

DIARY 2025

## October 1<sup>st</sup> – Wednesday

Well, that is September out of the way. Just another five weeks of shop opening, so if you want something, you had better hurry. Of course, our online shop will still be open and for longer hours than the one in The Cove opens thanks to having a far less lazy, online grumpy shopkeeper running it. The shop is quite easy to find as well, being the button you so studiously avoid, dear reader, next to the one for The Diary.

We will not dwell too long on the matter of closing because five weeks is a long time in shopkeeping. It is only when it arrives that it will have disappeared in a flash. Instead, we will look out across the apparent serenity of the bay, the wispy cirrus cloud, the hazy sunshine in the east and the small, white dots of fishing vessels plying their trade on the glistening waters. Look more closely, dear reader, and you will see the almost imperceptible roll of a burgeoning swell beneath the surface just waiting to break free. Watch at the margins of the bay where the occasional white plume reaches up the cliffs opposite to know the power waiting to be unleashed.

In fact, the swell developed into nothing at all today. There was no sudden transformation into big surfable waves in the middle of the tide and later on, no surf across the whole beach that anyone could use. Yesterday's wave action must have been a flash in the pan.

We had noticed that the week commenced very quietly. The weekend hardly set our world on fire, and I still have a surfeit of pasties (sorry, MS) in the freezer. I ordered enough yesterday to see us through today and it rather looks like that will see us through tomorrow as well. Unfortunately, I did not know that when I placed the order for tomorrow. From that, dear reader, you may determine that it was quiet again today. It was, only much worse.

Oddly, there seemed to be plenty of people sitting at the benches outside the café and quite a few milling about and promenading along the street. We quite often find that when the café is busy, we are quiet and vice versa. It really was irritatingly quiet for us today and much more so than the previous days. I fear that now October is here, this level of business is set in and will be non-existent during poor weather, some of which we are expecting at the end of the week.

The absence of customers did allow me to finish the spreadsheet that I had to construct to give me a fighting chance of determining the wetsuit and rash vest numbers we will need next year. I have all the required numbers and now have a list of the numbers of each size I need. However, I also have to get the Missus to do the count of shoes up at The Farm before I can finish off those too, so I guess the spreadsheet is not really finished at all. Even then, I need to settle down with their order sheet and select the codes related to each colour. I have said before that I do

not care about colours other than the item being not pink. Unfortunately, that means placing the order with specific codes for each colour we do want all of which will take some time.

I was about to congratulate myself for another job sort of finished when I remembered that we had a message from our longest service postcard company. They informed me that at the end of the year, they are retiring en masse. They are all ladies of a certain age and had worked for the company for years. When the previous owner retired, they were able to buy the business off him and have run it since, although how many years that was, I really cannot remember.

It leaves us quite exposed with only the one postcard supplier left. It is the most progressive of the two and I do like the lady who runs it. We had all the new cards printed through her, but the other company has some best sellers and cards that we could not hope to recreate. There are cards depicting various outlying locations such as Land's End, St Ives, Penzance and so forth. While I can arrange to buy from their existing stock at a discount rate, they are going to run out eventually. I will not have the rights to reproduce the image.

It may be that someone will be interested in taking the company on, but I cannot run my business on guesses. The best I can do is buy some of the stock which will buy us some time to see what happens or to plan an alternative. I will sort out a list of the cards we would miss most and see what stock of these they have left.

The painting of the shop walls continues apace. Our man did the front of the shop today since it was so quiet and up the steps too. It is almost worth stopping him there as no one is going to see the back, but I think he has bought the paint now. We were discussing him doing up the steps before I went off to the gymnasium. I said it was best to wait until I had finished as I would be up and down the steps a few times when I came back. He uses our facilities in the flat, so when I came back from the gymnasium, I thought it best to warn him. I said I did not want him coming up in the middle of my ablutions, seeing my athletic physique in all its glory and then feeling inadequate for the rest of the day. Luckily, he laughed.

Our refrigeration man yesterday told me that the seal on the beer fridge needed replacing. I thought no more about it until the company sent me a quote for fixing it. I took a quick peek and, frankly, I could see nothing wrong with it, but I am no expert in such things. I looked twice at the quotation to make sure that they were not recommending replacing the fridge; the quote was for nearly £200. I wrote back explaining that even if the fridge was working inefficiently because of the door seal, it most likely would have reached its end of life before I had recouped the cost. I declined their kind offer to replace it.

I have said it before but there is nothing that will attract customers quicker than needing to do something else. We had been exceedingly quiet during the day, so I had absolutely no expectation of inconveniencing anyone when in the later afternoon

I went upstairs to, erm, make a cup of tea. When I returned there were six people, yes, six, lined up at the counter waiting to be served. We had not had six people all day, let alone all at once.

Later on, because I would have to go straight from the shop the Lifeboat station, skipping my tea, I decided to have a quick sausage roll. They are pleasant enough when they are hot, luke-warm, not so much. Again, there was not a person in sight down the road, so I thought that I would have a couple of minutes to eat the roll still hot. Au contraire and nom de plume and other such Latin phrases, not on this watch apparently. From the moment I pulled the hot morsel from the pasty warmer, the customers started rolling in. I ate the rest of it cold, half an hour later. My dietary necessities aside, it was business that we desperately needed today, so, again, these events are observations, not complaints.

Since there were no orders and few customers to delay me, I arrived at the Lifeboat station on time. I had feared that I might be a tad late and had made arrangements so that the launch sequence could commence without me. Both boats were launching, so I arranged that the Inshore boat be delayed so that we could use the same crew for both boats. As it happened, even if me and another late comer were on time, we were still short on the ground, so the arrangements were still useful. By carefully organising the sequence of events, and with the arrival of two unexpected crew members, we launched both boats without issue and set up for recovery an hour or so later.

In the interim, we had a cup of tea, of course, and some rather posh chocolate biscuits some guests from last week had sent. That aside, I had the two assigned head launchers do the appropriate administration by writing launch details into the record books for each boat. The head launcher for the Inshore boat is a medical man. I have made a mental note that he should be deterred from writing in the book again. It must be part of medical training that your handwriting should be completely illegible. I suppose, at work, it helps cover your tracks if something goes wrong. "No, honestly, that there says *left* knee to be replaced."

Now harbouring a deep concerns for my forthcoming surgery, I took to the winchroom for the recovery operation. From there it is impossible to see the head launcher and chum at the bottom of the long slip in the dark. I must rely on his instructions over the radio – I am deaf – and seeing two green lights, one on the boat and the other in the hand of the head launcher – I am colour blind. Fortunately, the green lights are in the form of a long wand, which helps.

Thus, we were assured of a faultless textbook recovery up the long slip at near low water at the start of the spring tides – or end of the neaps if you prefer. It was a long haul up the slipway, but we are a patient crew bolstered for the night by a volunteer member of the Inshore boat crew and our own people who had tucked the Inshore boat away for the night. We are, after all, a very organised, very excellent Shore Crew.

## October 2<sup>nd</sup> – Thursday

Let me share my breakfast with you. I have been eager to try the rocket pesto the Missus made the other day, but various distractions have intervened. I recruited the Missus to the cause a couple of days ago and while I was Lifeboating, she cooked up some pasta, chopped up some ham and fried the last of my Clonakilty black pudding.

The latter had been gifted me by a friend and regular visitor. She told me it was head and shoulders above the Highland version I had enjoyed on our holiday doing the North Coast 500 a few years ago. I am not about to cause a rift between Celtic nations, but I can vouch that it was, when I tried it earlier, very much among the best I have ever tasted. Thank you very much.

The remainder of the pudding went in with the pasta and ham and stirred in with a healthy spoonful or two of the rocket pesto. It was delicious. I shall add some olives and capers and have the other half of it on Saturday morning.

I had thought that we would be out in the darkness of the morning again today. ABH only came out at the end of my morning exercises to acknowledge my presence and collect a chew she had left in the living room, it seems. She went straight back to bed after that. She was not terribly inclined to come out later, either, when the sun, such as it was, had risen and lit up the bay. I went down to bring out the shop display but when I got back, she still was not up and had to be further encouraged to get her backside out of the door.

Being late did at least mean we could head to the Harbour beach in the light. The heavy sea the day before last had ripped up some more oar weed off the bottom and left it on the beach today. The pile was not huge but quite widely distributed on the eastern side of the beach about halfway up after what was the smallest tide of the year yesterday at 4.9 metres. ABH took me under the slipways to have a geek at the other side. There is still plenty of sand between the piers but rather less than there was at the peak.

It was comfortably temperate out in the early morning. Several people throughout the day told me how warm it was, and I am guessing it is to do with the coming weather. Pressure has been dropping all the while and temperature has been increasing. St Ives had it at 17 degrees halfway through the afternoon today. It is still -68 at Land's End. We also had a duvet of thick cloud over us, which would have helped but, even then, it was reasonably bright for the whole day.

The brightness, the warmth and the lack of rain did nothing to improve our customer footfall. Like yesterday, there seemed to be a few around and about and the café looked busy again. Once again, I thought that yesterday was worse than it was when I looked at the till at the end of the day. Today looked better, so it was bound to be worse – perhaps I will not look when I do the till.

It was a little heartening to have a five minutes to closing rush, however. Alright, it was at half past four o'clock, which is a bit early to be having a five minutes to closing rush but work with me, I am grasping at straws here. I can hardly say I blame the customers who were seeing an increasingly gloomy sky and a dropping visibility. Someone had told me earlier that it was misty up top but far better down in The Cove. Then I started hearing reports of the wind increasing at Land's End and when I checked, it was indeed ramping up quite a bit. We were largely unaffected because the wind was in the south, southeast or south or southwest if you were at Gwennap Head, windiest place in the universe, where indeed, it was a tad windier.

It added to a level of confusion that I had suffered from all day. Having a Lifeboat exercise on a different day does me no good at all and I spent the day thinking that it was Friday. Looking at the sea state at half past five o'clock, we might well have launched this evening instead. I am surprised, too, because all the indicators were that the sea state would deteriorate from today onwards but there again, I was not paying too much attention as it did not really affect me.

Bringing a little intrigue to The Cove was a low fly-past by a US V-22 Osprey. They are based at USAF Mildenhall, which is a bit of a stank away for a relatively slow aeroplane, so I wonder if they are playing away at RNAS Culdrose. I will never know, so I do not know why I am asking, but it did excite some comment when it had gone.

The rain was setting in when I took ABH out for an after tea walk around the block. It was on the dark side of dusk by that time now, and we were early getting out. It was not raining hard but had increased from when we left the flat. Happily, the painting that our painter had done had dried much earlier in the day. I cannot say that it is a bad thing, but when I was a child, we had to stay away from wet paint for days waiting for it to dry or face some retribution for coming home with paint on our clothes. Progress that is.

## October 3<sup>rd</sup> – Friday

Last night's rain made a reprise visit this morning. It was more mizzly than proper rain, but it was enough to dissuade ABH from going out in the first place and when I did get her out, wanted to go back as quickly as she could. It was dark, which did not help, and the breeze was starting to make itself felt.

There was not even the mere thought of a change-over bubble today. The very idea of having anyone in the street seemed a very foreign concept indeed. The street was deserted but for a few hardy souls and remained that way for the entirety of the day.

It was a blessed release to get to the gymnasium for a blistering session halfway through the morning. I took ABH out again when I came back but we were excluded from the beach by an unattended local dog who has been bit assertive when it

comes to the little girl in the past and was best avoided. We walked around the block, which was not unpleasant, and the rain really was not trying that hard. We hardly noticed it, although ABH's undercarriage was a little moist when we got home from brushes with the local flora.

So mild was it today, I returned to my short sleeve shirts and did not regret it at all. The rain blew through by the middle of the day leaving a legacy of low cloud and soggy air. Radio Pasty has already downgraded the usual guff about 80 miles per hour winds by early this morning and today's fare would top out in the mid 30 miles per hour. We were to expect worse tomorrow as the wind went northwesterly, and even if it did not, it would feel like it was. Looking at the track of the storm, Northern Ireland and the west coast of Scotland would get the worst of it again.

With no customers, I would have been left with not much to do if I did not have a contingency plan to put in place for the loss of our original postcard company. I am still not sure that buying a lot of postcards off them is the right thing to do. The postcards will eventually run out and we will be left in the same position. Even buying them to give us some time does not seem right; we will have the whole winter when not having postcards will not be a problem.

I think my main concern is the cards from further afield that I cannot easily replace not even with my own photographs. I would need to do a whistle-stop tour of the surrounding area taking photos to include the beaches down the south coast to Penzance, Cape Cornwall and Land's End and the ancient sites such as Lanyon Quoit and Merry Maidens. It would still leave St Ives a major gap in our stock as I have lost the map of how to get there. I sent a note to our alternative, now sole supplier to see if she has any ideas.

We have a very good relationship with her. She only took over the alternative supplier maybe two years ago and has transformed it. The printing of our own cards was a masterstroke. Calling me after she received my message and we discussed the issue, she said that she would call the other company to see what could be achieved in collaboration.

It was probably as well we had a lack of customers today, at least the ones who wanted to purchase bananas. For the last month or so, all the bananas we have had delivered have all been green – I am told. I thought they just looked a bit darker than normal. The ones we had this morning were particularly unripe and I remembered from somewhere that they can be artificially ripened by placing them next to an apple.

I looked it up forthwith and sure enough Mr Internet search with enhanced AI features told me I should place my unripe bananas in a brown paper bag with an apple. An apple I had but had to make do with a random diamond pattern gift bag to trap the ethylene gas. If the brown paper is important, my bananas will be just as green as my valley in three days' time. The alternative was to place them in an oven

for ten minutes until they went soft. I think I would have to be soft in the head to fall for that one.

The Missus headed off to the shops as soon as I returned. She needed some items for our tea tomorrow and to fuel up the truck for my trip to Plymouth for my pre-operation checks ahead of my dickie knee replacement. There is not much to the procedures I must undertake as I did much of it when I was there last. I think central to it all is a blood test which could have been done here and saved me the trip. If they are testing other things, I am glad that I got in two blistering sessions in the gymnasium this week.

I am hoping that the sessions will mitigate any effect from the rather toothsome chocolate gateaux that next door brought me unrequested. In fact, I said “no, take your temptation from me immediately, I do not want your toothsome, ‘rich but not sweet’ chocolate treat with strawberry alluringly on top”. That is what I said, but the glare of insistence from the very pleasant lady who came hither to tempt me was just too much to bear and I unwillingly – very unwillingly, I will have you know, dear reader – capitulated but only so as not to upset her. The quarter of clotted cream that I had with it probably would not have helped, either.

We were just rolling towards teatime when the Missus called down to tell me that she had missed BB’s second vaccination appointment. She thought that it was next week. If we did not get it done today, apparently, we would need to start the sequence again, which would have been disastrous. The veterinary surgery would see them at six o’clock, which scuppered tea completely. Plans were made to take Mother home, go on to the surgery from there while ABH waited behind.

I took ABH out and around before the Missus came home again. She had been delayed at the surgery for a priority case ahead of them and arrived home long after we got back from our walk. It was still light when we went around and the breeze, while more punchy than before, was well off its peak. It also was still in the southwest and we were very much sheltered from it, although it was still blowing mizzle into our faces, which was not entirely pleasant.

When we went out last thing, it was starting to gust a bit. We did not tarry long and prepared for a night of listening to it howling in the eaves.

## October 4<sup>th</sup> – Saturday

I recall only once getting up in the night and the wind was indeed howling in the eaves at whatever time that was. It was still at it at five o’clock when ABH woke me up on clearly an urgent mission. I slept for a further half hour or so and then got up to start yet another day at the tin stope.

ABH was not minded about waiting until it was daylight to go out again. I was with her on that one. There is something a bit sinister or disconcerting or possibly sinister and disconcerting about heading out into a raging wind in the dark. It is far less intimidating in the daylight. Even so, I had the notion that it was just toying with us when we went down to the Harbour beach. We went down because it was empty and the tide was well out. I would not have ventured down even at half tide because the sea state was definitely agitated if not downright aggravated and thrashing about a bit.

It was not a surprise that the beach was deserted. Only a complete eejit would have headed down there in this weather – or a dog walker, or an eejit dog walker. We met another coming down as we were going up. The weed, strewn across the beach yesterday, was wrapped up in a neat bundle by the painter line that runs down the middle of the beach. Somehow the painter line manages to corral the weed in the one spot. Weird science or nature being spooky. I came back with sand blasted legs. No wonder ABH was in a hurry to get away.

I had a little scan around the local weather stations to see what the wind had been up to during the night. Land's End recorded close to 60 miles per hour as did St Ives, which was roughly in line with expectations. Gwennap Head, windiest place in the universe, of course had to pitch in with 83 miles per hour. By the time it came around to the northwest around the middle of the day, it had moderated quite a bit making the main feature of the day, the sea.

One local resource had the swell at 4.5 metres, presumably on Seven Stones buoy, which seemed reasonable given what we had in the bay. The Lifeguards had red flagged the beach from the outset, but any waves out there had been knocked flat by the wind long before they reached us. There were vast amounts of white water inshore and a mass of white-crested waves riding in from way out across the rest of the bay. Big though some of the waves were the wind and swell direction made for only minimal contact up the cliffs opposite.

As the tide went towards the top of the flood, it upped its game. The waters over Cowloe and down Tribbens were boiling and dancing and the waves came thundering over the Harbour wall. With the wind behind them, the waves were thrown across the Harbour. Down on the big beach, the only available place to stand was up in the Valley and a sliver under the black huts of Carn Keys. Even there, at the peak of the tide, you would have been lucky not to get wet feet.

The Missus took Mother to the doctor in St Just for a routine appointment. She left ABH and BB with me in the shop. ABH settled down straight away for a mope, having been parted from the Missus. BB is getting the same way but there is not a great deal we can do about it short of only getting dogs out of our season. The littlest of the little girls took a while longer to chill out but before she does it is like managing a bag of eels. She needs a little while with no interruptions before she zonks out completely and given the day, that happened quite quickly.

There were people about, but very few. As usual on quiet days, we get pockets of busyness which I will never work out. We get half a dozen customers all at once and it is not as if it is a single party, these are unrelated groups coincidentally arriving at the same time. One of those groups near the end of the afternoon was particularly large. They coincided with a local lady coming in for frozen pasties that she had asked for at the beginning of the day, which I had forgotten all about. The frozen pasties have migrated to the bottom of the chest freezer, of course they have, and required a great unpacking at the same time as the biggest group of customers we had seen all day wanted serving. For a short time, the contents of the freezer were spread across the store room floor while I attempted to do everything, all at once.

Shortly after, I had a younger couple in seeking our small tubs of ice cream, which the young man duly purchased. He then saw our confectionery display and decided that he would have a couple of milky way bars – the sweet you can eat between meals without ruining your appetite. I suggested, in a moment of cheeky inspiration, that since he had two tubs of the very excellent Moomaid ice cream in his hand he might like to purchase a flake to stick in them. He thought this a splendid idea and agreed and the young lady with him thought it such a good idea, she had one too. Gosh, I am good.

Also as usual, the crowds arrive when I have decided to do something that takes me away from the counter. One of those things was labelling and repacking a consignment of wetsuits that I had ordered. It is not like we need wetsuits at present, but they were clearance stock available at this year's price. They will be shipped off to The Farm tomorrow. The other thing that took me away was the arrival of some cake.

A customer last week recommended some fruit cake that he purchased on the train on the way here. Whichever rail company have them as stock and he told me it was quite the best fruit cake he had tasted. I made some enquiries, and the baker, in Bristol, was most accommodating. I placed an order yesterday and it arrived today. It was a bit of a risky venture because we close in four weeks, but the products are ideal for walkers which we have a number of currently. The best before dates are such that they will be good for Christmas week, too and if we still have any left, the Lifeboat crew will, no doubt, be most grateful.

Most of our business was in the late afternoon but towards the end of the day, business dwindled to a passing lost soul every now and then. I contented myself with a bit of wave watching at which point I noticed that our windows had a thin crust of salt that rather obscured the view. I had also noticed when brining in the outside display, the gritty feel on my fingers from the salt on those things too. There is no point, and certainly I was not minded to so at five minutes to closing, in washing down as the salt will be back by morning. I retired to my tea instead.

It was dark by the time I took ABH around the block after tea and not particularly enjoyable in the still blustery wind. It was not cold, but the wind had certainly dropped the temperature a little and there was spray in the air that left a salty taste on the lips. I think ABH was not that taken with it either and we nigh on jogged back home along the back nine.

I had not looked at a forecast for tomorrow. I am hoping that it is a bit more encouraging than today for our visitors otherwise I will once again be adding to our stock of frozen pasties (sorry, MS) in the chest freezer that will make it even more difficult to get to the bottom of it in a hurry.

## October 5<sup>th</sup> – Sunday

I think that BB and ABH must be exhausting each other during the day because neither of them seem inclined to get out of bed early. At present, this is not a problem and hopefully things will have evened out by the time we get busy next year. For the first time, BB came and joined us at the door. She has not been able to get out of bed by herself previously. Looks like she worked it out this morning. Watching her jumping off things is quite the funniest thing I have seen in a while. She launches herself upwards then lands in a heap.

The guidance is to stop puppies from jumping off elevated surfaces for 4 months or more because their bones have not fully developed. Whoever came up with that guidance has clearly never had a puppy - or lived in a house without furniture.

When we did get out for a walk, it was down to the Harbour beach again. The oar weed has been washed out by the bigger tides as we head into springs again. There was still a bit about, but it was spread a bit wider. The wind was definitely much diminished from yesterday, about 20 miles per hour off yesterday's highs. It must have been so windy at Gwennap Head, windiest place in the Universe, that it broke their machine. It was not registering anything today.

Not only had the wind packed up and gone home, so too had the rain. We had some early cloud but by and by the clear skies won out and it was a much brighter and sunshiny day.

It took a while for the new, improved weather to tempt our visitors out. The first few hours of the morning were unremittingly tedious with hardly a soul about. It seemed the ideal opportunity to continue developing the postcard strategy which meant finishing the count. I might have mentioned that I did a count of the overstock a day or two ago but for the life of me, I could not find the sheet of paper I used. It seems that I had filed it with the postcard order papers from earlier in the year when I put them back. It was a relief, but it would not have taken that long to count the overstock again.

What took all the time was counting the postcards on the display frames. It is a job that we usually save for the end of the season when we do the shop stock take. I will not repeat this task then as it is unlikely, we will sell that many cards between now and after Christmas, but I will make a suitable adjustment to our final figures to compensate. Just for fun, I totalled up the number of cards we had sold during the year so far. I was quite surprised. It appears from just this company alone we have sold 2,300 postcards, so it is definitely worth continuing with them. The number is consistent with last year and the year before, so perhaps I am wrong about the effect of the postage price.

As soon as she was ready, the Missus headed off to The Farm after collecting Mother. I had asked for a count of shoes so that I could complete the wetsuit and shoes order for next year. It is one of the most onerous of counts. The shoes, because there are so many of them, take up quite a bit of space and are piled high in boxes designed to make it a little easier to get at them. It still required pulling some of the boxes out if you are to count them all, so that little matter probably took the best part of an hour.

She returned in the late afternoon with lettuce, Mother and Mother's overnight bag. It is entirely convenient that Mother stays with us tonight so that she can look after ABH and BB during my absence tomorrow. I shall be leaving for the big city lights in Plymouth, although by the time I get there they will be turned off. I still have no idea what my pre-operation consists of, but I have packed some extra blood in my arm just in case. It does seem odd that this cannot be done somewhere closer, and the results sent on – it is the modern world, after all. I do get the sense that the various hospital trusts do not trust each other and feel happier doing their own wet work. I am now left wondering why they are called trusts.

I will never cease to be amazed how quickly the sea state can change here. Yesterday, big waves were thundering across the bay, white topped and angry. Today, there was still a big swell, but it was much more ponderous, and the white water was confined to the margins of the beach. There was still some boiling water over Cowloe at high water and waves were bashing over the Harbour wall but without the backing of the wind, they flopped heavily over rather than launching across.

The sea was still making a noise when I took ABH out after tea. I was going to take her around the block, but we got as far as the Roundhouse and she diverted me to the beach. I had to use the headtorch to see our way around but with the tide well down the beach we were in little danger of getting our feet wet. We did not linger long and headed back after a nose around. There was not a soul about to tell us different.

Before I collapsed for the evening, I did as many of the morning chores as I could. I am away early tomorrow as I have two rush hours to get through.

## October 6<sup>th</sup> – Monday

Oh dear. Oh, very, very, dear.

The day did not start out like that. It started out exceedingly well. By the time I got to Penzance on my way to Plymouth, the sun, yet to rise, was bathing everything for miles about in a hazy golden hue. It was the sort of view to gladden a man's heart which would be much needed later and had I known that I might have savoured it a little more deeply.

Also about that time, I realised that the reason I could not see through the truck windows was not condensation that would evaporate but encrusted salt that would not. I had to stop the truck and wash down the windows with the bottle of water I had brought with me to sustain me on my expedition. Thus, with greater clarity I was able to advance my mission.

Earlier, I was not as pressed as I thought that I might be. I had decided to leave at seven o'clock, leaving myself an additional hour on top of the expected journey time. There are roadworks in Penzance to consider and, on Radio Pasty, they are always reporting traffic queues on the Tamar Bridge. Since I was due to arrive at around rush hour, this seemed likely. In the event, neither bothered me but I prepared all I could the previous night so that I would not be delayed on my departure.

The journey itself is about as simple as journeys come - three roads door to door. I refreshed my memory by looking at the computer resource that allows you to 'travel' the road as if you are actually there. I noted the landmarks to look out for and the road names, A30, A30, Tavistock Road. This does not require any special skill and I arrived around one hour early.

If I had thought that I might be seen early, I could clearly think again. I was seen dead on time. With that sort of efficiency, seeing someone half an hour ahead on the schedule is likely to upset all manner of fruit conveyancing equipment. I was very happy to wait particularly as at the end of the wait, a nurse was waiting to prick holes in me and drain my life-force away.

At the end of it all, I wondered again why I could not have performed the appropriate requirements a little closer to home. It was a blood letting and a blood pressure reading and someone asking if my health had materially altered from the last time they saw me, which it had not – unless you include my knee being a little more dickie that it was and feeling a tad weary being near the end of the season. What really burst my bubble and left me utterly defeated and deflated, even more than the removal of four milk bottles' full of blood, was the cast away comment that if the blood tests came back within range, surgery would follow within 12 weeks.

At every stage of the process, I have been at pains to explain the circumstances and that surgery need be conducted in early November. Indeed, the whole reason for

being at Plymouth was because they were able to do the surgery then. In January, the consultant had told me that it was entirely possible and when I telephoned in August to arrange the pre-operation tests, they told me the same thing.

There was no talking to the nurses. Apparently, it is in the hands of the schedulers who are not clinical staff and the clinical staff do not talk with them or hold any sway. I must wait or pay to go private. Having discussed it with the Missus, I shall call the consultant's secretary to see if anything can be done.

Adding further to my mood of apprehension, the nurse called me as I drove home. I had barely come across the bridge when she rang to see if she could ask me some questions. It was not ideal as there was nowhere to pull over but I was hand-free, so I told her to go ahead. It transpired that the person who did the first half of the pre-operation tests was a healthcare assistant. The significance of this revelation clearly had some relevance to the nurse that she was not about to share with me, so I let her carry on as I answered the questions, bemused. I thought she was going to ask me to come back, so I was mightily relieved that after a few questions, she let me go on my way.

I have led what might be described as a charmed life. I have never suffered poverty, nor have I been asked to risk my life by taking up arms for a cause and my health has been moderately good despite my best efforts do it damage. With the trouble I have had replacing my false ears and now an upset to the carefully laid timetable to undickie my knee, it might appear that my chickens are coming home to kick sand in my face. Darn it.

Never mind, it was a very fine day until the middle of the afternoon when it clouded over. When I arrived back in The Cove in the middle of the day, it could quite easily have been confused for a summer's day. I promptly, took ABH down to the harbour beach since she had been couped up with BB for the whole of the morning and she promptly took herself off for a swim.

The sea that had been full of heavy swell yesterday had been utterly transformed since I had been gone. First thing, before I left for foreign parts, I had taken ABH out briefly. It was still dark at that time, a couple of hours after high water, but I could hear the sea crashing about and even at that time it was flogging over the Harbour wall. When we met it a couple of hours after low water, it was a completely different beast, calm and welcoming enough to tempt ABH into it for a couple of swims before we headed back.

About halfway back from Plymouth, my telephone burst into song to let me know that I was required to attend the Lifeboat station in a bit of a dash. Even if the truck could have taken flight at that very moment and reached supersonic speeds, I doubt that I would have arrived in time to launch the Inshore boat that was needed. I did not find out who joined the party, but on enquiry when I did get back, I discovered that the crew had been tasked with a shore line search for a vulnerably person lost around

the Gwenver beach. The person was found shortly afterwards by the Cliff Team and a policeman, so the Inshore boat was stood down.

Now that the roof garden has been renewed to its former glory, the two girls have been allowed out to play and cavort upon it. The Missus had put a temporary barrier across the front and back end to prevent escape or accident but the arrangement at the rear were incomplete. We had both noticed that on occasion BB was tempted to nose between the cracks in the barrier and the Missus was keen to nip her escape attempts in the bud. She, the Missus that is - BB has not yet learnt the use of power tools – set to with timber and screws she had brought down from The Farm and spent the afternoon making it safe.

As the gloom descended in the afternoon, so too did the numbers of visitors gadding about. It had been quite busy when I first came back and the Missus reported a lively morning, too. We coasted into the buffers of the end of the day with just a few solitary visits to wake me up. One of these seemed overly grateful that we were open. She explained that our Internet entry said that we were closed on Monday leading to a forehead slapping moment for myself.

I routinely forget that many people look at the Internet's entry for The Old Boathouse rather than our own website. Not surprisingly as the Internet entry often comes up first in a search. I was exceedingly proud of myself, therefore, when I remembered to update our shop hours on the occasion of the Aged Parent's shuffling off service to show that we were closed. Of course, what I then failed miserably to do was to set it back again. I have now corrected the omission, and we are, once again, open on Mondays.

The events of the day had caused me some turmoil, and I left me having to fight a rearguard action I could have done without as well as rapidly trying to organise rescheduling, mitigation and contingency. My spinning head seemed to have been infectious and ABH had been feeling under the weather for much of the day. We spent the evening trying to intercede between her and BB who was very keen to take advantage of this temporary levelling of the playing field. So, I imagine, despite not feeling much like a stank around the block, ABH, was nevertheless quite keen on an after tea walk around the block. There was not much sniffing and no eating of weeds even, but the walk must have been a blessed relief for a while.

By bedtime, she had rallied some. I would spend time trying to doze off with two dogs wresting beside and on top of me and occasionally nibbling an earlobe. The very dear of them.

October 7<sup>th</sup> – Tuesday

Oh, dear. Oh, very more, dear.

I had slept exceedingly well after hostilities were ended last night. It is quite remarkable the resilience of the human spirit given the day I had yesterday. I had resolved to call the dickie knee consultant's secretary today to try and clear some of the muddy waters, but that would have to wait until the morning business was out of the way.

ABH had clearly put a brave face on her under the weatherness. It was probably more that capitulating to BB's insistent attacks was preferable to them continuing undefended. She was in no mood to shift early this morning and I left her until the latest possible time before taking her out for a walk. BB, on the other hand, was up with the lark – which was a little while after sparrows' when I got up. She must wait until the end of next week before she is allowed out but is clearly keen, nevertheless. She was reasonably content to have a game on the living room floor instead.

When ABH eventually emerged, we headed for a sliver of Harbour beach that the tide had recently vacated. The fishing boats had all left much earlier and were out taking advantage of the reduced swell. I had spoken with one of the fishermen yesterday and noted how quickly the swell had diminished after the storm. He assured me that the swell had not gone completely, and it had been particularly uncomfortable the just the other side of Cowloe.

We had light for our dash to the beach, but it was not quite the spectacle we had yesterday. There was a lot of cloud about still, but looking north, there was quite an area of blue sky looking hopeful. The cloud continued to clear through the middle part of the day. Radio pasty had warned that the cloud would return ahead of a weather front approaching from the northwest but by last light, there was only a mackerel sky acting as portent. It was a grand looking sunset, too.

For the last several days, there have been a fair few taking their breakfasts or brunches on the tables opposite the café. On numerous occasions when the café is busy, we are very quiet, and it has been no different this week. Yesterday, despite the good weather and a seemingly generous crowd of people milling about, the crowds, it would appear, were not generous and avoided us almost completely. This was even after I had smartened myself up with my best patchwork shirt of many colours – I do not know which colours, so please do not ask, and they are a little faded, now. I discovered that smartening myself up only went as far as making me feel a little more comfortable in the searing heat of the first half of the day. That did not last long, either, because when the sun went in, it got a tad chilly and I wish I had stopped with my mid-layer.

Anyway, the quiet of this morning gave me ample opportunity to make an attempt to contact my dickie knee consultant. I did not have a number for the man and only found his name after a search of some paperwork. My only recourse was to telephone reception and go from there. I was expecting a few gate keeper questions but what I was not expecting was to be told that my consultant no longer works

there. It took a moment to regain the power of speech and after trying to put me through to someone that could help, she told me she would get someone to call me.

It took some further time to play telephone ping pong by eventually I got to speak with someone more knowledgeable. I thought it best to ask some other relevant questions. As the conversation continued it became clear that the hospital saw the absence of my consultant as a matter of little consequence and another consultant would be assigned to do the job in due course. She told me that they were all similarly qualified, but I suggested that it would give me greater confidence to have a named consultant. Currently, I might have the impression that they could assign the person cleaning the toilets if no one else was available. After all, an unqualified person did my ECG.

I chose my words carefully - I do not wish to upset anyone who will be standing over my unconscious and defenceless body with a sharp knife in their hand. I said that I did not doubt that they were all highly qualified, but I pointed out that it was likely that some did knees rather better than others having had more practise. I mentioned that my concern was rooted in the fact that I had been with my knee a long time and had grown quite protective of it. She found that quite amusing, which handily broke the ice.

After several minutes of friendly exchange, we eventually got to the crux of the matter. I could accept the first available date for the operation and the consultant who was free at that time or choose the consultant and possibly have to wait for a later date. Either way, my expectations of having my dickie knee undickied in a timely manner were fast evaporating.

The Missus had no such troubles as she launched herself into completing her roof garden project. Having sealed off the far end, the near end needed to be shut off to stop the little dears coming to the front of the roof and shouting obscenities at passers-by – well, they are shouting something at passing dogs. They also might fall off, which is unlikely but there is no need to present the risk. We can now keep the living room window open for the girls to come and go as they please, while with the onset of winter, we can freeze our socks off.

Her work spurred me into action to change the flag holder on the west side of the shop front. If you recall, dear reader, some eejit had left the flag in it on a particularly windy day and the vigorous waving of the flag had cracked the holder. It had irritated me ever since that I was unable to put the second flag out and irritated me more every time I had to move the bleddy thing from where I had last placed it in the store room. It was the work of a couple of minutes using the power driver that the Missus had brought down to do her work on the roof. I could have wondered why I had not done it before but instead accepted that my days of irritation – regarding the flag, at least – are over.

Like yesterday, The Cove died a death at around half past three o'clock. We had fared a little better with business. When I saw the till yesterday, I asked the Missus if she had been closed all morning and just opened five minutes before I got back. She found that very amusing, ahem. Unlike yesterday, I had elected to wear my mid-layer instead of a shirt and by the middle of the afternoon, wished I had worn a shirt. The temperature had slowly climbed through the day leaving me most uncomfortable by the end of it. Especially after exerting some effort to change the flat holder.

Reflecting back on the shop day, I revived my frustration that we left one customer clearly dissatisfied. She was a walker and, having perused our shelves, asked if we were the only grocery shop in The Cove. I assured her that we were and what was it particularly that she was looking for. She dismissed the question, just saying she was wondering where the next bigger store was on her journey and having dashed her hopes of Porthcurno, concluded that it was Penzance.

It is infuriating when customers will not tell us how we have fallen short of their expectations. Not that we could do much about it immediately, or even in the near future at the end of the season, but it helps us to learn and improve. I cannot imagine what she was looking for especially having just called in Mr Pullins excellent fruit cake and gone to the lengths of acquiring tinned Argentinian strange-tailed tyrant's feet in mint jelly and vacuum packs of roasted Malayan tapir tails. What more can a grumpy shopkeeper do, I wonder.

I pondered such conundrums as I took ABH around the block as the light faded in The Cove. The sun had already set but the western horizon was still aglow and tinged the mackerel sky with hints of colour. By the time we came back along Coastguard Row, it was getting very gloomy. There will not be too many more evenings to make it around without a torch now.

## October 8<sup>th</sup> – Wednesday

Whoopie! Nothing went wrong today – that was really casting caution to the wind because, when I wrote it, the day was not over. Brave, me.

Oh, I have just noticed that the waste cardboard was not collected today. That is not a huge problem. I will just re-bag it and let the Laurel and Hardy Newspaper Company take it instead. Oh, and the batten light in the store room has stopped working. Oh, and I cannot get hold of our electrician to come and replace it.

The weather front of which I spoke arrived during the morning arrived. I think it was running late. It had allowed me time to run ABH out first thing in the dry, which was handy and only dropped a little rain on me as I came down the steps to open the shop. After that, it filled the bay with low cloud and mizzled for a couple of hours. The rest of the day became increasingly sunny but a cool northwesterly struck up early on and held down the temperature. Well, it did on the shady side of the street. A lady

came in late and admonished me for saying the wind was chill; she said it was lovely and warm. So there.

There was not a great deal happening during the morning, so I took myself off for a blistering session at the gymnasium leaving the Missus to look after the shop and two dogs. I took one of them down to the Harbour beach that had far less water in it than it did first thing when we went out. Now she has a playmate at home, she met up with a willing playmate on the beach. They got on well enough but after five minutes, ABH signalled that she had enough. I do not know if she is still a little poorly or she has enough running about at home now. Anyway, the other dog left and ABH took herself down to the bottom of the beach for a swim in the still waters.

The tide was nearly all out when we left the beach. All out was nearly as low as it gets on a very big spring tide and was the reason why our Coxswain and his team of merry men decided on today to replace the channel markers. I did not think I would have very much to do with it but was asked, just as I was returning to the shop to work, whether I could be head launcher for the ILB. Offers like that do not come along very often and noting that the Missus had given her blessing, I went and kitted up to look a bit more official and jumped into the passenger side of the cab.

We were launching the Inshore boat from the big beach because there was no water in the Harbour. This also ticks another box in the running a Lifeboat station manual because we are supposed to launch the boat from alternative sites every now and then. I think the big boat is exempt from such a rule.

There was plenty of sand at the bottom of the OS slip but the neck at the bottom had narrowed with big rocks either side. There was just enough room to get the boat through and then we were on the wide expanse of the big beach. I had not been down there since the early part of the year, walking ABH. I had quite forgotten how fine it is down there at the bottom of a spring tide with a bit of sunshine lashing down.

Up until launch, I had been a passenger executing my head launcher duties by looking out of the window and waving regally at oncoming vehicles and passers-by. The driver, our mechanic, was going out on the boat, so we swapped seats and I duly launched the boat into the crystal and placid waters of the bay.

The boat slid away to become the working platform for the boys chaining the new channel markers to convenient rocks and cutting loose the old ones. I was told that they would not be very long. They lied. I had departed in such a hurry that while I had my smart mobile telephone with me for entertainment, I did not have my spectacles. I decided that I was going to think deep thoughts but with the tide out, it seemed obtuse, so I thought shallow thoughts instead. That did not last very long, so I admired The Cove's seafront and the mix of buildings and architecture and of those further up the cliff.

I then reviewed my first impressions of the newly painted OS, which were that it looked like Dartmoor prison and why would you want to try and camouflage such an icon building. I quickly discovered that I had not changed my mind. I note that they have moved the ugly pizza shepherd's hut so that it no longer blots out the view from the expensive apartments. There are now no car parking spaces at all. I see too that they have painted the OS name along the top of the new apartments which stands out clearly. They have done the same on the old building but for the life of me I could not see what it said upon the dull background.

I spent the remainder of the very long time on the beach, squinting at my smart telephone to see if I could read things. I also paid the tractor insurance that was late coming to me. I think that I paid the correct amount; it did look right.

Eventually, I watched the boat pull away from the Harbour and the channel and steam across the bay. I fired up the Tooltrak only to see the boat streak past me on its way to Gwenver and some mighty surf for them to play, ahem, practise in. They practised for a long time, running into the beach and crashing out through the large waves. I considered if they could play, ahem, practise, then so could I and I put the Tooltrak through its paces on the wide wet sand, which is not as exciting as it sounds. I placed it back near the water's edge and waited for the boys to get bored or have a conscience.

It was a long wait. I was not paying that much attention, but I was aware that the sea was creeping around the Tooltrak with each successive wave. As the tide increased, it also became a little more lively and maybe one to two feet waves were crashing just ahead of me. I was just thinking that if the boat did not come back soon it would be tricky recovering it when I noticed that the Tooltrak was sinking into the sand. There were not many people around on the beach, but that would not have been a good look and towing it out with the tracks half under water would not have been easy. I moved it pretty sharply.

I was not wrong about recovery. The waves were slapping into the windscreen and the trailer was moving about in the wash. The boys had to jump out and guide the boat in by hand. I took the Tooltrak back again, negotiating the narrow neck of the slipway and up the slope. I dropped the boat on its usual slipway outside the Lifeboat station where a willing and happy volunteer was waiting to wash it down. I made a hasty exit to go and relieve the Missus.

She had enjoyed the busier part of the day, it seemed. When I took over, The Cove largely emptied out of the very few people who had been around earlier. I imagine that the early poor weather had driven any visitors we might have had into arms of St Ives retailers or other under cover attractions.

Of the few that we did have many are from foreign parts. During September, we saw a lot of Dutch and this month it appears to be Americans. They clearly have nothing like some of the items we stock in the shop and see things differently. I was

surprised when one lady asked about our napkin rings, mainly because we do not sell napkin rings. I asked that she point me at the item in question and she took me to the children's snap bracelets. For the uninitiated, these are thin strips of metal, covered by fabric that snap into a wrist sized band or ring when given some slight encouragement. I could see immediately that they could indeed be used as a napkin ring but for the life of me I cannot see why anyone would want napkin rings with sand filled frogs, fishes, snakes and geckos on them.

Once again, we coasted in towards closing time with little in the way of customer visits. I had time to re-bag the cardboard and put it out with the newspapers and check that I had paid the right amount for tractor insurance and otherwise do very little.

Speaking of insurance, our shop and Farm insurance renewal came through today. It is one mighty tome of a schedule with a commensurately mighty premium. It seemed significantly more than last year so I went in search of last year's paperwork. In the paper basket next to the pasty warmer – an ideal place to keep paperwork, obviously – I found the year before last and various other documents that were no longer relevant to anything. I put those into the store room for shredding but of the previous year, I could find nothing despite further extensive searches upstairs and down.

One of my aims is for any such paperwork that I must keep, to be scanned and held electronically. Thus, I would know where it was and could easily find it when I needed to check it, for example when I need to see what last year's insurance premium was. No longer would I have to rifle through all the papers in the several usual places paperwork was kept. So, when I eventually looked in last year's computer folder for the shop, I found it neatly and electronically filed under 'contracts' as per my aim. It is good to know that the strategy was successful and saved me hours of searching.

I contemplated such weighty matters as I walked ABH around the block, now in the near darkness. It will not be as pleasurable now as it was when we had some light about to see the changes that had come across our end of The Cove and up the cliff. It will not be long before I am dragging BB around as well. The darkness will be useful then to cover up what an utter cock-up I am making of it.

## October 9<sup>th</sup> – Thursday

The wind that was picking up when I took ABH out for her last walk last night, had eased quite a bit by the morning. I hardly noticed it when I took the girl out again in the morning, once again tardily. The hour does not matter very much as there is no pressing need to be in the shop early and I am finding that three quarters of an hour is ample time to cover all the deliveries and the bottling up.

We have not had a pasty delivery (sorry, MS) all week and have slowly used up the stock from the freezer. I used the last of them today so we can start afresh at the

weekend when, because I have ordered too many pasties, I can freeze the overstock and do it all again next week. Hopefully, I have got the numbers just right but given the demand this week when one day we sold a dozen and another day five, guessing the numbers is not at all easy.

It was a grey, drab day throughout today. It inspired no one to come and visit and even the café that has had numbers on the tables opposite all week, looked deserted today. The beach was no busier either and the waves, a little more blown out than yesterday, were not attracting any surfers.

I had very little to occupy me during the day. The wine delivery arrived but I could do nothing with it as I had a small dog on the counter that needed watching over. The Missus, who had inadvertently uprooted her eucalyptus bush while digging during the winter and killed it off, had spent last night slaving over new eucalyptus bushes on sale over at Hayle. She announced that she was going over to get one today and added several other stops to her itinerary. Because she was going for some time, I would need to look after BB as she could not let her out of the car to walk her; her vaccination is not active until next Friday.

BB slept for most of the four hours or so the Missus was gone. No doubt we would pay dearly for that later, but it meant little in the way of grief for me. I was still unable to go far from the till or for long but there was a great deal to do anyway. The Missus returned with various goodies she had collected on the way. I did not see the eucalyptus; perhaps it was a small one, but the chocolate éclair that she returned with from Travaskis Farm Shop, known for its cakes amongst other things, was huge.

We had half a dozen customers in the run up to four o'clock which was the busiest that we had been all day. I would have expected a least a few going home present buying sessions but perhaps they are waiting until tomorrow. I thought that I might miss the beginning of the Lifeboat exercise which had been called in early to fit in with the tide but with nothing going on in the shop, I closed on time and arrived just after the big boat had launched.

I helped in a small way with the setting up for short slip recovery and then went and brought the Inshore boat down ready for launch. The helm had a meeting to attend, and the boat was to launch a good hour after the big boat. It gave me time to gingerly take the ensemble across the angle of the slipway, which I detest. I was once in a 4x4 being driven across albeit a steeper angle when it rolled 50 metres down the hill and dropped over a six foot retaining wall. That sort of thing stays with a person even if, as I suspect, the wide, low and heavy Tooltrak is capable on a much steeper angle than our slipway. At high water, we cannot launch the boat from the usual place as the angle is too acute. The western slide of the slip is much flatter.

We launched the boat a while later, just as I had sat down with a cup of tea. It was not that long after when the big boat called to be brought back in again. With the

Inshore boat still out on exercise, the combined crews were able to apply themselves to the big boat. Without a lifejacket, I was not on the slipway but from where I was it was clear that the boat was subject to a textbook recovery up the short slip in some moderate sea conditions.

The swirling and leaping waves in the Harbour were slightly more than moderate when we went down to recover the Inshore boat. They had called just as we were finishing with the big boat, which was handy. The helm wanted to practise some recoveries with the less experienced crew which meant the Tooltrak waiting in the churning waves a while longer than usual. I had to keep moving and adjusting the angle of the trailer as it was pushed around by the water and also to stop the Tooltrak sinking into the sand again.

After recovery, I took the Tooltrak along the tide line before turning up the slipway. It made for a shallower angle on the turn and also meant that any sand on the Tooltrak and trailer was washed off and the washing down at the top was much quicker.

Most of the crew had departed by the time we tucked the Inshore boat away. Because of the early start, I also had time to sit down for a while and enjoy the entertainment of watching the two girls play before the closing act of taking ABH for her last walk. The wind had picked up a bit when we went out but I could not say that it was cold. We do not want cold yet.

## October 10<sup>th</sup> – Friday

It is almost official. I shall be de-kneed on 3<sup>rd</sup> November. They had me on tenterhooks for a while there but that was the clinical staff who were trying to maintain their image of being brutal for my own good. If anyone wants to decry the NHS for its waiting lists, you should know that the first date I was offered was next Friday.

I shall now have to cram five weeks of preparatory physiotherapy into three weeks. I had the list of things I have to do yesterday. To be honest, the exercises shown are far less strenuous than the ones I currently do and serve the same function. I shall do them nevertheless because I am almost not that arrogant – no, really I am not – and if my new knee falls off a week after I have it, I will only have myself to blame.

The Missus has arranged to rent a bungalow nearby where she and Mother and the two girls will lay in wait for me. We will get there the day before the operation which, incidentally, is the day the shop closes for the season. The timing is exceedingly tight, but we will make it work because it gives me every chance of being properly fit when we open again with a slim chance of being able to do Christmas as well. The only disappointment with the date is that I will not be able to go and see the Aged Parent as I usually do after the shop closes. I shall have to ply him with malt whisky

in the hope he does not cut me off from the family fortune that he is busily spending as quickly as possible.

It was a pleasant enough day to be contemplating such things. ABH no longer gets me up early, I think that our masterplan of wearing her out with our small friend has paid off. Unfortunately, BB seems to have a bottomless reserve of energy and has replaced her as the alarm clock. She will eventually go back to bed and leave me to the administrative duties I have got up early to perform. She eats like a bleddy horse, too, demanding food the moment she gets up.

When we did get out, the sea was still commanding the Harbour, so we walked up to Coastguard Row for no other reason than to see if it was still there. It was, so we came back again and got the display out for the front of the shop. It was mostly light by then but still dark enough to warrant to use of my headtorch in the darker corners. There are no darker corners in front of the shop, and I should really remember to turn off the flood lights a bit earlier. I must also remember to cancel the scheduler that turns them on each morning or for the first week after we close, they will be on all day and night.

About the only thing selling like it was summer are the small pots of Moomaid of Zennor ice cream. They have sold well largely because the ice cream kiosk has been closed since the end of the summer holidays. We have the most impersonal relationship with the company that makes and sells them, but it is a relationship that works efficiently and effectively and without complaint from either party. I call and leave my order on their answering service; a driver, the only person from the company that I meet in person, delivers the order and an invoice; I pay the invoice and send a remittance advice when the electronic invoice arrives – I can hit 'reply' instead of typing the address and a formal message. Today, it reached its ultimate symbiotic nexus: I called in the order at around half past eight o'clock; I received the electronic invoice by one o'clock, paid it and sent a remittance note by reply; at half past two o'clock the delivery arrived. Marvellous.

I mentioned earlier in the week the dynamic range of daily pasty sales (sorry, MS) and how it was difficult to determine how many to do each day. Well, for the weekend I needed to guess how many to last us through until Monday. What a hoot. I tried to imagine the average pasties sold per day over the last few days, multiplied by three and added a few. Today, we sold half of them. I have some in the freezer to fall back on, thankfully.

The going home present buying that usually happens on Thursday, happened today instead, so we did rather better today than the rest of the days this week. There are far fewer people that we know around now but it was a delight to see a family that we have not seen in some while. I thought it was some while, but they told me that it was much longer than that. They brought a gift from the family matriarch whose sole job it was each year was to tell us that she was not going to be around much longer and that we would not see her the following year – which we always did. We do not

see her now, but she sent a lovely note and gift. I note that she has given up saying that she will not be around much longer. I guess there is point where you have to admit your powers of foresight are probably not a strong suit.

The rest of the day slipped by in a very unremarkable way. I enjoyed a blistering session at the gymnasium and got ABH down to the beach for a run. It would have been a run, but we managed to coincide with the boats being brought back in, so I had to keep her on the lead the entire time we were there. She, quite rightly, found that a bit tedious and we headed home just in time to take the call from the hospital.

It seems quite obtuse to find some elation in being given a date for a man with a sharp knife to hack your knee off. I imagine I will see the sense of it in the fullness of time and learn to quiver with the abject fear of it. Ah, well, ears next.

## October 11<sup>th</sup> – Saturday

Both alarm clocks failed to go off this morning and I overslept for the first time in a very long time. It was not a cause for much concern as there is not much of a hurry to get downstairs these weeks. I had, however, quite forgotten the several orders I had placed to see us through the weekend, and I ended up finishing these off after I had opened the shop.

I do not think that anyone would have noticed if I had been late opening as I did not see a customer before the Missus came down to relieve me just after nine o'clock. By that time, I had cleared away the milk and the greengrocery leaving me free to head off to the big city and my appointment to conclude the saga of my false ears.

I had decided to leave in plenty of time because I imagined the traffic on Saturday to be worse than the same time during a weekday and there are any number of road works dotted about the place to make progress through the town fraught. I had checked with our friend and neighbour from up the hill who had been into town more recently than I – I do not get out much – that the Wharfside car park was still accessible and he assured me that it was.

What had prompted me to ask the question was when I was coming back from Plymouth on Monday, there was a big sign on the road leading into the town from the last roundabout to the east, saying 'Road Closed'. This is most misleading. It certainly misled me to believe that I could not get to the Wharfside car park from there, which is why I asked.

Happily, I was able to get to the Wharfside car park from the Newlyn end without issue. There was also far less traffic than I had imagined, and I arrived at the car park with plenty of time to walk up through the town to get to the optician than does ears.

Radio Pasty had a morning of discussion on the increased charges for parking the much maligned council had introduced across all its car parks in the Duchy. My two hour slot I had purchased was a little under £6 which, in the grand scheme of things is not a huge amount. However, as an element of everything else that is going on, it is maddening.

Penzance town centre appears to be dying on its feet. Halfway through a Saturday morning and there were so few people about, it was most disheartening. There is work afoot to make the main street pedestrian only and large build-outs are being installed. Although no one has said, I presume this is to make the town centre more attractive, but at the same time, to put up the parking charge to push people away seems counter intuitive. The great frustration is that there appears to be no grand plan to any of it.

I recall not so long ago that the then new Tesmorburys was to give over some of its car park to be a park and ride. It was a completely rubbish idea to start with; the existing Tesmorburys already had a free bus service into town that very efficiently took shoppers out of town to its doors. The current Penzance park and ride in is Lelant – what! – eight miles away or you park at the St Erth ‘transport interchange’, which is a mile closer and just as inconvenient. I know the much maligned council is trying to push the green agenda and get everyone out of their cars. So far it has greatly lowered vehicle emissions by successfully reducing the number of buses on the road.

The shops in Penzance, those that are still open, look shabby and as far as I know, there is no incentive to businesses to move into town such as additional business rate relief or rent reduction through some sort of agreement with landlords. To have a café culture you need cafes and a vibrant shopping street. One of the three remaining banks in the town is closing and moving out of the most iconic and recently refurbished building and the number of empty shops appears to be growing. There are some excellent independent shops in the town, but these appear to be surviving against adversity rather than thriving through encouragement.

I am sure someone will tell me different and that there is a master plan, and the developments are all myriad jigsaw pieces making up a masterpiece of civic pride. I still cannot help thinking that there is not a lot of blue sky in there and half the pieces are down the back of the much maligned council sofa.

So, that was the grumpy bit. The nice bit was a very pleasant man at the optician that does ears took me through the hearing test and at the end of it presented me with a brand new pair of false ears.

I had already been warned that the company did not like to use the shop there because the room was not sufficiently soundproofed. I had joshed that they could do the test on the street as far as I was concerned, as long as I got my false ears back. When it came to the test, however, I could hear what they meant. While I was

chatting with the very pleasant man it had seemed silent enough but when I was concentrating hard to hear the quiet beeps the machine was making, I could hear what seemed like a cacophony of voices, footfalls and knocks and bangs coming from every direction. I only stopped him once because of some loud voices outside and he stopped on a number of occasions for the same.

In the end we triumphed. As I sort of knew, my hearing is particularly poor in the higher ranges which I hope will be mitigated by the function of the false ears. I was very pleasantly surprised that I was able to take functioning devices away with me at the time. On the last occasion at Company Bad, I had to go back a week or two later. Apparently, he and a colleague discussed the possibility when I had telephoned. It was because I was the last customer of the town centre facility before they moved to better premises at the health centre further up towards the by-pass. Lucky me. The only minor disappointment, perhaps, is that they are the same make as the old faulty ones. They are a newer model and if Company Bad were to be believed, the ones I had worked for everyone else but me.

As I left the town centre through the Wharfside shopping centre, I passed a relatively new restaurant. They were open from breakfast to tea, and I was tempted to drop in for an eggs benedict which I have not had for far too long. The restaurant appears to have garnered many good reviews and I made a mental note that we should maybe try it one day during the winter. I looked around and it epitomised what I was saying about surviving against the odds. All the surrounding units were empty and that end of the shopping centre, desolate. I had only passed it because I was heading for the lifts and the only reason I was heading for the lifts was that the escalator was out of order. I recall that it was not working the last time I came this way either. Both lifts were also out of order, so I took the outside steps that I only just remembered were there. None of those things are encouraging.

Returning to our shop in The Cove, it made me realise how lucky we were and how difficult it would be to ply our trade with derelict buildings all around us and the road ripped up and escalating parking charges on top of that. No one would come.

Hardly anyone came during the week, but that is another matter. It is the reason that I radically reduced the number of pasties (sorry, MS) that I ordered for the weekend, It will also be the reason that the small gods of grumpy shopkeepers sent us 16 hungry bikers to wipe out our remaining stock. I had used up the cooked frozen stock during the week thinking that I had plenty of uncooked frozen to fall back on. When I went to look, many of the pasties I thought we had were cheese, of which we had an abundance. I have cooked off the stock we had and hope that it will be enough to cover tomorrow.

Once again, I had not looked at a forecast, so I am not blaming that for getting the numbers wrong. Radio Pasty in the morning did give me some confidence, however, that we would be alright when it explained that we would have a day of thick cloud and dreariness. I tried very hard to reconcile that with the three eights cloud of the

afternoon and the sun beating down from the wide expanses of blue sky between the fluffy drifting clouds. The breeze had gone easterly, but it was not until late in the afternoon that I felt anything like a chill descending on The Cove.

The bay looked as flat as a dish throughout the day. It was deceptive as there were some fine surfable waves mid tide and there were several surfers out there making use of them. The swell was evident when I took ABH down to the Harbour beach after I returned from town. The waves were washing in and out on the stones quite vigorously towards low water and ABH was not encouraged to go in.

That little burst of good weather had brought us quite a little surge of visitors. Among these was a small group of twitchers who spent an hour or two with their big field scopes perched on tripods opposite the shop. They are not known for their propensity to support local business with large donations of cash, but one did come in for some tooth floss. I took the opportunity to ask him what the excitement was in The Cove today and he told me that they were seeking the elusive Mediterranean gull. I had to ask again if he had found some and he seemed most reluctant to tell me that there had been four out there to gaze at. I would have had a geek myself if I knew what to look for – gulls with tanned feathers, dark glasses and an easy way with girl gulls, perhaps.

Business did not last long after that. We had some late visitors, just arrived, some of whom I recognised. It would be good to have a bit of a resurgence this week after a week in the doldrums. It will be good too that I can mainly hear them.

## October 12<sup>th</sup> – Sunday

It was a shame that it was not light when I first looked out of the front windows because I would have enjoyed the sublime vista for a few hours more. It is hard to pin down exactly what made the morning glorious without clear skies and bright sunshine to accentuate colours and contrasts. I think that it was just the utter peace of it that manifested in a very visual way.

There was a fair bit of cloud around for most of the morning. Even into the afternoon when it brightened quite a bit, there was more cloud than breaks in it. The wind that remained in the east seemed a little more intent on seeping through the doorway today bringing a little chill to the counter area where I was standing, largely inert.

My inert status was due to a largely customer free morning. It left me to eat my leftover pizza from last night without interruption. Yesterday, I had ordered a BLT roll from next door to celebrate the arrival of my false ears. The moment it arrived, we were flooded out with customers, and I ate it cold and soggy later on. Earlier, I had dialled the Aged Parent to report the news about my knee operation only for a customer to appear out of an empty street just as the phone rang once.

It took a while, but I eventually stirred myself into action to check the grocery shelves for gaps as I could think of nothing else to do. It did not strictly need doing but it was better than standing still and scratching my behind. I also managed to catch the grocery supplier that had turned up for next door. Yesterday, I had inadvertently purchased two cases of Worcestershire sauce instead of two bottles. The driver took them back and filled out the paperwork that saved me having to telephone on Monday to sort it out.

Next, I called in our pasty order (sorry, MS). Ordinarily, I would not trouble you with such mundanity – not with all the other mundanity in The Diary – but it is relevant only to a detail about my new false ears. There is a smart mobile telephone app that is available to use with them. It works far better with a Bramley telephone device, and I did not bother last time as the facility was more trouble than it was worth for my own mobile telephone. This time, with upgraded false ears, I decided to see if the link was any better or more useful than before.

It took a while to install the app on my mobile telephone and then to link it to my false ears. It was disappointing to note that there were no apparent major enhancements, but I left the connection in place. It was not until I placed a telephone call that I noticed the connection was streamed to my false ears rather than through the mobile telephone speaker. It was something of a surprise and a tad disconcerting. The sound is tinny and remote like some ethereal voice talking to me from space across a walkie talkie. It is also too quiet, and I have to concentrate to hear it. I will leave it on to see how it goes, especially as I have no idea how to turn it off. I will also try to see if the volume can be adjusted as the switch on the false ear does not seem to do it.

Now that we are rolling into neap tides, low water is sliding towards either end of the day again. This morning, ABH and I managed to get onto the beach, narrowly avoiding a roll in some very aromatic fish skin left behind on the sand. In the latter part of the afternoon, the slightly less wide expanse of sand was dotted with more casual walkers than at any point during the week. With no waves at all today, there was no action in the water, although that did not stop one very optimistic surfer from bobbing about for a while. I had thought that the rock field at the join where the sand ramps up at the back of the beach had been covered when I looked a couple of days ago. It could have changed in the interim, but I think it more likely that I did not look closely enough. It is still there but not as wide or pronounced. The southern end of the beach is sporting quite a bit of new sand, too.

I do not think that the sand had much to do with it but we were relatively busy across the weekend. I think there were a few more people around yesterday but business today was none too shabby either. Later in the afternoon, the Highly Professional Craftsperson came by with family and friends. He was delighted that the building was still standing as indeed was I and we fell into casual conversation. We discussed our closing after half term and mother Highly Professional Craftsperson, who lives in Penzance, told me that the schools there are closing for two weeks this year.

The rumour of the school summer holiday being shortened by a week and the balance being tacked on to the autumn half term has been circulating for a while. I checked the much maligned council website that sets out the holidays and, sure enough, the summer holiday was a week shorter. However, when I looked at the autumn break, it was still listed as being only one week. I found this confounding and assumed that perhaps it was just the junior school academies that were affected.

At teatime, I mentioned this to the Missus. She told me that the autumn break was indeed only one week, but the authorities had tacked on five inset days to make it a two week school closure for the students, at least. She said that was the reason that the much maligned council's website still listed it as only being a week. This made sense for a while, but I cogitated on the detail as I took ABH around later in the dark. If the official listing for the summer holiday was five weeks and the official listing for the autumn break is a week, then the students are short a week of official holiday. I feel insurrection in the air. I shall slip on my Che Guevara t-shirt and beret and mention it to the usual suspects who come in for sweets after school and sow a few seeds of discontent. Power to the people, comrades.

## October 13<sup>th</sup> – Monday

I found it very difficult to get going this morning. I think that I may not have been alone in this; The Cove was deserted for much of the day.

The day had started out so well, too. It looked like it had some real potential to be a splendid day of bright skies and placid seas. There was a thin haze in the air. Apparently, some places had it thicker, so we should consider ourselves fortunate, and we did for a while. It was as we closed in on the middle of the day that it became gloomier, and the east wind picked up making it chilly as well.

I had intended to visit the gymnasium this morning, but the Missus will cover for me during the next three days while I attend a casualty care course at the Lifeboat Station. The timing could have been better, but it is probably the last chance I will get to attend. It is a very thorough and detailed course covering a lot of ground. Without the qualification I do not get to use oxygen and entonox gases, both of which I have had to use locally in the past. I have even had to use them on casualties.

I was about to explain that it would make Diary writing a little challenging over the period but there is likely to be more happening on the course than there was anywhere in The Cove today. It was an exceedingly tedious business day, the weather was dull, the sea flat as a dish and I could probably count the customers today without taking off my socks.

It is not really the time to be investing in stock, but I had to do something to fill the lonely hours, so I delved into the surf jewellery online catalogue and ordered a few

lines. It was long overdue; the thin display had been nagging at me for several weeks to do something about it. It is not as if the stock will go off and will save me the hassle of placing the order before Easter next year. I am still disappointed that I cannot refresh the stand but will not give up on it just yet.

Talking of refreshing things. The curtains that cover the front windows of the shop and the first electric sliding door in The Cove have been in state of disrepair for some time. Just recently, one of the hoops on the right side window snapped, and the corner of the curtain has been hanging down since. It was also a while ago that the Missus purchased some replacement curtains that had languished upstairs since they arrived. I think she discovered that they were not wide enough and had to order more and join them together. Anyway, for some reason, today was the day of curtain installation.

The Missus had started first thing while she stood in after my failed attempt at going to the gymnasium. By the time I returned, she had hung the curtain for the window on the right and the first electric sliding door in The Cove, installed the magnets that keep the curtains gapless at the edges. What remained was to shorten them so that they did not sweep across the floor. She returned later in the afternoon to install them properly, including the one for the left window. The shop front now looks much more presentable and an attractive proposition, erm, when we are closed. In fairness, it also looks much tidier when we are open, too, with the curtains neatly tucked away.

I was very tempted to close the first electric door in The Cove halfway through the day. The chilly east wind was seeping into my bones which was a huge disappointment after the clear, bright and largely windless morning we had enjoyed. I went and got my jacket instead, whereupon the wind dropped out, and the skies brightened again. It was as well that I had fetched my jacket, however, because an hour or so later, the wind got back up again, and the cloud thickened once more.

Despite all that excitement, I was very grateful when the clock came around to closing time. I had to place orders at the end of the day which was frustrating because it was not to replace sold stock but stock that had gone out of date. It is the result of being unable to accurately predict volumes needed and the irksome trend for customers to purchase the longest date on the shelf even if the item will be consumed on the current day. I have to be careful not to put fresh stock out until the older stock has run out.

With children out of school next week, I should have spent this week preparing. Given the casualty care course, I will have Friday to do it. I am still unsure if this two week holiday malarky is nationwide or Cornwall only. If it is only the local schools, the effect will be less marked and the preparation less important. I am not sure how I might find out. Whatever the case, we should see some increased business for our last two weeks, which will be most welcome after today.

October 14<sup>th</sup> – Tuesday

The day started out and remained somewhat gloomy, much like parts of it yesterday. It made the easterly chill seem a little more pronounced with nothing to counter it and, by the look of it, kept the crowds – if crowds there were – away from The Cove.

I knew nothing of it and spent the day learning how to deal with poorly people. It is at least five years since I last did the Institute run course and, in that time, it has not materially changed. The CPR element now includes the use of defibrillators but other than that, it seems much the same.

The course is delivered by qualified paramedics who still practise their skills within the Lifeboats environment, taking time off to run the courses. This enables them to bring real life and current experience to the training, which makes a very positive difference. I think that this is the third or fourth casualty care course I have attended – the qualification expires in three years – and the previous courses have been run by another person. The current very pleasant lady, has a different style to the previous very pleasant lady which, for me, make the course fresh and coherent.

It does not, however, make for very easy Diary writing unless I am to convey all the detailed content, blow by blow. The very pleasant lady running it this time also makes use of all the business hours in the day from nine o'clock to five o'clock, not leaving much latitude to include much else.

During the short lunch break, I took ABH down to the Harbour beach and around the block. When I went up to collect her, both little girls were moping about looking sorry for themselves. Even with 'nanny' looking after them they were not in the mood to chase and play as they would have done had the Missus been with them. It is an unfortunate situation resulting from me being exclusively in the shop and the Missus being with them full time that I do not think we can do much about. Even saturating my time with ABH over two winters has not turned her around.

Despite its brevity, it was pleasant to take in some fresh air. We had the Harbour beach to ourselves, and the opportunity to run over it all but in our fit of depression, finding some pollack skin to roll in was about as much joy as we were going to get out of it. I thought that a trip around the block might be just the ticket. It was not but we did get to see a relatively busy car park on our way around. I do not know where all the people got to, but the Missus was adamant that they had been nowhere near the shop.

Nevertheless, it had been a busier day than yesterday. It would have been hard to have had a quieter day than yesterday. By the time I came out of the course – and I had to leave ten minutes early to get the bread order in – the street was deserted again. It left me time to do the closing down sequence without much interruption and to make things as ready as I could for the morning. There was no ordering to be done.

Earlier, I had left instruction for the pasty order (sorry, MS). While the Missus is just as competent as me at running the shop ... let me start that again. The Missus is competent at running the shop, but she is not there every day. It is why we would find it very difficult to employ someone part time as things like the pasty order need more intuition than procedure and that only comes from doing it day in and day out. It is also why we work well as a team doing our different things - organising me being on a three day course has been fraught. Having two young dogs, tied to the Missus' apron strings does not help.

I noted that just as we sat down to tea, that the skies had cleared, the cloud settled at the fringes of the available sky. I did not see the sunset, but it looked as if it might have been pretty when I took ABH around after tea and after a very brief, very important operations team meeting at the Lifeboat station. It made the walk out a bit late and ABH was not bother about going around; there was cavorting with her little pal to be caught up with.

### October 15<sup>th</sup> – Wednesday

It must have been national wildlife day, and no one told us. We started off with a seal pup on the Harbour beach just alongside the Lifeboat short slip. It was ABH who spotted it first. Well, she sniffed it first then had a good bark at it from the elevated concrete of the very old slipway that sits alongside the Harbour slipway.

I guessed what she was barking at and went to join her to have a geek myself. The light from my headtorch picked out its eyes at first then, when I got accustomed to the light, its speckled body too. It looked healthy enough, but it was a good way from the tide line and with high water five hours away, it would be exposed for a long time if it did not make the long trek to the sea. I tried to call it in, but the line was permanently engaged, so I guessed that it was out of hours. I did not get another opportunity. It was not there at the tail end of the day when I got to look again but there was no sign of a bun fight, so I hoped it had got away safely.

My recent mornings have been a bit of a rush. I get downstairs as early as I can but even then, I can only do so much until the deliveries arrived. There are also the two little girls, who are playing see-how-long-we-can-stray-in-bed. They are very good at it, although BB weakens first mainly due to her insistent appetite. No sooner has she made herself comfortable, she wants to eat, and I am duty bound to oblige or face the consequences. Invariably, she then gets ABH out of bed and we can eventually go out for our morning walk, which is when we found our seal pup.

I have just about enough time to set up the shop and clear the morning deliveries, have a mouthful of something to see me through the morning until tea break. The Missus comes down to relieve me and I head off to my casualty care course.

We covered a whole raft of injuries today. Spinal, head, chest and broken arms and legs of different sorts and what to do with them. The tuition came with colourful pictures of real people sporting all manner of examples for us to gaze upon and enjoy. It was a welcome diversion, therefore, when one of our classmates, who was sat facing the window, pointed out a chough perched on the end of a girder just the other side of the glass. It was no more than six feet away from me. I have to admit that it looked very real but must point out that we were all suffering from the soporific warmth of the crew room air and that there was no room for a unicorn to stand.

I am happy to admit that a few minutes later, the chough was joined by half a dozen of its pals all crowding together on the ledges outside just a few feet away. I shall not be at all surprised if psychologists of the future cite it as a classic example of mass hysteria and the red beaks and legs symbolic to the amount of blood we had been gazing at.

The Missus is not enormously delighted with running the shop all day, which I why our division of labour means that I do the lion's share of it. It is very good of her to cover my attendance at the casualty care course, gazing at choughs. I therefore went out of my way to bring her things that would break up the day and make it a little less tedious. Yesterday, I arranged for the postcard fudge boxes to be delivered which would need unboxing and placing on the store room shelves.

Having taken delivery of the replacement lights for the store room on Monday, I had our electrician turn up today to fit them. Since that alone would not have taken very long, I asked that he stay a while longer and tidy up the wiring, too.

The wiring had irritated me greatly since it was installed by another electrician some years ago. The ceiling is of plasterboard construction and does not take kindly to screws being fixed in it nor cable pins. The wiring was not done particularly well in the first place and time had seen the cable pins falling out and the wires hanging like sagging Christmas decorations. I had installed the last light but had to string another cable, which had merely added to the mess.

I am pleased to say, when I came back from the course today, the ceiling looks much better with the cables neatly tucked away in conduit and the ones to the lights secreted above the ceiling somehow. I have no idea how he managed that, but I am delighted that he did. The lights are longer and brighter than the ones that replaced them but would have been better being daylight rather than warm white. I had purchased them in a bit of a rush and forgot to check. I think that they can be changed by an internal switch but for now they will do very nicely.

There was not a great deal of time to admire them. The closing sequence took a while and there were groceries to order for tomorrow. How, I do not know, because the till showed that half a dozen people had turned up and purchased very little between them. Wednesday is traditionally a quieter day it has seemed this year, so we must hope for better tomorrow when we might see some going home presents

purchased. Hopefully, it will put a dent in the postcard fudge boxes that had just arrived.

All this week it has not been especially busy and although it has been dry all week and essentially mild, the easterly breeze has cast a bit of a chill. The sea has been as flat as a dish and, between breaks, when we have not been admiring visions of choughs, the beach has only been for people strolling about in the main.

The stroll that ABH and I do after tea is now in complete darkness and largely requires the use of a headtorch. On my own, I would probably go around without, but I need to see what the little girl is doing in the dark. It is especially disconcerting when she growls at some unseen danger in the gloom and probably even more disconcerting when I illuminate the scene to discover nothing there. She growled at something. Perhaps she is seeing choughs now, too.

## October 16<sup>th</sup> – Thursday

It was a day that broke like most of the others this week, in utter darkness, for me at least. The girls were up a little earlier and I had to take ABH out in the dark, so there was no opportunity to see if any rogue seal pups had invaded the beach. We took a little trip around the block, instead.

Shop opening was just as pressing as it had been for the last three days. Instead of a pasty delivery (sorry, MS), we had a greengrocery delivery which took time as I had to weight carrots and heads of calabrese. The previous to last bags of carrots had to be given away they had been there so long. The last delivery was only in the fridge for a couple of days and sold out. There is no rhyme or reason to it, so I ordered in some more and hoped for the best.

At the appointed time, I handed over to the Missus and headed to the Lifeboat station for more casualty care training and watching of choughs. We pressed on with illnesses of various sorts from cardiac, through diabetes and convulsions to snake bites to annaferlact, er, anafalactic, er, annerfilac ... allergies. I had been looking forward to the bit where we suck the snake bite out of the wound but apparently that is not done any more. It was a huge disappointment especially as I had brought my own snake. Not a real one, of course.

We had finished off the main training bits only leaving the use of stretchers. Electing to leave that until after the dinner time break we did the final test, which was the multiple choice question and answer sheet. This has moved into the modern world and involved the use of a smart mobile telephone. We also used it for a quick fire quiz practising the use of the new ten second triage format. This was developed so that all the emergency services could use the same system, useful in a multi-agency emergency.

Rather conveniently, well, more conveniently that it happening during the course itself, we had a Lifeboat shout in the middle of our dinner break. I was halfway through taking ABH for a walk and was in Coastguard Row when the pagers went off. I made haste to the Lifeboat station where at least half the required personnel were already present to prepare the big boat for launching. We did not have to wait long for a full crew and the boat launched in very quick time to conduct a search for a missing person.

Missing persons, shore line and search patterns can be interminable, so we decided to cover some more of the course and let the others catch up. We had already delayed for a short while, so we had only just begun looking at stretchers when we heard over the radio that the boat was being stood down. Since the boat was only around the corner when it was let go, we had very little time to organise the slipway for recovery. To make matters worse, we had to swop slipways to the short slip because the tide was in.

There were enough of us on shore to make light of the work and we completed the task quickly and efficiently as the boat waited on the moorings. Taking our positions, we informed the Coxswain we were ready and the boat steamed in for what was very clearly a textbook recovery in benign conditions on the short slip. We are, after all, a very efficient, very excellent Shore Crew.

It was not long after that we were back in the classroom and looking at stretchers again. I fancy that it was after this that we looked at the ten second triage, but I really cannot recall the order of things because we compacted the afternoon session having lost nearly two hours of course time. One very pleasing advantage of that was that we skipped having to use make up to represent injuries and the role playing and scenarios were done in pairs of casualties seen to by two pairs of responders. It made the whole event mercifully much shorter. I detest role playing, however useful it is.

Due to the big boat service during the day, our usual Thursday evening training – it was Thursday, who knew – was confined to the Inshore boat only. Even that was brought forward and by the time I closed the shop and attended, the boat was being put into the water.

A new trailer for the Inshore boat had arrived during the previous week. It is very shiny and new and had been put together in the RNLI car park by a team of experts from the Institution. It was the first launch using the new cradle – the second recovery later, I think – so it was something of a surprise when it came back out of the water missing one wheel. Alright, it was hanging on at an angle, the axel having dropped out of its fixing for the want of a bolt that had fallen out in the water.

The bolt was quickly found but too deep to be retrieved. We were fortunate that the decision had been made to go early, and it was still daylight and that the tide was

receding else it would have been lost completely. It was luckier still that another crew member did not mind rolling up his trouser legs and wading out to get the soggy bolt.

We were also blessed with enough crew to lift the trailer sufficiently to allow the wheel to be removed completely. The ensemble was then driven up to the sloping concrete of the old slip where it could be repaired by the various mechanics and mechanically minded that we had gathered there. On testing the other wheel nuts, all of them were just finger tight and had to be fixed. Had it been a normal training night, most of the people who helped out would have been on the boat. We are, after all, a very fortunate, very excellent Shore Crew.

I finished the day quite weary but quite differently from the normal shop work. The three-day interruption to normal duties had been very welcome. Up until that point I had done something like 180 consecutive days of the same routine. Doing three days casualty care felt like a holiday.

It was also the day that further up country, a small contingent of my family saw off the final farewell of the Aged Parent (maternal). Her dust, the last reminder of a life well lived was placed in the ground. The remaining Aged Parent had been encouraged by the people around him to write poems for quite some time. They are right to do so, I feel, as the process is cathartic, but it seems he has a talent for it too.

*Nigh on seventy years of marriage,  
Through family ups and downs,  
Through holidays in Yorkshire Dales,  
Before her health began to fail.  
Through Menieres and Parkinsons  
Which brought her tears and frowns,  
But the joy of her life was the children,  
Grand now, grown and Great Grand,  
Who were the jewels in Barbara's crown.*

## October 17<sup>th</sup> – Friday

Gosh, as perfect mornings go, this one was up there with the other perfect mornings we have had over the years. So perfect was it that I could find nothing at all to grumble about, which is a bit of a shame because there is nothing quite like a good grumble in the morning.

The girls were both up as one this morning and late. This suited me just fine and allowed me time to sort BB out before taking ABH down to the Harbour for a stroll. It is the last morning that I will have to make such a distinction – unless one is significantly later in getting up than the other – as BB is now allowed out on the street, her vaccination having taken effect. This means that after a month or so of

perfect digestion, she is now free to eat skanky fish left on the beach, old dried seaweed, bits of stick and snails.

The timing for our last solo walk coincided with the warming of the eastern sky with illumination of pinks and oranges and moving skyward into some darker blue type colours. They probably were not those colours at all, but that is what it looked like to me. High up to the south was a crescent moon attended a little way off by a bright Jupiter against a dark backdrop. On the southern horizon, which is the top of Mayon Cliff from where we were standing, was Venus, I presume, although I did not check. All around was at peace: the wind had dropped away to nothing; the air was still and the only sound, the gentle washing of the sea and a few stirring birds.

Later on, after the shop was open and the bustle of getting it ready was finished, I was able to look out over the bay, the glassy, still waters, the early sunlight playing on the sand and the high contrast of the shadows thrown up by the relief of the land and the steep angle of the sun.

You would think that a day like that would have had visitors rushing down to see the beauty of the bay and to bask in the sunshine. Well, that is both of us surprised and disappointed, then. I noticed yesterday that the Harbour car park was about half full and certainly, there were people milling about. Despite that, the shop was really quiet, so I can only assume that the passengers of those vehicles pile out and head off to Land's End or studiously avoid the shop in some other manner. They would have had a lovely walk today, at least, but I think it would have been a mite breezy up there. The wind had changed direction slightly to the southeast and was reasonably robust.

For all that, we had better business than we have had for the other days during the week. We made a bit of a dent in the pasty surplus (sorry, MS) which had accumulated from lack of sales and excessive orders over the last couple of days. I had sought to avoid a repetition of last week when we ran out of pasties because I had not ordered enough but have ended up with too many now. The weekend weather, announced by Radio Pasty, does not look too encouraging just now but we will keep fingers crossed.

The quiet played to my advantage a little later in the morning. It being BB's first day out, I was keen to see how she got on. It was a cracking day for a trip down to the Harbour and we were unbothered by the fishermen who had landed a little before we got there. I had closed the shop for the event, and I do not believe that anyone would have noticed.

When ABH first encountered sand, she was in awe of it. She buried her nose into it and raced up and down the keel tracks where the fishing boats had been dragged up and down the beach. BB had no such reaction, which was a bit disappointing, but there again she had her older pal to chase and tease which she does very well. It went exactly how we had hoped it would with the pair chasing around the beach and

rolling in the sand. ABH, when she gets hot, takes herself into the sea for a cool down. BB followed her to a point but stopped short at a paddle. The Missus dunked her at the end. There is no way she will not be a water-baby like her big pal.

Despite the quietness of the day, it would have been unforgivable to miss a sudden rush of customers, so I had to return to the shop not long after we got down on the beach. There was one walker who arrived at the same time as I did but I do not think I missed many others, if any; there did not appear to be any disgruntled crowds hanging about scowling at me. It was certainly still pretty quiet, and I was very grateful for the arrival of the surf jewellery I had ordered earlier in the week.

I had not paid much attention to the volume I was buying, in fact, I was not paying much attention to what I was buying either. As long as the prices fell in line with our blanket price for bracelets and anklets, it does not matter much what they look like. Most of them will sell. I surprised myself when, having emptied the bag, I was left with only a handful of overstock and pretty much a full stand. As self-satisfaction goes, it does not get much better than that – yes, I know, I do not get out much.

A while ago, a new venture started up in the holiday caravan park up the other side of the F&L in the village. There had been previous attempts to run a food place there and some had been successful others not so much. The current crew seem to be gathering a following and are running themed food nights that have attained some popularity. It is good because there has never been much variety in the village and some competition for the F&L is always a good thing, encouraging both to up their game.

Tonight, the Missus noticed, there were running a curry night with three different options. A take-away was not advertised but when she telephoned, the crew were more than happy to provide one. She went up there just ahead of shop closing time and brought back a selection. At first glance, the portion sizes seemed a brae bit small but were perfectly adequate we discovered, especially as the Missus had prepared some papadums and onion salad to go with it. That was all she had because, as we know, the Missus hates curry.

I had not exactly anticipated the joint after tea walk with trepidation, but I did realise that it would not be without challenge the first of which was trying to put an inadequate harness on the little one. It is intricate and takes far too long to put on. The leads are also of different length and one dog walks faster than the other. There is also where one wants to sniff a particular item but the other keen to go ahead. When you eventually get both going forward, one will suddenly stop or veer in another direction. Apart from that, it was not as problematic as I thought it might be, which is largely because I had not given it much thought at all. It is a work in progress.

I progressed the work again, just before bedtime. I am thinking of getting up an hour earlier in the morning so that dog walking does not make me late for opening.

## October 18<sup>th</sup> – Saturday

What did The Cove look like today, I hear you ask, dear reader. Well, picture the day I drew for you yesterday with its blue skies, glassy sea and brightly lit scenery. Now, imagine it in black and white. There, sums up today perfectly.

It is still a tangle of leads and being pulled in different directions with the two hounds in the morning. I thought that I might have to take them out separately because BB got to me first. We had a bit of a false start with her then ABH got up to see what was going on then both of them went back to bed. They were up again five minutes later which is when I managed to capture BB and then ABH followed suit.

I do not think that we were any earlier than the day before, or was it the day before that, but it was too dark to venture down to the beach. In that light I would have had to have kept both on a lead and run the risk of being tripped up down the slipway. The change in appearance of the day was obvious even then, with no eastern glow and no stars to gaze up at. It was cool but not overly cold. Tomorrow will be interesting, in the expected rain.

Radio Pasty made it very clear that the rain would be arriving in the evening today and then continue into Sunday. I tried hard to remember but I am pretty sure that they said there would be no rain today. It therefore upset my equilibrium somewhat to have a couple this morning telling me they were walking to Land's End but hoping not to get wet. I suggested that would be alright because Radio Pasty had assured us it would not rain until much later, but the very pleasant gentleman told me he had seen the rain on the rain radar.

Confused but about to become even more so, I looked at the rain radar to check and, sure enough, a geet band of 'rain' was in the process of moving over us and yet, outside, the ground and the air were as dry as week old pasty (sorry, MS). I can only guess that with the cloud being relatively high, the rain was evaporating before it reached the ground. Given that some of the rain was up to two millimetres per hour, that was a tough theory to accept but the only one I could reasonably come up with. An hour or two later we were getting wet. I can only assume the rain was so light, it was taking two hours to reach the ground.

Whatever it was, it halted business in its tracks. We had seen some early signs of life and some families started to appear, which was encouraging. It was still pretty small beer, but it had some potential. Sadly, that went out the window with the weather.

When I looked later, it was worse than I thought. Someone had already reported that the sea in Mount's Bay was rough while the bay here was glassy smooth throughout the day. I looked at our flanking weather stations both of which had problems: Land's End with temperature and Gwennap Head, windiest place in the universe, with wind,

extraordinarily. I had to have a geek at St Ives that told me that they had southeasterly winds in the 40s miles per hour, which would explain the picture in Mount's Bay. It also suggested that a drop in temperature in the early afternoon was the cold front on the synoptic chart had coming through. Up behind that was a warm front, due later in the night, followed by an occluded front bringing more rain and another cold front that would ensure an absence of customers for the next twenty-four hours. Oh, and a big bag of wind arriving shortly.

A young German lady who I had met earlier in the year quizzed me about the absence of surf. They only had a couple of days here and accommodation booked in Bristol. She was keen and her boyfriend more so, to get some surfing in while they were here and I said that it was reasonable to expect some change in the sea state fairly soon, although I had not looked at any forecast for it. She also bought our last, very expensive international stamp.

I had noted that we were running out and contemplated buying some more. One sheet of 25 should see us through but only if we open at Christmas, which at present is on a bit of a scalpel edge. I am hoping that I shall be fit enough to do Christmas opening but I shall have to work hard to achieve that, so will not advertise it until the last moment. The stamps however, are a different matter as I do not think that one sheet makes up a minimum order. If we order too many, we will be caught out by the price increase in April. What a dilemma.

It was the only contemplating I had to do for the rest of the day, which is why I made such a meal of it – a whole paragraph, dear reader. If you are willing to stretch the definition a little, we did have a five minutes to closing rush, spread over the period of an hour or so. We had arrivals and due to the inclemency in the weather, all they wanted was to purchase logs and kindling, although I did manage to upsell two packets of firelighters and a box of matches.

Despite the general downturn and malaise, we had some notable spends which saved the day. We sold several hooded sweatshirts, some premium gins and whiskies and nearly half a box of our special soaps. I would have sold an extra newspaper had I not been so premature in packing them away.

The rain cleared and the skies brightened an hour before we closed, which was good of them. By then, most people had got fed up and tucked themselves up at home. The indications at the start of the weekend were that we would have one good day but once again, I should not listen to rumour, otherwise known as forecasting. On the upside, I was able to get the girls around in the dry. I do not think that I shall be so lucky tomorrow morning.

October 19<sup>th</sup> – Sunday

My oversleeping seems now to have become normalised to the new getting up time. It is not interfering with the run of play or business, so I will let it be. It certainly played to my advantage this morning. By the time the hounds could be fagged to get out of bed, the rain, rather conveniently, held off for half an hour while I took them out. I had thought that the rain was stopping completely but it had a bit of a swansong when I came down the steps to get the shop ready for opening.

It was pretty gloomy to start with, and the gloominess hung in there until the late morning. When the rain stopped, the bay was enveloped in a thick mist with swirling damp in the air and with a southwesterly breeze. I had feared that it might stay for the rest of the day. The early poor weather did not do a great deal for business, but two forecasts had suggested differing levels of sunshine for the rest of the day, so there was hope yet. Then, in the late morning, the thick mist lifted leaving behind a thin haze and the sun started to break through.

With the spare time all that lot awarded me, I actually did something useful. The shorts at the far end of the shop have been in a bit of a state for a while. Those that could not be hung up I placed on the low shelf in their packets. When I looked the other day, all that was left was the ones in the packets with one or two hung up. It looked messy. I took the time to unpack all the shorts, label them and put them on hangers and hang them up. The only remaining issue is that we have no large and an excess of extra-large. When we purchase next year, we will still not have enough large but twice as many extra-large.

I also did something else that was really important and well-worth doing but for the life of me, I cannot remember what it was.

Customer visits into the afternoon were sporadic and few in number but at least they were sporadic and few in number instead of being absent altogether. We had shifted some of the excessive volume of pasties (sorry, MS) but earlier in the day I had taken the executive decision to put at least half of them into the freezer. We will dip into them during the week.

There were no notable spends through the day, and the prospect of a slim pickings Sunday loomed large. Then almost at the last knockings of the day a lady who had been with us on and off for at least a week took four wetsuits off the rack. She had asked for some assistance with sizing but with the wetsuit wearers absent, it was hard going, and this was a lady in a hurry. She also added some towels and a couple of bodyboards. I thought, given the speed at which she had chosen and the lack of proper sizing, I would see at least a couple of the wetsuits back again.

It was not long after the sale I saw the family walking down towards the big beach. At least three were wearing the new wetsuits, all looked perfectly fitted. This was clearly a woman of substance who knew her children's form exactly and I was amazed. I was also relieved because the sale was about a third of today's total.

The young German lady who I spoke with yesterday about surfing got her wish. Early on, around low water, the sea state did not look at all promising, with hardly any swell at all. Gradually, though, there were some waves out at North Rocks and some surfers sitting on them. Closing in on high water, there were some very usable waves coming in on the centre of the beach and a whole army – relatively speaking – taking advantage of them. I had seen our young lady earlier in the day and she told me they would be back in the afternoon. I do hope she made it because it did not last very long.

Slowly, during the afternoon, some cloud had drifted in. It was coming from somewhere south because it blocked out the sun every now and again. I was rather hoping that the expected rain for the evening would hold off at least until I had taken the girls out for their after tea stroll and, happily, it did. I was still being lucky for the last walk before bedtime by a cat's whisker, because it hacked down not long after we got back. I will settle for that, thank you.

## October 20<sup>th</sup> – Monday

Oh, I have just noticed that it is Responsible Retailer Week. Perhaps they will do something next week that I can join in with.

The weather was not our friend today. It had rained heavily all through the night and very kindly stopped at around seven o'clock when I took the girls out for the first walk. It started again just as we were heading back with a squally shower. BB, who had stalwartly insisted on being carried up the steps to the front door these last few days, flew up like her tail was on fire.

The showers persisted through the day, although they had the decency to turn down the frequency as we headed through the afternoon. The wind, however, had other ideas. It was robust enough during the night to scat over the Missus' new screen at the front of the roof garden and thanks to a line of flowerpots only managed to lean the back one over. It had only managed to reach the high 30s miles per hour during the night, but I had two people in during the day who said it sounded much worse than that. It continued through the day, easing off slightly during the afternoon.

We were not in direct line of fire of the wind, but the combined forces were making a proper mess of the sea in the bay. The tide came crashing in all morning, churning up charging waves with white caps then sprawling out in white foam toward the beach, flattened by the wind. The chances are this will get more stirred up as the week progresses and with spring tides building.

I managed to get to the gymnasium halfway through the morning, the first attendance in a week. It was a hard effort to achieve a blistering session and I was quite looking forward to running the two girls on the beach afterwards as a sort of reward. Unfortunately, we had to make a last minute change and walk around the

block as the Harbour Commission were busy on the beach with a telehandler doing some repairs to the Harbour wall.

We walked, although that is probably stretching the definition somewhat, around the block instead. The girls have clearly reached an agreement where one will sniff at something, very often a foot behind the point we have just passed, while the other continues to walk ahead. They then alternate. It is important, of course, to find something to sniff at that requires a sudden change of direction and if that involves running directly across the piece of ground I was just about to place my foot on, so much the better.

The weather had been some of the best of the day while we undertook our walk. There were blue skies amongst the cloud and the wind diminished a little. Just past the middle of the afternoon, it all started to fall apart again. The wind picked up, the clouds thickened and blotted out the sun and the sea, building towards high water, stepped up its game. It was not the sort of weather to be venturing out in for long. I suspect it was the sort of weather to step outside for ten minutes, tell everyone what a blustery day it was and head for shelter just to say you have been out in it. Ahead of high water, I had a geek outside and it looked grey and bleak. Just when I thought it was all over, the sun broke through again bringing the scene back to life. This is some strange this weather.

Naturally, the weather, particularly the wind and the sea state, had been the main topics brought in by the few customers that we had. One lady told me that the howling of the wind and the thrashing of the sea were producing what is called 'pink noise'. Apparently, it is very good for a person's health because it masks out upsetting noises. I told her that it probably was not helping me because I could hear better all anyway with my false ears off. I wondered if the health benefits included filling in for sounds that were not there, such as the absence of the till jingling away.

Today, there was no white knight buying multiple wetsuits and I had to make do with pints of milk, packets of butter and the occasional fridge magnet. I get the sense that it is a busier week generally due to the experimental two week holiday. I am hearing intelligence that it is being trialled elsewhere outside Cornwall but that it is only academies that are involved, although some neighbouring state schools have been affected too.

I conversed with a couple of teachers on the matter and asked why the holiday could not be tacked onto the May half term because the weather is better. I am told that this term is much longer and needs breaking up. One of the teachers told me that it also suffers greatly from staff sickness. From the grumpy shopkeeper perspective, it is a move in the right direction, and the teachers agree. They are also positive about breaking up the long summer holiday but that has been on the table for discussion for at least 20 years, so I will hold my breath over that.

There were orders tonight for dairy and beer, so it is not all bad. Anything we buy now is scrutinised for sell by dates. Too short and we do not replace. We will be disappointing a few people over the next week and a half, I expect. Sorry.

## October 21<sup>st</sup> – Tuesday

We had a much kinder day of weather today. There was far less rain around for much of the day, bits of blue sky opened every now and then and the wind dropped by half. I would say that the temperature had dropped a bit as well, but it was still relatively mild for the time of year.

I had to take the girls out separately this morning. BB was keen as mustard, but ABH was having none of it and I had to drag her out kicking and screaming just before I went down to prepare the shop for opening. I think I will have to take BB out a few more times by herself as it will build her confidence. Presently, she is very reliant on ABH when we go out.

The absence of rain made a big difference to business during the morning. We did not start seeing customers other than a few brave souls until into the afternoon. The quiet afforded me the opportunity to stand about and scratch my behind, which I did for a while before thinking that perhaps I should do something a little more constructive. I was still searching for ideas when the delivery of Cornish biscuits turned up. These, along with bags of fudge, form the cornerstone of the going home present provisions and we cannot really be without them. They have a good date on them into the beginning of next season, so there is no reason to be too careful about supply.

The other thing I got down from a high shelf was my munitions factory box. I had last made ammunition for my use at the range two years ago and the volume had lasted that long, as clearly I do not go as often as maybe I would like. I am running a bit low on a couple of calibres and although I probably will not be able to get to the range before February at least, I do not want to be short of ammunition when I do. Thinking ahead, I reasoned that I could probably make some ammunition with my leg recovering but I would almost certainly not be able to lift the heavy equipment down from on high. There, miles ahead of the posse.

Happily, business picked up in the afternoon, and the sea state calmed down. I never fail to be surprised just how quickly the sea changes condition. It allowed for a whole bunch of surfers to have a bit of splash in the region of low water. Winds were still offshore, so the surf was less formed and surfable, but still they try. It was also good enough for a spot of Lifeboat training in the evening.

Someone else spotted this very thing and since the sea state would return to rough on Thursday when we would normally do it, the someone else ordered up a training session for tonight. It had drawn quite a response and I was thinking about having an

early tea when my Lifeboat pager went off at four o'clock forcing me to evict a precious customer and close the shop.

The boat had been tasked to a yacht way out to the north. Had the shout not been cancelled, our boat would have been out for a tow for upwards of six hours and probably much more. Padstow were tasked instead, which was a much more sensible idea. We duly stood down, closed the station doors and returned to our respective duties. A little less than half an hour later, we were back for another shout. I had been listening to the VHF scanner in the shop to the Coastguard trying to get a position for a mayday caller, which I had assumed was the one we had been cancelled for but apparently not.

This time we launched our boat to a vessel with three people on board around by Gwennap Head, windiest place in the universe. I do not think that they were in any danger from the wind today, but they were broken down and required a tow back to Newlyn. After the launch, I had left the station as it was, doors open and winch cable in place with the thought of returning if the shout was to take some time. There were other crew around who were at hand because of the planned exercise, so I left the station in their hands and returned to the shop.

Having done a quick calculation and noted that the boat would not be back until gone seven o'clock, I went ahead with the closing sequence of the shop and serving the few final customers of the day. I also had my downstairs tea having already arranged to miss the one the Missus was preparing for her and Mother.

The assembled crew, a mix of Shore and excess Boat Crew, gathered to discuss many weighty matters over tea and biscuits while we awaited the return of the boat. We kept a careful eye on its progress. It had managed to gain some speed from earlier as the sea state on the south coast was much better than the north. However, they had to wait outside Newlyn while they brought the casualty vessel alongside because the port was full of netters for the spring tide.

As soon as our boat came through the gaps at Newlyn on the way home, we sprang into action. I had been concerned that if the boat delayed too long, they would miss the tide and the opportunity to recover on the short slip. They would have had to wait for the long slip and all the while, the swell in the bay appeared to be increasing. Happily, the boat had left in good time, and we set up on the short slip in readiness for their return.

It always seems to take longer to come back than we think and for some reason it takes ages to come past Porthcurno; you look once, then again ten minutes later and it is in the same position. I am sure there is some sort of time kink there. While we waited, I ragged our winchman, who was monitoring progress on his smart mobile telephone, by asking every five minutes if they were here yet. Eventually they were, at around quarter to eight o'clock, and we performed what was clearly a textbook

recovery up the short slip for a quick wash down and tuck away. We are, after all, a very meticulous, very excellent Shore Crew.

## October 22<sup>nd</sup> – Wednesday

It was a perfectly temperate morning which made a step out into it all the more pleasant. More importantly, it was dry and there was no immediate threat of rain, so taking two errant hounds out separately did not pose too much of a problem. I am usually happy to wait for ABH to rouse herself but this morning she was especially lazy, and it was nearing shop opening time. Once again, I had to drag her kicking and screaming to the front door.

Day was coming on swiftly, but the sky was covered in milky white clouds and refused to let the sun shine through. On the other hand, there was no wind to speak of and the sea was calm, which was a tad unexpected given that it looked like it was building again last night. There was just enough of a wave to keep some junior surfers happy in the shore break at around low water. Towards high water later, the swell seemed to have gone completely, so that was the fun over for the day.

It was not that much more joyous on dry land, either. I had slipped away to the gymnasium mid-morning, and this time slipped back into a blistering session with rather less anguish than on Monday. Two telehandlers were on the beach when I wanted to take the girls down there after I came back. This time I decided that they probably would not be moving about much and if we stayed on the opposite side of the beach, we should be alright.

ABH and BB let rip the second they got down to the sand. In fact, they started before we got there, and I had to calm things down while I fitted the 10 metre line on BB so that she could run about relatively unencumbered. They had a whale of a time. I am a little unsure just how much exercise the little one should be getting so I called an early stop, and we wandered about the beach for a short while. ABH went for a swim and I dunked BB in a convenient deep rockpool. If I had thought that BB should be protected from too much running about, she had other ideas. As soon as they were back home, they were chasing up and down the corridor while I tried to get ready to go back downstairs.

The Missus has purchased a trellis gate for the bottom of the steps outside. The idea is that we can let the girls down the steps ahead of us off the lead. This will prevent them from dragging us down the steps after them and stop them running out into the road. When I came down after getting ready, the Missus was fitting the trellis gate for size. BB slipped past me and down the steps and straight through the gaps in the trellis without breaking step. The Missus has some very good ideas from time to time, but I think this one may need fine tuning.

She left me with task to drill the holes in the side of the shop so that the trellis gate might be secured in place. The screws that had been supplied with the unit were entirely inadequate, so I looked about for replacements and wall plugs, which I found in the extensive spares box in the store room. Also, by some narrow thread of good fortune, we managed to find a masonry bit in the bottom of the drill box of just the right size. Thus equipped, I decided to have some breakfast and set to with the near impossible task of trying to drill a hole in our granite wall with an inappropriate drill of insufficient power.

While I was considering that, the Missus, with the idea to take a bus up to Land's End and walk back with the hounds, enquired about the likelihood of rain. I took a geek at the rain radar and told her that it looked like it would rain at any moment, so she abandoned her plans, as indeed did I.

It had started raining long before I had managed to finish my breakfast. Our visitors, probably very aware of the hideous lump of rain heading our way, queued up to visit the shop before it arrived. Quite why they queued when there were so few of them, will forever remain a mystery, but there were enough spread over the period of an hour or so that made eating my breakfast a bit of a marathon and conspired with the rain to prevent me from doing any drilling at all today. The weather tomorrow does not look particularly helpful either, so I think the stair gate will have to wait until the weekend or rather the next cessation of rain.

The rain was heavy at times but was persistent through the rest of the afternoon. It very much stopped play, and we had been looking relatively busy in the morning, too. I had no more lifting things down from high shelves to do and the shop shelves were as full as they are now likely to be until when we close at the end of next week. We have discussed why I do not read books in the shop – I end up despising the customers I have been waiting for – and my thumbs are worn out from an excess of twiddling.

I have discovered an app called TikToc on my smart mobile telephone. It is a place where ordinary people, mainly, place short films that they have made. It is, largely, more light-hearted than Twitter and quite entertaining. It is also a thief of time and quite engaging and presents a similar danger to reading a book, but not quite as enthralling. I shall have to be on my guard.

It took me through to shop closing which is when the small gods of grumpy shopkeepers thought it a jolly wheeze to stop the rain and display a clear and bright western sky. It prompted a few customer visits for which I was very grateful if only because it took my tired eyes off the screen on my telephone.

For the second evening running I made do with a makeshift tea. The Missus had been invited to tea with the family of one of our neighbours. I would have been invited too but someone had to stay in with the hounds and it was the food rather than the people which was the focus of the invitation.

The Missus has a keen interest in making noodle dishes she had seen on recipe programmes on the computer. The visiting couple have taken their similar interest to extreme and are competent exponents of the art of noodle dish making. It involves acquiring difficult to get hold of ingredients – around here, anyway – and the boiling of pork bones for several days. There is probably the reading of Chinese spells of some complexity involved as well, but I would know nothing of such things. Our visitor has prepared such a meal and, because of her especial interest, had invited the Missus along to try it.

I have not been left with the two girls for such an extended time before, just a couple of hours. I must report that they are scarcely any trouble at all. ABH is content to settle on my lap and chew a chew for much of the time. BB, who I expected to need constant supervision, largely entertained herself and required only a couple of extended interventions to stop her becoming so intensely bored she started doing naughty things. I suspect a few more such absences from the Missus will be helpful in breaking BB's unhealthy reliance upon her presence.

Nevertheless, it was party time when the Missus came back.

### October 23<sup>rd</sup> – Thursday

On occasion during the night, we could hear the rain on the skylight accompanied by the constant droning of the wind getting into its stride. I was, once again, fortunate that the rain had stopped by the time the girls decided that it was time to get up. Actually, I had decided it was time to get up and had to go and evict them from a nice warm bed. That was the other notable thing about the morning: the temperature had dropped two degrees since midnight.

Radio Pasty very kindly informed us that the wind, already near fifty miles per hour, was just getting started for the day. Land's End had it just under fifty miles per hour and to make things more interesting, it was piling in from the northwest, our most feared direction – especially if there was rain about, which there was. It meant eventually setting the first electric sliding door in The Cove to automatic, which I rarely do, to mitigate the effect of heavy showers pouring into the shop. It might have been more effective if the first electric sliding door in The Cove was not triggered by something unidentifiable in the shop front display causing it to open every few seconds. It may have been that it had not been used in a while because the door eventually settled down and behaved itself.

The first electric sliding door in The Cove did a good job with the wind but was not really needed, for the expected rain did not show up. Even the wind failed to ramp up as Radio Pasty had indicated. Once I had screened out the random opening and closing, I became quite comfortable curled up next to the pasty warmer (sorry, MS). It was indeed the warmer that alerted me to the fact that I had not placed the pasty order for the weekend. Given that the 'rain all day' forecast for today was completely

wrong, it made ordering for the weekend complete guess work. We will now have either far too many or not enough. Having just the right amount is way too much to ask.

While the weather is clearly the only subject on the menu of today's discussion, I should note that the beach was red flagged today. Those placid seas from yesterday had been replaced overnight with another big thrashing sea. Big waves were rolling in on the centre of the beach and the wind whipped up white caps all across the bay and far out to sea. The white stood out bright in the sunlight against the steely colour while huge white, fluffy cumulus clouds, hanging low above the scene, drifted by.

Attractive as the scene was it did nothing to attract visitors to The Cove. Even the appeal of watching the first electric sliding door in The Cove in operation did not seem to stir our visitors into action. That really is a tough environment in which to try and make a living.

Congratulations are due to our representative councillor at the much maligned council. I am sure it was largely due to him that the return of the St Just bus service has just been announced. The reinstatement is very welcome, and I am sure it took much effort and lobbying to get it done. I am puzzled, however, why the clever and good people at the much maligned council and bus company decided it would be best to start and terminate the service in The Cove. There are ten families in The Cove so it would seem to make sense to start it at Land's End and run it through the village with its 900 citizens. Perhaps the extra mile was a deal breaker. The service starts just after we close at the end of the month.

Towards the end of the afternoon, the brisk breeze started to drop out and some showers moved in. We were probably more exposed to the wind than most places and, frankly, apart from ruffling my hair a bit, it was hardly worth a mention. The forecasters had once again put the jeheebies up everyone by announcing an early apocalypse. I checked later and the highest wind in the UK was in Kent, a staggering 55 miles per hour. I look forward to being warned about the onset of dawn tomorrow lest I become alarmed by the gradual lightening of the sky in the east after so many hours of darkness.

The showers that blew through during the afternoon were sporadic and fleeting. They were most notable for the size of the drops of rain, which were immense. I had forgotten all about them when we stepped out for an evening walk and in our innocence, made it around the block without a single drop falling on us. We had been lulled into a false sense of security, clearly, because when we went out for our last walk, we were caught good and proper. They was no warning to it, just immediate heavy raindrops, in abundance, forced in our direction at great speed by the renewed vigour of a northwesterly squall. I dragged the girls into the RNLI car park and hugged the lee side of the wall there but to no avail; the wind appeared to be omnidirectional, and we were all soaked in moments. What a glorious end to a bitter day.

October 24<sup>th</sup> – Friday

Dear reader, I know that we did the weather to death yesterday but in a weak moment I had a geek at the weather forecasts for today and the weekend. The BBC has it that we will have strong winds again today and some rain. The Meteorological Office, on their colourful new website, insists there will be light winds but now decline to tell you from which direction, making their forecast even more useless than it was previously. When you dig deeper and eventually find some detail on the wind, two pages later, while the overview says, light winds, the gusts will be strong. So, if you only look at the overview as the majority will, you are going to be a mite surprised when you get flattened turning the wrong corner. Additionally, while the gusts will be only five miles per hour less than the gusts yesterday, they apparently do not warrant a weather warning for wind.

That is all I will say on the matter, honest guv. I will however, mention that the sea was still in an excited state that involved launching itself over the Harbour wall. I mentioned the Harbour wall to a local lady of some years who asked if I meant the wharf wall because I was obviously not talking about the breakwater. I mean, who ever heard of calling it the Harbour wall. I shall continue to call it the Harbour wall in the full knowledge that I am wrong to do so. Changing names now would be far too confusing.

The temperature seemed to drop a bit more today and made worse by a continuing strong or light wind, depending in your point of view, from the west. If it was only the gusts doing 45 miles per hour, they were pretty tightly packed together. I had thought it was going north today but apparently that is tomorrow, instead, and something to look forward to. The cold, that we all are yet to get used to, brought out winter clothes among our visitors when they eventually decided to show up, which was late. As is usual, we had a better afternoon and thankfully, the promised showers held off all through the shop day.

Yesterday, I had sent a message off to our esteemed, much maligned council councillor regarding the replaced St Just bus and it terminating in The Cove instead of Land's End. I had to be very careful how I asked; the man had put a lot of effort into having the bus service installed and I did not want it to look like criticism. I must have managed alright because I had a swift and pleasant enough response. The reason the service was not extended to Land's End was cost. I felt it best not to argue the point that the additional fare payers would probably more than cover the extra cost. There again, in winter, the majority of the users might well be pensioners using their bus passes, so perhaps that is fair play.

Talking of being old and creaky, I had to book in to the bone cruncher. I had noticed that I had cricked my back during the last week or so. I put it down to walking two dogs. I had noticed that I was bent over as I went, trying to avoid BB as she dashed to and fro across my feet. I was going to ignore it and exercise it away but that was not working. I also considered that, if I was going to have something done, I had very

little time to do it. I was lucky enough to get an appointment in the early afternoon. Mother would be here by then and could look after the hounds while the Missus looked after the shop. Ideal.

I had left what I considered to be plenty of time to get to the appointment. I always do because parking there can often be a problem. What I had not factored in was the continuing roadworks past the new estate leading up to Mount Misery roundabout. Fortunately, it was not rush-hour, but I still only got to my destination with minutes to spare.

On the way back, I had the opportunity to see what they were doing there. It seems improved drainage is being installed in the ditch alongside the road and the path is being widened to half the width of the upstream side. I imagine it will be a cycle path as the much maligned council is keen on such things, almost as keen as they are to remove buses from our roads. I will be interested to see how that develops because it appears to stop halfway down the road. If it is to service the new estate, it is on the wrong side of the road, so I must wonder if a cyclist's crossing will be installed there. Whatever it is, it seems to be taking an inordinate amount of time.

Talking of which, the lady who is the leading light in the rebuilding of the gymnasium called in today. She showed me the artist's impression of what the gymnasium would look like and asked, since I was the only user, if it would suit my needs and what equipment might be missing. I have never had a gymnasium built for me before, so I was not sure what I should ask for, not being an expert in such matters. I told her that for me, I only needed a rowing machine, some weights and a step. I did not know what some of the gymnasium items were in the picture. It might well have been a picture of Torquemada's enquiry room looking at some of the kit and I hope that I do not have to use them.

In the meanwhile, the work on the building seems to be taking an age. I spoke with one of the builders during the summer and he said that if it was not finished by Christmas, the team will lose their funding. I am not entirely sure how true that is, but I spoke with the owner of the neighbouring property a few days ago. I asked if the work had disturbed or been a nuisance to him. I had heard that he was an architect and had a medium sized building firm before he retired. He told me that the works had not bothered him at all and that he was well used to such things. He also said that there was no way the building would be completed by Christmas. They would need to be finishing the roof by now and they had not even completed the walls. I have no doubt that is a credible analysis, but I do not think that I am in much of a hurry. It is unlikely that I will be gymming again for at least six weeks or two months after my knee is undickied.

I spent an unreasonable amount of time today getting the sucker hook that holds the curtain rail on the first electric sliding door in The Cove to stick. It used to spring off occasionally with the old curtains in place but now that the new ones are installed, which are heavier, it seems to be off more than on. I also suspect that the drop in

temperature has played a part because it was holding in place quite well until the day before yesterday.

Having stuck it back several times, cleaning it and the surface with bleach cleaner, it still has been popping off. Today, it escalated its unsticking to not wanting to adhere at all. I resorted to the Internet that suggested that Vaseline should be used to seal around the sucker. This seemed a most unlikely solution to me, and I envisaged that all the Vaseline would do was enable the sucker to slide down the surface effortlessly. And I was right. I even tried using a glue stick but even that failed at the first load test.

Closing in on the end of the shop day, things were getting desperate because something had to be put across the window even if it was not the curtain. With no other ideas forthcoming, I decided upon the nuclear option and got the general purpose glue off the stationery shelf. It alarmed me slightly that a moment after sticking it to the door frame, it fell off. I decided to conclude that I must have left it dry a little too long on the sucker because thinking that the glue had not worked might threaten my sanity at this stage. I cleaned up and tried again. This time I held the sucker in place for much longer then strapped it down with gaffer tape. With my luck, it will come off with the gaffer tape tomorrow.

After I came back from the bone cruncher in the middle of the afternoon, we seemed to be much busier than when I left. We started seeing new families arrive and I hoped that this was the vanguard of a bigger holiday rush than we had last week. Since I still had time to work on the curtain rail sucker, it was not that busy, but enough to give me some heart that we might have a better week.

Getting the two hounds out in the evening was a bit of a struggle both times I did it. Going out in the chill and windy Cove, nearly getting bowled over at the top of the slipway by the Lifeboat station and getting wet from the spray in the air might be viewed as refreshing or bracing in some circumstances. Being a small dog, wrenched from a comfortable and relatively warm and breeze free living room, I can understand their reluctance. They have to do it all again in the morning.

## October 25<sup>th</sup> – Saturday

I think in the ordinary run of things I would have converted to big boy trousers over the last couple of days. I have, however, painted myself into a bit of a corner by deciding that it was eminently sensible to wear shorts during my stay at the hospital Monday week (Monday week!). The last thing that I want to do is convert to long trousers and then revert to little boy trousers a week later. First, it is not the done thing and secondly, my legs would become terribly confused.

My legs were definitely not confused when I took them outside this morning. Twice. The girls were not in the least interested in getting out of a warm bed, so I went

downstairs to get the shop display out without them. The action of opening and closing the front door quite often prompts some movement by one or the other of them and this morning, it was both. While ABH was resigned to having to go out in it, BB was not in the least interested and I had to encourage her down the steps with my boot.

A consequence of all that was that I was late getting down to the shop and a little pressed in getting everything ready in time for opening. With the wind back in the north and showing little sign of going away, I was grateful to have the first electric sliding door in The Cove shut while I worked. Unfortunately, I had to open it eventually at the appointed hour and prepared myself to spend the rest of the morning feeling the benefit.

Based on yesterday's indications of arriving families, I ordered in some croissants for the morning. I had avoided such rash purchasing since the end of the summer holidays and thought it worth the risk today. The first customer bought half of them, which was gratifying and although the other half stayed stalwartly on the shelf, we did see a much better flow of customers through the morning than we had for a number of weeks. It stayed buoyant through the day but without the northwest wind and its whopping six degrees of wind chill, I suspect we would have been much busier.

It was difficult to know whether the cold or the wind was the major feature of the day. I do know that for me it was the cold. There was one squally shower earlier in the morning for which I had closed the first electric sliding door in The Cove. Ex Head Launcher had then shown up for a chat which meant opening the door again. It was only then that the cold set in. By early in the afternoon, I capitulated and went and put some socks and shoes on.

One positive thing that the cold did for us was to increase the number of hooded sweatshirts we sold. We sold at least six and all for immediate wear. It seems that many of our visitors had not anticipated the depth of the cold today and it was as much a surprise for me, too. I am going to have to run a stock check on the adult sweatshirts as I know we are running short of a few sizes. We sell a few during the winter on the shop's online store, the one next to The Diary button on the website, dear reader in case you missed it, and it would not do to be without.

The cold put me in mind of something someone brought up yesterday. We were discussing how business had been during the recent weeks and how the temperature had dropped a bit in the last couple of days. They had then inserted into the conversation the latest big thing which is having a beach sauna. Apparently, a few resorts have installed wood-fired beach saunas close enough to use the sea as a cold plunge pool. I looked it up and there are a few companies with mobile units that they have installed here and there in likely spots such as Polzeath and Carlyon Bay. There is also one at Hayle and our closest at Newlyn, although the dash to the

sea from there looks a bit distant. I would think you probably would have changed your mind about the cold plunge by the time you got to the sea.

I am quite a fan of saunas even though it has been many years since I have used one. Having one on the beach in The Cove I think is a capital idea and shall put it to the Parish Council that it should seek funding immediately. If they place it just right, on spring tides they could have the plunge pool come to the door.

I could have done with a sauna today. After most of the day with the door open and the chilly northerwesterly pouring in, I was pretty much chilled to the bone. With the number of customers dwindling after what was our busiest day for a while, I decided to set the first electric sliding door to automatic and see if I could warm up a little bit. It was remarkable how quickly the shop temperature increased, behind the till at least. I think I got there just in the nick of time before I went hypothermic.

Talking of which, the Missus returned with BB stuffed down her top. She had taken them down to the big beach for a run around which they had clearly enjoyed. ABH had run into the sea and BB had blindly followed her. She was shivering while walking home, so the Missus put her inside her jacket to keep her warm.

ABH should not have been in the water at all because the Lifeguards had red flagged the beach. Oddly, it had been open at the higher range of the tide earlier in the day. It was only during low water that they had pulled out the red flags. I am not sure what had happened to provoke the change in policy, but it did not look inviting at any stage of the tide from where I was looking. The beach, however, was a different matter. It had basked in bright sunlight for long periods of the day, the sand looking bright and clear and dotted with people walking about.

Today was not a day for hanging about and doing nothing. When I went out to bring in the outside display near closing time, my body had almost seized up through the cold and inaction. I had to do a quick bout of exercise to get it all shifting again. It took some power of will to drag myself out with the girls after tea and I am pretty sure they felt the same too. The wind was pushing us around like a big bully and the sea in the Harbour was boiling. I have said it before, that with the wind for added effect, having the sea crash about noisily in the dark is quite intimidating. I was glad to be home and with the prospect of an extra hour in bed too. Such anticipation.

## October 26<sup>th</sup> – Sunday

There had been the suggestion that, out of pure spite, the girls might have got up early today when I might otherwise have had a lie in. No, I was still out of bed ahead of them, although I had only dozed the extra hour having awoken at the appointed hour.

The most notable thing about the morning, other than the outside lights came on at five o'clock rather than six o'clock, was that it was relatively light outside when we took our walk. Alright, I suppose that the other most notable thing was that we did not get blown halfway down the street by the insistent and now tiresome wind. That, the forecast told us, would come later.

It was not long into the morning that I remembered that I had not sent a note to the Laurel and Hardy Newspaper Company. I have to inform the company each year that we are to close imminently and could they stop sending newspapers and magazines, please. Last year I had omitted to ask that they pick up the last delivered newspapers on the Monday largely because I did not think that I would need to. I had to send a special request through to get them to collect the papers a week later. This time I made a special effort to ask for collection. I put it in capitals so that even the hard of thinking might notice it, bless them.

At some point close to our closing day, I am going to have to count up all the tokens and create a return note for all the magazines. It is a pain in the bottom, but it has to be done, otherwise I will not get my money back. I must also remember to cease the cardboard collection contract, which I have to do by telephone and on the day I want it stopped. This is also a pain in the bottom. I wonder what they would do if I kept the contract running beyond our closing date. The driver would have to turn up to fulfil the contract, and I doubt very much that the recycling people talk to the newspaper people, so I do not think that I would be charged the delivery charge. It is tempting to find out, but I would have to find some cardboard from somewhere to put out.

We enjoyed some busyness today. It was mainly in the late morning and the early afternoon and at one point we had a pasty frenzy (sorry, MS) that I took for a pasty drive. I had started the day so low in numbers that I had decided early on to bake some of the frozen stock. This turned out to be a mistake. We had a brief period of frenetic pasty buying which I struggled to keep up with. Expecting the orders to continue, I lined up a succession of replacements only to find out that the demand suddenly evaporated. Had I not baked the frozen, we would have had exactly the right number, which was very frustrating.

What scuppered us was a shower of rain that blew through The Cove shortly into the afternoon. It was not that heavy, but it scattered the busy street of visitors and for them not to return. After the rain, the wind went around to the west, a much kinder direction for us, but the skies had darkened and glowered and since it was not the warmest out, it could easily have been mistaken for winter. I think I would have elected to stay at home, too. It only stopped glowering when it went dark at around five o'clock and I had to turn on the outside lights. It seemed even more like winter then and I was thankful that there was only an hour of opening left.

I am also grateful that there is only a week left. To begin and end my working day in darkness feels almost Dickensian and that perhaps I should be working by the light

of one guttering candle. I shall be very worried if Tiny Tim is sitting at the table when I go up for my tea – especially if he has his ukelele with him.

## October 27<sup>th</sup> – Monday

It was a much more respectful sort of day to grumpy shopkeepers trying to go about their business: less rain; less wind; more sunshine, sort of and perhaps a little warmer. Despite all that, the customers seemed to want to be somewhere else today.

The less wind might be a little in doubt. This morning, I ventured to put out the flags that hang outside the shop. They had been furled and sitting on the paddle bat display just inside the door for the last week. It had seemed much less windy when I took ABH out first thing, although that bit just past the corner of the Lifeboat station always get you. It only took a couple of seconds to realise that the poles were rocking in their holders, and I took the flags down again.

We had enjoyed some rain during the early part of the morning and even when it stopped, it looked like it might start again any minute. A lady dog walker, our first customer of the day, asked if it would rain again in a minute because she had intended to continue her walk and did not want to get wet. Ordinarily, I would have had a quick peek at the rain radar and would have had a decent chance of giving her a reasonably accurate answer. What I had not appreciated until very recently, because a neighbour told me, was that the rain radar is shut down for maintenance and has been for several days. It is a bummer because it is about the only resource that gives accurate information.

There was no further rain, but it was still wet on the ground when I slipped off to the gymnasium in the middle of the morning. It is the first of the last three blistering sessions before I have to stop for a couple of months. Getting back on that horse after such an extended period is going to be exceedingly hard, I imagine. I intend to keep some weights at home so that I can maintain the upper body exercises, but I am not sure what I can do for cardio vascular training. I will have to look around.

Perhaps I should continue to sell pasties (sorry, MS) through the closed period. There was some proper, edge of the seat, cliffhanger stuff going on with those today, I can tell you. The drama is set to continue into tomorrow as well, so hang onto your hats, ladies and gentlemen.

After the pasty performance earlier in the weekend, I had decided to go large today. When Sunday threw a googly into the mix by being bleddy awful, I was left wondering if I would be left holding the baby at the end of today. If that was not enough mixing of metaphors for you, dear reader, I have more. I had ordered today's pasties ahead of yesterday's poor performance due to the deadline. Had I not, we would have been very short today.

If you have been following closely, dear reader, you will have known that I had 17 pasties left over from yesterday. I had ordered in 40. At first thing this morning, I was looking at what I imagined to be a surplus on the day. This was reinforced by the extreme lack of customers all morning and a sky that would make Cecil B DeMille reach for his VistaVision and 10,000 extras to film something biblical. It was still very much like that when the deadline approached for ordering the next day's pasties. In consequence, I suppressed the numbers for the next day, imagining that I would be inundated, else.

No sooner had I put the telephone down than the first of the pasty eaters arrived. They marked the start of a long and sustained trail of customers buying pasties for themselves, their extended families and all their best friends and near neighbours. If I was minded to call it something, I might have called it a pasty drive, to draw a distinction between such a thing and a short and intense period of pasty buying that might be termed a frenzy. I am so glad I had the opportunity to explain as it had caused some consternation when I mentioned it yesterday.

The long and the short of all that was that I am now in a position where I am fretful that I may not have sufficient pasties for tomorrow. I did take the precaution of replacing the frozen stock that I used on Sunday, so I may have to fall back on that again if we look like we are faced with another pasty fest. A fest is similar to a drive but ... oh, never mind.

I am not sure that there is a correlation between the two, but as the pasty buying drew to a close, the weather started to improve. The day had thus far been drab, misty and damp. The skies were overcast and even the grey seemed indescribably dull. By the middle of the afternoon, half the western sky was blue and the cloud on the eastern half was starting to break up. It brightened up the beach, which was in great need of brightening up, and provided a bit more warmth that the greyness of the day had seemed to extract.

There were a fair few surfers in the water in the afternoon, too. They were never going to catch a wave as they were far too blown out and messy – the waves, that is, not the surfers, although I could not see them that closely - but for a bit of playing around and getting wet, I am sure it was just ideal. I do not suppose I would have noticed them if the sun had not come out. Perhaps they were not there before the sun came out. I would not know as there was little down there to catch my eye before then.

The next time I looked, we were back to grey, although not as bleak as before. The blue skies had lasted no more than an hour, and the cloud rolled in again. It was a day that had no idea what to do with itself. I must admit, I was starting to feel the same.

We coasted in to closing time with a smattering of customers as that seems to be the way of it this week. It has been reasonably busy, in spite of the not too helpful

weather. The day seems to start shortly before the middle of the day and ends halfway through the afternoon. I really should get on with the closing down preparations as everything needs to be done by the end of the week this year. I will start in earnest tomorrow, honest guv.

I was punished severely for such commitment. With no rain radar, I have been going out blind with the hounds. The after tea walk was foreshortened when, having stepped outside the door, we were set upon by a sharp and reasonably heavy shower. The exact same thing happened last thing. My luck at avoiding the rain appears to have run out.

## October 28<sup>th</sup> – Tuesday

I thought that something was amiss this morning when we stepped out because it was almost full daylight. We were no later than we had been the previous two days since the clocks went back but it was significantly brighter. It still looked like we were covered by cloud, although I did not make a detailed study and the sun had not yet properly risen. I sensed a day of joy ahead.

There is nothing more pleasing than getting a message from the Laurel and Hardy Newspaper Company acknowledging my request to have my newspaper and magazine deliveries ceased. They even told me that they would come on the Monday to pick up the returns. Having had my mind turned towards all things newspaper related, I went further and prepared the returns note for the magazines. It takes a little time to do even though I am using the template I have used for the last few years. Done with that as far as I could, I counted the newspaper vouchers and filled in the return form for those. Hopefully, I will just need to make some last minute adjustments to both, print them and send them off. This will save a lot of time at the tail end of Sunday when we are trying to get away.

The next joyous thing to turn my attention to as the day outside grew brighter and more alluring, was the pasty (sorry, MS) situation. I know, dear reader, that The Diary has dwelt far more on pasties this week than just about any other topic. This is because, pasties have occupied more of my time than just about any other shop imperative due to the fluidity of demand.

The precipice that I left you dangling from yesterday, dear reader, was that I had ordered very few for today based on the early impression yesterday that I would be left with a surplus at end of Monday. I was, but it was a very small surplus and even worse, I had not ordered any cheese pasties, and we had almost run out of those. Fortunately, we had some unbaked ones in the freezer, so my next job was to guess the amount we would need for the day and bake them. I also added a few Cornish pasties with a view to baking more if it looked like it was getting busy.

Remarkably, in a move that completely frustrated the jeopardy The Diary was trying to build over volumes of pasties and demand, we had exactly the right number of

pasties today. We did need the cheese pasties I had baked, so that was something. I think, dear reader, that we have wrung every ounce of excitement and anticipation possible out of the purveying of pasties in such a dynamic week and we may draw a baking sheet under the whole debacle, at least for now.

We had seemed quite busy and from earlier in the day, too. This was most gratifying and showed what a bit of weather could do for proceedings. It was not just pasties going out of the door, either, we had, for the first time this week, some beachware essentials being sold. It seemed that the sea state was at last playing ball if you wanted to do a bit of surfing or bodyboarding. The wind had gone around to the southwest today and had stopped flattening the waves in the bay. The waves perhaps were not the best but any port in a storm. Except there was no storm and most of the surfers probably do not drink port. There were quite enough of them for a representative sample, too, littered about in the shallows.

The Missus went off shopping close to the middle of the day leaving me with two errant hounds. ABH sat in the shopping trolley and largely chilled out. BB sits in her basket on the counter and pops up to greet every single person who comes in through the doorway. She becomes especially animated when small children come in and they, mostly, return the excitement, petting her and poking her in the eye and such like. This then becomes a problem for me trying to keep her in her basket or to stop her toppling off the counter as she wriggles about. That is not so bad unless I am serving someone else at which point having more arms would be useful. It is not the first time I have had to look after her, but it was the first time I have done so when it has been busy. It was fraught at times.

When she returned from her spree, the Missus, who thinks of such things, suggested that I should look out a device that I could wear in the shower to protect my dressing from getting wet when I had it. It had already crossed my mind, and I had thought that I could fashion something out of the arm length rubber gloves we have stashed under the counter, surplus from some long forgotten project. She told me that Mother had tried something similar when she had her knee done and that it did not work; I should seek a purpose made article on the Internet, instead, I was told.

Enter LimbO Products, I kid you not. There were dozens of other vendors that I could have chosen from but, frankly, you would not want to buy from anyone else but LimbO Products. All it required was Acme in front of the name and for Wile E Coyote to turn up and take one away. Just as an aside, dear reader, while I was looking up how to spell Wile E Coyote, I note that Warner Brothers, the creator of the animation, is to bring out a live action and animation film with the character. The plot is that Wile files a lawsuit against Acme. I do not often seek to anticipate films, but I think I might make an exception in this case.

Sorry, I digress. Now, where was I. Ah yes, the LimbO Product is a clear plastic tube with a neoprene collar top and bottom. I suspect there might be challenges with the

fitting of the device. For example, pulling the tight upper band over the very tender bandaged knee without the stretched neoprene snapping back at a crucial moment.

When you have stopped wincing in proxied empathy, dear reader, I shall continue. Not that there is much left to continue with since the day rapidly deteriorated from its sunshiny and mild state to grey, overcast and eventually, dark. Fortuitously, it remained dry for the after tea walk that BB and I conducted alone. ABH is becoming increasingly grumpy about such things. She was always a bit of a grouch when it came to putting on her lead but very recently she has upscaled her protest, so we left her behind. It felt most peculiar and entirely wrong walking about with just the little one and it seems she felt it too. It is good for her confidence, but I would much prefer it if we all went out together.

We managed later and order in the universe was restored. I will scan the pages of the Acme catalogue tomorrow to see if they have something to encourage reluctant hounds out the door.

## October 29<sup>th</sup> – Wednesday

Mister nice guy weather did not hang around for long. There was mizzle to contend with this morning, the sort that soaks you through before you know it. Some of it was clearly aspiring to become proper rain when it grew up, too. I would know because I was out in it.

Walking the hounds was again a two step process this morning. I had given up waiting for them to get up and had gone down ahead to get the outside display ready. For the second day running, I was able to put the flags out, although it was a tad breezier than it had been yesterday. A little later I heard the Radio Pasty weather lady talking about fifty miles per hour winds and wondered if I should pull the flags back in again. I had to check, but she was talking about tomorrow when the winds will be coming from the south.

It surprised me greatly to find ABH waiting for me when I went back up. I had expected it to be BB. She was quite keen, but I had to visit the bedroom to find BB because she was not about to be called. She was curled up on top of the prostrate and sleeping Missus. She looked very settled and not about to leap into action and BB looked even more rooted. If she had fingers, I am sure she would have offered me one. I left her there and took ABH on her own. This is beginning to feel like a conspiracy or just two bleddy hounds taking the absolute Mickey.

It was a blessed relief to be able to go downstairs and start some work however late I might have been made by the errant hounds. Successive delays for the same reason had resulted in me ignoring the soft drinks fridge for some while. Part of the closing down sequence is that the soft drinks are eroded without being replaced but we still have some stock in the store room that needs to be put out, so that it too can

be eroded. Not that they will go out of date, but we were short of small and large bottles of still water. We are likely to run out of small bottles of sparkling.

The last bottles of Coca Cola and Diet Coke went yesterday, which was a success because the dates in those would not have made it to Christmas. The cans have a little longer date, but we are woefully short of cans of diet coke. We will run out but with only four days left of trading, I am not going to replace them. Our visitors will have to trash their diets for a few days. They are on holiday, after all.

The beer is another pansy in the briar patch altogether. I placed my last order when we were actually selling quite a substantial quantity over the week. I did scale down for the end of the season but clearly not by enough. In retrospect, I would not have ordered any beer at all and still had a surfeit to deal with. Last year, we had a surplus and we had to give a case or two away because the best before dates expired before we would open again. Verily, it brought a tear to my eye.

This year, we were forced to change the types of lager we sold because the cash and carry did not stock the other any longer. One purports to be Spanish and the other quite a famous Dutch brand. On checking, they are both made by the same company in The Netherlands. What a swizz. Regardless of how disingenuous such behaviour is, the relevant point is that the company clearly pumps the products full of preservatives such that its best before date will not expire ahead of the end of days. There will be no tears this Christmas about having to give beer away, although I will leave a can for the milkman as a thank you for his services this year.

Putting such matters behind me, I slipped away for my penultimate blistering session at the gymnasium. I am finding it hard to comprehend that I shall spend such an extended period away from hard exercise. I have missed weeks before now but have always kept up the morning exercises of press-ups and plank. From Monday, it will be static quads and gentle ankle lifts at the most and I shall feel grievously unfit within days.

It was still drizzling when I came out into the world again, the tide was pressing on the beach, so I elected to take the girls around the block, instead. It was one of those moments during the morning that the rain had upped its game and we got a bit wetter than we had planned for. It did not seem to bother the girls too much as it was not full pelt rain, but it was enough to require them to be towelled down robustly when we got back.

The rain had dampened down business during the early part of the morning, too. Word on the street was that the afternoon would be brighter, and the message seemed to have encouraged people out in anticipation. I was busy straight away on the hand-over and we stayed quite buoyant through most of the rest of the day. We even had a bit of a five minutes to closing rush, which was good to see and although it was only Wednesday, there were some going home presents being amassed.

During the morning still, a mother came to the counter with a small child in tow. She asked if we had matches, which I told her that we did and asked if she wanted long ones or ordinary. She replied that it was only to light the candle in her daughter's pumpkin to set it spookily aglow this evening. I had quite forgotten about it being that time of year again. I said that I was surprised that candles were still allowed and that there must be some health and safety legislation by now that insisted the on the use of LED bulbs in pumpkins these days. She said that she was going to use a candle nevertheless and I congratulated her on her stand for freedom. I comforted her that that she should not listen to people who said it probably made her a bad mother, and in any case, I would not let on. I think she thought I was being frivolous. I do hope so.

As we drift ever closer to our closing day, there is less and less to do in the shop and the more reliance that I have on customers to keep me from climbing the walls. I also have to be very careful now about our daily orders and constantly look ahead to try and predict sales. This year we have added complication. Normally, we would distribute such things as left-over bread, dairy and fruit to the poor of the parish – a loose term roughly determined by those not driving a Porsche or new BMW. This year, we will be cutting and running almost the second the doors are closed leaving everything behind for up to five days. By the time we get back, all the perishable goods will be ruined. The poor of the parish will have to fall back on their van deliveries this year.

Fortunately, I had little trouble getting the girls out together for both evening walks, which was not only refreshing but surprising. They had both been up to The Farm earlier and had, without rest, explored every inch of the place and dipped in their swimming pool. Their required hosing down when they returned and a good rest. I am sure that will not be the last time this season, either.

## October 30<sup>th</sup> – Thursday

I was not terribly sure what to make or expect of today. Someone had mentioned rain yesterday but since I had not seen a forecast, I was uncertain when it was supposed to rain. I was very grateful that it was not raining in the morning although there were a few spots on the ground when I eventually managed to extract the two girls from their bed. We headed for the beach where the two of them behaved impeccably.

It was not long after that, I returned to the shop to complete the opening tasks. They included rather more orders than I had anticipated making after last night's dissertation on running stocks down. I had also made the effort to stop any further magazines from being delivered but, for some reason, it takes two weeks to cancel a magazine order. I updated my returns form in anticipation of not selling any of them, so that is now ready to go.

During the day I started hearing reports from people coming in from Penzance. While the bay here looked almost flat calm, the waves in Mounts Bay were thundering in and washing over the Promenade. The wind was blowing in there almost up to 50 miles per hour and really making itself felt. I noted it was not the 60+ miles per hour the forecasters would have us believe. Here, on the lee side of the cliff, there was just a little breeze, but I imagine on the north side of the beach it was a little more robust.

The sea state may have looked benign but there was a ponderous swell below the surface that was breaking noticeable waves against the cliffs opposite and giving enough impetus to keep a good number of surfers happy in the shore break. The fishing boats had been out for the last couple of days but even one of the hardened fishers said that he was still wallowing with the boat a while after he landed yesterday. They did not go out today.

Business took a while to get going in the morning but closing in on the middle of the day, things started to pick up a bit. Visibility had been slowly closing down in the run up to it and shortly before midday, a band of light rain and mizzle pushed across the bay. It lasted no more than an hour, and we reverted to the order of the day which was grey and overcast and a little damp. It did not exactly promote ventures out and busy shopping and we were left to endure a modest frequency of visits throughout the rest of the afternoon.

With a bit of a lull in proceedings, I decided that it was an opportunity to get lost in a good book. Actually, several books. We have used this particular supplier ever since we took over the shop some years ago. It is only recently, the last few years, that they seem to have lost their way in providing a proper and useful service. Earlier in the year, I had to chase them for supply and then we were supplied with a whole heap of books that we would rather not have had. There was also a number of books not appearing on either of the lists I had, which I had no idea what to do with. It was not until I looked again that I realised I was looking at the wrong lists, and I had to review the count all over again.

Armed with the correct paperwork, I collected the books that I could send back. Next year I will ensure we lay down some ground rules about what we get and the volumes. Part of the problem is that the company has not modernised and I am not aware of any complete online list I can choose from. I believe they came very close to folding completely this year. They will have to pull their socks up if they want to survive longer as things are only going to get tougher in the coming few years.

Our five minutes to closing rush was early today, just before four o'clock. I realise that is a full two hours before a legitimate five minutes to closing rush, but I am willing to make allowances. My feeling is that it is starting to get dark, especially of gloomy days such as today, as early as four o'clock. I suspect that our visitors, many of whom are staying away from The Cove are anxious to get home before it goes dark. I know that I would.

A little earlier, I had been approached by a mother who was asking about what happens in The Cove on Halloween, particularly in reference to knocking on doors in fancy dress. I told her that the authorities were still looking for children who had done it in the past, although some parents had seemed quite grateful, but she was welcome to try it as at least some had come home again. Unfortunately, she thought that I was in jest, so I said that it had generally been local children who had indulged the practise, and they knew which doors to knock on. It is usually the case that the event falls outside the school holidays and that most of the properties in The Cove are empty.

I know that it was not much of an answer, and I had largely forgotten all about it until we were about to close and I suddenly panicked. Having invited at least one party to knock on our door, we had no sweets in the place to fend off horrid retribution. It was not until almost bedtime after we had received no callers at all that I realised that I was an evening early. I will not doubt have forgotten all about it by tomorrow evening and be caught out.

## October 31<sup>st</sup> – Friday

Well, we were very lucky this morning. Up late and on the beach, we missed the bulk of the rain by about half an hour. It was already starting to spit a bit while we were down there but nothing too serious. I had risked BB being off the lead and that worked out alright. I am rather pleased about that because the 10 metre lead is a torture.

The most remarkable thing about the morning was the sea state. We had gone from almost flat calm yesterday to some serious lump today. When we strolled around the block later, geet waves at least ten feet tall were charging down Tribbens towards the Harbour wall. They were creating a fair din when we were on the beach first thing too, but it did not seem to bother the girls too much.

It had started to rain a bit more seriously when I dropped the girls back and came down to prepare the shop. I was late again but I am getting used to that. There is not a great deal to do in these final mornings of the season, just the papers to organise and the beer fridge to top up. I am hoping that the dairy delivery was the last. I know that the pasty delivery (sorry, MS) certainly was. Naturally, the rain stopped play, but it cleared through by half past nine o'clock.

I had checked the forecast on this occasion which said that the rain was coming back again shortly, but it never did. The skies eventually cleared to pastel blue with low cloud around the fringes. That may have just been spray hanging in the air from the abundance of crashing waves all around the bay. It was certainly the centrepiece of the day judging from all the visitors pinned to the railings staring out to sea.

A little way into the morning I wandered off for my last blistering session, almost certainly for this year. I shall miss it terribly, but the worst thing is that I know it will be tremendously hard getting back into it again. I am dreading it. So, I gave it my very best today and at the end took away one of the dumbbells that I hope to be able to use from a sitting position at home. Outside the door of the stand-in gymnasium I met a gentleman with a dog, looking like he was in some patient anticipation of something. He looked me up and down, so I apologised for the long weight. I got a smile, unless he was amused by some chump in an orange top and psychedelic green shorts carrying a dumbbell.

No sooner than I was back than the Missus headed off into town. There is preparation to do for our going away and the truck needed to be fuelled in readiness. The Missus spent quite a bit of yesterday cooking meals to take with us. Since the length of my stay in hospital is not certain, we are hoping just the one night, the meals needed to cover all eventualities. I was given the option of which meal I should like to miss but since all the meals were toothsome, I was torn. I regarded it as very unfair; she could have done at least one meal that I dislike to make it easy on me.

I am to attend a private hospital, paid for by the NHS, as I certainly could not afford their rates. Last time I stayed in such fine accommodation, the company I worked for forked out through its medical insurance and I was treated to some of the finest scrambled eggs I had had not made myself. I am wondering this time how it works. I cannot imagine that I will get access to the same fare a paying guest will have. That would be most unfair. I must therefore assume that I will have to wait until the posh people have eaten and I will be fed with the crumbs from their table. I am thinking a half-chewed bit of steak or perhaps I will be permitted to suck the bones off a bit of turbot. Surely the Julien Brocard Chablis will be out of bounds, but I might get lucky and have the dregs from a Blue Nun, maybe.

I have been truly humbled by the visits from well-wishers over the last couple of days. Thank you all. I am sure that it has had nothing at all to do with the posters explaining my predicament in graphic detail or the sad face t-shirts I have had printed. I am wondering that now the ground has been softened, so to speak, it is a good time to start a 'go fund me' page. No, me neither.

The Missus went off to desert me for the second time today an hour before closing. She also left the girls home alone as she went off to join Mother and the in-laws for a meal at the local Meadery. They were most welcome as I cannot abide the fare nor the fact that you eat in near total darkness off a wooden plank.

The girls are perfectly well behaved on their own as they instantly go into mope mode when the Missus goes off somewhere. As soon as I was finished in the shop, I took them off for a run around the block. I had intended to go all the way around the big loop, but it had started to rain almost as soon as we all stepped outside the door.

As it happened, it would have been alright because for the first half an hour, it was light rain in an increasing wind.

I had asked the Missus to buy some suitable sweets while she was out so that I would have something to give the devilish evening visitors if they turned up. The first of them duly tapped on the door two seconds after I had sat down to my tea. With my false ears off I probably would not have heard them but for the girls kicking off at the door. Actually, BB lets ABH do all the talking. I expect she thinks she does not need to.

We had just the two visits in the end. It was not a surprise there were so few visits. The night was not the best to be out, with heavy rain persisting through the hours when small children would be allowed out. I had given them all one sweet each, a special Halloween mini packet. Had I my wits about me, they would have had better pickings but both girls tried to escape as soon as I opened the door leaving me to hold one under one arm, put my leg in front of the other while I balanced on the other and holding the door with the other hand all while trying to reach the sweets that were behind me. I will take the bowl down to the shop tomorrow and salve my mean conscience by distributing the balance to any youngsters turning up through the day.

Happy bleddy Halloween.