

DIARY 2021/22

January 1st – Saturday

There appears to be an expectation that today should be different in some way. It is a new year. It must be different from the last one. I suppose it is psychologically inflicted and a huge disappointment when we discover that today did not feel remotely different from the day before. I had a little flutter on the Lottery last night, it being New Year's Eve and all. I had won £5 on the National Lottery last Saturday and assumed I was on a roll. I did win again, spending my £5 win for a £2.90 win. Yes, that is about the same as normal.

Even the weather was much the same to start with but by mid morning, it was starting to look quite 'ansum. I still could not see Cape Cornwall but, up above, vast amounts of blue sky were opening up. It had all the hallmarks of the foundations of something of a day of splendour. The Cove held its breath.

While there was no breathing going on I found the answer to the question, 'how do you entertain a grumpy shopkeeper early in the morning?'. Apparently, all you have to do is to try and get a St Bernard dog into the back of a car when he would rather be outside it. I watched a couple, parked opposite, try treats, encouragement and subterfuge all to no avail. It took about ten minutes by which time I was on the floor, holding my ribs in. One effort involved running the dog around the car, perhaps to fool him into thinking it was a different boot he was getting into but this dog was definitely not daft. It was not as if the dog was distressed by the notion. He clearly just wanted to play a different game to that one. He went at the end of much bounding and pulling with just a little help to get his hind quarters on board. What jollity.

While it was still quiet and I could hide my disappointment, I checked the New Year's honours list. There is a British Empire Medal heading this way, I see, to the lady at the top of Gwenver who makes all the chutney. I do not think she was awarded for her chutney but has many other good works under her belt. She is also on the Cliff Team here, so many congratulations. I will have to tug my forelock next time I see her – after I have managed to grow one, of course.

The promise of a bit of sunshine early on lured out the unsuspecting and we had a bit of early pasty business. It was then around the middle of the day that the low cloud and mist made a reappearance, blotting out the blue sky and heralding a wave of dampness in The Cove. Happily, this did not precipitate a mass exodus, especially as the brightness came and went as the afternoon continued. I suspect that it would have taken some weather to evict the horde dispersed on the shortening width of beach. Instead, the tide did the job a few hours later.

The sea had not really let go of its angry man status for the last several days, although it did a good job of masking it now and again. There had been a heavy swell lurking out there during the lower part of the tide and, come the push, it started to charge in. The surfers did alright with this for a while but near high water it was all shore break and nothing out the back. It was lumping up the cliffs opposite and exploding over the rocks under the Beach car park in spectacular fashion and no doubt soaking a sock or two.

By half past two, with The Cove packed to the brim with visitors, the last of the pasties were in the oven and all was roughly, alright, sort of, with the world. We could have done with the double yellow lines being in force for this fortnight as the road was packed solid and at the far end and traffic disrupted. Sadly, too, we had a bit of mask wars on the last day but we found some common ground: they said they were not going to shop with us and I agreed with them. Frankly, dear reader, I do not give a care, we sold every one of our pasties with just one hour left of business and that was good enough for me. We had some sausage roll wastage, but I can live with that.

With the sun dipping in the west and treating the mist to a bit of a sepia rinse, we were blessed with the sight of a flock of oystercatchers taking flight across the front. They were flying to the left, which clearly meant that I should close the shop and make a sacrifice to the beer gods. It would have been so wrong to ignore an omen of such clarity, so I sacrificed heartily.

January 2nd – Sunday

The weather seemed to have turned a little bit when I came face to face with it at the top of the Harbour slipway. It is possible that the wind came around to the west a little more and was more obvious this morning. It was even more obvious later when it came around to the west properly.

It was exceedingly pleasant not having to get up in darkness and the bleddy hound kindly waited until the first glimmers of light seeped into the bedroom before getting me up. I even remembered to unset my alarm, so I was undisturbed until then, too. It was even more pleasant not having to open the shop. I am quite exhausted after just a week and a bit of it thanks to the continually having to remind people about mask

wearing and steeling myself in case my requests were countered by ill-feeling. Once again, it is only now that we have stopped that I have realised the enormity of it and have concluded that I lost the battle, war and peace. If masks are still mandatory when we reopen, we will just cry havoc and let everyone get on with it. It is just too costly, else.

Having returned from the beach with the bleddy hound I was able to take note of the brightness of the day in prospect. Ten minutes later, it all went grey and dark and rain fell from the sky. Well, it probably did somewhere a long way west of here, but it arrived here from the left, rather than the top. I did not take an awful lot of notice of it because I did not have to go out. It certainly kept the numbers down while it was here.

The Sennen Cove Café is still stalwartly bashing on, so I took around some of the bread and milk that we would have thrown away. They did not have quite the day of it that they and we had yesterday, however. It was busy but not a patch on the crowds that were here then. Later, when I took the bleddy hound around – when I eventually managed to persuade her off the sofa – there were quite a few people around to look at the stormy sea. Again, the waves were charging into the bay and in the Tribbens, some quirk of the topology sent the wind back against the waves there, blowing the caps off them. The car park wall was lined with eager camera buffs snapping pictures of the waves as they danced and leapt over the Harbour wall. In the Harbour itself, the sea was fair boiling and swirling and it is supposed to be sheltered in there.

Despite having a free pass today, I did some more work on our orders for the coming year. It is a bit more productive than sitting in front of the television set even if there was anything there to watch. Everyone I have spoken to has decried the lack of quality content on any of the terrestrial channels. Even on the streaming services the cracks are beginning to show. As Prof said, it is likely the gap in continuity occasioned by the dreaded lurgi and all the production companies are playing catch up. In the meantime, the immediate space appears to be being filled by easily churned out, low grade paperback fiction and crass game shows. There is the occasional gem on offer, and I confess to having stayed up late last night so that I could binge-watch the last few episodes. It was Prof who alerted me to its arrival, so thank you for that. The trouble is I now have to find something else to watch.

Such are the trials of modern living. Any day now we will be going back to toiling on the land, like in olden days. We will hire the mini-digger to start with to level the soil and get the tractor mowing the long grass, before turning on our solar powered kettle for a cup of tea while we peruse the Internet for planting schedules.

January 3rd – Monday

There was some more grey around today making the whole world look monochrome. If these days did not happen, I imagine we would not appreciate the sun and all the magic of colour that comes with it quite so much.

The very best thing about today, or at least the morning part, was that it felt so clean and fresh. It was hardly what you might call cold, although the temperature has taken a tumble over the last few days, and the breeze out of the west somewhere was still quite robust. Standing on the slipway and down on the beach, however, it was good to be out in it.

I made it down to the gymnasium for the first time in a week and found that no rust had set in at all. In fact, I had a lively and blistering session that left me invigorated for the rest of the day – apart from an hour in the middle of the day when I had a little zizz. This was not really a surprise as I had just finished, at last, the beachware order and sent it off and started to look at electrical points. If anything is going to send a person to sleep it is looking at electrical sockets.

There is, what I thought was going to be, a minor project on the cards to put in place an additional ring main in the living room to cater for all the audio visual and computer equipment tucked into one corner of it. I took some time out one day to count them all and there are 29 individual bits of kit including the television, recorder, AV receiver, computer, network drive, screens, routers and the telephone bits. They take the amperage on the circuit in the worst case to near its maximum, which is a little too close for comfort. The plan is to run an additional ring main from the consumer box at the back of the building, to the living room at the front to share the load. An electrician has already been tasked with the job but could not do it until this month, so I thought that I had best get in with a bit of planning and it is fortunate that I did.

We had thought that the biggest task was the running of the cable because it means emptying the loft, lifting the boards up there before any cabling can even be thought of. When I sat down today to think the whole project through, I came to the conclusion that the cabling across the loft might actually be the easy bit.

It makes sense that some, probably around a third of the equipment remains on the original circuit. Everything else will go onto the new. Currently, everything is plugged into extensions, which while safe, is not ideal. This will mean adding an extra six sockets, properly wired in, to the existing circuit and making twenty new sockets available on the new circuit but in two locations. The cables will have to run through the first ten, go onto the other ten and come back again. The two cables also need to run up to the ceiling, up the window frame, in trunking that is already full.

I have looked at dado trunking into which sockets can be incorporated but it will need to run behind my desk and the clearance is insufficient; I suspect the desk – here when we bought the place – was made for its current location. Ten double sockets are an option but I suspect that they will not look terribly aesthetically pleasing and

will have to have minute lengths of trunking running between them. I have so far only spent a few hours on this and wish I had started a long time ago.

My train of thought was interrupted quite sharply by the tone of my Lifeboat pager going off. It took me a moment or two to remember that it was that making a noise as it has been remarkably silent for some considerable time – 21st November to be precise. The initial call was for the Inshore boat, but the pager went off again asking for the big boat, too.

A quick look at the bay suggested that it was probably for a surfer in trouble. The bay was a boiling pot of huge waves and white water but possibly surfable if you were that kind of desperate. The other thing that struck me was that I was glad it was not me being asked to jump into a small rubber boat to go and save someone and the next thing was that it was going to be super tricky to launch the boat in the first place because we were pushing in towards high water. When the tide is in the boat has to be launched from the slipway, which forces the bow of the boat into the water at an angle. In calm water that is not too bad but with big waves thumping in, another matter altogether.

I was half way down the slipway when a crew member came charging after me to tell me that we had been stood down. The bodyboarder, caught in a rip out the back had managed to get himself out of trouble and taken back in by a wave rather than back out by the rip. It was a happy result for all and at least the tooltrak had a bit of a run even if the Inshore engine had not and it reminded the crew where the Lifeboat station was.

Having returned the boat to the shed, I went home to put my feet up. I would think no more of electrical sockets and where they might go until three o'clock in the morning when I could jump out of the bath shrieking Eureka! What I might be doing in a bath at three o'clock in the morning, especially as we do not have a bath, might be left to history to decide but at least I will know where my electrical sockets are going.

January 4th – Tuesday

The first thing that the Missus did when she woke up this morning was to book in the mini-digger for The Farm. It is arriving early doors tomorrow. At least she did not need to go outside. The first thing I did when I got up was to dodge the showers when I took the bleddy hound out.

We were lucky enough to miss the rain but there was no dodging the fierce northwesterly, screaming in across the bay. The temperature had dropped significantly from yesterday and the wind just added an extra edge. One minute we were basking in sub-tropical air and the next I was freezing my knees off down in the Harbour. Oddly, I felt a lot less cold in my shorts first thing than I did later in my big

boys' trousers. Maybe it is something to do with the cold fabric flapping against your legs.

I am sure that I was very much warmer than the two ladies I met down on the beach in the middle of the day who were going in for a dip. One of these, and I met her yesterday as well, was our latest BEMist whom I heartily congratulated. I was wearing a woolly hat with a peak on it, so at least I was able to doff my cap at her. I did not repeat it today as I believe you only have to do it once and after that 'alright, missus' or 'ow do lady' will suffice. I asked them to wait until I was off the beach before they dived in as I was quite chilly enough without witnessing ladies going in for a dip in swimsuits.

The sea state had changed quite a bit from yesterday. There was still some ground sea running but no big waves charging into the bay. Some of the last of the waves were coming over the wall first thing in the morning but it was a half-hearted effort and they had given up altogether by the afternoon. The direction of swell had changed and any waves left appeared to have been flattened out by the wind. Looking out as we closed in on evening, the sea state had drifted into the heavier side of 'choppy', speckled with white and dotted with gannets diving into it.

There was not quite a 'eureka' moment in the middle of the night, but the plan for the new electrical circuit did become a lot clearer. I will settle for dado trunking for the new circuit outlets that will be hidden behind the television, although one length will be the other side of the partition. For clarity, the dado trunking is the sort you see at dado rail height around offices, dotted with power points and computer outlets here and there. The additional six outlets will be on the front wall, somehow, by expanding the end of the existing ring main. The real bugbear is the computer and screens that sit in the corner to which the only solution I can think of is going to be an extension lead. The only other thing I can think of is to kick out another plank from the modesty panel on the desk and install a couple of double outlets there. Anyway, our local electrical supplier has the necessary items and I will drop by later in the week.

It is only the first week in January and we are already being inundated and flooded with conflicting tasks. The digger is coming tomorrow, first thing, the tree needs to come down while the weather is with us – tomorrow morning – and I have an urgent appointment at the gymnasium in the morning. I really need to be pressing ahead with the electrical work and a big bag of seeds arrived this morning that need to be planted. It will be good to start the season in the shop again for a rest, I suspect.

There was not much doing anything today. The early rain blew through quite quickly, which was no surprise being chased by the breeze we had. It took some will-power to convince myself to take the bleddy hound out in the early part of the afternoon. We are going to have to man-up if we are going to meet our commitments as the weather for the rest of the week hardly looks like it will be kind in any way.

We were grateful for the day off today but tomorrow we will need some commitment.

January 5th – Wednesday

Crickey! My feet barely touched the ground today but at the end of the long, long day, I am not entirely sure that I got very much done.

We were told that the mini-digger was going to be delivered early because the driver had to be away from his first job in St Buryan before the road closed at nine o'clock. We are not entirely sure which road was being closed as it was the first we heard of it but since we were not due there until later, we did not bother to find out. In any case, someone had to be up early to go and meet the delivery person and as the bleddy hound needed walking and feeding first, early was much earlier than is generally comfortably on a cold winter's morn. Oh, and someone was me – again.

I was also dressed for the gymnasium that I intended to get to after receiving the digger, but happily there was not the slightest breeze to ruffle the hairs on my legs and although it was considerably colder than yesterday, it probably did not feel much like it. I rather confused my weather forecasts and was expecting a bit of a south west blast when I arrived at The Farm and had dressed accordingly by putting my DIYman overalls over my gymnasium gear. For those who know, overalls are the thing to wear in chilly weather. Warm as toast in overalls, unless you intend standing about for an hour and a half, then all that happens is you get colder a little later.

This was singularly apparent at The Farm where there was no breeze at all, thankfully, but it was still close to freezing up there. The solar gain that works so well in the cabin had solar lost and the greenhouse was similarly bereft of any warmth. Sadly, so too was the polytunnel, which I tried as the last resort because the polytunnel is always hot – but not today. There was only one thing for it and that was to work.

There is an area next to the greenhouse that we have earmarked for three IBCs – big plastic cubes for filling with water, lest you have forgotten – and it needs to be cleared and flattened. My inaugural effort with the strimmer did most of the clearing and I had hoped to use the digger to flatten it. In the absence of the digger, spade, fork and wrecking bar would have to suffice and what they lacked in finesse they made up for in effort. Effort equals heat – and exercise, which was a handy replacement for a gymnasium session that was slowly slipping away from me.

It was half an hour into my work and exercise effort when my bank manager telephoned. He had sent an electronic mail yesterday to ask when it might be convenient to talk and up until half an hour earlier, this morning would have been ideal. No matter, it was a general chat where he asks if everything is fine and dandy before he tries and sells me something. At the end of the call, the Missus sent me a message to tell me that the man with the digger was coming up the track.

Rather than bring his delivery truck up the slippery lane – the rain of late has done it no favours in that regard – he drove the 3 miles per hour top speed digger all the way up. He told me that he would prefer to walk back down the lane to get warm again, so rather than chase him down in the truck, I decided to wait for ten minutes. It seemed only reasonable that in that ten minutes I have a little play on the new toy, which probably turned into twenty minutes as I took time to change the bucket into something better for the job at hand – clearing the scrub along the hedge.

I had quite forgotten just how much fun it was and got rather carried away, I do confess. It was the Missus calling that brought me back to Earth asking if I could collect Mother and a prescription for her at the St Just clinic. The Missus was wrapped up in disassembling the outside Christmas tree, so it seemed only reasonable that I go instead. Added to this was a request to pick up some more red diesel from the supplier up that way, as some would be needed at some point for the digger. The round trip would take the best part of an hour.

We were into the afternoon by the time I returned with Mother in tow. With cold seeping into my boots, I really needed a cup of tea and a warm before resuming operations. It was near two o'clock by the time we were all free from various tasks. Mother was due to come back to The Farm with us in the afternoon but it was too cold up there to be sitting, even planting the seeds would not have kept her warm enough. Given that we only have the digger for a limited period, every hour counts, so we left Mother at home in the warm and I took the Missus to The Farm to do digging. I had other plans, which did not include standing up in the field watching the Missus play with the digger.

Eureka moments aside, I had a list of the various items we required for the electrics project. We have an account at a wholesaler in town and they had everything that I needed or thought that I did. A very pleasant man at the shop helped me find all that I had on my list, which, I have to admit, is a lot of guess work and supposition. My master plan is that I will put the finished article before a qualified electrician who will connect the last few ends and pronounce it safe or not. The whole process put me back at home just ahead of it being time to collect the Missus from The Farm.

She had pressed ahead quite rapidly along the back of the cabin. There was a big pile of cleared scrub behind the digger and a large area of flattened ground. She had discovered two telegraph poles that will be useful as roof supports, a few old vehicle tyres, piles of bricks and stones and a lost tribe of neolithic farmers – not really but I would not have been amazed if she had. We need to maintain this sort of progress, despite any weather, if we are to gain maximum benefit from the digger hire.

Not that I had much time to notice but the sea state in the bay had calmed completely from the last several days. Some smart Alec had noticed that this would be the case a couple of days ago and thought that it would be an excellent opportunity to put the Lifeboat in the water to see if it still worked.

We gathered in a relatively safe manner and learned all about the exercise planned for the evening. With sufficient crew, both boat would be deployed for a bit less than a few hours. Under the new regime, all exercises are pre-planned and numbered. Any crew taking part automatically gain a green tick on their training record for the jobs included in that number's exercise.

We were not exactly over-manned on the shore but had sufficient to just about cover all the bases. For some of the less experienced it was a good time to refresh memories of exactly how to launch and recover as it has been some time since we did it. Everything went remarkably well and other than the doors being a little sticky through lack of use – a state I associated with – there were no equipment problems. Given that we were close on high water, we set up the short slip for the boat's return and once done, did our main job of waiting.

Both boats arrived back at station at around the same time, which was not ideal for a short crew on shore. Consequently, we deliberately delayed the recovery of the big boat by putting the pick up line on the wrong side of the 'fishing rod' collection system causing the recover to be attempted a second time with the line corrected. To the uninitiated, this would have looked like an error but in our world, everything is meticulously planned and not at all a very carefully concocted untruth to cover up a cock-up. Honest, guv. So eventually, we brought the boat up the short slip in what was, technically, a textbook recovery with caveats. We are, after all, a very Machiavellian, very excellent Shore Crew.

January 6th – Thursday

Who would have thought that you could have so much fun in 50 miles per hour winds and lashing rain? All you need is a mini-digger and a field full of scrub and stuff.

I was not entirely sure what the game plan was when I first awoke other than the usual running the bleddy hound down to the beach, except we had to go around the block because the tide was in. It was a bit on the chill side but was not too bad outside in the fresh air. Perhaps I should have stayed outside. Anyway, the game plan became apparent after the Missus had discussed it with Mother who decided that it was not such a great plan to head up to The Farm today and she would stay inside – her place has warmth and heating. The Missus therefore decreed that she would spend the day in the greenhouse planting things and, for one day only and as a special favour that I should in no way become accustomed to, that I could run havoc with some digging.

Apart from wondering how I would end up paying for such largess, my first thought was that the weather today was set to be not all that pleasant. A quick look around the weather sites explained that it would be fearfully wet and be accompanied by a fierce south westerly wind. This combination is not ideal on a field that slopes down to the south and is very exposed to southwest winds. I have full metal jacket

waterproofs but these are intended for a wearer standing up and walking, allowing accumulations of rain to run off the fabric. They are definitely not designed for sitting on the plastic seat of a mini-digger, digging. Given that waterproofs designed for walking were all I had to protect me from wet stuff falling from the sky, these were therefore the attire of choice because, despite having a pile of electrical work to do, I was not going to pass up the chance of digging, no matter what.

It was already raining when we left for The Farm, although I had thought that the worst of it had piled through, silly me. I had made the additional error of putting on a thicker hooded sweatshirt over my mid layer and under my DIYman overalls and waterproof jacket. Because it is quite long it also increased the dimensions of my waist thus making the waterproof leggings very tight, difficult to move in and prone to sliding down my rear.

In the event, I was not that cold because despite the impression that sitting down working is not very strenuous, digging requires quite a bit of movement and frequent mounting and dismounting the machine to clear rubbish that it does not cope with very well, such as long planks of wood. The work centred around the area to the rear of the cabin, where the Missus started yesterday and, up to a point, this was relatively sheltered. However, the dumping area was very much exposed to the day's elements and the seated figure on the digger was an open target for high wind and horizontal rain.

It was not very heavy rain but issued in your direction at 50 miles per hours and for sustained periods, it does not matter how heavy it is or the efficiency of your waterproofs. It makes you wet. This is particularly the case if the individual is sitting in waterproofs designed for walking. Rain runs down with the assistance of gravity and collects at the lowest point, which given the angles and posture of my body, was my rear end. I did not notice too much just how wet my rear end was becoming until I stopped to have a cup of tea a little way into the afternoon.

However, by the time I stopped, I had made significant progress clearing the remaining area behind the cabin. I was particularly impressed that I had managed to clear and level the ground immediately behind the cabin without knocking the rear wall down with the swinging bucket, which is prone to sharp jerking movement if you press the levers too hard.

It takes a little while to get used to the movement of the bucket and the combinations of lever actions required to get it to do what you want. It is also remarkable how precise you can make the movements and also how easy it is to be imprecise at exactly the wrong moment through the loss of concentration at a crucial moment. Not only is concentration on the levers and the bucket required but also your spatial awareness, lest you reverse into something or swing the bucket into a delicate object you wanted to remain in the condition that it started in. Finally, there is the concentration on what you are digging up. This might include the large round tube

that was not another telephone pole but an oxygen cylinder, that I reversed away from rather rapidly.

The business end of the cylinder was buried, so I was not sure if it was potentially under pressure or not. It was also excessively rusty and while I was pretty sure that it would have had to be there several decades to rust to the point that it was dangerous because of it, I decided that today was not the day to test the theory. I dug it out by hand, discovered that the valve was still in place but ran out of time to take it further. I will have to look at that another day with a spanner to loosen the valve.

I could not proceed any further in the direction I was going and the plan is to start again from the other direction. In the way in that direction are the significant remains of the caravan that was the pitiful predecessor of the cabin. It now is no more than a chassis with the component parts of the walls, windows and contents piled on top of it. There is also another pile of bits right behind the polytunnel that will require moving very carefully. The tractor I refuse to call Poppy was the ideal instrument to attach the strop to and drag the chassis part out of the way. All that happened very smoothly once we had found the tow bar attachment for the tractor I refuse to call Poppy. We are now set to start the next bit. Given that we probably had an hour of daylight left, we had stopped for a cup of tea and my bottom was wet, we decided to call it a day and what a day it was.

As if even more could not go right, I decided to try out the leads that arrived yesterday. I now cannot recall if I described that I had purchased these from a foreign supplier, which various reviewers had suggested was an untrustworthy source, but I thought to give them a go anyway. The items were of low value and I could not get them anywhere else. They arrived today, as the company told me that they would. The idea is that we can use these to connect traditionally powered Christmas lights to the solar and rechargeable battery pack that came with the new lights we used this year. These were highly successful as if there was insufficient sunshine during the day to recharge the batteries, we could detach the packs and charge them on a computer. We were delighted that they fitted perfectly and need only to be soldered to the end wires of the traditional lights of a similar sort.

Flushed with such success, we had a celebratory toasted sandwich for tea and retired to bed. We know how to have a good time, I can tell you.

January 7th – Friday

It is remarkable just how quickly the sea state changes. On Wednesday we launched the Lifeboat into approximately calm seas and this morning, I could not quite make out if we had high winds or a big seas from the racket going on outside. It turned out we had both.

The Missus and I can clearly make some bad choices with what to do and where to be on our days out. Yesterday with the wind blowing in from the south west we chose to go up to The Farm where we got it in the face and today we chose to stay in The Cove with the wind hammering in from the west or west northwest. Ditto.

Actually, today's choice was much to do with having to take the truck into the garage for its new tyres. We had noticed just before Christmas how the tyre walls had been scuffed up by our regular runs up the rough track to The Farm. At least, that is what I assume ruined them. We ordered three new tyres but when the garage came to do the work, they added a fourth, which caused a bit of a delay while they waited for it to be delivered. As a bit of an aside, I have often marvelled at the garage trade where they can order parts on the fly which are delivered inside a few hours – true just in time delivery. I can understand the background to it, the servicing of multiple car types, the parts of which you could not possibly hope to have in stock all at once, but it has always struck me as super-efficient. Why can we not all have such a kick-bottom support network?

I had expected to wait at the garage for the work to be done but they had supplied a loan car, which it turned out was an eminently sensible plan. I took the digger key out of the truck when I left it, which seemed like a good idea at the time but afterwards when I worked out that we could not get to The Farm in the loan car, seemed completely daft. In any event, coming back home enabled me to go to the gymnasium, which was long overdue having scuppered Wednesday's visit and suffering a small amount of weight gain over Christmas.

This will no doubt alarm the Aged Parent, who on the last visit suggested that I looked pale and was having lost a fair few pounds in the last couple of years. This, by the way, is the same Aged Parent that pointed to my prodigious beer belly a while back and suggested that perhaps it was time to look after myself a bit better. Incidentally, the NHS website calculator for Body Mass Index suggests that I am overweight and that being at least four stones lighter (56 pounds or 25 kilograms) would be ideal. If I was four stones lighter, I would roughly resemble a person who had spent five years building a railway in Burma and would almost certainly blow away in the fifty miles per hour wind we had today.

Sorry, I digress. Now where was I? No, I have not got a clue, either.

Since the tyre changing had taken until the middle of the day to complete, I detoured on my return journey to pick up Mother. It is Mother coming around for tea day and to let her look at the big and crashing sea. By the time we got home it was merely picturesque, with white water covering most of the bay and especially around Cowloe and the footings of Pedn-men-du where latterly it was pounding up the cliff and smoking over the top. When I was on my circuit with the bleddy hound, there was a couple at the end of the car park, he poised with a camera to catch the next big wave coming over the top. I told them as I went by that the next wave to come over the top will be when he puts his camera down. He turned to speak to me, and I

imagined the irony of a wave coming over the top at that moment. I would have waited until I got around the corner before laughing though.

It was hard to take my eyes off it as we went amount our route. We met up with the bleddy hound's best pal on the back nine and I discussed with our neighbour just how spectacular it was. We watched as a particularly big wave over-topped Brisons. Earlier, it had exploded up Creagle almost to the top of the cliff there. This was one very mean sea a few days after spring tide, too.

After my wet bottom episode yesterday, I decided that I had best purchase a pair trousers that were designed for the job. The Internet does not return much useful information to a search string of 'trousers that keep your bottom dry on a digger', so I went to the same place where I got my work jacket that I have found to be very good. I did find and buy a pair that looked like they might do the job but without sitting in them on the digger in the pouring rain, I will not know for sure how they perform. We live in hope.

Much of this was putting off the moment when I had to buckle down to start wiring the sockets for the new circuit and the additional ones for the existing circuit. It is a job that I do not particularly relish. The main issue I have with it is that the cables are not very malleable, and they need to fit into ridiculously confined spaces inside the back boxes. Also, two cables need to fit into the one hole when the hole is clearly only designed for one cable. This requires the use of a third hand but even if you had one there is insufficient space for it to be deployed as you try and cram, twist and bend the various components together.

On the bright side, I discovered that the socket units fit side by side flush to each other, so I will not have to cut slender sections of trunking cover to fit into the gaps. In fact, if I cut the trunking to the exact length of three double sockets, I will not have to use any trunking cover at all. This is a very good result as I suspect cutting any width of trunking will exceed my exceedingly limited cutting-plastic-in-a-straight-line skill set.

With the time available to me, I managed to put three double sockets in a row. Do not get overly congratulatory, dear reader, as they are just three sockets in a row and not even in the trunking yet. I have a further three to do and a pair, by which time I may have retrieved the workbench from The Farm, the jigsaw and the multitool for cutting joining holes in the trunking. With all that in mind I think I may be subconsciously putting off going up into the loft to run the cable, which is still just a theoretical process not involving taking the floor up. I am, however, at this moment optimistic.

We are near enough back to normal dinners now and tonight a lovely bit of hake for me and Mother. The Missus had frozen fish in batter from Tesmorburs because it 'does not taste like fish'. The Missus hates fish.

January 8th – Saturday

Today was not a day for straying very far away from shelter. Even the bleddy hound knew this as we got as far as the Roundhouse for this morning's walk before heading back again in a bit of a hurry. She retired back to bed and I did not see her again until the early afternoon when it was time to go out again.

I had a number of administrative duties to perform which took a little time during the morning. There are bills to pay even when we are closed. Because we are closed, I am apt to forget them and we are busy doing other things and, well, we are closed. It takes a bit of effort to set out time to mop these things up.

The sea was still pretty ferocious despite having calmed down a lot from yesterday. At high water, great lumps of it were coming over the Harbour wall and with a bit of wind behind them, the waves were almost reaching the short slip. It was the rain, however, that was the major feature of the day and there was lots of it in varying degrees of heaviness in showers all the way through until the later afternoon. Someone I bumped into in the morning told me that it has been heavy in the night, too, so our butts and IBCs – big plastic cubes for holding liquids, in case you had forgotten, dear reader, from three days ago – will be full to overflowing. There was even some lightning towards the end of the afternoon, just one flash and one thunderclap as if to mark the end of hostilities. The skies cleared after that and the showers were very sparse. Up until then we had been in gloom and darkness for much of the day.

Behind me on the table during my administrative activities awaited the remaining double sockets to be wired up. It took a great deal of mental effort to turn myself around and start work on them. I do not know quite what it is about the work but it just is not very appealing and finishing it off, as I did today, means that I have to move onto the next more difficult bits of attaching trunking to the walls and running cable and connecting the cable with the double sockets in place. My made to measure desk will also need to be cleared and pulled out from where it is so that I can run trunking behind it. No, not much fun at all. In any case it will have to wait because while the desk is out I may as well connect up the extra points to the live existing circuit which means I will need a junction box, which I did not get when I bought everything else.

It seemed to me after being such a good lad in executing my electrical duty that perhaps I should stop for the evening and enjoy a beer. It was at this time that I remembered that I had not put any beers in the fridge. Oh.

January 9th – Sunday

It is difficult to think just how the weather could be even more miserable than it has been these last few days. It has certainly stuck the boot in regarding running amok

with the digger at The Farm, although it would have to try much harder than that to avert a session at the range, which went ahead as normal today.

I thought that perhaps we had caught a gap between the showers when I took the bleddy hound out, but it seemed that the showers were all loosely connected to each other. At least it was not pelting down when we went out and the bleddy hound must have felt that it was better than yesterday because we got as far as the car park before coming back again today. At the moment of driving up to the range, the weather saved its best, tipping a deluge of water at me, slanting in with the wind.

The rain was almost constant during the day, varied by intensity here and there just to keep it interesting. We all had to dash out into it every five minutes or so to reset targets, which we know, so we were all appropriately dressed. This time I chose a slightly thinner hooded sweatshirt, which was a good decision because despite the wet and the wind and standing around a fair bit it was not all that cold.

Today is shotgun day, which apart from requiring muscles like Charles Atlas to cart all the kit around, is also the noisiest day of shooting. We have half a day on shooting targets and the second half on shooting clay pigeons, which is all jolly good fun even in the rain and swirling mist. It is more problematic for centrefire and .22 shooting because the paper targets get wet and fall apart. It is also an extremely active sport and by the end of day in the gathering gloom, I was quite worn out.

It got so gloomy by the time the Missus dropped me back home that I paid no attention to the state of the sea. When I left several hours earlier, the sea was in renewed efforts to demonstrate just how angry it was. As we hurried into the car park there were explosions of white spray leaping into the air at the footings of Pend-men-du and across the bay, Creagle was getting a good pounding, too. I can only assume that it is subtle changes in the direction of wind and swell because sometimes all the outcrops along that line of cliffs are alive with waves crashing up them and often times just Creagle or Aire Point. Perhaps a university group finding itself at a loose end could undertake a study to determine exactly why that is the case.

The fates intervened late in the evening, clearly horrified that I had missed the sea state on my return from shooting and thought that I could do with a closer look. They arranged for a Lifeboat launch at nine o'clock or thereabouts to rescue a crabber out around eight miles northwest of us. It had become tangled on another boat's fishing gear and was stuck fast.

The sea state had in no way moderated from earlier in the day and there were large rolling waves coming across the bottom of the launch slip. It is not the first time we have launched in such conditions and once or twice in conditions much worse. The launch event calls for precision and co-ordination between Coxswain and Head Launcher so that the sliphook is let slip exactly on time so that the boat hits the water between larger waves. Unfortunately, on this occasion, a smaller wave slipped in between and the boat launched straight into that. There was a brief pause as the

boat slowed, then picked up again before punching through the rest of the oncoming sea and out through the gaps.

There was no way that the boat would be coming back to station after the job was done and would spend the night at Newlyn. I went to bed thinking about those boys tossed on a stormy sea. I hope I never have to repeat those sleepless two minutes again. We shall review the sea state in the morning for a recovery on the tide.

January 10th – Monday

I was not scheduled to have too much of an early morning but the Missus has set her alarm so that she could take Mother for an early appointment. This meant that the bleddy hound was awake, which meant that I was awake, too. It is the order of things and I have long since become accustomed to it.

There was, of course, the small matter of getting the Lifeboat back to the station and hopefully that was going to be at some point today. When I got the bleddy hound down on the Harbour beach, because we can for the first time in a few days, I had a look at the sea state on the short slip. High water would follow a couple of hours later but when I looked, it seemed that a recovery would have been doable between sets. I rather suspected then that we would attempt a recovery at high water and when I met with the luminaries of the station an hour later, so it was decided.

We do not need too many of us for a short slip recovery, although in poor weather it helps to have a spare or two in case we lose one. Because many people are at work some distance from the station, we were down to what was probably the minimum of four. We mustered at ten o'clock by which time the boat was ten minutes into her journey from Newlyn and we were near enough ready for the boat, ten minutes ahead of high water, which was ten minutes before it arrived. The last remaining activity was putting the fishing rod in place down on the tide line but before we could do that we needed to have a quick game of three card brag to decide who would go down and get drowned and take one for the team. In the end, three of us went down with the loser in front and the two behind there to laugh in case he fell in.

We had waited until the boat hove into view as that darned fishing rod has to be at the lowest point when the boat arrives. Too early and the water is too far down or too far up from the pole, depending on the direction of the tide. It took a couple of attempts to get the boat on the slipway in the correct position as it struggled with the swell and the current. The hook up took a mercifully short time and the boat was brought up the short slip in what was clearly a textbook recovery in adverse conditions. We are, after all, a very all-weather, very excellent Shore Crew.

The washing down took a little while to execute on deck. It was, after all, quite a rough trip that the boys had last night, exacerbated by being tied to a big lump of

steel fifty fathoms behind. There followed a lengthy fuelling up before a swift debrief could be had.

I retired from the station as soon as I could because the Missus was champing at the bit to get up to The Farm to start digging. I was to look after the bleddy hound while I got myself ready and had a morsel of croust before setting out on my errands for the day. Since the bleddy hound gets a bit nervous about her journeys into town – because it is in the direction of the veterinary doctor - we try and leave her with Mother if possible, which entails a diversion to St Buryan.

One of the reasons for heading into town was to pick up a cord pull for Mother's shower. The existing cord broke at the small plastic junction where the short cord from the rose ends and the cord for the owner's chosen pull cord starts. It is a common point of failure and I have no idea why you cannot purchase the item separately. Alright, scratch that. I just checked and they are available from the Internet auction website. I had expected bags of them to be available for a pound but they come in ones for more that I can get the entire unit. I bought an entire unit and threw away everything but the connector, which seems an awful waste.

I then travelled on to purchase a soldering iron and a work bench, as you can never have too many work benches and the one at The Farm has 'things' on it which was too tiresome to move. Before you castigate me for my laziness, dear reader, there is more to this than meets the eye. It is true that the work bench at The Farm has 'things' on it but on several occasions last year, I could have used a second for supporting long pieces of timber. The new one also has a lateral vice, and up until now I have had to make do with clamps, which clamp vertically. Having already thrown away a perfectly good pull cord switch, I thought that I had better explain myself.

My last detour was to the farm shop just outside Penzance. The Missus had requested some protective gloves as the ones she purchased on the Internet were too large. Although they fit me, the backs are pink so I shall not be wearing them and they will be thrown away – which is obviously a joke and not to be taken seriously at all. It does not matter that they are pink; I can dye them another colour.

In all, my shopping excursion, the detour to Mother's with the bleddy hound and the visit to diverse stores along with stopping at Mother's on the way back to fit the small plastic bit on the existing pull cord rose, took me longer than I had anticipated. It was getting dark when I left Mother's for The Farm and to pick up the Missus, which was much to do with the weather closing in and mizzle as thick as a bag. She was still digging when I got there, which I am unsurprised at because it is extremely addictive and should come with a warning on the side of every digger. The amount of space she has uncovered is huge, too. As if the field was not big enough already, we now have another to go with it.

I am now on the back foot as I achieved very little today. I will set to with a vengeance tomorrow. Honest, guv.

January 11th – Tuesday

The mist had refused to leave during the night and was still hanging around above The Cove when I went outside with the bleddy hound. I had been awarded the grand order of the lie in this morning, which I took full advantage of. Quite what I had done to merit such high reward, I have no idea. Perhaps she was just feeling a bit off today.

It was pretty mild for the time of year yesterday and that seemed to continue into today. It was hardly worth a jacket to head down to the beach especially as there was also hardly any breeze about either. There was, however, a modicum of dampness in the air, so I did not feel too badly about wearing mine.

I had every intention of moving forward with the electrical work now that I had all the required bits at hand. Before I got cracking on that I thought that I had best discover what I needed to do with the broken soldering iron as I did not want to drop it back tomorrow and find out that I should have dropped it back today. The reason I did not drop it back today is that the Missus had plans to head up to The Farm and therefore would need transport. I could have dropped her up there, but I had two people coming to see me one in the morning and the other in the afternoon that would make timing of being away from the shop tricky. In any event, the very pleasant man on the telephone told me that I could go back at any time in the next 30 days with my broken bit. It also made no sense to hurry because I had purchased the last soldering iron in the shop, so they could not replace it anyway and would have to order another.

With that detail resolved, I slipped into DIYman persona and headed downstairs. My immediate plans to start cutting up the trunking to the required length were scuppered by discovering that the work bench I had purchased required some construction before it was used. The unit came with a bag of nuts and bolts, some steel supports, height adjustable legs and some knobs and stoppers along with a folded over instruction sheet.

Most of the sheet was given over to safety warnings ensuring that I did not swallow the small screws or stick my fingers into holes too small for them or use the unit for purposes that it was not intended. It told me this in about six different languages together with the very sensible warning to keep away from small children. This left just one quarter of the available space on the sheet for a set of drawings showing how the construction of the unit should take place. Because this was in eight stages, each drawing, including some very detailed bits, were so small that they could easily be misinterpreted if they could be seen at all by the human eye.

It took me rather longer than I anticipated putting the work bench together and I was interrupted during the process by the first caller of the day. This was our bone china mug man whose visits are quite useful as he will tell us which designs are selling better than others and he also has lists of mugs not in the catalogue for one reason or another. I have pointed out before that we have been here so long now that we are seeing the grown-up children of customers who we met when we were first here. We must have surpassed even that longevity because the salesman today was the son of the original salesman we met when we first started and have seen most years since. If we start seeing grandchildren rock up to sell us things, I think we might take that as time to consider our retirement – part time, of course. We placed a healthy order because these mugs sell very well and always have done.

As if to prove the point, I was contacted while at Mother's yesterday by a very pleasant lady who was enquiring whether we had in stock a particular design of mug as hers had broken. I told her that I would return her call once I had been able to check the stock and did so yesterday evening. She asked when she might be able to view the mugs that we had left and I could see no reason, since she was in the locality, to refuse her and agreed to meet early this afternoon. Very politely, she arrived at the agreed time and purchased three mugs.

By the time the lady arrived I had done most of the work and only had a few lengths of trunking to slice off. Various holes will have to be cut into them to allow for cable runs but I decided to leave that until tomorrow as I had some calls to make before close of the business day.

One of the calls was to our business bank. I usually conduct all my business with them through the contact we have developed over the last couple of years because calling or emailing any other part of the bank is fraught with hardships. However, I had a letter asking if I should wish to change a facility I had with them, which I did, I should call the number specified, which I did. The request was very simple, to change an overdraft facility, so, in my innocence, I imagined the bank had furnished me with the change-your-overdraft-facility-number to make life simple for all of us. Au contraire, and how quaint of me to think so.

I spent the first five minutes learning that they were experiencing a high level of calls at present, how important my call was to them and how I may be recorded to assist in training their staff before being told that I would be placed in a queue. I momentarily removed the telephone from my ear to turn on the speaker so that I could place it on my desk while I waited and missed a very pleasant lady asking something.

Only having heard the last word, I called out 'hello' as you do to attract the attention of the caller and to alert them that there was someone at my end wish to speak with them. I was therefore quite surprised when a recorded voice replied, 'you want to talk about interest rates, is that correct?'. Well, no it was not, I thought, so I said so to which she answered that she was terribly sorry that she got it wrong and maybe I

could repeat my request of what I wanted to talk about. I told her 'overdraft change'. There was a pause before the very pleasant lady replied, 'is that a mortgage application, a business loan or private equity enquiry?'.

This, clearly, was not going well. I was beginning to suspect that the lady might have been speaking in English, but she might well have been listening in Swahili. Whatever the case, she had clearly given up on that particular tack and told me that she would have seven choices for me, which turned out that even in that wide field not one of them was relevant but at least I had the option of pressing a number rather than trying to communicate by voice.

Having not chosen any number offered me, the system admitted defeat and told me that I would be put through to an agent that I dearly hoped would be human. It did have one last try at automation and insisted that I enter my account identity number, which I did by chance know and my telephone banking PIN which I did not until she explained that it was the same as my digital banking PIN, which I did.

At last I spoke with 'Tracey' to whom I explained that I was quite exhausted, having just completed the twelve labours of Hercules to speak with her. She may not have quite gathered what I meant but at least she understood when I said 'overdraft'. That was, indeed, a small triumph that I should dearly savour because the next thing she told me was that because I have a 'relationship manager', I should really have placed the request with him. Yes, that distant sound of manic screaming that you probably heard fading into air, dear reader, was indeed me.

I hope to return with my sanity in tomorrow's exciting episode of everyday grumpy shopkeeper folk, clinging to hope in a distant coastal outpost of the realm.

January 12th – Wednesday

Well, we have not seen many of those of late: a completely clear sky, not a single cloud, a vapour trail nor wisp of any sort from horizon to, erm, top of cliff.

The obverse side of our clear sky delight was that it was a tad chilly. We noticed that the temperature dropped like a stone in the last few hours we were up last night. This morning it was exceedingly fresh and cold enough to make the cheeks sting a bit. I cannot say that it bothered the bleddy hound one iota and she certainly said nothing about it on our short excursion to the Harbour and back.

It was a day full of good intentions, much like the new year resolutions people make at the beginning of January but with a little more substance and slightly more immediacy. Mine were to complete putting the new electrical points out and to connect them all up despite this meaning pulling out the television and the custom built desk. The Missus had plans to head up to The Farm, early doors and had

entreated me to carry out my gymnasiuming at my earliest opportunity. How could I refuse such a pleasantly put request?

I was at the gymnasium at just after nine o'clock. I was going to say feeling the 'burn' but with the temperature being a few degrees lower in the hut with a tin roof the 'burn' was more of a slightly tepid glow. It was also extremely damp in there – there is a leak in the tin roof, so the moisture levels inside build up a bit. This meant opening the windows, although that actually increased the temperature inside as well as having the effect of airing the room. I still managed a blistering session, which given that I had missed Monday due to the Lifeboat recovery, was most welcome.

I had expected on my return to be bowled over by the Missus heading to The Farm, but it seems these things cannot be hurried. I was in the middle of breakfast by the time she went, which admittedly was not that long after I came back. I had been invited to join her as she wanted to sieve some of the earth out of the mound of brambles and detritus she had hauled from along the hedge. Much as that was appealing – because it meant doing some digging – I was pretty determined to get the electrical work finished before I head off to the trade show at the end of the week.

We spent the rest of the day apart and she came back at around four o'clock looking somewhat exhausted from her efforts. She was singularly unimpressed with my progress on the electrical work and, to a degree, so was I. It was the intention to have finished all the work in the living room today but there is still some to do.

The cutting holes in the trunking took a while as I wanted to be as precise as I could be. The cutting the holes in the end plates was even more tricky because it had to line up with the smaller trunking that the cables will arrive in that has not been installed yet. An additional difficulty with those was that there was a strengthening baffle inside the end plate right where the hole needed to be cut. I had to end up with a smaller hole above it which will line up with the top of the small trunking and I just hope that it will be big enough for the cable.

All the cutting took longer than anticipated – why was that a surprise – and I did not start the putting the big trunking on the wall until well into the afternoon. It has not helped that I had charge of the bleddy hound and she needed a walk out in the early park of the afternoon, which of course introduced a further delay but was quite pleasant to stop and get out in the fresh air. The transition to working upstairs caused its own problems as I had to take all the tools I needed with me. Naturally enough, I forgot a few and had to make multiple trips back down to the shop each time I got to the point where I needed another tool that I had left down there.

I suppose progress was not too bad. I had managed to put all the new circuit sockets in place and had connected two of them together. This only leaves another two to be connected and a 'tail' put in place for the return part of the circuit. I am not entirely sure how the electrician will want to play the connecting part. Deep down I am

guessing that he will want to run the wires without breaks all the way through to the first socket on the circuit and similarly for the cable coming away from the last. However, there is a chance he will be happy to run the circuit to a junction box, mainly because the last socket is an awkward distance away from where the cables will run from. Running at least the return cable from a junction box will be a whole lot cleaner but there may be regulations involved.

I had almost screwed the trunking for the three extra sockets on the existing ring main to the wall but suddenly remember that I had to pull the desk out. Where I had planned to put them would have been right in the way. There is a chance that I will be able to lift the desk over them but will want to make sure by trying that out first.

Well, last year I was concerned that The Farm dominated these scribblings and there is quite a risk that the electrics will take over this year. At least that is variety of sorts.

January 13th – Thursday

My efforts on electrical expansion in the living room consumed the whole of the daylight hours today and some of the dark ones too. No only had I no time to scribble one word of nonsense for The Dairy, I had no computer on which to scribble them even if I did. The computer rests on the desk that had to be moved to install the ill-fated extension to the existing ring main and therefor was out of action.

This is probably a kind fate for you, dear reader, as you do not have to slog through another day of electrical misery and can skip straight through to tomorrow, which is now today as I write. You may, however, be disappointed to learn that the work on the extension was unsuccessful because the wire I thought that was carrying all those spare and unused volts back to the consumer unit was actually old and unused, I think and I will have to think again. The unfortunate effect of this is your relief at noting having to read another page of electrical weariness is merely a stay of execution.

Still reeling from my efforts during the day, I dragged myself to the Lifeboat station due to it being a jolly nice evening for a training launch. There were not so many of the Bat Crew around today so only the big boat was launched into a benign sea approaching low water on a neap tide. While it was gone, a good many of we left behind rallied around taking the main cable down to the bottom of the long slipway along with the span for use later. Everything in order for the boat's return, we settled back to wait.

We could see the boat in the distance going about its training with the bright star Vega sitting directly above it. Come the hour and a half later, a few of us gathered in the sharp cold at the bottom of the long slip to await the final stages of its return. We executed what was clearly a textbook recovery a few minutes later and after a wash

down, put the boat to rest on its cradle for the night. We are, after all, a very caring, very excellent Shore Crew.

January 14th – Friday

I had promised myself that I would not do very much today as my exertions of the last few days left me feeling like a wrung out damp flannel by the end of yesterday. Time for a day off, I felt. Consequently, I spent the entire day thinking about how far I could have got with the bleddy electrics had I continued.

I was completely out for the count when the bleddy hound woke me up this morning. I had awoken earlier when there was the suggestion of a dim glow of day but had dropped off again. It was bright daylight when she got through to me. It was not a particularly late start, but the mornings have at last started to lighten up over the last few days. This has resulted in the bleddy hound getting up a bit earlier and because I have generally been awake at that time, I have let her. A schoolboy error, I feel.

The temperature must have taken a nose dive during the night as I had to crack the ice off the curtain we have up in the winter to stop the heat running out of the living room. The practice is a bit old school, I know but you must understand that half the walls are windows and the other half are granite. It is not the greatest insulating combo and the best we can hope for in an attempt to be green is a pale, dirty brown colour.

Still, it felt clean and fresh out in the air when we headed to the Harbour. We met another couple of the bleddy hound's pals while we were down there, affectionately known as the ASBO girls. They are a couple of bruisers who have the propensity to raise hell when they see another dog anywhere in the forward 100 yards or so of their direction of travel. Their owner has dubbed them Ronnie and Reggie – not their real names, I hasten to add. They are as good as gold, really, and quite playful when you get to know them – just a tad noisy.

Despite my day off I had a couple of errands to run in town and as per the other day, agreed to drop the Missus off at The Farm so she could carry on her work there. This time she would be ready when I came back from the gymnasium so I went as early as I could for the second time this week. It was even colder today and it took as much mental effort to get there as physical effort when I did. I was also not fully restored from my great works of the last few days and I found myself half dropping off to sleep midway through my 5,000 metre row. I did feel a bit better at the end of my blistering session, but I could still have quite happily gone back to bed again.

I dropped the bleddy hound off at Mother's on the way out to town to avoid the inevitable meltdown of her thinking she is going to the veterinary doctor. I also tried again with my not so clever smart mobile telephone to get it to tell me directions. I will need this at the end of my journey to Exeter tomorrow to get me to the hotel I

shall be staying at. So far, my telephone thinks that I am in central London and I cannot seem to convince it otherwise. Thus, when I try to tell it to give me directions to Penzance it tells me that it will take five hours in light traffic.

Over the last few days I have tried all manner of settings and suggestions. I did have a bit of a breakthrough this morning when it told me I was in Penzance when I was on the Harbour beach. Despite that, the map app shows me roughly in the right place but during my journey it frequently tells me that it has lost the GPS signal. I downloaded another app to see if GPS was working and thus far, that app tells me that I do not have a signal anywhere that I have been today, including Penzance where the map app seemed to be working a bit better. Even up at The Farm with a clear view of the sky and right next to a mobile telephone mast, the GPS app could not find a satellite signal. Interestingly, however, it was able to give my latitude and longitude but had me in the middle of Mounts Bay.

I must confess I smelled a rat when I was in Penzance and the map app seemed to be working, sort of, and downloaded another GPS tester app. This could happily see satellites and tell me where I was. The problem with this being if GPS is working, why is my mobile telephone still telling me that I am in central London? I may have to factor in some getting lost time in Exeter tomorrow.

Ah, yes, the going to Exeter bit. There is a trade show there, every year except last year and despite some misgivings, we thought to attend this year. Given the fragile state of the dreaded lurgi at present, the Missus will stay behind and I will go alone – very carefully. The game plan is that I will test myself for dreaded lurgi a day after I come back, being the optimum time to test apparently. In the meantime, the Missus and I will avoid each other, which is about the same as normal, so, sleeping arrangements aside, we are unlikely to notice any difference.

January 15th – Saturday

Today started with a very slow getting ready to leave for Exeter, which is somewhere right of Camborne on the map. Cornish maps actually do not go that far, and I resorted to finding one on the Internet that gave me vague clue as to where I was going. We have been going to the same hotel for years because it is reasonable, comfortably and well placed for coming home as well as access to the trade show itself.

It must come as a surprise that after so many trips I am still confused about the last five minutes of the journey, which takes use through an Exeter suburb and a few very unlikely back roads. Because I was not exactly enthused with trusting my not so smart, smart mobile telephone I resorted to looking at a street map for the area. I also had a geek at the very clever application that allows you to see the journey as if you were driving it. It was a mammoth undertaking to drive every road everywhere, filming as you went and then integrate those photographs with satellite images and

maps for anyone to use. It seems to be to be a very understated wonder of modern engineering and the brains behind it should have had some sort of recognition, much as Sir Tim Berners-Lee did for inventing the World Wide Web.

Sorry, I digress. Now, where was I? Ah, yes, going back to looking at good old maps to find your way somewhere. Once I had looked at the route on a map, backed up by memorising landmarks at junctions by using the pictures from the 'street view' program, I was pretty much on top of it. In the event, I pulled off the A30 at the appropriate junction and found that my amazing satellite navigation system decided to put up a fight, so I went manual. My homework paid off and I found my way to the hotel, arriving about an hour earlier than I had planned. I should note that the hour earlier was not because I had exceeded the speed limit, well, not by much, but because my planning and timing was rubbish.

Having arrived at my destination far earlier than I would like, I had to find ways to amuse myself until tea time. Thankfully, we are in the modern age where with access to the Internet that the hotel very kindly provides, I can watch television programmes and films on various streaming services and not have to rely on what was on the television at that precise moment. I must also confess to having short zizz – well a couple of hours driving can be quite tiring, all that concentration and all, combined with actual map reading, too.

I will spare you, dear reader, from any further detail of my stay at the hotel as I am sure you would find a description of the bar and the meal that I ate somewhat tedious – possibly as unwanted as a whole day of electrical wiring installation.

There will be an early night involved as well, because I would like to get to the show ahead of the rush and get out of there as quickly as possible.

January 16th – Sunday

It is always a bit tricky going to bed early. Sometimes it works out and sometimes you wake up at four o'clock in the morning having had close to eight hours sleep wondering what you are still doing lying in bed. It was one of the latter today. Obtusely, I drifted off at around half past six o'clock and woke up late.

Happily, I am not the person to be out of sorts by such things even though I could not find a cat to throw my boots at. It did not make me frightfully late for the trade show that I had intended to be the first through the door at. I did manage to park in the area right next to the show hanger for the first time in the many years that we had been coming here. Naturally, in all the years when it had been snowing, teeming down with rain or blowing a gale or all three that would have been most useful, today

was pleasantly mild, dry and not a breath of wind in the air. For the first time ever, I was able to walk from the car to the hanger without the aid of a coat.

I had anticipated a reduced showing of visitors this year but it was probably busier than some of the previous years we have attended. While the visitors were there in numbers, many of the exhibitors backed out this year either from fear of the dreaded lurgi or the fact that showing at trade shows is no longer the big earner that it used to be and stalls are expensive. One long-time supplier of ours commented that of those who did come many had reduced the size of their stalls.

The stalls that were there had been more spread out this year to give everyone more space. This filled just one hall with the reduced numbers where in previous years, two halls have been required for a more compacted number of stalls. In truth, had I pulled my finger out and applied myself, I could have made it around the entire show and returned home in the afternoon. However, it does pay to have a chat with the suppliers to understand what issues and challenges lie out there in the big world beyond The Cove. The more experienced suppliers have a good understanding of what is going on in the supply chain and what affects it all may have on our small business in the coming year or two.

A faster run around the exhibitors would also mean that I may have missed some detail that I might be useful to us. There were, in fact, a few new suppliers to us whose products I will give good consideration to after consulting with the Missus. I would hate to tease you now, dear reader, of what new delights may be adorning our shelves this year or, indeed, our online shop, which is the bit you skirt around to this very page.

So, having finished my tour earlier than expected, I returned to the hotel. It was only as I drove into the car park that I recalled that I needed fuel for the journey home. Ordinary people in ordinary cars probably would be able to arrive at Exeter from The Cove and go back again without having to worry about such minutia. Unfortunately, grumpy shopkeepers who need to transport large quantities of goods around but also need to drive up rough and muddy lanes to farms need a vehicle that requires to find a petrol station every couple of hours of driving. When we finally are not allowed to purchase such vehicles and are compelled to have ones that run on AA batteries, I will delight in seeing the size of trailer we will have to drag around just to get to the end of the road and back.

At home, at the farthest end of the known world, we have to drive some miles to find a petrol station and therefore must plan when fuelling needs to take place. It is one of the disadvantages of remote living – there are many more advantages. However, here I was at the heart of metropolis land, the big city of the West – Exeter in all its populous glory. There will be a petrol station around every corner, surely, thought I. Surely not, it seems. I consulted the very knowledgeable Internet for assistance and learned that there was a petrol station in the trading estate opposite the hotel, just a few hundred yards and a couple of roundabouts hence. Hence I bounded, in the light

traffic of a Sunday afternoon and arriving at my destination without the aid of a net or, for that matter, satellite navigation, discovered that there was no such thing as a petrol station there, just a big cash and carry store.

I sat in the cash and carry car park and reviewed the map the Internet had provided me with. In truth, the first option I had been given had been a little unlikely, so I opted for a second petrol station, a national franchise, on the main road to Plymouth. A dead certainty.

At least this petrol station existed but it was not until the numbers on the petrol pump stayed resolutely at the final count of the previous user that I discovered that it was, in fact, closed. There was one petrol station that I had passed on my way back from the showground but it was at a busy junction on the wrong side of the road and I was not entirely sure that I could get out of it and drive in the direction I wanted to go. It also seemed unlikely that I could turn around on the road that it would put me on, so I kept this option as my last resort.

Before that last resort was the penultimate resort, which was an independent petrol station on a less busy road. This seemed an unlikely option after I decided to telephone the garage to see if it was open before I wasted my time going there and got no answer. I went anyway as it was not entirely out of the way to the last resort and happily, I found it open and unsurprisingly, quite busy. Perhaps this urban living is not all it is cracked up to be.

This is now particularly the case after discovering that the air conditioning in the hotel bedroom is possessed. Pressing buttons had no effect for a while but I surmised that they do not actually turn on the boilers until five o'clock. The digital dial allows the user to set a specific temperature, which I did. After a while of belting out heat, I detected that the room was getting a tad overly warm but assumed that the thermostat would sort it out. It did but instead on stopping blowing out heat for a while, it blew out ice cold air to cool the room, and me, down. It was very effective on me, the room not so quickly it seems as the cold air blowing appeared interminable. I shall just wear a thicker jumper next time and leave the air conditioning off.

I think I should be quite pleased to be going home tomorrow.

January 17th – Monday

Well, that was a surprise: a thick covering of ice on the truck and all the fields about the hotel dusted with white frost. There were a fair few fields on the shady side of hills on the way back as well and mist was hanging in the valleys. The temperature reading on the truck's thermometer was -1 degree centigrade and I suppose that it was probably a tad colder than that during the night. That and the hotel's air conditioning system was blowing ice cold air at me all night. That will teach me for being so far away from the ocean.

I resolved the ice situation on the truck windows by pouring warm water over them and running the engine for a bit. I had to do it twice as the first lot refroze. It is far more effective than scraping at it with a tool or a credit card and perfectly safe provided the temperature of the water is not too high. I sorted my own chilly condition with a blistering session in the hotel gymnasium and ruined the weight loss benefits by having a fried breakfast afterwards. I consoled myself with the knowledge that it was a rare treat and a highly enjoyable one at that.

The route back to the A30 for my journey home involved a repeat of the suburb route but in reverse order. Such are my skills at map reading backwards, I managed this with the minimum of difficulty and drove with the assumption that these roads would still probably be icy. I will not dwell on the remainder of the journey as it was just driving in a straight line for the main part. There was, however, a detour as I reached the final quarter as I had to call into a supplier in Helston that the Missus had found and as you might imagine it was to do with The Farm.

Over the last few days, the Missus has struggled with using the transport box on the back of the tractor which will tip its contents on the pull of a rope. Unfortunately, the unit will not perform correctly when it is of the correct height to tip properly and the problem has hampered the Missus's progress in moving earth about for the growing beds. We decided on a replacement that would do a better job and she came up with the tipping trailer and found a supplier in Helston.

I rather wish that we had found the supplier before because they had all manner of pins, chains and connectors that the Missus had to search long and hard for online. A quick trip over to Helston, not a stone's throw from my shotgun cartridge supplier as well, would have resolved the requirements in half the time. I bought the trailer there and then, although we will have to wait for it to be delivered. The very pleasant owner of the business, who was most helpful, also gave me a catalogue to take home, which was my only mistake. We both perused the catalogue when I eventually got home and we now have a tractor mower and post hole drill on Santi's list for next year.

The Missus and I practised our promised separation for the rest of the day, sporadically squirting things with sanitiser as a precaution. The bleddy hound was not at all happy about that. Hopefully, we will not have to do this for too long as it is a pain in the bottom as well as being of uncertain efficacy.

The weather in The Cove could definitely be described as settled with mainly clear skies that at the end of the day let a perfectly full round moon rise uncluttered from above Sunny Corner Lane. It is no good calling it the Wolf Moon in the manner of the native Americans because I do not think we have had wolves here since before people could name things. We should stand on our own two feet and proudly name things meaningful to us. So, I dub thee Brass Monkey Moon, big bright satellite of ours, because at this time of the year it is generally bleddy cold. There, job done.

January 18th – Tuesday

Oh, you lucky, lucky people. Guess who was back doing electrical work again today?

The Missus and I had spent a day of separation yesterday after I came back and a bit more today. We hardly noticed as it is very much how we normally spend our time. We had read that I should look at test results a couple of days after suspected exposure to the dreaded lurgi, so we waited until late afternoon and discovered that I appear to have got away with it again. I shall have another poke at it over the next couple of days, just to make sure.

On reflection, perhaps I should not have stepped out to run the bleddy hound down to the beach this morning. I am afraid it just did not occur to me. At this time of the year I could walk to Land's End and back, run up and down the street a few times and take a trip round Carn Olva and down through the Valley and back across the beach and still be self-isolated. I can understand just how different that would be in the city or a large town as I would not be able to step outside the door. Yes, we are blessed here.

It was a splendid morning to be out, as well. There were clouds in the sky, but it was bright and windless and there was barely a ripple on the water as far as I could see. It was so calm that one of our keen fishers decided it was time to bring his punt out of hibernation and do a bit of fishing. He is very recently a repeat father, which I imagine was a further impetus for running a punt a few miles offshore for the day.

I spent the morning and part of the afternoon catching up on things I would have done had I not gone away for the weekend. There were also the results of my endeavours at the trade show to update our inventory with and to send orders off to the suppliers I met there. This is a work in progress and I will have more time at it in the next few days before being finished with that.

There was also the conducting of enquiries with our new farm equipment supplier as to just how much a flail mower and a post hole drill would cost. These are the items on Santi's list and, of course, he will not be around for such a long time perhaps we might just be able to afford them now. We cannot but I ordered them anyway on the basis that you are only young once. Alright, that particular ship has sailed but I could not think of an appropriate excusing aphorism to replace it with, so you got that one. At least we will save some money on the delivery costs.

All of the work I did in the morning was simply trying to put off the worst part of the electrical job still to be done: running the cable in the loft. For a start, it is not the most comfortable of workspaces. There is a very narrow crawl space under the A frames where having big hips is a definite disadvantage and between those it is kneeling room only. Fortunately, we have a choice of knee pads which are essential

for spending any more than five minutes up there and especially for having to drag tools and cables most of the length of the loft.

I started when I could put it off no more and collected the conduit tubes for my masterplan of running them under the boarded floor and pushing the cables through them. I also took the power driver in for Plan B, taking up the floor boards if the conduit did not work. Plan A fell at the first pole and Plan B was a non-starter as well it turned out due to beams that shut off any route down the middle of the floor. There was, I discovered, space under the purlin and just above the eaves where I could run the cable without too much of a problem.

A lot of box moving and reaching into dark spaces later, most of the job was done. It had taken a couple of hours as I kept having to scoot back down to the beginning of the run to unwind more cable off the drums. I then had to poke it through the first gap after straightening out the kinks so it had a level run when I scooted back to the other end to pull it through. There is probably another couple of feet left to pull through and the other end needs to be dropped down into the living room. I have left that and connecting it to the consumer board for the electrician who will be better at both jobs than me and I am certainly not confident enough to be messing around with the main board. There is just one small run of cables in the living room that I must redo and that will be that – as long as it all works.

There, that was not so bad, was it dear reader? I am now free to write about going to The Farm every day for the next three months and for a real treat, I will tell you about the weather from time to time. The computers are going out all over Europe, I doubt that we will see them lit again until he re-opens the shop in March.

January 19th – Wednesday

I have heard of the term muscle memory but I thought it referred to repetitive tasks. However, my muscles definitely recalled being confined into small spaces and being asked to twist and contort as I deployed a length of cable in the loft. I knew this because they complained loudly about it when I got out of bed this morning.

Benjamin Franklin was wrong. There are three certainties in life: death taxes and the bleddy hound wanting to go out first thing in the morning. Also, if you prefer, time, tide and the bleddy hound wait for no man, however bent and twisted his muscles might be from his exertions the day before. I found myself on the Harbour beach in no time at all under a grey and overcast sky, having avoided the rain that must have come earlier in the night. We were just finishing when the bleddy hound's best pal turned up at the top of the slipway, so we waited and had a chat before we headed away.

I knew that the Missus would be keen to get up to The Farm today, so I hurried to the gymnasium. Not only was this probably a mistake given that my muscles had not

forgiven me from misusing them yesterday but had I the foresight to think what I would be doing later, the session was probably superfluous. Still, I went anyway and managed, despite it all, a blistering session.

Not long after finishing a spot of breakfast the Missus was clearly ready to get on with Farming. She has already extended our hire of the digger by another week and there is certainly no shortage of the work we have for it. The current schedule is digging earth from one side of the field and delivering it to the other side where it is spread on top of cardboard to form one of the growing beds. I have not asked which items will be planted here but there is knee-high fencing all about it to ward off the bunnies and other noshing creatures. It may not be completely effective but based on the premise that white rabbits cannot jump, it is better that given them a free pass and a big sign saying free food here.

While I have been busy with my electrical work, the Missus has been about this business by herself. It involves digging up the dirt, dumping it in the transport box in the back of the tractor and driving the tractor to the growing bed to hand shovel out the earth from the box. Having done this myself today I can confirm that it is back breaking work so I can understand why she needed some help and also a tipping trailer.

There is much jumping on and off the tractor and the digger to do first one job then the other. My new waterproof and lined trousers came into their own for hopping from wet seat to wet seat. When the tractor is at the growing beds the transport box needs to be emptied by hand. I used a Cornish shovel, which is the optimum tool for the job but given that it is long, even a small amount of earth on the other end is heavy. The Missus used a miniature spade, which would have been easier to manipulate but take longer and require more bending down – although she is shorter and therefore not bending down as far as I would. In either case, it takes a long time and much effort to empty the box.

Later on, when she had finished planting the second wave of seeds in the greenhouse with Mother, she drove the digger while I drove the tractor and emptied the box. This did not work either because driving the tractor and emptying the box takes longer than it does digging up enough earth to fill the box. This meant I was working my socks off while she idled on the digger waiting for me to finish. We will have to schedule a discussion on the division of labour because it was looking decidedly one sided there for a while. I am still of the view, as I was last year, that it would be more efficient to dig the hole in the growing bed, place the cardboard, the scoot the dug up earth back over it.

Since she did not come for tea yesterday, her normal day, Mother came home with us tonight. We picked her up earlier as she is a dab hand at potting seeds and we use her consultancy services for what happens and when. We also use the consultancy services of a gentleman who works for a company called Moles Seeds – The Diary rarely mentions names, but I hope that on this occasion we are forgiven.

PW is a regular visitor to The Cove and when he discovered what the Missus was up to, very kindly offered his advice for free, gratis and for nothing and let us face it, we need all the help we can get. Given the free help it would be churlish of us not to purchase our seeds from the man's establishment. There are some advantages from being a grumpy shopkeeper, surprisingly enough.

Right, I believe that the exercise my fingers have enjoyed over the last 865 words brings them up to speed with the rest of my muscles in my arms and probably my legs as well. I think that is sufficient for one day, especially as I require my arms to perform the act of raising a beer bottle to my lips for the remainder of the evening. Thank you and good night.

January 20th – Thursday

There was no shirking and lying in bed this morning and not just because the bleddy hound said it was time to get up; our fridge man was turning up early doors as well.

Because we have a maintenance contract with the company they do insist on turning up and doing preventative maintenance. I have no idea what that entails but they do check that the fridges are cold and the freezers are, well, freezing. I have long since left them to it on the occasions when the shop is shut as we know the engineers now. They come twice a year so one of the times is when the shop is open. That is a bit more tricky and we try and arrange it for quite parts of the year. This messes up the schedule a bit because we get two visits quite close together but that cannot be helped.

We would have headed off to The Farm as soon as the engineer had left but I had a meeting at the Lifeboat station to meet a potential new recruit to the very excellent Shore Crew. The nominee lives up on Maria's Lane, so he will be extremely useful being so close. We have a shortage of people living close enough to attend launches in a meaningful timescale. Quite often I am the only one there for a rapid launch. This recruitment, if it is successful, will mean that we have two more people able to arrive in short order when the pagers go off.

We went directly to The Farm after that. We left Mother home by her own request after suggesting that it would be quite chilly up there today. It certainly was when we got there but after shifting several hundredweight of soil, the temperature increased markedly. I continued with the soil shifting while the Missus cleared the beds in the polytunnel. There was a fair amount of spinach that had grown up in the intervening period and she harvested two trays of the vegetable. We also noticed that a couple of the crop bars had worked loose in the violence of the winds of late. These are not structural but do not good hanging freely. The Missus found one of the nuts and bolts but the other is buried in the soil somewhere and I could not find a spare. We will have to do some searching.

The troubles with the transport box continued. We spent a little while getting it latched onto the tractor I refuse to call Poppy as one of the arm tensioners is broken meaning the arm swings left and right freely. I thought that we would get away with it but as soon as the tractor leans slightly to the offside, the transport box fall to that side and against the rear wheel. I tried tying it up with some electrical flex, since I have some experience with such things, but that was largely unsuccessful. We shall have to order another tensioner but by the time it comes it will be time for the digger to go back. We can probably get away with using the transport box as it is provided we can stay on the straight and level.

It did not seem that we were at The Farm very long before it was time to come back. We had started late, so it was no surprise. There was a bit of a rush to get tea ready while the Missus prepared to blanch the spinach ahead of freezing it. The hurry was mainly because there was a Lifeboat training meeting in the evening.

The Institution has avoided unnecessary crew meetings for the last couple of years lest we all catch the dreaded lurgi at the same time and cannot take the boat out. With precautions it has been deemed safe enough to meet up and do the training that does not happen while at sea. This is mainly for the Boat Crew, leaving the very excellent Shore Crew to make their own entertainment after listening to general notices. There was a pretty poor showing of all crew and only four of us shore bound, three of which were long in the tooth, experienced sorts. For the benefit of the one less experience person we thought long and hard and came up with 'the naming of parts'. That did not seem very interesting so we resorted to our usual fall back of replacing the starter motor on the winch with the manual one.

The likelihood that we would have to replace the starter motor in anger is exceedingly remote, to say the least. An inexperienced crew member having to do it alone and therefore requiring to be trained how to do it is about as likely as the Missus letting me have a full day diggering when she has nothing else to do. We do it anyway because it is about the only fun bit of training we can indulge in without actually launching the boat.

I closed our part of training shortly after that and a brief discussion on backup cradle turning procedures and retired to rest my weary bones on the sofa for the rest of the evening. I thought a small nightcap would be deserved after an effortful day, so I had one. I do hope you do not mind, dear reader.

Earlier, I had caught the tale end of the weather forecast that suggested some particular cold heading our way over night. I had quite forgotten about it until I saw the flashing yellow light of the gritter passing in the road in front of the shop. I looked at the online forecast which showed that we could have one of our rare dips below freezing during the night. Having once had a frozen outside pipe with disastrous results, I took the precaution of turning off the supply and leaving the tap open. It might be time for my Wee Willy night hat tonight.

January 21st – Friday

The temperature during the night had done its best to get enough below freezing to clog up a few pipes. I am not sure just how low it went but when I looked in the morning there was just a bit of frost on the hosepipe. It was worthwhile taking precautions with it but I am not sure just how necessary it was on this occasion.

Having said that it was, indeed, quite chilly when I stepped out first thing with the bleddy hound down to the beach. She did not want to tarry too long either, but we spent just enough time to pick up some bits of plastic off the sand and someone's full water bottle. There are usually some bits of plastic lying about but it does seem to be one of the cleaner beaches. It is possibly due to its position because the big beach is quite often strewn with a fair bit more detritus of one sort or another.

I reasoned that due to the exertions I have placed my aging frame at the mercy of over the last few days that I would eschew my regular trip to the gymnasium. It was pure chance, but it would have been a mite chilly in there today and would have taken some effort to warm up. I also knew that I would be warming up quite nicely anyway with the delivery we expected today.

There was a little bit of kicking my heels waiting for the biggest delivery that we have had for some time. It is also possible that it was the biggest delivery we have ever had if only I could be sure of my memory of all the deliveries we have had. Things have changed this year and all our orders have had to be in early. We are also, fortunately, in a position where we can take delivery of some of these orders before the season gets going, so we arranged for a large majority of our beachware order to come today.

Quite often the company sends a pallet transport company for the bigger orders but for some reason all the boxes today were delivered loose. This took some time in the chilly air to unload and place as neatly as possible outside the shop. Ordinarily, we would have had plenty of space just inside the shop door but we have offered that space to the Ice Cream Kiosk for their fridges and freezers while the place is being refurbished. There was a good deal more than I had imagined, mainly because it was all in individual boxes, which made it look bigger, and I started thinking ahead to its transport up to our store at The Farm.

Having our van would have come into its own today. We could probably have taken everything up in two journeys with no trouble at all. If it had been wet for the last few days, however, we probably would have only made the first trip before getting stuck in the slippery lane. Only having the truck meant three trips, two of which included using the small trailer we have access to. I am getting quite adept at reversing with it despite its size but ducked trying a three point turn when I got back to The Cove and elected to use the Harbour car park instead.

For the first time ever, we met a vehicle coming the other way on the lane. As luck would have it we were on the first trip up without the trailer attached. Whoever it was using the lane was ill-equipped to be there, in a clean white car, possibly misdirected by a satellite and clearly lacking a reverse gear. It was down to me to reverse some 100 yards down the track to the nearest field entrance. I could have reversed into it but it looked dry enough, so I made the wayward motorist do it instead. Frankly it was the least he could do given the nearest turning in the opposite direction was only about fifty yards.

I left the Missus at The Farm, organising the store shed while I went back for repeated loads from the shop. We are fortunate that we are in a place where I could leave the boxes out at the front of the shop, which made shifting them so much easier.

While we will be allowed to stop to do such loading and unloading, parking generally in Cove Road will be a thing of the past from the middle of next week. I watched a much maligned council person remove the signs this morning. This cannot come too soon in my view. Driving back along the road on all the days this week has been fraught. For the last two days cars have been parked nose to tail all long from the OS to just short of the bus turning area making passing difficult. There is also a large white van seemingly parked permanently on the corner making it impossible to see down the road when approaching from the hill. It used to be that fewer cars would park sensibly, now it is a free for all of poor common sense.

Due to the timing of our delivery and the time it took to put it all away, we got no farming done at all today. Mother decided to stay at home so we would not have to 'come all that way' to collect her, which was a shame and meant missing our fish tea. While it was cold up at The Farm, she would have been very cosy in the cabin which was like a sauna when we opened the doors when we first got up there. All it takes is a bit of sunshine and we had that in abundance today. It is a shame that there is no way of capturing that heat and saving it for days that are just as cold and not so sun blest. That has rather just triggered a thought about the greenhouse. I am wondering if we can put one of those solar water heaters outside and circulate the water through pipes around the greenhouse. I will add that to the list ... and maybe open the shop a month later.

When we got back home there were still things to do. I am working through the list of orders generated from the trade show. I managed to fire off another couple before tea and think I only have one left before I can concentrate on other matters. What a busy life we lead and we would have it no other way, apart from maybe having a bit more time to do it all in.

January 22nd – Saturday

How disappointing, our beautiful clear blue skies turned to a blanket of grey at some point during the night. It was, however, much warmer, so I guess you cannot have it all. Obtusely, of course, the lack of sunshine meant that the cabin was not so warm for Mother when we went but fortunately we have a small heater in there that does the job admirably.

There was not a soul about when the bleddy hound and I headed for the beach. We are in the midst of spring tides currently but unusually they are particularly small and do not swamp all the sand. In most other months the bleddy hound and I would be heading around the block.

We had pencilled in an early start to get up to The Farm and start work. Somehow, something went awry and we ended up heading up there at near the middle of the day. I am not entirely sure what caused the delay because I was mindful of the rush and did not get too distracted, although I did have to have a bit of breakfast and a cup of tea first.

I was pretty certain that the Missus and I had discussed what we would be doing today and I am equally certain that she wanted to finish weeding the beds in the polytunnel ahead of building the tables. I had made the assumption that the table building would be a two person job, requiring effort from both of us at the same time and together. When we arrived at The Farm gate, however, all planning was abandoned and clearing another of the growing areas was on the agenda. This seemed sensible since this required the digger which we have for a finite time. Best of all, the Missus said that I could do the diggering. Well, I was not going to argue, now was I?

We did swap over at half time, which was a great plan because I had been shaken and jolted quite enough after a couple of hours at it. There is a definite skill to the combination of handle and lever movements to get the bucket to do what you want it to. It also requires a great deal of concentration, the best analogy that I can think of is rubbing your tummy in a circular motion while patting your head with the other hand. Not only that but occasionally you have to swap hands and go anti-clockwise. It remains, however, immensely good fun and do not let any digger driver tell you that they work for a living. It is far too much fun to be work.

Meanwhile, the Missus made a good fist of putting together the flat-packed industrial strength tables that we bought. The intention is to place growbags on these for the lettuce, rocket and baby leaf spinach so that the Missus does not have to spend hours on her knees at picking time. By the time we swapped over at half time, she had built nearly all the table ends. This left me to put in place the supporting t-bars that run along the bottom and join the two ends together and the long table top supports that connect the ends at the top. This, I discovered, would be far better as a two person job as it meant holding the ends in place while the long supports were hammered into place. We shall team up when coming to the subsequent tables but I did manage to complete one table by holding the end with one foot, one hand on the

upright and the other on the long support and banging in the joints with a mallet between my teeth. Alright, it was not quite that demanding, but it was close.

We packed in as the light started to dim having achieved quite a bit. The new growing area is largely complete with just a wide Mohican of grass down the centre of two cleared areas. The earth has been turned over in the two finished areas and just needs racking over. The fencing around both these pre-existing areas did not survive the time spent unused and new framed fencing will have to be constructed to ward off the bunnies and other nibblers. There is enough space around these growing areas to dig a moat, which will sort the beggars out, although we would have to fill it with pretend water. I have no doubt, however, that the bunnies and badger have a REME regiment and would have a bridge over it in no time.

Another reason for leaving sharply was that Mother was coming back with us, having missed tea yesterday. It was not quite a fish tea as expected but the Missus made a rather good fish pie for Mother and me. The Missus had a lamb hotpot; the Missus hates fish.

January 23rd – Sunday

I was up before the bleddy hound this morning just to get a jump on the morning so I did not have to rush around before going to the range. This works reasonably well provided nothing goes wrong and, happily, it did not.

We even still had a sliver of sand to run around on down on the Harbour beach despite it being pretty close to high water. I noticed from the living room that we appear to have collected a bit of ground sea rolling across the bay. The waves were just about slopping over the near end of the wall, which was a good indicator. Out to the north, the sky was making some effort at being clear and the temperature seemed to have dropped again but not by much, just noticeably a little chillier which might just have been the wind in the east.

There was definitely a temperature curve while we were up at the range all day. We were cold in the morning and slowly warmed toward the middle of the day. By three o'clock in the afternoon we were all starting to feel the icy cold creeping back in again with a fair about of moisture in the air. This was evident looking out at the ocean towards the Isles of Scilly, which are visible from the range on a clear day. By the afternoon there was a thick mist collecting on the sea.

The course of fire we followed today kept everyone moving about, which helped no end. The main man in the club, and his wife, have also introduced some changes to the routine that had been in place for years. This has added a freshness to our range sessions, not that they were ever boring before but it is good to have some change every now and then. I am sure that it is similar in most clubs that there seems to be a single driving force and everyone else is just thankful that they just have to follow

directions. I know that I am as I have once or twice in the past had to do the leading and design the courses of fire. It is a pain in the bottom, to be frank and much responsibility. The dynamic works well in the club and we all have a very enjoyable day.

It is also extremely tiring, especially if it has been cold or cold and wet. That seems to take a lot of effort out of a person and I am generally ready for a slouch when I get back. Unfortunately, used guns need to be cleaned, which itself is quite a lot of work, and then put away. I am really ready to collapse in a heap after putting everything away.

The only problem with stopping is that I start to think about everything else that needs to be done. You would never think that I was once qualified to run fairly major IT projects. All we have out in front of us is in our heads with not one jot of it planned, budgeted or written down, it just sort of happens. Perhaps I need to go and get a pencil.

January 24th – Monday

Oddly, it did not seem the sort of day to be very cold. There was plenty of cloud cover and when I headed to the beach with the bleddy hound I did not feel overly chilled. It was only when we got up to The Farm that it became really apparent, although I had noticed the top of my head freezing over in the gymnasium earlier.

There was no way that I was going to miss out on a second session in a row and, besides, I had done no Cornish shovelling that really did me in last time. Digging and running about on the range, although tiring, do not count when it comes to excuses for not gymnasiuming. It was particularly dark in the room as well as particularly cold, this morning. It is not very often that I have to have the lights on, though they are not the brightest and the ceiling is quite high. Even with heaters in there I can guess that they probably would not be too effective. The conditions were just right for a blistering session – the alternative was seizing up with the cold.

There was some discussion about dropping the Missus up at The Farm before I went to the gymnasium so that she could get on with things. She rethought that, much to do with me going to the gymnasium rather early in the morning and a bit more to do with having to look after the bleddy hound while she was digging. The bleddy hound has previous for coming to sit as close to you as possible while you work and with digging, that was not a good mix. Consequently, it was decided that I would take her up after I had been to the gymnasium and then return to clean up and have a spot of breakfast. I also had a few calls to make, which were easier to do while seated comfortably with a notepad in front of me.

We have to pick our time when we call in orders from the building supplier as the drivers are quite averse to coming up the lane when it is wet and muddy. It is not so

bad coming up the lane when they are full loaded but going back with an empty flat bed truck, rear wheel drive is fraught. Last year I had to dash up and tow a truck out that had got stuck in the field. Since we have had little to no rain in the last fortnight, the conditions up the lane are as good as they are likely to get at this time of the year.

There is a range of materials to call in including some hardcore, timber and other bits so that I can make the shelter for the compost bins. These are being relocated to behind the IBCs (the big plastic cubes that collect our rainwater, in case it has slipped your mind, dear reader), which will make them more accessible for use in the polytunnel and also the rainwater from the roof can be collected and not wasted. The work will have to wait until the hole boring machine arrives as you cannot expect a grumpy shopkeeper to be hand digging all his own post holes these days. It is also very hard to hand dig them round, even though the posts I will be using are square – they did not have a square post hole digging machine.

During her clearance of the area now scheduled to be the compost bin building, the Missus found some old telegraph poles. These would have been ideal to repurpose as the supports for the compost shed roof, the only fly in the ointment being how cutting them to the right size might be effected when I cannot even lift one end of them. This brings me to the second problem, even if they could be cut down to size, which is how to lift them into the post holes as I suspect even at the right size, they will be mighty heavy. The Missus reckoned the solution would be to line the end up with the hole and lift the other end using the digger. If anyone has seen Mr Clackson's very excellent programme about farming, you will understand the perils in attempting this manoeuvre. Once I had stopped laughing, I would then have to consider the replacement of three crushed IBCs and very possibly the cabin as well. We are using square posts that I can lift and there is an end to it.

In the mean time the last of the IBCs (the big plastic cubes that collect our rainwater, in case it has slipped your mind, dear reader) needs to be put in place. We have noticed from the previous two that they have sunk at the rear and have sagged backwards. Our intention was to make sure that was not the case with the third and then do some remedial work to level the original two. Since the Missus had the digger, I set about with a traditional garden fork and spade. If this was just ground then there would be little problem, done in a jiffy, but this is no ordinary ground. This is ground that has tyre inner tubes, bits of lorry and tractor and deeply rooted brambles and ferns in it.

Digging it all out was a work of attrition. Some of the root systems were four or five feet long and intertwined around bits of old tractor. To make life even more interesting, the bleddy hound, banished from the area around the digger, came and sat right in the middle of the clearing ground. It seemed churlish to move her, given that she had been admonished for wandering off, so I had to work around her. It took a while.

Given that all that was left at the end of my efforts was soft ground, I am not entirely sure that it will be any more suitable to having an IBC (the big plastic cubes that collect our rainwater, in case it has slipped your mind, dear reader) placed on it than it was before. We have some hardcore coming, which will help and we also need to lay some weed matting down to stop the weeds growing underneath it.

Nevertheless, by the end of the day, it was a good job and I was toasty and warm after my exertions, although I had to wrap up straight after finishing – it really was quite chilly up there. The Missus was in a worse state after sitting exposed on the digger all afternoon. She was still deep frozen by the time she went to bed and that was after being sensibly clothed for the duration.

There are errands to run tomorrow, so chance of farming is limited. This does expose us to the scary possibility that we might have to turn on the heating. What a complexity life is.

January 25th – Tuesday

We had planned for a bit of an uneventful day, clearly mapped out and with nothing much to do, especially in the afternoon. It just goes to show how rubbish we are at planning such things.

It was just right for an uneventful day, too. There was so much grey around it looked like even the air had been tinted with it. I am not suggesting that there was any mist around it is just the grey was so intense that it pervaded everything. Oddly, with the sun sitting behind the cliff above us, it was surprisingly bright. Light was coming into our northward looking vista but being swallowed up by the grey. This made any white in our view, breaking waves, seabirds and the like, stand out like beacons, catching the eye each time a new bit appeared. It was quite a surreal picture.

There was a little bit of a rush on this morning. I had an appointment up Madron way at ten o'clock and while that sounds quite late in the morning and not something to have to rush for, the bleedie hound needed to be attended to first. I had expected her to get me up at the usual time but when I awoke thinking that perhaps time was getting on, she was quite happily dozing in the middle of the bed. I now know what to do when I want a lie in, pretend I need to get up early.

I was bang on time for my appointment, which did not take long and headed off to Penzance afterwards on the next of my errands. We only have to visit the bank once a month to pay a bill in cash. This necessitates going to the one and only cashier desk in the spacious bank building that used to have about six cashiers. Instead, there are now five automated stations which provide all the services that are available online plus the ability to take out cash. I noted that the facility to pay in cash, specifically coins, has been removed and you need to go to the cashier for that as well, now.

While I was at the bank, which was about twenty minutes, there were eight other customers all but one of which needed to use the cashier's services. I do not know if this snapshot was representative, but there is no reason to suppose that it is not – especially as it seems to be the same each month we go. This might suggest that the ratio of machines to cashier posts seems somewhat inverted to customer requirements. I do understand that not everyone is able to use online banking but the percentage of those not able to because they cannot grasp the technology would also need personal assistance with the machines in the bank. Surely it would be easier to have just two of three cashiers and dispense with the machines altogether but then again, perhaps we should just consider ourselves lucky to have a bank at all.

I was mindful of the time while I was about my errands. The people that we had ordered the roofing sheets from called yesterday to tell me that they would be delivered today. The very pleasant man was going to call when he was on his way so I could coordinate being around when he arrived. I had just one call left, our electrical wholesaler for some last minute bits for the home wiring, and then return home collecting mother on the way. That last call resulted in a further call because the trunking I purchased did not have a sticky back to it, so I needed some double-sided tape. This last detour was the one that made me miss our roofing delivery.

As we drove back into The Cove we were flagged down by a neighbour. He had recalled that I might have occasionally mentioned our need for IBCs (the big plastic cubes that collect our rainwater, in case it has slipped your mind, dear reader) and stopped us to say that he had one spare if we wanted it. I was delighted and told him that we would probably be back tomorrow for it as I had not intended a trip to The Farm today.

I had not intended a working trip to The Farm today, although we would need to transport the roofing sheets up there. The plan, when I purchased them and the lane was being difficult with wet and mud, was to have them delivered to The Cove and to load them onto the roof bars so that we could transport them hence ourselves. Since the order, the lane had improved and my new plan was to slip the driver a few extra pennies and entice him to take the roofing sheets up in the delivery truck and we would unload them directly. All this meticulous planning and scheming fell in a crumpled heap on the ground when we arrived home to discover that the roofing sheets had been delivered not twenty minutes earlier. Had I not stopped for double sided tape, I would have been back in time.

No matter, the Missus and I loaded the sheets onto the truck. In the flesh, these fitted quite well and the new ratchet straps that I purchased a while back for this very purpose, held them firmly in place. In retrospect, we could very well have got them back from Camborne on the roof without the issues that I anticipated of them overhanging the windscreen or the tailgate and being pulled back at the front by the airflow. We will know for next time.

While thin, they are also long and surprisingly heavy. We could struggle with two at a time or just take our time and do one on each lift, which is what we did. Learning a valuable lesson from last time when they ended up in a different field, blown by the wind, we placed them temporarily in the barn. I have a pal lined up to give me a hand putting them in place, or rather I will give him a hand since nearly all of the work will take place above the second rung of a ladder. It was an unintended piece of work but hopefully it will soon be complete and we can get back to the real items we have on our imaginary list.

Since we had made the trip to The Farm it seemed sensible to hook up the trailer and go and get the IBC (the big plastic cubes that collect our rainwater, in case it has slipped your mind, dear reader). Since we did not have the telephone number of our very kind donor, I arrived unannounced, which was probably not the best plan, it transpired.

The IBC (the big plastic cubes that collect our rainwater, in case it has slipped your mind, dear reader), was up on the terrace and the intervening space in the yard was filled with the detritus of a serious refurbishment of the property. However, the air was filled with a lively 'can do attitude' and the bright idea that it could easily be slid down some scaffold boards into the yard and taken from there out to the front when the trailer awaited. I understand that there is photographic evidence of the ensuing process and I await demands for payment to prevent the pictures going into the public domain. To suggest that there may be some parallels with Laurel and Hardy's 'The Piano' might be a bit harsh – neither of us sported bowler hats for a start – but let us say that it might have gone better. I blame myself for providing insufficient warning of my impending appearance and anyway, the IBC (I am sure you recall by now, dear reader) is now up at The Farm waiting on its final resting place being prepared for it.

Although I now have the wherewithal to put the last touches to the electrics in the flat, I suspect time at The Farm is on the cards for tomorrow, especially as I have to be on hand for our building supplier who has been exceedingly patient with me.

We actually managed to have a few uneventful hours after we returned from The Farm. Perhaps we should not be quite so ambitious with our plans in future.

January 26th – Wednesday

I do not know how we got from 'well, we cannot do much until the tipping trailer arrives' to only getting back home at five o'clock having been flat out since the middle of the day.

It might well have been longer had I not diverted my attention to go to the gymnasium for another blistering session. It is difficult to know whether it is the

blistering sessions that permit me to do all the lifting, digging and carrying or whether doing both is making a happy man very old. It would be poor show to experiment and drop the blistering sessions only to find that I was unable to lift a bag of postmix on each shoulder a week later. We shall continue with the status quo for now and look out for signs of weakness, such as waking up face down in the grass with a bag of concrete in each hand. In the meantime I will avoid digging big holes, just in case.

I needed the trip to the gymnasium to distract my attention from the alarming sight down on the Harbour beach this morning. We arrived, bleddy hound and I, just after two ladies had extracted themselves from the water. Most of the swimmers wrap themselves up in those huge insulated robes and wait until getting home before getting changed. This morning's swimmers did their changing on the beach in towels that appeared insufficiently large for the job. I did avert my eyes, several times, but the copious amounts of flesh on display seemed to draw the eye. Thankfully, the bleddy hound was keen to leave the beach as she had spotted a seal close in on the waves. Got to love that bleddy hound sometimes.

The plan was that I would take the Missus up to The Farm as soon as I returned from the gymnasium. Just like Monday she was unavailable at that time, so I tried again after I had cleaned up. Since it was already quite late, we both went up together after I had eaten a spot of breakfast.

At the point of leaving, the Missus procrastinated about whether or not it was worth her going as she could not continue diggering until our tipping trailer arrived. I had to be up there as we were expecting the building supplier's delivery in the early afternoon, so I was definitely going. After a bit of indecision, the Missus got her coat and we headed up together. It did not take long after arrival that she got on with raking over the new bed that had only been turned over in great clods by the digger. It is a large area to be raking smooth and it took her some while.

In the meantime, I set to with the tools I had loaded earlier to remove the broken lower lift arm stabiliser chain. This is an adjustable chain that stabilises the lower lift arm of the three point hitch on the tractor, in case you were wondering, dear reader. Without it the arms can move freely from left to right and rub against the inside of the large rear wheels, which is not ideal if there is some weight attached. One end is held on by a bolt secured with a split pin and came away relatively easily. The other end was not quite so forgiving. It took half a can of easing oil and strategic use of a three pound lump hammer on the end of a long handled spanner to shift it. Having spend about twenty minutes on it, the first movement on the spanner's handle was very satisfying. I will take the bits to our man in Helston tomorrow to see if he can fix it as there does not seem to be a replacement unit in the whole of the country at present. I had one on back order but the likelihood is that it will not be available until March.

Our building supplier took two trips to bring up our prodigious order including splitting the three tons of hardcore between the two trips. In the interim, I moved the postmix

bags to the barn and put some weed matting down in the space that one of the IBCs (come, come, surely by now) is being placed. I was about to get the wherewithal to mark out the area for the compost bins but the driver came back on his second run. He was a most amiable man and we stopped for a chat about this and that as we unloaded some more timber and he tipped the second lot of hardcore. After he had gone I just had time to spread a couple of barrow loads of the hardcore onto the matting I had laid down to stop it blowing away in the wind before the Missus was ready to move out.

She had decided that we needed to collect some more red diesel as we had emptied the last two cans I had collected a few weeks ago. The ulterior motive was to collect some of the free wood chippings the fuel company has at the entrance to their yard. She has, in the past, taken black bags and filled them. That clearly was chicken feed and what was really required was to take the trailer that was still full of IBC (oh, you know). Between us we unloaded the IBC and hitched up the trailer and headed off to the sunlit uplands just outside St Just.

The trailer we have use of is so small that it cannot be seen in the rear view or door mirrors of the truck, which is most disconcerting. I keep waiting for the next big corner when I can see it and just be assured that it is still there. I am sure that it would make sufficient noise if it did come off to alert me. It is not yet a precise science, but I am getting more adept at reversing it using the rear facing camera and the direction of the towing arm to guide me. All the big bins where the wood chips normally are were empty but there was quite a bit of spillage beside one at the end of a particularly muddy stretch. I managed to reverse the trailer to the end of that and leave it there with the Missus while I went and filled up the fuel cans.

The Missus had made a good job of covering the woodchip so that it did not blow out and at least it rattled enough to let me know that the trailer was still there on the way back. When we arrived, we gave the bleddy hound a quick run while I dropped the trailer and put away the fuel cans. Fortunately, we had taken some microwavable left overs from previous meals out of the freezer before we let in the morning else we would have had nothing for tea. It is one of the many benefits of having Mother with us – we do not forget we have to eat in the evening.

January 27th – Thursday

When the bleddy hound and I headed for the beach this morning it was roughly business as usual. We met Ronnie and Reggie, the bleddy hound's two ASBO pals, down on the sand who had got there ahead of us. We stopped for a brief chat and the bleddy hound did what she normally does when I stop to speak with someone, which is sit down. Previously she had wandered the width of the beach to the western slipway and back without complaint. As soon as her pals were out of sight she started to bark – this was her bark reserved for the detection of seals, whether currently present or had been in the vicinity sometime in the last 48 hours.

She was right, of course. Having been alerted and going to check, there were the definite markings of a seal heading for the water in the middle of the beach. The bleddy hound clearly did not want to be seen to make a fuss about a seal in front of her hard mates who probably would have laughed at her.

I think that I was just finishing a bit of breakfast and paying a few bills when the Missus said something about the weather she had noticed out of the window. I did not initially hear what she had said but assumed it was something about another grey day in the offing. I looked out anyway and was rather taken aback that all I could see was a wall of mist. It must have dropped like a stage curtain because there was no inkling of it when I had looked no more than a few minutes earlier.

It was not just mist that arrived, a whole variety of drizzle arrived with it changing in intensity depending on whether you were out in it or not. As we drove to the top of the hill on our way to The Farm, it just got thicker until it was as thick as any fog we have seen here with visibility down to no more than fifty yards. I discovered that even fog of this severity was still insufficient for quite a few motorists to bother with headlights or in several cases, any lights at all.

I dropped the Missus at The Farm and continued with my plan for the day that was largely to provide Mother with a magical mystery tour. It would have been a sightseeing tour but that was clearly scotched by the fact you could not see any sights and it was, at times a mystery as to exactly where we were. Nevertheless, she seemed to enjoy just getting out and about.

In general, I had three errands to run in Helston and the Missus had entreated me to go onward from there to a new gardening wholesale store in Hayle where she wanted some anti-weed matting and some twine. The trip out to Helston is one of my least favourite at the best of times, in the mist and wet, it was even worse and there were major roadworks at Breage. However, the trip was worthwhile as the new farming equipment supplier we have found agreed to fix the current stabiliser chain by doing welding and other magic arts. I also collected some more shotgun cartridges from our friendly gunshop and eventually had some good advice from an irrigation expert.

The latter was a bit of a longshot. I had spoken with someone on the telephone a while ago who had been most helpful at the time and said that we could drop in at any time if we needed further assistance. I asked about the installation of a pump and a timer to water the seedlings in the greenhouse so that when we were busy in the shop, the Missus was not pressed to go and water them in person. I explained my plan, which was a mistake, and we spent the next twenty minutes learning all the reasons why it would not work. I had said that there would be around 40 metres of hose with holes in, which was the key issue. After he asked if we could have used four ten metre lengths (at the end of the twenty minutes why 40 would not work) I said that there was no reason at all. I had clearly asked the wrong question. Five

minutes later and I had all the information I needed to make it work and quite cheaply at that.

We moved swiftly on to the garden store in Hayle, which is in the middle of an industrial estate. My clever smart mobile telephone still cannot tell me the way, so once again I used good old fashioned map reading to get there. The only difference I can see is that the latter is less immediate and requires some homework. It is a product of our self-imposed hectic lifestyles where everything has to be done and had now.

The main problem I had with the directions to this particular store was that I had no idea where it was. Alright, I had a general idea because the Missus explained but she had sent me a link to a website that I had not looked closely enough at. The website had the location in Worcester, the head office, and I was definitely not going to drive to the other side of Camborne for a bit of weed matting. I found it by a little bit of reasoning that the sign for the only garden store in the area I was looking in must be it.

It was quite late in the afternoon by the time I had dropped Mother back home and arrived at The Farm. The Missus, who has been bemisted all day up there but had managed to produce about eight fence frames for the new growing plots in the damp air, was ready to come home.

We were in a bit of a rush anyway because someone had decided that today would be an excellent day for a bit of a Lifeboat launch. The time had been moved forward from our usual Thursday training seven o'clock because of the state of the tides – a launch at the usual time would mean recovery at a time in the tide between slipways where neither would be usable. We launched both at five o'clock with a well attended training session with plenty of Boat Crew and, for the first time in a while, an over-manned very excellent Shore Crew.

The boat was not out for very long. I left operations to my colleague while I explained to a new recruit the process of how we ensured a textbook recovery while a textbook recovery was going on before his very eyes up the long slipway. There was no washing down of the boat because inexplicably the hose stopped working at the crucial time, possibly because it draws water from a tank and had just been used to wash down the Inshore boat. The water company insists on the use of a tank in commercial settings where a hose is used next to the sea or a body of water lest the hose drawn up water from that source at contaminate the mains supply. We are, after all, a very dry, very excellent Shore Crew.

January 28th – Friday

We were very disappointed to note that the weather had not changed since yesterday as we headed for the beach this morning. The bleddy hound had to work

extra hard to wake me up as I was deep in slumber, but she started early to compensate. Thankfully, she had forgotten all about the seal from yesterday, which was a surprise and a relief. Not a moment's sniffing of the air and no hesitation and she was all over the beach as well.

There was no indecision about the need to have a blistering session at the gymnasium this morning. I had hardly done anything very physical in the last few days to compensate and driving all over West Penwith does not count as exercise however far we went. With the temperature definitely edging up the scale today it was most comfortable in the hut with a tin roof and bright enough, despite the weather, for me not to need the light on. A blistering session was had, indeed.

I was not long cleaned up and ready for my breakfast when the Missus told me that she had spotted another IBC (anyone telling me now that they cannot remember is definitely taking the Mickey) for sale over at Angarrack, near Hayle. She was on it like a kestrel on a fieldmouse and secured the purchase and an agreement to pick it up before three o'clock in the afternoon. Given that it was nearly the middle of the day already, this meant getting a bit of a move on – after breakfast and a cup of tea, naturally.

I had to remind the Missus that we would need to spend additional time preparing to go because the trailer we would be using was still full of woodchips. In the event, this did not take too long to clear with the trailer tipped up and scooping out by hand. The Missus did the scooping out by hand while I went to the shed to get my Cornish shovel, which I immediately retraced my steps to replace because she had finished scooping out by hand when I got back.

We are aware that the brake lights on the trailer do not work and neither do the nearside running lights. Given that it was still misty, and we were taking a slightly longer trip today, I thought it best to stop off and replace the bulbs. There was a little trickiness about taking off the lights lens and removing the bulb so that we would know what to buy, which delayed us a little but we were on our way soon enough to pick up Mother. It was about the same time that I was thinking about it that the Missus mentioned how we might turn around in Mother's small estate. There is a small car park there but it is not very wide but it turned out to be the best option as it had the most available space. As it transpired, my recent live practises with the trailer attached paid off and I did a three point turn without issue or having to correct and adjust.

We travelled with Mother out to Angarrack, stopping at the car parts shop for replacement bulbs. This delayed us further and turned out to be wasted time as the problem is clearly not with the bulbs but with the wiring. We decided to risk the infraction of travelling without brake lights but if you were far enough behind us, the truck's lights should have been visible.

Angarrack is quite the prettiest of villages in the area. It is nestled under the supremely impressive Angarrack railway viaduct that towers above the houses. It used to be 100 feet high but is now 30 metres. The original was built by Mr Brunel out of wood, which is unusual for Mr Brunel but by the time the Great Western Railway reached West Cornwall he was probably short a shilling or two. Consequently, it did not last long and the current stone structure was completed by a Mr Stevens in 1885. There is a detailed description of the building of it on the Angarrack information web page should you be interested, dear reader.

The address we had for collection of our IBC was in a little private side road, more of a drive really, that serviced three properties of increasing footage. On the last in the row, where we turned around – we apologise for any inconvenience caused and any disturbance of the freshly raked gravel – the garden alone was large enough to build a small housing estate on. In was an incongruous place to find an IBC, which was probably why it was for sale – perhaps the owners had been sanctioned by the resident's association and charged with immediate disposal. However, the owners we met were very pleasant and wheeled the IBC to the front of the drive on a large sack trolley and helped the Missus and I to load it onto the trailer.

We made our way back carefully to Penzance where the Missus wanted to stop off at the big general store in Long Rock. Fortunately, there is a big car park at the rear where I was able to turn around without having to risk embarrassing myself with another attempt at reversing. It was at the big roundabout that sits between there and Penzance that I recalled seeing a pedestrian crossing ahead of me yesterday. It made me wonder if someone had missed a trick when penning the new Highway Code rules. We are now supposed to stop to permit a pedestrian to cross a road that the motorist intends to turn into. This, I supposed, included the exit from the roundabout, after all, it is a turning. The problem is that I could legitimately be travelling at thirty miles per hour and would have to stop quite quickly. It is also two lane, so a car coming past me into the same turning would also have to be aware that a pedestrian, quite likely obscured by my vehicle, was crossing his path too. I wonder who I might ask to confirm that an exit from a roundabout is a turning or not?

By the time we had reached The Farm to drop off the IBC, the whole afternoon had flown by. The purchase of our penultimate IBC (you will be glad to understand, dear reader) had taken up the entire day, sort of. Do not misunderstand, dear reader, it was an amazing stroke of luck to secure two IBCs within a few days and get so close to finishing with our water reservoir plans, so we are delighted. It is just that when we think about all the other things we could have done with that time, it is quite frustrating. However, having had no fixed plans for the day – as we invariably do – it was difficult to nail down exactly what we missed doing.

Since we are so close to having water resources complete, I must consider setting up our last solar panel next to the greenhouse, buying our pump as recommended by the expert at Helston and putting in place the automated watering system in the

greenhouse. This is an interesting project and will do very nicely while we are waiting for the tipping trailer and hole boring tool to turn up.

Must be time for a beer to celebrate.

January 29th – Saturday

By gosh, there was a surprise chill waiting for us on the Harbour beach. I had not felt that cold in the flat but there was a bit of a sharp breeze from somewhere and it was blowing right up my little boy's trouser leg. It was quite warming to meet with the bleddy hound's best pal down on the beach, though. We tarried for a little chat, well, the neighbour and I did, the dogs wandered off to do their own thing. Apart from the chill it was a reasonable day but it did not stay reasonable for long.

The weather waited until we had arrived at The Farm around the middle of the day and then started to throw a bit of a tantrum with more mizzle sweeping in every now and again. I read a weather forecast that said after a mild start it would get colder, which was a bit concerning since if that was a mild start, I am a supermodel's left foot. There was no mention of wet, just that it would get brighter, which is the opposite of what it got. Perhaps I was looking at the forecast for Ouagadougou by mistake.

Still, us hardy farmer types, when we are not being grumpy shopkeepers, care not for a spot of weather while we are out tending to the soil and there was much tending to the soil today. As usual, no plan had been made until we were on our way to Mother's as to what was on the cards for the day. I had packed all my tools in case I had the opportunity to form my upright posts for the compost shed, which in the end, I did not. Today's plan, we decided, was to press on moving the soil from the hole in the opposite side of the field to the growing area at the back of the tool and tractor sheds. You might recall that the Missus is an advocate of the no dig garden philosophy, which involves laying cardboard to stop weeds growing through and putting compost on top of it. I have negotiated a truce on the compost as we have a three acre field full of grade A growing soil, so we are using that instead.

The original plan, which is why we hired the digger for another week, was to wait until the tipping trailer had arrived and use that to transport the soil from left field to right field. Given that there is some delay in the arrival of the tipping trailer, we decided to use the trailer we have, which does not tip, is considerably smaller and requires some manual spade work. At least we are not wasting the hire time for the digger.

I have to admit that the Missus is much more adept at manipulating the digger than I am. She obviously has the knack and had mastered the skill of being reasonably precise with the bucket. It is not all there at present as some of the dings in the trailer will attest to – sorry, Mr TB, whose trailer it is, the dings are not material, we

promise. However, since my skills with manoeuvring the trailer in a backwards direction are burgeoning, so I stuck with towing that around and putting it where the Missus told me to put it. I was also chief digger with a spade, although the Missus did an admirable job of scraping the earth out of the trailer with the motorised digger.

We made several trips and I would say that one or two more will see that growing area complete. We have also resolved the problem of what to do with the hole created in the left field by all that digging earth out. We are filling it with the detritus (organic, which is something new for this part of the world) from the clearance that the Missus did earlier along the hedge line at the back of the polytunnel on the north side of the field. All manner of bits of fern, gorse and so forth, along with much weedy earth went back in the hole transported on the trailer as we returned to the hole for more soil. My word, we are efficient.

We continued until poor light and being very weary stopped play. We dropped Mother back home, who had been doing the essential jobs of looking after the bleddy hound in the cabin and making tea. We have a small gas heater in there that does a first class job of keeping her warm and a carbon monoxide alarm on the wall, just in case. As we drove back to St Buryan, the weather closed in rapidly. We stopped at St Buryan store for some ingredients for our tea during which time I sent a message to my pal who was due to help me with the tractor shed roof on Monday, postponing the work. Monday's weather does not look too smart for roofing jobs with a gale of wind on the way. When I looked up again to pull away after the Missus got back in, I could not see a thing. Thinking that the windows had steamed up, I opened mine to look out and discovered I still could not see anything. The mizzle just got thicker and wetter as we drove home.

It is difficult to describe just how welcome sitting down and doing nothing was after we had settled. I do not think that there was an emergency urgent enough that would have shifted us, either. What busy little farmers we are.

January 30th – Sunday

In complete contrast to the last few days, we woke up this morning to an absolute corker of a day. There were bits of your actual blue sky up there, in fact quite a bit of it, spoiled only by a wide strip of mackerel sky heralding a change in the weather.

The bleddy hound and I were all alone on the beach first thing. It was a wide expanse at lowish water and very clean with only a bit of weed strung out across the beach by the tide line and some down by low water. We were not even interrupted by any sea birds or the resident pigeons and doves that had been getting all amorous all over our end of The Cove for the last week or so. Just we two.

I was up early for the range, but we had headed to the beach at about the normal time. Most of my preparations for range day are done the evening before so things

are usually pretty slick on the day. It was only half a day today because I do not shoot what some others were shooting in the afternoon, although it does not make any difference to what I prepare. The Missus dropped me off as usual and went off to collect Mother and to head to The Farm.

I joined them in the afternoon. The Missus had told me to look out for the plume of smoke over in the direction of The Farm as it can be seen from the range. She had planned to burn all the wood that we had sorted out of the wreckage along the hedge line but I saw no smoke the few times I looked. She told me she had no luck lighting the pile because it was damp and perhaps I would like to give it a try after I suggested using some accelerant. You know you are onto a losing path when not even a good dousing of petrol sets it alight, although it was quite effective on my eyebrows. (I should explain at this juncture, mainly for the benefit of the Aged Parent who will be having kittens with worry, that the last bit was a little jest and that I took exceptional precautions during the process and completed a risk assessment before I even stepped foot towards the pile of wood. My safety was never in doubt because I let the Missus light it – nooo, that was a joke, too.)

We gave up on the fire, although it smouldered a good deal for about half an hour afterwards, and concentrated on moving some more organic waste to the earth hole on the other side of the field. I had even more opportunity to practise my going backwards with a trailer and the Missus had even more opportunity to practise missing the trailer with the bucket on the digger. We managed another two trailer loads before the holes we had dug were full to the brim. The Missus then went over at our last knockings to push the original sods back over our filling. You would never notice that we were there – sort of.

Before the Missus took me back up to The Farm, we dropped down to The Cove so that I could get changed into my farmer clothes. The surf was looking good and a large number of surfers thought so too. They were in so much of a hurry to get into the water they clearly had no choice but leave all their cars parked along the road without leaving too many spaces in between them. It is a good job that the double yellow lines are not active at this time of year – oh, of course, they are now. That worked well, then.

As the afternoon pushed on, the day became a little colder, a little more breezy and a little more grey. Those clouds just kept rolling in and at the last vestiges of light, there looked to be some mizzle on the horizon sweeping in. We packed in early up at The Farm as the Missus had to cook our tea, which was specially chosen to use us some of the spinach that the Missus had 'weeded' from the polytunnel before we started putting up our tables. I think that there is still three times that amount left in the freezer and I shall look like Popeye.

I came across my old pipes in the loft while I was working up there. It was a phase that never suited me, but I was only twelve at the time. There is even a Meerschaum up there, so I am loathed to throw them away. Perhaps I should put them in one of

the holes at The Farm and let some future archaeologist find it in centuries to come, when they knock down the housing estate for an Alpha Centurian landing pad when they come to save us all from wrecking the plant.

January 31st – Monday

There was a minor level of panic at the last knockings yesterday when I rechecked the weather forecast to see if the expected wind was still to be expected. I had not done what I usually do and look at alternative forecasts but when I did late last night I discovered that the BBC has reckoned on a whole different level of breeze. It had forecast lighter winds that would not have impeded us replacing the tractor shed roof. In any case I had to wait until morning to find out who was right and who I should shake my fist at or congratulate.

The howling in the eaves early in the morning rather suggested that on this occasion, the Meteorological Office had got it right. I checked with the local weather station down Porthgwarra way and sure enough the windspeed had reached 40 miles per hour definitely ruling out any roofing work.

It was quite breezy when I took the bleddy hound down to the beach but we have had worse, or better depending on your point of view – you might be a kite flier, for example. It did not seem that cold and the sun was doing its best to break through. It did that for the rest of the day with very little success. The wind won the day and the temperature never really had a chance, making it a little frosty in the flat given its direction straight at us. Work up at The Farm was already in doubt for today and when a shower of rain blew through we decided that today, indeed, was our day off.

Days off are a bit relative for us as there are always things to do and on this particular day it was sending back all the year end documents to the accountant as they should have been with the taxman today. Work at The Farm has been so intense that I forgot all about the taxman, so there has been that hidden advantage all along. He also wanted all my hard-earned cash today, too, which is very unfair. I wonder if I changed my name to Google that he might let me keep it.

The other thing that I wanted to do, more than needed to do, was to have a geek up at The Farm just to see if the breeze really was enough to stop roofing or not. I had to go up that way anyway to post the end of year documents so I slipped into my alluring DIYman costume and my new dayglo water and wind proof trousers. Since I would not be moving the digger, tractor or truck around the field, the Missus suggested that I take the bleddy hound with me as she would not be at risk of being squashed. Little did the Missus or the bleddy hound know that heavy equipment was not the risk to be aware of.

There only seemed to be one way of determining if roof working was on or not and there was to get up there and have a proper look. While I was there, I decided that it

would be a good idea to see just how difficult it was going to be to remove the roofing nails holding down the bitumen roof. I had expected this to be a full day's work of beefy nail extraction and I had expected right.

I started out with a sizable claw hammer and selected one nail at the edge of the roof at random. The edge of the roof gave me the optimum access, pushing my own personal envelope of third run up the ladder that just about gave me sufficient height. Maybe my feet were three feet off the ground. Obviously, this was on the lower end of the roof pitch – my foolhardiness has limits – and the side where we had spent all that time shifting earth to on top of the cardboard as per the Missus's instructions and that lay loose and fresh below and behind me on the ladder.

The nail was, indeed, as resistant to being extracted as I thought it might be. I twisted it away from me, towards me and thumped it a fair few times to try and loosen it. The nail gave in a millimetre here and a millimetre there but it was a huge effort just to move it that much. I did not put these nails in, and I only had the merest notion of just how long there were. This was a detail the relevance of which became very apparent when it rather unexpectedly and suddenly came free of the wood into which it had been erstwhile embedded.

Two thoughts passed through my mind at the point that the nail gave up its grip. The first was that how much of a better outcome it would have been had I been pushing instead of pulling with both hands when it came free. The second was that I was very glad that I was out of view of the cctv camera as I slowly fell backwards in comedic style with a claw hammer in my hand. It also struck me just how slowly the process unfolded giving me sufficient time to look down at my feet to see just how far away the ground was. That particular action was probably quite useful as it tucked my chin in so that all of me apart from my head impacted the nice soft earth together that we had not long put there.

I landed with a soft thud and the first thing I saw was a look of utter disdain on the bleddy hound's face. I think that she had been lying down roughly where I fell and had to move out of the way rather more rapidly than she would have liked. Having discovered that all my various parts still seemed to work approximately as they had previously, I could not help but laugh my head off. It was even funnier when I managed to get up and discover that I had left a cartoonesque imprint of a surprised grumpy shopkeeper in the earth.

Looking back, I was surprised just how quickly I had assimilated all the information related to my predicament and made the right decision in not flailing about as I fell. It also confirmed my life-long conviction that rising more than two rungs on a ladder is against nature.

Having established that the roof nails were indeed very difficult to extract, I thought that I had better just check that I had not just picked a rogue nail. I went back up the ladder again and took with me my small wrecking bar that has a claw of the end.

That did not help at all even when I belted the top end with the claw hammer. I did make sure that my more robust efforts pointed in the direction of the roof and while I was pulling, I held onto something solid. This nail sheared while I was manipulating it and I came to the conclusion that perhaps we should just put the steel roof sheets on top of the existing. I shall consult with my pal who is set to help me.

I was delayed in my progression of the day by several telephone calls as well as the sorting out the taxman issue. One call was from our credit card payment machine company. I had, six months earlier, posted a support call with them to ask them to explain why that sometimes our 'cash back' report had the cash back highlighted in red but, more often than not, it did not. It was a minor enquiry and about three months ago I had been asked to provide some screen shots as examples, which I had already done but did so again without complaint. Despite it being not very urgent it is not the most responsive that I have found a company being to a support call. After waiting such a long time, it was disappointing to get an explanation that really did not ring true. I was told the black and white was an old report and the colour, the new one. If true, why have I only seen the colour one a few times but generally get the black and white. I did not ask. Having waited six months for an unbelievable answer I did not fancy seeing how long it would take before I got a believable one.

The other telephone call was even more disappointing. You might recall, dear reader – no, we have had enough of that with IBCs. Let me start again. Dear reader, you will not recall that we ordered a new reclining sofa back in November that was due to be delivered in February. I had kicked myself for falling for fancy electronic wizardry but all in all, it was a very comfortable sofa. A very pleasant man at the Truro store from where we purchased the item explained that, just two weeks before our due delivery date, the company that makes them had gone into receivership and would not be making any more sofas.

I could hardly shoot the messenger and who had probably chosen the short straw of all the staff at the store to make all the calls. He told me that everyone so far had been very pleasant about it and he had not been sworn at once yet. There was some good news, which was that the company owned the sofa design and had an alternative manufacturer lined up. Unfortunately, while the original company was based in the UK, the new one is in China and that there would be a renewed lead time to delivery that would see it delivered in May. As an apology, the company would give us a ten percent refund if we wished to renew our order.

I said that I would have to consult with the Missus, after leaving the house and telling her on the telephone as I did not wish to be within the blast zone. We know that we have very little choice in the matter. We had looked elsewhere and really there is nothing similar we liked the look of. Also, there are not many stores withing convenient visiting range and we would have to purchase online, which does not seem sensible. I have sent a message back asking for assurances on quality and delivery and await a response.

We have consoled ourselves by having pasties for tea. I am sure we will feel much better after that and I can confirm that throwing yourself off a ladder is not the answer.