

## DIARY 2022/23

May 31<sup>st</sup> – Tuesday

It was a helter skelter morning stumbling from one task to the next without having time to think about it. The soft drinks fridge needs topping up daily and the beer fridge more so, although I do not often get the opportunity in weeks like this. It made for a hurried run down to the beach with the bleddy hound. I would say dodging the early morning showers but, obviously, someone as rainproof as me does not have to worry about such things.

I had just settled for a quick cup of tea before heading to the shop to open for the day when the beefy duo of sofa removers turned up. I had missed the half an hour advance warning as I was busy in the shop when it arrived, so it caught us by surprise. Had we known that they were arrive so early we could have arranged the delivery of the new one for the same day and avoided an evening sitting in the floor. They were happy that there was only the one sofa to removed from upstairs and even happier that the second was already outside close to their lorry.

The deliveries in the morning came thick and fast, unable to finish one before the next arrived. I was very grateful that we had not had to do a big grocery order this week as that would have completely floored me. We had a sizable fish order, which arrived shortly after the pasties and a delivery of vegetables. The fish order needed to be vacuum packed, weighed and priced and somehow I managed to do all that and have breakfast between customers.

After the early rain, the day brightened, although I had the impression that perhaps there was a bit of a draft from the west somewhere. Still no waves for the poor beleaguered surfers but never mind, the swimmers were having a ball without being run over. I fancied not quite so many on the beach today, but I guess that everyone needs a break from that sort of thing every now and again.

It is entirely possible that I was wrong about the numbers on the beach, of course. In the later part of the day, after beach kicking off time, we were once again run over in the rush. This is easily comparable to last year when everyone was stuck in the country, petrol was half the price and we had no stock to sell.

I spent another 45 minutes after we closed restocking what I could and discovering that we are quickly running out of things. The Missus is going to have to do a rush over to Hayle tomorrow for beer, mainly, and we will see if we can get a frozen order in before the weekend. Even with my extended time restocking, there is more to do and I will get to that first thing when I go down.

Was it only last week I was complaining how quiet it was? Ah, those halcyon days.

May 30<sup>th</sup> – Monday

Some concerned parties expressed some notion that perhaps people would like to stay at home for the impending jubilee celebrations, choosing to be amongst friend and families or other people's friends and families in a big street party. Others, like me – I only narrowly avoid one when it was just silver and counted my blessings then - clearly found the prospect of a street party too scary for words and decided to come away. I might even suggest I am in the majority, as the numbers of people here are legion and I think they all arrived at the shop today at one time or another.

It was reminiscent of the busy times of years ago when we had queues down the shop. This is generally late morning when buying beach things clashes with late breakfast buyers and we alternate between loaves of bread and buckets and spades. It was still quite quiet when I ran off to the gymnasium for a shortened session. Shortened sessions require much more effort to make them blistering, in case you were wondering, just as an aside. Anyway, by the time I came back the place was heaving. I almost felt guilty about heading upstairs to have my breakfast.

We were still going some into the afternoon. It was no surprise, really, as the weather was behaving itself again. It was not quite the same level as the previous two days, but it was good enough to attract a decent horde down to the beach, ready to be chasing off in the late afternoon. There was still no appreciable swell for the surfers but there were enough swimmers to make up the shortfall. Earlier, off the Harbour beach, I had watched out practising hydrofoiler boarder practise some more without the aid of a sail. He was making large circuits outside the Harbour and without the aid of a sail and I imagine that requires some effort. He was still at it when I came back with the bleddy hound.

The Missus spent the day up in the flat disrupting the living room. The all singing all electrically dancing sofa that we ordered last November is at last being delivered on Wednesday – so they tell us. The company that is collecting the old sofas is turning up tomorrow to haul them downstairs. Because taking the old ones away and delivering the new the following day was going to be much too easy, the Missus decided to rearrange the living room in the middle of the process and shampoo the carpet. Because even that was child's play, she arranged for a friend to have one of the sofas that is due to be taken away so that the £80 we paid two burly men to take two sofas downstairs will now pay them to take one sofa downstairs. If that, too were not complicated enough, the same friend has a sofa to get rid of so we are to convince the two burly men to removed friend's sofa, which will be brought down to the shop ahead of the collection. We are hoping that they are sufficiently grateful that they did not have to drag two sofas down the stairs that they will not mind the last minute change of arrangements. What could possibly go wrong.

The disruption to the living room was not a victimless act. The bleddy hound had been on her throne in the shop for the balance of the morning and some of the afternoon. The Missus took her out for a walk in the early part of the afternoon and took her upstairs afterwards. She brought herself down ten minutes later complaining

that her snug had gone, which was a dark and quiet spot under a coffee table that is destined for removal. I am glad that there were no cans lying about outside else she would have kicked one down the road. She disappeared under the corner of the counter, another dark and quiet spot. I think she was making a point.

I no longer have to run a survey about the extra hour of opening. We were busy right through the later part of the afternoon and into the evening. We even had a two minutes past closing rush. Business as usual.

May 29<sup>th</sup> – Sunday

What? Another rip grihbler? Surely not. This morning there was a bit of cloud out to the east and the north, nothing to worry us at that moment but a change nevertheless. The breeze had moderated and gone around to the east – a potential benefit to the surfers if the swell picked up later – but enough cooling to make believe the skin is not frying with each passing minute. More aftersun goes on the shelf.

The forecasters, clearly not prepared to stick their necks out on a firm forecast have hedged their bets. Yesterday, one gave the possibilities of showers in the afternoon while the other had sunshine all day. Today, they swapped over leaving in no doubt that we would have weather today of one sort or another. We spent the morning selling swimsuits and sun cream. We have rain ponchos and umbrellas for the afternoon or indeed more swimsuits. Later, I had reports from Helston that it tipped down there.

It is a pretty good measure of a business day when I am still eating breakfast at dinner time despite starting early to avoid the rush. It was around about the middle of the day when things started to slacken off a little. The big beach, with a little time to high water, was packed along the top end with the usual encampments and the beach itself was busy with activity. There was for a short time some small waves to keep the surfers happy but as the tide pushed further up the beach, these smoothed out.

The wind slackened off completely at the middle of the day and the flags on the Lifeboat channel went limp. This must have been a bitter disappointment to the wing surfer who had just struggled through the weed in the Harbour entrance to get there. He sat, becalmed, at one of the flags waiting for the wind that never came, well, not until after he struggled back in again. He had been there so long, one of the locals rowed out to see that he was alright. I think he should have taken a few hankies.

Last week was full of walkers starting off or passing through The Cove. This week, particularly in this weather, there is not so much of that although some coastal path walkers still pass through and many do the pilgrimage to Land's End from here. One lady asked this morning about walking to Porthcurno but foxed my usual response about the coast path by suggesting that she wanted to walk direct. I was not sure

how much time it would save, if any, as it is not quite as 'direct' as could be imagined. I said that it would be necessary to have a walking map to complete it, but she told me that she had the Internet free map app on her phone. My opinion that she was likely to end up in Ouagadougou if she relied on the notorious app was politely snubbed. I do hope she took the bus.

Our quiet spot in the middle of the day was rapidly supplanted by an increasing trickle of shoppers buy all manner of goods. By four o'clock, as the tide pushed all but the most stalwart off the beach, we had queue down the shop and some quick-fire customer handling going on – in a most appropriate manner, of course. This continued for at least an hour with the till starting to smoke and my fingertips calloused from the constant key bashing. By half past five it was over, but we certainly turned over some stock.

Running on past six o'clock for our extended holiday hour, watching the clock tick slowly on, I wondered, and not for the first time, whether it is actually work extending our hours for the holidays. We simply have a dead hour until the last fifteen minutes and then a sudden rush as everyone panics that we are closing. Perhaps I should run a survey or just close an hour earlier and see if anyone complains.

May 28<sup>th</sup> – Saturday

A veritable rip gribbler if ever I saw one. That is what met us as we threw back the virtual curtains in the living room and stepped out onto the morning. Total blue skies, sun belting down from the very off – yes, a rip gribbler, and no mistake.

The Hopper was much calmer down on the beach this morning and was running around like a mad thing. It all came to a bit of a head when bleddy hound's best pal came thundering down the slip. Bleddy hound's best pal is not very friendly to other dogs and clearly took exception to bleddy hound bringing a friend without permission. There was a bit of a telling off from best pal, so we made a quick exit, which was just as well because I could have been down there for longer than was good for me.

I had the morning routine carefully planned down to the last second, since we have more papers than usual starting this weekend. This was truly scuppered when the more pasties and bread than usual arrived in the middle of doing the newspapers. Do not misunderstand me, getting the more pasties and bread than usual early is ideal but probably not in the middle of newspaper time. I diverted my attention to the pasties and went back to the newspapers just as the first customer of the day were arriving.

For once, I could not fault people for thinking that we were open despite the curtains still being drawn. There was one customer I knew to be wanting to get away early, so I had let him in after the pasty man departed. That was that and I had a stream of first customers follow suit while I whizzed through the last of the newspaper stuffings.

Business continued to be upbeat for the rest of the morning, although I managed to cram an early breakfast and get that out of the way. Sun shining, blue sky, customers pouring through the door and pasties being sold before ten o'clock – this is a plan coming together and we are marginally less of a grumpy shopkeeper than usual.

I am sure that it has not eluded the eagle eyed amongst you Harbour cam watchers, and I have had several enquiries in the shop as to why the Lifeboat is sitting outside on the slipway. I was reliably informed by the person that did it that due to the scaffolding being extended, the short slip was no longer an option for recovery. It also restricted movement inside so we would have to launch from its position on the long slipway and wait for the next convenient tide for recovery. Unless the scaffold is removed by then, this will also dash any hope that we would have an exercise launch on Thursday to entertain the hordes of holidaymakers we will be playing host to.

The squeeze on the beach was on from about two o'clock in the afternoon and the tide pressed in to its half past four o'clock high. It was delightful to see the beach crammed with the usual colourful tents and windbreaks all the way from the Beach kiosk to and up The Valley. Right opposite The Valley, the sea was crowded with swimmers just like a proper summer's day should be. Further on, bobbed a big bunch of surfers, hopeful for a wave in the diminished swell that had dropped away after yesterday. Well, you cannot have it all – or at least not today.

All the surfers and swimmers for that matter had gone by the time high water came along. They were replaced by three jet ski riders who decided to show off for the crowd just off the promenade. It is not the sort of thing we are used to here and earlier in the day might have been unwelcome competition for those in the water. It was not clear whether they had launched from the Harbour or had come around the corner. They did not stay for long, the vibes must have got to them, and were last seen heading off down the Tribbens but a seemingly little too close to Cowloe for safety. Even at high water the rocks are barely covered and this is not a big spring tide.

The day eased off after five o'clock and business slowed to a trickle. We had sold a mammoth amount of beer in the run up to the evening, which I stayed behind after hours to back fill. I will be on the telephone on Monday ordering more of what I can.

In all it was a splendid day and a cracking little evening even though the breeze from the northeast freshened and brought with it a bit of a chill. It cannot have been that chilly because we did not sell any logs unless the lot here this week are hardy sorts. I do hope they stay all week.

May 27<sup>th</sup> – Friday

It was all going far too well, so I should have known that something would go wrong. For some inexplicable reason, Hooper, has a sudden epiphany that perhaps he, as a stranger in a strange land, should not be on some foreign beach with some odd grumpy shopkeeper and some other bleddy hound he hardly knew. He was off, with the bleddy hound practically the other side of the beach and he was halfway up the slipway. He was desperately conflicted, torn between pausing for me when I called him and his keen desire to get back to the flat and 'safety'. I did catch up with him before he got to the road and the bleddy hound followed on behind. The poor boy was shaking like a leaf, so I shall be a little concerned with taking him out tomorrow.

It was a glorious morning to be having a bit of a trauma in. The sun was out from the start of the day and all that greyness of the last couple of days banished. There was a bit of a breeze coming in from the north, which moderated the temperature somewhat, else it could have been something of a scorcher. I have bolstered the stock of aftersun on the shelf in anticipation of tomorrow's sore arms and legs and other bits that were unwisely exposed for too long. Some were already buting it today.

It being a Friday it is, of course, a day for the gymnasium, although I will moderate my attendance if it gets busy next week. For some reason, I was feeling on top of the tree when I bounded out of bed in the morning. I have no idea why I was quite so full of beans but a blistering session at the gymnasium hardly put a dent the feeling at all. I doubt that there was very much that could counter my overwhelming feeling of exuberance – except perhaps no one turning up for a weekend that I had furnished with pasties in abundance.

Maybe it was to do with being awarded the Queen's Platinum Jubilee Medal today. There was no pomp or circumstance surrounding its delivery, merely handed to me in an almost clandestine manner by the permanent Lifeboat mechanic, although how he got the job is a mystery. It was awarded, obviously, for valour and having toiled almost endlessly on the perilous front line of grumpy shopkeeping, often under enemy fire, for more years than I can count on more than one hand. Clearly, it has been longer than that but that is how far I can count without the aid of the till.

I am, without doubt, deeply moved that Her Majesty has recognised my selfless service, by bestowing upon me, through the mechanics of the Department of Transport – well, it had to get here somehow – this prestigious award. Naturally, it would be most common not to mention ungallant to brag that I had been awarded such a thing, so I will not make a single mention of it. Ever. At all.

Our bright and glorious day continued to be bright and glorious right through to the afternoon. The sunshine, glinting off the shininess of my medal, brought out quite a few beach dwellers – probably to admire it -, armed with body boards, towels, beach mats and all the paraphernalia of beach dwelling. It is a good sign and there were many children starting to appear on the scene as well, although this early in the weekend they were more likely to be local or localish. They might have had a bit

more trouble beach dwelling in the afternoon as the tide was not allowing any such thing, except for on the approach to The Valley and The Valley itself. There was a fair amount of lively swell about, too, and the surf schools appeared to be having a field day, although one lot of juniors had to decamp to the Harbour beach because the waves on the main beach were just a tad too ferocious.

We have seen a cosmopolitan collection of visitors over the last few weeks and probably none more so than the last few days. We have seen a good number of Canadian (because they said that they were) and not just a few from the USA. If I devoted a bit of practise I could probably discern the difference but I have found it is just best not to mention it in case of getting it wrong.

We had a lady from New York, sorry, I cannot do the accent, today who bought a collection of gifts. I was just reaching for the paper gift bags when she stopped me, preferring to do without. She told me that in New York, plastic bags are completely banned and those brown paper bags you seen used in the movies for groceries – except when it is raining – are 5 cents. For a country that is often associated with wholesale consumerism and waste, they are clearly streets ahead of us in that respect. She told me that most people carry a tote bag around – especially when it is raining.

I for one would be more than happy with that. We would have moved to stronger paper bags if we could, but they are far more expensive than the plastic ones. Having the customer pay some toward it would have worked just fine. People would slowly get in the habit of carrying a tote bag, too, and if they did not have one they could purchase one. We sell tote bags, quite voluminous ones (they are big, but do not glow in the dark) and they are available on our web shop. The web shop, dear reader, is just below the button for The Diary, you may have observed – just in case your interest was piqued, of course.

Big Sis and chum went off galivanting again today – well, it was her birthday, after all. Late in the afternoon they went to an escape room. This is not a room to which you might retire if you wish to escape the vagaries and pressures of the modern world, which seems like a particular good plan occasionally. No, this is a room you go to deliberately to be incarcerated then try and escape. Through the application of logic and answering conundrums posed, you can extricate yourself. Apparently, it is an enjoyable pastime.

They told me that they were heading to a particular restaurant they liked the look of afterwards. Or not, I suggested, if they were unable to correctly complete their escape quiz. I suppose I should have asked where it was, just in case.

May 26<sup>th</sup> – Thursday

Our morning did not look very inviting at all. Still, since I am officially rain proof I did not take a rain jacket with me when I took the dogs out. Rain jackets are, of course,

now surplus to requirements. The bloody hound had quite forgotten the seal from yesterday, which was something of a relief and we concluded another orderly excursion to the beach.

I had deliberately not placed any orders for this morning as part of my intricate and clever planning for the coming busy period. Only the newspapers needed to be dealt with and I enjoyed what is probably my last relax with a cup of tea before the shop opened for the next week or so. I will order in the dairy for the weekend to arrive tomorrow along with any last minute groceries and I have ordered in the first half of the weekend pasty supply to avoid an overly large delivery on Saturday morning.

During the quiet of the morning, I whittled away the remaining boxes of our grocery order. I could not quite work out why we could not seem to fit it all onto the shelves in the store room but I suppose it was quite a large order. Also, some of the items we have not had for so long the space for them on the shop shelf has been used for something else. I am wondering, rather too late, that since there has been no particular clamour for those items, perhaps we need not have brought them back. In the meanwhile, I will have to try and crowbar them in somewhere.

During the middle of the day it had been quite busy but by the middle of the afternoon the street had near enough emptied. When I looked down the road there was a small knot of people by the bus stop who could not wait to leave – well, they could and they were. Business was sporadic after that and we coasted towards the end of the day.

The quietness was interrupted by arrival of our man from FalRiver who brings an area guide and advertising for the Fal River water bus, which is a fine trip by the account of the in-laws who have benefited in the past from our free ticket for stocking the guide. Our man is also charged with bringing bus timetables which he did not have. The bus timetable is available because I have seen people with one but he tells me that the company has not yet seen fit to let him have any to distribute. It is frustrating as we get asked for them frequently. He told me that the companies are producing an amalgamated one covering both service providers. This will be ideal, if we ever get it.

Some excellent news dropped into my electronic mail box late in the day. The Colwith Farm Distillery that makes the very distinctive Aval Dor vodka that adorns our shelf has just won its third consecutive double gold at the San Francisco World Spirits Awards, dubbed the Platinum, which of course is highly appropriate this year. This is a remarkable achievement and it also a remarkable vodka. If you do not believe me, you will have to buy a bottle and give it a go.

On the basis that I have to get up early in the morning, I decided not to give it a go tonight and we had a Chinese meal instead, which has not won quite so many awards but was probably the safer option.



May 25<sup>th</sup> – Wednesday

Something has got to give. I cannot continue being so lucky with the rain or perhaps I am just blessed, never to be rained upon again.

It did look a bit grey when I headed for the door this morning. Hooper, Big Sis's dog just watched me this time with no particular interest in heading out, although I was prepared for it if he looked like he wanted to. It suited me that he did not want to go because it gave me time to head downstairs to put the display out at the front of the shop. When I opened the door to go upstairs, the light mizzle that had presented a few minutes earlier had turned into heavier rain and I quickly adjusted my plans for taking both dogs out to getting my rain jacket first. I had the key in the lock when the milkman hove into view through the mist, so I stayed behind so that I could clear away the milk delivery. By the time I finished that, the rain had stopped.

There is a knack to getting the harness on Hooper that I have not yet mastered. I watched Big Sis do it last night, which involved sneaking up on him. Every time I picked it up this morning, he backed away from me. I had to wait until he was practically out of the door before slipping it on from behind. We headed for the beach, of course. Because I was caught behind with Hooper, the bleddy hound had gone on ahead and was halfway down the slipway when we caught up. She would normally have a lead on but the Missus left it in the truck, which was why I could not find it.

I always thought that I would struggle with two dogs having watched other people in the same position. I have discovered that it is an absolute breeze, but I have the advantage of having one exceedingly well behaving dog and a bleddy hound neither of which have no desire to go chasing off in different directions. For Hooper the beach is a rare experience. He had been down once before, a couple of years ago but I imagine that some of the smells are a complete novelty. Like the bleddy hound, he gets engrossed to the point of fixation and yesterday I had to physically pull him away from one small area that had captivated him.

Today, they were both drawn to one particular area. It took me a while to recognise that it was the beginning of a trail that led back to the sea where a seal had dragged itself back to the water. I am surprised that it took the bleddy hound so long to identify it as she would normally start howling from half a mile away. It has been a while, in her defence. Hooper, of course would have had no idea and would have been utterly perplexed at the bleddy hound's sudden look of realisation and her swift exit towards the slipway. He stayed a while longer, sniffing and I had to call him away in the end. It is an odd time of year to have seals on the beach and the sea had not been particularly rough in the last twenty-four hours. Perhaps it just fancied a bit of a dry.

Having a bit of a dry was the last thing that you would want to try today. Clouds of mizzle intermittently blew through on the freshened westerly breeze. It forced our

passing visitors into coats and hats where yesterday they were wandering about in t-shirts. We hope for better at this time of the year but at least there were visitors about. This week has definitely shown its mettle and we have had a bit of a surge of customers from the weekend onwards. Hopefully, this will just segue into the weekend with an ever increasing throng of happy holiday makers. Well, we can dream, can we not.

We have had some regulars appear this week and some regular returners who have not been for a few years. It is pleasant to have the time to stop and catch up, as we have known some of these people for years – not that I could tell you more than a few names names out of them all.

The Missus had spent the morning working through our new delivery while I went to the gymnasium for the first time in a week. It is surprising just how much a body can slip back in just a week, and it was a proper blistering session getting back into the swing of it again. It was not long after I came back that she went off on an extended shopping tour. Some of this was for our meals that we were fast running out of at home, even the dog's breakfast – the real one not the metaphor – the last one having been consumed in the morning. The other half of the excursion was to pick up the bits that we could not get from our new cash and carry. We will have to find a more acceptable solution than running back to the old supplier each time we are missing something but at present some essentials we are stuck without, such as the small salt pots that are exceedingly popular now that the holiday lets do not supply them – it was a dreaded lurgi thing but hopefully that may soon be changed back.

I took over with working through the remaining supplies in the store room while the Missus was away but, hands up, I am just not as good as she when it comes to blasting through the packages. I am hoping that what I lacked in quantity, I replaced with the quality of the work carried out. Sadly, that hardly applies when you are just removing packaging and putting things on a shelf.

All the while I am trying to model in my head how the weekend will look for customers. Pre-planning spreading out pasty order over two days and judging how much bread to get and when to get it. I am also working through a mental list of beach goodies that the Missus will have to bring down from The Farm, probably tomorrow. In fact, I am so wrapped up in being two or three days ahead that it is no wonder I have not got a clue what I am doing in the here and now.

Counting the shekels at the end of the day showed that it was not a great day, but for a poor day it was quite good. The last hour or two was dotted with a few customers, some preparing for the big journey home before the fight starts at the weekend. The evening culminated in a Big Sis and, mainly, chum cooked tea, which was a pleasant surprise even if we had to wait a minute or two for it. They reminded me of a very good friend, now long lost, for whom the phrase 'doing a Coady' was invented. It roughly means using every pot, pan and kitchen utensil available whether it is required or not. Unlike my friend, Big Sis and chum did most of the washing up.

May 24<sup>th</sup> – Tuesday

Our guests including a Big Sis and dog arrived last night and we enjoyed a good catch up over some tea that the Missus had prepared. This was all very pleasant but led to some interesting changes to my routine this morning.

I had been listening to the heavy showers rattling on the bedroom skylight before the alarm went off. The bleddy hound was clearly also listening to the showers and judged that now was probably not the time to push the getting up thing. I got up on my own – well, almost.

Big Sis's dog, Hopper, is not permitted in the bedroom overnight and slept on his own in the living room. He was still slumbering when I arrived there as my first task of the morning is a quick warm-up set of exercises on the living room floor. Apparently, kneeling on the floor is a dog signal that play is about to commence, and I was pounced upon in a playful sort of way.

Realising that warm-up exercises were off the cards for the rest of the week, I made to repair to the bathroom, but Hopper made it clear that going out was actually next on the list. This I had not anticipated and indeed I was informed the night before that the Big Sis dog did not go out until around eight o'clock as part of the home routine. Having little choice but to capitulate, I considered that I would probably need to keep the dog on a lead, at least for our first excursion and we headed for the beach.

Duty complete, we returned home where I abandoned any hope of resuming my warm-up and carried onto the bathroom and back to the normal routine. On this agenda, the next item is talking the bleddy hound out for her morning walk. I had dangled Hopper's harness in front of him in case he wanted to go out again as well, but he demurred. That was until I was halfway out of the door with the bleddy hound at which point the dog squeezed out quickly beside her, sans harness or lead.

I had considered earlier that Hopper would probably be alright off the lead and, luckily, that proved to be the case. He was as good as gold and stayed with the bleddy hound for the most part. He did let his hair down on the beach, running around in huge circles like a dog possessed then ending up looking up at me with a 'where's the ball to, then' sort of look. When it was time to go back, he came along readily, which was something of a relief but I did slip the bleddy hound's lead onto his collar when we neared the road, just in case.

I will adjust my routine expectations for the rest of the week and somehow make room for extra dog walking time, although I will make sure I take them both together tomorrow.

Despite my multiple trips out, I managed to miss the showers, which was a blessing for me and the dogs. By the time I opened the shop, the day was looking much

brighter and by the middle of the afternoon we, well most of us, were basking in the bright sunshine cast down from a mainly blue sky. Rather than struggling to sell the small number of pasties that I had ordered in, we ran out in very short order. I have booked a longer order for tomorrow when, once again, demand will drop through the floor, no doubt.

We spent most of the morning awaiting the new cash and carry delivery and fretting that it would not be what we expected or are used to. I had already determined from the contract that the goods are delivered in those cages on wheels. My main concern, that I asked about and failed to receive an answer for, was whether they expected to just dump the cages and pick them up the following delivery. This would not be viable for us as we would not have room to store them. We feared a battle with the driver but he was the most amiable chap and helped us unload the cages into the shop.

I had spent some of yesterday and the evening as well, entering the new prices and products onto our inventory system. This helped invaluablely as I worked my way through the boxes as I did not have to look up each product price as it came up. Some things are more expensive, and some are cheaper. On balance, there is probably not much difference between our old and new supplier. We have also identified some gaps in the provision such as rice, inexplicably, and non-food products that we used to be able to get. However, there is much more retail oriented produce in the new company's stock. It is going to be a case of getting used to new things and the fact that we cannot necessarily replace like for like.

Big Sis and chum went off galivanting to Newlyn to visit a café there. Some of Big Sis's friends from when she lived here work there but sadly, she missed them. They took a bit of a run on Marazion beach with Hopper while they were out that way and came back and spent some more time of the beach without Hopper because he is not allowed. They had a glorious day for it, but someone mentioned that it may have been a tad breezy.

We finished the day a little more confident that things are moving in the right direction. There have been three or four days of improved business, which is starting to look a bit more reasonable than of late and has smoothed out at least one of the addition furrows on my brow.

Then, at the last knockings of the day, we learnt a valuable lesson: let sleeping dogs lie. The Missus had been aghast that Hopper had spent the night in the living room and was determined that he could join the bleddy hound in our bedroom for the night. Just for the record, I did not think that this was a particularly well thought-through idea. I thought so even more when, after falling into a peaceful sleep it was rapidly curtailed by an exuberant hound jumping from the floor and onto my midriff. This, I was told would not happen again after he had been properly settled. Just for the record, it had already occurred to me that there was no way that Hopper would

remain in his bed on the floor while the bleddy hound enjoyed the luxury of sleeping on ours. Our bed is big, but not that big to allow co-somnolence of the both dogs.

I had just slipped peacefully back into the dreamy world from which I had been rudely awoken when I was rudely awoken again. The first thing that crossed my mind was that the bleddy hound mkII had walked all around the bed to jump up on my side and the second was to suggest in quite firm tones to the Missus that the dog be banished to the living room.

May 23<sup>rd</sup> – Monday

I caught the end of the newspaper review on Radio Pasty this morning. One of the newspapers and I cannot remember which one, stated that a ten day heatwave is forecast for the Queen's jubilee celebrations. Given that the forecasters' struggle with forecasting the weather for tomorrow, I am dubious. The article also probably mentioned the expectation of bluebirds filling the skies and unicorns cavorting in the fields for the event.

Here, in the real world, there was a bit of rain about the place before I stepped outside for the opening of the day's work. It had gone by then but the forecasters on Radio Pasty assured us that more was on the way. It certainly looked a little more overcast than it had when the bleddy hound and I visited the beach. I had shut her in the bedroom despite a couple of dark imploring eyes looking at me as I closed the door behind me. Callous and cruel as well as grumpy, me.

I was paid out for my treachery by having grey skies roll in from roughly the time we opened the shop doors in the morning. Despite that we were treated to some unlikely customering and some worth-while transactions, then that was it. The rain set in and although not at all heavy or sustained, it was sufficient to clear the street. The trouble was that even after it stopped raining and the skies brightened a tad, the streets remained largely empty. It was definitely not our finest day.

Tedium set in and I was compelled to find my own entertainment. Having filled shelves yesterday there was nothing for it but to key in the pile of invoices that had accumulated since the last time I was bored enough to do them. It did not take all that long this time as I have become quite adept at it and my familiarity with the computer system has led me to discover quite a few short cuts that speed up the process.

I try not to look at the shop clock; that way leads to frustration and eventual madness. It does not matter too much because around three o'clock the boys from the OS kitchens clock off for a break before starting again for the evening. They come to the shop for refreshments which are far cheaper than they can purchase from the OS. We have a chat about their day and how busy or quiet it might have been. I am sometimes perplexed when we have had a super quiet day that they have been run off their feet. We also chat about things in general while I am serving

them. One, whom we have known for some time told us that he had seen a deer on the way into work this morning. That surprised me because I would have thought that there would be limited opportunities for a deer employment.

Another surprise was that all the boxes of smarties that we have are subtly different from one another. The difference is so subtle that it is only visible to boys aged around five years old. I am not particularly good at aging children. These could walk and talk but still look exceedingly excited about being allowed to have a sweet of their choice. One boy was older, I presumed, but not by very much and the younger lad clearly followed closely his elder sibling. Smarties were chosen then returned to the box and another tube of smarties was extracted until the correct one was established. One that the elder boy had rejected and he gave it to his young brother. Possibly because elder brother had rejected it, younger brother felt that there must, indeed, be something wrong with it and just as they were being encouraged to come to the counter, the younger one quickly put it back in the box and chose another after carefully scrutinising it.

Both boxes of smarties were placed on the counter and as the adult items were gathered there two, the boxes were moved and mixed up. After the transaction was complete, both boys picked up a box of smarties and carefully examined it. There was a swap of boxes and everything was well with the world again. After they had gone I pulled the box of smarties from the shelf and had a good rifle through the contents.

I think if we all took the sort of care those five year olds took to choose the exact right box of smarties, we would have time to worry about anything else and world peace would just drop into place.

May 22<sup>nd</sup> – Sunday

I am going to have to have a word with that bleddy hound because she was at it again this morning. She excelled herself, too, a good 45 minutes before getting up time. I pushed her back once and the second time she tried it I kicked her out of bed and went back to sleep. That will teach her – but probably not.

It was not a bad morning at all, and I was down on the beach with just a t-shirt, mainly because I had left my jacket in the shop and could not be fagged to go and get it. The fishing boats were just launching, the first time they have been able to all week. The breeze, such as it was, had started in the north before I had got up but was down in the southeast via a brief spell at southwest. Still not satisfied, it veered back to the southwest in the space of an hour and freshened. We wonder where it will go next.

Our day picked up almost immediately, which was a happy state of affairs for a beleaguered grumpy shopkeeper trying eek a pitiful existence from the resources at

hand. Perhaps I should try and eek a life of luxury from the resources at hand and see how that goes instead.

We had the influx of the newspaper refugees from overhill. I have heard that the SPAR shop expects its supply to be back on again from Monday but none of us hold our breath where the Laurel and Hardy Newspaper Company are concerned. We also had a fair pasty bashing session quite early on in the morning. I feared for my volumes, which I have reduced given the lack of trade recently. We are bound to get caught out at some point and today could have been it. As it happened, the pasty bashing took a back seat in the middle of the day while the majority of the visitors headed for the beach.

There was not a huge crowd down there but more than we have been used to seeing of late. The little knot of tents and windbreaks nestled up against the dunes under the Lifeguard hut. It was the only available place other than into the Valley due to the tide eating up most of the beach. We are slipping off spring tides now but even so there was little available beach until gone one o'clock. Given the lack of room, presumably, many people jumped into the placid sea for a bit of a dip at the near end of the beach. At the north end a bunch of very optimistic surfers bobbed just off the beach. There was a bit of a shore break there that looked alright from a distance, so it was not all bad.

It was a pretty day all the way through. The breeze did not present much of a problem and business had been up and down but with some beach goods going out along with the general grocery and snacks. We have a week left to prepare, making sure all the right bits of stock are present in the shop and that the Missus can easily get her hands on the spare stock up at The Farm.

I had heard the phrase 'four day weekend' bandied about here and there and have been meaning for ages to nail down exactly when that was. Not that it will make a whole heap of difference – most of our suppliers work through such things anyway – but it is best to be prepared as it is likely to be the busiest bit of a busy week - if things go according to plan.

In the evening we gathered around the computer to study the ordering we were doing with the new cash and carry. Most of it was plain sailing but there are some things that we just cannot get there such as Eccles cakes – a complete disaster – and, strangely, bags of reasonable priced rice. We will still have to make a visit to our original cash and carry to fill the gaps and to purchase some of the catering items that the new one does not do. If we get organised, we can buy those in bulk and make only a couple of extra trips a season.

I was about to go and sit down and read a book when I realised that bed time had arrive, so I did that instead.

May 21<sup>st</sup> – Saturday

The bleddy hound was being over-keen again this morning and once again had me out of bed before the alarm went off. I was not overly delighted by this, as you might imagine; I have lost enough sleep over the last couple of nights. It was, however, a glorious morning to wake up to, although it did not last very long. It was not exactly poor later but 'glorious' it was not.

What it was, though, was busy. Being a bit of a long of tooth grumpy shopkeeper, you get a bit of a sixth sense about such things and late yesterday there was a bit of a tremor in the fabric of things suggesting a change was in the air. I had the same inkling last week and although the change that came was small, it was nevertheless a change of gear. This morning, we were not long out of the blocks before we noticed a bigger swath of customers frequenting our shop floor than we had been used to for a while.

The sudden increase had been contributed to, in no small part, by the SPAR shop at the top of the hill suffering a catastrophic Laurel and Hardy Newspaper delivery failure. It is very likely that it came about when they changed fascia companies. Any change big enough is likely to rock the delicate balance that the Laurel and Hardy Newspaper Company relies upon to stop it toppling into panic and uncertainty that the sky may fall in at any moment. The helpdesk that the customer is pointed to is an outsourced body in a far-flung corner of the globe where labour is cheap. It responds reasonably well if the query you have matches one on the list they have, missing newspapers, requirement for supplies, all the routine stuff, but anything out of the ordinary foxes them completely.

The proprietor of the store at the top called us the day before in utter desperation. Let us face it, if anyone turns to us for help they would have to be desperate. Having been through this particular mill and come out on top, I was please to hand over the email address of my contact at the Laurel and Hardy Newspaper Company. A letter to Convenience Store magazine might work as their trouble shooter there is quite effective and failing that a letter to the CEO works wonders as middle managers rally very quickly to save their behinds.

The bleddy hound came down to join me in the afternoon and took up residence at her usual post, on her throne by the door. This elicits quite a mixed response from passers-by and shoppers and small children love to per her. I cannot say whether the feeling is reciprocated but I largely suspect tolerates is a better word. Most often people ask if she is our guard dog to which I have developed a small repertoire of responses but even then, sometimes those seem tired in the face of repetition. Today when it happened, I merely replied to the lady enquirer that she was fourteen now and did not guard so much any longer. I added as an afterthought that she mainly replies on her reputation, which had a pleasing response. I will add it to the list for future use. Perhaps customer can lay bets on which one I will use when they next ask.



Our pleasing upturn in business was not consistent, leaving me some periods of quietness. During those times I busied myself with our grocery stock, learning what we had left and where required using it to top up the shelves. As I did so, I compiled our shopping list for the next cash and carry order due tomorrow. This took the best part of the afternoon between customers and at least the shelves are now as fully stocked as our store room allows.

We have visitors arriving next week in the form of Big Sis and chum, which tied the Missus to a mop and broom in the flat, preparing. I could also hear the vacuum racing across the floor above me in the shop, which when it stops for more than twenty minutes is the signal for all clear. I waited for that before ascending for my tea. It felt like the right thing to do.

May 20<sup>th</sup> – Friday

I made the mistake of getting my head down for an hour when I really should have braved it out. We had estimated that our boat would have the yacht it was towing into Newlyn at midnight and by the time it had offloaded and made it safe for the night and returned to The Cove, it would be close to one o'clock.

All had gone according to plan with the tow, so we mustered at half past twelve to set up the long slip to bring the boat back in at close to low water. It is a tad slipperly with weed still at the bottom of the long slip and it hampered setting up a little. We are brave and hardy souls, well, so we have heard, so we persevered and set up the cables and the span according to convention.

The boat returned on time and two of us gathered – if, indeed, two people can gather - in the slipperly darkness at the bottom of the slipway, with the water ebbing rather more swiftly than we had anticipated away from us. Happily, we had exactly the right amount of cable available and we executed a textbook recovery that no one will ever see – not even us - up the long of the long slipway. All I can say it that it is a good job we eat our carrots. We are, after all, a very nocturnal, very excellent Shore Crew.

It was probably around two o'clock, just twenty-four hours after getting up to launch to the first shout, that I slipped between the covers to discover I was in the wrong house. No, not at all, that just slipped off the fingers while I was typing. I probably slept exceedingly well but I will never know, as I was too asleep to notice.

It only seemed moments later that my alarm was asking me to get out of bed to start the next business day. It did not actually say that, but I knew what it meant. I had already decided that it was best to eschew attendance to the gymnasium lest I fall asleep under my dumbbells. I reckoned that the steady ebb and flow of a bunch of eager customers would keep me active enough – if indeed we would have a steady ebb and flow of any sort of customers.

Occasionally, the postperson brings joyous news with their almost daily deliveries. Today, I had a letter from our mortgage company explaining that they were changing the terms of our direct debit guarantee. It explained that it is constantly looking for ways to improve “processes for our customers”, which is most gratifying, I am sure. On this occasion it has decided to improve the bit where it is able to change how much it charges us with even shorter notice than it did before. It almost made me feel like writing to them to express just how delighted I was that their teams work tirelessly to improve those processes on our behalf. Almost.

It was quite a bright and pleasant day despite the forecast that threatened rain. There was also quite a breeze from out of the west somewhere that kept the temperatures down but encouraged out a traditional windsurfer. None of this new-fangled hydrofoil, and wind wing lark for he. It also showed how much the sea state had moderated since the last couple of days. When we launched the boat, whichever of the launches recently that it was, I would say that the sea state was picking up as it was flogging over the Harbour wall. It clearly changed its mind and the heavy ground sea had almost disappeared.

It was a day of mixed busyness. In the quiet of the middle of the day I ventured to top up a few drinks in the chiller and to lay the groundwork for our first order with the new cash and carry at the weekend. Consequently, with trolley full of soft drinks waiting to be deployed a string of customers filtered into the shop. The trolley remained where it was for a further hour as small groups wandered back and forth shopping and browsing.

Not only did the sudden and unexpected busyness scupper my plans to top up the drinks fridge but it also curtailed some research I was conducting for an enquirer whose electronic mail had dropped on my virtual welcome mat during the afternoon.

It would seem that romance in the twenty-first century is alive and, possibly, kicking, whether we would like it to be or not. The enquiry I had from a gentleman who is bringing his fiancé to our nearby shores right at the start of the half term holiday, asked that I recommend some romantic things to do either with or without two dogs that they intend to bring with them – or possibly not. He mentions the age of his fiancé and my assumption is that he must be somewhere in the same arena, which is far too old to be clinging to such notional ideals, which he should have left behind long ago along with unicorns and choughs – sorry, wait, choughs are real, I saw one.

My second thought on the matter was, what was he asking *me* for? He clearly did not look too closely at our website where me and my wife’s name are listed. Although, conceivably we could be construed from that as being brother and sister. He would have clearly noticed that a married man was exactly the wrong person to ask. It is unfair to require me to drag through the depths of my mind for the horrors of attempted romanticism.

About the only thing that I could imagine being in that category was perhaps sitting up at Pedn-man-du watching the sunset, surrounded by the screams of small children, it being half term. Perhaps not, then. I may possibly outsource this task to someone young enough to believe in unicorns and pass it off as my own work.

In the evening I let the Highly Professional Craftsperson drag me off to The Minack for an evening of culture. I was dubious but he told me that he really appreciated the singist who was there, Katherine Joseph who I had not heard of. Reading the description that the Minack put out was even less helpful – a one-off special event around the spaces between material and non-material world, imagination, dreams and enchantment. As far as I could work out there was a maid with a fiddle playing a bit, another with an electric organ singing a bit and one with a book reading a bit.

The latter started off her bit by saying quite a few bad things about men in general and lots of nice things about ladies in general. I am not sure she said 'scourge' of the Earth, but I sort of think that is what she meant. She then started reading her book to us, which went completely over my head and allowed me to ponder the question every man in the audience might have been pondering, "what had I done", other than being born and I did not have much to do with that. The story she was reading had lots of long and interesting words in it, but I got the distinct impression that it probably was not a whodunit and even if it was, I am guessing that it would have been a man, for sure.

The maid with the fiddle was just lovely but I am not at all convinced that she was 'conducting an experiment by responding to the setting, audience and environment and balancing between the cosmic and molecular worlds', which I think she made up to try sound a bit like the write-up in the event flyer. It sounded like someone playing a violin to me and rather well, too. At the end she joined in with the maid on the piano and I could have listened to a lot more of that if I had not been quite so cold by that time.

The Highly Professional Craftsperson commented, rather loudly, that Rowena Cade, who founded the place in the early 1930s would have done better to build it on the Treen Cliffs headland opposite, where the sun was currently shining and a sight warmer. Happily, our neighbour found it amusing and we were not banished to 'man land' off the premises.

It was an immense improvement on our last visit when we could barely hear anything even through the tin can speaker next to us. We were a bit closer to the stage this time and I was not in the least concerned regarding the steepness of the seating as I expected that I might be. We observed others there who were clearly veterans and next time we will be prepared with thicker jumpers and hats.

Gosh, that was a bit of a day.

May 19<sup>th</sup> – Thursday

Ah, the merry sound of a pager going off at two o'clock in the morning, rousing the deeply sleeping grumpy shopkeeper from his nocturnal reverie. There is nothing quite like it.

We responded to a call from a crabber just south of Land's End that had broken down on its way to pick a few crab pots up. Its sister ship had tried to save us the trouble by doing the tow itself but had problems with the hauling lines. It was not a very long tow back to Newlyn from that point but I waited to see that a tow had been established before heading back to bed again for a couple of hours.

I set my alarm for fifteen minutes before the Lifeboat was due to arrive at Newlyn and surprised myself by getting it spot on. This was just as well because the Lifeboat was able to drop the tow just outside the gaps to Newlyn harbour and make a quick turn around back home. A quick message to our available team had us mustering at the station at half past five o'clock.

The tide had been at about its lowest when the boat went out causing it to take some caution moving away from the slipway at launch. As we set up to bring the boat back, the tide was sufficiently high to force us to turn to the short slip for the operation. Fortunately, the sea state had calmed significantly from yesterday and we were able to deploy the 'fishing rod' from which the Lifeboat Crew collect the span's leading line without getting our boots wet. By using the term 'we' it brings some comfort to the delegated volunteer of the day, making him feel like we are all in it together, which we are patently not.

The boat arrived soon after we had finished setting up, which was testament to some very clever timing by the Head Launcher, who's modesty prevents me from naming. It waited on the moorings while the crew prepared and shortly afterwards we brought the boat up the short slip in what was clearly a textbook recovery and all tucked away and finished by half past six o'clock. We are, after all, a very timely, very excellent Shore Crew.

Look at that, half a Diary written before the day has even started,

The forecasters managed to pen this day in correctly as being a sunny one from a few days before. There was a bit of high level cloud around but there was also plenty of blue up there and plenty of sunshine on the ground. The Cove, dutifully, came alive and we were inundated with visitors on the street from reasonably early in the day. It was not until the middle of the afternoon that they melted away in the heat.

We even had a coach load of German tourists pile through The Cove at around half past two. This is a sight that we have not seen for a couple of years and not one that does us any particular good either; just as before, they hurry through in the direction of Land's End afeared that they might miss the bus back again. We did enjoy the

benefit of a visit from the tour guide with them who stopped by for a packet of jelly babies. Thank you, ma'am.

Since I dragged you all down with me yesterday, I thought that I might share a little more uplifting story with you today. It came courtesy of my newsfeed from Newlyn Harbour and concerns the dry dock business that was closed in 2021 and saved from the high value real estate pile by a group wanting to use the dry dock as a ship building yard. It seems that they have not let the grass grow under their feet and have secured a potentially huge project from the unlikely far flung corner of Africa, specifically Tanzania and Zanzibar, which I must assume are a bit like Brighton and Hove but in Africa.

Penzance Dry Dock is able to provide, with the assistance of its partners, the full lifecycle of shipbuilding from design and build, through maintenance and repair and end of life support, spelt scrapping. With this formidable offering they have the interest of the Blue Economy forum, which is a department of Tanzania and Zanzibar government, to build a fleet of modern, efficient fishing boats adaptable to long line or crabbing. It is early days yet and the parties are working on a memorandum of understanding to formalise the process. If all goes well it will see a hub of excellence in shipbuilding develop in the heart of Penzance developing with it the support network that entails. We wish them every success.

Just in case we had forgotten how to launch a Lifeboat we did it again in the evening with full sound on. I told a local lady earlier that the boat had gone out at two o'clock in the morning. She lives on the front down by the fish and chip shop. She said that she usually hears it when we do an engine test on the slipway but last night she never heard a thing. I said that was because in the wee hours of the morning, aware than people are sleeping, we do a silent engine test and launch the boat very quietly.

The evening launch was a training run, and we pushed the boat out at around half past six. It was not due to be out very long, and we set up the short slip as we had twelve hours earlier to bring the boat back in again. The sea state was not ideal, but at least there was not a great deal of movement in the water in the Harbour. The Inshore boat had gone out too and it was a while after the big boat returned that we saw that arrive back.

We had barely carried out a textbook recovery of the big boat up the short slip when the pagers went off for a live call to a yacht stuck in the Traffic Separation System. Given that the boat was on the recovery slip and not the launch slip, we had to go through the rest of the recovery procedure to bring it in, swap winch cables and turn it around to face the launch slipway. It was the worst possible position to be in for a quick launch, so it was fortunate that the call was relatively non-urgent.

We launched the boat back out into the still rising tide at goodness knows what time but at a guess it might have been around quarter to eight. We decided to wait until it was clear that the boat was going to tow the yacht back to Newlyn, a four hour

operation and in the meanwhile, wonder how we were going to recover the 'fishing rod' that was now thigh deep in water, attached to the short slip. I have to admit to not being the idea's greatest fan and this is one of the reasons why. We had to ask the returning Inshore Lifeboat crew to recover it for us in their drysuits.

Lingering just enough to ensure that a tow was indeed going to happen, we closed up the boathouse and retired to our homes to await developments. Depending on how the tow went, this would see us return in the early hours of the morning to recover the boat or wait until first light to do it then. It was a time to watch, listen out and wait.

To be continued ...

... will the boggle eyed very excellent Shore Crew wake up in time? Will they be able to execute a textbook recovery under such trying conditions? Will the Head Launcher be able to find his flashing green light in time? Is any of this real or just a figment of a weary Diarist's befuddled head?

Find out. same time, same channel in tomorrow's exciting episode.

May 18<sup>th</sup> – Wednesday

It was a bright and sunny morning. The bleddy hound knew it was a bright and sunny morning because she gently nudged me in bed before the alarm went off to suggest that it might be time to get up. To be fair, I have not specifically informed her that I had an alarm that goes off at a particular time and that I would rather not get up before it has gone off because it is early enough. I let her win on this occasion, which was probably a mistake; she is a dog that will take several miles if offered an inch.

Not only was it bright this morning but it was perfectly pleasant, too. There was a haze in the air that was more to do with the waves bashing on rocks and over the Harbour wall than any meteorological effect. Once again, we were compelled to traverse the car park and go around the block. I had been assured by a local, concerned about my concern that we were facing oblivion for lack of visitors, that the car park was full in the mornings, indicating a Cove full of avid shoppers. I can see now that she was just being kind because the car park that I was looking at had half a dozen cars in it and I recognised two of those as locals.

While we are on the subject of visitors and locals, according to certain media outlets there seems to be a storm brewing over in St Ives. This particular alleged storm concerns the town council's decision to make the local toilets pay-to-use, which is not controversial at all – I have it on good authority that Regent's Park does it too - and neither should have been its decision to create a local pass to let the few inhabitants there use the toilets for free. Somehow or other, it has all got a bit fraught spurred on by a disreputable local rag and, surprisingly a big national broadsheet that should know better.

Some years ago, the Land's End attraction, after some refurbishment or some such, offered residents a locals' pass to use the facility without paying for parking. This noble gesture passed without comment and still operates today. Indeed, on the back of its flyer, available in The Old Boathouse Visitor Contact Centre, ahem, it says "*Locals' Pass: Residents of Cornwall can enjoy year-round discounts with our Locals' Pass*". No one at the time raised so much as an eyebrow (other than a few sceptical locals who wondered what the catch was) or raged that it might be seen as anti-visitor and no one has since. It just quietly exists. After all, the attraction of visitors is the Land's End Landmark's raison d'être, so it was unlikely to want to try something that might upset them.

So, we go back to St Ives – if we must – and look more deeply into their toilets, so to speak. What is so different about issuing a locals' pass to use the toilet when Land's End already does it for parking, without issue? Why is that sticking one up to the visitor? After all, the residents have already paid once through their precept after the much maligned council saw fit to rid itself of the shared responsibility of toilet provision for the Duchy. Instead, foisting the problem onto the parishes in a grossly unfair distribution of burden. Here in The Cove the precept doubled to cover the running of the Beach car park toilet alone, currently closed apart from a single unisex cubicle, whereas in Truro at least a dozen were covered by a one percent rise. I think that I too would be seriously miffed if the Cove toilets suddenly became pay-to-use and I was not offered at least a discount.

I think that it is fair to say that most of us believe that the provision of public toilets should be a basic human right, free to use and available in all the right places. Unfortunately, they carry a cost, and someone has to end up paying for it. Someone has to keep them clean; someone has to pay the business rates that the much maligned council refused to waive, someone has to pay for the water at commercial rates and someone has to replace the sink that the oik tore off on a Saturday night drunken rampage. In fairness, the people that use them most should really shoulder the biggest burden and in places like St Ives and to a large degree in The Cove, that is the visitor. There is no malicious intent there, no nationalistic subplot, just plain good old fashioned fair play. Like paying to park your car.

So, why is there maliciousness, discontentment and a feeling that the locals are revolting, which in some cases may well be true? Leading the charge is an organ that once had its roots in proper journalism and was a much-respected newspaper for the Duchy – or at least the west end of it. Sadly, it has morphed into a caricature of a sensationalist rag, its online presence fuelled by what is commonly known as 'click bait', rousing headline backed by insipid, unsubstantiated clap trap that purports to be news, often not even local. But why report the facts when you can stir up some hatred at the same time. It is single-handedly stirring the xenophobic pot and may possibly be a contributor to the downturn in traffic this end of the Duchy.

While it is true that there are commentators here who would like to see the end of Cornwall's reliance on tourism, which is not altogether a bad aspiration, I have not seen one detractor offer a sensible or pragmatic alternative. Indeed, when the space port at Newquay was revealed, the first new industry in Cornwall for many years, it was shouted down for being not ecological and elitist. I despair. In short, do not believe all that you read in the papers, and one more so than others. It is being quite poisonous.

Do not adjust your set, dear reader, this is indeed The Sennen Cove Diary. Let us get back on track.

Despite there not being many cars in the car park, the day's business developed quite nicely for a change. I cannot say that it was very much good for selling pasties for some reason and if that was my only business, I would have been supremely unhappy. Luckily, we sell all manner of other things, hooded sweatshirts, just right for a nice bright sunny day, greetings cards that are veritably flying off the shelf and various local and general groceries that seem to be well received.

Generally speaking, our customers are a jolly and wholesome bunch and barring the last couple of years where we had a right rum lot arrive amidst the crowds, we do not get many we would not like to see again. Sometimes, and it is a highlight of the job, there are proper characters that turn up, each memorable in one way or another. One such lady turned up today and her visit was not even for us. Her car pulled up opposite and she rather gracefully descended from the driver's seat, cream slacks first finished in sensible cream coloured shoes. When the rest flowed out, she had on a crimson two piece, a crimson jacket in exactly the same hue as was the beret that topped off the outfit. She was most striking and held the deportment of a debutant. Her lipstick matched and was set off with round, gold-rimmed spectacles. Around her neck was a contemporary metal band with some enamelled adornment close to her throat.

I was quite mesmerised as she entered the shop. She enquired about the Round House Gallery, closed on a Wednesday, to which she voiced some disappointment. She said she was an artist – of course she was – and had some cards of the wildflowers she painted. I thought it might have been rude to ask to see them, so I did not. She said that she sometimes brought one of her 'old ladies' down for a trip out, which was amusing as she herself was a most senior lady. I commented on her attire, which she gratefully received without embarrassment or affectation. I had the impression that she had been very properly brought up and educated. I could have spent hours with her, I thought, Perhaps I should ask her out for tea next time.

We spent the last few hours of our opening time providing cash back to panicked visitors. Earlier in the day, a gentleman stopped me to ask if I knew where Carn Boel was. Off the top of my head I did not, so I looked it up on a vintage map I had secreted on the computer that shows rather more detail of such things than the modern day one does. Our caller told me he was seeking it out because all the lay



lines in the country pass through it, or that is what I thought he said, as if I should be aware of such a thing. I found it for him in short order, lying half way between Land's End and Nanjizal, slightly off the cliff path and looking like it was going to be tricky to get to.

It was not until he was thanking me for my time looking and was about to leave that he said, "you have the Internet". I found this an odd thing to say and told me that it came when they installed electricity in the area a few weeks ago. That was in the morning after I had returned from a blistering session at the gymnasium. It was not until late in the day that one of our cash requesting customers told me that all the far end of The Cove was without Internet and some businesses had closed because of it. The OS was still open but sending people down to us to access cash.

What a lively day.

May 17<sup>th</sup> – Tuesday

It was a bright a sunny morning, enough to fill the heart with joy and lift the spirit to the heavens. Then some smart Alec on Radio Pasty tells you that rain has already reached the Islands and will spoil your day until at least the middle of the afternoon.

The bleddy hound and I were forced around the block by the tide this morning. It was a bit of a surprise, which only means that I had not been paying attention. There were no other surprises on our journey around other than the bleddy hound is much more inclined to follow and sometimes lead the run. We note with some disappointment that no further work has been carried out in Betty's garden. However, both there and at the start – or end – of Coastguard Row, the seemingly dead and bleached bones of the chrysanthemums (no spell check required, I will have you know, dear reader) are sprouting into life. It is the most fascinating thing to see new leaves poking out from something that is ostensibly dead.

Talking of ostensibly dead, the rain came roughly in the middle of the day. Ostensibly dead is also a reasonable description of our business day.

Earlier, when there were still customers about, I called the structural engineer we had used to do the original drawings for our steel work at the front of the shop. It has been three weeks since I first tried to make contact by electronic mail and two since I spoke with his business partner who told me he was on holiday. I was very pleased to get through straight away this morning but rather less so when he told me that the company does not do the sort of work we were asking for any longer. I told him that it would have been enormously helpful if his colleague or someone at the office could have told me that three weeks ago. We will doubtless have to join a waiting list for someone who will do the job and we will have wasted that time. I was not happy but fortunately, our lead on the build who I am warming to with each new contact, has someone who might fit the bill.

Yesterday, I wrote to the head honcho of Visit Cornwall to ask if the organisation had any analysis regarding the lack of visitor numbers and short term projections. If anyone had any idea, it would be Visit Cornwall who run surveys of its members and are closer to the issues than anyone else. I was surprised when he responded that same day. Perhaps he was having a slow day as well. It was to some degree of comfort to understand that we are not alone with our experience in the far west and that people are staying away in droves from the whole Duchy and the wider South West in general. He had no answers but suggested that it might be the boom of the last two years and the busyness that brought might have put people off. Reading between the lines: keep our heads down, pull in our horns, mix as many metaphors as we can and hold on for a bumpy ride.

The rain cleared through by three o'clock and we started to see a few people sticking their head out to see what was going on in The Cove. By four o'clock it was as if it had not been raining at all, the street was drying quickly and the day was bright and clear – and humid too with all that rain evaporating into the atmosphere. There was still a fair amount of cloud about, but it was far from dull.

Out in the bay, the sea had begun to act up somewhat. The white water was dancing at the footings of the cliffs all the way from Gwenver to Cape Cornwall. There was a background of roaring from its activities over Cowloe and along the shore below us and there were some fine upstanding waves for the surfers out towards North Rocks and beyond. There must have been a bit of breeze from somewhere because the spray off the waves on Brisons was fair near over-topping the rocks.

There were even bigger waves marching into the big beach in short sets near high water. There was a number of surfers still in the water for it and a small crowd on the lower slope of the footway up to the Beach kiosk, there for a geek. It was a marvellous backdrop for 50 junior school leavers to sit opposite the shop and have a fish and chip tea. They had come all the way from Reading, just a bit east of Camborne, for a reason best known to themselves. I was just calculating the enormity of the benefit a pound each on sweets would bring us when a teacher came in and bought six bottles of pop. We are grateful for small mercies, you know, dear reader.

May 16<sup>th</sup> – Monday

Veritably a day of two halves. I tell you, dear reader, we do not know where we are with the weather over the last few days. None of the forecasts have been particularly accurate – oh, I should really stop soft soaping it: the weather forecasts have been entirely wrong other than using the word 'unsettled' to cover their behinds. It is not just me who had been fooled, either. One of our fishermen came by this morning cursing that they had expected enough ground sea to keep them on shore but looking at it this morning, there was no swell at all. At least not on the north coast.

It definitely did not look the best first thing but, as it turned out, that was the better bit of the morning. I was told later that it has rained heavily in the night and it was trying very hard to when I stepped out to ready the shop in the morning but despite that I did not bother with a rain jacket to head down to the beach a bit later. Rain just did not seem imminent.

That changed somewhat while I was at the gymnasium that I successfully got to this morning. It still had not looked very much like rain when I set out but at some point during my blistering session some low cloud had drifted in and brought some rain, heavy enough that it leaked through the leaky tin roof of the hut I was in. The last information that I had was that the trustees had been awarded a grant to fix it, so I have no idea why it has not been fixed. Either they have not been able to match the funding, or they have as much trouble finding someone to fix it as I did.

It was not long after I came back that the day brightened considerably. By the middle of the afternoon we were gazing up at the wispy cloud above us and shading our eyes from the strong sunlight. That fierce easterly – southeasterly to be accurate – from yesterday had moved to somewhere in the south and was not bothering us at all. Sadly, by the time the sun came out, decisions had been made and any volume of crowds that we might have expected had beggared off to St Ives or an under cover museum somewhere.

The, hopefully, temporary cessation of hostilities allowed me to progress some administrative matters that were pressing. This first was to pay an initial deposit for our solar panels, so that is not going to be a reality at some point when work gets that far on our roof. I also ascertained that the new cash and carry company that we had been trying to engage with had eventually lined us up to start ordering from them. This is handy because, despite the diminished trade, there must at least have been some because we are running out of a few essentials and will have to place and order this weekend.

The last thing on my list was to progress replacement of the polytunnel door. Both were blown off in a fierce southeasterly earlier in the year and while I managed to roughly cobble one back into place, the other was too bent to be usable. I crow-barred it back onto the door frame but it is stuck in place and now the weather has warmed up the Missus needs a fully operational pair of doors back, although we will have to bodge something to form a runner for them at the bottom. I telephoned the exceedingly helpful polytunnel company because I could not immediately see the single door replacement on the website. The very pleasant gentleman listed to my requirements and picked the right parts from his list. I had thought that by complimenting the resilience of his polytunnel in the face of an eighty miles per hour wind he might waive any charge in place of using us as an example of the quality of their product. Clearly, they are in no need of such endorsement and he charged me full whack.

My quiet reverie was rudely interrupted at around four o'clock by a sudden influx of customers wanting to buy things. Having accustomed myself to a life of solitude and meditation, I was most put out. I even had to tear myself away from the counter to ply a customer with a sample of Pilgrim and Galaxy hop gin. Thankfully, she bought a bottle else I might have been really upset. The busyness continued for the best part of an hour and included the arrival of a coach party from foreign parts, somewhere the other side of Camborne. Had I only known, I would not have bothered opening the shop until the late afternoon and taken the morning off.

May 15<sup>th</sup> – Sunday

We awoke to a bright and glorious morn and for once it was still bright and glorious when I went down to prepare the shop for opening and again when I took the bleddy hound down to the Harbour beach. Here, the increasing tide had done its thing and removed large amounts of the oar weed that had accumulated during the couple of stormy days that we had mid week. There is still a fair bit of weed down there but the big clumps are gone. I met up with the bleddy hound's best pal and walker later in the morning and I heard that there is a large area of weed covering the big beach, too. Best pal was not keen walking on it which occasioned a large detour to avoid it.

Disappointingly, we were not quite as busy as we were yesterday but, looking on the bright side, we were busier than we were last Sunday. The brightness very quickly went out of the day, which probably had much to do with it and there was a briskness to the wind coming in from the east somewhere. This would have pleased the surfers no end had the swell not slipped away a bit today. It was not all bad and points should be awarded for sheer determination of the thirty or so on boards strung out across the beach. They were there in numbers on Gwenver, too, where it looked to be a little more rewarding. Later in the afternoon some light rain moved in and really stuck the boot into business.

The Missus headed up to The Farm in the afternoon for a few hours. She had fallen for the old forecasters' trick of making people believe that it was going to rain all night just because they had forecast that it would. Of course, having decided not to water the outside vegetables on this basis, the Missus was sore disappointed when it did not rain and the forecasters changed their website to match what they could see out of the window. Before she made amends to the irrigation situation, she dug up some of our Cornish earlies that she noticed had come, well, early. Also, with some lettuce that was ready too, we have the basis for our tea tonight. Our plans for self-sufficiency seem to have taken another leap forward, although producing beef and lamb might be a bit of a stretch.

Thanks to the rain the later afternoon coasted by very slowly. The street had been empty for some time and our customers were the occasional few from cars stopping as they passed through. It gave me time to top up the drinks fridge, which was about the only place we seemed to have made a reasonable dent in the stock. Earlier on the day I had put out the remaining two big boxes of shoes that the Missus had

brought down, so I was not exactly idle, not all day anyhow. I made amends during the evening and remained idle for all of that.

May 14<sup>th</sup> – Saturday

I had an inkling yesterday afternoon that there seemed to have been a step change in the busyness of The Cove. By mid morning today, I was a little more convinced of it, although the numbers were hardly likely to set the world alight.

At first, I was met with a couple of parties wanting sandwiches. I had toyed with the idea of ordering some in for the weekend but dismissed the idea since on the last two weekends they would have ended up in the bin. Quite coincidentally – and probably a portent of some kind – the new sandwich man turned up to introduce himself. He arrived just before we opened and will be delivering directly to us from now on since our pasty company decided not to act as intermediary with them any longer.

This, of course, was no good whatsoever to our sandwich seeking parties who found themselves without and at that time in the morning we had no pasties to offer either. It did perplex me rather because the representatives of both groups told me that they had planned particular walks today. I am sure that they researched the correct bus journeys and the times they should leave and what time they would be expected back. With all that planning, why leave the food until the last minute and to chance. Pretty Poor Planning leads to Pretty empty tummies come dinner time. I did suggest taking some of our rolls, butter and ham that they could make something of on the journey, which did not find favour.

Mind, if they had made arrangements with us for food collection they may also have been disappointed. There is no fixed agreement with our pasty supplier as to the time of their delivery but generally speaking they are here before nine o'clock and often much earlier. Today, the van rolled up at gone ten o'clock, long after our walkers would have been on the path. It was not hugely inconvenient and does not happen very often, so there was no need to say anything.

The morning was, indeed, a little busier than we have been used to but the early afternoon, when it has been busiest of late, was particularly quiet again. It gave me the opportunity to work through the shoes that the Missus had eventually brought down from The Farm. They were in one of the earlier deliveries and had been buried in the subsequent boxes that turned up since. I am sure that it pleased her immensely when I sent a message to tell her that I had finished with that box of shoes and needed the next one brought down. In fact, she 'voiced' her thanks in a message using those emoji pictures everyone is so fond of using instead of language. This one was a face in a bright shade of red when all the ones I have seen are yellow. Perhaps the colours get brighter, the happier the sender is.

The day had started out quite bright when we headed to the beach in the morning. The bleddy hound met up with her best pal down there and for the first time in ages she was doing a bit of running around. The injection that she had earlier in the week has really kicked in and been very effective. She is walking without lumbering along now and it has been a long time since she was game to frolic with her pal. I am a bit wary of pain killers as they just mask the real problem but at 14 years of age, I think she deserves a bit of a break.

It stayed bright for some while but became a little overcast in the middle of the day for a few hours before brightening again in the evening. One of our fishermen told me that the waves were breaking over the Harbour wall this morning at high water and there was a fair lump in the sea. It was not all that apparent lower in the tide but looking more closely at the waves breaking on the shore under Aire Point and along to Creagle it was still there. Heading towards the afternoon high water, it provided some entertainment for the surfers. There was a whole army of them in the sea from the middle of the beach out towards North Rocks getting some pretty good action for a while.

We returned to busyness after a couple of hours break in the early afternoon. It is all change, it seems, which is very heartening and I am hopeful -or desperate, perhaps – that it is set in now through to the half term. Even the weather appears to be playing cricket by introducing the rain, which I knew nothing about until someone mention it in passing, during the evening and night. One local lady even heard that there were thunderstorms that the national BBC had spoken about. The Meteorological Office appeared to disagree, however. Frankly, my dear, I will be in bed pushing out the 'Z's and could not give a stuff.

May 13<sup>th</sup> – Friday

The days seen very good at repeating themselves, it seems. When I peeked from our window first thing there was blue sky and loveliness. By the time I came downstairs to prepare the shop for opening, the cloud had rolled in and stayed.

It has been a while since we had a big fish order but surprisingly, I whizzed through the vacuum packing last night like a man possessed. The weighing and pricing can be fiddly sometimes, fine tuning the best price and printing off individual labels but I managed to get that done as well, all before we opened. We now have a full stock of hake, haddock – that I was very tempted to smoke a bit of – whiting and a geet pile of smoked mackerel, some of which had breakfast tomorrow written all over it.

Sadly, the only bit of fish that had been ordered by a customer did not turn up in the delivery. Because of the mis-communication with the supplier, I did not find out until late in the day yesterday but was able to order some from an alternative supplier but would arrive a day later than agreed with the customer. To add insult to injury, the fish that did turn up during the morning was a size down from the size ordered, so, in all, not a happy result. Unfortunately, it is not something we have very much control

over. A fish listed as available when I order it may not be available the next day for delivery largely because the fisherman did not catch it. It does not make the disappointment any less disappointing.

For the rest of the day the blue sky did battle with the cloud. For a long while it was tantalisingly just off to the north of us and occasionally it managed to break through above us as well. What was not so welcome was what appeared to be a fog bank riding up behind it but fortunately it came to nothing, while we were still awake, at least.

It had been quite busy in the street for some of the afternoon. Up until the later part it did not seem to translate to custom in the shop and I had been coasting for some time. It took the decision to go out into the store room to pack away some newly delivered king prawns into smaller bags and, hey presto, a shop full of people. We had quite a flurry of activity for an hour or so, which was most gratifying.

After that had died away, I looked to the gift food stock on the shelves and went to fill the gaps left by the departing few, laden with going home gifts. Now, here is a funny thing, I was checking the clotted cream shortbread offering, which for the second time since we have opened has gone up in price. I left some old priced items on the shelf and the new stock arranged behind it. When I went to look to see what was needed, the old priced stock was still there. Customers had deliberately pushed the cheaper stock to the side to get at the more expensive ones at the back. I can only assume the belief was that there was something wrong with the lower priced ones. It was a most odd discovery.

After five o'clock the crowds thinned to not being there at all. When I surveyed our bread shelf I discovered that it was empty, which I had not expected and pointed to a bigger influx than in previous weeks – with any luck. Naturally, it comes just as I had slimmed down the weekend bread and pasty delivery in an effort to throw less away come Monday or Tuesday as I have for the last few weeks. I suspect that now we will not have enough.

May 12<sup>th</sup> – Thursday

There is a build up of weed again on the Harbour beach. It started off yesterday as the swell started to increase and yesterday's bashing brought even more along. We are heading in the direction of spring tides, so it should be gone by the other side of the weekend. I do wonder how much longer it will be before the cost of harvesting it, which I am assuming was a large reason why farmers stopped using it for fertilizer, drops below the increasing cost of bought fertiliser. Perhaps there is just not enough of it now for the larger farms, as well.

The day was sparkly and bright when I first looked out but by the time we got onto the beach the cloud had rolled in. It took until the early afternoon before the sun came back out again and brought a reasonable crowd with it. They did not seem in

the mood for shopping much but we picked up a few going home orders. With so many walkers about, we also picked up a reasonable trade in pasties, although 'reasonable' is a comparative term at present. We had a couple of walkers leaving early who had placed their order the day before. This is helpful as we are able to wrap the pasties with a bit more insulation and they should still be hot at dinner time.

By the middle of the afternoon I should have been knee deep in fresh fish but was woefully bereft. I telephoned our man at the fish company to make sure that the order had been received but somehow he had missed it. When he telephoned back there were sounds of frantic filleting in the background as his team struggled to put the sizeable order together. He told me that he would have it with us inside the hour, which turned out to be nearly three. By the time it arrived I was sorely pressed to finish the packing and pricing to the extent that I will have to do some of it tomorrow. It was a package of fine looking fish, however, and very much worth the wait. I know where two meaty lumps of hake are going as well – Mother and I will have them on our tea plates tomorrow evening.

Ordinarily, I might have been tempted to work into the evening to finish off the packing, but some bright soul had demanded that we launch the Lifeboat on a training mission at half past six o'clock. Most of the big swell had left the bay by the time evening came and we were cruising toward low water by the time the boat came back in again.

This week we had suitable numbers to perform our tasks and as the boat approached two of us strolled down to the end of the long slip to make final preparations for its return. As expected the tide was a good deal lower down the slipway than we had been able to get earlier, so we had to drag the cable and the span the remaining distance to the new water line. In doing so we uncovered a particularly tricky snag in the span cable which took time to unravel.

The operation was hampered somewhat by the build up of weed, only newly treated to get rid of it, and exceedingly slippery. Given our pedigree, we efficiently untangled the snaps, although to the casual observer I can imagine it looked rather like Laurel and Hardy moving a piano. Of course, it was nothing of the sort and we were in perfect control of the tangled mess of ropes and cables over our shoulders and around our legs seemingly becoming worse instead of better for a while there.

Soon, but less soon than we had hoped, we brought the boat up the long slipway in what was a textbook recovery with rope entanglement procedure – a true classic and rarely practised. We are, after all, a very talented, very excellent Shore Crew.

May 11<sup>th</sup> – Wednesday

I may not be having too much luck with the shop lately, but we did not do too badly in the morning's rain. It was not raining at all when I went down to get the shop ready and to do the milk and papers but by the time I came out, it had started to rain again.



It was particularly light for the short while the bleddy hound and I were down on the beach then it eased off again as I headed down to the gymnasium, I did have to break out my light waterproof for the run down to the beach for the first time this year but the rain at that point was hardly likely to soak us.

The forecast had it that the rain would clear away to the south before the middle of the day after which the sun would come out. Well, slap my thigh with a stick of celery, it was bang on. There was I in the early afternoon looking out on a sparkling bay with the high tide thundering onto the beach. The prediction for the sea state was pretty accurate as well and that was more than 24 hours in advance. They are getting a bit sharp, these forecasters. I do not know where I should go for a bit of fun poking if they keep on being right.

It was a truly blistering session at the gymnasium in the morning. I felt fit to take on the world when I came back until I had eaten my very wonderful Vivian Old's pork pie, after which I did not feel quite so confident. They are quite big, after all. We are quite blessed in having such fine food suppliers on our doorstep practically. With our freezer looking a little sparse for fish I have called in a mountain of it from our special, non-restaurant fisher in Penzance. The cuts from him are not delicate and trimmed portions but are roughly hewn chunks and actually look like they came from a fish. It will keep me occupied for some time on Thursday when it is due in.

Now that the Lifeboat station has its new roof complete and has been signed off as watertight – they think – the powers that be sent in a team of cleaners, starting with the carpet. This was a serious crew with very serious bits of kit including a van with a long fireman's hose coiled up inside. They spent the day pumping product through their hose, scrubbing and shampooing with their compressor running for most of the day. Crickey, was it ever noisy. I struggle to hear our customers even with my false ears on and turned up and today I could not hear them at all. Fortunately, they could not hear me either, so at least it was a balanced failure to communicate.

The Missus decided not to head off to The Farm today, so I was bereft of my shoes or very much to do at all, other than listen to the constant racket from across the road. I did have a go at stocking the grocery shelves but to start with we have not sold very much and secondly, there is not that much overstock in the store room, especially of what we have sold. There were a few telephone calls I could have made but I would not have heard very much, so I put that off until tomorrow when, if things run to normal, I will be too busy to make them.

If there is one thing I do know, it is when I am beaten. I have a lot of practise and experience in that area.

May 10<sup>th</sup> – Tuesday

There were signs of a brighter day when we headed for the beach this morning. There was still plenty of cloud but it was giving way to more high level stuff and bits

of blue sky were visible here and there. I could have done without the jacket, but it was useful for the pockets.

The tides jumped and we are sitting in the middle of the neap tide, which is a very small neap tide indeed. If I were the tide, I do not think I could be bothered with coming in and out at all for all the distance covered. A good half of the available beach has not been touched at all and the sand is all churned up by the action of the tractor and the boats coming and going.

The day brightened up just as it looked like it might but it still did not bring me much to do. The swell in the bay perked up a bit and gave the surfers something to do. It would have been ideal had the wind stayed in the east, but it had shifted around to the west this morning, just to prove that it could ruin a good surfing day too. It had rained overnight, so I assume that there must be a weather front or two out there to the west somewhere. I did not look too closely as I do not think it was likely to make much difference to the run of play at present.

The long barren days lead grumpy shopkeepers into bad ways. The customer who came through the first electric sliding door in The Cove first thing, with it wide open, the curtains put away and all the shop display out the front, who asked if we were open yet got away with it. I had, by that time, not yet reached my boredom threshold. I should however know my audience, perhaps, as things can go awry. When a lady pointed out to me that it was JMW Turner on the back of the £20 note I told her that he was my favourite and that I had all his records. She looked blankly at the confirmed eejit behind the counter. I concluded such wittiness maybe does not translate well into Polish culture.

I was saved from further disgrace by the sudden influx of customers in the early afternoon and we sold some pasties, too. I have at last got the measure of the required volumes even though they fluctuate widely, and will be caught out, no doubt, when it all suddenly changes one weekend. I was trying to determine which weekend that might be and in my research remembered that the half term week, which is the most likely, has been put back until the first week in June. I had hoped a busy week would come a little sooner, if indeed it will be busy. We will have to hang on a little longer.

With plenty of time later in the afternoon to look out across the bay, I watched as the swell stepped up a level. The forecast is for an even bigger lump out there tomorrow, which should make for a bit of a different day. The sea was already enjoying itself over at Aire Point, leaping up at the big outcrop at the bottom. The water was turning increasing white over at Gwenver and the rest of the shore break was catching up fast. I had been told earlier that there was a fair amount of breeze from the southwest for most of the day, although we could not feel it our side of The Cove. Those who had taken the open-top bus ride today came into the shop wrapped up and freezing but I suspect that they chose the right day, nonetheless.

The Missus missed my message about bring down a box of shoes for me to put out tomorrow. I shall have to find my own entertainment again, so I shall have to resort to my cutting wit and repartee, which the Missus tells me is best enjoyed when I am in a locked room by myself.

May 9<sup>th</sup> – Monday

It was a day that really did not know what to do with itself. As I looked out first thing we had a hazy, grey bay, dull as ditch water as just about hanging onto cool. The wind had gone around to the south and spared us any further drop in temperature and I was back to wearing a jacket on the beach with the bleddy hound.

The morning was quiet again, although there are a few more around for breakfast good than there was last week. After that initial burst, however, we returned to the sporadic visits of the wandering few all the way through until the early afternoon. When I stepped out of the gymnasium late in the morning, there was not a soul to be seen in either direction on the street but the day had brightened considerably.

I am sure that all this quietness is infectious. There must be a host of things I could do in the absence of customers, but I cannot even be bothered to think of what let alone do it. I suspect it must have affected the Lifeguards as well because when I looked out in the middle of the afternoon, their swimming and surfing flags were several feet deep in water. It would have taken some effort to put them there, for sure, but on a falling tide they would not have to return to them for several hours or possibly not until they were retrieved at the end of the day.

The Missus was a little more dynamic. She had arranged another appointment at the veterinary surgery for the bleddy hound as if torturing her with one journey in a month in that direction was not enough. Our post lady had told the Missus of an injection that would help her arthritis. It would also furnish the veterinary practitioners in further luxury to which they, no doubt, had become accustomed after 14 years of milking us over the bleddy hound. I shall be expecting the bleddy hound to be dashing about like a young gazelle in no time else I will be looking for our money back.

Of course, if it works it may not all be good news. It has taken years before I could keep pace with the bleddy hound. If she is on springs again, I would never to be able to catch up. I recall when she was quite small, she decided to test herself against some cantering horses on the beach. She kept a respectable distance but shadowed them right across the tide line. If she is able to start doing that again I will take myself off to the vet.

There was certainly no dashing around in the final hours of shop opening. The afternoon had been slightly more animated than the morning but even so, we were nowhere near being pressed. Any more of this and we will go to a three-day week and I will tout my services as a garden spade for hire.

May 8<sup>th</sup> – Sunday

It has been some hours, less than twelve, since we have had one for the big boat, so it was about time we had a pause from shouts and the timing could have been way better. I was about to slip into something more comfortable, opening the shop, when my pager went off summoning me to the station.

A converted fishing boat had shut down its engine after discovering that all the oil had run out of it and were adrift in the TSS, Traffic Separation System, between The Cove and the Isles of Scilly. This is a potentially tricky place to break down with big tankers and container ships piling up and down it at frequent intervals and casualty vessels need to be removed with some haste. So, the Lifeboat only paused to load some cans of oil for the stricken craft before we launched it into a calm sea with the sun shining and the birds singing. Alright, the gulls were not exactly tuning up for the Apollo Choir but just take it as a metaphor for one glorious day.

The mist had rolled back to the horizon during the evening yesterday but was now sat out in the distance like a ghost at the feast. This was vaguely the direction that the Lifeboat headed in searching for its casualty, some six miles to the northwest of The Cove. Down on the beach with the bleddy hound this morning it was jacket off and basking in the sunshine time and that looked set to continue. It was still glorious on the slipway some hour or so later as we set up on the short slip again, nearly twelve hours after the last time we were there.

I had kept tabs on the operation from the shop, listening to the radio and watching the progress on the ship finding program on the computer. It was a fair bet that the boat would either be fixed at the scene or need to be towed to Newlyn, therefore, either a one hour wait or four to five hours. We just needed to know which one so we could plan recovery. An hour later the Lifeboat started moving towards The Cove but the speed it was going suggested that it was either towing or escorting the fishing boat. It turned out to be the latter. It was not long after that, as we watched the Lifeboat discontinue its escort duties after seeing the boat around Land's End, with very little notice, we hurried back to the station to set up to bring the boat back in.

The conditions and the state of the tide were almost identical to those for the recovery the previous evening – except one was in the dark. Given that we had successfully brought the boat back in with a similar amount of water on the short slip we had better confidence in the clearly textbook recovery that happened shortly afterwards. We were also blessed by a surfeit of keen volunteers. Not only did we have sufficient for a crew but we had spares, too. We are, after all, a very numerous, very excellent Shore Crew - sometimes.

Well, we had all morning of glorious sunshine and, for the first time in what seemed like forever, we had people on the street and they were frequenting the shop. By eleven o'clock I had taken orders for pasties into the early afternoon and it was plain

that we would run out pretty swiftly, so I pulled the reserve stock out of the freezer. This was clearly what the small gods of grumpy shopkeepers were waiting for because soon afterwards the mist started to roll back in and the easterly breeze that had been there since early morning, freshened. It was not so bad with strong sunshine beaming down but as that turned to haze, the breeze felt a bit chilly driving the visitors to seek some shelter.

Although it brightened later on, the mist never really left us, choosing to drift in and out, with the breeze, kept a lid on the temperature. Despite the drop in numbers during the afternoon, we had the busiest day that we have had for a while. The OS, according to the chefs who drop by for refreshments in the middle of the afternoon, was packed for most of their day. By contrast, the beach was near enough empty for much of the day, clearly not warm enough for sitting out on it and the waves being negligible, not much use for surfing either, offshore wind or no.

Talking of wind, what must be the unluckiest sailor is back in The Cove, I noticed. The yacht was in the Harbour car park and I could see the mast poking up above the buildings on the wharf. This was the yacht that parked up on the beach on Thursday night and left for the Isles of Scilly the next day in a fresh westerly. He must have come back today, delighted by the fresh easterly he was faced with.

We puttered to a close in the evening with hardly a soul about. We looked out on the placid and peaceful scene as the tide closed in on the beach, slowly enclosing and covering the sandbars at the near end of the beach. There were a few solitary dog walkers using up the last few minutes of available sand and their dogs charging about in the shallows. Sometimes the bay is filled with sea birds vying for space on the rocks and the bobbing waves. This evening there were hardly any, in fact, there were more collared doves and feral pigeons that have made their home around the Lifeboat station than anything else. Probably a sign of something really important, if only we knew what it was.

May 7<sup>th</sup> – Saturday

I am sure it was a glorious morning, if only we could see it. The mist was sitting on the top of the hill when the bleddy hound suggested that we go out earlier than normal. It was a fortuitous move because she met her best pal at the top of the slipway. There was a cooling breeze blowing in from somewhere towards north, which was rather pleasant in the humidity.

By the time I came down to do the newspapers and open the shop, the mist had descended and blotted out the view. Radio Pasty had nailed it a couple of days ago, promising that the mist would clear to leave behind a perfectly sunny day – except for the Isles of Scilly and the Far West of Cornwall, of course.

Perhaps we should have more fog. It is the first morning in a while that we had a bit of a rush of shoppers arrive. I do not know if they were newly arrived or if they had

been here all week and were just leaving, having decided at the last minute to have a quick peek at the local shop. It would be good to think it was the former and the evidence, buying breakfast goods and newspapers and not presents to take home, was such that supported the theory. We also started to get a little pressure on the pasty sales, which was about right because for the first time in weeks I had decided to let my optimism slip and drastically reduced the number I bought in. Sacre plume and nomme de bleu as they say in parts of Finland.

The Missus was away up to The Farm early this morning. Our friendly neighbourhood bobby had been pressing her about the length of the grass in the field. The subtext of this particular concern was not the length of the grass particularly but his desire to be the one on the tractor mowing it. This was the sole reason for the Missus hanging around at The Farm last evening to attach the flail mower to it. The Missus would enjoy doing it herself, as would I, as it is quite relaxing as well as satisfying but she has enough to do else and it was very useful having a willing volunteer to do it.

After she had set him up and running, she came back to the shop to collect yesterday's delivery. Together we packed that into the truck, leaving behind what we could set out in the shop straight away and she was gone again. It was just as misty up at The Farm as it was down in The Cove, but the Missus was mainly working inside, so it probably did not matter too much.

Sadly, the afternoon did not measure up to the morning's potential. It was possible that I was wrong about the earlier contingent and they had gone home but more likely, the fog put many people off. I lost count of the kind souls that pointed out to me that it was bright and sunny on the other side of the fence. Even St Just got away with it over us, which was unnerving.

It was not until gone half past four o'clock that the mist finally cleared off sufficiently to make it look a bit sparkly down in The Cove. It was very much the case of 'look what we could have had'. It did nothing to improve our customer throughput and one look towards the beach and the empty car park above it told its own story.

It has been some weeks since we had one for the big boat, so it was about time we had a shout but the timing could have been way better. I was about to slip into something more comfortable, my bed, when my pager went off summoning me to the station. Someone had spotted a red flare over on the south coast around Porthcurno, so we launched the boat in a bit of a hurry at around ten o'clock.

Such calls are more often than not false alarms but need to be treated as urgent up until they are proven not to be. With this in mind the launch crew stuck about at the station to witness developments because in all likelihood, the boat would be back sooner rather than later.

There were various reports of human activity around the area, some fishing and some tomfoolery, so the Coastguard suggested a shore line search along the coast to see if anything could be found. Unfortunately, red flares seen from the shore could have been fired from just about anywhere and are notoriously difficult to pin down. We all rely on experience and reported evidence to try and make sense of it. In the end, after the best part of an hour, the boat was stood down leaving us on shore with a bit of a dilemma.

The timing of the launch and the subsequent recovery was such that it entered the time when the tide was between slipways. There was just too much water on the long slip to bring the boat in there and the available water on the short slip was fast diminishing. I had a look at the long slip first and determined that even given the 20 minutes the boat would take to come back there would still be too much water there and there was also a fair bit of movement. I decided in the short slip. There the level of the tide was already below my marker of what I would consider the ideal lowest point but thought that there would just be enough clearance albeit with a bit of sand kicked up. After all, it is not our boat and any scratches on the bottom when we handed it back could be down to, erm, barnacles.

We were precious few on the shore to carry out our work and one of those was still in training. We welcomed the boat back at around half past eleven o'clock and brought it up the short slip in what was clearly a textbook recovery. It and I was all tucked in the boathouse and ready for launch again by midnight o'clock. We are, after all, a very timely, very excellent Shore Crew.

May 6<sup>th</sup> – Friday

Phew, what a scorcher. Well, sort of. It was a bit milder than we have been used to today and by the time I came back from the gymnasium it was worthy of a short sleeve shirt in the shop – I had other clothes on as well. I had exchanged my session on Wednesday for a trip to see the bone cruncher, so it was good to be back to having a blistering session again, throwing a few weights around and rowing for miles – virtually.

We are hoping that the couple of chaps heading to the Isles of Scilly today in their yacht will not have to do too much rowing. I had a chat with one of them last night as we waited for the boats to come back in. They had left their small yacht on the beach in readiness for the trip this morning and my acquaintance was concerned if they had brought it far enough up the beach to be safe from the high tide. I assured him that he would have plenty of room where he was over by the Harbour wall, but we would be there at high water, anyway, to keep an eye on it. I am not sure we could have done much about it if we were wrong but at least we could have borne witness to it floating away.

Both yachtsmen were on the beach in the morning when I headed down with the bleddy hound. The previous evening, I had remarked that the wind was not being

helpful for them but at least it was not too severe. Perhaps I should not have mentioned it because the westerly had freshened by this morning making it even worse for them. They had looked like they knew what they were doing and one had even remembered to climb under the boat to make sure the bung was properly in. Sure, they will be fine.

After a bit of a super day yesterday we are back in the doldrums, it seems. I had foolishly finished off setting out the keyrings in the morning while there was no one around and left myself nothing to do when I came back to the shop after the gymnasium. I eventually remembered some sew on patches that arrived yesterday but that was a short-lived pleasure. It was not until gone four o'clock that the pallet delivery that I had been waiting for arrived. The Missus found herself ensconced with attaching her flail mower to the tractor at The Farm and was unavailable to collect the delivery, so I ushered it into the store room. Fortunately, it was not a huge delivery.

In the meanwhile, we did have some customer activity and some of it was quite worthwhile. Hooded sweatshirts, swimming costumes – the brave souls – and some bottles of premium spirits left wrapped up and paid for. At one point two Asian gentlemen arrived seeking postcards. They were most amiable fellows and we had a little chat about the place. They asked if there was a post office nearby, which we distilled to the requirement for stamps, which we could supply. I made the cardinal sin of judging my book by its cover and offered international stamps; they were both from Edinburgh.

The Missus was fearfully late coming back from The Farm. She had some struggle with the flail mower as the top bar would not extend long enough to allow the connection. Without that in place the mower would just scrape along the ground. Having already taken the tipping trailer out of the barn, full of boxes, she was a bit committed. Happily, perseverance is her middle name, which is odd to have as any sort of name, although I suppose it is not a great deal different from Prudence – except it is spelt differently. Sorry, I digress. Where was I? Ah yes, perseverance. The Missus hung in there until she had fixed the top link into place and rearranged the order of things in the barn. It meant late tea, but that is a price we pay. Thank heavens there is beer.

May 5<sup>th</sup> – Thursday

It was still a little hazy in the morning, but it was bright and mild. I got the impression that there was a bit of breeze blowing in from somewhere in the west but it was not bothering us at all when we headed to the beach. Our man with the hydrofoil was at it again when we got down there. He is getting quite proficient and is doing turns and almost returning to the beach. I had a brief chat with him and he told me that he would be out practising in the bay with his wing had there been any appreciable wind.



Not even the paddleboarders were out there today; it was flat as a dish all over. All told, it was a pretty fair day and it brought some visitors out to play. There were moments that we were actually busy through the day (*busy adjective*: having more than one customer in the shop at any one time.) and there were a fair few milling about in the street for several hours.

We are clearly going to have to do a course on written communication. Some of our signage around the shop seems to cause confusion. A case in point is the signage around our fridge magnets. We have two types, plastic and metal and there are different prices, the plastic being a pound cheaper. To make matter even more complex we offer a 3 for £5 on the plastic ones.

*Customer*: [holding up a metal magnet] “Are these three for a fiver?”

*Grumpy Shopkeeper*: “No, just the plastic ones, sir.”

*Customer*: [Still holding the metal magnet] “But this one is next to all the plastic ones.”

*Grumpy Shopkeeper*: “Yes, sir. Still think you will find that it is metal, though.”

*Customer*: “Oh, it was just that it was in the place where the plastic ones were.”

*Grumpy Shopkeeper*: “Yes, we don’t really have a special place for plastic and another for metal. We rather hoped that our bright customers might be able to tell the difference between the plastic and metal without them being labelled. Apologies. My mistake.”

Our “Cash only under £3” replaced one that said, “Cards only over £3” but it appears that both cause equal discombobulation, so I added another that says “Minimum card payment £3”. We still regularly get asked if people can only use their card for payments that are under £3 and a fair few more who only read the word “cash” and think that we do not take cards at all.

I am also going to have to change our pasty sign because it says, “steak pasty” and the number of people who walk out because they were looking for a Cornish pasty is legion. Similarly, we have got into the habit of telling people that they have purchased sparkling water when they bring it to the till. The number of people who have not read the sign on the front of the fridge or indeed the bottle itself are numerous. I rather suspect that there are just far too many signs in the world and life is too short to read them all.

An afternoon of rigid tedium was saved by the arrival of a small delivery. This came from a small outfit up in Taunton, somewhere east of Camborne which does an attractive range of keyrings and small souvenirs. I was just enjoying leisurely putting them out on a display that I had put together for the purpose when a thumping great delivery of fudge and biscuits arrived. This required far greater effort in unwrapping, pricing and putting out than the key rings did. There is also rather a lot of smaller boxes that need to be found room for in the store room but fortunately I had thought ahead for this delivery and reserved some space.

Being such a calm and peaceful day out in the bay, some bright spark insisted that we take the Lifeboats out for a spin. We were spread thin on the ground for launching and I took the tooltrak and the small boat down through the narrow gap in the scaffolding down to the beach while the other three launched the big boat. The spring tides are diminishing and were not very big to start with, so there was a bit of beach to launch from, which was a relief. It is always a bit tricky launching at the angle from the slipway straight into the water.

As soon as the Inshore boat was away, I returned to the boathouse to help set up the short slip for recovery. We then kicked our heels and engaged in lively debate on matters of great import until we realised that we did not know much about matters of great import and we resorted to casual banter instead. I had stepped outside on sighting the Inshore returning to the bay when the Aged Parent called for a chat. Luckily, the boat passed by for a charge around the surf on Gwenver but I had to cut the call short when it returned to practise recovery with the trainees on board.

Finally, we recovered the small boat and I ran it up the slipway for a washdown before tucking it away in the shed at the top of the car park for another day. While I was doing that, the big boat was being received on the short slip in what was clearly a textbook recovery. I made it back in time to help wash down the boat, bring it back into the boathouse and return the cradle to the launch position for another day. We are, after all, a very multi-tasking, very excellent Shore Crew.

May 4<sup>th</sup> – Wednesday

It was one very glorious morning when I poked my head outside first thing this morning. It was still that way when I ran the bleddy hound down to the beach, too. There was a big blue sky and the sun was splitting the hedges, so that was nice. Half an hour later, the cloud rolled in, mizzle happened and up on top you could not see a hand in front of your face unless you opened your eyes and found that there was thick mist as well. The low cloud blotted out the sun for the rest of the day, although we did have some brighter bits and it was warm and quite humid.

The day followed what is now a familiar pattern of quietness interspersed by visits from regular visitors and, today, the ex-Head Launcher dropped by for a chat. In between those times there was still plenty of yesterday's deliveries to work through and to put away either on the shelves or shoe-horned into the store room. It is quite remarkable just how quickly the free space in there has been used up. Some of it should have been transported up to The Farm but we have already filled up that space to the point we can get no more up there.

The Missus left halfway through the morning to go and try and tidy up some more space and to water the plants that need watering and to pick a bit more produce for the shop. I did not quite manage to finish the automatic watering system I had intended to put in place. In Fact, I had not even started it other than a discussion with the expert man in the industrial irrigation shop in Helston. It reminds me that I still

need to get the various bits to join the two IBCs at the barn. At present one is working alone to collect all the water off the barn roof and one heavy shower a month or so ago alone almost filled that. We have not had much rain since then, so there may well be more room in it now.

She returned in the middle of the afternoon to allow me to head into town for an appointment with my bone cruncher. The finely tuned athletic physique, maintained by regular trips to the gymnasium, occasionally needs a little outside help to keep it on the straight and narrow. Crumbly old frames probably need a bit more, which is why I went. I am glad it is expensive because I do not think it would do much good if it was cheap.

Talking of expensive, our front numberplate dropped off a few days ago. It suffered from the seaside disease – rust, and the last flakes of it holding the bracket on eventually gave up on the task. I had tried to remove the last bits of the bracket so that I could fit a new one but the screws are also so rusty they refused to budge. Even after several applications of copious amounts of easing oil, they remained resolutely in place despite encouraging them with heavy screwdrivers and pliers.

I decided that it would be a good idea to stop by our garage man on the way back to the shop to see what they thought. Obviously, I had hoped that our man would say he would resolve the issue there and then, which happily he did or rather did not. It was not for the want of trying and one of the screws gave up and came out without too much fuss. The other refused and our man, unable to easily get to the back of it gave up on the basis that it would need the front removed to get to the back. Since we need some welding done at the back to ward off failure at the next MOT test, I agreed that we would book the truck in for that and while it was there, they could come up with a cheap and dirty solution for the number plate. We will just need to avoid automatic number plate recognition installations until that time – or reverse past them.

In what is now a familiar routine, we coasted through to closing time finding things to do in the absence of serving customers. We must have a few people buying things because I am having to place reasonably regular orders for milk and groceries. It is the devil's own job trying to keep on top of the fresh vegetables and making sure they are not going rotten in the fridge and how much to buy to replace them with when they do. It is quite a relief to close the door on it all for a while.

May 3<sup>rd</sup> – Tuesday

After yesterday evening's sunny exit I had expected a clear start, but it was all misty, damp and grey. The tides are clearly not up to much this spring tide and there was still a sliver of beach big enough for the bleddy hound. She is not keen any more even to saunter around the block, although I feel there is no harm in forcing her now and again. She will thank me for it one day – or perhaps not.

Despite the dourness of the start of the day, it was reasonably mild. Radio Pasty reported that one of the red top newspapers was suggesting hotter than Crete at some point in the next few days. It is a shame that Crete is expecting such poor weather. Our day was set to improve, however, and it certainly did from the middle of the morning. Although there was still a fair amount of cloud cover, it was warm and a tad humid and bright enough for us to sell a few sunglasses.

We had sold a total of two pasties yesterday, which was something of a record, and had thrown away a lot more first thing this morning. Determined not to have so much waste today, I took care to bring pasties out in small batches. This could have gone horribly wrong if demand had picked up considerably but, in the event, it worked quite well, and we sold a few more today with less to throw out tomorrow.

I had a lady in today who asked if we had any fresher bread. What was on the shelf still had two days left of its best before date, so I told her we would get more in when the current bread had sold out or its date expired. There is still much concern over 'best before' dates, which it is felt is leading to unnecessary food waste. Most products are good to eat a good few days after the expiry and some bigger suppliers are experimenting with removing the date, recommending customers use their eyes and nose to establish edible worthiness. Perhaps I should try that here.

We have had an electronic mail from the Diary's International Correspondent (Australasia Branch). We have not heard from him in a while, and I assumed those fierce Tasmanians were not even letting messages out. Those Mediterranean types are very strict, you know. Our friend tells us that the island had spent a considerable time free of the dreaded lurgi but since the borders have been opened, the rate has climbed astronomically and he has been keeping his head down. In fact, he had kept his head down at their summer residence at the beach with his extended family, being mainly pets. I was intrigued to find out that the parrot was named Clarence Froghorn Henry, although Clarence has been renamed Clarrie after she started laying eggs, a fact that made me chuckle for a while.

Apparently, it was too hot on many days to sit out in the sun from mid-morning until late in the afternoon, a situation that we are most familiar with here on perhaps one day of the year when it is 20 degrees cooler than our Correspondent is used to. Still, give it time; we are nearly there.

Our International Correspondent clearly does not let the grass grow under his feet and in the interests of 'copy' and a good story, risked exposure to the dreaded lurgi by venturing out to the Fingal valley. Who knew Fingal had a valley as well as a cave? He tells me that it is a mining area for coal, unlike much of the UK's industry it is still active and being invested in.

The mining area here and the town that sits in it is called Cornwall after the large number of diasporic Cornish miners who were attracted to the area and settled. The geology is mainly granodiorite, which is similar in qualities to granite and so the

Cornish miners were particularly suited to extracting the coal here. Today, it is recognised as high quality product. This is just as well because the Australia Institute suggests export from the island costs \$100,000 more per shipment to any of the usual northern Asia ports than exports from New South Wales.

Sadly, our Correspondent reports, the Cornish miners were just as exploited in Tasmania as they were at home and found just as much poverty in their new home. There, and who said that reading The Diary was not an education? (We do know that Tasmania is not in the Mediterranean. That was a joke. We do not want to upset our New Zealand buddies, now do we.)

The Missus had left in the middle of the day. She had an appointment for the bleddy hound at the veterinary doctor's surgery in the late afternoon and went over to Mother's first to lull her into a false sense of security. Before she went, she gave me a hand with the deliveries. We had already had the main grocery delivery that arrived halfway through my morning cup of tea for the first time this year. It is useful for both parties that it arrives at that time, which is a plus point for the status quo. When or if we move to the new supplier, the delivery details we have much to do with whether we switch or not despite the £40 charge for it. It was late in the morning that the frozen and the second grocery delivery arrived both together. I needed some help in getting the frozen away before it started to melt. It put the Missus too late to detour to The Farm as she intended, so ended up waiting at Mother's. The bleddy hound was still a quivering wreck on the trip in, regardless of the different direction.

The bleddy hound may have had her nose put out of joint – not to mention the opposite end - but the Missus was late enough to stop at the local curry house in Penzance on the way back. We have not had a take out curry in a very long while. Gosh, what a treat and the Missus bought extras for the freezer, too.

May 2<sup>nd</sup> – Monday

There was just enough beach this morning to run down and have a stomp on, which pleased the bleddy hound no end. She was not the only creature happy, either, as our friend with the hydrofoil was there as well. The first attempt we witnessed ended very quickly in disaster again and I feared that there had not been much improvement since Saturday. The next attempt, however, saw him bounce without too much effort out to the end of the Harbour wall before he fell off. Given that the tide was mainly in, that was a respectable distance and I congratulated him heartily when he paddled back to the shore. A remote friend had also watched him on the Harbour webcam and reported that he had subsequently made a couple of circuits of the Harbour without falling off. I have no doubt we will see him with the next breeze out in the bay ... falling off heroically.

For some reason best known to myself, I had expected some blue sky and sunshine today but it was still overcast and grey when I went down to sort out the shop. The forecast from Radio Pasty suggested that there would be some showers, too,

through the day, which was very disappointing especially as I had told myself it was going to be a good day. That will teach me to be optimistic.

I am not going to mention business being poor, the lack of customers or how quiet it is for the time of the year. Not a word. Promise.

I woke this morning in a state of confusion. I was rather thinking that it was Sunday but my shorts, gymnasium for the use of, were hanging on the beam by our bed ready for me. It was only this that convinced me that it must have been Monday – or Wednesday or possibly Friday. Happily, all the deliveries were present when I came down to prepare the shop, ahead of taking the bleddy hound out. I do like it when that happens because it means I do not have to time my return to the shop to take care of any late arrivals and can sup my cup of tea at leisure.

It was only when I came back from the gymnasium, after a particularly satisfying and blistering session, and went to the bathroom that I realised something odd was afoot. My towel was damp and so too was my shaving brush. It occurred to me that I had already showered early in the morning which I do on days that are not gymnasium days. The task was so automatic that I had not even realised and, after I came back from the gymnasium, I could not immediately recall doing so and had to rely on the evidence to convince me. I think I may have to lie down for a bit, drink heavily or possibly both ... sequentially.

The Missus left for The Farm as soon as I returned. I should have gone with her; no one would have noticed – oops, don't mention how quiet it is. She went to start to sort out the barn and the store shed to see if we could actually find any of the stock in the mountain of stock there. At some point we might actually see some customers – oops, don't mention the lack of customers – then we will be stuck about how to find the bits that they had bought to replace them. I did offer to come up in the evening and lend a hand. We could have sandwiches on the veranda afterwards. My genuine offer of assistance was spurned on the basis that I am useless at such things and would only get in the way. I could not possibly argue.

The highly professional craftsman dropped by in the later afternoon, which passed half an hour. We stood and admired the bright sunshine and blue sky that had broken through toward the end of the middle of the afternoon, just after the few people who were here had beggared off – oops.

May 1<sup>st</sup> - Sunday

Well, the merry month of May here so soon and already we have the threat of a gale of rain descending from the north and a cancelled charity cricket match that the Missus was making sandwiches for. I do not know how many were in this 'five-a-side' style match, RNLI versus the fire brigade, but she had clearly decided it was probably around 50 people and had already made sausage rolls for 75 of them. The

notice of postponement was a little late in coming but, happily, most of it will freeze for the rearranged date.

The complete silence of our mornings had been replaced by the familiar rush of waves against the shore, today. The tide had only recently left the beach and I suspect that we will be pushed off it in the coming days for our first walk of the day. Nature may not have been quiet this morning but there was not another soul about in any direction and I rather hoped it was not setting a trend for the rest of the day.

The weather had been pretty fair in the morning but there was a hint of damp in the air. It has also clearly rained a bit at some point shortly before I went down to prepare the shop in the morning. There was no particular hint of more rain to come, although it was heavily overcast and misty. I had quite forgotten about the possibility of rain and Radio Pasty had been reasonably dismissive of anything serious on the way here. The Meteorological Office begged to disagree with warnings of heavy rain from the middle of the morning, which failed to materialise, and it did seem for a while that the jury was still out. The forecast had clearly put off any rush to the café for an outside breakfast and there was very little in the way of visitors in numbers anywhere along the street.

The rain had taken its time moving southwards and when it did come in the early part of the afternoon, it settled in for the rest of the day. Any notion I had of a reversal of fortune and an increase in customers from this weekend were washed away with the rain.

On the occasions that we have had customers, we are increasingly asked if we sell belts. I have always found it odd that it appears to be a staple of the seaside giftshop in the larger resorts. I recall with some regret wandering the streets of Newquay where every other shop had rotating displays of belts of many varieties. At the trade shows we attend, any stall that is remotely connected to seaside trade or gift and crafts has belts hanging up alongside umbrellas and snow globes and I have never understood the connection. Do people's trousers suddenly fall down when they arrive at the seaside? Stocking belts is not something that we have ever considered and until recently the subject has rarely come up save for the odd holiday wardrobe emergency. I shall keep a weather eye on demand and possibly venture into stocking them but until then, we have the twine I tie up the newspapers with.

Talking of being helpful, I thought that it might be worth pointing out a small matter of etiquette. It is to exclusively be used at time when it is patently obvious that the shop is closed. For the avoidance of doubt, the key indicators of this status are that the curtains are in place and the door is closed – and also that the hour of the day lies outside those stated on the 'shop opening hours' notice on the door. There are occasions, however, when an emergency might overtake you and you find it necessary, within the margins of a politeness either side of our open hours, to throw yourself on the mercy of the grumpy shopkeeper still therein, to seek extraordinary service measures. Such emergencies might include a sticking plaster for a recently

inflicted minor wound, sustenance for an infant that could not have reasonably been purchased before the shop shut and emergency need for beer. Of course, all excuses may be superseded on the presentation of a brown envelope stuffed with shekels of the realm.

The etiquette, the framework for which is set out in the previous paragraph, should be employed upon the door being opened to a request satisfying the conditions above. The quickest way to being refused such a request, and a clear breach of etiquette, is to commence with the phrase, 'Are you still open?' when it is plain that we are not. The most effective and endearing gambit would be to start with, 'I know that you are closed but ...'. This may be followed up by any excuse that comes to the caller at that moment, the more inventive and far-fetched earning additional points for bravery and barefacedness.

I trust that this has cleared that up. We are only here to help.

With the rain persisting through the afternoon, the pace was sedate but at least there was a pace, for which we are very grateful. There were a fair few walkers geared up to meet the conditions and a fair few nomadic individuals in need of rainproof ponchos that we were happy to supply for the required compensation. As noted previously, there was a greater proportion of foreign nationals than of late visiting the shop. Many of these, I would guess were Spanish or at least Spanish speaking. It demonstrates that there are at least some modes of transport operating in this direction from abroad even if the poor souls cannot easily get back again.

We ended the day with a small group of young people looking for the entire ingredients of a roast dinner including the joint. Pitifully poor planning precedes pitifully poor performance – other versions are available. They were also hampered by not having any personal transport and staying in Mousehole where I do not think that there are any proper shops left. After admitting that they were not going to get to Tesmorburys by bus in time – they would be closed in any event – they settled for local butcher sausages, Cornish potatoes, local onions and Boathouse Farm parsley, arguable a much better quality meal than they would have procured at Tesmorburys, even if they had executed better planning. I imagine they will not look back after finding such fine local epicurean delights.



