

DIARY 2026

## March 1<sup>st</sup> – Sunday

Just three weeks left on the 'holiday' clock and with a couple of month's work left to do. Was it ever thus. I think that there are just two things left to do at The Farm, the greenhouse roof and the tractor. The roof is in hand, but the tractor is a massive unknown. Then, of course, there is getting the shop ready and tying up the orders we have agreed to place.

So, with the clock ticking, my back against the wall and the chips down it was time to pull out all the stops, place my nose against the grindstone and my shoulder to the wheel, mix as many metaphors that I could think of and head to the range to knock over a few metal plates and falling men. Yes, I know I should have dropped the range in favour of something work-like, but all work and no play make Jack a grumpier sod than he normally is.

With no notion of how the weather was supposed to look today, I took it at face value – grey, damp and slightly cold. There was a little rain in the air but nothing too uncomfortable as we headed for the Harbour beach to have a little run around first (well, late enough to be a second or third) thing. The girls had a bit of a shouting match with Twiglet and Crumble who had come out on the elevated patio so they could have a look-see at the girls on the beach. It was not malicious shouting but purely a necessity given the distance between them. Unfortunately, there was to be no meeting up on this occasion and we headed for home under the other dogs' watchful gaze.

We were not back long before we were all piling into the truck so that the Missus could drop me at the range and go on to pick up Mother.

The first Sunday in the month is always shotgun day, the morning using pump action or semi-automatic shotguns and the afternoon, clay pigeon shooting. Since I am only doing half days, I had to pick one and elected 'practical shotgun' in the morning session as it is a lot more fun. It is also very popular and with interest and membership of the club on the rise, it was also very well attended. There were close to 30 shooters in attendance. The first three course could be run simultaneously but even then it took nearly two hours to see everyone through all of them. The last stage, the combat stage, is run sequentially, on shooter at a time over the whole range and that took a further hour and a half.

Between each shooter, everyone mucks in to rush out and reset the targets. While keeping a person active and warmer than we would be sitting around doing nothing, it is also quite wearing over a long period. It is the reason why I am only doing half days at present because I am frustratingly running out of puff much sooner than I

used to. I am hoping – and am reasonably confident – that this is all to do with the dickie knee operation and the lack of muscle development in certain places. I am seeing a consultant on Wednesday for my follow-up meeting, so must try and remember to ask, purely for my peace of mind.

The cold and damp, which turned a bit rainy at one point, would not have helped and a quite vicious blow struck up towards the end of the morning. I was therefore quick tuckered out when I called in medivac and the Missus responded by driving up to collect me and bring me home. Before I settled, I took the girls around the block for a quick run, thus leaving me the rest of the afternoon – after cleaning my gun – to recuperate.

I was quite surprised to see two youngsters in smart RNLI Sunday best over at the Lifeboat station, just in front of the viewing gallery. They had set up a table with information fliers and give away badges and the like. Since the Missus is events organiser and on the Management Committee, I asked what was on. Apparently some bright spark further up the line thought it a capital idea to have a 'face to face team' out at Lifeboat stations when the weather is poor.

Someone must have told the bright spark that people like to come and look at the sea when it is big and angry. Sending a couple of youngsters down to shake a tin in front of the hundreds of wave watchers, would no doubt earn him employee of the month points. Sadly, with backdrop of a rough sea so mediocre that a group of young adults from up the hill decided to come and have a splash around in the thick of it, skies grey and bleak and an unkind windchill, the wave watching hordes stayed away in their hundreds and settled for a pint in front of an open fire at some nearby hostelry and watch the action from there.

One thing is for certain, the wave watching hordes would not have attempted to get here by bus. I spent an agonising couple of hours trying to make sense of the latest bus timetable. It is an unmitigated mess, the worst I have ever seen it, which currently involves a gruelling two hour journey to Penzance that visits St Buryan twice on the route. I will spare you the detail just now, dear reader, because I want to check whether this timetable is just temporary while the work at Chywoon that forces the bus on a circuitous route, is to blame. I do hope that it is.

Regardless of the temporary or permanent status of the timetable, the investigation that took away precious hours of my short existence, was much like a spiritual purge, much like a vigorous self-flagellation or lengthy wearing of a hair shirt might be. My, I felt pure of heart afterwards and if I could have thought of some heinous sin to commit, could have done so with impunity in the knowledge that I had already paid for it several times over.

March 2<sup>nd</sup> – Monday

For what it was worth, I took a look at the weather for the coming week last night. Mindful that I had to collect the roofing sheets, I was looking for a weather window for picking them up and another for installing them. The obvious day for installing them was Wednesday, which stood out among the other days of the week due to not having rain symbols, the first for two months or more. Not only that, it had a big sunshine symbol instead. The boys at the forecaster's office probably spent a couple of hours finding it in the first place then another hour or so buffing the rust off it. Not that it means it will be sunny that day, of course.

*Newbie forecaster.*: "Hey, Tom, what's this symbol here for, then?"

*Old Boy Forecaster.*: "That, my lad is the symbol for something we used to call 'sunshine'. Used to use it all the time before global warming set in."

*Newbie Forecaster.*: "How about we give it run, see if it still works."

*Old Boy Forecaster.*: "Sure, why not stick it on Wednesday. The Wednesday rainy symbol if a bit frayed around the edges anyway."

*Newbie Forecaster.*: "Great. Will it be sunny on Wednesday, then."

*Old Boy Forecaster.*: "Not a clue."

*Newbie Forecaster.*: "Aren't we supposed to put up the symbols to match what we have calculated the weather will be for that day."

*Old Boy Forecaster.*: "Stupid boy. We're not bleddy fortune tellers."

Unfortunately, I have an appointment and a trade show to visit on Wednesday, so it will almost certainly be a perfect day for fixing roof sheets into place. There were other days that looked good and it was a reasonable assumption that the forecast was improving – actual high pressure is on the way. With this in mind, it seemed sensible to pick up the roofing sheets sooner rather than later and today was as soon as it got.

It was a grey and bleak day but most notably the wind was not likely to get above 10 miles per hour. Grey and bleak were fine for moving two large sheets strapped to the top of the truck, a gale of wind, not so much. The forecast for the day contained rain all through it but on the basis that every other day for the last six weeks had rain in them, apparently, whether they did or not, I decided to ignore it.

I had asked the Missus if she wanted to come along too and loaded the question to receive an affirmative answer by suggesting that we visited MacSalvors on the way. The MacSalvors store in Pool is irresistible, containing every conceivable tool, item of hardware and household appliances that you could possibly imagine and quite a few you could not. I am glad that we do not live closer because, frankly, we could not afford it. There were a few items we needed, cable ties and grass mats for The Farm and I spotted some cord for the new bodyboard stands. The Missus, with no list at all, made up her own list of necessities on the fly.

It had started to rain a little bit when we stopped at Penzance for some groceries. By the time we were halfway to Pool, the rain was coming in properly. It was worthy of waterproofs while we visited MacSalvors – you have to move between buildings in

the open air – and by the time we reached the roofing company, a bit south of Redruth, it was tipping down. This inevitably meant loading the roofing sheets on the top of the truck and strapping them down in the lashing rain.

We had some trouble finding the place; the company had moved since I last used them. Although they were on Lanner Hill, the access was down a side road that I had turned down by chance to get off the main road while we got our bearings. I was intrigued to find we had parked in front of 'Railway Cottages', or some other rail reference. When I looked either side of the building, there were clear signs of a long disused rail track that would have run in front of the building and across the road.

I looked it up later on when we got home. It was the Tresavean branch of the Hayle railway that left the main line at Redruth junction headed up Lanner Hill. It operated by a static steam engine initially to haul ore wagons up the hill by cable. It ran from 1838 to 1936 with the track removed a couple of years later. It is now a walking trail.

Sorry, I digress. Now, where was I. Ah yes, strapping down roof sheets on the truck. I had preplanned how I would do the strapping down which involved two of the ratchet straps being passed through the truck inside and running above our heads in the front and back thus using the roof as an anchor. The third strap looped around the roof bars that run lengthways down the back box and therefore did not have to pass through the vehicle. The strapping process took a while and necessitated the straps lying in puddles on the ground while I arranged them in place on the roof. When it came time to tighten them, the action stretched the webbing inside the truck which had the effect of wringing it out.

When I stuck my head inside the truck to make a minor adjustment, the Missus took the opportunity to rebuke me for dripping on her head and Mother's head in the back. I had by this time been standing outside for fifteen minutes in the rain and was doing more than a fair bit of dripping myself. I tried very hard to convey in one cold stare the dichotomy in our respective conditions, the few drips on the Missus' head and the rain coursing down my jacket and off every part of me below where it stopped.

When the last strap was in place and tightened up, the ensemble tested with a few robust thrusts and pulls and found to be stable, I climbed back into the truck. Inadvertently, I had clearly installed the sheets on the level because when I moved the truck forward and braked, a tsunami of collected rainwater cascaded over the windscreen and momentarily swamped the effect of the windscreen wipers.

I had intended to avoid the dual carriage way and take the old A30 back to Hayle but, being unfamiliar with the route, I found myself following the way back to the dual carriageway anyway. I was reasonably confident of my strapping down – which was unusual – and that the sheets were not so long that the airflow could peel them back at the front, so went with it. Provided I kept it under fifty miles per hour, I reasoned it was unlikely that we would have an issue.

It appears that I was correct in my assessment and after dropping Mother off in St Buryan, the roof sheets were as robustly seated on the roof as they were when we left. It had mainly stopped raining by the time we got back but it took far less time to undo the straps that it had to deploy them earlier in the tipping rain – naturally. We put them in the green house out of harms way and I laid out the webbing straps along the raised bed so that they could dry out.

We let the girls run riot across the field. They had been strapped into their seats for three hours as we went about our business. We were only up there for twenty minutes but both were soaked through when we got them back in the truck.

I had intended to wrap up my work on the bus timetable but by the time we got back home, I could not summon the mental capacity to deal with it. I had established that it was a temporary timetable while the roadworks that effectively blocked the normal bus route and necessitated the changes completed. This was some relief because the detail of it is truly horrific. I shall save this soupçon for tomorrow, dear reader, so that you have something to look forward to as you cling to the edge of your seats in fretful anticipation. We have not had a cliffhanger in The Diary for some time. I do hope that your constitutions are up to it.

### March 3<sup>rd</sup> – Tuesday

BB decided that she had quite enough of being in bed at quite an early hour this morning. Clearly, she thought that I had too. It did not really matter as I was awake already, my head spinning with departure and arrival times and how to go about fault finding on the tractor and whether the weather would be helpful or not today – not that it mattered much either in the end.

The last question was answered first. It was still grey and uninspiring and quite possibly raining some still from the previous day and overnight. I think that the rain was just clearing out because it was not raining when I stepped out a few minutes later. ABH very quickly appeared on the scene, and I took the initiative to get them both out of the door before either could head back to bed again.

There was limited amount of beach to cavort upon, the sea having not long vacated it. For the first time in a while there was not even the slightest dribbling of waves over the Harbour wall in a clear sign that high pressure was indeed starting to influence the ocean, so I thought. We were soon bored by wandering over the limited sandy resource and headed around the block to finish off our morning stroll.

The weather showed no signs of improvement after we got back and rain started to show an interest again, just before the middle of the day. It was getting late enough that I should really head over to St Buryan to collect Mother and because BB is at the door the second anyone thinks about going out, I took her with me. This suited very nicely because when we got back it was time again to take both girls out.

The weather changed completely between leaving and coming back. I was in full metal jacket waterproofs heading off because it was tipping down. Half an hour later, I found myself down on the beach, still in my waterproofs under a blazing – a relative description – sun and milky blue skies. It had turned suddenly warm and I felt exceedingly overdressed. It continued the theme of frustration that I had immersed myself in for most of the morning.

I had agonised – mainly in the darkness, staring at where the ceiling was in the wee hours of the morning, it is in the same place usually during the day, too – about how best to display the seeming random times set out by the bus company on their new timetable. I confirmed yesterday that the current timetable is only in place until the roadworks at Chywoone hill have been completed. These effectively block the back road into Penzance and send the buses down the A30 instead.

The temporary nature of it is just as well because it is a complex beast and I suspect that even the Artificial Intelligence that must have been used to create it must have used Artificial Intelligence I of its own to design it. Having taken two days to reverse engineer it, I was left with the assertion that if I were designing it, I would not have started from there.

Let us take the first bus that leaves The Cove on a weekday morning. It departs at 06:20 and makes for Porthcurno and on to St Buryan where you arrive near 07:00. If you missed anything at St Buryan as you passed through, do not worry, you will be coming back again 'ere long. Next, you are off to Newlyn, the top of the town in the middle of the housing estate there. You are just three miles from Penzance bus station or around fifteen minutes by road.

Great, you put away that book you were reading in keen anticipation of your arrival, but wait, what is this. You turned left at the road to Penzance and not right down the hill. Oh, there are roadworks, so there must be a diversion. There is. Your next stop on the diversion is, looks a bit familiar, oh, we are back in St Buryan about half an hour after you were here last. At least it is full speed ahead to Penzance bus station now, where you will arrive at around eight o'clock, one hour and forty minutes since you left The Cove.

Still, it could be worse, you might have arranged to take the 08:16 service. This will have you at Land's End eleven minutes later where you will sit and admire the view for the next 23 minutes until you are ready to head off. Again, you will have the pleasure of two visits to St Buryan before arriving at the bus station two and a quarter hours after you left The Cove. At least you did not take the 09:52 which takes five minutes longer than that. Luckily, the remaining buses during the day are all around an hour and a half to Penzance.

There is another interesting anomaly later in the afternoon. I suspect the AI went for a cup of tea and a human, intervened for five minutes. A bus leaving Penzance at half past three o'clock arrives in The Cove at around five o'clock. It then heads off to

Land's End where, seven minutes later, it comes back to The Cove again before heading off to St Buryan. Why? I mean, just why?

Of course, not everyone wants to go to Penzance. There are many walkers for example who like to take a bus out to Porthcurno and walk back. They also like to take the bus up to Pendeen and walk back from there too, but that opportunity has long gone. The Porthcurno service is hanging on by its boot laces, just about. If you arrive during the tenure of our temporary bus service, you can get out to Porthcurno on the 08:16 or the 09:52 then not again until near six o'clock. Coming back, if perhaps you have walked there, you are much better off with services at eleven, one and three o'clock and again at just past six o'clock.

I could go on but I will leave after just one last comment. If you were thinking that your Diarist had gone completely off the rails and made up these almost unbelievable arrangements for a public bus service, you ain't seen nothing yet. Wait until I explain Sunday's timetable.

On the face of it the Sunday buses looked as plentiful as any city centre service. I sniffed a particularly aromatic rodent and looked a bit closer. According to the published timetable two buses with the same service number leave Penzance bus station at precisely the same time to exactly the same destination. The difference between them is that they follow different routes arriving at the same main stops at different times and the same destination about twenty minutes apart. I have tried to contact the bus company for clarification but have met with unanswered calls and messages. I suspect that the roadworks will be finished sooner than me getting a response. The Sunday timetable may just have to be left a mystery.

The epic disassembling of the bus timetable left me quite exhausted when I should have been keen to go and do something constructive. The weather had started to clear near the middle of the day and by the middle of the afternoon it was looking remarkably like one of those fine days we used to get. I did my best to ignore it and spent an inordinate amount of time doing begger all during the rest of the afternoon. Ah, well.

Did I say that today was the first day that the sea had not been throwing its weight around. It must have heard me because when I took the girls around late in the afternoon, the swell had increased to wave watcher worthy proportions. It was fair lumping over the near side of the Harbour wall and in the Harbour itself, it was boiling away nicely. Head height waves were rolling across the bay and breaking close in with their tops pulled back by the easterly breeze. The breaking waves over Cowloe were making a show of themselves for the several watchers in the Harbour car park, escorted by big waves rolling down Tribbens.

I noted that the temperature had dropped as we walked around the block but when I checked the Land's End weather station, the ambient temperature was actually up

on yesterday. I concluded that the sharp easterly wind had introduced quite a hefty windchill to the day. Still, it looked pretty.

I wrapped up my day by taking Mother home. The Missus had her very important meeting across the road, which took her away for a couple of hours. With a journey away deep tomorrow, I slipped away for an early night when she got back, hoping that the timetable ghouls would leave me alone.

## March 4<sup>th</sup> – Wednesday

If we were to fill every unforgiving minute with sixty seconds' worth of distance run, we certainly gave it our best shot today. It was pretty relentless and at the end of it had very little to show for it. In fact, our footprint on the day was barely visible to the naked eye – of even a fully clothed one for that matter.

I was out of the blocks so early, sparrows had not even given thought to their first gastric expansion of the day. Even the girls were a little alarmed by my urgency, although they will soon need to be used to it. I had done much preparation the day before and had reaffirmed the schedule in my head at some point in the middle of the night. We even managed to escape the gravitation full of The Cove eroding only twenty minutes of the forty-five minutes buffer time I had built into the journey.

Our destination was Plymouth and the hospital that had very successfully undickied my dickie knee. After leaving The Cove, we still needed to stop at a neighbour's house just outside the village to collect he crutches that he no longer needed. Mine were already in the back of the truck. The next stop after that was Mother's in St Buryan, heading around the long way because the normal lane is closed for a week for some sort of work or other.

When we got to Penzance, we were still not done with stops as we needed fuel for the journey and the Missus insisted on a cup of coffee from the Costalot facility close by. It was only then that we were on our way and judging from the amount of buffer we had eroded by this point in the journey, I somehow needed to make up some time along the route. Clearly, this needed to be done with skill and strategy because it is illegal to drive faster than the 70 miles per hour limit on the A30 dual-carriageway section.

I must have been exceedingly skilful as we arrived at the hospital with ten minutes to spare. I booked in for my appointment and almost immediately had to return to the truck because I had forgotten my spectacles. When I returned and as I headed for a seat in the waiting area, the consultant called me as I passed his door. After a two and a half hour journey, I had a very succinct two and a half minute consultation at the conclusion of which both parties seemed to be satisfied with each other's respective performances. I even established conclusively that I would technically be able to kneel on the affected knee but that it might be so uncomfortable for me to not wish to do it.

Rather than waste a five hour round trip, the appointment rather fortuitously coincided with a trade fair at the Royal Cornwall showground in Wadebridge. I had not appreciated, because I had not look, how close Wadebridge was to Plymouth making it even more convenient. This trade show was predominantly for the hospitality trade and most of the stalls were food or drink orientated. If you arrived hungry and thirsty, you would leave sated beyond expectation as the proliferation of samples of both are legion. Should you be so inclined, you could arrive early doors and leave in the middle of the afternoon very much in your cups – bladdered, slaughtered, mullered, banjaxed, blotted, k-lined, kaned, pished, plastered, pie-eye or wasted all for free. We both demurred on this occasion – the Missus because she does not imbibe, and although no longer likely, if I felt like drinking the Missus would take great delight in declining to stop on the return journey for any sort of comfort break.

Instead, we met a great number of sales representatives keen that we should avail ourselves of their business propositions of one sort or another. We may well during the course of the coming season and one in particular, Cornish pasta, is more likely than most. We took a good hour to peruse all the stalls of interest and came away with samples of this and that. One of which was pizza bases that we exploited for our tea later on.

I was aware that there was Lifeboat activity planned for latter part of the afternoon. I had signalled my absence and the unlikelihood that I would be back in time. As it was, we arrive back in The Cove just minutes after the arranged first meeting time – there were two planned launches. After we had unpacked and released the girls from their motoring confinement, I headed across the road to see the state of play.

Clearly, I had not paid much attention to the order of events planned at the station because I thought that the Inshore boat was launching twice in quick succession. It was in fact the big boat, an arrangement organised for a visiting television film crew, that was first to launch, just shortly after I arrived. Having recovered from the surprise, I joined the very excellent Shore Crew who had attended in my absence. The plan had been a launch and a pause while the appropriate slipway was prepared and a recovery immediately after. If the film crew had been dissatisfied with their footage, they would have asked us to do it all again. Fortunately, they were happy with what they had so the process was concluded after what was clearly a textbook recovery up the short slip. You will have to take my word for the fact that it was, indeed, a textbook recovery because the film crew packed up and went home after recording the launch. We are, after all, a very under-appreciated, very excellent Shore Crew.

Not five minutes after the boat was tucked away for the next service, the same crew gathered for an Inshore boat exercise launch. This launch was a practise run for a soon to be signed off new Helmsperson, from which nomenclature you may determine that it is a lady helmsperson, the first for this station, I believe. Everything

in done by the book for the training including a detailed briefing for all members of the respective crews.

We launched the Inshore boat near high water into a slightly kinder tide than the last effort at high water. The boat would be gone for the next hour or so and we retired to the crew room for tea and biscuits. Since the Coxswain was there too, it provided the opportunity to iron out some of the training system issues we had discovered around the Tooktrak drivers and Inshore head launchers not being recorded properly. Where once we were under the impression that all the Tooktrak drivers were automatically 'head launchers' it seems the system though different. We are now woefully undermanned in both Tooktrak and head launcher roles because of the administrative mess-up. We discussed how we might resolve it.

It was a thorny issue and took some time to reach agreement by which time the Inshore boat had returned. We decamped and efficiently recovered the boat onto the trailer in a moderate swell near high water. Half an hour later, we were done and I was headed back for my tea. We are, after all, a very hungry, very excellent Shore Crew.

## March 5<sup>th</sup> – Thursday

Gool Peran Lowen – Happy St Patrick's Day.

Alright, do not get frosty with me, I know that it is St Piran – I could hardly miss it with Radio Pasty pulling out all the stops on the pasty and flag front. It is likely that the man's name was actually Kiran. In the Cornish language of the time, they did not do a hard 'K' sound, so Piran was easier on the tongue even if it was not easy on the brain to believe he surfed in on a Millstone.

I had arranged an appointment in town for eleven o'clock. That may sound like plenty of time to get things done before hand, but it evaporated pretty quickly after the morning administration, having some breakfast and rounding off the bus times enquiry.

A very pleasant lady sent me a message yesterday telling me that I had become confused with the temporary and original bus times. If we had a telephone conversation, we would have sorted out in a couple of minutes. As it was, we played ping pong with messages as we each tried to grapple with the other's perspective. It took until last night to work out that she was on a different page to me – quite literally – as she was talking about the downloadable PDF version and I was talking about the online screen version. When I explained and sent her a screenshot, we immediately found our common ground. I would be able to fix the Sunday timetable I was working on and she – very quickly as it happened – fixed the online screen version that was very wrong and very confusing.

I made it into town with a little time to spare and for the second time in two days had a meeting that seemed hardly worth the time of travel, except this one really did need to be face to face. The brevity of the meeting meant that I could move on to the other task I had decided to do while I was in town and that was wash down the truck.

The truck goes in for a service on Monday, and I think it is probably fair that the underside at least is clean while the boys work on it. The fact that I am very likely to have to take it up to The Farm tomorrow or Saturday is really neither here nor there. It is likely to be cleaner than it was regardless. Since it will not go through a car wash because of the roof bars, I need to use one of those power washer stations. I prefer them anyway as you have more control and I am able to give more attention to the areas that need it.

Once upon a time they had one of these washing machines in St Buryan. I could turn up at any time during the weekdays and be first in the queue. At the Tesmorburys store in Penzance, it is far busier and I had to wait for two cars in front of me to finish first. Given that it is a year since I last washed the truck, it did not take as much washing down as you might imagine. However, once a wash would have left the motor looking quite spruce and shiny. When I finished this time, although the mud had gone there was no lustre at all, just a dull surface where every minute scratch could be seen.

The weather forecast for tomorrow was looking worthy of a bit of greenhouse roof fixing. It crossed my mind that I should drop by The Farm in the way home to check how many fixings I had and gather the relevant items together so I was not wasting time looking for things when we started work. I agonised over this for a minute or two before deciding that I would not bother. By going home when I did, I would be back in time to take the girls to the beach and also oversee Lifeboat launching operations. I had already established that there were enough crew operationally but needed to ensure the right training system boxes were ticked for the right people.

By the time I got home and unloaded the truck – I also stopped off at Tesmorburys for the Missus' coffee whitener – she had already departed with the girls. This was most helpful as it would enable me to attend the station ahead of the launch. I did not need to be there for the briefing, so I stopped by for a cup of tea first and was there as the crews headed up to the Inshore boathouse. I had a look down on the Harbour beach while they were there. The timing of the launch had been very cleverly arranged for a little after the turn of the tide. Half an hour earlier and there would have been insufficient water in the Harbour to get the boat out. I tarried to watch the boat launch and retired to the crew room to sort the paperwork out.

Part of the administration is to record the sea state, moderate, and the wind speed and direction, southerly and Force 2-3. Less than three hours later, the wind had gone northerly, increased to Force 7-8 and the sea state had become rough to very rough. A messed-up weather front had passed over us, cold to the north and south and warm overhead. It brought with it a sudden stream of Arctic air and took our

temperature from reasonable to bloody freezing in the space of an hour. It was quite a shock to the system and although we were aware of the change coming – the big Lifeboat launch for later was cancelled – the extremity of it was certainly unexpected.

The big lump of rain that we had seen coming and scheduled to arrive with the weather front, went north of us and we did not see a drop of it. Later, a weak band of rain followed on with showers in varying degrees of heaviness. While the rain was not that intense, it was thrown at us with some ferocity by the strong northwesterly and made it seem much worse.

We seemed to have to wait an interminable time for the results of our new helmsperson's passing out. It was not until gone four o'clock that the message come through that we now have the station's first lady helm. How about that, then.

## March 6<sup>th</sup> – Friday

The wind was still howling in the eaves when I awoke this morning. It had been forecast to begger off during the night but had clearly decided to hang about, only very slowly decreasing during the day. It was just as well that my oppo whom I had asked to help with the greenhouse roof could not make it today as I had planned. The various bits of panelling would have been halfway down the field.

I was determined not to be idle today just because the plans had changed. There was plenty to do in the shop instead. So, putting my maximum effort into it and pulling out all the stops, I was utterly idle until near the middle of the day when I had to get off my backside to collect Mother. Just as I did so, the girls started circling, so I had to divert and take them out first onto the Harbour beach. It was as I was heading down that I noticed how resplendent the big beach looked under the clear blue skies and bright sunshine – not to mention the blustery northerly. Irresistible.

I let the girls run riot on the Harbour beach for fifteen minutes. It was clear then that they could do with a longer run, so I promised them I would take them on a stank down the big beach when I got back. I am sure somewhere deep in my head there is a gamester at play, giving me ample excuse to put off doing any work for as long as possible.

It also played into my subconscious self that I have to drive the long way around to collect Mother as the short route is temporarily closed making it even longer before I started work. I had a geek as I drove by and they have a trench dug along one side of the road going away from the junction. At a guess, it is Wildanet, the fibre broadband company that had its funding pulled recently. I presume someone still has money to allow them to continue with their immediate commitments, but I am not sure what will happen to their longer term arrangements.

Out of direct influence of the breeze in St Buryan, it was decidedly warmer than it was in The Cove. That is not to say that it was warm, just the windchill had less of a hand in it. I suspect that in the direct sunlight and in some shelter, it probably was quite warm, but I never had the chance to find out.

True to my word, I kitted up to take the girls on a longer stank than they had earlier. I took some time to decide whether it would be big boy trousers and leggings against the stiff breeze or to risk it with little boy trousers. I decided on the latter and did not regret it. Once we had a pace on us – it is relative as the girls stop every couple of yards for a sniff – I hardly felt the chill at all. There were some places on the Coast Path as we headed to the Valley that were positively balmy. It was in fact an exceedingly pleasant afternoon.

We met one walker on the Coast Path and when we looked down on the beach, there were very few people about. As we descended onto the beach just the other side of The Valley, there were just two couples on the whole expanse of sand before us. This was most comforting, especially the absence of other dogs. Just before I left the Missus announced that BB had just come into season. She would be a little walking pot pourri of pheromones, inviting the unwanted attentions of boy dogs from miles about. I am not sure it would concern me greatly, but the Missus has always wondered how dog breeder can give away the little mites that they produce. What would concern me more is a houseful of a dozen pups that she would not relinquish. I was therefore on my mettle for breaches of our exclusion zone.

Our vigilant walk across the beach was, nevertheless, entirely pleasant, stopping for a chat with some people we knew and watching the girls chase and immerse themselves in ice cold rockpools along the way. There is still much sand deposited at the southern end of the beach and the big ramp all along at the back is now flat with no big field of rocks until well back against the dunes. If we have no further changes before the season starts, the beach is in good shape to welcome our proliferation of visitors.

Having idled for most of the day, I wasted no time in getting my behind downstairs to start work. Alright, I did have a cup of tea and a biscuit – so, sue me. I had no real master plan, knowing only that the floor would need to be mopped ahead of moving all the displays back to their normal places. Ahead of that, there were some Christmas decorations that had eluded my initial sweep, which are now in the back of the truck along with other items destined to be stored at The Farm.

I had quite forgotten that we had intended to replace one of the two commercial mats we have. The plan being to move the one currently inside the first electric sliding door in The Cove to behind the counter and the one behind the counter to the tip, sorry, Household Waste Recycling Centre, where it will be tipped. After I had got as far as clearing away the detritus and mopping the floor and any surfaces that needed it at the top end of the shop, I repaired upstairs to research rugs.

It should have been a simple case of selecting a supplier of which there is a plethora, selecting a rug of the correct size and colour and ordering it. Unfortunately, I came across an offer that we could have a rug with our logo on it for what looked like a reasonable sum. To establish the full amount, we would need to submit a image of our logo. We have a number of different renderings of our logo none of which have a charcoal grey coloured background and a light enough logo to go on top of it. I would need to modify one of the existing images first and then upload that.

We have recently acquired some software that the Missus can use to design her posters and I can use to manipulate photographic images. This was a necessity because the previous software packages had become unsupported. We are both unfamiliar with the new software to the extent that I did not have a clue how I would modify one of the logos to fit our requirements and I found myself disappearing down a rabbit hole of advice and tutorials, none of which quite seemed to do what I wanted. The simple act of creating a charcoal grey background, for example appeared to be a task of unsurmountable complexity. It was probably as well that teatime intervened otherwise I would even now still be sitting at the screen wondering which button to try next. I resolved to try again tomorrow for a limited time and if I could make no headway then, would simply purchase a plain rug.

So deep was I in my battle of man against machine that I had forgotten entirely about running the girls out for their late afternoon walk. I took them after tea instead when the dusk was fast become night and a thin remnant of a spectacular sunset still lay at the western horizon. There was a sharp pinpoint of light due west in the sky that I took to be Jupiter – I meant to check but forgot.

It was a fitting end to a turbulent day when the last of the bluster from the north was eventually fading away. When we went out later for our last run, the wind had gone completely but the sea, as ever, was a couple of scats behind and still thrashing around in the darkness. It had at least stopped lumping over the Harbour wall by that time. It was soon to be my turn to be thrashing around in the darkness as I considered the last bit of stock taking: all our groceries and the necessary disposal of out of date goods.

## March 7<sup>th</sup> – Saturday

I hauled myself out of bed in a better frame of mind to carry on with the shop today. I still did not get downstairs until eleven o'clock but given that I have two weeks holiday left, I did not feel too badly about it.

Not knowing quite what to expect, I togged up warmly against an expected chilly morning and was not all that disappointed. It was indeed quite sharp out but the wind that had gone last night was still gone this morning. We had also accumulated a bit of cloud cover at some point during the night, but it was reasonably high up and let in

a lot of the brightness of the day. It did its best to spoil that by the end of the afternoon but for most of the day, it was quite acceptable in a pleasant sort of way.

After the morning administration and a bit of breakfast, I returned to the conundrum of producing an image for our door mat. Our logo is blue on a white background but for the mat, we needed it white on a charcoal grey background. I was clearly of fresher mind in the morning as I managed to produce the background fairly easily and at the right scaled dimensions for the mat. Getting the colour right was another problem and in the end I had to add a text note to the application explaining the shade that I was trying to achieve electronically.

Extracting the design from the white background also happened quite straightforwardly, although if you asked me to do it again, I doubt that I would remember which buttons and options I pressed. It being all the same colour made it easier, as I could select it by colour. It was then just a matter of overlaying it on the background and adjusting the size so it fitted. A piece of cake, if you will, but probably akin to making a Japanese cotton cheesecake with lark's tongue topping and alba white truffle flakes carved into gnus for decoration. After all the effort, and a blessing from the Missus, it was a relief to discover that it would only cost an arm rather than the usual two limb combo.

I really did waste no time after that to head downstairs with a bucket of soapy water. I had left the mop ready for use leaned up against the windbreaks. Before I could start, however, I had to move all the things from the bottom half of the shop to their usual place in the top half of the shop. This also included getting shot of the cardboard boxes that we had used for several years to display the body boards and replace them with the new stands.

It did not take more than a minute to establish that the space that two cardboard boxes occupied one in front of the other, was insufficient for two new stands to do the same. This might have spelled disaster had I not reasoned that I could probably dispense with the skim board frame that was barely adequate, put two of the new stands side by side and mix the smaller bodyboards and the skimboards on the same stand. The remaining two new stands just about could be arranged one in front of the other. I will still have a problem when the new jewellery stand arrives, but I will build that bridge after I have fallen in the river.

Rather than mop the floor, I started on the shelves. These accumulate black dust at a rather alarming rate. They only get cleaned once a year which is wholly inadequate but perhaps better than not doing it at all. I have not concluded whether the dust gets blown in from outside or falls from the ceiling, dislodged by footfall from above. I recall once when the conditions aligned, we were inundated for days with airborne dust from the fields up in the village. The dust on our shelves generally is similar to that but on a much reduced scale, so perhaps it arrives from outside. Wherever it comes from, it is a constant nuisance on the white shelves that are most obvious,

such as between the bottles on the beer shelf. It is particularly a problem with lower shelves which adds credence to the idea that it blows in from outside.

The process is excruciatingly tedious as everything needs to be removed from the shelves, the shelf washed and the items put back again. It is the sort of task that the Missus is good at and relishes and falls into the same category as jigsaw puzzles. In fact, she normally does it and, indeed, offered but was busy doing something else and I was keen to get it done. I am ever mindful that the amount of other work is mounting up and we are running out of time.

It took me a couple of hours to finish half the shop. The remaining half of the middle aisle and the grocery aisle will be done on Monday. I cannot get up to The Farm on Monday because the truck is going in for its service and MOT test.

Somehow, I also managed to get a stank to the beach in with the girls. I took them down after I had rearranged the shop furniture and before I had started the cleaning work in earnest. It was not quite the glorious day we had yesterday, but it was decent enough for a scant across the beach and mild too. I dispensed with a jacket and little boy trousers were more than adequate. Unlike yesterday, too, the beach was crowded – there were at least twenty people milling about including a surf school session down on the tideline.

We had plenty of beach to avoid everyone and still BB elected to stray as close to people as she could. She just cannot help herself. On the outward journey we stayed close to the sea where there were fewer people. From sea level, the waves that looked tame from higher up, were at least head height. The surf school had picked a spot where the waves were reasonably sedate but as we walked north, the waves increased in force, size, frequency and ferocity. There was good surfing closer to North Rocks where a photographer was capturing a particularly showy piece of tube riding by some exponent of the waves. Looking out towards Gwenver, the waves were huge and just plain vicious, breaking in tumbling chaos all the way out at Aire Point and across the breadth of the beach.

At North Rocks, we tarried while the girls had a proper swim in a sizeable rockpool there. They do like to cool off, even on cold days, and sometimes even before they have got warm. I think it is any excuse to dive into a bit of water and get wet. From there we ambled back in front of the dunes and the rocks there where there is a bit more interest for them to sniff and ferret.

I had not quite made up my mind yesterday, but it was cleared today that the sand on the south of the beach from the chip shop on, has been eroded away. I always find it difficult to tell, or maybe remember, just how far the sand is along that stretch; was there more or less rock than last time I looked? There is definitely less, I decided and definitely fewer rockpool on the bit that is exposed, which is about half of what there was a few weeks ago.

It was an excellent bit of diversion before I had to return to my cleaning duties. ABH on the other hand was captured not long after she got back and the Missus proceeded to give her a hearty shave and manicure. It took as long as I did cleaning the shelves, poor mite. She is half the size now and ready for the warmer weather. It remains to be seen if she is as keen to dive into cold rockpools for a while.

## March 8<sup>th</sup> – Sunday

The wind had gone around to the southwest yesterday. It took 24 hours to bring its moisture laden air to us and fill The Cove – and probably much of the Far West – with mist. There had been drizzle with it, mizzle, earlier in the morning but when we went out, late for once, it was merely soggy air and mild with it. So mild, in fact, that it had attracted half a dozen ladies wot swim to the Harbour, splashing about and making an awful racket with shrieks and laughter. All that enjoying yourself on a Sunday morning is, I am sure, against nature.

The sea was in turmoil again. It was a bit rough in the Harbour at the time the ladies were there and as we tarried at the end of the Harbour car park, we watched the waves lop over the Harbour wall. It was dancing and boiling in a white watery mess over Cowloe and the Tribbens were a chaos of waves unsure of the direction they were heading. It was marvellous to stand and watch while the girls sniffed around the patch of grass behind where the wartime latrines had been. It took me some time before I realised that they had been built with the door on the seaward side, presumably to allow more discreet access. How coy we were back then.

There was not much point in starting anything as I would have to stop soon after commencement. Mother needed to be picked up, and I was heading for the range soon after. It did give me sufficient time to panic when I realised that I had done nothing about the VAT quarter end that finished at the end of February. The invoices need to be placed in order and keyed into the Making Tax Difficult system. On the upside, during this quarter there are not too many of them. Conversely, there are more of the little slips of receipts that are tediously small, difficult to annotate and easy to lose. I shall do some on Monday, I told myself.

I then remembered that I was going to order some replacement shelves. The bottom shelf of the stand where the buckets sit is terribly rusty. Its adjoining partners are going that way too. I suppose it is the thought of the salt water that would at some stage causing the problem. I can assure any casual bucket and spade buyer that it is not that the buckets have previously been used – honest guv. Anyway, I had forgotten to measure them when I had the chance yesterday and had to go down on purpose to do it this morning.

I had expected to look and compare several suppliers. The last time I made a small purchase for similar shelving items because I had forgotten them on the bulk order, they wanted to charge an exorbitant amount for carriage. So, I was pleasantly

surprised that the first supplier I chose were to charge just five pounds for the service.

That done I found that I still had at least an hour before I needed to leave for the range. Rather than twiddle my thumbs in an idle sort of way, I dived in with the invoices. It did not take long to put them in date order as there were only about sixty in total and some of those were statements that do not need processing. There was still time after that to start the inputting and I managed to complete about half of them.

I would have done more, but the software company that rents me access to the software at a premium rate – there is nothing cheap about Making Tax Difficult – had changed the interface completely. Where once the button to bring up the input screen was on the first screen, it was now completely absent. It took me an age to discover that it had been placed, along with a number of dissimilar functions under a tiny icon buried in a lengthy menu, called ‘Create’. Really obvious when you think of it - or had exhausted all the other possible alternatives.

It was therefore a blessed relief when I could pack my pistol and head for the hills where I could shoot small holes in paper targets – very meaningfully. I have found that a half day in the pursuit of this entertainment quite enough in my present condition. I had never stopped to realise just how much physical effort we expend running out after each shooter to patch and reset targets or, indeed, how much tea I consume in the process. It was also immensely pleasing that it was mild enough to dispense with a jacket, and we were not rained on for the duration of the session.

We were, however, in a constant cloud of varying thickness that kept a bit of a chill running through the mild air. While it did not rain, there was enough moisture in the air to keep everything damp. When I had left The Cove earlier, the overnight mist had started to clear. It was as I climbed to the top of Cove Hill it got a little thicker and when I made the final ascent to Carn Grean, we were back to full head in a cloud conditions.

As evening came on, the fog got thicker. The F&L had put on another quiz in aid of the Crew Fund that we collect for in the shop. Since its modest and somewhat clandestine beginnings, it has become more commonly known and appreciated and even has a more official counterpart at the station. The organiser of the quiz very kindly added the Crew Fund to the list of charities the quizzes collect for. As such, we were happy to go along and show some support, although we were late after taking Mother home.

Taking Mother home was an adventure by itself. The fog had closed in to be the worst we had seen it for a while. We have forward fog lights on the truck, but we would have found a white stick or a chap walking ahead waving a flag more help. I would guess that visibility was down below 20 metres in places and we advanced at

a crawl to avoid dropping into a ditch. We are, fortunately, familiar with the road else it would have been an even more tricky drive.

We joined the Lifeboat team halfway through the quiz and participated only on the fringes after we arrived. It would be easy to claim that our influence was key but in the end we only contributed to one answer, and the team won the quiz. Even the fog celebrated by lifting a little as we made our way home. It was a pleasant interlude to our normal run of things if I could only blank out the trauma brought on by the price of a pint.

## March 9<sup>th</sup> – Monday

I went fast asleep to wide awake very quickly this morning. Usually, it is an orderly process of waking up, collecting thoughts and checking everything is where I left it the night before and eventually getting out of bed when I deem the time to be right. This morning, there were no niceties involved and I was up and at them, whatever 'them' is, in one swift manoeuvre. It put me right off my stride, I can tell you.

The issue was that I had to get the truck to the garage for its service in a timely manner to give the mechanics an even chance of getting all the work done in a day. I had a sneaking suspicion that it would be more than one day, anyway, because I seem to recall that there was a bit more to do this year; shock absorbers, overhead foxbats, and mainspring flanges greased, that sort of thing. Before I set off, there were a number of things to do, not least finishing off *The Diary* for the previous day with enough time to publish it and walking the girls. I got around to walking the girls, but *The Diary* had to wait, apologies.

We make an arrangement with the garage that we take a loan vehicle for the duration of the work, which is very good of them. It is not *all* that good of them as it never has any fuel in it and if we need to go further than to The Cove and back, we must fuel up. I did not bother on this occasion, as I did not think we would be using it much. I had forgotten all about Mother having an appointment in St Just which is the opposite direction of the most convenient petrol stations. I had also forgotten Mother's blue park anywhere card – another unforgivable misdemeanour.

On the bright side, the garage had swapped out their aging courtesy Model T Fords for a spanking new, well, fourteen year old Audi A1 Sport. It was in remarkably good shape for its age and apart from some odd stickers on the paintwork – the faded remnants of go-faster stripes, perhaps – it looked the part as well. I took a few minutes before going to get used to the feeling of being posh and being in a vehicle that was not covered in rust and mud. I then explored where all the buttons and levers were that I would need to press and pull to make it go to where I wanted it to and reasonably safely. I must say, it was very nippy and clung to the road and the corners like a limpet. It handbrake turns very sharply and makes for excellent donuts in the Harbour car park.

It was about an hour later that the Missus reminded me that she would be driving it to take Mother to her appointment. I told her about the fuel situation but said that there would be enough to get her to Penzance, where she was heading after the appointment, so she could put some petrol in it. I had actually remembered to ask which fuel type it took. Usually, I arrive at the petrol station and have to gamble that there is a label on it somewhere.

Not five minutes later, as I was halfway through a very palatable scrambled egg on toast breakfast, the Missus called to tell me that the car would not start. It was at this point that I remembered that I had not turned off the headlights which I turn on regardless of the weather or time of day when driving anywhere. The truck takes care of such carelessness by giving off an audible alarm if I have left the lights on and if I ignore that, it will turn them off for me. The Audi apparently has no such feature and happily allowed me to depart the stationery vehicle with the headlights blazing.

We have one of those small and very effective power packs that I have used on numerous occasions to start visitor cars when they have found themselves in such predicaments. We keep it in the back of the truck in case we ever need it ourselves. This is where it still was, six miles away on the ramp at the garage at Buryas Bridge. Fortunately, the Lifeboat station has one, kept in the Inshore Lifeboat shed – or more accurately *had* one in the ILB shed. I went up to the crew room to ask where it was, interrupting a meeting of three Lifeboat mechanics who, without being asked, leapt to my assistance.

It seems that the Harbour keeps a power pack and our Coxswain, also a fisherman, went off to get it while the remaining two mechanics assessed the issues, the first being there was no battery under the lid. Apparently, it is in the boot which we could not get to because the keys were not working because the battery was dead. Being experienced mechanics, they quickly worked out that there were terminals under the bonnet but not immediately obvious which were positive and negative.

We were all rather surprised that the battery had run down so completely after what was not a very long time with the lights on. They suspected that the battery was not as efficient as perhaps it might be. Attaching the Harbour power pack initially had little effect, only to light up the dashboard panel with a warning that the security lock had engaged. To release the lock, the car needed to be unlocked with key fob which was not working because there was insufficient power.

They eventually got the car started after waiting a while for the power pack to transfer sufficient power. During the stalemate, the Missus had to cancel Mother's appointment. Since we were still not sure about the state of the battery, I arranged that I would head into town to do the shopping that the Missus intended to do and, on the way, collect our power pack from the garage just in case it was needed. This I did, but again forgot the get out of jail free parking badge.

Once in town I also stopped at the petrol station. Another thing that I had forgotten to check was how to open the fuel filler door. Each vehicle seems to be different with either a press of the door itself or a lever or switch inside the car. I remembered that I had forgotten to ask as I pulled alongside the pump, quite fortuitously on the correct side, having forgotten to establish that as well. Just to further define my predicament, I had apparently chosen the busiest time of the day and immediately a car pulled up behind me to wait its turn.

Now under pressure, and since I could not immediately see a button or lever, I tried pressing the fuel cap door which resolutely refused to move. Convinced therefore that there must be an internal lever or button, I went about searching all the obvious places and when that offered no positive result, looked in a few not so obvious places, including the passenger side since it was a foreign car. There was either no button or lever, or it was exceedingly well hidden. As I imagined the driver of the car behind me seething with impatience, I decided it was prudent to withdraw, find a less inconvenient spot and recommence my search.

One of my sweeps of the interior included the glove compartment wherein I found the car's documents and user guide. Remembering the acronym RTFM, that encourages the daft and hard of thinking to make use of such a guide, I thumbed through for instructions that should reveal the whereabouts of the elusive switch. It became clear very quickly that there was no such hidden button and I had merely failed to push the door in the correct spot or hard enough. Sure enough, when I tried again, it sprang open with ease.

If I thought that the day had finished with its unrelenting torrent of vicissitudes upon my person and that no further punishment or ignominy could be lavished upon me, I was gravely mistaken. Relieved that I had found a solution to the filler cap issue, I casually drove back to the petrol pumps. Parking at a convenient spot, I got out of the car and pressed the button to seek attention from the attendant. I suppose that I should be grateful that I could not see him at this point because his face would have been a mask of derision, I am sure. I had picked the only pump on the forecourt that had large caps over both the pump handles that I might have selected showing that they were out of use. I had to climb back into the car, manoeuvre around a car that had queued up behind me and move to a working pump. The only comfort that I might derive from any part of my existence in the previous hour or so was that the car started each time after I switched it off.

I should have taken note and found greater enjoyment in my drive home because it was the only time I was not standing up doing something until well into the afternoon. No sooner had I arrived home and discovered that we were already into the early part of the afternoon, I went immediately – well, after a cup of tea and a biscuit – remember I had abandoned half my breakfast earlier – down to the shop to continue my work on cleaning shelves and making ready for opening the shop.

There is no easy method or shortcut in cleaning the shelves or mopping the floors. It is simply a case of getting on with it. I had thought that I had done half of the middle aisle the day before but discovered that it was rather less than that. I also discovered when I updated our inventory records with data from The Farm that I had omitted to count the t-shirts in the shop. There are not that many of these and we will need to place an order this year, at least for children's sizes. We might manage for adult ones until next year, which will be helpful.

I found that having finished the shelves I had to mop the middle aisle again having already done that area before I moved the furniture back. The shelves are dusty enough that it affects the floor when they are swept. Also doing the gift aisle it only left the grocery aisle which I will do after I or the Missus finishes with the shelves.

The next thing to do was to sweep the groceries for out of date stock. Over the years we have become quite efficient at running down the stock levels but sometimes it is inescapable that whole cases of, say, crisps and soft drinks are left over. I went around the aisle with a trolley and deposited the items in it for sorting into donation or throwing away. This is the hardest and most traumatic job of all for a grumpy and tight shopkeeper; it is difficult seeing the best before dates with eyes full of tears.

Most of the out of date stock were indeed crisps and soft drinks – they commonly are. The date refers to the 'best before' date and the products themselves are most usually perfectly edible or drinkable. Unfortunately, many of our customers would eschew such purchases fearing that they would be poisoned by mouldy and contaminated produce – we struggle to get rid of bread with two days left on the date, for heaven's sake. There are occasionally some products that are indeed beyond the pail, and I poured a dozen bottles of orange juice down the drain outside.

Given that I was a quivering and weeping vessel after such horrific actions, I decided to retire after delivering the boxes and bags to the Lifeboat station. No one feeds Lifeboat persons at home and any food delivered to the station disappears almost the moment it arrives. It is a well-known fact. That I was not mobbed by ravenous persons in yellow when I dropped it off was itself something of a curiosity.

That was it, as far as I was concerned. I had endured more than could be expected of a normal person in the pursuit of simply getting from one end of the day to the other. I had every intention of shutting the door, gluing myself to the sofa for the remainder of the evening and excluding the vagaries of the outside world forever – or at least tomorrow. Then I remembered I had to take the girls out. Later, then.

## March 10<sup>th</sup> – Tuesday

I am pleased to report that I had a far less traumatic day today. In fact, it was so devoid of effort or concern that I ended up being concerned that I had not put in enough effort to bring us closer to being ready to open the shop on Saturday week. I

should say that I was not entirely idle, it was just that the things that I did failed to match up with my expectations for the day.

It had been my intention to head down to the shop to continue my work there but the nearest I got to the shop was to get the can of easing oil I had left by the door. On my walk around the block with the girls in the morning, I met a couple staying in one of the houses in the mews. They asked if I could fix the lock on the bin which has rusted up and seized through lack of use. I attended to it when I came back and saw that someone had knocked the waterproof cover off the lock, which explained why it was in such a parlous state. I will now have to attend to it on a more regular basis. It needs a new lock, really, but if I do that, it will have a different key to the lock on our bin and require me to carry two around.

I then became distracted by a number of tasks that I had on my mental list of things to do but kept relegating them to the bottom on my mental pile. They had rested so long in obedience that they had now become reasonably time critical. During the stock take it had become clear that we were short of some things we would need before the Easter holidays. Since we were expecting a delivery from the relevant supplier next week, it was important to get the items added to the order they already had, so it would all come together. It will be major task landed on our laps in the middle of next week, but I am hoping that everything will be ready by then and we will have time to sort it out without panicking. If everything is ready ahead of the delivery, it will be the first time in 22 years that it is. Normally, we are working into the night the day before opening.

The task of preparing the new order took far longer than I anticipated. Adding in arranging the reinstatement of our regular bin collections and notifying our big cash and carry supplier that we would be placing our first order of the new season for delivery on Saturday, simply pushed the time on still further. Before I knew it, time had come around to pick Mother up in the nippy little loan Audi. I think that if we did not have the need to move large amounts of stock about it would do us very nicely, although I think we would miss being higher up and I struggled a bit to get into it. It just seemed such a waste, all that effort on working out how to open the filler cap only to hand it back the next day.

The Missus was on hand when I came back to dissuade me from going down to the shop. She said that she would do the grocery aisle tomorrow: stock count, shelf clean and mopping. This left me free to finish off inputting the invoices into the accounts packaged which took a good amount of time. The Missus offered to do this as well on Sunday night. We then diverted to support the quiz at the F&L. I hope there are no similar diversions tomorrow because I have to do the cash and carry order by the end of Thursday or we will not get our delivery on Saturday.

It was this that reminded me that I should call the people at the cash and carry to ensure that our account is unlocked. It only happened the once, but because we had not used the system over the winter, they suspended our account. We only

discovered at the last knockings and there was a bit of a panic whether we could get it unlocked in time. I had to send a message to the delivery manager and after a while he responded saying that all was well.

The other big outstanding task is the greenhouse roof. My oppo who offered to help was not available last week and the weather was against us. Time is rapidly running out, so I am keeping an eye on when the next window of opportunity might be. Looking at the weather forecast yesterday, it showed that Wednesday would be dry all day but a little breezy from the northwest. When I looked again today, the forecast had changed to rain in the morning on Wednesday and a bleddy gale of wind Thursday. All the rest of the days stretching into next week show the obligatory rain every day forever. The weather overview on the news site suggests high pressure will be back next week but this is not reflected in the daily forecasts. It is of no help whatever and the only recourse is to look out of the window in the morning.

It was late in the day when the garage called to say that the truck was ready. They told me there was little wrong on the MOT test front, but there was a wiring issue with one of the rear light clusters which I should be able to repair myself with a new wiring loom that I might be able to find on one of the Internet auction sites. The biggest issue is rust that will become increasing worse until it is a big problem. The only way forward is to get rid of the truck sooner rather than later.

We had been considering a replacement for a little while now. I am sure I have mentioned before that the truck is a rubbish alternative to a van for carrying loads and a rubbish alternative to a car because it is big and cumbersome. The only thing that it is good for, and it is a big plus, is getting us along the lane to The Farm without knocking the sump out and moving around the field in wet weather when the four wheel drive and low gears are essential.

It is a conundrum or a Hobson's choice, perhaps. The load carrying is perhaps the biggest issue and it is the Missus that is most affected. It is during the summer when carrying stock to and from The Farm becomes a major factor. She has managed for several years with the truck, so I left it to her to decide. After some thought, she came down on the side of having a van again. I have been here before and after a period of rain and mud at The Farm and a few bumpy rides up the lane have changed my mind and come back to the truck again.

To help bolster her decision on the van, I decided to ask at the garage when I went to collect the truck. One thing I thought might help with the van is if it could be raised a little to improve the ground clearance; I recall our first ex-AA van had something like that. The boys at the garage sucked through their teeth and shook their heads. Apparently, this is not an easy task at all. They also offered that we should avoid a newer vehicle. I had thought to get as new a vehicle as we could afford as we would expect to have it for some time. They advised against it because newer vehicles have 'wet' timing belts, they run through an oil reservoir, and are prone to early deterioration. I was glad I asked!

The garage helped immediately with the project of acquiring a new vehicle by charging us very little - well, much less than I expected – for the service and requisite repairs to get through it. Lifts the heart, don't it.

## March 11<sup>th</sup> – Wednesday

I was quite excited that there was blue sky anywhere I looked out of the front windows this morning when I got up. It looked like we might have a sufficient window on the weather to go and do the greenhouse roof. It had been a lengthy wait, and we were fast running out of time to do it before the shop opened at the end of next week. My exuberance was such that I did not even let a couple of showers that arrived while I was contemplating taking the dogs out spoil my joie de vie.

The wind gusting to 35 miles per hour did introduce a bit of a waver in my cast iron resolve but I fully expected the wind to drop as the afternoon progressed. With no further opportunity available on the horizon, I called it and sent a message to my oppo to be ready at half past eleven o'clock for me to collect him to take him to The Farm.

Since I had missed Monday's gymnasium session, I was not about to miss a second one despite having much to do. I went as early as I could and followed it closely with a breakfast to give me enough time to get a few things done before I headed for The Farm. I was in the middle of my first mouthful when the refrigeration engineer called to say he was waiting outside. I had quite forgotten I had arranged for our service to be carried out this morning. I went down to let him in. He was one of the regular engineers, so I made sure he was alright and left him to it on his own. I had just eaten my breakfast when he knocked to tell me he was done with all the units on his list.

Quite frankly, I do not put much store in the visits. The engineers do little more than turn everything on, if it is out of season, and check they come up, or down, to temperature. In terms of preventive maintenance, it of little value but if it keeps the maintenance contract valid and they turn up when they are needed, fair enough.

It dovetailed nicely with having to leave for The Farm and picking up my pal on the way. The weather had cleared up as expected and the wind had indeed decreased, although it was still a difficult 25 miles per hour. We both felt we could have a look and decide if it was too much when we got there. Since the Missus would be working in the shop, I tool the girls with me so that they could run about while we were working. That almost worked. They ran about for a bit and then went and sat in the truck until we were finished. At least they did not get in the way.

The work was pretty straightforward, after all, we had done it before. It did not take very long either and because many of the fixings were on the edge of the roof, I

could reach them if I was very brave and stood on the third rung of the ladder. Even the cutting to size was easier because the sheets were in two shorter sections this time. Having established that this part of the roof was the weakest, I brought out some metal edgings, right angled metal sheets that form a protected edge along the length of the western end. I had the edgings from a previous project, so it was good to put them to use at last. The whole job took around an hour and a half.

During our absence, the Lifeboat station had seen some action thanks to the attendance of a visiting assessor. On the shore, we had administratively lost a number of Inshore boat head launchers. Once minute we had plenty, the next they were wiped from the system because there was not a 'plan' set up for them. The assessor had arrived to rectify the situation, putting the previously qualified head launchers through an assessment to make them qualified again. While he was here, he was also signing off, with competency or is it currency ticks, those whose qualifications had not been affected and that would leave us unmolested for a further five years.

All the assessments were supposed to be done at the same time commencing at six o'clock. Somehow, various people had turned up during the day and rather than put them off until later, they were assessed during the day. My oppo and I joined the fray after we got back from The Farm and took our turns in our respective roles of both Tooltrak driver and head launcher. We now do not need to be assessed for a further five years and neither did we need to attend in the evening.

I repaired to the shop where the Missus was knee deep in out of date stock and soap suds. She looked like she was enjoying herself, so I left her to it after bringing her succour in the form of coffee. I went upstairs to continue with anything I could continue with including seeking out and purchasing the wiring loom for the truck rear light that the garage had warned me about. The galling thing about this purchase was that the wiring loom came complete with a light cluster that I had only just purchased and replaced the week before.

The Missus takes the job very seriously and is much more thorough than me. She eventually emerged from the shop at gone four o'clock brandishing a list of out of date things, which frankly, was small beer. I have not valued the list along with the crisps and drinks I did the day before, but my guess is that the total is one of the smallest of all the years we have been running. They are the usual items, as well, mayonnaise, condiment sauces, cereals and jars of bleddy curry sauce. One surprise was rice. It did not occur to me that rice went off.

In all the excitement of the day, we somehow managed to miss delivery of the replacement shelves, which was irritating. I have arranged for them to be delivered tomorrow which is a begger. The Missus and I had planned to go into town tomorrow on separate missions that would save us a double trip. We will wait to see what time the rearranged delivery is but I suspect we will have to make two trips now so that one of us can stand vigil for the delivery.

Never mind, the important jobs of the day had been completed leaving only two weeks' worth of important jobs left before we open in a week's time. Phew, I thought we were in trouble there for a while.

## March 12<sup>th</sup> – Thursday

As if the mounting pressure of all the things to do in the shop were not enough, I booked to visit the tip, sorry, Household Waste Recycling Centre, where things are tipped or incinerated. I booked in for eleven o'clock and nearly missed it. I should mention in fairness, that the centre has opened a recycling shop full of things that they have either extracted from the tip or where things have been brought directly by the public. We are told that the proceeds will initially cover the setup costs but then will be diverted to a 'community fund'. The setup costs and running costs are undisclosed, ahem.

It had been unplanned but convenient that I had woken early. I had completed ablutions, walked the girls and enjoyed a leisurely cup of tea and was in the shop ahead of having any breakfast. I had decided to take advantage of the extra time to do the first pass of the cash and carry order. The first of the season can take a little time, first because the stock is so run down and secondly, it takes a moment to remember what was in the gaps on the shelves four or five months ago. I enlisted the Missus to check my work after I had done and before we attempted to place the order on the system.

This work, rather conveniently, brought me around to time to leave for the Household Waste Recycling Centre. I had planned to stop by the accountant on the way to drop off the invoices for quarter end, but I was delayed leaving and missed the opportunity. The hold up was that I had remembered late on that I was to take the old and rusty shelf units to get rid of them at the scrap metal yard in Hayle since I was in that direction. In the event, I went straight to the Household Waste Recycling Centre, arriving there ten minutes late.

I know that the facility does not present in the usual way of supplier meeting customer. Nevertheless, I cannot help feeling that a slightly more user-friendly character on the gate might have better represented the human face of the much maligned council. I also appreciate that the weather was not ideal for standing out in but, there again, it could have been much worse. I was impatiently beckoned hence as I approached the gate, and my initial good morning was met with a blank and disinterested stare. I had already taken my commercial vehicle token out of my wallet, but had I not done so, I would have been waved through anyway.

The level of disinterest continued into the yard. There were very few operatives working the yard and I was not challenged at all about the broken GRP roof sheets I took to the general waste. I had fully intended to take the shop shelves to the scrap

yard but on the basis that no one was showing any interest, I put them in the scrap metal bin and made my exit. Not one to give up easily on a hopeless case, I wound down the window to bid the gatekeeper a polite thanks and farewell. I was roundly ignored.

Making a small detour to drop the accounts off on the way, I made haste for home where the Missus was waiting to exchange places. I mentioned yesterday that we had missed the shelving delivery and had requested it for today, instead. As they had not sent a delivery time for the revisit, we had to keep a constant vigil lest they turn up today and we miss them again. It was late in the afternoon when I had a message to tell us that they would not be coming but by that time we had arranged our whole day around them.

Like yesterday, I slipped over to the Lifeboat station to join a few others getting signed off, this time for the big boat launch roles. We could not launch the boat in anger because of the sea state, and we had to do it multiple times. The assessor was happy that we simulated the launch by running the boat onto the slip. There we secured the boat on quarter stoppers so that it would not run away when we let go the slip hook. During our session, two new Very Excellent Shore Crew were signed off, and four winch operators and two head launchers were ratified for another five years.

The day had started mizzly with a robust westerly blowing through the Harbour. It was also relatively mild, and I was quite comfortable walking the girls first thing. It went downhill from there. The wind increased, although we did not get the worst of it in The Cove, it being in the southwest, and the mizzle got thicker and heavier and in the end rained properly on and off. It prompted me to purchase windscreen wipers on the way back from my excursion. I will fit them by and by.

As soon as I came back from the station, the Missus went off on her delayed shopping trip. It was gone teatime by the time she came back and in that time I had completed the cash and carry order and moved on to planning the jams and preserves. I had looked for an alternative supplier both online and at the food trade show after getting grumpy about our current supplier's general attitude. Sadly for me, there was no viable option but to continue with the same. We are nearly out of stock of their products, and I should have placed an order earlier given their unreliable and variable response times. I will place the order tomorrow and hope it arrives before Easter.

I also hope that the shelves arrive tomorrow since I have disposed of the old ones. The stock that was sitting on them is arranged down the grocery aisle and will be in the way when it comes to putting out the cash and carry order. The store room will also need to be cleared – a job for tomorrow – so that we have somewhere to put everything when we bring it in from the lorry.

The Missus found the balance of the out of date stock when she did her sweep of the shelves. I added to it when I checked the store room when I did the cash and carry order. The grand total to be given or thrown away came to just under £300 which is not bad going at all. A good proportion of that will, and has already, fed hungry Lifeboat crew who otherwise would have starved after a long winter. When I visited the station earlier at least a third had been consumed. That was on top of the cake that one of our newest intake insists on supplying each time she makes a planned appearance. Clearly, I resisted such temptation as it might impair my carefully crafted sylph-like figure. Obviously, I had to make a show of eating a very minute sample as it would have appeared rude to refuse completely.

The assessing continued after I left with a late afternoon session and one in the evening when we collected another head launcher for the big boat. It was a marathon session for the assessor whose previous visits have normally prompted an emergency launch or two. He is still here until tomorrow, so I probably should not have mention it until he was safely back across the Cornish border. Fingers crossed.

### March 13<sup>th</sup> – Friday

The southwesterly wind kept up its onslaught through the night and into today. Unlike yesterday, we had blue sky and a lot of brightness. The sea was big and angry again and the bay flecked with white caps in the strong breeze. Where the sea had been churned to a white froth over Cowloe and the footings of the cliffs, it stood out brightly in the sunlight.

The girls get frisky in the wind which was swirling in many directions as we headed for the Harbour beach. At one point BB was distracted by a passer-by and they both ran off home, confused whether they were coming or going. We went down to try again and this time they headed for the tide line that was moving up and down the beach with the heavy waves thumping in. Just as I moved down to join them, a strong gust of wind blew down from the western slip. The loose sand was suddenly lifted off the surface and fired down the length of the beach. It felt like a thousand needles on the back of my legs and heaven knows how the girls felt who were facing into it at the time. I decided we were probably better off heading for home.

There were a few things to do as I whiled away the morning. I am not having much luck either with applying to have a feed-in-tariff for our excess solar panel energy for the flat. I sent all the documents I had been asked for and sent one again when the company told me they had not received it. This time they told me that the address registered on the document did not match the meter number for the supply I was applying for.

It took me a little while to determine what had happened. It seems that I need two certificates, one for the business – which is the one I have – and one for domestic. I would need to apply to someone, either the governing body or the supplier for a new

certificate with the flat address. In the end, I sent a message to the solar panel supplier to let them sort it out.

In the meanwhile, it appears that I had all the appropriate documents to apply for a feed-in-tariff for the business. This suits quite well as I will soon be switching the solar panels to the shop and we will no longer be sending electricity up the wire in respect of the flat. Where the application process for the flat was straightforward, the application process for the business was a sight more complicated. I presume they assume that people applying on behalf of businesses are more grown up and can answer more complicated questions.

One of the requests was for a photograph of the export screen on my smart meter. When this was installed, the engineer, very roughly speaking, pointed to it and said, 'there, it is installed. Goodbye.' When I looked, the screen showed 'Act rate 01' and a number which I assumed to be our current usage. I needed to move to another screen and there were two buttons to choose from, Button A and Button B. I made the assumption that by pressing Button B, I would get my money back (ask a grown up to explain that one, dear reader), so I used Button A, which, sure enough changed the display. I had expected that it would cycle through the available screens returning to the first when it had exhausted the options. It did not. Instead, it stopped on the last screen and no matter how many times I pressed the button, refused to do anything.

Button B, it would appear, does nothing, so I pressed Button A for ten seconds which pushed the unit into some sort of setup mode which I could not get out of. Thankfully, I had taken photographs of each of the screens that had been displayed at each press of the button previously. I concluded that one of them must have been the screen my power company wanted, so I uploaded them all.

Since we are on the subject of frustration, I had arranged for our cancelled delivery from yesterday to be delivered today. It meant once again holding a vigil by the window in case we missed the driver turning up. I had waited all morning and when I went to collect Mother, the Missus took over. It was while I was down on the beach again with the girls in the middle of the day when I had a message from the courier to say it had been cancelled again.

Since the company had offered both dates as valid, I was not prepared to leave to chance booking a third date, so I telephoned the original supplier. They made some enquiries and came back to me half an hour later. Apparently, the original courier had subcontracted the delivery to another company, and it would still be delivered today. I was dubious. I left it until four o'clock and called again and explained that while it was technically possible that the delivery would still turn up, on the balance of probability, it would not. When the very pleasant lady said that she would call back, I had little doubt that we would be having the same conversation on Monday. She did not and we will.

While I was waiting, I had done very little. It was a doing very little sort of day, particularly as the cash and carry had telephoned and asked very nicely if they could postpone delivery until Monday. It would not make much difference to us this time, so we kindly acquiesced. It meant that I did not have to rush around creating space in the store room, I could now leave it until Sunday afternoon and rush around then instead.

I arrived at a point in the afternoon when sitting around, scratching by behind had paled as a form of pastime, so I headed downstairs to do a bit of clearing up. The first thing was to clear away the throw away stock. These were things that I could not imagine anyone wanting even for free. Things like apple sauce, lasagne sauce and cream of tartare have to be binned. The only downside to this is that it makes our waste collection overweight and we have to pay extra – as if throwing it out was not punishment enough.

Not wishing to exert myself too much ahead of a tiresome evening doing nothing, I did not tarry too long in the shop. However, I managed to clear quite a bit of the store room floor and move things that should not be there into the truck for storage at The Farm. There is still plenty to do and I shall be in a better frame of mind to do it tomorrow – probably – so I cut my losses and returned to the flat.

Mother is staying with us over the weekend as a Mothering Sunday treat, or punishment depending on your perspective. It was also Friday, which is generally fish tea which rather reminded me that we are nearly out of fish in the freezer and we will need some for the shop. The timing could not have been better being at the end of neap tides and the netters would have been out in force. I placed an order for collection next week and an hour or more of packing. At least I will be able to do the processing at my leisure, the last time it will be so until the end of the season.

There are a couple more orders to place over the weekend and during next week. A bit of shelf stocking and we will be ready to rock and roll. Although I despise the stress of the preparation stages and all that can go wrong, I always quite look forward to opening again. It will be a shock to the system, but I will soon become accustomed to the routine and look forward to closing again. What joy.

## March 14<sup>th</sup> – Saturday

We had a day today just as bright as the day before but without the ferocious wind. Oddly, it was colder today but felt much warmer in a moderate breeze that had gone around a tad north of west.

With Mother staying with us for the weekend, now extended by a change in circumstance, the girls were much more inclined to get out of bed a bit earlier. This meant that at half past eight o'clock, I sat staring at my computer screen having walked the girls and finished the morning's administration wondering what I was

going to do next. I contemplated going downstairs to pick up where I left off because it was too early for breakfast but then concluded if I went downstairs at that moment, I would then be too late for breakfast by the time I had finished. If anyone thinks that I get an easy ride just because the shop is not open, they need only take a look at the momentous decisions I have to make on a daily basis.

I had breakfast early and was still ahead of myself going downstairs.

The one big thing that I had ignored until today was that the remaining groceries and gift food needed to be counted. It takes a little while and is exceedingly tedious. As well as the shelves, some of which I could not get to because the stock from the beachware shelves – awaiting replacement – is all over the floor, I need to delve into the store room too.

Having waded through that, I then prepared the order for the ‘farm shop’ cash and carry. I expect much of this to be changed and I will take some time deciding on alternatives and replacements. I know, for example, the very popular ready to eat hummus dishes will be missing, which is a great disappointment.

By the time I had finished that, it was time to take the girls out again, except the girls had arranged themselves on various soft furnishings and did not look inclined to come out. BB particularly had been under the weather since we got up this morning. She had some medicine but was clearly not quite herself. She stirred herself after a while and we went down to the beach, but there was no running and chasing. We ended up having a stroll around the block instead.

I awarded my efforts with a bit of a zizz when we came back but looming in the background was the fact that there were still things to be counted in the shop. The stationery and the fishing tackle were still outstanding and having got so close to the end, they needed to be done and done now. It took some time, though not as long as the groceries, and I was upstairs with enough time to key the results into the system. I would have congratulated myself on the end of a long and boring job except it is not the end. The Government, because they like to be seen to be helping small businesses along and the more important jobs are far too difficult, decided last year that I could not end my financial year in line with my VAT year and must curtail it at the end of March instead. Whereas before we were able to neatly tie things up before we started a new season, we must now include a little bit of the new season along with the old season.

Anything we purchase, and it can be quite a lot, before the end of March needs to be included in the register for the old year, at least in terms of its value. It means recording the value of the invoices for stock and taking away anything we sell in that period. It is a veritable pain in the posterior and I confess that I do not do it with the accuracy that His Majesty’s tax people might demand or expect.

I know, dear reader, the sheer excitement of it boggles the mind. It is a wonder how one person can be so lucky. I mean, what else would I be doing in the chill of the end of March.

## March 15<sup>th</sup> – Sunday

Happy Mothering Sunday to all you mothers out there.

For a day that was labelled as rainy, like all the other days for the last two months, it started out reasonably well. It was overcast, sure enough, but at the time we ventured out, the girls and I, it was at least dry. It was also quite chilly in a roughly southwesterly breeze that was a bit stronger than yesterdays.

It was not enough to put off our only fishing boat putting out to sea at the time of our walk. They were loading a string of pots when we went down there so I was able to let the girls off the lead. The sea state had calmed a lot in the last two days, and it was merely moderate to rough today instead of very rough the days before. There was enough swell to make it uncomfortable, especially while manhandling heavy lobster pots into the water. The fisherman told me he had put them out a couple of weeks ago but had to go out the next day to bring them in again because the sea state had suddenly and unexpectedly changed.

Anyway, the girls did not seem too bothered about being on the beach, so we ended up walking off around the block instead. It was only an hour or so after we came back that the weather closed in and we had a couple of weather fronts come across us in quick succession that brought a few hours of mizzle. We happily stayed in for the duration and discovered that today has been ordained as a day for doing begger all.

I cannot say I was displeased. If all goes according to plan, the first three days of next week will be filled with deliveries and shelf filling. Hopefully, it will also be shelf delivering to permit the shelf filling as well. Somehow, I will also have to fit in trips to The Farm to get the tractor operational or at least to determine what is wrong with it and we have visitors arriving on Tuesday for the remainder of the week. Largely, though, the shop is ready for opening. There are just a few last minute clean-ups to do, which is mainly cleaning the bits – like the shop counter – that have already been cleaned and immediately after used to put things on.

Since I cannot plant my behind on a sofa for the day and be happy doing nothing, I compromised by sitting in front of the computer and did the signage for our opening hours. I also had a look at the bus times to see what they would look like when Chywoone Hill is open again. That proved a little too much and the timetable for after due date is showing as unchanged. That is going to be a wait and see job.

After the mizzle cleared out, the day improved in measures hour by hour. So too did the wind, moving around to the west and ending up in the late afternoon at around 30 miles per hour. From my post by the window, I watched with increasing envy as the various walkers and amblers, erm, ambled by. It was as I was lashing the girls up for a middle of the day walk that I thought that perhaps they would have been better going for a longer stank. It was too late then and, besides, the tide was in and the big beach only narrowly passable. I decided that we would go out again in the late afternoon and head along our usual route to The Valley and back along the, by then, wider beach.

So it was that I discovered just how windy the wind was and just how flushed and rosy my cheeks could become in a somewhat chilly breeze. It was, though, quite wonderful and you certainly knew you were alive. The girls, for once, were better off as they were sheltered by the undergrowth along the path and the marram grass through the dunes. On the beach there was little in the way of loose sand to blow around and enough space for them to run about without affecting too many people. BB is getting much better on the 'stop' command when she rushes off to jump up unsuspecting and possibly unreceptive adult legs. However, she has a penchant for small children that also makes her deaf. I could see one such approaching but could not get to her quickly enough. Despite her small size, jumping up a small person is probably quite intimidating and needs to stop. There were several more small people on the remainder of the walk, so she stayed on the lead after that.

The sun was just dipping into our eyes on the way back and not one of the big, white fluffy clouds was helpful in that respect. It is the light that makes everything look soft and warm and I could watch it for hours. The wind, though robust, really was not unpleasant and while it was fresh on the face, I cannot say that that I was particularly cold wandering about. There were plenty of people on the beach – although it might have just looked that way in a smaller area than we were used to – and I had a sense that the season was underway. Since we open the shop next week, I do hope so.

We have been told to expect the cash and carry delivery later in the morning tomorrow because they have to stop at the docks first to load up for the Isles of Scilly. It will play havoc with my gymnasium time, but I was born to suffer such things. Carrying in heavy groceries will have to do instead. I prepared myself by doing even more begger all for the rest of the day.

## March 16<sup>th</sup> – Monday

I was already awake when the call came in. Our cash and carry driver was waiting outside since before seven o'clock. He told me he waited until after seven o'clock to be polite. I think that the girls must have been alerted to the commotion outside because it was they who woke me up twenty minutes earlier. When I got downstairs a few minutes later, I explained I had been told to expect him at ten o'clock after

meeting the boat at the docks in Penzance. It appears that the boat was early today – probably getting ahead of the weather – and where he normally has to wait, he was ushered to the front of the queue.

Today's delivery was on pallets that he had already dropped outside the first electric sliding door in The Cove. We took about fifteen minutes to bring it all in and drop it into the store room awaiting the Missus' pleasure. She went down just before the middle of the day, and we did not see her again until near four o'clock – when I let her out again.

It was quite handy having the delivery early; I had agonised about whether I could squeeze a gymnasium session in and not miss the driver. The issue was rather neatly side-stepped for me and I got my session in with no fear of being disturbed. The whole thing of missing deliveries was on my mind this morning and as soon as I got back, I called our shelf supplier to find out what was going on with our missed delivery. To recap, we somehow missed the driver last Wednesday and the delivery company had failed to deliver it since.

Today, I spoke with a very pleasant gentleman at the company. I told him that when I checked the package tracking earlier, it seemed like it was being delivered back to them. He asked me to wait while he called the courier. He told me that sure enough, the shelving was being brought back. Apparently, he had been told that the driver decided not to deliver the package because we have a sign on the shop door saying we were not open until the end of March. As if we would have placed an order knowing that we would not be in to receive it. I left it with them that they would send the items again on express delivery that would come tomorrow. Tomorrow, then, will be another day with my nose pressed to the window, watching.

Yesterday, I had spent some time preparing an order for the local interest books that are very popular. Perhaps I had left it a bit late, but I was prompted by a message from the original supplier of such books asking when I wanted them delivered.

Over the last couple of years we have had much trouble with the original supplier. They did not return messages and at one point looked like they had gone under completely. Last year, they sent a supply of books quite unsolicited. There were many titles we would have turned down had we known what was coming. Thankfully, they were all sale or return but it was a complete pain finding somewhere for them for a year. According to the message I had last week, they were about to do the same again this year, so I headed them off at the pass with a message asking for a list of what they intended to send. I have heard nothing since.

Knowing that we would need some books for the Easter, I approached the new company who are a bit more user friendly and, erm, approachable. Unfortunately, their website is a complete disaster. It lists the books well enough but having selected the 20 or so I wanted, it promptly lost them again when I came out of the website to check some volumes in the shop. I sent a message to the contact asking

him which titles he had recommended when I saw him at the trade show in Exeter as I could not recall. Armed with those, I did the order on the website again and pressed send. Even this promptly disappeared into the ether.

The sales contact and I had another conversation later and we agreed that I would do the order the old fashioned way, by making a list and sending it. Being that this was the third time, I could remember most of the titles without looking. It was, however very time consuming.

I had been down to the shop not long off the Missus finishing her bit with the cash and carry order. I had taken an hour in the morning going through the invoice and updating all the prices. The last two years has seen marked increases across most of the stock. I am pleased to report that since the end of last year, nearly all prices have remained stable.

Clearly, having stable grocery prices is not in the grand plan. I had a timely reminder from one of our suppliers that from 1<sup>st</sup> April the sugar tax that was completely ineffectual when it was introduced in 2018, will be increased. All soft drinks with levels of sugar above a certain amount (5g to 8g) will be subject to a 6.7 percent increase in tax if my arithmetic is correct £1.94 to £2.08 on 10 litres if not. Apparently, it went up last year too and I did not notice which probably demonstrates just how ineffective it is. My personal view is that if a small child prefers full fat cola over its 'diet' equivalent, they will just pay the extra. Certainly, I am not aware over the eight years since it has been introduced of one child taking note of the price of anything. Most of them cannot add or subtract to save their lives.

It is exceeding difficult to estimate what affect that will have on a can of Coca Cola, for example, because there are many contributing factors. We will have to wait until the first deliveries after that date and adjust our shelf prices accordingly. Currently, there is a 10 pence difference between which may become 20 pence. The more marked increase may therefore have an effect. We shall wait and see.

In the meanwhile, I placed an order for our soft drinks from our usual local supplier that will arrive tomorrow. This will coincide with the Farm Shop cash and carry delivery, so at least I can do them both together. All I have to do now is clear all the stuff that I had to take off the shelves we no longer have so I can get to the drinks fridge.

All that pricing and ordering was enough for one day, not that there was much of the one day left by the time we had decided to end it all. The weather that was reasonably benign at the outset of the day had slowly deteriorated. It did not rain particularly hard but there was increasing levels of mizzle that thankfully abated when I came to take the girls out for a walk in the later afternoon. The sea state, however, when from reasonably fair in the morning to rough as a bear's bottom in the afternoon. There was plenty of crashing over the footings of Pedn-men-du and

the cliffs opposite and boiling over Cowloe as well as coming over the Harbour wall. Under a dull and grey sky, it did not look half the picture it had on previous days.

It was making a big fuss well into low water in the later evening. We could not see it but we could certainly hear it. It was still mizzling by the flecks visible in my headtorch light. We must hope for better when we open – five days hence.

## March 17<sup>th</sup> – Tuesday

It was looking a bit more wholesome when we set out for a bit of a run down to the beach this morning. I even dispensed with a rain jacket as there was no mizzle or rain and the wind was behaving. Actually, it was not. It had gone around to the southeast and was not bothering us today.

Not that I did or intended to spend very much time outside today, I was expecting three deliveries and had to be there for them this time. The third, or it might have been the first, was the one I was most looking forward to as it meant that I would be able to restore our shelving and put all the stuff that currently littered the floor back onto the shelves. As you will be keenly aware, dear reader, this had been a traumatic journey. I had been assured by the supplier that they would be delivered today.

Not that I did not believe the very pleasant man who told me that they would be, but I wished to be assured a bit more, so I called in the morning to ask. Yes, they had been picked up and as if to prove it, very shortly after I had a message from the courier whose laughable trade marked deliver message was Delivered Exactly. I discovered later on, just inside the midday deadline, that it was Delivered Exactly Wrong.

This time it was not the courier at fault. The supplier in their rush to get out replacement shelves, had sent the wrong size. It is a very good job that grumpy shopkeepers do not know any rude words because I certainly would have used a few if I did. I did have words with the supplier, none of them rude, but I did encourage them strongly to send the correct shelves and to make sure they arrived by midday tomorrow.

I was in the shop when the package arrived. It had not been long since the first grocery order arrived, the soft drinks, and I was in the process of tidying them away. I had left the door open just in case. It was as I was finishing with those that the Missus returned from her trip with Mother to an appointment that I had messed up the previous week by leaving on the lights of our loan car. She parked outside to unload giving me the opportunity to do the unloading – she is good like that.

Leaving the truck there then gave me the opportunity to replace the wiring loom for the rear light. This proved a little more tricky than just pulling the connector apart and replacing it with the new one. I discovered a little while that the pins were not

aligned with the holes and I had to very gingerly bend them inwards. It was while I was in the midst of this delicate operation that the farmshop cash and carry turned up.

I had not noticed because he had parked halfway down the road. He is a very amiable chap, so I knew that he would not punch me on the nose when I berated him for parking halfway down the road. He apologised profusely and told me that he would have made every effort to park right outside the shop if some grumpy shopkeeper had not already carelessly parked their bleddy great truck there.

It was not long after I had fixed the lights, replaced the windscreen wipers and moved the truck back into the RNLI car park that the brother-in-law turned up. It seemed churlish to continue working in the shop while they settled in, so we all repaired upstairs. We all already had some trepidation that their boy dog might have a rather more than passing interest in our girl dog who is in season. It was well founded and there was mayhem and carnage for a good part of the afternoon while they sparred and dodged and the adults in the room tried to protect BB's virtue.

Discretion being the better part of valour, sometimes known as utter cowardice, I decided that it was a splendid plan to go downstairs and clear the storeroom of the deliveries that had come earlier. It was not as if it could have waited as the beachware supplier called earlier and asked if it would be alright to deliver the not inconsiderable order I placed, tomorrow. It would need somewhere to go, so the previous deliveries would need to be cleared. Half of it was soft drinks, so the drinks fridge is now, once again, looking a bit more fit for action. I finished just ahead of teatime, which was convenient.

Things were a little more settled when I arrived upstairs. Either the adults in the room had developed better controls or the dogs had become a little more used to each other or maybe a bit of both. The Missus had also fashioned a, shall we call it a chastity belt, from the romper suit ABH had after her operation. It was functionally effective but did nothing to cool the ardour, probably the opposite, as from the rear it resembled a thong. It is a work in progress, perhaps.

It has been a while since we all met up so we enjoyed a very convivial evening. We can be sociable when we try hard.

## March 18<sup>th</sup> – Wednesday

We awoke to a very pretty looking morning, quite a bit of blue sky was showing topped with some high and wispy cirrus. The cloud remained all day but did nothing to dimish the bright sunlight that came with it. As you might expect, only very rarely are we permitted to have a beautiful day, unsullied by some distraction, and today was not one of them. Today we had a chilly easterly breeze that slowly ramped up as the day went on.

I had rather expected all the cardboard that I had left out the front of the shop for collection to have gone before the wind took hold. The general waste had duly been picked up, early doors, like it usually is. The cardboard collection usually follows close on but today it was notably absent. It had me concerned but I left it a polite amount of time before calling the company to give them a prompt. I was told that according to driver's tracker, he had not been yet. Given the time and from experience, I was dubious but decided not to push it.

The reason why the collection was so forefront of my mind was because I was down in the shop. The reason I was down in the shop was because at around half past ten o'clock, just as I was about to slip the first morsel of my breakfast past my lips, the beachware order arrived. In one regard the timing was fortunate because the brother-in-law had come down to move his car out of the way. He lent a hand to shift the 53 boxes of various sizes into the shop, which was most welcome, thank you very much.

Earlier, the butcher had caught me unawares by arriving a day early. Another fifteen minutes and I would have been about my ablutions, which might have been embarrassing for the poor lad; I had not long returned from the gymnasium, so my pectorals were still rippling from exertion. He might have felt most inadequate. I was, in short, kept gainfully employed from early on in the morning and the beachware delivery was the main source of that employment. What I did not need was a distraction trying to sort out my cardboard collection.

As I anticipated, in the early afternoon the cardboard was still flapping about in the breeze out the front. In fact, the breeze was so strong that some of the boxes had toppled over, and the contents were migrating westward. Not wishing to give the company the excuse that it was too late to come back, I called them again. This time I was on the telephone for some considerable time while the very pleasant lady conversed with the depot.

I am not sure how the company ended up with a helpdesk system that they could not enquire upon, but apparently without my call reference that I was given when I ordered recommencement of the services, she could not act. If I could provide the reference number, that is proof that I had indeed recommenced collections, she could ask the driver to come back. I eventually found the reference that proved that I had made the request and once again she put me on hold while she called the depot. It did not surprise me in the least that when she came again, she told me that despite having the reference, the driver would not come back. It has happened before. The next available service would be next week, which I was not prepared to wait for.

In a fit of pique, I telephoned the local waste disposal company base over at St Just. They will fit me in tomorrow for a couple of quid, bless them.

The delay enabled me to add the not inconsiderable extra bits of cardboard generated from processing the beachware delivery. There will be more yet when I dismantle the boxes of goodies for the shop shelves but for today it was sorting The Farm storage from what we would keep in the shop. I had intended to load the truck with the appropriate boxes and take it up to The Farm but by the time I had finished, it was getting on a bit.

There was some good news amongst the supplier failures. The shelves that I had been waiting a week for arrived and, bless my soul, they were the right ones. I could not fit them at that moment because both aisles I might have used to get to where they would go, were blocked with delivery boxes. Once I had established that they were indeed the right shelves there was no particular hurry and I carried on with what I was doing.

A little while later, I called the shelving company to ask what they intended to do with the incorrect shelves that they had sent. Unsurprisingly, they did not want the expense of collecting them and suggested that I dispose of them how I saw fit. I told the very pleasant lady that while that may have looked like a commendable offer from their point of view, it rather lumbered me with a large package I had no easy way of getting rid of. Dumping them would have required a visit to St Erth or Hayle and even handing them off to a charity shop, which was the other suggestion, would mean a trip around the available charity shops a 16 miles round trip away. In short, I suggested that they send a courier to collect them given it was their error and they should deal with it.

It was late in the afternoon by the time I had finished as far as I could. I had been working with the first electric sliding door in The Cove open to the world. This had, of course, attracted a number of enquiries as to whether the shop, clogged halfway to the ceiling with boxes, was open for business. It has also allowed me to view the bay as I worked, and this turned out to be a major distraction.

It was day of aquamarine sea – I am told – and bright white wave tops. There was a considerable swell, and the fierce easterly breeze was peeling back the tops of the waves as they charged into wherever they were going. It was fabulous to watch and given the inflated number of visitors we had in The Cove today, I was not the only one who thought so. The waves, even mid-tide, over at Aire Point and on Gwenver looked twice their actual height with their wind blown capes. They were fair exploding up the cliffs there and the wind taking them as they towered upwards.

In the late afternoon, when I venture through the Harbour car park, the waves in the Tribbens and over Cowloe were providing a tremendous display of power and agility. The car park was busy with cars along the front. It really was a very entertaining display.

What was less entertaining was my missing fruit cakes from the inestimable Mr Pullins Bakery up the line. A customer had suggested we stock them and they had

done very well, especially with me loaded with a bit of Trewithen butter. According to Doing Parcels Dreadfully they were to be delivered between eight o'clock and nine o'clock last night. As far as I was aware, no such delivery had been made. The family here present did try and convince me that I had gone downstairs yesterday evening but had reported that what I went down for was not what I had expected.

Anyway, with no sign of my parcel and no communication from the courier, I called the supplier. They called back having investigated the issue and told me that the courier had delivered them the previous evening as planned and had spoken with someone with my name. There were several possibilities none of which were the courier handing me the package. The supplier had gone to the trouble of providing the driver report which included a photograph of someone else's door.

As the plot thickened and I checked the Lifeboat station just in case, the Missus wound back our outside CCTV. At around the specified time, a van was indeed stopped a little way up the street, and a driver was seen to come out and visit a neighbour's door. I duly, went along and found our package there on the doorstep. Clearly, the person with my name who received the package felt it appropriate to leave the package on the doorstep. It was either that or the courier was lying through his teeth. Surely not.

What could possibly sooth a grumpy shopkeeper's brow after a day like that, I wondered. Well, quite remarkably it was the much maligned council that stepped up with a salve. We received our business rates notification today in the post. A keen reader with a long memory may recall that with the revaluation of all business rates across the country, we were about to be thrust above the threshold where our relief no longer applied. I had even taken the unusual and ultimately time-wasting step of writing to my member of parliament which had been a waste of time, mainly because no one read it or, if they did, completely misunderstood the issue. I suspect the former. I opened the business rate letters and all three stated that our rural rate relief was a mandatory 100 percent and therefore nothing to pay. Well, ring out the bells, slap my thigh, light me a big cigar and smoke me a kipper. All is well with the world tonight.

## March 19<sup>th</sup> – Thursday

It was without doubt a very beautiful morning. We were in the grip of some high pressure that is set to last for a few days, so we had better take advantage.

Knowing that I would be up against it today, but quite unaware at the outset just how much up against it I would be by the afternoon, I decided to make an early start. The truck had been loaded up yesterday, so all I had to do was to get into it and drive up to The Farm. Since this coincided with taking the girls for a walk, I combined the two and we headed off into the blinding early sunshine.

I should have tried to squeeze a bit more into the truck before I went because when we came back and I reloaded the rest of the boxes, there were two I could not fit in. I had thought that the Missus and I would have sufficient time to make the second trip and be back in time to meet the plumber. I cannot now recall if I mentioned that the waste pipe in the kitchen was leaking again at roughly the same place that it leaked before. In fact, there are quite a few things during the last week that I cannot remember. Anyway, we had a leak and had called the plumber who is very good and very busy, probably because he is very good. After he finished, he showed me that the pipe had broken almost completely in two.

When I returned after that early run, I noticed that our cardboard had disappeared. I had to check the camera to make sure it was the company that I contacted yesterday, and it was. Sadly, they missed a bit, but it was in a different place to the rest, so I was not that upset. The important bits had gone.

I stopped for a morsel of breakfast and by the time we were ready to go up again, it was getting late, so the Missus said that she would go on her own – in fact, her brother went as well – and I would wait behind.

Waiting was not actually what I was doing, or at least not only waiting. I took myself down to the shop to continue putting out on shelves. While I was there, the courier arrived to collect the unwanted shelves, so that was another thing I did not have to worry about. The Missus was back shortly after with a plan to go shopping, so brother swapped with sister-in-law and they were gone. I had hit my stride by this time and was going great guns and generating more cardboard to replace the cardboard that had been collected. It was at this point that I had a call from our fish supplier telling me that our fish order was ready.

This necessitated a change of priorities, and I diverted my attention to clearing the top of the chest freezer that we use as a work surface. Well ahead of the Missus returning with the order, the vacuum machine and the scales were set up and waiting. This time I did have some waiting to do, so I lent an ear to Radio Pasty.

Keats wrote, 'A thing of beauty is a joy forever' in a rather fine poem called Endymion. Keats shuffled off in 1821 which saved him from having to gaze upon what Great Western Railway are calling a statue on their platform of St Ives. Based on Keats' theory, I would say this depiction of a mermaid – apparently – will last all of a few nanoseconds. I had been alerted to this, erm, phenomenon by the other reader, so I had already had a look at the photograph of it in place. To say that it has attracted some ridicule from the presenters and listeners of Radio Pasty, would be something of an understatement. Gosh it is some ugly – and cheap.

However, its purpose was to attract attention, and it certainly has done that. Its stated purpose was to draw attention the folk lore and legends that abound beyond the end of the railway. Apparently, our Poet Laurette has written a book that is

connected with it. Unfortunately, the statue is more likely to be remembered for frightening small children and adults of a nervous disposition.

The Missus arrived with the fish just after two o'clock. It was nearly three hours later that I had finished the vacuum packing, pricing and freezing. Since I had used the pasty (sorry, MS) fridge to hold the complete vacuum packed fish while I did the next batch, I had to clean that thoroughly ahead of the pasty order I had just remembered to do in the morning.

There as just time for some tea before I had to head over to the Lifeboat station. It was the first training launch we were able to undertake in more than a month, and it was exceedingly well attended. There was a last minute early launch of the Inshore boat that I had to break away from to ensure a crew was available to take it out, but the main bulk of the action was a little later.

By the time I got over to the station in the evening, I had been engaged in various performances nearly constantly since early in the morning. Perhaps I should step up my gymnasium attendance and intensity because quite inexcusably I was feeling a little weary. With so many fine and experienced bodies in attendance, I completed some of the administrative duties associated with the launch and headed for a comfortable seat back at the flat.

Before I concluded my day entirely, I fired off three big orders for dairy, fresh groceries and souvenir treats which we were missing. These will all arrive at some stage during the early morning – I hope.

The last thing I observed was the return of the boats. From where I was sitting it looked every bit like a textbook recovery and was assure later that it was. We are, after all, a very supportive Very Excellent Shore Crew.

## March 20<sup>th</sup> – Friday

There is something very heartening about waking up to a dazzling and bleddy 'ansum day – well, looking anyway. Stepping outside there was still a fair chill in the easterly breeze but it had, at least, diminished since yesterday.

It was also positive in the knowledge that I would have the fullest experience of it having been woken up early by the girls. It was like they felt that I should perhaps like to get used to getting up at the time I would usually get up for the shop but on the last day that I could have a lie in for seven months. Thank you very much.

There was some advantage to the early start. I had called in nearly all the usual weekday deliveries to furnish the shelves for our opening day. I could have left at least some of them to relieve the pressure of doing them all at once, but I felt that in

the last week or so I had not yet met a stiff enough challenge and was keen to test my limits.

The first to arrive was the pasty (sorry, MS) delivery followed closely – and I mean before the first pasty was unloaded – by the greengrocery. I had barely finished bringing those in and was about to retire upstairs when the dairy arrived. Having brought all three in I found that I could not proceed with the pricing and putting away because the prices had nearly all changed and I had left my spectacle upstairs. So, I abandoned all the goods on the floor, the top of the freezer and on the counter to go and fetch them.

As often happens, as soon as I arrived upstairs, I was distracted by some other errand. I had also been in the middle of publishing *The Diary* at the time and I was momentarily flummoxed whether to continue with *The Diary* or go and do the dairy. If I had been dyslexic, it probably would not have mattered much but after a moment agonising over it, the time sensitive dairy won the day.

It took me a good while to clear the various deliveries as there was quite a bit to clear. It also required that I update our prices on the inventory system and if I did not do it there and then would end up having to do it again another time. I always find pricing the groceries something of a shock because the prices for some items are much higher than the last time I purchased them. Tomatoes, for example are more than a pound per kilo more expensive. It should not be a surprise because they are now out of season and imported. The one thing that seems to hold its price no matter what the time of year or what geopolitical influences may come to bear is the banana. They have been £1.65 per kilo for at least two years. The day that bananas change in price is the day I go and find a nuclear bunker to buy.

It was not long after I cleared the deliveries that our guests decamped and left for home. They had a rough few days, nights particularly, due to their boy dog's discomfiture. BB was hardly blameless with her thong and the way she shamelessly flaunted herself in front of him. She had even taken to wearing eye liner and lip stick, just to tease him, further. We kept shut our bedroom door at night, so we were not much bothered but I know had we been in their house in the same situation, we would have felt just as on edge. I am sure they were grateful to get home for a peaceful night's sleep.

When I commenced the day, I had high hopes of completing all my chores in the morning leaving me the afternoon to have one last run out on the big beach with the girls and then do begger all for the rest of the day. It did not seem too much to ask at the time but then the deliveries took longer than expected and I remembered a supplier visit that had been rearranged for today. The latter could be skirted around. I did want to see the man from the Cornish Pasta Company, but if I did not it would not be the end of world. He was supposed to send me a message an hour before his arrival, which would have given me ample time to come back from wherever I was, all supposing I saw the message.

What I most wanted to do was to address the issue with the tractor at The Farm, a matter that had been begging since the summer last year. I could not do anything for the first couple of months of our closing because of my knee. From then on it came back seat to the other Farm priorities and the weather.

And so it came to pass that the tractor came to the top of the list on the very last day I was available. It was not quite top of the list. Top of the list was taking the girls down to the huge expanse of big beach, resplendent under a blue sky dressed with floaty bits of wispy cloud here and there. Gosh, it was some 'ansum. Wild horses would not have stopped me from heading down there today, my last day of being able to do so ahead of autumn.

We were not messing around today. There was no pretence at highbrow walking the Coast Path to make sure we had a bit of culture with our gratuitous beach wallowing; we headed straight to the big, bright, golden acres of perfect sand. There were more people down there than we were used to but given the space, we would probably manage to avoid all of them, especially by skirting the tide line on the way out.

It was difficult to know where to walk there was so much choice. Where we were walking were large areas normally under several metres of sea, pure sand, no pebbles or rocks. The girls were able to range in various directions all around me and ran and walked and played all the way out and all the way back. When we reached North Rocks, they cavorted in the lagoon there, with only small waves to bother them. There was no possibility of walking to Gwenver over the sand on this spring tide. That lagoon stretched across the divide and abutting North Rocks themselves, even at the depth of low water. It was probably full of fish, too, since at the point it joined the general tide line, there was a sand bar stretching across.

I had elected to wear little boy trousers and a couple of layers with my heavy wool jacket. It had been cold in the shop, and the east wind still carried a fair chill in the shade of our side of the street. Initially, I was not too badly off as we walked out with the wind and the sun at my back. By the time we got to North Rocks, I was beginning to regret the choice. Heading back, I was fair cooking in my woolly coat. It was indeed a glorious day.

All good things needing to come to an end, we returned home to a much needed cup of tea and a quick turn-around before heading off to The Farm. I had discovered when we replaced them it earlier in the winter, that swapping the battery that feeds the store room lights is easier done with two people. It also turned out that the Missus was necessary when playing about with the tractor, so she came too.

We left the tractor battery charging off our very clever and compact battery booster while we swapped the store room battery. When we came back to it there was absolutely no reaction when we turned the tractor ignition key. Over the next half and hour we persisted discovering on the way that the ignition key assembly itself

needed some attention. Eventually, we managed to get it to fire a couple of times but by the third attempt we had exhausted the battery booster and had to stop. Before we left, we took the battery out and I connected it to the solar panels feeding the cabin system.

In my heart I knew that it would probably take more than a day to play with the tractor. It is just the way things turned out that the Missus will now have to do the rest by herself. She is more than capable but will face the same issues as me in that it all takes time and planting needs to commence. It is also a fact that some of the work is better done with two people rather than one.

With nothing more to be done, we collected a few items of stock needed for the shop and headed for home.

It was three o'clock by the time we got back and everything that needed to be done had been done, and the rest would wait until the shop opened in the morning. It was at last time to sit down and do begger all, so I did that until it was time to go to bed – well, sort of.

The Missus did not go to bed, however. She had elected to spend the night on a bench outside the Lifeboat station in support of a charity initiative that shone a light on the plight of homeless ex-servicemen. It is called Sleep Out for Tommys or something like that. The Missus agreed to try and get the crew involved but when it came to it, none were available. There were three supporters over there when I turned the flat lights out. It was going to be cold under a cloudless sky but at least it was not raining, I reasoned, as I headed for my electrically heated bed.

### March 21<sup>st</sup> – Saturday

When I looked out at the Lifeboat station forecourt early this morning, two of the overnight outside sleepers were sitting up, looking a little weary. Over on another bench, were the rolled up blankets of the Missus' bunk. You could just hear the snoring from where I was. Apparently, she had woken for a comfort break and gasper at one o'clock after which she slept soundly until gone seven o'clock.

A regular customer a little later in the morning, commented that even The Cove was not immune to the appearance of homeless people on the streets. She had taken them for real rough sleepers. I told her that it was an easy mistake to make and that the Missus was one of their number. I think it would have been highly amusing if someone had offered them a couple of pounds for a cup of tea.

The weather had helped overnight, but it was a tad chilly. It was still chilly when I took the girls out while our rough sleepers were packing up their kit. The blossoming day looked every bit as delightful as the one that had preceded it and for most of the day it was. Later in the afternoon, a mist began to form in the bay, and it thickened and thinned again towards nightfall. Judging from the number of t-shirt wearing

customers I served, it was warm out there but, in the shop, it remained colder than I would have liked.

What I did like, however, was just how busy it was. It was mostly down to the weather, I am sure, but we had customers from the outset of the day and pretty much continuously through until late afternoon. I was a little late in putting out the pasties (sorry, MS) but it did not seem to matter because most of the pasty action was in the later morning and into the afternoon. Pasty eating exceeded my expectations – and planning – and we will probably run out during tomorrow. We have already almost run out of cheese pasties and sausage rolls. I have taken note.

The store room started out quite full. There were still remnants of yesterday morning's deliveries that I had not put out and late in the evening, someone had delivered our local interest books. Early morning the bread had arrived and needed pricing and I was just finishing that when the time to open arrived. I had thought that we were quite well prepared to start as soon as the first electric sliding door in The Cove was pushed aside but I was sorely mistaken.

It took me most of the morning to open the books and put them out and the rest of Friday's delivery and also to eat a bit of breakfast. This still left the small 50 pence sweet bags to put out and the large pile of toys and novelties from our beachware supplier that we had not taken up to The Farm. The Missus had told me that she would handle the sweets, but she did not get down to the shop until into the afternoon. Having finished the sweets, she migrated onto the gifts leaving me with a large pile at the end of the afternoon to find some room for on our shelves.

When we place orders for new and exciting items, we do not necessarily have a location allocated on our shelves for it. Generally speaking, groceries go in the grocery aisle, gifts in the gift aisle and stationery and more gifts in the middle aisle. Mostly all the spaces are filled, and some perennial items are merely replaced in situ when they run out, although they occasionally move about depending on circumstance. So, I sallied forth into the shop with hope in my heart, a good deal of creativity in my head and a crowbar in my pocket.

One of the things that I wished we had prioritised for today was ice creams. Every other customer through the middle of the day asked if we had any. To make matters worse, we would have been the only shop in The Cove to have them, and we could have cleaned up, banked the cash and retired to our own Caribbean island – possibly. A good day it might have been but every request for an ice cream was like a stab to my heart.

Then, late in the day, the new jewellery stand arrived. The surf jewellery, relatively cheap, handmade friendship bands, anklets and the like, sell like fury. I will top up the homemade stand that I lovingly crafted several years ago, many times in a year. When the company eventually came up with a larger floor stand that was suitably sized for us and looked the part too, I jumped at the chance of buying one. It comes

with a full stand of jewellery that will have to be put out and will take a laborious hour or two to complete. Then, dear reader, I am going to have to find somewhere to put it. This will require less of a crowbar approach and more of a demolition of something else to fit in – I am thinking we probably have to lose a postcard stand. Although I am excited at the prospect of having such an eye-catching display, I really am not looking forward to loading it. It all went into the store room for tomorrow's consideration.

Having been gainfully employed with stock and customers for most of the day, I had little time to gaze upon the wonders of the great outside. I was vaguely aware of the beach looking similar to yesterday in a hazy sort of way, although as the spring tides recede, there was marginally less of it than the day before. Later in the tide, it was noticeable that a bit of ground sea was creeping back into the bay. A regular visitor suggested that he was going fishing later. He was clearly familiar with the local spots because he mentioned The Irish Lady. I pointed to North Rocks where white water was jumping around as the waves lashed in and told him to mind his step down there.

Our rough sleepers were at it again in the evening. The same lady but this time with her daughter and two granddaughters who thought it a tremendous adventure. It was a clear night again for them with Jupiter brightest in the sky. Hanging over the Harbour was the very slimmest of a waning crescent moon and all was very still until the two girls spooked at something up the lane and created havoc. So much for peace on Earth.

## March 22<sup>nd</sup> – Sunday

We had a much quieter start in the shop this morning. It gave me the opportunity to move a few things around and fit a few more things in and in a more appropriate place. To be frank, I did not get very far with my crowbarring and creative space making yesterday, so this morning was a great time to make amends.

When I was done rearranging, I moved into the store room so I could clear the gift overstock shelves which were cluttered and rearrange those too. Normally, when I secret myself away from the counter for any length of time because it is quiet, it immediately gets busy. I think the small gods of grumpy shopkeepers had a lie in this morning because I was largely unmolested for the duration. Of course, it would have been preferable to have customers, but I was still quite pleased that I had got the clearing up done. All the additional overstock was salted away for future use – if I remember it is there.

Our day was not quite as bright and glorious as the previous two. In fact, the days have been slowly degrading as if not to make it too much of a shock when we slip back into winter again as we surely must after being spoilt so. A customer today said he was quite looking forward to the storm coming on Wednesday. I knew nothing of it, but there again I have not looked at the forecast. I did, though, have a sneak peak

at the synoptic chart and sure enough, there is a big low pressure system moving across to the northwest of Scotland. I surmised that it was far enough north of Camborne not to give us more than a bit of swell and a heft breeze, but what do I know.

It did make me chuckle later. I spotted the BBC lady forecaster on one of the social media feeds telling us that Wednesday and Thursday were going to be super, sunny days. I took a look at the BBC website straight afterwards where it was showing Wednesday and Thursday to be overcast with rain. So, I am glad that is clear, then.

The Missus came down at around the middle of the day to crack on with organising the freezers today. It would result in much out of date stock being thrown out and one lucky local family being consigned to fish finger dinners for a week. We also ended up with some ice creams to sell on a day when nobody wanted one.

While the Missus attempted not to lose a few fingers to frostbite I made a start on making room for the new surf jewellery stand. I know that the Missus was not keen to lose one of the postcard stands but on consideration, the surf jewellery makes more money per square foot than the postcards do, and it was not like we were getting rid of postcards altogether. As it happened, I managed to transfer all but three cards to the remaining stands through using spare slots and removing duplication.

Doing the postcards reminded me that we had run out of first class stamps at Christmas time, which is why you did not get a Christmas card, dear reader – alright, one of the reasons why you did not get a Christmas card. We have been bereft since then, but I thought not to bother ordering more until we opened the shop. A couple of customer requests later and I made the effort to place the order. Before I did so, I needed to check when the prices would increase – April 7<sup>th</sup> - as they always do around this time each year. We must wait until the increase has happened before we buy the international stamps lest we get left with them because they are all price marked. However, the first and second class stamps are not price marked and we are able to purchase at the old rate and sell at the new rate. While that sounds like profiteering, it actually means we can sell postage stamps at a small profit instead of a loss when they are purchased by credit card.

After buying the stamps, I returned to the matter of the jewellery stand. It was remarkable well constructed and on assembly, fitted together well. There were only a few niggles: the cladding that covers the top and bottom boxes could have been sized a little better. They had gone to the trouble of making two opposing sides longer than the other two so that they overlapped making the join seamless. Except they did not because they had not allowed for the thickness of the Velcro adhesive strips holding them on. Also, the bottom cladding panels needed to be precisely placed so that they did not interfere with the lazy Susan turning gear at the top or the castors at the bottom.

I did not get as far as placing the hundreds of hangers onto it. That is a pleasure I will endure piecemeal during the week. I left heavy stand where it will sit in the shop for now and attended to the closing down sequence which was sadly uninterrupted by a five minutes to closing rush. I will also attend to the mountain of bubblewrap that the unit came wrapped in. It is the type with large bubbles which is difficult to use in the shop; it is designed for big things. If I try to wrap mugs in it, for example, the resulting package is so large it will not fit into our largest gift bag. Sadly, most of it will have to go into the bin.

It will probably take another week before I bludgeon my body into accepting that standing up for ten hours at a stretch is the way it is going to be for the next seven months. My dickie knee did not have a problem with it, so the new one should not, although it is taking some time to convince it. I can, however, bend it when doing things lower down, though I have to remember that I can, which saves an awful lot of bother with my back. Regardless, it is a whole lot of fun finding out and I have many distractions. Right now, though, I need my bed. Good night.

### March 23<sup>rd</sup> – Monday

It was all rather misty in The Cove today. Thin mist in the morning and quite a bit of brightness and thicker mist in the afternoon and not bright at all. The wind that was feisty and from the northwest yesterday had calmed and moved to the west. How very good of it. It was still chilly, though, especially in the shop.

Today it was all going to be about finishing off the jewellery stand. I was not looking forward to it. It was the sort of job the Missus would have loved or someone who likes doing jigsaw puzzles or who likes making Houses of Parliament out of matchsticks. I largely switched off my brain during the process and found to my delight that by the end of it I had not slipped into a coma. It was actually not too bad and it looked the business when I had finished.

It was only after I had slipped the last item over the last peg that I saw a 'planogram' that had come with the package. Apparently one side should have been 'jazzy' bracelets and another surf anklets and so on. I had separated anklets and bracelets but in a much more random way. Ah well, it looks alright to me. I will have to address the panels at the bottom at some point as they look shoddy, and one fell off when I moved it this morning. That will have to wait.

I did manage to slip away to the gymnasium today. I added another 500 metres to the row. I am not concerned with timing at the moment and do not think that I will get back to where I was a year or so ago. I am not sure what happened there, but I had added several minutes to my best and never got it back. I also added a couple of kilos to my weights, which is a good thing, and I managed to lift then which is an even better thing.

The Missus absolved me from taking the girls out when I got back. She said that she was going up to The Farm to put the battery back on the tractor and to try it out. Before she could go, one of the fishermen who had been out pulling their pots and wrestling octopi, offered her some lobsters. She hung around waiting for them until she discovered that they were down on the wharf waiting for her. She paid with cash and pasties (sorry, MS) which beggered up my supply continuity just as it started to get busy.

I had been completely tripped up by the consumption of pasties over the last couple of days. We had been very busy on Saturday and consequently I factored that in when I placed the order for Monday, halfway through Sunday morning. The Sunday demand for pasties subsequently dropped off a cliff, not only leaving me with an excess but also making the order for Monday way too big. We had also sold more sausage rolls and cheese pasties than I bargained for. The grand plan had been to have sufficient pasties of all kinds to last a couple of days, next delivery Wednesday. What we had was enough Cornish pasties until Thursday - probably a week Thursday the way things were going – and only enough sausage rolls and cheese pasties until Tuesday. I cannot just order cheese pasties and sausage rolls because it will not meet minimum order value. Darn it.

We were quiet again today. Of the people we have seen quite a few have expressed surprised how few businesses are open at present, not just in The Cove, but generally in the area. It surprised me as well until I thought about it. The cost of staff has increased dramatically since last year with National Insurance hike and the increase in minimum wage, which is very relevant in Cornwall hospitality. The places we are taking about have to be very careful when they open as they cannot afford to have staff and no customers.

We are able to open largely because I managed to find an eejit who works for hardly any pay at all. Even then, it was not that many years ago that we would open in early March, regardless of when Easter was. The high cost of electricity and an increasingly belligerent grumpy shopkeeper put paid to that.

Those who have arrived despite the lack of facilities are not all happy bunnies, it seems. I had a lady in yesterday who had paid cash in the car park, but the machine had failed to provide a ticket. It is a sticky situation because there is no proof that payment has been made. Once there would have been an attendant to sort things out, now there is a sign with a telephone number manned by some disinterested machine.

She was proper put out, which I could understand, but she also said that it put her off coming here. I did not argue but I felt that was a little unfair since a car park ticket machine could fail to provide a ticket anywhere for any number of technical failures or the omission of the provider to properly maintain the machine. It was just hard luck, not malice or negligence.

Her complaint to me was as if I could do something about it, but I assured her the only recourse was to call the car park management company. Ignoring that, she informed me that she would be telling the people at the OS. I did say that they did not own the car park either, but I suspect that by now the OS staff will be as nonplussed as I was.

As is often the case, the day brightened a little as the sun slipped down the western sky. There was still a moderate swell in the bay, and this encouraged some evening surfing going on towards high water. In all, it was a perfectly pleasant evening, although it seemed a little chilly. Just the sort of evening for a bowl of warming lobster pasta in a cream sauce knocked up by the Missus during the afternoon.

It sounds like we were lucky to get them. I already mentioned that one of the fishermen told me he had been wrestling octopus as they pulled the pots. The Missus told me later on that she had notices pots and pots just containing broken crab and lobster shells, victims of hungry octopi handed dinner on a plate. Our fishermen are able to take the well-fed octopi to market, but I would wager that the exchange is not financially equitable. I do not know where the market for octopus is, but it is unlikely to be in the UK.

Later, as we neared closing time, some regular visitors stopped by. The lady always orders a dressed crab when she arrives, which we supply from our regular crab supplier. I called the order in after she went with the intention to add our own order for white crab meat we sell in the shop. I was met with an answering system message that informed me that there would be no crab for the foreseeable future due to octopus invasion of their crabbing grounds. For a company whose sole product is Cornish crab meat, that is a pretty serious and possibly existential problem. I shall put my ear to the ground and await news. In the meanwhile, expect very expensive crab sandwiches if you can get them this year – or baked octopus sandwich, maybe.

I shall leave you to ponder that, dear reader. Sweet dreams.

## March 24<sup>th</sup> – Tuesday

All change today with the weather. We stepped out into some damp in the air. It had been wetter previously and was again not long after we came back. It was well into the day when I had a geek at the weather forecast, really just to check that it would be alright to put the cardboard out tonight. It was not in the least encouraging to see that we were to expect 50 miles per hours northwesterlies during the night. Any cardboard that I put out tonight most likely would not be there in the morning.

We had been quiet these past two days with the weather in our favour. Today, I saw two customers by the middle of the day. Even the painters and decorators up the back of us had bugged out early because of the weather and at least they had

bought a pasty (sorry, MS) and a packet of crisps each yesterday. With drizzle and a gale of wind on the way, things were unlikely to improve.

With nothing much to do, I continued with the reorganising that having the new jewellery stand forced. The old jewellery stand, the one that I lovingly crafted out of some very expensive reclaimed wood, some long bolts and a bit of imagination, was not going to be retired. I probably made it ten years ago and it is now an antique, an heirloom and an inherent part of shop furniture. Alright, maybe I am just a sentimental old fool, but I have known it since it was a drawing on a bit of paper; it would be a bit of a shame to just dump it. I intended to repurpose it as the keyring and patches stand, which would remove the current mishmash of stands sitting above the wet shoes down the middle aisle.

The engineers have been doing things with the Lifeboat these past couple of days. Our esteemed Coxswain put out a message yesterday evening to announce that the work was expected to be finished by the middle of the day today and that a test launch and run would follow. As it turned out, I could have shut the shop for the duration, and no one would have noticed. Since I did not know that beforehand, I asked the Missus to cover for me and duly attended at the prescribed time.

There were comfortable numbers of crew on both the boat and the shore and having waited for the engineers to complete their work, we went about our respective duties. I arranged for another to take on the head launcher role and I took to operate the winch. I keep a rota for who does what and when and try and rotate people into the various roles so that it is fairly spread. It was my turn to operate the winch and had absolutely nothing to do with the fact that the wind had started to bite a bit, forcing the drizzle across the slipway at speed – honest guv. I will fight anyone who says different. Alright, I will have strong words with anyone who says different – if they are smaller than me.

The launch went ahead a little later than planned and the boat was gone no more than 45 minutes. It emerged from the mist while we were all still milling about at the top of the slip having previously set everything up for its return. We all took our places and what ensued was clearly a textbook recovery up the long slip in windy conditions. After a washdown, the boat was put away for its next service with everyone executing their duties with aplomb. We are, after all, a very assured, very excellent Shore Crew.

There were some bits of brightness through the afternoon, which was a bit of a surprise. Looking at the forecast again, I noted that although there was plenty of wind, there was very little in the way of rain coming, which was helpful. It did not make an awful lot of difference; we remained very quiet right through the afternoon but happily rather less quiet than we were in the morning. That all changed again at the end of the afternoon when the mizzle thickened and it all got a bit damp and dreary.

I started my packing up early so that I could tie down the wheelie bin to something other than the big bin. The bin man, clearly frustrated by the fact that it was tied to the commercial bin last week, had cut the cord rather than untying it. Once all was away, I brought out the cardboard and tied the boxes to the newspaper bin. As long as that stayed in situ, the cardboard would be secure. Concerned that the string might provide an obstacle to its collection, I left a pair of scissors in the newspaper bin and wrote a note on the waste cardboard. What could possibly go wrong.

## March 25<sup>th</sup> – Wednesday

We awoke this morning to the bay a maelstrom of white water and a complex of random large, white-capped waves hurtling in towards the beach and flattening into a foamy blanket fifty yards out. Along the cliffs waves churned and leapt in white ragged columns all the way from Cape to Aire Point. All the while the sea egged on by a fierce northwesterly that had peaked during the night at 55 miles per hour at Land's End and had refused to give up. We will avoid mention of Gwennap Head, windiest place in the universe, where it topped 65 miles per hour. Oh, just mentioned it.

I am very pleased to report that the cardboard that I had taken some time to tie down outside was still there when I came down in the morning. I am even more pleased to say that the truck turned up to collect it this week, too. It was slightly irritating that they turned up while I was in the shop, so I could have got away with leaving the cardboard inside overnight. Still, I did not know that and, no doubt, had I not put it out, the truck would have been early.

In the shop, the wind brought a hitherto unfelt level of cold, although behind the counter I was out of its direct influence. I was sorely tempted to turn on the first electric sliding door in The Cove but was fearful it might have put off the two customers we had all morning. In the end, I cast caution to the wind – and, let us be honest, there was an abundance to cast it to – and switched it to automatic just ahead of the onset of hypothermia and frostbite.

There was very little to be done today. I had completed all the major jobs of setting up the new jewellery stand and reorganising the gift shelves. We had some very alluring greetings cards arrive a week or so ago and they are now out and the Sea Sisters cans of fish in varying flavoured sauces arrived yesterday, and they are out, too. The latter are a bit of an experiment. I saw them in the fishmonger in Newlyn before we opened and decided to try them.

They are from Dorset, but we will not hold that against them, but they use Cornish sardines and Cornish hake. The special thing about them is they come from a small craft business where the fish recipe is cooked and the product canned on site. You pay a little more for the privilege, but the product is of exemplary quality and highly sustainable. They are not going to replace a tin of tuna for your pasta bake but as a special treat, they are just the thing.

Today, I was left with something much more mundane: putting out fridge magnets. It was about the only thing left that I could think of, although we have some more orders on the way. With the exception of bodyboards, we are ready for Easter – until I discover the things I have forgotten about.

I mentioned a day or two ago the observation by some visitors that there was little open in The Cove at present. Well, the good news is that the café next door will be open from Friday. Like us, they have taken a couple of weeks to get things ready and have been actively recruiting new staff for the season. I have no doubt that their open hours will be carefully honed to meet optimum staff costs against profit. It is a crazy situation that a business cannot afford to open unless they are running at capacity. It will antagonise visitors who do not understand when they close at three or four o'clock when there will still be some people around.

Similarly with the private car parks whose prices have risen this year and will no doubt face criticism for doing so. I had a quick look and discovered that the Top car park's business rateable value increased by £11,000 this year – I could not find the numbers for The Beach. That is 30 percent off the bottom line. It is worth noting that The Beach car park has introduced a camera numberplate recognition system recently and hopefully they will be checking the paper in the machines more frequently.

At roughly the middle of the afternoon we were surprised by a vicious squall. I suppose it was not that much of a surprise because we could see the shower heading in across the bay. Lucky that the first electric sliding door in The Cove was closed at the time else we would have had a dowsing inside. The rain slapped against the windows, but it was so short-lived, there was not enough to clear the accumulation of salt. I will have to get the hose out when the wind eventually abates.

The wind dropped by twenty miles per hour by the end of the afternoon and I fancy moved a little to the west as it was much less severe than it had been all day. It was enough to tempt me out to clear up the twine I had used to secure the cardboard that has flapped about over the pavement all day. I also took the opportunity to clear up the twine I had used as a temporary measure to secure the newspaper box to the wall. It has now some much more attractive cord doing the job. I will need to address the other end, too, at some point. The spring clips on the cord there which double as a dog tie-up point, are rusted and no longer spring open. They require a hammer so that I can open the clips and remove the offending rusted items. I do not have a suitable hammer in the shop, which is an oversight that needs to be resolved.

Just to make sure that I knew what a squall was, we had another just as I was about to bring the display in from outside. Again, I could see it coming across the bay and just about got the ball stand in before it struck. It reminded me that the balls need inflating and topping up and the signage for those and the windbreaks need to be replaced. I have a job for tomorrow. Oh, happy day.

We should note that it is Happy Birthday to Mother by the time you see this, dear reader. I should not reveal a lady's age but she she three years off a decent cricket innings. She still ives independently and is very able for a pithy response to the grief I give her. Party on.

## March 26<sup>th</sup> – Thursday

There. Tis done. With the last inflation of the last ball, I have hopefully done the last of the preparation for the Easter hordes arriving real soon now. Of course, there is still the regular ordering to be done but hopefully the balls were the last of the non-regular stock. This included the must have and most attractive “Sennen Cove” mini rugby ball – it is a small rugby ball with Sennen Cove printed on it - that we acquired at great expense for our customers delectation and enjoyment. The delectation and enjoyment is only available at great expense, too – unless they nick it.

With the ball stand brimming, I turned my attention to the weekend pasty order (sorry, MS). I was on the cusp of inventing it when it occurred to me that some schools may have elected to commence their Easter holidays from this weekend and that we should be prepared for such an eventuality. It only took a couple of Internet searches to establish that Dorset, Birmingham and some of London had their term end dates this weekend. It was a good indication that there would be others too and that I should not only gird my loins but also order a geet load of pasties. Obviously, having now done so, The Cove will resemble a Hollywood western ghost town set complete with tumbleweed and creaking sign boards for the entire weekend.

Putting such fears aside, because grumpy shopkeepers can have their moments of fearlessness too, I realised that we were also short of firewood. I cannot imagine what alerted me to the need for firewood, perhaps it was the lack of feeling in my feet. I reasoned that our visitors may wish to light their log burners that every holiday home here seems to be equipped with, to save them from a similar fate. Grumpy shopkeepers are also famed for their hedging of bets, so I added some lumpwood charcoal to our order just in case it was barbeque weather instead of fresh this weekend.

The reason I mention something so mundane as ordering firewood is that the company we order from is staffed by exceeding pleasant people. The very pleasant lady I spoke to today told me that the wood that we normally order was not available. She had, though, an alternative and took time to explain the differences and how it may affect our customers. The fact that she knew without asking what we usually had, spoke volumes to their customer service ethic. We cannot be their best or most frequent customer for sure, but we are treated like we are, and it makes a huge difference.

It is entirely possible, however, that the word has got around, which is why I am being treated so politely. It seems that I have reached an age this year that requires

me to be treated with deference and gentility. It was not long ago that my electricity supplier wrote to tell me that I had been placed on the 'Priority Services Register'. This is not something that I initiated; it was just dropped in my lap. It now appears that my electricity supplier told their supplier just how delicate I had suddenly become, and they too wrote to me, today in fact, to tell me the same. The National Grid even went as far as providing me with a 'hot line' that should I find myself in difficulty I can call on, similar to having an arc light that shines a picture of a bat into the night sky. Just as an aside, it was never properly explained how Batman might have been summoned on cloudless nights or indeed during the day. I do not suppose Commissioner Gordon is still around to ask. I am minded to give the system a trial run, after all I would be sorely disappointed if I phone the number in an emergency and find it is a Turkish massage parlour in Camborne – or possibly not, thinking about it. Maybe I should just trust them – the electricity board, not the Turkish massage parlour, although ...

The weather today was a slightly improved on the day before – basically the same but without the howling gale. There was some early rain which did not bother us much and when I took the girls out, we were able to get down on the beach for the first time in more than a week. The sea was still agitated at that time but nothing in the order that it was yesterday. It was still enough to keep the fishing boats in the Harbour but bit by bit the sea state moderated, and one boat did get out a little later in the day.

Mother and her entourage had arrived late in the morning for her birthday party. It was a very understated all day affair and I was most disappointed to understand that there was to be no jelly and ice cream later on. In fact, I was more disappointed because I was expected at the Lifeboat station so shortly after teatime that I would not have time to be there with everyone. I tarried for a short time but they had already eaten and left me some crumbs on the table to enjoy later. Alright, hands up for soup. It is a fair cop, guv. You will, of course have realised that the Missus would have prepared a feast suitable for a battalion of soldiers who had been lost on a desert island for a month. I shall be eating the remnants morning and evening for a week.

Every now and then, the Institution insists that all crew members hear a particular bit of information. It is akin to a three line whip and all must try their best to attend or face having to go to another station at another time. There was an accompanying paper on what was to be discussed but I did not understand a word of it and was confused by the inclusion of the towing policy that seemed to have nothing to do with 'human factors and critical skills matrix'.

I had expected a short presentation, no more than an hour, so I was reasonably alarmed when we were told that it lasted around two hours. Thankfully, it was an early start else it would have gone past my bedtime. I had not heard the term 'human factors' before but it turns out that it is the new name for what we called 'man management'. Of course, the whole western world is scared to death of using the

word 'man' in anything at all and it is only a matter of time before we are forced to use new words for 'manual', 'manoeuvre', which is a good thing because I can never spell it correctly first time and 'management' itself. I also fear for the future of Manchester.

Anyway, I digress. Now, where was I. Ah, yes, human factors. We spent a little more than the first hour on human factors which the Institution has apparently hitherto had little acknowledgement of by its own admission. It has always focussed on the technical skills previously. The internal project has given the consultant carte blanche to come up with new acronyms and even some TLAs (three letter acronyms) and lots and lots of key words and memorable phrases that I confess, I have already forgotten. I know that I sound somewhat cynical and of the package, perhaps I am. The core message was sound but the delivery was a bit Dale Carnegie.

The last 45 minutes of the presentation concentrated on the Institution's amended towing policy. Once, Lifeboats would tow anything or anyone in simpler times. These days of blame and litigation create some problems that cannot be ignored. Firm rules have now been set up to guide Coxswains through the quagmire of risk and even as a member firmly based ashore, it was most interesting.

I was not much interested in tea when I returned home, having been exhausted with new things to learn. I took the girls out for a last spin and retired to dreams of man management, manipulation and manufacturing. I will probably be arrested tomorrow.

### March 27<sup>th</sup> – Friday

I am sure you could imagine a day more miserable and dreary, but it would require some effort. We had mizzle from early on and the mist and the rain in it just worsened as the day went on. Mother told me when she arrived that it was thick as a bag up top. It brought with it an absence of customers right to the later stages of the day.

It was a good job, then, that we had an abundance of deliveries to keep us busy instead. I, of course, dealt with the prodigious pasty delivery (sorry, MS) first thing and the Missus was here to help with the frozen and soft drinks when they arrived just as I got back from walking the girls after my visit to the gymnasium. The Missus was still working on the frozen food and ice creams when I returned from upstairs after making myself a little more respectable for the general public. I need not have bothered, of course.

The frozen delivery was the first since the end of last year. For the last few years there have been a slew of price increases across the board for the first delivery of the year. I am pleased to report that this year there were very few, especially true of the ice cream part of the delivery. They had all gone up quite a bit last year, so it was pleasing to see no change in twelve months. Dairy prices have stabilised over the

last year, and some have come down, although you have to wonder just how much dairy is in modern day, mass produced ice cream.

Normally, a late breakfast would have been interrupted many times, extending it into the afternoon. Today, I had no such trouble, and the lack of customers gave me time to catch up on the general and trade news from one of my feeds. A recycling campaign group somehow managed to count all the non-disposable vapes that has been disposed of since the law changed that made it illegal to sell disposable vapes. Quite how they managed to count them all will forever remain a mystery, but they report that 6.3 million have been thrown away.

The good news is that 6.3 million is a 23 percent improvement on the number thrown away in 2024 but since the ban was supposed to do away with disposal altogether, it must be a bit of a disappointment. One of the main concerns with disposal, other than disposal, is that the disposed of vapes which contain lithium batteries, catch fire in the lorries collecting them. The waste companies complain that they are not disposed of in the correct recycling containers – it does not say which one that should be mainly because it will be different in each council area, I imagine.

The high level of disposal is absolutely no surprise to me at all. Whoever drafted the legislation allowed so much leeway that the cigarette companies that make them must have thought that all their Christmases had come at once. They duly went about producing the same disposable items with small and inexpensive tweaks that made them compliant but definitely not re-usable.

Now, I find it hard to believe that the Government were unaware of the blatant loopholes in the legislation. Even if some work experience schoolboy had been left to draft the original on the back of a vape packet, someone would have picked it up. It would have been peer reviewed, a team of lawyers picking it to pieces and ministers crawling all over it. That kind of only leaves the explanation that it was done on purpose.

Then I think, if that were the case, some sharp-eyed member of the opposition would have picked it up and made trouble with it. So, I am perplexed how such a weak and flawed law made it to the statute books. Either they are all in on it – free fags for a year – or not one of them read it as it went through the Commons twice and the Lords once. Obviously, I was never meant to understand such lofty decisions.

To distract me, in the afternoon, the small number of wetsuits and bodyboards that I had ordered in to plug the gaps in our stock arrived. The bodyboards, after removing the ones we needed in the shop, had to be taken to The Farm because they would be in the way else. The Missus took those while I processed the wetsuits – putting labels on them and repacking the ones going to storage at The Farm.

Not that it mattered a huge amount, but whoever packed the wetsuits for us replaced two that we did need with two that we did not. We will have enough of all the sizes

for Easter but the mix up cost me some time when I was in a bit of a rush to get them out of the way. We also now have an additional two wetsuit sizes that we already have an abundance of and that we did not ask for.

There were some more pleasing deliveries. The jams and preserves arrived. The contact at the company is very much more user friendly since my nudge last year that I was dissatisfied with their communications. This time I was told in advance that certain lines were not available which means I did not have to spend time chasing up the shortfall. Things are indeed improving, although I am still short on supplies.

It was an hour before closing and the mist finally beggered off. It would have been nice if it had done it several hours earlier but that would just not have been how the world of grumpy shopkeepers works. The breeze had abate a bit, too, although I believe it is returning tomorrow to spoil what is pegged as a bright and sunny day. The news tells me that some warm weather is on the way but it failed to detail whether that was just for the South-East and whether it would come with a guts of rain and a gale of wind. I will wait and see.

I placed the last minute orders for dairy and greengrocery in the expectation that we would have customers this weekend. All aboard. This train is about to leave the station – ten minutes late and without a buffet car, probably.

## March 28<sup>th</sup> – Saturday

Well, it looked very pretty through the window this morning. No, actually, it looked like it would rain any moment with some dark clouds out to the north made darker by the position of the sun at that time. It was not until a little later it looked very pretty and by that time we knew all about the fierce northwesterly and the biting cold that rather took the edge of it all.

There was a fair amount to do in the morning. I had ordered in dairy and greengrocery that needed to be put away and some of it weighed and priced. The beer fridge that I had neglected for most of the week needed topping up and there were some gaps on the grocery shelves that needed attention. I had already done the soft drinks fridge after the delivery yesterday, so that was something.

Clearly, I had hoped that we might be busy from early on courtesy of the new arrivals last night. Either there were no arrivals last night or the biting cold was putting them off coming out. Whatever the reason, we were quiet, so I went about pulling together the stock values for everything we had purchased since we completed the stock take earlier in the year. Anything we buy and had not sold before the end of March, our new financial year end, needs to be included in the stock valuation for accounting purposes. That is why being forced to move our year end proved to be such a monumental pain in the rear.

I have an update on the octopus saga, you will be delighted to know. I had it yesterday but was distracted by 6.3 million disposable vapes. The first thing to note is that I had been mistakenly using the incorrect plural of the word. It should be octopuses as it comes from Greek not Latin. That will teach me to be clever.

The second thing to note is that the numbers are of biblical plague proportions. I spoke with another of our fishermen who told me that they had already worked their way along the south coast, Jersey and Guernsey and now were heading up the west coast clearing the areas of crab and lobster as they went. There is some recompense for the beleaguered fishermen in that the octopus they catch are valuable, possibly more so than the lobsters they have replaced. In his view, our fisherman told me that their appearance would be short lived, but the effect of their presence would be felt all year by the dearth of lobster and crab available afterwards.

The Missus was present yesterday when another fisherman was in for morning pasties. The talk inevitably came around to octopuses, and she said that she would like to try one, after all, she loved the squid that come around in the autumn each year. I am glad I was there to apply the brake on this particular direction of travel. There is a whole bucketful of difference between squid and octopus. At least ten kilograms to start with. Octopus can take out submarines; I have seen it in the movies – or that might have been giant squid. It is a long time since Voyage to the Bottom of the Sea was on television.

Then there is the preparation and cooking of the beast. My concerns were confirmed when I spoke with the chef next door later on who told me that it would need at least two hours cooking and there was a whole raft of different methods of cutting it up afterwards. The cooking might be the least of the problems – finding a pot big enough would be an issue and how to stop the begger getting out of it another. I also have no idea how one despatches an octopus and we would be eating octopus for a very long time. Fortunately, I managed to head the Missus off at the pass this time. I know her, though, she will be plotting and looking at YouTube videos. I shall have to be on my guard.

Just out of interest, I looked up how to despatch an octopus on the Internet. Apparently, there is a small 'thread' that joins the cephalothorax to the head. All the videos I watched were of divers and fishermen using their teeth to bite it in two. It should be noted that in all the videos I saw, the octopuses shown were about a tenth the size of the ones being caught here.

It took a long time to get going today. If it was the weather keeping them away, I would be waiting even longer. Fortunately, closing in on the middle of the day, we started to see some action at last. It was not the busiest of days, but it was a good start and there were some notable sales. The quiet bits allowed me to clear the last of the late deliveries and get them out on the shelf. There is nothing further I can do

to be better prepared for a bigger onslaught, although I will probably think of something when I discover I forgot it.

The cold just got worse through the day. Moving around helped, otherwise I could feel everything seizing up. The wind had been banging in at around 30 miles per hour consistently all day bringing a windchill temperature of around four degrees. In the shop, it felt colder. I would have closed the first electric sliding door in The Cove but that would mean moving the pasty sign (sorry, MS) and pasty sales were thin enough as they were. The sign sways around in the breeze and triggers the door mechanism. I stood and suffered instead, occasionally breaking into a little jig to move the blood around my system.

The sea was showing off again right through the day. There was no ground sea to speak of, but the wind had whipped the sea into a frenzy of white tops and there was enough push behind it to send it over the Harbour wall near high water. We had clear blue skies for much of the day, dotted with fluffy little white clouds. It really set off the white tops and the waves as they pounded up the cliffs opposite and ran in long frothy runs to the beach. One lady, later on, asked if there was anything wrong with the tides today because the sea had not gone out as she expected. We are in neap tides, so they are smaller anyway but with the wind behind it, the sea had been pinned to the beach.

I was exceptionally grateful when closing time came around and I could retreat to the warmth of the flat. Before I went, I set the time on the shop clock – it was slow anyway – so it was correct in the morning. It was only as I closed the door that I realised I had set it back rather than forwards. It is supposed to do it itself but cannot see the radio signal in The Cove. I will correct it in the morning – if I can set my own internal clock correctly.

## March 29<sup>th</sup> – Sunday

I managed to evade any problems resulting from the somewhat daft changing of the clocks this morning. I awoke bang on the time I would normally wake, albeit an hour earlier than the same time yesterday. The subject used to spring up in Parliament at least annually but for some reason they always decided to leave it be. Like everything else these days, leave it alone or change it, you are going to upset some group or other.

The morning seemed to pass by very slowly. Whether it was the psychological effect of the time change or the lack of customers, it is hard to tell. As I reported yesterday, all the preparation had been done, so I had nothing to fall back on. It did give me time to update our opening hours on our website. A sharp-eyed neighbour reported that the page was still showing Christmas hours. I really thought that I had changed it but clearly not. It is done now, the work of a couple of minutes. Perhaps I should have strung it out a bit.

It was no real surprise that we were quiet again today, possibly more so than yesterday. It was a day as dull as ditchwater and just as cold as yesterday but without the incessant breeze that had dipped toward the southwest. Given that The Cove is primarily a beach resort, it had very little to commend it today – apart from a small shop filled with alluring goods and a commensurately attractive looking grumpy shopkeeper.

It is a shop so welcoming that small children would prefer to remain in its cosy environs than be with their own parents on occasion. You may think I jest, dear reader, but hold fast. It was only today that we were visited by a couple of families with small children keen to sample our icy comestibles while the parents enjoyed a pasty (sorry, MS) or two. They were gone a full ten minutes before one set of parents hurried back saying that they had left the baby behind.

The child, no more than eighteen months, perhaps, had been perfectly happy, sitting down in the 'black hole' corner of the shop where all the toys are. I certainly had no notion that there was a poor orphan child down there. It took a further ten minutes of negotiation before the parents took executive action to extract the child by force. There was kicking, screaming, wailing and grinding of teeth. I rest my case.

Today had been pencilled in as wet with rain approaching from the northwest. I had checked the rain radar early on and, sure enough, there was a geet lump of it off the southern coast of Ireland. It was a good few hours away at that stage. As the day progressed, I forgot all about it until late in the afternoon when it looked a bit duller and greyer than it had done earlier. I had another look at the rain radar to see how things were and discovered that the rain had indeed arrived, enveloping most of the Duchy but had thus far missed out the Far West completely. At the time, I thought that it was probably only a temporary stay of execution but the rain when it did arrive would probably only be mizzle of one degree heaviness or another.

The rain arrived just as I was about to bring in the outside display. Of course it did. It was only mizzle but chose to be of the heavier sort of drizzle rather than the light. I had not really noticed as I had switched off for the day and it was not until a lady came in, her coat wet and dripping that I realised that it was raining at all. She was the last customer of the day, a full half an hour before we closed.

It is the last half an hour that I reserve for ordering replacement groceries and dairy. So overly optimistic was my ordering before the weekend that we have an abundance of things that will last into the first part of the week. Unfortunately, a good proportion of that has 'best before' dates that will expire at the end of Monday. There will be much throwing away of perfectly good food unless we have a mad rush in the meanwhile. It is more likely that the mad rush will come after I have pared back on the next order and have insufficient for their needs.

And so the cycle begins again.

## March 30<sup>th</sup> – Monday

It was a much better day in prospect today. It was still cold, and the wind had gone back around to the northwest, but the big beach looked stunning. The tide was still going out as I gazed down in the first hour of shop opening. In the early sun all the colours were pastel and filtered in the light haze that hung over the bay under a near cloudless sky. The wind was, once again, whipping up white-topped sea horses in the bay and the waves were spreading in long foamy runs to the beach. Out at Creagle and Aire Point, great white plumes were exploding into the air as the waves crashed into the rocks below.

Looking at that scene, I came to the conclusion that it is not the weather keeping the visitors away, it is just the lack of visitors. I have amended my mindset accordingly and will no longer seek to feed and equip large numbers of people who are unlikely to come into the shop. I made a start by ordering a small number of pasties (sorry, MS) for tomorrow that should last two days. I also made a list of things that I could do to amuse myself in the lonely, customer-free hours ahead.

One of those things was to watch the two kite surfers plying those long runs the waves were making onto the beach. They were there for a couple of hours, skimming gracefully over the surf and lifting into the air. They made it look effortless, although I suspect that it takes a good deal of strength and skill keeping the kite to the correct angle to the wind and looking where you are going at the same time.

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Those people who were abroad, and the numbers picked up from the middle of the day, were all dressed up against the bitter windchill. Just ahead of opening we had placed an order with our beachware company. Earlier, I had noted that we had exhausted our stock of woolly hats and gloves last season, so in one inspired moment, I added a dozen woolly hats and gloves to go with the toys and gifts that would be coming. Gosh, what a clever grumpy shopkeeper. Over the last couple of days there has been a conveyor belt of hats and gloves coming to the till. We do love it when a plan comes together.

On the other hand, I had put a number of pasties in the freezer and reduced the number I was keeping in the warmer. Perhaps you would like to hazard a guess as to what happened today, dear reader.

It was a very encouraging afternoon even if I did have to get all my pasties out of the freezer again. The numbers were about what I had been expecting from the weekend, so perhaps it was the weather holding people back. Without question it was due to the increase in audience that the sea started acting up as it drove in towards high water. Waves became larger as the swell increased, barrelling across the bay. It was fair boiling over Cowloe and dancing up the cliffs opposite and, naturally, leaping over the Harbour wall. It was some spectacle.

Our busyness evaporated from around four o'clock and the street became deserted, just like that. There had been a veritable crowd for two or three hours during the early part of the afternoon, which did very nicely. It certainly gave me a little more hope for this part of the season and, of course, it is likely to be much busier when our own schools break up at the end of the week. It still meant kicking my heels for the last few hours of shop opening but I amused myself by playing with a couple of computer problems that has irked me from time to time of late.

I also reviewed our shelves to see how the stock was holding up. When it is slow, things running out sometimes take me by surprise. Mostly we seem to be alright, and no emergency ordering need take place. The Missus had made her first run up to The Farm today to prepare the potting shed, previously known as greenhouse, for Mother and her to plant the new seeds. I asked her to bring down the balance of our woolly hat order so I could replenish our empty hooks. The biggest surprise was the artisan tins of fish which have been selling out of their socks. We sold nine in two days, nearly a third of the stock.

All we need now is for it all to happen again tomorrow. My loins are girded.

## March 31<sup>st</sup> – Tuesday

All change today, at least in the morning. The haze that we had yesterday had coalesced and sat like a bit duvet on the cliffs above us. It thickened as the day went on but the cloud that had sat above that, cleared and offered some brightness in the afternoon on and off. There were remnants of yesterday's swell in the bay first thing, but that slowly declined leaving just enough for a few surfers to enjoy.

It was much warmer too, largely thanks to the absence of any strong breeze. The wind was still in the northwest, but a third of its force from the last few days and even standing across the road from the shop, I could barely feel it. With the wind offshore it puzzled me greatly that the mist was not on the other coast. I did not linger long on the explanation, but it is the same principle, warm wet air and cold sea/land but called something different. I thought it wholly unfair. The mist lowered early on the afternoon and swirled about us. It was, in fact, very cold air but wet nonetheless. It stayed for an hour or so and lifted again just a little to hang above us. Then it came back again.

Fortunately, our visitors are made of sterner stuff and like yesterday they gathered in abundance from the middle of the day for a few hours bringing busyness and pasty sales (sorry, MS) to a hitherto quiet day. Yesterday, I had set a cunning plan to order pasties sufficient for two days given the poor performance of sales thus far in the week. Closing in on the cutoff time to order more for tomorrow, we were selling pasties at a rate that, if it continued, would see my carefully crafted and considered plans in shattered pieces on the ground. It was time to employ an artful dynamic

risk assessment, make a new plan and order the same number for tomorrow. Even grumpy shopkeepers can be fleet of brain when push comes to shove.

I had made arrangements, not long into the morning, to go and drive the Tooltrak. The Inshore boat was going out twice today, the second had already been covered. There are normally enough bodies around to cover such things but on this occasion it looked like I would have to step into the breach. The Missus kindly agreed to cover, and I duly attended at muster time. A brief conversation later and I was back behind the counter. The mechanic and the Coxswain agreed to cover the required posts and I was let off the hook.

The launches were for another of our crew being passed out as helm on the Inshore boat. It was one of the areas where we were deficient and now, we are anything but. I think that brings the number of helms to six, some of which are more available than others but with launching of the Lifeguard's jet ski under review, we may well need the extra numbers this year.

With some unexpected time on my hands and the street devoid of life, I decided to pull out our long hose and wash down the windows. The salt from the first north wind day had made them mucky with salt, the subsequent days just made them increasing degrees of opaque. Someone also mentioned the need to wash down our solar panels from time to time for the same reason. The hose was just long enough to go around the side of the shop but there was insufficient pressure to reach the top of the uppermost panels. I was not in the mood to overthink a solution to that, so they can wait until something comes to mind when I am not thinking about it.

We must have been busy in some regards because I did a quick review of our grocery shelves during the day. There were several gaps that I hastily filled. I also noted that much of the gift biscuit stock, the fairings and the shortbread had diminished considerably, so I put in an order for those as we have no over stock. The venture kept me amused for all of half an hour, but it was better than standing about doing nothing else.

With the fog coming and going throughout the entire afternoon, and occasionally being very wet as well, it was only a matter of time before it drew comment. We had clearly been having day trippers passing through The Cove today and some had hailed from Penzance and the south coast. They took pains to tell us, that there the sun was verily splitting the hedges and the day glorious. It was heartwarming to note that the old traditions of telling us how wonderful it is everywhere else are still alive today.

There was not even a five minutes to closing rush to console us today. There had not been a five minutes to closing rush since we opened, so perhaps not all the old traditions have survived. We did have, I noted, the best revenue day of the year so far when I closed the till at the end of the day. The fact that I had spent it all on

Furniss biscuits and Kernow chocolate earlier in the day was neither here nor there. It had heartened me no end. I might even open the shop tomorrow in celebration.