

DIARY 2024

July 31st – Wednesday

We had cloud first thing as I looked out of the window. Admittedly, it was hard to see as it was still largely dark outside. Those darker mornings seem to have crept in almost unnoticed, but I am guessing that the cloud would have helped in that regard this morning. The cloud was with us all day but was broken in a mix of high level and cumulus that provided enough sunshine during the day that no one really noticed.

The tide jumped overnight and for most of the day, the neap tide was pressing in on the top of the beach. This made it look particularly crowded as everyone squeezed up against the dunes. They ranged all the way from one end of The Beach car park and into the mouth of The Valley. A frequent visitor to the shop and a local man told me that he and his wife usually pitch up at the North Rocks end because none of the visitors want to walk that far. He said it was usually the case but last time a group of about 20 youngsters turned up and started to play cricket right next to them.

I managed at last to top up the fridge magnets and the sunglasses, which was most disappointing. It meant that I had time to do it which also meant that we were not as busy as the previous two days. It had also taken me a little less time to top up the drinks in the morning, although I was still downstairs for an hour and a half before we opened. The morning deliveries came spread out and at advantageous times and I was hardly pressed at all until the first customers started rolling up in numbers, a good hour into our day.

That is not to say that we were not busy, just less busy than the previous days. There was still enough action to slow me down considerably as I tried to build a minimum order for our supplementary cash and carry delivery at the weekend. I enlisted the help of the Missus in the early afternoon to help finish it off and we barely scraped over the minimum order level after a lot of effort adding several things we did not strictly need.

We had not long posted this when I had a call from the manager of our remote store telling us that we were not set up for weekly deliveries and that he did not have a driver for the weekend. This was a surprise to us. I know that we said that we would prefer to have fortnightly but there was never an discussion about making a choice that we could not go back on. There was no point in arguing the toss and we will have to make other arrangements. It was irritating that I had sent him a message the day before setting out our intentions. He could have saved us much effort by replying then.

The decision on having the extra delivery was made on the basis that we only needed water and beer. The other items would be useful but, in truth, were only there to meet the minimum order value. The other reason for wanting a delivery was that the alternative was for the Missus to drive to Hayle and pick up the goods there.

She would have done it, but I did not fancy her having to load over 100 kilograms of water and beer. It will have to be done now but I will call ahead and make sure that there is someone who can do the lifting for her.

Mentioning 100 kilograms reminded me that a customer had asked yesterday whether the bodyboard he had chosen was suitable for his eleven year old son. I asked how tall he was and was told that he was about 145 centimetres. That foxed me.

The summer madness continues, however. I am still enjoying the bluster and fluster of it all. We are still answering questions about how to get to Land's End and what time the buses are. There are other questions we can have so much fun with. In times past, we had what time are the dolphins in then it was there used to be a big beach here, now it is all sea and what time do the pasties (sorry, MS) arrive. Never before, though, have we had, how long will my beer stay cold. Gosh, I love being a grumpy shopkeeper.

With all the free time I had today, ahem, I did manage to get around the shop to survey the damage. Actually, it was when I showed a gentleman where the ladies' swimsuits were that I noticed large gaps in on our shelves. I am going to have to place emergency orders for shorts in certain age groups and I sense that we are selling more adult bikinis to older teenagers than ever before.

This is something new, as I have always thought that the styles we are able to get did not appeal to the fashion-conscious youths. Either our fairly mundane selection has come back into favour, or they are just desperate. It also suggests that physical development comes earlier and earlier because the sizes we are selling surprise me for the girls who are buying them. We are not getting any back again, so they must fit. There is also the possibility that I am just getting old and still know nothing about the subject at all.

I quickly moved on from such things because despite the appearance that we were not as busy today, the till said different at the end of the day. We had a flood of customers again at the end of the day that kept me away from making lists of shorts and swimsuits. I did remember to put away the newspapers this week and we once again, for another day running, have half empty drinks fridges that will need to be addressed by another early start in the morning.

Sleeping is highly overrated, anyway.

July 30th – Tuesday

Yesterday was one of the busiest days we have had. I have not checked our records, but the gross take was up there with the best. No wonder I was a tad weary at the end of the day.

The sterling performance clearly did not go unnoticed by the small gods of grumpy shopkeepers who must have thought that they had been far too soft to all that as a free pass. Today they decided I should do it all again but this time with both hands and a leg tied behind my back. They cut our Internet connection.

Any business worth its salt, has a tried and tested contingency plan ready to go at a moment's notice. So, I quickly formulated our contingency plan, tested it, and put it into operation. The only item of relevance really was the card payment machine, without which there would be little point in opening. Ordering could wait for a bit, and I would later borrow the Missus' mobile telephone to call in our pasty order (sorry, MS).

The business could operate very handsomely on cash only, if only our customer had some. By using the mobile telephone signal, I was able to link the card machine to my mobile telephone, using a 'hot spot' and get it working. My mobile telephone, however, had to be placed near the window to get any sort of signal at all. I was scared to death of moving it for the rest of the day hence having to use the Missus' to call in orders.

I had already looked online to see what the problem was and it reported that a 'major incident' had occurred and the service was expected to be restored at half past seven o'clock. I registered my interest and a message a little later said that I would be sent a notification when the service was restored.

At ten o'clock, with still no service I decided to try and get an update on the situation. Several customers had also said that they were not working but, oddly, the café next door was working just fine. I spent the next hour trying to get some sense out of the provider and had been misdirected, cut off and made to wait twenty minutes and we are on a business tariff. When I eventually spoke with someone, I was already less than pleased with the response.

The very pleasant man I spoke with eventually, took me through a grindingly tedious identification process and then wanted to test my line to see what the problem was. I explained that it was a 'known problem', a genuine technical term used by support organisations, and that many people in the area were affected and I just wanted an update on progress and a refreshed expected time of fix. I was told that I should let him carry out his tests and only then would he be able to tell me what the problem was. I spent a moment biting a bit of tongue that I had not already chewed to destruction and let our man do his completely superfluous tests.

A short time later he told me it was a 'known problem' and I was not the only customer affected in the area. I thanked him and asked if there was any information I had not already told him. I was told that 'no one knew' and I would be told when it was fixed. I tentatively asked, if no one knew, how would they know if it was fixed. I wished that I had not because apparently, I was being impertinent and at risk of having the call terminated. I then had to wait, patiently, while he took the longest time

ever to provide me with a fault reference and wait some more while he gave me a complaint reference.

After the first few card paying customers of the day went through successfully, I was able to breathe again. It was a while later that the chef from next door came through and suggested that we try connecting to the café's Internet. That worked marvellously for the shop laptop, but I dared not try and switch the card machine from a working but nerve-rackingly fragile connection to an untried one in the middle of a busy day. It was good of them to offer, and it was useful for getting The Diary published.

We were busy again. Around the same as yesterday but not quite. Once again, I was pinned behind the counter with no hope of filling shelves until much later in the afternoon. I had some success with sun lotion that unsurprisingly had disappeared of the shelf at an alarming rate. At least people are using it. I also managed to put out another couple of boxes of Saturday's delivery, which had sat undisturbed on the store room floor. We are contemplating another order for the coming weekend because things are going rather more rapidly than we expected. The problem is making minimum order and giving sufficient notice for them to organise a driver. We have to decide tonight.

In the middle of the afternoon, a neighbour came by to tell me that the Internet was back up again. Despite assurances that I would be notified, I had nothing from the company to tell me. I had to wait for a break in the traffic to reconnect the card machine to our network. I discovered not long afterwards that the OS was not back online and clearly did not have a contingency plan, which for a company of that size and that reliant on the Internet for bookings and payments, I should have been surprised.

Subsequently, I had a queue of people asking for cash back so that they could pay for meals and drinks. The problem quickly emerged that the prices of both at the OS far exceed our limits. We can do cash back in multiples of £50 but since customers need to purchase something each time, it rapidly becomes an expensive way of getting out cash. I did not hear, but I imagine that their service was restored before the evening anyway.

We had been quiet for about an hour in the later part of the afternoon and then picked up again closing in on teatime. This merged seamlessly with a five minutes to closing rush and a last minute dash by locals on the Harbour beach.

The Missus had run off to Land's End again with her raffle tickets to capture the crowds there for fireworks night. She had left me with ABH who behaved herself very well sitting on her throne in the doorway and being petted by every small child and affected adult that came in or walked by. She is fast assuming the role of shop dog but even she had her limits and was ready to escape as soon as I shut the first electric sliding door in The Cove on the last leaving customer.

I will have an early start again in the morning to top up the drinks fridges and to see if I can also get to the fridge magnets and sunglasses that also are in sore need of some attention. ABH does not even need to try and wake me up early doors as by now she has me very well trained. I will probably need therapy to ease my withdrawal when I no longer need to get up at that time. Something to look forward to.

July 29th – Monday

Let me get this out of the way, then we can get back to some more interesting things, perhaps. Well, as interesting as The Diary get, that is.

I am more convinced than ever that the rearrangement of public bins in The Cove is some ridiculous attempt at money saving by some clueless, educated bleddy eejit at the much maligned council. The bin across the way had not been emptied since Saturday. The one collection yesterday, missed it out, I am now thinking deliberately. Today, we had a specialist team arrive with extra black bags and armed with rubber gloves, to hand pick out the excess, scoop up the detritus from around the bin and shovel it all into an outside plastic bag. It is not much of a saving if they have to send out the big boys every time the bin gets full. Better to empty it more often, surely, at least in hot spot areas.

Just to add to the utter farce of it all, ten minutes after the specialist team left, the ordinary bin lorry came by and went through the motions of emptying the empty bin. I could have wept at the stupidity of it.

Alright, we will pronounce today a proper rip gribbler right from the start. Blue skies with little wispy clouds at high level here and there and blazing sunshine the day long. We began the day with a bit of an easterly breeze and ended it with a waft or two coming from the northwest. We had also lost the waves, although I only recall seeing it at high water when any effect those sandbars would have had been negated.

We were busy, relentlessly so from early on in the morning. I admit I did think it would calm down a bit when I headed off to the gymnasium for my slightly cut down blistering session, but it was still busy when I came back. Much as I need and enjoy going to the gymnasium, I dislike coming back to a busy shop. I am on the back foot for ages after I return and not really in control of what is going on. Much of the day job is anticipation and it is difficult to recover from being in reactive mode. It is almost impossible when there are no breaks at all in the traffic.

After so many years, we have most of what people want but still do not manage to satisfy everyone. Yesterday, a foreign person asked if we had any sausage, by which he meant salami or something of that nature. We do have a Cornish supplier who makes such things but with minimum orders and limited shelf life, we could not

get it regularly enough. It is also very expensive. Another more prosaic request came this morning when a man asked if we had any revels, the chocolate sweets containing a raisin or peanut or some such. We do not stock them, and I could not think of a good reason why we should. Obviously, you cannot have revels without a cause.

It was not until half past six o'clock that I had a proper opportunity to have a geek down on the big beach. I love it as the sun starts to dip away, the light mellows and the colours deepen. It is my favourite time of the day. The crowds had ebbed away with the tide just as a few small waves picked up across the sandbars and the breeze picked up from the northwest, cooling down The Cove. I do not think the surfers could be bothered with the waves and the breeze was probably most welcome to most.

I surveyed the damage on our shelves when at last I could get out from behind the counter. The soft drinks fridge had been largely emptied and most of the beers had gone. There was no opportunity to backfill those as the day progressed, so when they were gone, they were gone. It had taken an hour in the morning to top up the drinks from a much less empty position in the morning and I certainly was not capable of doing it again in the evening. It will be an early start and head down in the morning but it was gratifying to note that at last we had enjoyed a day that had exceeded expectations.

July 28th – Sunday

If I was a man on fire yesterday, I must have still been smouldering overnight because it did not take much effort to reignite me when I came down to the shop first thing. I spent an hour and a half topping up drinks, predominantly. These are a thirsty lot, this week's intake, although it would be fair to point out that it was a local crew who saw away most of the cans of beer yesterday.

Also, very well aware that my paltry order of 140 pasties (sorry, MS) was woefully inadequate for the weekend, I cooked off a further 20 from our frozen stock. I had a deep suspicion that even then that would not be enough. We had started off with sales not long after we opened, and it continued strongly until the early afternoon. We had run out of our cheese and vegetable pasty yesterday because the eejit ordering did not order half enough. We do not keep frozen cheese pasties.

Among our pasty requests during the morning one smart Alec asked for a 'breakfast pasty'. In a feeble attempt to out Alec him, I told him that he was welcome to have his award winning traditional pasty at breakfast, dinner or tea if so he chose. He then went to the lengths of explaining to a daft grumpy shopkeeper that the 'breakfast pasty' had bacon, sausage and beans in it. I told him that he must be making it up as no one would consider making such an abomination of a pasty in Cornwall and that he should not darken my first electric sliding door in The Cove again with such horrors.

Talking of horrors, Basho completely failed to collect The Cove's old domestic bins within the seven days that they themselves had defined. They managed to do it today in the middle of the afternoon. It and the much maligned council have provided three dates for bin collection causing confusion and consternation. They do not seem to be in much control of what is going on and we will not rely on their information again.

It seems we cannot rely upon Basho to empty the public bins anymore, either. The new extra bin across the road from the shop was full at the end of the day yesterday. A hopeful gull was pulling bits out of it this morning when I came down to start on the shop. As the day progressed, people were shoving more into it in the hope that it would suddenly yield some more capacity. I took the step of placing a sign across the front aperture, pointing people at the bin near the Lifeboat station. Undeterred, they used the side apertures instead.

I had thought that I might have been right that having increased the number of bins, the much maligned council were reducing the collections but halfway through the afternoon the bin lorry turned up. The crew serviced the bin by the Lifeboat station, which was good of them then passed by the one opposite the shop. In fairness it had been moved ten feet but there again, it has been emptied before. I still think I am right that the numbers of services have been reduced because we only saw the bin lorry once today. It is usually here at least twice.

In the shop we had marvellous fun with a wide cross-section of customers from around the globe. Sadly, there was not a great deal of time to pursue interesting conversations with them all. Our customers are generally a more relaxed lot than we might expect, say, in the middle of a busy town in the middle of their busy lives. We can afford to be jolly and playful, too where in other circumstances I could probably expect a punch on the nose. It came close a couple of times during the Great Dreaded Lurgi when some of our customers were grumpier than me.

Pasty seeker.: "When will the next lot of pasties come out?"

Grumpy Shopkeeper.: "When the first lot have sold."

Pasty seeker.: "What time is that, then?"

Grumpy Shopkeeper.: "Well, that depends on how many people buy them and how many pasties each person buys. I have an algorithm to calculate it but it takes half an hour to run on this laptop. Do you mind waiting?"

Pasty seeker.: "What time do they arrive in the morning?"

Grumpy Shopkeeper.: "About five minutes after the van gets here."

Pasty seeker.: "What time does the van get here?"

Grumpy Shopkeeper.: [Aware this could go on a bit, tries a different tack] "What's the traffic like tomorrow morning?"

Pasty seeker.: "How do I know that?"

Grumpy Shopkeeper.: "Zackly!"

Of course, no summer Sunday, busiest of the year so far would be complete without a Lifeboat shout to complement it. A yacht had entangled itself in some rope up at the top end of the Traffic Separation System and required some assistance at getting disentangled and out of the big shipping lane. I found myself initially Johnny no mates at the station but was joined by another launcher who just left for home not ten minutes earlier. It is perfectly feasible for one person to launch the boat alone, but two is less effort and quicker.

The boat launched into a perfectly calm and blue sea and raced away to the north. The north end of the TSS is a long way away and if all went normally, the boat would be gone for a couple of hours at least and much longer if a tow was required. What would make it a lot shorter was the tasking being cancelled due to the yacht freeing itself half an hour later. This happened and given only two other people turned up for the shout, left us a tad short handed on the shore side.

I sent out a message asking for immediate muster and waited to see what we had. Our winchman had responded to an earlier message and was close by. He and I set up the long slipway, which I had not done on my own for a while. That cable gets quite heavy by the time you get to the end of the long slipway at low water, especially if it is snagged a bit further up, which it was and I was unaware of. The boat was making its approach when I spotted a couple more crew turning up at the top of the slipway. One of them was despatched down to me, which is just as well. Since I would already be doing something strenuous, waving the green flag, it is best to have someone else do the other strenuous thing, catching the heaving line.

Despite waving a green flag about, it was very clear to me that we had just executed what was in all likelihood, a textbook recovery and we brought the boat up to be washed down and put away until next time. I left the winchman in charge of our side of the fuelling up and made my excuses to return to the shop. I had closed it twice now and was a tad keen not to leave it closed any longer. We are, after all, a very fleeting, very excellent Shore crew.

There was a smaller bunch of adoring followers outside the shop than the previous time I returned. It was disappointing to note that I had gradually become less popular during my second absence. I had left in such a hurry that I had neglected to put up the 'out on a Lifeboat shout' sign in the doorway. This usually absolves my sin of closing when people are desperate for a soft drink or pack of toilet tissue and I do not have to explain multiple times the reason for the closure.

The Cove had become generally quieter by the second return anyway but we still had a crammed five minutes to closing rush that had me open beyond our extended open hours. I also had a long list of orders to make and place with various suppliers for delivery the following morning. It all went to help me forget that I had one pasty, order earlier, left in the oven at closing time. The lady was waiting across the road for it. She had to telephone me in the middle of my tea to remind me she was still there.

Thankfully, she is a very lovely and forgiving person, but I did feel awful for about five minutes.

It was still busy when I took ABH around for our last walk close to nine o'clock. It seemed that a large party was only just commencing on the Harbour beach, so we avoided it as we went around. I also noticed that there are two new cameras on the Harbour pole. The Missus told me that the feed is not working at present, so the two are probably connected. Hopefully, that will come back because I know many people rely on it for a refreshing glimpse of The Cove when they are away.

Glorious evening, though. I would have enjoyed it some more but my bed was not just softly calling, it was yelling aggressively.

July 27th – Saturday

In a rather worrying case of *déjà vu* it rained again this morning. Apparently, it was very isolated because I asked the butcher from St Just who said that it had not rained there. I took it as a personal affront.

We had warm sunshine from early on in the morning. The cash and carry driver and I were basking in it every time we went out for another handful of goodies. He was yet another new acquaintance and I wondered just how many drivers they have. Even though he was a bit later than usual, we managed to get everything in well before we opened, and I had plenty of time to see to the other morning chores as well.

There now only remained the daunting task of clearing the goods on the floor with the store room shelves already bursting. I am almost certain that it would have gone much more smoothly had I not dropped two jars of lasagne sauce on the store room floor. They smashed with spectacular ferocity over the floor, the lip that goes under the shelves, the boxes yet to be cleared and my foot and flip flop.

I am sure that I would have got used to it eventually, but I was not overly comfortable having a flip flop full of pasta sauce. I cleaned it up as best I could with paper roll but had to close the shop for five minutes while I went and stuck my foot and flip flop under the shower. I am also convinced that *Woman's Weekly* would, somewhere in its back catalogue of issues, have had complete detailed instructions and friendly tips on how best to mop up the offending goo. Not having been privy to such useful advice, I laboured on with paper roll until I reasoned that all it was doing was spreading it around.

Putting aside the concern that it would render its use redundant afterwards, I resorted to the dustpan and brush. However, it would be a messy job and breaking off every minute to serve customers would only lead to frustration, so I closed the shop temporarily. The dustpan and brush were indeed more effective and also negated the risk of slicing open my fingers on sharp bits of glass that were scattered randomly in the mire. It did the job for the bulk of it and the sharp glass but left

behind what could only be cleared up with a good mopping. The only alligator in this particular bird's nest soup was that while we have a perfectly serviceable mop and bucket in the shop, we do not have any water.

Given that the nearest water is in the hose at the top of the steps, and I was not really in a position to shut the shop again to go and get it. I decided to wait for a long break in the traffic before going up to fill the bucket. When I eventually got around to it, I discovered that the hose had been dragged through to the back by the builders and I had to scabble around to the back window to retrieve it. It was worth the effort because a bit of mopping later and the floor was serviceable again.

It was a huge distraction and did little to advance the clearing of the cash and carry order, although I had two less lasagne sauces to find room for. We were also sufficiently busy to make any sustained attempt at doing the work impossible. Instead, I picked at it in dribs and drabs but made some modest progress by and by. Ordinarily, I would have cleared much of the pile of beer cases first, but I had used the spare room at the bottom of the beer cupboard to temporarily store stuff that was in the way. I had to clear some room first before I could get it back out again and get the beer in. Even by five o'clock I had not achieved that and we will move to day two and see how we get on. As it turned out, I spared myself some effort. We cleared a case and a half in the progress of the day as I managed to backfill the sales as they went.

The day had developed into something a little more glorious than it presented during the early part of the morning. We ended up with a typical sunny day profile of busy either end of the day and far less in the middle. The far less kept me occupied in fits and starts with enough gaps to gaze down on the widening beach as the last of the spring tides ebb away. The upper part of the beach was a mass of predominantly blue of tents and windbreaks. All the sand appeared to be covered by water users going to and fro and the general milling about of people just having a wander. The sea, with still some useful waves at low water thanks to the many sand bars, was just a mess off wetsuited surfers, body boarders, paddle boarders and slightly less fully clothed general cavorters.

Meanwhile, back on the farm, the Missus found that she was alone on the collection front. She had gone up to sell the raffle tickets and expected some support from the fund raisers but ended up having to set up the gazebo and tables by herself, which did not help the recovery of her dickie shoulder. It also meant that she could not break away from the stand to take ABH to the fun dog show. It must have been a bitter disappointment to have stardom taken so cruelly at such an early stage in her career. I hid all the amphetamines and bottles of vodka around the flat before she came home because we have all seen those sad images of failed Hollywood starlets hitting the skids.

In better news, however, Mother came back with a rosette having won Best in Show.

July 26th – Friday

It was raining just before I took ABH out this morning, which was not expected as the several people who told me it was all going to be wonderful will attest to. It rained some more during the morning, which would have been disappointing had I believed for a second the several people who told me it was going to be wonderful. It did turn out to be sort of wonderful toward the end of the morning with some sunshine and warmth, so that was alright, then.

Despite the shaky start, people seemed to be happy to believe that it was going to be wonderful regardless that it did not look like it was. I think they call that blind faith. By the middle of the afternoon, the beach was doing a fair impression of a proper summer's day with a mass of colourful windbreaks and tents amassed at the head of the beach. They were able to spread out a little more comfortably later as the tide receded.

In the late afternoon, it was difficult to see the water for the number of revellers in it. We are just coming away from spring tides but in the bright sunlight the sandbanks stood out clearly. There is a big one out toward North Rocks that has a ring of water around the back of it, forming a bit of an offshore beach. There was a big crowd of surfers just offshore of it doing whatever they were doing which did not look a great deal like surfing. Never mind, I am sure they were having fun. Later in the tide, there were some very useful waves there and a few surfers who knew that they were about exploiting them.

I was pretty determined to have some fun of my own and took myself down to the gymnasium as soon as I could in the morning. I was a bit nervous about it because we had got busy almost as soon as the doors were open. It is a good indicator when pasties (sorry, MS) are required first thing. As usual, it went in waves, and it calmed down a little before I left. I could not really dispense with another visit as I find a good blistering session is essential to get me through the busyness of summer.

When I returned to run the little girl around the block afterwards, The Cove was teeming with visitors. The Harbour car park was busy and we had to scurry across to avoid the traffic. Happily, it always seems to be quiet along Coastguard Row and we could take our time sniffing at the verges. Well, she did the sniffing and I did the looking.

Mindful that we have our big cash and carry delivery tomorrow, I spent the day clearing the store room floor one bit at a time between customers. I like to keep certain shelves free for certain items so that I know where things are. All that went out of the window and every inch of shelf space was utilised. I was still doing the remaining few bits in the last hour of opening which will give you some idea how long it took. Obviously, I will never find anything ever again.

We had a very expected five minutes to closing rush. Anticipating such a thing, I had pulled in some of the outside display and cleared up the newspapers in advance. I was very aware that everything had to be put away so that I could top up the drinks at the end of the day. I would not be able to do it in the morning as usual because the cash and carry delivery would be in the way. Gosh, the level of dynamic planning is awesome.

There were still plenty of people on the beach when we sat down to tea a little later than usual and we watched as, bit by bit it cleared for the evening. There were no revellers out on the Harbour wall; they had their last night of high jink last night before many left today. The beach was largely clear as well apart from a pasty crust that ABH rooted out. She would turn her nose up at it if we offered one at home but found on the beach it is an illicit delicacy.

Mother and the Missus are off on an all day picnic tomorrow and again on Sunday. They are spending the day at St Buryan Agricultural Show doing collecting for the Grand Raffle. ABH is being entered into the 'Fun Dog Show' in the Earliest Riser and Best Snail Eater categories. She is a dead cert. for first place.

July 25th – Thursday

Well, whoever it was that said it would be rubbish weather today certainly got it right. At least they did for the early part of the morning.

At first, we were enveloped in a closely fitting blanket of this fog. There was damp in it swirling about and a rain jacket was necessary as ABH and I walked down to the dim beach first thing. I do not know if it is the season or the weather, but it has been darker these past few days at that time in the morning.

The first of the rain came just before I headed down to the shop. I had already taken the precaution of putting out the outside display when I took ABH for a spin, so I did not have to tarry too long in the downpour. I had missed the deadline for pasty (sorry, MS) ordering yesterday, which turned out to be a good thing as we hardly sold any yesterday and the ones we have, kept in the fridge are good for a couple of days at least. It also meant that I did not have to prepare and wait for the pasty man arriving and could focus on all the other things that needed doing in the morning.

The lack of pasty order also puts me in mind of the recent increasing and irritating trend of asking if things are 'fresh'. There seems to be some insistence that if the product has not been finished less than five minutes before, it cannot be worth eating. While we occasionally are asked if the pasties are 'fresh' it is most often the bread that people refer to. I have noticed that our foreign visitors are particular culprits and I have been asked several times this week alone if there is a bakery close by.

At first, I simply replied in the negative and not knowing exactly where the nearest bakery might be, politely pointed the enquirer vaguely east. After several such enquiries, I decided to make enquiries of my own since we have, especially in the peak season, fresh bread on our own shelves. This bread, baked the previous night and delivered each day, apparently does not pass muster, so I asked what sort of bread the enquirer was after. Despite asking several different people the same question, not one could give me a straight answer about the type of bread required. I can only assume that it does not matter provided that it has been baked a few minutes prior to being purchased. I now point them east and wish them good luck in finding one.

It took until the middle of the day before we started seeing some proper action. The rain had cleared up some time before, but the fog did not start lifting until gone one o'clock. It was still clinging to the tops of the cliffs and stopping all flights to the Islands but we could see across to Gwenver and the little dots of surfers scattered across the bay. It also revealed that the little rowing boat that had arrived yesterday afternoon had gone, too.

One of the builders brought my attention to the strange looking craft on the moorings out in the bay yesterday. I checked it through the binoculars and discovered it to be one of those transatlantic rowing boats. I seem to recall that only one company make these boats and are probably laughing all the way to the bank. The rowers in this particular case were the Wick Lifeboat Coxswain and his paramedic wife. They were doing a round Britain row raising money for the RNLI and the Scottish Air Ambulance.

I do not know how these things work, but if I imagine these things cost quite a bit to put on. I know that sponsors usually shell out for such costs, but it strikes me that money might be better added to the charity pot. I can understand that the very first transatlantic row, for example, would have raised a lot of interest and money because it would have been national news. These days, transatlantic and round Britain rows are two a penny and not particularly newsworthy; I had to go looking for this effort online. Not wishing to belittle the efforts of the people that do these things, it is doubtless highly commendable, I just wonder at the efficiency of these ventures as a tool for raising money.

A tool for raising money would be most useful just now. The appalling weather during the morning had the street empty. We saw some improvements during the first part of the afternoon, but it dropped off steeply in the latter part. The Lifeboat launch in the evening brought a fair few down to watch but we were closed by then.

At least those who were here are spoiled for choice where they deposit their waste. I have already explained that we were provided with an unexpected second bin at our end of The Cove. Now I understand that the other bins down the street have been doubled up, too. The much maligned council originally installed smaller bins to discourage too much waste disposal but it now looks like they changed their mind. I

was not particularly aware that there was a problem. Unless they intend to reduce the number of collections a day, the action looks like it might increase costs when the much maligned council is claiming poverty. I cannot imagine that Basho signed up to a contract that included unlimited bin emptying.

The Missus is going all out on the sale of the Grand Raffle tickets. She helped organise an attendance at Land's End fireworks display in the evening with an old rowing Lifeboat as an attraction. The Institution has provided some portable payment card machines, so at least when we attend outside events, they can take card payment as well as cash. She was still there long after I had gone to bed.

This also meant that I was unavailable to attend Lifeboat training in the evening and I handed over the reins of launch and recovery to my colleagues. This will continue to be the case for the rest of the summer as the shop hours extend from Saturday. This evening, though, I stayed home to look after ABH.

I watched the launch from afar and spoke with our crew when I took ABH for a spin. The Missus said that both boats made a bit of a spectacle in front of the crowd at Land's End that triggered a spate of donations, thank you very much. On shore, they had more than enough people for the recovery of both boats, and I have every confidence in their abilities and can patronise as much as I want since none of them read The Diary. Although, it is quite possible that some of them can read, I am led to believe. I missed the recovery, largely because it was on the short slip, and I cannot see that from our window. I am told, however that it was at least a very close approximation if not actually a textbook recovery at shortly after eight o'clock. We are, after all, a very supportive, very excellent Shore Crew.

July 24th – Wednesday

One thing about being a grumpy shopkeeper is you get to hear a few life stories now and again. Sometimes you wish you had not but on this morning's occasion, a meeting with a lady who sported an Australian accent, it was a pleasure. She had been born in Mousehole and the gone to live at Cape Cornwall. Father was in the Merchant service and provisioned lighthouses and remote islands around the country. He then changed jobs and worked for English Electric and she found herself whisked off top Thailand for a bit then then Queensland, Australia.

She was now approaching retirement and had decided to visit her old home. It sounded like she had enjoyed her trip down memory lane enormously and was in The Cove on the penultimate day of her holiday. It was then back to the sugar beet farm she owned, which sounded like it could be another tale altogether.

The little girl had got me up early again, so I decided to capitalise on that and head to the shop as soon as I could. Cancelling the gymnasium again, I set my sights on clearing the sweets and the hooded sweatshirts today and almost succeeded. I thought I could at least get ahead with the sweets before the shop opened. Instead, I

was still topping up the drinks fridge when I had to break off to take ABH around again.

The morning was not tremendously busy. No one was inspired by the cloudy skies and robust breeze and the buses on strike again were not bringing any trippers down. It allowed me sufficient time to clear the sweets but left me with the problem of what to do with the overstock of around ten boxes. The store room shelves are pretty well crammed already and frankly I did not have time to sort it out.

I still had four boxes of hooded sweatshirts to label and put away. Really, I did not stand a chance but that did not stop me from trying. I managed to empty one box but, while we were still not busy, there was sufficient flow of customers to make the going pretty tough. Racing to my aid, at least a couple of hours earlier than any of the Radio Pasty or online warnings, was a gale of rain that swept in from the west. It turned off the flow of customers almost instantly.

I thought that it might have solved the issue of having enough time to do the sweatshirts, but it did not really. There were still a few customers risking a run out, many of those were parents who suddenly discovered that they were without indoor amusements for their small children. In fits and starts we sold crayons, colouring books, pencils and toys. We also sold umbrellas and rain ponchos, presumably for children who had become fed up with drawing and colouring and were being dragged out in the rain regardless. So, not all was lost, just my free run at getting the sweatshirts finished. It was probably as well. I had exhausted my enthusiasm toward the end of the afternoon, which was a shame after such a bullish start.

The rain was relentless and even our hardy builders gave up. They were doing some cement work that does not go well with continuous rain. The good news in that regard is that the skip has gone and the compound opposite the shop cleared up. Any further building rubbish will be bagged and taken away by truck. Unfortunately, in lifting the skip, it swung back and bent the brand new railings behind it. With the help of our man from Zack's Garage at the top, it was fixed today and you would never know apart from it being a bit shinier than the rest.

As predicted, the new bin was moved yesterday evening and now sits opposite the shop. Hopefully, it does not need a sign on our side of the road but the signage we have on our bins does divert the unobservant. I noticed some lady dog walkers sitting on the benches next to the bin having a smoke. ABH swung by on our way back from the walk for a nose there. Despite sitting right next to the bin, they dropped their dogends on the ground. I had thought that having a bin less than 10 metres away from our own would save us. Apparently not.

The rain continued into the evening as various thicknesses of mizzle. ABH and I were lucky on both our walks that it was barely noticeable. Perhaps I have evolved in the continuous wet of this year and grown a waterproof layer of skin and just did not notice it. Several people delighted in telling me that there was more of it

tomorrow. They also said that after that, it would be great weather again. Now where have I heard that before. Ah, yes, just every week since Easter, I think.

July 23rd – Tuesday

Well, I do not know what to say. One week we are lost for public waste bins at our end of The Cove then a new one turns up out of the blue, which was most appreciated. It was smaller than the last one, but since it its emptied roughly twice a day, it was adequate. Today, another arrived and was sited opposite the ice cream kiosk, which might cause a bit of consternation as they use that space for parking.

It is a topsy turvey world. We were expecting bins to be taken away this week and instead we get one delivered. Whatever will happen next.

My guess is that there was already a process in train to replace the original bin through the Replacement Bin Department at the much maligned council. When the bin went missing and several people complained, it was more than likely the Bin Complaints and Repair Department at the much maligned council who stepped in. Clearly, the functions are so dissimilar that there is no earthly reason why there should be lines of communication between them.

It remains to be seen, a) how long Basho will continue to empty two bins 15 metres apart, b) the people at the ice cream kiosk move it out of their parking space and along next to the other one and c) how many people continue to follow the sign on the front of our bins directing them at the furthest before they realise there is one closer. I am obviously very grateful to the much maligned council for a four paragraph gift this morning. I would write to tell them, but I have no idea which department I would address it to.

I am also very grateful for the sun working its socks off this morning to bring us some gloriousness and warmth. It was fighting an uphill battle with a robust northwesterly but was holding its own for much of the day. It did look a bit dark out to the west first thing but it amounted to nothing at all, which was a good outcome. Clearly, it was tiresome task and it went home early in the middle of the afternoon.

It was not long into the morning before the sun did its job and lured people to the beach. Happily, they detoured into the shop, and we started to see some serious beach shopping for the first time since the last sunny day, whenever that was. As is always the case when the good days are few and far between, a sunny day brings a bumper harvest of eager beach goers. Today was no exception, and we were busy through to the middle of the day. I suspect we would have been busier had the buses not been on strike.

As is usual, business went slack in the early afternoon as everyone had gathered their beach needs and settled down there for the day. It was a significant improvement on the other beach days that we have had. The camps at the head of

the beach were spread two deep against the rocks and dunes. The sea that had looked quite rough during the morning high tide, had moderated but still with waves, was full of little figures surfing, paddleboarding and paddling in various places from North Rocks to the sand bar. I would wager there was probable more than one hundred water users.

We had a grocery delivery in the later morning. The quiet period gave me an opportunity to get whatever I could out on the shelves and the rest salted away in the store room. There were still cases of drink littering the floor, but I will get to those tomorrow morning. With still time on my hands, sort of, I migrated onto the surf jewellery I abandoned yesterday, or was it the day before. It is taking longer than usual because I am setting up barcode reading for each item so that the Missus, who only covers when I go to the gymnasium or occasionally other times, can read the prices. Unfortunately, the labels do not support a price label. The rest will have to be done on a piecemeal basis, which should not be too much of a problem unless we start shifting what is out more quickly.

I had to quickly put everything away when, at five o'clock or a little later, we started an extended five minutes to closing rush. It would have been helpful if the tide had pushed everyone off the beach an hour earlier because I was still going strong at closing time. It was proper busy, too, queues at the counter and that sort of thing. There were all the usual shenanigans of last minute shopping, like not knowing who wanted what and holding up the queue at the counter while deciding, leaving half the shopping in a pile at the counter and going off to shop for more and leaving finding purses and wallets, buried in the bottom of bags, while a queue of people wait behind them.

The only thing not selling in that terrible melee was pasties (sorry, MS). Yesterday it was touch and go whether we had enough, so I ordered more for today and sold no more than ten all day. The order is already placed for more tomorrow so we will have to do some careful management for the day after.

Then, just in the last hour, with confusion all around, the delivery of hooded sweatshirts arrived in four large boxes. Alongside them, the small sweet bags in three slightly smaller boxes came too. Somehow, I managed to clear enough of the store room to drag the boxes out there and out of the way of bringing in the shop display. I will have to make an early start on them tomorrow if I am to clear the store room ahead of the weekend's delivery.

And so it starts. A blistering six weeks of mayhem.

July 22nd – Monday

As days go, today was definitely one of them. There was certainly nothing especial about it, grey and overcast but possibly a little warmer than yesterday. Unless someone knows differently, there was very little to commend it. Let us look on the

bright side, though. At least there was a day, which was a comfort, but the fact that it was hardly likely to foster a stampede of customers, was not.

It was still quiet when I headed to the gymnasium for the first time in a week. The absence does take its toll as does successive five o'clock starts so it was not surprise that I cut short my 5,000 metre row short of 1,000 metres to go. A man must know his limitations, as Mr Callahan told us and if I did not know it, my body was going to step in to tell me. I managed the rest and dragged myself back home in time to take ABH around the block.

We would have headed down to the Harbour beach but there was a big digger down there, digging. The Harbour Commission must be flush this year because not only have they refurbished the public conveniences in the car park and are plugging the hole in the sea wall, but they have decided to fix the western slip as well.

I think that it was ages ago that I mentioned that the western side at the bottom of the western slipway is missing a few blocks. It is only noticeable when the sand has been scoured away and currently there is plenty of sand there. It is odd that they did not wait for neap tides because the tide would not reach up that high. However, when I looked down there near the middle of the day the digger had extracted a monster boulder that must have been lying under the corner there. Why the Commission has chosen to do it now is a mystery as the damaged has been there for years. I do not know if any major repairs have been done before but it was built just over 100 years ago, so it had done pretty well. There again, it was built by the people that built lighthouses, so they probably knew a thing or two about building slipways as well.

Business did not pick up until I started my breakfast, at which point we had a reasonably regular flow of customers keeping me from the remnants of my aromatic duck. I manfully struggled on, or at least did not weep in public. There was a surprising number of public to weep in front of if so I chose. It appeared to be a milling around sort of day. A day when they were not sure whether to go and do something else or stay in case the weather improved, which would have been a mistake.

In the middle of the afternoon, the mizzle came in quite heavily and those brave enough to still be around, came into the shop dripping. It did not exactly grease the wheels of industry and busyness. If not coming to a complete grinding halt, did its best to emulate it.

Irritatingly, our hooded sweatshirts were due to be delivered today but not until the evening. I could have had them all done and put away by close of play had they arrived at the normal delivery time of two o'clock or thereabouts. Instead, I had to come down in the middle of my tea to unload the truck and put the boxes out of the way of the morning works. As it happened, I did not come down in the middle of my tea as I was walking ABH around when Doing Parcels Dreadfully arrived. Apparently,

they saw that the shop was shut and did not even bother to knock, they just drove off. It seems daft to schedule what is clearly a commercial delivery outside normal business hours but I did have to apply a certain level of common sense before I arrived at that conclusion.

It may be that we have even fewer customers tomorrow. I took the opportunity to quiz one of the First Bus drivers who came in for snacks about the rumoured strike. It is true and will affect the Land's End Coaster bus on Tuesday and Wednesday, I believe.

The mizzle had cleared out by the time I took ABH around before tea. Summer, though, it was not, with a bit of a breeze blowing and damp in the air. The sun made a valiant attempt to break through the cloud to give a hint at a sunset going on behind it, which delighted one couple at the end of the Harbour car park. Let us see if it can delight a few more tomorrow.

July 21st – Sunday

It was a glorious morning, roughly translated as it was overcast and grey but at least it was not raining – yet. It was therefore a pleasant surprise to see some blue sky and sunshine develop during the afternoon. It did not last long, but it was nice to see it try.

It did not seem to make much difference to the shape of customer activity. We had seen a few coming through during the morning and one or two beach buys for children. This was reflected, too, in the poor showing of camps on the beach. During the middle of the day, we became irritatingly quiet, so much so that I was able to do most of our grocery order that I decided to start now rather than wait for Wednesday when we might be busier.

The order is a particularly difficult one as it will lead into the first two weeks of the main school holidays. We should expect to be much busier then and ordinarily would have placed an order accordingly. This year I would not like to second guess if the usual step change happens, unfortunately though, I am going to have to. We do not have to post the order until Wednesday, so I will review it then after a few days thinking about it.

Much of the day was quiet but with moments of busyness that were most welcome. It was not until much later in the afternoon that things changed a bit. It was kicked off by an order for a gluten free pasty. I had received a text message in advance, so knew it was coming. Usually, we order one at a time, but this becomes problematic if the order is placed at the start of the weekend or after the ordering deadline. This time I decided to get a small case of frozen ones so at least we could offer a more timely service.

It should simply have been a case of slipping one into the oven for 45 minutes on the arrival of the text message, but the text message seemed to trigger a deluge of customers arriving at the shop at the same time with more behind them. Not only did they want to buy gifts and groceries, they also wanted pasties. I had some in the warmer but the stock was fast dwindling. More needed to go into the oven but I could not get there because there were customers waiting to be served.

The second problem I had, when I eventually capitalised on a small break in the traffic, was that the frozen gluten free pasty and the pre-cooked and chilled Cornish pasties needed to be heated at different temperatures. Also, because the two were sharing an oven, the gluten free pasty would need to be cooked in its cellophane wrapper, which it was designed for but leaves the pasty unbrowned. I decided the chilled pasties would not suffer greatly at the higher temperature provided I kept an eye on the time they were in. Naturally, I did not, but they were not too badly burnt.

We were busy for an hour or so, which was much needed but the shower of rain that ended it was not. A line of heavy mizzle had materialised out of nowhere. It was gone inside twenty minutes but the damage was done.

I had also been knee deep in surf jewellery when the rush occurred. I had not expected the delivery to come on a Sunday, but the company prides itself on timely deliveries. I managed to get a couple of items out and put them to one side with the intention of continuing when the rush died down. Since it went on for a bit, I postponed the jewellery until a quieter time – perhaps September.

Another text message came through at about the same time as the one about the gluten free pasty. The second was from Basho, the much maligned council's contractor for waste mismanagement. I sometimes cannot help thinking that the two entities deserve each other. Anyway, the message informed me that our old wheelie bin would be collected sometime in the next seven days. This is the collection that was originally pencilled in for mid August which is suddenly happening at the end of July instead. Of course, this will be entirely coincidental that it comes hot on the heels of a somewhat critical article in a national newspaper that made a bit of a laughing stock of the much maligned council's organisational skills.

The message also stipulated that the bins had to be empty, which is exceedingly optimistic. Our bin sits out the front anyway but those further back, like the mews behind us, will have to leave their old bins on the street for up to seven days. We used to keep a lock on our old bin, and do for the new one, too, but even then, the inventive eejits amongst the Great British public managed to squeeze litter through the tiniest of gaps. I was going to add 'lazy' before eejits but I would suggest that trying to prise open the locked bin lid would have required more effort than walking the twenty metres to the public bin.

The forecast had suggested low cloud during the latter part of the afternoon and into the evening, which is probably why the sun broke out at half past four o'clock. It

stayed through into the evening for a bit and drove a bit of business up until the time we closed. Naturally, it clouded over again by the time it came around to taking ABH out for a spin and threw a bit of rain at us as well. This summer just keeps on giving.

July 20th – Saturday

The Diary's highly paid – not by me, obviously – press monitor sent me a cutting from one of the national newspapers this morning, The article highlights the much maligned council's mishandling of the transition to the new waste collection system. It specifically mentions the fiasco of not fulfilling a timely collection of the old wheelie bins.

The much maligned council originally said that these would be collected one week after the new service came into force on 1st July. Two weeks after they should have been collected, we got a message telling us that they would not be collected for a further month. Here, we had taken the precaution of tying down the bin lid to prevent its use but many people, who perhaps live in more residential areas did not bother for such a short period of time. Consequently, their bins have been used for public litter and by passing dog walkers. Arguable, this has been a public service, saving the users from having to throw their litter on the ground or hang their bags in the nearest bush which they otherwise seem to find necessary.

It will be interesting to see how the much maligned council resolves this. I have a sneaking suspicion that since the collection will be carried out by Basho, its chosen contractor, they may well refuse to take the bins that are full, leaving it to the householder to sort out. Since I have nothing better to do at present, it will be quite entertaining watching it all unfold.

While on the topic of disasters, I am pleased to report that not one single issue has been reported to me regarding the big computer meltdown. The whole thing seems to have avoided our little corner of the Far West, chiefly, I imagine, because so has technology. Our till, for example, is so old that the last upgrade it had was when it was converted to electricity. I confess that I do still sometimes miss the smell of the old coal-fired boiler.

Just before we leave today's Diary's catastrophe corner, I will repeat the rumour, from a knowledgeable source, that there will be a bus strike next week. The drivers need to be careful, I would venture. Given the number of breakdowns, cancellations and the parlous state of the timetable this year, I am wondering if anyone will notice.

There is an instruction in the margin of my notes that says, 'insert good news here', and thankfully we have some that came to me as I was serving a precious and rare customer. I heard a whoop coming from the direction of the beach and I was minded to have a geek after my customer had left. Just visible through the mist, from Gwenver to the middle of the big beach where the sand bar stretches out, waves were rolling into the sand. There were at least 40 would be surfers on the sand bar

and between there and North Rocks at least a dozen of the more experienced surfers. The waves melted away towards high water but for a precious few hours, all was well in The Cove – for the surfers, anyway.

Now that we have put the good news out of the way, I can tell you that the weather today was pants. I had managed to get ABH around the block first thing just before the proper rain came in. It was just starting as we mounted the steps to our front door after getting the shop display out. The rain then started and carried on in varying intensities all the way through the morning and, in the afternoon, rained every now and then just to remind us all that today's weather was, indeed, pants.

We suffered a very quiet morning. I had omitted to put any pasties (sorry, MS) out until half past eleven o'clock and had not inconvenienced anyone. In the late morning the weather had started to improve a little and we started seeing customers for newspapers, snacks and a few morning goods. There was not much in the way of deliveries to process, so I carried on topping up shelves. I do not think that at this stage in the season, the shelves have been more closely maintained. After I finished with the groceries, I moved onto the sunglasses, which did not take very long but they have sold well in the last few weeks since I did it last.

I also changed the bus timetable on the website for publication tomorrow. The buses go to hourly from, erm, Monday but for some reason the Sunday service remains in low season regularity of two hourly. It is not before time, as we heard people were being turned off services earlier in the week and we need all the help we can get bringing visitors to The Cove.

I would have done more shelf filling but near the end of the afternoon, we started to see some customers come and go. They were mostly fresh faces, so I made the assumption that some arrivals had taken place. After four o'clock, I was sure of it as I started recognising regular visitors arriving, which is always a pleasure. Like reviving old acquaintances. With all these arrivals, things were beginning to look up until a heavy downpour close to half past four cleared the street.

It seems that the downpour was merely a prelude to a sustained flooding a little later that coincided with the bringing in of the display from outside. So, thank you for that. I had no choice but to seek out The Bonzo Dog Doo-Dah Band and their wonderful rendition of Canyons of Your Mind. It is a love song, of course, and contains such lyrics as,

*In the canyons of your mind
I will wander through your brain
To the ventricles of your heart, my dear
I'm in love with you again*

*'Cross the mountains of your chest
I will sticker Union Jacks*

*To the forest of your cheek
Through the holes in your string vest.*

Tugs at the old heart strings, does it not.

Much heartened by such amusement, I took ABH out once more after tea. I went to the trouble of checking the rain radar to make sure that the rain had gone, which it had. What the rain radar does not show is the presence of mizzle and while it was lightly damp when we left the front door, it came in with a vengeance when we were down on the beach. We continued around the block because we were wet by then. Just the perfect end to the less than perfect day.

July 19th – Friday

Before I proceed too far down the path of the events of the day, I should point out the caveat that some or all of today's Diary may be spurious falsehoods or desperate truths or neither or both. It is all down to some cyber security company that scored a massive own goal by bringing the world to its knees without a single intervention by a aggressive foreign power. I pity the trousers of the poor programmer who pressed the send button on a piece of poorly tested code.

The honeymoon is over with the Laurel and Hardy Newspaper Company's recycling service and the rot has started to set in. Neither the bag of plastic I filled or the big box of cardboard were collected this morning. Our driver had turned up in his small van and presumably decided that he did not have enough room for both newspapers and recycling and left it. It is exceedingly irritating when I already have a crowded store room to contend with. What makes it even worse is our driver is an amiable and happy soul and it would make me look, and probably feel, like a Victorian melodrama villain to raise a complaint. I will just have to suffer until he brings his bigger van.

The much lauded heatwave that I had been bashed around the head with for the last couple of days, came to an abrupt end today. Defenders might say that it was still very warm, which it was, but the sunshine that usually goes with the generally accepted expectation of heatwaves was notably absent. In fact, the brightly overcast sky of the early part of the morning, finely tuned its tactics and by the afternoon had developed into a mist that hung about at the top of the cliffs. It went further by half past three and turned into mizzle.

We could argue all day whether it was the weather or it being a change-over day that caused all our customers to run away. It did not matter very much as the result was much the same and after being buoyed up with enthusiasm yesterday, we were cut down again today. I cannot remember who it was, but someone told me optimistically that at least we would have better waves today. There did not. In fact, it was even more still than yesterday and who thought that would ever be possible.

Unlike other slack times, I was not idle. Quite the contrary, I was most industrious, mainly because I could not take the boredom any longer. I finished off my jewellery order and embarked on a mission to clear the store room floor, which I did not quite achieve but one can dream, I am told. The latter has only taken a week but all that remains are an accidental over-stock of refuse sacks and a proliferation of pringles – the crisps, not the expensive golfing jumpers. I had ordered an excess of these after noticing quite a few being bought by the youngsters about the place. Of course, having acquired the stock, the youngsters switched allegiance to other crispy products that we are now running out of.

The Missus spent most of the day gadding about. There was some purpose to it: collecting raffle prizes from various benefactors across West Penwith. She returned late in the day brandishing four heavy bags of shopping, which I was hoping were raffle prizes but turned out to be things that we had to pay for. Lucky for me I had plenty of time to heave the bags up our stairs to the flat. How she had managed to load them into the truck in the first place with her dickie arm will remain a mystery.

If I thought that it had been quiet during the day, I should have waited until after half past four o'clock when the view down Cove Road would have made the wardroom on the Marie Celeste look busy. We had a slew of busyness around half an hour earlier, which I discovered a little while later was our premature five minutes to closing rush. After that were a few farewells of long time visitors leaving again for another year.

We were able to gaze out on a slightly clearer bay as we had our fish tea with Mother. There was at least one or two people wandering about and some young lads catching and releasing a few smaller fish off the Harbour wall. Even with a softer swell there is usually a few desperate surfers bobbing about but even those have given up in these still waters. It cannot have affected our visitor in the neighbouring holiday let too much because he did not look as deflated as the pump up paddle board he was packing away for the journey home.

The mizzle had eased a bit as I took ABH around in the evening and the damp in the air was quite welcome in the humidity that came with the cloud. She was not at all sure of the pugs she met on the beach and since they did not want to run around and play chase, she lost interest very quickly.

Last knockings, I put another box of cardboard in our box for the newspaper man. I hope he takes the hint that there will be another tomorrow if he does not take those in the morning. I twiddled my wax moustache and threw my black cape over my shoulder as I did it, too.

July 18th – Thursday

Today was glorious from the outset and a pretty good approximation of a proper rib gribbler if ever I saw one. The skies were blue from cliff top almost to the horizon

save for a few high clouds in the northwest where a slight breeze was wafting in from. It was the sort of day when coming down the hill, but for a few palm trees, you could be forgiven for thinking you were arriving at some Caribbean resort with its azure sea, flat as a dish. As pretty as it looked, all was not a bed of roses in our particular flower garden; there were a few sharp thorns awaiting our day.

I was just breathing a sigh of relief that our deliveries were fewer today and better spaced out. The fruit and vegetables still needed to be priced but all else was spirited away in timely good order. It was still early when the alarm man arrived, which turned out to be handy as it was still relatively quiet. What was not so handy was after being here for ten minutes he explained that the wiring that the boys had done was all wrong. Instead of wiring back to the main panel, all the wire had been taken back to the keypad upstairs.

Now, it quickly transpired that this was the man that we had needed to talk with on the telephone when we were establishing how the wiring needed to be done. The Highly Professional Craftsperson had spoken with someone over the telephone three times to make sure that we had the instructions straight. I too had spoken to someone at the alarm company as well because it did not seem to make sense to me that the wires should go to what I thought was the slave panel, the keypad upstairs. Downstairs is a big panel, the one I took to be the master, but like The Highly Professional Craftsperson, I was told that was not the case and the wires needed to go upstairs. Upstairs, they went.

We were fortunate that the engineer who turned up knew what he was about. Between us we batted some ideas around, what was important and what could be left out. After half an hour and a couple of ideas that were non-starters, he came up with a plan that would give us full cover in the shop and sufficient cover in the flat. What had saved the day was that the Highly Professional Craftsperson had installed an extra wire just in case we needed one going to the sounder. We ended up with a fit for purpose solution with a few redundant wires here and there in the flat.

We entered the familiar pattern of a hot beach day: we are busy at either end of the day with nothing in the middle. Having complained about the lack of good weather for the last three months, it seems churlish to say that we now had the wrong sort of sunshine, so I will keep my mouth shut. The lull in proceedings allowed me to get to grips with the solar company for laying cables across our skylights. I was asked when, ideally, we would like to see someone come and resolve the issue, so I told our man, yesterday. He did the next best thing and arranged to someone to come in just over an hour from when I made the call. They duly attended and inserted an extension into the cable that allowed it to be rerouted around the openings. It took less than fifteen minutes, and they were gone.

There were enough customers every now and then to make doing anything constructive impossible. I still have a jewellery order to place but it takes quite a bit of time and concentration, and I did not have enough of either to even make a start on

the task. I must have done something to fill the time between customers, but it cannot have been very productive as I had nothing to show for it. By the end of the afternoon, I was on my knees in the soporific heat of the shop even with our smart fan blowing.

I knew that it was hot in the shop because when I was disturbed by a pop and a clatter of something hitting the ceiling, then the floor in the store room. While bagging and weighing the carrots that I had left until the afternoon to pack, one of the corks on a bottle of posh hand sanitiser that had been on the top shelf for a couple of years, popped off. It was a bit of a mystery to start with until I found the stopper and guessed what had happened. I suppose I should be grateful that the bottle did not go bang instead.

I was also grateful that the Missus headed out into the world today despite her crook arm. She went off to collect Mother and they came back with a bag of pennies. I had run out of pennies the day before and had already raided the counter collection, which rendered slim pickings anyway, the Missus having not long cleared it out already. I came to dread change for a customer ending in a one or three as each extra penny I was forced to give out as change was like a stab to the heart. It was with much relief that she returned bearing several bags of copper to end my misery.

There was a five minutes to closing rush today. Of course there was, as there was a Lifeboat launch planned for seven o'clock and I was rushing to make the muster time. I was late getting upstairs for a bit of rushed tea and when I got to the station, everyone was already gearing up for launching. To my chagrin, someone had mistakenly put on my kit which left me scrabbling around for spare, which I could not immediately find. There were more than sufficient numbers to cover all the tasks, so I retired gracefully to go and sit with ex-Head Launcher and discuss his ancientness being as it was his birthday.

I tarried for some while, watching as the Missus left to take Mother home and then after a time, retired again to go and do the jewellery order. I do not like doing shop things after the shop closes as I only have an hour or so between tea and bed and it is precious. However, it was clear that the jewellery order would not get done else, so I capitulated and sat for most of the hour picking bracelets and anklets as if I knew the desires and fancies of the young ladies who, in the main, would buy them.

There was still a moment to watch as the Lifeboat returned, cutting through the still waters of the bay. A little figure – it is not his fault he is short – and his mate at the end of the long slipway executed what was clearly a textbook recovery. I did not see the Inshore boat recovered but all was peaceful when I took ABH around last thing for a spin. We are, after all, a very well-distributed, very excellent Shore Crew.

It was a weary grumpy shopkeeper who hit the sack shortly afterwards and it only the threshold of the mad six weeks. I am going to have to man up and gird a loin or two, for sure.

July 17th – Wednesday

It was the sort of day to feel good about. That sun was shining from the very outset of the day although the warmth that was to permeate even into the shop, took a little while to gather itself. It was pleasantly chilled walking ABH around the block in the morning a fact that was better appreciated later in the heat of the day.

The feeling good lasted until about five minutes into opening the shop when the frozen order arrived first thing followed closely by the fresh vegetables. The milkman must have come while I was topping up the drinks or doing the newspapers because I found that in the box outside when the customer who has ordered some specific bottles of milk asked where they were. I was then distracted because the customer order was missing, and I had to telephone to get the driver back. I managed to get our part of the in order into the fridge around serving customers at which point, the pasty delivery (sorry, MS) arrived. I had not completed the frozen delivery, but the pasties need to be shipped out of their trays while the driver waits as we have no room to keep them. It was at some point during this melee that the builder came to tell me that the solar guys had run cables across the sky light openings in the roof and they needed to come back and reroute them. The builder, seeing my plight, very kindly offered to sort that with the solar people himself.

The mayhem lasted about an hour and a half but seemed much longer. There had been a bit of an initial rush during that period, but it calmed down sufficiently for me to cram a breakfast in. I was not idle even then and managed to price and weigh the greengrocery delivery and get it into the fridge. We were busy again for a while through until the middle of the afternoon when things slackened off almost completely. That happened after yet another delivery, this time of postcard fudge boxes that required some rearrangement of the store room shelves to crowbar it in.

The flow of business appeared to follow the availability of sunshine which had been abundant in the morning but by the afternoon the skies had largely clouded over. It was still a pleasant enough day and one of the warmest that we have had in a while. It was definitely warm in the shop from late morning, and I had to use the fan behind the counter to keep me cool and the fan at the back of the shop to keep the fridges and freezers from overheating as well.

I would say that the weather had not attracted the numbers of yesterday to the beach and in the shop, it was considerably down on yesterday despite some notable single purchases including, oddly, hooded sweatshirts. There was once again an absence of surf that had the surf schools spitting feathers, no doubt, and kept all the surfers in their rooms watching YouTube videos of other people surfing in places that had waves.

It is very easy to keep tabs on the headline goods in the shop, such as the hooded sweatshirts and the gifts. Alright, it is not always that easy and I often miss things

than we have needed to reorder. What is really easy to ignore is the mundane stuff sitting on the grocery shelves and before I know it our very kind neighbour is pointing out that I only have one of something or other left or there is a chopped tomato tin shaped hole next to the tins of plum tomatoes.

With this in mind, I spent some time in the quiet of the afternoon topping up the shelves down the food aisle. Surprisingly little had gone, although there were some noticeable absences, and we will be placing an order ahead, or possibly in the middle of, the main drive the week after next.

The shift in busyness at present I am putting down to the weather. There are children about which I assume to be from Scottish schools in the main. The bus timetable changes to hourly – except annoyingly on Sundays – at the weekend, which is apparently too late for some. I have reports of people already being turned away at bus stops because the bus is full. This year's timetable really is a complete pig's ear and that is being very unkind to pigs.

It was busy enough and pleasant enough in the evening for us not to have the beach to ourselves when the Missus and I ventured down after tea with ABH. She has to go and meet everyone, which is tolerable for them and us usually but when the other party want to play a bat and ball game, she will not leave them alone. I had to put her on the lead, which is not ideal on a big wide beach, and eventually take her around the block. She could not get around fast enough so she could be reunited with the Missus who we left on the beach. In the end, I took her home where she pined – roughly translated as doing everything she could to irritate – until the Missus came home too.

The Missus was late coming to bed because she forgot to place the order for those little sweet packets that are so popular in the shop. That is another delivery I shall look forward to and one that is quite time consuming to deal with. What you might call, sweet joy.

July 16th – Tuesday

The tide jumped today, and the big beach was swallowed up with sea for the main part of the day. It might have been this that made it look that way but the camps at the top of the beach looked bigger than the day before and certainly larger than we had seen for a while.

It was not one of the best beach days ever but given what had been thrown at us so far this year, it would do very nicely for that purpose, thank you. The cloud that had alternately made The Cove a bit dull, a bit hazy and occasionally bright, thinned throughout the day but then came back again. Happily, it was reasonably warm despite a bit of breeze that was heading slightly north of west but sadly, once again, for the surfers there was no surf.

Anyway, blow all that, we were busy enough. It took a while for things to get started but I imagine we had to wait for trippers to arrive from far and wide. The transition is hardly noticeable, but we have gone from mainly walkers to mainly beach users over the last week or so. This was manifested by the wealth of sandwiches we have left from the last delivery. It is only a theory, but I believe most of the sandwich sales go to the walkers starting off for the day. We had been selling out over the last few weeks and I had already increased the numbers once. I had intended to do so again this week but when I went to put the new delivery in the fridge this morning, nearly all the last delivery were still there. If you had ever wondered what pointless drivel fills the mind of a grumpy shopkeeper in the dull moments between customers, now you know.

One thing that I have no theory about is the desire to purchase greetings cards for specific events. Nearly all of our cards are blank on the basis that it can be purchased for any event rather than just a birthday, christening or shuffling off. I always suggest to customers that they can write on or in the card expressing the event required. I simply do not understand why the event has to be printed. The select few people, alright, probably not that many, who receive a birthday card from me get one of our blank cards with 'Happy Birthday' in it. Do they have a hissy fit because it was written and not printed. I have no idea.

A lady asked today if perhaps we had a card saying, 'congratulations on passing your degree', which on the face of it was the most specific of greetings card that we had been asked for yet. I did suggest that she might struggle with finding such a card, particularly west of Penzance and that writing the message, I was sure, would be equally well received but she looked doubtful. Clearly, I am missing a trick. I immediately placed greeting cards orders for 'congratulations on getting your degree in ethical hacking' and another for degree in folklore. My future card sales are assured.

(Just in case you were wondering, Ethical Hacking and Folklore are genuine degree courses and good luck to those that have one, especially the latter, where, I suspect, a congratulations card is about the only reward you are likely to get for your efforts.)

Not that we particularly need them at the moment, but we now have working lights at the front and side of the shopfront. The stand-in electrician turned up this morning and set to work. We are hoping that the brackets on which the lights are mounted will last a bit longer than the ones previously installed. We had new, industrial weight brackets made by our local friendly fabricator who recommended we use Denso paste, a black sticky goo, as a barrier between the stainless steel screws and the marine grade steel bracket. The chromium in the stainless steel would react with the marine grade steel of the bracket and rapidly corrode the metal. We shall have to see how that goes.

The Missus felt much revived today, which was something of a relief to both of us. We cancelled Mother's Tuesday visit as a precaution but should be back on

schedule again by her next visit come Friday. The Missus' torn bicep ligament is still troublesome, however. It really needs total rest and would benefit from being strapped up but that is just not feasible. In the middle of the season neither one of us can be ill or debilitated else the whole pack of cards come tumbling down.

Our business continued until late in the afternoon but, unlike yesterday, there was no extended five minutes to closing rush. We have noticed over the years the people to look at for. If we were a bit smarter, we would have marketing campaigns targeted at grandmas. They are a seemingly bottomless pit of funds where grandchildren are concern and so much have fortunes stashed away. One came in today with two teenage grandchildren for whom she was financing a hooded sweatshirt and an expensive skim board. Both grandchildren dutifully gave a sincere "thank you, granny" and as she left, so did I, which made granny smile. I did, however, fall short of the kiss on the cheek that the grandchildren supplied, although if that is what it takes ...

It was a pleasant but cooler evening to be wandering The Cove with ABH after tea. She had not long finished exploring the beach with the Missus earlier, so we did not tarry long down there. We went around the block seeing if there was anything to see of the works on the sea wall. There is not but a big cement mixer had visited earlier in the day. I am not minded to venture over the wall to have a look as I do not fancy being dragged over the rocks by an enthusiastic ABH. While it may shatter some illusions, my commitment to The Diary does not extend to risking a broken ankle.

The sun poked through the cloud on our last trip out, enough to provide a halfway decent sunset to gawk at. ABH dragged me the length of Coastguard Row to meet Barney, a very young labrador pup. Quite how she knew he was there, I have no idea. He is a regular in the shop this week and receiver of treats. Some bigger dog gave him a bloody nose on the beach yesterday, which was a bit unnecessary but resulted in extra treats this morning. Sorry, but this does not generally work for humans, just in case you were wondering, dear reader.

July 15th – Monday

Now, those noble scientists told us that climate change will bring us mild wet winters and long dry summers. So, we are either in the middle of winter or someone got it very wrong.

Oh joy, it is also St Swithin's Day and according to the old prophecy we can expect 40 days and nights of rain because someone moved the poor old begger's grave. Being a saint, you would think he would show a bit be restraint and turn the other cheek, erm, bone. Anyway, since we have already had more than that, by my calculations we are in credit. I am also going to play my joker on this game and say that it will be hose pipe bans by September.

It was raining but not uncomfortably so when I took ABH out first thing. There were heavier showers now and again during the morning but by the middle of the day, the rain had stopped. It left us with a cool day and covered with cloud. I would have avoided getting very wet at all, but the boys have omitted to finish the launders that run along the side of the building, above the steps. Runoff from the roof delights in dripping on us as we go up and down from the flat.

While I was in such an optimistic and enthusiastic mood, I dealt with all the morning deliveries as they arrived. The Missus was feeling a brae bit poorly when she got up this morning, so I eschewed my trip to the gymnasium and therefore had plenty of time to do, well, not very much at all, really.

It is a dreadful trait but find a slow down in activity in shop business is infectious. Where I suddenly have time to do all the things that I have no time to do else, I really cannot be fagged to do them at all. It also did not help matters that much of it had already been done. The soft drinks were all done early doors when I first came down to the shop and the beachware shelves were topped up yesterday. I suppose I could have run a broom around the place, but it will only get sandy again in short order and having swept, I would have been compelled to mop and that really would have been a step too far.

Instead, I spent some money, which is daft since we were not earning it, but I noted a little while ago that the lack of Tarquin's gin needed some attention. The bottle of original brew had declined to one bottle and the little tins of gin and tonic that I thought would fly out, eventually had found some traction and were beginning to gain some popularity. Tarquin's does not have its email address on its website, which is not only illegal but downright annoying. I spent far too long before I remembered that having experienced this before, I had written it in my contacts list. It then took me far too long remembering what I had put it under because it was not under Tarquin's, which is the brand, but under the umbrella company, Southwestern Distillery.

By the early part of the afternoon, I had remembered that I had meant to top up the surf jewellery stand. Remarkably, I had generated sufficient enthusiasm to actually go and do something about it and spent the next half an hour restocking the stand. We will need to order some more of those, and I will have to cut out some time to do it. It is rather a shame that I did not think of that earlier.

I felt that my efforts with the surf jewellery were sufficient physical effort for the day and that I should do something a little more strenuous, such as write a list of the frozen food and ice creams that were looking a bit thin. I had just embarked on this task when five crates of local preserves, marmalades and mustard turned up out of the blue. Well, not completely out of the blue because I had ordered it. I just had no idea that it was coming and because the company does not bother with acknowledgements, whether it was coming at all.

This took considerably longer than the surf jewellery and not only required jars to be put out on shelves but also some effort in reorganising the store room so that I had somewhere to put the overstock. The process also produced another box of waste cardboard, and I was beginning to see the benefit of signing up to the Laurel and Hardy Newspaper Company's recycling scheme. Without it, the store room would be waist deep in boxes of waste cardboard by now and no collection due until Wednesday. On reflection, if someone else could do the newspapers, I think the Laurel and Hardy Newspaper company has found something it is good at.

The preserves delivery complete, I returned to the frozen order I was compiling. I got no further than finishing off the ice creams when the wine delivery arrived. This was bigger than I remembered, and I only ordered it the day before. All the bottles require pricing and then I need to find somewhere to put them. Space is earmarked for the stock but there was more in the deliver than the space allowed. The spare cases are on the floor of the store room for now but the wine is moving quickly now, so there will not be there for long.

What also happened as the wine delivery arrived was that all the customers that might have been here during the day, all came to the shop at once. We were exceedingly busy from about half past four o'clock and had been monumentally quiet up to that point. There were some decent sales during this time, too, for which I was very grateful, and the till was jangling almost constantly until closing time. The scores on the doors at the end of the day belied the lack of trade during the day and, for a morning of rain and a day of little cheer, it was far better than we might have expected.

It was quiet out when I took ABH around the block, twice. Once before and then again after tea. The sun had broken through in the late afternoon and I found myself wishing that I had not worn a jacket. There was still a bit of breeze about from somewhere – I have given up on wind direction – but up on Coastguard Row it was sheltered and I baked in the glare of the sun. Shame we do not have such weather during the day.

July 14th – Sunday

The sun was putting on a show as it ignited the sky behind Sunny Corner Lane at the top of the cliff. It was all reflected off the wispy high cloud in pinks and oranges or so I imagine. I did not have to imagine that it was all gone and replaced by heavier and lower cloud that blotted out any sun at all by the time I came down to open the shop.

We had to wait until the afternoon before the sun broke through again. There were big clouds moving about casting sizeable shadows on the ground. I had to laugh. At one point all the land was in sunshine except for the area of big beach where people were sitting. The same happened to Gwenver later in the afternoon. The cloud was particularly slow moving today, so the blackout lasted a little longer than it might otherwise have done.

There was very little breeze to start the day, but it increased as the afternoon went on. The general forecast had the wind in the southeast but when I looked at the flags on the Lifeboat channel markers, they were indicating a breeze from the northwest. I checked Land's End and Gwennap Head (windiest place in the universe) and they showed a southeasterly and a southwesterly respectively, which was odd by itself and St Ives showed a northwesterly. It is nothing to worry about, just the end of days having a bit of practise.

The surfers were probably a little concerned that they might never see a wave again. The bay was glassy calm during the morning and quite rippled in the afternoon when the wind increased. Even the paddleboarders seemed disinterested. There was a healthy sized camp across the top of the beach and the sand, as the tide retreated, filled with promenaders and game players. With a crowd of paddlers and dippers in the shallows, it was the Laura Knight scene of seaside holidays forever, at least for one day.

Even I could not feign ignorance of the football match planned for the evening; it was plastered all over every front page of the Sunday newspapers. It amused me greatly that one of the weekend newspapers was calling for the manager to be knighted. A week before it was asking for him to be sacked. I am not sure why it was such a notable event. I mean if a bunch of girls could do it a few years earlier, surely it cannot have been that big a deal. All joshing aside, I did not pay any of it much attention other than the start time would not impinge on the business day and that I might be ready to sell a few beers toward our closing time.

It was the beer aspect that some sharp-eyed customer brought my attention to. He pointed out that the premium lager we were selling was Spanish and how very dare I. I wish I had been more au fait with its origins at the time because when I looked it up it was first brewed by a Spaniard in the district of San Miguel in Manila, where the envelopes come from. It is now brewed in the UK by a Danish company in Northampton. So, probably not the most Spanish lager in the world.

During the afternoon, we had some extended quiet spells. The rot set in during the middle of the day and by five o'clock, the street was largely deserted. The Missus has come down during the earlier quiet bit to help process all the stock she had brought down from The Farm yesterday but could not unload. She did all the pricing and unwrapping, and I put out on the shelves between customer visits. It worked quite smoothly and all I had left when she had finished were the aqua shoes that filled the shopping trolley. I put these out in the later afternoon when it had become almost devoid of customers at all.

The last thing on the list were the balls, all of which need to be inflated. I try to do these at either end of the day because of the noise of the compressor. The mornings have been scotched because of the holiday let the other side of the adjoining wall. The compressor outputs around 90 decibels, which strictly speaking requires ear

protection. It is in the store room, tucked around the corner so the noise does not leak out too badly into the shop. Even so, I make sure there are no customers in when I switch it on. I then turn off the compressor so that it does not automatically top up and pump up the balls until the reservoir is empty. Naturally, the second I press the on button, I have a rush of customers. In a business like ours there is bound to be some collateral damage.

From about five o'clock, The Cove cleared out. There was just a small party barbequing on the Harbour beach when I took ABH out after tea and a few cars lined up against the sea wall while occupants observed the lack of waves. Later, just before our bedtime, The Cove was utterly deserted and deathly quiet. A few years ago, there were near riots when we were all told to stay inside. Now we do it voluntarily because a few blokes are kicking a ball around. What a fickle bunch we are.

July 13th – Saturday

Great Scott! Right from the outset, a spectacular day that brought visitors from far and wide for a proper beach day. I think that we were also blessed by the Scottish contingent who take their summer holidays from school earlier than we do in the South. We were busy right from the moment we opened and all the way through to the middle part of the afternoon when it went quieter for a bit. It was the sort of day that we should have been enjoying consistently since the middle of June. It was gratifying to note that such days still existed.

It was as well that the drivers of the big cash and carry delivery like to arrive nice and early. Today's driver we had not seen since the inaugural visit a couple of months before and he was a bit later than the others. It meant that I had got up at half past five o'clock without the insistence of a needy ABH who, for once, was inclined to lie in. We had the entire delivery carried in off the cages in less than fifteen minutes and the store room floor packed with boxes and trays to about four feet high.

The newspapers arrived not long after the cash and carry had departed. The driver is a happy soul and I ribbed him about the amount of recycling I would have for him the following morning. The weekend newspapers being chunky items, he is likely to have less room on his van than at any time during the week. I will put out quite a bit and tell him to take what he can. It makes a mockery of the unlimited service, but I understand the restrictions that the drivers have even if the clever dick behind the desk at Laurel and Hardy Newspaper Company who thought up the idea does not.

There was no time to dwell on such issues as I finished stuffing the newspapers just about at the time the shop was due to open. It did not take very long after that for the first customers to arrive and then some more followed by even more. Breakfast was a two hour affair and there was little hope of making a start on the cash and carry delivery. The cavalry arrived in the shop in the form of the Missus. She carved

through some of it then went off with my shopping list to The Farm and left me with the rest.

As business in the afternoon dropped off, our visitors nicely settled on the beach for the day, I was able to attend to the task of dealing with the delivery myself. This was only partly successful as, although it was quieter than the morning, we still had frequent customer visits. The process of clearing space in the store room became increasingly more urgent the closer we came to the Missus coming back with a truck load. In the event, she could not park outside the shop, so the unpacking will have to wait until tomorrow.

Still causing a little consternation is our spending limit for the use of cards. Despite two signs either side of the till, this is still met with surprise when it comes to part with money. We do not get too much in the way of complaint anymore, after all it is no different to entering a payment card only establishment with cash and being turned away. The solution, of course, to the problem is to always carry a modicum of cash or, vice versa, a card so that the customer is ready for any eventuality.

One foreign lady was caught out when she came to the counter with a one pound bottle of water. She told me she had no cash and looked at me expectantly. I explained it was because of the attendant costs of using a card machine, which she said she understood. I suggested that she buy the water from the café next door, which is card only. She told me ruefully that the same water in there was two pounds. I paused for dramatic effect and told her that was rather my point. I believe the phrase is *quod erat demonstrandum*, succinctly put by some old Italian.

By the middle of the afternoon, the party was largely over. Cloud had been lurking on our fringes from the middle of the day and had slowly built and encroached until we were covered. Radio Pasty had warned of such an outcome and had also said that some heavy showers would be about. However, in a 250 mile long Duchy, they failed to specify which end the showers may occur. Looking at the rain radar there were some to the south of Mount's Bay that had materialised out of nowhere. Earlier, a big lump had approached from the north but had fizzled out before it reached us. All the action appeared to be in the West and being rained upon or no was a matter of luck. I believe that the odds were very much in our favour, but we were lucky.

The downturn in the weather was clearly not sufficient to clear the beach of its inhabitants of which there was quite a number. Sitting around on the beach or bobbing about in the sea were about the only two games in town as there were no appreciable waves to make a go of surfing. There was no wind, either, so kite, wind or sail boarding were all off for the day. I am sure immense fun was had by all, nevertheless.

A couple of days last week, I forgot to put the day's newspapers out for collection. Last night, I excelled myself and forgot to bring the windbreak stand in for the night.

Several people made comment upon it, politely avoiding the addition of 'poor ole soul', clear signs that yet another grumpy shopkeeper was on the way to oblivion.

I thought hard about our closing tonight and remembered to do the newspapers and the windbreak stand. I also remembered to put out the recycling not all of which fitted inside the newspaper box. It is fair, I suppose, that if the newspaper man will need a bigger van, I should get a bigger box.

July 12th – Friday

I can take a joke as well as the next simpleton, but I have to say that this bad weather jape is wearing a bit thin. Not only did I get a bay full of mizzle in my face while I helped to get the pasties (sorry, MS) in this morning, it was cold mizzle blown in by a particularly – for the time of year – harsh northwesterly. The rain eased and became sporadic eventually, but the warmth remained elusive, and the day became the property of Coast Path walkers and the brave or foolhardy.

I had a store room of boxes to clear, so I had something to distract me from the frightening lack of customers frequenting the shop and numb my brain. I suppose it worked to some degree and removing the plastic sleeve from two gross of sunglasses is likely to do that to a mind. Swimsuits, shorts, showerproof hats – an essential purchase – are now adorning hangers in the shop or spaces in the appropriate storage box in the store room.

It was the sort of day that you would imagine nothing memorable happening and in fact, nothing much of note at all. I, certainly, was of that opinion and therefore completely unprepared for the heinous assault I endured halfway through the morning. The shop was full of customers – well, when I say full that is comparative to the condition it was in for seven eighths of the day, largely empty – so my suffering is a matter of public record. There was no warning, either. The perpetrator might have asked me to sit or stand somewhere close to something soft when he said that someone had told them that we had twenty percent off all hooded sweatshirts.

There was a lengthy silence while I battled to maintain my vertical posture and recoup my senses, equilibrium and consciousness not to mention my calm and self-respect. I sought a suitable response that did not include the terms, 'over my dead body' or 'had hell frozen over so soon', and think I managed a pathetic 'no'. The lady in question pointed at her husband across the street being the source of such scurrilous rumour. I had thought to tell her to make him come across the road and fight me like a man, but decided against it just in case he did.

It was after this that I immersed myself in the sunglasses, just to forget. There was not much in the way of interruption, which is a shame because it is such a balls aching task. I did take a moment to wonder at the two wing surfers out on the bay whizzing about on their hydrofoil or more precisely, monofoil boards. They seem to

attain high speeds and I imagine falling off at such a rate must be quite painful. I will ask next time I see one of the exponents to talk with.

Business was not what you might call, buoyant, but it perked up towards the end of the afternoon as the weather improved. I suspect these were early arrivals for the coming week as they were mainly purchasing grocery supplies. A good proportion of these were foreign, German and Dutch at a guess, or putting it another way, those who do not have much of a choice to be here in this weather having come a long way and booked a way in advance. A native visitor told me that he was asked by a German at the campsite whether it was always like this in summer. He said that it was always this summer, at least.

ABH had her Staffordshire pal back. They played constantly through the day and at the end of it, I could not convince ABH to hang around on the Harbour beach more than ten minutes. After the briefest of sniffs and digs, she decided to take herself off back home.

I empathised, for different reasons. After stuffing some excess boxes into the back of the truck just before we closed, the store room floor was empty and ready for the big cash and carry delivery tomorrow. It will now coincide with a fairly substantial order I have to make for stock from The Farm. The Missus has been busy all week with the RNLI raffle, sorry, grand raffle, the prizes for which I will soon post on our website, and has had to defer the trip up there. Luckily, that will not happen until the afternoon, so I will have the whole morning to clear the grocery order. Now, that is lucky and very possibly impossible.

July 11th – Thursday

At five o'clock this morning, there was not a cloud in the sky and the sun, had it risen by that time, would have been beaming down on ABH and me as we walked around the block. It was lucky, really, that I had managed to convince her at half past four o'clock that an extra half an hour in bed would be a good idea.

By the time the shop was up and running, large amounts of cloud were drifting in to ruin a perfectly good day. They had the good sense to moderate through the day but gathered again towards the evening and produced some rain. In the meanwhile, our visitors largely ignored the threat and arrived in numbers, which was most gratifying.

Now, I know that I am sometimes away from behind the counter, but it is the usual place to find a grumpy shopkeeper most of the time. I am therefore continually bemused by the number of people who express surprise when I greet them as they enter the shop. The most common expression is, 'I didn't expect to see you there'. Upon entering a shop, I would have thought that the counter is the first place that you might expect to see a shopkeeper. I suppose that I should ask, 'where did you expect to see me?'.

I did try very hard, but I was unable to complete unpacking all of the beachware delivery that turned up yesterday. It was no real surprise because some of it required fitting to hangers, which is time consuming, especially when I could not find enough hangers of the right size. Once, shorts and the ilk came with hangers attached but production and shipping costs have put an end to that sort of thing. It is probably just as well because we would be drowning in hangers come the end of the season. We came to that point a couple of times in the past when we had to shed great loads of them or load great sheds with them. We still end the season with more than we can find room for but with breakages they tend to diminish each year. We still have plenty but never of the size you need.

It was my turn to be surprised in the latter part of the morning. I took a call from the Laurel and Hardy Newspaper Company. It is starting a new service collecting recycling alongside delivering and collecting the newspapers. Perhaps they will be better at that than providing newspapers and magazines. I did not think for one minute that it would be free, but they are offering six weeks without charge to start with. The ongoing costs are entirely reasonable – which surprised me even more - for unlimited collections per week. I signed up because we generate a huge amount of cardboard waste and a week between collections is too long in the height of summer. I anticipate getting another call in the first few days after we start asking us to desist when the drivers complain that they no longer have room for newspapers in their vans.

If all that was not fun enough, a Lifeboat training launch was organised for the evening and then promptly cancelled due to technicalities. This just about gave me sufficient time to cram a morsel of food before heading over the road and discovering that I need not have done. I might have been inclined to take ABH around the block after the launch but first, the launch did not happen and secondly, she had found out just how tiring looking after a small pup can be.

The in-laws visited today with their new, eleven week old blue Staffordshire terrier who was a playful little girl called Lily. The two of them, after an initial bundle and chase around, got on famously together, followed by another bundle and another chase around. I was able to track proceedings from downstairs by the thunderous pounding on the floor above. Quite how two small hounds can make such a racket is beyond me. Every time I went upstairs during the day – short times when I was not behind the counter in the shop – I was set upon by a clever duo where one distracted me for petting while the other attacked the strings on my flip flops.

We had high hopes that all day engagement might have tired ABH out sufficiently for an all night sleep but by bedtime she was already showing signs of recovery. The weather, however, was not but after two consecutive days of summer I doubt that we have the right to complain.

July 10th – Wednesday

Golly G Wilikins, that was a busy day and no mistake and it was not just a revival of the ancient practise of customers buying things that filled it up, either. The root cause of all our customer busyness was a rare day of sunshine that was in my eyes from the very outset of the day. It was joined by the arrival of the solar panel workforce and the delivery of the beachware that I was fearing yesterday and then, late in the afternoon, remembering that I had the cash and carry order to do.

It all started innocently enough with the usual crowd milling about and a few newspapers being sold. I knew something was afoot when the first pasty (sorry, MS) request of the day arrived before half past nine o'clock. I was then deluged by several deliveries and while trying to squeeze in a little breakfast, the arrival of the solar boys and girl. The latter did not need much other than permission to park in the mews behind us. Happily, someone, I know not who, granted permission which absolved me of any responsibility for the incursion.

They spent the entire day fixing in the trays and panels and, eventually, routed the cables into the loft where eventually they will emerge to be fitted to the inverter. The panels look very grand, reclining on our untiled roof and are currently producing current that is going nowhere. We expect an electrician at some point to come along and join up all the relevant bits so that it saves us half our electricity bill.

I knew very little about their work as I was far too distracted in the shop. The increase in customer visits was very gradual but if I needed any indicator of what sort of day we were looking forward to, the arrival at the counter of parasols and windbreaks might have just given the game away. I had taken advantage of an early quiet spell to put out some greetings cards that had arrived yesterday and was over by the card stand when a familiar voice called for my attention.

The company that stands as our major supplier of beachware uses its own drivers where it can, so I recognised the voice. There were only eighteen boxes in the order but some were quite large. I was particularly keen to empty two of the biggest so that I could get rid of the cardboard on the waste collection that had not yet arrived. I just managed to unpack and unwrap two boxes of ladies' flip flops, break down the boxes and get rid of the plastic wrapping all before the truck arrived. The truck was later than usual, which helped.

What did not help in that regard was the increasing number of customers piling into the shop demanding to buy things. It presented something of a challenge, but a welcome one and I think I managed to serve both masters without complaint. During the course of the rest of the morning and most of the afternoon, I worked through the boxes. We now have all the flip flops out on display, the novelty rock which should have been done ages ago is out on the shelf and the remaining boxes I cleared from the shop.

This left me very little time to set to on the cash and carry order. Part of that process is restocking the grocery shelves to see what remain stock we have in the store

room. Trying to do that with a shop full of customers also has its difficulties because the customers, whatever it is you are putting out, are always in the aisle you need to access. As a consequence, I was still keying in the order long after we closed.

By some miracle, I also managed not to miss the deadlines for the pasty order, the bread, which I forgot yesterday, and the cans of local beers. They were inexplicably out of stock when I tried to order on Sunday and we had run out of one and were close to running out of another. They are very popular, particularly when the sun is shining, and if I had missed the order this time, we would have been in trouble.

I was not the only one being busy. The Missus has been labouring away on a grand raffle for the RNLI's 200th anniversary celebrations for the station. It built on the kind donation of the e-bike and she has contacted a large number of local businesses many of which have added to the prizes. There are now nearly forty pledges of various things from an original oil painting by a local artist, tickets to a show at Minack Theatre, surf shop vouchers, weekend breaks at holiday parks, afternoon teas at prestigious hotels, day trips on the Scillonian and cinema tickets. It is quite an achievement.

The tickets, at £5 each, will be on sale locally at the RNLI Shop in The Cove, the SPAR shop in the village and at the Old Boathouse. There may be other locations which will be advertised on social media. Sadly, we could not find a way of selling the tickets online and sales will be by cash only, although the RNLI shop might be able to take cards – I do not know.

July 9th – Tuesday

Well, it stopped raining, or at least it had when I took ABH around first thing.

One thing from yesterday that did not make the final cut of The Diary was the erection of a fair bit of scaffolding halfway down the Harbour car park over the sea wall. I left it a day and by now all the jokes about ferry terminals for Isles of Scilly and so forth had been aired and exhausted. Now that the smoke has cleared, I can confirm that it is the ground works for the new lithium mine.

It is only recently that it was found that The Cove is at the other end of the newly discovered Wide Formation that lies to the north and below the Great Flat Lode exploited by South Crofty tin mine historically. Lithium mining is already being carried at South Crofty alongside its traditional tin and more is set to happen there once the dewatering had finished. That, incidentally, is a story worth following up if you have the time, dear reader.

The extent of the Wide Formation, identified by a 14-hole exploration at Crofty, was accidentally uncovered in The Cove. The sea has eroded a geet hole in the sea wall at the point where the scaffolding is, that expands into a cavern under the Harbour car park. If the cavern can be extended further and the roof supported, it will mean

that the explorative work can continue without undue disruption to car parking and daily life above.

The rain may have mainly gone but it was a drab and colourless day in the main interspersed with short periods of brightness. This improved in the afternoon when the short periods of brightness became longer periods of brightness. There was even some blue sky on occasion. To get there we had to endure several waves of mizzle blowing through The Cove that sent our visitors into a frenzy of digging into bags and rucksacks for waterproofs to put on.

Business picked up in the afternoon. Regardless of the fact that the day was not really up to scratch, it was better than the day before and, as such, would do nicely. There was a small camp at the head of the beach, but any serious surfing was scotched by the dead calm waters of the bay. I did not spend too much time looking but I did not see any paddleboarders either, so the snorkellers have a free run of it today.

Our builders had a softer day of it today, apart from the mizzle blowing through during the morning. We now have two rows of slates on either side at the bottom of the roof, which I am told are the most difficult and time consuming ones to do. The builder said he was confused that the panels appeared to start lower on one side than the other and he will be here in the morning to meet the solar people. I really have no idea what to expect, how much they will get done and whether I need to do anything. I guess I will find out tomorrow, which also happens to be our big cash and carry order day. We are very keen to have the panels operational as soon as possible. Our monthly electricity bill is not insignificant, and the working panels will cut the bill in half at least, it is expected.

Given the poor showing of business this year, we could really do with a helping hand. While it was busier than yesterday – it could not have been less busy unless we closed – it was nowhere near where we should be for the time of year. The familiar faces that we are seeing of our regular visitors are telling us that the price of accommodation is definitely putting people off. Many properties are struggling to fill vacancies and the agencies are urging price cuts. Unfortunately, we are caught up in the downturn and have no influence on one of the major factors. Some improved weather would really help.

What will not help is the delivery of a fairly large beachware order that I placed last week. The small gods of grumpy shopkeepers could not pass up the opportunity to have that delivered when I need to keep the store room clear for the solar boys. Hooded sweatshirts that have been selling tremendously well will come in a week or two when we are hopefully up to our eyes in customers. If things were not tricky enough. The irony is that it is self-inflicted.

Just before I close for the day, I ought to come clean. Happily, or sadly, depending on your point of view, there is no lithium mining planned for the Harbour car park. I

am sure you saw through my blatant foolery straight away, dear reader. Just after I wrote it in the morning, a lady asked about the scaffolding at the counter, so I tried out the lithium mining angle. Yep, hook, line and sinker. Of course, I did not let her loose with such a fervent belief that The Cove's demise as a peaceful resort was sealed.

There is a hole under the car park after the sea breached the sea wall halfway along. The 'cavern', which I believe is quite prodigious, is to be opened at the top and filled with rock and concrete. We have a serious amount of rock up at The Farm. I will nail the contractor when they turn up and our problems will be over.

July 8th – Monday

I would not mind betting that those weather forecasters are patting each other on the back and having a bit of a beano at getting the forecast right for two days recently. Well, when I say, right, I meant that it rained, mainly for the entire day. I am not completely au fait with the symbols they use on their maps, but I am inclined to think that a black cloud with two rain drops coming out of it is heavy rain. Not here it was not, at least not all day, and for grumpy shopkeepers that is an important detail.

There was rain during the whole of the day, but the morning held the worst of it – before we saw what we had in the evening - and, in the afternoon, light rain came and went. The wind had gone around to the southeast and by the middle of the afternoon, I could feel it blowing into the shop and across the counter at me. At least it was a relatively mild wind and saved me switching on our smart fan.

I quite welcomed the breeze because the little girl had me up shortly before three o'clock and it was keeping me awake. I am not entirely sure what I had done to deserve such treatment but she enacted every wicked thought she could muster between then and half past five o'clock when I could stand no more of it and got up. Even then she did not give in, and I took her around the block twice on some pretext or other, the second time in rain that was becoming a little more insistent. I was glad to come down to the shop for a rest.

On my way down to the shop, I gathered together the components of our very first recycling submission. I waited with nervous anticipation for the truck to turn up wondering if I had put all the right things in the right bags. When the moment of truth arrived, I was strangely disappointed when he did not look inside any of the bags and merely tipped them into the appropriate receptacle on the truck. He even took the shop cardboard I had tucked behind our big commercial bin. I was so surprised that it was in his truck before I could point out that it was not supposed to be taken – honest, guv.

Last week, we had a smart new specially designed truck turn up to collect our food waste, acquired, no doubt, at vast public expense. It was therefore somewhat bemusing when our man took our food waste bin and emptied it in the same pot our

plastic and metal went. I am rather hoping that was a mistake because if it is not it makes a mockery of buying a fleet of food waste collection trucks. Perhaps they only have the one food waste truck and wheel it out on the very first collection just to make it look good. After that, everything just goes to the tip, sorry household waste ... oh, never mind.

As early as I could, I followed up the message I had from our solar people on Friday that asked for photographs of some of the slates in place. Our builders and I were under the impression that only felt and batten was required. It had stemmed from a conversation with another of the company's representatives who muddied the waters. The solar man had already spoken with the builder to address the issue and shortly after I finished on the telephone, the builder arrived to start putting the appropriate slates in place.

While they laboured in the rain, I set about clearing some more of the store room. I would not be able to find out until the installers were on site when they would need access to the store room and in the meanwhile I would do my best to keep it as clear as I could. This was going well until a grocery order turned up and I diverted my attention to that instead. I had made good progress with that, especially as I had very few customers between me and the drinks fridge, but then the second half of the clothing order arrived, and I moved onto that.

I spent an increasingly wet afternoon buried in hats. The problem with hats is that they need to be put out in an aisle from which I cannot see the counter. I have noticed that several of our customers are particularly quiet when they come into the shop and very often a plaintive call from the till is the first I know about it. What makes matters worse is that hanging the hats on the hangers is a fiddly task and takes far longer than it should. As a consequence, I do them in small quantities at a time and the whole task takes an age. I hate bleddy hats.

Needless to say, I did not finish the task and will have to clear up the loose ends tomorrow. I also have a grocery delivery to attend to later in the morning, so I will be kept busy with that even if the weather tomorrow does not improve greatly.

It was when I passed the bedroom door after finishing for the day that I noticed a rather unwelcome stain on my pillow that was not there in the morning. The builder's dog Zita, a Weimaraner had spent most of the morning in the flat. She and ABH have a riot together; the sound in the shop is akin to a herd of rogue elephants charging about on the floor above. We initially thought that something may have spilled but further investigation showed that our waterproof membrane, stretched across the gap where the skylight had been, was not so waterproof after all. It was leaking in two places.

With no recourse to fix it and the rain showing no sign of letting up, I resolved to spend the night in the spare bedroom. First, however, ABH needed a couple of runs out and both times it was teeming down. It was the first time since the shop opened

that full metal jacket waterproofs were required and ABH in her waterproof coat that does nothing to stop her ears looking like dripping dishcloths. It was a memorable experience for both which would have been all the better for being forgettable instead.

And I thought that we just had a general election to fix all these problems.

July 7th – Sunday

We seem to have a right sporty lot in this week. By the middle of the morning, I had seen dozens of them jogging up and down the street. It was all far too energetic for a Sunday morning and quite unnecessary in my view. The joggers were followed by several groups of people in wetsuits heading for the beach to do something that probably was not surfing given that there was no surf.

At least they were not all rained upon when they went about their chosen activities. It had rained some more during the night but when I stuck my head out of the door first thing, there was a bit of blue sky and a smidgeon of sunshine to enjoy. That sun proved elusive, hiding behind the many lumps of cloud to start with but won out in the afternoon.

For those brief few sunshiny hours, we had quite a spectacular time of it. A decent sized camp set up at the head of the beach and the wide expanse of spring tide sand was scattered with people. At low water there were waves that enticed a small gathering of surfing hopefuls into the water. There was much bobbing about and not so much surfing it looked like.

The latest tide, or maybe the one before it, has brought an abundance of sand to the Harbour beach. All of the rocks under the top two arches of the short slipway are buried and there is much up in the top western corner. None of the damage at the bottom of the western slip is visible. It does seem that it is mainly in the upper parts of the beach but I have not had a good look at low water for a while. It is difficult to tell from afar, but there does not seem to be the same recovery on the big beach. I now cannot remember when it was last that there was enough sand to cover the reef underneath The Beach car park, but it has been several years.

Our visitors were clearly enthused by the unexpected good weather and came to the shop in vast numbers – well, vaster than we had seen for a little while. We duly ran out of pasties (sorry, MS) but not until the middle of the afternoon, which was partly respectable, in my view. We had regular custom for most of the late morning and the bulk of the afternoon. Despite that, I still managed to do our farm shop cash and carry order. I had used the slightly less busy morning period to finish orders for our jams and preserves which are perilously low in volume and the cheese biscuits that had been selling their socks off for the last week or so. Our local interest books was clearly an order too far. The ordering website was so slow I had to leave it processing individual orders while I served customers. Editing the basket took an

absolute age for each individual item that I had purchased and right at the end it failed to offer me a payment method. I send a message to the company address only to get an automatic reply that the salesperson was on holiday. The message suggested, if it was urgent, to send a message to the company address, which I had just done. I was tempted to send a smart reply but decided to telephone the sister company in the morning and find out if my order has been accepted.

We did not enjoy a five minutes to closing rush. I think that the tide had pushed most of the beach crowd off way ahead of our closing time, which probably accounted for it. That same tide was just running out when ABH and I took a run around after tea. There was a sliver of beach that she insisted on exploring and then was alarmed by the sound of rocks being rolled around by the swell the other side of the Harbour wall. Up above, the cloud was winning again and there was little in the way of a setting sun to attract in sightseers in the car park and only a few vehicles were lined up against the wall.

I thought that I would leave this until the end. The other reader, who is visiting The Cove this week, very kindly arrived with a present today. I am humbled, as it was a substantial gift. The Diary, a bunch of random words strung together by a simple eejit in a spare few minutes each day, is a free thing – other than the cost of your Internet connection. This is not here to start a bidding war, dear reader, so you are off the hook, I just needed to say thank you.

July 6th – Saturday

The highlight of the day, which explains much, was having a replacement bin delivered. They even put it back under the Lifeboat station flag, which is excellent news for my signage. Order is restored in The Cove.

It rained heavily in the night. Well, it sounded like it rained heavily in the night, at least. We have no skylights currently and the waterproof membrane that will sit under the tiles is stretched across the gap rather like the skin of a drum. I had never really considered whether I wanted to experience what it sounded like inside one of the drums at a concert by the heavy metal band, Saxon, but I suspect that I now have.

Happily, the rain had gone when I was taking ABH around the block first thing this morning. The rain had been supplanted by another bout of wind that had persisted since the previous evening. That died away during the day and went around to the southwest. The rain stayed away until the early afternoon when a reasonable short, but heavy, shower cleared the street that was just starting to look shopkeeper friendly.

It did pretty much put a dent in the run of business for a good few hours afterwards. The morning had been quite upbeat, and we had a good run of sales. Pasty sales (sorry, MS) were just starting to take off to the extent that I wondered if I had ordered

enough for the weekend. The afternoon eased that fear, but I would still have rather run out of pasties than had the downturn in trade.

I was about to write that it was unaffected by the weather but the runners in this year's Rat Race may disagree. The course runs from Marazion, across the moors to the north, then along the coast and not necessarily the Coast Path. The runners would have got wet anyway as the course includes jumping into the sea here and there but the paths and rocks off which they run and jump would have been wet and slippery. We do not always see them come past, well not many of them, anyway, as they run along the foreshore below the sea wall. I am not keen to walk across the jumble of boulders there let alone run across them. Still, I am sure they all had a jolly wheeze doing it – even the ones sloping past our door defeated and in ignominy.

Before I get told off, that last bit was not entirely true. The later runners all came along the road due to the tide being in. Of course, it could be said – I would not dream of doing so – that the later runners had an easier break than the leaders as they did not have to run across the boulders. There were an awful lot of them too. It took a bit of digging but the results seemed to be appearing on their website in real time, which was very clever, with each runner being tracked by satellite. There were more than 600 runners, the fastest male doing in four hours and the fastest female in five hours, the slackers.

I always thought that the Rat Race was a generic name, and this was a local run. Looking at the website, it appears that it is global and quite possibly a franchise. Talking to a few of the runners who returned to The Cove after finishing at Land's End it is one of the more expensive runs to take part in but there again, someone has to pay for more than 600 satellite trackers. Someone else said that it was not the most expensive race and one of them, possibly abroad, was more than £1,000. I am not sure that I would part with tuppence for such physical self-abuse but the people I spoke with seemed happy enough with it.

I was certainly happy with them. The runners and their supporters brought much trade to The Cove on a day that would have otherwise been largely written off by the weather. It was not altogether easy to distinguish but I also think that there were a good many incoming visitors toward the end of the day. In any case, it looks like I will have to top up the soft drinks fridge in the morning as for the first time this week, it looks a little empty. At this time of year, I should be filling that up every day.

We dodged the remaining showers after tea when we visited the empty Harbour beach. I did not think that we would get down there, but the tide was departing and had left enough room for a play. ABH was lucky enough to meet a friend on the last run out of the evening but not entirely as the other dog was fixated by its ball. She got a good run out of it and hopefully I will get a full night's sleep, though my level of confidence on that score is not high – especially if Ginger Baker* is going to be practising on top of my head again.

*Ginger Baker was a world renowned rock and blues drummer. Not the same when you have to explain, sadly.

July 5th – Friday

Well, it is congratulations to the new head honcho, the big cheese, the numero uno, the big boss and I am sure that he thoroughly deserves it. He has worked hard for many years to reach this pinnacle in his career and has faced many challenges along the way. Obviously, he had to be on top of his game, but he would have needed a fair bit of public support to get to where he is today, well, last night really. What is more, we are related – well, the Missus is – so we could not be more proud of him. Yes, the Missus' great nephew was promoted to head chef at Plates by Purnell's, a tapas bar in Birmingham, which is north of Camborne, and owned by the Michelin starred chef Glynn Purnell. Well done, CM – do not let being mentioned in The Diary go to your head.

It had been widely broadcast and well in advance that today would be pants. It had rained on and off during the night it looked like but at five o'clock in the morning when ABH decided a walk was required, it was sort of dry, but the wind was still punching in from the northwest. By the time we went out again at a more reasonable hour it was still sort of dry, but the wind had gone completely and we were surrounded by low cloud.

Rain came and went in varying degrees of heaviness throughout the day and customers arrived and departed in varying degrees of frequency and density. The weather certainly got worse in the latter part of the day as we were told it would. It was probably the most accurate forecast that we enjoyed for a while, which gave me no comfort or pleasure at all.

Adding to my discomfort was a text message from Basho, the much maligned council's preferred waste collector. They informed me that they had lots of old bins to pick up, which meant that they would not now collect ours until August 18th, when the previous message told me Monday of next week. Any corporate body with half an ounce of sense would have maximised efficiency by scheduling all the collections from one location at the same time. It is clearly a vendetta for escaping their contract earlier in the year; only a complete eejit would schedule collections from the same location on different days.

Additionally, right at the last knockings of the day I received a forwarded message from the much maligned council. It was to do with the public bin that had been removed from our end of The Cove. The other information I reported here I had received second hand, and this was the first direct response to my submission I had placed via the much maligned council website. Apparently, I had raised a bin repair request which triggered their "hazardous criteria", a bunch of words that made no sense at all. The repair request had been sent direct to Basho and I was copied. There was lots of important information in the report such as the bin's location and

whether it had sharp edges or not and most importantly, the fact that it was missing. It was dated today, which means it took the much maligned council five days to raise this repair request. Perhaps they were too busy scheduling multiple trips to The Cove to pick up one bin at a time.

The gratuitous incompetence reminded me that the Laurel and Hardy Newspaper Company saw fit to cancel nearly all my Tuesday magazines, the busiest magazine day of the week. They also cancelled two thirds of the Thursday ones as well. I used the online messaging service to enquire if they did not want me to sell magazines anymore and listed three titles by way of example.

Theirs is a very simplistic, black and white world, it seems, as the message received in reply apologised for the inconvenience caused and the three titles I mentioned would be sent on later in the week. It was my error, of course. I had only alluded to the other titles they had deleted and they were duly ignored. Unless I reorder, I will not get any of the titles next week either including the ones they restored – because I only referenced that week. It would not occur to them that I required the root cause to be resolved. I now have to make up my mind whether I can be bothered to go back into the system and order all my magazines again just to have them cancelled again at some random moment in the future.

As it was rainy and we did not have many customers and the gaps between them were long and boring, I saw to the remains of our deliveries. We also had half of another delivery turn up, the hats from our clothing supplier. By the time the day ended, I had almost done all that was left. There are some mugs to put out, which is the easy bit of it. The difficult bit of it is finding somewhere to place the overstock. I have to be very careful this coming week as the solar installers are coming on Wednesday and they will need full access to the back wall of the store room where the inverter is scheduled to go. I just hope they put it the right way up.

Due to the weather we have sold a good many hooded sweatshirts. In particular the jade coloured ones have been going down a storm to the point that the box in the store room was in sore need of replenishment. Initially, I had intended just to count the jade stock and seek to reorder just those but at the last minute, I decided not to be lazy and count the whole lot. I am glad that I did because although we have only just received the last of the last order, we have serious gaps across most of the colours. The new order is substantial.

As we were warned, the rain became heavier in the later afternoon but at six o'clock, or just before, when I was pulling in our dripping outside display, the sky brightened and the rain cleared up. It stayed that way until ABH and I were halfway around the block after tea when a mercifully short but heavy shower got us at the end of the car park. We avoid any of that unpleasantness later when we went around the short block for our last trip out but the breeze was getting fresher. I was rather expecting an olive branch dropped gracefully from a benign dove, not beaten across the ear 'ole with it by an irate wind.

July 4th – Thursday

It was the sort of day best looked at through a window. It looked rather lovely like that. Cloudy, for sure, but there was a brightness to it and sometimes properly bright. The thing really putting people off the day was a robust wind coming in from the northwest that was bringing an uncomfortable chill with it. It might have been better that yesterday, and if the forecasters are correct, much better than tomorrow but you would be pressed to call it a summer's day. It was busier today, however, and since that is the point of it, perhaps we should be happier.

First thing, it was even quite sunny as I discover when I went to cast my vote at the Community Centre up in the village. We used to be able to just walk along to the hut with a tin roof but that was far too convenient, so they moved it. I was first one there this morning and walked in with one of the officials rather pessimistically carrying a small heater. She told me it was cold when the Police Commissioner voting was going on, so she was talking not risks this time. The hall is enormous; it would be like trying to illuminate a cathedral with a match. Given the weather we had later, I hope it helped her.

The word on the street was that it was going to be the best day of the week and it sent those who had no choice about being here down to the beach for the day. This looked to be the case from the little string of camps and windbreaks down on the high water line on the big beach. One lady who had been here all week with her daughter told me it was the only day that was worth going down. It made me smile because she was wrapped up in several layers of robes and fleeces. Very likely, anyone who did not have to be here was down on the south coast sheltering from the wind. They might have had better surf down there as well. Here, there were some reasonable waves but with a fair amount of wind behind them, it was not ideal – certainly judging from the lack of surfers in the water.

I understand from two sources that we will get our public bin back. We just do not know when. It will be much smaller, the same as the others down the street, which should reduce the amount of abuse the old one got. The much maligned council was out in force on the bin front down here taking away some of the old bins and delivering one or two more new ones. This necessitated the use of two trucks as deploying one was clearly not nearly wasteful enough. Neither was taking ours away at the same time; that will be picked up on Monday – I hope. With all that activity and resource, they still could not bring down the replacement public bin. It is scheduled to go back where the old one originally was before it was moved because it annoyed too many people. I will still have to change the signage on my bin else the arrow will point in the wrong direction.

Now, the thing about leaving deliveries until the next day is that the next day may also have deliveries and then you have more deliveries than you know what to do with. We had another two deliveries today both of which needed quite a bit of work

sort out and, yes, I had more deliveries than I knew what to do with. I finished off the fishing tackle, but the stationery order was much more involved and, of course, its started to get busy as soon as I opened the first box. They will wait until tomorrow; I do not think I have any deliveries tomorrow.

The afternoon was as busy as the morning was quiet. There was much going home present buying, which will probably mean not very much of it tomorrow. Given the Armageddon-like forecast being bandied about, there will not be very much of anything tomorrow including builders who had clearly just finished reading the latest Boys Own Book of Lawyering telling me that it was illegal to have a minimum card limit in the shop. I hope he was a better builder than he was legal eagle. I assumed the role of senior advisor and advised him that there were other shops if he did not like ours.

With the wind ramping up and winter setting in, there was no Lifeboat launching to be done. There was not much very excellent Shore Crew training either, but I did give our new man an overview of our domain below stairs.

I was early back home and was going to take ABH out for a spin, but the Missus had beaten me to it. When I took her our last thing, it had already started to rain. Happily it was only a sprinkle but the wind made it feel worse. Our new insulation is clearly working in the flat as there is not the slightest hint of a draft and the sounds of howling wind and crashing sea are hardly present at all. It is also dry inside, so the roof is working, too.

Sweet dreams, eh.

July 3rd – Wednesday

The Diary, it seems, has some use occasionally. The other reader, CW, was equally incensed by the disappearance of the public bin by the Lifeboat station as it is her 'designated bin' for the inaccessible property she has up on the cliff. She is on the case with the much maligned council, so we will probably have two bins with brass handles back by the end of the day. She is most persuasive, I hear.

As it turned out, that offered the most excitement that the day had in store for us. The business day was as drab as the weather outside and that was bleddy awful. Radio Pasty told us that we would have some sunshine late in the day, which we clung to desperately, for all the good it would do. Just as I started clinging, the mist closed in and blanked us out for an hour or so. Looks like we were clinging to a brick.

Since the weather killed off most of our trade, it left me some time to do some more ordering. It seems obtuse to be ordering more stuff when we are not selling any, but we live in eternal hope of better to come, even if it is next year.

We have some gaps in our beach clothes, namely small boys' shorts and older girls' shorts. The supplier we use for such things has been sending desperate messages since Easter in the hope that we might need something. I sense that they are probably in more trouble than we are. I also ordered some hats from them. I am hoping they are waterproof as we probably will not need sun protection.

The company replied saying they did not have everything we had ordered, which was disappointing since I had not ordered that much to start with. I fell back on our beachware supplier which also does such things and had them in stock. It passed much time as such orders need to be right first time. I think by the middle of the afternoon I had enough of ordering things and topped up the small sweet bags display that was looking a bit thin. While I was thus engaged two deliveries came in which should have enthused me to open them and bestow their bounty upon our naked shelves. What actually happened was that I put them in the store room and sat down with a spare supplement from one of the weekend newspapers and read that instead.

True to the word from Radio Pasty, the sun broke through at around half past everyone going home o'clock. It must have been a cue for the wind to ramp up from the low twenty miles per hour to something approaching the high twenties and the sea state to deteriorate. Even knocking on five o'clock there were brave souls milling about, wrapped up against the weather and sitting eating ice creams on the benches opposite. Earlier, I had placed an order for more logs and kindling because there still seems to be a demand for such things. Looking on the bright side, at least we will not have to buy more sun lotion next year. I was thinking of having a t-shirt printed with "Summer of '24" on it and with "I survived" in small print on the back but I think the reference might be a bit obscure even if the sentiment is current. That and the risk that it might be tempting providence.

Half an hour later we were plunged back into autumn, and I pretty much gave up on the day.

July 2nd – Tuesday

The little bit of sunshine that we had at half past five o'clock when I took ABH out was long gone by the time I opened the shop. What we had then was more of the drab and grey overcast skies and enough of a breeze from the northwest to make it feel cold out. That changed a bit in the afternoon with some bright sunshine, but summer it ain't.

While I am in the mood to delight and bring cheer to you all, a local enjoyer of the much maligned council waste collection services wrote to me this morning. I am told that they did not receive a new waste bin – do not worry, it will be at a business rate paying holiday let somewhere at your expense. The much maligned council also told them not to worry as they could still use the old bin. They duly used the old bin, and their waste was collected but at least they had a naughty sticker attached to it.

Perhaps there were so many infractions that the bin men had run out of naughty stickers by the time they got to The Cove.

It also seems that several people up Stone Chair lane missed out on the joy of having their food waste collected and will have to keep it for another week. To cap all that, however, the much maligned council has seen fit to remove the public bin at the head of the Harbour beach. Not only does this make a mockery of the new signage on the front of our new domestic bin, it makes the next nearest public bin 50 metres in the opposite direction. This is probably a waste disaster for our end of The Cove because no one is going to walk that sort of distance to drop off their litter.

We were no less or more busy than yesterday in the morning but perhaps I was just a little more focused. After the morning chores that I did at a bit of a pace, I set to with some of the orders that I had been meaning to do, some of them for weeks. First off was the fish order and, inspired by that, carried on to the bone china mugs and the stationery. I was nearly put off balance by the arrival of the crab I had forced myself to order yesterday after promising some to a customer the day before and then forgetting. That needs to be labelled and put in the freezer quickly to ensure it is in tip top condition, after all, it is very expensive, which also takes a bit of time to organise.

I was feeling pretty chuffed with myself by the middle of the day having achieved *things*. The fact that I had been up since half past five o'clock and not stopped to get to that point is neither here nor there – although it very much is. I was looking forward to maybe slipping into neutral and costing a bit when the fish order arrived.

There was quite a bit of it because my aim was to see us through August as trying to get a fish order packed after the middle of July is not worth contemplating. The volume of fish we had today took me into the evening to vacuum pack and label. There were more than 50 portions of fish and then scallops as well. One lucky couple asked if we had fish not in the freezer and had clearly chosen exactly the right time to ask. I had just finished packing the hake and quickly calculated the price for a couple of loin portions for them. We still very much regret that we cannot do fish to order but that ship has definitely sailed.

Late for tea, I took ABH on a short run out to the Harbour beach where she met a very unwilling playmate. I had to drag her away in the end because her insistence was likely to cause offence and she does not give up, ever. We hurried back home where after more than a year of saying that we must do it, I introduced the Missus to the accounting system. I had been eyeing the growing geet pile of invoices in the folder in the shop. It has grown to mammoth proportions in the last week or so and I was wondering where I would find time to do them. The Missus very quickly earned her wings and with very little prompting from me charged through more than fifty. I think she may regret that.

July 1st - Monday

It was disappointing, although not entirely unexpected, that the new all singing waste collection service went off with a whimper. The much maligned council had already blotted its copy book by making a mess of the distribution of bins and today it appeared that it did not even bother to try to implement the changes it so widely lauded.

Several of the new bins were wheeled out to meet the much maligned council's exactly instructions for the day. Mainly, however, all the old bins were put out as people either did not read the instructions sent out or did not care to follow them. The truck came through The Cove at the same time as usual and the team of collectors merrily went about emptying everything old and new.

I was incensed. Having put a moderate effort into digging out the recycling bags we have had for at least ten years – we should have had a medal for finding them at least – and for using the new food waste system. What got my goat more than anything was that all the old bins were collected without issue. The team could at least have put a sticker on them or banged on offending doors and threatening incarceration or toenail extraction if the good citizens of The Cove failed to comply again. But no, everyone gets a free pass. At least they collected the food waste halfway through the afternoon which went some way to easing my frustration.

Sadly, it was not the only frustration; the day was full of them. For example, I stopped to pay a few invoices at one point. I have to download them from the electronic mail and print them off first. Having reviewed and paid them, I noticed a newly arrived statement from the local cash and carry, whose latest bill I had just paid. Because they only send a statement when I owe something, I stopped and printed that too and discovered that I did not have a copy of the invoice to which it referred. I had to send the accounts a message to have a copy sent. What started out as five minutes of invoice paying turning into half an hour.

I had cleared most of Saturday's delivery but the store room is still choc full and now includes boxes of cardboard produced during the process. While I was at the gymnasium a further two deliveries turned up and the cases of drink were stacked just inside the door to the store room. The cases had to be moved so I could get into the store room to put some of the cases on shelves and get them out of the way. I could only do one at a time because, while it was not busy, we had customers floating in and out. With customers down the aisle I needed to put the drinks out in, they had to remain on the store room floor and in the way.

Before I came down in the morning, I had intended to send a text message to the electrician to get him to install the floodlights along the front of the shop. That did not happen as I was distracted by other more pressing matters that the intervening pressing matters of the day have resulted in me forgetting. I eventually got around to it at half past four o'clock at the expense of doing the fish order, which will have to wait until tomorrow.

Other than that, on average, it was a pleasant day. The average was the best way to look at it because it swung from cloudy and dull to bright and sometimes sunny throughout the day. We had started out with rain, so anything after that was an improvement of sorts. It also seemed to warm up pleasantly through the day, but I had started out with fleece on. The sea had taken another step towards being completely calm today, which left the sea to junior surfers of which there were plenty today.

A group of young children had paraded by under the watchful eye of a couple of instructors. I was asked if they were local children, and I really had no idea. It was not until later that a lady in a uniform dropped into the shop that she told me that it was a school visit. Given the grandeur of her uniform, I suspect that this was a private school from up country. Had it been local, the wardens would have been with them.

I heard a few days ago that our favourite dairy had been taken over, which alarmed me somewhat. We sell (and consume) their butter, clotted cream and their yogurt has a good following from some of our regular customers. I looked it up last night and found that the German firm Ehrmann had bought it and added a £20 million investment. We were assured that the products would remain the same, which I trust that they will. For their part, they get access to the UK market to promote and sell their dairy desserts. I am minded to look them up just in case they have any more spare cash to invest in local businesses.

I could spend the money on umbrellas and raincoats that would go a storm this year. We had rain, or rather light drizzle waft in during the late afternoon. Any mist that came with it hung about offshore. So light and intermittent was it that I did not bother with a rain jacket when I took ABH out later on and did not suffer for it at all. There was some breeze still, apparently from the northwest – I did not check – that was quite robust else I doubt I would have felt the damp at all.

The girl was not much interested in the beach and we came around the block and back home in short order. It may have been because she has a new toy, all the way from China, that the Missus discovered on the Internet. It is a small, battery operated ball that vibrates, flashes and bounces across the room in random patterns. It entrances her and I thought that it may give me time to read my book less interrupted than usual. It might have done, but our clever little girl has worked out how to switch it off. She is not, however, so clever that she has worked out how to turn it on again and looks to me to intercede. More frustration.