

DIARY 2026

February 1st – Sunday

Crikey, January disappeared quickly. I had best get my finger out. I think the shop is open in seven weeks and I do not think that I have done half enough of anything. It would be disappointing to reach the end of March and not be able to point back at something heroic, although I do not think we will be matching making a greenhouse.

It has not helped that the weather, or rather the weather forecast has been against us. We had very poor weather penned in for today and, sure enough, we had a bit of rain first thing before I took the girls out. When I looked again, the skies were clearing and although I was late taking them out, it was still in the first part of the morning.

Once again, the Harbour beach was clean, smooth sand. There is something about getting to the beach first with the sand pristine and unmarked. The only thing we left behind when we eventually left were our foot and paw prints, and the scuffs where they had skidded and collided in their play. The sea was way down the beach and any waves, and there were still a few and noisy too, were just tumbling in around the end of the wall. We had a look under the slipways. Even more rocks are exposed under the short slip, and it would be difficult to get through, so we did not bother.

Nothing much happened for a while as I picked my way through breakfast and a few chores. As I procrastinated, the outside world became more and more attractive under a mainly clear sky. There were a few white fluffy clouds and bags and bags of sunshine pouring its heart out on a wide spring tide (almost) beach. It had surprised me the previous evening to see a near full moon peeking through the mottled cloud. These things creep up on a fellow who is not paying much attention. It got to a point where I could stand it no longer and reached for my hat and coat and two small girls to drag off for a beach walk.

I did not bother with the walk up the Coast Path today. This was straight onto the beach at the OS and let slip the dogs of phwoar, as they raced off to the nearest rockpool. Despite being an hour later to the beach, we had plenty of time today in front of the tide. We took a detour to the south of the beach to start so the girls could play in the rockpools that are in abundance on that part of the beach. Then we ambled up the tide line to the black huts of Carn Keys before turning back again.

Up at the neck of the stream out of The Valley, some older boys were building a dam. It was a favourite pastime of mine once long ago and wherever a small stream flowed, a dam was essential. We should have let them finish as it would have been easier to cross the wide delta spread out below them.

There were other dogs aplenty and, off the lead, the girls integrate well. They are cautious of some and playful with others and generally return when called. BB is more adventurous, but she is yet young and will learn by and by that all that glisters is not gold and sometimes has sharp teeth and a nasty snap. She is attracted to small children, which can be problematic because she will jump up. While she weighs nothing, she is tall on her long legs and can frighten the little ones. We left a trail of traumatised children when we eventually left the beach.

There was much collapsing in a heap when we got back, and the remainder of the afternoon was quite restful. I had suffered a little having walked to North Rocks and back with Big Sis and Edward the week before. I was suitably pleased that I managed a similar walk and probably faster paced with no ill effect at all today. As soon as I have my replacement ear buds, I will resume rowing maybe a couple of times a week. I could not contemplate a reasonably lengthy row without some musical distraction.

I left our late afternoon stroll until half past five o'clock today. There was still plenty of light at that time, although dusk fell quite quickly afterwards. The sea was making a proper spectacle of itself from the middle of the afternoon and ended up, once more, thundering over the Harbour wall and making a mess over Cowloe. It had looked reasonably benign at low water but from the level of the beach as we traversed it, the waves further offshore were at least head height.

There will be much girding of loins tomorrow as I prepare to apply myself. It may come to nothing but we must have hope, surely.

February 2nd – Monday

I am finding it harder and harder to drag myself of bed in the morning. What a time to find my lazy streak just when I should be mobilising to change the world up at The Farm. Oh, well.

If I am finding my lazy streak, ABH is leading the charge. It is the devil's own job to get her out of bed in the morning. This morning, she did not even respond to my trick of knocking on the front door that most times brings her running. I had to drag her kicking and screaming out of bed. When we eventually got to the beach, she sat at the bottom of the slip rebutting all of BB's attempts to draw her into a race or a fight. The pair of us gave up in the end and we came home. Looks like we'll have to get the little girl a playmate – no, I jest, I jest.

I let them settle again while I took breakfast and waded through a few chores and checklists. Part of this was gazing aimlessly out of the window and wondering where the promised rain for the day was. I thought it unlikely that the forecasts would get their guesses wrong three days in a row and if they kept forecasting rain for each day, by the law of averages, they would be right eventually. I had not realised that we were quite so advanced through the morning and when I saw that there was

indeed rain coming, I decided to stir myself to take the girls out again before it arrived.

Looking at the rain radar, I estimated that we would have plenty of time for another stank along the big beach. Spring tides and the convenience of low water in the middle of the day come once a fortnight. Those days do not always coincide quite so nicely with a bit of fair weather or when I am booked to do nothing else. Therefore, advantage should be taken whenever possible.

We had the plain walk out and back yesterday, so it was our turn to walk up the Coast Path again. This would give me the opportunity to do better on the steps at the outset of the path. This time I arranged the girls to my left and pushed my luck that they would not be under my feet if I made a small run-up to the step. There are half a dozen steps, and I successfully mounted five of them. I nearly came to grief on one of the middle ones. In mid stride, ABH chose that particular second to be distracted by an interesting niff slightly to the left and behind her. The effect was to pull me back and to the side as I attempted to throw my weight forward. As luck would have it, BB was at that moment tearing forwards and her impetus saved the day by providing just enough counter force for me to evade disaster.

We may have made it out before the rain, but we had the full effect of a strong easterly breeze. It was quite refreshing as our exercise warmed us up, but it had generally lowered the temperature in The Cove, and I had certainly felt it in the flat during the morning before we left. I had removed my woolly hat in the latter part of our walk yesterday but today I had no inclination to do so at all. Nevertheless, it was a very pleasant stank out and when we arrived at the beach, we discovered that it had every inch of it to ourselves. It remained that way until we were halfway back along the road in the direction of home.

With the main exercise of the day out of the way, I decided to at least get something done. The next task on the list at The Farm is the second camera. The first part of that is to set up the solar panel that will power it. I had toyed with the notion of using a supplied bracket to mount the panel on a convenient pole. I thought it through over several nights and concluded that every time we had a bit of wind, I would fret about the panel being damaged. I would therefore install it on the ground even though that would be a less efficient position.

Even on the ground, the panel would have to be secured, and I thought I would use rebars bent in half and used as tent pegs over the solar panel stand. There would need to be additional devices, but the rebars would be a good start. This meant a trip up to our builders' merchant on the moors above St Just. While I was there I remembered the angst I had endured as the result of having no cross head screwdrivers in my tool kit, so I remedied that omission while I was there.

The rain had commenced on my journey out and had become a little more continuous on my way back. It was not heavy, which was probably a relief for many

who have to travel that route a lot. There is standing water and flooding at all the usual problem spots along the road. The worst is at the dip by Nancherrow Farm just past the Higher Treggiffian campsite. It is pretty severe there, flooded from both sides of the road and does not seem to have gone away in months. I had thought that the much maligned council would take some action as it is quite a dangerous spot although I supposed that they would claim lack of funds to work on a road that was not important. I was quite wrong; some flooding expert has been along to place a sign that says 'FLOOD' on it either side of the spot.

I excelled myself in the afternoon by ordering a couple of gabion cages on which to place the IBCs (alright, it has been a while – IBC are the 1,000 litre containers we use for water storage). The current arrangement of pallets is collapsing and a replacement needs to be done or the Missus will not have enough water for the summer – unless it rains a lot. That is two things I did today.

Exhausted from my efforts, I did begger all for the rest of the day until it was time to take the girls out again in the late afternoon. It was still raining on and off by then and we had half the walk dry and half the walk wet but again, it was not heavy rain. I was happy that I had done better today. I just need to keep it up tomorrow.

I shall end today on a sad note. A very dear soul and gentleman departed us today, a long term Lifeboatman and most latterly a member of the very excellent Shore Crew. Thousands of visitors would have known him as he plied his trade as photographer at the Land's End sign post for many years. While poorly at Christmas he made what would have been a mighty effort to attend the Christmas party at Land's End. Just a few days ago, he and his wife brought flowers and a thank you to the Missus for organising it. It had seemed then that he was looking forward to improvement which made the news even more abrupt.

Something by Kelly Roper

*Oh dear, if you're reading this right now,
I must have given up the ghost.
I hope you can forgive me for being
Such a stiff and unwelcoming host.
Just talk amongst yourself my friends,
And share a toast or two.
For I am sure you will remember well
How I loved to drink with you.
Don't worry about mourning me,
I was never easy to offend.
Feel free to share a story at my expense
And we'll have a good laugh at the end.*

February 3rd – Tuesday

Apparently, it is Sunday today, according to my head. No matter how hard I tried to tell myself it was not, I could not quite shake the conviction that it was. I will be alright by tomorrow when I will think that it is Friday. Please, do not ask.

I cannot have started the day thinking it was the weekend. My tax rebate has still not appeared, and I resolved to call the good people at His Majesty's Revenue and Customs to see if I could shame them into paying me what I was due. I could not have done that if it was Sunday. I decided to call them myself as I had asked the accountant twice and twice I was told to leave it a couple of weeks. I had been informed previously by an online robot that I was not permitted to ask such impertinent questions if my accountant had filed for me. I sought to see if they had changed their mind.

It is my suspicion that HMRC does not want people calling up to talk to them. Having called the advertised number, I was told, if I was self-assessment, please call a different number. I redialled furnished with this information and was met by a swiftly speaking, very pleasant lady whose regional accent I could not understand. She was also speaking so loudly, the sound was distorted. I worked out that I could not understand some of it because she seamlessly went from speaking Glaswegian to speaking some foreign tongue that I did not recognise. Since I could decipher none of it, it made no difference and I resorted to talking to the robot on the computer again.

One of the questions it asked was when did I first make my claim to get some money back. Since I had no idea, I looked up my messages from the accountant and in doing so discovered that the accountant had, not five minutes prior, sent me a message. By some uncanny coincidence, the accountant had, that very morning, chased the tax office to see what had happened to my rebate.

I am told that the good people at HMRC are so very busy taking money off people that they had not found any time at all in the last eight weeks to process my claim to get some back. Apparently, they were very apologetic – of course they were – and they processed my claim while the accountant was on the telephone to them. I might expect to wait ten days for it to clear but should it require investigation, it could be another twelve weeks. I shall be rather miffed if that is the case since HMRC had already had eight weeks to get it done. There is little consolation in the fact that HMRC will add interest to the delayed sum because they do so at one percent less than the Bank of England base rate. Had the money been righteously in my own account, I would have received a much higher rate.

The matter must have riled me somewhat and disturbed my equilibrium because I suddenly had the urge to rise up, not exactly to rail against the machine, but to go and install my solar panel up at The Farm. First, however, I had to go and collect

Mother, which might well have, in my fragile state, have been the outset of my thinking it was Sunday.

I took the girls with me to The Farm. The visit would serve instead of their main walk of the day. It was rather a shame because the big beach looked every bit as enticing as it had the previous two days. We had a large amount of blue skies, a few fluffy clouds and only a small risk of getting wet in a shower. It was terrible having to make the choice of beach or Farm, but I reasoned that we had been to the beach thrice and The Farm not once. I packed the girls in and we headed off.

My new coat has not yet arrived, nor do I expect it very soon. There was the threat of rain and had discovered on my trip to pick up Mother, a bit of a breeze coming in from the south. We felt none of it in The Cove, in fact it was perfectly temperate and windless. Up at The Farm, I knew we would be in the thick of it and showers would be harder to avoid. I was not about to take my posh coat, so I pressed my old one back into service and took a belt in case I had to stop it flapping open.

I cannot recall exactly when I had purchased the solar panel for the camera. Certainly, it was several years ago. The box was not even open until I took a quick peek inside a few weeks ago to assure myself that it was indeed the solar panel I expected it to be. Had there been any setup instructions they were not in the box and had they been elsewhere, they would certainly be lost by now. There were limited options for cabling, so that was good, but it was a shame I could not say the same about fixing it to the ground or a post.

My plan to attach it to the ground was losing its attractiveness. A none too robust wind would probably pull the rebars out of the ground quite easily. I know that I had said that attaching it to the post would have me worrying about it being blown off its fixings but the more I looked at it, the better that option seemed. It looked particularly attractive if I could attach it to the post nearer the ground. If it was blown off, which when I looked at the fittings seemed unlikely, being nearer the ground would reduce the risk of serious damage. The only one thing against me, and it was quite a major thing at that, was that the post connecting kit was for a much thinner pole – think road sign post.

In one of the many self-help videos on the Internet, I vaguely remember seeing a demonstration on how to fix two things together with wire by twisting the join tight with a screwdriver. While this seemed like an eminently good idea, there were obstacles. First, I did not have any wire of the sort I remember seeing and what I remembered seeing was so vague it was next to useless. There was some electrical cable in the cabin that I had recently used for its designed purpose, so I tried using that. Since I could not remember exactly what to do with it, I ended up using inappropriate knots and twists that barely brought enough tension to hold the unit in place on the post.

With enough applications and enough twists, the solar panel did hold in place about a foot off the ground. I will need proper fixing but for now, it will do. I also found a small pallet and a not quite robust enough basket to place under the panel to support it. I decided that if I could shave enough off the post, I could purchase some extra long bolts and attach the panel in the manner for which the fixings were designed. Later, I used the supplier I had found to provide the hanging bolts which had just the thing at a reasonable price.

The enterprise had taken far longer than I had anticipated. In the time I was up at The Farm, I had hoped to install an old water pipe through which to run the electric cable so all that was left would be to install the camera. I had not planned to install the camera today because I reasoned that the battery on the solar panel would need charging. Surprisingly, after several years, I discovered that it was still charged up.

I had also changed my mind about the camera location. There are two poles one in front of the other. Plan A was to install the solar panel on the rearmost and the camera on the front post and run the power cable through the water pipe underground to it. During the installation of the panel, I thought it much more convenient to install both the solar panel and the camera on the same post. It would save me much time as well.

During my extended installation, the girls were most patient. They had run about and cavorted around the field for a while, then BB either got bored or cold or both, and retired to the truck. I leave a leeward door open for them for just this purpose. BB had sought shelter early on and stayed inside while ABH continued to wander about, even when we endured a couple of extended showers. After I called a halt to my work, I hauled BB out of the truck to give her a quick run about. Having spent all that time hiding, she now felt it a good idea to run about a bit. I spent the next twenty minutes watching as they used the best part of half an acre of ground to run and chase each other.

That was it for me. I had achieved most of what I had intended and more importantly, had broken free of the malaise, otherwise known as bone idleness, that had pinned me down for the last several weeks. All I have to do now is keep it up. Better weather would help as it is no fun working in the open and having to duck showers or try and avoid getting too cold.

I rewarded my efforts with a slack rest of the afternoon. It was hardly a treat as I had been doing it for the last couple of months. By and by the showers cleared up and the sea increased its wrath. It is quite remarkable the difference between low and high water. Earlier, the sea had looked quite benign. The swell was still there and it was clean enough to encourage a few surfers into the water over towards North Rocks. As we moved towards high water, great turmoil was evident over Cowloe, waves thundered over the Harbour wall and great plumes of white spray launched themselves up the cliffs opposite – a proper Jekyll and Hyde of a sea.

It had returned to some semblance of normalcy when I took the girls for their last walk. We tend to walk along the front of Tinker Taylor, the big thatch at the head of the Harbour, and turn up Stone Chair Lane. There was not a soul about but as we advanced up the lane, BB kept turned to stare back the way we had come. I turned the torch on to illuminate the lane, but there was nothing and no one there. She persisted until I dragged her around the corner into Coastguard Row but despite assuring myself that no one was following us, it was most disconcerting.

Time for stories around the campfire – it was a dark and stormy night ...

February 4th – Wednesday

It is no use. It still does not feel like a Wednesday to me. It is of no great importance, really as I have things to do and which day of the week I do them on makes no difference, unless of course it is an appointment.

I was up early this morning for no particular reason other than it felt right. The girls were not bothered about getting up with me, so I left them dozing while I prepared for the day. It was a good couple of hours before they felt like joining me although BB had stuck her head out momentarily to make sure was not missing anything.

The conundrum about the location of the second Farm camera came to visit me during the early hours of the morning. If I affixed the camera to the rearmost post, the front post would be in its direct line of sight. I could either cut down the front post or raise the camera up on an extension similar to the one on the cabin. The fact the installation on the rear post would be much easier won the day in the end – at least at three o'clock in the morning it did.

I had not made any plans to go up to The Farm today. Planning a day ahead when the forecast for each day is rain but the experience it mostly sunshine, is utterly futile. The only way to decide what to do is to look out of the window on the day and have a peek at the rain radar. This is precisely what I did today and seeing that on the balance of probability it would not rain, I made to decision to continue my work at The Farm. The only wombat in the pantry was the wind that looked punchy from the east, or thereabouts.

On the experience of yesterday, I decided not to take the girls with me. It was very likely that BB had got cold yesterday which is why she went and sat in the truck. There is nothing of her to keep her warm, so I thought it best to leave them behind and let the Missus run them out in the middle of the day. It meant that I was not tied to time, so I left almost immediately.

The only thing that I really intended to do was to install the water pipe to carry the cables down – or up – the post. When I arrived, that went out of the window, and I prepared to make the increased height post for the camera to attach to. This, like the

one on the cabin, would be a block on a stick arrangement with the block sitting on the top of the post and the stick, screwed onto the post to secure it.

We have plenty of spare wood in the wood store and it did not take very long at all to identify some likely offcuts. I only had to saw one length to make the layered blocks that made up the big block that sits atop the post. Today, I had remembered to bring the waterproof connection boxes, one for the terminals of the camera wiring and the other for the spare length of the ten metre power line extension.

Before I attached the camera, I hoisted the ensemble onto the post which required me to climb to the second run of a step ladder. At this point I almost changed my mind about which pole to attach the camera to. I could get to any side of the front pole, but the rearmost one had other bits of telegraph poles, brambles and foliage behind it. It meant that I could not arrange the steps to the rear of the pole so that I could easily screw in fastenings to the tail of the camera post. I consulted the Missus who told me that she did not want cables run across or under the ground, so short of running the power across the top of the two poles, using the frontmost was out.

I did consider installing on the front for a moment but reasoned I would find a way to insert screws to the rear of the rear pole. While the camera post was heavy already, once installed I would need to go to the third or fourth rung of the ladder to install the camera subsequently. That was definitely not going to happen, so I took the camera post back into the barn where I had set up my temporary workshop to attach the camera there.

My next worry was with all the elements now attached to the camera post, I would have to find a way to secure it while I screwed in the retaining screws. The camera post on the cabin sits comfortably without the restraining screws and in theory, so would this one. I was however not all that confident, it was windy and it is an expensive camera. As with yesterday, I resolved to use electrical wire to hold it in place while I arranged to get the drill and screws ready to make a more permanent solution.

The theory sounded good in my head, but I failed to think through that I would need to hold the camera post in place with one hand and somehow tie the electrical cable in place with the other. While I swayed about on the ladder, holding the post in place with one hand, stringing the cable around the girth of the pole with the other and holding the loose end in my teeth, I noticed a convenient nail sticking out of the front of the pole at about the right height. Between the teeth and some surprising dexterity of the fingers of my right hand, I managed to knot the wire with sufficient confidence that I could let go of the tail of the post. Thus unencumbered, the second wire was installed with relative ease.

I had to reach around the post with my right hand to hold the screw in place while I used the power drill with my left. It was awkward and my weight was not even on the ladder, so I was precarious as well. I only used three screws which was quite enough

even if it was not. It was not until afterwards that I considered that I would have to change the retaining arrangements for hanging bolts and nuts so that the post could be removed more easily if I needed to get at the camera again. I would have to do this quite soon while the screws could still be removed. I had screwed them into a line in the centre of the wood and the angle grinder would never get to them if I needed to cut them out.

The last job of the day was the job I had intended to do at the outset: attach the waterpipe to drop the power cable down. I am sure that the power cable would have been perfectly alright had I just tacked it to the pole; the one on the cabin survives without covering. Here though, there is a join in the cable that I thought would be better under cover.

Having measured the length required, I went with my pipe cutter to extract the amount needed from the roll of thick water pipe that had sat surplus to requirement in front of the tractor for several years. Once cut off, the length remained curved, which I thought would straighten when I attached it to the pole. Sadly, it is a thick and unforgiving type of material that would remain curved for eternity. My effort to straighten it resulted in the top end, which I had already used a bracket to attach to the pole, tearing the bracket off its moorings. It was very clear that this was not going to work.

Happily, we also had a suitable length of wastepipe, a little narrower in diameter but useable, nonetheless. This is straight in the first place and not designed to bend. The right length would be almost perfect apart from my brackets now being too large to hold the pipe in place properly. I used them anyway, but they will need to be replaced.

With all the elements in place, I connected the power cable connection and switched on the battery. Everything worked perfectly first time and the signal from the WiFi unit is adequate even though I have not yet installed it outside the cabin. I spent a few minutes tidying up the cabling and then put my tools and equipment away. I will have to spend a few minutes clearing the back of the truck from all the accumulated packing, but you cannot have everything all at once. I will do it another day.

Earlier in the day, there had been a flurry of communication on the Lifeboat messaging board. One of the Boat Crew is taking his helmsman examination tomorrow and the Coxswain had arranged for a final bit of practice with the Inshore boat in the late afternoon. The arrangement was to meet at five o'clock, an hour before high water. When I arrived to add my assistance, the plan had changed as the Coastguard helicopter had requested an exercise with us since we had a planned launch.

It has been a long time since the last exercise with the helicopter mainly because arrangements have to be fluid and coordinating both services is not easy. We do not turn down requests when they come because they are so rare. Despite the

deteriorating sea condition as we approached high water, we launched the boat anyway on the far side of the Harbour slipway where the angle of attack is shallower. Launching was unremarkable but the swell in the Harbour was clearly increasing.

We are fortunate enough to have some new recruits on the very excellent Shore Crew. Ordinarily, we would have given them some Tooltrak time on the beach while the boat was out. Since what little beach we had kept disappearing under some rather hefty waves, we repaired to the empty Harbour car park for a run around the perimeter. It was while we were here that the helicopter arrived, so we stopped to watch the several attempts at landing the helicopter crewman onto the moving Inshore boat. We heard later that the swell was so large that the crewman was elevated and dropped more than ten feet during the attempts.

Having successfully but uncomfortably landed the helicopter crewman a couple of times, they recovered their man and made off in the direction from whence they came. Shortly after that, the Inshore boat headed back to the Harbour where we had returned with the Tooltrak the moment we understood what was afoot.

I observed from the top of the slipway as the Inshore boat made a couple of attempts to come astern onto the trailer. There was much adjustment going on with the trailer and the boat as both were tossed around in the heavy swell of high water. Our soon to be new helmsman is a consummate professional in his boatmanship and expertly put the boat in the trailer on a third approach. We very quickly came away and rested at the top of the slip for a wash down. The beauty of a high water recovery is that there is no sand to clear away and we were washed and finished in short order. We are, after all, a very efficient, very excellent Shore Crew.

February 5th – Thursday

It was a bit of a helter skelter morning. I especially got up early because I knew that I would be pressed. I was rather more pressed than I thought and could have done with another half an hour. I found that I had to reorganise some of the things on my to do list and some got put back, such as publishing The Diary.

Our esteemed colleague on the Lifeboat had his helmsman pass out scheduled for the morning. We were to muster at quarter to nine and as is the way of such things, many more people turned up than were strictly necessary. This included our newest recruits on the shore side who are still full of enthusiasm. We are currently running a book on just how long this will last. With so many at hand my presence was in the not strictly necessary category, but I thought that I had better hang around to show willing.

The assessing luminary turned up half an hour late. There was much jesting, joking, discussion and telling of stories and much drinking of tea in the meanwhile. As I had forgotten to put in my false ears, I missed all of the joking and jesting and discussion of things and probably missed someone offering me a cup of tea. It is also entirely

possible that no one offered me a cup of tea, it was not easy to tell. I did however receive a telephone call from the driver of the truck delivering our gabion cages. He told me that he had arrived at the address he was given down a farm track but could not find our house. I told him that it was no surprise as the address he had read out to me in St Loy was on the other coast. I gave him the correct address, and he told me he would be twenty minutes, which he was.

The instructor had arrived during my telephone call and shortly after I returned to the room, our helmsman elect gave out a briefing. We all went to our respective crew rooms, and I checked that all our people were comfortable with their roles and would be around for the duration of the exercise, which they were. I made my excuses and went to wait on the delivery driver while the crew went off to launch the Inshore Lifeboat.

I did not have to wait long for the delivery and had the driver drop the pallet across the road where I could dismantle it and load it into the truck a little later. When later came it was highly convenient to have a fellow member of the very excellent Shore Crew on hand to help load it onto the back of the truck. There had been a small delay ahead of that as I had to unload all my tools and the empty boxes from the camera installation first. It was the work of a few minutes to load the gabion cages and the pallet and, once finished, I rejoined the Lifeboating party.

It was not long after I returned that we heard over the radio that the exercise was over and the boat was returning to The Cove. We had been a little concerned that we would have similar issues with the sea state that we had last night. Luckily, we launched a little while after high water and the sea state had gone from rough to moderate. With the tide out a good way, we were able to launch from the sand of the Harbour beach in a much more orderly fashion than last night. This also applied to the recovery one and a half hours later when the waves were hardly noticeable at all. The post recovery procedure took a while as under the watchful eye of the assessor, every 't' needs to be dotted and every 'eye' crossed. We were all held on tenterhooks until the very last moment when the assessor assessed that all was well and that our boy passed with flying colours.

I would normally conclude such a discussion in The Diary with a review of the very excellent Shore Crew performance but on this occasion, I shall demur lest it detracts from the very great achievement of our new Helmsman.

The Lifeboat event had taken until the middle of the day to conclude. It had brought me to the very cusp of exercise time for the girls who had viewed my coming and going through the morning with increasing excitement. To pique their anticipation just a little more, I stopped for a cup of tea before kitting up to take them for a walk.

The morning had been fair and bright under a largely blue sky. In the direct sunlight it had been quite warm in our Lifeboat kit, and I made some allowances when selecting what to wear for our walk. I reasoned that I would probably be too warm

with my usual attire, so I changed to little boy trousers although I retained a few layers on top. Initially, I had thought to just run the girls out to the Harbour beach and around the block because every day this week they have been on a bit of a major exercise. However, looking at the brightness of the day and how it shone so gloriously on the wide open sands of the big beach, it was impossible to resist.

Another reason that I had considered the shorter walk was that I suspected that I might have over exercised my new knee and it had started to complain a bit. Having looked at the big beach again and the fact that it would probably be the last time for more than a week that we would have the opportunity to enjoy it, I told myself not to be such a big, erm, wimp's blouse (one has to be so careful with metaphors these days – I await my first complaint from the association of British Wimps) and get on with it. I did tip my hat to a bit of sense and chose not to go on the Coast Path and around; we would head to the beach the conventional way.

It was only moment after we set out that I noticed the large dark clouds to the south which coincidentally was the direction from which the wind – and all the weather – was coming from. We had again seen a forecast for the day that indicated the presence of showers throughout. There had been none nor any threat of one for the whole of the morning until I stepped out with the girls. We made it all the way to Carn Keys and were just turning back when the first spots dropped on us. I had expected a bit of a deluge of fine rain but it concentrated itself into three heavy raindrops, and that was it. Lucky ain't I?

That was my sole contribution to life on this planet for the day. All my effort ceased at two o'clock or thereabouts and I did not lift another finger for the rest of the day. What a lazy ruin of a grumpy shopkeeper, I hear you say and I cannot argue with you, dear reader. I shall no doubt pay when the great ledger is opened at the end of it all but given that the taxman has already given me enough grief, I am hoping that he will weigh that in my favour.

My new coat arrived shortly after we returned from my walk. It was a substitute model to replace my discontinued one. There seemed to be a lot less bulk to it but compared side to side, it was difficult to tell how. It is possible the material itself is more lightweight. Having worn it a few times, it is perfectly adequate for the role I need it for – everything and everywhere – and is the correct size. If it lasts as long as the last one, I shall be very pleased.

We had to wait at the very end of the day for our last walk before bedtime. The rain that we had been expecting had arrived in some abundance maybe half an hour before we were due to go out. It was just leaving us according to the rain radar. We caught a little of the tail end, but it was just a few spots. I had noted earlier just how mild the late afternoon was. After the rain had passed, the temperature had dropped and the air was full of moisture. A dew had formed on the grass and the shrubs, and my breath was visible in the air. It was strangely fresh and pleasing. Perhaps I am just easily pleased.

February 6th – Friday

I had really intended to have a quiet day today. There was no particular reason for it; I have not exactly over excelled myself in recent weeks. I had two chores to run which would have made doing anything else impractical, that and running the girls out in the middle of the day scotched pretty much all else.

There was also no reason that I should not have a bit of a lie in, too, so of course I did not. Up with the lark again and halfway through my floor exercises, the Missus opened the bedroom door. I was almost immediately beset with boisterous bundles of excited fur clambering all over me and trying to extract my clearly desirable ear buds. They were squirting music into my ears loudly enough that the girls' appearance was a complete surprise not allowing me time to protect any sensitive areas exposed to attack.

Since I would have immeasurable difficulty getting ABH out of the door if she was allowed to go back to bed, I quickly prepared to capitalise on their sudden appearance and grabbed my hat and coat. It was a good move because it gave me a clear run at finishing my exercise, conducting my ablutions and completing the morning administration on the computer uninterrupted. In fact, because of the overall timing, I segued nicely into having my breakfast and catching up on the day. It all came together very smoothly, as it happens.

On discovering that we had run out of chicken for the girls' dinners last night – I know, I know, but they have quite gone off quail and foie gras - I had sent a note to our butchers asking for a bulk order that we could place in the freezer. I had not received a response but assumed the order had been received and made plans to head over to St Just late in the morning to collect it. The other errand I had intended to run was to trek over to Helston and the gun shop there for primers for my ammunition loading enterprise. To that end, I telephoned first to make sure they had some, which they did not. This gave me some two hours of more of the day which I had not expected to have and threw my plans, such as they were, into disarray.

Since that I now had plenty of time, I left it until late morning to go and collect the ordered chicken from St Just, picking up Mother from St Buryan on the way. It had rained heavily during the night but as we woke to the new day, there was plenty of blue skies and beautiful sunshine. I noted, however, on the way over to St Buryan that there were some darker clouds hanging about and by the time I had collected Mother and started out on the road to St Just, we were seeing some isolated little showers catching us here and there. There must have been a fair few about as we drove towards a close and massive rainbow just ahead of us as we crossed the shoulder between Chapel Carn Brea and Carn Grean.

We were served by several showers while we ventured into St Just and attended Mr Olds excellent butchery emporium and just for fun, Mr McFadden's as well. I would never purchase hogs pudding from anywhere but Mr Olds and similarly, Mr McFadden has his specialities. To have two excellent butchers within ten minutes of each other is unusual to state the least in this day and age and that both seem to be able to cut a living, even more remarkable.

Having concluded our restocking, I set a course for home. The road between St Just and the A30 at Sennen has seen no improvement since I last travelled it some weeks ago. There are large pools of standing water in the usual places. I know that we are much better off than some parts of the country and that the road is at least passable. However, I would have thought that some action other than putting up signs that say, 'Flood', would have been taken by now. It is, or was, a bus route which I thought would have made a difference.

While on the subject of buses, I am hearing some local rumblings that the timetables have been upset by the exit of First Bus Group from the Duchy at the end of January. When I looked at future bus times before it happened, it seemed that the status quo would be maintained. I will have to check and report back ... there, I checked and it all seems to be as it was before. I suspect that the complainers just have not looked properly, although I have seen better timetable presentation, to be fair.

We were late back for the girls' middle of the day walk out. Today, I had intended to give us all a rest and have a simple foray out to the Harbour beach and around the block. Unfortunately, the big beach looked resplendent again under a bright sky and utterly irresistible. Next week it will be up the cliff or not at all, so it seemed churlish to ignore such a clear invitation for a stank across the beach.

The weather had looked about the same as the day before with the more obvious risk of being caught in a shower. Despite that, I selected little boy trousers again because it would be far more comfortable unless the rain was particularly heavy in which case I would suffer a cascade of water off my new jacket and onto my shorts and wet socks – nasty. I reasoned that the rain had not been that heavy so far and on the balance of probability it would remain that way. We were promptly showered upon when we arrived on the sand but, as expected, it was not that heavy as to give inconvenience.

The previous day I had shared some footage of the state of the slipway with other head launchers. On occasion we might be compelled to recover or launch the Inshore boat from the big beach using the OS slipway for the purpose. In its current state with a large drop onto medium sized boulders, it looked unlikely and I sought a second opinion. The others felt it did not look that good and today I noted that a large boulder had shifted onto the slipway near the bottom making the passage too narrow for the trailer. I concluded that launching from the big beach is definitely off for the time being.

While the slipway may be constricted, the beach itself was anything but. There were wide stretches of sand available for two energetic and eager hounds and plenty of deep rockpools for them to cool off in. Once again, we set off along the tide line, this time in the company of three racing cocker spaniels chasing a ball. BB demonstrated the ability of her long legs and easily caught up and kept pace with the rearmost spaniel. We headed for Carn Keys again and if this may sound repetitious – and indeed is – it feels like anything but. There were some other people on the beach that we met and stopped for a chat with one as our dogs played together. He had come from Land's End, and his dog did not look all that eager to make the return trip – it being all up hill and all.

We chilled for the rest of the day, taking in just the obligatory later afternoon and evening walks. I managed to get some chores done like booking the truck in for its annual service and MOT test. For the last couple of days, I had wanted to polish my walking boots that are suffering for the lack of it. The problem is I keep wearing them and they have not had time to sufficiently dry. With a good layer of polish, they repel water quite efficiently and even the additional waterproofing product I use is not effective on wet boots. I might have to miss a day or two of walks out just so I can get my boots polished. Still, I should be grateful that I have the strength of character to cope with such weighty problems set against me.

Exhausted from all the effort, I elected end the evening with a beer and a whisky. Occasionally, such things are entirely necessary.

February 7th – Saturday

It is officially no interest Saturday, so this should be interesting - ironically. I woke this morning more tired than I went to bed with a strong desire to do begger all. Actually, 'strong desire' suggests I had some enthusiasm for it; I did not.

The showers seem to be getting a little too frequent for my liking. That is not entirely true, either. When the showers come, they are frequent over that period but not continuous rain. We then have long intervals without any rain at all, just the threat of it. It was also quite chilly in the robust southwesterly breeze which was knocking four degrees off the otherwise quite reasonable temperature.

We made it around the block in the morning without getting wet at all. I was quite pleased with that because I had taken no precautions against it. I was even more pleased, nay, smug, when quite a heavy shower passed through The Cove not five minutes after we got home. And that was that for the next four hours.

The new bolts I had ordered to secure the solar panel to the post up at The Farm had arrived yesterday. I could feel them searing into my back as I sat at the computer begging me to go and use them. I was also mindful of the fact that the

gabion cages and the pallet they had arrived on sat in the back of the truck waiting to be unloaded up at The Farm. As time approached the middle of the day, I would either have to walk the girls out on the beach again or find some impetus to wrench myself out of my seat and go up to The Farm.

Somehow, I managed the Herculean task of getting off my behind, climbing into DIYman overalls and going off to fetch the truck. Before I could leave, I would have to load all my tools back onto the truck as I would need many of them. I must also not forget the new bolts, which I almost did and had to come back for them after loading up the girls.

It was pleasant enough up at The Farm. Getting there perhaps not so much. The lane is suffering from not having the hedges trimmed and hefty brambles and gorse bushes scrape against the truck as we make our way up. I really must put some effort into finding someone with the necessary equipment who might be pressed into service and certainly before spring, when it will get much worse.

Putting thoughts of that aside, I concentrated my efforts on deploying the new bolts. It was the work of moments to unload the gabion cages and the pallet, and I immediately set to work removing the temporary wire stay I had installed. I suspected that drilling the hole through the side of the post at the precise point that connects the two holes in the bracket would be tricky. I marked where I thought the holes should start and finish using a level to ensure the front and rear holes would align. I was going to pull the solar panel out of the way, but I reckoned that I could probably drill the hole from the rear with not too much awkwardness.

The drill bit is new and only used once and it bored through the old telegraph pole rather more easily than I imagined. I threaded the bolt into the hole to discover to my amazement that it lined up precisely with the hole in the bracket attached to the solar panel frame. Buoyed up with such success, I repeated the procedure with the second hole on the other side, in an even more awkward position than the first. Again, inserting the bolt, I found that it lined up perfectly. I anxiously awaited a moment or two for something to fall on my head or a crucial element of the equipment to fall apart; things never go that right. The universe held its breath but nothing untoward happened.

Oh, apart from the bolts being too long. There is a finite space between the bracket on the solar panel side and the frame onto which it is welded. If I had a suitably secure vice, I could probably have used the angle grinder to lop a bit off the bolts I had, sadly I do not even have a vice. I will order some more and we will try again another day.

Similar to our last visit, BB had taken herself back into the truck after an initial run around. The breeze up at The Farm was stronger than down in The Cove and the chill was more evident. I am sure it is the cold that has the little girl run for shelter. I was mindful of our last visit and had deliberately not intended to stay very long. It

had been a semi-successful visit, although it would have been better if I had managed to drill the lower holes as well. This I could not do without removing the solar panel from its moorings completely, which would have upset its position relative to the holes I had already drilled.

I returned home to resume my celebration of idleness for the remainder of the afternoon. We had been invited to attend a wake at the F&L. This was for the Lifeboatman who had shuffled off just before new year. Judging by the crowd we encountered when we arrived, he was exceedingly popular. The bar was crowded with a lot of familiar faces, representatives of every business and pastime our man crossed in his varied life. There were fishermen, mechanics, Lifeboat people – even from Penlee – builders and, of course, his immediate family, mainly his four boys. It was convivial company, although we could not mingle as much as we might have liked because we had the girls with us. It was a suitably lively send off, nevertheless.

We did not stay all that long and bade our farewells not too late in the evening. It was a glimpse of the evenings that were once commonplace. We should be grateful they are still possible for special occasions.

February 8th – Sunday

There had been some heavy rain during the night. I heard it on the bedroom skylight and hoped at the time it had all gone by morning, which it had. There were some pretty heavy showers about during the day but all but most missed us here in The Cove. The wind that had plagued us a bit yesterday, remained in the south and the sea state started to pull back a little as the tide receded. All in all, it was the best day in a very long time for pushing the Lifeboat out for an exercise.

I had already decided that I would go to the range today. It would only be for half a day but there is precious little time left of the winter season, and I had to start somewhere. It was frustrating, but a few people at the station had put in some effort to get me back on active service. It would appear ungrateful in the extreme not to show up for the first ALB exercise I was available for since October last year. So, I did.

We gathered at quarter to the middle of the day and took our instructions for a two hour exercise. The Boat Crew would exercise for two hours, and we would remain behind drinking tea and eating chocolate biscuits for two hours. We did very well at both and when the Boat Crew returned later, they complained that there were no biscuits left. We felt that it was remiss of them not to be specific about chocolate biscuit consumption before they headed off.

Normally, after a launch, we set up the appropriate slipway to make it ready for recovery at the later time. On this occasion, the swell was still beating in on the toe of the slipway making the operation unnecessarily risky. I terminated our efforts at

the head of the toe and noted that we would return twenty minutes before the boat was due back and set it up then. The exercise had been timed to coincide with near low water when the swell would be at its minimum. We finished off with the agreement we would muster later at the appointed time.

With so much time available before the boat was due back, I returned home and took the girls out for a spin. Since my time was limited, we headed for the empty Harbour beach for a run around. It had been quite busy with people watching the launch a little earlier but by the time we got there it was empty. This is an advantage because BB still runs and greets each person she sees as a long lost friend. This particular worrying if that person is at the top of the slip near the road. She will come back on a whistle but not until she had been met and greeted in return.

We ended our exercise by walking around the block afterwards and I returned to the station for much needed tea and chocolate biscuits. We discussed matters of great import which I clearly cannot reveal here they were that important – I also cannot remember what they were – and drank more tea and had more biscuits. We broke early because today's mechanic is an enthusiastic and thorough soul and requested buckets of soapy water with which to wash down the boat after its return. Duly armed we switched our attentions to completing the set up of the slipway. Well, me and my operating buddy did as the boat was bearing down on us from across the bay and as soon as we had finished, we needed to be ready to receive it.

I had taken one of the new recruits down with me. He was previously Boat Crew, which we obviously did not hold against him – well, not much, anyway – but he moved away and is currently living outside the minimum distance for Boat Crew, hence we have him. The swell that had been big enough earlier to be problematic was just producing a comparatively gentle run of about six or eight feet on the toe. The movement always gets a little bigger as the boat approached but it gave us no problems, neither did catching and hooking up the heaving line.

For my first appearance in a few months, I managed to get the main line length absolutely spot on and when I ordered the winch up, it took up the line without any delay at all. Had I been the sort of person to blow my own trumpet I might have said that it was pretty much an exemplary textbook recovery, the sort that write textbooks about, but fortunately, I am very modest and will not mention it.

We completed our work by hauling the boat the rest of the way up the long slip where the others of our team washed down and later strapped in the boat for its next service. We are, after all, a very precise, very excellent Shore Crew.

It was already the middle of the afternoon by the time I returned home. It left little time for any other shenanigans, so I did not get involved in any. Instead, I took the hint and put my feet up for the afternoon and did what ordinary people do on a Sunday afternoon. Well, I assume that is what ordinary people do. I must ask one, someday.

February 9th – Monday

After weeks of eluding the rain in any serious quantities, it caught up with us today. I rained from almost the outset of the day to the middle of the afternoon when it turned to mizzle under a dull, grey sky.

It was probably just as well because my false knee had started to complain rather vociferously about my excessive treatment of it over the last couple of weeks. I am not entirely sure that it was ready for a fortnight of two mile walks and I pushed it some more even after it had started to complain just a little bit. I rather think lumping heavy bits of kit around on the slip yesterday, was the final wake up call. Oh, very dear.

I still needed to run the girls out a few times during the day but neither they nor I really appreciate being out in the rain for very long. I constrained our ventures to a run – them not me – down to the Harbour beach and around the block if we felt like it – which we did once. The rest of the time, I remain sitting and much of that with my legs up. That does not leave a lot of room to manoeuvre when trying to write about exciting times in The Cove.

Both the Missus and I were out of bed early this morning. The second smart electricity meter man was arriving today between eight o'clock and ten o'clock and had clearly set out early himself to arrive here at around quarter past eight. These chaps must do an awful lot of meter replacements because he was in and out in less than an hour.

Unlike our domestic meter, we do not have a clever little device that connects to our WiFi to tell us exactly how much electricity we are using at that very moment. I agreed with him that for a commercial environment it would be a waste of money as no one would have time to monitor it on a real time basis. I think that I will be able to see the previous hour or so when it eventually established itself. I did install the gadget for the domestic supply, but I have not looked at it since. I think it would be far too scary to watch the pink bars spike every time we turn on the kettle. Also, what is the point; you generally turn things on because you need to use them.

The rest of the day I played the good boy and rested my leg. I watched a pointless and mindless film and read my book, which is a very good book written by a Spanish person in Spanish. Fortunately, someone who understands Spanish and English made a particularly good fist of translating the one to the other. I read another book by the same author a while back and now know quite a bit about the city of Barcelona – at least one that existed between the wars. It is a hardback book, so I am getting some exercise with I sit lazing about.

I did not hear the bin men when they came around and nor did I hear the food waste truck when it came later. What alerted me to the fact that the bin men had been was the sound of our wheelie bin toppling over. I had not appreciated that it was windy on any of the occasions that we had stepped out, so I was most surprised that it had. The wind was in the southeast, and when I checked it was moderate. I am therefore at a loss. Perhaps the bin men had left it in a precarious position, and the merest waft of air had it over. There is always the possibility that it was there when some frustrated soul needed to kick something and could not find a cat.

Sitting with my legs up, poor value films to watch and a to do list up at The Farm as long as one of my outstretched legs, I will bear kicking the bin over as my outlet – when my knee has improved.

February 10th – Tuesday

What I had not appreciated with the new electricity meter is that it has a bright strobe light on it. Actually, several. It is perplexing why quite so many; one would be sufficient and the bleddy geet bill I get every month proves it is working.

There used to be a wheel that spun around that indicated it was working – silent and unobtrusive. I did not notice the strobing light until the dead of night when the room lit up every so many seconds. The other new one does much the same, but with the cupboard door closed, I had not noticed it. The upper cupboard door, behind which the new one resides, does not close properly.

The Missus told me that she was aware of another piece of equipment in there doing the same thing for even longer. I had not seen that one. I do not think she is too bothered by it or has just got used to it and I only notice it if I have my eyes open. It does draw the eye, but I guess the trick is to keep my eyes closed. I will try that tonight.

We swapped our rain for varying degrees of mizzle today. It was heaviest in the morning when I wore waterproofs to take the girls around the block. There was a bit of breeze behind it too so that it was coating my face as we headed across the car park. It was not in the least cold and by the middle of the day we had reached twelve degrees, which is the mildest we have had it in a long while.

I had wondered on the continuous line of low pressure systems queuing up to give us wet and grey weather from across the Atlantic. I had guessed that the Jetstream had dropped a long way south and when I looked, it was over the bulk of Europe. Quite coincidentally, there was an article in the news about it, with the Jetstream being the expected root cause of low pressure systems on a conveyer belt across us. There does not seem to be an end in sight and sooner or later, I will have to head up to The Farm whatever the weather to do the things that need to be done.

For today, though, I had already decided that I would spend another day with my legs in a sling. It took a monumental effort and gritted teeth to will myself not to run off to do other things, but a second day should push me in the right direction. After that I will misbehave again, although the weather does not look at all conducive right through until the weekend.

Assisting in my endeavour to do very little today, Falmouth Coastguard had made arrangements to visit the Lifeboat station. In the past, there have been occasions where Lifeboat managers have not always seen eye to eye with Coastguards on some of the decisions made or level or quality of information shared. Since the irregular meetings started, there has been a greater understanding on both sides regarding the constraints, limitations and requirements each party has to abide by. Some procedures have been amended and better communications developed and the meetings ensure both parties are up to date with changes.

Today, it was good to meet some of the people whose voices we hear over the radio from time to time. There was no specific agenda and we started talking about incidents over the last year particularly and memorable incidents from times before that. It may have looked like so much recounting old tales but by doing so we could see how much had changed and what was and was not still relevant. One of the biggest changes has been in towing casualty vessels.

Very generally, the Institution mandates that vessels are not routinely towed unless there is risk to life. There are other considerations to be taken into account but the decision largely rests with the Coxswain. To assist with the decision making, a checklist and risk assessment is provided. The change came about after a couple of high profile towing accidents. Subsequently, much emphasis is placed on practising towing more frequently. In The Cove, the majority of our calls have tended to result in towing operations and because of this, our crews are very good at it. Other stations are not so familiar and the training for them is more relevant.

The relevance for the Coastguard in discussing this was that they need to be aware of the Institution's policies when assigning calls. Their expectation that a particular casualty will be towed may differ widely from the Coxswain's constraint under the policy. Our informal meeting lasted about an hour. I only attended out of interest and similarly some of the Boat Crew attended too. I found the meeting quite frustrating because someone had gone to the trouble of providing some biscuits, but everyone was too polite to open the packets.

Most of the mizzle had cleared away by the time I left the station. This coincided nicely with the Missus leaving on a shopping trip and me taking the girls out for a middle of the day walk.

I had intended to just walk around the block on the level, but the girls were keen to head to the beach. Well, they were until BB noticed and older couple behind us at the head of the slipway and ran back to greet them. Having got her turned around and

heading in the correct direction, she then found it necessary to run back up the slipway from the beach a further two times to greet the same couple. I am not entirely sure how we break her of the habit, although we do not want to stop her being friendly to people she meets. It is the being over friendly and ignoring advice not to go that we have to break.

After we got back home, I resumed the tedium of the previous day. This time I did not even get to watch a pointless film. I took a zizz instead and found that I quite needed it. Maybe the strobing electric meter had more of an effect than I thought.

Proper rain returned in the afternoon, and I curtailed our usual walk around the block in favour of a shorter, more functional walk instead. It was still raining some when I went to our very important operations meeting at the Lifeboat station.

Fortunately, these meetings tend to be brief as none of us really want to be there. Everyone keeps their reports brief and to the point, just like a proper meeting should be. It is a mystery why none of the management books I have read in years gone by have ever suggested holding meetings at a time when all the participants would rather be at home doing something far more pleasurable. Think of the boost to productivity there would be. Gosh, I think I am on to something here.

February 11th – Wednesday

I did manage to misbehave a little bit today, but it was not quite how I imagined it.

The wind had done a bit of howling during the night, so I was mildly surprised when we were not all blown away when we stepped out this morning. Granted, we were not quite as early as I had imagined we might be, but ABH has decreed that she will not get up early under any circumstances. There was still a bit of a blow around the corner of the Lifeboat station, but when we got down to the beach, we could hardly feel it at all.

There was plenty of evidence that it had rained and quite recently, but the sky was suggesting that we were in for a much better day than the previous two. It was enough to convince me that I should make some effort to push in the direction of getting things done. I had the added impetus that Mother had left her Bramley Pad behind last night and you know what nonagenarians are like if you part them from their tech. I was under strict instructions to return it before she went into meltdown.

Since I had to get into the truck to go to St Buryan, I may as well go via The Farm where I wanted to check how much and what sort of timber I had there for one of the next projects. I had to go to the builders' merchant at St Just to see if they had the right length bolts for the solar panel I was trying to fix to its post and I did not want to waste the trip and have to go again. The timber and some fixings would be required for bodyboard stands that I had intended to make last year for the shop and never got around to it.

In truth, I had no more than some rough sketches of what I wanted to make, so I did not even have measurements for the amount of timber. I would just have to guess. The first unit would be very much a prototype anyway, so if I had to go back, it would not be too much of a surprise. I could have collected the timber anyway, but we have so much at The Farm, it would have been annoying to buy something that we already have. Naturally, having detoured to The Farm, we did not have any of the right size.

Having dropped the Bramley Pad to a very grateful Mother, I headed off to St Just and the builders' merchant. The bolts they had were not exactly what I wanted, and I may yet have to go back to my Internet supplier. I hope not because it is just four bolts which is crazy to buy online. I had also noted that my screws box was deficient in several sizes of screw and took the opportunity of replenishing those supplies as well.

Timber comes in two standard lengths, 3.6 metres and 4.8 metres. The 3.6 metres would fit in the truck and be easier to transport home. Since I was not bothered about size at this juncture, I duly asked for the 3.6 metres and took myself down the yard to the timber shed to collect it. I searched the shed from one end to the other. There was plenty of 4.8 metre lengths but none of the shorter. After looking again, I telephoned the office – it is a fair distance to walk back – and asked if I was in the wrong shed or something. There was bit of a pause and then the confirmation that the reason I could not find it was that they did not have any. I would have to have the 4.8 metre lengths instead.

This was not a huge problem, just a little inconvenient as the timber would have to protrude out of the back of the truck. I would have shortened it but had not thought to bring a saw. Sticking out of the back of the truck it was then. I had not emptied the back of the truck since working on the solar panel and camera installation, so there was some cord there to secure the protruding timber. I was in the process of tying down the timber when my telephone rang.

It was a call that I wanted to take but would take a few minutes to resolve. It was not the best location or situation to be in to answer some technical questions that required some thought, but needs must. It was during the call that it also started to rain or at least drizzle quite heavily. Had I not stopped to answer the call, I would have secured my load in the dry and been on my way.

Having finished the call and tied up the timber in the rain, I headed back to The Farm to store the timber. It had been my intention to collect the girls on my way back and then take them up for a run while I proceeded to do things. Radio Pasty had gleefully announced the expectation of rain in the afternoon “becoming heavy at times” which pretty much scotched any further misbehaving for the rest of the day. This was very much a shame because I had pulled on my DIYman overalls and everything.

As it was, I dropped off the timber and headed back home. I would need to take the girls out anyway as it was past their middle of the day walk. I had debated whether I should take the trouble to put on my waterproof work trousers – it would require removal of jacket and wellies – but since the rain was abating slightly, I risked venturing out without. The girls were not keen to tarry, and we returned home swiftly after to enjoy a convivial hour or so with ex-Head Launcher who had stopped by for a visit.

That was most of the afternoon gone. I had got nothing done at The Farm but at least I was in a position to do something much more quickly next time there was a break in the weather. The other thing I failed to do was to track down some replacement roof sheets.

These are a veritable nightmare. Most of the suppliers, the ones that do roofing pretty much exclusively, are too far away to drive to. The ones that do a few roofing sheets amongst other things and are closer, do not have the right ones. The roofing sheets are difficult to transport, and the roofing sheet companies charge a lot of money to get them to you. Our preferred supplier charges near £200 which is just about acceptable if we are buying a whole roof's worth, but when we only need three sheets, they are cheaper than the cost of delivery. The cheapest I found was £150 which I was about to grudgingly accept when I remembered a small farm supplier in Camborne that we had used way back. They did not have the right items on their website but they would be worth an ask. I meant to call them today but ran out of time.

We are told that this current, seemingly endless run of poor weather is due to break soon. While it is only partly to blame for the lack of progress up at The Farm, a bit of improved weather will remove one of the big excuses I have been using to stay at home and do begger all.

In the meanwhile, the rain set in for much of the afternoon and only cleared out at the end of it when it brightened a bit. It was still awful damp out and the walk around the block was somewhat less than a joyful occasion, just necessary interlude. The damp was still clinging on in the late evening with a bit of swirling mizzle. The atmosphere was not helped by ABH getting spooked by some imaginary thing behind us in the dark – well, I did hope it was imaginary. It accelerated our return home almost pulling my arms from their sockets. It was less than helpful therefore, that there was some character hanging over the railings opposite the shop when we got home. The girls were practically hammering on the door to be let in after racing up the stairs. It is a good job I am made of sterner stuff, but I admit that their anxiousness is infectious. Besides, I cannot run anywhere at present, so if we are truly being stalked by some creature with bad intent, I am stuffed.

February 12th – Thursday

The weather was looking a bit more user friendly today when I looked out of the windows. Admittedly, it was a tad breezy out; the Lifeboat flag was fair tearing at its moorings from the ministrations of a strong southwesterly when we passed by. It did not seem too bad down on the beach when we got there.

Most importantly, it looked like the sort of day a keen DIYman could get himself up to The Farm and get some work done. To that end, I organised an early breakfast. We are still trying to get through the last of the remaining eggs from our Christmas shop opening. They are dated to the middle of January but have not yet hatched or walked out the door and I still seem to be alive after having some earlier in the week. I had a large portion of scrambled eggs on granary toast. It was bleddy 'ansum.

It also took a little longer than was strictly necessary, but I considered I had a bit of time on hands. My plan was to go up, do some work, then come back to take the girls up there. With the breeze the way it was and a noticeable drop in temperature today, I did not think that, particularly BB, would fair well at the exposed Farm for an extended period. I could then do another hour or so and if BB got cold, she could get into the truck until I had finished.

That master plan very quickly collapsed in a heap on the ground when the Missus told me that she had planned to meet a friend for dinner and would need the truck. She offered to take us all up to The Farm, which on a warmer day would have been a perfectly good solution. Without the truck BB would have nowhere to shelter and even if I opened the cabin, there was no guarantee she would work out it was a good place to go. Additionally, I would be working in the barn which is not in line of sight. In short, being dropped off was not going to work.

It was just plain unfortunate that the Missus has made her arrangements for the first day in a while when the weather was almost favourable. A quick look at the rest of the week showed a return to daily rain and strong winds, not that it meant very much. The narrative that had appeared in the news was that Saturday would be sweetness and light. It was anyone's guess which was going to be correct.

I was not to be completely deterred. There was still more than an hour before the Missus had to leave, which was an hour I could spend at The Farm and at least get something done. I gathered my DIYman overalls, wellies and a jacket and headed for the door.

The Farm was much more exposed to the breeze than down in The Cove. The cold was far more evident than it had been for a week or so despite the thermometer reading little difference. I was glad that I did not have the girls with me even for that short time, and certainly not for a few hours. I brought the truck close to the site of the solar panel as I reckoned finishing that was the best I could manage in the limited time I had. It had also seemed like it had taken weeks and was still not finished. I was keen to have at least one success to look at.

The upper bracket arrangement was almost complete. The holes had been drilled and proven to be in line. All that required was to test the new bolts. They were the sort where the thread stops a short way down the shaft. The test was whether the nut would tighten sufficiently before I ran out of thread. I tried it out on the nearside and discovered that it tightened easily. I also discovered that if I used a ring spanner to hold onto the nut at the end constrained by the proximity of the solar panel frame, I could not get the ring spanner out again once it was tightened. I had to loosen it again and use the open ended spanner instead.

My next revelation was that having tightened the nearside, the far side bolt was no longer long enough to get the nut on the end. I had to loosen the nearside again and tighten each side in turn to get the bracket roughly level on both sides.

The bottom bracket was always going to be the troublesome one. First, leaning down that far it was going to be difficult to judge that the drill was level. It was hard enough on the nearside that I had good access to, the far side was just hard work because I had to reach around the post to do it. Adding to the problem was a carelessly thrown away telegraph pole that did not allow me to drop the drill low enough to ensure a level hole. In retrospect, I would have brought the solar panel up a foot but even then, I had already run into trouble with the waste pipe I had used to protect the power cable. It was in the way of the rear part of the bracket which only fitted once I had cut slits in the bottom of the pipe.

When I came to fit the bolts on the lower position, the nearside one fitted with just a slight adjustment to the hole. The far side hole was a complete begger. It only worked in the end because I had hacked a hole three times the size that was necessary. It did not matter. The nuts tightened up with ease and the frame is very securely held onto the post. Now that it was fitted and I could see how firmly it sat in place, I wished I had planned it better and had more confidence that it would not fall off. I would have put the solar panel nearer the top. There again, if I had thought to put all my savings in buying Bramley shares in 1980, I would be living on a Caribbean island and not needing to install solar panels on posts in a windy field in the middle of February.

The work took up all the hour that I had at my disposal. In truth, I never expected that I would be able to do very much past finishing off the solar panel install. I packed up all my tools and headed back to The Cove where I was in plenty of time to hand the truck over to the Missus. I was also right on time to take the girls for a walk around the block and started off heading to the Harbour beach. They were already preparing their fits of depression in the absence of the Missus and were not keen to run around, so without delay I took them around the block and headed for home.

At the Lifeboat operations team meeting on Tuesday evening, I rather carelessly volunteered to produce some training documentation for some of the Boat Crew. Each crew member must keep up currency on the various units of activity related to their roles. For example, everyone trained in towing must perform a tow either in

anger or in training every six months to remain current in that activity. The training system records when it is done and if it is not done, that unit for that person turns red on the screen.

The issue raised was related to Boat Crew having outstanding currency units for Shore Crew activities, such as driving the Tooltrak or operating the winch. Because it is not part of their normal activities, those signed up for those programmes, do not necessarily notice. I had volunteered to look at the system and print off easy to see sheets of which Boat Crew had what activity outstanding.

Demonstrating the stupidity of volunteering for anything – you would have thought I might have learnt by now – I soon discovered that it was not quite as straight forward as printing sheets from the system. First, the system does not have a print facility, forcing me to do a screen capture and a cut and paste into MS Word. Before I did that, I had to identify the individuals and the outstanding units and get them onto the screen together. It was a little time consuming and produced in the end, six pages.

Because I cannot help myself, I also analysed the results. It seemed to me that many of the Boat Crew signed up for these roles really did not need to be. We already have eleven qualified Tooltrak drivers, including two mechanics who would need to drive the machine as part of that role. We then had three additional crew signed up for the role who had not taken part in a launch or recovery for over a year. On top of producing the pretty coloured sheets, I also submitted my recommendations for dropping certain crew off the list rather than making them catch up with currency. If they had not performed the task in over a year, they probably did not need to be on the list in the first place.

I would have had a conversation about my submission when I went for training in the evening, however, it was unusually busy and I was later than planned. The Coxswain, being the prepared soul that he is and aware that we could not put out to sea, had arranged an evening of playing with navigation charts. Split into small groups, we all had a chance to identify locations, plot courses and understand the various codes and symbols on the charts. I will never need to use such knowledge but it was interesting, nevertheless.

We learnt that reading a position was done the exact opposite of the way it is done on a land map and that the red (it was pointed out for me) indicated the colour shown in a certain direction by a lighthouse; the various flashing signals on cardinal buoys that demonstrate whether they should be passed to the north, south, east or west; the fact that Camborne does not figure at all in determining where the Eddystone Rock is. It was all quite fascinating and the time passed so quickly, I was surprised and quite disappointed when it was time to come away. Another session like that and I will be able to sew a navigator badge on my sleeve.

February 13th – Friday

Ah, Friday 13th, that will explain everything, then.

Once again, the morning did not look too bad. I do not remember if it was as breezy as yesterday, but a day of trauma will do that to a person. I fancy that it was not and neither was there any evidence that the day would be anything other than pleasant and full of cheer. We revelled in its wonderfulness as we cavorted on the beach early doors.

Talking of which, ABH no longer responds to me knocking on the door to get her out of bed. I inadvertently discovered that playing the sound of a dog barking was much more effective and she would come out running. Fed up with trying to find the appropriate sound on my smart mobile telephone, I also discovered that it is every bit effective to make the sound myself. I have refined it so that I can now call out in chihuahua, 'come and get me, fatso' which brings ABH seething with indignation.

Talking of coming out fighting, I awoke with the urge and determination to get things done this morning and to steal a march on the day by getting out of the door early. This worked to a degree – I got out of the door early - but I needed to collect Mother from St Buryan first and collect some dog food from Tesmorburys that the Missus omitted to get when she went shopping on Wednesday. Since I would be passing the door of the car garage on the way, I wanted to stop by to ask a question.

I had booked the truck in for a service and MOT test, although strictly that should currently be the DfT (Department for Transport) test. Either way, without a pass the truck would be in dry dock. From our previous two tests I recalled that the tow bar had come in for some criticism for being rusty. When I had looked, the rust seemed rather superficial and hardly worth worrying about. I was aware, however, that my skills in that area are sorely lacking, so I thought to gain the opinion of one of the mechanics. If he determined that the towbar needed replacing, I could purchase one on the Internet at half the price the garage would charge me and have them fit it, thus avoiding a fail for a rusty towbar.

With Mother in the back, I stopped at the garage, and the mechanic duly came and had a look. He agreed with me that the rust was indeed superficial and to make it look better, I could tap it vigorously with a ball pein hammer to knock all the loose stuff off. I was still revelling in the feeling of satisfaction that I had avoided the necessity of spending £180 on a new towbar, when the mechanic pointed out that several of the tyres were worn. They were not just a little bit worn but at least two of them were bordering on the illegal. I thanked him for pointing this out and since I would be passing the tyre shop on the way to Tesmorburys, thought I would pop in and make an appointment.

The very pleasant man at the tyre shop had a look and agreed with the mechanic's assessment that three of the tyres needed replacing immediately. He also pointed

out that the fourth was not far behind, so I agreed that we would replace all four. The tyres would be available from four o'clock that afternoon but, should I prefer, they were also open on Saturday morning. I agreed that I would come back then.

Already behind on my trying to get going early, big idea for the day, I went on to Tesmorburys for the dog food. That is all I needed so there was no going up and down every aisle that Mother warned me against and that I had no intention of doing in the first place. She is far too used to shopping with the Missus.

Having collected the goods from the shelf I went straight to the automated checkout. Here I swiped the product barcodes and pressed the button to arrange payment by credit card – I am sure that Tesmorburys can afford the card charges. That may have been the case, but they were not keen to take my money either and the machine rejected my card. Assuming that it wanted me to use the chip and pin facility, I duly inserted my card and awaited the prompt to enter the pin. I waited some more and then some more on top of that but absolutely nothing happened.

I returned to the main screen to see if I could back up and try the process again but quickly discovered that the machine was completely locked. I looked around for an assistant. There is usually someone hanging around the automated tills, so it did not take long to recruit some help. The very pleasant lady pressed some buttons and assured me, and herself, that the machine was indeed not working. I asked her where the off switch was to apply a universal reset but instead, she pressed and held two buttons on the card payment machine to reset that.

From the experience we have with our own machine I am aware that it takes a veritable age for card payment machines to reset. Quite what they are doing during all that time, I have no idea. Anyway, the process fixed the problem eventually and left me to explain the delay to Mother. The incident had also diverted my attention from the virtual list of necessities I had in mind to complete during our foray into town, and I was halfway back when I remembered that I should have got fuel as well. I will now have to refuel after having the tyres replaced tomorrow when it will be busy and I shall have to wait.

By the time we got back home, it was time to take the girls out again. I was not taking them up to The Farm because it was cold and getting breezy and some rain had started to arrive. I whizzed them down to the beach where the last of the morning sun was making a proper spectacle of the beach and the lively sea. Largeish waves were starting to lumber into the beach, and the ladies wot swim a bit in the Harbour were making the best of it before it deteriorated further.

It was therefore early afternoon by the time I managed to get myself to The Farm. The weather was starting to close in, and Radio Pasty had announced that the rain would get heavier as the afternoon progressed. I ignored the warning, mostly because I was in train and an unstoppable force of determination, and went up anyway. Most of what I intended to do was going to be in the barn, and it obviously

would not rain in there, now would it. The only thing outside the barn, emptying the cabin's IBC, would happen mainly by itself once I had set it up. While the weather would be irritating, it would not impede my work, I was sure. The small gods of grumpy shopkeepers had other ideas.

It had become dull and grey by the time I arrived at The Farm. I opened up the barn and the tool shed and positioned the truck so I could easily get at my tools in the back. I had quite forgotten at this stage that I had loaded the next two Christmas trees in the back and had to get rid of them first. They are a pain in the rear because the branches curl around each other in the back of the truck and the wires from the fairy lights get twisted around the metal frames. With just four now in the barn, they are using up an inordinate amount of space.

Getting the pump working on the IBC seemed the sensible first thing to do. This would take about half an hour to empty 1,000 litres and I arranged the hose so that it would pump into the lane. I pulled the heavy battery from the cabin and hoped that it still had sufficient charge – which looking at the way things were going today, would not have surprised me if it did not.

Having set the pump in action, I set up the workbench in the barn and collected the timber I had purchased from the woodstore along with the offcuts I had decided to use as the base. Having looked at my original sketches, I had reviewed the design to make it as simple as possible. It only needed to support half a dozen lightweight boards, was unlikely to come under much strain or abuse and did not need to be a work of art.

My biggest mistake in the whole proceedings was to start. Sorry, that just slipped off the end of my fingers. No, the biggest mistake was to think that I could handsaw straight edges on the two by one that would form the backrest against which the bodyboards would lie. Next time I will use the circular saw no matter how disproportionate it looks.

The only really complex thing about the design is that the backrest is hinged so that it will lie flat when not in use during the winter. The only complex thing about making the first prototype was that the wind moved to the northwest, increased to force eight and brought with it a guts of rain. The wind frequently slammed the barn door closed thus cutting off what little light I had to work by and when it was not slammed closed, rain in varying degrees of heaviness, blew into the barn onto my tools, the workbench and my timber – and me.

If I had not been quite so determined to finish one bodyboard stand today, I would have given up halfway through and gone home. In any case, having put together the very basic structure, I noted that the upright frame against which the boards would rest could use some strengthening. Sadly, that will have to wait for another day because cold, blown out and rained upon, I had endured enough for one day and packed up to go home.

I returned to the IBC emptying on several occasions to note the progress. I was keen that the pump was not left to pump if it had run out of water as there is no automatic cutoff. Since I had draped the hose into the lane, I wanted to make sure I was not creating a flood there. Alright, no I did not. I could not give a fig if it flooded the lane which was the whole purpose of hanging the hose out there in the first place. When I checked the lane, there was a stream of water running down one of the wheel tracks. I had no idea that the incline was so pronounced as it was carrying the water all the way down the track in the direction of the sewage works and it was not collecting at all. At least, it was not collecting anywhere I could see which amounts to the same thing.

It took around half an hour to clear away all my tools, the hose and the battery. As soon as I had done so, I fled the scene. I was pleased to see that the stream had dried up and there was hardly any evidence that I had pumped 1,000 litres of water into the lane at all. The rain was coming in harder by then, but it was still in showers, albeit more frequent than they had been all day. The wind had ramped up and blustery had turned to punchy or perhaps somewhat worse.

I think that I got home just at the right moment because from then on, the weather started to get serious. The wind pounded in at 45 miles per hour, according to Land's End, and the rain became continuous. The temperature also dropped like a stone from nine or ten degrees to three degrees come the middle of the evening. As I sat in the northwest corner of the living room was, I could feel the wind and rain lashing against the windows inches from my face. Later the wind went northerly and the chill became more evident.

It was a very dirty night. I had to venture out twice, once in the late afternoon when the rain had not really got into its stride. I took the girls around the back of the shop, but even there the wind was swirling about. When we went out again at nine o'clock, we fortuitously managed to find a five minute pause in the onslaught of rain. Again, we were only outside for minutes before running back for shelter.

I have never paid much attention to Friday 13th before but today was pulling out all the stops to make me into a believer.

February 14th – Saturday

We celebrated moving into the shop and flat 22 years ago yesterday. Well, I say celebrated, it was more of a vague awareness that it had happened. There was no broaching of champagne that we had laid down 22 years ago, or even one we had purchased at our local independent wine merchant more recently – if we knew of one. Just an, 'oh yes, how interesting'. Perhaps we will be more enthused at 25 years.

I was no more enthusiastic about getting out of bed early this morning. The tyre shop people told me that they were open from nine o'clock and I was keen not to waste any more of the day than I could help. I aimed to be there just before they opened and be the first in the queue. It was therefore something of a surprise when I turned into the trading estate at ten minutes to nine o'clock and discovered that they were not only open but had clearly been so for a while and had two vehicles in the workshop being serviced.

Hailing one of the mechanics, he told me that there was a one hour wait and I should find somewhere to park. The trading estate is a small one and the available parking spaces commensurately few and as far as I could see, all full. There were two spaces reserved for a particular company which were enticing but given that it was early, I decided not to risk using one, despite it being a weekend.

This proved entirely provident because I parked in what looked like a free space but slightly overlapped the company's frontage. I had just turned off my engine when a vehicle arrived and parked in one of the reserved bays. The very pleasant lady who emerged from the motor car asked politely if I would move, to which I equally politely acquiesced. She offered the second space in her company reserved space which was most generous of her, and I confirmed that I was likely to be an hour waiting. She said that was alright and I thanked her profusely for her kindness.

I waited in the tyre shop's salubrious waiting lounge taking care not to trip on the threadbare rug or further tear the seat coverings. I will say that it was spotlessly clean, which must have taken some doing in a tyre shop. As it transpired, the hour turned out to be twenty minutes which is much better than the other way around. I must also say that all the staff are polite, efficient and very good at what they do and probably thirty to forty minutes later all four tyres were changed, and I was relieved of a considerable sum of money. I should point out though that while there is no arguing that the amount was considerable, it was also very reasonable, which is why we use this particular tyre shop.

During the time that I was waiting, I allowed my mind to wander onto the tasks ahead of me which were far fewer than the tasks I would have had ahead of me had I not had to have the tyres changed. I was still thinking about these tasks halfway back to The Cove when I remembered that I was supposed to refuel the truck while I was in Penzance. There was insufficient fuel to leave it for another time, whenever that might have been, so I turned around – a feat in itself on the A30 - and returned to remedy my omission.

When I got back to The Cove my intention was to have a quick breakfast and head off to The Farm as quickly as possible. As I dismounted from the truck, I bumped into ex-Head Launcher who was waiting for his son who was at that very moment helming the Inshore Lifeboat on a training exercise. I suggested that he come back to the flat for coffee and more than an hour later, I was once again in the position of about to have a quick breakfast and head up to The Farm.

The day had started out with blue skies and sunshine and the wind that we had endured last night has long dissipated. It was, however, also the coldest day we had in quite a while, but it was ideal for a bit of Farming. It was therefore very frustrating to find myself delayed for one reason or another. When it eventually came time to go, I discussed with the Missus whether I should take the girls with me or not. The main issue being that I would be distracted and unable to maintain attention on their antics for long periods. To resolve the issue, the Missus decided to come with me. She could start preparing the beds in the greenhouse while I saw to the bodyboard stand and the preparations for the IBC stands.

We eventually managed to get to The Farm in the early afternoon and started our respective work at either end of the top of the field. I started on the IBC that needed the small amount of water still in it, emptied. This could only be done by taking off the tap attachment and tipping it. Having done that and washed out as much sludge as possible, I tipped it off the pallets it was resting on and pushed it to one side. When I went to lift the upper pallet I came away with a strip of crumbling wood in my hand. It was no surprise that the IBC had tipped over. Both pallets were completely rotten through, and I had to remove them one piece at a time.

Before installing the pallets some time ago, the second such installation on that site, I had levelled the ground and shovelled some hardcore down. It was not a proper effort, which would have meant digging out at least a foot down and backfilling with hardcore. I had hoped what I had done would be sufficient, but the pallet had sunk into the ground. When I got the level to it, I was lucky that the pallet had sunk almost uniformly. Another few shovels of hardcore should be enough to put the gabion cage down. This would wait for another day as I would run out of time today.

Later, in a chance conversation with the Missus, she told me that she was moving the pea and bean beds to the other end of the greenhouse. When I asked why, it was because she had to move the water pump from the new IBC cluster at that end to the IBC near the cabin currently. I then questioned, if the pea and bean beds were to be moved, whether the IBCs near the cabin would be any use at all. Apparently, they would not. Since I already have a spare gabion cage already set up at the greenhouse end, I would install it there instead. This then pulled into question why I purchased two new gabion cages in the first place. I was going to suggest that buying a second pump and leaving the cabin IBCs where they were would be an awful lot easier than levelling new ground and moving the pea and bean beds but somehow, I was distracted. I will need to pursue this before I make the effort of continuing with Plan A.

After that, I diverted my attention to finishing off the prototype bodyboard stand. This, if you recall, dear reader, simply needed some additional support for the uprights that would support the boards. I put into practise the learning from the previous effort and used a jigsaw to cut the timber. It was the work of a few minutes to add the supports.

Without opening another box, I had access to four of our largest boards. They sat perfectly in the new stand, and the stand did not topple over. Hurrah for DIYman.

It was soon after that we decided to pack up and go home. The girls had a fantastic time and even had a visit from their pals, dogs of a friend who lives close by. Before we left, the Missus cleared the last of the tomatoes, dug up half a dozen turnips (swede to you, madam) and three cabbages and we brought them back with us.

There was not much left of the afternoon by the time we came back. The girls, after BB had been relieved of the mud coat she had acquired at The Farm, fell into a heap on selected sofas for the rest of the evening. We elected to try a food delivery, mostly burgers and chips adorned with various toppings, from a relatively new concern in St Just. Ordering can be done online and in advance, but no time is given. It arrives when it arrives. It is not cheap but there again, food out no longer is, and a small charge for delivery is made. The food was excellent and still hot enough on delivery not to require reheating, which is always a risk with deliveries.

During the morning, we had noticed that The Cove was very busy from the influx of half term holiday makers. It gave me momentary cause for thought whether we might have opened but quickly dismissed it for the usual reasons. It will go dead again in a week, and we would be left with all the fresh food with had overpurchased for the event. It has crossed my mind that it might affect the timing of the food delivery, but the order was with us less than an hour after the stated opening time.

Before we stopped completely, I made preparations for tomorrow. I shall be heading to the range, nearly a year on from my last visit. I am on tenterhooks.

February 15th – Sunday

For the first day back shooting in almost a year, the weather pulled out the stops and sent everything it had at its disposal, with the exception of sunshine. It did try a couple of times to brighten up but it was no more than a ruse to get me out in the open without my coat on. To assist in this endeavour, the day of cold that we had yesterday was replaced by a relatively balmy ten to eleven degrees. Having waited for me to remove my coat because I was cooking, the rain would come back all in a rush.

For most of the morning, we could barely see the targets at the back of the range, just 25 metres away, due to the mist. Even the 30 to 35 miles per hour westerly was not doing much to move it along. The rain and the damp air between showers ensured that the paper targets lasted no more than two or three uses before being replaced. Oddly, the wind at that speed and direction would normally be toppling targets and blowing over barricades but did not give us much trouble at all today.

I had decided that I would only do mornings in the few weeks I have left of being able to attend the range. It was a wise decision because there is much running about resetting targets and plates between shooters. By the end of the session, I was beginning to feel the excess movement. I think doing the afternoon session would have been foolhardy, although that never stopped me before.

The session took a while to finish as well. The club has attracted some new and younger members during the year, which is very encouraging. It has hitherto been the preserve of older, mainly male, members so it was refreshing to see several younger people in the mix including some ladies.

When the official session came to an end, I needed to zero in a new optical sight I had purchased. These red dot sights project a red dot onto an optic and once set up correctly, the red dot will always be the point of impact what angle you look through the lens. The products sell between £50 and £100 or well over £200. Because I only use it half a dozen times a year, I opt for a cheaper option.

However, as we all know, 'buy cheap, buy twice' and the previous sight had ceased to work after one season. Still not keen to spend over £100 and hoping that the early failure was a one off, I bought another cheap one. This I needed to set up at the range ahead of its use in anger next week. I had fitted it to the rifle the evening before and tested that the red dot showed up when I switched it on. Standing in the middle of the range with a full magazine of ammunition and ready to zero in my new purchase, the red dot resolutely refused to show when I pressed the button. I tried refitting the battery, but nothing happened. Having unloaded and retired to the 'fumble zone', I tried a few more options but, again, the red dot did not reappear. It was hard to believe that a lithium battery that came supplied had expired overnight even if I had left it switched on, which I am sure I did not. I must now go into town to purchase another battery to see if it is indeed that at fault because if it is not, the unit needs to be returned within the finite number of days for such complaints.

I had quite forgotten how much of a balls aching task it is cleaning and putting everything away and this time I only had one gun to clean. I still find that I tire more quickly after exertions and after a morning at the range, walking the girls when I got back and cleaning and putting away the shooting equipment, I was quite exhausted. It is a frustration and unexpected that this has carried on so long after the knee operation and is why I decided to make an attendance at the gymnasium tomorrow morning. I shall keep the session short and exploratory to see how much or how little I am able for.

As a consequence, I let myself be idle for the rest of the afternoon and evening save for a few walks with the girls. The rain had apparently cleared up by the time we left the range, and I had walked the girls around the block in the dry. It had become increasingly windy from the west, which had the effect of accelerating the weather from the Atlantic in our direction. I had not long returned from the walk when we were

lashed by quite a heavy shower of rain. This continued into the evening and we were lucky to just miss another before we headed out for the last walk of the night.

Someone highlighted that we had endured 40 days and 40 nights of rain, so it has quite literally been biblical in its proportions. Perhaps we should gird our loins for plagues of frogs, lice, general pestilence and, in the summer, flies and locusts. Even I would be ready to consider an exodus after that but quite where to I should not like to venture a guess. I hope all our guests enjoy their holiday this week coming.

February 16th – Monday

There were more showers blowing through early in the morning. They were going at some rate, too, in the increasing northwesterly wind. By some quirk of doggery, I had woken up half an hour early and because I was heading to the gymnasium, getting ready was half an hour less again. Both girls were at the front door and keen for a run, early doors, and I whizzed them down to a mid-tide beach for a brief dash around.

Despite not knowing the outcome of my first post-operative visit to the gymnasium, I decided that I would take my weights back – well, one half of them; they are bleddy heavy. I had brought them to the flat with the intention of maintaining my upper body strength at least while I awaited the green light to use the gymnasium again. That has not really worked out – so to speak – because I am inherently lazy, they were in a different room and I would have to move them from one room to another, use them while sitting on a chair I would have to move into place, and move the chair and the weights back again. It was never going to happen with the best of wills and intentions.

Waiting for the green light to use the gymnasium again was also a bit of a red herring – as if I would notice the difference between them, although I suppose they would smell different. There was no one in authority over my rehabilitation to provide it - the green light, that is - and it was down to me to decide when I should go and give it try. I decided that last week, but circumstances decided otherwise, so I was not about to miss the second appointment. I was there shortly before nine o'clock.

Had I not had warnings in the last few weeks, the results of over long and too frequent walks and pulling and lifting weighty objects, I might have been inclined to go at it a little more vigorously. As it was, I reduced my target rowing to 2,000 metres and lowered the resistance friction to about half of what I had been used to. I also knocked a few kilos off my weighted squats and the weights I generally throw around.

The squats against the wall as opposed to grabbing the back of a chair were much more effective and the rowing was pulling at all the right muscles, although I will ramp up the resistance a bit next time. Not going with the full weights was also a

very good idea. I practically waltzed out of the gymnasium feeling full of vim and fury and ready to surmount the insurmountable obstacles of the day – the first being what to do with two slices of bread, a pack of bacon and two types of cheddar.

As explained yesterday, I had to get new batteries for my optical sight I purchased recently. The only place I could think of was the independent electrical shop in Penzance. I called first and they confirmed they had the particular cell I was after. For some time, I had been putting off making one of my signature dishes, one that the Missus will also eat, so, since I was heading into town, I would get the ingredients for that as well. Nearly all the ingredients were available from local independent stores in town but for some reason, it is nigh on impossible to get beansprouts, a key ingredient in the dish. That meant a trip to Tesmorburys.

As it happened, I had planned a visit there anyway. I have a little pot that I keep for my used batteries. When it is full, I take it to Tesmorburys where they have an even bigger pot where they collect used batteries. That aside, I also needed a particular brand of tomato juice, which I can only get from one of our suppliers, or, when the shop is closed, from Tesmorburys. Only today, they had every variant in the brand including beetroot juice, for heaven's sake, but not tomato juice. In what sort of world is it more relevant to stock beetroot juice than it is tomato juice. And it was double faced. To make matters worse, I had already purchased the limes to go with it in town.

One of the consequences of shopping in town, no matter how much or how little is required, is that it takes half a day however much you might care to plan the visit to make it as efficient as possible. I had delayed my departure because it was too close to taking the girls out for their middle of the day run and as a result did not get going until early afternoon. Factor in a slower amble up and down the high street because I cannot be speedy on my pins at present, and having to go back into town after visiting Tesmorburys because I had forgotten to run an errand that was one of the main reasons for heading into town in the first place, and the whole afternoon was effectively wasted.

As I drove back home, I thought that I could at least manufacture some ammunition that might salvage some of the wasted time, but when I got home, there was not much time for that either. I sat down for a cup of tea, became distracted looking for a rear tail light cluster because ours has an MOT failing hole in it and that was that.

The showers of the morning had blown through by the middle of the day. The weather forecasters had made a hurried reassessment of the afternoon from showery to dry late in the morning. Armed with that I might have gone to The Farm instead – but perhaps not. The northwesterly fine-tuned its performance into the afternoon, and it became very blustery indeed in The Cove.

The sun, however, was doing a fine counter-balancing job. There were large portions of blue sky available for it to shine in and, in town, where we were sheltered from the

wind, it was impossibly warm. I had to divest myself of my outer layer and my hat was found to be surplus to requirements too. I was also wearing my super new yak-wool hooded jacket which I retained simply for the use of its deep pockets. In short, apart from the wind, it was ideal for working up at The Farm that made the journey into town even more frustrating.

During the lower reaches of the tide, the sea in the Cove was rough and lively. As the tide drove in, the sea's fury became more and more evident until at last it reached a pinnacle of viciousness. Throwing its weight around, crashing over rocks, throwing itself up cliffs and fair launching itself over the Harbour wall it produced a spectacle reminiscent of a child in an exceedingly awful tantrum. It was marvellous to watch with the sort of remote satisfaction that you were not its parent.

I shall once more endeavour to make tomorrow the day I actually get something done.

February 17th – Tuesday

It seems we have a choice of weathers. We can either have sunshine with a gale of wind from an unkind direction or a guts of rain. On special occasions, we can have a gale of wind *and* a guts of rain. What we cannot have is a day of sunshine or even cloudy with a hint of brightness all on its own. We are, of course, not allowed to know in advance what sort of day it will be. It is far too much trouble to determine, so all the forecasts show a mix of showers and sunny spells for each day of the week for seven days or so.

I determine the day's weather by looking out of the window in the morning and stepping outside with the girls. If we come back wet, it is raining, and if we come back dry with slightly tousled hair, it is windy and will possibly rain later. I also cheat by looking at the rain radar to see if there is any rain on the horizon.

Today there was nothing in the way of a breeze and the Lifeboat channel markers were not leaning in any particular direction. I surmised that we would get rain later and a look at the rain radar confirmed that it would be arriving in a big continuous lump in a couple of hours' time. I was not about to suffer another day of not doing anything, so I wasted no time in slipping into something more comfortable – in this case DIYman overalls – and headed to The Farm leaving the Missus slumbering, surrounded by hounds. I would send her a note later to tell her what was on.

I was just about to get into the truck when I remembered that it was Mother's day. No matter, I had not intended to dally long at The Farm as I had to come back and walk the girls. I would do what I could and then go on to pick up Mother.

I had some time to consider what would be the most efficient use of my limited time. I determined that I would cut all the lengths of timber required for the remaining

bodyboard stands. All I would have to do on the next limited time visit was screw them together in a meaningful way. There were only a few things, such as short lengths strengthening the uprights, that would have to wait.

Before I went, I remeasured the prototype. When I gave it a quick test on completion it was clear that the remaining stands could be around 100 millimetres smaller on the base – the whole purpose of building a prototype. The original will be used for the largest boards, but the rest will be of the smaller design. They will also be slightly lighter.

I had intended to use 3 x 2 timber for the base but had inadvertently used 4 x 2 for the prototype. When I went in search of a sufficient quantity of 3 x 2, I found it lacking and will therefore use a mishmash of both sizes. One of the methods of the project was to use as many offcuts as possible. We have a wealth of wood offcuts and due to their size, the board stands were ideal to use up some of it.

By a surprising turn of good fortune, I completed the wood cutting – as much as I could do - at about the end of my time limit. As if the two had been prearranged, it also started to rain at the same time; a signal that my time was up. There were only a few lengths of batten outstanding and by visual assessment I knew that I would run out of the 2 x 1 before I finished. I had also only purchased a minimum number of brackets and hinges in case they were the wrong ones, so I needed enough to complete the job. To that end, I told Mother when I called her to let her know I was on my way, that we would detour via St Just and the builders' merchant on the way home.

With Mother safely ensconced in the truck we arrived at the builders' merchant through the burgeoning rain. I did not need long in the store but then had to collect the wood from the yard. It struck me that if I took it back as one length hanging out of the back of the truck, I would have to go back to The Farm to unload it. I asked the very pleasant lady in the store if she had a saw I could borrow, and she told me that there was one at the yard.

It is worth noting at this juncture that before I discovered the builders' merchant at St Just, I used to use the chain stores in town. A few years back, the saws they had available disappeared. I was told that it was down to a health and safety risk assessment. It concluded that the big hairy bottomed builders who regularly turned up to purchase wood and used such dangerous implements on a daily basis might injure themselves if a saw was left lying around.

Sorry, I digress. Now, where was I. Ah yes, borrowing a saw. Clearly in heart of rebellious St Just such rules do not apply and having pulled the wood from the stand, I went in search of the saw. I was told that it was by the door. It was not. I searched high and low and after some while one of the delivery drivers showed up, so I asked him. He took me to the rear section of the store (cement and such products) where it was hanging on the wall behind the large, leather Chesterfield chair. Thanking our

man and kicking myself that I had not thought to look in such an obvious place, I went and cut my wood into lengths, miraculously without severing a limb, so that fitted neatly in the back of the truck.

The standing water on the road coming back from St Just was as bad as ever in the usual places. The rain had also come into its own and was heavy and continuous. The wind that had started in the southeast and had been almost unnoticed to us in The Cove, came around a little more to the east. It started throwing rain down the street and made my walk out with the girls quite uncomfortable. We did not tarry long and headed back to the flat for a rub down. I settled for just removing my waterproofs.

With time to do things ebbing away, I thought that I had better get on with loading my ammunition. If I could get that finished, I could put all the kit away and that would be another thing done and out of the way. I had purchased more primers at the range on Sunday and had enough to finish the job – actually, I had them on tic and must remember to take sufficient funds with me next week. What I did not have was time and only managed 100 rounds. Given a rainy day tomorrow, I should be able to complete it then.

Before I went down and after I had walked the girls, I had just settled with a cup of tea when my pager went off, requesting an Inshore boat launch. The sea state had improved on yesterday and with an offshore wind had produced some excellent surf conditions. With the swell still substantial, it also produced conditions for a big rip up the middle of the back and two surfers had got themselves in it. They had been stuck for at least ten minutes and observed from the Lifeboat station, it was decided to launch the boat to them.

I was first there and decided to drive the Tooltrak myself, mainly because it was raining and the machine offers at least a little shelter. I was just heading to the Inshore boathouse when another Tooktrak driver drove in, parking close to the building and got there first. We had considered fisticuffs to decide the matter but settled on cards instead. Realising we did not have a pack between us, we had a game of 'rock, paper, scissors' which I duly lost. I am sure it had nothing to do with us but by the time we got the boat to the tide line, the surfers had extracted themselves.

Thumbing my nose at the Tooktrak driver to indicate my derision, I returned home to finish my tea and biscuits.

I shall leave you with this. On my journey to St Buryan to collect Mother, Radio Pasty had an article about Helston Museum and a collection of banners they had. One was from WW1 and promoted support of the TOC-H group. The name caught my attention because from the dim and distant I recall the phrase dim as a TOC-H lamp being used. I had never understood it then and did not have the interest to discover what a TOC-H lamp was.

TOC-H refers to Talbot House, a facility in Belgium used for the comfort and rehabilitation of soldiers during the First War. Its symbol was a lamp – think Ali Baba – which featured the Cross of Lorraine or the Cross of Ypres symbolising the light of comradeship and the support of others. It became a Christian organisation with branches across the UK, founded at Poperinge in 1915.

There, who said that reading The Diary was not an education – albeit somewhat esoteric.

February 18th – Wednesday

Yes, it was another of those soddit days when things conspire against you to get nothing done. Sorry, to go on about the weather, I know everyone is in the same boat - or will be if it carries on. The weather forecast website showed exactly the same picture as it has done for the last month, they just added a little black triangle and exclamation mark to show that a weather warning had been issued.

The lump was not as big as yesterday and had breaks in it, so it was unclear whether we would have rain or not, most likely, yes. It was clear, though, that if we got it, the rain would be heavy. The times of concern covered more than 24 hours, so it was anyone's guess when it would affect us. This rather led me to decide that The Farm was out of the picture for today and tomorrow as well. There was more weather to come tomorrow – howling northwesterly – and the Missus was out for a few hours in the middle of the day.

I was in two minds about the gymnasium today. I did not know whether going straight back to three sessions a week would count as excessive. I could hear the nagging voice of the physiotherapist telling me recovery can take a year, etcetera, etcetera, so I decided to ignore it and go anyway. I would soon find out if it was excessive.

The intention was to go as early as I could but after walking the girls first thing and completing the morning's necessary chores, I was late, which was irritating. Since I was not going to The Farm, I suppose there was not much to hurry for but that carried little comfort; the day was wasting. Knowing what to expect in my session helped and I was able to organise things around my limitations and pushing them some. I also increased the friction on the rowing machine and that turned out to be ideal.

I had already set out the contingency of what I would do if I could not get to The Farm: finish with the munitions factory. I had just 100 rounds left to manufacture which I knew would take an hour. There was then clearing up afterwards and putting everything away that would take 20 minutes or so and leave me free to take the girls around again.

Although I do not do it very often, I have learnt that I can sustain making 100 rounds of ammunition before my concentration tends to lapse. While it is a simple and repetitive task, a mistake can have serious consequences either at the time or later when using the stock. A high level of concentration doing a mundane and simple task are not great bedfellows to me, as my mind will inevitably wander. Today, I was into the last ten rounds when I lost the flow. The only thing to do in such circumstances is to stop, discard the round in progress and start again. The main problem I have is recognising that my concentration has lapsed. I am still here with all my bits and no unnecessary holes, so that worked out alright.

With everything packed away for another time, I repaired to the flat to collect a coat and take the girls out. I checked the rain radar and thought that we would probably get away without too much in the way of waterproofs. We headed for the empty Harbour beach, largely due, I imagine, to the inclement weather. The girls had a good run around before we were joined by another family and then by a lady walking a larger dog. The girls barked a bit but mainly, it was amicable. I had already decided it was time to come away when it started to rain a little bit. By the time I had them hooked up we were being deluged by a heavy downpour of fine rain. That will teach me.

While I considered it an awful waste of time, I was not about to be doing something else, so I headed into town again. At teatime on the day I had previously gone, I had discovered that we were out of cracked black pepper that we use in the grinder. I had been past the shop that sells it loose not a few hours before. It is only a little thing but it is symptomatic of this whole period of frustration of setback after setback. Since I would be doing nothing else and mindful that it was me making tea this afternoon, I decided to get the trip into town out of the way.

I just had time to sit down with a cup of tea and a biscuit before heading to the kitchen. It has been a couple of years, I would say, since I made this particular dish – beef in oyster sauce with (my) special fried rice. I have made lots of other dishes for us over the years but on the basis that the Missus hates curry and fish as well as other ingredients I tend to include in the meals I make, they have been whittled down to just two. With cooking time, it takes a couple of hours during which I took the girls out for their afternoon spin.

The sea that had been lumping in all day yesterday had decided to take a bit of a rest today. There was still some swell but in comparison to yesterday, it was calm with hardly a bit of white water across the whole bay. How it changes some completely in such a short time is hardly credible. Nevertheless, it was still swirling about at the foot of the slipway when we passed by on our walk, so we took the long block around our end of The Cove.

Earlier in the day, we had seen a technician working at the payment terminals. The old ones had been removed a week or so ago. When we passed by in the late afternoon, new ones had been installed with clever solar cells on the top to reduce

their power consumption. They still take coins, which is a relief, but I suspect the preference is for cards or use of the 'app', one of hundreds you must have on your smart mobile telephone if you use different car parks across the country.

Rumour has it, well, it is rather more than rumour – The Diary has ears in important places, I will have you know – that a system including Automated Number Plate Recognition is to be introduced. Apparently, it will be clever enough to discount vehicles that have entered the system via Coastguard Row or have driven through the car park to the private area at the other end. Service vehicles, like the toilet cleaners or the various fishermen who come and go, will have their number plates excluded. Quite how it will handle the variety of water board vehicles that service the sewage system in the car park, I do not know. I will also have to discover the grace time allowed to enter and leave the car park without the necessity of buying a ticket. I am sure I will be asked in the shop.

I feel certain that I will need to gird my loins for the veritable tsunami of complaints and exclamations of indignation that will be coming my way when the system is in place and the shop is open. It is quite remarkable the number of things going on in The Cove that I find myself responsible for. It is a good job that I have an iron resilience to such things – and a good stock of malt whisky to fall back on.

February 19th – Thursday

The morning began with a very encouraging blue sky and brightness. I was not to be fooled; behind that welcoming façade lay a day not entirely commensurate with putting in a full day doing stuff – even if I had the opportunity to do so.

There was no point in wasting what we did have, however. I left it until later than usual but then ran the girls down to the Harbour beach. Any earlier and we would not have had a Harbour beach to run to. We have entered spring tide territory with high water in the morning and evening and a big expanse of low tide beach to cavort upon during the middle of the day. Today, however, there would probably be less of a big beach than would normally be the case because the sea had decided to get all upset again and those big waves were being blown in and held there by a robust northwesterly that was only going to get more robust as the day wore on.

The Missus would be absent for most of the afternoon with the truck, so anything that I wanted to do would have to be done in the morning. I did indeed want to do something, but setting up the gabion cage would take too long and continuing with the bodyboard stands would be interrupted by the barn door continually slamming on my face – and also take too long.

I had been meaning to take the Christmas decorations that had sat on the shop floor since they had been dismantled, up to The Farm for storage. I had not done it initially because I was waiting on the Missus sorting them out. The waiting had been going

on for a while, so I consulted with the Missus who told me that they did not really need sorting out and I could take them as is. The tail end of the morning and an hour or so before the Missus intended to go out, seemed the ideal opportunity to make something actually happen with them.

I knew that I would not be able to get them all into the truck, but I reckoned, probably half. There was no need to get kitting up, just sufficient layers against the wind chill and the wind that would be more blustery at The Farm. While I gathered my outwear, the girls gathered around my ankles looking hopeful. I had not intended to take them as I did not think that I would be that long but as it was close to their going out time anyway, I thought, why not.

We have been lucky at The Farm that the incessant rain had not made too much of a mess of the entrance way at the field. I think that I posted a picture of the Somme-like quagmire that we had last year. The difference being, of course, that we have not been up there as much; it was every day last year. I noticed last time I was there that one of the truck wheels tore up a bit of ground just inside the gate where I turn in to reverse back to the barn doors. Today, I tore it up some more and the ground there is very soft under the grass. It will only get worse and is unavoidable as we enter the field.

It did not initially register that there would be other softer, more delicate areas. After I had emptied the truck and made ready to leave, I noticed that the girls had definitely found some of these delicate areas as they were looking a bit muddy around their hocks – if dogs have hocks, if not, ankles. I just looked up hock and wished that I had not because it sounded like a rendition of the 'Dem Bones' song. I could have confused my hocks with the fetlock, pastern, cannon and hoof and I was still no wiser.

Anyway, I digress. Now, where was I. Ah yes, the girls getting muddy. Except that it was not mud. When I got up close and personal when I loaded them in the truck to come home, the 'mud' was exceedingly aromatic. They would be needing a wash when we got home. Before we went, I walked the girls to the end of the field to have a look at the subsoil dump there. I wanted to see how much work I would be up against as I would need some loose to form a base for the gabion cages and then a whole mountain – alright, a small mountain – of rocks. I concluded that it would take some effort to extract it. Of course, it would.

We were not far off the time when the Missus told me she would like to leave. Given that the skies were still blue and the tide was out I thought it worth a shot taking the girls down to the Harbour beach to encourage them into a rock pool. They might even have had a dip in the sea, but the tide was so far out that the sea was almost out of reach. Seeing as they had just spent half an hour dashing about the field, I was quite surprised that they seemed keen to dash about on the beach as well. What they were not keen to do – unusually – was dip into a very handy rock pool under the short slip.

Having run around for another ten minutes or so, I did manage to direct them to take an ankle – or whatever body part it is – dip in the pool. This at least washed the mud off their legs, which was of some help but still left the aromatic mire around their necks.

There was still sufficient time when we got back to the flat, before the Missus left, to help me cleaning up the girls. We took one each, in the bathroom and the kitchen sink, and shampooed the affected areas or at least the worst of it, which was under the chin and along the neck. It was the same on both of them and must be some sort of inherent dog thing. The bleddy hound used to do it was well, so it transcends breeds. There is probably a perfectly logical explanation for it but, frankly, I would rather not know.

When the Missus left, there was little I could do to push forward the frontiers of humanity or even advance shop life by a small amount. Outside, our beautiful blue sky had been replaced with grey and sullen cloud and a good deal of wet. We had just been caught by an unexpected light shower as we came up the slipway. The promised gale of wind was also starting to cut in, and the sea returned to its happy state of utter turmoil. It was as rough as any day recently with large and unruly waves charging into the bay, boiling over Cowloe and lumping up the cliffs opposite. The swell direction was such that big explosions of spray were crashing around the footing of Pedn-men-du when we cared to look it that direction.

It was late in the afternoon when the sun and brightness returned, just in time for sunset and a bit of soft light. It lit up the bay with enough strong light to highlight the white water in the tips of waves and the churning swell. Down in the Harbour a small band of cold water swimmers were enjoying being heaved up and down in the lumpy water, whooping and shouting. It looked like fun, if you like that sort of thing and frankly, they deserved a bit of fun after a half term week of grim weather.

The time for waiting on an improvement in the weather to do any work is now over. From tomorrow, we are going to have to get stuck in regardless. Oh, sweet joy.

February 20th – Friday

I have only been back at the gymnasium for a week now and I am already reaping the benefits and they are legion: I have greater movement in my leg than previously without the tug on the muscles; I can descend stairs straight, rather than crabbing down them; ascending stairs, I use both legs equally and do not have to haul up using the rail; I am also more comfortable at rest. On top of all that, the big boys have stopped kicking sand in my face at the beach. The only disappointment is that the maximum angle of bend I can achieve is still only 90 degrees. By now, I should be able to reach 120 degrees and slip my ankle easily behind my ear. I might have to make enquires.

The decision had already been made that I would bite my thumb at the weather whatever it might be and head to The Farm regardless. I am quickly running out of time to complete even the reduced workload I have set myself. I had made a determined effort to get moving during the morning so that I could have an hour at The Farm, collect Mother, walk the girls and go back to The Farm. As I finished the last morsel of a bit of breakfast I had prepared after coming back from the gymnasium, the time on my computer screen was slipping past fifteen minutes after eleven o'clock. That was the initial hour at The Farm lost forever. On the plus side, the weather was improving.

There was a thick mist crowding in on the bay and drizzle in varying degrees of heaviness filled the air. It had hardly been damp at all when I took the girls around first thing; we were excluded from the beach as the tide was in. The sea state was again wildly different from yesterday. The turmoil was gone but under the surface there was harboured still a heavy swell, enough to chuck big lumps of water over the Harbour wall which had apparently come from nowhere – the waves, that is, the Harbour wall has been there some time. Come low water towards the middle of the day, the bay looked almost benign.

There was still some bluster to the wind, but it had gone around to the southwest and was more noticeable at The Farm when I got there. We had the last of the drizzle as I went over to collect Mother, although the mist hung around until the end of the day as it slowly tried to clear. I asked the Missus to take care of walking the girls and made off very belatedly for The Farm.

The reason I had not taken the girls was because I had I intended to press on with the gabion cage for the cabin IBC. I would need to be driving up and down the field as I went first for some subsoil to level the ground and then rocks fill the cage with.

I had quite forgotten the amount of physical effort required to dig out the soil and the even more effort needed to extract the rocks. I used large plastic tubs for both products. The soil was heavy enough and the rocks nearly broke me. As well as filling the tubs with medium size rocks, I loaded larger rocks of more than ten kilograms separately. Since I could not get the truck anywhere near the gabion cage, I had to carry everything from the truck 25 metres to the cage. As I recall from last time, the rocks need to be loaded in a certain way, they cannot just be thrown in. Last time the I had two half metre wide cages which I could reach the far side. The cages this time are a metre wide, and I had to climb in and out with each rock if it needed to go to the other side.

What I am trying to say, dear reader, is after three rounds of digging out, filling tubs, lifting tubs and carrying tubs and rocks over uneven ground, I was on my knees. Well, I would have been on my knees if I knew that I was allowed to kneel on the new one. I reckon that I would need another three or four trips to complete the job and that would have to wait for another day. I had reached the end of my reserves.

I am clearly not half the man I used to be. The knee hampered me a little, on the rough ground mainly, but my core and upper body have also suffered. I suspect that I will feel it tomorrow.

Before I collapsed in a heap, I swapped out the nearside rear light cluster on the truck. The old one had a hole in it which was probably an MOT test fail and the new one arrived yesterday. I have changed the unit before so there were no surprises about fitting it. I am guessing that they are made cheaply in various factories as they are not original manufacturer items. The last one I purchased fitted a little better than the one just arrived, but it will do. I was unable to test the brake light but everything else seemed to work alright.

I spent a little time at the computer after I was done and then retired to the comfy chair where I promptly fell asleep. Poor old fella. I roused myself, thank you very much, to take the girls around before tea and later on in the evening, fortified myself with a large malt whisky. Oh, come on, that is only two this week.

February 21st – Saturday

We had a grand plan for today. Enough said.

Quite surprisingly I did not wake up sore and aching. I clearly ran out of energy before I ran out of muscle yesterday, which is annoying. I did not get to test myself on up and down hills as the Harbour was full of water again and we went around the block, instead.

It was misty again, rather more so than yesterday, and although the air was wringing wet, it was not drizzling or raining. The only wet on the girls was from them charging through the sward or rubbing up against shrubbery. It was all looking alright for the grand plan which would take us all up to The Farm for a few hours.

The grand plan actually covered yesterday as well. It was why I did not continue with making the bodyboard stands and got a start on the gabion cage and the cabin IBC. Today, with the girls up there too, I could not go charging up and down the field in the truck. Ideal then to stay in the barn woodworking while the Missus ploughed through the stock take in the store room. It would also not matter too much if there was a little bit of mizzle now and again.

As it happened, I got ahead of the posse early on during the morning. Just as I wondered where the time went on the previous days, I was suddenly sitting having finished breakfast and it being still the earlier part of the morning. Well, there was no point in wasting it, so I let the Missus know that I would come back and collect her and the girls later on. In the meanwhile, I could do a bit more hard rock mining and shifting because I had not quite damaged myself enough yesterday.

Just for a bit of fun, I looked up the approximate weight of one cubic metre of granite. According to the Internet, it is 2.7 metric tonnes or 53 hundredweight. I concede that the rocks are loosely packed, so it will be a bit less than that. I rather wished I had not looked now.

The mist was thick enough down in The Cove. At the top of the hill, it was thick as a bag and the moisture in the air very quickly went from damp to wet, starting with fine rain and the heavier, more traditional stuff followed soon after. I had already dug out one lot of rocks and was up by the cabin when the fine rain came in. I had taken the precaution of getting into my working waterproofs including my new jacket. I put up with the fine rain, but when it came in heavier, I sheltered in the truck until it was over.

The truck windows instantly fogged up, even with the lee side window open. I also discovered that while the waterproofs were very effective at keeping the rain out, they were also keeping me very warm, much warmer than I really wanted to be.

On Friday, Radio Pasty had delighted in announcing that the weather was about to change. I decided not to get too excited by such a revelation because they had done much the same last week. They told us that the high pressure over Scandinavia was moving and thus clearing the log jam that had kept us in wet weather for weeks on end. There would be a period of dry sunny weather. What they did not say was the period of dry sunny weather would last precisely one day before the rain came back.

Yesterday, they enthused that the deep cold snap – that only the North got – would be over and we would bask in temperatures into the mid teens. They were honest enough this time to say that the wind would go southwesterly and would bring another guts of rain with it. The heat wave did not quite come all the way down to the Duchy, we had eleven degrees down here, but it was enough to make me feel like I had been working in a thermal suit wearing an electric blanket.

It did cross my mind to pull a Poldark and strip to the waist, but you never know when a paparazzi will pop up with a long lens. At the present, he would probably have not seen me at all, so closely camouflaged was I to my immediate surroundings. The rain had instantly turned the ground to mud, and I was lagged in it from head to foot.

I managed another round of rock collecting before I ran out of time. I told the Missus I would give her a call at around midday to say I was on my way. By then, the weather had properly closed in and although the heavy rain had cleared, it was still mucky enough for it not to be ideal for the girls. I warned the Missus off and switched my focus to completing the woodworking. We may as well stick to one element of the plan.

Spending the next couple of hours in the barn, I pressed ahead with completing the bodyboard stands. The only bit of wood cutting I had to do was to finish the last of

the upright supports that I had run out of timber for on the last occasion. Everything else was ready to be just screwed together like a flat pack furniture box, except I had a greater expectation that everything would fit and that I had all the right screws.

I did not have to worry about slotting tab A into slot B, either. It was more a methodical order of placing the lengths of timber in the right places, ensuring that they lined up and that right-angles were right and the right screw went in the right places. The only area where things might have gone wrong was the placement of the hinges. I had to ensure that the uprights hinged forward and laid flat but bound in the upright position and did not fall backwards. It is the one weakness in the design: if the boards are pushed back on the upright with too much vigour, they could easily snap.

Up until that very moment I had not thought of this weakness. If I attach a cord to the top of the upright and a forward position on the base, it will stop the upright being pushed back and act as a 'side' to stop the bodyboards falling out of the stand. I may add a modification if I have time.

It had taken a couple of hours to put the 'kits' together. Naturally, the rain had stopped soon after I decided to repair to the barn, and the day brightened a little. I called the Missus at one point to see if she wanted to come up, but really it was too late. In truth, I could have finished the gabion cage – of it could have finished me – but I was glad that I had diverted to the stands. It is one job out of the way, and I can now concentrate on the others.

While planning to work regardless of the weather sounded quite forthright, it really is not that practical. Digging out the rocks is hard enough in the first place without trying to do it hampered by thick restricting clothing in which you heat up uncomfortably. I was using twice the energy fighting my clothing that should have been engaged in pulling rocks from the ground. I shall have to pick and choose my time to finish the job.

It was late in the afternoon when I staggered back into the flat. I will have to wipe down my jacket at some point to make it look a little more respectable as I will be wearing it to two appointments on Monday. There again, perhaps I should leave it as a sort of badge of honour. I could go about looking like a swarthy working type person. As long as no one got too close, it might work and I would be revered in certain quarters, although I might avoid dining at Claridges in it.

It reminds me that I once attended a posh Christmas do when I worked at an American bank. Parking was at the St James' Hotel where they had valet parking. It was early in my career, and I drove a somewhat dilapidated Ford Granada. The passenger door fell off if you did not open it in a certain way. When I pulled up, the valet moved to let my passenger out and the door came away in his hand. Until that moment I had never received a look of utter contempt and derision. Not to be demeaned, I went around, dropped the keys in his hand and walked off.

The remainder of the day and the evening thankfully passed uneventfully. The rain had gone but the mist and damp in the air clung to our end of the Duchy like a limpet. I have no reports of the weather on the south coast. It would not surprise me that they are basking in sunshine. I shall make enquiries.

February 22nd – Sunday

The morning looked just as mucky as the day we had left behind yesterday. There was even rain in the air and more to come. I was quite lucky that the girls decided that they were not bothered about going out early. That is going to have to change fairly shortly as I will not be able to go walking them at close to nine o'clock when the shop is open again. In fact, tomorrow will be a bit of a test as I have to be out the door just after eight o'clock.

We still had the tail end of the rain that was hardly anything at all, especially compared with some of it we have had. The mist was still thick in The Cove and probably even thicker at the top of the hill. It was still perfectly mild, and the temperature had held all the way through the night according to Land's End weather station. It was hampered by a strong southwesterly breeze which only dropped out in the early hours of the morning. By the time we went out, it was hardly noticeable at all and by the time I sat down to breakfast, the skies were beginning to clear and the mist evaporate.

I had elected to do the afternoon session at the range this week. I had a bit of a dilemma. Last week I had intended to zero in my new optical sight which came to disaster when it did not work. This meant that I could persevere with a rifle with inaccurate iron sights or an afternoon with my old army rifle with only 46 rounds to play with. I completely forgot I was short of .303 ammunition and did not make any while I had the kit out.

The occasions when I can use the old Lee Enfield No4 Mark 2 are few during the range season. I had not used it in over a year, which rather swayed my decision. It is the first gun I fired as a teenager in the Air Training Corps and was rather good at it at the time. The rifle I acquired was manufactured at the Fazackerley factory in Liverpool in 1959 and was decommissioned from service in India some time during the 1970s. It was quite a ubiquitous rifle in armies across the world and for an extended period. Mine is a machine you have to love as the magazine requires a screwdriver to release and the bullets need to be made by hand and even then, do not cycle through the magazine well, or at least did not. Nevertheless, it is a very accurate rifle over long distances, although we only fire over a maximum of 50 yards using low powered rounds.

Because there are very few of us who shoot .303 rifles, some of the more experienced and technical among them took an interest in my inability to cycle

rounds through the magazine. It has been this way for a while, but clearly today was the day my problem irritated my friends enough for them to do something about it. There are two lugs at the forward part of the magazine that guide the rounds into the chamber. One of these was bent out of place. Once corrected, it worked very well. I have put up with that for ages. I still cannot get the magazine out easily, but it can be loaded from the top, so that does not matter too much.

Later in the evening, I looked up to see if I could purchase a replacement magazine catch. I was quite surprised to see that they were in ready supply. I had not thought to look before. It was five pounds. I was about to purchase it, but when I got to the delivery section of the checkout, they wanted £7.50 to send it. The item weight 4 grams and could easily be sent for £3 pounds, first class and tracked. It irritates me greatly being ripped off for postage in that way. I shall seek an alternative supplier and see if they are any better.

We spent a couple of hours putting holes in targets and knocking over tin men. I was quite happy that after more than a year of not using it, I was still able to hit the target quite accurately near the middle. I was also able to shoot from the kneeling position (on my natural knee) which I had not been able to do for some years. Getting up again is still a work in progress, but we will not dwell on that.

The sun of the righteous shone down upon us for the entirety of the afternoon. I made a note to thank the righteous when next I met one. It was also warm in the light southwesterly breeze, and I was able to dispense with my jacket for the whole session. There was still a haze left over from two or was it three days of mist, but when we returned to The Cove later, it was all over St Just to the north and northwest. High above The Cove, it was all blue sky and loveliness.

I had not been home long, just enough time to clean up and put away, before it was time to run the girls out for their late afternoon venture. There was enough Harbour beach to cavort on, so we headed down. We were not there five minutes when we were joined by two girls who are regular visitors at this time of year. ABH had got on like a house on fire with the older girl when they had met a couple of years ago. Last year, the visitors brought along another playmate and ABH played nicely with her. Now with two aside, it was a melee of tumbling fur and legs as they ran and rolled over the available beach. The visitors are here for several weeks, so we might expect many more encounters before they have to go home.

I shall be up at sparrow's tomorrow and must get the girls out before I go. Wish me luck with that.

February 23rd – Monday

Well, that did not last long. The sunshine of yesterday afternoon a distant memory, we were back with mist again today. The weather forecast suggested mizzle but,

really, it was just a little damp in the air. That stayed with us all day along with the balmy temperature and light southwesterly breeze.

I was blessed with two appointments today, the first of them at the doctor's office at twenty to nine o'clock. This meant getting up earlier than I had been for some weeks, taking the girls out for their walk and heading off just after eight o'clock. It all went swimmingly and I was in the car park at St Just at a little after half past eight o'clock.

The doctor's surgery had sent me a message a little under a week ago asking very nicely if I would like to be the proud recipient of a pneumococcal vaccine. My latin is not up to much but I suspected that it was something to do with having my tyres inflated and getting a posh coffee while I waited. I duly ignored the invitation. Almost at its expiry – it was withdrawn after a week – I reconsidered, or least decided to look up what it vaccinated against. The Internet told me that the vaccine warded against pneumonia, meningitis and septicaemia with a good chance of fighting off a nasty case of distemper as well as footrot and bluetongue, if I were lucky. I thought that I could take my chances on the pneumonia front but the others sounded a bit tricky. I signed up and my appointment settled for this morning.

After having to wait twenty minutes or so, I spoke with the very pleasant nurse assigned to my case – at least I assumed she was a nurse. You never can tell these days with all manner of assistants and students and part time helpers involved. Frankly, I do not care if it was the cleaner, as long as she knew what she was doing with the outcome of me leaving the surgery in one piece and vaguely alive.

She told me that I had been singled out, along with everyone else in my position, due to my age. Since I was there, they had a special offer of book one, get another free on vaccines and I could have a two-part shingles vaccine too. I demurred on the basis that I was reasonably sure that I had never had chicken pox, which I believe is a pre-requisite. Despite telling her this, she continued with the hard sell making me wonder if she got a bonus for upselling such things. I told her that one hole in my arm was quite enough for one day, thank you very much.

The whole thing only took a couple of minutes, if you discount the ten minutes of pressure tactics to get me to have the second injection. It was not until I escaped the nurses clutches entirely that I was able to retrieve a message I had from the optician that does eyes – my second appointment. The message told me that the optician was poorly and would not be in and my appointment was therefore cancelled.

You may recall, dear reader, that this was an appointment that I had rearranged after cancelling the original because of the disruption to my train journey to see the Aged Parent. I had messed up by not arranging to take the appointment the Missus asked me to cancel on behalf of Mother, else the whole thing would have been over by now. When I called the optician that does eyes to rearrange, they could not fit me in before the shop opened again, so I will have to wait until November before having my eyes checked. This was not so bad. My current spectacles are functional with the

slight exception that the left hand lens drops out of the frame occasionally. It is a bit of an inconvenience at home as I have screwdriver to fix it. If it ever happens away from home, it would be quite disastrous. I am on the cancellation list, so I may yet get an appointment. We shall wait and see.

Once again, my carefully orchestrated and highly detailed master plan for the day lay in tatters at my feet. So big was the pile I nearly tripped over it on the way back to the truck. I had arranged, since I was heading into town anyway, to do some essential shopping while I was there. The original necessity for making the trip had gone but the shopping still remained. I went anyway.

The Missus had insisted that I procure the items that she had requested from Tesmorburys, which I am sure she does to serve me out for being obstinate about using the excellent, much cheaper and better quality, independent shops that we have in abundance in West Cornwall. I have had a small victory in that respect as she now routinely purchases our meat from butcher shops which means that half of our Sunday roast is no longer left on the side of my plate. Today, however, the Missus had the winning hand.

There was some convenience to it because we needed to refuel the truck and I took the opportunity to see if they had restocked with tomato juice, which they had. There were only a few more items and, for once, I queued at the checkout serviced by a real person. How refreshing that was. If the queues were not ordinarily so long, I might be encouraged to do it more often.

Before I left town, I dropped by our bulk fish supplier in the trading estate. We had run out of haddock a week or two ago and Mother likes a bit of haddock now and again. She will be sorely disappointed again this Friday because the shop had no haddock today, but I was delighted to see that their fish counter was brimming with other species all looking fresh and attractive. They even had some whiting which I subsequently regretted not getting. I do like a bit of whiting and it is not often available.

The nurse, or toilet cleaner, who filled my arm with vaccine told me when I asked that there were no common side effects of the procedure. She said some people react more severely than others but probably the worse I could expect was some tiredness or possibly a slight chill. I had quite forgotten about it and was initially surprised while I sat at the computer after I got home, just how droopy my eyelids felt. It was time to take the girls for a spin, so I thought that might revive me but it was a bit of an effort to drag myself from my chair to do so. I did not feel much enlivened after I got back, either, despite it being reasonably fresh out.

I was once again starting to wind down and could quite easily have retired to the sofa, put my feet up and had an hour's zizz. There was, however, the gabion cage still to be completed at The Farm and the sand in the hourglass was running thin. It took a monumental power of will to drag my drowsy frame to my boudoir to

clambered into my DIYman overalls and even more to get myself downstairs to drop into my wellies. Thankfully, the weather was much improved on my previous visit as I almost certainly would have convinced myself that the sofa was a better option.

My injection arm had been a little tender earlier but did not seem to impede my performance as I resume my rock mining. The pickings are getting slimmer at the rock face I was working but starting again further along where I would been to remove the greenery first, did not over-enthuse me. I am at the stage where only smaller rocks are required, although I did manage to fit in some medium sized ones when they presented themselves to the point of my wrecking bar.

I managed a further two runs down to the end of the field and a further eight tubs of rocks. Over the last four of so days, I have moved more that two tons of granite and quite honesty, I am amazed that I am still standing. It is not like I have not felt every ounce while I am doing it but the subsequent after effects appear to be entirely absent. Today, however, seemed to require rather more effort than the previous days combined. This was very disappointing because I think I have just one trip left and can close the gabion cage lid. There is, of course, more to do after that, lifting the IBC onto it and filling it for a start.

Retiring with as much good grace as I could, I returned home and this time the sofa was not to be denied my grateful weight.

I shall leave you with this, dear reader, since I know how much you delight in hearing about my cosmopolitan diet. I had for some time hankered over a bit of haggis, attended by the requisite neeps and tatties. It is something to do with New Year events of times gone by, or something like that. Anyway, I meant to look for some near Burns' night as the butchers around here sometimes have them. I forgot. Quite by chance, the Missus, while visiting the shop run by Cornwall's patron saint, St Michael, acquired some. I had it for tea and I must report that it was every bit as toothsome as my memory was expecting. My only regret is that I could not book a piper in time.

February 24th – Tuesday

Well, what a lucky chap I am; I shall have to buy a lottery ticket later.

It all started quite innocuously with an early dash out with the girls. For once they were both up early together, so I took the opportunity to run them out quickly before ABH could change her mind and hurry back to bed. It was pleasant enough out with the mist thinning and not much in the way of wind – in The Cove, at least. The wind was, in fact, quite feisty and from the southeast and thus not bothering us much.

I had intended to walk around the block again but there was a sliver of beach, enough for a small run around on. I was a bit apprehensive about the waves that

were making a lot of noise and thrashing about a bit. There was some flogging over the wall but largely, it was all bluster and no substance. There was still a hefty ground sea running in the bay, but the Harbour seemed safe enough. We ended up going around the block anyway as the girls seemed to tire of the constraints on the beach.

It was not long after we got back that I had a call from the Aged Parent. He is struggling with the operation of his smart mobile telephone that is far too complex for his needs – just making telephone calls. However, from the call recipient's point of view – or hearing, more like – the call quality is ideal. He did try a cheap and simple mobile telephone, but when he used it, I could not hear a word he said. He went back to the smart one and inadvertently called me this morning.

Not suggesting for a moment that I would prefer not to receive calls from the Aged Parent, even accidental ones, but on this occasion it coincided with a call from the optician that does eyes and I missed it. You may recall, dear reader – it was yesterday – that my appointment with them for yesterday morning was cancelled due to the poorliness of the optician. I asked that they put me on a list to be considered if there was a cancellation by another customer – do opticians that do eyes have customers or do they have patients, I wonder.

As luck would have it another customer or patient cancelled their half past ten o'clock appointment. By the time I called the optician that does eyes back no more than ten minutes later, the cancelled appointment had been taken up by someone else. It was quite a disappointment. While I sat there being disappointed, the optician that does eyes called back. They told me that the person who had filled the cancelled appointment had called back and cancelled the cancelled appointment that they had initially filled and would I like it. Would I like it, indeed. I fair near bit her virtual arm off.

There was not much time between me agreeing and me having to be there. I made it to the much maligned council car park with some time to spare. Normally, I would approach via Newlyn and Wherry Town from the west. This is the quickest route, that is when the Ross Bridge has not been removed for a make over. The Ross Bridge is a swing bridge installed to permit boats access to the dry dock off the Abbey Basin. There has been a bridge there since 1881 but the current bridge was installed in 1980. The bridge before that was made out of an old railway turntable. It was big news yesterday when the engineers had called in one of the biggest cranes in the country to lift it off its hinges and place it on a barge. It is destined to be overhauled in Falmouth if it ever gets there. The tug must wait until calm sea conditions before attempting to tow the barge around Lizard.

It will apparently be ready to be reinstalled at Easter. I will not hold my breath. I should remind readers that the sea has been calm enough to launch the Lifeboat once for training since Christmas. Even then it was not calm enough to tow a barge.

Sorry, I digress. Now, where was I. Ah yes, I had arrived at the Wharfside car park with limited time to spare. It was not very helpful therefore that the closest ticket machine had run out of paper. The lady who was before me discovered this. Fortunately, she was paying by card so would have some proof should a parking enforcement officer notice the lack of ticket and provide one of his own. I, on the other hand, was paying cash – as you do for £2.20 – and would have had to cough up again as no one would believe me if I said that I had already paid.

The second machine I attempted to use was payment card only and the third, where eventually I had some success, was right the other side of the car park. Breathless, I burst through the door of optician that does eyes a few minutes late for my appointment. I was forgiven, it seemed, and was briskly introduced to a twelve year old who told me that she was my optician that did eyes today. For someone so young she was very competent and for the next half an hour entertained me with charts on the wall and pretty coloured lights to look at. There was an amusing moment when I read a line of letters and was momentarily confused by a smaller numeral in the last column. I read out the number after a moment's hesitation only to be told that the number was part of the chart identification. It reminded me of a Goon Show sketch where Eccles had to read a chart. He read to the bottom including the J. Smith & Sons. Printed in Birmingham.

Oh, happy day. Not only are my eyes in perfect health but my prescription has not changed since the last check two years previously. This rather means that I have several hundred pounds spare that I had expected to spend on new spectacles.

I picked up Mother on the way home, as it is her day to visit. Had I known that the weather would be quite so appealing and temperate, I might have suggested that we all head up to The Farm and carry out our respective tasks. As it was, I was misled by a forecast on Sunday that told me that Wednesday would be the best day this week. Wednesday, according to the forecast today, will now be laced with rain, so once again we shall have to work around it to get the stock take up there done.

With today's weather having developed quite early on into one of the most splendid that we have had for a while, it was an opportunity too good to miss. It was ideal for heading up to The Farm on my tod to finish off the gabion cage that has stolen my time for the last several days. Therefore, I wasted no time – alright, I stopped for a cup of tea first – in grabbing my hat and coat, two harnesses and two girls for a walk up the Coast Path.

The Missus, in my absence, had taken the girls to the big beach a couple of times but they had not been on a longer stank for a while. As the day was so utterly perfect, we headed up through to The Valley and down to the beach that way. The southeasterly breeze was more evident in places along the path and when we were down on the beach. Under the direct beam of the sun, the warmth more than compensated for the windchill and I was glad that I had opted for a reduced number of layers and little boy trousers.

Sensing that hopefully my last run of hard rock mining would generate a substantial amount of warmth as well, I remained in my little boy trousers under my DIYman overalls. After a further cup of tea and a fortifying biscuit, I headed off to The Farm for the last gabion cage day of the year. I do have another that I had intended to use but at present do not have an IBC to place on it.

I collected the tubs from where I had left them in the tool shed. I left them there last time too but spent ten minutes searching for them because I thought that I had left them at the back of the cabin. This time, there were no ancillary tasks and after collecting the tubs and my wrecking bar, drove to the bottom of the field. I spent fifteen minutes digging out before changing my tactics to foraging for them from the extensive top of the pile. From there, I picked the small rocks I needed from the surface and threw them down to the tubs I had left at the bottom. Most of them missed. Guessing correctly that I had enough for the four tubs, I returned to the scattered collection and placed them in the tubs.

Of all the elements of the process of filling the gabion cage it is the last that is the trickiest. The rocks previously placed inside had pushed out the sides. I must have been more careful with the previous cages because the problem had not been so severe. This time I had to do a lot of rearranging, that meant emptying certain portions and refilling again. The lid needed to marry up on all four sides so that I could insert the spiral spines that hold the lid on. This took most of the time I was up there but is worth the investment to get it right.

At last, I was able to heave the empty IBC into place only to discover that it was a good eighteen inches higher than it was before. I needed to be quite robust with the downpipe that feeds it from the cabin launders, to arrange it into place. Quite fortuitously, it is now wedged into place and should hold in a high wind without further security. There remains the tasks of transferring the water from its neighbour and moving that IBC around to the spare gabion cage, already filled, around at the end of the greenhouse. This then needs to be connected to the other two already there. At some point in the future – when the memory of shift a couple of tons of granite by hand has faded - I will set up the spare gabion cage either next to the cabin or in line with the others by the greenhouse.

Again, I did not feel so rinsed of energy that I could not attend Lifeboat training in the evening. The day was changed to leave Thursday free when we would be sending off our erstwhile companion in a shuffling off ceremony. Our esteemed leader had set up some casualty care scenarios for us to practise our skills on. Having attended the course in September, it was remarkable just how much some of us had forgotten. We are lucky to have a firefighter in our ranks whose training is far more current than our own to help guide us through. If anyone needs to be strapped into a stretcher in the coming weeks, I am right on it.

Given my exertions over the last few days, it is more likely that I will need the stretcher. I am not sure you can strap yourself in.

February 25th – Wednesday

I am inventing a new national day – Say Rude Things about Weather Forecasters Day. February 25th is the day.

Having listened attentively to Radio Pasty yesterday tell me that there would be rain in the morning I was expecting the rain that we had this morning. Being told two days earlier that today would be filled with sunshine and loveliness is neither here nor there. The rain must have been so brief in its attendance that it had completely gone away by the time I got the girls out the door first(ish) thing. There was a little bit more beach this morning to run around on. There will be even more tomorrow and the day after that as we slip towards neap tides.

We were informed yesterday that after the morning rain went through, we would have a better afternoon. Since that is all we have to go on, I made plans to head to The Farm with the Missus and the girls as soon as I had finished my gymnasium session and had some breakfast. The Missus would concern herself with counting the stock and I would go about pumping the water from cabin IBC number two to cabin IBC number one – the one sitting proudly on a rock steady, granite filled gabion cage. What could possibly go wrong, I hear you ask, dear reader.

Well, the first thing was that the weather did not seem to be improving all that much, although it was not raining at least. There was some mizzle about, and we could no longer see across the bay which was not a good sign. We were also later than I imagined starting and when the clock ticked around to midday, I stirred myself with super-human effort and headed up to The Farm on my own with the two girls in tow.

The mist was thicker up the top and there was seemingly more damp in the air than I was expecting. It was still mild and very humid which was probably much to do with a southerly breeze drawing its air from northwest Spain. It did not seem very Spanish when it got here and far less so later in the afternoon.

Undeterred, I hauled the pump out of the tool shed and the heavy duty battery from the cabin. That reminds me that I have not charged it for a while and I should top it up before the shop opens. I set the pump doing its thing and retired to the store room to start counting things. The girls, in the meanwhile, dashed off somewhere unseen. They do not get into too much trouble up there and I check on them, if I can find them, every now and again. I noted though that the mizzle was getting heavier but not enough to be concerned with.

The stock take always takes longer than you think. There are quite a few full boxes with volumes on the side which are easy to count. If the boxes are open, each item

inside needs to be removed and counted. The real bug bear every year is the clothing, mainly swimsuits and shorts, that need to be not only counted by identified by size also. They are mainly the sizes that we cannot get rid of and accumulate each year, such as size bleddy 16 ladies cotton shorts. Some of the packets that had been counted last year had labels on the side that saved me counting individually. Some, though, I was not sure that we had not dipped into and had to be counted again.

I nearly finished one side of the store, the most difficult part, and slow because I kept nipping out to check on the girls and the status of the pumping. Each time I went out, the mizzle seemed heavier. ABH was doing alright but was not looking happy about it but BB, cold and bedraggled, had taken shelter in the truck and was clearly keen to go home. As indeed was I at this stage. I had to wait until the pumping was complete, although each time I went over to check it, BB felt compelled to come with me, so I tried not to do it too often.

As soon as the water transfer was complete, I packed up and bundled the girls into the truck. The mist was as thick as a bag but seemed to be confined just to the highest point of the village, which just happens to be the church and our field. Although there was mist all around, it was not as thick and down in The Cove it was just on top of us like a thick blanket.

The girls took some drying off when we got back and after, we settle in for a peaceful evening. Close on teatime I had a call from the chap who had responded to our call for a man with tractor to trim the hedges of the lane to The Farm. It had been on my mind since he first made contact because the brambles and the gorse were scating geet scores down the paintwork of the truck every time we went up there. Our man was clearly coming our way after finishing work and I agreed I would go up and meet him thirty minutes hence.

He was a young and most affable chap with a geet tractor I doubted would get past the first corner of the lane. He left the tractor on the double yellow lines at the entrance to the lane, engine running and suggested that we amble down the track so he could see what was what. He told me a great many things as we walked together, such as the huge machine, the size of a small house and probably the price of one, pulling parsnips in an adjacent field, came all the way from Cullumpton to do the job. He told me a great many things on the way back as well.

I had expected him to tell me all was well, or not, and he would come back another day to do the job. However, he said he would do it there and then, so I paid the man and asked if he was alright to do it again in another six months or thereabouts, which he was. I left him to it as I really did not want to see quite how he got his big machine down the lane. I suspected that as much of the foliage would yield to the tractor as the flail attached to it. When I looked at our cameras later, the job took the best part of an hour to complete.

After a day of spoiled expectations, having the lane trimmed was a welcome success. Earlier, I had called the company in Camborne that was going to look out roof sheets for us. They have them in and have no reserved some for us. They are longer than I hoped and will have to collect them. At three metres they are as long as I am willing to load onto the roofbars of the truck, although I do not relish driving back on the A30 dual carriageway with them. I shall have to gird my loins for that one as well as rigging up a Heath-Robinson roofbar for the back section of the truck – the last one rusted off.

I am really looking forward to the relatively stress-free running of the shop after we open at the end of March. I can hardly bleddy wait.

February 26th – Thursday

Well, that is it. The lights are going out all over Cornwall and one thing we can say is that we will no longer be doomed and not in a good way. The news today is that Molson Coors, the owners of Sharps Brewery, are planning to close the plant because it is no longer financially sustainable. It surprised me greatly as I knew that Doom Bar, the flagship brew, was sold all over the country and in Tesmorburys, too. Perhaps I should have read more into the fact that for the last couple of years we had been unable to get the very popular cans of their Offshore Pilsner. The excuses I had were that they reserved production for the draught market during the summer months because they could not brew enough to keep up with demand. That was the writing on the wall, and I missed how big it was written.

There is some hope that the brands might be saved. After all, Skinners was resurrected after a period of near certain extinction. Perhaps there might even be a management buy out that would save at least some of the 50 job reportedly at risk. However, if a giant like Molson Coors struggled to make it pay, independence might be a little too hopeful.

I had hoped to make a quick dash to The Farm in the morning. After our visit late yesterday, we had left the gate open so our man in his tractor could turn around. Somehow, he managed to turn the beast of a tractor around without coming into the field – I saw it on the CCTV. He left the gate open, though. I had also not replaced the tap on the IBC. The integral one leaks a bit and left too long, and the IBC will empty and waterlog the ground. I suppose the ground is waterlogged anyway and the IBC will probably fill quicker than it empties with the rain we are having. With my luck we would have a drought for the next three months. In any case, the Missus had an appointment in the morning, and I thought I could not get up there. As it happened, she was back sooner than I thought and I did my quick dash with time to spare.

Today was all about our friend's shuffling off ceremony. The service was up at Camborne crematorium, a place that has been caringly crafted in the hill to the north

of the town, and a wake or gathering at the F&L afterwards. We had originally been offered a lift by ex-Head Launcher, but when we considered it, we had to drop the girls up at Mother's and a neighbour had asked for a lift, so we rearranged. It meant, once again, arriving at the event in a truck slightly shabbier than Steptoe and Son's horse and cart.

I had asked on Tuesday what dress code we would adopt as a good number of us would form a guard of honour at the event. Some bright spark, who will be forever held to account, suggested RNLI shirt and our new RNLI gilet. I am willing to accept that he would not have known, even by looking at the weather forecast, that we would be experiencing the worst weather this week and quite possibly for the month. It has started with a light shower or two halfway through the morning and as we drove eastwards, the rain became heavier and more persistent. It was, in short, fair lashing it down at times.

I was comforted, as we left The Cove, that it was, at least, not very windy. I am sure that you can imagine my disappointment as we descended into Mount's Bay to see the daffodils on the verges near flattened in a strong southerly gale. It also did not escape my attention that the lovely crematorium set in the hill north of Camborne was south facing. I also drew comfort from the knowledge that as I stood there, honouring the hearse as it passed, head bowed in a 40 miles per hour gale of wind that was lashing the rain against my backs, neck and seeping through my trousers that I was not alone. It was some consolation, then, that the guard of honour had been allocated seating at the front of the warm and dry chapel.

One of the things that I find most uncomfortable about such events is that as we spill from the chapel afterwards, we all stand in awkward little groups. We mill about agonising over what sort of condolence we should offer but above all wondering when it is acceptable to leave without appearing disrespectful. Happily, the weather and the lack of shelter made the decision easy for many, and the congregation dispersed very quickly after the event.

The rain had seriously upped its game during the service. It continued long into the night. It was not the best to be detouring on our way back but were short of fish for tea tomorrow and needed to visit a couple of fishmongers in Penzance and Newlyn. Newlyn was necessary because the fishmonger in Penzance did not have what we wanted.

Normally, to get to Newlyn from Penzance we would have driven along the Promenade after crossing the Ross Bridge which is no longer there. To compensate, the much maligned council has set up a what can only be described as a Machiavellian diversionary route which, even if you are familiar with the roads, is nigh on impossible to follow mainly due to other diversions along the route. As if that were not confusion enough, the much maligned council has licensed road works, one with three-way traffic lights, at multiple points along the diversion route. I could have been well into my second pint at the F&L – should I have been flush enough to

afford such a thing – in the time it took to complete the journey. Thankfully, the fishmonger in Newlyn had what we wanted.

We eventually made it to the gathering at the F&L, somewhat damp and in the company of two faithful hounds, where it was still busy with mourners enjoying lively conversation. We did not tarry long. We could not penetrate far into the crowd to meet people because the two faithful hounds made that impossible. We dallied on the periphery and chatted to a few people there that we knew and waved to others if we caught their eye. It was a fitting send off for a popular fellow. Later, someone sent around a photograph of the Land's End signpost where they had arranged their own tribute to the photographer who had spent a few decades serving the public there.

We bolted the doors when we arrived back home not intending to venture out again, save for the girls' last walk. It was still tipping it down even then, so I whisked them quickly around the back of the shop for a functional visit before retiring for the night. The rain was heavier today than earlier in the week when weather warnings were in place. Quite how we escaped without one today, will remain a mystery because it was a serious lump that swept across the whole of the Westcountry on its way east. We are hoping for better tomorrow but that is also a mystery because the forecast has the same pictures that today showed except with a northerly breeze. As ever, I shall have to look out of the window in the morning.

February 27th – Friday

As I browsed through my messages this morning, I noted one from the Deposit Return Scheme. This is the organisation charged with introducing the system of allowing customers to bring drinks cans and bottles back to a retailer to reclaim a deposit paid when they purchased the drink. The retailer then puts the filthy container into a sack and stops serving other customers while the shop fills up with used containers not collected by the organisation. It is a method of reducing the number of independent shops so that only Tesco and Morrisons are left.

Obviously, I am all for the scheme that will recycle millions of drink containers because traditionally people have been too bone idle to recycle them for themselves. I am sure that the millions of pounds invested in the scheme will prove massively worthwhile.

I nearly missed the newsletter in my inbox because it was called Exchange for Change. Is the result of the first year of operation and several millions of pounds wisely spent on making the service happen. The organisation has spent the first twelve months of its existence in making sure all the most crucial work has been done to provide an effective service. They announced last month after exhaustive efforts, long hours, free coffee and biscuits and a national tour that they had chosen a new name that "... reflects the scheme's core purpose – a simple exchange where

people return their empty drinks containers to reclaim their deposit – and the wider impact that simple action has in reducing litter and keeping communities clean.”

Having nearly exhausted themselves and probably the budget on deciding a name, they then spent a good deal more on the design of a logo. I imagine that they still had some loose change left of the expected £1.13 billion the scheme will cost to deliver – just deliver, not operate. Therefore, it was probably essential they had the best people on the job. To that end they also enlisted a further five executives, “further strengthening the organisation's capability across operations, corporate affairs, legal, people and technology.” Tugs at the heart strings, dunnit.

I am sure that they were not particularly overwhelmed with enthusiasm when the Welsh insisted that they included glass bottles in their scheme. I pity the small Welsh independent shops, similar in size to ours that will have to risk life and limb to deal with the inevitable heaps of broken glass the scheme will ensure. Everyone else, quite rightly, could see the problems with that.

Rant? I have barely got started. It seems to me that for £1.13 billion of our pounds someone could have invented drinks containers that evaporate after you empty them and saved all the trouble of recycling.

The best thing to do with things that are completely beyond your control is to ignore them entirely and, perhaps, take yourself off for an extended session at the gymnasium. I had already decided on the last visit that 2,000 metres on the rowing machine was too tame and that I ought to extend it a bit. Today, I added a further 500 metres with the aim of moving to 3,000 metres during next week, although the appointments and tasks next week are ramping up alarmingly and I may have to forego the gymnasium entirely to fit everything in. Casting that aside for the time being, I also added some extra weighted squats and stair climbs.

The euphoria I felt after completing such a session was somewhat diminished when I stepped outside to discover that it was pelting down with rain. I had seen it coming and was glad that I managed to get the girls out first thing unscathed. It was, however, noticeable breezy, probably about the same as yesterday but this time from the north and there was definitely nothing Spanish about it today unless you wish to include the Inquisition.

I had hoped that once this lump was through, I would be able to get up to The Farm. I knew that there would be no point in restarting the stock count as the wind would be continually slamming the barn door or blowing a hooley through the gap if I managed to wedge it open. It would have been feasible, however, to roll the empty IBC around to the greenhouse end and connect it up to the two already there. By the time I finished my breakfast and had another look at the rain radar, it was clear that all bets were off.

Quite why this lump of rain, much heavier than we had experienced for some while did not warrant a rain warning, mystifies me. Yesterday alone there was more rain falling on us in a single day than we had for a while. When the lump today had finished with us, we would have had nearly an inch of rain in 24 hours.

It really did come in with a vengeance, slapping against the windows with increasing degrees of ferocity as well as velocity. The Missus had ventured out to collect Mother and to detour via St Just on the way back while the rain was still in its infancy. I battened down any hatch I could find and involved myself with recording the stock I had listed so far at The Farm on our inventory system. I had become so engrossed that I would have forgotten about taking the girls out complete had ABH not come to remind me.

As luck would have it, she had alerted me at precisely the time we had hit a gap in the huge lump of rain that was passing over us. It was barely raining at all for half an hour or so and we took full advantage of the cessation. We were not so lucky in the late afternoon and kept ourselves to a short functional run only.

The temperature had dropped quite dramatically at the onset of the weather and the northerly breeze served only to make it feel colder still. Even with our new insulation, the difference is noticeable inside and probably added to psychologically with the wind howling and the rain lashing on the windows. At some point during the afternoon, our large commercial bin made a bid for freedom, dragging the domestic wheely bin with it. We have had stronger winds from the north, this one peaked at 45 miles per hour, but for a change, we were exposed to the full force of it. I met one of the ladies what swim late in the afternoon when I dashed down for some forgotten teatime supply. I told her that there was little point in running down to the Harbour when she could merely stand in the street for the same effect.

When it came time for Mother to go home, she wrapped herself up like Nanook of the North only to find out when we opened the door that the rain had stopped. It was still breezy, so she did well to cover up.

I am hoping for a truce tomorrow when we can head up to The Farm and finish off the immediate tasks at hand. Next week will be a helter skelter with little time for niceties and thereafter a headlong rush to shop opening. I can hardly wait; I could do with a rest.

February 28th – Saturday

Fortunately, no semi-governmental organisations sent me any messages this morning. I am sure you are as pleased as I was about that, dear reader. I did not even get any bills but there again, it is the weekend.

My mood was instantly lifted when I looked out of the window to see that some blue sky had sneaked into The Cove. I am not sure that I was expecting it to look quite as good as it did, but I had at least expected a small weather window that would allow us to finish off another couple of tasks at The Farm. I did note, however, that while the morning looked conducive, the afternoon appeared to be laced with rain. We would have to get out in the morning, for sure.

BB did her bit to start the day off in the right form by waking me up early. It was in fact very early and I encouraged her to wait a while which she did. The next time she climbed all over me it was later than I would have liked but at least there would be no gymnasium to get in the way this morning.

There was still a bit of breeze around when we headed to the beach, but it was nothing compared to the previous night, and it had moved to the south again. Over the last few days, I have been taking care to check the beach before I let the girls loose. One day earlier in the week, there were clear signs that a seal had come and gone. It had not beaten us by more than an hour judging by the tide. I suppose that it should not have been too much of a surprise given that the sea had been in endless turmoil of one sort or another for the best part of six weeks. The poor dears must be fair knackered fighting their way around it.

Before we headed off to The Farm, I took some time to visit our neighbour up the hill. We keep in touch via text messages every now and then and I felt that it was high time I paid her a visit. I do not like to go up empty handed as I know how much it frustrates her being unable to return the favour. She tried to pay me off with a bottle of wine later, which I refused. She is not getting off that lightly and, besides, we do not drink wine. It was only coincidence that I had anything to bring with me. We had run out of butter at home, so I had the dairy drop some off along with some ham, bacon, eggs and natural yoghurt. I ordered extra and took some up with me.

The visits are always a convivial and full of confusing and obtuse, light-hearted banter. I took BB with me – ABH wanted to stay behind – which added to the utter mayhem. I managed to escape without the wine, and I will try and get up again before the shop opens again.

By the time I came back, the Missus was ready to head up to The Farm. We only had the rest of the stock take to do and while the Missus was doing that, I would roll the empty cabin IBC around to the greenhouse and install it. We set the girls free to roam and attended to our respective tasks. The plan was that I would go back to the store after I was done to lend a hand.

My job was almost as easy as I thought it would be - almost. I had to wait initially because I had failed to check that the IBC had emptied. It did not take long to do so once I opened the tap to let out the residue and even less time to roll it around to the end of the greenhouse. It should have been a five minute job to connect the hose coupling but I had forgotten that the tray under the tap needs to be cut away so that

it fitted. It took longer to fetch the angle grinder and multitool than it did to actually do the job. Once done, I fitted the coupling and turned the taps. The tanks connect at the tap at the bottom of each IBC, so it takes a little while for the water to flow between the tanks and find its own level. I left them to it and was satisfied that the small drip on the new fitting meant that it was working.

I headed back to the store. I had not quite finished the wall I had started and some of the notes I had made did not make sense and needed checking. The Missus was already steaming ahead and had finished a wall and a half. Having finished with the clothes on my side, I went ahead of her to finish the last wall. This only left the 'slides' beach shoes, which are numerous and a pain to count and the windbreaks, which are legion. I had forgotten that we bought a job lot of the little ones because they were so cheap. This was from the company that shutdown at the end of last year. I did not know that at the time, so the reduction now made sense.

Before we left, I went back to the IBC to check that the levels were, erm, levelling and was surprised that they were not. I did not think it would take that long and imagined an air lock or some such technical issue. It was indeed a technical issue. Some eejit had turned a tap the wrong way preventing the water from entering the empty IBC. I shall have to trust it worked out after we left.

Thus complete, sort of, we packed up including the girls who had somehow managed to avoid any unpleasant country accessories and headed back home. I could not quite bring myself to do the data entry, which I will save for Monday or maybe Sunday afternoon. Instead, I treated myself to a cup of tea followed by a refreshing zizz.

As we arrived back, the expected rain seemed to arrive. I did not pay much attention as we were home but after exhausting a few spots it appeared to come to nothing. We might have had longer at The Farm should we have wanted it but the tasks I have left need supplies first – except the tractor which probably needs someone with more mechanical skills than I possess.

It was not until later, when I wanted to take the girls out for a late afternoon spin, that the proper afternoon rain appeared – of course, it did. I kept an eye on its approach not wanting to take the girls too early or when it was likely to rain. I left it as long as I dared and took them to the beach. There was not a great deal of it, the high water only just receding but at least the flogging over the wall had stopped. As with our walk earlier, BB insisted that we extend our time out by walking around the block on the way home. We were starting to see a few flecks of rain, but I was in full metal jacket waterproofs, so what did I care. There was no need to bother as we made it back in plenty of time.

We even avoided the third heavy lump of rain in consecutive days when we went out later. There was some rain in the air as the last of it headed east but not enough to worry about. I have not bothered with looking at a forecast tomorrow, mainly

because it will show showers all day regardless and also because I would hate to spoil the surprise.