

DIARY 2026

May 1<sup>st</sup> – Friday

There was still a bit of cloud around first thing this morning when we headed for the beach, but it was trying hard to make amends. We were lucky to have a bit of beach; the tide having not long left it. I think tomorrow we will be walking around the block again. One of our lesser used fishing vessels was just launching, containing the Lifeboat mechanic and his pal. They own it between them and go out when they can. I think that this is the first time this year. More octopus, then.

By the time I opened the shop, the day was in full flight with brightness peeking through the sky dotted with fluffy white cloud, high level cirrus and some mid level cloud that acted as a filter for the sunshine. It was warm, too and even in the shop on the shady side of the street, I did without any sort of jacket all day – the first time this season.

There were a fair few more people floating around than over the last few days. It did not translate into too much of an increase in footfall in the shop, but we did see some buying of going home presents. Most of the people were frequenting the café next door and stopping on the benches opposite for breakfasts and dinners through to the early afternoon. None of this had got going at the time I went off to the gymnasium for the first time this week – they gathered during the time I was there.

I took the girls around the block afterwards. We would have gone to the beach again, but it was occupied. There was a small child down there and BB still cannot be trusted not to jump up, although she is getting better. With her long legs she would have been as tall as the child, so it was best not to chance it. We have not been around the block for a while, or so it felt, and in the pleasantness of the day, it was a proper joy. We also stopped to speak with friends as we went by who have a house at the end of the car park. What jollity there was in The Cove today and probably just because of a bit of sunshine.

Then it was back to shopkeeping for the rest of the day. In my absence, the soft drinks had arrived, and I took time to put those away before I settled for a spot of breakfast. There were a few interruptions to that, so the day was not a complete loss, although for such a lovely day I had expected a better.

I managed to pull the beachwear clothes out of the hat yesterday for something to do but that was grasping at straws. Actually, I am glad I mentioned straws because I forgot to check the status of our stock of hats. Oddly, I mentioned 'hat' too, but that somehow did not trigger my memory, but 'straws' did. Perhaps I should withdraw from the brain function survey I have signed up for before they discover that my brain is clearly just plain weird.

Anyway, I digress. Now, where was I. Ah yes, I must go and have a geek and see if we need any hats because they will be ordered with the other clothes I compiled an order for yesterday. However, since I thought of that later in the day, the only other thing I could think of doing was to complete some more of the brain survey questions I agreed to do as part of the University of Exeter study – and that was before I thought maybe I should not.

I do try and write The Diary in chronological order but sometimes I get lost and bewildered in the review – yes, unbelievably I do reread what I wrote – *and* still publish it. Apologies.

While I cannot do the actual tests while I am behind the counter in the shop, there are other sections that are not timed or do not need the complete concentration that the tests demand. The system threw up some more sections for me to fill out which request details about my background, my lifestyle and physical condition. It did not cross my mind that I might wish to withhold any details from the study. They appear to have a secure system and have made assurances that the data is held anonymously. Since The Diary probably contains more information about my physical and mental condition that the survey could possibly ask in a lifetime of questions, I saw no reason to be shy.

I was not far into the questions when it became apparent that they were going to be exceeding difficult to answer. My life occurs in two unequal halves, seven months in the shop and five months largely working at The Farm. Questions such as how many hours a month do you spend indoors, for example require a different answer in the summer and winter. There were quite a few questions like that, and I had to make a best guess how to provide an answer.

There was another section on emotional wellbeing. This was one of the parts of the survey that they will also ask of my nominated ‘buddy’ to compare results. I will not see what my ‘buddy’ has written. I can only guess – and worry.

Have I become more grumpy than usual of late? Have I become irritable and snappy? Am I more critical of others? I answered all these as ‘no’ obviously, because I am exceeding well-balanced and emotionally stable – it says here. One of the questions made me laugh, ‘do I find myself talking with strangers in an overly familiar manner?’ Well, yes. It rather comes with the job of being a grumpy shopkeeper. I will no doubt find out later that it is a red flag marker for some deep psychosis or other. Good job I did not fall for the trick question about hearing voices and seeing unicorns and choughs. We all know everyone has that, right?

When I started answering the modules, there were four on display. Some of them were quickly dealt with and I thought I would probably clear them all since we were quiet. I do not know if they thought that I would not notice but every time I cleared one, another one or two modules would pop up. When I thought I had finished, there were more modules to complete than when I started. I am very grateful to my special

friend for pointing that out. He notices everything I do not. I am very lucky. Not everyone has a six foot white rabbit to give them advice. I am surprised no one has mentioned him.

Hold the bus just a cotton picking minute. We just had what was suspiciously like a five minute to closing rush. I was not really paying attention. We had one or two customers in the last - alright, probably an hour before closing which makes it a bit of a stretch for a five minutes to closing rush but, no matter – and then a few more after that. It was probably quite fortunate that it happened when it did because it awoke me to the fact that I had quite forgotten to place the bread order for tomorrow and thus the weekend and had missed the deadline. I then had to try and rescue the order by throwing myself on the mercy of our supplier while at the same time serving more customers that we had all day.

Everyone promptly disappeared again and when I came to close the shop the street was completely clear that made me wonder if I had imagined my five minutes to closing rush. When I took the girls out last thing, I noticed that quite a few more holiday lets had lights on that in the week before. Hopefully it is new visitors and not the cleaners forgetting to turn the lights off when they finished.

## May 2<sup>nd</sup> – Saturday

We were a little bit more upbeat this morning with the numbers of customers coming through in the middle to late morning. I think that largely we were fighting the advancing weather that was set to be poor for the later afternoon. It was not that great to start with. The cloud had thickened overnight and brought some damp in the air with it. There was not much in the way of breeze first thing, but it made up for it later, banging in from the southeast again. Strangely, ever since Thursday, Land's End weather station has shown the wind in the north. It is either a very peculiar weather anomaly or some rogue has stuck a lump of chewing gum on Land's End wind vane.

The rain started around the middle of the day, but it was not very heavy. Looking at what was hanging around to the south of us, we were very lucky. The BBC tried to tell us that we would have some sunny spells with our rain, but I must confess that there was not much evidence of it.

We had a delivery late yesterday that I took to be our t-shirts order arriving. I did think it a bit odd that the boxes were so heavy so I should not have been surprised to discover it was the small sweets bags that the Missus had ordered during the week. As ever, the children who were here during the Easter break made a serious dent I the first order and replenishment was desperately needed. Restocking can be a bit of a fag, but with nothing else to do, I was grateful for the distraction. It took all morning.

I had asked the Missus to avoid a couple of types, 'yummy bears' being one of them. Since last summer, we have been left with an abundance and they always seem to

be the last to go. She duly left these and a couple of others off the order. When I came to top up the stand this morning, I noted that the 'yummy bears' peg that had been full a few days ago was now near enough empty. Of course it was.

It was probably as well that I had rather less time to myself than I did on the previous few days. I might have been inclined to reply to an organisation that had 'reached out' to me suggesting that I might be interested in becoming a partner in the My Five Iron Golf platform whose name I have changed in case they get upset.

Apparently, our humble store had been recommended to this company despite us being at least five miles from the Cape Golf Club, which was mentioned in the spiel, and there being at least three closer convenience stores that they could have targeted. Gosh, I felt special.

To lure me into this prestigious partnership I was offered a plethora of inducements including "exclusivity for your sector", "your branding on the flyovers on one of the holes on our West Cornwall Golf Club web flyovers which is trackable and targeted to your demographic within the local area. I am sure these would be really useful if I knew what any of them actually meant. I would also have free golf for me to entertain my clients, colleagues and guests – I presume the clients, colleagues and guests would either have to pay or enjoy watching me while I had my free go.

I will have to act quickly because our man has 'reached out' to a number of companies locally, so whoever was doing the recommending was clearly none to fussy about their recommendations.

I spent the afternoon itching to send a reply. I was anxious to know what 'exclusivity in my sector' was. Did they really mean that they would not sign up other newsagents, off-licences, wetsuit purveyors, beachware suppliers, grocery stores, pasty (sorry MS) providers, novelty and gift shops, book shops and clothing stores anywhere else in the country. I was tempted to consider selling golfing equipment so that I could include that, too. I loved the idea of branding on flyovers if only I knew what one was – other than the highway constructions that allowed one road to cross another unimpeded.

The more I see, the happier I am that I do not have a real job anymore. I cannot help but think that I would by now have had to do a lot of 'reaching out' and finding impenetrable slogans for everyday expressions.

I would have had plenty of time to play silly games with the letter writer as the rain returned in the middle of the afternoon and got heavier. It was a proper shame because we had just started to get much busier, busier than we had been all week. Half an hour into the rain starting, the street emptied, and our merry band of customers disappeared off to the nearest ale house, I would imagine. Nevertheless, when I did the till after closing, we had enjoyed quite a good day by comparison to the rest of the week.

The rain also stopped just before I went out to bring the display in. It looked like it was brightening up in the last gasp of the day. However, when I merrily threw open the door for our last walk of the evening, I had to scurry back to get a coat as it was raining again. Thanks.

## May 3<sup>rd</sup> – Sunday

It was a drab and colourless scene to gaze out upon first thing in the morning. We were excluded from the beach thanks to the tide but at least it was not raining. There was plenty of cool damp in the air but largely it was temperate. The fresh wetness of the earth and the flora kept the girls sniffing the whole way around the block as my freshly made tea went cold at home.

Naturally, it started raining when I went down to put the display out ahead of opening the shop. It was short lived, but the sky looked threatening at times for most of the day. I was dubious that it would rain at all, but a customer dropped by in the middle of the morning to tell me that it would rain at two o'clock, stop raining and get brighter for the rest of the day.

It was doubtless this highly specific bit of intelligence put all the rest of our customers off visiting us, at least until ten minutes past two o'clock. Even some unexpected sunshine in the middle of the day failed to have the restorative effect that we might have hoped for. It threw into disarray my careful crafted plan for provision of pasties (sorry, MS) and forced me into a ill thought out order for Monday morning.

During the quietness of the morning, I attended to the few gaps that we had on our Jewellery stand. I may have omitted to mention that we had a visit from the very helpful young lady who last year looked after our surf jewellery ordering and putting out. I know that I did admit to making a hash of the display on the new stand and against the advice that came with it as to which type of bangle or anklet went where on the stand. I almost turned down her offer of a visit thinking that she would not have much to do when she got here but thought to let her see the new stand anyway.

She duly arrived after a false start and had to change the day. When she did get here the shop was empty and she had plenty of time to review my cobbled up job of display. I was distracted by some customers and when I looked again, she was in full flight rearranging the display. By the time she finished it resembled the example photograph that they company had sent with the stand. All the correct types were on the correct sides of the display. Despite only working for the company part time, she clearly knew the stock intimately and did the rearranging without referring to any notes.

I cannot work out exactly how she exists, perhaps it is the modern way and I am out of date. She works for the jewellery company on and off during the summer on a

contract basis then, during the winter, she went off to some ski resort and did something completely different there. She appears to be very level headed and utterly competent and perfect in a client facing role. I am sure she will do well and I do not think that she will ever find herself in a rut or bored with her job.

I am equally sure it suits many progressive employers and certainly suits the employment market in Cornwall. I know many young people who do three or four jobs during the summer and survive on fewer during the winter. It is a form of adaptation that many young people who are prepared to put in the effort seem to find not only effective but essential.

Her visit also prompted me to pull my finger out to correct the signage boards on the bottom of the stand. As supplied, they were too large and bound either on the rotating stand above or the wheels below. I knew she would be disappointed by my effort with the display, and I did not want to disappoint her with the stand as well.

This has been a very long way of saying that her efforts made it very easy to top up the displays because they were in a logical order. On the downside of that, it did not take very long at all, and I was left with nothing to do sooner.

This was probably a good thing because as the afternoon went on, we got quite a bit busier. It is difficult to determine whether there has been a general increase in visitors, or this was just trippers deciding it was a good time to visit The Cove. Traditionally, this bank holiday weekend is not a busy one for us, although it too may have been influential in the upturn. One thing is for certain, it was not the weather forecast that brought them; that was more than a tad wrong. The BBC had promised us showers all day and our random customer of good cheer assured us of rain at two o'clock.

Neither were correct. The weather that had improved in measures during the day ended up as exceedingly pleasant. There was plenty of thicker cloud to the north of us, but the sun had found some gaps to the south and it was bright and often sunny later on. Someone had removed the chewing gum from Land's End weather vane and it was showing a northwesterly of light airs. The bay was mainly flat as a dish but there must have been a bit of swell and a few waves because there was a small group of surfers at one point over by North Rocks. It flattened out completely as it neared high water, but it did not seem to deter a desperate few.

It was still mild when I took the girls out for a run later on. There was some coolness drifting around in the air that was pleasant since I had elected to wear my woolly jacket again. There was still the cloud cover to the north but elsewhere it was broken and there was enough light and just gone nine o'clock for me not to need my headtorch. We had ended with quite a successful day. A few more of them would be quite welcome, thank you very much.

## May 4<sup>th</sup> – Monday

After a bit of a blinder yesterday it was difficult to determine what to expect from today. Radio Pasty had given it the scattered showers all day again but after yesterday, you could not really rely on them. There certainly was not much rain on the rain radar when I looked but of course it managed to rain on some customers just after I told them there was not much rain around. Like yesterday, it just looked like it might rain any minute and unlike yesterday, it did.

Also like yesterday, we had very few customers in the morning. Those who did arrive cleared us out of pasties (sorry, MS), although, happily, not completely. I had the suspicion that many of these purchases were ones to have on the journey home as it did feel a bit like an exodus. Early into the afternoon and The Cove was looking a little bit deserted. At about the same time, there were 25 people on the beach and half a dozen in the water. You know it is bad when you can actually count the people on the beach. Quite where all the people buying pasties were coming from, I have no idea and I was not about to ask but the purchases continued to be frequent even when the street was nigh on empty.

Deeper into the afternoon, the sun broke through the cloud and wonder shone about. There was little wonder, however, that there were so few people in the water; it was flat as a dish. There was one paddleboarder, a chap with a motorised blade and half a dozen very optimistic people on surfboards. The Lifeboat channel markers were standing straight up and unmoving in a – southeasterly in St Ives and southwesterly on Gwennap Head, windiest place in the universe. Our joker had been back to the Land's End weather vane because that was back showing northerly again. Whichever direction it was coming from, there was not very much of it.

Despite having few customers, those we did have made some notable spends which helped tremendously. It was telling that we were selling beach clothes, towels and boardboards – telling me to pull my finger out and order the clothes that I had spent some time compiling the lists for. I still have not looked at the hats, by the way.

The other thing we were selling was snacks for the walking trade. I had stocked up on fruit and a few greengroceries in the morning having placed a number of grocery orders last night. Because we cannot weigh things at the counter – alright, we probably could, but it is easier to prepack. It means I do not have to worry about putting on gloves or washing my hands between customers. The latter would be impossible because we have no water supply downstairs.

The prepacks are not excessive – tomatoes mostly in threes and the same with bananas and the majority of people manage with that. Occasionally we have the question asked, 'can we purchase one banana'. I do not think that we have been asked that about tomatoes. Three bananas cost around £1.50 and when I checked later, there was a bag of two for 77 pence. I understand that none of us want to

waste food, but surely the customer could have given the unwanted one away, thrown it out or left it behind. Perhaps not.

Well, it was the very strangest of things and made me wonder whether all The Cove's visitors were hiding around the corner all day, snickering behind their hands like a group in a darkened room at a surprise party. They had peeled off in ones and twos, stripping us of our stock of pasties and waiting for the big moment when they all leap out and shout, 'surprise!'. That moment was apparently half past three when we went from scarcely any customers to being overwhelmed in a few short minutes. It would be a bit of a stretch to call it an early five minutes to closing rush, but it had that feel about it.

It was but fleeting but restored my faith in the business day and was very welcome. What was not so welcome was the apparent loss of my 13 millimetre socket and its handle. A visitor has appeared in the shop somewhere near the middle of the day to ask if I had such a thing. Him and his pal were trying to fit a roof rack to their vehicle. My 13 millimetre spanner was already missing from the set, so I lent him the socket. I almost reached into our good set but thankfully I thought better of it.

He promised to be back in around 20 minutes but that was the last I saw of him and my 13 millimetre socket. We do occasionally lend out such things and after so many years I suppose it was bound to happen that we would lend to a wrong 'un. It is irritating and will be difficult to replace, however, I would not have lent it if I was that worried about not getting it back again. I do not think that I can say that the incident had rocked my faith in humankind, well, not the majority of the ones who come down here, anyway. The key is to forgive and forget - hope his bleddy roof rack falls off and breaks into a thousand pieces.

The day was quite the weirdest I think I had ever had in the shop. The till at the end of the day showed that it was better business than the day before. Had you asked me, I might have bet a substantial sum that it was the other way around. It was also the first day that the local mob had commandeered the Harbour beach. This normally results in multiple trips by the youngster coming to buy drinks and snacks and the adults clearing out the beer fridge. There was none of that today. Just one trip by a few of the children and one adult buying beer. The world order is proper on its head, well the only bit of it that affects The Cove, anyway.

Thankfully, order had been restored by the time I took the girls out last thing. Mind, it is difficult to tell in the half light.

## May 5<sup>th</sup> – Tuesday

Well, that gave me a chuckle this morning. For the last couple of days of largely dry weather, the BBC has shown on its weather website, full days of black clouds with raindrops falling from them. This morning, with a bay you could not see across and

the rain pelting down outside, the website showed a full day of sunshine and light cloud. I knew there was a good reason for paying a licence fee: it is the entertainment value we get.

At least such an anomaly is easily explained: the website is maintained by people who cannot be fagged to look out of the window once in a while. What was a little harder to explain was my 13 millimetre socket and handle sitting on the counter when I opened the shop this morning. I went to the lengths of checking the CCTV to assure myself that it really was not there when I closed nor had the borrower returned it while I nipped to the end of the shop for something I forgot to take out of the fridge after I had initially closed up.

Fortunately, our system highlights movement and when I checked, the Missus had nipped down at half past nine o'clock, after I had retired for the night, and placed it there. Perhaps she is trying to gaslight me and have me committed. She would probably find that she did not have to try very hard. What actually happened was that she had gone outside to get rid of the lobster shells from our tea and the socket and handle was sitting on our newspaper box. Anyway, I am very pleased to have it back and, moreover, our 100 percent return record has been maintained. Obviously, I also do hope his pal's roof rack did not fall off and smash into thousands of pieces.

Of course, it is also possible that our man's roof rack did indeed fall off and smash into a thousand pieces which was what prompted him to return the spanner – in case the wheels fell off as well. We will never know but I prefer to think that our natural human trait is honesty – with a few exceptions.

The rain went on rather longer than I had hoped. There was a geet long chain of it piling down the north coast in a straight line. At some point it changed its mind and hung about where it was leaving us damp and overcast for the rest of the morning. It was not the most alluring scene to draw visitors to The Cove, and we consequently remained quiet for the rest of the day. There was not even a clandestine pasty (sorry, MS) underground movement clearing out our stock. Very poor show, I felt.

There is a clear expectation amongst our fisherfolk that the sea conditions are set to improve over the longer term. The spring tides were much smaller than I expected this time around and we were able to get down on the beach in the Harbour this morning. As we turned down the slipway, I was surprised by the increased number of punts down on the lower parts of the slipway. They were either dragged down yesterday or the days before and I just did not notice. For the past month there were only two or three punts down there so the change was very noticeable. The girls went running off between them and disappeared. They did emerge eventually on the sand, but the smell of bilge water was clearly too much of a draw for a while.

In what seems to be the usual progression of such things, business did pick up in the afternoon. It was, however, very clear that the bank holiday weekend was over and done with and 'picking up' was a very minor affair. The weather decided to clear and

improve during the afternoon but, as ever, we cannot get a pat on the back without a boot up the backside to go with it; the wind picked up. It started in the northwest and ended in the north, so that even Land's End was correct. It felt chilly during the morning to the degree that I had to go and get a jacket. Even when the clouds cleared and the sun came out during the second half of the afternoon, it did not seem to improve much. I think that it might have been different if you were out under the sun.

As usual, business took a dive after four o'clock and the street emptied. It gave me the chance to look out across the bay as the tide became full and chased any remaining characters off the beach. The water is still essentially flat but today was rippled in the northerly breeze. There had been a few waves in a bit of a shore break earlier. One young lady staying here told me it was ideal for her, and she could get away with not having to join her boyfriend in some more macho surf.

With the skies clear, it was still light when I took the girls around last thing. I think it was the first time this year that I have not needed my headtorch with me. We are charging through the year it seems.

## May 6<sup>th</sup> – Wednesday

I am going to have to get myself a new mental notepad. The old one is bleddy useless. It was while I was chatting with a customer about newspapers for the umpteenth time this season that I remembered. Last year I made a mental note that I would start doing newspapers a week earlier this year because there were probably enough people around to make it worthwhile and, by this stage last year, I had just about enough of telling people why we were not doing newspapers. It is too late now, and I shall endeavour to remember for next year.

There was no sign of any rain around this morning despite Radio Pasty's best efforts of telling us otherwise. It is a shame that their analysis was not included in their website again. We had some brightness, and I took the precaution of wearing sunglasses when I took the girls down to the beach. A member of the very excellent Shore Crew had told me last week that the optician that did eyes told him that his eyes had been adversely affected by UV rays. He is roughly the same age as me and has not, like me, spent an unusual amount of time outside. His job has been predominantly indoors.

It was bright down on the Harbour beach and the early morning sun was reflecting off the water which was close in to the top of the beach when we went. It was rather glorious with just enough nip in the air to warrant the wearing of my woolly jacket and a hat. The waves were happily slapping on the sand, but it was the only noise there to annoy the peace.

Some cloud drifted across us in the early part of the day but after that we enjoyed sunshine for the rest of the day. The temperature was down a bit on yesterday and the windchill brought it down a little further. It certainly did not put off anyone from nestling on the benches across the road that were all in the sunshine all day but on the beach we had the same lacklustre gatherings we had for the last few days. I would concede that it probably is not sitting on a beach weather just yet and with no surf, the surfers are not interested either.

There were some rumblings in my inner ear; some small, barely present signs in the ether that we were about to get a bit busier than of late. We started to see a small influx while a friend and neighbour dropped in for a chat and after he left, the tsunami started. Another sign: a coach load of Germans walking past on the opposite side of the road, an omen very much akin to an eagle flying to the left if you are an ancient Greek – or was that right and Roman? Soon, the shop was alive with visitors from all manner of places buying gifts, beach clothes and, of course, pasties (sorry, MS).

Being a glorious afternoon that just got more glorious as it went on, I suspect helped a good deal. I still could not fathom why the beach was still so empty, but I was not going to ask many questions as all the people who might have been there were up our end buying things.

I was kept busy for the entirety of the afternoon which is, of course, why our delivery of t-shirts arrived today. It had arrived slightly before the main bulk of the busyness and allowed me to get some of it dealt with. Many of the t-shirts I was able to get out into the shop bins, but some would need to be taken up to The Farm. It was a blessing that we can now order far fewer for each run – it used to be 300 and is now 50, thank heavens. Needless to say, I did not finish them all and have the children's t-shirts to look forward to tomorrow.

It was while I was topping up the t-shirts that I noticed that the wetshoes were in a terrible state of stock erosion; there were gaps all over the display with sizes missing completely. The Missus had asked me a week ago to make a list of the stock we needed but I had forgotten all about it. We now need 50 shoes brought down in one go and it is one of my most disliked tasks – the unwrapping and removal of the card and paper stuffing in each shoe. That will teach me.

Late in the afternoon, I was engaged in conversation with a lady who regaled me with tales of her early visits to The Cove and surrounding area. It was just post-war which would put her in her late 80s or early 90s. She recalled staying in an old Victorian railway carriage and particularly remembers the gas lamp fittings and the lack of electricity. It is not the first time I have heard of railway carriages being used for accommodation in the area and given the location of this particular one, I did wonder if I had met one of her relatives at some point in the past. I still find it quite incredible that there were quite so many railway carriages here; we are ten miles from the nearest track.

Our busyness went soft sometime after half past four which is a good half an hour after it usually does, even on busy days. The Missus had been up at The Farm all afternoon and had a busy day herself. There was much planting going on and she also planted up two decorative shrubs for the decking in front of the cabin. This is the same decking at the front of the cabin where we have lost a big umbrella, several chairs, a glass top table and various other decorative items to 80 mile an hour winds. I do not fancy the chances of these two shrubs being there this time next year.

I was feeling quite ebullient by closing time. I cannot imagine it will last.

## May 7<sup>th</sup> – Thursday

I had to drag myself out of bed early this morning. It was necessary to do all the normal chores and then be ready to leave for the metropolis of St Just by ten minutes to eight o'clock. I had booked my annual blood letting appointment via the message that they sent me which did not allow me to enquire whether it was a fasting blood letting or not. I took the precaution that it was and booked it early. The Missus would have to cover in the shop, and her preference would have been a later appointment. She probably would have been more sympathetic had I not checked later to discover that it was not a fasting test, and I could have indeed gone later.

As I drove out up Cove Hill, I noted that there were three large diggers in the car park there by the entrance. I was not aware of any working going on up there and I meant to ask the Missus when I got back. She has her finger on the pulse of such things but, of course, I forgot.

All became clear later on when two of the diggers appeared on the beach over by the Lifeguard huts. My guess, when asked by some of the observers who had seen the diggers down there, was that they would make vehicle access to the Lifeguard hut. Whether this was by moving the rocks or loading sand on the rocks would have to be seen. We had to wait a while but by late morning the diggers were moving some of the rocks out of the way and moving sand over what was left – which answered that question.

I was not sure why the Lifeguards should need vehicular access to their huts, and I surmised that it might be to do with the jet ski and its trailer. It was well into the afternoon when one of the Lifeboat crew and also a Harbour user disabused me of my random guesses and explained the real reason. It was nothing to do with the Lifeguards. The fact that the diggers were working at the foot of their access ramp was merely a red herring.

I am reliably informed that one of the transatlantic fibre cables in the bay needs to be replaced. The diggers were performing ground works ahead of the main laying. The cable will use existing ducking through the dunes to the top of the cliff and thereafter to wherever it goes. The marine end of the operation was due to arrive today but

there was no sign of it. It will also explain the presence of various gentlemen with false beards and dark glasses wearing ushankas hanging about the place and looking furtive.

Circumstances interrupted my reverie in the form of the frozen delivery arriving in the late morning. It was poor timing because we had just started to get busy and I had to divide my time between customers and the delivery. It is the only order that cannot be left until later if we are busy. It is also not helpful that the company has the most disorganised delivery process of any of our suppliers. Our order is displaced all over the storage space in the truck and the driver needs to find the item on the delivery note then search for it in the back of the lorry. The box will sometimes be in plain view and sometimes buried under other items which are not part of our order. Why the orders are not segregated per customer into cages or boxes, defeats me.

There were sufficient gaps between customers to get the order away before it melted and we now have a full display of ice creams. It was starting to look a little thin as we had not topped it up since the first ice cream delivery just ahead of Easter. Since the ice cream kiosk next door is not open every day, we tend to be the fallback option and consequently sell quite a few on their off days. I had done the order twice. The first was more than a week ago and I had delayed too long in sending it to the Missus to be placed. When I did it the second time, I remembered the pizzas that I had forgotten the first time but forgot the prawns and the chips that I had remembered on the initial list. I think we will be alright until the next order as we still have some weeks to go before we are in full flight.

The other thing that scuppered any further interest in the works on the beach was a jolly little Lifeboat shout at two o'clock. The boat was called to a small open boat with double engine failure that had tied itself to Longships lighthouse to stop it drifting away. There were comfortably enough Boat Crew for the job but on shore it was looking like I would be on my own for a while. Luckily, the winchman turned up just ahead of the launch and we had the boat away in a timely manner.

We were fortunate that the Lifeboat took the casualty under tow because it would be down to the two of us to affect the textbook recovery. It would have been possible, but I would need to lie down for a bit afterwards. Instead, I estimated that we would be looking at a recovery at around five o'clock or just a bit later when more people would be available to help.

Things in the shop had calmed down dramatically. The little run of busyness we had, evaporated after I returned to the shop. I was still in my yellows for a good while after as the story unfolded and I relayed information to the other members of the very excellent Shore Crew who were just waking up from whatever stopped them attending for the launch. I calculated that the boat would return to The Cove at five o'clock but half an hour out from Penzance harbour where they were taking the casualty another craft called in sick from the Wolf Rock lighthouse area.

With no other takers, our boat volunteered to go to its aid if Penlee could be tasked to take over the tow of the original craft. The Coastguard thought that a spiffing idea and less than twenty minutes later, our boat was on its way to Wolf Rock.

I recalculated my timings but half way there, the Coastguard informed our boat that the casualty wanted to be towed to the Isles of Scilly to which it was closer and to which it was heading when its engine failed. I recalculated again and it looked like our boat would be returning to The Cove at the time it would have been had the day gone smoothly and we had launched on training in the evening as planned. Fortunately, I had not broadcast any of my calculations, preferring to wait until we were sure of the outcomes of each phase of the operations. It saved my embarrassment because when our boat arrived at the second casualty vessel, it had already been taken under tow by a passing motor cruiser and was well on its way. We assess the tow to be satisfactory, and the Coastguard were happy to stand down our boat so that it could return to station.

I recalculated again and discovered that the boat was just half an hour off being back and had to hurriedly arrange a recovery crew. As it happened, various interested parties had already arrived and more followed giving us more than sufficient numbers to execute what was clearly a textbook recovery up the long slipway.

There are two Boat Crew due to be assessed and hopefully signed off on another stage of their training on Sunday. Since they were not part of the rescue crew and anyway needed to practise skills other than towing, it was decided that the arranged training would go ahead anyway. We had recovered the boat and finished up at six o'clock, so we all hung about and waited half an hour for everyone else to turn up.

Both boats launched again toward seven o'clock and because there was a lot to cover, the big boat did not return until quarter to nine o'clock, crossing the setting sun to the northwest. It surprised me that the sun was so far north but then I realised that we are only a month or so off the summer equinox. Gosh, where did that go.

We had set up what we could on the short slip when the boat had come back the first time and did the rest after it relaunched. We were therefore as ready as we could be when it eventually steamed into the Harbour and we carried out what was clearly a textbook recovery up the short slip in very calm conditions. We very quickly washed down and rearranged the boat for its next launch and retired to the crew room for a very brief debrief. We are, after all, a very repetitive, very excellent Shore Crew.

## May 8<sup>th</sup> – Friday

We were met with the view of a stonkingly glorious morning when I threw back the virtual curtains first thing. It has all the hallmarks of a burgeoning rip gribbler about it and when we arrived on the beach, it was further evidence of the loveliness of the day in prospect. It was the sort of day to foster laziness and not even the sea could be fagged to push a few waves onto the beach down in the Harbour.

Idleness was not an option for me as I had the shop to open. There was also the large collection of wetshoes and slides in the truck that the Missus had brought down from The Farm yesterday. They had yet to be unloaded and I would have to wait until later in the morning for the opportunity to get my teeth into those. Instead, I started with a handful of deliveries that I had called in including the pasties (sorry, MS) for the weekend which I had in mind were probably either going to be twice too many or half not enough to see us through the weekend.

In the late morning, a couple of RIBs arrived. I assumed, in fact they could not have been anything else, that they were to do with the cable repair in the bay. They traversed the line of the cable many times during the afternoon doing something. I had rather expected something a little more exciting than a couple of nondescript RIBs charging up and down. Fortunately, someone who knew better than I told me that the RIBs were just doing the inspections; the bigger cable layer would be arriving next week.

That then begged the question what the diggers were doing uncovering the cable up the beach. Obviously, I could not see exactly what they were going but there was a line of road work barricades running up the beach just short of The Valley and they were digging a trench. It is possible that where they were was above the neap tide high water mark, so the assumption had to be whatever they were doing was only preparatory for whatever the big cable boat would be doing. Next week, the bit they are working on will definitely be swapped by the tide. It was quite frustrating not knowing, so when one of the workers came in for snacks, I grasped the moment. He told me all they were doing at the moment was identifying where the cables were. There are several together where they are digging, so I assume they could not just use a metal detector if they are looking for one specific cable.

There was one thing that did make me raise an eyebrow. The works they were carrying out today were at least 50 metres away from the path leading up to the Lifeguard hut. I do not know but I strongly suspect that those diggers were indeed making the huts more accessible from the beach. It does rather look like they were slipped a fiver to do that while they were waiting to start on their own work. It is also possible it was part of the agreement that let them use the top car park as a staging point.

We were fearfully quiet again today. There had been a bit of action during the middle of the morning, and we had some walkers passing through. The café looked like it had more business than us during the afternoon with several of their tables outside used up. It was, after all, the sort of day for sitting around outside.

The day had not developed quite as rip gribblerish as I had imagined. Some milky high level cloud moved across us and softened the sun considerably. There was not much in the way of a breeze, and it was hard to determine exactly where it was coming from. The local stations could not agree: St Ives had it northerly; Land's End

was not sure at all and had pointers in three different directions; and Gwenapp Head, windiest place in the universe, had it in the southeast. The BBC were keen to tell us the northeast and the Meteorological Office, the southwest. The Lifeboat marker flags were slightly suggesting the northwest, although we have been known to have local anomalies in the past. The flag on the Lifeboat station pole was limp and therefore no help at all as was the flag on the Lifeguard hut. A mystery, then. We will leave it at that.

It was about half past one o'clock when I started on the wetshoes and the slides. It was as far back as I could put off doing them without not doing them at all and I could find no further excuses for putting it off. It did not take all that long to be honest. The Missus had prepared all the slides so all I had to do was to put them out. The wetshoes, however, all needed to be torn out of their packets and the stuffing extracted from each shoe. I did it between customers that were so few and far between that I did all the shoes in about three batches.

We had a minor five minutes to closing rush. It was just ahead of this that I was compelled to go upstairs to, erm, make a cup of tea. When I return there was a group of small children just outside the doorway looking in. They looked for all the world like they had been transplanted from a Victorian melodrama and were dressed not much differently. All it needed was a couple of inches of snow to complete the picture. They looked at me with glum apprehension and their expressions failed to change when they went back to looking inside the shop.

There were several people in but only one couple fitting the parental bill and they were down the far end of the shop by the soft drinks fridge. Frequently, with a family of that size, the children would be all over the shop, running about and causing various degrees of mayhem. I was very impressed with the discipline, but they did look down hearted, like little street urchins down on their luck and dressed in rags. I parcelled up some of our small packets of sweets and gave it to the parents when they came to the till, a reward for the children for being so good, I told them. I do hope they were allowed them after their regular afternoon beating.

I dismissed any further thought of the children – they probably deserved a good thrashing, anyway – and spent teatime watching the digger people refill the trench they had dug. I am not exactly sure how they are getting to and fro the beach but someone observed them coming down off the dunes using their buckets to stop toppling forward. The next time I looked have cleared the table and cleaned up, they had gone for the night. The digger driver told me that the next phase is uncovering the cable below the tide line, which clearly will be a timely effort, especially in neap tides. I shall be looking forward to the next exciting episode.

May 9<sup>th</sup> – Saturday

How very disappointing. When I looked out this morning, we had more cloud than we knew what to do with and the wind that did not know where it was coming from yesterday decided to settle in the northeast this morning and be a little more brutal. It was not that uncomfortable down on the Harbour beach, although I did have to wear a hat again. I cannot say that I was otherwise disturbed by it until a little later when I was standing behind the counter as it blasted through the doorway.

It was a change-over day, so it was never going to be busy, I told myself. It makes me feel much better when it is not. It also gives me the opportunity to feel much better if it is busier than my downgraded expectations, which today it was. I think that we are generally now in an upward flow of visitor numbers and this will continue through until the half term, which we hope will be busier still. The BBC news website suggested or perhaps predicted that the UK would see an increased number of 'staycations' due to troubles abroad and the increase in jet fuel prices. I am not very receptive to predictions – I am reminded of 'barbeque summer' that was anything but - and will wait and see, thank you very much.

I had hoped that I would see the diggers arriving this morning to discover how they were getting down the dunes. Missing it completely, I caught up with the action just as they drove onto the beach via the ramp to the Lifeguard hut, thus scotching the rumour – started by me - that the ramp was built for other reasons. When I looked a little later, they had built a Guinness World Record size sandcastle roughly where they had been digging before. From the shop, it did look like they had dug a pit in the one place suggesting that the cable they were after was a lot deeper than I imagined. I am beyond the point of guessing anymore. I have not got a clue what they are up to. All I know is that the boys at the digger depot were probably queuing up for this job.

With nothing much else going on for much of the morning, I decided to crack on with the first quarter invoices for the Making Tax Difficult system. The first thing to do was to order the invoices by date which is a task of overwhelming tedium. The Missus will usually do this for me because for some reason she enjoys such tasks. Sadly, she was unavailable at the time, and I had to do it myself while trying desperately not to think of the other more interesting things I could be doing, such as polishing packets of drawing pins.

Once complete, I set out to start the inputting. I had not started particularly early and I did not complete the entire pile. At some point during the process, the hooded sweatshirt order arrived. This is also a task requiring Jobian patience as each item needs to be stuck with a size label so they are easily identifiable in the boxes that they are kept in. I also box them in size order with the smallest at the front so that I can quickly get at them during the course of the shop day.

My preference is to sell the hooded sweatshirts out of the box in their original packet. A customer will bring me one on its hanger from the display and I will endeavour to find the same size in a packet from the store room. It is pure bone idleness on my

part. The hooded sweatshirts on the hanger have our own label that I would have to remove – we reuse them – and I would then neatly fold the article before taking the payment. I would then have to open a corresponding packet from the store room, place it on a hanger and rethread the label. Clearly that is far too much effort for anyone.

I managed to get two thirds of the delivery cleared before we started to get a little busier and I had to stop. There were new visitors arriving and some who we have become firm friends with over the years we have known them. One of them had a dog that I was keen to see again but sadly it had been ill and they felt it best to leave it behind, which was unfortunate.

The influx underlined my failure to order newspapers because the entire body of the new intake came by during the day to ask if we sold newspapers. My ankles are now sore from the number of times I had to kick myself. Perhaps the bruises will still be there next year to remind me to order them a week earlier. Actually, I negated the need to rely on my hopeless memory and put a reminder in my electronic diary to get it right next year. That and wearing a hair shirt and half an hour of self-flagellation in the evening should do the trick.

Part of my penance was played out in the shop, however. At one point in the afternoon a small crowd of German ladies appeared in the shop asking for a UK power point adapter for their devices with German plugs on the end. We have stocked such adapters for years and sell a lot of them. It was easier to go and get one rather than direct the ladies to them and I handed over the article to the lady who had followed me.

In fact, they had all followed me and had me pinned down in the aisle. This was clearly deliberate so that the first lady could harangue me about how unsuitable the adapter was for the equipment she needed it for. We quickly established that the equipment she had was not non-standard and I started out by merely suggesting that our adapter would be suitable. No, it was not, she told me, as it did not look right.

In response, I escalated to insisting that it was. She became equally insistent that the pin holes were not in the right place. I escalated further to an assurance that it was a universal adapter and that her two pin plug would indeed fit into it. We both reached for our ultimate play together as I guaranteed that it was the right adapter and she reached in her bag for a device with which to demonstrate her position.

It ended with me tossing caution to the wind, which was by this time quite considerable, and ripping open the packaging on the adapter. I took the German plugged device that I was offered and went to demonstrate the insertion. I admit I did have a moment of panic when it took rather more force than I bargained for to fit it into the socket but fit it did in the end. I had thought to tell the lady I would not sell it to her as punishment for not believing me in the first place, but she offered to buy a

second one, so I demurred. I have principles but she clearly did not like them, so it was fortunate that I had others.

We had a quiet enough run into closing time after that. The diggers on the beach were still hard at it; my they have a long day. They are still working above the high water line, so they left the big sandcastle where it was for the evening. They were gone when I looked again after tea.

What actually made me look was a sudden squally gust that charged in from the northwest. It was enough to rattle our bin and flap a few loose things outside. We then settling in for a more consistent, robust blow and to listen to it howling in the eaves for the rest of the evening.

## May 10<sup>th</sup> – Monday

The wind still had its dander up in the morning and was still in the northeast. It had not lost any of its lustre from the previous evening and although Land's End is not playing with us for the time being, St Ives weather station had it pegged at near forty miles per hour. That seemed reasonable as I was pinned against the back of the counter for most of the day.

The Lifeboat was due to be launched on training early this morning. There were two crew members aiming to attain new qualifications and the assessors had agreed to come along on a Sunday to do it – must be double-time or something. Seeing that we had more than enough numbers on shore, I ducked out and let the others have a play, instead. I made sure main roles were covered and left them to it. I was assured that later on the boat was hauled up the short slip in what they told me was a textbook recovery. I have no reason to doubt them. We are, after all, a very honest, very excellent Shore Crew.

I was very busy through the morning but sadly not with customers. By and by and between the customers we did have, I worked my way through some more invoices. There are probably around 200 and, mid morning, I was through about half. I did not get to finish them all and the Missus announced, when she came back from The Farm, that she would do the rest to keep her hand in.

The other thing that I had half an eye on was that I think we will need a cash and carry order next weekend. There are some key items we need – cans of cider and biscuits, for starters – but overall, I thought we might struggle to make a minimum order. Although the order does not need to be in until Thursday, I like to give the delivery manager the best part of a week's notice, since we are not a regular delivery, and therefore I would need to know today if we could place the order.

The process took much of the rest of the day between the infrequent visits from customers. All of those cited the blustery wind, so it was no problem guessing what

was keeping our numbers down. For all that, the sun was shining and it looked a splendid day and probably was if you could find some shelter. The smart money would be around at Porthcurno basking in the sunshine, no doubt.

There were some brave hearts taking a walk out on the cliffs. They were few and far between. One of our customers pointed out that we had walking books for every level of interest: walks, short walks and really short walks. I told him if he turned the display around a bit more, we had another called walks you can see out the pub window, but it had sold out. It certainly was that sort of day. I had a friend come by earlier who told me that the OS frontage was very busy with drinkers.

We had to wait for a five minutes to closing rush before we saw any busyness at all. In the vanguard of that, our friends arrived for postcards and we fell to chatting. Their curiosity had got the better of them and they had gone to have a talk with the working party down on the big beach. It seems the focus of today's work was the dismantling of some of the old, twenty year old cables down there. They even had a picture of one of the lengths cut off. It looked remarkably like one of the very old cables, with layers of steel and bitumen cloth but would have had fibre optic at the core. The first of those was laid in 1988 from Widmouth Bay, east of Camborne.

Interestingly, even the Internet cannot tell me when the fibre cables were laid in The Cove. It tells me the last cable laid was 1926, so I imagine it is top secret. While the Internet is keeping hidden *when* the fibre was laid, "submarinecable.com" will tell you exactly *where* it is.

Again the diggers on the beach worked into the evening; they have a longer day than me, almost – they start a bit later. We did have a geek at the marine traffic website to see if we could identify the cable boat and where it was coming from. We could not find it but when I took the girls out last thing there was a bleddy geet boat hanging off the Pedn-men-du. It had sneaked around the corner, a French registered boat and had come from Dunkirk. It is a big lump of a boat and the back deck is absolutely crammed with drums and cranes and winches. I think it stays on station with the clever use of GPS and various propellers and bow thrusters rather than anchors. When I looked later, it was lit up like it was Christmas. Let the works begin.

## May 11<sup>th</sup> – Tuesday

Crikey, what a morning! My feet did not touch the floor until nearly the middle of the day, and we still do not have enough customers to call it business. I must get longer legs.

We had a slew of deliveries before we opened which kept me occupied a little way into the morning. We then had our pagers going off just before opening time. There was a moment or two of confusion because each Monday at half past eight o'clock, we have a system test. To add to the upset, our mobile telephone messages went off

first which, even for the purposes of the test, are labelled as a shout. It is only when the pager itself goes off that we can determine from the tone whether it is a test or live shout. Today, for some reason, there was a delay in the pagers going off, so I was uncertain whether it was a shout or the test going off early.

I stuck my head out of the first electric sliding door in The Cove to see what was going on and I only had to wait seconds to see others heading to the station. We had barely got the doors open when we were told to stand down. The Coastguard had determined that we were not immediately required but we should remain on standby just in case the situation changed.

It allowed me to return to the shop to continue with sorting the deliveries that had turned up and just as I finished those, the pasties (sorry, MS) arrived. They were followed by a delivery of fudge and biscuits that we had been cleared out of in the last few days. There was a lengthy gap into which I tried to fit having some breakfast, but I had not quite finished when the milkman arrived. It is difficult to say that he was running late as there is no fixed time for his arrival – perhaps we should just say later than usual. The poor chap has damaged his shoulder quite badly and should be resting it. As he pointed out, it would probably be a lengthy wait and statutory sick pay does not cover the rent. I helped him unload the milk.

I was by this stage well behind. It was by sheer chance that I had the pasties ready when our fishermen turned up for their croust. They usually drop in between trips but there is no fixed time. However, they do not want to be waiting around for pasties to come ready, so I have to be on my mettle during the shoulder seasons when I do not get the pasties ready early in the morning.

It is probably pure coincidence that there are two big diggers on the beach and the Missus deciding that she needs the use of one up at The Farm. I mentioned the other day that she is bent on moving the growing area. She wants to make it a little smaller and also to bring it closer to the IBCs and the other growing areas. The first stage in this project – probably one we would have undertaken during the winter if the weather had been kinder – is to clear the ground. Of course, had the weather been kinder, we would have had equal dibs on who got to play with the digger. Thinking on it, the Missus probably did it on purpose so there would be no equal dibs and she would have use of it all by herself.

Previously, we had hired the mini digger from a national chain that has a branch in Penzance. We simply dropped in and booked it, and it was delivered on the agreed day. When she went to book it this time the person at the branch told her that due to a change of policy, we would have to become account holders. Since I was already busy, I asked the Missus to complete the online form. She tried, encountered problems and besides she does not like doing such things and thus it fell to me.

I did not get past the first page. I had already discovered that we needed to say that our average rental would be between eight and twelve weeks, which it would not.

When I provided the answer they wanted for that, it still would not let us proceed unless we ticked the box to say we were a limited company or public limited company. I could not pull the wool over its virtual eyes for that because it asked for a registration number. The preamble also suggested that we would need a guarantor, a letter of introduction from the King, hard evidence that I was a human being and the sacrifice of my first born.

Given that getting a letter from the King might be a bit tricky, I decided to look elsewhere. It did not take long to find another supplier in Penzance, and I gave them a call. They were most helpful and had the very thing available to hire for just parting with some cash, no pound (0.453592 kilograms) of flesh necessary. I handed over to the Missus to make the final arrangements as she would need to meet the delivery at the top of the lane. It is arriving tomorrow, apparently.

I still do not know if we will be able to make a minimum order for the cash and carry because I had not had enough time to key in the order. However, I sent a message to the manager at the cash and carry telling him that the order would be coming and could he arrange the delivery, please. I will now have to make sure that the order reaches the minimum even if it means ordering things we do not immediately need.

Since digging seems to be a la mode, and not to be outdone with the digging works happening on the beach, we arranged some of our own. Around the middle of the day, the waterboard workmen turned up to dig up the leak we have outside the shop. They very kindly asked if we minded them starting work as they would be very noisy outside the shop. I told them it would be entirely churlish for me to complain now as I was the one who reported it, along with our neighbour in the mews behind.

Quite typically, we had been quiet all morning and as soon as they were about to start work, a flood of visitors arrived. The first electric sliding door in The Cove that would have been very effective at reducing the noise, was constantly sliding open. I find it very hard to hear what our customers are saying anyway, I had no chance with their disc cutter going. I did not have to suffer it long; I found a much better solution: I went into town.

For the last week my lower back had been giving me gyp. Usually, I can clear it with a couple of pills and a cold pack. I would have used the cold pack, but the Missus reminded me that I had lent it to someone. This time my dickie back hung on regardless which was a right pain in the, well, back really. Strangely, it was alright when I was in the shop but came on with a vengeance after I had been sitting for a while and overnight. A trip to the bone cruncher was in order and I managed to book an afternoon appointment today.

The Missus ensured that I did not get away with just a bit of acupuncture and a massage and furnished me with a shopping list as well. As a consequence, I was gone for quite a while.

It had been quite chilly standing behind the counter for the first part of the day. I had worn my woolly jacket on and off. It was better than yesterday, however, because the breeze had gone to the northwest and was not blowing through the doorway at me. If it were not for the wind, it would have been a corker of a day. The long and the short of it was that I had worn my woolly jacket when I went into town and subsequently cooked. With no breeze to cool it down, it was like a summer's day in Penzance, and I was glad to get back to the more temperate climate of The Cove.

I arrived as the waterboard were tidying up the site for the evening. Another team will be coming tomorrow to tarmac over the hole and repair the road. I met with one of the men shortly before he left, and he told me it was a difficult job. The repair was very deep and as he fixed one bit, the water popped out of another. It must have been a job that tested the team because he left with several beers. I am sure that we are grateful they had the beers after they finished.

One job I did have to see to before we closed was to sort out the eggs. At the tail end of Easter, I had been somewhat over-enthusiastic with my ordering. Well, we were piling through them, and it did not register that very soon the demand would quickly drop off. As a result, we were left with a lot of eggs slightly past their best before date. I had given some away but that was never going to be a solution, and I ended with seven dozen to do something with.

I had already made some egg mayonnaise and the Missus suggested that she make some more and freeze it, which seemed like a plan. I took the eggs up before we closed and shortly after tea the Missus hard boiled the lot. She had left the peelings aside, so I stepped in to clear them away, filling a food waste sack and putting it out. They would only end up getting spilled and we would be finding them all over the floor. I know the Missus is sensitive about such things and I did not want to be treading on eggshells all night.

It is probably best that I leave it there for today.

## May 12<sup>th</sup> – Wednesday

It was all action in The Cove this morning. The thrumming of the cable boat's engines was a little more noticeable as it had come closer into the bay and positioned to deploy the cable. I counted six RIBs of varying sizes, and I was told by another observer that there were several workers in the shallows and multiple divers in the water.

I was down on the Harbour with the girls quite early on and pleased that the northwesterly we had yesterday had calmed down quite a bit. There was definitely a bit more chill in the air, but it was bright and certainly no evidence of any Arctic blast just yet.

With still some time before I had to go down to start on the shop, I thought to observe the great works going on in the bay. I would have had the best view in The Cove if I could have seen through the windows; they were absolutely lagged with salt. Instead, I had to set the CCTV camera at the boat and look through the camera at it.

By and by through the morning, they brought the cable ashore. I was updated by various visitors who clearly had a better inside track than I did. I had wondered how the cable was being dragged in and was told later that there were two winches ashore doing the work. I then heard that they would pause operations at the middle of the day as they were expecting the sea state to worsen and the wind increase. A couple of regular visitors gave me some more background – one of them had worked for the company – and suggested that I tune into channel 11 on my scanner where I would learn more. There was indeed some chat going on but I could not listen to that and our customers who were numbering a few more than yesterday through the morning, so I desisted after a while.

The Missus dashed off in the middle of the morning to receive the digger. She was waiting for a call from the supplier. She had to take the truck to The Farm and walk back up the lane to collect the digger off the trailer and drive it up to The Farm. She had left the girls behind, so she was not very long and after that had to go over and fetch Mother. I did not see her again until late in the afternoon.

We had become surprisingly busy either side and through the middle of the day. There was a good cross-section of purchases going on as well as a good venture into our pasty stock (sorry, MS). I was in two minds about whether to place an order for tomorrow and luckily the interest in pasties was early enough to persuade me to call some in. We had also sold a fair amount of bread which was a happy result after throwing so much away after the weekend.

Our farm shop cash and carry appeared towards the end of the busyness and I was able to put it out and away in reasonably short order. After that, I forced myself to do the main cash and carry. I had either been too busy or distracted over the last couple of days but knocked it out over a couple of hours. The main part of the groceries just about made the minimum order and then I added beer which took it over the top. Adding the cigarettes – of which I am ordering less and less – almost doubled it but they do not count towards our minimum order.

Out in the bay, the work continues. There did not appear to be any pause in the middle of the day but the cable boat moved out a little more. I spoke with one of the shore works team much later when he came in for a beer. All the marine cable bit had been done but there was still some work on shore to bury the cable on the beach and fit some of the armour. He told me the trench was 2.5 metres deep, which should keep it out of trouble.

We had a small five minutes to closing rush after being quiet for an hour or so. I had raced around the previous closing time to put all our cardboard out before I realised I was a day early. It was probably as well because just ahead of closing, our consignment of posh mugs turned up. They were delivered to the café next door because the driver was either hard of thinking or dyslexic and could not read the two feet letters on the front of the shop. I unpacked the inner boxes which gave me a whole lot more card to put out.

Apart from a very important Lifeboat meeting across the road that took all of thirty minutes, that was me for the day. Or so I thought.

## May 13<sup>th</sup> – Wednesday

Technically, last night's service launch of the Lifeboat should have appeared in yesterday's Diary. The boat launched at two minutes to midnight o'clock and just about qualified by a gnat's whisker. I could have slipped it in during this morning's edit but, frankly, I was very short of time and all you got was a short cryptic clue. I am sure that you have been on tenterhooks all day. I do apologise.

I was sound asleep when my telephone burst into song. The pager system has not been fixed, and we get the text message first which triggers music on my telephone by the local band Hanterhir. I am used to it, but the music confused the Missus no end and she failed to be alerted to its importance causing me to formulate words of explanation before my mouth and brain had fully formed synchronisation. The Missus was therefore not enlightened until my pager went off a minute or so later.

The page attracted quite a positive crew response leading to six for the boat plus some spares who were left behind and five on shore. Some of the very excellent Shore Crew are from up the hill and I was quite surprised how quickly behind me they were. I think that my tardy response is due to the buttons on my Rupert the Bear pyjamas; they are too big for the buttonholes and difficult to undo.

We had the boat away in timely manner to a yacht with a fouled propellor not far to the southwest of us. There was enough information from the Coastguard for us to be assured that the vessel would be taken under tow to Newlyn. With nothing further to be done immediately, we closed up shop and discussed the likely time for return which was agreed to be around four o'clock in the morning. I returned home, set my alarm for three o'clock and thought no more about it.

The Missus, however, likes to stay up and listen to the marine traffic on the scanner. While I was snoozing, she discovered that the lone, apparently octogenarian, sailor was very seasick. He refused to come off the boat, probably due to his malady rather than obstinacy, and retreated into his cabin after a lengthy standoff. The Lifeboat could not come near due to the deteriorating weather and eventually the Coastguard

called in the helicopter. They, when they arrived, took one look and turned down the job as not safe.

The Lifeboat crew bided their time and at slack water they spotted an opportunity to come alongside briefly and throw one of the younger crew at it. He made the tricky jump and was able to assess the sailor's condition and also attach the tow. They were aided in the approach by a passing passenger ferry that was commandeered to provide some shelter from the wind. The sails on the yacht made for a further complication and as they could not be taken down. Our young hero had to slash these away with his cutlass that each crew member carries with them for such eventualities. Three hours after the launch, the yacht started its two and a half hour tow back to Newlyn.

Having set my alarm to wake me at three o'clock, I caught up with the action at that point and did a quick recalculation of the expected return to The Cove. There was no point in waking anyone else at that point, so I took another couple of hours kip. Reassessing progress at five o'clock, I made myself ready for the day and sent a message around to gather a shore team half an hour ahead of the boat coming back.

I was not far out from my estimate, but the boat was slowed down after it came around Gwennap Head by the increasingly poor sea conditions. These were amplified by the big cable boat that had for the last few days been near enough still in the water and was now bucking like a lively donkey. We took our own battering when we went out onto the slipway. The wind was thumping in with gusts reaching 50 miles per hour making it a tad uncomfortable for standing about on the slip.

It was getting in towards twenty past seven o'clock when the boat rounded Pedn-men-du. It looked very small against the thrashing waves and the big bulk of the cable boat and took a further battering from the waves coming through the gaps. It could not, however, have been better timed. We were two hours off low water and the feisty seas at the bottom of the long slipway were slowing down minute by minute. It allowed us to conduct what was clearly a textbook recovery in very choppy conditions.

As we were hauling up and washing down, one of the Launching Authorities, rustled up some bacon rolls that I had cleared out from the shop earlier. They will be paid for through our customer donations to the crew comfort fund, so thank you very much if you are one of those.

On shore, all those who had turned out to launch the boat at midnight, were there again at half past six o'clock to recover the boat as well. We are, after all, a very consistent, very excellent Shore Crew.

I made it back to the shop just about on opening time. We have had very few customers first thing, until today, of course. A German lady asked for freshly baked bread. It was fortunate that we had a delivery from our artisan baker this morning

and I went to fetch it out of the newspaper box at the front. I showed her the sourdough cobs, the white and wholemeal sliced bread and the white and whole sliced cobs. We had malt crunch rolls and tiger rolls, too. She bought a packet of scones delivered three days ago. I am not complaining; it was the best sale all morning.

It was remarkably quiet during the first part of the day. The wind was not helping at all but by and by we started seeing a few visitors passing through and not one managed to come into the shop without mentioning how windy it was. We did have a few, '*is it always this windy here*', which evokes the standard response of, '*only when it's not raining*'. On the subject of daft questions, I had a '*what time do your pasties run out?*', yesterday (sorry, MS). Said customer was not at all sure what to do with, '*just after we sell the last one*' and came back a few minutes later to pre-order a couple for later on just in case we ran out by selling the last one in his absence.

Business picked up a little during the afternoon and kept me busy to a degree. It was halfway through the afternoon that I realised that I had not dealt with the posh mug delivery and I ought to pull my finger out. We need to advise the company of any breakages inside a day or two of receiving the order if we want them to cover the loss. It also gives me the opportunity to price everything so they can just be put out when they are needed.

I think I mentioned that when I placed the order, we strictly did not need to top up our supply. This became plainer when I tried to put some of the new mug designs out on display; we simply did not have the space for them. Previously, I had filled gaps on the shelves with some duplicates, and I removed those in favour of some of the new designs, but I was still short of space. I had started too late in the day which had not allowed for difficulties. I did what I could and placed the remaining boxes back on the store room floor. I will have to find some space for them ahead of the grocery delivery at the weekend.

I was a little narked that the hole menders from the waterboard had not turned up yesterday. The other team had told me that they would. I was surprised therefore when a team in three trucks arrived at three o'clock to make a start on fixing it today. Clearly, this was not a big job for the likes of this team. They made a bit of noise to start with, cutting the edges of the hole square but after that, it was just filling in with bags of ready to use tarmac. Job done.

For entertainment between customers, we had the sea. There was little in the way of ground sea, but the wind had whipped the bay into a frenzy of white topped waves pushed with force toward the beach. For much of the day, there were large portions of blue sky above us and sunny brightness. They lent their colours to the water, the white foam and the surrounding cliffs; an absolute wonder to observe.

It was also cold by the end of the day. The draft was circulating in the shop and even with my woolly jacket on, I was feeling it. The Arctic blast was here and no mistake. I

had not noticed through the day, so either the temperature has dropped and the wind a slightly unkind direction, or I had been busy enough not to notice. Either way, I was happy to close up even without a five minutes to closing rush and go up into the warmth of the flat.

I do not know how the boat crew felt who would have had next to no kip last night, but I was dozing off into my book in the evening and was looking forward to my bed. The wind was still howling in the eaves and I renewed my acquaintance with the cold of it when I took the girls out last thing. Fortunately, we had no rain again after the first untimely showers. The first customer of the day had asked if it would rain today. I advised that it was unlikely as the weather from the northwest is usually a dry. Ten minutes after they left it started to rain. Oops. I doubt that I will be losing sleep over it tonight, though.

## May 14<sup>th</sup> – Thursday

I was so bored during the morning today I actually did my job. It is alright, I do not intend to make a habit of it.

It was very disappointing to notice that the wind was still howling in from the northwest today. I had thought that it might at least have eased off a bit. If you want an insight into the Machiavellian minds of the small gods of grumpy shopkeepers you might note that after complaining about the wind yesterday, not only did they send more wind, they added some rain to it. The windows were dotted with rain when I looked out first thing but fortunately, it brightened up a bit when I took the girls down the beach this morning.

They are a bit more keen to leap out of bed as Mother is staying with us for a short holiday. She was feeling a brae bit under the weather, so having some company makes her feel a bit better. BB cuddled up with her for ages last night. I clearly was not including me in this equation; I am the last person to make someone feel better.

I was a bit tardy getting downstairs to the shop after that. I am not sure why. The deliveries came in a sensible order at least, and I was not batting one off against another to get them all in. I had done the milk order the day before but omitted to send it off. I only just had enough bacon for the crew bacon sandwiches and ran out of semi-skimmed milk before the end of the day. This morning, I made amends with a surfeit of milk and replaced all the bacon with an equally prodigious amount.

It was not long into the morning when it became clear that nothing much was going to happen today. The frequent showers slapping in from the north were pretty much keeping the streets clear and our visitors indoors somewhere warm. It was then that I turned my mind to the mugs on the store room floor and where I was going to put them. There was a bit of space in the usual space but the shelf next to that was piled with, essentially, rubbish. It was, however, the sort of rubbish that we might need sometime like spare rolls of plastic food bags, till rolls, a spare flood light for outside

and various things that had been dumped there for the want of putting them somewhere sensible but less convenient.

The first thing to do was to create some space in the office part of the store room. It is not really an office, but the access is so narrow it is little used for stock and contains the printer and a small fridge for our personal foodstuffs. It also has all the things that we use rarely and spare bits we use slowly. It was also about to contain all the things on the store room shelf I wanted to clear out of the way, hence having to clear some space.

That took a little while to achieve and I also cleared the shelf below it that was in a bit of need as well. I filled a paper carried bag full of old credit card receipts from the days when the machine used to produce a duplicate. All of them had the card number printed on it, something that would be unthinkable now. I started to shred them but soon realised that would be exceedingly tedious as well as taking a very long time. I will let the Missus have them and she can incinerate them up at The Farm.

Somewhere along the line, I also filled a few gaps in the shop shelves. The frozen pizzas have been waiting to be topped up and replaced for the best part of a week. There was also the butchers' delivery from yesterday needed to be moved from the store freezers to the display freezer. They have to go into the store freezers first because they are at least ten degrees colder and the freezing happens more quickly. It is a food safety recommendation.

The cable boat is still with us but slowly working its way westward. On the beach, they still seem to be working away as the big pile of sand is still there and so are the bollards. They had better hurry up as the tides are increasing. I noticed that high water in the Harbour was up to the slipway this morning, a good couple of yards more than the previous morning.

I had a couple in this morning who are staying in one of the houses up on Sunny Corner Lane. They look down on the works from on high. They said that they had never seen so many people doing so little for so long. I will not comment; they are all bigger than me. One of the details they pointed out, and I had heard this yesterday from some other observers, that there was more than half a dozen of them leaning on a barrier yesterday looking down into a hole.

I had to draw the line there and make my case for the defence. It is the inalienable right of all men that if they see a hole to go and look into it. It is the natural order of things and any attempt to thwart it is an act against Nature itself. It is ordained and no less natural than childbirth, breathing or having a pint on a Saturday night. Really!

It was definitely unnatural in my view that I was left to my own devices in the latter part of the afternoon. It had been an appalling day all told and near the end we were washed out by a particularly vicious knot of heavy showers that forced me to close

the first electric sliding door in The Cove. After they went, the skies cleared to some degree, but it went from already being cold to colder and I was, once again, happy when we came to close.

The Missus had not long gone up to The Farm. She had to water the plants, and I suggested she take the opportunity to give the tractor a run. After the effort we went to charging the battery, I did not want to have it run down again through neglect. It did cross my mind when the heavy showers came across us that the Missus would, most likely, have been driving down the middle of the field exposed to the elements. She was, apparently. I promise I did not laugh, not even a little bit, even when she had gone upstairs.

We ended the day as it had begun – bleddy windy. Since it was still light, I ran the girls down to the Harbour beach that had a light covering of loose oar weed. It is treacherous stuff if you try to walk over it as you cannot see the bigger rocks underneath which you invariable step on the edge of and turn your ankles. Sure-footed bleddy hounds know this and deliberately lead you across it, sniggering like Mutley, no doubt.

## May 15<sup>th</sup> – Friday

If I thought that yesterday was as quiet as it could get, I was roughly disabused by the desolation of this morning in The Cove.

The wind was far gentler this morning and we had some blue sky visible through the white cumulus and high cirrus cloud. There was, however, still quite a chill in the air, although it did not bother me too much while down on the Harbour beach first thing with the girls. The sea state, too, had amended its rough and rowdy ways and was merely slightly choppy under the lighter breeze.

In the absence of any customers, I finished off clearing up the store room ahead of the cash and carry delivery tomorrow. I then promptly had a sizeable soft drinks delivery that was delivered onto the store room floor. Alright, I knew it was coming because I ordered it. It did still have to be put away, though and much of it into the drinks fridge that was looking somewhat neglected.

The Missus had already alerted me to the fact that I would have to go to The Farm to detach the flail from the tractor and attach the tipping trailer. Her intention is to fill the tipping trailer with hardcore using the digger so that she can fix some of the potholes in the lane. It was the work of less than an hour that saw me leaving around the middle of the day and not getting back until four o'clock.

Before I left, I had to take the girls for a spin. The Missus assumed that I would be taking them to The Farm with me, but I would be moving the tractor around, so that was off the cards. I took them to the beach instead for a quick run around and headed off after that, kitted out in DIYman overalls (tractor maintenance edition).

It was quite a splendid day to be up at The Farm. It was dry, which was the main thing, but the breeze was unobtrusive and I hardly noticed it. The rain that Radio Pasty suggested might arrive later did not come, at least while I was there, so, overall, things could have been worse but, as I discovered, they soon would.

The first obstacle to overcome was removing the flail from the tractor. It is attached to the tractor in three ways: the hydraulic lifting arms; the upper top link, a simple bar that can be shortened or lengthened to hold the unit in place; and the power take off (PTO) shaft. Before I attempted to remove those, I had to find somewhere convenient to drop the flail that was slightly above ground level so that the hydraulic arms could drop below the level of their connection. We have used a wooden pallet before, so I did so again.

The other problem we have had with the tractor is the ignition switch where the key goes in. There must be a loose connection and it takes a bit of fiddling to get the darned thing started. That took about ten minutes of messing about after which I was able to reverse the flail onto the pallet that I had placed alongside the trailer.

I have had previous experience of removing the flail as well as other items from the three point linkage system. I imagine, if it is done regularly, it is a far easier operation. Our flail has been in place for more than a year, and I knew in advance that it would be an absolute begger. What I had not appreciated was that this was actually going to be the easy bit.

I approached the task in hand with the correct tools for the job: a crowbar and a bloody geet hammer. There is nothing subtle about making farm machinery work, at least until it comes to the PTO shaft when a little more craft is required. I ensured that the hydraulic arms were relaxed enough so that they would drop when freed from their connection and set about thumping the somewhat seized connectors and fittings. In between thumps I deluged them with copious quantities of easing oil and eventually the connections gave up their grip and the arms dropped away.

The upper top link required slightly more attention. It is secured by a pin that needed to be knocked out using a solid screwdriver as a follower. This almost came to disaster when the pin flew out unexpectedly, the screwdriver lurched forward and was jammed when the flail dropped forward. It took some wiggling to remove the screwdriver where the pin used to be but at least it had a handle to help the process along.

The next job was to remove the PTO shaft. The ends are secured, when eventually I remembered, by a connector that uses a button to release the mechanism. It took a further ten minutes for me to ferret around in the back of my mind for the instructions. After I found them, the PTO came away far more easily than I had hoped for. It was removing the PTO shaft that I had asked the Missus to do so that I could determine why the flail was not working. Having done so myself. I could now run the tractor

PTO system and establish that it was indeed working and therefore it was the flail at fault.

Next up was to attach the tipping trailer to the tractor. This is a far simpler arrangement. The tractor has two bars with an aligned hole. The tipping trailer had one bar with a hole in it and when aligned with the tractor's two holes, a pin is dropped through all the holes thus securing one to the other. A piece of cake if ever there was one. All you have to do is reverse the tractor, with some degree of accuracy, so that the bars and the holes line up. The only other prerequisite is that the tractor bars and the trailer bars are on the same level.

To assist with making the two units level, the trailer is equipped with a telescopic trailer jack. There is a rotating arm at the top that raises and lowers the telescopic foot and thus facilitates levelling it with the tractor's bar. This does require that the tractor is in the vicinity of the trailer so that the trailers bar can be visually matched. It was the work of a few moments to move the tractor and establish that the trailer needed to be jacked up by a fair amount if the connection was to be made. No problem, I shall just jack it up – ha, ha.

It was the work of a couple of moments before I realised that whoever had parked the trailer previously - no names, no pack drill - had wound the jack down onto the ground rather than putting something solid under the foot. All my winding up was doing was winding the foot down into the ground and where it was stuck. The bar with a hole was staying stalwartly where it was.

My immediate reaction to the dilemma was to resort to using the bottle jack on the truck. This is secreted behind the back seats to which we have strapped the seats for the girls. No matter, I could not return home with the job not done, so I set about removing the dog seats so that I could get at the mechanism for dropping the car seats. We had done this when we first had the truck some years ago. As I recalled, it involved tugging on a tab that protruded from the top of the back seats that caused the seat backs to come away from their moorings.

I found the tab but tug as I might, neither the tab nor the seat would shift. Bearing in mind the first rule when all else fails, RTFM, I scratched around in the glovebox for the manual to see if what I was doing was indeed the right thing to do. It was while I was rooting through the manual that the Missus called me. She told me that she too was unable to move the back seat when she tried but, hey, why did I not use the digger to lift the trailer.

Why indeed. Tee hee.

I had thought the digger might be out of bounds and besides, the idea of using it to lift the trailer had not occurred to me. What further invitation did I need. I went and fetched the key from the truck.

It took a while to arrange the digger in an appropriate place to do the lifting, and I attached a strop around the trailer arm and the digger bucket. From where I had to place the digger, I could not see where the tractors and the trailer arms were, so I had to guess the height. Having done so and visually checked the levels, I went to the tractor to see how the lining up had gone. It was a smidge too high or too low. I went back to the digger.

I lost count how many times I went from tractor to digger and digger to tractor. The digger did not do micro movements, so a nudge up or a nudge down would often be inches too much in either direction. I cannot imagine how long it took but my legs from the mounting and dismounting of the machines were telling me it was quite some time. Eventually, I managed to get the two aligned and the tractor connected to the trailer. Returning the digger to its parking space seemed to take an interminable amount of time and I was pressed to return to the shop to do the bread order.

Forgetting how parlous my mental note taking system is, I took a mental note to give changing tractor attachments much longer next time. I will have to call the mechanic – the one we called six weeks ago and still has not come to our aid – and tell him the more precise faults we need him to look at. Hopefully, the repeated call will give him the nudge necessary to actually attend.

I returned to the shop at the outset of a five minutes to closing rush. I did not ask if the Missus had been busy in my absence, but it was doubtful, although she did have cause to top up the pasty warmer (sorry, MS). The first lady who relies on crutches to walk short distances – she had a mobility scooter for longer runs – bought several bottles of cider which I placed in a box for her. If she had arrived at any other time today, I could have taken my time in walking the box to her car. As it was, we had a queue of customers who had to wait.

So frequent were the visits that I struggled to get the bread order done in time. Also, the customers we were seeing were some of our regulars and I started to form the impression that we could be quite busy this coming week. It also underlined that I really should have organised the newspapers for a bit earlier than I did and having promised everyone that they will be here from Monday, I have absolutely no faith that the Laurel and Hardy Newspaper Company will keep their end of the bargain.

Must be time for a beer, surely.

May 16<sup>th</sup> – Saturday

By some fluke of time, random brain activity or atmospheric, I was ready for the day just ahead of six o'clock the morning. BB came out for a quick tummy rub, but ABH was having none of it and it was a further hour before I got them out of the door.

Whatever the reason for my early rise, it was very useful because this morning saw the arrival of the first cash and carry delivery for maybe three weeks. There is no set arrival time, so I have to be on my mettle for whatever time he does arrive and this morning it was around twenty minutes to eight o'clock.

It had forced my hand to run the girls out a little earlier than I might ordinarily have done so. I had thought we might not get on onto the Harbour beach because one of the fishermen was getting ready to go. Happily, we made it in and out ahead of him.

I had noticed yesterday that there had been a wealth of sand delivered to the upper reaches of the beach. In the top west corner, sand is piled up against the steps up onto the wall. This was mostly wind blown over the last week or so, but all the large rocks there are also covered and there is a noticeable incline to get into the corner. Over on the other side, it is now possible to walk through all of the arches under the slipways whereas before, only the through second from the top was it possible without clambering over rock. Unfortunately, it has taken away the girls' rock pool that they liked to dip in when the sea was too rough.

The cash and carry delivery was not one of the biggest. I did have to order things in advance, expecting some busyness over the half term holiday and just had to guess what might be the biggest sellers. Between me and the driver it took less than fifteen minutes to unload the lot and half fill the store room floor with goodies. I managed to tuck away the beer and tobacco before we opened since they have their own reserved spaces. This clears enough space to make it a bit easier to manoeuvre. I then did nothing until after I had my breakfast.

When it is relatively quiet in the shop, it is quite easy to work through the delivery between customers. It forces a gentle pace and before you know it, most of the delivery has been done. The cases of big bottles of water will have to wait until I have had my Weetabix one morning and there are a few other boxes I have yet to put away. There was no pressing need to finish it all off and besides, we were getting busier in the shop, so I concentrated on that instead.

In an obtuse departure from what the forecast said it would do, the weather decided that it would be pleasant all afternoon. It must be difficult being a forecaster when the weather point blank refuses to do what it is told. There was everyone wrapped up in waterproofs expected the 90 percent certainty of a deluge they had been advised of but instead basking in some temperate weather, hardly any breeze and definite absence of rain. The sea was flat as a dish for the most part but early in the tide, there had been enough movement in the centre of the beach to give the surfers a bit of a game.

The dogs on the beach restrictions came in to force yesterday, for Blue Flag and 'award' beaches of which, the big beach is one. To my mind it is a tad early for here. Yesterday, the beach was a wide expanse of emptiness, and a few dog walkers down there would have made no difference to anyone, since there was hardly

anyone there to annoy. It is likely to be that way until the end of June with the exception of half term week. I realise that it would be difficult to impose restrictions for one week only but to the casual observer outside that week, the restrictions make no sense at all.

I am going to have to go and have a look at the bus timetable posted at the bus stop. I am still getting people making enquiries who are utterly confused when buses do not turn up when they expect them. I ask what time the expected bus should have been and often it does not correspond at all to the current timetable. I must assume that the timetable they have seen is the wrong one. It is more than a month since the times changed so the bus company has had ample time to send someone around to change the timetable displayed. I will make sure of my facts and drop them a line and see if we can get it sorted out.

We enjoyed a little busyness during the afternoon but lost it again before four o'clock. The sunshine and the warmth that we had earlier had been replaced by gloom and some heavier cloud as some weather fronts either approached or passed over. There were some arrivals, people we had seen before, and it seemed that four o'clock was when they could get into their accommodation, so that would have had an effect.

Then the mizzle came. The forecasters were right at last but were out on their timing by about, erm, all day. Although it cleared less than an hour later, it really did stick the boot into business for the rest of the day. After it cleared, we had some late sunshine, glowing against the side of the cable boat in the bay. It has come back inshore again, and the growl of its engines have been a constant background noise for the best part of a week. Some friends showed me a photograph of the new cable laid out on the beach. I had assumed all the digging going on was burying it but apparently they are still removing the old one. Through the spring tides they have been able to get lower down on the beach and I suspect that they will have to be finished tomorrow or the day after – I have not checked – for the lowest tide in this set of springs.

The Missus was also doing some digging of her own. Wasting no time after me attaching the tipping trailer for her, she has been loading up with 'hardcore' - which is actually subsoil but we will not split hairs – and dumping it strategically down the lane to smooth out some of the potholes. She had just finished when the weather front and mizzle came across us, so she was better off than yesterday when she got a minor soaking.

Mother is feeling much better and was up for a curry in the evening, so, look out world.

May 17<sup>th</sup> – Sunday

It is the last day we shall see the diggers on the beach. I have it on good authority: one of the drivers was in getting his sausage rolls and said he was looking forward to going home to Yorkshire which I believe is north of Camborne.

They have been parking the diggers and other equipment in the top car park. Early on in the piece I suggested that they were doing some additional work as compensation for their stay. It was definite the case this morning as I spotted them clearing one of the paths down to the beach from The Beach car park under the watchful eye of the owner.

Today is the lowest tide of these spring tides, so their last opportunity to reach the lowest level on the beach. Even then I spotted them at around low water with two of them waist deep getting a few extra feet done. There is dedication for you.

There must be similar dedicated workers deep in the back rooms of our telecommunications supplier. They have clearly been working hard to make logging in to get at my bill the most difficult task imaginable. They have made it so secure that it is almost impenetrable even to the authorised user – me. Apparently, my electronic mail username, the one they supplied, is no longer any good and I must select another. Luckily, I have two to choose from. Not everyone would and creating a new one is not always that easy.

Once I had keyed in my new username, the system sent a verification code to the new address. I had to provide this in before I could proceed. I had already keyed in one verification code before the change in username. I was then prompted to enter a new telephone number. The company provides our 'landline', it is a virtual one, so this was already known to them. I keyed my mobile number just because I suspected my landline number may not be good enough. This then promptly crashed the system, and I was compelled to start again.

Not knowing whether the new username had been accepted, I used the old one only to discover that it was now wrong. I keyed the new one and was asked again for a verification code that they sent to my mobile telephone number. I was then prompted to provide my telephone number that they had already sent a code to so that they could send another code to it to establish that it was indeed my telephone number. I entered the code they sent and at last, I was let into my account.

It was an unnecessary nonsense. I struggled with it and I could imagine Mother, perhaps, being completely bamboozled. The absolute kicker was that when I eventually got into the system, I could not see my bill. There was an error message telling me something had gone wrong and I should try later. If I have time, I will call on Monday and tell them that I want to go back to paper billing that they send through the post.

As usual, it was deathly quiet during the first part of the day. For some reason I found myself in possession of a surplus of enthusiasm and, strangely, the impetus

and energy to carry it through. I shifted the big cases of water in the store room so that they were out of the way and cleared the remainder of the cash and carry order that was left on the floor.

Still nursing some reserves after I finished that, I took a walk around the shop to see what we were missing ahead of half term at the end of the week ahead. The usual focus tends to be on the grocery aisle but having only just taken in an order to resolve deficiencies there, I applied my concentration to the gift aisles. I came up with only a short list for the Missus to retrieve from The Farm but also noticed that I we needed ladies' flip flops, and I will have to place an order as soon as possible.

The very idea of it threw me into a bit of a panic. In truth, I should have done the order last week, but the half term holiday has rather sneaked up on me. The quietness has lulled me into a false sense of business suspension, I fear. I spent quite a while working through the stock list adding what we might need to the order. I had to abandon it not long into the process because we got a bit busy.

Our busyness ramped up considerably when the skies darkened and threatened rain. Once again, the forecast had warned of rain all day today but apart from a light shower earlier, the day had been dry and often quite bright. It was around four o'clock that the northern sky blackened and showed signs of a biblical style oblivion. A quick look at the rain radar showed that it would be a very short-lived shower and afterwards, quickly clear. In fact, we looked like we had been very fortunate indeed. The whole of the United Kingdom and Ireland looked to be peppered with isolated showers. The west of Ireland copped it worse than everywhere else with a complete deluge going on there.

We continue to see many international visitors breezing through The Cove, some are more obvious than others. Later in the afternoon today, we had a couple come in bedecked with flags and ribbons of their home nation. I was not completely sure of the nationality, but I thought that it was Norway with an outside chance of it being Denmark. I thought that I had better ask.

The lady told me that it was indeed Norway and the reason for being so decorated was that it was their Independence Day. I do like to hear about such things and especially as I had no idea that they were once not an independent country. She told me that Norway was once ruled by Denmark, which might explain the vague similarity in their flags, although she disagreed that they were anything alike at all. Completely ignorant of this part of history, I asked when this independence had occurred which turned out to be embarrassing because she did not know.

While she was present, I looked it up on the Internet and having only briefly scanned it, I found that it was 1905. This surprised me because I did not think that it would have been so recent. When I looked again after she left, I discovered that the 1905 date was the country's independence from Sweden, which was an even greater surprise because the lady made no mention of their immediate neighbour. It seems

that Independence Day celebrates the independence on this day in 1814 from Denmark. The Internet told me that almost immediately, Norway was forced into a 'personal union' with Sweden which was eventually dissolved in 1905. Quite why it was forced into the union with Sweden, I did not find out as I was a brae bit busy with the beachware order. I do apologise.

After all that excitement, it went a bit quiet again. We saw the arrival of a few more familiar faces but by five o'clock the street was entirely empty. There was no five minutes to closing rush and when I did the till I discovered that I would have been better staying in bed this morning.

However, had I done so I would not have recognised that we needed a beachware order. As I worked through it, there were several things that we would have missed terribly during a busy week. I ran out of time before we closed and ended up finishing off after tea, which did not amuse me in the slightest but at least I was able to do it without distractions.

I also looked up the Norway independence issue. I had guessed that it was something to do with the Napoleonic wars given the date and sure enough, the whole thing was as a result of the Leipzig Treaty. Denmark and Norway had backed the wrong horse during the wars and as punishment, Denmark had to cede Norway to Sweden. Norway, as you might imagine, were a tad miffed at this and chose to ignore it and write a constitution anyway. Sweden, feeling that they had been a bit cheated invaded Norway a little bit and Norway seeing what the likely outcome was agreed to a soft take over: Norway would get to keep national sovereignty and have its own parliament but would share a king with Sweden. Sweden would also rule its foreign policy just in case it made any further dodgy partnership deals with diminutive dictators. Ironic how that turned out. Norway, chose to conveniently forget the Swedish bit and celebrate Independence Day on the 1814 date, May 17<sup>th</sup>.

Here endeth today's Diary history lesson. Aye thang yew.

## May 18<sup>th</sup> – Monday

It was raining when I took the girls around first thing. It was not raining hard and was more troublesome being blown in on a westerly and therefore coming in sideways to a degree. We were excluded from the beach this morning because the tide was in and fairly active.

At the back end of yesterday afternoon, the sea state had become mobilised, and a fair swell was charging into the bay. It was loping over the Harbour wall along half the length, so there was some power in it. There was still some flosing over the wall in the morning but as the tide went out, so did the swell. It certainly made me feel better about one of our regular visitors who turned up mid-afternoon yesterday and

told me she was taking the morning sailing to the Isles of Scilly. I do not think that she would have been badly thrown about.

I had clearly been handed some duff information regarding the works on the beach. The diggers were at it again from early morning and working down on the tide line at low water again. They had some of the cable out of the water and were addressing the familiar full metal jacket casing. I am wondering if they pulled more cable onto the beach than was required, put the casing on and the boat, that is still in the bay, pulled it back again. Otherwise, I cannot see how they got the casing on that far down and will explain why the boat is still there.

The gymnasium beckoned for the first time in more than a week. It was nearly two, I think. I did not mess about and gave myself a good beating, extending the number of lifts, steps and time on the rowing machine. In truth, I have slouched since I came back from my extended dickie knee leave and not pushed my exercise beyond light exertion. I felt much better for resuming my blistering sessions even though I had to do most of it in the dark. There was an electrician working when I got there and I could see no reason to stop because of it. In fact, I could not see much at all.

The rain came and went throughout the day resulting in very poor performance from our visitors. The casual walkers had clearly given today a miss and even the more enthusiastic trekkers were few and far between. Most of our trade disappeared in the mizzle and never came back. It left me to watch the diggers on the beach as they dug a final – I think – trench for the new, armoured cable and to consider what orders I might need to make. Of the latter, I discovered that we were perilously low on our preserves and chutneys and, after I finished topping them up on the shelf, our postcard boxes of fudge and sticks of rock needed replenishment.

You may think, dear reader, that when there are no customers about to buy it, ordering more stock is akin to being at the bottom of a deep hole and continuing to dig. You may well be correct in that assessment, dear reader, but it does seem a little like preparing to fail and there are still some threads of optimism and hope smouldering away deep down. Again, I left it a bit late, but I do hope that the fudge will turn up even if I have to wait a bit for the preserves as the former is the cornerstone of going home presents.

We did manage a five minutes to closing rush: two ladies came in for 'a few sweets' and left with enough provisions for an attempt on Everest. We are very grateful. Otherwise it was another day that I would have been better looking at from under the covers of my bed, thank you very much.

It was only when I put our pasty sign (sorry, MS) away that I remembered that I had papers to collect and send back. Yes, against all expectations the Laurel and Hardy Newspaper Company pulled out all the stops and delivered newspapers this morning. They even delivered the right ones in the volumes that I had asked for. No wonder I was giddy with emotion all day. After a week of batting off newspaper

enquiries and repeating the reason why we did not have any, we sold precisely six. I suppose as a percentage of the customers we had all day, that was not bad at all. It will not, however, pay the bill so we must hope for better. And, I must try and remember to send them back at the end of the day.

When I came to close up, I discovered that the rain had learnt how to do it properly. It continued to rain into the rest of the evening in varying degrees of heaviness. When it came time to take the girls for a last run, I had to wait for a break in the heavy stuff so that I could take them out in the relatively light rain, which seemed to work out alright. We cannot really complain – oh, really? – as we have not had rain like this for some while. It is just that so far this month it has felt more like March than May and has my inner seasonal gyro compass that tells me how things should be at particular times of the year, in a complete spin. I will need to make manual adjustments, else I will think that Easter is coming again.

## May 19<sup>th</sup> – Tuesday

I should have known better, really. The Laurel and Hardy Newspaper company delivered our newspapers again this morning, two days in a row – hurrah! They sent me a weekly invoice for week ending Saturday – boo!

In the ordinary run of things, we get our weekly invoices delivered on Tuesday. The company has suggested that we go paperless, or rather they go paperless and leave the customer to print – and pay for – the invoices. I demurred because it would be just an extra task and they already charge enough for delivery and I reasoned they could afford it ... and, of course, the last thing I was going to do was give them an easy ride.

Since we did not start getting newspapers until yesterday – and if you have been following closely, you would have been fed up with hearing it – I was not expecting an invoice. I was especially not expecting an invoice that charged me £62.71 for something I did not receive. It was charged on Thursday, so I suspect someone got over enthusiastic and charged me for The Cornishman.

I telephoned the company unhelpful desk and as I was in a bit of a rush to get the problem reported was not at all happy that I had to wait the best part of a minute's worth of advertising and special offers. When I got through that, I was unsurprised to learn that they had an unexpectedly high volume of calls and that I would have to wait an unspecified length of time for an operator, who was busy serving other disappointed customers, to become free.

If that was an end to it, I would have been irritated but content that the matter had been reported. What happened was that the moment the music stopped and a ringing tone began, it immediately stopped again leaving me in silence. I had to terminate the call and start all over again. This second time I actually got to speak to

someone for long enough to identify myself. Something then went awry and although I could hear the agent, he clearly could not hear me. The boys with the diggers on the beach are still digging today and I did wonder for a moment ... no, surely not. Given I had given my details - twice, any helpful desk would have called back. I gave up at that point and resorted to the form on the website to report it. I should have an answer in a week or two.

On the bright side, it was not raining this morning, although it did look like it had not long stopped. It was also milder than we have been used to in the last week and my woolly jacket was consigned to the cupboard again for our walk around the big block. We became very aware just how mild the air was because as soon as we entered the Harbour car park, we had a lot of it blown into our faces at thirty miles per hour. There was still a good bit of swell in the bay, but it was the kind that did not break until it hit the shore. Our big boat, very noticeable by its absence when I looked out of the window in the morning, was instead a good bit further out to the west.

Our first pasty customers (sorry, MS) of the day were some gentlemen of the Royal Air Force. I avoided being facetious about the distance we were from the nearest service airfield as I guessed that these were the members of the Royal Air Force Mountain Rescue Service, even though they were only about twelve years old. I did mention that it was a tad windy today for hanging off Pedn-men-du on a bit of string and he agreed. They had just been up to have a look and said that it was very wet as well and that they would come back another day.

I asked where they were stationed and he told me – obviously, I cannot name the station for security reasons – and the fact that I cannot remember – but it was in North Yorkshire. I made mental note that if I were to crash my aeroplane into a mountain and need rescuing, I should do so on a windless and sunny day and make sure I pick a mountain in North Yorkshire (north of Camborne).

It was a very quiet morning. I had banked on this to allow me the luxury of having a bacon sandwich largely uninterrupted. It was most toothsome. We were considerably busier than our previous two days as we moved into the afternoon. It would, of course, have been very difficult to be less busy than the previous two days without actually being closed. I very happily saw off our remaining stock of pasties and we can make a fresh start with the delivery tomorrow. There was a bit of going home present buying. Either some people were only here for a long weekend or they were very organised.

In the lead up to the middle of the day, I called our telecommunications supplier. I must have latent masochistic tendencies that I was unaware of to challenge two corporate telephone IVR systems in one day. It took ten minutes to get to the point where I was in the queue waiting to speak with an agent. The many hurdles I had to jump to get there had included keying in our telephone number and speaking to confirm what I was calling about. The very polite AI person I spoke to sadly did not

understand me and in the end, I just had to agree with what she had suggested she thought that I said as she would brook no argument.

She then told me that as part of the security arrangements I would have to key in a verification code she would send me. I assumed that the code would be sent to the mobile telephone number that they already hold for me, which would have made sense. Instead, she asked me to provide a mobile telephone number that the code would be sent to which did not make any sense at all. In any case, the code never came through which sent the system into an apoplectic fit.

Naturally, although I had started the calling process when we were quiet, by the time I got through, we had started to get busy. Fortunately, whatever the very pleasant man who I was talking to had done, worked, and I was able to view my account again. What a palaver.

Happily, being busier for the afternoon I could concentrate on serving customers and had to do nothing that would cause me further irritation. I had a reply from the Laurel and Hardy Newspaper Company that surprised me greatly. They had indeed charged me for The Cornishman and had now inserted a credit into the system. I was very impressed and take back anything wrong I said about them. Do I heck. One swallow still leaves a lot in the glass to drink.

I had confirmation the other day that the numberplate recognition system in the Harbour car park is indeed active. The cameras are just not where you might expect them to be. It means that if you want to park for two consecutive days, you will need to drive out and drive back in again to book for the second day, which is clearly not ideal. If that were not enough, it was reported to me that one of the residents who parks in the residents only area at the end of the car park, got an excess charge notification in the post.

The system is supposed to be smart enough to recognise a car driving through the car park and out the other end. Something clearly went wrong and a penalty notice was issued. I suspect also that if you get as far as the Round House and maybe reverse out or turn around, you will be nabbed. I will have to make enquiries.

At least we got to the end of the day in the dry. The shop went quite after four o'clock and there was no five minutes to closing rush, but it had been a reasonable day. The orders I had placed at the end of last week and the beginning of this look like they will all come home to roost tomorrow. I must go and spend the evening girding my loins but will have to hone my girder first as I have neglected it for a little while.

May 20<sup>th</sup> – Wednesday

Well, the swell finally came out of the closet, did away with the kid gloves and by this morning was bashing about in the bay with gay abandon. There was thumping over the Harbour wall, exploding up Creagle, dancing over Cowloe and churning up a

maelstrom in Tribbens. The latter was particularly mesmerising to watch as it swirled and tripped over the rocks close in.

When I looked through the window first thing, I had assumed that it was just misty. Fortunately, I realised before we got out of the door that there was a good bit of drizzle in there too. Although it was barely damping the air, the girls came back dripping. It was, however, the warmest that we had felt it in more than a week and if Land's End data is to be believed, the temperature increased two degrees on the day.

As I took myself off to the gymnasium for another blistering session, the skies were clearing and blue patches were starting to appear. Even before that, it had not been too dour or grey. It rather set the scene for the rest of the day with blue patches every now and then and overcast brightness else. I really did not have much time to study the sea or the weather after that as things became a mite challenging for the rest of the day.

The first mountain to climb was the lack of evidence that our cardboard would be collected. I telephoned the company, grateful only that there was no major obstacles getting through to speak with someone. I was, however, faced with the usual excuse that it was not our week. I pointed out that they had not turned up last week either. They had collected the week before and by their logic, that should not have been our week either. The very pleasant lady told me she would get the depot to reschedule it. I told her not to bother because from previous experience, the rescheduling would not be until the following week.

Having expected the usual nonsense, I had considered our alternatives before I called. I told the very pleasant lady that I thought it best if we terminate the recycling collection element of our contract because they were just not very good at it. I agreed to leave it with her as a raised ticket, and I shall see what the outcome is before pulling the plug. In the meanwhile, I called up our local company for another one off collection tomorrow.

It was not long into the afternoon when the first delivery van turned up. Eighteen boxes on that one and the biggest delivery of the day. Alright, hands up for soup, I *did* place the orders so I should have expected deliveries. What I did not expect was that they would all arrive within three hours of each other on the same day. I had absolutely no chance to clear one before the next one turned up, although I did apply my best efforts.

We were perhaps fortunate on this occasion that the customers were few and far between. It allowed me to concentrate on emptying boxes and transferring goods to the shelves in the shop or the store room. Perhaps the biggest bugbear was the flipflops that required ripping from their cellophane packaging and the removal of a small ring of polystyrene wrapped around the toe posts. I even managed to get most of them onto the display rack. The only ones left over were a surfeit of size four.

These I put aside together with the surfeit of size four we still had from last year. We are hoping for an influx of ladies with size four feet and a hankering for flip flops this year.

It was closing on four o'clock by the time we had cleared as much of the deliveries as was possible. The Missus loaded up the truck with all the remaining boxes from the beachware order and took them up to The Farm. That made a big dent in the number of boxes to process and just left me with the Cornish savoury biscuits, the postcard fudge boxes and the Tarquin's gin delivery.

The postcard fudge boxes was fairly easy because like the beer, they have a reserved place in the store room. That is a bit fluid, and I had to adapt around some other things that had encroached but by and large it took as long as it takes to remove them from the boxes and put them on the shelf. The gin was much the same and I had prepared a little by making space in the beer fridge for the new 'spritz' cans.

The word spritz in the context of drink confused me when I saw it first. I thought it meant spritzer which I took to be wine and sparkling water or lemonade. Apparently, it is something different entirely. The new small cans are a mix of vodka and a mixer – what we used to call vodka and lime, for example, except for the fizz. The last lot I had in sold very well. The company had discontinued the one I had, so I selected two new ones which, of course, I will have forever.

I came to a convenient stopping place at four o'clock which would give me the opportunity to complete the bread order for tomorrow. What happened instead was that I was flooded with a near continuous line of customers. It was hardly a five minutes to closing rush but it was of similar nature and allowed me no time to write the order down let alone send it off. The rush went on for nearly an hour and I very nearly missed the deadline.

I will have to concentrate very hard for all our orders from tomorrow. They will lead us into half term which, of course, we hope will be busy. Just about everyone who turned up to the shop today told me that the weekend, at least will be very sunny and warm. I was dubious to start with, but the BBC website has removed all its rainy symbols, and I am now downright suspicious.

Adding to my confusion, the mist returned in the evening. There was some damp in the air, but it did not require a jacket when I took the girls around last thing. It was still mild out, humid even, so perhaps there is change on the cards. As ever, I will stick my head out of the window in the morning and have a geek. I have ice creams in the freezer, cold drinks to hand and umbrellas and rain ponchos on the shelf next to the woolly hats. There are no flies on me.

May 21<sup>st</sup> – Thursday

It was a day that was not entirely sure what to do with itself. It started mild, misty and overcast and decided on various iterations of differences until it settled on a cool southeasterly breeze and a bit of variable brightness. There were some bits of blue involved along the way and a mist that came and went until the middle of the afternoon when it just looked pale and wan.

Sticking with the weather for a moment and our promise of sun splitting the hedges all weekend long. Radio Pasty decided to piddle all over our firework by telling us that while the rest of the country basket in full on sunshine and record temperatures, we would have thick fog along the south coast keeping it dull and cool. Not that I wish to be selfish, but I do hope that they are correct about it being the south coast.

As the vindictiveness of the sea state started to melt away with the tide, it left some rather good surf behind. Oddly, there were only a few surfers out there enjoying it, although, I suppose, it was quite short-lived. Later in the tide it really excelled itself which must have caught some eager eyes. For a good while in the later afternoon with the tide on the push, the sea was inundated with surfing dudes.

I took advantage of the quiet of the morning to deal with the remaining boxes of yesterday's deliveries. I made good progress given that processing the shorts and swimsuits can be quite involved, or at least time consuming. They all need to be labelled for price and because the size is not always obvious, we add a size label, too. We have also learned from experience that the bikini components need to be pinned together else they will go missing or find themselves separated and attached to inappropriate other sizes. It takes an excruciating amount of time. It was no surprise, therefore, that I did not finish.

I was very pleased to see that the size ratio for the bikinis had changed. There are predominantly more size 8 and size 10, which we have found to be the biggest sellers and mercifully few size 14 of which we have an abundance. I have put out the 8s and 10s, the rest, hopefully, will be dealt with tomorrow.

I was keen to finish up promptly tonight in the shop as there was a Lifeboat exercise planned. This meant cramming a bit of tea and getting the orders done in a timely manner. Naturally, this was telegraphed across all the various visitors in The Cove who, at irregular intervals during the latter stages of the shop hours, dropped in to prevent me from first, cramming my tea and secondly completing the orders in a timely manner. I will give them their due, it was very well orchestrated and for added effect about half only came in to browse or engage me in conversation. A clear conspiracy if ever I saw one.

I have been critical in the past about people being overly fussy about best before dates on our products. I am of the view that the product is good until the date printed on it and very likely well beyond. I can perhaps understand someone not wanting a large loaf of bread that is at or near its due date if they are likely to take a week to consume it. While I find it hard to understand otherwise, I realise that people have

different opinions and shall leave it there. I will however never comprehend the gentleman who refused a product at the last knocking of the day that had at least a week left of its best before date. They were dog biscuits, and he did indeed have a dog. If you are telling me that dogs now have a view on the matter, it is about time I gave up.

I am ashamed to say that I took my consternation out on the next customer who came in as a family group. They were after a walking pole for the most senior member who felt that he needed some support while walking. Our trekking sticks are telescopic, and we store them in their collapsed state and unless you have used one before, it is not obvious how they extend and lock. He chose the colour he desired, and I placed them on the counter. He then asked how they work. I replied that you hold one in each hand and lean on them while walking. I was very pleased that he and the family had a sense of humour.

Finishing off my ordering after we closed, I scurried off to the Lifeboat station for the pre launch briefing. There was a good attendance for both boat and on the shore and we launched away for around quarter to seven o'clock on a rising tide. It was my turn to operate the winch, which was annoying because it was not even raining. The southeasterly had ramped up a bit in the latter stages of the afternoon and although by this time we had bright sunshine, it was a tad chilly on the slipway.

As ever we considered great thoughts over a cup of tea and some thoughtfully provided homemade brownies and a fat free cake – who knew such a thing existed – or why. One of those gathered had rather more modern technical abilities than the rest of us. I cannot remember what great thought prompted it, but he was able to take a photograph of us sitting around the table and then use an AI program to manipulate the image to show the table full of cupcakes. It was quite an alarming notion that such a thing could be done. I spent the rest of the time wondering where the cakes had gone.

The big boat had launched to investigate and document continuing problems with the compass, so it was not out as long as a normal training exercise. With the tide now more advance we made the final adjustments to the short slip setup as we watched the boat head back into the bay. Conveniently, the Inshore boat came back first and the shore team from that joined us before the big boat was ready.

From my observation post on high in the winch room, it was plain to see that we executed a textbook recovery up the short slip in calm conditions. We had prepared some buckets of soapy water for the Boat Crew to give the deck a proper wash down. When they had finished we brought the boat in and made it ready for the next service without further incident. We are, after all, a very efficient, very excellent Shore Crew.

May 22<sup>nd</sup> – Friday

We were back to mist again this morning after yesterday's rather splendid evening. The sun did not feel like packing in until well after I had finished on the Lifeboat and I ended up taking the girls around the block afterwards.

It might have been misty, but gosh was it humid. I could have dispensed with my jacket but for a little damp in the air – actually very damp in the air. We were allowed back on the beach again, which surprised me, but we were an hour earlier and the tide an hour later. There was quite a bit of beach for the girls to run about on which is probably why they chose not to.

We had a very busy day yesterday with going home presents, so it should not have been a great surprise that we were very quiet during the morning. We were very quiet during the afternoon, but that is another story. Initially, this suited very well because I had ordered a glut of greengrocery, a diversity of dairy and a plethora of pasties, sorry (MS) and I rather imagined that they would all come at once. I was very fortunate that the greengrocery came early and since I was ahead of the posse, I came down as soon as I could to get it out of the way.

I need not have rushed as the milk came well after I had finished packing and pricing the fruit and vegetables. Because it was later it increased the chances of it arriving with the pasties, so I was on tenterhooks all the while I was trying to get it into the fridge. In the end, the pasties were so far behind that they delayed me heading off to the gymnasium. It really was a geet load I had ordered and fitting them into the fridge was a work of precision. All we have to do now is sell them

I scurried off to the gymnasium as quickly as I could after I had finished with the pasties, but I was a good three quarters of an hour later than I would have liked. I have not let off from the new extended blistering sessions and feel much better for it. Of course, my body might see it differently, but we are as yet to have that conversation.

When I came back, the Missus announced her intention to go diggering again and therefore I would take the girls out after I had made ready for the shop. I dressed as I had done for the early morning walk with a mid-layer and a hooded sweatshirt jacket. It took no more than a few moments outside to realise that I was dreadfully overdressed. The humidity was still with us as was the now slowly clearing mist, but the temperature had shot up in the intervening hours. That, as it turned out, was a completely fabricated nonsense; it only seemed warmer. The temperature was about the same as yesterday, but that chilly southeasterly was dormant.

Whatever the truth of it, the experience made me change into something more comfortable before I returned to the shop and for the first time this year, I wore a short sleeved shirt in the shop. I debated the advisability of wearing shorts but as I was pressed for time, I stuck with my big boys' trousers. My how liberated I felt.

I had plenty of time to examine my feelings as it was exceptionally quiet today. I am hoping it is just a lull while we wait for our new visitors to arrive. I did not continue with processing the bikinis. I had a very late breakfast and then could not summon the enthusiasm required to do the job. I did have a look in the box and came to the crushing conclusion that the second set of bikinis in the box were the same as the ones we had plenty of out on display. I cannot imagine what happened there, but we will sell through them eventually.

While at a sort of loose end, I pursued an enquiry that had dropped into my lap quite by chance. I think that I mentioned that some residents at the end of The Cove had been caught out by the new number plate recognition system. Since then, I have had two more reports of locals being nabbed. My immediate reaction was to stay out of it, but I reasoned that I was probably the only one who knew that several people had been caught and therefore it was more likely a systemic failure than a one off. I spoke to a relevant contact and have been asked that I collate the details from the affected people. I will report directly to him to see if he can identify the cause of the problem. I now have to track down the victims again.

There was some definite gathering of pace during the afternoon, and we start to see signs of arrivals. It did not seem that busy but the till at the end of the day was quite respectable, so something must have happened. I upped the dairy and bread orders in anticipation as we will open longer from tomorrow. I will also need to be down in the shop earlier as I noted the drinks fridge needed topping up.

The girls seem to be under the impression that because it is daylight when we head out for our last walk that we should do a full around the block or a visit to the beach. I can see no reason not to, so we found ourselves crossing the Harbour car park. Along on the left towards the toilets as we went, there was a large van parked. As I waited for the girls to have a sniff at the flora on the wall there it occurred to me that the van obscured the view of the car park exit. I wondered if I might have stumbled on the reason why some cars are not being registered leaving at that end.

Perhaps I should just accept it is not my problem to resolve, which is a far better idea.

## May 23<sup>rd</sup> – Saturday

I should have known better than to trust Radio Pasty's 'mist on the south coast'; our day started out and remained misty from the outset. A heatwave Cornish style. The wind was in the northwest, although there was not much to it, so possibly cold air, warm sea or land or something like that. Lovely in St Just apparently and everywhere else I kept being told - endlessly.

Regardless, we started the day in the ascendant. The first few customers swept through our grocery aisles and one admitted that everything he purchased, which was a lot, he had in a bag on the kitchen table at home. We had quite the mini rush for the first hour or so, then everything went quiet again when everyone realised that the mist was probably not going to clear and it was time to begger off somewhere else.

I think we can safely blame the weather. That northwest breeze was chilly and with the mist in the air it was damp, too. There were certainly more people around than during a normal Saturday. We had the early arriving families in to case the joint and select their gifts that they may purchase later in the week. We even had small children blowing their holiday money straight away, presumably hopeful that they could negotiate more later on.

We had to wait until into the afternoon for even a hint of the sunshine that everyone else was getting. The mist was lifting tantalisingly before returning again several times during the afternoon. During one of the lifts, it was possible to see the big beach for a fleeting few minutes. Quite remarkably there were small camps down there with tents and windbreaks that disappointingly did not come from us. There were a fair few in the water too. I had heard that the surf earlier in the morning was ace. I was told that it was especially good because no one could see it from the webcams and our man had it all to himself.

There was not quite the action that I had expected on the pasty front (sorry, MS). We made a bit of a dent in the stock and one order of a dozen gave me a great deal of relief. They did have to wait until I could get them all ready at the same time but by and large, I was not pressed and there were few succession problems as I might expect on a really busy day. Not exactly a bitter disappointment but a definite must try harder.

The biggest surprise of the day was being told that the St Ives round trip bus service had resumed. It took a lady from Zennor to bring me the news. She runs a bit of an information service for the community and let me have the details. It would have been beneficial if the bus company could have made a bit more of a song and dance about it, but it is in the news section of their website. In fact, that is the only place it is. If you look up the Number 7 timetable on the same website, it is blank for today's date with no indication that it had been replaced by a wider service.

It is very much a case of blink and you would miss it. The extended service is running for the three days of the holiday weekend and both days next weekend. The company clearly did not think that anyone would want to use it during the week. It is unlikely that anyone will used it during the weekends either, unless they are clairvoyant.

Since it went a bit quiet in the late afternoon, I spent an hour sorting out a timetable for our window. It seems the service does not quite do the full loop in both directions

and for some of the services you will need to change to the regular bus at Land's End to get back to Penzance. It is, however, a most welcome addition and a complete surprise even if it is exceedingly limited. It would be even more welcome if it is put on again for the summer holidays, especially if they can run it on more than weekends.

Today I think I witnessed the clearest evidence of the intransigence that persists between generations and that it transcends national boundaries and cultures. A while ago I wrote about the Rosamund Pilcher phenomenon that exists in Germany. So popular were her novels there that German companies come over in swarms to film mini series and films of her great works. At one point, one airline flew special Rosamund Pilcher themed flights from, I think it might have been, Stuttgart to Newquay complete with Rosamund Pilcher cardboard cutouts and Rosamund Pilcher herself providing a recorded welcome message on the flight. Every year we would be inundated with German visitors seeking out the film locations and walks around West Cornwall.

Wind forward how ever many years it is since I wrote that and welcome to a couple of young German ladies perusing the goods in the shop. We have, at a very discounted price (not my discount I hasten to add), a book called Rosmund Pilcher's Cornwall and one of the young ladies brought this to my attention. She told me that she was vaguely aware of the films and series and that she and her friends made jokes about them, but she wondered why and what it was all about. I know that life can throw you a googly from time to time and catch you out when you least expect it, but I never thought for one moment that I would be stood here having to explain Rosamund Pilcher to a couple of Germans.

After such a surreal experience, it was good to find myself back on terra firma with a good old fashioned five minutes to closing rush as my traditional anchor. We, of course, had to wait through an hour of quiet from our normal closing time for it to come along, but it was a comfort, nonetheless. The till at the end of the day was respectable but not exceptional as it should have been.

When the girls dragged me around the block at the last knockings – they have no respect for a weary grumpy shopkeeper – the sky was clear with angry foggy darkness out on the northern horizon. The coolness was also drifting off and, as long as that fog stays in the north, we might well have a decent day tomorrow. I will, no doubt, be up early to meet it.

## May 24<sup>th</sup> – Sunday

Not that we could see them, but the dive boats were back yesterday working on the undersea cable. The digger boys said that they still had some 80 hours, I think, of diving to do before the job was done. I met with a couple of the boat providers this morning and quizzed them for more detail. They tell me that there is a further 20

days of diving to do. The main work is to armour the cable to 500 metres out from low water spring tide, the bit the digger boys did.

The boys on shore had the digger to lift the cable so that they could put the armour on. Quite how the diver lifts the cable underwater will perhaps be a mystery forever. I will keep my eye out for a dripping wet person with big muscles and ask, if I see one.

I either have the selflessness of a Franciscan monk, or I am bereft of any sense. I think the former unlikely. I have taken great pains to promote and advertise the very temporary bus service to St Ives and this morning, I printed off two signs and placed them in the window and by the first electric sliding door in The Cove for all to see. If the advertising works, it will see a good proportion of our much needed customers begging off to St Ives for the day instead of spending their shekels here. What was I thinking.

It was a stonking good day, though; a proper rip gribbler if ever I saw one and we were busy, thankfully. We had the traditional rip gribbler of a day shopping profile. There were early shoppers, some circling before we even opened, after breakfast goods; a wave of early beach goers looking for buckets, spades, tents and windbreaks; a second wave of beach goers towards the end of the morning looking for much the same as the first wave but with snacks and, of course, pasties (sorry, MS).

It had me on my toes from the very outset of the morning. I had come down to the shop early to prepare and having done so, made a breakfast sandwich before we opened which took more than three hours to consume. The pasties I put on not long after we opened despite there being, at that time, hardly a soul on the street. It was the right thing to do because the demand came on all of a sudden. After that, it was just a case of keeping them topped up. At peak, this meant having some in the oven constantly from late morning to the middle of the afternoon. I took eight from the freezer otherwise I had ordered roughly the right amount for the weekend.

As we would expect, we did have a lull in the middle of the day but even then, there was an irregular flow of customers drifting in and out. The Missus was arranging two trips to The Farm, so I had her bring back some reinforcements after the first visit including, as I was reminded by a customer, some parasols. I had sent them up to The Farm at the end of the last season and forgot that we might possibly sell a few under blazing sunshine conditions. Unfortunately, by the time I got them, the demand had dissipated.

I did not see much of the day; my eyes were focused on the counter. When I did have time for a look, the beach looked packed, probably because it was. It did not help that it was high tide but there was enough beach for everyone to squeeze in tightly. I had stepped outside on occasion and discovered that it was very warm, so it was no surprise that the water was alive with bodies swimming, surfing, bodyboarding or doing just about anything to get wet and stay cool. Land's End

recorded the temperature at 23 degrees with a bit of a northeasterly breeze. I suspect that it might have been slightly warmer in The Cove.

As you may imagine, I saw a good cross-section of humanity visit the shop during the course of the day. We had all manner of shapes and sizes, cultures, colours and nationalities coming to the counter. At one point a gentleman arrived and asked a question which I did not hear. He had some sort of speech impediment. It took him great effort to say anything at all and spoke very quietly. Even with my false ears, I struggled to hear him. I had to ask him to repeat himself and pointed to my hearing aids to make him aware of why I had done so. It was at that point he rolled his eyes up in a gesture of what might have been derision, as if perhaps I was not making sufficient effort. I thought it a tad ironic that a man with a disability could be visibly irritated by a person with another. It did not perturb me greatly, just worthy of comment, and we concluded our business without further issue.

We had another wave of customers in the late afternoon as many families headed off to their teas. Those less encumbered, and some of the families too, focused on fleecing us of alcohol. I had topped up the beer fridge at half time knowing what was likely coming later on and by the time we closed we were empty again. I will be down early again tomorrow to fill it up and I have no doubt I will be doing the same again the next day if this weather holds.

While emptying the beer fridge may not have been a surprise, selling logs and kindling certainly was. It is possible that it was for barbeques but using wood and kindling, while not unheard of, is unusual. We seemed to be selling far too much for that to be the case. The other thing, which probably should not have surprised me were the Sunday newspapers. After a week or more of fuss about not having them, and on one of the busiest days of the year, we sold five. One Sunday Times and four Mail on Sunday. Hmm.

All the conditions were in place for it, so it was no surprise at all that we had a pukka five minutes to closing rush at five minutes to closing. Three times I approached the first electric sliding door in The Cove to close it and three times I was met with people coming the other way in a panic and aghast that they might miss purchasing the things that perhaps they should have purchased a few hours earlier. It was no matter. We had been very busy over the day, and a little more busyness would do no harm and buy some good will, perhaps.

I tarried after we closed for a further half and hour to place the orders for the next day. I also considered it worthwhile bottling up the beer fridge as it would save me time in the morning. With all the orders I had placed, I would be busy enough.

It was still warm when I took the girls out last thing. I did notice, however, that an easterly breeze had struck up that was firm but not yet robust. The dive boys had told me that Wednesday was off for them with expected strong winds. We had to wait a couple of extra days for our heatwave to start and now that it has, there are

already cracks starting to appear. At least it might head off the complaints that it is too hot, due any time soon.

## May 25<sup>th</sup> – Monday

It was ABH's idea that I got up at just gone five o'clock instead of an hour later. Clearly, she knew better than I that it would take me far longer to do the bottling up of the soft drinks and the remainder of the beer fridge than I had accounted for. I was further hampered when all the morning deliveries were late. This made life particularly awkward as we started to get busy just as soon as I opened the first electric sliding door in The Cove.

I went into some detail yesterday about the sort of profile we expect on rip gribbling days such as we were having more than one of. Well, forget I said anything. It was completely different today, although that is not exactly true. I think that the breakfast goods phase and the getting ready for the beach phase just rolled into one, along with the later phase of people coming back off the beach or wherever they were for drinks and snacks. Merged into this was a good surge of gift and bodyboard buying.

The latter was most probably driven by a reasonably sudden increase in the swell in the bay. It was a deep swell with a long period between waves and together with an east wind, provided some excellent, if slightly large, surfing conditions. I had watched it earlier in the tide. The waves were only breaking along the cliffs, over Cowloe and on the shore while the rest of the bay was just a deep uninterrupted blue.

The reduced size beach was packed again and almost certainly more so than yesterday. So busy was it that it seemed that there was just one body of people down there half of whom were in the sea because there was not enough room for them on the land. Down on the Harbour beach it was not quite so busy. It is populated primarily by locals and those that know and somehow avoids the crush of the big beach. The water, however, is teeming with life – children of all ages diving, swimming, boarding and kayaking. Days they will remember for life, I suspect.

I have no tales to impart of errant or outstanding customers visiting the shop today. They were a blur before my very eyes and there was not much in the way of friendly banter, just the cursory exchange of necessary information to execute a sale and purchase. Of course, we have children in abundance, many permitted to come to the shop on their own or with their friends. It is mainly in the pursuit of fizzy drinks and sweets, and I am continually amazed by how even the very young wield their smart mobile telephones to pay. They are much more adept than older adults and even some younger ones who seem to need to key in essays' worth of keystrokes to get the thing to work.

Of course, the day would not be complete without an examination of the sales of our pasties (sorry, MS). I had gone large with my order, I thought. Our customers

thought different and plundered our stock like a fleet of marauding pirates. It was only late in the morning, but we were heading for a wipe out, which would have been somewhat embarrassing. I delved into our frozen stock and brought out the last of those but that only amounted to a further eight. We made it through to two o'clock in the afternoon with barely a couple of shelves full in the warmer when pasty business began to slow a little. The onslaught had been constant from the moment I opened the doors until around quarter to three o'clock in the afternoon. Breakfast had been no more than a fanciful suggestion, and I had to wait until gone three for a quite bite of cheese and biscuits. It was about then that the pasty demand floated off almost entirely and we coasted into the end of the day with the few we had left. No one left disappointed but it was a close run thing.

There was not so much of a scramble at the end of the day and the five minutes to closing rush was a little more sedate than it had been yesterday. I was already aware that the beer fridge had been taken apart again. I had absolutely no chance of doing a half-time top up as there was no let up in the flow of customers. I got there when I could, but it was a bit late by then. I also took a tour down the grocery aisle and found it to be a scene of devastation, like we had been visited by a plague of locusts. I had hoped to avoid a big cash and carry delivery this coming Saturday because it was likely to still be busy, but it now looks like there will be no choice.

It was when I got to the soft drinks fridge that I had the biggest concerns. It too had taken a beating and the two cases of small bottled water I had put in before we opened were all gone. It is the large bottles of water which are the greater worry. I had topped that up in the morning as well, four cases of it and now it was back where it was. These come from the cash and carry, and we have just two left. I scabbled to look through our local supplier catalogues and fortunately found something similar from one of them. The height of bottles is important else they have to lie down in the fridge and we can only get half the volume in. I have ordered the only ones available and hope that we are lucky.

I spent an hour after we closed filling up the soft drinks as I would not have time to do it all in the morning unless I got up an hour before I went to bed. These are exceptional days that require an exceptional response. Once I get into the swing of it, the weather will turn and I will have wasted my time. I need to swing quicker.

## May 26<sup>th</sup> – Tuesday

I got up earlier than ABH this morning. There, that will teach her.

It was a necessity since I could not do everything last night and had left the beer fridge until this morning along with the rest of the soft drinks. I finished off the rest of the big water bottles and held my breath first, that the ordered ones would come and secondly that the bottles were of the correct size to fit in the fridge.

Once again, most of the deliveries were late. It really is no surprise: the roads will be chocker; there will be problems parking; and everyone's volumes will have increased exponentially. While having late deliveries is irksome, we can hardly blame the suppliers; they will be under the cosh the same as the rest of us. We are grateful to get the deliveries at all. There have been times gone by when we have been rationed for water because of the demand.

We had the third rip gribbler in a row. It was lucky that I had to go to the shop for milk before I took the girls out because I had pulled a jacket from the cupboard to wear. Radio Pasty said later that the temperature had not dropped below 21 degrees, a 'tropical night', they said. When we went down to the beach for a run, it was very warm already and the sun had barely risen. It seemed a little cooler today and I noticed for the first time that it seemed cooler outside than it did in the shop. I ramped up the extractor fan at the end of the shop. I am not sure it made much difference.

The swell eased a little today; the cable boats were back. They have become a bit of a weather vane, indicating whether the sea state is favourable or not. Despite that, the sea still harboured some latent power. At high water waves were thundering in on North Rocks and prancing up in white foam and there was still reasonable surf as the tide pushed in earlier. I saw one roller come ashore under Carn Keys and the way it bounced looked like a Mexican wave.

When I looked later in the afternoon, there were definitely fewer people on the beach than there was over Sunday and Monday. We noticed it in the shop too. While we still had a fairly constant flow of customers through to the later afternoon, I was much less pressed. The obvious metric was that we sold fewer pasties (sorry, MS). The downturn was not overly apparent until after I had placed the order for the next day, so we will have to play rationalise the pasty numbers for the rest of the week to get to the right level.

Because I had noticed that the grocery shelves needed some attention that I was unable to give them, I recruited the Missus to lend me a helping hand. Not only did she top up the shelves, she also went through and tidied the shelves in the store room and wrote me a list of what we had run out of. This will be very handy when I come to do the cash and carry list that I am resigned to do even though things will go quiet again next week. For one thing, we need our regular water.

The unintended disadvantage of the Missus doing the shelves was that she could not place the frozen order. Even if she was not doing the shelves, she still could not have done the frozen order because I had not written it yet. I could not get out from behind the counter to examine the contents of the freezers to check what we needed. The same was true of our butcher's order. Early on, someone had asked when we would get more of their bacon and I had been trying to do the order ever since.

We had a bit of a lull in the later afternoon before a major resurgence as people came off the beach heading towards teatime. The flow was fairly constant and the grocery shelves that the Missus had filled up earlier were slowly emptied. I also watched with mixed feelings as the soft drinks fridge was emptied – delight that sales were going so well and dismay at the knowledge I would have to fill it up again.

I had called in a very large delivery of soft drinks in anticipation of a big hit today. It had sat in the entrance to the store room since it was delivered in the morning. The large bottles were still in the shop where they had been dumped. During the late afternoon lull, I was able to move the cases about into some sort of order so that I could see what was what. When I had a proper look at the end of the day, it was worse or better than I had thought. It is a big fridge, and entire shelves had been emptied. It took me 45 minutes to do most of it, the rest will wait for tomorrow.

I had to stop so that I could do the orders for tomorrow – more soft drinks and ice – and still have time for some tea before bedtime.

As I sat at the table for that tea, I looked out across the beach at one of the best looking times of the day in my view: all that soft sepia light. There were still plenty of revellers on the beach and many in the water. The camps had largely gone but I am sure there were some barbeques in progress and the smell of them was in the air when I took the girls around later. A Falmouth tender had arrived at some point during the evening and was anchored on the mooring just offshore. I have no idea what it is about and I shall make enquiries.

There was no jacket required for our final walk of the day. I managed to avoid a full walk around the block, and we sauntered around our end of the car park. We have been warned of more breeze tomorrow and it was noticeable and most welcome this evening. Hopefully cooler during the night, although I it has bothered the girls more than it has me.

Alright, time to collapse in a heap now.

## May 27<sup>th</sup> – Wednesday

The Falmouth tender, it seems, is linked with the cable divers. My guess is that they needed a more substantial boat to act as a platform in the strong winds that were expected in the later morning and the afternoon. The ribs were here for the morning, but they ran for cover by the middle of the day as the southeasterly ramped up beyond 30 miles per hour. Land's End weather station is still showing a spurious northerly of 13 miles per hour all day. I think it may be a bit broken.

I was feeling a bit like a rusty weather vane myself this morning. Three days of long hours toiling in the African sun, dragging myself across miles of unforgiving desert ... sorry, I was thinking about a John Mills movie – they have been those sorts of days. I was feeling like a rusty weather vane but it was three days of extreme shopkeeping

that did me in. I missed out on my gymnasium session on Monday, so I was quite determined to get one in today. As it happened, the morning started quite slowly, and I slipped away in the middle of it for a blistering session. Ten minutes after getting back to the shop, I was ready for another three days. Bring it on.

I chose to take a jacket with me to run the girls to the beach first thing. I had expected the breeze to be a little stronger, but I did not feel overly warm in it. The main premise was to use the pockets for my mobile telephone and accoutrements. If I put heavy things in my gymnasium shorts, they fall down. At that time in the morning, I was not too bothered about being seen but it does make it difficult to walk with them around the ankles.

Quite what drove down the numbers today it was difficult to tell. It might have been the southeasterly breeze or the threat of it in the forecast, although it was hard to see to what other beach a person might go to be more sheltered than the big beach. Or perhaps it was going to St Ives day. One day of the week usually is but I am not sure that I would choose town over beach on one of our limited sunny days of the year – unless I had been burnt to a crisp on the previous three, of course.

That is not to say that we were not busy. We were just not as busy as the previous few days. I would be very grateful for a day like this on a wet Wednesday in April. We had some very busy periods, but we also had quite long gaps in between which we did not have on the other days. It was not quite a going home present buying day, although some of the children were trying hard to shed a good proportion of their holiday money. Rather oddly, it was a big sausage roll day. I had learnt my lesson on the first day and had subsequently ordered plenty. It kept me on my toes keeping enough cycling around in the warmer. They key now will be knowing when to stop the big orders.

When I came to assess the damage at the end of the day, the beer fridge was once again largely empty. I probably had time to do some half-time topping up but did not, so hard luck. The soft drinks fridge survived particularly well, enough for me not to bother with staying after school to top it up; I will have enough time for both fridges in the morning – which are probably famous last words.

The Missus had already been to The Farm once during the day but she decided to go up again in the evening to do some more digging. She only has a limited time left with the digger. She cannot go up with the girls, so mainly the work has to be done when Mother is here to look after them. They would only be on their own a short time when she went this evening. She was back just after nine o'clock.

When I stepped out of the shop to start bringing the display I looked across the bay. Cape Cornwall had disappeared in a bank of fog that was creeping into The Cove in a most artistic manoeuvre. It was a double pincher movement, coming in from the northwest and down the Carn Olva to the east. Later, just after sunset, out on the northwestern horizon, the mist was laying in clouds on the surface of the sea. It was

a sight much like you would see looking down from an aeroplane flying above the clouds. How very pretty it was.

## May 28<sup>th</sup> – Thursday

Oh, very dear. The mist that rolled in and out and in again last night was still hanging about this morning. It varied in thickness through to the late morning when it cleared to a thin veil. It resulted in thin business with very few people about until into the late morning. After a first half the week in full pelt, it felt like someone had robbed my toys.

Those people who were around did their best to compensate by buying gifts in abundance. We also had a burgeoning demand for pasties (sorry, MS) which took me a little by surprise. I had spent some time trying to calculate how many we might need for the weekend allowing for how many we had left over today and guessing how many we might have left over tomorrow. I had estimated that the placed order would cover just the weekend as we would have enough for today and tomorrow.

Just half an hour before the pasty ordering deadline, we had already burst through my allowance for today and were eating into tomorrow's allocation. I called in to up my order by a reasonable amount. An hour later, after the deadline had passed, we were still selling pasties in quickfire succession and the oven was constantly humming in the background. The weekend will be an interesting couple of days, I am sure.

By early afternoon, the sun had burnt through the mist, leaving just a haze over the bay. The cable boats were back and the Falmouth tender that spent another night here, was out there with them. It is possible that they are expecting the sea state to change next week for the worst and are trying to get ahead of it with the diving. They could not have had better conditions today as the sea was perfectly calm. There had been a few waves for the surfers in the lower reaches of the tide but a couple of hours ahead of high water, even those had disappeared.

Pasties were not the only deadline I had for today. The cash and carry needed to be keyed in and sent off. The quiet morning had allowed me to prepare the order, so there was some advantage to it but as the day went on, the opportunities to key the order diminished as we got busier. In truth, I probably had all night to do it as the absolute drop-dead time would be before business on Friday, but I had other plans for all night.

The keying needs some concentration; there are similar products and it is easy to key the wrong one. Even without distractions we have ended up with a carton of six packs of six somethings instead of a single pack of six. I did that with the half bottles of vodka two orders ago and we now have enough until the end of the year. It is handbag or pocket drink and we often sell quite a bit.

Ordinarily I would have handed the list over to the Missus but in the afternoon she had taken Mother to an appointment up in Truro and would be gone for most of it. The other thing she would be absent for was the arrival of the frozen order. That usually turns up in the morning, when she would have been on hand to help. Clearly, the small gods of grumpy shopkeepers had tipped off the delivery driver to come in the afternoon when I was on my own and, if possible, when the shop was full of customers.

Business in the later afternoon was patchy, and I managed to get upstairs a couple of times to check on the girls. They manage very well on their own and if the Missus is away, they will mope and sulk and not be bothered to do much, including getting into trouble.

We reached the end of the day without any sign of the frozen order which was both a relief and a frustration. We had placed the order on Tuesday; they usually arrive next day. We are now out of the most popular ice creams, and the freezer looks abandoned with so many spaces. Most people seem to find something when they visit, and I have not noticed a big clamour for ices over the recent days.

There was a big clamour across the road and in the Harbour as people gathered to watch the Lifeboat launch in the early evening. I had elected not to attend as it was slated for when the shop was still open and I would not have been of much use even if I did turn up. There were more than sufficient crew to cover the required duties and I observed from afar.

The launches at holiday times draw a big crowd. The railing opposite the shop were packed with small children and sentinel adults ensuring that they did not topple through the gaps in their excitement. There were probably more down on the Harbour beach where the Inshore boat was launching, but I could not see them, and a few along the Harbour wall. As the boat slipped down the slipway and made its dramatic splash into the sea, a mighty roar went up from the crowd and top hats were tossed with abandon into the air. Alright, I made that bit up, but I am sure people were impressed even if they just wandered off muttering.

There were precious few who returned for recovery. The boats were only out for an hour and a half barely enough time for a cup of tea, an involved discussion and, this evening, a cheese board supplied by our resident snack provider. The Inshore boat was first, snapped up by the trailer, Tooltrak and ready crew. I could see the big boat come in as I sat at the table for my tea. It was clear, even at distance, that we executed a textbook recovery up the long slip in perfect conditions and a glassy sea. After a quick washdown, the boat was secured for its next service. We are, after all, a very conscientious, very excellent Shore Crew.

May 29<sup>th</sup> – Friday

I discovered late last night that my false ears have stopped working again. For the last few weeks, I have struggled to hear customers in the shop and put it down to my actual ears not working. It started with my left ear and then, more recently the right ear. I had tried ear drops, pipe cleaners and a plunger all to no avail. I concluded that since the Bluetooth connection to my mobile telephone was working correctly that my ears were permanently fried.

I do not quite know what made me test further, perhaps I had just reached a peak of frustration, but I thought to take them upstairs and try them on our clock. It makes a soft ticking that I can only hear if my false ears are working properly. I could not hear it, ergo my false ears were not working. It was something of a relief to know what it was, but I now faced the problem of getting the NHS outsourced supplier to believe me.

Things did not start out well in this regard. I spoke with a very pleasant lady on the telephone to book an appointment with someone sensible. I explained the issue in careful detail and at once I could sense her scepticism over the telephone. She immediately told me that it was probably just the tubes needing to be cleared. I pointed out that if the tubes were blocked, I would not hear the wake-up tone when I switched them on and sound from the Bluetooth connection would at least be muted. Even pure logic did not seem to sway her but she clearly thought it best not to press the matter and booked an appointment for Monday. I do hope I do not have a mountain to climb when I get there.

Anyway, it was not the sort of day to remain grumpy for long. It has started out a little cloudy, but it was already warm and still from the outset of the day. The girls were keen to go out early doors. I am happy with that as it gives me a clear run on the morning to get things done. I was downstairs early and steamed through topping up the two drinks fridges. To be fair, there was not a great deal of bottling up to be done, especially in comparison to earlier in the week when I could not have done both fridges and opened on time.

My most pressing concern now is the clear enough space in the store room for the grocery order tomorrow morning. We have more cases of drink piled up than we might ordinarily have and some of those are plumb in the way. The Missus parked the truck out the front of the shop when she came back with Mother, and I placed some boxes in the back temporarily. I still think we will struggle, and I will have to pull my finger out to clear them as soon as possible after the delivery.

It was a very quiet morning. In fact, it was a disappointingly very quiet day despite it being a positively ripping gribbler of a day. I felt that I could safely visit the gymnasium for a blistering session without tearing a hole in the space-time continuum. It was probably as well that it was quiet because while I was gone, the frozen order arrived, and the Missus had to take it in by herself. I got back to help just as she was filling up the ice cream freezer and order was restored. We now have plenty of ice creams and not many customers.

The day proceeded as I might imagine it will for the next few weeks. I had hoped, or at least prepared for, one more day of busyness but it seems most families cut and run today. I definitely backed the wrong pasty horse (sorry, MS) and I shall see to freezing a good many tomorrow at some point as they will not be needed. I finished off what was left over from yesterday's stock and did not make too much of a dent into what was planned for the weekend.

Quite some number of those who elected to stay all day and leave this evening or tomorrow morning, chose to adorn the beach, and who can blame them; it was a splendid day. I looked down in the middle of the afternoon and they was a tenth of the numbers down there at the start of the week. The sea was dead calm for most of the day, picking up some ripples and a slight swell toward the end of the day. A surfing day it definitely was not and the bay was left for one boarder on a motorised blade gliding effortlessly around the circuit.

Earlier, I had spotted an inflatable towing a board with a chap riding it. I thought that he was water skiing to start with, which I suppose he was after a fashion. The cable boats were out again and seemed to have multiplied, although they might have been leisure craft; it was difficult to tell, and I was not that interested to look more closely. For a sea that looked so utterly inviting, it was the least populated that I had seen it all week.

We ended the day with a verifiable five minutes to closing rush, which was oddly irritating after a day of quietness.

As I went upstairs the Missus was leaving to take Mother home and would return via The Farm and more diggering. It is no wonder we get on so well; we do not see each other.

## May 30<sup>th</sup> – Saturday

Last week I was bowled over metaphorically by the early morning rush. This week I was bowled over psychologically by the absence of one. It takes a bit of getting used to travelling one day at 90 miles per hour on the open road and the next day punting down the Cherwell.

That is not to say that I was idle – well, not very anyway. I was still up at sparrow's, had the girls down the beach and was in the shop before seven o'clock. I had been lazy last night, deciding that I could do the bottling up this morning. On my way down the stairs, I caught the newspaper man delivering and shortly after, the greengrocery arrived. I had not factored these into my morning challenge for some reason and ended up rushing about to get done before the cash and carry order arrived. It was late.

The driver told me that the previous driver of the van had not told anyone that it had broken down, so our driver had to unload and reload onto a different van. He arrived twenty minutes before opening and together we smashed the unloading of a fairly hefty order in fifteen minutes. Happily, my gymnasium session yesterday paid off, although I will still let the young fit brute they sent do the lifting of beer cases in threes and twenty five kilograms of water at a time, bless him.

The delivery set the theme for my day. I allowed myself breakfast just because today I could. Thereafter it was an endless line of lifeless packaging, slicing open boxes, pricing packets and finding room on shelves or in the store room for them. It seemed endless too. It would have looked better had I been able to move the cases of drink, that would be used later, to the back out of the way. Unfortunately, until I could process the boxes further back which were in the way, they would have to stay where they were. Psychologically, it was not at all helpful.

That was all going very well until the middle of the morning when we started to see some customers arriving. That slowed me down considerably. There were those spending their last day coming in for provisions. They were back later for sweets and snacks for the journey ahead. Then there were the trippers, older couples, young couples and those with young families and finally, the arrivals for the coming week.

It was busy enough, although more sporadic than the constant flow that we had been accustomed to over the last week. After yesterday, it was certainly busier than I expected and we made good progress through our pasty stock (sorry, MS) which was definitely more than I had expected. I postponed bagging the most of them up and freezing them until I had a better picture of where we were with them. All the while, in between customers, I attacked another box in the store room. It was never going to a clean sweep, but a thousand mile journey starts with a single box of Weetabix, erm, something like that.

Our glorious day ended quite abruptly at half past two o'clock. The clouds had been creeping in almost unnoticed until they blotted out the sun. It was still a little bit glorious after that but previously it really had been quite spectacularly rip gribbling. There had been little to no breeze in the first half of the day but from late morning it had been picking up little by little from the southwest. It put a few ripples on the sea that had been hitherto glassy all day. By the end of the day, we were seeing a little swell come into the bay.

There was still a five minutes to closing rush as we rolled into the end of the shop day, but it was small beer compared to the others we had this week. We had been quiet for the hour preceding it. As business days go, it was quite acceptable, about half of where we were at the peak of the start of the week. Tomorrow should set the pace for the coming week, and I will be able to see where we are for orders and such.

The most noticeable change was when I took the girls around for their last walk of the day. All week, there have been people going to and from and older children still mooching about. Tonight there was not a soul about. They are gone.

## May 31<sup>st</sup> – Sunday

I had looked at the BBC forecast a few days ago and then again a day after. The first told me that Sunday would be rainy then sunny, then rainy again. Last night would be mizzly. It was not. Today we started with full cloud cover and were promised sunshine later. That seemed to work out alright. They say a monkey will type the works of Shakespear if it is at it long enough.

I was in the shop well ahead of necessity this morning. I would have topped up the drinks fridge, but the cases were still blocked off by the remaining boxes of the grocery order. Since I had time on my hands before the shop opened, I made a start on those remaining boxes and got quite a long way with them before I had to break to open the shop.

The business day started with a whimper. This was not a surprise after last night's solitary walk around this end of The Cove. Later, I was surprised just how many children there were still around and about many I do not recall seeing during the week. Some did appear to be on their way home, buying gifts and such, but some appeared to be just settling in. It made for a reasonably upbeat day when I was expecting it to be much quieter.

No long after opening, the Lifeboat launched on a joint exercise with Cape Cornwall National Coastwatch Institute. I ducked out of the launch since I would have to have arranged cover and there were enough happy volunteers to take my place on the shore. Unlike Thursday, there were only a few onlookers to wave and hoorah as the boat went down the slipway.

The boat was out for best part of a couple of hours, and I watched as it steamed back into the bay. I was a bit busier by this time, so it was as well I had stayed off on this occasion. I did observe out of the corner of my eye what looked to me very much like a textbook recovery up the long slip in reasonably calm conditions. I would expect nothing less of the crew who substituted my appearance. We are, after all, a very interchangeable, very excellent Shore Crew.

Towards later afternoon, I took the decision to bag and freeze a number of pasties (sorry, MS). The number equated to the additional pasties I had ordered when I panicked on Thursday in the middle of a bit of a pasty fest. I could have reflected on the fact that I should have left it well alone, but it really did no harm to have too many. I also would have been far too cocky had I got the numbers exactly right and ended up hating myself for it. It is one thing sporting unusually youthful good looks and quite another being cocky with it too.

Having dispensed with the normal cash and carry delivery, I turned my attention to the farm shop cash and carry order. These stocks too had been largely depleted by the increased business over the week. This list does not take half the time of the main one to complete nor does the keying in require as much concentration. There were sufficient gaps in today's traffic to allow me to compile the list by walking around the shop and later, keying it in. By Tuesday, when the delivery arrives, we will be fully stocked in our grocery provision for the next onslaught, whenever that might be.

The later afternoon dragged a bit as the customer visits became less frequent. There was not a great deal to do, although I have some orders to place, so it dragged out even longer. I am very grateful that we were closing an hour earlier. It is amazing how much difference that makes. I was very cautious when it came to next day orders for dairy and greengrocery. Happily, I can order those daily, so short ordering is not too much of a problem. I also need not be embarrassed about small orders as the drivers will be visiting the café next door in any case, although I do try and make the orders a sensible size. I finished off all the ordering well ahead of close of play and then forgot about the newspapers until the last minute. Darn it.

It was a splendid evening. The locals were down on the Harbour beach until quite late. I believe some of the local schools have an inset day tomorrow, so the children get an extra day. There was plenty of splashing around at the water's edge, high tide being in the early evening, but there was not much swimming going on as even in the Harbour the water was getting a bit lively.

The jury is out on what weather will be like tomorrow, but it is generally expected that we will have a mixed week with unsettled weather. For our evening walk, it was still exceedingly pleasant, although the cloud had returned and the clear sunsets we have been seeing were not in evidence tonight. I was tempted to let the girls loose on the beach since it was empty, but I was keen for to get back. Having had less to do today, my body had suddenly realised how tired it was and was urging me to take it to bed and I was keen not to upset it.