DIARY 2026

October 1st – Thursday

My first treat of the morning, other than it not raining when I took the girls around, was a sky dotted with celestial bodies. Due to a combination of a bright gibbous moon and the impending dawn, I think that I could only see the bright stars and planets, but it was still splendorous, regardless.

I had to wait for daylight to see the exciting spectacle of the sea in full fury, although I could do nothing but hear it earlier. Most of the bay was covered in strings and patches of foam, rolling deeply with the waves moving in multiple directions. Waves were coming over the Harbour wall in great lumps, launching up Aire Point and Creagle opposite and dancing on top of Cowloe that was just a mess of white water.

Into this churning maelstrom came a lone person on a surfboard, paddling out from what little beach there was left by waves pounding and running up the sand. It was hard to see what he was trying to achieve because there was not one surfable wave in the bay. All he succeeded in doing was getting a sound thrashing with every wave he encountered and a couple of times parting company with his board. Maybe he was trying to cure a hangover.

It is hard to tell with the tide out, but it looks like there is a bit of an incline at the top of the beach. While I looked this morning, there was a couple, in swimsuits, standing on the slope letting waves lump into them. This looked like fun until one was knocked off their feet and had to be hauled up by the other as a wave threatened to pull them out. The sea state was really quite severe and, I think, even standing on the sand inside its reach was not the best of places to be.

The Lifeguards were apparently late on parade or were just looking for enough sand on which to place their red flag. When I looked a little later, there was a group of around fifteen people lined up looking at the sea not far from the Lifeguard hut. They were fully dressed, so clearly not there to catch a bit of sun. Much later, they were still roughly in the same spot, although more gathered around than in a line. I could not see what they might have been up to and will have to make enquiries later. If it was a litter pick, it was all in the same, now very clean, ten square metres.

Late in the morning, we started to see a little action in the shop. It was busier than it had been all week and consisted of quite a lot of going home present buying. As the afternoon drifted on, we actually became quite busy with an almost continuous stream of people passing through the shop. We even sold some posh mugs, which was a pleasant surprise and as things were going so swimmingly it was high time for an upset.

It came in the form of a response to a query I had placed with the ‘Exchange for Change’ people. This is the jack-booted body that is inflicting on the retail world unimaginably draconian conditions related to the collection of plastic and aluminium used drinks containers. The dreaded DRS – Deposit Return Scheme.

I had previously reported that rural stores under 100 metres squared were automatically exempt and had breathed a sigh of relief. It now seems that I had been misled. The lasts missive from the organisation countered that information, so I wrote to ask for clarity which I had back in spades.

The message I had back was very clear that rural stores under 100 metres squared must still register on the system and subsequently apply for exemption. I was pointed at the guidance that had been drafted, suitably entitled “Return Point Exemptions Criteria”. It is thirteen pages long. Since we were relatively quiet during the afternoon, I read it.

There are two routes to salvation. The first is by having a willing party within ‘reasonable proximity’ who will be taking in the bottles and cans. More than half the pages of the document are dedicated to the criteria defining the other store and ‘reasonable proximity’: its size,; the opening hours; the public transport around it; walking routes to it; the relationship to the hours; and location relative to the store seeking the exemption. Once all that had been taken into account, it was still a subjective opinion by someone who almost certainly had no knowledge of the local area or the nature of tourist areas.

The second route is premises-based. If it is not reasonable to host a return point because of the characteristics of the building, I can apply for exemption on this basis. This is our best hope and the one that we will be applying under. We will be required to jump through far more hoops than we were for the pavement licence and some of them may cost money. Scale plans must be submitted, fire safety reports by a certified fire assessor, ventilation constraints certified by a suitable assessor of some sort and so forth. If I felt there were questions over the parentage of the pavement licence people, these guys had been spawned from the combined offspring of Machiavelli, Marquis de Sade and Genghis Khan and Vlad the Impaler. I suspect that if we are to attain exemption – which we are told can be revoked at any time – we would need to sacrifice our first born and sell our souls to a deity of their choosing.

All we can do at present is register and mark the box to indicate that we wish to apply for an exemption. I must then wait for the boys at Exchange for Change head office to decide the rules and the process for exemptions all while with big sack of rusty pop cans hanging over my head – swords hanging by horse hairs have been condemned as an unacceptable health and safety risk, apparently.

While I fretted over how I might deal with bags of dirty cans and bottles while serving pasties, the weather changed on us. The blue skies and bright sunshine we had

during the morning disappeared while I was distracted and was replaced with a blanket of grey, albeit light grey, cloud. I do not think that we were expecting any rain, but the temperature dipped a bit and, eventually, our customers ran off. Never mind, it was undoubtedly one of the better days of the week, if not the best. It was just a shame that the devastating news on DRS had taken the shine off it.

A good Lifeboat launching would have made all the difference after that but with the sea state being unhelpful, we had a presentation to take part in instead. We had been subjected to the introduction of Human Factors a while back by a wandering head office refugee. It is the collection of soft skills that the Institution has embarked on imbuing us with. Things like communication skills that negate misunderstandings, learning new terms, like ‘authority gradient’ and ‘plan continuation bias’, and being aware of deficiencies in previous things we had learned.

Tonight, we had one of our own, a member of the very excellent Shore Crew, telling us more. It is testament to the obvious skills of the team that the Institution thought to poach one of us for such an important role. It goes without saying, of course, it was a textbook presentation and led discussion and we all learnt big things – and far too many to mention.

We are, after all, a very multi-talented, very excellent Shore Crew.

October 2nd – Friday

I was a bit more serious about my star gazing this morning. It might have been because it was darker and there were a few more on display but also, as I had intended to do yesterday but forgot, I went and looked up the names. It would have been more effective to do it while I was looking at them. It means pointing my smart mobile telephone in the appropriate direction and a very clever ‘app’ shows a picture of what you are looking at, labelled with names.

More effective it might have been but practical it was not. I had the two girls strapped to one hand trying to pull it off in two different directions and I would have to have put my spectacles on and hold the telephone steady with the other hand. That was just not going to happen, so I just had to memorise where I had seen what and emulate looking at them through the telephone when I got back home.

High above and slightly to the south was the waning gibbous moon – I did not need the app for that. Then there was a host of planets. Jupiter was up there, brightest after the moon then straight ahead near the western horizon was Saturn, which I had not expected. There was also Neptune and Uranus, but they were hiding up there somewhere and only the telephone app could see them.

Then there were the various stars. Orion is a fairly obvious constellation with lots of stars in it and nestled on the horizon – which is the top of Mayon Cliff – was Sirius, the brightest star. There were others, too but I was not taking notes and by the time I came to write these words, I had forgotten what they were – quite apart from them being long words with lots of letters in odd orders. I saw too that my smart mobile telephone app had been updated and it is a much more cluttered and complicated screen and thus less easy to read and remember. You will just have to take it from me that there were oodles of stars with complicated names, honest guv.

I was bumped back to Earth by realising that my star gazing and messing about had made me late for going downstairs to prepare the shop. I was half an hour late which by the time we opened made absolutely no difference at all. I could quite easily spend an extra half an hour in bed in the mornings and then spend the intervening time before we opened fretting that I was going to miss something or be late.

We were a little busier during the early part of the morning that we had been during the week. Many people were making preparations to leave and needed provisions to take with them. Others just needed a last breakfast milk or box of eggs and some just a newspaper. I think that it was just pleasant to see customers during the morning instead of gazing out onto a deserted street.

There were an increased number of people milling about and sitting at the benches between us and the café when I returned from my blistering session at the gymnasium. It did not appear to generate a great deal more footfall in the shop but at least the potential was there. I had to wait to see if it was fulfilled because I was despatched to the beach with the girls soon after.

We had started the day in much the same manner that we had started the day before, with blue skies. This continued into the morning and by the time we arrived on the beach, we were back to summer again. The sea state is moderating, falling back to a deep rolling ground sea providing unbreaking waves running into the beach at high water. Down in the Harbour the waves were a little more than gently slapping at the sand. I avoided getting a shoe full this time, but I still had to wind my way around the oar weed that seemed to have increased since the last time we were there.

With very little to do in the later afternoon – I did top up the stationery section, good ain't I – I had plenty of time to stand and stare at the big beach. I do love a good low tide as there is generally quite a bit going on even if there are very few people on it. Today there were a few, some of them in swimsuits still, taking a dip. There were very few surfers at the lower ebb of the tide but they came out later as the waves increased in size. At the near side of the beach, the waves were coming on in perfect arcs, tumbling into foam at the last minute, probably a foot or two high. Out the back in the middle of the beach, the waves were coming on in classic form before breaking over some of the sandbanks. Over on the far side at North Rocks, it was a bit more disorderly and blown out.

It was on the nearside that the community of black headed gulls had decided to bob around on the shallows. Here they took to some synchronised wave jumping which they appear to be born to. A cluster of young herring gulls with their mothers gathered on the sand trying to look aloof. When I looked late, the black headed gulls were still at it. My, they must have some tenacity, but there again, they do not have television.

The gloriousness of the day stayed with us until the evening. Since the Missus was out late on an appointment for her dickie shoulder, I took the girls down to the Harbour beach after I finished in the shop. It was perfectly pleasant even then and the high cirrus cloud, providing a bit of mackerel sky, looked set to give out a spectacular sunset. I am sure someone will say whether it was or no. I was not going to hang around that long – I had some of that hake we had during the week for my tea. The Missus had lamb chops; the Missus hates fish.

October 3rd – Saturday

I had thought that we had possibly seen the last of the splendid weather for while when I took the girls around. It had either been raining overnight or it was heavy condensation, very possibly the latter, as the street was wet and the greenery glistened with dew. I could not see the stars, either and that clinched it for me.

So, it was a very pleasant surprise that when I came down to open the shop, there was clear sky above us and, on the fringes, areas of high cirrus cloud that seemed to be clearing away. It was not long before it started looking bright and happy again, which was just as well because we intended to launch the Lifeboat.

There was still a bit of ground sea but not enough to make a journey uncomfortable nor indeed to preclude a safe recovery. A morning launch suited most people and coincided with high water and a short slip operation when it returned. We launched at half past nine o'clock after I got the Missus to cover for me. The original intention was that the Inshore would launch as well. We would have been spread thinly to cover both but as only the big boat went out in the end, we were overmanned on the shore, which made for very light work.

The boat was gone for just over an hour and had followed the coast around to Porthcurno where it hung about a bit before returning. We had retired to the crew room for cups of tea and to discuss great matters and eat biscuits. There was much discussion and that much is true but since I could not hear much of it, I might be exaggerating on the greatness of it. However, from previous experience, I would suggest that it was – great, that is.

I had kept track of the boat and noticed when it was on its way back. We had set up for the short slip and it only needed minor adjustment for it to be ready for the return

of the Lifeboat. There was some sporadic rise and fall as the tide diminished but not so much that we could not execute a textbook recovery up the short slip. With all due efficiency, we hauled the boat into the house and strapped it down for its next service. We are, after all, a very effective, very excellent Shore Crew.

After, we all piled into the crew room for a presentation to an ex-crew member who thoroughly deserved it and for whose benefit the boat was launched on this occasion.

I returned to the shop when it was all over and took over from the Missus standing behind the counter and staring out to sea. We were intermittently interrupted by customers when we had to resurrect our long forgotten skills of serving them and taking their money. I know that it was a change-over day but if it was this quiet when the sun was shining, I was very pleased that it was not raining.

I was also very pleased that one of our grocery suppliers had eventually got around to issuing credits for some of its mistakes it had inflicted upon us. They have previous for sending the wrong thing, replacing it quite speedily and without fuss but failing to issue a credit for the wrong thing they took back. After six weeks and multiple telephone calls reminding them of the omission, we eventually had the credits issued late yesterday. For the delivery today they sent chicken seasoning instead of Cornish sea salt with chilli. So, here we go again.

With the way the tides are, our surfing community were compelled to surf as the tide receded, which was better than nothing but not ideal. There were some waves but there was also much bobbing and much waiting. It may not have been a great surf day, but it definitely looked like a beach day and there was a small gathering at the top of the beach, with tents and with the absence of wind, no need for windbreaks – darn it. Judging from the number of swimsuits the water is still a comfortable temperature.

Now that dogs are allowed on the beach at any time, they were taking advantage – or at least more advantage than when they were not allowed on the beach. Through from the middle of the day I spotted quite a few down there. This included our own when the Missus took them in that direction to issue events posters to the Surf Lodge and OS. They came back drenched from rock pool swimming and looking very pleased with themselves.

They were a sight more pleased that I was at the end of the shop day. It is a disappointment that I shall have to become accustomed to as the day was probably the best we can expect before half term. After that we will not have to worry.

October 4th – Sunday

The grey that I thought we were having yesterday, we got today instead. I was not looking skyward this morning as I walked around; I was looking out to sea. When I

first dragged myself from my pit there was a bright light to the north of the bay. I think it was one of the Newlyn netters poaching our sardines – not that anyone else was after them. It did not have its vessel tracker on, so I could not be sure.

Certainly, our own boats were going out have been warned off by the sea state for the best part of last week. It spooked me a little when I heard a noise on the wharf, which was one of them getting ready, when I was walking the girls in the morning. Oddly, the girls completely ignored it but then went off barking at shadows in the car park two minutes later.

The fishing boats were joined by various other kayaks and dinghies under a drab grey sky. They were encouraged by a largely flat sea with little in the way of swell and just a rippled surface in the light nor'westerly breeze. Such waves as there were, close in on shore, provided some sport for a few undemanding surfers trying their luck there. The waves would be giving the fishers no problems at all.

I had plenty of time to make observations because, again, we were very quiet during the morning. All the visitors who had been staying in The Cove and had been regular morning customers, had all gone home yesterday. We will have to wait for the new influx to discover that we are quite useful on occasion. As it was, we had to wait until near the middle of the day before we saw any serious numbers – more than two – come by and start shopping.

In the meanwhile, I finished off the cash and carry list. There is not enough there for a delivery, but I shall entreat the Missus to drive up there during the coming week to collect it. We can even place the order online and have the people there pick it so that all the Missus has to do is collect it. I am bound to have forgotten something on the list and there are some things that we need to check the shelf date of first. These she will need to find in the warehouse herself.

We had to wait until nearly the middle of the day, but the cloud broke up and gave us another sun-drenched afternoon. We were selling sun lotion again, a few sunglasses and I even sold a parasol in the middle of the afternoon. One customer, perusing the sunglasses display brought his selection to the counter. I was a little curious because they did not have a label and on closer inspection, they were clearly someone's old, worn pair. Whether the person who left them there had purchased new ones or surreptitiously swapped their old for new, we will never know.

While the sunshine was very welcome for us, I am not so sure it was for the three back to back marathon race, the Atlantic Coast Challenge, that started to come through at two o'clock. I was alerted by a small clatter of applause as the front runners came past. We saw the others in an increasing state of weariness throughout the rest of the afternoon. They have the option of running one, two or all three stages, starting up Padstow way. There was no way of telling who had done what but the ones coming through on their knees toward the end of the day were either heroic triers or just very over optimistic about their abilities.

Having a bit of a better time of it were the youngsters down on the surf in the latter part of the afternoon. The late low tide was providing some decent junior waves for them to exploit, and they were having a terrific time of it by the look of things. I had some time to watch them after a late rush at the counter that did not quite qualify for last minute rushing. I had more than enough of that yesterday evening. It was hard on closing time and the street was deserted. I was about to complete the last of the packing away when I was descended upon. They came out of nowhere or possibly the sun, in a proper orchestrated ambush. It was good to have customers but a dirty trick, nonetheless.

There were no such shenanigans this evening which was probably just as well. After a rushed tea we were off to the F&L for a quiz. The quizzes are organised by a very fine gentleman who lives in the village and each week it funds a different local cause in rotation. This week it was to the benefit of our Lifeboat friend who we launched for yesterday. He is a brae bit poorly and the local machine is coming together to provide support for him and his family. As well as the quiz, there was a raffle, too, for which we had taken up some prizes.

We were late arriving and the all the tables were full and the teams chosen, so the Missus and I formed a team of two at the bar. It was pretty much a fun event and the questions not too challenging. We were four points behind the winners but, there again, so were several others. We had brought raffle prizes to join with many others and the raffle was held at the end of the quiz. The total collection for the night topped £500 that was none too shabby for a locals only quiz and raffle.

It was all done by half past eight o'clock, which was handy because so was I. Once upon a time, I would work all day and party half the night on a Saturday with a band up at the F&L. Those days are definitely gone. There is a birthday celebration next Saturday for a local hero and luminary. I had intended to go but on the strength of tonight, I may have to demur. A man must know his limitations.

October 5th – Monday

It had been remarkably warm over the last two nights, not dropping below 14 degrees according to Land's End weather station. St Ives was suggesting that it was even warmer than that, probably because it had its back to the very light winds.

There must be a fair amount of moisture in the air and along with the clear skies we have had dew for the last couple of mornings. It was lighter this morning but in the dark, it looked like a frost in some areas and since it was so warm, it was an odd sensation. At least we had no spooky fishermen hiding around corners.

The outstanding feature of our walk around the block was the quiet. Once I had got past the Harbour there was utter peace, not a bird twittering in the bushes and not a

whisper from the sea. Just utter silence. It would be a thing if that could be bottled and visited any time you needed it.

Despite Radio Pasty's best efforts in forecasting bright skies similar to yesterday for the afternoon, the cloud cover stalwartly failed to shift itself. It was still a warm and pleasant day; it is just that there was no added sunshine for the extra feel good factor. Everyone was sitting around looking miserable. I jest, of course. I could not tell if they were miserable because they did not turn up until halfway through the day.

It left me plenty of time for a blistering session and to take the girls to the Harbour for a bit of a run afterwards. We are well into spring tides now and the tide is not reaching the slipway at the top of the beach. Having said that, it was coming on quite quickly while we were down there. There was one clump of weed holding back the tide, which was interesting. In front of it the obligatory field of small pebbles that were not being washed away. I should have done coastal erosion studies at school. We did oxbow lakes and levees instead which we not half as interesting and not half the use to me now.

Being back in a geography class would have been a sight more enthralling than the ensuing hours in the shop. Miss Frobisher (no, not her real name obviously, whoever heard of a geography teacher being called Frobisher, and anyway it was so long ago I cannot remember her real name and also, she would be mortified to think that I had remembered anything she thought she had taught me). Anyway, I digress. Now, where was I. Ah yes, behind the shop counter today, it was tedium itself. If it were not for the fact that we had a bit of a pasty day (sorry, MS), it would hardly have been worth getting out of bed for.

I have explained before the vagaries of pasty ordering and selling in the doldrums of the off season. The weekend before last I had 90 pasties in and put 50 of them in the freezer. The weekend just gone, having learnt my lesson, I ordered in 40 pasties and sold 80, falling back on the pasties I had frozen the week before. For this morning, I had called in 40 fully expecting them to last two or three days. Happily, it was before the ordering deadline that I noted that sales were rather more fierce that I expected and called in a similar number for tomorrow. Later in the afternoon, I had two ladies drop by who purchased the remaining stock of around ten. Gosh, I was lucky I had placed the order.

The pasty problem provided some much-needed excitement in a day that was so grey that you could not see things that were already grey. The bay was largely flat as a dish but with enough swell to tempt at least a dozen surfers out to bob about optimistically. I am still surprised there are so many available in the middle of the afternoon. They cannot all still be on holiday, surely.

Someone earlier in the day told me that they had seen dolphins in the outskirts of the bay. That would be the first time in quite a while. I told her that it was more often tuna now to which she expressed surprise and segued into telling me she had seen an

angler with some fish they had caught from the other side of the Harbour wall. ‘Tuna?’, I asked. ‘Pollack’, she replied. Well, I only asked, I thought.

While there was no breeze to speak of during the day, the air had notably become cooler. Several people commented upon it. I looked later to discover that it was actually warmer than the day before. I also noted that there had been an increase in the wind from the southwest or west that had not been that perceptible in The Cove. I can only imagine that it was the lack of sunshine that had caused the effect. I also think that there are fewer distractions and people have more time to notice such things.

They must have been so busy noticing that they completely forgot to give me a five minutes to closing rush. I closed on time and without ceremony. What a disappointment.

October 6th – Tuesday

What a very weird weather morning we had today.

The temperature had dropped sharply in the early hours of the morning and when I took the girls out first thing it was very noticeable. There was also some moisture in the air very similar to mist, small droplets picked up in the light of my headtorch. The crescent moon was visible through some high level broken cloud but I could see no stars.

When dawn lit up the bay, there was some thin mist hanging in The Valley and some thicker mist out on Cape Cornwall and the cliffs north of Cot Valley. I had not paid much attention after a brief look, but when I looked out again, the mist had thickened and spread. Before long, it was enveloping all the cliffs from Cape Cornwall to The Valley and was tumbling into the sea.

I had been busy in the shop and did not look again until the pasty delivery (sorry, MS) arrived by which time it was spreading into the bay. By the time we had the pasties unloaded and I went out to see off the driver, the mist had come right across the bay and was almost at the rocks in front of us. Very oddly, we could look up and see some cirrus cloud in an otherwise clear sky. I turned my back for half an hour to see to the pasties and when I came back, the mist had entirely vanished. Well, maybe not entirely – it was resting menacingly on the northern horizon, poised to come back when it felt like it.

Once again, we were quiet in the morning which might have been aided and abetted by the weather. Our visitors had no excuse later because the skies cleared in places offering a bit of brightness. It turned into quite a fine morning, and the temperature eventually came back up to where it was yesterday. It was much in line with the rest

of the weird weather today, increasing five degrees in four hours. Things were going swimmingly until it started to rain.

It was just before two o'clock and we had not long started to see some gathering momentum in our customer visits. We were certainly not going to overrun our pasty quota, but sales were going alright. It was mainly servicing the walker community who had decided today was the day to take to the Coast Path or it was the day that they all arrived here from wherever they had started from at roughly the same time. Within half an hour the street had emptied, and The Cove turned into a veritable ghost town.

At least with the lack of customers I was not going to be asked any questions that I could not answer. We are an information point, this is true, and we welcome questions on the locality, directions on how to get to places and the complicated bus service times. The volunteers in the Lifeboat station shop also direct their customers in our direction to ask all manner of questions of us. It does add some interest to a dull day.

There are times when the questions we are asked just are not within our ability to answer. I know, it is very hard to believe, but it is true. For example, we cannot see the ice cream kiosk from behind the counter but are asked numerous times if it is open and, if it is not, why is it not open. People are quite affronted when we tell them we have no understanding of their random opening strategy.

Similarly, today I was quite perplexed when I was asked when the Roundhouse Gallery would reopen. First, I had no idea that it was open in the first place and secondly, if it had been open that it had closed unexpectedly. They do not check in with me each time they open and close, regrettably, and I explained this to the enquirer. The lady, clearly not yet keen to give up, then added some pertinent and crucial information that explained everything. She told me that there was a note on the door, 'Back Shortly'. Thus informed, I was able to tell our enquirer that the Roundhouse would indeed be open again in a brief but undefined period of time. We do like to be useful in the shop.

It is, however, difficult to be helpful when there is no one to be helpful to. In the absence of anything better to do I went and head launched the launch of the Inshore boat at five o'clock. One of the handy things about having a wealth of available helmspeople is that the Inshore can be launched with little effort at any time for a bit of light training. One of the trainee crew had made the request and it had been authorised and a helm duly volunteered and was appointed. It meant handing the shop over to the Missus for a short time but while I was gone, she had little to do.

To be brutally frank, I had little to do as well. The powers in the Institution have decreed that thou shalt have a small army of people launching the craft even in the circumstance that they will stand about and scratch their behinds. Far be from us to gainsay a direct directive, and our small army of three, duly did their bidding and two

of us stood about scratching while the third drove the Tooltrak. My, we felt good about it.

I returned to the shop while my oppo gave one of our newer members some Tooltrak driving experience. I am made some preparations before I left just in case I was delayed with the launch. This left me little to do on my return other than to pull in the display from outside and close the curtains in readiness for a five minutes to closing rush that never came.

I had completed all the ordering previously which included a larger than expected requirement for butter. We may not have been that bust today but clearly no one had advised me that it was National Buy a Pack of Butter Day. Near all our customers carried off a pack including a few of the walkers passing through. I must assume that it was this uplift that made the till look unexpectedly healthy when I pressed the relevant button when we closed.

With joy in my heart, I returned to some more scratching my behind when the Inshore boat had finished the exercise and had returned to the Harbour. It must have been the uplifting thought of our butter sales that enabled me to extract the digit long enough to give the boat and the Tooltrak a proper wash down at the top of the slip before escorting it back to its boatshed for the next service. We are, after all, a very responsive, very excellent Shore Crew.

October 7th – Wednesday

Cor, crikey and stone the bleddy crows. It was a tad breezy this morning. Add to that a dark and glowering sky – when I could see it – and it looked proper wintry across to the north.

It was cold too. Alright, not proper cold. Just colder that what we have been used to. Although the ambient temperature was much the same as yesterday, the wind chill forced me into my thick woolly jacket to take the girls around this morning. They were jittery, too. ABH had been up since the early hours barking at things going bump in the dark. Our bin had fallen over on its moorings but fortunately was still moored and there were other undetermined objects flying about outside, as well.

Things did not improve much when I came down to prepare the shop for opening. I had to unmoor our wheelie bin so that the commercial bin could be emptied, so I found it clattering about the street when I came down. The flags were a non-starter and the ball stand was straining against the cord that ties it to the wall. The windbreaks, while encased in a sturdy frame that was not going anywhere, spent the day rustling their polythene covers loudly with each gust of wind.

The biggest problem was the net bin that is top heavy to start with and has a broken base that I meant to fix for the last two years. I had propped it up at first only to find it

sprawled on the street when I stepped out later. It had a bungy for the purpose of restraining it but that did not work either, despite trying the attachment in two different positions. I went out with a length of rope to do the job properly, but I decided it was far easier just to give up and bring it back into the shop for the duration.

The pesky wind that was causing all the problems was banging in from the northwest, a direction from which we find no shelter anywhere in The Cove. Land's End had it gusting to 35 to 40 miles per hour and although it was not much higher at Gwennap Head the gusting was more sustained lasting from early morning, thus confirming its position as windiest place in the universe.

It was not the sort of weather to shout 'welcome all' at our visitors who promptly decided to run off somewhere more sheltered. The café next door, that seems to do well when we are doing badly, also must have been suffering. Even in the quietness of the last few days the tables opposite have been busy with people dining al fresco and taking coffee in the unseasonal sunshine. Today, they were empty.

By way of excitement, I carted myself off to the gymnasium for a blistering session. It was the first time for a while that I had to wear a sweatshirt to start off until I had warmed up. I also had to put on an additional layer when I took the girls down to the Harbour beach afterwards. While I was in the gymnasium, the glowering sky had been replaced with one that was blue and had fluffy white clouds dotted about it. I am sure in a place where there was shelter from the wind, it would have been perfectly pleasant. Unfortunately, in The Cove, it did nothing for us but look pretty.

The Missus had decided that she should go to the cash and carry today. I had completed the list last week but had been adding to it as I thought of other things we needed. I have an idea that she thought if she left it any longer, she would need a bigger truck. There were a few items on the list that we were quite desperate for – people had been asking for them – and the rest would hopefully see us through until shop closing. Even then, I will wager that I missed a few things.

I had to wait until the late afternoon before she came back with the goodies. She had returned via dropping Mother off home. Mother had been staying with us for a few days just to mix it up a bit and the house would have needed some freshening. By that the time the Missus got back to the shop it was too late to go putting them out – it was not really; I just could not be fagged to do it - but at least it will give me something to do tomorrow.

In truth, setting to with the groceries would have warmed me up a bit. While the wind in the northwest does not get at me behind the counter directly, it is still banging through the doorway, swirling around and bringing down the temperature. I had chilled through by the end of the day, despite wearing a jacket. It is still an aim to remain in little boy trousers and flip flops until the end of the season, which probably worked against me during the day.

I was very grateful when the time came around to closing and I could put off venturing out again until giving the girls their last run out. It had rained at some point in the intervening couple of hours, but we were lucky it had gone when we stepped out. To my mind the wind had diminished a little but not by much and my woolly jacket did excellent service again. I am hoping for a better weather revival or the little boy trousers might be heading for the drawer for the winter.

October 8th – Thursday

Well, that is much better, thank you.

The breeze was still in the northwest and still cooling but its ferocity had been tempered by half, and it made all the difference. The blue skies and the bright sunshine finished the job off and all was well with the world, my legs in their little boy trousers and toes in flip flops.

Possibly, as a consequence, we saw a few more people during the morning. Some were planning on doing some walking and others were just doing some milling about with dogs in tow. One of the walkers – a German fellow who speaks impeccable English with an American accent – told that it was not all that pleasant walking in the wind yesterday. He had a minor accident when the wind had unbalanced him. It happens. I warned another couple who were heading off to Pendeen to watch their step; on the uneven path having good balance is important as it is very easy to misstep when being buffeted.

It was very unlikely that anyone on the beach would be having any difficulty today. There were acres of available sand, even for a neap tide. There were quite a few people exercising dogs down there earlier in the morning but by the middle of the day, it was mainly couples walking about. There were also a few surfers in the less than perfect conditions although about half of them were engaged with the surf schools.

Out on the middle of the bay, flocks of seabirds circled and swooped. A few were settled on the water but there were hundreds in total, possibly indicating the presence of shoals of pilchards out there. This theory might be reinforced by the return of dolphins, not just here but on Mount's Bay as well. I had a couple in yesterday – people that is, dolphins find the first electric sliding door in The Cove off putting - or maybe the day before who had been out on one of the nature boats and had reported sightings. Naturally, I will not be seeing dolphins. They wait until I am looking the other way and, later, someone will tell me there were there.

We had to wait until the middle of the afternoon for any decent action and then it happened all at once inside the period of about an hour. I was beginning to think that I could have got away without a pasty order (sorry, MS) today but then we emptied the warmer in pretty short order and I was playing catch up for the next forty minutes.

It was much improved on yesterday and people were once again occupying the seats opposite where it was business as usual for a while.

It was all over by half past three o'clock. Fortunately, I still had a few boxes from the cash and carry delivery to deal with to keep me from dozing off. I had been picking at them all day – you do not want to use up something like that all at once. Happily, but quite strangely, the demand for pasties also kept me busy late into the afternoon. It never fails to amuse me the fickle pasty eating habits of our visitors. It just goes to show it is never too late for a pasty rush – unless of course, you bake a whole load of pasties in anticipation of a late pasty rush in which case all the pasty eaters will disappear off to distant planet never to be seen again.

I had to have a bit of tea in the shop today ahead of an early Lifeboat training launch. Naturally, this invoked a constant flow of customers arriving sporadically to impede my consumption. It left me hurrying to complete the shop closing sequence far too close to shop closing time. It is also embarrassing when people apologise for interrupting me when I am trying to be discrete.

Nevertheless, I made it to the muster on time and settled who was doing what and when on the shore side. We were a little thin on the ground but by staggering the launches and recoveries we were able to service both impeccably. It was almost dark when we launched at seven o'clock. The cloud had slowly closed the skies from the early part of the afternoon and by shop closing time, we looked very grey and dismal indeed. The forecasters had originally penned in rain for the late afternoon and through the night. All we managed here were a few spots and an early darkening of the day.

We retired after launch to mince pies and clotted cream. I would have baulked at the mince pie offering, especially as they came in festive boxes, but the clotted cream covers a multitude of sins. My act of contrition was taking a new member of the crew through the obligatory units of training such as pyrotechnics – we do not have any, local knowledge – there is a bar withing walking distance, and navigation skills – how to get to the bar. He is a very competent fellow and will be passed out in no time, as long as we can find someone to pass him out.

With such intense training involved, the time passed very quickly and before we knew it, the Inshore boat had returned and required recovery. Shortly after that, the big boat cruised into the bay, only visible by its lights. From my lofting spot in the winch room, I could just about determine through the gloom that it was a textbook recovery in deteriorating conditions.

We have been issued with new tin helmets, somewhat akin to cycling hats you see being worn. We discovered tonight that the head torches we have fit into slots on the new headwear and thus work marvellously without the fear of them falling off into the water. The helmets also have chin straps which will be very handy in a high wind, which are absent from our previous tin hats.

Thus attired, we continued with the recovery, ably assisted by the Inshore recovery crew, until the boat was washed down and strapped in for the next service. We are, after all, a very organised, very excellent Shore Crew.

October 9th – Friday

Oh, well that did not last long, now did it.

I paid some attention to the rain radar this morning before I stepped out because I recalled some wag on Radio Pasty talking about rain. There was some light rain indicated to the south of us but that was to the south of us. So, the light rain that filled the air as we walked through the car park first thing did not really exist.

There is no doubt, however, that the breeze was real enough. It had moved around to the west but was still making itself felt in The Cove. It worked itself up to 30 miles per hour or more by the end of the day and brought a line of showers with it, which were most untimely.

It had already looked grey and bleak when we had some light to see the day by. It then progressed to being grey, windy and bleak before advancing all the way to grey, windy, rainy and bleak by the middle of the afternoon. Add to this that the café next door had chosen today to have an end of season party and begger off for the day. It left us all alone in the world and no one wanted to be our friend.

The combination of weather not entirely conducive to fair trading and the café being closed really did shut down our end of The Cove. There were two regular customers in early on then no one. That was not just no one coming into the shop, it was no one at all in the street for a very extended period. I do not think that it is an exaggeration to say that we saw ten people all morning and three of them were delivering things including pasties (sorry, MS) that we almost certainly will not need.

I had pre-empted this week's pasty crisis by placing yesterday's delivery – or two thirds of it – into the freezer before today's pasties arrived. Since we had sold a similar quantity the day before I had no reason to think that we would not do so again. I therefore ordered for the weekend as if we would start from scratch. As it was, it was a pitifully poor pasty performance, and we got stuck with a preponderance of previous day's pasties. I will somehow have to filter them into the mainstream and get rid of them before we close.

The having nothing to do at least spurred me to do something about our business insurance which we are notified is due for renewal soon. It is a fearful cost anyway and includes The Farm and its buildings but this year it has increased by nearly twenty percent. I thought that I had best market test it and contacted a couple of companies. The reason I hesitate embarking on this venture is that it is veritable pain

in the rear end. There are so many imponderables in our business, the level of stock at different times of the year, some of the stock in different places and having a flat roof sends insurance companies into apoplexy for some reason even if it is only twenty percent of the area.

Not having recommendations is a bit of a problem but I selected the company that insures our tractor as being a good place to start – they did not charge an extra 20 percent this year – and another more at random. We only have three weeks to make up our minds, or we have to continue with the existing one, so the responses needed to be swift.

I was not disappointed with our tractor insurer who sent two data gathering forms, one for the shop and the other for The Farm. I had already extracted the relevant information from the original proposal and modified it to represent the current position. It did not take long to complete the forms since, unusually, I had no interruptions while I was doing so. I sent them back.

Later in the afternoon, with still only a few customers drifting by every now and then, I decided that it would do no harm to cast the insurance net wider and called a second company based in Truro. I had rather expected the same approach, that I had to complete some forms, so I was taken by surprise when the very pleasant lady who had answered my call started to ask the usual questions over the telephone. This time I was not surprised by the sudden appearance of customers halfway through the question and answer session. Happily, the very pleasant lady did not mind being put on hold while served my customers.

The other distraction that I had during the day was the appearance of a robin. I had caught movement out of the corner of my eye while I was at the counter and upon investigation discovered a robin proudly puffing out its chest as it hopped around the shop floor. I asked, ever so politely, if it would not mind awfully beggering off and by and by it did so – in its own time, obviously.

I did think that to be the end of it, but it was back an indeterminate amount of time later preceding some customers who happened along. Since I was busy with customers, I ignored it and presently forgot all about it being there until I went into the store room to put some pasties in the oven. A flicker of the light drew my attention upwards and there it was again, having a good geek at me. I explained again, that it really should be outside then left it to its own devices. It must have gone out because I saw it come back in again later on. There is no point in trying to chase it out, it knows where the door is and will leave when it is ready. Provided that is before closing time, we are all happy.

The weather front we had been told about, the one bringing the rain, did so in the early part of the afternoon. It was very plain to see it coming as the low cloud preceded it with an increase in the breeze. To prevent it blowing rain in through the doorway, I set the first electric sliding door in The Cove to automatic and enjoyed a

slice of chocolate cake with clotted cream until it passed. Very fortunately, the weather front passed in the time it took to consume a slice of chocolate cake with clotted cream. How very convenient.

Just as we had watched the line of low cloud approach followed by the line of rain, we now watched the end of the line of cloud as it revealed blue sky behind it. We – surely someone else must have been watching too – also observed the sea state go from slightly agitated to very upset in a very short space of time. Very soon it was pounding over the Harbour wall, cascading over Cowloe and marching in untidy ranks at the beach. There was a bit of activity on the cliffs opposite, but the swell direction must have been away from there as it seemed muted.

What is it about a rough sea that attracts gannets. First one I had seen in a while struggling against the wind as it flew past the Harbour wall. Just one, then it disappeared.

We had some increased footfall under the blue sky, which was very welcome. Some of the trade was postcards but we had a good session of going home present buying which swelled the coffers nicely. There were familiar faces among them but largely these were tripppers coming through. Toward the end of the afternoon, there were just a few, very few, announcing that they were here for the coming week and had come in to reconnoitre the place. I do hope we passed muster.

Unfortunately, we have arrived at that part of the season when out shelves are running low and we are not replacing what was there. We have to be most careful in what we buy in, checking that the sell-by date at least takes us through the Christmas open period. Some things we have to abandon altogether such as out local butcher’s bacon, some of which I had already had to extract from the fridge to out personal freezer stock. I also discovered some milk about to go out of date which is a real end of season marker. That too went in the freezer.

Having said that, we had almost run out of milk. The Valley had an unexpected late booking and took a big chunk of the remaining semi-skimmed. Fortunately, with the trading day being as poor as it was, no one noticed its absence. Other than a few small loaves for the weekend, the milk was the only end of day order and even with those, I need to be careful.

Very happily, there was no further rain in the day, and we took our last walk out with just some wind to content with. Even that was starting to wind down. The girls, however, wound up rather suddenly when they spotted something down on the Harbour beach. I shone my headtorch down there and picked up two amber eyes reflected in the light. There was no human down there with it and the eyes shot towards the slipway after it had been spotted. It was unlikely to be a cat and a dog on its own might have been a concern if I could have done anything about it. Whatever, having two bright amber eyes shining in the darkness is very

disconcerting. The girls thought so because they concluded their business in record time and dragged me all the way to our front door. Halloween soon, I think.

October 10th – Saturday

The clear skies had persisted through the night as there were stars above us as we navigated around the block this morning. I also noted that the hills have eyes. My torch light reflected in two just off the cliff path above us. Thankfully, the girls were oblivious, and we continued unhindered. It was still disconcerting, though.

The morning did blossom into something bright and glorious with a bit of breeze that had gone back to the northwest. There were a few more people around during the morning but not many. With hats and jackets being order of the day, it seemed, there was less sitting at the tables outside the café, certainly during the morning, although it was much busier there from the early afternoon. This did not translate directly into busyness for the shop, although we dined on a few crumbs from the café from time to time.

The sea state also changed completely from yesterday. I cannot remember what it was like exactly at the same state of tide yesterday, which was before the weather front came through, but I am sure it was not as calm as it was today. The waves were running to foam into the beach, so there was still some swell at work in the bay and there was a bit of white around Cowloe and along the cliffs.

Heading towards high water, the waves became a little more structured and offered some surfing opportunities for the more experienced. I saw one ride in from way out the way all the way to the beach, near enough. It still was not interesting in playing with the cliffs opposite and neither was it coming over the Harbour wall. In fact, it was exceedingly orderly in a robust sort of way which is either very good of it or a tad boring – unless you were a keen surfer.

There was not a great deal to do to pass the time in the afternoon. Even if there were, I was rather inclined not to do it. The Missus had some lurgi since Tuesday which had knocked her off her feet and given her a very high temperature at times. I had thus far been celebrating the fact that it had not reached me but this morning when I took the girls around, I was feeling less than bright. By the middle of the morning, I was starting to feel the cold, which it was not – well, not that much – and, deciding to give myself a better chance of surviving the day, had elected to ditch my little boy trousers and flip flops for big boy trousers and shoes. Surprisingly it helped and after a few hours, I felt much improved and by the middle of the afternoon, I was far too bleddy hot and wanted my little boy trousers back.

If I was feeling lonely in the morning, I need not have worried. Not long into opening, our friendly robin came back. Having someone standing in the doorway talking with me bothered it not, hopping around his feet to come in an make itself at home. It did not take it long to settle in the store room where is continues to surprise me each

time I went in there by being perched on something else. It came and went as it please for some hours after that and I never knew if it was in or out.

I discovered that it was definitely out when I had a call from the much recovered Missus who showed me the footage she was filming of the robin leading the girls a merry dance. It had invited itself into the flat, flitting from out of reach point to out of reach point as the girls attempted unsuccessfully to get at it. There were customers, so I did not get to see what happened but a while later, robin came back into the shop again where we surprised each other and caused it to jump up on the bodyboards out of the way.

We saw a few more customers during the afternoon, which is getting to be a regular feature. Thankfully, this involved some going home present buying which is an improvement on just groceries. One of the Lifeboat shop volunteers alerted me to the fact that many schools will have two weeks holiday this half term. I had suspected that some might, despite much confusion. The good news was that the two weeks would run from two weeks before our closing date rather than straddling it. We should expect to see some increased business from next weekend.

What was not such good news was while sitting on my stool twenty minutes from closing, our robin hopped up beside me on the floor. We had a chat for a while but since my robin is a bit rusty, I must have misconstrued its purpose. Come closing time it had taken up residence in the store room and resolutely refused to budge. I recruited the Missus and with fishing nets, we tried to evict it with little success. Consequently, it will spend the night in the shop, and I will have to hope it takes itself out in the morning and has learnt its lesson.

When I came to take the girls out last thing, I noted that it has started to rain. There was not much of it but I fetched my coat as a precaution. That bleddy robin clearly knew what it was about. I will be asked for rent next time.

October 11th – Sunday

Our robin was nowhere to be found when I went down to the shop this morning. It had the whole run of the shop, but I gave the store room a thorough going over, since it seemed to prefer the sanctuary, and a brisk walk around the shop. I concluded that it had either made a run for it unseen when I put the display out the front or it had expired during the night and we would be drawn to its rotting corpse by and by.

Anyway, there I was adding a picture of the offending beast to The Diary that I had forgotten about earlier when I caught movement out of the corner of my eye. There by the fire extinguisher sat our rather dishevelled friend. Even then I had to chase the begger out. Mind, I can imagine why it was loathed to go home.

Mrs Robin: “Just where have you been all night? Coming back here looking like you’ve been dragged through a hedge backwards. No, don’t answer that. I’d rather not know.”
Errant Robin: “You’ll never believe what happened.”
Mrs Robin: “Some trollop you met while foraging, no doubt.”
Errant Robin: “No, it’s not what it looks like. I was trapped.”
Mrs Robin: ”Yes, of course you were. Is that beakstick on your collar?”
Errant Robin: “What? No. I was trapped. I found this place that was warm and full of food, and I was doing a reccy. Planned to bring home a proper feast, honest. Then these humans attacked me with these big, long sticks. I barely escaped with my feathers.”
Mrs Robin: “So, let me get this straight. You found a nice warm, cosy place to spend the night, and refused to be evicted by the humans. I bet you’d been in and out of there all day, too. There was me under this bush all night in the cold and rain, like some mug.”
Errant Robin: “No, it wasn’t like that at all.”
Mrs Robin: “’course not.” [FX: sound of clip round ear ’ole – robins do not have frying pans]
Errant Robin: “Ouch”
Mrs Robin: “Ere, get yer own bleddy breakfast.”

We had been told to expect the rain a little later in the morning, but I found myself wearing my full metal jacket waterproofs when I took the girls around first thing. The rain was not particularly heavy, and probably did not warrant my leggings, but the girls were damp enough for a towelling down when we got back. At least there was no wind to speak of. That had whizzed around to the southeast during the night and had dropped away to a light breeze.

Looking at the geet clump of rain heading our way and observing it through the morning I had half expected it to dissipate into the afternoon. It did not. At times it got worse and at best it gave light rain without a break. It fair did in any business we might have hoped for, and we settled for the occasional newspaper sale and buying of snacks.

There was the occasional walker or small group passing through, but most did not bother to stop. Around the middle of the day, a fairly large group of walkers stopped off to gather on the tables opposite for a spot of croust – which they had brought with them. I think that they may have had a coffee from the café but once done, they were on their way.

Despite the grim weather there were a few people who decided that a walk on the beach would be fun. I counted a dozen people, all couples, strutting about right across the beach. At the outset of another week of spring tides, free passage to Gwenver is available again and I saw a few make the journey and mess about on Escalls Vean. Earlier in the tide, before the passage was open, the surfing was an attractive option. I spoke to one of our regular visitors who said it was particularly

good for an intermediate exponent, such as he categorises himself. I had watched a few out there before I saw him and agreed with his assessment. With the wind in the southeast, it was probably an improvement on yesterday even if the waves were smaller.

And that, dear reader, was about as interesting as it got today. The rain persisted, sometimes a little harder and sometime pretending it had gone away completely. Naturally, it rained hardest when it came time to being in the outside display which was nice, especially as earlier I had taken my waterproof jacket upstairs thinking that I would not need it.

I could report on the very few people who braved the element – singular: it was all about the rain today – and our robin who arrived at half past four o'clock looking like it was here for the duration again. It would not have surprised me to see it turn up with a suitcase and a blanket. Fortunately, it made a timely escape around half past five o'clock and I pulled the curtain across the door to the store room. Not that it would stop the little begger but I hoped it might deter it long enough for me to shoo it out.

There, I squeezed another couple of paragraphs out of what was an utterly abysmal day. I have come to the conclusion, however, that flogging a dead 'oss might prove somewhat more interesting than reporting what happened for the rest of the day and evening – that and my snuffles have made me super grumpy. Just for once, you will have to imagine the grey, wet, desolation all for yourselves.

October 12th – Monday

I was a lot less of a grumpy, grumpy shopkeeper this morning because, temporarily, I can hear again.

I would have been a whole lot less grumpy had the weather improved, too. Well, it had changed but it is arguable whether that change counts as an improvement or not. I contend that it was not and may even have been worse for business at least.

I knew that the rain had stopped because even in the dark, the street looked less wet in the light of the streetlamp opposite. It is one of the few streetlamps that the much maligned has still allowed to remain on. The vast majority in the Duchy are turned off to save money. Even Truro can now apply for 'dark skies' status.

It turned out that I was very lucky to be able to see the street or even the streetlight for that matter. Our rain had turned into thick fog and occasional mizzle. In fact, the air was so thick with moisture that I could not see further than a few feet in front of me by the light of my headtorch. It was very much akin to using a car's main beam in similar conditions; the light is reflected straight back at you.

The girls were very dewy when they got back home – feet and undercarriage. The grass and leaves were glistening in patches, some had attracted little reflective droplets and others had not. The effect was little, sometime large, patches of glistening silver foliage dotted about on the verges where we passed. It looked quite fantastical, as if from some Disney cartoon film.

I did not expect much from the morning and was not disappointed. The upside was that I was not there to endure it as I had an appointment in town to collect some replacement false ears. I left in plenty of time for the appointment as I guessed that the fog would slow me down and there would always be someone in front of me even slower and probably without lights. I was pleasantly surprised that nearly all of the oncoming vehicles were appropriately illuminated, which was a first.

Arriving near enough at the time of the appointment, I only had to wait a moment for the optician who does eyes to appear. I reiterated my disappointment with the model of hearing aid that I had been provided with and gave a brief synopsis of my history with them. He told me that he had new ones to replace them faulty ones with. If these failed to meet muster this time, there was another type by a different manufacturer that they would replace them with. Since I am likely to be using them in earnest only for the next three weeks, I would expect them to remain operational until next year based on previous experience. I shared that soupçon with him, and he was quite happy to proceed on that basis. Hopefully, they will see the season out.

As I had descended from the moors on the way into Penzance, the mist had thinned and by time I got into town, it had cleared altogether. It was still cloudy but at a much higher level and the cloud was patchy. The most immediate difference else was that it was incredibly warm and very humid. I discovered that I was very overdressed in my long trousers, shoes and socks and made a note to change when I got back.

The other thing I had noted, before I left home, that the girls were running out of food. This required a trip to Tesmorburys, unfortunately, as they are the only shops that do the food in quantity. It is a disadvantage of living in a more remote community that such purchases need to be made in bulk for efficiency and economy. The advantage of living remotely, however, far outweighs such niggles. So, we now have food and snacks in abundance and when I got home the girls were more interested in welcoming my bags rather than me.

The other errand I had to run was a trip up to The Farm to take photographs of the buildings at the behest of the insurance company. I had thought at first that word had got around about our bomb proof greenhouse, but then the very pleasant lady asked for photographs of the barn, the cabin and the potting shed, previously known as greenhouse.

I managed to mask my disappointment and had thought that I could trawl my photograph archive for suitable snaps. I had plenty of pictures of the other buildings, but views of the barn were either not appropriate or too old to be useful. It meant

going there in person to take some and send them off as soon as I got back. What I had not planned for was the heavy dew that still populated the long grass and very quicky discovered that I was wearing inappropriate footwear. It ended up soaked, although I did get my snaps.

It was as well, therefore, that I had intended to shed my warm clothes for my little boy trousers, shirt and flip flops. I noticed that the fog had thinned for most of the journey back but was still very thick in the village. My photographs of the barn were very atmospheric, but the mist added a level of chill that was absent in town. I was glad to find that it had lifted from The Cove when I returned and my little boy trousers and, particularly my dry flip flops, were most appropriate. They were until later in the afternoon when I got a brae bit chilly which made my cold feel worse – but that is another story.

We had to wait for most of the rest of the day for any busyness; I had the sensation that it had been quieter than yesterday. Naturally, the busyness came shortly after I fielded a call from one of our potential insurers and was engaged in talking complicated numbers. I had to call her back – twice – but it was worthwhile as the quote was much less than the one I was trying to beat. They also do their own underwriting, which I would mark as an advantage – unless they go bust.

The customer rush was heralded by a car parking up on the pavement and so close to the outside display that it was a struggle for anyone to get past and for a wheelchair user, impossible. I find it hard to comprehend why you would do that as the road is wide enough with no cars parked opposite to park and for a bus to get by. It irked me almost as much as being asked ridiculous questions about our pasties (sorry, MS). The question in question came at the end of two reasonable questions and caught me off guard:

‘Were our pasties fresh?’ very reasonable question. ‘How long had they been in the warmer?’ again, reasonable but heading into perfectionist territory.

It is difficult to know what a customer believes a reasonable time for a pasty to remain in the warmer. In this case, I had to heat some more after a rush and the pasties had only been in there 45 minutes or so. I would regard that as more than reasonable. All day, not so much.

It was the final question that pushed me over the edge and came when I had said that they went in at around three o’clock. There was an initial acknowledgement that three o’clock was acceptable before our man thought about it and added, ‘three o’clock today?’. The family left quite soon after that, which was no surprise. I blame my cold for making me irritable, but I was glad to have our pavement back.

There was little action after that and not even a hint of a five minutes to closing rush, for which on this occasion, I was quite grateful. The temperature had dropped off sharply – or at least it felt like it had. I think I would have closed early had I the

choice but our six o'clock closing is sacrosanct. We have rarely closed earlier and even then it has been notified for several days in advance.

I am sure all will be perfect again from tomorrow, I can feel it in my bones alongside the damp chill of the evening.

October 13th – Tuesday

We played get lucky with the rain this morning. Two lines of rain, part of a cold front, passed over this morning. We were too late for the first but the second just about coincided with our early walk out. Happily, the line of rain was broken and passed north and south of us. I had worn a rain jacket but not bothered with the full kit; I might do the lottery later.

There was not a cloud in the sky by the time I came to go down to the shop a little later. I cast caution to the winds, which were quite robust and from somewhere in the west, and reinvested in my little boy trousers and flip flops again. It was not all a bed of roses - they call it a cold front for a reason - and the temperature dropped a couple of degrees from yesterday. Nevertheless, it was comfortably temperate and before long I cast aside the jacket I was wearing in favour of just a short-sleeved shirt.

Once more it was fearfully quiet – I should have got used to this by now. By the middle of the day, we had not sold one newspaper and only a few bottles of milk and a handful of groceries. I could quite easily have spent the morning in bed, and my absence would hardly have been noticed.

Still, the lack of customers means that I can get on with other things without interruption such as, erm, such as – no, I have not got a clue. I had a look to see if any of the shelves needed filling but other than a few items, they did not. There was only one thing left to do and that was spend some money.

Yes, I realise that it is exactly the wrong time of the year to be ramping up the stock and it will pay itself forward and leave me less to do in the new season. However, needs must and all that – whatever that means – and we did need some posh soap because there were rather too many gaps. We had an online order yesterday which alerted me to the shortages in the first place. Since they are on our online shop – it is next to The Diary on our web page in case you missed it, dear reader – I thought that we better have stock to meet the obvious flood of orders we shall expect as we head towards Christmas.

It was while I was checking the soap stock on the shelf that I noticed the withering quantity of tea towels on the shelf below. We have acquired our custom tea towels from the same supplier, a lady up the coast a bit, for twenty years. There is nothing wrong at all with the quality or cost of the tea towels she supplies but the other tea

towels we have from her have not changed in years and we could do with some fresh stock.

To this end I contacted our postcard supplier lady with whom we get on very well. I was pretty sure that she did tea towels as well as other goodies. I would have looked at her website but could not remember the full address and Mr Google was no help at all. I was sure that I had located it before using an Internet search but this time it was as if her expanding company did not exist. Let us face it, if you are not on the Internet, you probably do not exist. It is alright, dear reader, I did not mean to alarm you, and I apologise if you have just looked yourself up and are now doubting your existence. I was referring to companies that are not easily found on the Internet, not ordinary people – or even extraordinary ones, although some of those are. I am, by the way. I looked up grumpy shopkeeper. It seems that the Internet knows rather a lot about me which was both embarrassing and quite concerning. I shall have to be more discrete.

When I was not spending money, or trying to, I was staring out at the wide, brightly lit beach. It was largely empty but looked glorious as indeed did the day in general. It was a lively sea state and backed by a westerly wind made surfing less attractive than it had been over the weekend. Earlier in the tide, the waves had been kinder, but as the tide went on the flood it became rougher and shapeless. By the end of the day and closing in on high water, the heavy ground sea with lumbering waves really showed its hand.

The good weather had brought a few people out and it seemed we did better today than since before the weekend. When I looked at the till at the end of the day, we did worse than yesterday which confused me entirely.

We are not going through an enormous number of pasties (sorry, MS) but we seem to be running through ice creams at an alarming rate. The weather looked very ice cream worthy, and it is still quite mild, but it is still a surprise. Although, I suspect we are the only show in town, particularly at this end of The Cove, where ice creams are available. I had hoped to avoid another frozen order and had planned the last one to see us through until closing, ideally leaving us with little stock. Over the winter we rationalise the freezers in use, so the less we have to store, the better. I will monitor the situation closely and will have to wait to see if the ice cream kiosk opens next week. The trouble is, the longer I leave it, the less flexibility I will have on what to order.

I had not anticipated dilemmas over ice cream stock at this time of year but agonising over bread orders is part of life in the doldrums of October. I am not ordering daily as we are not selling enough to warrant it but with short-dated stock, I cannot leave it too long either. Getting the numbers and the combination right is nigh on impossible. Luckily, the local supplier fully understands our small orders and since they deliver next door anyway, had no minimum order.

I cast aside such concerns for the evening because the glory of the day extended into the night. I hardly needed a jacket when I took the girls around last thing; it was like summer time again.

And talking of the girls, there are two very far north of Camborne, L&L, who sent a lovely card and some photographs. What have yous done with the wee bairns that once used to come doon. And that wee duggie: either yous two are still very wee or that duggie is a muckleboukit.

Sorry, dear reader, I had to slip into north of Camborne there for a minute so that L&L could understand. I know it is hard to believe, but I have spent a little time north of Camborne and picked up a bit of the lingo. Roughly translated, I was indicating that the girls we knew when they visited The Cove have grown since we last saw them and their dog is larger than I expected. I do hope that helps.

October 14th – Wednesday

We were met with a star-spangled sky as we circled the block this morning. It was moonless and dark and, once again, the verges were dabbed with patches of silver where the dew had been selectively at work. There seemed to be some background warmth, too, although the air itself seemed fresh and cool. That was most odd. I almost did not need a jacket.

Still clinging on with little boy trousers and flip flops, I hardly need to be down in the shop half an hour before we open these last few days. I am letting the drinks fridge slowly empty and will have a proper topping up ahead of some expected busyness coming next week. While this looks like a clever strategy to ensure proper rotation of the drinks and more economical operation of the fridge, it is actually pure and utter idleness. Mind, I had not thought about the economy and the rotation until that moment, and I could easily have got away with it. Darn.

There is not much topping up of the beer fridge required, just a few bottles of wine. This just leaves the newspapers which currently do not take long at all and bread and milk. I have not had a greengrocery delivery for a few days but I noticed this morning that we will need some clotted cream fudge and fairings biscuits ahead of the weekend.

As is becoming the normal, we had a very quiet morning. I think we had seen a few people for milk and that was about it. Nearing ten o'clock, the street was empty and I felt no guilt about slipping away to the gymnasium for the first time in a week. You may by that, dear reader, assume that my cold has dissipated to a good degree and you would be correct in that assumption. I also felt that a good blistering session would cast out any remnants of lurgi lurking in my system. I am not entirely sure that it works like that, but it sounds as if it should.

I had wandered the shop during the morning looking at things. There was a purpose to it, but I am certain that I cannot for the life of me remember what it was now. I was down the middle aisle and noticed that one of the spotlight clusters was hanging by one remaining screw into the ceiling. Fixing it is a little trickier than just re-screwing it into place as the ceiling into which it is screwed is either asbestos or asbestos related plasterboard. Ideally, there needs to be a batten there to attach it to.

The lighting is part of a string that illuminates the shelving down the gift aisle and the furthest corner. It is a bit of an anomaly as the circuit runs off the ring main and was a bodged addition so that we had spots where we needed them. Unlike the rest of the shop lights which I can turn on and off remotely, these use a switch which is in a hard to reach place above one of the freezers.

Several of the bulbs in the string have gone but, really, the whole solution is dated and needs modernising and replacing. The conundrum consumed me while I rowed my 5,000 metres some time later and even after twenty odd minutes, I was no further forward in coming up with a plan.

An effective solution is to place under-shelf lighting all along the relatively new run but having refreshed my memory of how expensive they are, I hastily moved on. There is also the constraint that there is no power that side of the room and the most convenient feed is still off the ring main, so would offer little advantage. I let my mind wander over the subject on and off for the rest of the afternoon and came to the conclusion that fixing the hanging fitting and replacing the spotlight bulbs would probably have to suffice. I might, however, encourage our electrician to replace the switch that works them with one I can operate remotely.

The mental activity of researching lighting at least occupied me for some time. It took my mind off the fact that our glorious morning had disappeared quite rapidly as we found ourselves under a blanket of cloud from early in the afternoon. We had been building up to some decent busyness but not long after, the day took a turn for the dull and our potential customers also disappeared. It was very disappointing so soon after we had go going. It felt like someone had robbed my toys.

The other interlude was a call from the insurance company that I had not long terminated cover with. Obviously, I had expected the call but the very pleasant lady who I spoke with made no mention of my letter of termination. Quite the opposite, in fact, she asked if I would like one of the bosses to come and discuss the renewal. Clearly, after two days, the office had not yet read my message. I enlightened her. The company clearly needs to look to the quality of its procedures and supported my decision to discontinue business with them.

I eventually received the call I had been expecting from the boss a little later. It was brief.

It was soon after that the sun made a reappearance. I have no idea if it was coincidental, but things looked much cheerier through the rest of the afternoon. Even the sea transformed to a blue beauty with some very while wave caps lit up in the new brightness. The swell was a little more ordered than yesterday and attracted quite a few surfers. They looked to be having quite a good time of it too. Towards high water at the end of the shop day, the waves were breaking closer into shore and only the committed and the over optimistic remained bobbing about.

After getting a tad chilly yesterday in the late afternoon, I was wary about not leaving it too late to do something about it today. Although my sniffles worsened a bit later on, the temperature stayed pretty much constant through to the end of the day. It might have been that there was less of a breeze, perhaps. Even when I took the girls out last thing, it was still mild.

I think we are in for a bit of an upset tomorrow evening. A deep low pressure system is moving across to the northwest, the centre of it just off the Icelandic coast. It had been driving the swell in the bay, I would imagine. While Scotland, a place north of Camborne, will feel the brunt of it, we are in for some wet stuff later – just so it seems like we are all in this together. Hopefully it will conveniently be gone ahead of the upcountry half terms starting this weekend. All supposing we will see some benefit from the up country half terms, perhaps I should add politely.

October 15th – Thursday

What a busy grumpy shopkeeper I was this morning. No, not like that; we did not have our first customer until after ten o'clock, although I did let someone in before we opened, but that does not count. No, I had done all the normal things, both of them – newspapers and milk – but then busied myself with cleaning the pasty fridge (sorry, MS).

I had not intended to. It was because I had turned out the paper that I line the shelves with in preparation for our delivery and discovered that the shelves beneath them needed a bit of a polish. As I pulled the shelves out, I found a bit more that needed doing and ended up polishing the whole fridge. That only then left time to do the milk and put out the store room bin before we opened.

The store room bin needed putting out without doubt. One of our neighbours who shops with us regularly keeps an eye on the shop shelves for me. Not that I ask her to, but she takes great pleasure in telling me I have a gap here or an out of date item there. Yesterday evening she told me that the fruit and vegetables fruit needed to be cleared out as it was starting to honk. I had only checked it the day before but, in fairness, my nose was not working then, and, clearly, I was not as thorough as I should have been. There were several items that had gone over and some of the fruit had looked much fresher at some stage prior to their current pitiful showing. I removed them all. This morning, even *my* failed nose had the inkling that something

was amiss, so I cast out the offending bag along with a fair few pasties. Obviously, for a while there, I was inconsolable.

I took some succour from looking at the bay. It was putting on The Ritz for sure today. Great waves were piling in, dancing and tumbling all the way into the beach. They were lumping over the wall and jumping up the cliff opposite and the noise of churning sea filled the air. It was the sort of scene that Wagner would have written tunes for. It was the sort of scene that demanded not just any sky; this scene needed a big sky, and by George it got one. I have never seen the sky so big as it was this morning, acres of it stretching all the way to the horizon and wide as an Epsom Derby hat on Ladies' Day.

It was a huge pity that there were not many people about to see it. The weather seemed to be playing ball during the morning with it being pleasantly warm, a light southeasterly blow and a bit of sunshine, to start with at least. If that was not going to temp people out, the cloudy afternoon with apparently deteriorating weather was going to be no help at all - and it was not.

If I was playing Johnny No Mates, so too were the Lifeguards on the beach. I do not know about earlier but at low water they had the beach open, the flags flying proudly but there was not one taker. There were precious few people on the sand, either. It seems that the whole Cove had been deserted – unless they were all in the bar, but it certainly did not seem to me to be that sort of day.

Even on a day when we hardly saw a customer from one hour to the next, we still got odd requests. We have bent with the times and carry quite a stock of new age foods, such as lentils, hummus crisps and pretend milk. We only do one of the latter, a barista oat milk that generally finds favour. I knew that there were others, but we cannot do them all. A lady came in during the afternoon and asked if we did almond milk. I said, 'crikey, they make one out of almonds?' and she said, 'yes'. Amazed, I said, 'that's nuts.'

Yes, it was indeed a very slow afternoon.

All the people who had been absent during the day gathered in a big crowd 50 metres off the beach to have a bit of a surf. As we sat at the table for tea, shortly after I had closed the shop and nudging towards high water, the sea had gathered pace. The bay was full of deeply rolling waves, all in some disorder, breaking at random places and generating a lot of white foam in the last bit before the beach. The surface was laced with white streaks from waves breaking over Cowloe and throwing themselves over the harbour wall a full two hours before high water. It provided snatches of surfable waves amid the chaos eventually terminated by the arrival of dusk.

There was no Lifeboat launch for training as the sea conditions would have made recovery exceedingly tricky. Instead, a good number of us turned our attention to the

operation of the cradle that moves the boat from recovery to launch slip and vice versa. I had been advised that a written procedure to operate the system was missing and would I mind awfully writing one – which I duly did. When I visited the station earlier in the day, I was told that the day staff had found the missing procedure and I was handed a copy to peruse.

On the face of it, I had wasted some time duplicating some paperwork but on examination, the exiting procedure was simplistic and inadequate. We decided that we would test both on our newest member of the team who would have not preconceptions. It all fell apart a bit as there were far too many of us pulling in different directions. Nevertheless, by cutting out the background chatter, we were able to determine some clearer facts. We also discovered some new information that will help with manual operations. I will have another go at a more definitive set of documentation and submit it for further discussion. We are, after all, a very progressive, very excellent Shore Crew.

I was also a very pleased very excellent member of the very excellent Shore Crew to discover that the rain that had started just as I closed the shop, had eased considerably when it came time to walk the girls last thing. It was still mild too despite the passing of a cold front.

October 16th – Friday

The rain had gone, and the street was dry by the time I got around to looking out of the window in the morning. I had guessed that it was probably breezy before I even opened the door but even with it in the northwest, it was not exactly pushing me around. I did not find it all that cold, either. I suspect that the breeze increased later which led people to complain about the cold.

The girls dragged me to the little patch of grass at the end of the Harbour car park where they like to sniff about. We were a bit more exposed to the draft there and it looked like small clouds of mist were wafting by us. I assumed it was a bit foggy but when we looked down on the car park from Coastguard Row, there appeared to be no mist at all. Stange and curious, that is what it was.

There was nothing particularly unusual about not having many customers again during the morning. The really odd thing was why I had ordered a geet pile of sausages, bacon and steaks from our top butcher in St Just. I am still clinging onto the notion that we might actually get a bit busier this weekend with half term holiday makers. It is yet a bit early to tell if any are coming this week, but I thought that I would be prepared. Good job I like sausages and bacon.

I had not paid much attention, but I think that the sea state had diminished some. It was no longer bursting over the Harbour wall and the bay looked much more serene than it had done about the same time yesterday. At the lower reaches of the tide

there were still no takers for a bit of a dip and the foreshore at our end was littered with gulls. They were a bit far off, but I think it was the flock of black-headed gulls that do not have black heads we saw a few weeks back. They were pretty much safe from any disruption as there were precious few people down on the beach. Even the Lifeguards were up in their hut having a snooze. Alright, they probably were not. At least not all of them.

Most of the afternoons this week we have seen an upturn in our fortunes. Some days the upturn has been very small but at least noticeable. Today, the doldrums continued through the day, and I was thankful that I had our Lifeboat cradle procedures to work on as it gave me something to do. My perfectly planned pasty purveying projections (sorry, MS) were in a small pile of tatters at my feet. However, I took some succour in a couple of orders that arrived unexpectedly for cold pasties to take home on Sunday. Together, they put a satisfactory dent in the numbers and almost brought me back on track again.

Then, at half past four o'clock, we started to see some life kindle in The Cove and among them, some family groups. They were not great in numbers but there were enough to encourage me to think that some half termers had indeed arrived. The purchase of one bag of kindling was enough to wake me up to the fact that I had let our supply of firewood and kindling dwindle down to almost nothing. I promptly placed an order that will be here early next week. Hopefully the weekend will not be so chilly that we sell out of our remaining stock in the meanwhile.

Talking of chilly, the wind must have come around a bit more to the northwest during the afternoon because it had introduced a cold draft swirling about the counter. The effect had largely been unnoticed by me until quite late in the day when I determined that my lower half had chilled through. I had put a jacket on early for the top half but by the time I discovered that I could not feel my toes, it was far to late to be bothered to do much about it. Let them go black and fall off, I thought. See if I care.

With nothing to order, I closed up shop and retired to sit and have tea looking out at the bay. It was not half so exciting as it had been the day before which no more of a disappointment than the rest of the day had been.

So, it was with trembling fingers that I opened the marine traffic program on my computer when I returned from walking the girls last thing. Out to the northwest in the inky blackness was a vessel with a red flashing light high up on a mast. Red flashing lights are not normally a maritime thing, so it intrigued me. The height of the light would have placed it at the top of a mast of a yacht reasonably close in. So, I was surprised when the only vessel in that direction was probably more than five miles distant. It was a jack up rig, obviously a big one, and the red flashing light was on top of one of the legs to warn low flying aircraft. Now, there is something you do not see every day – alright, I could not see it today, either but just knowing it was there was excitement enough.

There, it was worth getting out of bed this morning.

October 17th – Saturday

By ten o'clock this morning I had already seen more customers that we had all day yesterday. That might have been a bit of exaggeration but not much.

The clear blue sky and excessive sunshine probably did us not harm at all and despite it being a bit fresh there were plenty of people willing to sit on the benches outside the café. I had persisted with my little boy trousers and flip flops but by mid-morning I was starting to doubt me telling myself it would get warmer any minute.

While the sea state had diminished and changed some more today, the wind that had gone around to the northeast, set up some good surfing. There were still some hearty waves at the south end of the beach, and these had attracted some early birds to take advantage of them. Even by the middle of the day, the waves were still there and so were the surfers having moved a bit to the middle of the beach.

Our big rush and new and improved type visitor were all over by the middle of the day. Before I knew it, we were running on empty again with just the memory of morning busyness to keep me warm. It was very disappointing as I had such high hopes.

My reverie was very happily interrupted by the other reader who asked about the jack up rig I spotted last night. I had thought no more about it and had not recorded its name, so it took a bit of finding. Called the HEA Hercules it had travelled 68 nautical miles by the time I got around to searching for it which was around three o'clock in the afternoon. It still has a long way to go arriving at Walney Island on the Cumbrian coast on Monday morning. There is a large windfarm there, so I assume it will be employed planting new wind turbine towers. It is owned and operated by HEA Energy, so I imagine that is pretty much all it does.

At least looking up the answer distracted me for ten minutes. I had to wait an hour or so before we saw a few more people milling about but after four o'clock when the café closed, we were back to the desolation again. I had ventured to do some more of the Lifeboat cradle documentation but even that failed to enthral me. I braved it out manfully until closing time and collapsed in a catatonic heap. I must hope that a good night's sleep and drinking to excess provide the necessary impetus to carry on tomorrow.

Then, just proving that despair is for those who see the end beyond all possible doubt, a regular couple dropped by near the last knockings. They have been coming for years, have one beer and a soft drink, sometimes an ice cream, then go and sit on a bench and watch the bay. They told me yesterday that following an operation they are staying at the caravan park as there are no stairs. The lady told me today

that she had a call from the hospital today to tell her that the operation was a success, and she is clear to live whatever the rest of her life brings. So that put my boredom into perspective, and I wished them both hearty congratulations.

Life has its own special way of giving you a friendly kick up the backside when you are falling behind. I shall pay better attention tomorrow.

October 18th – Sunday

Some people might have called it fresh but to my mind it was a proper autumnal chill pinching my cheeks as we walked around the block this morning. The wind was quite robust and was blowing in from the northeast, shipping our cold in from Scandinavia or thereabouts. The sky was completely clear, so there was no help keeping any warmth in and, overnight, the temperature had dropped four degrees into single figures.

Very happily, that wind had diminished by the time I opened the first electric sliding door in The Cove first thing. Sadly, though, I have consigned my small boy trousers to the bottom drawer, and my flip flops have been replaced with proper shoes.

Like yesterday, we started the day quite upbeat with a number of people coming through for breakfast goods and a few newspapers. Despite the chill, people were sitting outside the café for their meals and coffees, although they were togged up for the occasion. There are a few school children about but not very many. Most of the children I have seen so far have been of pre-school age or maybe just above. I will maybe reserve judgement on whether there are more families around by the end of the day when I would expect any that are coming to have arrived.

Of those who have arrived, some are so keen on their fitness that they must even practise on a Sunday. There are any number of runners and sports cyclists scooting around, particularly but not exclusively, during the mornings. We had one such lady drop in for a drink and a sandwich, dressed in running gear and exuding sportiness all over the place. She told me that she was in training for the ‘lighthouse run’ which is due in early November. If I had heard of it at all I had clearly forgotten about it and she did me the service of explaining what it was.

The run is another Coast Path challenge, this time starting at Land’s End, not ending there. The girlie, wimps’ run finishes at Pendeen which the Southwest Coast Path Association tells me is a mere 10.4 miles. The grown-ups’ run, the real hardcore event, runs from Land’s End and ends at Godrevy. I told her that really was a toughie especially the last mile.

Running over the water would have been a better idea today; there was certainly no surfing on it. All the waves from the last few days had vanished. The bay would have been dead flat had it not been for that stiff northeasterly setting the surface alive with

a million ripples. At high water, the sea allowed itself a few waves to break on the beach with the occasional white cap seen here and there.

There was some cloud about. Over to the east stretching to the north was a bank of thick, white cloud and above and behind us some more, frequently cutting out the direct sunlight. This did not seem to bother the many people who had decided that a stank around the beach would be a good idea. It was definitely not a day for sitting about; it was a day for perambulation and today there were dozens of people perambulating about the beach.

That clearly did not apply to the gulls. The flock I saw early in the week were back and there were more of them. I could not see them properly before and this time they were further off, sitting in the shallows and jumping waves. They are clearly in tune with one another. Some unseen thing disturbed them and they rose as one, just a foot above the water, moved a yard further out, and settled again.

Although there was a dinner time hiatus, we were relatively busy again in the afternoon. We had a good hit on the monstrous pasty order (sorry, MS) I placed for the weekend. I am very grateful to two people who purchased a shipping order each that made a lot of difference. In fact, had we not started Friday with pasties left over from Thursday, the numbers would have been near enough spot on. I will have to pull the same miracle next two weekends and then I can put away my crystal ball for a few months.

The days of five minutes to closing rushes are well and truly over it would appear. I was very much left to my own devices and to carry out the next day orders from around five o'clock. The only effort remaining in the day was to take the girls around last thing. I could just about manage that.

October 19th – Monday

Yesterday, about five minutes apart, I had one customer tell me that we were in for a good spell of weather this coming week and another telling me that it would be poor. There is nothing unusual in that. The forecasters are a progressive bunch and have obviously been on the course that tells them that we are their customers and therefore we should be given some choice. Being a grumpy shopkeeper, I can appreciate that but still have a nagging doubt that they may not have completely grasped the concept of weather forecasting.

So, given that I had no idea what the weather would actually be like today, I was very pleased to see that the street was dry when I looked out first thing. I took the perhaps naïve view that if it was not currently raining that I would not need a rain jacket when I took the girls around. Having stepped out, I was also very pleased to note that the rather unkind northeasterly was either completely absent or was so much diminished that I did not notice it.

I am certain, dear reader, because I can feel it in the ether, that you were fully expecting, or indeed perhaps willing, me to report that we had got halfway around when the heavens opened and we were drenched to the skin. I am very sorry to say – no, really I am because I hate to spoil your glee – that it remained dry for the entirety of our journey and we arrived back home undrenched and in good humour. Alright, maybe that is a bit of a stretch, but we did not get wet, anyway.

So, it was therefore a complete surprise to see that our steps were wet when I opened the door to go down to start in the shop. It was only light rain, which became a little heavier while I was putting out the outside display – or course it did – but it was rain, nevertheless. One of my customers had been vindicated and the other I shall be having words with, leading me astray like that.

The rain continued for the rest of the morning only letting up in the middle of the day and was slowly replaced by cracks of blue sky and some brightness. The absence of customers that we had suffered for the whole of the morning took a little longer to fix.

Since the weekend I had the impression that our little bloom of busyness was of a delicate nature. Say or do the wrong thing and it would wilt and die. Well, it looks like it got over-watered this morning and dropped dead. It was a wonder where everyone had gone; it was a bit too early for everyone to begger off to St Ives for the day, surely. It is possible that they were just hiding because after the sun broke out in the middle of the afternoon, we started to see a few people milling about and stopping by for soft drinks and snacks.

Maybe they were all at home shocked to the core that doubling council tax for second homes has led to second home owners changing them to holiday lets and registering for business rates. I mean, who could have predicted that. The worst of it is that some of them have been taking advantage of a bit of legislation that permits them to claim a rebate on their council tax going back 30 years.

The reaction to being charged exorbitant rates on your second house was not only understandable but obviously foreseeable. I did and it is not my job. Someone at the much maligned council should have foreseen it, surely. The legislation that allows the owner to claim a historic refund is quite bizarre. I cannot imagine any circumstances under which that would be fair and equitable and whoever penned that rather curious bit of legislation might need their head examined.

It has left the much maligned council with a £10 million deficit, or so they say, which it claims will mean clawing back from the council tax support scheme for poor families. That sniffs a bit of political posturing, but it has set housing groups and tourism business advocates at each other’s throats. I am looking up to see if I can get ringside tickets.

While the much maligned council and certain factions are keen to paint second home owners as evil rich, the majority provide the accommodation for our visitors that provide one in five jobs in the Duchy. Perhaps some of the revenue from that should go to support tourism but that is a separate discussion. Some smart eye will point out that the biggest employer is retail but more than half the jobs in Tesmorburys would not be there without tourism to support them. There, I have nailed my colours to the mast hopefully on a boat that continues to float. It might be pointed out that I would say that would I not, but I suggest it is pragmatism not being partisan.

Slowly, throughout the day, the temperature crept up and the wind went around to the southeast. It took a while for me to notice that I was sweltering and would have been better off in little boy trousers and flip flops – darn it. I might hold that thought because one of our few customers told me that they were thinking of going home early because of the yellow weather warning. It was the first I had heard of it and looked it up. It seems we are due a bit of a blow at the end of the week, coming in from the northwest at 50 miles per hour. It is as yet too early to believe the hyperbole, but it does give me a couple of days to think of a solution for anchoring down our food waste bins. They are on the flat roof and there is absolutely nothing out there I can tie them to. The last robust northwesterly had them down as far as the chip shop and one of them smashed to pieces.

There were no signs of bad weather when I ran the girls around last thing. In fact, quite the opposite. The air was mild again and the cloud that had been gathering all day, seemed to have enough breaks to let through some starlight. That was good enough for one day, thank you.

October 20th – Tuesday

Well, we cannot complain about the weather we had this morning. The sky was clear from the outset. We know this because we could see stars and planets shining down on us from on high. The temperature had dropped overnight and created some dew here and there on the grass, but it did not feel as cold as it had done on previous mornings this week. There was no breeze to bother us. It was still in the southeast and had dropped away to not a lot.

When the sun rose and the day proper started in earnest, the sunshine lit up the bay. There were some clouds about, thick cumulus that blotted out the sun here and there but mainly the sun won. It was lighting up the wave caps and the foam running into the beach from the bit of ground sea that had developed overnight. There was some surf to be had in the couple of hours before high water and led to a small party of surfers going out to sample it. They would have to wait until late in the afternoon to try again.

We were better off in the shop thanks to the early good weather, and the café next door had a bumper time of it. While there is definitely a small upturn in business this

week, I do not think it will turn around our newspaper misfortune. The invoice for the previous week arrived this morning. I have been recording the figures for the last few years to keep an eye profit and, particularly, loss. This last week we dropped to -20 percent profit to stock papers no one wanted. This will be mitigated by vouchers I may have taken, which averaged over the six weeks we have collected them, should hopefully turn the loss into a small profit.

Our customers must have been aware that I was bemoaning the lack of newspaper sales because they came in and bought lots of pasties (sorry, MS) instead. Naturally, based on yesterday's performance, I had reduced the number of pasties we bought in, and I was very rapidly running out. The plan for this week had always been to try and use up the pasties in the freezer, so I fell back on them when I had the chance. Naturally, based on previous experience, as soon as the frozen pasties were ready demand dropped off. Luckily, we had a late revival and went through the lot.

I had sneaked a peak at the rain radar earlier since we had been warned of rain today. There was a geet pile of it moving up from the south and only the edge of which was in the Duchy. It did not look likely to come much closer to us and I dismissed it, especially as the day had looked so shiny. I was aware that the forecast had it that more rain was coming our way and in the late afternoon and predicted that it would reach us around five o'clock and since it was on the Islands at half past four o'clock, that seemed likely. It very kindly waited until I was climbing the steps on my way to my tea which is when I felt the first spots.

I had not looked but with such weather we would expect a bit of wind to come with it. This put me in a quandary because with our commercial waste collection coming in the morning, I would have to untie our wheelie bin from the commercial bin where it is anchored. I have lost count of the times a high wind has coincided with the bin collection and resulted in the wheelie bin heading down the street. The small gods of grumpy shopkeepers seem to think it a joke that never gets old.

The wind had not switched into gear when I took the girls out last thing. I had slipped into some full metal jacket waterproofs for the occasion but found that the rain was not especially heavy and I could probably have done without them.

I took some time to look at the pressure chart predictions for Storm Austin, expected on Friday. It looked like it will form off the west much like Storm Grotty at the beginning of the year but at least give us twelve hours before it arrives in the middle of the night on Thursday. I must remember to move out food bins out the back. At least I will be able to keep the wheelie bin tied up – so I can lose it and the commercial bin together. At least it will be easier to find.

October 21st – Wednesday

As expected, our wheelie bin was not where I had left it last night. It was not that bad; it had only migrated to the front of the shop. I should have taken a bit more notice of the expected wind that was piling in from the west at 40 odd miles per hour. As you might expect, Gwennap Head, windiest place in the universe, had it at more than 70 miles per hour but it does like to play fast and loose with a westerly.

The sea had joined in with the party too; it was wild. The bay was filled with white capped waves, surface foam, wave dashing up the cliffs opposite and boiling over Cowloe. When I was looking at it halfway through the morning, it was still low tide and if it had been coming over the Harbour wall earlier, I missed it in the dark.

The rain had largely gone by the time it came to take the girls around the block. There were myriad showers dotted about all to the west of us and heading our way, but I only bothered with a jacket as it looked dry enough when we set out. The girls were very keen to make haste around the block as we were buffeted by the gusty wind all the way around. There was very little in the way of sheltered spots on our journey, so I was as keen as they were to get back inside again.

I hesitated about putting all the gear outside but since the wind was westerly, I guessed it would not give me too much trouble. I was mainly right; the net bucket remained upright, and the ball stand is secured to the wall and was not going anywhere. That is more than can be said for the top of it which promptly blew off and landed in the lane beside us. I should have expected that because I knew it was loose and it has happened before – I just had not got around to fixing it. I put some cable ties on it when I brought it in later.

I lasted ten minutes in the shop after opening before I was chilled to the bone. The wind may not have been directly blowing in, but it was strong enough to swirl about and get at me anyway. There was only one remedy for such conditions and that was to put the first electric sliding door in The Cove on automatic, which I duly did.

The other assistance that I would not necessarily have recourse to was to go and have a blistering session at the gymnasium. That warmed me up no end, and I was quite happy to take the girls down to the Harbour beach after that, although I put a rain jacket over my sweatshirts, so I did not lose the body heat I had generated.

The tide was trying to push us off the beach and with the sea flexing its muscles like an out of sorts bouncer having a bad night, it was in no mood to be argued with. The wind was already throwing sand in our faces and Charles Atlas was nowhere to be seen. Enough was definitely enough, so we gathered ourselves and went around the block instead.

Need I say that it was quiet today. Alright, it was quiet today. During the morning quite vicious squalls were blowing through, lashing a bit of rain about. That kept most people away, although we did see a few brave souls dashing about, dodging the showers. Even today I spotted some stars about first thing, and by and by during the

day the sun broke through the cloud giving some much welcome brightness. It is one thing having showers blowing through when the skies are glowering at you and quite another when those showers occasionally interrupt some sunny spells.

We saw a few people now and again through the day but, in truth, I should have whizzed out the invoices and started input a few into the system. At least it would have been something constructive and I had already placed a good wedge of them in date order in readiness. Maybe I will do that tomorrow or as soon as I find my enthusiasm – erm, whichever comes later, I suspect.

Being at a loose end it seemed like very good idea to annoy myself by trying to call my business bank. I have a loan that is coming to an end and I wanted to know if I needed to do anything to wrap it up. It seemed a simple enough request but clearly the bank's 24/7 assistant – a computer – did not think so. It suggested I telephone the help centre which I did since there was not a potential customer in sight in The Cove.

Having dragged my brain through its paces to remember my telephone pin and pass numbers, I was told that I was in a queue. It very helpfully told me I would have to wait three minutes. It either told me a falsehood or had absolutely no concept of time because fifteen minutes later I was still being told that my call was important to them – surely, we have moved on from those old clichés. Apparently not. I was also informed that if my call was not urgent, I could use the chat facility. That would be the same chat facility that told me to telephone because it could not help me.

I gave up with the telephone and went back to the chat this time asking the same question in a different way. It assured me that it would direct me to the correct business team who would pick up the chat conversation, erm, dreckly. It did cross my mind that the banking world had moved on in recent times if they were working into the evening. I was even more surprised when it told me that I would be answered in a further 226 minutes which would have been around nine o'clock in the evening. They might be working that late but that is almost my bedtime. I also had to consider that the 226 minutes might be like its three minutes earlier. I would try again tomorrow.

It as a good job I closed down my bank contacting efforts because shortly afterwards we had a five minutes to closing rush. Alright, it was just one family after three postcards and some beer but that was three postcards and some beer more that I would have sold had they not turned up.

The breeze was still being a nuisance when I stepped out with the girls a little later. It had also been raining which we narrowly avoided. I took the food waste bins around to the back while I still remembered, too, and made a mental note to check that the newspaper box at the front of the shop is properly secured. I went to sleep with the increasing wind howling in the eaves and a few splashes of rain falling on my face from the skylight. Ah, autumn. You have to love it.

October 22nd – Thursday

I noted when I awoke this morning that something was missing. It took me a minute to realise that the howling in my ear was absent and there was not the patter of little raindrops on the window.

I opened the door to a very peaceful scene, although I could not see it, but I could feel the absence of a rough wind slapping me around my face, the lack of rain and the mildness of the air. We took our time walking around the block and met up with a neighbour who had been out for a run, presumably to avoid the crowds. The girls were at first frightened of the approaching lamp then over excited as she made a fuss of them. None of us expect to see anyone else at that time in the morning and at this time of year.

As has become usual in these last weeks, there was very little to do in the shop to get ready for the day. Other than the absence of things to do there is also the ritual checking of 'use by' dates that we have needed to step up in these quiet weeks. Since we have slower turnover, things like the dairy have been going out of date before we can sell them. Trying to get the numbers right to avoid this is just not possible as one day we will sell ten of something and the next day one – completely unpredictable.

Talking of which, I had a conversation with the café owner next door about opening at all tomorrow. He was inclined not to, and I could not blame him. I suspect that people will quite wisely stay away in droves. I did curse him because if he closes, we will have a string of people coming through our door asking if we do coffee. We have this when the café is open; it is just worse when they are closed. When we point people to the café, they tell me that there is a queue. 'So, you would only buy coffee from us if next door is busy, then', which normally elicits some embarrassed back tracking. I suppose I could add for completeness, 'what is wrong with the coffee we don't do?'

The notion of queuing reminded me that I was in the process of waiting in a chat queue for the bank to respond to me. When I logged in on my smart mobile telephone there was a message waiting for me. It seems even after logging out last night that 226 minutes was still counting down. There was another message that told me it would be a further 76 minutes and after that a message that told me that the helpdesk was closed for the evening. I am very glad that I did not wait.

The final message was the customer service desk opening up again and continuing the dialogue as if nothing had happened in the interim. I eventually responded a couple of hours after they had. I told them I was very sorry for the delay, but I was busy serving other customers, but their response was important to me. I left a message stating my query and when I looked back later, they had answered it.

The shine on the morning's brightness started to dull towards the middle of the day, when it started to rain a bit. It was not heavy, but it very quickly dismissed the little bit of busyness that had just been building through the morning. Before long we were back in the doldrums again and if it had not been for some concatenated pasty pre-ordering (sorry, MS) things would have looked very bleak indeed.

This was not so for the experienced surfers in the community. Yesterday, the big waves in the bay were blown out by the wind and the beach had been red flagged all day. Today, with the wind more moderate and in the southeast, the large waves were entirely surfable the and the big boys were having a rare old time of it – all four of them. It really was quite meaty out there and quite exclusive because of it.

The initial look I gave the huge lump of rain out to the west had us getting soaked for most of the afternoon. In reality, most of it missed us and just gave us a mucky afternoon with few customers instead of a rainy afternoon with few wet customers. In the middle of the afternoon, I took a call from our new insurer who prefers to do everything by telephone. This worked out well since we had so few customers. During the conversation she told me that Truro was being pelted with heavy rain. We really had got away lightly.

Understandably there was no launching of Lifeboats in the evening. Instead, we watched the training induction videos. They need to be watched and the question and answer session after each needs to be completed every five years. We can do it at home individually or, on wet and stormy evenings, they can be done as a group and have a jolly wheeze while doing it. Or, as I did, one can struggle to stay awake in the back row.

It was lashing down outside just before I left, and I had to spend a few minutes going to get my rain jacket. By the time I put it on and grabbed my false ears, the rain had stopped. When we emerged an hour or so later, it was still dry and the air was perfectly still. I suspected that we were in the eye of the low pressure system and had missed the stiff southerly breeze that would have come through earlier. Our bit of wind was not due until the early hours of the morning. I was quite satisfied that I had strapped down our bins and the newspaper box, which also had a wire through the lid latch to stop it flying open. It will utterly confuse the newspaper man in the morning but I hope, when he has worked it out, that he remembers to replace it.

There, nothing at all to worry about.

October 23rd – Friday

Crumbs and crikey. That was a bit of a blow. St Ives reckoned on 92 miles per hour while Land's End must have been hiding in the cupboard when it measured 75 miles per hour. It certainly sounded a lot worse lying under the skylight and being rained

upon at three o’clock in the morning. I will only briefly mention Gwennap Head, windiest place in the universe, that only managed a few miles per hour up from St Ives. How very much against type and how disappointing.

I had clearly done a good job on the bins and the newspaper box as both were still in place after the peak of the winds had passed. The newspaper box would have definitely gone had it not been restrained; it was dancing around at the end of its tethers the whole morning. The newspaper man seemed to manage alright taking the makeshift lock off the box. However, he struggled some to put it back again, tried twice and left. I watched it for a while on the CCTV and the lid stayed shut but when I came down later to open the shop, it was wide open.

Thankfully, the rain stopped not long after six o’clock else the newspapers would have been soaked. We had let the girls onto the flat roof for their morning walk as it was far too rough at the normal walking time to take them around. I left it as long as I could before going down to the shop which was later than usual because I was not going to put the display out today. It took enough effort to take the newspapers out of the newspaper box while trying to prevent the lid from taking damage. It may well have been the first time that none of the display went out during our season.

It was definitely a day for switching on the first electric sliding door in The Cove. Even then it was not a perfect solution as the wind was finding ways of opening the door unbid. It is a tad irritating because I use it as an indicator that someone had come into the shop if I am not behind the counter or, indeed, snoozing while behind the counter. On a day that a snooze would have been welcome, too.

There was very little in the way of human activity to swing our door open during the morning. There were a few about checking on potential damage from the early hours. As the day progressed, the wind very slowly eased, the sun came out and we started to see a few people stepping out to have a geek at the sea.

It was well worth a watch, too. The bay was filled with a sea in turmoil. Waves were running to the beach in total disorder, breaking where they felt like it to be swallowed up by waves coming after them, tumbling and spreading into bright, white foam. The swell direction was clearly wrong for anything much climbing up the cliffs opposite, but occasionally there would be a big burst of white up in the air on Aire Point or Creagle. Over Cowloe, the sea was a boiling mess and waves were lumping over the Harbour wall with the full force of the wind behind them. With the waves being constantly pushed towards the beach, there was little difference between high and low water and the Lifeguards had placed their red flags right up against the dunes.

I was lucky to see any of it. The shop windows had been getting dirtier and dirtier after the ban on the use of hosepipe. Yes, I am very aware of how lazy that sounds and, indeed, probably is. It would, however, mean shipping multiple buckets of water down from the flat and, quite frankly, I would probably use less water by using the hose. After today, I would need even more buckets because everything is now

covered with an additional layer of salt and the windows are near enough opaque. Worse than that, I cannot see through them, either.

Still, the forecasters had told us that Boelo, the next named storm coming tomorrow, would bring a guts of rain that might wash off all the salt. The main part of that storm is striking at the top of Scotland, some way north of Camborne, and we will get the let overs. The forecast reckons on another gale of wind but from the southwest, so I should be safe to put the display out tomorrow but probably not the flags.

The day tomorrow looks far more bleak than today, if the forecast is to be believed, with rain all day. At least today, the brightness of the afternoon and the diminishing of the wind brought our visitors out to play. It was clear that this was an increasing number of newcomers, which was encouraging. When I did my closing checks, we had been cleared out of milk and bread and some of the greengrocery. We did our best to avoid having deliveries today but could do nothing about the newspapers and pasties (sorry, MS). The till at the end of the day was far better than I expected but I have no such hope for tomorrow.

The rain was set to start in the evening, and I checked the rain radar before I took the girls for a last spin. There was a small lump of heavy rain right on the doorstep. The timing was such that we probably would get caught in it, so I togged up in full metal jacket waterproofs. We were quick, but I did not need them. The rain must have just shaved us but fell hair's breadth to the south. How handy, I thought.

October 24th – Saturday

We were fortunate again this morning having inadvertently chosen a time that had just missed one of the early showers passing through and before the main bulk of the rain arrived. It was still a bit breezy from somewhere in the southwest but not enough to bother us as we walked around the block. The ground was wet and we had to avoid some puddles along Coastguard Row, so it had been raining quite hard before we came out.

The proper rain, set in for the day, was just starting when I was putting out the display when I went down to prepare the shop for opening. I had already been down once when the milkman and the greengrocery deliveries arrived simultaneously and at the same time which was highly convenient. It meant that when I came down again, I could take care of all the deliveries in succession and without delay.

I came down at the new normal time – around half past seven o'clock – to discover that it was still dark. I had to keep the floodlights on until an hour into opening. The dawn had clearly seen the big, heavy and threatening skies and decided not to bother today. It certainly was gloomy and that pretty much lasted all day. I cannot blame our visitors for staying at home; it was the least inviting day we had seen in quite some time – and wet, too. You would only really come out if you were

desperate for milk or some other essential and even then, you would send someone you could bully.

Despite that assessment, we did see people on and off through the morning. The café was open again and later they said that they were much busier in the morning than they had anticipated. It was not exactly busy but there were definitely more people needing things than I thought likely and we even sold a few pasties (sorry, MS).

More surprising was the sea state. We had gone from utter madness to apparent serenity in two tides. It was low water during the morning, so we might expect less of a fuss but there was nothing to suggest that it had been big and bouncy just twelve hours earlier. It returned to form later in the afternoon, the swell increasing as the tide pushed in. The wind was forecast to come around to the northwest again, back where it was yesterday. I thought it had as it was getting blustery in The Cove and the sea seemed to be backed by the impetus.

We had expected the wind to come around, but I had thought it would be much later in the day. A few unexpected gusts just an hour into the afternoon and I decided we had best pull the outside display back in again. Oddly, I checked again in the late afternoon, and all four local weather stations were telling me that the wind was still in the southwest. All I can say is, you could have fooled me. As we pressed into the afternoon, the day became increasingly wild and so did the sea. The waves appeared to be bigger than yesterday, more ordered and with a longer gap between each. This was a deeply rolling ground sea, formed in the Atlantic, and bolstered by a bigger tide. At high water and for some time before it, there was precious little of the big beach available. The Lifeguards were cut off and would need to retire via the Coast Path. In the meanwhile, they had very little to do but watch it.

I had threatened myself with it a day or two ago but with nothing much else to do and to take my mind off the boredom of it all, I set to with the pile of invoices that had accumulated since the end of August. With very few interruptions, I managed to pile thorough 100 before I decided to call it a day. There is probably about the same left, so that was not bad going and as the additional invoices are becoming fewer, will make it less of a mountain to climb when I come to do them against the clock at the end of November.

As we got later into the afternoon we started to see a few more customers. Families were dropping by, largely for a mooch and look-see, bored at last with being cooped up all day, but bread and groceries were leaving with many of them. It was a sort of long, drawn out five minutes to closing in slow motion. A little earlier we had a return customer from later in the summer season. Then, he had made multiple grocer trips from us which we love to see. He came twice today and left with large carrier bags full of comestibles. He even paid for them, which was nice.

Closing was once again a swift affair having already brought in the outside display. At least the rain had stopped a little earlier and left us with wind driven mizzle. The outside items sit in front of where we keep the logs and, of course, what did we sell a lot of today. It made it very awkward to reach them. I will have to order more for the coming week as I suspect it will be a theme.

We had a swift tea. The Missus and I were going out on the town – together. Mother had been drafted in earlier in the week and had been staying with us. She looked after the girls while we were gone. We went to a surprise birthday party at the Surf Lodge at the end of The Beach car park.

I had togged in full metal jacket waterproofs for the occasion – I had quite forgotten what the man about town wears to such events. I had noticed a thin band of rain was approaching from the north, no more than a couple of miles wide but containing very heavy rain. We made it to the event unscathed; the rain came five minutes after we arrived.

We were late leaving and our arrival was just ahead of the birthday boy. As we pushed open the door, we were confronted by the assembled company eagerly expectant to see the host make an entrance. The disappointment in the air when they saw it was us was palpable. I know that I am a disappointment to many, probably my parents chief among them, but never so many all at once.

We did not stay all that long and were back by my bedtime. My partying skills are a little rusty.

October 25th – Sunday

I have never seen the point of changing the time twice a year. Perhaps I am not among those who gain some benefit from it. I have heard so many apparent reasons for the change but none of them have really explained it sufficiently to justify the disruption. I am not entirely sure that the clocks would be changed to stop school children in Scotland tripping over haggis in the dark and farmers now work night and day anyway – they have lights. Whatever the case, it will always be a mystery to me how they managed to persuade the tide to come and go earlier than it did yesterday.

I, of course, woke up at the usual time and lay in bed with a nagging anxiety that I really should not be there. When I did get up to take the girls around, who, incidentally, were not in the least disturbed about the change in clock time, I hardly needed the headtorch I had taken with me from habit. It did let me see into a few dark corners but, by the end of the week, I doubt that I need be bothered to take it with me.

We were aided by the much clearer sky that we had from first thing. There was still plenty of cloud, mainly cumulus or stratocumulus rather than a low, glowering

blanket of nimbostratus that we had yesterday. There was a mix of rain and sea in the air from waves shattering on contact with the footings of Pedn-men-du. The resultant mizzle, forcibly issued through the Harbour car park, was rather like getting slapped across the face with a wet fish – I imagine.

The little bit of sunshine added to the day made all the difference to business. We were seeing customers from the outset, breakfast goods and newspapers. Our returning customer who bought two large consignments of groceries yesterday came back and bought another today. I can only assume that he is staying with a small army or has a couple of teenagers salted away. We also started to sell pasties (sorry, MS) from early in the day and made a good dent in the remaining weekend stock.

The wind had stalwartly refused to come around to the northwest as promised and stayed in the west, edging slightly to the west northwest by and by. Despite that, it was making its presence very much felt in The Cove. The sea was still raging, egged on by the wind, but at least it did have the good grace to leave the beach at low water today. It was trying hard not to. The waves were breaking and taking long runs up the sand which would have been ideal for a bit of skim boarding if you were not likely to be blown off your feet doing so. Further out, the wind was whipping every wave that dared to raise its head into a white cap, and they were dotted about everywhere in sight.

Busy though it was during the early part of the morning it was not so busy that I could not devote my time between customers to doing some more invoice keying in. They were sitting on the side counter, being in the way, and eventually I could stand it no more and decided to shift a few. It was while I was engaged in this diversion that the numbers of interruptions started to mount. Before I knew it, I was serving customers rather than recording invoices and many of those sales were pasty related.

Fortunately, I recognised a pasty rush when I saw one and made sure that I was lining up plenty in the oven. Even then, a couple of larger orders had me on the backfoot, and I had to delay sales for ten minutes to catch up. We were nearing the end of the pasties that I had ordered, so I made the decision to pull some from the freezer. It was while these were defrosting in the oven that the demand quickly dropped off and it rather looked like I had overshot.

There was a lull during what might have been, ‘let’s go and have a roast dinner at the pub’ time, and after we started to see visitors come back onto the street to admire the pounding sea as the tide began to build. It was looking much the same as yesterday but this time it had the sun on it and was showing itself off to its best. Waves breaking over Cowloe in a boiling mass ran off in white foam across the mouth of the Harbour. The Harbour wall itself was buried in successive waves, adding to the foam along the front of the promenade.

Large waves were breaking in the middle of the bay, folding into churning white foam. Others were waiting until the approach to the beach, 100 yards out turning all before it into white surf. On the cliffs opposite, sporadic waves were dancing up the points and rocky outcrops. It was a splendid view that you could watch for hours and, just to prove the point, there were many people doing just that.

Among the wind-blown heads are many that we recognise as regular visitors. It always feels like a homecoming of distant relatives – one you quite like – and adds a warmth to these last several days of grumpy shopkeeping. We rather wish that the weather would have held just for another week but today was about as good as it gets when the forecast lines up three storms in a row just to show that it can. We have another low pressure system tomorrow that will bring a guts of rain. It is not that we do not need it, although one wonders if these deluges will be as mismanaged as the 60 continuous days of rain we had at the start of the year, it is just that we do not need it this week.

What I would also rather not have had was night falling before we closed the shop. I could not give tuppence for a bit of dark in the morning when there are few people about. Coming before we close plays havoc with my five minutes to closing rush.

October 26th – Monday

I cannot say that I was overly delighted to look out of the window first thing and note that it was raining – and quite heavily at that. I had seen the forecast for today that had insisted that it would be raining all day. It then changed in the morning to tell me that the rain would stop in the early afternoon to be followed by low cloud and mizzle. None of that was of any help at six o'clock in the morning and we sallied forth into the pouring rain.

By the time I came down to open the shop, the rain was just coming to an end rendering the forecast about as useful as a colander at a beer festival. Even the revised forecast was wrong because by later morning the sun was splitting the hedges. It did deteriorate into the afternoon when we were dominated by some low cloud and things got a bit damp for a while. My expectation of the day was that it would be raining, so anything other than that was an improvement.

The morning orders were the biggest that we have had for a while. I should have come down earlier so found myself quite pressed even though the deliveries were timely. I got most of them done before we opened and had to address the greengrocery after. That was not a problem because everybody else's expectation was that it was going to rain all day and had chosen to do something else. I suspect that even those options were limited because there was a proper hooley blowing up from the south. Another weather warning had been issued taking us into tomorrow when the wind would veer back to the west again.

In the quiet of the morning, it would have been very rude not to take advantage and go to the gymnasium for a blistering session. On my way, I met up with the Lifeboat mechanic who had been down fixing the long slipway. The rough seas had taken out one of the footway grilles leaving a gaping hole. I was very glad that he had spotted it first and it was not one of the very excellent Shore Crew in the middle of the night. In truth, we would not have been down there. Had the boat launched, we would not have been able to recover it with the current sea state and it would have laid up at Newlyn until the sea state improved.

Our mechanic had found the displaced grille not far from its site but had been unable to find any fixings. These have been ordered and, in the meanwhile, some have been removed from grilles at the top of the slipway. We are not telling which grilles have the missing fixings to add a bit of jeopardy and I have booked winch operator post for the foreseeable.

Since the sun was out and the tide low, I took the girls down to the Harbour beach for a bit of a run after gymnasium. It was desereted save for a young American lady and we tarried for a chat about the girls and her own dogs back home. I find it refreshing to meet such youngsters who seem confident and fluent enough to hold a conversation with an adult on reasonably even terms. I left her to her examination of the shoreline and took the girls between the slipways to explore. I had noticed from above a new covering of sand and thought to have a geek. It was rather disappointing that much of it had gone just two tides later. The rough seas had also been at work under the short slip where there is only one arch that is not too rocky to get through.

There was not much movement in the sea in the Harbour. In fact, there was not much sea in the Harbour to move, it being low tide and all. The bay was similarly calm by comparison to the last few days. Even at high water, there was only an undulating swell lumbering through the bay, and all the breaking waves were at the beach, over Cowloe or at the foot of the cliff opposite. Having said that, it was making a right meal of breaking over the rocks at the end of the OS slip. I could see it almost topping the sea wall down there.

Sadly, after a brief reappearance of the sunshine during the afternoon, we spent most of the remainder of the day looking at that hazy low cloud and feeling that damp air. We were far from the busyness we had yesterday and must hope for better during the week.

Again, the darkness of the late afternoon clips short our business day. Our floodlights do an excellent job of advertising our presence – I expect a call from the space station any day, now – but few seem willing to venture out. So, surprising me at five minutes to closing time, we had a five minutes to closing rush. Well I never did.

October 27th – Tuesday

I gave the day a cursory check for rain before I took the girls around this morning. Unlike the gloom of yesterday, the near enough full moon was bright in a cloudless sky – well, it was at the time I looked – and no headtorch was needed today. There was a bit of breeze thumping up the slipway that knocked us sideways when we passed the Lifeboat station, but it still seemed to be mild.

Also unlike yesterday, I was downstairs in plenty of time and only then remembered that I had no orders to deal with. At a slightly short end, I remembered that a good deal of rain had blown under the door on Friday morning and was still waiting for me unwelcomely under the welcome mat. I dragged this out and banged the sand out of it on the road. Since it was still wet on the back, I left it draped across the bins to dry out in the breeze. Meanwhile, I went back in and mopped the floor.

I had the newspapers to do and my rounds for out of date stock. I checked back on the mat drying in the wind a couple of times and it was doing alright. I decided to leave it as late as I could before we opened and five minutes to opening, I went out to retrieve it. I do not know exactly how long it had been raining heavily but the mat was wetter than when I put it out.

There was a fair amount more cloud about than I had determined there was when we were walking around the block first thing. Despite that, the beach was lit up in bright sunshine for most of the day. The 25 miles per hour breeze from somewhere out to the west did not seem to be bothering us very much. People on the beach, of whom there were quite a few, may have felt it a little more keenly but most people wandering about seem to have been wrapped up well. It must have come around some later because during the afternoon every other customer complained about it.

There may have been a few wandering around earlier in the day but business visits in the shop were sparse. It was quite a disappointment, although perhaps not a surprise as today had initially been slated as rainy. I would have thought that with a fair bit of sunshine and despite the breeze, there would have been some more about but I surmised it might take a while for our visitors to discover that they had been duped.

The sea state was very much mixed this morning. Out in the bay, all looked relatively calm but even early on, waves were coming over the Harbour wall. There is still an underlying bit of ground sea and with the wind behind it, the waves were pushing hard onto the beach. At low tide, the Lifeguards had opened the beach to swimmers and surfers. There were even a couple of anglers in wading gear, fishing on the southern end, standing in the surf, too. It was not long after the tide started to push in, around the middle of the day, that the Lifeguards very quickly reached for their red flags. The only person clearly happy with that was a lone kite surfer who was fair tearing in and out of the surf and leaping over waves at an extreme rate of knots.

The swell continued to increase alongside the tide and producing some spectacular views around the bay. Waves were piling across the full length of the Harbour wall, exploding up Creage and the cliffs opposite and pounding in on the beach. Maybe it was because of this that our business was transformed in the afternoon. We were as busy from the early afternoon as we were quiet in the morning with people buying from across our range, novelties, going home presents and, at last, pasties (sorry, MS).

I had agonised about our ordering for the next day since hardly any pasties had gone out of the door when it came time to place the order. I spent some time trying to calculate the number we would need for tomorrow and then, wondering how I could increase the spend to meet minimum order. In the end, I ordered for what I thought we would need for tomorrow and Thursday. We then started selling far more pasties than I had anticipated and now will have too many pasties tomorrow for one day and probably not enough for two. Oh calamity.

The day finished on a high and made me wonder if it was worth opening in the mornings. I concluded the business with some ordering for tomorrow. I am having to be very careful of what I order now, trying to ensure that we are left with as little as possible while still having stock to satisfy the current demand and not leave customers wanting. Business will drop like a stone over the weekend, so my pasty order on Thursday will have to be very carefully orchestrated.

Food is starting to arrive now for the Home Harvest Auction that the Missus has organised as part of her role as events organiser for the Lifeboat station. It will be held at the OS on Friday evening. She had contacted as many local suppliers and wholesalers as she could think of, and most have responded. She will spend Thursday driving around collecting donations that could not be delivered to us. We still await answers from Harrods and Fortnum's both of which have been a little tardy in their responses. Oddly, I do not think she bothered with Tesmorburys, but I think our buyers will be better off with local produce from independent suppliers.

When it came time to take the girls around last thing, there was still the remnants of the stiff breeze from throughout the day, but it was well on the way to calming down. The air was still very mild for the end of October and most importantly, it was dry. The tide was out at the time and in the outer reaches of the light from the Lifeboat station door, the beach seemed clear of weed and smooth of sand. We did not venture down; the poor little dears are spooked in the dark. I will probably go down tomorrow after the gymnasium for a geek. It is always pleasant to have something to look forward to.

October 28th – Wednesday

This morning was like having been in a long, dank tunnel, filled with nasty things and suddenly bursting out into the light. Even in the dim light of the morning, the air was

mild, the wind hardly existent and the moon bright enough overhead to light our way around the block.

We had to endure some low cloud and some haze initially but after I came out of the gymnasium, the sun was splitting the hedges again. As I had hoped, I took the girls to a weed free and nearly unspoilt sandy beach for a bit of a run and it was like being down there on a summer's day – a proper rip gribbler, it was.

I scarcely needed my second layer, and my hat came off shortly after we arrived. We had the beach mostly to ourselves, although we discovered a family the other side of the slipways when we went around there at the end. Fed up with the girls being inert for our length of stay, I threw some weed stalks for them which was quite effective. They will, of course, completely ignore them next time I try it. I even had BB bring them back occasionally.

When we walked around in the morning and later when I could see what was going on, the sea was again in turmoil. There was plenty of crashing over the Harbour wall and the sea in the Harbour was clearly in distress as it danced and swirled about. It had done a good job of scouring the sand clean but had also left plenty of sand there, covering the rocks up in the top western corner and down to the tide line. While the sea had been kind to the bit you could see, it had ravaged the areas under the slipways to the point that there is only one way through both. The others are a jumble of exposed rocks.

I had not hung around long enough in the morning to see how the shop business went early in the day; a blistering session awaited. When I came out of the gymnasium, the street was much busier, and the Missus had seen some action in the shop while she grappled with some of the auction donations that had arrived during the morning. When I took over in the late morning, there were more people around than we had seen at that time all week and they were eating pasties (sorry, MS).

My cunning plan had been to order sufficient pasties today to cover two days. We had already sold more than I anticipated yesterday afternoon after the order, so we were already down on our volume. With time pressing before the order deadline today, I chickened out and added some more pasties for tomorrow. I was never any good at poker, either. Thus, I sealed my fate to end the day with a lot more pasties than I imagined.

The Diary, on the whole, steers clear of the pot holes of fate which are littered all over the road of political commentary. Just occasionally, however, there are gifts which just cannot be ignored, and the Budget has brought us a big fat, juicy bag of irony to get our teeth into – particularly that it is grumpy shopkeeper related.

It is without doubt refreshing that the politicians in their sumptuously furnished ivory towers of the big city, have clearly understood the current public mood and have 'got

it' that there is a crisis involving the cost of living for ordinary folk. While money is short even for Government, the Chancellor has found some headroom to vastly reduce the cost of groceries for the ordinary family. This has been warmly welcomed, especially by the press which quite remarkably managed to keep a straight face.

I understand that life-supporting staples such as imported garlic and gherkins are chief beneficiaries. Also on the list are boiled sweets, toffees, caramels and similar confection which even more ironically are subject to a government 'fat tax' to dissuade the common person from getting fat by eating too many. It is at the very pinnacle of this intervention, which I am sure had brough relief to many, that the list included reductions in tariffs on chocolate-coated wafers and waffles.

The newspaper that I extracted this exciting news from tells us that the expected savings for the average family from this action, combined with previous reliefs mind, is 40 pence per week.

Well, that is quite enough of that sort of thing. It is time for more sea gazing since we had precious few customers through the afternoon. There was again a big swell lumping into the bay but perhaps not quite as big as the day before. The main difference today was that it was not backed by a bit of ferocious wind that flattened the waves and closed the beach. A couple of hours off high water, the beach was still open for swimming and surfing, although you would want to have some experience under your belt to be doing some of the latter. There were a few such people out on the waves, as they appeared to be having a good time of it out there. I suppose, though, if they were not having a good time of it, they probably would have been in the OS nursing a pint instead.

One thing that they probably would not be doing is going back to their billet and lighting a warming fire; it was vaguely tropical today. We had run out of logs during the weekend and had to disappoint a few visitors who came asking on Sunday. I thought it a good plan to order a dozen or so bags and some more kindling on the basis that the poor weather was still with us. I fully expected that they would probably arrive on Tuesday, like they did the week before.

When the logs had still not arrived by this morning, I thought I had better telephone the company to see if they had received the order or not. I thought that, on balance, if they had not, I would let matters rest as we certainly would not be using the volume I originally ordered. Unfortunately, it appears that they did get the order and it was scheduled for delivery tomorrow, which is a bit irksome but at least they will not go off and we will have them for Christmas opening. On the downside, they are bulky and will be in the way a lot.

Looking about the shop, I have the feeling that we might be a little overstocked on much of our fresh produce. Business this week has been anything but consistent and one day we were selling out of milk and the next hardly any at all. As it stands, the poor of the parish are in for a bumper closing spree. I will not tell them yet as I would

hate to see the disappointment on their little faces if we have a last minute rush and sell out of everything.

Talking of last minute rushes, we had a five minutes to closing one again today. It seems that our floodlights are attracting our panicked shoppers like moths. Sadly, they did not put much of a dent in the fresh goods, but the business was welcome, nonetheless. I shall have to try the hard sell with the customers we have tomorrow; the poor of the parish are not that needy, especially now they have their grocery reductions. Me, I am off for my cocoa and chocolate-coated wafers. What a bonanza.

October 29th – Thursday

With the shop close to closing, it is time to visit the Aged Parent now living in Sherborne – some ways east of Camborne. Visiting en masse is such a logistical mountain to climb, so I have been going on my own for the last few years. I leave the truck behind so that the Missus can still get to and from Mothers and the shops `as needed and I take the train. I was going to sit on my laurels for a week and go next week but for some reason I now cannot remember – perhaps the lack of laurels - I am travelling up on Tuesday and back on Friday.

I booked the tickets a while back and because selecting a time is cheaper than an open ticket, I chose specific trains to take me up and back. How I could have been so remiss as to forget the obvious impediment to travel, I have no idea, because clearly, it should have been forefront of my mind. Thankfully, the railway company must be used to dealing with eejits such as myself and sent me a message to tell me that due to SMD, two of my trains had been cancelled – one more than a week in advance.

I hardly need to explain that SMD stands for Soil Moisture Deficit, presumably occasioned by Excessive Precipitation Absence or Prolonged Aridity Exposure. It seems that trains cannot run if it is either too wet, too dry, too windy or, down here, the sea too rough. We call it the Goldilocks service because conditions have to be ‘just right’ for the trains to run at all.

So, I should not have been surprised that the train company sent me a message this morning telling me that one leg of my outward journey had been cancelled and one leg of the return journey also. Through their largesse, I was at liberty to choose another service either side of my original time without incurring a penalty. To aid me in this endeavour, the message contained a link that allowed me to key my start and end points and select alternative services. In doing so I also discovered that my return service will include an additional change at Plymouth and a last leg back to Penzance on the slow train, in suburban service carriages without facilities. Oh dear. Oh, very dear.

In the meanwhile, back in The Cove, we woke up to an absolutely spiffing day. Perhaps not quite as spiffing as the morning before as some light cloud developed between our early walk around and shop opening that blotted out much of our sunshine. It was, however, bright, dry and temperate with very little wind. Although the sea was crashing and banging about in the Harbour first thing, there was some rather pleasant wave action lower in the tide for a small army of surfers and bodyboarders to enjoy.

Business today was alright but not exactly what you might call racing. The morning was largely in the doldrums, and we had to wait until nearly the middle of the afternoon for very much to happen at all. I had taken the opportunity to count my newspaper tokens and to prepare the paperwork. If we take any more tokens, it will not take much to add them on.

The Laurel and Hardy Newspaper Company are hard at it ensuring their incompetence lasts through until the very last day. Today, they decided it a jolly good time to send me eight surfing magazines. After spending the year reducing my magazine selection to zero, they decided that now was an excellent time to make amends. The magazine title was not on my list else I would have cancelled them. Needless to say, I sent them back without taking them out of the box. I still had to complete the paperwork though, which was an additional irritation.

I had sent notice of our closing to the appropriate Laurel and Hardy Newspaper address at the end of September, thinking to give them the best possible chance of avoiding an administrative meltdown. I had a response last week, acknowledging receipt and telling me my message would be passed to (another) appropriate department. I foresee being charged for newspapers well into next week and having to spend a week sorting it out. Perhaps I will send the notice at the same time as my opening notice next year.

Once again, we had an unpredictable day of busyness. It was no help at all in determining our very last pasty order (sorry, MS) of the season. We already had an abundance of pasties in the fridge from the last two underachieving days, so it was never going to be a big order. I decided that I should just accept that I would never get it exactly right and that running out at some point during the weekend was far preferable – from our perspective – to being overstocked when we drew the curtains – veils are far too see-through - on the end of the last day.

With the sea state slowly returning to a more normal or acceptable condition, our Coxswain, newly returned from his holidays, decided that having a Lifeboat launch would be a splendid idea. It came with conditions, centred around the time of high water and the window we would have to recover it up the short slip. It would not be practical using the long slipway with the tide so full as it would put the very excellent Shore Crew in danger of getting wet wellies and this would never do.

Consequently, we mustered at quarter past six o'clock forcing me to have an early tea while trying to serve customers at the same time. As it happened, most of our customers had beggered off after around four o'clock leaving me plenty of time to have a largely uninterrupted sandwich.

It was surprising that I found room in the store room to put down my plate. The Missus had departed The Cove reasonably early doors to do the rounds of the various suppliers and wholesalers who had promised her donations for the auction on Friday. She returned with the truck stacked with produce. There was meat in abundance from two butchers, cheeses, yoghurts and butter from our milkman. She also visited one of the large vegetable wholesalers and came away with eight boxes of brassica, cauliflower and cabbage which they would have garnered straight from local farms. The quality looked exceptional.

I am sure some might say the same for the very excellent Shore Crew as we spread out in a bunch to launch the two Lifeboats in our first dark launch this end of the season. The sun had set in a blaze of glory in the late afternoon, tinging even the clouds to the east in pink – or a very similar colour. I had assigned myself to the Inshore boat tonight which had nothing at all to do with there being no holes or loose grilles on the Harbour slipway, honest guv. The hole on the long slipway had a temporary fix applied. I told the rest of the crew that it had not been fixed, and the hole merely been moved to a random location, just to make it interesting, which I thought a jolly wheeze.

The ruse was a bit wasted because we diverted to the short slip to set up for recovery. There are no holes on the short slip – that we were aware of. Then we retired to the crew room for tea and Halloween themed cupcakes and to discuss matters of great import. Our discussions did not get very far as one of the crew remarked that he still had not watched some of the induction training videos that we are required to watch every five years. The include such riveting subjects as 'safeguarding', one hour, 'working at height', ten minutes and 'safety and induction training plan' which includes another drilling on safeguarding. It is far easier to complete the video sessions as a group because we can all feel less guilty by committee when we ignore them - sorry, autocorrect error there – study them intensely as a group.

Sadly, my small team and I on the Inshore boat duties, we called away prematurely so that the Inshore boat could practise some docking on the trailer. During the launch at high water, I had to get dangerously close to the swirling waters. The boat had slipped forward on its tethers and had to be hauled back to release them. To achieve this the trailer had to be on the level and the only level bit on the slipway was in the water. Not only did I get my wellies wet, they got wet and sandy. Someone else can do it next time.

The Inshore boat came in well ahead of the big boat, so we had plenty of time to finish our duties and return to assist the big boat team. We had already set up

everything for the boat's return, and it only required some minor adjustment and to rig the 'fishing rod'. Shortly after, the boat returned and from my advantage point in the boathouse I could clearly see that we executed a textbook recovery up the short slip in moderate sea conditions with a little movement on the toe of the slipway for interest. After washing down and retuning the boat to the launch slip for its next service, we retired for a debrief and dismissal. We are, after all, a very complete, very excellent Shore Crew.

October 30th – Friday

When we could see it, the morning looked quite delicious. There was acres of blue sky, some high cloud and a light breeze. It was a fair few degrees cooler than we have been used to, but it is the end of October, after all. We were all set for a rip-roaring last day of the half term holidays, although I was aware that some had gone home the previous evening or early today. When by the middle of the day we were still very quiet, I had to conclude that rather more had left yesterday than I was expecting.

It might have been, of course, that our remaining customers were all down the beach, surfing. There was a small army of them littering the centre of the beach hitting the shore break and further out waiting on bigger waves. It was looking far too hopeful for them at the back as the swell had further decreased from yesterday and was not even troubling the Harbour wall at high water. Near low water, the waves were breaking along the shoreline where most of the youngsters and least experienced managed to get a last fling at a decent bit of surfing.

I could probably have closed the shop to go to the gymnasium and no one would have noticed. It was just as well that I let the Missus take over, however, because she had a wealth of splitting orders and boxing to make up the lots for the auction in the evening. I left her to it and headed to the gymnasium for a blistering session followed swiftly by taking the girls for a run on the Harbour beach.

It was a lovely little venture down there under the blazing sun, but we were not alone. There were other dogs to negotiate with and, under the slipways, a family with small children and other dogs. Our two conducted themselves remarkably well which I think was more to do with being outnumbered and, with some bigger dogs, outgunned, too. We had a bit of a game until BB decided chasing the stick being thrown for one of the other dogs a good plan. With her legs longer than some dogs much bigger, she tends to be much faster. It was then that the other dog took umbrage at its stick being hijacked. We did not tarry too long.

When I got back to the shop, the Missus was in full flight. Lead, follow or get out of the way: Lee Iococca, the Chrysler boss to whom the quote is often attributed, clearly had the Missus in mind when he said it. She was still splitting deliveries into sensibly sized boxes to create each of the nigh on 30 lots. There were boxes all over

the counter, the chest freezer at the back and piled up in front of the ice cream freezer in the shop. Of the options available to me I felt that getting out of the way was the most appropriate.

All week we have had a roughly two hour blast of business, sometimes a bit longer maybe. It has come late morning, straddling the middle of the day, early afternoon and late afternoon. Today, we had one in the early afternoon, which I had not really expected, and it expired at around three o'clock. In that time, we were cleared out of the weekend's sausage rolls and pretty much the pasties too (sorry, MS). Last night, I had a very strong suspicion that we would either have most of the pasties left over or we would run out early; there would be no middle ground. We do have a few frozen pasties that I could bake off but, frankly, I cannot be fagged as they would make very little difference. If we are doing quotations, let them eat cake – which we have rather more of.

The Missus ran off to collect the fishy donations as soon as she had finished all the boxes. I think that she had only approached Stevensons and the lady there, the first lady master fishmonger in the country, did us proud. They are very keen supporters of the Institution, and the pile of fish, shellfish and sauces was mighty indeed. I had set up my vacuum packing station for when the Missus came back but when she did, she told me the very pleasant lady had already done it. What excellent service for a donation.

When she finished she left me with a pile of 25 boxes blocking the ice cream freezer, thank you very much, and I spent the day reaching over for distant ice creams for small children. We then hit that busy few hours when the pasties were in a continuous cycle of heating and selling until they were mostly gone. Unfortunately, the cheese pasty alternative did not keep up, and we have an abundance of those left over. Having congratulated myself on clearing the freezer yesterday, it looks like I will have to fill it again.

The Missus had gone to The Farm ostensibly to empty the back of the truck so that we could fit all the auction boxes in. When she came back, I thought she had forgotten because apart from the cardboard, it was still full of rubbish. We just about managed to get all the boxes in and the polystyrene boxes with the frozen went on the back seat next to Mother. It will be such a relief when we find the right van to replace it with.

Mother and the Missus headed to the OS early on. Two of the Boat Crew, eager lads both, dropped in while she was up at The Farm to offer a hand at loading and unloading. I made arrangements with them to meet the Missus at the OS and they did a marvellous and very necessary job of unloading. The Missus had carefully loaded the boxes in numeric order so that when they were unloaded, they were in the correct ascending order for sale.

Because we were all very pressed doing things, the Missus very sensibly suggested that we eat at the OS before the auction. She brought a menu back so that I could make a selection as I would be last one arriving after the shop closed. The Missus warned me that I should not spoil the mood by making any derogatory comment about the prices. It was a huge mountain to climb for me to say nothing of the hugely and unnecessarily expensive options on the menu. Or indeed not to suggest that perhaps it was the reason that the staff all wear striped shirts leaving their masks off to fool the public. She told me that she would pay for the meal which was cold comfort given that we both drink from the same well. I settled for a starter and a side that cost just less than a king's ransom and kept quite – ish.

I promise I will not go on about it – oh, alright, just a little then. The delivery of the meal rather soured the outset of the event. I had my starter and side delivered shortly after the appointed time. It was a very toothsome Korean chicken dish and a side of sweet potato wedges that worked out at £2.50 per wedge – oops, mentioned the prices but, really. Both the Missus and Mother had ordered the lobster soup – spelt bisque so they could add an extra fiver each – oh, darn it. They had fries for sides, five each – chips that is – which arrived but the soup did not. 'Have a nice meal' did not arrive with any cutlery which the Missus had to go and ask for.

Halfway through my meal, the soup had still not arrived, and the chips were getting cold. "Sorry, we forgot to add the soup to the order." What! The soup duly arrived another ten minutes later after one of the highly skilled chefs had opened the can and slipped the teacup sized bowl into the microwave. Even that was cocked-up because while the Missus had hot soup, Mother's was barely lukewarm. I went up to ask the kitchen to add a few more minutes to the microwave. My mother would have been proud of the look of calm serenity on my face and the pleasantness with which I asked. It was a Herculean effort.

By contrast, the auction went exceptionally well, which was a relief after the effort the Missus devoted to it. The Lifeboat Station Chairman, a local farmer, persuaded the auctioneer who used to do the OS auctions when it was still a proper pub, to do it one last time. He is over 80 years of age now and just as humorous and smooth as he was fifteen years ago. It made all the difference having a proper auctioneer and great fun for everybody. The auction turned nearly £600 so a huge thank you to everyone who turned up to play along and all those suppliers who donated a huge pile of goodies.

I even stayed up past my bedtime to help clear up and take the girls home, who had behaved themselves for two hours under the table. What a splendid night.

October 31st – Saturday

The morning had a real feel of finality about it. The café next door closed a weekend ahead of us and that had the effect of enhancing our feeling of isolation. The lack of

customers, even for a newspaper or two, set the theme until the middle of the day. Then came to occasional pasty hunters (sorry, MS) all of whom left disappointed. One visitor yesterday had the foresight to book our last remaining pasties. I took the opportunity to add the cheese pasties and the precious few others to at least clear what we had left.

It was an absolutely stunning day, this time with just a hint of milky white cirrus cloud more readily identifiable at the margins of our sky. The resulting hazy brightness brought out the white of the waves, their tops peeled off as they travelled by the light easterly winds. The sea had found some renewed vigour, throwing some waves over the Harbour wall in the early morning, and making for an excellent surf day. It had clearly attracted the great and the not so good from far and wide – and surely the last of our half termers as well. At times the beach was busy but for most of the day, the sea was busier.

I have been at loose ends before, but this one was definitely looser than most. I had wandered about the shop, tidying things up and looking at a date or two to determine which items we might be getting shot of after we close on Sunday. I cannot gather them just yet as there is the outside possibility that we might just sell one or two of them. They will be distributed to the poor of the parish unless the rich of the parish get wind of it and push their way to the front of the queue. Frankly, if the poor of the parish are not going to assert themselves, there is little to be done for them.

To be honest, there was not much there. As well as the pasties, I seem to have been super efficient this year in getting shot of products that will expire before our Christmas opening. There are some, including a whole case of crisps, that expire just before, which is annoying, but I am sure the boys at the Lifeboat station will be pleased. That took me all of five minutes. I suppose I could do it again just to see if I missed something, but it was not all that exciting the first time around. I was beginning to think that the café next door had the right idea about closing before the weekend.

Quite early on in the day I discovered that the light easterly breeze was blowing directing in through the doorway. I had fetched a jacket down because I was getting a tad cold standing around doing nothing behind the counter. By the middle of the afternoon, either the wind dropped away or changed direction, but it had warmed sufficiently for me to take my jacket off. The only problem with that is I did not notice it getting chilly again as the evening pressed in until it was seeping through my mid-layer.

I was distracted by the evening coming on – starting at around four o’clock. It was heralded by the colours on the beach softening as the sun dropped. It settled into that sepia colour while the sea stayed a pastel blue and the surf still white and it was all rather eye catching. There was still a smaller group of surfers out there even as the light started to fade, just as the waves started to get a bit more robust. I guess they could navigate in by the stars if they were that keen.

I breathed a sigh of relief when the time came around for us to close. It really had been an act of endurance to get through the day and even a minor five minutes to closing rush that cleaned out some of the beer fridge and a good many red wines did not really cut the mustard. I shall have to unearth something exciting to do tomorrow, else I will be climbing the walls.

Earlier in the afternoon, I had taken some sweets upstairs just in case we were set upon by passing little horrors, it being Halloween and all. There is only one family in The Cove with children of a suitable age and as the half termers had gone home, it was unlikely that we would be disturbed. We had also forgotten the plastic pumpkin the Missus got last year because we could not be fagged to do a real one. I understand that it is a kind of invitation these days and without one right minded evil-doers give you a pass.

As it turned out the only ones getting a fright were the girls when I took them out last thing. The people in the Tinker Taylor thatch had taken the trouble to carve proper pumpkins and had put one on the wall and the other on a post that was most effective. The girls did not see the flicking lights at first and then set up a proper fuss as we went to walk past them.

I had been asked earlier in the day if we had tea light candles. It was only late in the evening that I understood why. I made a mental note to forget them next year as well.