

DIARY 2022/23

April 30th – Saturday

It was all very still again in the early morning. Frankly, after a small flurry of newspaper buyers came and went, it was still for the rest of the morning, too.

I met up with Ronnie and Reggie (not their real names but suitable nonetheless), some more of the bleddy hound's pals, as we headed for the beach first thing. It was the sort of time that you might take your brand new hydrofoil board down to the Harbour to practice how to get onto it for the first time while there was no one there to watch you fall off ... erm. It was very hard not to titter. Not so much at the chap falling off but the fact that he probably hoped he would be on his own while he did it. We were only there for ten minutes and by the time we left he had perfected his technique; you have never seen such fancy falling off.

There was a good deal more cloud about today, but it was still perfectly pleasant. Again, there was no appreciable breeze from anywhere but there was some movement in the water towards the middle of the afternoon. I saw a group of surfers catching a small shore break the far side of the beach and another on a sand bar just off North Rocks. It was also starting to look a bit more positive out on Gwenver but I did not trouble myself to look closer. Everywhere else it was still flat, apparently.

Business in the afternoon seemed to pick up for a bit. That was clearly enough for the small gods of grumpy shopkeepers who immediately sent a power cut. Fortunately, it did not last very long but it had affected all three businesses at our end of the street. Once, we might have managed to stay open but with the numbers of people not carrying cash anymore and the payment card machine inoperative, there is probably little point. It demonstrated just how fragile our business existence is now, where once we would have stuck a few candles out and carried on regardless.

Still, after we resumed, we continued with the upbeat performance. Later in the afternoon we even had the buying of groceries such as would make tea on the first day of arrival, so perhaps things are looking up. There was also a lot more traffic moving about in The Cove and the car park at the big beach end looked fuller than it has been for a while. I secretly nursed some hope for the coming week.

I mentioned previously that we have seen an increased number of foreign visitors for the first time since the dreaded lurgi struck. I bit the bullet and ordered in some postcard stamps of the appropriate value for sending abroad – oddly the Post Office insists on an airmail sticker for such post but will not supply me with the labels. I may have mentioned before that the new stamps are about three times bigger than the normal stamps that we have been used to for some time. This will play havoc with postcard sending, especially for long addresses, as it reduces the amount of address space.

The reason why they are so big is that they now contain something similar to a QR code along the side, a computer or mobile telephone readable code that directs the reading machine to carry out a particular action. It is used by the Post Office for tracking but, a long-standing customer and conversationist, tells me, it also has another purpose. Using the appropriate app on your smart mobile telephone you will soon be able to link a message to the unique code that the recipient, using the same software, will be able to read. Clearly, it also means that anyone getting their hands on the item being sent will also be able to read it – unless there is some clever security involved – so it is unlikely to be used by secret agents or their enemies to convey covert messages. Currently, I was told, it carries a short Shaun the Sheep video by way of example and you can also track the item's progress through the post office.

Naturally, in the interests of Diary integrity, I had to try out this rather bizarre innovation and downloaded the rather chunky Royal Mail app. Sure enough, reading the code brings up the Shaun the Sheep video. Given the Royal Mail's rather long list of things that they would rather not transport, I wonder how they intend to police content of the messages, which may contain pictures of contraband sent, as it were, by proxy. Utter anarchy.

Talking of anarchy, the Highly Professional Craftsperson and I broke out of our self-inflicted cocoon in the evening to go and see our favourite band. It is, in fact, the only band we have seen in the last two years, which has seriously narrowed our focus where once we might regularly see numerous bands on the local circuit. Hanterhir has almost released a new album and appears to be going from strength to strength. The band also has a new video out to go with their latest single release, which is an incredible work of psychedelic fantasy and colour. It is on the You Tube facility on the Internet.

It was a most enjoyable foray back into the real world and the band were excellent, as ever. They had no new t-shirts but I purchased some of the old ones in my new size, having shrunk in the wash recently, against the wishes of the Missus, – purchasing the t-shirts, not shrinking in the wash - who believes I have sufficient. I stuffed them up my jumper so she would not notice and will later pretend that I have had them forever. Obviously, no one here will spill the beans, now will you dear reader.

April 29th – Friday

My friend and neighbour told suggested this morning was a proper rip gribbler. I fancied that he was probably right, although it all went a bit hazy and chill later, which took the edge off it rather.

It was certainly pretty looking when the bleddy hound and I were on the beach first thing. It was also perfectly still. We were joined very quickly afterwards by her best

pal who had made a bid for freedom after being told by my friend who walks her that she was only allowed a functional trip out. Bleddy hound's best pal had employed the tired but ever successful, 'I dropped my ball and had to chase after it' routine and had spotted the bleddy hound on the beach from the road at the top. My friend was late for work, so she was very grateful that the bleddy hound and I were just on our way back. Even so, best pal was clearly not that keen to go home and we had to walk halfway back up the hill to encourage her in the right direction.

Fortunately, it does not matter all that much if I am late for work, especially at the moment when there are so few people about to notice – apart from one, of course. There is always one who thinks it a jolly wheeze to form a queue of one outside the first electric sliding door in The Cove before we open, piling the pressure on an already fraught grumpy shopkeeper.

It did not get much better later in the day, either, as we ran out of pasties in the middle of the day. Wednesday, I think we sold half a dozen and yesterday four. I ordered ten for today on the basis that The Cove had been spurned by pasty eating humans for the best part of three weeks. I am convinced of a conspiracy to drive me even further to the edge of sanity.

If I am heading that way, it was an extremely pleasant day for which it to happen. The sea is now on its third day or so of placid flatness, which made it ideal for Falmouth Divers to steam around on their flat-bottomed platform. They arrived in the middle of the day and anchored up to service each of the Lifeboat channel markers. These had been temporarily fixed in place by local fishermen and had lasted well through the last set of storms. We shall see how long they last this time.

We sank to new depths of desertedness in the afternoon. There were a few people sitting at the benches opposite and on the ones further down the street, eating ice creams and watching the entertainment laid on by Falmouth Divers. The big beach was pretty much devoid of revellers and even the paddler boarders had given up pretending it was exciting. Actually, I saw one early yesterday morning and I imagine the quiet and tranquillity out on the bay at that time was very much worth the effort.

There was a bit of excitement in the last hour of opening as a few customers tried to brighten the business day up. It was most appreciated. The others will just have to try harder.

April 28th – Thursday

The bleddy hound was a little more keen than normal to get out today. It turned my morning schedule on its head, but I survived the trauma of it and still managed a cup of tea and to open on time. It is the sort of dynamic, quick reaction, grumpy shopkeeper I am.

The day had started off a little chilly as it had on previous days of this week. However, by the time ex-Head Launcher and his dog turned up for a bit of a chat it had warmed up considerably. I had not noticed until we decamped in the absence of customers and went and sat on the benches opposite the shop. While the sun was not exactly beating down, it was bright and most comfortable for a while. I had to return to the shop a few times during the period and the last time I came out, the cloud appeared to have thickened and a breeze had struck up from the northeast. It started to get chilly almost immediately, which we accepted as time to both go about our own business.

It had passed an hour and the Missus had provided tea and coffee halfway through. By the time I returned to the shop there was a more positive flow of customers, although it could hardly be labelled as being busy. There was not even the little peak of going home present buying that we might expect from today but if few people had arrived this week they would not be going home, either.

With little else particularly to do during the bright and sunny afternoon, I stepped out to take some air and have a closer look at a vintage motorcycle that had putted into The Cove a few minutes earlier. Two other motorcycle enthusiasts with their modern machines had already engaged the new rider, so I did not approach closer. From looking at pictures on the Internet I believe that it was a mid 1920s Royal Enfield in the process of being restored. It started first time, so at least the chap had the mechanics soundly fixed.

It was while I was outside, I noticed a large shape on the horizon. It could have been the superstructure of a large ship but did not seem to fit the bill somehow. I had a quick look on my ship finder app on my mobile telephone and it told me that it was S. B. Gladys. Gladys is a London barge or spritsail barge built around the turn of the last century and is absolutely massive for its type. More than 80 feet long and twenty odd feet wide, the mast was nearly as high as it was long. At a rough estimation there was 300m² of sail involved, so no wonder it was so visible even at around five miles distant. It was a glorious sight through the lens of binoculars, and it was fair bowling along, too.

The roofing boys have really pushed ahead with their work over the last few weeks and today announced that they had finished. They spent the day clearing up out of which we gleaned a few spare pallets for The Farm. They are a friendly bunch and have spent a few shillings in the shop since they have been here, which has been much appreciated in our doldrums.

Talking of doldrums, with the wind but a mere light air and the sea looking like a dish it was high time to launch the Lifeboat on exercise. Clearly, I was not the only one who thought so and we pushed the boat into the rippling water at half past six o'clock or thereabouts. We also launched the Inshore boat and while they were gone we used the Tooltrak vehicle for some training.

Having completely churned up the pristine sand on the Harbour beach we returned to our stations to be ready for the return of both boats. They had not been out long and had taken along with them the foreman of the roofers since he had been working so long above the boat. With the tides being quite small this week the tide had receded enough so that we could set up on the long slip. There, at the bottom of it, the waves were gently lapping at the concrete, and it made for quite a casual return of the big boat as it went astern into the keelway lit by the sun dropping to the horizon out of a perfect sky.

As the conditions change with the seasons and ebb and flow of the tides, so too does the condition of the concrete tow of the slipway. Today, it was covered in a layer of green seaweed slime that made it excessively slippery. I could not even rest a hand on it to push the cable to the centre of the dip without slipping away with it and stepping out on it, as we occasionally do, was out of the question. However, it allowed the boat to glide effortlessly up the tow, in what was clearly a textbook recovery when it usually judders a bit with the friction.

Both boats were pulled in, washed down and made ready for the next launch all by around eight o'clock in a well-attended session. We are, after all, a very complete, very excellent Shore Crew.

April 27th – Wednesday

There was a bit more cloud around in the morning when we stepped out but that easterly, ever-present breeze is still present – as ever. It makes for a proper chill in the air, and it is probably no surprise that our visitors are keeping a low profile currently. They will, no doubt, be here in abundance when it goes south westerly and the temperature increases - just before the rain arrives.

With that wind banging through the first electric sliding door in The Cove I was particularly grateful that it was gymnasium day. When the Missus came down to relieve me, I scurried off down the road for a blistering session to get the blood circulating and the cold out of my bones. Because the ambient temperature is not too bad, it is not so cold in the gymnasium which is pretty draught proof since the windows were replaced. They just need to look at the roof to stop the rain coming in and it will almost be like one of those luxury gymnasiums they have in the big cities, but with a tin roof – and no air conditioning – or bar.

The Missus waited until I got back before heading into town. She needed to get to the bank to deposit the pitifully few shekels we had earned over the barren Eastertide while I stayed behind penning begging letters to Elon Musk – rumour has it he has a few pennies. If I had garnered some small morsel of hope from the small uplift in business yesterday, it was dashed against the pavement of the deserted streets. Once again, it was exceptionally quiet in The Cove with just a few walkers passing through and a handful of trippers popping in for a postcard. I have now ordered the

international stamps, which should bring the foreign visitors flocking in when they find out.

We also had a chance visit from a salesman. With his polished car and sharp suit. I was thinking, 'he'll be lucky' and hoped he was heading into the café next door but he came to the shop instead. He told me that he had just been up to Land's End and offered me his calling card with a gilt logo on it and I thought, 'he'd have to be especially lucky because whatever he is flogging is probably expensive'. He did not offer me a brochure and only gave a brief description of the sort of things that his company provides. I suspect that he had taken one quick look at the shabby little shop and decided that he really was not that sort of lucky. He left pretty smartly after that.

Later, I took time to look at his card. His gifts were to do with history and heraldry according to the card but when I looked at the website it was anything but. Oddly, the first pages of the website oozed class and expense but after selecting the option for the gift products each section looked like it would be more at home on the advertising pages of a tabloid newspaper. All of the products, however, come on huge rotary displays that we would not have space for, but the enquiry passed a few minutes.

As did opening the boxes that had arrived from one of our giftware suppliers. We had already had an initial delivery from them before we opened. This was the balance that was not available earlier and includes our net bags full of mixed seashells. We have stocked these for years and they are a regular best seller. Quite surprising, too, is they have not increased in price like everything else despite being shipped from abroad and being heavy and fragile.

Someone at the company has a sense of humour, which is comforting. I had asked why we only had 11 out of 48 of the glass bunnies that we ordered previously. I said that it was unusual for bunnies to reduce in number. The fellow wrote back and told me that they were not as hardy as the feral bunnies and were therefore quite fragile; they had become extinct on the journey here.

We have had a breakthrough on our mission to find a different cash and carry supplier given the current one is trying to rid itself of us. Fed up with the lack of response from the new company – actually, just fed up generally – I telephoned the customer service centre to break the deadlock. I was answered by a very pleasant man who I had trouble understanding. He had a very strong foreign accent, which I understand the people of Perthshire use to ward off unwanted advances from people of the South. Mainly using sign language, which is quite a skill on the telephone, we managed to discover that the company would indeed like to do business with us despite the miles between their depot and our shop. I would need to find the application form on the website and go from there.

All is now in train. We have to send some identification and some proof that we are trading – the actual instruction was to drop into the depot but that was waived because of the distance involved. I shall see to all that tonight as well as delivering our track and trace numbers to show we are a licensed vendor of tobacco products. With any luck we will be able to place our next grocery order with them, although at present that does not seem very imminent.

The street was utterly deserted for the last couple of hours that we are open. I am beginning to feel like a hermit. Any more of this and I will grow a beard and start being grumpy with people. Oh.

April 26th – Tuesday

It was a very pretty day to be gazing out upon and was pretty reasonable when you were out in it, too. The cool breeze persists but, find some shelter and it was probably quite warm in the sunshine.

We met up with the bleddy hound's best pal down in the Harbour when we went and were suddenly joined by a crowd of other dogs and their owners heading for a dip in the sea. They have been out in worse and colder waters so today must have been a proper treat.

I had not long got back to the flat and was just preparing the bleddy hound's kedgeree and smoked oyster breakfast when my pager went off. It is a sound that we have not heard for many weeks but one that it is not easily forgotten. We were called to launch the Inshore boat to a local fisherman whose engine had failed out in the farthest edge of the bay. It was only the second time this year he had been out in my reckoning.

It is a tight corner at the top of the slip and even tighter when someone puts their wheelie bin out on the drive. I had not thought it would be an issue when I ran up to the boathouse else I would have moved it but had to lean to the right a bit to compensate for it and took out one of the plastic barriers on the other side. At least I left the scaffolding where it was.

There was not blazing hurry for this shout as the fisherman was in no immediate danger. It gave time for an experienced helm to choose four of the new recruits to take with him. The sea was benign, and the task was routine, so it was excellent experience for the youngsters on their first shout where they could be involved at an unhurried pace under no pressure.

The process gave me sufficient time to return to the flat to have the cup of tea that I was in the middle of making when the pager went off. The Missus had fed the bleddy hound and I just had time to post The Diary from the previous day, so I apologise if it seemed a little rough around the edges. Sorry, rougher than usual around the edges, dear reader.

Half an hour later and I returned to bring the boat back in. I had already prepared by opening the side door on the station and getting the hose out for one of the Inshore Boat Crew to wash the boat and tractor down with. I did not knock anything over on the return to the Inshore boathouse and I was back to the shop only shortly after the Missus had stepped in to open it.

The day followed the usual pattern of extreme quietness until late in the morning when something strange happened – people started to arrive. I had been contemplating another day of not ordering anything but had to revise my ideas after several people started buying pasties. Of course, as soon as I placed the order they would stop but that is all part of the game, so I placed the order anyway.

A shopkeeper in Perranporth interviewed on Radio Pasty this morning, said he was really busy over Easter, which is encouraging to some degree. Also uplifting was the arrival of a few European visitors over the last few days. There was even a German coach pulled into The Cove yesterday, although it did not disgorge its passengers even to just walk on to Land's End. I should take the hint and purchase some international postage stamps, which I have been resisting to do until there was a positive need. It looks like there might be, now.

Happily, people had not stopped buying pasties after my order and we sold more than we had for the last couple of days. Naturally, now that I had customers in and out a delivery arrived. Since I knew another was due later and another tomorrow, I thought that I had better work through it between customer visits. We now have a full jewellery stand ready for the bank holiday weekend and some alluring gifts they are, too.

I can hardly say that I was pressed but it was at least a bit better than yesterday. It was most likely that the sunny weather attracted people in but that chilly wind persisted through the day. As usual, it seems, it picked up quite bit towards the end of the afternoon, which made it a little uncomfortable when it came to bring in the outside display, but I consoled myself that it still looked good. Apart from the wind ripples on the surface and the occasional flick of white horse, the sea remained flat and calm and once again a playground for our man on the wing surf board. He falls off much less now, and mostly makes it look quite effortless.

The Missus reported back on her progress up at The Farm during the day. She had clearly been busier than me and had planted out all the broccoli and broccoli with a fair bit of broccoli of two types as well. If you are not Cornish that is translated as she planted broccoli, cauliflower and cabbages of two different types. We will now see just how well the bunny proof fencing works. We have already had some lettuce and rocket selling well in the shop. If all goes according to plan, we should see some vegetables for sale too during the summer months. How very exciting.

April 25th – Monday

Another daring day of dynamism in The Cove today to sink our teeth into. Would that it were true but there was hardly a thing dynamic about it and my teeth are hardly up to the job of sinking into very much there days. We shall just take it as it comes for the foreseeable future, I think.

At least we had better weather to be alone in. It was a bright morning and although there was quite a bit of cloud it was up high and very thin. It was not the warmest with the wind now in the southeast, which I had to discover when asked early on in the morning. Usually, from that direction it blows in through the first electric sliding door in The Cove but for some reason it was not today. It did keep the temperature down, though.

The better weather brought out a few more people during the day, which was hopeful. Still, by no stretch of the imagination could it be regarded as busy, not even in the street let alone in the shop. All that down time is bad for a person and gives them too much time to think. I was thinking what I might do if push came to shove and I had to find gainful employment outside the ranks of grumpy shopkeepers.

The week before last I had been asked by a holiday let owner if I knew of anyone who could do a couple of hours a week looking after the garden, just keeping to tidy really. I drew a blank among the short list of contacts and even their contacts were already far too busy to help out. A neighbour came to us at the end of last week to ask the same because her regular man had retired. The Missus set about looking at a bigger list we found and when the neighbour drew a blank with the half dozen or so the Missus had found I cast the net a little wider. Still no joy.

So, there I was thinking about plan Bs when the solution was as plain as the nose on a wellington boot – I could do gardening. The fact that I have no training or experience is a mere detail and need not stand in the way of a sparkling second career. In fact, it could quite easily have been my first career. As a lad, I worked Saturdays for a local seed merchant. Together with a pal, we mixed rabbit food, cleaned the yard and humped 56 pound bags of compost to customers' car boots. We were there for a fair few years, earning some pocket money and came to know and be friends with the owner – though heaven knows we drove him near bonkers with some of our antics.

When I was about to leave college and look for a proper job the owner made me a very attractive offer to go and work with him. He would pay my way through gardening college, give me his old Hillman Hunter, which was in incredible nick for its age, and I would work with him and his brother in the shops, one of which was in up-market Wimbledon. But for one fateful decision the world would not have the faintest clue who Alan Titchmarsh was and I would not be considering bluffing my way around the gardens of The Cove's various house owners for a few quid.

Sorry for the long pause between paragraphs just then. I had a person walk into the shop and it took me a while to recall that they are called customers. It took some further searching in the annals of my mind to work out that we are supposed to try and sell something to them. I will have to write a check list of what to do because it is easy to forget when there is such a long time between each one.

While the wind is still offshore, the wave have almost completely disappeared now that the naught low pressure system to the south of us has moved on. This has somewhat disenfranchised the surfer community, although many have clearly got wise to the problem and purchased paddle boards as well. Our local wing surfer with the hydrofoil ski was out during the middle of the day. He should have waited until later when the wind freshened, which I discovered as it started blowing straight at me. Even so, it made no discernible difference to the state of the sea, which remained flat as a dish the whole day.

April 24th – Sunday

The sun was splitting the hedges first thing while the bleddy hound and I visited the beach. It was a glorious morning for about five minutes and then it clouded over. A local soothsayer – he says other things but mainly it is the sooth – said that he expected rain in the morning. He had clearly seen the forecast alternative to the one I looked at and within the hour it was, indeed, raining.

It very likely made what was already going to be a quiet day even quieter, leading me to consider that perhaps I should have bought those plans for a scale model of the House of Commons made out of matchsticks. Instead, I did what I said that I was going to do yesterday and that was to build an order for our surf jewellery stand. That took an inordinate amount of time as there are a wealth of bracelets and anklets to choose from. It really does not matter which ones are chosen as they all sell very well but it is useful to have a good cross section of different types. It passed the time and will guarantee me something to do later in the week.

I read on the social media that today is Cornish National Minority Day. I am not entirely sure what we should make of that other than distinguishing a small particular culture and heritage. I am of mixed raced, so perhaps I am even rarer or possibly just diluted. Given that there was only one response to the posting and that was from someone in France and in French with a link to a video that we are not allowed to watch, I am not entirely sure anybody else knows what to think either. I will wait to see if the streets fill with nationalistic fervour later and report back. No, the streets remained quiet, but I have learned that the much maligned council has a working group dedicated to it. Therefore, it is very impotent.

The Cornish were not the only minority group of the day. We could easily say that visitors were in even smaller numbers. I had reduced our pasty order to a miniscule level but even that was about three times more than we needed. Even when the weather bucked up a little in the late afternoon, the streets remained empty but for a

few hardy souls or those needing last minute supplies on their way back to barracks. It was not a happy scene for grumpy shopkeepers.

One visitor, later in the day, entertained and educated me with a recollection from many years ago. It is relatively common knowledge that during World War II a sea mine floated into The Cove. There was some controversy over it and the army stationed here waited too long before firing upon it to detonate it. I had always heard it reported that the resulting explosion caused windows in The Cove to be blown out. Our man was very young at the time but remembered his mother telling him about it. He said that he was living in Maria's Lane at the time and that the way the shock wave travelled up the cliff meant that their house was largely protected. However, the force of the blast took off the chimney that was exposed above the line of the cliff.

I do not know exactly how close the mine was to the shore at the time but the description given me meant that the force of the explosion was far greater than I had previously appreciated, with just a few windows being blown out. The fact that most of the cottages along the front are granite will have been significant, but I cannot see how the wooden mission building, roughly where the chip shop is would have survived it. Sadly, I do not think there is anyone left to ask.

I had asked the Missus to bring down a box of the shoes we have in the store so that I could prepare them during the week. It would give me something to do during the long, lonely hours. She came back empty handed. Apparently, the shoes are behind a wall of other boxes. I think we will have to spend some time up there in the evenings sorting that out. Last year we had no stock and a wealth of customers and this year we have so much we cannot get to it but no customers anyway. Is it any wonder I am a grumpy shopkeeper.

April 23rd – Saturday

For the first time in a few days the morning was grey and uninviting. Invited or not I went anyway and found it just as chilly as the day before, the only difference being that this one looked it. It did brighten up later on but without the blue skies and just like yesterday, the breeze softened later in the morning and came back again in the evening.

We were joined by a clutch of swimsuit swimmers as the bleddy hound and I visited the beach first thing. One commented that she did not expect to be very long this morning as she discarded her towel and headed for the waves. I was going to suggest, perhaps not at all but she had already gone. I do not know if they were a party, but two others came down soon after and were there for some while I noticed after we had got back home in the warm.

As slowly as slow days go, this one was definitely slow and positively ground by. I took my time with the remnants of yesterday's stock delivery and the morning's

groceries but even that amusement ran out too quickly. The day was marked by the leaving of a few familiar faces and the arrival, later in the day, of a few. Other than that, I could have emulated one of those cliched American movies set in the deep south where the shopkeeper sits outside on the porch in a rocking chair because he has not served anyone since a week last Wednesday.

It was not until late in the afternoon that it occurred to me that the surf jewellery display was looking a bit thin. Restocking it can take a bit of time trying to find the right products on the supplier website. I gave up on repeating the orders on popular items because the company generates new products almost constantly and finding the old ones is difficult. Since I was starting too late to finish the order, I left it for another dull day. Yesterday, I decided that it was about time to order some more local jams and preserves but thought that I had better check on their raspberry situation. Since I could not get hold of them, I did not manage to do that order, either. By the look of it I will have plenty of time during the week to get them done.

In the end I resorted to reading the newspapers. Naturally, as soon as I landed one on the counter, customers started appearing. I caught the headline for the *Western Morning News* (did I mention I once had a review ...) that tells us a new ferry is being considered to run between Wales and the West Country. I am not sure that Cornwall is in the running as there is no suitable port along the north coast except possibly Padstow if they can do something about the Doom Bar and the port may be a bit far down for consideration. In my humble estimation, I would have thought that going around the corner to the south coast would just be too far – seven hours to Penzance even at 20 knots. I could be mistaken but I thought that Ilfracombe, another contender, already sported such a service on the Waverly paddle steamer or perhaps that does not count.

The new service will apparently be ultra-ecological, running on hydrogen, which on the face of it is a jolly good idea until you work out where the hydrogen comes from. Another newspaper article went into some depth about Japan's decision to drive down the hydrogen instead of battery power route. The problem centres around the fact that the clean method of producing the gas is eye-wateringly expensive, so the Japanese import the hydrogen from Australia where it is generated by burning coal. Whoops. So, we can expect our new ferry to be either unaffordably expensive or just not as eco as it makes out, although it might score points for the cars and lorries it saved from making a longer journey.

We shall watch ferry developments with interest but I will not start planning an excursion to Wales any time soon. The only journey I was particularly interested in by the time I read the article was the one upstairs that could not come soon enough.

April 22nd – Friday

Well, it looked very pretty again but step outside and a chill northeast wind had you in its icy talons. It probably was not all that cold in the grand scheme of things, not like a winter wind, but gosh, it did feel cold.

The first part of the morning was spent shivering in my plimsols as I waited to be relieved for gymnasium time. The wind was poking straight through the first electric sliding door in The Cove and while I could have switched it to automatic, it seemed a little churlish to close out the few customers we did have. When I returned in the early afternoon in a thick woolly pully, the wind had ceased to blow in and the shop was relatively warm again and I was too hot.

Despite some 'ansum looking weather, offshore winds and a bit of swell, the day provided the clearest indication yet that everyone had already gone home. The little uplift we have been having in the afternoon came in the late morning with a few parting breakfast goods and a few leaving presents. After that we hit the doldrums, allowing me time to clear the last bits of the non-food grocery items we had yesterday and put the mountain of cardboard we had amassed out for collection. Shopkeeping is not all glamour and excitement, I will have you know, dear reader.

Sometimes, and quite often recently, I must keep an eye on our bank account. All our bills will be coming home to roost at the end of April which will require a modicum of financial wizardry to manage. By checking more frequently it also gives me an additional edge in timing should it be necessary to do a Lord Lucan in a hurry. Checking our account in the afternoon very nearly had me rushing to find the booking website for a cheap ticket to Rio. There was a rather large hole in the account where a commensurately sized chunk of money should have been.

Looking further, I noticed that the money had been withdrawn by a fish supplier that we have not used for a good year. We had quite obviously footed someone else's direct debit for the month and whoever it was dealt with an awful lot of fish during the month in question. Fortunately, there was still time to contact the accounts department of the supplier and have a little chat. The very pleasant lady apologised profusely for the error and promised to resolve it straight away. What a sign of relief I breathed.

As things could not get more scary than that I decided to press on with registering our invoices in the computer system. I did not get very far with that before the Missus arrived back from The Farm with a truck load of stock I had asked her to, first find in the mountain of boxes there and, secondly bring back to the shop. We spent a while unloading and another while putting out on the shelves, which was enormous fun as you might imagine.

The forecasters had promised that our sunshine would be snuffed out in the later afternoon and so it was. The breeze that had either changed direction or dropped off came back with a vengeance just in time for me to go out and haul in the outside display. Since I had already taken my woolly pully upstairs, I was rather glad that it

was not long before it was time to close the doors and gracefully retire upstairs to the relative warmth of the flat. We can do it all again tomorrow.

April 21st – Thursday

It was one gorgeous looking day from the off and no doubt about it. The sun was beating down on the Harbour beach sand that the tide had not got to yet and one happy bleddy hound had a small plot to wander about on. The chill that has been in the air for the last few days was still with us and persisted for the rest of the day. All the same, it looked very pretty.

The day seemed to follow its now regular format of deathly quiet in the morning and picking up somewhat in the afternoon. If the morning could just follow suit – erm, follow in front – then we would have a half decent day of it. There seemed to be a bit of going home present buying but it was not very pronounced and we had a few notable sales of grocery orders, which is always gratifying. We see so many Tesmorburys vans around and about it is good to see some people spurning the trend and shopping locally with us.

I have mentioned previously that our main cash and carry supplier, such as they are, is now owned by Tesmorburys and has been for about a year now. The company used to have its own label products, which were markedly cheaper than the branded alternatives and sold very well. The big supermarket owner has now stamped on that and the own label we are seeing come through now has the Tesmorburys label on it, which is, frankly, irritating. The alternative supplier we were pointed at and to which I made initial enquiries seems to be taking a very long time to come back to us. I will send them another message next week, which will be five weeks after the first contact, but it does not currently look good.

Apart from an increase in customers during the afternoon, the Doing Parcels Dreadfully brought some rash vests and some late arriving wetsuits. It should have been two boxes but it seems they struggle with consignments of more than one and sometimes find that difficult too. Following that was the delivery from the company that is filling the non-food gaps not forthcoming from the cash and carry. I spent most of the afternoon between customers unpacking that and pricing it. It kept me occupied and gainfully employed while the Missus was also doing something useful up at The Farm. She returned with our second crop of mixed leaf lettuce and some rocket, which now adorns the inside of our refrigerator.

I had not had much opportunity to gaze out of the window but when I did the sea looked quite placid. This was a deception afoot. A ponderous swell unlay the smooth surface and only presented itself later in the day and giving a body of surfers some rather big waves to play with on the push of the tide. Combined with an offshore

breeze it was a bit of surfer heaven to which around twenty avid wetsuited players ascended. Later in the evening, the sea really started to misbehave and there was nothing but white water from Cowloe to the Harbour and lots of banging over the wall.

I do not know how our customers fared but our earlier closing almost caught me by surprise. The time had crept up on me and all of a sudden, we were twenty minutes from shutting the door. I started to clear up the outside display and, behold, what do you know - a five minutes to closing rush.

April 20th – Wednesday

It was not quite so bright this morning for our walk around. The tide is still being greedy with the beach so we were compelled to head around the circuit yet again. I suspect we will not be down there again tomorrow either but I did not tell the bleddy hound. She would only dwell on it.

There was nothing remarkable about the day or our walk around, although we did see a Jenny wren flitting about the tri-cornered garlic and the Spanish bluebells at the corner of Coastguard Row. I fancied that it was a bit warmer than the previous day and that had much to do with a diminished breeze blowing through The Cove. The bleddy hound was marginally faster going around today as well. By the end of the week, we will be back before we started.

Quite fortuitously a neighbour had asked me to find an electrician for her. In a moment of inspiration, I remember a fellow that we had used a few times and once was local to the area. It also minded me that the work we had planned and I had already spent quite a bit of time on had still not been done, so I asked the neighbour to ask the electrician to drop by to us when she had finished with him. I had first called our first electrician back in December. He said that he would be available in January but when I called in February he said he had some family problems and would be available again in March. I had given up on him come April and the fellow I recommended to our neighbour is much more reliable it is a wonder I did not go to him first.

We had another tradesman in later in the afternoon, a man from the window company. Our previous builder had claimed that he was struggling to find a window company which was why he could not provide us with a quote for our roof work. The new people suggested we go our own way with window supplier, so I gave the company that provided the first electric sliding door in The Cove a call. The man said he would come the next day, which demonstrated just how hard it was our previous builder tried to find someone. The 'next day' happened to be Good Friday, so we made an arrangement for today instead. It does seem that we are having to put in quite a bit of effort ourselves into the roof project but at least it means things are getting done.

I must say that I was grateful for the variety in a day that was hardly on fire with customers. We were busy sporadically but by and large, it was another quiet day and probably quieter than all the ones before it this holiday. I had spent some time in the morning ordering the piles of invoices that had accumulated to heroic proportions. I had even managed to input a few into the computer system in accordance with the Government's Making Tax Difficult drive. In this respect, it has been highly successful. It is not only difficult but hugely time consuming, too and I only made a small dent in the pile today.

During the last hour of our opening today I made the decision that we would abandon our late opening from tomorrow. It is only a couple of days sooner than we were scheduled to go back to normal hours anyway. The last few last hours have been spent by me scratching my behind with nothing better to do. I reasoned that I could probably scratch my behind upstairs in the warmth and comfort of the flat without inconveniencing anyone too much. We will draw a line under this Easter holiday and not mention it again.

April 19th – Tuesday

The sun was splitting the hedges when I got up and largely remained that way during the day. There is still a noticeable chill in the air, and I had to go and fetch a jacket for the shop halfway through the morning.

I had made an effort to get my act together quite quickly in the morning just in case the big grocery delivery turned up early. For once the newspaper delivery and milkman both turned up in timely fashion to help matters along a bit. The only one not playing along was the bleddy hound who decided to take the longest time yet to traverse the high tide circuit. Whether it was in revolt at not being able to head to the beach – not my fault, so why take it out on me – or she was genuinely interested in the various perfumes she came across every six inches, the effect was the same in that it took a monumental time to get back home again. Any time I had saved earlier was completely wasted.

So too have been the more frequent visits by the much maligned council's parking enforcement officer up to this point. He has been turning up at random moments during the weeks since the parking restrictions changed earlier in the year. Word of the unexpected nature of it had clearly circulated and parking along Cove Road had largely been eliminated – until now. Since the holidays started and even more this week, we have been inundated with cars parked across the road from the shop. This has played havoc with our deliveries and, indeed, loading and unloading our own truck. Our parking enforcement officer has been very notable by his absence since the holiday started. We have clearly used up our annual allocation of parking warden visits for the whole year all at once. Well, it was nice while it lasted.

We waited until the middle of the afternoon again for our grocery orders. Our driver was not all that happy about it either and cited management not wishing to deploy

the second van that the company had purchased. He has had additional trips because of it. Still, we had most of what we ordered, which was unusual but of course it was not all available to order in the first place, hence deferring to yet another supplier. Our man did at least have a young helper with him, and the delivery was unloaded in quick time, which is always helpful.

A local company that is impressing at present is one we have only just started doing business with. Someone telephoned out of the blue and asked if we would like some of their beer. I had heard of the brewery, it was one of the first micro breweries before it became popular and initially just few the pub, which is just the other side of Penzance. They are canning their beers, which is popular with the public and me, as it is easier to handle and they have made quite an alluring brand of it. It took me a while to discern the cleverness of it, which is called Easy PZ. Being used to the English pronunciation of Z took the time – as well as just being slow.

Since we have been stocking it, I have had to top up the fridge every day. Just before Easter, sales went into overdrive and we sold three cases in as many days. I sent a message asking for more at the outset of Easter but did not expect them to be working over the holiday, which they did not. They arrived today with the order, which was pretty good service in my book.

It may have been a bit over-enthusiastic, ordering quite so many. I had only joked that the visitors will have gone home today, especially as the sun has only just come into its own. The sad truth is that I might be right. The numbers loitering about today seemed much diminished from yesterday, although there were some people about throughout the length of the day. I am definitely questioning the wisdom of extending our hours this holiday, however. It has not been worthwhile for us and I am not sure that it has been for our visitors, either. There has been no five minutes to closing rush or any ‘thank heavens you are open’s so far, although we have the rest of the week to go. Perhaps I should use the time wisely and start to process our ever growing pile of invoices.

The Missus had spent the time after the deliveries down in the shop. She methodically worked through the order until all of it was either out on the shop shelves or tucked away as spare in the store room. It is one of her fortes, working through piles of ‘stuff’ methodically and quickly. If it were down to me, it would still be on the store room floor the following week with what was needed pulled out here and there. I have my uses too, of course. When I have discovered what they are I will let you know.

April 18th – Monday

It was fortuitous timing. I had just finished setting up the shop and was heading upstairs when I saw the bleddy hound’s best pal at the top of the slipway. I left the front door open in my haste to get her out of bed. When I turned around, best pal

had made her own way up and was there in the bedroom. How very forward, I thought.

We stopped for a quick chat outside, and as best pal was heading off to the big beach we parted company, but I noticed that best pal looked a bit indecisive. Once more we were forced to go around the block and we headed off at slow pace as the bleddy hound sniffed her way inch by inch toward the Harbour car park. It was shortly before we got past the payment machines that best pal caught up. She clearly thought better of a long stank down to the big beach to chase a ball about.

There was a bit of a chill in the air but nothing on yesterday and the sky was clear and the sun bright. The sea had calmed some yesterday and today it was sporting a much subdued swell noticeable only on the wave breaks. The sun shone for us the whole day, but it did not seem to entice a multitude to the beach as we were just as quiet as the previous days of Easter. There were very few cars in the car park as we walked through, suggesting that not much of The Cove's plentiful holiday accommodation is in use, unless people cycled or walked down. Despite the inn not being full, one visitor felt compelled to sleep in his car and another to pitch a tent on the site of the old RAF latrine by the cliff edge.

It really was a fine day. In fact, several customers came in especially to tell me how lovely it was outside, which was good of them, With low water being in the middle of the day there was a big expanse of sand to gaze out on in between customers telling me how lovely it was. It would have been difficult to crowd such an area at the busiest of times but there was a small set of camps up near the high water line making a go of it. There was a colourful array of windbreaks – some of them ours, I would guess – and small beach shelters set up and strung out sporadically all the way to the Valley. Up above on the cliff, those dark areas that I saw last night were much more clearly green shrubbery of some sort and very likely tight clumps of heather.

There was quite a lot of action on the shore break, although Gwnver looked bigger. Dozens of surfers filled the waves jostling for position and there was probably an equal number of people in the swimmers' area just about all of them with a bodyboard to hand. We sold a few but not enough to ease the squeeze up at the barn.

The last hour or so of opening was more than a little tedious. As the afternoon progressed, the temperature appeared to drop and even in the shop I was forced to go and put a jacket on. Earlier, I was told that it was relatively warm in the shelter from the wind but since that was heading in from the northwest, sheltering in it in The Cove was going to be troublesome. I suspect that the chill took people home, but it gave the fish and chip shop one blinding evening on the cod.

April 17th – Sunday

I am very glad that I have the opportunity to test the day when I come downstairs to make ready the shop before I take the bleddy hound out. Had I not I would have assumed that since I did not need a jacket yesterday that I probably did not need one today and that would have been a big mistake; it was unexpectedly chilly.

Had we been heading for the beach I may not have been too concerned but the big tides have caught up with us and we were compelled to walk around the block instead. At some point during the night, the wind had gone due east and was making its presence felt hours later before it veered around to the south west later in the morning. Franky, despite the chill, it could have happily stayed in the east as far as I was concerned because not only did it veer to the southwest, it brought with it a guts of rain. The small gods of grumpy shopkeepers had clearly decided that this Easter was not yet quiet enough and could do with a helping hand at keeping the customers away. How wonderful.

Once again we were busy at times and again we put a half reasonable dent in the pasties before the rains came, which was helpful. In the between times, I filled a few grocery shelves ahead of deciding whether we needed to do a grocery order this week or not. It was only after the Missus dropped down to offer me a tea break that the list developed into something orderable. It seemed we do have some holes here and there on the shelves, mainly because our supplier continued to shorten its stock or keep so little that it is not available on sporadic weeks. We discovered that it has decided to drop the provision of paper tissues, which had been inundated with requests for.

The other thing that we have been harangued for over the last couple of days is Easter eggs. It used to be one of the first things we ordered when we opened year on year so that they would be on the shelf for several weeks ahead of the big weekend. Religiously each year we would discount them the week afterwards, having sold only one or two, before giving them away to a few chosen local children the week after that. It was several years of perseverance later that we realised that stocking Easter eggs was probably not the best use of our meagre resources at the start of the year. This year, not only have they been requested more times than I can ever remember, the reaction to their absence from our shelves has been treated with shock and consternation. I felt a very inadequate grumpy shopkeeper at the end of it. We still will not be getting Easter eggs in, though, I shall just get used to feeling guilty about it.

The expected rain in the early afternoon was just as heavy as it was suggested by the weather forecasters, which was refreshing. The suggestion, not the rain itself, which was cold and wet. It stopped play, such as it had been, pretty much for around an hour. After that we picked up sporadic trade, some of it quite rewarding, as people indulged in changing robes and various beach clothes; I think the forecast for tomorrow has lots of sun symbols in it. It demonstrated that at least some people would be hanging around for another couple of days.

In the rainy doldrums, I put together a stationery order, mainly to fulfil the need for paper handkerchiefs that we had been needy of. At the same time the Missus did the big grocery order and called down several times with additional items that I would need to get from the stationery supplier as well. We have used this particular supplier for several years and in that time it has broadened its scope of stock such that it covers most of what we required. It amounted to quite an order at the end and will arrive on the same day as the big grocery delivery, which will be delightful.

Then, to end the day a mystery. In the quiet of the early evening, for the want of something better to do, I was looking out across the bay and at Escalls Cliff or thereabouts. The dark patches I saw may well have been there for years but I never really stopped to consider them before. Perhaps it was before they did not look like areas of burnt scrub, which was probably a trick of the light. They were around Carn Towan, just above the black huts of Carn Keys and again at Carn Barges. There is a little more at the top of the cliff the other side of Carn Barges, too.

I asked the Missus for a second opinion and she told me that they were definitely green. The sun very obligingly came out towards the end of the day and lit up the area suggesting to the Missus that it might be heather, which would mean that it had been there a while and I just had not noticed the contrast before. That would be embarrassing. I shall confer with an expert and report back but only if it is not going to make me look silly.

April 16th – Saturday

We awoke to another grey but perfectly temperate day in The Cove. The tide must have jumped in recent days as it had been a fair way up the slip a little while before the bleddy hound and I got there. The sand, or what we could see of it, had been properly scoured of weed with just the odd strand of new oar weed left lying about. The sea state had been quite pronounced last night but it looked like sand had been brought in rather than taken out, so perhaps all the old weed was just buried instead.

Later in the morning the skies cleared to blue and the sun shone beautifully. It came at a price that was kinder to some than others. A southeast wind put a smile on a surfer or two, especially as there were still relatively large waves rolling in from Gwenver through North Rocks and a little beyond. It was mesmerizing watching the long lines of spray peeled back from the breaking waves. Others, including grumpy shopkeepers, discovered it a bit chilly after a while as the strange phenomenon of the wind from the southeast squirting straight across the bay from Gwenver and in the first electric sliding door in The Cove. The blow was softened somewhat by a sudden spike in windbreak sales, which did no harm at all, thank you kindly.

I cannot say that I was run off my feet during the day but at certain times I was quite pressed. We made a healthy foray into our stock of pasties and some surprising cold weather gear such as our new bobble hats that are selling well. I should be grateful for small mercies, perhaps, but I knew I really would not mean it. We held on instead

for the big tide to push everyone off the beach and back into the shops on their way home. This gave us a little bit of uplift towards the end of the day.

So too did the advance of evening. There was another moody sunset in the making with big waves sloshing over the Harbour wall dumping tons of water on the Harbour side in dramatic fashion. It gathered quite an audience when I had a quick geek after delivering some flowers to the birthday girl up the hill. It looked like she had enjoyed a splendid time with family running about the dappled garden in the late sunshine. Simply glorious.

April 15th – Friday

Another misty morning but this time there was some damp in there too. It was more low cloud than mist, although the effect is the same, and it cleared pretty quickly down in The Cove but left it as thick as a bag up the top to slow all those busy motorists down as they headed home.

The mizzle was particularly light, and I did not bother with a rain jacket as we headed to the beach for our morning amble. Despite some pretty much benign seas over the last few days, the oar week on the Harbour beach has almost entirely gone. The weed had pretty much dried out and the bigger tides must have lifted it easily. All that was left were single strands littered all over the sand. Even the shingle that had built up around the big clumps had gone or were more liberally scattered across the beach.

There was enough slack in the morning's business to allow an unhurried putting away of the late dairy delivery and the subsequent groceries that arrived piecemeal until the late morning. I was grateful that the main delivery, including wine and beer, turned up. It was the third sending of a facsimile message to place the order. The supplier sore blind that they did not get it despite getting a second page of the same order on the same day a couple of days ago. I sent it yesterday and telephoned to make sure it had arrived. I think that they find it amusing that we still use fax but the only alternative they have is to telephone in the order. At least with a fax they have a ready made list to work to rather than trying to transcribe from a telephone message

I had high hopes around the middle of the day that business looked like it was perking up a bit. By the early afternoon the street emptied and my hopes were dashed – at least temporarily. I think the short-lived uplift was people buying going home presents and the like after which we waited for the new contingent to arrive.

It was either that or everyone was in the sea. It looked pretty flat yesterday but there was enough of a swell to provide some entertainment for the less demanding surfer. Today, the sea looked like it might have upped its game a little and was just too enticing for surfers of all levels of experience. When I looked out in the early afternoon with the tide on the push, the shore break was littered with them. There

were more people on the beach, too, than there had been all week, so perhaps things were improving – just not in the shop.

Those that we did have were all very polite and pleasant. One lady said sorry for offering a ten pound note for a purchase of a few pounds. I told her not to apologise for giving me money, in fact I wished that more people would. I do hope that is set to continue – the politeness, that is, although the giving me money bit would do no harm at all.

It was difficult to determine exactly what was going on with the weather through the day. There were periods of brightness through the grey but a customer waiting to fly to the Isles of Scilly by aeroplane had been warned that flights were suspended. This might indicate the low cloud still hanging about up at the airport. The same customer asked had I not noticed the absence of aircraft noise and frankly I had not. I lived close by Heathrow airport as a child and the constant roar of aircraft became no more than background noise – unless it was summer and Concorde took off. You definitely noticed that.

I also noticed a definite improvement in the numbers of people, which was heartening. Perhaps what was not was some complete eejit not wanting to replace an apron on its hook two feet away, tucked it under a £18 bone china mug instead. At some point later, as the apron was snagged onto a passer-by, two mugs ended up in pieces on the floor. It rather took the shine off what was looking to be an encouraging later afternoon.

It is almost certain that a monk from ancient times, discovering after a five mile hike to the well and back that his gourd had a leak or some similar misfortune that ruined his day, prevented by his religion from kicking the monastery cat, invented beer. I thank him for his restraint, innovation and, erm, example.

April 14th – Thursday

It was another ugly duckling of a morning. At least this time our beautiful swan hung around for a bit longer later in the day. While the weather was fine and temperate it did not deliver the Easter volume of visitors that we might have once been used to. It is beginning to look a bit bleak for the bottom line on our first bite of the cherry this year.

There was a bit of topping up of our drinks fridge first thing before we opened but soon after that I continued with the bone china mug delivery that turned up yesterday. With hardly a soul about for the extent of the morning, I made good progress. The main struggle that I had was finding sufficient room on the area of shelves designated for the mugs. This was even after I had extended the space on the new gift aisle shelves. In the end, I think, we have at least one example of each mug on display and if anyone wants two, we will have to ferret about on the shelves in the store room.

One of the other deliveries that arrived was postcards and the gifts that the postcard company supplies, which includes those slim drinks bottles. We also have some tin enamel mugs, the sort that you took on cub scout camp, although perhaps those are plastic these days. It was while I was doing these that another two deliveries popped up and I progressed onto those after I finished with the first. With no available space left up at The Farm any over-stock from any other delivery coming in will have to stay somewhere in the shop. Time to pack it all in, erm, as in compress the goods rather than stop doing everything, although the idea has merit.

Not that you might know it from the numbers, but with the school holidays in full swing we see more children about during the week, as you might imagine. I have mentioned before that I must wonder at what they do in school. The number of them, quite senior in years, who cannot add up is astonishing. We do prefer that sales are a minimum of £3 if the buyer is using a payment card – someone offered to pay ten pence for a plastic bag on credit card yesterday - and the confusion this casts amongst our younger customers is a matter of consternation. I am regularly asked how much just two items added together come to.

There are a few glimmers of hope. We have a regular visitor whose age is indeterminate, but he is perhaps eight or ten and comes in to buy sweets for him and his sister. His command of basic arithmetic is exemplary, and he will be counting out his exact pennies even before I have advised him of the total. Brings joy to the heart. He is not alone but far from being in the majority.

I shall not complain about the lack of visitors, especially as it was a little more upbeat today. The general absence of busyness, however, is becoming common place and two busyish days was not the Easter I was expecting. I am sure the weekend will be better, and it will all be alright on the night. It is just the day I am worried about.

On the days where we work late I demure from Lifeboat launching practice. Tonight was one such but I noticed after the launch a shortage of very excellent Shore Crew milling about on the slipway preparing for recovery. It was also that both boats launched which would spread a small team quite thinly. It seemed churlish, therefore, not to slip over after a spot of tea and lend a hand.

I took over on the Inshore procedure and at roughly eight o'clock had the small boat recovered and being washed down on the Harbour slipway. As I did, it was quite clear that a textbook recovery was being executed by my team pals on the long slip. After I took the Inshore boat back to its shed in the RNLI car park, which now requires a good deal of skill – some may say blind luck – negotiating the tight clearance where the slipway joins the road, I joined the rest of the team clearing up with the big boat. We are, after all, a very supportive, very excellent Shore Crew.

April 13th – Wednesday

We were grey again to start with this morning but it was very mild and I barely needed the light fleece I was wearing. It was very pleasant on the Harbour beach where I had been beaten to it by the fishing boats that must have gone out several hours earlier. I understood later that they were fishing for pollack. They must have done well because they stopped at the moorings in the bay in the middle of the afternoon to gut the remaining fish, mobbed by gulls.

Due to the lateness of the grocery delivery yesterday, most of it was still piled up in the store room. The Missus set to with it when she came down to let me scoot off to the gymnasium for the first time in the week. She was still working at it when I returned to the shop exercised and refreshed. It was shortly after that a message arrived telling us that the 27 missing boxes would arrive soon.

I felt a bit rotten for not giving the driver a hand to unload but I had already decided to be grumpy on the occasion of the delivery being four days late and going missing for three of those. I was polite, mostly, although I might have asked if the company were delivering by camel, which would account for the delay. Happily, our foreign driver was blissfully ignorant of the bad English habit of resorting to sarcasm in moments of frustration.

We were delighted that our 27 boxes arrived with a further ten from our bone china mug supplier and followed by another company's van a few minutes later with some more. That was us set for the afternoon, which as I predicted yesterday, was the busiest day we have seen for a while. We reached the sort of levels that we might expect from an Easter holiday, although it still seemed quite restrained. We love it when a plan comes together.

The Missus did the heavy lifting, sorting through the boxes in a swift and well organised way. It is one of her many top skills but it still took us into the evening to shift all the lot including labelling all the wetsuits. What we could, we put out on display and we now have a full compliment of shoes and wetsuits. In an ordinary Easter we would have rued not having these at the start of the week not hardly anyone has asked where they were, which is all slightly concerning.

We were still tidying up the last of the boxes as we shifted into the last hour of opening. I agreed with the Missus that I would come up to The Farm after we closed to help move the over-stock into the barn and the store. When we got there I was quite taken aback just how much space we have filled up. In retrospect we should have cleared out the barn in advance, but I do not think that we expected the enormity of box volume that we now have. One of the greatest challenges will be finding things that we need to bring down to the shop and I suspect that after Easter we will both need to spend a few evenings up there sorting out the mess.

I will try and put the image out of my mind for now and hope that we do not have any further large deliveries in the pipeline.

April 12th – Tuesday

After all the rushing around to get ahead of the posse, the big grocery delivery did not appear in the morning. It was probably to do with the fact that we were locked out of ordering and filed late.

I spent the rest of the morning not starting anything because I expected the grocery delivery to arrive as soon as I did and leave me in a pickle. I had chased up our alternative supplier a few days before only to be told not to be so impatient. These things take time, you know. Given that I only sent an enquiry to ask would the company be interested in delivering down this far, I had been quite surprised at the delay, but it seems that the company had pushed ahead to organise a transport route and to take us on board. I did not complain but I shall if it takes much longer. I really just wanted to know what the delivery arrangements might be. It would be no good to us at all if the best they could manage was an arrival at seven o'clock in the evening on a Friday and to just drop a pallet on our doorstep. I guess we will find out now when we place our first order – hopefully this year.

There was mist all around the bay first thing. By the middle of the morning the skies, at least, were clearing to blue and it was looking a rather pretty day in the making. The mist eventually cleared but so, unfortunately, did the blue skies, which were replaced by the standard grey again in the afternoon.

We were once again in the doldrums for quite a while today. I think I have concluded that this is not just an anomaly but what this week has settled into being. I have adjusted our pastry and bakery buying accordingly just ahead of a big influx of surprise visitors who will all want pasties and bread that we do not have. It did not take long for the surprise to happen; the afternoon was remarkably busy but only by comparison to the quiet of the morning.

Speaking of anomalies. We are seeing an astounding hike in the price of raspberries. A neighbour has us buy big tubs of frozen ones that we keep for her. These have doubled in price since last year. As I was unpacking and pricing the grocery deliveries, I noticed that the price of the raspberry jam was a good percentage above that of the strawberry, so the price increase is not just wholesale on soft fruit. I tried to search the Internet for some clue and discovered that the world's bigger producer is Russia but that would not have an effect on the processed foods we are dealing with currently. Besides, the jam we sell boasts that the maker grows its own fruit, so, just a bad year for raspberries, perhaps?

Oddly, it stayed a little upbeat into the early evening despite the weather turning to give us a few showers. That may well have just been the people caught out in it because after that The Cove was deserted for our last hour.

Before the end of the business day, I called our wetsuit supplier for an update on our delivery. The very pleasant lady had met with the representative of the Doing Parcels

Dreadfully company who had told her that he had seen our parcels with his own eyes. I was assured that this was an improvement as he had said yesterday that he had not, so she was, erm, confident is not the right word, hopeful that our delivery would go ahead tomorrow. She added that I should not hold my breath.

I will put it all out of my mind, so that if the delivery turns up it will be a pleasant surprise. Perhaps I should do the same about the visitors.

April 11th – Monday

It looked a bright and wholesome day when I peeked through the window first thing. By the time I was heading down to the shop, the skies were darkening in the most alarming way. I quickly checked the rain radar as it was hard on the time to take the bleddy hound out too and it did not take too much thought to realise that we were to be imminently deluged by some quite heavy rain. Consequently, I toggled up in some full metal jacket rainwear by which time the shower had passed and we had our trip unscathed.

Our escape was, however, purely good fortune as it came in again a few minutes after we had got back and again after that. While the big ground seas of a few days ago had departed, there was still some boisterous activity over towards Gwenver, I noticed, and at Aire Point where the waves were thundering in with the spray peeling back off the top. The Harbour beach is still a bit of a mess with weed strewn about the place. I had noticed before but did not give it much thought, but the presence of the weed must disrupt the normal action of the tides and currents. Not only is there a preponderance of weed about the place but the shingle has gathered in piles where the bigger lumps of weed are and all over the beach are larger pebbles unable to draw back with the current.

Just before I headed down to open the shop, we had a couple of close-by rumbles of thunder, which is unusual for down here. It did not amount to much and the rain seemed to have gone for the day. There was some brightness but like yesterday we were struggling under a mainly light grey sky, although a few blue patches broke through the cloud on occasion. Again, the ambient temperature was none too shabby but the breeze, sharp from the east to start the day with and later from the southeast, made it feel a bit cooler.

The weather was barely discernibly different from yesterday, but the morning's business seemed to pick up well in advance of yesterday's poor show. It was almost at a level that met my expectations for Easter busyness, but I am not exactly sure that I shared the enthusiasm of the *Western Morning News* (did I say, I once had a review in the *Western Morning News*) suggesting the busiest Easter in eight years, especially in my book that it had already started and had been a bit of a like a damp squib.

As time progressed into the afternoon, I started to have a sense of foreboding that our wetshoes and wetsuits, supposedly scheduled for delivery last week and rescheduled for today, would not be arriving. I called our supplier and asked them to check as we did not want the boxes being delivered tomorrow when we would already be up to our necks in grocery deliveries. I was not expecting the response that I got and was quite taken aback. I know that I have very little faith in the Doing Parcels Dreadfully transport company but even they have discovered a whole new depth of awfulness to descend to. We are told that the company has lost the shipment, all 27 boxes of it. I know that the depots they have must be huge, but two whole pallets going adrift. Do come on.

Our supplier has instigated a complaint, after consulting with the company, which will take up to six days to elicit a response. I do trust that our supplier has more clout than we, as it took Doing Parcels Dreadfully four months or more to allegedly investigate and tell us, 'hard luck'. In the meantime we are without wetshoes and wetsuits and this is not good since we have to pay bills at the end of the month. While our supplier is keen to lay the blame on Doing Parcels Dreadfully, I must question the wisdom of sending pallets through a company that is ill-suited to the task.

On the bright side, the sun came out. The grey of the day faded away and the blue skies became the abundant feature of the sky. It did not seem to make a huge difference to the number of people coming and going but those who did were clearly enjoying the summery weather. Even the breeze diminished, which explained why I was getting uncomfortably warm in my fleece behind the counter.

It must have made a difference for the Missus, too, who changed her mind and headed for The Farm in the afternoon. She came back with tales of planting a fury of cabbages, which had taken far longer than she anticipated because there were quite a few more than she expected in the one seed tray. She had to abandon the second seed tray, which was bigger, as she had run out of time. I have no idea when we expect to see these on the shop's shelves but we should be better off thanks to her planning and do not expect a glut of cucumbers at the end of October.

I did expect a glut of groceries to arrive tomorrow, after a false start where we were locked out of the supplier's system again, so I spent some of the late quietness to clear space in the store room. We should have our very helpful delivery driver and he will turn up early to avoid the rush and I will have to dash about in the morning to meet him halfway.

April 10th – Sunday

I welcomed a gentleman onto the shop early on in the day. He was after a couple of stamps for postcards he had purchased and commented as he did so that he needed to keep the mother-in-law sweet. I told him how surprised I was that a postcard was all it took and I told him how lucky he was. I said we have to feed mine

three times a week. I should point out at this juncture, just before I am cut out of the will – again – that it was a joke. Honest, Mother.

While we are in a jovial mood I should share with you the information coming from the roofers across the way on the Lifeboat station. They are all quite familiar characters now having been in regularly for drinks and snacks over the extended period that they are here. I had a question asked of me from another customer whose husband was also in the industry regarding the type of material being used on the roof. I said I would ask the guys next time they were in.

It was not long before one of them dropped by for some vitals, so I took the opportunity to ask the question. He told me that it was stainless steel like before but this time they were doing it right. I do hope so, as the next big wind might well be from the northwest and while we do need a new roof I am not sure I want it in the living room.

It might have been the weather, but I somehow doubt it. I should not be sitting twiddling my thumbs in the middle of the day on the first Sunday of the Easter holidays. Worrying also was the lack of an army of small children arriving first thing for breakfast goods and newspapers. By early afternoon we might have expected there to be at least the beginnings of a thronging crowd gathering for the café next door but only one of their benches was attended by that time. Even the beach was sparsely occupied, although the lack of waves might have had something to do with that.

Trying not to think about it I twiddled my fingers some more. Had out wetsuits and wetshoes arrived on Friday, like they were supposed to, I would have had plenty to do. If that had happened the shop would be busy, of course. Just to prove the point, the Missus came back from The Farm in the middle of the afternoon laden with the shopping list I had given her for stock from the store. As we unloaded, customers came from far and wide and busied themselves in the shop for the next couple of hours.

It was near five o'clock by the time I had unpacked and distributed the goods around our shelves. The other job that had been outstanding the whole day was to fix one of our garden bench seats across the road. The roofers had been kind enough to move the railing compound so that there was ample room for three tables across there. As I moved one of them back into position, I noted that it was swaying a bit and discovered that the two braces had come away from their moorings.

I had the Missus bring my box of screws back from The Farm along with the stock and as The Cove went quiet at just after five o'clock, I scurried across the road to affect the repair. I had turned the table on its back to do the job and left it that way while I put my tools away in the shop. When I came back, a jackdaw was stood on one of the upturned legs inspecting my work. He remained there as I approached

until I was just a couple of feet away. He looked me straight in the eye and said, 'bit shoddy, mate' and flew off. I think I had best have an early night tonight.

April 9th – Saturday

The Easter holidays start here and just to prove it we have some improved weather just to kick things off – presumably just before the rain arrives. Yesterday was a mite chilly – how is it we only are allowed power cuts when we have sub zero temperatures – but today I was out and down the Harbour without a jacket basking in the early morning sunshine and wading through the deep weed on the beach.

The sea state had improved sufficiently to let the fishing boats go and do a bit, even if it was moderately rough. When we arrived at the beach there was one of the bigger punts loading up with pots and about to go out. I noticed yesterday that the tractor had spent some time clearing a passage through the weed and now was assisting with the loading of pots before pushing the boat out. What I did not witness was the tractor having gone out deep in its pushing the boat out then failing to come back to shore again – on a rising time as well. It explained the appearance, not long after we had opened one of the farm tractors, three times the size of the Harbour tractor, driving by on a rescue mission.

Talking of rescues. It must have been while I was distracted that the Lifeguards sneaked back onto the beach again. They will be there for the rest of the year. I had heard on Radio Pasty that the Lifeguards were starting again on selected beaches, but they fell short of mentioning The Cove. The next thing I knew was that the flag was flying above the little black hut on the dunes and more brightly coloured ones on the beach at strategic points. Their big 4x4 did not make an appearance but the small neap tide was not being all that helpful for access.

The comforting presence of the Lifeguards clearly engendered a keen desire to be beach dwelling and having a splash about in the water. There were more people down on the beach than we have seen for a while, although it may have had much to do with the sunny weather. It was not the busiest start to a holiday, but I assumed – and hoped – that many people were still on their way. We put a reasonable dent in our pasty supply but will have to go some tomorrow to finish off the weekend order.

One of the comforting things about entering the busy parts of the season is meeting all the regular visitors again of whom there is an abundance. It resembles, to some degree, a big family gathering and, indeed, one lady was telling me how her children and those from other families who come on the same weeks each year, have grown up together, albeit in snatches of odd weeks here and there. It is difficult to tell, and I have not made a detailed study, but at a guess I would say that eighty percent of our holiday trade is repeat custom. It is this that drives us to try and find new products each year so that we have at least a few new items to offer.

To help things along during the busy periods we stay open an hour later. Come the roll in to our usual closing time at six o'clock today, it started to look remarkable as quiet as it would normally be out of season. My stomach that expected it to be tea time led the complaints followed by my attention span and finally my joie de vivre. It must be time for a beer, surely.

April 8th – Friday

It seems that electricity is not just expensive but unavailable.

We had a lengthy power outage yesterday that played havoc with Diary writing, which while I am sure a matter of much excitement among the readership, such as it is. It also dispels the rumour that it is initially etched upon stone tablets by some mysterious hand carried out by the dim light of some smouldering shrubbery.

We trust that normal service will be resumed the following day, provided that I can find my chisel - oops.

April 7th – Thursday

We had a mixed bag of weather today with heavy, squally showers driving through the bay interspersed by lengthy periods of bright sunshine married to a blustery wind. I did not bother with any rain gear when I took the bleddy hound out in the morning thinking that the worst was over and got away with it. There were many others today who thought the same and did not.

Possibly because of the weather we were very quiet during the first part of the day but later on The Cove came alive a bit as the frequency of the showers seemed to diminish. One of the big deliveries was not scheduled in despite it being signalled yesterday by the Doing Parcels Dreadfully company that it was. This has happened before and while not expecting it, they delivered it anyway. I spent the whole day on tenterhooks not really knowing one way or another.

Our windbreaks, being delivered by a proper transport company, arrived on schedule on a big pallet that was placed outside on the pavement. Naturally, its arrival heralded an influx of customers that prevented me from shifting it as quickly as I would have liked. I had deliberately not filled up the windbreak stand with our existing stock so that we could use this delivery and have less to take up to The Farm. Despite that there were still plenty of boxes to load onto the truck that was still full of the last set of boxes the Missus was taking up but had not unloaded.

She had just returned from a mercy trip to the cash and carry for some items of desperate need that could not wait until the normal delivery on Tuesday. I was hoping that the alternative supplier would have its act together by now but since it had not, we are compelled to stay with the supplier which no longer wants us. The positive side of this is that when we get the delivery on Tuesday it will be by the very

helpful and efficient driver we had all last year. We know that he will turn up before we open on Tuesday and have the van unloaded in the fastest time possible.

It was not until late into the afternoon that I had time to look about outside. The showers continued to plague us judging from a small group who turned up soaked to the skin. When I looked, there was an abundance of blue skies dotted about by big, fluffy white clouds. The sea had been quite in turmoil during the morning and was flogging over the Harbour wall when we were down there earlier. It had clearly been mean for a couple of days because the beach was strewn with little clumps of oar week with one big heap of it on top of the rope that runs down the beach at the tide line. Low tide had come and gone when I looked again in the late afternoon and the sea was in a much softer state than it was earlier. It was still choppy out there and as one of our fishermen predicted, would not be alright for fishing until Saturday.

I just had time to try out our smart new hangers for wetsuits before we closed. Last year, I made the decision that we needed something a bit more robust for the heavy garments and looked for heavy duty metal hangers, which I could not find. I settled for a somewhat inferior product that tends to bend if we are not careful. This year, when looking for another sort of hanger, all I could find was the metal hangers I was looking for last year, so I bought some. They are exactly what I thought them to be, and we will spend a little time tomorrow swapping out the original hangers on the heavier, adult suits ahead of our new delivery of children's wetsuits. Those liberated hangers will be used on the lighter suits when they arrive.

By the look of it we will be some busy tomorrow what with larger deliveries expected, the first of this year's fish orders that will need to be vacuum packed and frozen and this week's customers leaving and, later, the vanguard of the new, bigger contingent arriving – we hope.

April 6th – Wednesday

There was rain lashing against the window as I prepared to go down to the shop first thing, so I thought it advisable to slip on some full metal jacket waterproofs. That did the job nicely. It did not rain again when I was outside for the rest of the day.

It was a bit grey and damp when I got around to taking the bleddy hound down to the Harbour beach. There must have been some more robust wave action as we slipped into neep tides because there is a shelf in the sand at the back of the beach. It is causing the rope running down the beach on which the boats hang their painters to be about ankle height off the sand and just right to trip over if you are not looking.

Having survived the dangers of the beach I set forth to see if I could survive the day, too. There was no pasty delivery, we already knew that, and the newspapers and magazine were done in short order. We might have been busy at times yesterday but it was for things that we do not necessarily buy on a daily basis such as most of the fresh food in the store. Therefore, there were no other deliveries to look forward

to and I could concentrate on finishing off the hooded sweatshirts. We had already decided that the t-shirts would have to wait until the paper wrappers arrived, hopefully tomorrow. I did bag up a few that we had completely run out of, just in case but will leave the rest.

The Missus came down halfway through the morning to help finish off the hoodies. Between us we emptied all the hoodie boxes and squared them away only discovering on the last box that some were missing. Initially, I thought that our friends at Doing Parcels Dreadfully had split the delivery without saying anything, but I telephoned the supplier to see how many boxes we should have had. The very pleasant lady who answered my call explained that some of the consignment had yet to be packed. It would have been helpful and saved a lot of time if the detailed delivery note told us that.

The Missus headed off to The Farm after that as she had not been for a few days due to the deliveries and there are more tomorrow. This only left me the last vestige of the 100 box delivery from last week, which was the sunglasses. We were probably not going to sell very many today as the showers kept blowing through on an increasingly blustery westerly breeze. Indications have been that even on moderately sunny days there is a demand and we had already seen sales of what was left of last year's sunglasses stock and some of the sun cream.

I very nearly forgot completely about sunglasses as we tend to buy basic models for people that have forgotten theirs or who have been caught out by an unexpectedly bright day. We are not generally thought of as a buying sunglasses destination. The policy has served well, and we regularly get through two gross of sun spectacles each year. As with everything else this year we have been unable to get truly basic models and have had to shell out quite a bit more. It remains to be seen whether we will still get through the same volume but our glasses. Although more expensive, the new ones will still be seen as low cost, I think, just not as low as previous years.

The work had taken me until the last hour of the shop day and given that we had only one delivery it was heartening to end the day in credit, as it were. It will be entirely different tomorrow with some fairly large deliveries expected that at the time will feel an insurmountable burden. But, how do we eat elephants? One bit at a time.

April 5th – Tuesday

Well, I could not complain about the start of today. We have some mild air about, almost no jacket required, and there was just enough beach down in the Harbour to make the bleddy hound's day when we went out first thing.

Things had been going relatively well with the Laurel and Hardy Newspaper Company. All my newspapers had turned up and there was a small smattering of magazines last week even though I was not expecting them. I was expecting magazines this week because I had specifically ordered them and today was the first

day of regular supply. The good news is that I did not get any magazine that I was not expecting, which was something. The bad news, sadly, was that magazines that I had ordered arrived last week when I was not expecting them but did not arrive this week when I was. It was something of a relief to be honest. I was beginning to think that I was getting newspapers from the wrong company there for a bit.

With big deliveries arriving at the end of the week I put in some effort to clear some space in the store room. Whatever I cleared was unlikely to be enough but some effort had to be made. The clothing overstock is boxed up and waiting for the Missus to take up to The Farm – if she can find a square inch that is not already used up by other boxes or farm equipment. The clothes need to go into our safe store away from the mice, which makes it even more tricky.

It is probably a good job that we were quiet again today. During yesterday we had the heads up that a Lifeboat launch was planned for this afternoon. Some engineers had arranged today to come and do some work on the big boat's radar to help the crew from bumping into things in the night. If nothing else, it will save on batteries – currently there is a crew member assigned to stand at the front of the boat with a bright torch to look out for things. In fog he has a loud hailer and a long stick. A working radar will be seen as a big advantage.

As is usual during the weekdays, availability of crew is limited and today was no exception. We had numbers on the shore side but it is numbers with the right qualifications that is important and one of those is winch person. Our regular man could not be there today but luckily we had someone who could stand in. The launch went perfectly and we were told that if the tests on the radar were successful – apart from the boat not bumping into things – it would be back pretty smartly. If, however, it required some adjustments the boat could be out for an unspecified further amount of time. We watched as the boat headed off around the corner and set up on the long slip on a falling tide.

Given the open ended nature of the exercise, we dispersed leaving me to keep watch and alert everyone when the boat looked to be coming back. I barely had time to make a cup of tea and return to the shop counter when I noticed the boat heading back in our general direction. I was going to post a message to confirm they were coming back when they re-entered the bay, heading for the moorings.

The return was a lot sooner than we were expecting and it took a couple of minutes to muster the crew. With minimum numbers we settled into position to take the boat back in and while we executed what was pretty much a textbook recovery up the long slip, other crew arrived to help. With the tide still going out, we had to receive the heaving line from the boat by dropping off the end of the slip's walkway and onto the rocks beside the slipway tow. From there it seems to take an inordinate amount of time to haul the boat up to the boathouse doors where we made it ready and strapped it onto the cradle for the next launch. We are, after all, a very long haul, very excellent Shore Crew.

Going back to the day job in the shop, I noticed several large boxes piled up outside. We have been expecting a delivery of our hooded sweatshirts and this was it. It had arrived while the Missus was under the cosh behind the counter. Strangely, it had become exceedingly busy during my absence and she was doing a roaring trade in, amongst other things, pasties. This is what happens when the small gods of shopkeepers notice that you did not place a pasty order for the next day because you had far too many and easily sufficient for tomorrow as well. We now do not have sufficient for tomorrow as well. What was I thinking, trying to be clever and predict things? Honestly.

As the afternoon slipped on, I had enough time to start working through the boxes that arrived. The first thing I noticed was the new t-shirts we ordered were supposed to arrive rolled up with a paper band around them – very environmentally friendly - but they were, instead, loose. We will need to wrap them individually before we put them out, which will keep us busy when we already are. I left the t-shirts in the too difficult pile and starting working through the hooded sweatshirts instead. By the end of the day, I had done one box of adult garments and all of the children's ones, which are now boxed away and cleared. I should have time in the morning to clear the other adult hoodies and find room for them but the three boxes of t-shirts, all 313 of them, will need to be put aside until the wrappers arrive.

I was quite worn out by the time I closed the shop doors. I can now look forward to doing it all again tomorrow.

April 4th – Monday

It was not the sort of morning for trying to drag a reticent bleddy hound around the block again. It was not proper rain, but it was wet nevertheless and came and went in the density of its wetness. It was also fairly breezy and the temperature had not yet found out that it was supposed to be climbing a bit or perhaps it does not bother to look at a forecast either these days.

Monday morning is pretty much the easiest of the week, especially if there is no milk delivery – there was but it was pretty insignificant and did not amount to a hill of beans; the milkman does not do beans. The papers come without inserts and the first magazine delivery of the week comes tomorrow. I caught the milkman when I was down setting up the shop but missed the newspaper man by a whisker. I met him just as I was taking the bleddy hound out in the mizzle.

With the extra time I had I was able to send off electronic mails to our proposed new grocery supplier and our wetsuit company. We had heard not a dickie bird from the former since the last communication that told me our enquiry was in the hands of the transport manager. It was not encouraging but I thought I would give them the benefit of the doubt and a little nudge. Our wet clothes supplier had already let us

know that children's wetsuits would not be with us until the beginning of May, which was irritating but also told us our wetshoes would be late, which was unforgivable.

The message came back that we had agreed the beginning of May for delivery, which seemed unlikely. The long of the short of it was that there was some of the stock available and they would try and get it to us by the end of the week. I can foresee a mad dash to try and get them out on display while various other deliveries are dropped on our doorstep.

The greyness and the mizzle were slowly clearing by the time I had left the gymnasium. I had travelled down late so it was edging towards the middle of the day by that time. The frozen food delivery lorry passed me on my way back and when I arrived at the shop the Missus was in the final throes of putting it all away. Had I not stopped by for an extra 300 metres of rowing I might have been back in time to help. Ah well, there is always next time.

It means that we have at last a slightly less embarrassing ice cream freezer display, with more than just a couple of lollies to choose from. I busied myself with the new prices so that we were not caught out but I could have done it in the evening given the number of ice creams we sold today.

Despite the upturn in the weather during the middle of the day, there were precious few visitors about. We did more business with the boys working away on the Lifeboat station roof who will be here for many weeks to come yet. It was disappointing after such a buoyant Sunday but we are not yet in the full swing of holidays and the weather was set against us. The hiatus allowed us time to distribute a delivery of books around our shelves. I do not know what size shop the supplier thinks we have but the number of books seems to increase each year. The real coup of the day was to actually get to the end of the clothing delivery we had last week that has taken ages to process.

During that grind I discovered that I had ignored some overstock we already had up at The Farm and that we now had something of a surplus of bikinis. Let us hope for a particularly hot summer with agreeable sea state. I also discovered that out of all our lady visitors, not many of them are size 16 or perhaps size 16 ladies are averse to buying shorts in seaside resorts. Oddly, it is size 14 in swimsuits and bikinis. It is a question that needs to be answered – or at least asked. I am not entirely sure asking lady customers if they are size 16 is the correct opening gambit, although size 18 ladies might be quite flattered. I suspect that we will just have to live with an abundance of size 16 clothes.

We now look forward to tomorrow's exciting challenge.

April 3rd – Sunday

My, oh, my. You certainly do not get many days like today to the pound. It made up for all the rain we had yesterday.

I vaguely recall seeing a forecast from the previous evening but the only thing I remembered about it was a very low overnight temperature for this end of the Duchy. It struck me a little later that perhaps I should have turned off and emptied the outside water pipe but by that time I was in a nice warm bed and could not be fussed getting out again. When I emerged from the front door in the morning, there was no evidence that we had any frost during the night, so I think I got away with it.

There may not have been any frost, but I was very glad we did not run a pawnbroker's shop. It had been cold over the last few days, but this surpassed that and I was very grateful that there was no wind to do with it. The tide had eventually chased us off the beach and we were left to head around the block. Whereas, in the last few months, we have largely had the journey to ourselves, today there were various holiday makers dotted about enjoying the gloriousness of the morning.

It has been a few weeks since we were last around the block. Things tend to move slowly during the winter and on the previous occasions there were no major changes to report. The season is clearly starting to bloom, although none of the usual plants are just yet but in the Harbour car park a RNLI shop has suddenly appeared. It is remarkably bijou and not very big, either, but better than not having one at all. I have no idea how many car park day tickets it will take.

Further on, some work has been going on in Betty's garden on Coastguard Row. At present it looks like it has just had a very bad haircut, long overdue, but hopefully it is just the start of something better. It is a good sign that the shrubs have been left in place; I would be very concerned if they had all been dug up. There is a planning application in place for the old Coastguard office, which looks a sight more sympathetic than the last one. While another holiday let in The Cove is probably superfluous, it will be a more aesthetically pleasing view than the broken corrugated roof of the existing building.

I had anticipated – or perhaps hoped – that today would be a good deal busier than the last and I was not wrong. It took a while for the assembled masses to assemble but when things got going, they really go going. It was not what you might call full throttle summer holiday busy but for an Easter with only a subset of the schools on holiday, it was none too shabby. In the morning I had sufficient time to finish most of the clothing delivery and in the afternoon I was pretty much pinned to the counter.

Had Saturday been busy as well, I would have run out of pasties halfway through today. The way it turned out I had a comfortable surplus that will be used up with tomorrow's order that would have been too few without them. We are, however, running out of some grocery items that are not numerous enough to meet our cash and carry's minimum order for delivery. It is most likely that the Missus will have to make a trip out to Hayle next week to fill the gaps ahead of next weekend.

We are also likely to have to find an alternative supplier of wetshoes that are a huge seller when the schools are off. I am somewhat peeved that our usual supplier has failed to deliver despite being advised to place an order with them last July. There are other suppliers that have them, so it is either our supplier's bad luck at choosing the wrong manufacturer to get them from or just plain bad planning. I am beginning to suspect the latter. This will be something else to sort out on Monday.

By the end of the day we had been thoroughly busy throughout the afternoon. There were many regular customers about and also a fair few new ones to be introduced to including, for the first time in a couple of years, some foreign sorts from foreign parts – beyond the east of Camborne, if I am not mistaken.

I am quite looking forward to being cosmopolitan in The Cove again.

April 2nd – Saturday

I had no idea what to expect from today, with rumours abounding that holiday lets were full and that some schools in the capital – London, not Truro - were off from yesterday. I thought that I had better be prepared, so I put on my best frock and did my hair only to find out that the party was on a different night.

It had started out looking a bit dubious to the north. There were big clouds, black as pitch, hanging over the bay. It had rained some during the night and there were some spots of rain here and there during the morning as I was preparing to open the shop. I had cast caution to the winds by taking the bleddy hound down to the Harbour beach – yes, there was still just enough sand down there – but had got away with it. There may have been rain hanging about but at least the day appeared to have lost some of its bitter chill of the last few days.

We had not tarried on the beach, which was good for me as I can be a little pressed on weekend mornings. Today was no exception as I had a large milk order to deal with as well as newspapers and some groceries arriving all roughly at the same time. There was no sitting down having a cup of tea this morning, at least not for long, and I was down opening the shop before I knew it.

There were a satisfying number of people hanging around outside the shop early on until I realised that they were waiting for the Sennen Cove Café to be open. We did shift a few newspapers and some early bread and breakfast goods but after that things went mysteriously quiet. The rest of the day held little better fare, with a peppering of visitors having arrived early for the week but I must hold on to the hope that the rest were on their way.

I did not let the lack of customers discourage me too much and was not going to let the time lie idle, either. I had already used the first part of the day to restock our drinks fridges which had taken the brunt of sales during our first week. There was still the

substantial remains of the clothing delivery sitting in the store room, so in the afternoon, I set to with that. I dealt with the swimsuits and men's shorts first, solely because they already had hangers attached and merely required pricing and finding some room for. The remaining ladies' shorts, quite a lot of them, all needed hangers finding for them and labels to put on the hangers expressing the size. This was the sort of picky task that the Missus laps up; she also likes doing jigsaw puzzles, which explains much. Since the Missus did a runner in the early afternoon up to The Farm, it was only me up to my ears in ladies' shorts for the rest of the afternoon.

Towards the end of the shop day, there were signs of life beginning to emerge from round and about. We sold a swathe of pasties, so it paid off keeping some available until later than I might normally and there was a bit of explorative surveying going on. It at least gave me cause for some encouragement that tomorrow might be a little livelier. It provided some solace as I brought in the outside display in the most persistent rain that we had all day. We are told that the temperature will plummet tonight, which was something to look forward to. Welcome to sunny Cornwall.

April 1st – Friday

It seemed to be just cold this morning when I stepped out to prepare the shop for the day but at least the fierce and piercing wind had abated some. Sadly, it was replaced by some quite vicious hail showers most of which I managed to avoid. It looked like they had all gone when I took the bleddy hound down to the beach, but we caught what must have been the edge of one as it was not very heavy.

I spurned my visit to the gymnasium in the morning and later regretted that I had. It would have been a mite chilly in the hut with a tin roof, so I did not miss that bit but the exercise would have done me the world of good having been consigned to the shop counter for all of yesterday. I made the decision based on the amount in the store room yet to be processed and reasoned that probably took priority ahead of the Easter rush.

It was quiet in the morning, and I got quite a lot done. There were various empty boxes left over from my labours and yet when I looked in the store room there seemed to be just as many boxes as were there when I started. It was not very encouraging. I was still doing them when the Missus came down in the middle of the day to take over while I had a cup of tea. That was most welcome because, although the wind had gone, it was no less cold than the day before and I was quite chilled through.

I took the bleddy hound out again on my way back from my break and headed for the beach again as it is most convenient. Down there in the sunshine it would have been quite warm if I could have found somewhere sheltered from the renewed northerly breeze. By the end of the day, that breeze had learnt how to blow properly and made me regret putting out our flags, which were rattling away in their sockets. I resorted to wearing a woolly hat in the shop, but I could not find any fingerless gloves to

complete the street trader image. I resisted the urge to start bawling out my wears, but I was certainly working hard enough to be wearing out my legs going to and from the store room.

I was very grateful come the close of play and I was able to retire to the warmth of the flat. I should be grateful, too, to Mother who pitched up with family unannounced, which forced me to put the heating on upstairs. My hands would still be blue typing this else.