

## DIARY 2025

### 1<sup>st</sup> March – Saturday

There, by four o'clock in the morning I had a reasonably detailed outline of how the stable doors for the new greenhouse will come together. The only thing that eluded me was how they might be secured closed. Initially I considered a simple bar dropped into slots on the front but not long after I thought that I might use the spare cladding sheets as facings for the doors which would preclude any furniture on the front. I thought that the Missus might want to close the bottom doors and leave the top ones open which would mean separate locks top and bottom but I really needed to consult with her to make sure.

ABH must have been aware how keen I was to get cracking on the new phase of the build and had me up early. It was another stunning day to behold but the sea had commandeered the Harbour, so we went all the way around the block again, which now seems to be becoming a routine. There is absolutely nothing wrong with a walk in the weather we had today even if at that time in the morning it was quite sharp as the sun had not yet got into full swing.

Despite the cold, I omitted a layer under my DIYman overalls this morning and dispensed with my thermal waterproof leggings when I got ready for The Farm. Yesterday, I suffered as most of my time was in the truck and when I did get up to The Farm it was pleasantly warm. I reasoned today, actually doing some work, I would be uncomfortable in the extra layers. I was right and not long into working, another layer came off.

The Missus only has the digger for another couple of days. I have looked up on the Internet what the likely withdrawal symptoms might be and whatever they are they will be at the extreme end because the Missus will be going cold turkey when the man comes to collect it. I could not find any information and am considering making a quick replica instead of the doors over the next few days, just to help a bit. Today, she did her best by mixing her day between using the digger and the tractor in about a 50:50 ratio.

She has had the idea of building a hedge along behind the greenhouse with the rocks that we have in abundance in the geot dump of subsoil we have at the end of the field. There are a few exponents of the Cornish hedge build dotted around locally who probably spent ten years in apprenticeship and another ten perfecting the craft. The Missus will probably throw our wall up during the summer between growing things. First though, she is amassing the required rocks by transferring them from the bottom of the field to the top in the tipping trailer. There is value in those rocks, so if the hedge does not work out, we can sell them.

Before we came up to The Farm in the morning, I ordered the gabion baskets on which to place the IBCs. I know, dear reader, I am really asking a lot for you to remember two obscure references to enhance your reading, erm, pleasure. I apologise. The gabion baskets will need to be filled with stones. The gabion baskets are being placed not a, ahem, stone's throw from the pile of rocks that the Missus is amassing for her hedge. Do not look at me like that, dear reader, I am merely pointing out the facts.

While the Missus was amassing rocks, I was digging for victory. The victory in this case is the completion of the greenhouse doors. Before I can determine the dimensions, I need to determine where the ground is. That may sound obtuse but the ground on one side of the door is higher than the ground on the other side of the door. I had intended to level it by placing a concrete 'mat' that would also serve to keep the natural growth away from the operation of the door without me having to leave too big a gap at the bottom. It was bad enough with the sliding doors.

I had not intended to make the concrete mat too thick, but it had to be thick enough to withstand regular foot fall and the passage of the occasional wheelbarrow without cracking. First though I had to peel back the ant-weed matting that the Missus had meticulously installed a task that was made more difficult by the number of weeks growing through it. I also marked out the area which amounted to a space three and a half metres by one metre.

When I looked at it and calculated the amount of concrete required, I very quickly abandoned the idea. I had intended to use postcrete, which while being inappropriate, was quick and easy and I was running out of time. It would also have required more bags than I could contemplate, and it would have been indefensibly costly. I reassessed and we will now have a wide doorstep that will give me the level I need for the door height and the rest will have to be maintained with matting and gravel.

It took far longer than anticipated to dig out the hole and given the amount of earth removed, would take far more bags of concrete than I had. I could not really have made the hole any shallower and even then I put in a layer of hardcore and some wire to strengthen the resulting pad. I estimate that the two and a half bags of concrete I had to hand only filled a third of the hole. A trip to our builders' merchant is looming on Monday. I have also discounted putting a similar mat at the other end of the greenhouse, certainly this year. That end will have to rely on matting and maintenance to keep it clear.

We worked through until the sun was low in the sky. One of the first things I did when I arrived at The Farm was to make a quicky ABH proof barrier for the gate, which seemed effective; she was contained all day in the field. It crossed my mind whether she is content to be at The Farm all day, but she will have to get used to it because with the greenhouse complete, the Missus will be up there all day when the shop is open.

When we drove back down to The Cove, it was clear that the sea had started to misbehave in our absence. It was looking a bit lively in the Harbour first thing but had really upped its game for the evening high water. I never fail to be amazed just how quickly it can go from placid to rough. We would be sleeping with the sound of thumping waves tonight, for sure.

## 2<sup>nd</sup> March – Sunday

The sea was fair dancing in the bay this morning. It had clearly learnt how to misbehave and was upping its game and enjoying stretching its muscle just to mix a few metaphors about it. With the water swirling in the Harbour, we were compelled to go around the block again. It is unlikely that we will get to the beach this week as we will be at The Farm during the period of low water.

I have given up on shooting and the range completely now. There is just too much to do between now and shop opening and every minute will be precious for one achievement or another. At the moment it is all about The Farm, although I have a couple of pressing messages to send giving advanced notice to suppliers of our intentions. For once, the small gods of grumpy shopkeepers have conceded some ground and have let us operate in near perfect weather.

Again today, I went ahead without my jacket on, although I did have the usual layers as it was a bit cold first thing. It was cool enough to remain that way for the rest of the day and despite some sunshine between the clouds we never really had the full benefit of the sun.

I collected Mother and then came back for the Missus. Arriving at The Farm was the last time I saw the Missus until tea break and then she disappeared up the lane with the digger to do some road repairs. It is the last two days that we have the digger, so I can hardly blame her for taking advantage. Not only has she completed an enormous workload, she has had more fun than rolling around in a big box of fun things all labelled 'fun'.

While she was unashamedly enjoying herself, I set to with the greenhouse doors. Since I still do not know where the ground will be, I decided that at least I could make the upper doors because they do not need to know where the ground is. All I had to do was to make two perfectly square frames of the correct dimensions. Knowing that any eejit could do that I decided that it would be far harder to do it using mitred corners with none of the right tools like a mitre saw. Any eejit would also have looked at the wealth of advice available on the Internet before attempting such a feat, so I studiously avoided such cheating. If that were not making the job nigh on impossible, I also discovered that there was not one big enough level surface at The Farm to ensure that the frame was flat, either.

Before all of that, I wanted to install some timber as door frames. The posts are set too far back and if we wanted the doors to open out flat against the side of the greenhouse, and we do, the frame would need to be at least level with the side. I used some 3x2 which when installed was flush. Later in the evening, I reviewed that decision and thought that I may change them with the 4x2 I have which will protrude a bit more. The only trouble with that is that the cladding on one side would need to be cut back. The other issue with that is I do not have screws long enough and there are only three anchor points if I want to screw from the side.

At the time, however, such detail eluded me, and I pressed on with making the door frames. Meticulously measuring the width of the doorway, I divided that number in two as the width of each door. It did not take long to cut four lengths of timber at one length and another four at another. All the mitres were done free hand using a circular saw that I reasoned would cut the straightest cuts. Because the circular saw did not cut deep enough, I finished each cut with a hand saw. All the cuts looked alright but only putting them together would prove whether they were good enough.

None of the corners were good enough, although some just about worked with a bit of imagination and a blind eye. Others were slightly more fraught and needed some fine adjustment. I used my square to make sure that each corner was at 90 degrees and while clamped, screwed them into position. Quite how then the last corner was not 90 degrees will remain a mystery in my head. I think you are supposed to put all four corners together without joining them first, ensure the corners are 90 degrees, then measure the diagonals. Then, when all that is tickety-boo, clamp the ensemble and then screw them together. I think I was lucky – twice – getting the door frames as square as I did. They will work as doors because they have to.

The other bicycle wheel in the icing sugar was when I came to place the doors in the door frame, they were at least 20 millimetres too wide. My meticulous measurements were clearly something I had dreamt up. The intention was that I would shave 15 millimetres off each door but from a starting point that my saw blade is a couple of millimetres wide, it was never going to be that accurate.

I disassembled my carefully crafted door frame, shaved two of the sides and put it all back together again. I very quickly discovered that my shaving had been a little over-enthusiastic and that the second door did not need to be touched. It does, of course, mean that the doors are now not of equal size and somehow, I will have to repeat the accidental mismatch for the lower doors. I do not have the time to start over and I consoled myself that along with the crooked front, the back being shorter and the front – or the other way around – the uneven sized door will fit in very nicely to the whole greenhouse build philosophy. It will catch on, I am sure, and I will be holding lectures at the Bartlett School of Architecture before very long.

Oddly, I did not feel in the least disheartened by my failure to achieve door making perfection. Perhaps, I am just used to such things by now. I did, however, feel quite weary and welcoming of a bit of a sit down somewhere comfortable. Mother was of

much the same mind but it took a bit of persuading to encourage the Missus to put the digger away so we could go home.

Once home we enjoyed a traditional builder's fried breakfast for tea with extra cholesterol on the side and big tin mugs of steaming tea. We regaled each other with tales of big hammers, swing shovels and manly tools in the comfort of the knowledge that we would be doing it all again tomorrow – with the possible exception of the big fried breakfast.

### 3<sup>rd</sup> March – Monday

Today turned out to be largely wasted. The gabion cages were being delivered and came with a four hour estimated delivery window, which the courier company missed completely. We left them to it and went up to The Farm anyway which we should have done at the very outset of the day. Whenever way we did it, we would have regretted doing so.

There were certainly no regrets about enjoying the visual splendour we had bestowed upon us. The day was every bit as glorious as the two days before it and just as cold when I eventually took ABH around the block in the morning. She had woken me early and I encouraged her to go back to sleep again, which she did. When I got up, I expected her to follow like she normally does but once I had put on my walking out attire, she was nowhere to be seen. I looked everywhere and eventually concluded she must have gone back to sleep and found her under the covers in our bed. It was another half an hour – after I had poured out my tea – that she emerged. I put all my going out clothes back on and later came back to my cold tea.

I had been far too lazy last week and omitted my gymnasium sessions completely. I thought that I had better make amends especially as the gymnasium is now downstairs in the shop. With all the Christmas decorations still there and all the outside display bunched up in a huddle, there is precious little space for the rowing machine and even less for additional exercising. Even rowing involved pushing aside the occasional wetsuit that intervened in the process. Nevertheless, I still managed a blistering session, although I fancy it was slightly less blistering than I would have had in the hut with a tin roof. For a start there is no machine to properly exercise my quadriceps, and I will have to find a suitable alternative. Unbelievably, there is also not one square inch of empty wall against which I can roll up and down as I do my weighted squats. Given that is an important part of the routine, I will definitely need to find some way around it.

Being as the gymnasium is downstairs, I was also there and back much more quickly. I had also shortened the session and started early because the game plan was to deliver the Missus to The Farm and to rush back so that I did not miss the delivery. It would have been a risk as the estimated delivery window started at half

past nine and I did not finish at the gymnasium until gone that. In any event, the Missus decided it was not worth the risk, and she would wait. She also said that she would keep an eye out while I went over to the builders' merchant in St Just to get the cement. I could then take her up to The Farm after that.

By the time I came back from St Just, there was only an hour or less until the end of the delivery window, so surely it was worth waiting some more. It was not. The driver missed the window completely, so we decided not to wait any longer, left a note for the courier and headed to The Farm. The courier arrived ten minutes after we left.

We left in the blazing sunshine of a glorious day, although the warmth had yet to follow. The sea had moderated a good deal from yesterday, although at high water the waves were coming over the near end of the Harbour wall with some force. There was far less white water around, however and as the tide slipped away, the deep rolling swell lent itself to some decent surfing conditions, witnessed by two wave boarders just to the east of Cowloe.

The surfers were plying their sport just north of the Lifeboat channel where today the Inshore boat had been deployed fixing the channel markers. The boat had been launched from the big beach as there was insufficient water in the Harbour to float the boat out. I left them to it on this occasion.

Up at The Farm, we went our separate ways again. I thought that I would leave the Missus a while alone with her cherished digger. I am no good in those highly charged emotional moments so got on with my concreting far enough away not to be able to hear the sobs.

I had purchased another six bags of postcrete and used five and a half of them. I had just smoothed out another layer when our builder friend arrived with his two dogs. Mayhem ensued while all three hounds ran about the place chasing each other. It was only after they had run off down the field that I noticed the postcrete was mass of paw prints. Luckily, I had not yet poured water on it.

There was not much for me to do after I had finished with the concrete. There was too little time to start on the doors, so I decided to test the new water pump instead. The 20 millimetre hose is heavier than ordinary hose and not a thing to cart around watering plants. The first aim is to transfer water between IBCs so that I can move them and eventually I intend to install it more permanently so that water in the greenhouse will be on tap at the flick of a switch. That would be next year provided my undickied knee comes good in time.

The Missus finished washing down the digger with a different hose arrangement, one with a squirter at the end of it, while I cleared away the bigger hose that had worked admirably. We had forgotten the digger bucket that the Missus had mainly used and that was only changed yesterday when she repaired the lane. The bucket had earth stuck inside it that seemed to require a chisel to break loose. Since I had locked up

the toolshed, I managed some of it with a handy trowel that had been left lying around.

The sun was well on its way to the horizon by the time we left The Farm behind. I had a message earlier to say that our delivery had been made and intended to slip it into the back of the truck, ready for tomorrow. When we arrived back home, there was an enormous box blocking the doorway. On it in big print was "Acoustic Slatwall Panel". It looked the shape and size for acoustic slatwall panel, but I rather hoped that it was a repurposed box used for the gabion cages. This looked even less likely when the Missus found another box in the newspaper box and that one had "Gabion cage" written on it. I had been a little surprised when I saw we were getting two packages but assumed that the gabion cages were too heavy for the one box.

It was too late to call the company, so I sent a message instead. I will call in the morning, but we will be up against it because I am picking up the volunteer roofers at half past nine o'clock. Even getting up early, it is going to be a very busy morning indeed.

## 4<sup>th</sup> March – Tuesday

I was up with the lark this morning, albeit quite a lazy one I imagine. The sun was already shining madly, lighting up the bay and the big sploshy waves coming over the Harbour wall. Out in the bay it was more understated: there was less in the way of white water but the rolling, heavy swell was impossible to mistake.

ABH was a bit more keen to take me around the small block this morning and we were both surprised to see a small inflatable craft down at the bottom of the western slip ready to be launched. I watched carefully and it did seem that the conditions had given the launcher pause for thought. Quite why it has only occurred to him having reached the bottom of the slipway when it was perfectly obvious from the car park that launching would be utter madness, will forever remain a mystery. Having satisfied myself that he had no intention of launching, ABH and I went home a bit relieved.

They launched later in the tide, and I saw them packing up well after seven o'clock in the evening when I took ABH around. They are regulars launching from the Harbour, so almost certainly know the score. It still puzzled me why they set up so early because they would need to have waited a couple of hours for safe conditions.

As if to prove the point, one of the channel markers being worked on yesterday, escaped and went on a little trip down Tribbens and beyond. It came back later in the tide and the Inshore boat launched again to secure it a bit more tightly this time. It will not be long before the waves have one of them again and it is a regular battle to keep them in place.

I had taken time to prepare as much as possible all my morning chores the night before. I had even made some sandwiches so that I did not have to tarry for breakfast. Therefore, there was little I had to do that would get in the way of getting the Missus up to The Farm giving me enough time to come back and pick up our roofing volunteers. I also wanted to progress a resolution to our wrong parcel situation when the supplier opened at nine o'clock.

The latter did not take very long. The very pleasant lady I spoke with assured me she would arrange for a courier to pick it up tomorrow but, once again, we would need to wait in all day because, for collections, the courier could not guarantee a time. It was not ideal, but we had little choice but by the end of the day, I had not received a notification to expect a courier. I will have to call the company in the morning to ensure that the collection has been arranged.

I had been looking forward and fearing today in equal measure. It marked the beginning of the end of the project but also there were uncertainties about measurements and so forth and I was working with at least one professional builder who would no doubt point out limitations that I had hitherto not considered.

I collected them both. When we had made the agreement, there was still mud in abundance. The situation is much better now, but there was no hardship in collecting and taking them home at the end of it all. They did not hang about, either, when we arrived at The Farm and before very long the first three tops of the main posts were being lopped off – I had already done the first and it had passed muster, apparently. The first panels came on quickly and the first problems emerged. Because of the way the corrugation fell at the edge of the building, an additional batten was required. Fortunately, after many past building projects, I have quite a collection of spare timber and had just the thing. The same occurred at the other end, too, which was almost as easily resolved.

We also discovered that the roof sheet supplier had supplied half of the correct profile foam edge fillers and half the incorrect ones. It was not something we could do anything about other than for me to make a mental note to check deliveries when they arrived in future. We made do with the wrong ones which we put on the north side and live in hope that weather from the north will never be severe.

The boys took half the time we all imagined that it might take to complete the roof. Initially, I had been in some demand to answer queries about this and that. Once they had got going and I was no longer needed, I started on the lower half of the doors I had started last time I was there. One of the rectangular frames came together perfectly and I fully expected the same to be true of the smaller one, but it was not. The mitres looked correct from one side but abominable from the reverse. I had noticed this right at the last knocking and will have to take it apart start again. Elsewhere on the project, some inaccuracies were acceptable but not really for the doors.



We could not have had a better day for the work, nor could we have had better volunteer workers. We have known both for a number of years and happily they have known each other for some while, too. By the middle of the afternoon, the roof was complete, and I had taken both back home again. The weather was immaculate, with the brightest of sunshine and just a hint of cold breeze taking the edge off quite warm sunshine. All in all, I am glad that it is over.

My remaining work on the greenhouse will be to complete the doors and install the launders. In the main, though, the building is complete and while it might give a building inspector a coronary, it is solid enough. I make no apology in saying that I am more chuffed about it than I was wearing my first pair of grown-up trousers on our inaugural day of secondary school when I was eleven years old, and I had not made my own trousers then. Actually, I was not just chuffed about that, I was relieved, too. As I recall, I had insisted on long trousers at the time and knew on the first day that I had dodged a very hot bullet, when the one classmate who had worn shorts had the Michael verily ripped out of him all day for it.

## 5<sup>th</sup> March – Wednesday

St Piran's Day. He who made his way here on a small boat fashioned out of a millstone. On the balance of probability, it was probably an inflatable but was no less miraculous that he had enjoyed favourable winds all the way from Ireland and had evaded being sunk by a passing ferry.

I read a hypothesis that his arrival was part of an Irish invasion of West Cornwall. It is not so hard to imagine as some of the pure bred families hereabouts are short in stature, feature red hair and drink a lot of Guinness. Others are large and frightening, often times known as begorrahs.

Oh, never mind.

The day fell in well with our run of fine weather. It did seem especially cold this morning in part due to the change in wind direction, now coming from the east. We did not feel much of that down in The Cove but up at The Farm, it was much more marked. When I met our builder friend later, he remarked that he was glad that they chose yesterday to do the roof. Even then, with light airs, it was difficult moving the five metre sheets around.

It soon warmed up at the field and before very long, I was removing layers. My new overalls arrived while we were roofing yesterday. I opened the packet this morning, remembering my own advice to check things when they arrived in case they were wrong. I have tried them on, and they are a very robust garment and much thicker than my pink DIYman overalls. That, of course, maybe because my DIYman overalls are 20 years old or more and have worn thinner over time. The new ones will easily last another 20 years, although may not be the ideal wear for an octogenarian. Mind,

Churchill seemed to carry it off alright. Perhaps I should start smoking Monte Cristo cigars and sticking two fingers up at people in readiness.

I was not allowed to wear the new ones today. There is far too much risk this close to the end of the project. I am not superstitious like that but there again I do not agree with taking unnecessary risks either. I wore my pink DIYman overalls despite the cuffs hanging off and two of the poppers missing so that the gaping hole at the front catches on everything I pass by.

The Missus disappeared with Mother into the potting shed, previously known as greenhouse and I did not see them again until the end of the day. I pressed on with the manufacture of the doors. The frame I had problems with yesterday was eventually beaten into submission. I then had four perfectly square frames ready to have the spare transparent cladding attached. As if the door frames were not already heavy enough, I had to add additional timber to accommodate the corrugation of the cladding and to fill a hole that appeared where I had to make a cutout for the bolts.

It took all the time we had to finish the four doors but at least they are finished, although they are not yet installed. My previous thinking about hinges and the movement of the door did not really include the cladding. I had purchased robust and stainless hinges but at the last knockings of our working day when I looked at it, they will not permit the door to open more than 90 degrees. It requires some thought but I may have to install a deeper door frame or longer hinges or possibly both.

We had to break up early today. The sea state took a bit of a break today. Indeed, one of the fishing boats went out for the first time since the last storms a while back. It is forecast to pick up where it left off on Thursday, so spotting the break in the weather, our duty Coxswain suggested a training exercise today at the earlier time of half past six o'clock to meet the tide on the short slip later in the evening.

Part of the training should include trying to get to the station in a timely manner. We have been beset with roadworks for the past several weeks and the latest ones sprung up at the top of the hill earlier this week. I am not sure it is the same mob as before, so I am not entirely sure what they are doing but whatever it is, they have set up traffic lights just past the brow of the hill which cover a stretch about two third of the rest of the way to the A30. The waiting time seems to be interminable but is probably only a few minutes. There only seems to be work going on at either end, so why the entire stretch needed to be covered, I have no idea. Today, there was no work at all going on in the controlled section, but two teams had half the road blocked off on the hill before it with no traffic control at all.

I note from the work that was carried out down in The Cove just before half term that the contractors had to repaint where they had cut through road markings. We are used to just six inches of double yellow lines being repainted in a stretch that are now barely visible down most of the street. The works had also cut a narrow channel through the KEEP CLEAR either side of the bus turning point. Yes, they repainted

just the part of the letters they had disturbed, so the junction of the lines in 'K' the middle bar of the 'E's and so on. The workers have failed the words but words fail me to adequately describe such surreality.

Sorry, I digress. Now, where was I. Ah yes, we were about to launch the Lifeboat, and we did at the appointed time into a relatively placid sea with a bit of an easterly breeze blowing through. Since the tide was pushing in to high water not long after the boat was due back, we set up for a short slip recovery.

For once, we were heavily manned on shore and out numbered the Boat Crew who only had enough for the big boat to go to sea. Given our numbers and the new order to attain competency on various units of training for shore based crews, we gathered in the crew room after launching to do cover some of them.

The powers that be have ordained separate sections for high and low water launch and recovery. Certainly, for some of the units included in those sections, there are differences – not many for launch but certainly for recovery. However, there are also units such as PPE, pyrotechnics and emergency procedures which are the same for both and since there is very little guidance in these matters, I ordained that the same training would cover units for all gathered there for both high and low water. I will apologise later if that is not the case, but I certainly was not about to endure the pain and frustration of seeking permission.

Our training session did not take very long but met its objectives and left us time to retire to the upstairs crew room for tea and light conversation. We managed to have enough of conversation, much of which I did not hear because I had forgotten my false ears, to erode the time before the boat came back.

It was, of course, dark by then with Venus shining brightly near the western horizon. In the slipway floodlights we could see some moderate motion in the sea at the bottom, but it was not sufficient to mar what looked to me very much like a textbook recovery up the short slip. There was a bit of washing down and some very tidy putting away of quarter stoppers, spans and 'fishing rods' with only the minimum of water splashing on wellies. We are, after all, a very efficient, very excellent Shore Crew.

## 6<sup>th</sup> March – Thursday

Those hinges plagued me during the night. Troops of hinges marching up Market Jew Street in Penzance; swimming in synchronised groups in the bay; flying in close formation in the skies above me and looming over me as I lay quivering under the covers. On it went invading my every thought until, in the end, I thought I might become unhinged.

It was not quite a psychedelic mash up of Walt Disney Fantasia and Elephants on Parade from Dumbo, but it posed quite a problem for the closing elements of the greenhouse build. The only conclusion I came to, which was reasonably helpful, was that the axis of the hinge had to be level with the face of the wall cladding. This would either entail extending the door frame or purchasing long hinges known as parliament hinges. A quick look at the Internet during the more reasonable time in the morning showed that at the cheaper end of the scale, these were around £25 each. I noted some for more than £100 and reasoned that, since I would need a minimum of eight hinges for the cabin end alone, wider frames would probably be the answer.

Whatever the solution, it was not going to happen today. I had called the gabion cage supplier yesterday and they confirmed that the courier would pick up the errant parcel today. Eventually, I had a message that provided an hour window for the collection, but it came too late to organise any work for today and therefore we had a de facto day off.

I managed to be remarkably idle and did not feel the need to find things to do to pass the time – well, almost. There were a couple of orders that I had forgotten about and the cash and carry that I had messaged earlier in the week had not responded and needed to be chased. The Missus informed me that she was having trouble connecting to the Internet from the bedroom. In the back of the flat, the signal comes from downstairs. The unit that works down there in the bowls of the shop's dead spot was inexplicably not working. I spent some time on it and could not find an explanation, which explains why it was inexplicably not working – and still is not.

ABH who had spent most of the morning curled up in bed not doing much came alive near the middle of the day. I thought to take her around the block and then later take her for a proper stank up the cliff. On my way to getting dressed to take her out I changed my mind and geared up to take her up the cliff first and then a shorter walk later. I then agonised for ten minutes about how many layers I should wear.

The sun had abandoned us today. Later in the day yesterday, the air was filling with haze, and the street was getting damp from the moisture in the air. That had persisted this morning, as had the easterly breeze and although it probably was not as cold as it had been the last few mornings, there was still a chill in the air. I went to the length of checking the Land's End weather station that told me that it was a balmy eleven degrees but eight degrees after accounting for the wind chill. Armed with such detailed information, I was still not sure what to wear and ended up with the colder weather layers as usual.

We did not get as far as the cliff path because down on the beach was ABH's best pal from last year, Twiglet, and her new partner, Crumble. I let her off the lead to go and play with the other two dogs. At first, she was afraid; she was petrified – no, sorry, she was nothing of the sort. That sort of just fell out of the end of my virtual pen. She was a little overawed by the attentions of two dogs slightly bigger than she,

but they were friendly, and the play soon followed. Oddly, she got on better with the younger dog rather than her old pal – as the owner said, she did not call and did not write, what did she expect.

I have no idea how long we were down there, but we had a lengthy conversation, and the dogs had a lengthy play. There was little point in taking her up the cliff after that and we repaired back to the flat for a rest. In fact, the little girl insisted that I sit on the sofa so she could sit on a cushion on my lap and have a little zizz. I felt compelled to join her.

I woke up just in time to commence my vigil for the courier picking up the huge slatwall panel that was bunging up the remaining space on the shop floor. He arrived half an hour after I had started looking out for him and it was a simple matter of lending a hand to load it onto the van. I now have to wait until that package gets back to the supplier and is processed before they send out the correct one. At least I will not have to wait in for it now that I know it will fit inside our newspaper box.

Since ABH was bouncing off the walls again when I went back upstairs, I decided to take her along to the big beach via the Coast Path into The Valley. The haze in the air had started to turn into a bit of wet, although it was not yet raining. Mercifully, the proper rain waited until we got back home, which was very good of it.

As we mounted the Coast Path at the back of The Beach car park, I noted that work had commenced in what was The Surf Bar that had come to a sticky end before the start of last year's season. By chance, I met with the landlord on the path, and he told me the lease had been taken on by the experienced crew of a very well established hostelry on the Helford. It bodes very well for its chances this season and we wish them well. It is about time that the OS had some competition in the hope that it would sharpen its act a little.

Talking of which, The OS has undergone some serious sprucing up ahead of the coming season. It closed the bar, and we hoped, with some futility, that they might find someone to return the character to the bar that had taken near 500 years to mature. The brewery consciously ripped it out several years ago, making it into a facsimile of one the homogeneous coffee bars that sprouted across the nation a few years earlier.

The workers had covered the building in scaffolding and sheets which came down only a few hours before ABH and I wandered past it. I had stopped to see what ABH was doing as she once again retraced her steps along the path and happened to glance up. Oh dear. Oh, very dear.

At first, I could not see where the OS had gone. It has always stood out among the houses around it as the icon of The Cove that it has always been, despite its current owners. Looking again, it had blended into the surroundings having been painted battleship grey. Later, closer up, it might have been some sort of green, but in any

case, it was the sort of colour that they paint battleships so that they cannot be seen on the ocean or that the army paints its buildings so that they disappear into the land around them. It would have been more suited to a place on Dartmoor, Princetown for example. Given what has been done to the outside, I think that all hope is lost that some kind hand might have returned the character to the bar.

Hope was in thin supply on the battered beach as well. Earlier in the week, or was it the end of the week before, much of the rock field there had been covered up. The recent high seas have again returned the sand to the deep and the rocks are back all the way up to the dunes and The Beach car park. Perhaps the field is not as wide as it was, but the old international telegraph cables are back too. I had to scramble over one as we unusually walked back on the sea side of the rock field.

We also noted that no work at all had been done on the Lifeguard hut since we were last that way. I will have finished the greenhouse hopefully by the end of next week and shall be free if the Institution wants to give me a call. I will only have a week, but it is a quarter the size of the greenhouse. As long as they do not mind it a bit, erm, rustic, I should be able to knock it out before the shop opens. One thing is for certain: I will not be painting it battleship bleddy grey.

## 7<sup>th</sup> March – Friday

The mist from that started forming on Thursday night had taken hold by the morning. It added some rain into the mix that ABH and I happily avoided when we headed out first thing this morning. It did not paint a welcome picture for work up at The Farm, but the forecast had it that the sun would be out later and, besides, we could both work under cover now.

There was nothing to wait in for today, so we headed up to The Farm at a reasonable hour. I had fitted in a gymnasium blistering session early yesterday – unheard of on a Thursday – but it meant that we did not have to tarry and were ready for work at eleven o'clock. I realise that that is quite late in the grand scheme of things, but I will be getting up at silly o'clock for seven months when the shop opens, so working from eleven o'clock is my idea of a holiday.

I had assumed that the Missus would be in the potting shed, previously known as greenhouse, but she surprised me by setting to with organising all the rubbish she had gathered when clearing areas with the digger. We could put it in our commercial waste piecemeal but some of it is quite dubious for 'general waste' and may need to be disposed of separately. I recommended that we wait until our finances have improved and use the local building waste supplier, where we had our skips from during our build. It would cost money but would be done and out of the way and done without the potential of getting us into trouble.

While the Missus did that, I set to with the doors. I had concluded that changing the doorframes for ones that protruded more was the way forward, and so it proved. It

did not take long at all to take the 3x2 frames off and replace them with 4x2. My mitred joints were absolutely spot on, which utterly amazed me despite making effort to ensure my cuts had been straight. I almost had a celebratory cup of tea and went home as it was obvious I could not top that with anything else I had to do. I was right, too, because hanging the doors proved immensely difficult and took the rest of the day and that was just for two of them.

The mist and its accompanying chill soon gave way to clearer air and warmer, too. What we did not lose was a breeze from somewhere in the southeast. It was not severe but sufficient to make hanging a south facing door a pain in the bottom.

Having decided upon swapping the door frames for extended ones, I had hoped that the hinges I had previously purchased would serve my purposes. I found that I could take them out of their packets without damaging the packet and was therefore able to place them alongside their proper position. It was enough to convince me that they would be fine, so I pressed ahead.

I spent a while agonising over whether I should fix the hinges to the frame or the door first. Having tossed an imaginary coin and come up heads that the frame would be first, I also decided to recess them as is customary. On the doors, I would screw them onto the face because I am lazy that way and I could also make fine adjustments before finally screwing them in. That worked out better than I had expected and also managed to get them straight.

My next problem was being able to place the door in a reasonably stable position so that I could line it up to attach the other half of the hinge to it. There was nothing to clamp it to but thin air; I could hardly hold it and wield a screw and screwdriver not to mention lining it all up with the other hand. It took a while before I discovered that one of my workbenches could be elevated to roughly the required height. By using a couple of blocks of wood, I managed to get it even closer, but the variable wind was playing havoc with keeping it steady enough to get a screw into a perfectly aligned hinge. It took several attempts and the growth of a third arm but eventually I beat it into position.

The lower door was slightly easier. Here I rested it on my foot and a couple of blocks of wood. It fought back a fair bit and being lower down did not ameliorate the effect of the wind, but that door also soon came to heel. When I came to close it, the bottom bound on the concrete doorstep and a little judicious chiselling was required.

When I stepped back and looked at the two doors closed, they were perfectly aligned in the door frame. There is also very little gap between the door and frame, between the two doors when closed and, as we know, not much gap between the lower door and the doorstep. They both open fully, although I have yet to fit a catch to hold them open. In short, they were utterly perfectly fitted. I concluded something must have gone wrong. This is the greenhouse with a longer front than the back, the front is crooked and one of the back posts had to be widened because it was in the wrong

place. Perfectly fitted doors are a complete anachronism on a building like that. I will have to take them off tomorrow and start again.

## 8<sup>th</sup> March – Saturday

I need not have worried about my perfect greenhouse doors. I went up again today to do the two on the other side; what a disaster.

The day was looking pretty grim first thing. It had been raining overnight but I had no idea how much, but the street was wet when we headed out. There appeared to be little in the way of wind and it remained quite mild from the day before. It rained a bit more during the early part of the morning but since I was not going out in it, I was not too bothered.

We took a lazy approach to the day. I cooked up some hog's pudding for my breakfast and seeing I had something hot, the Missus decided on a bacon sandwich in bed. Actually, she had decided that late last night and even got the bacon out of the freezer in anticipation. Somehow in between my catering jobs I managed to order some gate hinges for the field side doors of the greenhouse. The gate hinges will be much easier to fit than the traditional ones I used for the cabin side doors. This is an advantage because time is running thin.

Before I headed up to The Farm, I needed to wash the underside of the truck. It is going in for its MOT test and service on Monday and the wheel arches and underside are lagged in mud. The garage mentioned it once a few years back, which was embarrassing, so I remember to give a wash down before I take it in now. Originally, I was going to drive it into town to the only manual washing facility which is supplied by one of the Tesmorburys stores. The others all have car washes that we cannot use because we have roof bars – let alone roof bars that are rusted through and will fall off and a back hatch that will not close because the hinges are rusted out.

It struck me on Wednesday when we brought the boat in that I could probably use the pressure washer that we use for the boat. We only needed to remove the mud, not have a highly polished vehicle and for another thing, the boathouse pressure washer would not cost anything. By parking the truck next to the side door at the station, where we wash the Inshore boat down, the pressure washer hose would easily reach. The only thing I needed to be careful of was that the truck and its somewhat dodgy brakes did not roll down the slipway into the sea that was covering most of the Harbour at the time.

In the Inshore shed there are a couple of chocs, prevention of trucks rolling down slipways for the use of. I took those with me and deployed them against the front wheels. Having dragged the pressure washer to the side door it did a magnificent job of removing the large clumps of cloying mud from the various parts of the underside



of the vehicle. I was also immensely pleased that nothing actually fell off having been held in place by the mud I was removing.

Thus washed down, so that the dear little mechanics could crawl about underneath it without getting their mitts dirty, I loaded all my tools into the back and headed up to The Farm down the muddy lane made worse by the overnight rain and into our muddy field.

As I announced earlier, the purpose of my trip was to finish the door job that I had commenced a day or two ago. All that was required of the day was to hang the two right hand doors and after yesterday's success, I had no doubt that I would be beset with problems and woes, and I was not in the least wrong.

I may have been a little over exuberant regarding my handywork of yesterday. Looking again, the gaps were not quite as perfect as I had thought but there was nothing particularly that would impact on the work of today. I had already roughly tested whether the remaining doors would fit in the remaining gap. When I looked again today, it was clear that it would be sensible and probably necessary to recess the hinges on the door and the frame side as the clearance for the second door was tight.

It had been slightly breezy when I fitted the first set of doors, and it had been maddeningly frustrating and difficult to work against. Today, I had been lulled into a false sense of wellbeing that there was no breeze at all but at The Farm, it was hacking in at somewhere around 30 miles per hour all afternoon from somewhere in the southeast.

Fitting the last pair of doors was going to be difficult anyway. Measurements had to be exact as clearances were minimal. Not only was it a trial having a door painstakingly lined up into position ripped out of your hand just as you were about to turn in a screw but even gouging out the recesses had woodchips thrown into my face obscuring what I was doing. I faced the same problem that I had the day before about how to hold the door in place while trying to fit it with one hand and hold the hinge in place while aligning a screw with the other. This time with gusting winds. I did what anyone in my position would have done in the same circumstances and shouted rude words at it.

Each door had to be fitted twice as screws were tightened after the wind had adjusted an angle or a height. There are only so many times that a hinge can be screwed into roughly the same place before there are too many holes to refit it again. I found this with the lower door right at the end. I had to lift it slightly as it was binding on the concrete while there was still too much of a gap between it and the door above. Having raised it, I discovered that the hinges should be moved again closer to the edge to stop the door binding against the frame – an issue brought on by recessing both sides of the hinge. Having moved the hinges once already, I could

not move them again. Fortunately, the binding is not too severe, but I will need to strengthen the door frame fixings to compensate.

I believe that I had expended every naughty expletive that I had heard of and quite possibly, several more. I do not think that anyone was passing in the lane at the time but, if they were, I was most appreciative that they did not stop to ask if I was alright. Such interaction would have been most ill-advised and possibly the reason no one stopped was because I sounded like a demented axe murderer in full flight.

I had mostly calmed down by the time I had reached home. This might have been partly due to the truck's brakes needing my full attention. I am used to the truck slowing down or stopping when I press on the brake pedal. If I see the elderly couple who suddenly discovered that they could run faster than they thought crossing the road ahead of me at the bottom of Cove Hill, I will of course apologise. I need to drive to the garage on Monday but until then it will remain in the RNLI car park on a level spot. I also thoughtfully hosed off the new layer of wet mud, but I do not think it will enhance the brakes' function any ahead of my journey.

ABH has been a little under the weather for the last couple of days. I cannot help but think she is consuming something at The Farm that is disagreeing with her or maybe it is the extended periods without rest that is upsetting her equilibrium. We narrowly avoided her consuming a mouse on Friday when the Missus uncovered its home under a pile of brush and timber. It made a lucky getaway having been tossed in the air by our playful hound. I am pretty sure that I too would make a shrieking sound like that in the grip of giant teeth and being launched into the air.

The little girl will at least get some Farm rest for the next couple of days as we have no means of getting up there with all the tools tomorrow and on Monday, the truck will be at the garage all day if I can get it there.

## 9<sup>th</sup> March – Sunday

It was a much improved morning on yesterday's which was just about right, now that we had been handed a free day thanks to the state of the truck's brakes. I certainly could have done with crack on with the last bits of the double doors and making a start on the greenhouse back door. I have just over a week to finish the doors, install the launders and put two of the IBC in place. A day off, I could do without especially as I will have another tomorrow.

I took it in good part and ran ABH down to the beach in the morning. It was good to see her wanting to go to the beach again. She decided to explore under the slipways where I noted a return of quite a bit of sand. There will need to be some very big seas indeed to clear the rocks from the back of the short slip but the build up of sand had done pretty well regardless.

We did not tarry for long before she took me up the western slip and around the big block. It had been very quiet in The Cove yesterday but there again I was only there in the morning. When I took ABH again in the middle of the day, the place was alive with people wandering about and heading up the Coast Path to Land's End. I thought that a pretty good plan myself and made a note to take ABH up the cliff later in the afternoon when it was likely to be quieter.

I meant to mention at the time because it seemed uncanny that the first tri-cornered garlic flowers had come out on the first day of spring. There is a small group of them on the triangle where the Coast Path starts going up the cliff. There are plenty of others all over the cliff and along Coastguard Row but none of them are yet in bloom. The same applied to most of the plants up at The Farm where I think we have a few daffodils in bloom and one solitary one in a pot on the flat roof over the store room. It is called tête-à-tête, although it is having a hard job of that on its own. The fields are full of daffs at present, so we must have late developers.

With the work going on at The Farm, I have ignored my duties to the VAT quarter and year end. Since I had a day off, I thought I had better make use of it to make financial administrative amends, so set about it early, inputting the remaining invoices and gathering receipts. There was not a great deal to be done to be fair, but I then remembered all the bank statements and, at the last minute, the till from Christmas.

Ordinarily, we would have gone through all the out of date disposals by now but have been too busy so far. I made a provision for them in the financial statement I have to do each quarter and will compensate for over or underestimates next quarter. We would also have emptied the shop of Christmas decorations, but I have been waiting for the tipper trailer to go back into the barn. It is where the overflow decorations sat for two years. If I take the decorations up before that is in place, then the tipper trailer is likely to stay outside for the best part of a year going rusty.

In the afternoon, I was entreated to stop what I was doing by a needy ABH who likes to sit on a cushion on my lap dozing or chewing a chew. She is most insistent and the only way I would get peace was to capitulate for half an hour or so. I resisted the temptation to have a zizz and read a book instead but even that apparently was not allowed on this occasion; she was demanding my undivided attention not just lip service to it.

I managed to fit in a little more work when she got tired of me, but the time soon came around to walking her up the cliff as I had promised earlier. It was much quieter when we headed out as I had expected. Despite a cooling blow from the northeast that was slightly less robust than yesterday's from the southeast, I thought that we would be warm enough on the journey without too many layers. I dispensed with my normal jackets and used my light, windproof one and little boy trousers as is usual for walking. I had chosen wisely, as they say in Kung Fu movies, and was perfectly comfortable for the whole journey. Spring is definitely sprung.

The wind direction somehow upset the silence in the silent hollow on our walk. It normally distracts me from complaining about the shoddy work National Trust carried out to drain the mud bath at the top of Castle Zawn. The recent rain had not drained away and the path was once again a quagmire even with the little rain we had. Hopefully, there will not be too much rain during the months to come and our visitors will be able to pass through without getting muddy feet. ABH did not bother with such niceties and walked through it. She also found another patch well off the path that she detoured so she could compound the muck already on her paws.

It was a very pleasant walk all the more enjoyable for not having done it for a while. There was not a great deal new to see but that does not matter at all on such a walk. The sky was blue in parts and the cloud light. It was cloudier out to the east that would soon cover the whole sky but that was a while off and we enjoyed our time.

On our way down Stone Chair Lane, ABH inadvertently washed her feet in the drain that runs alongside the path. She had gone in to have a drink from where the water cascades off the cliff. It gave me the opportunity to look down on the bay. From on high, the water looked smooth and certainly compared to recent days. There must have been some swell and with an offshore wind it attracted a group of around ten surfers. When I looked, they were bobbers, as I was darned if I could see any surfable waves.

I often wonder if the walk is sufficiently long for ABH or if it is perhaps too long. I gained some insight into the answer to that when we passed the top of the Harbour beach on the way back. Down there were Twiglet and Crumble, the two dogs from earlier in the week cavorting about. I led ABH halfway down the slipway and she cautiously went down to the sand. It took her a moment but when the other two saw she and came bounding over, mayhem ensued. We spent a further half an hour or more watching the girls chase about the beach with ABH taking a dip in the sea every now and again to cool off.

I had hoped she might collapse in a heap and rest for a bit when we got home. She rests while we have our tea but otherwise she was bouncing off the walls again. I get the impression that she has fully recovered from whatever it was that ailed her over the last few days.

I have to leave early in the morning and it will be good practise being a bit more orderly about my early routine. Who am I trying to kid. It has taken me four months to get used to and now start enjoying a bit of morning laziness. In a precious few days it will be snatched away and my mornings will not be my own. Oh, fear and trepidation.

10<sup>th</sup> March – Monday

I can allay your fears, dear reader, that I came to grief somewhere between The Cove and Buryas Bridge. I managed to steer our almost brakeless vehicle the seven miles without once touching the brakes. I have done the trip often enough to know how fast I can take the various corners and where I need to start slowing down in order to reach that speed at the appropriate time. I even managed to get down Tregonebris Hill by approaching the crest at a slow speed and locking the gears down on the automatic gearbox. I did use the brakes just once to stop the truck outside the garage workshop. They have some very expensive customised Land Rover Defenders in there and I did not want to dent one.

Despite that small victory, things did not start well. I had prepared as much as possible the previous evening for the various tasks I needed to perform but even then, I nearly forgot the replacement window hinges and the new running boards that we had asked to be fitted to the truck. I also discovered that the spare set of keys that we usually use for such events did not open the truck on the remote switch. The battery was clearly dead. I used the key in the time honoured way that keys are used in locks and promptly set off the car alarm. I am guessing that the battery is so flat that it could not even persuade the alarm system that it was genuine. I was a little disappointed, however, that with the lights flashing and the alarm sounding, I could still drive the car away. I thought that there would be some sort of immobiliser.

I parked the truck outside the shop and rushed upstairs where I have a spare button or coin battery on my desk. We sell them in the shop because they appear to be the standard type of battery car keys use. Naturally, our keys use a completely different sort of battery that is only available from a shop halfway up Everest which opens once every four years if it is not snowing and the ninety year old shopkeeper is not having a golf lesson that day. Luckily, they have an online shop, and I ordered it from there. It will arrive shortly after we have sold the truck, no doubt.

Using the main set of keys, I set off on my perilous journey arriving a little later than I had planned. We have a loan car for the duration which for once actually had some fuel in it. Since the Missus had planned to take Mother shopping after I got back after doing mine, I thought that I had best put a little more petrol in to compensate for our usage.

Remembering past embarrassing occasions when I have arrived at a busy petrol station to find that I had parked on the wrong side of the pumps, I thought to check before I got in this time. I also thought to discover where the button was that opened the filler cap – there are no flies on me, dear reader. This took me a little, no, actually a lot longer than identifying which side the filler cap was. I eventually found in just inside the driver's door sill, disguised as a button that moves the seat around.

It did not take very long to get used to driving a manual gear box car again, although it took a little longer to get used to driving something that low and small. I also discovered that it was much easier to park when I went into town on several errands including dropping off the VAT records for our accountant. I had got there soon after

they had opened but I had to wait for the bank to open and took in the services of several small independent stores while I waited.

There is a shop in town where you can purchase loose everything, such as spices, pulses, cereals and so forth. The shop has been there long before it became popular to refill your own containers of things, and I am very pleased it is still going. I managed to refill our 500 gramme pot of white pepper for less than half the price it would have cost even from our cash and carry.

All that glisters is not necessarily gold, however. Having forgotten to take one of my multi seed loaves out of the freezer this morning, I ventured into a shop whose name was synonymous with bread or at least the units they come in. On display was a wonderful selection of cakes and slices and further into the shop they also had 'ansum looking sausage rolls and pasties. I asked if they had a seeded brown loaf, which sadly they did not. I was told that they did sourdough this and that, plaits of white bread, focaccia, ciabatta, brioche buns, rye bread, cornbread, flat bread and soda bread. I think he was still going on when I left to go to the next shop where I bought some ordinary granary rolls for my breakfast later.

I finished off my shopping, including transactions at the bank where they still have one real person behind a counter. They had four other people milling about two of whom asked me if I really needed to speak with the person at the counter or could I use one of the four machines available. I also made a trip to the excellent independent butcher at the top of Chapel Street. I made it back to the car with just a few minutes left on the very reasonably parking ticket I had purchased. It had stumped me for a moment when I went to the machine because like most of them these days it required me to input my car registration number. I had to go back to the loan car to remind me what it was.

My foreign venture led me to the outskirts of town and the industrial estate where I collected the gate hinges I had ordered. I cannot see our truck being ready before tomorrow, so the hinges will have to wait. I will not be able to fetch the timber I need for the back door either until I get the truck back and all the while, time is pressing. Despite that, I managed to force myself to do absolutely nothing during the afternoon when I swopped places with the Missus. She went off to collect Mother and to spend the next three and a half hours finding things to shop.

I think that tomorrow I may well make a start in the shop, which hopefully will save time later. In all, apart from the trauma of driving without brakes and having to wander about the big scary city, I did next to begger all. I had best not get used to it.

## 11<sup>th</sup> March – Tuesday

At the last Diary knockings yesterday, the other reader who has been paying far more attention than I have, sent me a statement released by First Kernow. This is

the bus group subsidiary responsible for running many of the buses in this part of the world – or not, as it turns out. The statement went on a bit laying on how poor they were and how not many people were using the service anyway, so no one would really notice if they stopped running it.

The really interesting part was that they announced that it was not a real person who had made the decision; it was a darned computer. So, there was no point in haranguing them about lack of service. The company tells us that for the first time it used Artificial Intelligence to design the timetables. I agree that it is an improvement because previously the timetables were designed using no intelligence at all.

Anyway, it prompted me to write a futile letter to our much maligned council councillor and the members of our own parish council. I included at the end the much maligned council's vision statement from their Cornwall Transport Plan towards 2030 for impact. I include it below so that we can all have a good laugh.

*"Transport in Cornwall will be excellent and carbon neutral. Our transport system will connect people, communities, businesses and services in a way that enhances quality of life, is reliable, efficient, safe, healthy and inclusive. People will choose to travel in ways that will have a low impact upon the environment and other people."*

In other news, it was a rather pretty looking day and possibly a little warmer than of late. I was very much mistaken about the temperature. I could have sworn that it felt warmer first thing but when I went out later, it seemed very much colder. It could have been the wind, of course, piling in from the northeast according to the flags on the channel markers outside the station. When I checked the Land's End weather station, it had the wind coming from the northwest. It is very possibly the end of days.

If it is the end of life as we know it, it will have to be without our truck. At least I will have escaped the bill which no doubt will be enormous. It is not often the vehicle is in dry dock for more than a day but when I drove past coming back from the shops at eleven o'clock yesterday, they still had not started it. The garage owner, who we have known for 20 years is in semi-retirement and has handed over day to day running to two mechanics. One of those at least has been there a while, and I have yet to be disappointed with the service.

We have Mother staying with us this week. It is sort of respite care break in reverse, and she occasionally comes and stays for a holiday. She is most welcome, of course, but ABH gives her no quarter in the love she doles out and the attention she gives Mother in particular. After a few hours of non-stop love, I thought to give Mother a break and took ABH around the block. It was a short run around after which, the little girl resumed her attentions. I did try my best.

With the truck still in dry dock and not willing to have a second day of inactivity, I took myself downstairs to do a bit. I had previously worked out the shop hours for the year – that sounds a lot of work but is really beginning and end date and the two extended

hours for the busiest school holidays. The document was completed but it needed to be laminated and posted on the shop window, so I did that first. Hopefully, no one will read it, and I can change it if I get it wrong.

The other thing that I had been meaning to do was to stick the reflective strips on our meaty bit of ironwork on the back corner of the building. The ironwork is to stop vehicles scotching off the corner of the launders there and knocking the slates about. I tried to stick the reflective tape on using its own adhesive backing but it was having none of that. Someone suggested gluing it and I was waiting for a bit of dry weather when we were not at The Farm and today fitted the bill nicely. I used most of the tube of one of our general purpose glues from our shop shelves and hope that will suffice. While I was at it, I also stuck a spare bit on the receiving post for the barrier into the RNLI car park. One of the Tooktrak drivers pointed out that you could not see it when reversing the vehicle into the car park at night. Happy to oblige.

With the chores out of the way, I set to with picking off the out of date stock from our shelves starting with the soft drinks fridge. We had done particularly well this year and the stock that needed to be thrown away amounted to just over £200. I have not yet done the store room but the total will not go above £250, which is excellent given the amount of stock we keep. The process also highlights items that are slow or no moving and this year I identified beef stock cubes and tins of oxtail soup. We will not be doing those again.

Some of the items were water damaged. When we reinstalled the dishwasher last year, it leaked down into the shop and I had to clean up and throw a few things away. Later, the waste pipe from the sink was leaking for some time before we noticed. Because the evidence of the previous leak still showed on the shop ceiling, I failed notice the new leak coming through until I looked today. It had rusted the bottom of tins, stuck cardboard packaging to the shelves and hardened packs of sugar. There is still some cleaning up to do that we will get to next week.

I retired upstairs leaving a trolley full of unwanted stock to be thrown away or donated to the hungry boys and girls at the Lifeboat station – some of them will eat anything. With ABH still bothering ‘nanny’, I took her around again before settling down with a cup of tea. I was just considering calling the garage when they called me to say that the truck was ready. The various additional items were all done and we had lost our spoiler – as the other reader pointed out, I should have warned you about that news as a spoiler alert.

The very pleasant mechanic also told me how lucky we were regarding the brakes, well, one of them in particular. He said that we had lost the pad at some point and the piston was doing all the braking. The brake fluid was leaking out at that point which is why the brake pedal had gone soft. He reckoned the piston had fallen out not long since and the callipers containing the assembly took over. He showed me the parts when I got to the garage and there was at least 3 or 4 millimetres ground



off the calliper. All done, it was not as expensive as I feared but I had feared that it would be very expensive indeed.

I drove home surrounded by the air of relief but then had precious little time before I was due at the Lifeboat station for an inspectors' launch.

We launched both boats at around half past six o'clock. We were thin on the ground this time and borrowed one of the Boat Crew to bolster our numbers. The boats were out until eight o'clock and heading well towards low water. We had no further training units to complete when the boats were out, so we entertained ourselves with cups of tea and eating the posh biscuits brought in for the inspectors' visit.

We did have a small practice with a new toy that had been provided, a throwing bag which is thrown to fortunate crew members who might have fallen off the slipway into the water. You will note that these are fortunate crew members; the unfortunate ones fall off the slipway when the tide is out, and no amount of throwing bags would be beneficial in such circumstances. The key tactic to remember while throwing the throwing bag is to hold on to the rope attached to it. Putting this rope back into the bag after deploying it should clearly be done by someone else, because it is tedious.

Both boats returned to station with a few minutes between them. I found myself down near the bottom of the long slipway with our loan crew member quite literally showing her the ropes. Between us we executed what was clearly a textbook recovery in slight seas with a chill northerly breeze sharpening our attentiveness. Not long after, we hauled the boat back into the boathouse and strapped it down in readiness for its next launch which may well be Thursday. We are, after all, a very inexhaustible, very excellent Shore Crew.

## March 12<sup>th</sup> – Wednesday

We had a very disappointing start to the day when rain appeared on the flat windows, blown in on the fresh – very fresh – north wind. It came through in showers, some of them heavy, for the rest of the morning and some of the afternoon. Helpfully, the rain was a distant thought when I took ABH around first thing and we did not need to go out again until most of it had gone.

I even evaded getting wet when I made my sojourn to the gymnasium downstairs. I did the full session today, or as much of it as is possible without all the equipment. It had been a while since I had thrown the weights about thinking that the moving of heavy stuff up at The Farm to be an adequate substitution. It clearly is not as the weights felt very heavy and I struggled a bit, especially the bit where I toss them casually into the air and catch them with my teeth. No, not really. Anyway, it was an adequately blistering session nonetheless even if it did delay us a little in getting to The Farm.

With the weather unable to make up its mind whether it would be wet, dry, sunny or overcast, I put on the usual winter layers and within five minutes of starting work, I was tearing layers off. Given that I now have the luxury of working inside, I was able to dispense with the waterproof layer as well. I could have done that anyway as it only rained the once while we were up there and then only for a minute. Naturally, having dispensed with my layers, the wind picked up and the sun hid behind a cloud and I was instantly cold again. I could not be fagged with putting layers back on again and just worked harder instead.

I had thought that making the door frame would be the easiest part of the job, but I was gravely mistaken. It took ages to get the mitres for the lintel right causing me to discard the first one entirely and start with a new bit of wood. I needed a spare bit of 4x2 for the cabin side doors, so it will not be wasted. The doors themselves came together much more easily, although I had to narrow the bottom door because, inexplicably, the door frame obviously got narrower just after I measured it. Happily, that took no time at all to correct, and I breathed a sigh of relief that the door frame had not got wider instead.

At the close of play, I found myself 332 millimetres short of 3x2 having used up all the spare from the project and all my stock that I had in the timber shed, which ironically is made of metal. In all, I think I have used an estimated 134.4 metres of 3x2 on the project so far and will need to get some more from the builders' merchant in St Just tomorrow. I will have to be careful because the remaining rear roof bar is in a parlous state thanks to the rust. I think it will bear weight but will not be trusted to strap anything to.

The Missus had cracked on with her task of mending the potting shed, previously known as greenhouse. The east side windows including the ones in the doors were all made of heavy duty polythene. These had all been ripped to shreds at some point two seasons ago. The Missus saw to repairs while Mother planted the various seeds that had arrived in the post from our seed merchant friend, shop visitor and other reader, thank you very much.

It took them both as long as it had taken me to get as far as making the frames for the doors. The north wind had taken its toll of my body temperature and given that I had not been fagged to relayer, I was pretty darned cold by the time the Missus finished. I am pretty sure that I have also come to the end of my mitring for this project, which is worth a celebration all by itself. If I can find a night class that teaches such skills, I may well enrol. However, I would henceforth live in fear that having done so and acquired the requisite skills, I may never need to make a mitred joint ever again. I am not sure that I could endure the futility of it.

The greatest pleasure of the whole day was driving home, safe in the knowledge that we had brakes.

## March 13<sup>th</sup> – Thursday

It was a much kinder morning, largely meaning that there was no rain involved. What there was to compensate, was a brisk north wind that got brisker during the day and dropped the temperature that had already dipped five degrees on a few days ago by another four degrees. I wish that I had known that before I elected not to wear my padded waterproof work trousers.

I had also woken up with a potentially strained wrist. It hurt quite a lot when I rotated it right or left, so I stopped doing that. I then discovered that I could not do much at all with rotating my wrist, so carried on doing it but very carefully. It seemed very unfair since I had gone to bed in particularly good form and with a wrist that I could happily rotate in either direction without saying, ow.

Initially, I had assumed that I had slept on it awkwardly and that it would soon recover. By the time I was packing my tools away at The Farm, it had still not gone away, so I guessed that it was not going away quickly and probably less quickly than it would have done had I not spent the day aggravating it.

With only a week left before we have to start doing things to the shop to make it presentable for opening, I had very little choice about heading to The Farm. I had already decided that I would need to go to The Farm early doors to check how much guttering I had spare. I should have done it yesterday, but it got swallowed up with rushing at the end of the day. I went from there directly to our builders' merchant at St Just where I purchased tongue and groove panels for the field side doors and extra bits for the launders that I would hopefully get around to tomorrow.

I had not even got home when I remembered that I should have purchased bolts for the new doors. I was too far back to return to St Just so I will have to go tomorrow as well. I did have enough work and materials to see me through today, so I did not panic too much. With timber strapped precariously to the rusting roof bars, I picked up the Missus, Mother and ABH on the way back and we all headed off for a jolly day at The Farm.

If I thought, which I did, that the gate hinges were going to be my salvation for the field side doors on the greenhouse, I was very much mistaken. I will spare you the litany of issues I had, including not completely understanding how they were fitted, and cut straight to the door being too wide for the hole and having to be re-engineered. The cabin side doors were heavy enough, but they only had plastic cladding. Having fitted the tongue and groove panels to the field side door I discovered that they would have been better suited to a medieval castle than a humble greenhouse.

I had struggled lifting and holding the other doors but I had no chance with these especially with a dickie wrist. I had to employ the Missus to lift the door while I

guided it onto the hinge hooks on the door frame and discovering that the hinges needed massive amounts of micro adjustment even after I had cut the door to size.

Even when I had satisfactorily lined up the hinges, I found that the door wobbled. I had largely given in to frustration by this time as well as running out of time and left it as it was. It was not until much later in an idle moment that I had a eureka moment. There was an additional square hole close to the edge of the hinge that looked like it was not there just for decoration. Fortunately, I was with someone who knew about such things who advised that a special bolt inserts there and is tightened from the back of the door. The timber there is four inches thick, so I will compromise with a coach screw and washer.

During my trial by door, the Missus emigrated from the potting shed, previously known as greenhouse, to the greenhouse to start preparing the planting grounds. Mother had been left in the cabin but into the afternoon the temperature in the greenhouse elevated to a comfortable degree and we moved Mother in having transferred a comfortable chair from the decking. The comfortable chair was actually wedged between the solar panels having been deposited there by one of the 70 miles per hour winds earlier in the winter. With ABH curled up in the wheelbarrow beside Mother, we were all one big happy family working away merrily. I think I was sufficiently far away for the more than occasional rude word uttered in defiance of a recalcitrant door not to offend.

We had to hurry away at the end of the day because a further inspector's launch of the Lifeboat had been called for six o'clock. After a very hurried tea, I went across for the briefing fifteen minutes before the launch. I was uncertain how much use I would actually be with an inoperative wrist but with the number we had, and both boats being launched, I had to cover head launcher role for the big boat. Fortunately, there were people around me to do the lifting and dragging.

The boats were out for two hours, and I found myself at the bottom of the long slipway in the dark at eight o'clock watching the boat reverse in towards us. There was an eight to ten feet rise and fall on the slipway toe, which was not helpful, but could have been worse. Even with a dickie wrist, we executed what was clearly a textbook recovery up the long slipway, left-handed in a moderate sea. We are, after all, a very ambidextrous, very excellent Shore Crew.

## March 14<sup>th</sup> – Friday

It was still quite a sharp morning but at least the wind seemed to have disappeared. ABH had me up reasonably early which I had hoped would give us a good march on the day. It merely compensated for an unexpected delay a short while later.

I was already planning to visit the builders' merchant in St Just and had made a list, given that I had forgotten the bolts last time I was there. Yesterday, there had been

some sort of works going on in the centre of St Just and the road was closed heading into town. Fortunately. I was not going that way. I had seen nothing to suggest any change to the route, so I merrily made my usual way to the store on the moors. I drove past a sign that said, 'Road Ahead Closed' and assumed it was the closure from yesterday. I was still thinking that when I arrived at a set of bollards closing the road.

Both signs were after the last possible diversion, and I had not seen any diversion signs. I was not the only one to be caught out, either. As I was turning, still perplexed, another car arrived. I spoke with the driver who said he was walking on from where we were. I told him that I was not walking the remaining two or three miles to the moors and it was he who suggested driving up through Kelynack.

It was a route that I had not driven before, and I wish that I had not driven it this time either. First, it was incredibly eyesome and would have been better viewed as a passenger and secondly, it is a single track road with few passing places. This would not have posed such a problem had it not been for the fact that at the other end, diversion signs had been placed, directing a busy road toward me. I was lucky that all the oncoming cars were better placed to get off the track than I was. I still had to wait numerous times, and a short journey took a lot of time.

I eventually arrived at the builders' merchant late but confident that I would not forget anything this time. That did not start well when I realised that I had forgotten the list again having left it on the dining table where I placed it so that I would not forget it. Happily, I remembered that there were five items on it and, bit by bit, I remembered what they were. Ever since I had put the first door frames in place, I had been meaning to purchase some very long screws. I had temporarily screwed the frames into place into the sparse set of ribs supporting the cladding. I noted that the frames still moved under stress and needed additional screws from the other direction. I forgot these again but everything else, I remembered.

Deciding to avoid the same route back home, I went the long way around almost going into town before coming back out again. It scotched my plans for a grand breakfast using the left over mashed potatoes from a tea a few days ago as it would have taken too long. Improvising something a bit quicker, we were ready to head on less than an hour after we got back.

The pressure is really on now. Doors, launders and IBCs are the targets before I have to concentrate on the shop. In the week before opening, I should have a few days to clear up my mess or at least put all my mess in one pile to make it look like I made an effort. Today, I wasted no time in setting to with the last door to be hung which was the bottom one at the back. I had meticulously performed this task in great detail in my head at three o'clock in the morning and had no problems at all. All I had to do was repeat the whole process outside my head.

Assisting me in this was the miraculous recovery of my limp wrist. I had consumed vast quantities of legal drugs the night before, washed down with malt whisky. There was some vague shadow of discomfort this morning, and I was careful humping and lifting heavy things around, but by and large, my dickiness had gone off somewhere.

Quite amazingly, the door went on almost as smoothly as I had imagined that it would. I hung it by clamps from the door above, which made all the difference. Once the door was in place and stable, fitting the gate hinges was a breeze and only needed to be done once. In retrospect, I would have used gate hinges on the cabin side and put the cladding on after. It is far too late to re-engineer the first ones now, but I will have to do some trimming so that they operate a little better than they do now.

That was all the doors now in place and all that remained was the second fix. I cannot claim that the field side doors are as straight as the cabin side doors and there is a gap at the top that I only noticed after I had done with them. I have no idea how I got to have a gap because the doors are level, sort of, and so was the frame, I thought. In review, I decided that the gap was a deliberate device to permit air to flow about the greenhouse.

I spent the remainder of the day fixing the cabin hooks, bolts, stops and a door bar for the lower cabin side doors. The latter took a couple of attempts as the bar needed to be supported from below and the back. I am not wholly convinced it is a long term solution but then again a bolt across the door would not work either. Ideally, I would have two bolts going down into the concrete and even more ideally, I would have cemented in the two steel tubes I have exactly for that purpose if I had known exactly where they were going. At present, the doors close and can be secured, which is good enough for now.

It had been cold all day up at The Farm and we had the occasional few spots of rain. Since I was spending half my time outside, that would have been annoying had it developed. The wind that was absent in The Cove was more in evidence in the field and Mother took shelter in the cabin where we have a small gas heater – and a carbon monoxide alarm, although Mother turning blue and keeling over would probably do as well.

There was a fair amount of cloud cover, too, for much of the day with brighter spells now and again. As we headed back down into The Cove, the cloud lent a steel grey to the sea that was flat and calm. The warm light from the sun peeking out at the horizon lit up the white water around Cowloe and the dayglow orange of the Lifeboat channel markers making them stand out like beacons against the dull backdrop of the water.

All that beauty and a day of creativity at The Farm must have inspired me. My mashed potato mash-up with olives, capers, the good half of a rotten red pepper, red

onion and two tins of mackerel, pesto, horseradish and white pepper for tea was sublime. Mother had fish and the Missus had a sandwich; the Missus hates fish.

## March 15<sup>th</sup> – Saturday

I think that we can call the greenhouse now complete. I tidied up the front door area a bit and installed the launders. I cannot do the downpipe until the first IBC is in place and I think I will need some bits for that. Given that I must place the cash and carry order on Wednesday this coming week, I think we can call that 'just in time delivery'.

ABH must have known it was going to be a red letter day because she set to with waking me up before six o'clock this morning. Most times, she will nuzzle into my neck or wrap herself around my head and go back to sleep again for half an hour or so but this morning she was a bit keen to get out for a walk and I only got an extra fifteen minutes. It meant that we were in the starting blocks earlier than usual to get up to The Farm.

I had already established that it was bleddy cold when I took ABH around the block in the morning. The wind had come around to somewhere between northeast and northerly which was bringing down the temperature quite efficiently. It seemed that it was even better at it up on the field and today I had made the right decision about wearing my thick padded trousers.

That lasted about half an hour and then the sun came out. We were all instantly warm but as soon as the sun went behind a cloud, we were cold again. I had removed my winter over trousers and one layer during one particularly sustained period of sunshine and instantly regretted it an hour later when the sun disappeared again. I spent the rest of the day taking off and putting back on my hat which was very annoying since I could never remember where I left the darned thing.

You may have gathered, dear reader, that I spent the day working outside and not in the sheltered warmth of the greenhouse. After that brief interlude of replacing the anti-weed mat in front of the cabin side doors – let us call them front doors from now on as it is easier on the fingers – I set about installing the guttering.

It is not the first time I had installed launders. I did it for the potting shed, previously known as greenhouse, but the run was not as long. I was also painfully aware, because it had been pointed out several times, that the front had a very definite kink two thirds down from the cabin end. One of my three o'clock imaginings had suggested that I place the down pipe at this point and have the two uneven stretches meet there. This was a very good idea, although it would introduce some issues with the downpipe later, but even then, I would have to compensate for the beginning of the outturn at the second post in.

The second issue, which I explored the vastness of the Internet for, was how to manage the fall. I was expertly instructed, I hoped, that I should allow 3 millimetres for each metre travelled. Thinking that I would be smart about it, I installed the first bracket on the extreme right at the highest position possible. I then resorted to mental arithmetic to calculate 3 millimetres times the length of the run which told me that I should really use a calculator instead. Having done so, I fixed the extreme left bracket 20 millimetres lower than the right bracket and ran a string between them.

To cut a long story short, which goes against the grain for The Diary, the string idea was only marginally successful. When we are talking a difference of 3 millimetres between heights of sequential brackets, it was not quite accurate enough. Neither it seems, was measuring it because later I had to fine tune two of the brackets' position as well as having to place a block behind them to compensate for the kink.

In retrospect, I think that the fall could have been steeper. When I tested it, the water took an age to make the distance and there was residue in the launder when it had expelled all it could. I had plenty of room to adjust it but given that it worked, I decided to leave it alone and progress to the shorted length.

The two stretches of launders would arrive at the downpipe at different angles, so I elected to install a hopper rather than a running outlet. This left me to simply concentrate on the run, the longest with a single join. The shorter run was easier, and I increased the fall as well which meant doing it again, but it worked fine after that. The hopper needed doing again as well because the block I had put behind it was too large and the water from the launders in danger of pouring out behind it.

The sun was low in the sky by the time I had finished but we still had time left for me to start on the gabion cages. Strangely, I felt it appropriate to read the manual that had dropped out of the box onto my foot. I took it as a sign but realised very quickly that I should have taken it as a sign to toss it in the bin without looking at it.

The construction was very straightforward and needed no instruction at all. What made me realise I should have left it alone was the fault finding page. High on the list was, 'my gabion cage is bulging at the sides' to which one of the solutions was "stop sitting on it; the cage is not designed to be sat on." My first thought was, how heavy did they imagine a person sitting on a cage full of rocks to be. My second was if the cage is not designed for the average or even slightly overweight person to sit on, it presumably would not do all that well with a metric tonne of water on top of it.

I stopped to think about it logically and about how the forces might affect a substantial wire cage full of rocks. Clearly the weak point would be the wire spirals holding each edge together. These are truly inspired and are simple to thread in. They seem solid enough and I had high hopes that with an equally spread, static load, they will hold firm much like a Cornish hedge. I think it will take me all day tomorrow to fill them and I might consider getting some reinforcement bars on Monday to hammer into the ground on each side before loading up the first IBC.



The Missus came to a sensible conclusion of her work at about the same time I had finished wiring together the three gabion cages in the first box. She had cleared all the rubbish out of the greenhouse and laid fresh anti-weed matting down two of the walkways. She had also bordered off a growing area down one side of the greenhouse and most of the raised beds are now ready, even if they have paw shaped dibber holes all over them.

Happily, Mother kept warm in the cabin all the while watching our comings and goings over the top of her knitting. ABH spent much of her time snuggled up in the cabin too and at the end of the day, Mother came out to inspect our efforts. She will very likely be spending most of the summer up there, so she has to be happy with it.

I had intended to unpack my tools from the truck so that I could bring the Christmas decorations up from the shop tomorrow, but we ran out of time. I think that is likely to be a recurring theme over the next week or so.

## March 16<sup>th</sup> – Sunday

It was bitterly cold in The Cove this morning. Much of it was down to the windchill from the robust northeasterly breeze but the ambient temperature was down on yesterday, too. We heard the gritter coming past late last night. We would not have that if it were not for the Lifeboat station. I thought that it was a mite dramatic for the time of year but the temperature at Land's End dipped to two degrees at five o'clock in the morning.

I noted a while back that the much maligned council jumped on the name your gritter bandwagon. It seems an odd thing to do and even odder when you see the list of names they arrived at. Spreadruth, Demeltza, Gryttin Da and Mevagritty were reasonably inspired but others not so much, like South Frosty, and some did not make any sense at all, such as Jam First and Crimp My Ride. I think there were a lot of people with rather too much time on their hands and need to get out more. I still think the best, if you really must give a gritter a name, was Gritter Thunberg in Glasgow, I think.

Moving swiftly along because if we do not we will run out of time as well as patience, I had a hurried breakfast and made to head up to The Farm. The Missus and I had already agreed that it would be too cold up there to take Mother, so they would stay behind. This left me to get ahead with getting my rocks off the pile at the bottom of the field and putting them in my gabion baskets. I steeled myself for some heavy lifting.

Had the tractor trailer not been full of topsoil I might have used that to pile the rocks into and bring up a larger number at a time. I used the truck instead, putting my rocks into those large plastic laundry tubs we have in some abundance. While we

have them in some abundance, we only have four not in use for something else, but I found that it was sufficient for my purposes. It would not have helped having the digger available as each of the rocks needed to be hand picked. I very quickly discovered that it was not going to be a case of emptying the bucket into the basket, each rock needed to be placed carefully both to avoid gaps and to try not to put pressure on the sides of the basket.

Filling the first seemed to take a long time, requiring at least two visits to the end of the field for more rocks. We were both pretty miffed when our neighbour dropped what he called topsoil at the end of the field. It turned out to be subsoil but removing it again would have caused more damage than leaving it there. It has taken a couple of years but at last we have found a use for it. There are more rocks down there than several sticks could be shaken at.

It was back breaking work. I made four trips down the field to refill my tubs. If, or more probably when, the authorities catch up with me for crimes against literature and sentence me to ten years hard labour, I will choose mailbag sewing. Rock breaking is far too hard.

Having spent a couple of hours at the rock face it occurred to me that I was getting quite warm. The sun had been shining constantly and the breeze at the top seemed less hearty than it was in The Cove. The cabin was warm enough, so I called up the Missus to see if she wanted to come up for a few hours with Mother to continue her work in the greenhouse. I was actually quite pleased she agreed because it gave me an excuse to stop humping rocks about and to drive down and get them.

When we were all present and I had stripped off two layers under my new overalls – gosh, did I not mention the new overalls. I reasoned that working on the gabion cages were part of the IBC moving project and that the greenhouse was now complete. Alright, there is a connection, but the IBCs are not integral to the greenhouse and, besides, what could possibly go wrong with the gabion cages. So thinking, I decided to wear my new overalls today.

They are very well made, and weigh about the same as a light suit of armour. I am very glad I am not likely to wear them in the summer - I would verily melt. Not only did I wear my new overalls, I also got rock dust all over them so that I do not look like I was wearing them for effect. Ansum.

Sorry, I digress. Now, where was I. Ah yes, stripping off layers because it was very warm in the sunshine and my new overalls are very thick. I then ventured out to the gabion cages and completed the fill of the first and a shorter time later, the second one too. I had to take half the rocks out of the first one and repack them because my shoddy packing had pushed out the front of the cage. If there is too much gap between the various panels, the spiral wire that joins them cannot be inserted. I was more careful with the second, but it still takes time, especially on the last layer so that there is little gap under the top panel.

Having witnessed how easily the side panels can be pushed out I decided that knocking a reinforcing bar on each of the sides, two on the long sides, might be a good idea. As luck would have it we had precisely the right number of rebars in the tool shed. That done, I decided to load the empty IBC onto the finished cages for size. It was a bit disappointing that having levelled the ground a while back, it had gone out again and the IBC was slightly tilted. Levelling again would mean emptying the gabion cages and I do not have the time or indeed the inclination. It can stay crooked – it will go with the greenhouse.

I called the Missus to admire the result and although I was not expecting popping champagne corks, I was not expecting to be told it was in the wrong place. I agree that it is not ideally placed because it casts shadow on that area of greenhouse that it is next to. I had placed it there because I had not expected to be able to do a single run of the launders and moving the IBC to the side would have made the downpipe impossible to install. It was a compromise, and I had duly given notice of my intentions. Even where it is, the downpipe needed to travel a few metres to reach the hole at the top of the IBC which is not ideal.

Looking again at the launders now that the two halves are in place, it would be possible to have a single run. That can reasonably easily be changed. The more disappointing aspect is the two filled gabion cages would need to be emptied and moved – and the rebars extracted. I thought very seriously about doing it but concluded that I really did not have the time. If it is a serious problem this season, I will move it all next year when it will be twice as hard to do, and I will have a false knee to contend with.

That pretty much finished off the day at The Farm. Having looked at the installation of the downpipe, I need a couple of bits, and I will need more rebars for the other cages which are all now constructed and awaiting rocks. I have two more days to do it in. I have the feeling like I am rather up against it.

Aside from the realities of work, the afternoon had been glorious up there. Mostly the sun had shone, and it was as warm as a summer's day – at least one of our summers' days – but as soon as the sun went behind a cloud, which it only did mercifully infrequently, it became very cold again. Oddly, descending into The Cove was like moving into a different day. It had been cold there throughout, and the wind seemed more relentless. Moving up to The Farm for the day seemed like a very good idea.

When I divested myself of my overalls on returning to the flat, I observed the limp and sorry state of my DIYman overalls. The cuffs on both arms are hanging off, hem on one trouser leg is holed and a couple of poppers are missing. It seems disrespectful to just throw them out after twenty years of sterling service. I thought perhaps I might use the discarded timber from the greenhouse build and carefully

place my overalls on a raft, set fire to it and let it drift out into the sunset. There again I could build a burial chamber at The Farm. We have enough bleddy rocks.

## March 17<sup>th</sup> – Monday

Gosh and golly, that cold wind seems to want to go on forever. It was very sharp this morning in The Cove despite the wind having moved to bang in from the east southeast. Naturally, the little girl wanted to have a slow walk around the block first thing. Surely, she must know that I do not have a fur coat.

There was no sunshine today to mitigate against the effects of the windchill, so the Missus decided to stay behind today and keep Mother in the warm. It was exactly the right thing to do because the wind was making life uncomfortable up at The Farm, gusting in at more than 30 miles per hour. I had elected to wear my padded, waterproof work trousers, thick overalls and waterproof jacket, the full monty, and did not regret a single layer. It was not until the third round of rock picking that I felt remotely like removing a layer and by that time I was so involved with what I was doing, I carried on regardless.

There was no other plan than to continue to fill the next two gabion cages. I timed myself today and it is reasonable to believe that each pair takes three hours. This includes four trips, I think, to the end of the field to pick up the required rocks. Yesterday, it seems that I had cleared away all the easy pickings and now I was having to dig for the appropriate rocks. On the second run down, I took the wrecking bar to assist in digging out them out. It was not only that, but I had to climb over ridges to get to the prime stock which meant a two stage process of throwing the rocks to a place where I could load them into the tubs.

I also have to pick out larger rocks that have to be carried individually. I use these for the corners and the sides of the baskets and the smaller fry for the middle. The theory being that force from above will be directed inward rather than push out the side of the cages. You would think that picking up rocks, possibly the oldest of homosapien activities, would not require much brain processing. I wish I had listened more in my mathematics classes at school because I would have known where to put each rock for maximum load efficiency. Actually, having filled four gabion cages with heaven knows how many rocks, I know exactly where I want to put them.

Part two of my day's cunning plan was to go shopping after completing another IBC stage. I did stop for a cup of tea first as my body had suggested going on strike without it. On the way up from home, I had brought a truck load of decorations to put in the barn. Now that the truck was empty, I had the bright idea to start tidying up the timber remnants into the woodshed on my way out. If I did it piecemeal, perhaps it would not seem such a monumental task. I also picked up the large gas canister with the aim of replacing it so that the double hob in the cabin could be used again. Since

the gas ran out two years ago, we have been using one of those single hobs that uses a small, expensive canisters and lasts for only a few boils of the kettle.

In truth, I probably only needed to go to the builders' merchant as I needed rebars, primarily and also brackets so that I could hang the Missus' crop bars for her tomatoes. Once again, I had forgotten to measure the crop bars which we salvaged from the polytunnel, so I had to wing it. I really only headed into town for fuel and the gas was an afterthought. Since I was there, the Missus had me pick up some supplies, so the trip was starting to look worthwhile.

It crossed my mind that it was only a working day since the roadworks made a mess of my travel plans to the builders' merchant on Friday. I rather hoped that the road was open because it was getting late, and I really did not fancy retracing my steps back into town to get home. I would have been better off thinking about what I was getting from the builders' merchant because I was halfway home, thankfully by the more direct route, when I realised that I had not purchased the rebars.

In my defence, I was very weary from shifting rocks and had used most of my allocated daily brain activity on choosing where to put each one. I shall have to go back tomorrow, which at least will give them some amusement. Perhaps making people laugh was my calling. I might have been a better clown than greenhouse builder.

## March 18<sup>th</sup> – Tuesday

For once I was grateful for ABH getting me out of bed earlier than I might have done otherwise. I was awake anyway and was considering an early dash to The Farm to get ahead of the posse. There were still Christmas decorations in the shop that I had not managed to shift yesterday, and I planned to take these up before anything rash happened, like us all being ready together before halfway through the morning.

Had all things been equal, which of course they were not, this would have bought some time on a very pressing day. The unequal thing was about as unequal as you could get and involved having to visit our builders' merchants twice.

We had set off together, the Missus, Mother and I, and first headed off to St Buryan. All good things come to an end and Mother's holiday is one of them. We tripped over to her house ahead of her moving back home to turn on the heating and to make sure the fridge was stocked with necessities. From there, we headed off to the builders' merchant where I was to pick up the reinforcement bars that I meant to pick up yesterday. The Missus also made a last minute request for fencing posts and since I had discovered that the rebars came in three metre lengths when I wanted only one metre lengths, I bought some spare cutting discs for my angle grinder which was not in the truck like it had been for the last two months.

The rebars are kept outside in the yard and I drove down to pick them up. There were two sizes, and I noticed that the longest would not fit in the truck. It did confuse me at the time because I had carried longer timber on the roof bars, but I thought nothing more of it and decided that I would need to come back with my angle grinder. It was hugely disappointing because time was already marching on, and this was very likely to be my last full day at The Farm.

It was not until I returned after dropping the Missus, Mother and ABH at The Farm that it became apparent that I had looked at the wrong rebars. The real three metre ones would have fitted on the truck no problem. My brain had either decided to switch to grumpy shopkeeper mode ahead of the shop opening or I am missing my DIYman overalls. The error probably did me a favour as there was a table close by with a clamp that made cutting the bars much easier than I could have done at The Farm.

The morning was fast disappearing by the time I got back. I had one more complete set of gabion cages to fill that, as we discovered yesterday, was likely to take three hours. I had noticed yesterday that there was quite a collection of suitable rocks behind the cabin where the Missus had spread subsoil. It was one of the first jobs she did with the digger all those weeks ago. It might have been closer to the work site, but I still needed to bring the truck around to load the rocks onto, so there was not a great deal of advantage. I managed to get two loads from there and the third from down the end of the field and then, job done.

The third set of gabion cages are actually going to be surplus to requirements, at least initially. It seemed churlish to leave them empty and I also reasoned that the spiral connectors for holding on the top side could easily go missing. It was only in retrospect that I thought I could have used them to replace the collapsed pallet under the second IBC by the cabin. It is too late now, and I will have to somehow squeeze in replacing the broken pallet before we open.

With little time to do much else I decided that I could just fit in finishing off the downpipe, after all, the two right angle joins were one of the things I managed to remember from the builders' merchant yesterday. It was not much of a job and did not take very long.

The downpipe installation I had done previously for the cabin and the compost shed had suffered dreadfully in the various winds that had blown across the field. I was determined, therefore, to do a more robust job for the more exposed greenhouse. It was already at a disadvantage because the whole of the downpipe is flying from the hopper to the IBC with no support at all. It is actually more of an acrosspipe than a downpipe. Not only are the various joins lathered in sealant, but I screwed them together as well. The IBC needs to be turned around but after that I will tie that end of the downpipe to the frame despite a good length of additional downpipe going down into the IBC. That is also screwed on.

Mother and the Missus were packing up and heading to the truck just as I was finishing. I had put away some of the spare timber yesterday and again this morning but there is still some left as well as the metal roofing sheets offcuts that came with the plastic ones. Strewn across the site, although I have tried to group them together, are various offcuts of wood. Even the smaller ones can be of some use, and I like to keep them, but generally not in piles on the field. I do hope that I will have time to come up to move them, but I definitely need to come up to finish with the IBCs even if it means doing it by torchlight.

Being as it was Mother's last day on holiday, we had pie and mash for tea, one of Mother's favourites. We were keen to impress; those bad reviews on Trip Advisor can really ruin your day.

## March 19<sup>th</sup> – Wednesday

So, the race is on for getting the shop ready for opening, which is why we stirred ourselves and got down there to start at midday. It was not quite like that. There were a few things to do before we got going and the first of those was to take ABH around the block.

It was a good looking start to the day and the wind had diminished considerably from yesterday, at least in The Cove it had. It might have been the lack of windchill but it did seem warmer and when I checked later, it was, especially as we were nearly two hours later than the day before. I blame ABH. She woke me up early enough, snuggled in, and went back to sleep again. Even when I got up, later than I might ordinarily have done under the circumstances, she did not follow, and I had completed my morning chores before she made herself present.

We met some neighbours from up the hill and stopped for a chat. That extended our morning walk that not only was already late, it was around the long block as well. By the time I came back we were well into the morning and by the time I had made myself beautiful for the day – it only takes a minute – breakfast was on the cards. I was quite looking forward to it because, with diminishing breakfast options and having forgotten to take my bread out of the freezer, the Missus had suggested an omelette. It was not until the disparate ingredients were well on the way to being cooked that I discovered that there were only two eggs left; the Missus had used the other up a couple of nights ago. I hastily improvised. Do not ask.

I had convinced the Missus that the IBCs needed to be joined at the bottom for most efficient use. This effectively turns two 1,000 litre containers into one 2,000 litre container. Previously, we had connected via an overflow arrangement which meant dipping into each tank separately. I had investigated the possibilities of joining them via the standard outlet a year or two ago and the options available on the Internet for doing so were legion. When I looked this morning – time being of the essence – the only option I could find and in abundance too, was an inflexible pipe with connectors

at either end and a t-bar in the middle from which a tap was attached. It would have done the job had our IBC outlets been in line, which we have decided that they will not be.

It took an inordinate amount of time to discover a flexible hose solution with the appropriate connectors that was reasonably priced. I was surprised quite how much the more common solution varied in price. On the online auction sites and on the amazing website they were less than £40 but on most of the specialist IBC parts online shops, they were closer to £100. It makes you wonder how they sell any. They certainly did not sell a connector set to me and I purchased a cheaper one and hope that it arrives in time for me to fit it.

Squeezing in another walk with ABH, we eventually started in the shop. Earlier, I had moved my gymnasium out to its new home that I will spare you the detail of, dear reader. Suffice to say, it is conveniently located and not in a hut with a tin roof. If all goes according to plan with my dickie knee, I will not need it after November for a while and then it will be rehoused in the rebuilt hut with new, improved roof.

The Missus sets to any task like an unstoppable bulldozer and today was no exception. I was tasked with cleaning up the counter area which conveniently kept me out of her way. We had set aside three days for cleaning every shelf, the floor and for ridding ourselves of the detritus built up over the seven months of operation – not including the stuff we got rid of during the seven months of operation.

It did not take me long to finish the counter area, so I planned to progress to doing the cash and carry order that needs to be submitted by Thursday evening at the latest. As I was about to commence, my eye was caught by our local interest books spinner. The books are provided on a sale or return basis and usually I would have returned the unsold ones by now. At the beginning of the season, we were supplied with around a third of our usual stock, which was irritating but I did not follow it up because it was not that urgent and normally the salesman turns up at some point. This year he did not.

A rival salesman, however, did show up. We have been availing ourselves of their services for a couple of years. He explained that the competitor was ailing and, indeed, seemed to be in its death throes. When I tried to telephone the number was out of service which seemed to reinforce the idea. I also looked at the Government list of limited companies and noted that the company was overdue in filing its accounts. I sent a message anyway assuming that either the company or its administrators would be in touch.

I was in the middle of my tea when the salesman called. He was terribly sorry, of course, but he had been awfully busy moving warehouses. I mentioned that we were disappointed by the book supply last year and he agreed that it was not their best performance, but they were holding back on reprinting books because they were moving warehouses. I suggested that it might have been better all around had he



mentioned the moving warehouses and lack of reprinting last year when it mattered. None of it seemed to ring very true, however, the books are good sellers, and we would not like to lose the supply. We shall see how the company performs this year and hope for the best but in the meanwhile, I should expect a bill for the books we sold.

The Missus had cracked on at some pace and by the time I was doing books and cash and carry orders, she was already on the grocery aisle – the last one. She made gains with that while I cleaned the fridges and freezers. We are likely to conclude in the shop tomorrow that will give us a free day at The Farm – just as you were breathing a sigh of relief, dear reader, that you might be spared The Farm for another seven months. Sorry to disappoint.

I now have a plethora of things to organise and suppliers to contact ahead of opening, such as restarting our waste collection and getting regular deliveries lined up. There are also serious gaps on some of the food shelves which are not part of the cash and carry order arriving on Saturday. In the past we opened well ahead of our any busyness and had time to gradually build up such stock. This year we are opening almost onto the Easter holiday and will have to sharpen our act from the outset. Something to be pondered, no doubt, at three o'clock in the morning.

### March 20<sup>th</sup> – Thursday

It started out as quite the most pleasant day that we have this week. By the middle of the day, we were starting to feel some real warmth under the blazing sun that was doing our solar panels no harm at all. I had not expected it, but we are sending back up the line quite a bit of electricity that we failed to use at the point it was generated. If we had a battery, we might have survived some days not using any grid power at all. However, these hay days are short lived, and we will soon be switching the panels back to the shop. What I will consider before next year, is to have a smart meter installed for the flat because without it we cannot be paid for what we send up the line. Even at 50 pence per unit, it would have been worthwhile.

Generating electricity was not foremost in my mind today. We felt we had a good chance of finishing off the shop shelves today leaving us a free day tomorrow to go up to The Farm. We managed to start much earlier, which helped, and by late in the afternoon, the Missus was mopping the floor on the grocery aisle. There is still the mobile display units to replace in their rightful places and the freezers need to be reorganised and filled before we can open the door to the public. I also have orders to place for all the things not at the cash and carry and each of those must be done on specific days.

Since the Missus was doing all the important things, I did the breaking up of boxes and the sweeping of the floor. I also beat the industrial mat we have on the floor behind the counter, not because it had done anything wrong but to get the dirt out of it. I think that we might have used it somewhere else first because it is getting a bit

threadbare. It might be time to throw it out and use the one from the entrance and replace that with a new one. It might be time to do that, but it will not get done this season as time is too tight and we have too much else to do.

A little before the middle of the day, I took ABH down to the beach for a run and to give us both a break. I had not considered the weather; it had been looking good all week but bitterly cold. I wrapped up accordingly and sweltered for the entire time I was out. My hat came off in short order, but I could do nothing about my woolly hooded sweatshirt and jacket. It was as much like a summer's day on the beach as we are likely to get all year, and I was grateful for a light easterly blowing through. ABH must have known I was suffering because she took twice the time as usual going around.

The Missus joined me in the shop when I got back having been out on an appointment since I started. The rest of the day was grafting at the shop face, and the Missus double checking my earlier work of identifying out of dates and close to dates items and finding several I had missed – of bloody course. At the end of the day, we had a full trolley of things to throw away. This gives us a bit of a problem every year because most of them are heavy. The bin is already full of heavy things, and we are charged extra for being overweight. I think we will just have to swallow the charge. We have tried previously giving it to charity organisations, but they do not want it because of the date, even if it is only a 'best before' not a 'use by' date. It seems that beggars can be choosers.

Some of the items will be 'donated' to the Lifeboat station. I like to think of it as a donation rather than just saving weight in our bin. Some of the boys on the crew will eat anything no matter how out of date it is. Some of them are no more than waifs as well, so I am probably doing them a favour.

It was in dropping another basket across the road that I discovered just how fickle our current weather is. I had stripped off multiple layers when I had returned from my over-heated walk with ABH. The easterly breeze had at some point changed to a howling gale and was bloody freezing with it. The layers all went back on again when I took the little girl out again later on.

I had a chance to bask in the gratitude of the crew later as we gathered ahead of a two boat launch in the evening. The spring tides are slowing diminishing now and the sea was reasonably benign, so there was a bit of sand on the Harbour beach even at high water for the Inshore to launch comfortably. It had already been out once in the late afternoon in the effort to get a couple of our younger Boat Crew passed out as helms or navigators or possibly both.

We were reasonably thin on the ground on shore but managed to raise a crew for each boat. Having set up for a short slip recovery, or as much as we can before we know when the boat is coming back, we retired for tea and biscuits. I would have

taken ABH for a spin, but she was having none of it, so I went back and sat on my thumbs for an hour.

It was during that hour that I discovered that our long-serving winchman knows someone in the charity trade that takes old food from any source and is not fussy about dates at all. He called his lady up and she welcomed the offer with much gratitude. I think that we were just as grateful as it not only saves the weight in our bin but also the effort of bagging and putting it in there. It also means that most of the cans and packets will find a use rather than ending up incinerated, artificially digested or put in a hole in the ground, or whatever they do with it these days. I loaded up our winchman's car after we were all done and was happy to see it run up the hill.

The inshore boat returned to the Harbour half an hour ahead of the big boat coming back, which meant that we had an extra had when it did. With only a little movement in the water and the breeze having died off a bit, we had little trouble and, as far as I could see, we executed a textbook recovery up the short slip and around twenty minutes to nine o'clock. We are, after all, a very consistent, very excellent Shore Crew.

## March 21<sup>st</sup> – Friday

ABH allowed me another lie in this morning, which was most welcome. I even got up ahead of her and got my exercises in way before she was ready to go out. She came and got me just as I was about to make a cup of tea. Of course, such advantage cannot go unpunished and the second we stepped out the door, the heavens opened and the pair of us were soaked. A fellow dog walker, also caught out, ran for shelter in the doorway of the Lifeboat station but since I was wearing a waterproof jacket – we will not mention the flannel shorts and very unwaterproof shoes – I decided that we would only be out for a minute and to brave it. By the time I reached the barrier at the entrance to the RNLi car park, I had learnt how daft that notion was and headed up to shelter inside the Inshore Lifeboat shed.

The worst of it passed and we, my dog walking friend and I, made a break for it. As I predicted, ABH was not at all keen to stay out any longer than necessary, and we headed for home shortly afterwards. Here I had to employ the hair drier to dry her off as the towel I had previously used had been of little effect. She must love it or hate being damp because as soon as I picked it up, she was up on the chair with her head buried and waiting for me to turn it on.

This, of course, was the day that we allocated to go up to The Farm for me to finish off my projects and clean up and for the Missus to continue her matting in the greenhouse. Perhaps, had I seen the forecast earlier I might have switched the days around. We have years of disappointment where the forecasters have had it entirely wrong, and also I had not seen the forecast until the evening. Today they had

forecast heavy rain lasting into the early afternoon, which is rarely as bad or as long as they say. Obviously, today it was both.

We might have gone up regardless, but it was also mother's day and at the very least getting her from the truck to the cabin would be fraught. It seemed to be warmer than yesterday by some margin but with wind and rain it might have made it uncomfortable even in the cabin. I think we care more than she does that that is our prerogative. We decided to leave it for an hour to see how the weather developed at which point, I went downstairs to continue preparing the shop for opening.

After an hour, the weather showed small signs for improvement and the Missus decided that I would drop her at The Farm to warm the cabin and I would go and get Mother. Even on the way over to St Buryan, the weather was making great strides to improve on the error of its ways. The rain had stopped, near enough, by the time we arrived at The Farm, and it was game on for all the things that each of us had planned to do.

My first job was to rotate the greenhouse IBC so that the valve was facing toward the next IBC in line. There was only one problem with this: the rain had filled the IBC to three quarters full. It is, of course, exactly what should happen when it has been raining. The 50 square metre catchment of the greenhouse roof had produced 750 litres of saved rainwater since eight o'clock in the morning and I was about to empty it on the field. There was no choice as I had nowhere to store it temporarily while I reorientated the IBC. I thought that I had best pump it out rather than empty the tap because I could dump the water away from the immediate area so as not to flood it.

In an idle moment later, I tried to calculate the rainfall. We normally see the measurement in inches, so that was an added complication, and then divide the depth of water in the IBC by the area of the roof or was it the other way around. A short while in, spots started swimming before my eyes and my head started to hurt, so I stopped and looked at the Land's End weather station that told me 0.59 inches of rain had fallen in the day. So that is .59 inches times 50 converted into millimetres or possible centimetres ... no, no, stop it.

The small bilge pump performed very well. It took the best part of an hour to empty the tank onto the field, which was roughly in line with expectations, although I could not remember exactly what the throughput was so my expectations were somewhat fuzzy at that point. What I had not expected was that the toilet roll sized pump, floats. This became apparent when it started to bob about on the surface of the water and start to suck air. Understandably, it is designed to be fixed into a bilge, and floating would not be an issue, except maybe to float to the surface as a marker where the boat sank. I will have to make a better solution but in extremis, I found a suitable rock that I lashed to the pump with some twine. Job done.

With just a few inches of water left in the tank, I was able to turn it in the desired direction. It is the least worthy of our collection of IBCs and leaks despite the valve

being shut. Once the new connector is installed, it will not matter, but since we did not have the connector until later in the day, I was a little concerned that the leak might empty the container before it was fitted. I consoled myself that almost certainly more rain is on the way and at the rate it filled, I should not be worried. I therefore moved the pump to transfer the water from the next full IBC in line to the one I had just moved, which is where I should have started when we arrived had it not been for the rain.

While the pump did its thing, I set about securing the alongpipe so that it did not blow out of the IBC at the next strong wind. I did not really want to use twine as it will spoil the whole aesthetic from the most viewed aspect, but I could not think of a suitable alternative at the time. It would be awful to think that this one rash moment ruined my chances of winning the Sterling Prize.

It was while I was fitting up the hose to transfer the water from the next in line IBC that the Missus announced that she was running out of anti-weed matting. The lack of it would halt her production and we were not sure if the shop in Hayle that does all manner of big garden stuff was open tomorrow, which would have been a more convenient day to go. We decided that she should pack up, take Mother and ABH and leave me behind to carry on regardless. I estimated that her absence would be closer to two hours, and I was spot on. By that time, while our pump, pumped, I cleared the spare wood, put away the pallets on which it rested, tucked away the steel roofing sheets – which was fun in a 30 miles per hour wind – and cut up the remaining GRP roofing sheet offcuts so that they could be bagged and taken away.

When they arrived, I was just finishing a well-deserved cup of tea. Shortly after they left, I had a message to say that the IBC connector had arrived and I asked that they bring it back with them, which they did. Sadly, it was too late to do much with it and we abandoned The Farm for the next free time we could get up there.

I had a chance to examine the connector kit after tea. There had been some doubt in my mind whether it was the right thing or not because the photograph of it on the Internet had it set up incorrectly. They had the hose connected to the outlet on one side and the outlet again on the other instead of the inlet. A quick look at it showed that it was merely a mistake in configuration and the only remaining thing that could be wrong is if there is a one-way valve in either of the taps.

Not only did our connector arrive but so did the new inner tube for the wheelbarrow wheel. I had noticed it was flat a week or more ago rendering it merely a barrow. On investigation, having failed to pump it up, I discovered a sizeable tear near the valve, too big for repair even if we had a repair kit handy, which we do not. We used to but cannot get them anymore. We were able to acquire a replacement on the Internet for a few pounds and I shall fit it tomorrow. It will tidy up matters at The Farm quite nicely.

I have yet to empty the second cabin IBC so that I can replace the broken pallet under it. I have already selected a more robust one but may look to getting a gabion basket if the ones deployed so far work alright. That will be my Farm swansong. With the cash and carry delivery arriving in the morning The Diary will be shop, shop, shop for seven months, you lucky, lucky people.

## March 22<sup>nd</sup> – Saturday

As mucky days go, this one was mucky. We had a small measure of relief from it first thing when I took ABH around the block. This had been early, before seven o'clock and we had been interrupted halfway across the Harbour car park by the cash and carry driver calling to tell me he was here.

We hurried back and after dropping ABH upstairs, I joined the driver and his pal in unloading one of the bigger deliveries of the year. Between the three of us, it did not take too long which was just as well because between dropping ABH upstairs and coming down again, it has started to rain. It was not proper heavy, but it was heavy enough and when you are unloading heavy things the last thing you want is to be encumbered with layers of waterproof clothing.

The order was unceremoniously dumped in the middle of the floor. There was still quite a bit of floor because I had yet to put all the display stands back to where they are supposed to be. This made bringing it in even easier than usual when we have to squeeze it into the store room. There were a few out of stock items but nothing too serious and we will not have mayonnaise for the first three weeks because the Missus ordered the wrong size jar. Monday is earmarked for filling the shelves and restocking the stock room and in the meantime, the boxes will remain where they are.

I repaired upstairs straight away to finish my morning routine and to make a start on updating our inventory with new prices, pack sizes and new items of which there are very few. The main cash and carry tends to be the same items year after year unless we are forced into change by discontinuations. The new products usually come from the 'farmshop' cash and carry we use which is more premium type stock. With this we can experiment with new products from time to time and this year there will be quite a few.

I was pretty much stuck at home as we had a second grocery delivery due at some time during the morning. The outline plan was that I would drop the Missus up at The Farm and come back to wait on the delivery. She left it a bit late, and we felt that we could not risk missing it and therefore decided we would both wait until they had come and gone. The van arrived not long after. It is a much smaller delivery and was done in a flash. We departed for The Farm not five minutes after the last case of drink was in the shop.

All during this time the rain had not let up. It varied between heavy and light drizzle and was beginning to be accompanied by mist closing in around us. We were not about to let this deter us, especially the Missus who would be working in the dry of the greenhouse all day. I, on the other hand, would be outside for the duration finishing off my plan with the IBCs.

Sure enough, I spent the next several hours in variable mizzle. The work was also quite physical, so as well as being in the wet I was also overly warm in the layers of waterproofing required. It adds a layer of frustration to any job that requires a bit more finesse because clothes are just getting in the way.

Such was trying to install the IBC connector in the tight space between the IBCs the way we had them set up. I immediately discovered that the guard around the IBC valve on the second connector was preventing the hose being attached and needed to be cut off. I found myself traipsing between the IBCs and the distant truck for the angle grinder and various tools which made me even hotter and more irritable. Fortunately, there is nothing quite like employing a fearsome cutter like the angle grinder for venting frustration and I soon felt much relieved. It was even better that I had to kick the cut piece of metal to bend it out of the way. Cats in a two mile radius must have thanked their lucky stars.

I knew that I would have problems attaching the connector to the first IBC. I am pretty sure the valve is FUBAR, which means broken. It makes no difference which way the handle is turned, water still spews out of the valve like there was no tap at all. I would have liked to have wrapped some PTFE tape around the thread on the valve to help seal the join but there was no chance of doing so. I was lucky that I could screw the new connector on with the force of water coming out. It still leaks with a constant drip, but we will have to live with that. I suspect that it will only be important in a drought.

Once all the components of the new connector were in place, I opened all the taps to see if it was working. There was an initial glug, but I strained to see inside the IBC to check if water was coming in via the valve. I had wondered last night if there might have been a one-way valve in there but from the evidence of my eyes, I could not determine it one way or another. I thought to leave it for a minute or two while I set up the hose to pump the water from the second cabin IBC and when I returned, the water level in the empty IBC had noticeably increased.

I concluded that the connector was functioning as planned by it required a bigger diameter hose to work efficiently. In truth, it should work smoothly to level the volumes in each tank unless a lot of water is required to be extracted in a short space of time. Then we might be in trouble.

I set the pump to drain the second cabin IBC into the second greenhouse IBC. Overnight, I had charged the old leisure battery I have been using. It no longer takes a full charge or if it does, does not retain it but it is good enough to run the pump for

an hour or more. In charging, it would have drained the other two batteries which, of course, would not themselves be charging from the solar panels. I wish I had considered that because it was my intention to swop out the lone battery in the store room. I could not do that now until the battery in the cabin had been recharged and on such grey and miserable day, that took until nearly close of play.

While the water transferred from cabin to greenhouse IBCs, I hammered some big nails into the back door frame. That job had been outstanding since I finished the doors. That would not have taken much time if the last nail had not gone awry and I had to dig out the angle grinder again to cut it off. By that time, I had put the hammer away as well and had to retrieve it to knock the last bit of cutoff nail into the frame.

With the pumping taking its time, I made a cup of tea which also takes a while on the camp stove, and by the time my tea was ready, the pump was sucking air in the cabin IBC. I had to abandon my tea to sort it out.

The pallet under the now empty IBC was rotten through. It is early days to know if the gabion cages are a better bet but there was no immediate bending and twisting from the two with tonne weights on them. In the meantime, I selected our strongest looking pallet and used that. I thought to put in on another that looked in reasonable nick and when I went to connect the overflow pipe from the IBC beside it, I notice that it was now higher than its feeder, which would not have worked very well. I had to take it all down again and settle for the one pallet under it.

Had I been fastidious enough, I would have pumped the water from the primary to the secondary to avoid the issue of restricted flow between them. So ridiculously laissez faire am I that the notion did not even occur to me until much later when it was too late.

In the few hours that I was up there, I had heaved heavy hosepipes about the place, hammered in big nails, lifted pallets and IBCs around and, in the spare moments, installed the crop bars that the Missus needed to hang her tomatoes from. I also exchanged the 25 kilogram battery in the store room with the charged one in the cabin and as a last hurrah, put all my tools away as I would not need them again – probably. Having shifted all the opening groceries into the shop as well in the morning, I was feeling a little weary. The fact that we could no longer see the end of the field and the mizzle was coming in sideways did not inspire me to leap up and look for more to do.

So, it was slightly disappointing when the Missus emerged from the warm and dry greenhouse and asked for the electric saw, screws and power driver because she wanted to make some more borders. As kindly as I could muster, I suggested that it was late in the day and that all the tools had been put to bed, where I should be. I could see that she was quite a bit more disappointed than I was that she had asked but she agreed to stop for the day.



We will have to go up tomorrow regardless of the weather because Monday is grocery putting away day and the Missus will be climbing the walls if she cannot get her borders done.

I took a freshly washed ABH around the block after tea. Usually, she collapses in a heap after a day at The Farm but the bath must have invigorated her. At seven o'clock there is still light and certainly enough to see that the sea was getting up to mischief again. There were largeish waves charging down Tribbens and the sea over Cowloe was fair boiling. It was alluring enough to tempt some watchers out onto the Harbour wall, but it was low enough in the tide for them not to be getting wet.

One of the fishing boats had been out a few times during the week, which was a good indicator of winter receding and spring setting in. I also noticed an increase in the number of lights on in holiday lets about the place. It would be good to think that this resurgence of winter weather is a flash in the pan ahead of our rather less than grand opening next Saturday. We live in hope.

### March 23<sup>rd</sup> – Sunday

Perhaps I should not have gone on about the weather yesterday. This morning was as grim as the previous day but in a rather different way. The breeze had been picking up yesterday from somewhere in the east and this morning it was punching in from the north. It was bringing cold with it, a drop of a couple of degrees from yesterday with a further five degrees in windchill. The sea at half tide, which is when I saw it first, was raging with a bit of ground sea and torn about by the wind. It was no surprise that ABH was not keen to go out in it.

It took me a while to convince her and when we eventually went out it was just as cold as it appeared to be from inside. I have not been cold inside for a long while but today I seemed not to be able to shift the feeling.

The Missus and I decided quite quickly that we would cancel going to The Farm today. If I was feeling the chill, I am sure Mother certainly would even if the wind was coming in from behind the cabin. In truth, I do not have a great deal to do up there anymore; my work there is done. Anything that I do there now is likely to give me a problem that I will not have time to finish it, so I would rather not start in the first place. We decided that we would have a quiet day and since the weather looked improved for tomorrow, we would go up The Farm then and put the grocery distribution off until Tuesday.

Just because we agreed to have a quiet day did not mean that there was no work to do. I spent some of the morning finishing off updating the prices on our inventory system from the cash and carry invoice. For the first time in a couple of years, there were a few prices of everyday items that have come down, which was encouraging. Unfortunately, there were far more that had increased in price and by some margin,

especially for confection. These have gone up by 20 percent across the board. I cannot help but think this is probably a good thing, however, although just how much of a deterrent it will be for those who really could do without them is questionable. I am really quite taken aback at the number of very overweight children I see during the season who seem to be under no restraint when it comes to consumption of sweets.

We have the 'farmshop' cash and carry order to complete today. I had already drafted the list but kept remembering things to add to it. It was late in the afternoon when I eventually got around to placing the order and had previously to go down to the shop to make sure I had it right. One of the frustrations, and indeed attractions, with this company is that the stock list changes quite frequently. The advantage is we can add new and different items to our shelves and the disadvantage is things that are selling well can suddenly disappear from the stock list. One such item is the small pots of hummus we keep in the fridge. It sells exceedingly well but now it has disappeared with no useful alternative to take its place.

I still managed to do one Farm related job when I went downstairs to check my shopping list. The inner tube for the barrow, previously known as wheelbarrow, had arrived with the IBC connector and I had studiously ignored it since and had no time to do it. I had hoped that it would not need the special spanners and tools seen at a car tyre shop and was relieved to find that it did not. It did, however, require things to be done in a specific order, which took a couple of tries to get right. Also, the attachment I have for our compressor that does car tyres did not work quite as well as the other one does on the balls we inflate. The attachment has a pressure gauge the needle of which bounces around when the air is passing through the hose but does not appear to show the pressure in the tyre. The valve also lets air out, fortunately not as much as is going in, so has to be disconnected as soon as you have finished. It took a couple of goes of the tyre going flat again before I realised this. Still, the job is now done, and I shall fit the tyre tomorrow and we will have a wheelbarrow back.

Still suffering with the cold of the day, I decided that it would not do to let ABH off a decent stank in the afternoon. I was momentarily confused when I looked at the beach because with only two hours to go before low water, the tide was still substantially in. Later, even at low tide it had not retreated very much, and I concluded that the combination of neap tides and strong northwesterly wind was keeping much of the sea up on the beach. Still, there was plenty of beach for us to do the beach stank, so that was the direction we went.

Despite the cold, it would not be right and proper to set out on a stank without shorts on, but I had my proper wind and waterproof jacket and a few layers under it. For once, there was not much hanging about on the way to The Beach car park, for which I was grateful. Once we had got going, the cold did not matter much and at least it was dry. There is definitely an increase in visitor numbers, but we only met

one couple on the Coast Path heading the other way. By the time we arrived at the beach, I was warming up nicely and really rather enjoying myself.

I was not surprised to see some changes to the beach given that it has been a week or three since we last did this walk. I think probably over last week's benign spring tides there has been a major build-up of sand especially at the northern end of the beach where the little river has cut a deep gorge as it exits to the sea. There is definitely less of an escarpment as we walk south towards The Beach car park where the sand has ramped up at the back of the beach, mainly. That is not to say sand has not arrived further down, it has covered to the most part the telegraph cables which now only show in places. There is still a field of rocks and the bedrock is exposed near the OS slipway but there is enough there to say we have a decent bit of sand for the Easter holidays – at present.

With those holidays fast approaching, the boys have cracked on with the replacement Lifeguard hut. It looks palatial compared with the last one. Obviously not as palatial as our greenhouse but the hut appears to have three doors and a big picture window to compensate. I would say that they have lost a bit of terrace in the process, but with a summer like last one, that is probably a good thing. As long as they do not make a deal for surplus paint from the OS job, our visitors will be able to admire it during the holidays.

We had a cracking little walk against the best efforts of that cutting northerly wind which persisted into the evening. The skies became more glowing with steely coloured clouds as the evening went on and by the time we went for an after tea walk, it was dark and I do believe it was trying to rain a little, too. It was certainly a day to draw a line under and hope for better tomorrow.

## March 24<sup>th</sup> – Monday

The weather was much kinder today, although it was still chilly, but the wind had diminished considerably. Even so, we did not hang about on our morning walk that was early again thanks to an early wake up call.

The Missus was keen to get a march on at The Farm, but I was not entirely sure what I could get on with since most of my work was done. Before any of that I had a customer order to complete and deliver now that I had all the components of it in the shop. Our neighbour along the way has oversight of three holiday lets and we provision her with soap and shower gel for the visitors and cleaning materials for the cleaners. In a happy coincidence it was also her birthday today, so I slipped a card and some frozen raspberries (it is a traditional Cove gift, honest guv) in with the provisions she had ordered some while ago. I will add them to her account, of course, but it is the gesture that counts, is it not.

By the time I had finished messing about with things that generate a bit of income, I roused the Missus, and we headed off to The Farm where I could spend some more. Actually, I think all the spending up there has been done, although the Missus might have some more seeds to purchase. I have been keeping track of the greenhouse spend and it was not that scary, Given we were quoted £8,000 for a building a third the size from a shed company a while ago, it was a snip, although not as square in the corners.

I had a feeling that it would be my last day up at The Farm. The Missus is still working at preparing the greenhouse floor, getting rid of the deeply rooted weeds that took over last year when we abandoned the place and getting the growing areas ready. Having installed crop bars on one side of the greenhouse she sprung on me that she wanted some the other side. Sadly, it is too late as I would need to get brackets for the poles that used to provide the function in the polytunnel. Had she mentioned it when I did the other ones, I could have installed them today.

Instead, I finished off some of the niggling items that needed doing about the place. The downpipe that runs off the potting shed, previously known as greenhouse, had come adrift from the traditional water butts we have there. It was a job that had been outstanding for some time, and I was very pleased to be able to put that one to bed.

The latch on the farm gate was another irritation. One of our neighbours up there had blundered into our field for a reason best known to himself and torn the latch off the gatepost. He did not know that he had done it. He pulled the gate unaware that there was a latch and the bolts fell out of the gatepost leaving the latch on the ground. Had the gatepost not been split and broken, it might have held together and prevented him from opening the gate. The fix was not a perfect job and involved strapping a block of decent wood to the ailing gatepost and turning in numerous screws in the hope that some of them would bite into something solid. The gatepost needs replacing but that is a monstrous job as the current post is embedded in the hedge and held in by ivy of some sort. It is and will remain in the 'too difficult' pile.

The other outstanding task was to try and do something with the toolshed bolts. The door frame there was rotten through and had dropped a bit making it difficult to slide one of the bolts across and impossible for the lower one. Fortunately, what the rotten door frame was nailed to was reasonably good wood, so I cut it out and replaced it and then screwed the bolt keeps back into place. It is not the most secure toolshed in the world but hopefully it would deter any passing opportunist.

With still time on my hands, I cleared up the rest of the spare wood and moved all the scrap metal work from the polytunnel out of the way. This led me past the greenhouse IBCs and I was disappointed to see that the second one was leaning forward at a more acute angle than I remembered. When I installed it, I noticed that the gabion cages were not level, and the empty IBC rocked on the middle 'peak'. To stop the rocking, I placed two planks under the back end. I should have left it to settle as it was. When the IBC filled, the weight was unevenly distributed to the front

and now the gabion cage there has sunk further into the ground, hence increasing the angle of the dangle. I do not think that it poses a danger and certainly there is nothing now I can do about it – apart from fret and be annoyed with myself.

I frittered away the last hour up there while the Missus dug out a particularly extensive root system. What I should have done was put the caps on the cladding fixings that I meant to do at the time, retrieved the spade from the other side of the IBCs that I left there and loaded the big rake which is too big for the Missus to use and needs to go back to the builders' merchant that I, and they, thought I had done with for the season. I also need to return the hole digging spade to my pal who lent it to me. It looks like I will be doing all that in the morning while the Missus sets to with the cash and carry orders. Begger!

## March 25<sup>th</sup> – Tuesday

Having decided to leave the cash and carry delivery languishing in the middle of the shop floor yesterday, we had no choice but to do it today. This was a shame because from the very outset today, the sun was shining, the wind much abated and little birds tweeting in the trees – such as they are here in West Cornwall. In fact, I headed up to The Farm first thing just to experience how lovely and warm it was up there so I could tell the Missus just what she was missing.

It was not the only reason I was there, although it did seem a very good one. As mentioned yesterday, there was the small matter of the spade to put away, a spade to take back to its owner and a rake to return to the builders' merchant. It would have irked me terribly all season had I also not put the little plastic caps on the cladding fixings that I had omitted when I did the doors. Weeks ago, I had put a bag of spare caps in the greenhouse for that very purpose. Naturally, there were eleven short to complete the job and I had to go and unlock the toolshed to get some more. I duly fitted the eleven and as I locked up the greenhouse, my mission complete, I noticed a solitary missing cap up on the wall. I see sleepless nights ahead.

Unable to think of another reason for staying longer, I headed off to St Just where I had been asked to collect some groceries since I was heading that way. I would have collected Mother first, but she did not pick up her telephone. It is always good to have Mother on board if you are going shopping because she allows you to park in disabled spots. She has a get out of jail free card we can put in the car window that wards off traffic enforcement officers.

It was busy in St Just and I had to park some distance off from the shops and walk. It was not the walking there so much as the walking back. I had to pick up baking potatoes and found that I had left my bag in the truck. I had to waddle back with my pockets stuffed with large potatoes which, believe me, dear reader, is not a good look. I might have been better off had I not been tempted by the lardy cake that I resisted last visit.

With just a few days before the shop opens there was no way I was going to put it off again. I cannot say that I was wholly disappointed later when I had some because, at a guess it is probably fifty years since I last had a bite. Memory can play wicked games with a person over that period of time. I seem to remember it as somewhat more unhealthy, dripping in whatever it drips in and was permeated by. I should remember that years ago we were permitted larger Mars bars and Wagon Wheels than the children of today, probably because we were allowed them on high days and holiday only and then if we were lucky – apart from fatty Johnson who must have lived on them. Boy, did he suffer at school. It was years later I realised that we needed people like that at school to keep the flies off the rest of us, bless un.

Sorry, I digress. Now, where was I. Ah yes, having an, erm, clinically obese Johnson waddle back to the truck so that I could pick up Mother. She still did not answer the telephone, so I had the Missus message her duly collected her twenty minutes later. When we got back, the Missus was up to her elbows in cash and carry delivery and it was time that we mucked in as well. Mother set to with breaking up the cardboard boxes while I attended to a small outstanding matter outside.

The newspaper box used to be secured at each end, attached by rope to the wall. Since the roofs works last year, one of the fixings disappeared, mainly because it was inappropriately sized and rusted through, I suspect. I had been waiting the opportunity to have all the right bits of kit all together at the same time to enable me to do the job. Previously, I had the tools but not the bits or the bits and not the tools. I made a concerted effort this time and thought I had best get on with it.

It did not take very long, and I then fell in with Mother and the Missus in helping with the cash and carry order. Since it was me who set the prices for everything – if you want someone to blame - it was me assigned to stick price labels on the goods that needed it. That took quite some time after which I put away the cases of beer that were still out on the floor. The Missus finished off the larger portion of the work at around three o'clock, which was commendable. It left all the overstock piled up on the fridge in the store room for me to deal with tomorrow.

Towards the end of the work clearing the main cash and carry, the 'farm shop' delivery arrived. That too will have to wait until tomorrow. I will aim to get busy with that fairly early because halfway through the morning we are expecting the first beachware order of the year and it will be substantial. Most of this will need to be whisked away to The Farm and the store there. It is definitely all starting.

Having tested the lardy cake, I thought I had best take some exercise and sought the company of ABH. She was having none of it, so we all indulged in a thoroughly lazy afternoon and evening. It is Mother's birthday tomorrow and the Missus is taking her out somewhere special. I was aiming to come along as well but the deliveries now preclude it and I will remain home with ABH who will no doubt be obtuse and want to go out. That is just how things are.

## March 26<sup>th</sup> – Wednesday

Yesterday afternoon the mist came calling into The Cove. It made a few trial attempts, falling back into the bays and crevices along the cliffs, then came in properly. When I took ABH around last thing, I could barely see ahead with the light from my headtorch bouncing right back at me.

It had come with an increase in temperature which even in the morning made the jacket I was wearing superfluous. It was still a bit misty then, but it was clearing quickly. When I took the girl out again nearer the middle of the day, a t-shirt would have been sufficient down on the Harbour Beach. Sadly, I spent much of my time from the middle of the morning in the shop which was about five degrees colder than the temperature outside. I did not notice much because I was shifting boxes of produce about and filling shelves with the bounty from our 'farm shop' supplier.

Earlier, I had made another journey out to St Just. I ration my attendances because it is a bit of a luxury, but I make an appointment a few times a year with Wendy the Foot. She used to make house calls but more recently has found it more convenient to rent a room at the surgery in St Just. It does not bother me, and I as easily forget to call her when needed whether she calls around or I have to go to her. It is not entirely luxury, of course; there is a clinical element to the visit the details of which I will spare you, dear reader.

My breakfast bread that I had salted away in the freezer since the tail end of last season had inexplicably run out two days before the next order arrives. Since I was in St Just, I called around to the top grocery store there, the one that does lardy cake, for a small loaf of local bread. I suppose I could have managed two breakfasts without bread, but it was just as well that I bought some more because I needed it for tea, which I had not expected. My mental agility may have been dulled over the period of the winter but the looking ahead part still seems keen.

The Missus headed off for a posh tea at a posh hotel in St Ives not long after I came back. She was still there to look after ABH when our first beachware order of the year arrived. All 30 boxes of it. I did not get around to working at that today, but I did clear away the 'farm shop' delivery and the overstock from the main cash and carry delivery that had been left on top of the chest freezer in the store room.

That had taken me until the middle of the afternoon. By that time, ABH was getting noticeable more restless, so I decided it was a good idea to take her out for a stank. I had hardly noticed the weather outside improving all the while I was in the shop nor the temperature increasing. The original plan was to finish sorting the beachware order between boxes staying in the shop and boxes going to The Farm, but I did not get that far.

I was distracted during my work by the absence of a waste truck turning up for our cardboard, more of which I was generating by the minute. It was a matter for concern which had me calling up the supplier for information. I had sent in the request a week earlier which I explained to the very pleasant man on the end of the telephone was, in my view, ample notice to set up the collection. He did not exactly agree but neither did he disagree. He did go away to enquire and discovered that my collection would not happen until next week and nothing at all could be done in the interim. It is irksome in the extreme and the cardboard will have to be brought in again ahead of a gale of wind on Friday. The bin is now full, so I will need to be creative about shop waste disposal for a week.

It was, no doubt, fateful that I was interrupted because had it not, I would have started on the 30 boxes and not gone out for the walk. This would have been regrettable because for the second time in a week I actually got to enjoy a stank out into the wild. Happily, I will not be able to make a habit of it now as all that enjoyment is bound to be detrimental to an averred grumpy shopkeeper. In truth, it is unlikely that I will be able to repeat it for a year or more.

The air temperature and lack of strong breeze was such that I did not even contemplate any extra layers. Halfway through the journey, I suspect a t-shirt would have been sufficient, but I was not overly uncomfortable with just a mid layer on top of mine. With the tide nearly fully in, I elected to head up the cliff and our half walk to Land's End. I am sure I have defended my use of just two repetitive walks in the repertoire. They are convenient for a spur of the moment walk and require little thought or planning. There is always something new or different to observe along the way or someone new to meet or even someone we meet reasonably often on the trail as we did today.

There was no point in reviving my work when I got back. There was every point in a cup of tea and a slice of lardy cake – cold this time, which was a mistake. I think ordinarily the expectation is that once heated the whole cake is consumed. I assume it is normally eaten by people with friends or acquaintances. I managed to complete some administration which is starting to emerge as we approach opening and planning some orders for tomorrow.

The other part of the reason for finishing early was that I needed an early tea ahead of an early Lifeboat launch planned for the evening. Wednesday is fast becoming the new Thursday and on this occasion was urged by the impending change in weather that would have precluded a later launch.

We gathered shortly after six o'clock and launched both boats shortly after that. We had a good gathering of crew on both sides of the divide and because we like to move things around, I took my place in the winch room on this occasion. It gives me the chance to refresh my skills at winching the boat in the smoothest of operations and to spell eyrie correctly. It is from this vantage point, or eyrie, that I can observe



all the various operations and perhaps suggest improvements, which is obviously a difficult challenge.

The launches went according to plan, and we set up for a long slip recovery later in the evening. Under our new Coxswain and the training regime in place, the boat seems to stay out longer than previously and despite the earlier launch, the boats did not return to The Cove until half past eight o'clock. By this time, we were close to low water and the crew at the bottom of the long slip were a very long way down it. It was only thanks to the use of a headtorch and a signal lamp that I knew when to winch the boat up in what was clearly a textbook recovery. We washed down, polished and strapped the boat down for the next time it would be needed. We were all done by shortly before nine o'clock. We are, after all, a very dedicated, very excellent Shore Crew.

## March 27<sup>th</sup> – Thursday

Today was just too tedious for words, although I had better find some or have a very short Diary today. I knew that it would be because in prospect was dividing the beachware order between what was staying the shop and what was going to The Farm. If I managed to finish that, there was always plenty more preparation to do.

It was good then that ABH woke me up early despite the days that I might lie in dwindling away fast. I do not hold it against her; I must get used to even earlier mornings soon especially as the clocks jump forward on our second day of opening. We found ourselves down on the Harbour beach before seven o'clock which led to breakfast being not long after half past eight o'clock. This was also good because I had just consumed the last mouthful when the butcher turned up with our first consignment of meats for the season.

The order was ready when I was in St Just yesterday. I had a call from the butchers while I was there, so I dropped in to find out what they wanted. Having resolved a minor issue, I was asked if I wanted to take the order with me, but I demurred. First, I had walked around to the butcher, and it was a substantial order and secondly, I needed to have the freezer space to put the bits in that we offer frozen and, at the time had not cleared it. We would love to do their sausages fresh but other than at peak times, we do not have the throughput and end up throwing them away.

When it arrived today, I was better prepared and having emptied the store room freezer of my breakfast bread, I had some space. I did not bother being too tidy but regretted it almost immediately when I remembered that I had placed a fish order that was going to be ready today. That also would need some space.

As if they could read my mind, they called shortly after and told me the order was ready. If we are busy, they will go out of their way and deliver it which they do not do as a matter of routine but we collect, whenever we can. It is a trade off as we cannot

get the service we have from this supplier anywhere else. Everywhere else insists on sending us restaurant portion sizes, which are a tad small for retail selling.

Having arrived back home with it, I had to abandon the beachware order and spend time vacuum packing, weighing and labelling 30 portions of prime fish. I keep it in the pasty fridge (sorry, MS) while I am processing it which I had only just that morning cleaned ahead of our pasty order arriving tomorrow. I had to clean the fridge again after I had finished which must have taken a little more than an hour. I shall have to remember the volumes I ordered because the spread across the haddock, pollack and hake that I asked for was spot on.

At some point during my labours our guests, another branch of her extensive family tree, had arrived. ABH and I had been left to it in the shop and forgotten, it seems and when I went up to furnish myself with a cup of tea, they were all sitting around the table already furnished with theirs. I made my apologies for my absence, made my cup of tea and when I went back down to the shop, sent ABH back up in an act of petty revenge.

It took me roughly until the end of the day to finish off the beachware order. I put a few items out on the shelves when it was better to do that than push it into the store room for later. In doing so I also had to rearrange some of the shop furniture back to its correct position so that I could get at the shelves, so that was an added bonus. The dairy and the greengrocery are both arriving tomorrow morning, so I spend a little time getting the fridges ready and switched on.

I would also need one of the display freezers on for the fish and butchery. It is one of a line of three units the power for which is on the wall behind them and inaccessible. I had tried using wifi switches but the plugs were too proud of the wall, so in an moment of inspired inventiveness I hung the cables over the trunking that runs over the top of the units and ran extensions from the power points. The setup has worked very well for a few years despite needing a stool to reach the plug and socket. It works even better when the refrigeration engineer who comes to service them remembers to leave the cable hung over the trunking and not curled up on the floor behind the unit. I think I may have exclaimed what a naughty fellow he was – once or twice.

That was about it for me. There was plenty still to do, the beachware boxes need to be taken up to The Farm for starters, but I thought that I had exhausted my reserves for the day and that I ought to show my face with the visitors, which I duly did. We are not often visited thus, and it made for a pleasant interlude. They went back home late in the evening dropping Mother home on the way. It had clearly exhausted ABH as well because she retired to bed not long after they went, and we did not see her until our own bedtime. No doubt she will be up bright eyed and bushy tailed at sparrow's tomorrow morning after such a rest, bless her.

## March 28<sup>th</sup> – Friday

There was no hanging around today. Today was an escalation on workload from yesterday and it started earlier too. I was up at six o'clock thanks to ABH and welcoming the milkman at eight o'clock. He was preceded by the greengrocery delivery half an hour earlier, but I felt that processing that could be left until a more agreeable hour. The milk, unfortunately, could not.

Lest my breakfast be interrupted, I waited until the pasty man (sorry, MS) had been. The delivery always looks different in the flesh than on paper or the whiteboard where I usually scribble my relevant thoughts. The delivery looked a bit thin for what is pegged as a sunny weekend and the cheese and vegetable pasties especially look very short in number. I did hold back on the order because our first days of opening are usually very quiet but, then again, my memory is from when we opened a week or two earlier. This year, we are right on top of Easter school holidays.

I was expecting, due to the forecast, a bit of a blow going on when I first stepped out of the door, but the breeze was insignificant. It was a pretty looking day, and the sunshine was bearing down on our solar panels feeding our flat's electricity for the last day this season. My last action before I go to bed will be to switch the panels to the shop as we will be running on all our fridges and freezers from tonight. In fact, my last action was to forget to switch the panels from the flat to the shop and I had to do it halfway through the morning.

The sunshine persisted the day long with varying amounts of large, white fluffy clouds dotting the pale blue sky. The beach, hugely wide at low water, looked resplendent the one moment I had time to gaze at it and even then it was an incidental gaze, looking down the road that way to avoid being run over. Later, as the tide increased, the sea became more agitated until by the late afternoon, it was throwing itself over the Harbour wall with gay abandon with a hefty ground sea behind it.

The Missus brought the truck around ahead of going to collect Mother. I was just finishing off pricing and putting away the various morning deliveries. Together, we loaded up with the overstock from the beachware order, clearing much of the shop floor, which was most helpful. While I was squeezing the boxes into the back the Missus was plundering the remaining stock of our reed beachmats. She has discovered that they are excellent at keeping the weeds at bay once used in conjunction with anti-weed matting. I will have to get my finger out to order more but I will also need my thinking head as the reed mats alone will not constitute a minimum order from the supplier. I will have a look at what else we need from them over the weekend.

When they returned, the Missus settled Mother and ABH up in the flat while we both went at the remaining work to get the shop ready for opening. Despite our best efforts – no, let me rephrase that – despite our best intentions to give our best

efforts, we had once again left everything until the last minute. After all, we have been doing it for 20 years, so why change now. It is not that we play at brinksmanship; it is not deliberate. I think it is a rush born of necessity: the orders we make to arrive just in time for opening and therefore provide a mountain of work in a short space of time are left late to protect cash flow. Perhaps we should start earlier with some of the things we can do in advance, like the cleaning, but then we risk making everything dirty again before we open, like the pasty fridge yesterday.

In short, I think we are destined to have a mad rush on the last day before opening until the day when we do not open anymore. Someone else will then have the rush job of prising my stiff and icy fingers off the till and clearing me away before opening for Easter.

The Missus attended to the small sweet packets that had arrived yesterday while I cleared the gift order that has arrived at the beginning of the week. Both our activities generated even more cardboard than we had space to keep thanks to the failure of our waste collection company to come and collect it. She attacked the single freezer we had been using during the winter which generated some waste food that needed to go into the bin. The waste bin is now full and even after I deemed it full, I managed to get another bag in by crushing the bags under it. I now cannot move in the store room for waste cardboard and unpacked stock and will have to cope until the waste collection next Wednesday.

When the Missus finished and cleared out of the way, I was able to move the outside display in next to the freezer she was working on. It is inexplicable that this winter I have built a ten metre greenhouse and fixed our water reclamation facilities but the net bucket in the shop still sits on a broken dolly for the second year in a row. Once the display items had been moved, I was able to arrange the rest of the items in their proper place and call it a day.

Later, we sat looking out at the lively bay while we ate our fish tea. The waves were pushing through in an almost orderly fashion, collapsing into brilliant white foam in the last of the bright sunlight. We watched as the few scattered sea birds skimmed over the waves heading this way and that. Earlier in the week, one of the fishermen had told me that there was a group of sandwich terns, like ordinary terns but thinner, in the Lifeboat channel. They were gathered in numbers, presumably for safety. They try and avoid coming too close to humans; they have heard it said, of course, that humans, the polite ones at least, take terns.

The big fluffy clouds that had adorned some of the sky had all disappeared when I took ABH out after tea. All that was left was the tattered remnant of wispy cloud here and there in an otherwise clear sky. The wind had introduced a chill today but even coming from the northwest which it did by the middle of the afternoon, it was still not quite as cold as it had been a week or so ago. I think I can consign my work battered and dirty winter coat to the cupboard, especially as I am unlikely to be venturing very

far for the next seven months. From now it is bye, bye Farm, hello shopliness. You could write a song about that.

## March 29<sup>th</sup> – Saturday

I was down in the shop early and well ahead of the not so grand opening of the first electric sliding doors in The Cove to the general public. There were a few things that I had left outstanding from the day before and wanted to clear those before we opened to our adoring, ahem, public.

Given that we had clear skies the previous evening, it was disappointing that quite a bit of cloud had crept in. Radio Pasty happily announced that the cloud would increase throughout the day blotting out the sun completely. The announcer then went on in some detail about where special sunglasses might be obtained and how to watch the impending partial solar eclipse that you would not now be able to see. The event was evidenced by a glowering of the sky at around the appointed time. Spectacular, it was. I mostly missed it.

I had not expected much of our first weekend and was not disappointed on the first day. The weather did not help, especially as we had been told earlier in the week to expect better. I am sure we would have been quiet in the morning no matter the weather but in the afternoon, we would normally expect a bit of an upturn which did not happen to any great degree. It was probably as well, then, that I had forgotten to place the posh bread order yesterday as most of it would have gone in the bin.

The hiatus gave me some opportunity to complete the price labels that needed to go on the confectionery since all of them had changed from last year. The same was true of the soft drinks; I had been admonished by one local chap who told me we were too cheap. Changing the labels in the drinks fridge is a bit of a challenge as the glue on the peelable labels becomes almost permanent in the cold. It took me ten minutes to scrape off the half dozen labels already there, so I decided that this time around I would just do a laminated list to tack to the door. The disadvantage of doing that is that if one price changes during the season, the whole list needs to be reproduced.

The Missus headed up to The Farm halfway through the morning leaving me all alone in the world. She took ABH as it would have been far too long a day for her to be confined to the bed in the shop. I did not see the Missus again until near closing time. In the time she had gone, she had finished off the floor of the greenhouse. That does not sound like much, but it is quite gruelling work on her knees ripping weed roots out. It reminded me that I needed to do something about the reed mats she had filched and I think I can bolster the order with tiddler nets that we need in abundance. I will get right on that, dreckly.

Talking of which, there is a glimmer of hope on bus provision front. A couple came in during the afternoon. They are staying in St Just and made an enquiry about the bus times. They were aware that it is about this time of year that the bus companies change the timetables to add a few more buses into the mix for an increasing number of visitors. I had quite forgotten about such things, so, to be helpful, I looked it up on the Internet. Oh, very dear. The companies do indeed intend to increase the frequency and volume of buses on the various routes but not until April 20<sup>th</sup>. Clearly, their new artificial intelligence timetable application is not quite as smart as they hoped because April 20<sup>th</sup> may well be the Easter weekend, but it is also the end of the school holidays. The more frequently running buses will have to wait until the end of May before seeing the increase in passengers they probably hoped for.

I tripped over the glimmer of hope quite incidentally while trying to establish when the timetables changed. It seems that the alternative bus company in the Duchy, Go Cornwall, are stepping into the breach. It is actually a flash back in time when the new company won the main contract for bus provision in Cornwall. It was they who provided the Land's End to St Ives service and First Kernow the routine Penzance trip. Go Cornwall lasted just one season before they decided the route was not profitable enough for them and gave up. First Kernow stepped in, and the Community Bus stepped out because it could not compete on a commercial route. All very complicated.

It is therefore something of a mystery why Go Cornwall thinks it can now make a go of it this time around. The service, the 7/7a looks like it will run a "limited provision over the Land's End to St Ives ... in part replacing the Land's End Coaster". Now, those are words you can hide a multitude of sins in. It will also provide for two complex timetables for our visitors to be perplexed by instead of the one.

At the last knocking of the day, a chap from the vintage bus club dropped by to ask if we could put a poster up for him. Each year they are permitted to run their stock on some of the commercial routes and the St Ives run is one of them. There will be no charge and for one day only, April 20<sup>th</sup>, we will have a regular and reliable bus service in The Cove.

By the middle of the afternoon, the weather really fell apart. Low cloud descended and before very long Gwenver Beach disappeared from view as did any of the potential for more customers. We had enjoyed a bit of activity during the middle part of the afternoon with some visitor arrivals. It was good of them to come by for groceries. Made my day, indeed.

It was also good to meet our neighbours again, some of which I had not seen all winter. It is not deliberate that we avoid each other, well, not in all cases, but we are so sparsely dotted through The Cove and operate on different schedules, so we do not often accidentally bump into each other. It is a matter of great convenience for them that the shop is open again. I wish there was a way of being able to provide the

service somehow during the winter. Since I will be pinned down this coming winter, perhaps I should apply some thought to it.

ABH must have excelled herself up at The Farm. When she came home, she went straight to bed and was still there when it was our turn to retire. After one day at the fine stope, I could have done the same. I shall have to do some girding of loins before we get busy.

## March 30<sup>th</sup> – Sunday

I was a man on fire today. Maybe it was the getting up early that did it.

I had neglected to set an alarm last night but was only half an hour off what I would regard is a sensible time for getting up. I was alone in the endeavour; ABH was having nothing to do with it despite having slept since she came home from The Farm yesterday afternoon. I will get up earlier by and by but at present there is a bit of slack in my preparation time in the mornings, especially when there are no deliveries.

It had the look of a better day about it. ABH followed me shortly after I got up and I was pleased to see we had full daylight at what was half past five o'clock in the morning. Of course, to preserve one's sanity, it is best not to think about it in those terms – begger, I have just thought about it in those terms. By the middle of the afternoon, the sun was splitting the hedges and the wind from the northwest had diminished to a light breeze. I was told that it was warm out but on our side of the street, there was still a chill in the air.

At low water, the beach was an immense expanse of sand. It seemed you could walk to Cowloe but no such luck with Gwenver. There is a sizeable gully again and even on one of the biggest tides of the year, Gwenver beach was still cut off. You could surf as well, if you were minded to with some ground sea still available but with an onshore breeze behind it. There was half a dozen there as the tide pushed in who could be bothered to walk the half mile to the water.

As the sun beat down, we were blessed with a bit of a surge in interest in our ice cream selection. Calling it a selection might have been overstating the sparse array of last year's lollies available, but it did not deter people any. We had quite a continuous flow of customers at one stage which had me on my mettle. We even scored our first sun lotion sale of the year. Gosh, I was impressed. Later, I was also prompted to write out a frozen order to address our shortfall.

Things tailed off after four o'clock, which was just as well. I had not been used to such manic activity in quite a while and needed a rest. I dare say I shall eventually get used to it, perhaps by September after some training and much practise.

I was best pleased to note some customers bringing joy and amusement and that I enjoy their company just as much as I have ever done. A late afternoon customer who came in to browse our shelves and just before she left, she offered me a biscuit. She opened a container of homemade lemon and thyme shortbread biscuits. How could I refuse. Another lady asked me what music I was playing as it corresponded to the alarm tone on her smart mobile telephone that she rather liked. I assured her that I was playing no music at all, so she entreated me to listen harder. I had my false ears on, so there was no reason I would not have heard it. Fleetinglly, it crossed my mind that I might exercise some caution and perhaps call for a couple of doctors, but I followed her further down the corridor and heard it too. As we listened, the music seemed to be elusive and not quite loud enough to pin down to a specific location or direction. From its tone, I suggested that it was indeed the sound from a mobile telephone and perhaps someone had left it behind on a shelf, as they occasionally do. However, as we traversed the aisle, the music seemed as just out of reach as it had initially. Of course, we should have realised that it was just too much of a coincidence that the music was the same as her own alarm tone and when she reached into her bag to check her telephone, she announced that it was indeed hers making the sound.

It is that time of year when things are a little slower and people have time to be kinder. I could not criticise our customer as I recall once in a doctors' waiting room many years ago when you could actually go and wait to see a doctor – imagine. The whole room searching for a plaintive tone coming from somewhere. It was several minutes before a very unamused doctor pointed out it was the low battery tone from the pager I was wearing at the time.

The state of play here, though, is fast changing and the most noticeable thing about today was the number of families starting to arrive. We will hopefully be too busy to worry too much about chasing ethereal music around the shop and tasting rather toothsome lemon and thyme shortbreads from generous visiting ladies.

ABH was less inclined to retire to bed early today as 'nanny' was in the room. The whole routine has changed and she, like the rest of us, will need to get used to it. I took her around the block after tea and was surprised to see the sun setting to the right of Pedn-men-du. I should not be because it happens at around the same time each year. We will now see the setting sun from our side of the bay for the next six months as it travels north, then back again.

Later, when I took ABH around again for the last walk before bedtime, a perfect crescent moon, a tiny sliver, rested near the horizon, still showing a glow from the sun that set in the same place not two hours earlier. Ain't nature amazing.

March 31<sup>st</sup> – Monday



This morning I found myself scrabbling for time. I am not sure what exactly wrong-footed me, but I was still doing my chores with fifteen minutes to go before opening. It probably does not help that it is recycling collection day and it takes a while to collect all the various components. I have been doing it the previous evening but since I would be opening the shop before the collection, I reasoned I had plenty of time to do it in the morning. Yes, well.

Obviously, I need not have fretted. We did not see anyone until halfway through the morning, discounting deliveries. I had promised a visiting couple that our pasties (sorry, MS) would be available when we opened. The driver did not turn up until nearly ten o'clock. The couple were most kind about their disappointment.

Given that I was expecting the delivery at any moment up until that time, I spurred myself on to clear the other orders. I use the top of the chest freezer in the store room to process nearly all the incoming bits and I would have been in my own way had the pasties arrived while I was clearing everything else. Ordinarily, I would have taken a more sedate pace with little else to do but instead I was charged through it as quickly as I could.

We are still at the point where all prices need to be checked. This slows a swift process down to a slow one and if prices need to be changed, shelf labels may need to be removed, reprinted and replaced. I also discover that there are gaps on the shelves that something needs to be done about. If I do not divert at that moment and do something about it, I am apt to forget about it. If I divert and do something about it at that moment, I am apt to forget what I was doing at that moment and discover it undone later when I needed it to be done. Grumpy shopkeeping is not a simple life, I can assure you.

As a result of my endeavours postcard fudge boxes and sticks of rock have been ordered and later, purchase orders for jars of preserve and chutneys were despatched. It was into the afternoon before I remembered that I had to replace the reed beach mats that the Missus finished off while weed proofing the greenhouse. I was right yesterday when I thought she had finished her work on the floor – she sent me a video of it. All that remains is for the last of the raised beds to be filled with topsoil and she is good to go.

Now that we are open again, thanks to the visits from here and there about the place, I get to be a conduit for the news in the locality again. Sometimes this can be routine and everyday at other times obscure and mysterious. A friend and neighbour from up the other hill, came to visit today and enquired if I had heard the 'fog horn' in the mist of the other day, which I had not. We quickly established that it was too close to be Longships and she had been in the environs of Escalls at the time. I have mentioned before that it can be very spooky up there on the heath in the mist, so the horn blaring just added to the mystery. I suggested that it was probably just the Sennen Hooper that comes from time to time and swallows people up never to be seen again. Nothing to be concerned about, then.

Thankfully there was only a suggestion of mist in the air today and otherwise it was pretty day all through. As yesterday there was plenty of blue skies above us, but I was not quite so keen on the very evident easterly that for me was dragging down the temperature. It might have been a little warmer on the other side of the road, but I never got to find out. Radio Pasty informed me this morning that a gale of wind was on the way, but I was not exactly sure which day they were talking about. I shall let it come as a surprise.

There were a fair few surfers taking advantage of the conditions. An offshore breeze is what they look for to hold up the waves as they charge in. All the action was hard on the shore with decent sized waves breaking within 50 metres off the sand. It seemed better with the tide well on the way to being in, but it did not stop a few keen individuals from having a go earlier.

There were a few keen individuals hard at work on the Lifeguard hut as well. It looks like the windows are going in and at least one set of the double doors is in place. It is hard to see for sure, but the double doors look like they belong inside. They are dark wood with fancy panels and look better suited to a dining room in a posh house. Maybe my eyes are playing tricks and, since I will not get up there myself, might ask someone who has. It looks like just the cladding to go to finish the outside but my binoculars were not good enough to see what the inside looks like.

The day had taken the usual format of being quiet in the morning, busy in the first part of the afternoon before another lull set in. I am sure that you will all be as excited as I was to know that we were blessed with the first five minutes to closing rush of the season.

ABH was clearly weary after a hard day at The Farm and slept past the usual after tea going out time. I suspect that the evening walks will be subject to vagary this year with Farm days and non-Farm days, so we will play each day by ear. We went out late which precluded a last evening walk because she had already taken herself off to bed by that time. I had to squeeze in around her when I went to bed a while later. Disturbing her sleeping is like waking a wild beast and is to be avoided at all costs.