it, we were all ready to go a few minutes later. The whole afternoon had proved not quite as warm as it had been yesterday, and a fair amount of cloud sat over us. It was bright, though, and helpful dry and probably more conducive to working our socks off. By the end of the day, I certainly knew that I had been busy, and I shall sleep well, for sure. I just hope that I can get up again – I have an early call tomorrow.

March 14th – Monday

By the end of the day you would have been forgiven for thinking that summer had arrived, at least for one day. In fact, it was better and probably warmer in the sunshine than some August days that we can recall.

It started out pretty darn good with blue skies up above and the sun hitting both sides of the road down in The Cove. I am sure that the bleddy hound appreciated not getting wet and to cap things off her best pal was down on the Harbour beach waiting for her. There was plenty of the beach, too, being close to low water and while we were down there a family arrived to take a dip. For once I thought that it was probably quite refreshing and at least you could dry off in some warming sunlight.

We had made plans for the day. No, we still have not learnt that there seems to be little point in making them and today turned out no different. The Missus offered to set to in the shop down the grocery aisle making ready for opening, counting the stock and getting rid of anything out of date. This would allow me to head up to The Farm by myself to finish off the roof. If I got there early enough, I could also do the compost stalls and the guttering, too. The only problem with doing the latter is that I did not have the launders or the pipework yet and would need to go and get it first.

The other fly in the ointment was that the bleddy hound had eaten the last of her breakfast foil trays and if she was to have breakfast tomorrow, we would need to go into town to get some more. Before any of that happened, I was going to the gymnasium.

I had thought twice about going, as we are very pressed to get everything done. The problem was that I had forsaken all three visits last week for one reason or another and I have an appointment on Wednesday that would prevent me going then as well. In truth, I could probably have got away with it, but I do not want to get out of the habit, so I went as early as I could so as not to interrupt the day too much. I was quite surprised how easy I found it after a week of absence, and I had to work especially hard to achieve blistering session status. I got there in the end and felt on top of the world on the way back.

When I returned, the Missus suggested that she head into town to collect the bleddy hound's breakfast so that I could clean up and have mine. It seemed like a good idea at the time, but it did cross my mind whether the Missus would be able to visit Tesmorburys for just one item. She was gone ages. She cannot.

After she got back, laden with groceries, it was my turn to head out. I have already mentioned that there was guttering to get but also some parts for the compose stalls. In the end, I did not need them today, but I will certainly on the next visit. By the time I returned we were already into the afternoon.

It would be easy to say that this is where the plans started to come apart at the seams but, when the Missus woke up to the morning and looked at The Farm cctv camera, she remarked how gorgeous it looked up there. I cannot argue with this. The morning sun was already lighting up the place, reflecting off the polytunnel now it has doors again and the windows of the cabin. It was plain then that the allure of The Farm would be too much and when she mentioned how good the weather was

still looking later and how tragic it would be to work in the shop all day, it would have been hard to insist that she did – so I did not. Instead, we both ended going up to The Farm she to her flower beds and me to my roof and hoping that tomorrow would at least be overcast.

With the time that remained of the day, and we worked until quite late, I managed to finish off my roof on the compost shed and she her small wall and flower beds behind it. If the vegetables in front of it do not grow, at least it will look pretty – assuming that the flowers do.

It certainly was a full on summer's day. I had already forsaken some layers of clothing but after going at it with angle grinder, lump hammer and other tools of construction, I removed what else I could and still protect myself from the sharp edges of the roof sheets. It was probably necessary to stay protected from the sun as well, which was beating down on the naked steel about me with ferocious intensity. I am sure, as I looked out across the field, I could see the skulls of a few long horn bleaching in the sun and the early sprouts of some saguaro cacti pushing through the scorched earth. Could have been a mirage, of course.

I finished first and did the clearing up. As she usually does, the Missus took Mother around the work areas on her mobile telephone to show her what we had done. When we got to the compost shed with its concrete plinth and finished roof we both mentioned how useful it would be as a barbeque area. I am not sure I have time to build another for the compost.

It was not until we were in bed later that the Missus wished me a happy wedding anniversary. I think we forgot last year, too. Usually, the Aged Parent and Mother send cards which give us a sharp hint but that too was absent. So too was the normal reminder from our friends up the hill who share the same date – although not the same year – belated Happy Anniversary, up there, too. At least we both forgot, and I still have kneecaps. I set a reminder in my computer calendar for next year as it is a flagship one. Donations or presents gratefully received, or just letters of sympathy would do to whichever party you feel more keenly for.

March 13th – Sunday

If there was any doubt at all that the small gods of grumpy shopkeepers have it in for me, it was properly dispelled today. They really know how to kick a man when he is down.

After the abysmal weather of yesterday we were greeted by a half decent morning. It was even better that the bleddy hound had allowed me a few extra minutes in bed, I soon paid for that as no sooner had I led her into the living room than her best pal turned up. I had not even got my jacket on at this point. I scurried around so that we did not miss her because she had already been spotted and there would have been

hellup else. There was little chance of that really because best pal refused to move until I had opened the door and even then she came in to usher me out.

We headed to the Harbour beach for a short while and left the best pal there when the bleddy hound had decided it was time to come home for breakfast. I then had to do all the things that I would normally do before we head out, which the bleddy hound clearly rather I did not and pestered me for breakfast until she got it.

The hole filler man who had cried off on Friday was due to come back this morning at eight o'clock, so I waited. At quarter to ten o'clock he still had not arrived, so I gave him up for lost and went to prepare my breakfast. I had just sat down with it when he turned up and set to. I hurried down to greet him as the plumber had given me some specific instructions about covering up the pipe. I had already covered the pipes in the hole with sand, another instruction, which was just as well because hole man filled up the rest of the hole with hardcore before he left on Friday. Sunday must be bring a child to work day because he had a small girl with him. I gave them both a cup of tea and left them to it.

Filling holes and making good concrete clearly does not take a lot of time as I had not finished my breakfast when he knocked on the door to tell me it was all done. I went and had a look and noticed that the small girl had done the artwork of a "W" and an arrow indicating the run of the pipe, which was a smart idea.

We had already planned to spend some more time in the shop. The rest of the new shelving needed to be adjusted for the height of top shelf and we had a delivery yesterday that needed unpacking, pricing and putting out. The groceries still need counting for the stock values – we leave that late because some of it needs to be written off as out of date. We also need to prepare an order for delivery in the week before we open. We had chosen today because the forecast had been for showers today and better weather for the rest of the week.

I read a quote by Spike Milligan today that went 'If you do not have a plan, nothing can go wrong'. He has a point because our plan went wrong even before we started it. The Missus told me we had a message from one of our friends at the top of the hill, He regularly walks his dogs along Giant's Rock Lane and past The Farm. He reported that yesterday's wind, no doubt by special arrangement of malicious deities, had torn off the double doors at the front of the polytunnel. As if what we have left to do before the shop opens was not enough. This was the small gods of grumpy shopkeepers at their very best.

Of all the parts of the polytunnel, which is cleverly designed and very robust, the doors are the only weakness and very weak at that. Frankly, they could do with a complete redesign. The doors slide open, hanging from a runner above the door. This is secured by four very small self-tapping screws to the two uprights that serve as the door frame. The back door came off at the first relatively light breeze and it

was only secured by two screws, being a single door. I added a few more screws when I fixed that.

Once I had finished wailing, thumping my fists against the floor and chewing the carpet, I thought about the best plan to replace the doors and at the same time strengthen them. In review, I suppose that the surprise was not that they had come off, but they had lasted so long without doing so. I decided that I would build a wooden frame and hang the door off that. It sounded a grand plan in my head.

Looking at the facts of the matter, having arranged the wood, I then looked at the practicalities. The wood frame would be fine but there was still nothing to attach the wood to. The doors would probably all stay together but the frame would just come away in one piece. In the end, I put the door hanger back without the wood. Instead of the self-tapping screws, I drilled through the uprights and slipped an M6 bolt through. It was a remarkably swift resolution but was spoiled by one of the doors having been bent out of shape. I had tried some judicial reshaping with my lump hammer but even that could not bend it back. It is in place but will have to remain shut until we can replace it.

Meanwhile the Missus had run away to finish off her fencing. She asked if I was going to make a start on the roof of the compost shed, which given there were several hours left before we went home seemed like a sensible idea.

A rare stroke of luck meant that there were two gash roof sheets in the barn of exactly the right length for the job. The small gods of shopkeepers are never that benevolent, else I would have found four of them to finish the job. I will still need to cut a whole sheet to the right length with the angle grinder which will be a messy job and result in a sharp edge to the panels.

I struggled a bit with the gaining enough height up the ladder to work from the front of shed. Luckily, I can reach all the other anchor points from the middle where I have a beam either side of me. The back is just above my head height and only two steps up the ladder, once I have found some flatish ground to put it on. When we left, because we had run out of time, I had completed two of the sheets. I would not have had time to do the cutting and putting up, which I will do another day. I also need to get some silicone sealant as, very annoyingly, I missed the beam with a couple of screws. I think I must have gone dizzy at the altitude, which I think is a reasonable enough excuse.

We were also lucky because the weather had behaved itself, bright with sunny spells. It did try and rain a couple of times, but I suspect the small gods saw my scowl and decided that they had punished me enough. There was very little breeze too, although I was concerned at a couple of points that what wind there was would lift the roof sheets before I had screwed them down. I think that had I not got as far as putting up a couple of roof sheets I would have been very disappointed with our

day. As it was, we have moved things on a little way in the right direction and will have to pick another day to do the shop work – of the not many that we have left.

The sea was still a little agitated at high water and making a bit of a splash. It seems that was a bit of a last hurrah because after we got back from The Farm, the swell was easing off and calm was slowly returning. There was still some white water making an effort to climb up Creagle and Aire Point highlighted in the setting sun. A fair group had gathered on the beach to watch, dotted about with their long shadows. It was difficult to imagine doors being ripped off polytunnels not 24 hours previously. What fickle weather we have.

March 12th – Saturday

The reasonable weather was still with us when the bleddy hound and I ventured out onto it first thing in the morning. She was clearly concerned that she might get caught in the rain because she had me up half an hour before what is generally regarded as decent and indeed our usual time. She had tried three times by which stage I was well and truly awake with no point in trying to slumber some more. We met up with her best pal as we came off the beach because she at least knows what the proper time is for going out.

I was pretty determined to finish off the shelving today but still found it difficult to motivate myself in the direction of downstairs. I made it eventually, around halfway through the morning. It was, as we had expected, none too strenuous or difficult. I manufactured some wooden blocks with two screws in them that hung nicely out of the sockets in the uprights. These served to stop the posts from falling back when leant against and were easy to install. There were a few lugs on the shelves that needed straightening out but overall, it went quickly and easily.

The Missus arrived as the last shelf went on. She had come down to clear up the Christmas decorations that had just been stuffed into bags when we took them down. They had remained in the bags in various parts of the shop ever since when they really should have been salted away up at the barn by now. We were going to load them onto the truck after the Missus had sorted through them, but the rain came in and neither of us fancied going out in it, let alone loading the truck in it. When I took the bleddy hound out a little while later I toggled up in full metal jacket waterproofs. I could not understand why she was reticent; I was perfectly dry.

Once the shelves were done there was some tidying up to follow and a little woodwork cutting to size a wooden plinth that covers up the rotting wall at the back of the shop. After that I put back all the stock that I had taken off the old shelving before I took it down. It was while I was putting it back that I realised that the top shelf level could do with coming down a bit. I am reasonably tall, and I was struggling to reach the back of the top shelf and you certainly could not see what was on it unless you stood on a box. I am not entirely certain how issuing boxes to people as they come in would go down – short people might take umbrage, although I am not

so sure you can stand on one of those. No matter. We had expected to do some fine tuning when putting out the stock.

It rained persistently for the whole of the afternoon but just as the last vestiges of light disappeared into the oddly coloured west, it eased and died away. I was very pleased that I had fixed the primary IBC behind the cabin on The Farm, as that would now be half full. In the few times that we went out, there were very few people about, although we saw one or two come to read the somewhat out of date posters in the shop window. It reminded me that it was high time to do the new shop hours to put into the window and wake myself up to the fact that I will actually have to work for a living very soon. Gosh, that will be a shock to the system.

March 11th – Friday

I had heard some rain pattering on the window above my head in the very early morning and remembered that today was supposed to be very rainy. Fortunately, by the time I was due to take the bleddy hound out for a spin, there was no rain about, although it did look a bit grey still. The only wet we got was the drips coming off the corner of the Lifeboat station roof and the scaffolding that is now there. I had suggested to the Institution that when the roof is repaired it would be useful have to solar panels and some sort of water reclamation included. I have no idea if this would be feasible or whether we will just have the additional risk of solar panels as well as a roof coming through our shop window on a windy day.

We had already decided that The Farm was a non-starter today but I did think a little run down to the gymnasium would not hurt. I had excelled myself in heavy lifting and thumping nails into wood all day yesterday but was missing some cardiovascular training. I was all set to go but had a call from the ground works man who said he was on his way to refill the hole he dug earlier for our water works. He was late arriving anyway, saw that the scaffolders were using up quite a bit of room that made parking awkward and told me that he was coming back on Sunday. I suspect that he wanted to do that anyway since it would be double bubble and he probably had several wives and children to support – or am I just a victim of old age and cynicism.

Having missed my gymnasium session for no good reason and having no cat to kick, I thought that I best get on with the racking in the shop. I had a bit of breakfast first then headed to The Farm to pick up some tools that I meant to bring back yesterday but forgot. It was downright glorious up there, the sun beating down and not much of a breeze to be concerned about. I collected the tools but before I left my eye caught the last IBC behind the cabin that needed levelling. It seemed just a small and churlish thing and would not take long to fix, so I reset and collected what I needed for the job.

It took less than fifteen minutes to pull the IBC off its pallet plinth and remove the pallets. I fetched some hardcore from out dwindling pile and a few bricks for the core of the support at the rear of the IBC. Arranging the bricks and hardcore to stop them

slipping, I put everything back after checking it was level and aligned the downpipe to the IBC filler hole. It was one of the three remaining jobs that I had set out to do all those months ago. Such a simple action that required much preparation, pumping water from one IBC to another, batteries running out, pallets breaking and pipes not fitting and that was for an easy job. No wonder the more difficult ones have taken so long.

By the time I got back, family had arrived. It was a flying visit for the day and they had brought Mother over on their way here. We tarried, chatting for a while before I decided that I had better pull my finger out or the shelving in the shop would still need doing the following day. It had, honest guv, slipped my mind entirely that one of them had experience putting up shelving in a shop far bigger than ours. It was the Missus who mentioned that father and son might be able to help with our falling over problem with the corner unit.

They quite gleefully followed me down to the shop and set to on the corner unit with gusto. There was levelling, spannering and shoving and pulling the units to and fro. It took a bit of time and there was much trial and error. The unit that was leaning backward still leans backwards – even the experts had to give up on that – but with a bit of ingenuity there is a block between it and the wall, so it does not lean back as far as it did. We will have to do much the same with all the other uprights, too and I now have a plan for that. We suspected that once the shelves were in place, the leaning back would probably go away, however, there is no harm in belt and braces, and I will put a block behind each one.

They set up the full length of shelving down the shop to the point that all the uprights, plinths and one back panel are present in each section. It will be down to us to install the supporting blocks and the remaining back panels and shelves. We can then start filling them with all our new goodies once we pull them down from storage at The Farm. I can only imagine that endgame would be a few days farther on if we had not had such a welcome intervention. Our gratitude is boundless – but I should note for legal and tax reasons, it does not include remuneration, sorry boys.

On a day that we rearranged due to a forecast that warned us of apocalyptic rain and howling gales, it was remarkably clear skied and gorgeous looking. There was the occasional shower that if you blinked you would probably have missed and we even had a big rainbow at one point. The sea, however, seemed to have missed that particular memorandum and came running in all big and bruiser-like. When I drove down from The Farm later the bay was lapping up the contrast of brightness and stormy sea. The white water over the reef than runs from Brisons to Cott Valley was Omo white against a perfectly azure sea and huge explosions of white spray erupted over the Brisons and up the cliffs back towards Gwenver. Over Cowloe, the sea boiled, and big waves charged up the Tribbens peeling off to round the corner of the Harbour wall.

This perfectly aesthetic state of affairs lasted the entire day in one level of robustness or another. Turning onto the tidal push, perfectly formed waves ran in towards the beach, which would have attracted the more experienced surfer. I suspect, however, that the more experienced surfer would also have noted at that stage of the tide a balletic glide on those perfect waves would terminate rather abruptly in the rocks under the fish and chip shop – so perhaps not. Still, it was fun to watch after our guests had made their way east, stopping at Smokey Joe's for tea on the way back – they sent pictures, which was nice. We had the bits of their dinner they did not eat earlier and left behind. Sounds about right.

March 10th – Thursday

The forecasters had today as being the best we were going to get for a few days, so off to The Farm it was. I am sure that you can hardly wait, dear reader, for all the exciting derring do that went along with that.

Those forecasters were not far off the mark as far as the morning went because it was bright with bit of sunny as the bleddy hound and I hit the beach. For the second day running we were not on our own down there. A border collie was haring around chasing after a ball with its slightly heavier mate of a different breed chasing the same ball. I think if I were the heavier mate I would have given up after the first couple of throws that I had no chance of getting to first, but she carried on regardless giving a frustrated bark each time she lost the race. That is perseverance for you.

Mother has told us that the good weather was not going to last into the afternoon. That was not apparent from the forecasts I looked at, but it was due to get breezier in the afternoon. We decided not to take the chance and headed up to The Farm early. The Missus had her fencing to do now that the fencing steaks had been delivered along with the anti-bunny chicken wire. My aim was to complete the roof framework so that all I had to do was put the steel roof on – oh, and make the compost bins. Hopefully that would be the easy bit.

We both laboured until the sun started going down with just the shortest of tea breaks. I will spare you the gory detail, dear reader, but most things went incredibly well. There was the moment I came to raise the purlins only to discover that I had the beam hangers on one end slanting the wrong way. Since I did not have any spares I had to pull out the nails so that I could reuse the hangers. Everything else went so well I started looking for things that had gone wrong that I must have missed.

As the sun dipped in the west, I stood back to admire my handiwork and felt most accomplished at what I saw. Yes, one end is a little wider than the other mainly because I could not drill a post hole exactly where I wanted it. This will make it interesting cutting the roof sheets, some of which will be longer than the others. I only need four but must use my angle grinder to manufacture the sizes. That is next on the list on the next dry day.

The Missus did well with her fencing. We should have done this to start with instead of making individual frames. Mind, previously, the growing areas were likely move and the frames could be transported from one to another. Now that the growing areas are more permanent, the fence posts strung with a single length of wire is much quicker.

I have no idea exactly what we missed in The Cove being away all day. The scaffolders enveloping the Lifeboat station in a suit of Meccano were back again today, making an early start. They started on the slipway down to the beach side and completed that in a day. Yesterday they finished the front of the station – or back, if you prefer – and today they finished the trickiest side from the sea wall, across all those boulders to the long slip. There is still a ton of scaffolding left in the compound where the roof was opposite the shop. There is even more in the top car park, although that may be for the build halfway down the hill that still shows no sign of completion – in fact they are still on the groundworks holding back the cliff.

I do not know if the scaffolders planned to do the east side of the station today, but the tide would have been ideal, giving them plenty of time to erect it from late morning. The sea had calmed today, as well. Yesterday, it was getting all unnecessary and the day before that a bit calmer. I cannot wait to see what it will be tomorrow and perhaps I should run a book on it.

March 9th – Wednesday

I was out early enough with the bleddy hound to avoid the rain that arrived earlier than expected. It was probably because of this that we missed meeting up with her best pal but I had early callers expected and I wanted to be ready for them. She clearly had not seen the three seals swimming in close formation across the mouth of the Harbour yesterday, else wild horses would not have dragged her to the beach.

Despite my preparedness, the very early arrival of our builders' merchant caught me off guard. He was, after all, supposed to go up to The Farm and deliver the supplies there. I did not recognise the driver, so assumed he was new and was probably tasked with the delivery because all the seasoned drivers knew where it was and what the conditions were. I will give the new driver his due, he did not once mention the state of the track or risk of getting stuck in the mud. I had preceded him to the field and had gone ahead. I wanted to be able to direct him in deeper to the field and away from the gate where the risk of getting stuck is higher.

It all went swimmingly well, although not literally. We now have the timber to complete the compost shed roof and I will get onto that when we can get up there next. There was no point today. On the way up the hill I could hear the wind above the labouring of the truck engine as it went up the hill. At The Farm it was quite uncomfortable with the southerly wind racing up the hill at us carrying a smattering of rain with it. The rain was hardly heavy, although it might have been if it was coming straight down, but it was coming in fast and stinging as it struck.

I was in a bit of a dash anyway as the timber arrived about twenty minutes before the plumber was due. I was held back because I had to go in search of the lid to the compost bucket that we had taken up there to empty. The wind had deposited the lid the other side of the compost shed plinth. It was not that hard to determine where it went as I just followed the direction of the wind, even so it took a few minutes to find.

The plumber was late, so I need not have worried any. When he did arrive, he got to it straight way, connecting up our new pipe to the mains. Then followed the tricky bit of connecting it to our existing pipework I explained that with my cunning powers of deduction and logic I had determined that the middle pipe in the shop was the live pipe and the one at the back, the red herring. This assertion came apart at the seams rather when he sliced the top off the indicated pipe and the top half fell out of the ceiling connected to the thin air.

We fell back on plan B, which had started as plan A a while ago but, I think it was originally plan B because it was the more difficult option. Once I had removed the slatwall from its mounting and given him a bit more room to work in, our man made the connection in no time at all.

It was a tad galling that the first pipe had been redundant all this time because it was the one that was corroded and started it all. It was as well that the work was done, though, because the other pipe, at the back of the shop, was not in much better condition. Still, we could now press ahead with the racking.

I retired upstairs for some breakfast given that it was the middle of the day. I took a little while because I have noticed that our electronic mails are dropping into recipient's spam folders. The reasons for this are many and complicated, apparently, and I am learning as I go. I have put in place all the suggestions that have come from my reading but there is one aspect that first, I do not fully understand and secondly, cannot do myself but require one of our service providers to do for me. The problem is that each tell me that it is the other's responsibility and I do not know enough to argue the case. I will persevere for a while longer.

Eventually, I gathered enough impetus to head downstairs to start on the racking. I went down ahead of the Missus as I needed to unpack the boxes and separate the different parts. I made a start before she arrived and since she has some experience in this area, waited for her to arrive before putting bits together.

It was not the intention to start with the most difficult bit but that end needed to be done first for the rest to fall into place. It is a corner unit that presented a few problems in its assembly and even more when it needed to be folded into its corner. The Missus had expressed how important it was that the units were level, so I ensured that that were. How then, in blue blazes, does one end upright insist on leaning backwards no matter what I do. I gave up on it as time was pressing but my

current thinking is that I will screw it to the concrete floor to resolve the issue – and then, obviously, discover that I will need to move it.

The rain had persisted in varying degrees since it first came in sometime earlier in the morning. We had got away light when we were working on the plumbing outside and had spent the rest of the day indoors, which was largely deliberate. I had hoped to have got a bit farther with the shelving, but we will try again on Friday when the weather is once again set to be inclement. Tomorrow, the weather looks a little better, although Mother had heard otherwise. We will look out of the window tomorrow and see what we have and go from there.

While we were working on the plumbing, our pasty salesman came to say hello. He brought with him the news that inevitably pasty prices have increased for this season coming. We have always strived to keep our price in the shop at a reasonable level and it will still be so but just a little higher than it was last year. He told us that their sandwiches are likely to be discontinued, which will be disappointing and that we will have to make our orders for the next day even earlier as they try and make working hours for the bakers more attractive in the face of staff shortages. Happily, they will still be making pasties, which is something of a relief – I will not need to work a nightshift to make our own.

March 8th – Tuesday

At least this morning's walk out was much less eventful than yesterday. We were able to frequent the Harbour beach, too, where we were met by the bleddy hound's best pal again. We tarried for a chat while the dogs explored the handkerchief size piece of beach the tide allowed us, then went our separate ways as the others were heading on to the big beach.

It soon became very apparent that the plumber was not going to turn up today, so we pencilled in a trip up to The Farm. This we postponed until the afternoon because while I was out with the bleddy hound it had started to rain. Very soon, it was lashing down and since I wanted to dig holes in the ground this was not very helpful as I did not want them filled with water. We waited.

My forage out for building supplies yesterday was incomplete, I learned. I had forgotten the paint that the Missus wanted and since I needed to drop by for more post concrete, I detoured out to St Just before heading back to pick up Mother. Fully equipped, we headed to The Farm arriving shortly into the afternoon. While I thought that this was ample time to put in the two remaining posts, it was not because fate and big solid rocks got in the way.

I wasted no time in getting started because I was aware that there was much to do and I wanted to take the hole boring tool off the tractor before we came away. This seemed a way off as I started on the first hole. This went reasonably well to start with until we hit more solid ground. I was able to break up some of this using a wrecking

bar and probably got another six inches of boring done. It was clear that I would get no deeper, but I reckoned that it would hopefully not need to bear much strain, even in a high wind, and was probably deep enough. I could not say the same for the second which hit something very solid and rocky about eighteen inches down. Even the wrecking bar had trouble with this obstacle, and I had to give up. I reasoned that if I could not go down then I would have to go up and would build shutters up to make up for the lack of depth. Up there for dancing, I say.

By the time I was emptying the last bag of post concrete, the sun was setting. I could have done with another bag – and another half day - so that I could use some shuttering around the post at the front, but we will have to trust to luck. I now just need to lop a bit off the first front post and I can start doing the beam and purlin work and then the roof. The wood for the latter bit is arriving tomorrow if it does not rain too much before then. Any more rain on top of what we had this morning might scare off the delivery driver who has been stuck up there before. I was going to run up there to meet him, but I just had a message to say that the plumber is coming at about the same time. I might have to split myself in two.

We are in the final straight before the shop opens, now and there is so much to do we cannot afford any more nasty surprises or delays for any other reason. So, fingers crossed.

March 7th – Monday

That northeast air is still keeping the temperatures down in The Cove even if it was not quite as fierce as the last few days. We met up with the bleddy hound's best pal just as we got to the bottom of the stairs and went around the block with them. Since the bleddy hound takes her time – and always has – the going was too slow to warm us up any.

When we got to the bottom of Coastguard Row, the bleddy hound went ahead. She came back a few minutes later looking a bit sheepish and kept looking back. I could see something up there and it looked like someone had stopped and was attending to, perhaps, a dog just up behind the telegraph pole there. When I got a little closer it was clear that a person was on the ground and someone was in attendance. There was a casualty of a fall on the ground, however, I recognised one of the Coastguard cliff team with her, which was a relief.

The First Responder and ambulance were on the way, but I asked if they needed any help or equipment, since she had responded in a personal capacity. She agreed that some gas and straps might be useful, and I headed off to the Lifeboat station to fetch them. Noticing that the bleddy hound was slowing me down rather, my companion offered to bring her home, which was very good of her.

I ducked out, appearing to be surplus to requirements, leaving out local Coastguard lady to drop the kit back to the station when she had done with it. Leaving it until a

respectable time, I called our plumber but got no response. I had already sent a text message on Saturday asking for an appointment time but got no response to that, either. It looked like we would have to wait some more before moving on with work in the shop.

Speaking with the Missus about going up to The Farm to finish off my post holes, she reminded me that our painter was coming back today. I had completely forgotten and being after nine o'clock, I wondered if he had done a 'plumber' on us. Deciding to leave it a little longer, I made myself ready for the day in case we had the opportunity to work. It was while I was sitting having a bit of breakfast that I heard knocking against our wall. Looking out, I was surprised to see our painter, up a ladder and already in full swing. When I went down to welcome him an offer a warming cup of tea, he told me he did not know which door to knock on, so just got on with it anyway.

This rather sealed our fate about staying in, as we could go nowhere, together at least, with the painter in residence – who would keep him fuelled with tea to stop the frostbite and exposure setting in?

I did manage to escape a little later to get some diesel. I had telephoned ahead to Trewellard to see if they had some rather than heading into Penzance before I set off and thankfully they did. It was on leaving the garage that the plumber called back. He was busy but would try and get to us on Tuesday or Wednesday and, by the way, what was it we wanted him to do again. Gosh, I am really missing our regular man.

Our painter had steamed ahead in my absence and was quite close to finishing. I imagine the copious cups of tea had an impetus as he had not once asked to use our facilities. We only wanted a quick, thick coat of paint because with any luck, the whole lot will be coming down at the end of the year and it will need repainting after that. I did not check his work until later when I had a look on my way back from an errand and it all looks pretty good to me. It was reasonably priced as well, so I gave him a cold weather bonus – I had a spare pair of gloves, so I am glad they went to a good home. I jest, of course. Gloves are far too expensive to give away.

At least our local painters are not facing impossible legislative demands. I met with one of our local fishermen last week. I thought that he had braved the swell but he told me that the Marine Management Organisation, which manages England's fisheries – and Cornwall's – had conducted his five yearly boat inspection that involved a roll test in the Harbour. He had tried to assure the inspector that because he fishes in the unwelcoming waters of the Land's End, his boat did definitely roll but the inspector had insisted on seeing it anyway.

Our fisherman will soon have to comply with a whole new set of rules that the MMO had dreamt up. Some of these rules already apply to the over ten metre fleet where they are a little easier to comply with. One of the major stumbling blocks is that each fisherman will have to record on an 'app' while still at sea, the weight of their catch

per species. They must be accurate to within ten percent or face large fines or imprisonment, which seems very harsh especially given that the weights of all the catches are already recorded by the auction houses and fish merchants under the Buyers and Sellers Act. As you can imagine, a ten percent margin for the bigger boats is possibly a tolerable amount, the margin for a smaller catch is impossibly accurate for guesswork.

The fishermen have been trying to raise these concerns with DEFRA for two years but have got nowhere. Now they have filed for a judicial review and are seeking help for funding the effort. This may be of limited interest to you, dear reader, but I thought it worth highlighting. I know that quite a few visitors here buy directly off the boats. This will, of course, desist because the fisherman will have already recorded the guessed weight of his catch and should it not match the actual weight recorded by the merchant buyer he or she sells it to, it could land them in jail.

We had some entertainment arrive at our end of The Cove today. First, a big lorry arrived stacked high with scaffolding and a bunch of happy scaffolders to put it up. It is one stage of restoring the Lifeboat station roof but quite what stage it precedes, I am not yet privy to. It was while the scaffolders were laboriously unloading the lorry by hand that another couple of huge trucks turned up. One transported a big digger and the other a mammoth skip. I assumed, and quite rightly, that they had come to remove the old roof. There were just the two operatives involved in the work, both around fifteen years of age, I would say, and once the big digger was dismantled they set about lifting the metal cladding into the skip.

As you might imagine, this took some time. It reminded me of someone trying to eat stringy cheese because no matter how much you try to make a clean break between mouthfuls, the cheese has other ideas and stays connected to the remainder of the meal. The cladding was all in one piece and as one grabber load was hauled into the skip, another bit was clinging to the back of it making it awkward to contain. I watched for quite a while, mesmerised. I had to leave before the end of the show and a saw the big skip lorry parked up by the old quarry by the school when I returned, overflowing with roof. We may start again, perhaps with a clean slate. Oh, please yourselves.

Alright, I have just been teasing you, dear reader, because I know the only reason that you came to read The Diary today was to learn the results of the World Pasty Championship at The Eden Project over the weekend. There was a time when the competition was littered with names that you knew, famous and long lived pasty makers from across the Duchy. Oddly, it is now all new kids on the block and 'amateurs' who seem to have dedicated their lives to winning places in the competition and people making pasties with downright bizarre contents.

This year was no different, with one family taking three podium places in three different categories. Father, who had been at it for nine years, finally making first place in the amateur adult Cornish pasty category and two children, the eldest

winning for the second year in a row in her class and the youngest getting placed on her first appearance in her class. Meal time at their house must be no joy at all, 'what's for tea tonight – don't tell me, bleddy pasties again. We had that yesterday and the day before and, what did we have the day before that, oh yeah, bleddy pasties.'

The professional or company category though is the one most of us wait for. Our own supplier won several years in a row and our customers still come back to say how good they are. Times more on, however. This year The Cornish Premier Pasty company took first prize with its standard pasty, which was marred somewhat by the embarrassment of coming second as well with its 'gourmet' version. Third place went to the Phat Pasty Company.

Not that I am particularly interested in pretend pasties, such as chicken and chorizo or hog's pudding and blue cheese, however interesting that sounds but some of these combinations were placed in the open savoury categories. One particularly irked me was the peppered steakless vegan pasty. If you do not want to eat meat, that is fine by me but why make meals with references that suggest some pretence of meat in it. Why not just have a peppered soya bean vegan pasty. At least we were spared the most derided pasty company in Cornwall winning a place by submitting a pasty that is nothing like the commercial product it puts on the shelves in Tesmorburys – you know who I mean. I am sure a jolly day was had by all.

After all that pastying, there was nothing else for it - we had burgers for tea.

March 6th – Sunday

Something actually went right today. What joy. Just the one thing, mind. It would have been a dream if everything had gone right and I did not dream; I was too busy in the middle of the night thinking about how we would install the new pipework.

It came to me in a bit of a flash that if it was going to be difficult to connect onto the existing pipe work in the shop, perhaps it would be just as difficult and therefore a contending idea, to feed the new pipe through the ceiling and join up with our pipes there. I knew roughly where the pipes appeared into the flat and when I had a moment, I emptied the appropriate cupboard to have an investigation. It has been a while since I looked and I had quite forgotten what an utter mess it is. Imagine one of those surrealist drawings of impossible pipework that does not go anywhere.

Despite the plumbing carnage, the order lent itself to suggest that my initial assessment of what went where from downstairs wrong. It seems more likely that the first pipe, the corroded one in the shop that started all this, may be the primary feed. The other, I am hoping, is just a red herring. The benefit if this is correct is that the first pipe stands proud of the wall and will be much easier to connect up. Fingers crossed, then, for tomorrow when the plumber turns up.

You might have guessed by now that I had eschewed my regular trip to the range. There is simply too much to do and some of the things needed to be done today as the weather looked to be on our side, certainly in terms of it not raining. I had already made the decision that this week would be the last until the shop closes again at the end of October. Regrettably last week was.

I had to drop by the range anyway this morning to drop something off, so we were already earlier than we would normally be on a day of doing stuff. I picked up Mother on the way back and stopped by back at home for a spot of breakfast to fortify me for my labours at The Farm. It was as well that I did because today's efforts were arduous indeed involving moving heavy things and digging.

The time I had spent in front of the computer screen watching how other people used their hole borers was time well spent it turned out. I wasted no time at all getting behind the wheel of the tractor I refuse to call Poppy and reversed into position at the first site of the postholes for the compost shelter. By placing the point of the auger on the ground where it is intended to be, I can make subtle movements of the tractor to straighten the auger in its position. Once in place, I started it turning and in no time was boring a hole that did not fill up, well, not too much anyway.

One of the big warnings that every video made was not to dig too deep on each dip into the ground. The auger is a big corkscrew and if buried too far into the ground will get struck with the tractor unable to pull it out. There is no reverse gear on in PTO drive shaft to unwind it. Somehow, I had determined this by intuition when I put a practise hole in the ground yesterday. What I had not done, however, was extract the auger at the right speed and to the right height to despatch the waste soil to the side of the hole. I remedied that today and I had only the smallest amount of loose earth in the hole to be removed with a small spade. The only shortcoming is that I cannot get the lift arms to go low enough to drive the entire 90 centimetres of auger into the ground. Other than digging a pit for the tractor to be in, I have no notion how to fix that issue and I am left to scoop out the last foot of earth by hand.

I was quite cock-a-hoop after such success and immediately moved the tractor to drill the hole of the post to the rear of the first hole. I needed this hole dug first, in truth, as the height of the front post would be determined by the height of the one behind it. This, in turn, would be determined partly by the depth I could bury it in the ground but also how high above the IBC it was as we will need to run a launder into it from the compost shed roof. I do hope that you are following closely, dear reader, as might ask questions later.

It was in the second hole that I hit a snag. Actually, I hit something big and metallic and one chunk of metal that was thrown up suggested it was a Challenger tank. I have no idea what it was but it was not moving and I could not change the position of the hole, either. The auger had bossed its way through some of the obstruction and had left a hole, with some manual digging, just about deep enough to place a post in.

There followed some woodworking as I modified the height of the rear post to suit the IBC. This then allowed me to put a post in the front hole and mark off the same height with in stuck in it deeper hole. To permit a pitch on the roof, this front post needed to be a certain height above the rear one and I cleverly calculated this using Pythagoras's Theorem – well my clever mobile telephone did, or rather some clever soul who put a computer program on the Internet into which the user need only insert a minimum two key measurements for it to return all the other measurements and angles in the picture.

Very pleased with myself, I lopped the top of the front post accordingly and plopped in into the post hole. It was only after securing both with a copious quantity of post concrete that it became apparent that the pitch of the roof might be a bit steep. Not only that but I need to be mindful that I will, at some point, need to ascend to the dizzying height of the highest post to affix the roof. This is a major consideration, limiting the maximum height of the roof to my height plus two rungs of a ladder. The top will need to be lopped some more when the concrete is set.

There was no point in starting on the second set of posts as I would run out of time. I turned my attention to the IBCs, draining the primary one by the cabin so that I could level the base. Unfortunately, and rather unexpectedly the battery that would normally finish the job expired after only a short while. This rather scuppered the task at hand, so I gave up and hoisted another IBC onto the stand by the barn. This wobbles a bit and will need some adjustment, but a grumpy shopkeeper is highly experienced with such portents which when translated mean, 'quit while you are ahead, go home and put your feet up', which we all promptly did.

It had started out very cold again this morning and the breeze was quite robust. Even as we got to The Farm, the wind was still banging in and we were more exposed to it there. It was however bright at times and a combination of our efforts and the breeze diminishing made it a little more comfortable as the day progressed. The Missus had started a bonfire again – Dear Claire, my Missus likes to start bonfires more and more recently. Should I be concerned – this time in a drum from the old laundrette driers from next door. It was a clever idea that keeps the fire contained. At one point she and Mother were sat around it, wrapped up in coats and hoods, looking like a couple of old tramps taking a warm. They just needed a scrappy bottle of strong cider to finish the scene off.

It was a scene of improved decorum when we sat around at home later. The cold breeze seemed to have inveigled itself into the walls and it was the coldest day yet in the flat as the temperature dropped still further into the night. Perhaps we should get a brazier for the front room.

March 5th – Saturday

Oh, that is much more of what I am used to: a day of abject failures.

I had been informed that the hole diggers would be with us early in the morning. It was some commotion outside that had me out of bed in a trice unsure whether they had caught me napping or it was something else. I was early, even ahead of the bleddy hound, and it was something else that caused the disturbance to my beauty sleep. Thank goodness that I do not need much of it.

Still, the early morning worked out in my favour since I had to take the bleddy hound around the block given that the tide had swallowed the beach. I also squeezed in a cup of tea and a shower before what I had been told was the arrival time, only to find out that at the given time, nothing happened. I assumed the worst and waited until I had a telephone call telling me the lone engineer was on his way about an hour or more later than advertised.

He was a most affable chap, clearly on top of his job so it did not take very long to explain what I was trying to do and that having a hole in the right place was just what we wanted. He would also thump out the concrete leading up to our wall so that we would have a channel to put our new pipe into. I explained that we thought that the existing pipe ran up the roadway, so armed with a wrecking bar and a cup of tea, I left him to it.

He had not been working long before there was a bit of an urgent to at the door. I went down to see what was up and discovered that in his enthusiasm he had gone through the mains pipe. In fairness, it was not really his fault because the mains pipe was snaked up towards where the new one was heading and exactly in the path of his concrete wrecking. It was not even a glancing blow; he had hit it spot on. We discussed the matter in a calm and mature manner, using a few choice engineering terms to describe the situation. To make matters worse, he told me that had he been in his normal van he would have had all the parts to make it good again. Nevertheless, he helpfully hooked up our new pipe leaving me to find a solution to attach the other end to our supply. Of course, if he had uncovered the existing pipework first instead of breaking up the concrete, he would have seen which direction it was heading in and avoided the problem. It was just bad luck.

As if things could not have got any worse, the plumber we have been using was unavailable and so too was another local plumber that we know reasonably well. Before he left, our usual man, whose absence I was now being keenly feeling, left me a list of half a dozen colleagues in the profession, so I dialled the top number on the list.

This brought me into contact with the most helpful and responsive of tradesmen. I explained our predicament as best I could, which was not at all easy because it is complicated beyond measure. Despite that he agreed to attend and came almost immediately, so he must be quite local to us. We knocked about some ideas around connecting the new pipe to the existing pipework but on closer inspection, it is not at all straightforward as all the pipework hugs the wall tightly and will be most difficult to cut and join. I noticed this earlier when, in my desperation, thought that I

might be able to affect a temporary fix myself, dismissing the thought as soon as I saw the difficulty. In the end, he suggested that he use a length of the new pipe to join to the broken bit, which was quick and dirty and right up my street.

I was much relieved when we had our water supply back. It could have been so much worse. I was also glad to get back inside. The wind had taken a change of direction and was blowing in quite robustly from the Scandinavian countries we are told. This might be the reason that they call the temperatures it brings, Baltic, and it certainly was.

Allowing myself a while to warm up and to have the breakfast I was in the middle of preparing when everything went pear shaped, I then made ready to go to The Farm, which we had intended to visit some hours before. I had been very determined in my planning that we would head up there soon after the groundworks were complete and fit the hole boring tool to the tractor. I had rightly guessed that this might take some time since it was the first time of doing it. Despite the later hour, I pressed on with the plan, which in retrospect was a mistake, and headed to The Farm with the Missus.

Assembling all the bits for the hole boring tool was an early indicator that it was not going to be an easy ride. To start with, everything was very heavy. I followed all the instructions, which helpfully came with photographs of one person connecting all the bits. I very quickly learned that this person clearly had a team of weightlifters lurking just out of frame. The best bit of all was having to lift the monumentally heavy arm, holding it aloft while balancing the A frame and sliding in the retaining pin with a spare hand. I got there in the end, enlisting the Missus to attach the PTO, which is the drive shaft.

By the time everything was in place there was precious little time left to actually use it to deliver my post holes. I did attempt a sample hole in a convenient place and it was not quite what I imagined. I suspect the root cause is that the boring tool is not hanging vertically and I need to establish why that may be the case. It did bore a hole but promptly filled it back in again as the blade came out of the ground. It also hit something very hard at two feet that even my explorative wrecking bar complained about. We left it there as time was advancing and my capacity to absorb failure was nearing exhaustion.

We returned home where I gazed at myriad video clips on the Internet of people boring holes with absolute ease. They all had hints and tips, which in retrospect I should have listened to first but congratulated myself on already adopting many of them by applying common sense. None of them explained why our boring auger was not hanging vertically but, looking at the films, it perhaps is not that important as it will right itself in the ground. I must try again another day when the small gods of grumpy shopkeepers are feeling a little less playful with my emotions.

One thing is for certain, tomorrow cannot be any worse ... can it?

March 4th – Friday

It rained again in the morning. I had a look at the wood at the front of the shop when we went out and it was soaked again thanks to the sharp northwest breeze slapping the rain against it. I am hoping that the weekend will be dry or our paint job on Monday looks in doubt too.

Happily, the bleddy hound and I managed to miss the rain – directly, at least. The heavy drops cascading from the Lifeboat station roof at the corner were a different matter. These are cunningly designed to aim down the back of the neck of the unaware or sleepy and the bleddy hound is unaware enough not to give the corner a wide berth.

The remnants of last night's big swell were still in evidence as the tide receded this morning. Waves were still dancing over Cowloe and splashing insistently over the Harbour wall. There was just enough space for the bleddy hound to have a run around on the scoured sand, so she did.

Today was going to be another wait around for things to happen day, while the Missus could head off to The Farm as free as a bird. Our replacement shelving was due to be delivered and I had no doubt that it would be since our friends at the Doing Parcels Dreadfully would not be involved. We had no time for its arrival but I rather thought it would be mid afternoon because we tend to be towards the end of delivery runs. I was also expecting the replacement tube light for the strobe version that was currently in service in the store room. I had discovered that if I blinked at the same frequency as the light, it looked like it was alright. That delivery would also be in the afternoon.

Having established that our hole digging was now postponed again until tomorrow morning, I made a quick dash to our builders' merchant in St Just. I needed a hole boring bit for the drill. I knew that we had one somewhere, but the Missus had looked up at The Farm yesterday and I scoured the shop in the morning to no avail. The additional run was a bit irritating, given the availability of diesel down here but, as it worked out, it proved necessary. The hole boring bit that we had been looking for is the wrong size I discovered. We could have made do but having the right size seemed a bit more professional and while it will be covered up by the bookcase now, that may not always be the case. It only took a jiffy when I got back and the pipe is now in place and everything is waiting on the hole diggers turning up.

While I waited for the replacement tube light to turn up, I amused myself by taking down the strobe light in the store room. I also amazed myself by standing on the top step of the shops folding steps to do it – how brave. I think it is because that part of the store room is so narrow I was able to lean against the wall for support. I had also purchased an area light when I went out earlier, which saved the discomfort and awkwardness of wearing my head lamp. I wanted to get a battery one that uses the

batteries I use in my power tools. I recall looking before and wondered why I did not buy one then. I remembered when I discovered that everywhere was sold out. It was that way before, too, so I had to buy a cheap alternative that you plug into the mains. This nearly scuppered me because the store room lights run off the ring main – do not ask – which I had to turn off to unwire the light. Luckily, we have one bank of outlets on another circuit, so I was still able to use it with an extension.

When it came, I was surprised by just how lightweight the new tube light was. This is highly convenient as the ceiling in the store room is not very robust if you do not find a batten to screw onto, which is always. It did not take very long to install and now shines brightly with all the other strip lights in there. Another job ticked off – unless you count getting rid of the old one as part of the task, which is still left to do.

I did not have to wait too long for the shelving to arrive. It came in a big truck on a pallet, which the driver dropped outside the shop. It did not take too long to strip it of the protective covering, and all but the uprights were of a manageable weight. Even better, a young man who had been visiting the café next door where he used to work offered to give me a hand. He is a small lad but has swapped café working to construction working and has clearly sprouted muscles. I am not sure what it proves but nearly all the youth in the area are growing up to be fine upstanding citizens despite some of them not having all the advantages of those from better off areas.

It was not exactly the most productive day that I have ever had but it rated highly against most of the other days this week. As all my school teachers used to say, 'must try harder', when they were feeling benevolent. More often, they would say other things. Given that there was little else energetic that I could do, I retired to the computer to key in even more invoices and receipts into the system that is called Making Tax Difficult, erm, Digital. If that is truly the aim, why do they still insist that I keep so many pieces of paper?

In the end, I gave up on that as well and concentrated on trying to fix why my electronic mails very often go to the recipient's spam folder. I discovered something technical called a SPF record which I put in place according to the instructions. I sent a test mail off today to a company that tests the validity of your sendings for free. The company insisted that I 'must try harder' and that they could fix all my problems for a small fee. I think I will demure, but they did provide me with a few clues at what else I might do which is frightfully technical and with which I may need some assistance – hopefully for free.

When I realised that even that was turning the inside of my head into mush, I decided that it must be high time for beer. That worked marvellously.

March 3rd – Thursday

Today was a day of disappointment and progress. They rather cancelled each other out.

It started out alright, dry for a change and a bit of sunshine brightening things up a little. The bleddy hound was a bit wrong footed as we headed to the Harbour beach as someone had discarded a dark coat at the foot of the western slip. I thought for a second that it might have been a bit of a Regie Perrin moment until we got further down and noticed a family bobbing about in the water. The bleddy hound's nose was put out of joint because there really is not supposed to be a dark coat at the foot of the western slip. How dare they.

All morning I kept an eye out for the contractors who were supposed to turn up to dig our hole. It was close to the middle of the day when the call came in that they had been delayed at Marazion, which is no longer going to be Cornwall's second city. I suspect that I was not the only one who thought that it might be a little incongruous next to Leeds, Belfast and Brighton and even smallest city St Davids makes it look a bit diminutive. I know, size is not everything but sometimes it is. It would look ridiculous as a city, like wearing a top hat and tails three sizes too big. All that aside, it was doing a marvellous job of stopping our waterpipe being completed tomorrow.

The hole digging contractors, or lack of them, were not the only disappointment of the day. The painter turned up this morning and we discussed the work at hand. We both agreed that the woodwork was still too damp to be painted and that they would come back on Monday after it had been dry for three days according to the forecast. I lay in bed later just before we went to sleep listening to the rain lashing on the window above me.

The Missus was going to go and get the water pipe while I waited, in case the contractors turned up. That being off the cards I went and got it myself and collected Mother on the way back. She and the Missus were heading off to The Farm to water the plants in the greenhouse and I was staying behind to deploy the pipe.

Earlier, while I was waiting for the contractors when they were still supposed to be coming, I turned my attention to getting a hole made in the stud partition under the front side window. I thought that this might have been troublesome but as it worked out it was easier than I thought. When I pulled the bookcase out of the way I noticed that a panel had been tacked over the area. I had high hopes that there was just a void behind that but disappointingly it was there to cover up a nasty dent in the plasterboard.

No matter, I employed my trusty multitool and cut a neat square hole in one corner. I had guess where the wood frame behind it was and got it exactly right. I almost stopped there because such a rare incidence of something going right could only be followed by complete disaster. Au contraire, mon brave, as someone, somewhere might have said once. Indeed, they may have said it more than once but not generally in my company, largely because I am not Italian. I went outside to drive in from there because my multitool tool was not long enough to reach it from the inside. Here too, I managed to hit the right spot, although I hit the woodwork as I expected

because the clearance outside it is a good bit lower. For once, woodwork rotted by wet sea air played in my favour, and I had my hole through the wall in a trice.

I had to think about setting out the water pipe. It is inflexible material and comes rolled up in a reel. This was the first challenge, getting the bend out. I had already tried to push it behind the first display and found that it simply curled around and came back to me. I might have been best off doing the unwinding outside but there again, perhaps not. It behaves like an uncontrollable whip as it is unwound and could quite easily have slapped a passer-by to the ground or crashed nosily onto a car windscreen as it drove by. Thankfully, we have a long shop and I started by running it down one aisle and up the opposite side of the shop. Even then it put up a fight as I untwisted it, clattering against the shelves and dislodging a few lighter items. It took two or three attempts but at the end I had largely tamed it.

There was 25 metres of it, and I used approximately half. It was no particular challenge to push it behind the shelves and racks after it was straightened. The spare still runs up the opposite aisle, but I shall leave it like that so that the plumber can use what he needs, when eventually we can get him in. I also tested it through the hole in the wall and it fits snugly, which is ideal. I had better not have too many days like this, I might get used to them.

I retired upstairs after that and made a cup of tea just as the Missus and Mother returned from The Farm. The Missus had brought back some wrecking gear with her so that, flushed by today's success, I can make a start on some of the concrete outside in the morning.

As I sat contemplating that I had left the file for the year end paperwork downstairs and was too lazy to go back down and get it, I watched out of the window. The sea that had been benign enough to leave micro plastic on the smooth sand of the beach had reverted to type. A clandestine swell was surging into the bay, but it could not disguise its hand close in to the shore and up against the cliffs at Creagle and Aire Point. It boiled viciously over Cowloe and lapped over the Harbour wall burying it with every set that came through. It was a monstrous swell, completely hidden in the middle of the bay but edged with lively white water exploding up cliff sides and crashing heavily onto beaches. It was the sort of swell that made you glad that you were nowhere near it. Great to watch, though.

March 2nd – Wednesday

It was dry this morning, well sort of, which was a great relief but still did not mean that things were any better for heading up to The Farm and besides, the mains water situation has edged everything else out.

Everything that is other than the bleddy hound and, today, the gymnasium. There is nothing quite like thumping some weights around to ease the tension and a walk around on the Harbour beach in the peace of it all has no compare. There was

however the plain reminder that we have quite royally beggered up the oceans with little lines of micro plastics where the high water waves lapped against then sand. At least that spoke of much receding of the sea's temper and later on there was no more than a gentle underlying swell across the bay.

Before I left for the gymnasium, I left a message for our plumber. He is a pleasant enough chap but has been resisting a visit here. I think it was possibly more misunderstanding than deliberate and in my message today I left him in no doubt that I needed him onsite to provide some hard advice. It took until late in the morning for him to respond and even then he asked if I wanted him to come and have a look. When at last the penny dropped, he said he was on his way immediately, which was an utter relief.

The visit was everything we needed it to be. The Missus had originally suggested running a new pipe up the side of the shop to replace the existing. Last night after I had awoken white and screaming dreaming of an army of pipes come to get me, I put a little more flesh on the bones of that plan. There is a window bricked up with blocks half way up and to bring the pipe in there would be ideal. I really did not relish putting a 20 millimetres hole through two and a half feet of granite.

I presented these plans to the plumber, and we kicked them around a bit. I would need to channel out the cement our side of the kerb stones that run up the driveway and get down as deep as I could. He suggested that perhaps we could go through under the window at the side of shop at the front and run the pipe along the skirting inside. The wall there is just stud work and would be easy enough to drive through or at least easier than granite or block and I would not have to dig up the length of concrete. Only the merest fraction of the pipe would be exposed if any if I got it right. It was this suggestion that was the very reason I braved a call out fee for a visit. It would save time and effort, if not money.

The one remaining hard bit was to dig a hole to the rear of the meter so that the new pipe could be attached. Fortunately, the hole does not need to be very broad or deep but the surface is tarmac, which would prove to be an expensive problem, especially as it is not my tarmac. I telephoned my pal, who knows everything about everything if pressed and assured me that I would need special tools and that he could not help in that regard but gave me a local company that could.

We are very fortunate that with all the busyness in the construction industry, they could fit me in between jobs tomorrow. Because they need to bring a myriad collection of equipment with them regardless how small the hole is that we need, it will cost a small fortune. There is no choice in the matter. The work needs to be done and done professionally as it is not my drive and I am lucky that the work could be done so smartly. I will go and fetch the 25 metres of pipe required after they are done and my hammer and big chisel from The Farm. It will be down to me to make below ground access for the pipe between the hole and the frame below the window.

If I can get the plumber back on Friday, then whole thing could be wrapped up early next week.

I confess that it was a great relief knowing that this is in hand even if I have to divert my attention from the other priorities which seem to be piling up. It might have been prudent to start on one of them rather than play with the new printer but it was in the way and needed to be sorted, I told myself. I had a go at moving it after I came back from the gymnasium with the thought that the blood pumping in my muscles would provide some added impetus. One lift proved otherwise, and I went after the sack trolley, another nocturnal bright idea, and strapped the printer to it so that it did not topple off the end. I probably could have managed with that set up, but the printer thumped a bit going up the first step and I reasoned I would need someone to control its movement a bit for that to be wholly successful. I recruited Missus Muscles to the operation in the end and we heaved it up the steps with remarkable ease.

Spending the next hour setting it up and playing with the many features seemed like a very good use of my time. I did manage to send off a couple of orders that were long outstanding and pay a few bills, so at least there was some constructive work done. I will also be run ragged trying to snake inflexible plastic pipe under shelving and display units tomorrow, so I have justified my two days of mainly inaction. It still feels like I was being inordinately indolent but never mind.

In another step forward, our man telephoned to tell me than he is coming to paint the front woodwork tomorrow, so that would be another job out of the way. It rained later in the evening which might scotch that particular plan but I will check to see if the wood is still wet in the morning. If the plans come to fruition, it will all be coming down again at the end of the year with the building work, so I will not be overly bothered if the job is not perfect. At least I would not be having nightmares about pipe work in the night – the compost shed, well, that is another matter.

March 1st – Tuesday

There was no time for hanging about this morning as the Missus had reminded me last night that the truck was going in for its service and MOT test today. I had completely forgotten having dismissed the calendar reminder on my computer two days ago thinking that I would not forget such a thing.

I did have to tell the bleddy hound that while a slightly earlier start was required, it did not demand being woken at quite the time she had selected. She met up with her best pal right outside the door when she did go down and they followed on to the Harbour beach together. We both, our neighbour and I, remarked just how cold it was feeling today, which was odd because it was supposed to be relatively mild today. We did not tarry long and left them as they headed off to the big beach.

I headed off to the garage straight after feeding the bleddy hound. I did not even have time for a cup of tea but I reasoned that I would be less than half an hour

anyway even if I detoured to our builders' merchant at St Just for paint as intended. It is hard to believe that a grown man still believes that things will go according to plan despite the mountain of evidence to the contrary.

The first problem, but a minor one, was that the mechanic who is slowly taking over from the garage owner on the day to day work, did not realise we normally take a loan car. Happily, two were available and he gave me the keys to one of them. Even more happily, it had fuel in it, which is a rarity. I do not mind fuelling the loan car but I would prefer to do it when convenient rather than being unable to come straight home first. The mechanic started it for me saying that it was none too good in the cold, which did not auger well. It sounded exceedingly ropey, but he was a mechanic and it did not bother him, so I assumed it should not bother me. I drove off.

The drive was a bit sluggish, but I put that down to it being cold and the engine being very much smaller than the one we are used to. Then approaching the crossroads on the road out to St Just, the temperature gauge shot into the red and beeped at me. I turned around at the crossroads and headed back to the garage and as I did so, the temperature returned to normal. It stayed that way, so I put it down to a one-off glitch, turned around at the roundabout and went back again. As I reached the exact same spot on the journey, almost to the yard, the temperature once again shot into the red. Now, that was really spooky. Once again, as I turned around to go back, the temperature slipped down to normal.

The car, very clearly being possessed by some irate demon, which did not like me approaching the old toll house at such a heady speed, was going back to the garage come what may. Luckily, there was the other loan car but not so luckily, it needed petrol and I did not have my cards or any cash. I did have my clever mobile telephone which I am still afeared will not work when I most need it to. I fuelled up anyway, because I would not get anywhere without doing so and braced myself to apologise, or be arrested, for not being able to pay. The telephone worked, thankfully. I did notice, however, that all the diesel pumps were covered up. I learnt later that there is not a drop to be had – the result of idiotic panic buying. The Missus went shopping with Mother in the afternoon and discovered quite a few empty shelves. I think that they might have a few other details to worry about other than running out of bread if we are nuked, which I believe is partly the root cause of the irrational behaviour.

My own irrational behaviour kicked in after I got home. Actually, it is probably very rational, come to think, and it is called fear of work.

It was a miserably rainy day and became worse as the day progressed. It hardly inspired enthusiasm for doing very much and, once again, doing anything at all at The Farm is off the cards. In fact, the rain had just introduced more work because the water butts, even the one with a hole in it, will need to be emptied before I can move them and drilling holes in the ground will have to wait until it dried out a bit.

That left working inside and I am afraid to say, I failed there too. The plaster dust still lies in geet piles by the wall and needs to be scooped up into a couple of bins. This did not sound as interesting as sitting on my behind not scooping up plaster dust into bins. Going downstairs would also remind me that one of the strip LED lights in the store room needs to be replaced and I will have to get on a ladder and do that myself because the likelihood of getting an electrician in before reopen is remote. I would also need to look up the rusty water pipe and worry that it might burst at any moment. I did get to speak with the plumber who, after looking at pictures of the pipe, agreed that we will need to run another feed from the meter to join up with the good pipe work in use. That is going to be work enough but there are two pipe routed and I am not sure which is the one our network is connected to.

I was not entirely idle. Not only did I put a good dent in the pile of invoices that need inputting into the computer system, I ordered the replacement LED tube light and another for the loft that needs it – because I could do with adding another task to my extensive list. I also fielded the various parts that arrived for our new super printer. The extra toner and the wifi module came with two different couriers and the printer itself with a third. The printer box was huge and very heavy and the driver, one we have known for years, offered to help me take it upstairs. I told him not to worry as I was sure it was all box and little printer and the packaging would need to stay downstairs anyway. I very quickly wished that I had taken him up on his offer as having removed the packaging, I still could not lift the printer by myself. It was still downstairs when we went to bed.

The Missus arrived home with Mother and a mountain of shopping. She was not panic buying but we only go when we have run out of everything and then buys everything all over again. I am surprised it all fitting in the small loan car. The timing was perfect because we had just finished unloading it when the garage called to say that the truck was ready for collection. It was probably just as well I had the truck given the size of the bill that came with it.

I was glad to get to bed to be honest. We can do it all again tomorrow.