

DIARY 2025

December 1st – Monday

There is nothing quite like the prospect of having your GP becoming digitally intimate with you to get your morning off to a flying start. I know that it was all in a good cause and all that, but it was very unlikely that I would warmly thank him and even less likely shake his hand afterwards. As it happened, we talked each other out of it on the grounds that it would have been a superfluous procedure, which is what I had agreed with the previous doctor I saw. Quite why they do not read notes, I will never understand.

Still, going over to St Just on the greyest morning we have had for a while was not entirely a wasted trip. We have an honoured guest arriving tomorrow and I needed a fatted calf. Actually, we had been in touch about the evening menu and had agreed that a fatted chicken would probably do, even if Mother was going to be there, too. I walked to the very good butcher in Chapel Street straight after my appointment at the surgery. Having overdone my walking in St Just just three days earlier, you would have thought that I should have learnt my lesson and taken the truck around there. Some folks is just hard of learning, now ent they.

I purchased the appropriate quantity of fatten chicken according to my instructions – we had four breasts and six thighs, so I have to assume we were lucky they had two three-legged chickens to serve us with. There is usually a fair amount of nattering when I visit, although probably rather less than usual since I only saw them on Friday. Part of the conversation was just how stormy and dark it was out. I must confess that I had not particularly noticed on my way over. I must have had something else on my mind. Anyway, by the time I got out of the shop, it was tipping down outside, and a fair breeze was blowing in, something I had definitely not noticed down in The Cove. When I looked later, the wind was coming in from the south and later in the afternoon it peaked at fifty miles per hour at Land's End. St Just was far more exposed to it and even early in the morning, it was fair whipping in through the streets.

The rain became the main feature of the day after that and earned its yellow warning. We had been given one on Saturday that did not amount to a hill of beans, which makes a bit of a mockery of the whole system. I had noted bit of a gap that I had intended to exploit to take the girls around the block. Then I fell asleep and missed it and ended up taking them around in the rain.

The Missus had leapt into action not long after I got back from St Just. She had plans to put the big trees up across the road today and, with some effort, I managed to dissuade her. The weather is forecast to be better tomorrow, although it could not have got much worse than it was today for tree assembling. Instead, she enlisted the

help of some Lifeboat crew who were hanging about at the station to make a start on Santy's grotto in the viewing gallery and to put the station lights up in the top windows.

I am sure she would dearly have loved to have the Christmas trees ready. Tonight was the grand lights switch on, although, it is an exceedingly underwhelming event. You would think that they might have invited a local, internationally renowned Diarist and author to switch them on. Who knows, perhaps The Cove does not have someone like that, or he had something better to do. Anyway, the lights went on without the trees this year and even then, they looked the business. They stretch all the way down to the OS and across to the wharf. It would be encouraging to think that some of the other businesses down the road might take advantage and add a little embellishment of their own.

The grand display was very short lived. I told the main man that we had trouble with the panel last year when it was particularly inclement: the system trips out and has to be reset. The long string down the road duly went out an hour after lighting up. Our man had turned up anyway to make sure everything was alright and he blamed a bulb in the first string. I still think it is the panel and the rain, but he will be here tomorrow to fix whatever the problem is.

Shortly after finishing the lights in the station's upper windows, the Missus decided that she needed some additional tinsel for Santy to play with. As she was heading into town, I suggested that she do the remaining grocery shopping for our esteemed guest's visit tomorrow. She thought this a capital idea and was duly absent for the next three hours.

With light beginning to fade, I thought that I had better take the girls out for a last spin on the beach. They had fallen into depression with the Missus gone and were moping about the place. A good run would do them good especially as the rain was abating and, according to the rain radar, we were seeing the last of it for the day. No sooner than we had hit the beach than the rain decided to have one last fling and we returned to the flat thoroughly damp. BB is quite happy to be blow dried having initiated from an early age. We had done the same with ABH but now she is a moody teenager, she runs and hides first, and I have to wait for an opportune moment to grab her.

The next time we went out, the steps were completely dry. It is remarkable how quickly that can happen. It will have been helped by an increase in the ambient temperature today but due to the wind and rain, it certainly did not feel like a balmy thirteen degrees. Not bad for the beginning of December, which will account for the pent-up release of Christmas songs all over Radio Pasty as I drove to St Just. Season's bleddy greetings to you too.

December 2nd – Tuesday

It was a far better day in prospect today though much colder than yesterday. I could feel it slowly invading the flat and me as the day drew on. It did not feel that bad when I took the girls to the beach first thing but there again, the wind that was everywhere yesterday was but a bitter memory today.

Returning from the beach, I remembered that I had not re-locked the wheelie bin after yesterday's collection. I did not see the lorry come through but assumed they had been but when I checked inside our bin, it was still full. All the other bins in the street had been returned to their normal places, so I assumed it was just ours not collected.

Due to the wind, I had left our bin tied to the big bin behind it. This has not stopped the boys previously; they just pull the sacks out and throw them in the lorry. It is the only reason I can think of for it not being collected. I have submitted a missed collection request, so I shall discover shortly whether that is the case. Good job we have a commercial bin to fall back upon.

Our lights man was back early in the morning to check his handiwork. He was here for a couple of hours running them after making adjustments and replacing one of the bulb holders. We had a chat before he went, and we will let him know if we had any further difficulties with them. The ones in the Harbour carried on all night but as the Missus reported, their brightness obscures the publicly available video stream of the Harbour. We await complaints from the viewers of the webcam who now cannot observe the beach at night.

It was shortly into the morning that I discovered we were almost out of dog food. The Missus had omitted to buy any on her marathon shop yesterday and I had forgotten to remind her. I needed to go to town to resolve the situation and was immediately issued with a list of errands. Alright, there were two errands, collect some more decorations from The Farm and collect Mother.

There were a few showers blowing through today, but it was still a glorious day for being up at The Farm. Standing in the sunshine, it was wonderfully warm, and I took the opportunity to just stand there for a short while soaking it up. I also took time to have a look at how I might set up an extended CCTV operation up there and go through in my mind what would be required and if I would be able to do any or all of it. I reckoned I could get away with most of it, including building a stand for the necessary solar panel and reinforcing the cut down telegraph pole that was already in situ. It would mean working at height, which I was not keen on, but I might just manage at that. The only haddock in the cutlery drawer was messing with the 12 volt arrangements that are under the kitchen unit in the cabin.

Ever since I installed the 12 volt system in there, I regretted putting it in such an difficultly accessible place. Making and changes or additions requires me to kneel down and lean forward. Since in that position I need to support myself from falling flat on my face, it leaves only one hand free to unscrew connections and do

whatever else needs to be done. I have managed before but that was before I had a knee that I could kneel on. I may need help even if I wait a while.

Having completed my jobs up at The Farm I set forth to collect Mother. She likes a good trip out and since going to Tesmorburys in town was the only trip on offer, it would have to do. There are road works on the western approach to Mount Misery roundabout that have been there an age. I had a notion that they were supposed to have been finished at the end of November. Not only do they look a long way from being finished and with only four workers engaged on the 100 yard stretch, it was not looking like there was much of a will for hurrying up, either.

On Sunday, when we collected the trees, we had breezed through the roadworks on green lights in both directions. Today was clearly not our day as we had red lights both ways. Still, we were not in much of a hurry.

Descending the hill on our return to The Cove, the sea state that had been in remission from its fury of a few days ago, had decided to come back with a vengeance. There was a great angry churning going on in the Harbour and great lumps of white water were leaping over the Harbour wall. On the far side, great explosions of spray were dashing up the cliffs and all across the bay, large lumbering waves were rolling in. Despite that, I heard that one of the Lifeboat boys had managed to catch a sizeable bass off the end of the Harbour wall. I think it must have jumped out knowing what was coming up behind it.

Still feeling not quite herself, the Missus carried on with the preparation of Santy's grotto and the Lifeboat boys pulled out all the stops to help her set up the Christmas trees and rearrange the fence panels. All that is left to do is to spend the day decorating the trees tomorrow and nearly all be ready for Carols in the Cove on Thursday. For once, the weather is forecast to play ball tomorrow and provide her with a windless and dry day.

It had been a long time coming but my good pal from years back had made the effort – again – to come down and visit. He now lives east of Camborne but originally hales from very far north of Camborne where they speak with a foreign brogue. I wore my false ears which not only amplify sound but do a fair job at translation, too.

He was my first boss in computing. We were lucky enough to work in an atmosphere of relaxed friendliness which was almost familial in nature. When I moved on, we maintained loose contact which eventually spanned decades. One of our lasting memories is sharing a commute to London together to separate jobs. We created mayhem and consternation in the carriage by having the temerity to actually converse with one another which, promoted by the austere atmosphere and looks of disapproval, often had us in uncontrollable fits of giggles.

Later on in the evening, he confessed to having similar feeling to me that after such a long time apart, we worried whether the same chemistry and camaraderie had

survived. It took only seconds to realise that nothing much had changed other than the amount of grey in our beards – it was difficult to see whether same was true of our heads. We exchanged gifts of malt whisky, his a bottle of one of my favourites from where it all started and mine, a product of Cornwall. I will not labour the point, but we enjoyed each other's easy company long into the night joined by the Missus and Mother and well past my bedtime.

And that will explain the tardiness of the appearance of today's Diary. Apologies.

December 3rd – Wednesday

Unsurprisingly, I was almost late getting out of bed this morning. I would have preferred to be later still, but the girls had other ideas. All it takes is for me to open one eye and one of them to notice. I need some more practise at this clandestine sleeping lark.

Mother was already up and scared the bejebbies out of me, silently sitting in the corner of the living room when I came out with the girls in tow. We did not tarry for any niceties, and it was straight out the door for first run of the day. Someone sent me a clip from the Harbour CCTV of some old codger struggling with two dogs up the slip with aid of a walking stick. I wondered why they had bothered until I realised it was me.

It is the only time of the day now when there is any beach available to run around on, which is a little disappointing. There was plenty of beach too and the girls took full advantage, running about on most of it. We tend not to stop long in the mornings as I think the girls are keen to get back for their morning chew treats and to wake the Missus up. The remaining walks of the day would be around the block only.

Once we were back, I was able to settle into the morning routine with a cup of tea. Having done the dwindling amount of administration our closed season generates I was able to chase up on matters arising. One of these was prompted by a discussion on Radio Pasty while I was out and about in the truck yesterday. They had interviews with a few publicans bemoaning the recent review in business rates. It seems that either establishments will close, or beer is about to get even more expensive. I thought that I had better follow up the business rate changes to see if we were affected.

In the autumn budget the Government announced that it is committed to supporting small businesses by introducing a range of measures to protect them from the Valuation Office's revaluation of business premises across the nation. So committed are they that instead of paying a big fat zero pounds for the last so many years, from April next year, we will have to fork out around £1,000 per year.

We were the proud recipients of the Mandatory Rural Settlement Relief of 100 percent because our rateable value fell below the threshold of £8,500. Come April

next year, our revaluation takes us to over £10,000. So, instead of increasing the threshold by the same average increases in business rates and maintaining the status quo, we will now, with thousands of other businesses, have to cough up payment for no appreciable return.

I am yet to investigate what other reliefs we may be eligible for or whether we have to rely on the Supporting Small Business Scheme which caps increases to £800. So not only has the Government introduced a new charge against our business, we must also spend a considerable amount of time trying to establish our position and options with the much maligned council. I think, on the whole, small businesses would have been much better pleased had the Government decided not to be committed to supporting small businesses at all.

The trauma of it all was far too much for the Missus who immersed herself in decorating the trees across the road. She started very late and was still at it when it went dark and she could no longer see what she was doing. By that time, she had dressed the two main trees and added one of the five mini, colour themed trees to the line-up. My role in the affair was to provide tea and coffee at irregular intervals during the day and take the girls around the block.

I had left it until late in the day before making an attempt to clear the shop floor ahead of the freezer delivery tomorrow. I did not want to do it earlier lest I move something that the Missus was needing. I will not paint the detail of the scene that would ensue if she went to find some tinsel or other decoration and it was not where she expected to find it. There was still some risk when I started when I did, but I explained what I was doing and hoped for the best.

Keen to make some contribution, I unloaded the drier and put away the contents. I then decanted the contents of the washing machine into the drier and set it going. Very often, by crossing the delicate demarcation between roles, I am lambasted for getting it wrong no matter how good the intention. Today, I was thanked, which means I got it right, I think. I will have to watch that because if I get it right too often, I might be asked to do it permanently.

Halfway through the evening, I found that I was tiring rapidly. I have not late night partied since I had long hair, or more accurately, had hair. It was thoroughly enjoyable at the time but now I am ruined, I tell you, utterly ruined.

December 4th – Thursday

There must have been a bit of breeze last night. Two of the trees on the railings opposite had suffered damage overnight. The small plastic one was on its side and the decorations on the main tree had blown away making it look lopsided. There is always some fine tuning to be done each year and at least the trees are still there.

I was up early doors to wait for the freezer delivery. They told me that we would be the first job, so I was expecting them much earlier than the gone nine o'clock that they actually arrived. I was a little suspicious that they had arrived in a standard panel van, but I was happy to give them the benefit of the doubt. They are professionals, after all.

I had not seen them at first and by the time I got down there they had already removed the unit from the back of the van. I told them that unless it was inflatable or telescopic in some way and also transformed itself from being a fridge to a freezer, it was almost certainly the wrong unit. I agreed with them that it was somewhat disappointing having come all this way but at least I could now have my breakfast that I had been putting off while they went to fetch the correct unit.

The morning had thus far been spent wondering if I would miss their arrival by doing things such as running about on the beach – the girls, that is, I watch. I need not have worried, clearly, and now that I knew they would be an hour or so, I was able to have my breakfast without watching the clock.

The Missus had started much earlier today than she had yesterday. There was no option about overrunning as proceedings, Santy and his helpers at first, were due to start at four o'clock. She set to with the trees and enlisted the help of various Lifeboat crew who scurried about setting up the gazebo, moving tables and chairs and so forth. Disappointingly, the temperature had dropped again and was not helped by the wind going around to the west where it was a little more noticeable than before. There were also sharp showers blowing through, making the final setting up more uncomfortable than it should have been.

The freezer boys turned up while the Missus was in full swing. I joined the melee and directed the exchange of freezers, given that they had turned up with the correct one this time. Part of the preparation was moving the mat at the entrance to the shop so that it did not snag as the freezers were moved in and out. I should have known better but underneath there was the usual puddle of dirty water lurking. There was no time to clear it up and the process of treading through it and dragging a freezer through it as well, spread it around the shop quite effectively.

There was just about time to sweep the collected detritus of more than 20 years from the floor where the old freezer had sat unmoved for all that time. It was considerable as you might imagine. I swept it out into the food aisle as a temporary measure and got to grips with it later, when they had gone.

It is a monster unit. Of course, I knew the dimensions when I ordered it but seeing it before me, it was quite astounding. We moved the pasty fridge (sorry, MS) across to make more room and when the new one was in place, I realised that we had trapped the power cable for the fridge in behind. It took a little jiggling around so that it was in the optimum position and I could still get to and operate the power sockets now masked off by the new freezer's bulk.

I took the paperwork that came with it in a zip lock bag upstairs to peruse later. The boys had turned it on before they went but with plenty to do for Carols in the Cove, I left it all until later.

It did not take the Missus long to repair the overnight damage and to put out a second of the five small, plastic trees. She left it there, which was sensible, as there was so much more to do in preparation for the main event including a meeting in the crew room to make sure everyone knew what they were doing. I had a few jobs to do including mopping up the shop floor which took a little time. I am still finding that I have a reserve of around an hour before I have to collapse in a heap through lack of energy. I am no longer on drugs – other than the ones that keep me vaguely alive day to day – so I must presume it is that everything is being diverted to healing my knee. It is either that or I am so out of condition that is all that I can muster. So, after completing my few minor tasks, I went and fell in a heap on the sofa.

While I was there, for the want of anything better to do, I had a look at the paperwork that came with the freezer. It told me that the little plastic device in the bag must be inserted in the drain at the base of the freezer before switching it on. Oops. It was a very good example of RTFM, which translated means Read The Manual. It is not always so clear cut. I also read that to set the temperature I should press the up-arrow button but first I should unlock the keypad by pressing the P button and up-arrow simultaneously for five seconds to unlock the panel. I tried that later when I went down to insert the bung, but I had no luck at all.

Time passed remarkable speedily. I had run the girls out a couple of times since the freezer delivery, skilfully avoiding the showers that were blowing through The Cove on an increasingly chilly wind. All the while more things were happening and more bodies were running around doing them. When I had suitably recovered and with time expiring rapidly, I made a dash up to The Farm to find and collect the paper cups, coffee and hot chocolate that were excess to requirements last year.

I followed that up by taking the girls out for the last run before the fun started and darkness descended. In the meanwhile, Santy had arrived and was chatting with a member of the very excellent Shore Crew. You hear a lot about the fellow dashing here and there on the big day itself but it quite remarkable how ordinary he is in real life. And, I am sure that not many people know this, he comes from Camborne not the North Pole. It is probably something to do with climate change and socioeconomics that Camborne is slightly less inhospitable than the North Pole at this time of year.

My pal from yesteryear came and joined the party ahead of the show starting properly. There were already some visitors queuing up to see Santy. As I stood waiting for my pal, Mother headed back from her visit to the big man. She came back clutching a bottle of gin and a bottle of wine that Santy had determined were at her

heart's desire without her even having to ask. It is the magic of Christmas, I am certain.

After all that excitement and having given my friend a tour of the shop, we repaired to the flat to see out the rest of the evening. The church choir sadly had dwindled in numbers and had to be disbanded this year, so the gauntlet was taken up by the school choir instead. They drew quite a crowd and with hot chocolate, coffee and an abundance of mulled wine on offer, everyone had a jolly old time.

The choir was followed by Pendeen Silver Band. Unfortunately, the full force of the dulcet tones of their instruments was muffled by our very effective double glazing. The Missus popped up to see how we were doing at one stage and opened the window so that we might better appreciate the tunes. I sense that it must have been some effort to depart from scores of the movies prior to 1975 because after three of four carols, the theme from *The Great Escape* slipped in. Sadly, we were forced to close the window again immediately after the Missus went because it was letting in too much cold air.

Despite the Missus being unable to complete the Christmas decorations, the whole event went off swimmingly. It was well attended and miraculously stayed dry throughout. The band finished and people started to drift away at around eight o'clock and I can confidently say that it was another successful *Carols in the Cove*. Well done to the Missus and the Crew who put in so much effort to make it happen and the neighbours and various others who ran the refreshments and did the collecting. Now, relax, although Santy will be there for another three late afternoons.

I, along with pal and Mother had spent another enjoyable evening reliving the events of the past and discussing the events of the current. As my friend said, it was like we had pressed pause on our relationship so many years ago and just pressed play again. Nothing much had changed between us at all which is quite remarkable really, since we have been friends for more than 40 years. We both confessed to being rubbish at keeping in touch with anyone, me probably more so than he – he was here, after all. With the advent of things like WhatsApp, hopefully we can make some improvements – maybe, possibly.

December 5th – Friday

Gadzooks! The sky's cup, it brimmeth over.

Well, it looks very much like the *Carols in the Cove* dodged a bullet. Had we endured the weather we had today for the event, it would have been very uncomfortable indeed and probably much less well attended.

It was raining heavily and constantly when it came time to take the girls out in the morning. I had felt that we were a little earlier than normal, but I think that it was

purely that the day's light had been unable to filter through the thick and heavy rain clouds. I took the precaution of taking a head torch with me but only needed it momentarily. I was a little concerned about the waves crashing in on the beach with a very long draw on them. A little girl inadvertently caught in one of those would be whisked away before I could get to her.

The sand had been smoothed by the heavy grind of the waves and there was little evidence of the accumulation of weed that had been there earlier in the week. At least BB would not get clothes-lined by the painter line running down the beach. It was elevated as it sat on geet piles of the stuff and she ran into it in her excitement to meet someone. I do not think she was hurt too badly, but she refused to jump over it for a few days and went all the way around if she wanted to get to the other side.

Clearly, we did not tarry too long down on the beach before hurrying back for a dry. Mother and I had already set our expectations that we would not see the Missus until at least the middle of the day and even after that. She probably would not emerge from the bedroom until teatime. Sending two damp hounds back into the bedroom under pressure made no impact at all on sleeping beauty. I suspect that a handsome prince would have given up and turned himself into a frog with the prospect of better luck in another fairytale.

Mother and I joined the general indolence and accepted that nothing of any note would happen today and if it did, we probably would not be inclined to do very much about it at all. Sitting back on the sofa late in the morning, I perused my daily incoming mail and found an article on one of the retail newsfeeds that interested me.

The Deposit Return Scheme (DRS) will be coming our way at the end of 2027, not long away at all. Under the scheme, participating stores must take in returns of plastic drinks bottles and cans, returning a deposit paid by the buyer when they bought said item. The article stated that only 27 percent of independent retailers had made any clear plans for the scheme. That it was as high as 27 percent amazed me. We have received the sum total of three fifths and five eighths of begger all in terms of information on the scheme. All I knew about it was what I had read in previous articles in the same publication. How we are supposed to formulate clear plans when we do not know any details of the scheme, I do not know.

We live in fear and trepidation of the scheme to be frank. I am still smarting from the battery collection scheme introduced in 2010. We voluntarily joined in on the premise that a company would come along and collect the batteries from us at regular intervals. Five years later we were still short of the minimum collection amount by 20 kilograms. We could not combine with other nearby shops, either, because we would have broken the law by transporting waste without a licence.

As a point of utter lunatic interest, if we had separated out the nickel metal hydride or lithium batteries (I cannot now remember which), we would have needed a special toxic waste licence. Transporting them mixed up with other batteries only required

the standard licence. Some spotty graduate sitting in an office got paid a lot of money for coming up with that and all our MPs spent time debating and pushing it through Parliament.

Sorry, I digress. Now, where was I. Ah, yes. There has been no communication from Government concerning the DRS scheme or what to expect. Some shops can claim exemption but so far, the rules seem to be based on small shops in towns where a nearby larger store can take up the mantle. We have no other shops within a mile. On a busy day in August, we might possibly be overwhelmed with returns that no one will collect for weeks because we are too remote. There again, folk cannot be fagged to walk ten metres across the road to use the bin. Expecting them to walk from, say, the OS to drop an empty can with us for 10 pence is unlikely. There again, again, some enterprising urchin will no doubt patrol The Cove with a trolley offering to take cans and bottles off visitors for 5p and dump geet sacks of them at our counter for profit.

I would write to our MP but since it is a topic that is unlikely to bring him fame or advantage him in some way, it would be an utter waste of time.

With a bit more beach on offer and a sea less likely to spirit away a small lightweight hound, we headed down shortly into the afternoon. The rain, too, seemed to be easing and the rain radar appeared to confirm my assessment. That is until we got down there. The temporary cessation in the downpour ended as we reached the beach. ABH was a little more perturbed by it and BB shrugged and got on with it. There was a bit of running around but it was lacklustre, and it became clear that a quick extrication was order of the day. We returned to another set and blow dry session, when we could nail them down.

The Missus had not long been up when she decided that she had to go across the road to show some support for Santy. Quite why was a mystery to me but she felt duty bound to do so. I think that he was a very lonely Santy this afternoon. If he does not have any luck tomorrow, I suspect that there will be a rethink on the Santy front for subsequent years. The Missus will have to find another outlet for all the toys she bought. Perhaps Santy can come back in August when it will be much busier with small children. Let us face it, he will be doing begger all else and we will probably get him cheap.

Fish for tea tonight as things get back to normal. Not for the Missus; the Missus hates fish.

December 6th – Saturday

Well, that is better. A proper bright day, no rain and even some blue sky to be gazing up at, although short-lived. The sea was another matter altogether. It has very much got into its stride after several days at playing being rough. Today it was getting serious. Serious enough for one of the fishermen to advise that boats should be

pulled out of the Harbour given a 24 feet swell on Seven Stones buoy which was only going to get worse over the next few hours – and on a spring tide.

The waves were not so much large in the bay as very messy. The punchy wind that had now gone around to the southwest again, was knocking flat anything over six feet and making the whole bay a big, white, raging mess. When I took the girls around in the morning – the beach was out of bounds then – I did notice a lump of white spray raised up over the footings of Pedn-men-du. They seemed to be leaving the cliffs opposite alone but apparently were waiting for the tide.

That wind had been making a noisy scene all night. Coming from the west it was doing its best to destabilise me as I walked the girls around yesterday. Today, in the southwest but much stronger, it was a little kinder on a bloke trying to stay upright.

I tested the theory down on the beach in the middle of the day. The Harbour tractor had clearly been having some fun down there as the pristine and smooth sand was churned up like a scene from The Somme. Most of the boats had been removed from the slipway into the Harbour car park as a precaution. Most will now stay there for the duration of the winter I expect. It does not take much to move one of two back down for a bit of fishing if the sea state improves on a longer term basis.

We were blown about a bit while we were down there. BB's light fluffy fur was being blown about making her look like a wheat field in a storm. ABH's fur is still soft but much curlier and tight and she was hardly affected at all. She needs a bit of a haircut, but we are loathed to do it at the moment because we think it is giving her some protection from BB's needle-sharp teeth.

The Harbour beach had been scoured out over the last tide. It was already looking a bit thin from the previous poundings over the last few days, but this time was more serious. Three or four feet had gone from the back corner by the wall. Underneath the slipways, it is not impossible to get through on some of the arches where there are just boulders in the way. The concrete repairs to the bottom of the western slip that you would not ordinarily notice, are stripped bare to view.

I let the girls run amok for as long as they wanted down on the beach. Windy it might have been, but it was certainly not that cold. The temperature increased a couple of degrees for today. I am still wrapping up warm and will truly suffer if it gets really cold as I will have no warmer clothes to go to. When I thought that they had enjoyed themselves enough and we starting to slow down, we went up the western slip and across the car park. There were half a dozen cars there and some people milling about, presumably watching the waves. They were a bit more interesting a few days ago when I watched the waves thundering down Tribbens and meeting the previous waves rebounding off the Harbour wall.

I moved to my seat by the window as the tide increased and before we lost the light. From there I watched as the bay ramped up for an evening of mayhem. It was

Saturday night, after all, which apparently is alright for fighting according to Mr John. Even at half tide, waves were flogging over the Harbour wall. By the time they had got around to launching over at high water, we would only be able to hear them.

Santy in his grotto had a much better time of it tonight, at times being flooded with small children. Well, that rather depends on your point of view. We went to visit again as we embarked on the last of our afternoon walks. The shop was open, so I imagine they did a bit of business, too and the girls ran riot in the viewing gallery and ended up on Santy's knee. I do not think hounds get presents from Santy, well, at least not this one as he had not been furnished with any dog presents. They did get a treat each from the volunteer in the shop, which was good of her, else they may have harboured a Santy grudge forever.

At some point between that last afternoon walk and the one we undertake after tea was that the wind had ceased completely. All was calm apart from the crashing of the sea that was disappointingly not half so severe as predicted by our fisherman. The Harbour was a boiling mess, but the waves were not running up the slipway, just pounding over the Harbour wall. Earlier, I had watched as a wave caught the bottom of Pedn-men-du and the resulting spray launched fifty feet in the air. It was fair dancing over Cowloe as well and, no doubt was doing so again in the darkness. The most noticeable thing, though, was that the air was warm and humid, and I found myself very overly dressed. Back to shorts and t-shirt tomorrow, then.

December 7th – Sunday

What a lazy winter Sunday we had. It paired quite nicely with the largely lazy winter Saturday we had, I suppose. It might be difficult to put into words just how lazy it was, but I will do my very best.

My leg is not overly happy with letting me sleep, it has to be mentioned, although it is getting better at it. Having a small hound leap on it just when I think I have mastered the perfect position for comfort might have something to do with it, of course. I do eventually find a sub-optimum position and get a few hours in but when I wake up in the morning at a given time, lying there staring at the ceiling is the most likely alternative. So, I get up.

It was still gloomy when we ran out first thing. I had taken the head torch because it always looks gloomier through the windows than it does in reality. It is like the windows are tinted, which they are not, and it fools me frequently. Despite it being brighter than I thought, it was not all sweetness and light. The wind that had seemingly stopped altogether between fiveish o'clock and nine o'clock – it had gone southerly and diminished – was back in the southwest and making itself felt. It was even stronger later when we visited the beach and felt much stronger than its listed 30 to 35 miles per hour.

One of the things that had plagued my waking hours in the night was an appropriate solution for The Farm's proposed two CCTV cameras. Rather than each of them having a mobile telephone sim card to connect back to the Internet, the better solution was to have wifi up there and have the cameras connect via that. I had spent a considerable amount of time identifying an appropriate all-weather unit that would run off our 12 volt batteries.

The research had involved asking the company how I might connect our batteries to their unit. They had told me that the unit had a hidden port that would take a barrel jack, which we would need to provide, similar to ones that plug into a laptop computer or other low voltage device. The very pleasant lady kindly gave me the dimensions of the jack which were 2.1 millimetres inside diameter, 5 millimetres outside diameter and 10 millimetres length. I spent ages looking for the right connector on the Internet but in the UK, the most prolific standard is 2.1 millimetres, 5.5 millimetres and 9.5 millimetres.

The direct current supply to the device is clearly not their preferred method. That is taking power from an ethernet connection via Power over Ethernet or PoE. The company do provide a PoE injector, a discrete unit that would provide the power, but it plugs into the mains. Not an option at The Farm.

In the darkness of three o'clock in the morning, I agonised over the plug size and what would happen if the UK size barrel jack was a non-starter in the foreign box. It struck me that there probably was a unit that would connect to our battery and convert that to a PoE connection. That would be ideal and dispense with the reliance on the barrel jack of correct size. I could hardly wait to have a search for such a device.

It took a while, but yes, there is such a box available on the market, in fact three types of varying price. Rather handily, I know that these units are compatible with the wifi device that I have been looking at as they comply with the same standard, IEEE 802.3af. There, I knew that you would find that interesting, dear reader. That seems to take care of the hardware to make wifi available at The Farm. All I have to be concerned with now is how to crawl around under the kitchen unit to get at the battery connections to install the power feed. I will not order the devices just yet as I know with them sitting in boxes in front of me, I will be more than tempted to go and install them.

The Missus waited until I had taken the girls to the beach in the middle of the day before she got ready to go shopping. She had told me that she would be going today as we are running out of things. There did not appear to be any rush on her part, so we took our time down on the Harbour beach mainly as it was likely that it would be the one and only opportunity to have a good blast and run around. The blast bit was highly accurate as we were nearly blown off our feet, which was a bit unexpected since it was in the southwest.

By contrast, as soon as the Missus left, it was like someone had unplugged the hounds and they collapsed in heaps here and there across the living room, stirring only to occasionally change heap position. Our lives were frozen in suspended animation – well, there was much more suspension and not much animation – until she got back.

It was Santy's last day in the grotto. He had done the four days out of the kindness of his big heart. It was very good of him especially as he had all those other presents to wrap – unless, of course, he had finished them all in August and was at a loose end. The Missus put together a fruit hamper present for him, which was a bit coals to Newcastle really or a pleasant diversion from milk and biscuits, but I am sure it was much appreciated. She had offered to pay for his petrol, but he has an electric car, and no one knew what the mileage rate for that was. He would not take the cash, anyway.

I just looked up the rates of the Government website. It is 7 pence per mile for home charging and 14 pence per mile for public charging. It is reviewed quarterly. I have no idea how they distinguish between the two or they just have to take a person's word for it.

Once again, the Missus went across the road to hold Santy's hand. When I went over again with the girls, there was a small crowd waiting to see him and have their pictures taken with him by the Christmas trees outside. We made a swift exit, so that we were not in the way.

I had not long come back home when I had a telephone call from the OS. The lady there who has worked there since well before I stopped going asked if the shop was still open. The OS quite frequently fall back on the shop if they have run out of things such as gravy that they forgot to get in for Sunday roasts or orange juice for breakfast – easy things to forget when you are running a commercial hotel business. I assumed it was something like that. How wrong could I be.

A resident had asked if there was a shop open – at five o'clock on a Sunday – where he might procure a pair of flip flops for his wife. Our lady at the OS had immediately thought of us and, not wishing to disappoint her, I said that I was certain we could come to some arrangement, so she passed me on to the resident. I was a little taken aback that it was indeed a here and now request, but a grumpy shopkeeper must count his blessings when they are handed on a plate and gift horses do not grow on trees, especially at this time of the year. I told him that I would open the shop forthwith and meet him at the door. Two pairs of flip flops and twenty quid in my pocket, erm, the till later, I bade our man a farewell directing him to follow the lights to get back to his temporary abode.

Santy finished early tonight. This gave the Missus time to dismantle the decorations and made her late for tea. We will not know how successful it was or otherwise until all the pennies have been counted. I suspect that if it is done again. The timing

during the weekend might be earlier in the day, although I suppose the darkness might give it a little more mystery than in the daytime. Happily, I am not a Santy expert. One thing I am reasonably sure of is that it would not have worked at all had we been paying for the main man, and we thank Santy from Camborne very much indeed for the kind donation of his time.

Due to the late tea, we skipped our after tea walk around the block and settled for a last run out later in the evening. The wind that has been banging in all day had decided to pack in for the night. I thought that a splendid idea and did the same.

December 8th – Monday

I struggled to get my head off the pillow this morning. It really just did not want to move but fortunately I had plenty of assistance from the girls who clearly agreed that I had stayed in bed for far too long.

It was late and I was grateful for the extra time. Mother was already out of bed and waiting on her cup of tea. She can make her own, but we have a single cup water boiler which needs the dial in the right place for the correct size cup. She can handle her tablet computer like a pro, but the water boiler has her foxed. I usually set it up for her and leave her cup under the spout, so she had not had a chance to get to grips with it. She was happy to wait until I got back after walking the girls.

Unfortunately, ABH spent an inordinate amount of time making up her mind where she wanted to go this morning. When the beach is available it is straight down there, and everything is sorted out in short order, the girls get a run around and everyone is happy. When the tide is in, we head up to Coastguard Row on a short run out. Today, we headed up to Coastguard Row and kept going all the way around the big block in reverse. I am sure Mother wished she had her tea before we went.

It was the last day of Mother's holiday today. She emerged from the bedroom first thing with her bags packed and ready to go. It is almost like she could not wait to get home. Perhaps she cannot. She gets mobbed by the girls the moment she gets up and again if she makes any move here and there around the flat. She does love coming to stay but equally, she likes her own home and independence. The Missus took her home in the early afternoon after I came back from walking the hounds.

If yesterday had very little of substance in it, today was even more transparent. My highlight of the day was getting a reply from the editor of the trade newspaper I had gleaned the information from regarding the Deposit Return Scheme. I had written to express my concerns at the lack of information regarding the scheme and from the point of view of a small independent shop that would be disproportionately affected by it. I really had not expected a reply at all let alone one so soon after writing in. Either the online magazine has very few correspondents, or the editor is right on the ball.

The editor agrees that DRS seemed weighted toward supermarkets and larger stores with smaller shops stuck in an awkward position. He said it seemed like the choice was invest a lot in an automated system or seek an exemption. He also suggested that we would miss out in footfall should we decline inclusion. I am not so sure about that, but he offered to take our questions to the DMO, the organisation charged with rolling out the scheme in England and Northern Ireland – and Cornwall, which was very good of him.

Sorry, about the pause there. I just stopped to reread his message and was side tracked into sending him a lengthy reply. I did not want to list a bunch of questions that were only really peculiar to us. It struck me, though, that the current advice around exemptions only mentioned town shops. It spoke volumes that the organisers of this scheme had not really looked beyond Tesmorburys – who will all get fancy machines to cope with it – and town shops. I doubt very much that they would send someone out to look at our particular issues and it would be very likely we would have compliance forced upon us without any understanding of the problems. I asked the editor if he could bring that to the DMO's attention, it would be most helpful.

The word on the street, well actually it came via social media and a bunch called Kernow Weather Team, is that we are in for a bit of a bashing tomorrow from Storm Bran. Had I looked at the report from the Meteorological Office, we are all going to die in winds of hundreds of miles per hour and more rain than you could shake a big bucket at. The Kernow Weather Team were a little more tempered in their description. Yes, I am sure that Storm Bran will have some big movements of wind and rain and no doubt the forecasters we keep regular updates going throughout. We can hope that they were not be much damaged but if there is, it will be all Bran's fault.

Begger! It is Storm Bram. Disregard the last paragraph unless you too mis-read the name.

We had a yellow warning for rain that started at six o'clock. It was not a bad guess, as our rain started around seven o'clock when I took the girls out after tea. For the couple of hours before that it had increasingly become more mucky. We had managed to get down to the Harbour beach at four o'clock under leaden skies and with the tide in flood.

Despite the stormy nature of the sea in the bay and waves pushing into the Harbour, there was a lone swimmer there. It had BB mouthing off as she ran down the slipway and ABH was about to make a dash for it. I managed to convince them both it was a harmless swimmer and not the monster from the black lagoon and they went about running amok. Another two swimmers arrived and joined the party. The sea was rough, but it had been a little more orderly over the last couple of days. I would not have like to be having a dip in it, but this group are seasoned and know their limitations.

The rain had just commenced, pushing up in a geet lump from the southwest, when we headed out at seven o'clock. We did not go out for long and by the time we came back it was proper raining. It upped its game through the evening and by the time we went out at nine o'clock, it was heaving down. We modified our walk to a dash up the slope beside the shop and straight back again. The incline was running with water from one side to the other. It was a bit rainy, and the girls did not appreciate it at all. I cannot say that I was delighted, either.

December 9th – Tuesday

Storm Bram with an 'm' hardly affected us at all. The rain that we had last night was heavy and persistent and lasted until about four o'clock in the morning. I think that for once, the yellow warning issued by the Meteorological Office was worthwhile. The only problem being, as I have mentioned countless times before, we have become so inured to the worthless warnings, we hardly paid this one any attention at all.

There was a bit of a mighty wind blowing in from various points around due south. Had it been around a little further to the east, it would have been blowing across the bay from Gwenver in that odd quirk of nature that somehow bends it around. Land's End had it registered at 60 miles per hour by late morning. Gwennap Head, windiest place in the universe, was only slightly ahead of that which reinforces my theory that the cliffs on the western side of the head, cause the increased wind anomaly.

The sea state in the bay had worsened overnight. It was in remission over the last two days but the low pressure system to the north that created Storm Bram brought it back to being a raging beast again. There were plenty of big waves thundering over Cowloe, white water filling the area around the beach and waves crashing up the cliff opposite.

While we were promised rain during the morning, none fell as far as I could discern. I had whizzed the girls out in the morning and again in the middle of the day without a drop falling on us. The beach that had been dotted with small rocks yesterday at the same time, was completely clear and smooth today when we went down. It meant that the girls could run around without fear of stubbing their toes. I do not know if that is a dog thing, but it made me think about it while they chased across the beach yesterday.

We were gone for about an hour. There was much frolicking and much trying not to be knocked over by the frequent gusts of wind. We may not have had the wind whistling down through Gwenver, but there was enough of it coming down off the cliff to feel its force on the Harbour beach. It did not seem to bother the girls much as they raced about but I was glad that I was still using my single crutch.

At the end of a bit of beach play, I walk them around the block to slow them up a little before we get home. It was hard going up the western slip and even more so when

we went out again at four o'clock. The wind was channelling down the slipway in gusts and with two girls pulling in different directions, even with a stick I struggled a bit getting up there.

Earlier in the morning, I had what I hoped was the last natter with the very pleasant lady who had been helping with technical detail on the 4g wifi router for The Farm. It had taken a bit of to and fro to get her to understand that there was no electricity up there other than from 12 volt batteries fed by our solar panels. The bit of kit I had been chasing is more than capable for the role, but I suspect that we were battling against differences in US or Asian and UK standards of connector sizes and voltages. I had sent a diagram of our setup which I think did the trick and with the last assurance I would have all the right bits, I ordered it this morning.

The project has, at least, kept the synapses firing spasmodically. I have had little else to entertain them over the last five weeks. I know that I said I would not order the equipment until I was a little more ready to install it but it is coming from the US and will take a week or so to get here. The shop will then be open, so it will be into the new year before I have a chance to play with it. I can test it in the shop while I wait for customers to appear.

That was the sum total of my excitement during the day. Tomorrow I must at least get to grips with the quarter end invoices. Now, there is something to look forward to.

December 10th – Wednesday

I note that today the International Cider Challenge 2026 gets underway. This is the competition that awarded St Ives Farmhouse cider its 'best in the world' rosette. It was probably more of a surprise to them than anyone else and they have dined off it ever since – and so have we; we sell it in the shop and in some abundance.

Not only do the ciders get tested and marked for quality and taste but there is also a design and packaging award. There is also a blind tasting, which might be assumed on the basis that the tasters would be blind drunk by the end of it. Some of the ciders on offer are more than eight percent alcohol. So drunk are the judges likely to be that there is no venue for the competition. Instead, entries are sent to an anonymous warehouse where the judges can go, drink and sleep it off without having the ignominy of being identified.

I jest, of course. Everyone knows who the judges are.

It was forecast to be a beautifully sunny day today. This is probably why me and the girls got a good soaking when we eventually went out for our first venture of the morning. It was a proper cold shower, too, blown in by a robust breeze that made sure my exposed legs got the full benefit of it. I do not think that the girls were overly impressed, either.

Just out of interest, the nurse at the surgery advised that I should moisturise my operation scar with Vaseline. Following her advice daily had made my knee completely waterproof. Who needs full metal jacket waterproofs when there is Vaseline.

Despite the rain, the backdrop to the morning did indeed look bright and gay. The shower appeared across predominantly blue skies. The sun, newly risen, was casting a yellow tint through such clouds as there were and the fine mist that came with rain. It was a bit unsettling to be honest. It all looked a bit unnatural and not the sort of thing we expect of our mornings at any time of the year.

That was the last shower of the day. I had already made my mind up that we should take advantage of such an unexpected bounty and head off to The Farm. We have had the occasional day of better weather, but the last few weeks seem to be a constant conveyor belt of days that come with rain attached. I had not thought about it much until I had a look at the weather from the BBC. The days ahead for the next fortnight all had rain in them into the week that the shop is open, too, which is exceedingly disappointing – if true.

While I had decided to go to The Farm, the Missus had thought to do something completely different which she announced when she got up. I suggested that the weather on Friday might be equally advantageous, but we agreed to get it done today instead.

I picked up Mother, came back and collected the Missus and the girls and we headed off. I had expected that the lane would be deeper in water than it was. We used to have a major problem alongside the tip area that used to be used by the caravan park under the previous ownership. The water collected there and could be up to a foot deep and stretch the length of the tip, some fifty yards or so. Since the park has changed ownership, we do not appear to have had such a serious problem. Either the drainage the other side of the hedge has been sorted or rain ain't like it used to be.

There was not much standing water in the rest of the lane and when we got to The Farm, there were no issues there either. In fact, the ground there seemed to be remarkably well drained. If we cast back to last February when we were engaged in building the greenhouse, the field was a quagmire all the way to the cabin and beyond. We had to put ground reinforcement mats down which at the time were not all that successful. Now, they are all but invisible and an integral part of the ground and hopefully doing their job.

It was glorious up at The Farm. The sun was providing some proper warmth to the degree that I wished that I had not got quite so toggled up. There was a cooling breeze to go with it, which is the only thing that stopped me overheating. The cabin was more than warm enough to make Mother comfortable even with the door open.

My main aim at The Farm was to replace the battery in the store room. The battery health indicator was showing red, and it is not good to let a battery run down flat as it will damage them and these are not cheap batteries. They are also exceedingly heavy batteries and normally what I do is load one onto the back of the truck at the store room, drive up to the cabin, swap it with a charged one and drive back again.

I had not fancied doing the battery lift by myself so soon after having my dickie knee undickied. I think that lifting weights on it would be frowned at, not only by the medical practitioners but my brand new knee would probably have something to say on the matter, too. I would not ask the Missus to do the lift, while I am sure she would be capable, it just seemed like not a good idea. I had planned to shift the battery a foot at a time, dragging it where possible. I needed the Missus there to ensure the hounds stayed clear of the wheels of the truck as I was moving it between the two locations.

As it happened, we lifted the battery as a team. There is a carry handle at each end and with one of us on each handle, we simply did the swap by hand. Now, why did I not think of that.

While I was under the sink swapping the batteries, I took the time to peruse the wiring there. There is a bus bar for the negative cable and another for the positive, both connected to the appropriate terminal of the primary battery. Under the positive bus bar is another for the fuses. Individual wires connect separate terminals between the positive bus bar and the fuses, one for each connected device. Each device has a pair of wires, one connected to a negative bus bar terminal, and another connected to a fuse terminal with an appropriate size fuse. It is an ordered mess.

I had an idea that there were no spare terminals and, when I looked today, I was right. Quite what we have connected down there I am not entirely sure. There is the sink tap, pumping water from a tank outside, the CCTV camera, a charging lead for the radio scanner and another two for the lights. There is also a further charging outlet with a different connector. That would either have to be sacrificed, or we will need another fuse board. You really did not need to know that dear reader, but I could not remember what was using them all up and I could only do that by listing them. Thank you, you have been most helpful.

While I was there, I also took photographs of the outside arrangements where the CCTV is attached to a post and sits on the roof of the cabin. Getting up there to remove the camera and to install the wifi device was something I had agonised over. It was worse than I thought, too, because the camera and its holder both would have to be detached because the power feed runs through the holder. I had taken the pictures so that I could plan a strategy.

I had not remembered, but I had cleverly constructed the post so that it could be lifted into position from terra firma; absolutely no need to go up a ladder at all. All I

have to do to get it down, is unscrew four screws that hold it onto the cabin. In truth, it was not all that clever, as I had not intended to bring it down again. What I will have to do is modify the attachment arrangements so that it bolts onto the cabin structure. If I screw it in again, I will eventually run out of places to put screws.

The last thing, or it may have been the second thing that I needed to do was to find my 12 volt kit. I had a notion that it was in a cardboard box in the tool shed, so I started my search there. I was also of a mind that the cardboard box was on a shelf at the back of the shed, in front of which time had placed the lawn mower, the pressure washer and various cans of paint making the shelf inaccessible to someone with a not yet fully functioning knee.

From my distant vantage point, it appeared that there were just two cardboard boxes with dubious potential, both out of reach. Just about in reach was a carrier bag that I reasoned might be more hopeful, so, given that I could just about reach it, I dragged it down. Wires it had aplenty but they were all mains and not a 12 volt item amongst them. While getting it down from the shelf was by means of a drag, getting it back of the shelf was an even bigger drag. It had to be thrown.

Reaching the cardboard boxes required moving things and as we all know, this is not something that was made inherent in the male DNA. It took a monumental effort of will to move paint cans and bags out of the way so that I had sufficient space to manoeuvre the lawn mower and pressure washer aside enough to get closer to the shelf. The boxes did not contain the 12 volt kit, which was incredibly irritating.

I found the kit, quite by accident. It was in a proper compartmentalised case that sat on top of the reel of 12 volt cable. I had not remembered that I had been so tidy and organised that I had sought to purchase proper containers – actually I repurposed one from a tool no longer used. I was delighted and surprised to find an abundance of 15 amp fuses and small cable clips both of which I thought that I would have to go into town to buy. What a bonanza.

Talking of which. While I laboured and searched amongst the dust, invasive plants and detritus of the tool shed for my 12 volt kit, the Missus ventured into the greenhouse with the intent of doing a bit of watering. It surprised me that anything was still growing in there but after I finished, I sought her out as she was still in there. I caught her still picking ripe cherry tomatoes from the vine. There was a plentiful harvest too after at least a week of absence from The Farm. Of course, none of us will get a look in on these and, sure enough, when I looked in on the cabin later, Mother was working her way through the bag of them that the Missus had inadvisedly left in her care.

There were some proper size tomatoes in the greenhouse but largely, what remains, are the winter vegetables most of which are in the outside plot. I had a look last week when I was there and there are two rows of huge cabbages. Also on the plot were

some hidden potatoes that the Missus managed to track down and unearth. It seems that the plan really had come together this year.

We had been up at The Farm for more than an hour by the time we had all finished. I will need to go up alone to run the wire for the new kit which will not arrive until the end of next week. The battery end of the wires need to have terminals crimped on and all that can be done ahead of the kit arriving. I am a bit loathed to bring down the camera just yet. I will need the sim card out of it but with it dismantled, it leaves us a bit exposed up there for a couple of weeks. It is a dilemma I shall have to think on.

We cruised through the remainder of the afternoon. The Missus took more than an hour to give ABH a very necessary haircut. We were concerned that she was putting on a bit of weight, but after a bag full of fur had been clipped off, she is still quite svelte underneath it all. While the Missus was engaged with clipping fur off, I took BB into the kitchen to wash her fur down. Both has emerged from adventures in the field not exactly smelling of roses. Aromatic it might have been but roses it was not. I am pleased to report that a few hours after we came home, ordure was restored.

At last a day when we actually did something. It will not last.

December 11th – Thursday

As it turned out, today was not rainy at all, at least not when it mattered. We could have gone up The Farm today and done all those things and the Missus could have done what she had intended to do – and we would have had a bag full of cherry tomatoes.

I still think we got it right, though. The Missus wanted to work in the shop making ready the three remaining plastic trees for outside and to bring up the decorations to deck out the living room. Ordinarily, I would make myself scarce while she did that. It used to be taking the bleddy hound out and stopping by the OS on the way back and hoping that I had left it long enough. I cannot remember what I did last year but whatever it was, it did not involve going to the OS, as I had not won the lottery. This year, I am going to have to suck it up and move around the living room so that I am not in the way.

Today was a far better day for not going to The Farm. It had started brighter than I had expected and remained brighter than I expected until well into the afternoon. It was relatively mild, which should have encouraged me to change my attire – which I will no doubt regret – there was hardly a breath of wind, mainly as it was banging in from the south southeast again. I now remember why we would not go to the Farm today – the wind from the south.

I largely watched the brightness of the day from the window of the living room. It was a day of thinking and trial and error. Mainly error. I am still agonising over the camera

installation at The Farm. The original worked just fine when it was a discrete unit, and I could see the feed on my smart mobile telephone app designed for that very purpose. We have the same cameras on the outside of the shop. These are set up in the same manner as the proposed installation at The Farm and for the life of me, I cannot get the app to view their feed remotely. I have to be connected to the shop network. If I encounter the same problem at The Farm, the installation will be useless.

I was just writing a message to the suppliers when ex-Head Launcher knocked on the door. He turns up randomly for coffee and a chat. It is good that he feels he can do that and his visits are always an entertainment. He is either the unluckiest man alive, or he should have WELCOME tattooed down his body where he allows people to walk over him. He purchased a motorcar from a local dodgy dealership in town and had nothing but trouble with it. It was back with them for fixing more than it was on the road. By the time he eventually took everyone's advice and handed it back – that took more than a year – it must have had everything on it replaced.

He was given another car in replacement. It definitely looked the part, all shiny and red and according to him drove very well until the sub-frame fell in half one day. It was thoroughly corroded. I know we have a huge problem with the salt air down here and things rust in front of your very eyes but sub-frames tend to be quite sturdy things and he had not had the car that long. It must have been well gone as the dealer handed him the keys with the boys at the back falling about, watching it go.

Similar to the last car, the dealer is stringing ex-Head Launcher along with tales of how they are having problems sourcing another (second hand) sub-frame. They should be sourcing a brand new one, but our friend is letting them have a second chance to go with the dozens of other second chances he has given them over the last couple of years.

Not long after he left, I took the girls down to the Harbour beach for a run about. We were just on the cusp of leaving when he turned up. I think that it is fair to say that the day had reached its zenith of loveliness when we headed out. I really did not need the layers that I had on, which has become habit now rather than necessity. No matter. I was not overly warm down there and it was the girls doing all the running about, not me.

While we were engaged in cavorting, I received a message from our friend up the hill. It is a stiff climb, that first bit of Stone Chair Lane. Quite how she manages now she is gone eighty, lugging geet bags of shopping, is a testament to the power of will. Then she has to get up the steep steps of her garden to get to her front door, although she now has a chair lift she calls Roxy for some unfathomable reason. I had a director of the company I worked for call her printer Basil. I asked and she told me it was because it was always faulty.

Sorry, I digress. Now, where was I? Ah yes, the message from the lady up the hill. She had contacted me the day before telling me that she would meet me in the car park – she can see me on the beach with the girls from her lofty abode – because she wanted to donate to the Christmas trees, the Carols in the Cove and the Crew Christmas party. Rather than let her come down, I told her that I would come up. Today, she sent the message to give me a bit of a nudge.

I replied in a message that I would set off immediately but would need to set up a base camp at the bottom on the hill, so I would see her on Saturday. She has a wonderfully inane and madcap sense of humour, but she missed that one and I surprised her when I arrived at Roxy's shed at the bottom of her steps, gasping for breath. I did not fancy the last bit of the ascent strapped to a pair of eager hounds, so I let them loose and they went up ahead of me.

We chatted for a good while in the beauty of her wild garden. It is full of makeshift terraces, large decorative pots full of plants and one dead cat, and big plants growing randomly here and there. It is overhung from above by large bushes that elsewhere might be trees. The house is just as random, having been added to in a haphazard way and started off as a railway carriage that is still an integral part of the structure somewhere deep inside. Quite how a railway carriage arrives in The Cove ten miles distant from the nearest railway is a mystery. It is not even the only one.

Much revived by my visit, I wound my way back down the hill with the girls doing their best to pull me down. The view from just a little way up the hill is pretty enough and I have to tear my eyes away to make sure I am not about to trip on the rough path. The sea state is still in flux, one day monstrous and the next a little more orderly. Today it was the latter, although the waves even at mid tide were making a fuss about crashing in on the rocks.

I spent the afternoon behaving myself, which was entirely tedious, interspersed with pounding the leg exercises. If I had thought that was tedious, the Missus spent the same time sticking individual lengths of tinsel onto strips of tape. She was disappointed with the tinsel curtains that she used for Santa's Grotto this year, so set about making her own for next year. She felt that it had to be done now or the big bundle of tinsel that she was extracting from would be an impenetrable mess next year. We will have to find some way of storing her tinsel curtains so that they do not end up the same way after a year in storage.

The promised rain waited until I had taken the girls out for their last run before coming in with a vengeance. Verily it tipped down.

With far too much time on my hands, I made plans for tomorrow. Oh dear. Oh, very dear.

December 12th – Friday

It was one of those three o'clock in the morning thinking things jobs: the idea that I should, as a priority, address the fixing of The Farm's camera post to make it easily dismountable. It would require having threaded bolts protruding from the blocks on the cabin wall onto which the post could be slotted and bolted on. Ideal.

The forecast for today had been set fair, so it was a case of waiting to see what the weather was like before making any solid plans. It certainly looked alright through the window, but I had to wait for the girls to stir themselves before heading out.

I had no choice about stirring myself at a reasonable early hour because I had ordered a delivery of pasties (sorry, MS). The shooting club are having their Christmas shoot on Sunday, and it is usual that we supply the pasties. Just because I cannot attend myself just yet, does not mean that I cannot supply pasties, so I offered and they accepted and I am now to heat them and deliver them to the range at the appointed hour – yet to be agreed.

As it happened, the pasty delivery did not arrive until later than I supposed. I had been waiting at the window and still managed to miss his arrival. He knocked at the door to let me know he was here which set the girls off. They would just have to wait but at least the knock on the door had woken them from their reveries so that when I did come back up again, it was easy enough to lasso them and take them out for the first walk of the day.

There was a sliver of beach when I first looked down. However, the sea behind it was in raucous spirits and even as I watched, the next wave washed away the narrow width of sand and ran up the slipway. Waves were pounding over the Harbour wall and the dancing atop Cowloe. The whole bay was a raging torrent of water dashing one way or another. I spotted the tail end of some ladies heading up the western slip and hoped that they had not been tempted to go in. BB was eager to get to them, as she is to any passing stranger, so, as I knew the ladies, I let her lead go and watched as she dashed down the car park to them.

My morning routine, sufficiently disrupted to make me late on every aspect of it, eventually completed, I moved onto matters of the day. I had agreed with myself that fixing the camera mount up at The Farm was the chief priority of the day, so I went about compiling a list of requirements. Top of the list were special threaded bars that have a coarse screw thread on one end and a bolt thread on the other. The purpose is that the coarse thread screws into the fixed half of the wood leaving a threaded bar protruding. By ensuring there was a matching hole in the camera post, I could slot it onto the protruding threaded bars and secure it with a washer and nut.

I had already made plans to go to our builders' merchant up at St Just, but it is always helpful to have the correct name of the items I need. This serves two purposes: I might vaguely look like I know what I am on about and the people behind

the counter know what I am looking for. With this in mind, I consulted the Internet. Unhelpfully, such items are called wood hanger bolts, wood to metal bolt hangers, machine to wood hangers, threaded screw bars amongst other interesting names. Proving just how useless this information was, the people at the builders' merchant had not the first clue what I was banging on about and I had to describe what I wanted, instead. They did not have any.

Consulting the Internet again, there was just one shop in Penzance that had the type of screw/bolt I was looking for, but it was the wrong size. I would have to order the items from some online store along with drill bits of the appropriate size when I had established what the appropriate size actually was. In whatever case, I was not going to be able to do the work today. Had I not feared for my new knee, I would have kicked the cat or, failing to find one, some equally soft and available butt of my ire.

I had calmed sufficiently by the time I reached Mother to have given up on my spleen venting. Besides, Mother would have kicked back and harder. Instead, I had formulated a plan to install the 12 volt wiring in the cabin. It was not quite as pressing as sorting out the camera pole but would need to be done, nevertheless. All I would need to do was to collect a small hammer, my crimper for the battery end terminals and a pair of wire cutters from the store room where they had rested since the beginning of the year and the completion of the greenhouse. The drum of cable and the cable clips were already in the cabin.

The day had blossomed since first thing. There was plenty of cloud about but also plenty of brightness and very little in the way of wind. It was just the sea that was misbehaving today and in a very big way. All day, huge waves were pounding across the bay and descending into chaos in the last fifty metres in the run up to the beach. The noise was terrific. When I crossed the car park with the girls in the morning, a particularly big lump caught the footings of Pedn-men-du and sent up an explosion of white water rocketing skywards. It was most impressive and would obviously not have happened at all if I had my camera pointing in that direction at the time.

It was equally glorious up at The Farm. I had downgraded some of my layers because I had decided to wear DIYman overalls. Even then, I lasted five minutes in the cabin before stripping back to just a t-shirt. It was not the hardest or most satisfying job in the world, tacking five metres of cable to the wall. It took half an hour, and I crimped the appropriate terminals onto the battery end. The Missus offered to do the scrabbling under the sink but that would have to wait until the new Power over Ethernet box comes.

I had taken the girls up with me for a run around. They were slightly less animated than they might have been if the Missus was there, but they had a good nose about and I lost contact with them several times as they fearlessly explored deep down the field. The Missus loves being up here in the season away from it all. I reflected just

how lucky we were to have such a place to retire to whenever we felt like it – well, almost.

When I returned, the Missus and Mother were ensconced in the shop decorating the last of the colour themed trees for across the road. They had commenced when I brought Mother over after my failed trip to the builders' merchant and carried on until late in the afternoon. I spent the time trying to crack the problem of being able to see outside camera feed from the Internet – that turned out to be futile and frustrating in equal measure.

The response I had from the camera people was that I needed to manually set a filter that allowed the camera's outside IP address through my router. I looked up how to do this on the router's instruction manual – yes, I actually read the manual. It struck me much later after I had given up the night, that the filter must actually exist for the other app that we have to function. Networks were never in my field of expertise when I was working in the industry. Of course, I needed to know quite a lot about how they work, but clearly not enough. I have not given up completely. I will try again when the urge to throw my computer out of the window passes.

To clear my foggy brain, I took the girls out for a late afternoon run. It was fast becoming gloomy at half past four o'clock in the afternoon but there was plenty of beach to cavort on. What I had not realised was that it was national go for a quick dip in the raging broth of the Harbour time. Three people came down separately for a 30 second splash about. We knew two of them and stopped for a chat while they fussed the girls. I seemed terribly over-dressed.

At that time, the sea was starting to relax a little as the tide receded. It was still big and scary but not as big and scary as it was halfway through the afternoon. Just the sort of sea state for you to grab your surfboard and head well out the back off Gwenver for a photo shoot. It resulted in someone enjoying a relaxing drink at the Surf Lodge becoming rightly quite concerned and calling it in to the Coastguard.

My pager is not currently on, but my mobile telephone gets the alert. At three in the afternoon, I suspected that we would not attract a huge number of responders, so I went over to see what was on. I knew that there would be no major rush to launch the boat once the reason for the call was established. It was quickly determined who the surfer was – an experienced local – and it was also noted that he was paddling out further, not in toward the shore – so, clearly not in distress. If we had launched the big boat, we would not have been able to recover it due to the sea state. It was a case of watching and assessing.

It would be easy to say that the surfer should not have been there certainly he should not. We do not know if it was the surfer or the local, well-known professional photographer at fault – who encouraged who. The resulting photographs would be dramatic and valuable to various surfing magazines. If they had informed the Coastguard of their intentions, they would have been told not to go and if they

insisted, it is likely that the Coastguard would have put the Cliff Team and the Lifeboat on standby anyway. The result being not different to the Cliff Team and the Lifeboat being alerted because someone called it in. The surfer would almost certainly have assessed the conditions to be well within their capability, so would not see that he did anything wrong.

As I stood with the Crew across the road, watching, the only other oppo present asked what I was doing there. I told him, trying not to be noticed. Then he asked where my stick was, so I told him that had I brought it, I would have been noticed. I am sure the Institution would have frowned upon my presence, but I could have operated the winch at least if blind eyes were turned, and we were in a pinch. As it turned out, the surfer paddled into shore having not surfed a single wave – mainly as there was not a single wave to be surfed – and the crew that should have been there were stood down. We are, after all, a very blind-eyed, very excellent Shore Crew.

December 13th – Saturday

It is about the third day in a row of fair weather without rain. It looks like we have been sitting under a ridge of high pressure that I had not been bothered to check. Frankly, I have to go out with the girls every now and then and I do not have any major outdoor event planned, so I am really not that concerned. I am sure I would get to know if it was about to get seriously unpleasant – it would look like it through the window.

ABH is really not bothered about the early morning walks these last weeks. It seems she would rather stay in bed. BB, on the other hand, loves her walks out and is first in the queue – if queue there is – to have her harness fitted. When it gets so late that we are in danger of mucking up the timing of subsequent walks in the day, I have to resort to underhand tactics. At present, knocking on the glass of the front door is infallible. There again, slamming the cover of the letter box used to be infallible, too. I am running out of infallible options.

We were able to get to the beach for the first time in a week for our first walk. It seemed to discombobulate both girls for they walked around aimlessly for ten minutes before ABH decided that it was time to go home.

I must confess there was a lot of behind scratching during the morning. I knew exactly what I had intended to do today and every fibre of my being was resisting – and winning. The pile of unsorted invoices has been taunting me for more than a week. The end of the quarter was thirteen days ago. It will take an hour or so to sort the invoices into date order and probably a day or two of concentration to input them. So far it had taken thirteen days to take the box off the top of the printer so that I can open it and take the invoices out.

There were things that I just needed to do before I started. First, breakfast then talking the girls out again, then trying again to get the network to play nicely with the

CCTV cameras. Finally, because time was pressing, I took the girls out again. We had to walk around the block because the tide was in. Today, the sea was much more user friendly and was not racing up the beach nor was it quite so bang and crashy in the bay, although it was throwing itself over the Harbours wall – just not with such great force.

When we got back, the Missus had gone down to the shop to continue her work with the plastic Christmas trees. The girls settled down in mope mode because she was not upstairs with them and I ran out of excuses on the invoice front. It was the most concentration that I have had to apply since the last time I had to apply such concentration, and it was very tiring. I finished, probably 100 to 120 invoices and collapse in a heap on the sofa for a rest. I would have started the inputting, but I could not fathom how to set the very clever stamping machine.

We use a numbering convention that indicates the year and quarter in three digits, followed by a sequential number. I used to write the number at the top of each invoice. Since the Missus has been doing it, we have the machine. The very clever stamp allows for the static first three digits and then increments by one the last three each time the stamp is used. I have no idea how to change the numbers although I have looked at it with wonder for several minutes.

It occurred to me later that I could have gone back to writing the number on each invoice as I went along and stamped them later. I surmised that this was probably against convention, contravened some arcane medieval law, had some serious health and safety implications and certainly was against nature. It was all the excuse I needed to go and have a zizz.

I finished my action packed and exciting day with a further two walks of the hounds. Somewhere between them, I decided that my exhaustive efforts should be rewarded by the consumption of beer. I have no idea how the Missus got on.

December 14th – Sunday

Morning seemed to take forever to arrive today. It was very dark for much longer in my estimation and it took a while to get ABH interested in going out. BB was stalking me from the moment I got up.

When we eventually broke out it was into what appeared to be the most dismal day we have had in a while. It was a good few degrees colder, although I did not check the reality of it, and a bit of a breeze was blowing in from somewhere – I did not check that, either. It was the sort of day for just taking things at face value because it really did not matter much at all.

What did matter was letting the dogs off the lead onto a near empty beach and having BB run off toward a couple on the western slip. They walked up towards us

after making a fuss of the little girl and I met them halfway across and down the slip. They warned that there was a seal tucked up behind the western slip and asked if the dogs would be alright off the lead. It was quite the politest approach, and I really should have taken note of how it was put. I was not in the least offended because it was not in the least offensive, but I knew what they meant.

He was right that not only would the hounds have potentially disturbed the seal, but the seal could have hurt the hounds. BB especially, who has no fear, would have gone in to play with a new friend and would have been in harm's way of being given a very nasty bite. ABH, I think would have stood off and barked, the wuss. Either, neither girl was aware of the seal's presence, or they just did not care because they just stood and waited at my side of the western slip. I promptly hooked them both back onto their leads. We did have a quick circuit of the beach but there was not a great deal of point in being there on the lead, so I took them up the slip and around the block.

The next major milestone of the day was to make the Christmas shoot pasties ready for the club and for that I waited patiently for the telephone call. While I did so I prepared a message for the CCTV camera company who were helping me with the access issue I was having. I had made some serious changes to the router in an attempt to make the access work and in doing so affected some of its other functions. I thought that it might have done, but I needed to test some theories and I could not do so without making the changes.

Having gathered the information I needed to send to the company, I decided to revert all the changes I had made to get full function of the router back. I was in the process of doing so when the shooting club secretary called to give the one hour warning I requested. I was very fortunate that the call came through because, halfway through resetting my changes, I had inadvertently blocked all calls. Fortunately, we have a second telephone system that comes in on another route, and the call come through on that. I would have missed it else.

During the summer, the firing point was extended and largely rebuilt. It had been talked about for a couple of years, and I was looking forward to seeing it. Having heated the pasties and bagged them up, I drove up for the first time since just before we opened the shop. The tail end of the morning shoot was still going on, so most people were engaged in activities or watching. I had not expected a big social gathering and had not intended to stay long, just make the delivery and leave. It gave me the opportunity to have a good look at the renewals and my what a job they have done. The firing point is twice the depth allowing for proper places to sit or stand and wait while firing is in progress. The roof has been extended so that the club house is integral and proper concrete steps up to it have been installed. It is really very impressive and it clearly helps to have a builder in the club and other appropriate skills available.

I went on from there to Tesmorburys – yes, I know. My excuse is that the little dears had run out of food at home and needed supplies. We thought we could wait until Monday but last night they had a food fest that wiped out the last of the supplies. It would not have waited another day. Since I was there, I also purchased some razor cartridges for my razor. The packet states that there was enough for eight months use but since I do not shave my entire face, the packet will last nearer two or three years.

The razor blade cartridges are expensive, there is no doubt, and they are small and easily secreted should you be the sort of person who does that sort of thing. Due to that, the Tesmorburys people put them in a security packet which, I believe, sets off an alarm at the door if someone tries to leave without paying for them. It is virtually impossible to get them out of the security case and usually, the case is removed at the checkout. Or so I had expected.

Since the queues at the checkouts with a human at the till were legion with people having huge, brimming trolleys stood waiting and looking gloomy, I elected to use the self-checkout armed with computers. I have used these before in similar circumstances but on this occasion, I was concerned that I might need to visit the ordinary tills to have my razor blades in their security container dealt with. Fortunately, there were several employees milling about the self-checkouts helping people use them and correcting errors, so I collared one and asked about my purchase. I was told that it would go through the self-checkout without a problem, which it did and that it would not set off an alarm at the door, which it did not. Hoorah, I thought.

I collected Mother on the way back. She was coming to stay just a week after going home. The F&L has over several months been running quizzes, occasionally to the benefit of the Crew Fund which the Missus maintains. The fund pays for aspects of the Christmas Party, the beach barbeques, vittles for the crew if they have been out on excessively long services and a few beers now and again on special occasions. It is nothing to do with the Institution, just a comfort fund for the boys and girls of the crews. The organiser of the quiz wrote to the Missus a while back and suggested that we might attend one of the events and we thought it churlish to refuse, despite not having attended an alehouse in the normal run of things for several years.

The original plan was to take Mother, and we would eat at the F&L ahead of the party. As it worked out, Mother felt a little under the weather and decided to stay at home. Had we thought about it, we would have stayed at home, too, for the meal and head up later for the quiz. We did not think about it, so abandoned Mother and the girls and headed up without her.

We had not been to an alehouse or restaurant for anything other than crew events since before the dreaded lurgi. There are several good reasons for this, one of them being the Missus cooks better meals than we can generally get if we go out – I can

qualify that, but I will not bother – and another is seven pounds a pint. The latter I regard as wholly unnecessary.

There is an alehouse in Sherbourne that I frequent when I visit the Aged Parent. It is called The Digby Tap and has some notoriety both locally and, once nationally. It is a dark a dingy space down a back street, stone-flagged floors, old furniture and nicotine stained ceiling that probably has not seen a cleaning product in 50 years. It only does food at dinner time and does not look like any effort has gone into making it particularly 'family friendly'. It is completely wonderful. It also sells beer for four pounds a pint in a town with a reputation for being populated with well-heeled people. It is packed every night of the week and twice on Sundays. I rest my case.

Anyway. We took ourselves off to the F&L with an open mind and for a good cause, too. We arrived at the start of tea time and there were maybe another half a dozen other local diners enjoying what looked like a decent Sunday roast. The rest of the menu was short with a few good old fashioned 'pub grub' items such as scampi and chips, chicken and chips and I had the chilli and nachos. It was what I would regard as expensive for such things but there was plenty of it and it was decent food. My beer was £6.50, which I tried very hard not to think about especially as we sell exactly the same brew in a slightly larger quantity in a tin for £1.70 in the shop.

As the time for the quiz approached, the place filled up with Lifeboat crew members and their families, all lending their support to the evening. Without our inclusion, it would have been somewhat thinly attended but it was clear that for the others there, this was a regular event, although for different causes.

We agreed as we left three hours later, that it was a perfectly pleasant night out and that we should do it some more but probably not too often.

When we arrived home and started to get settled, I realised that I had not unpacked the shopping from earlier. This was largely prompted by the girls wanting food. They have been ravenous for the last few days for some reason which is why I went shopping in the first place. At the bottom of the bag I came upon the razor cartridges, still in their security container. I have no idea how to get them out.

December 15th – Monday

Well, that seemed like an idea place to take a break. I had reached the end of September, invoice number 109 in my bid to input all the quarter three invoices by the end of the day.

It had served to take my mind off the initial bout of poor weather we had been allocated early in the day. In fact, it had started last night accompanied by a weather warning for the stuff and it was just getting into its stride while I sought to sort out the wheelie bins. I had noticed that someone had been staying in the one and only remaining council tax paying property in the mews behind us. I used to have to drag

down three or four bins each Monday for them to be emptied. After the much maligned council's purge on holiday lets using its bin emptying services, I now only look after one. Even then, it rarely needs emptying. I checked it last night and whoever had stayed the weekend had not used the bin.

For the last several weeks, the bin men have been arriving halfway through the afternoon. I was not letting that lull me into a false sense of security so that I could get away with filling our own bin halfway through the morning. The general waste collectors came through early doors this morning. Good job I was on the ball.

The girls were not at all impressed with heading out in the rain first thing. There was no point in pursuing an adventure on the beach; verily it tippeth down. I could just see them turning around as soon as I let them off their leads and heading for home. It really was quite the heaviest rain that we had been out in recently. In fact, I could not remember the last time they had suffered so. I was alright with my Vaseline covered knee deflecting the rain before it got within a foot of my leg.

Fortunately, the Missus was up when I came back. I was trying to work out how I would remove the girls' coats, my own coat and shoes and dry them before letting them loose. They would automatically, no matter how wet they were, have run headlong into the bedroom and launched themselves at the sleeping Missus. That indeed was the plan had the Missus not been up already.

I had seen the rain warning in place from last night and rather assumed the rain would continue for the rest of the day. So too had the forecasters but when I looked at the rain radar a little way into the morning, the chances were that the rain would stop imminently, which it did.

The rest of the day was chilly and damp. It was certainly that we when went out again halfway through the day. Yesterday, the temperature had lifted midway through the day, and it was reasonably temperate. Today, we were back down a degree or so and the wind had shifted 180 degrees and was in the northwest, although it was hardly more than a light breeze by the time it got there.

Shortly after having consumed my breakfast, I reasoned that I had procrastinated enough and that I should make a fist of inputting the invoices. I has asked the Missus to fix the stamping machine last night, which she had done, so I no longer had that for an excuse. There was nothing for it but to open the online accounting package and plough into them. Oh, what utter joy.

I think that yesterday I had estimated less than 150 invoices. I was just a little short of 300 when I had finished the last one just ahead of teatime. I had only slackened for a short time to take the girls out but otherwise has immersed myself in my task from start to finish. Just when I thought that I had finished, I remembered to messy, small receipts that need to be input. These, from post office transactions and petrol fillings are small scraps of paper that I keep in an envelope. They are a veritable pain

in the bottom. We only claim fifty percent of the fuel VAT which needs to be calculated, and the receipts are often too small to use the stamp on. Thankfully, there are not that many.

Just as I was nearing the end I realised that we did not have a lever arch file to put them in. Apparently, there are some at The Farm. To save me a journey, the Missus said that she had seen some at the back of the store room in the shop. I ventured down to have a geek but discovered that they were in use with documentation that we needed to keep. I agonised over it for a short time before transferring the paperwork into an envelope and promising myself I would find another file and put them back again – probably sometime in the next decade and only after tearing the place apart looking for the paperwork in a file that I had forgotten I put in an envelope.

That is not the end of it, as I have to gather statements and create a financial summary for the accountant. It would, however, do for now because at present I do not want to see another invoice for the foreseeable future nor hole-punch a piece of paper. Time for bed where I will dream about bleddy invoices and hole-punching sheets of paper.

December 16th – Tuesday

I had to man-up for my physiotherapy appointment today. Do some early limbering up and lumbering down. Now I am past the six week mark, the exercises have changed and are more manly: squats, bridge, hip abduction and that old favourite, standing on one leg – it does not say I should whistle Dixie. Perhaps I should whistle Dixie. Mind, I could not do standing on one leg when both legs were in good health. I mentioned that to the physiotherapist lady when she asked me to demonstrate and promptly fell over – sorry, I did the falling over and she did the asking.

I also asked about getting back to being a very excellent Shore Crew and she had said, go ahead everything will be groovy. She did not, but it is a mere detail, I am sure. I am certain that is what she meant. The last crucial question that had bothered me from the outset was, apart from the one about playing the violin, would I be able to kneel again.

Clearly, being devout and once an award-winning genuflector, I was anxious to get down on it again. The Missus had said, kneeling was out forever. I consulted the Internet, half of which said kneeling may be possible, some with caveats that it may be uncomfortable or induce agonising rollings around on the floor and being unable to get up ever again. Then another cohort that said, you must be kidding, kneeling is for wusses anyway. The physiotherapist came down on the never again side, which was rather disappointing. She said the patella – which I thought was a Spanish fish stew - would rub against the ironworks above it. I will have a last ditch ask of the consultant, because I thought that I also had a plastic kneecap and a ceramic knee.

He should know because he put them there. I will brush up on my Polish ahead of the call.

After an appointment of mixed fortunes – I do not need to go again – I am not sure whether that is because I no longer need guidance and instruction or whether she just did not want to see me again. I will go with the former, just for peace of mind. Anyway, afterwards we repaired to town as we had run out of white pepper.

We use rather a lot. We have a catering container of it which we had recently emptied. Tesmorburys only do it in small quantities at an exorbitant price and even at the cash and carry it is £16 for a similarly sized jar to the one we have. The Weigh Inn in Causeway Head in town is the ideal place for such things, they sell it loose along with most other things that can be sold that way: oats, grains, rices, nuts, flour, pulses and spices. They also provide very pleasant conversation while the lady was spooning in the pepper and trying not to sneeze during which I admired their very pink till. That very pink till – I now want one – registered a total sale price of £8.50 for a full container. Aye thang yew.

We made a swift exit from the car park which is just around the corner from the shop. Well, we would have made a swift exit if it did not take some people five minutes to manoeuvre into a wide space, forwards and for another car to pull out of a space ahead of us without signalling and without looking. We had to reverse to avoid being clouted as she sought to compound the misdemeanour by reversing onto us, again without looking. Other than that, it was a swift exit and return home.

By the time we arrived home, it was time to take the girls around with my newly signed off knee – sort of. I have been flying solo for around a week now and even up and down the slipway, I am without sticks. I will hang onto them until after Christmas and then they must be sent back to a depot in Bodmin. Mind, I will be going that was in January, so I shall enquire about dropping them off.

I had to thought to look in at the beach to see if it was free to run about on now. For our morning run out I was in the process of taking BB off the lead at the top of the slip but her urgent body language that she had spotted a 'friend' to go and play with alerted me to look up. There not five metres away was yet another bleddy seal pup. There were acres of pristine sand to run about on only we could not use it.

I had not bothered to call in the seal from two days ago on the premise that it had lugged itself 50 metres up the beach and looked quite hale. I noticed later that someone else had called it in and the British Divers had taken it away announcing that it was a bit unweight. Having got it wrong last time, I called this one in when we got back from our circuit of our end of The Cove. The very pleasant lady on the telephone told me that it indeed sounded fit and healthy and I should not have bothered to call it in. Harrumph.

The bloody thing was still there when I came back from the physiotherapist. It was less of a disappointment this time as the tide was in and we could not use the beach anyway.

I indicated yesterday that there were still things to do for our quarter end accounts. One of those was to update the sales figures for the last couple of months of opening from the book that the Missus maintains. I dutifully, updated my spreadsheet with her numbers until I got to 29th October, four days before we closed. I had to ask the Missus and she reminded me that she had done the till up to as close to closing as she could so that we could bank the cash before we went away to have my dickie knee undickied. The paperwork I needed to complete the sales figures was in the shop but as time was pressing for my appointment, I decided to get them in the afternoon.

It took until halfway into the afternoon to eventually get down to the shop. In between I had to squeeze in dog walks, taking a parcel to the post office and collecting items on a shopping list when the Missus discovered I was heading out. It did not leave me a lot of time to get the sales figures done, download the statements, extract the online sales figures. Did you know, dear reader, that we have an online shop where you might be tempted to purchase all manner of delectable delights. There is a button next to The Diary on the website home page. I will have to finish it off tomorrow. I just thought that I would mention it.

Mother was clearly feeling much more spry today and announced that she would go back home today. We had stopped off at her bungalow to put the heating on coming back from Penzance. The Missus spent the afternoon rearranging the furniture in the living room and putting finishing touches to the Christmas decorations. We have the in-laws and Mother coming over for Christmas and she makes this effort each year.

I did various things during the afternoon to push forward humanity but for the life of me, I cannot remember what they were. What I did not do was get to the shop to make it ready for opening on Saturday – three days away, eek – nor did I compile my list for the cash and carry. I shall be a busy boy tomorrow.

Part of my great works were receiving a message from the electricity people regarding the installation of our smart meters. I think I explained that the only reason that I took the decision to have them was so that we could claim for the solar electricity that we send to The Grid that was rather more than I imagined we would. It will be very worthwhile claiming it. While sending information to the electricity people that they had asked for I enquired how these units would send their data back to our electricity provider. I was concerned that they would need to use our computer network.

I was assured that the digital metres were completely autonomous from our network and they would use 3G or 4G mobile telephone signals instead. I do hope that the boxes have an easily readable display as well because the likelihood of then

communication with anything the other side of our two feet thick granite walls is exceedingly remote. Not that I mind, but I think I will be submitting monthly readings manually for the foreseeable future.

It had been an utterly glorious day, not that I had much time to enjoy it. There had been a Lifeboat exercise mooted but cancelled early on when the swell unexpectedly increased. It was fair banging in on the roll up to high water in the afternoon. The clear skies allowed the temperature to dip a bit further and by nightfall, it was quite the chilliest it had been for a while. We are warned of rain for the next couple of days. Sod it.

December 17th – Wednesday

I could have stayed in bed just a little longer this morning. The girls were not in the least bothered about it and it was cold and, I imagined, damp. Niggling at the back of my mind, however, was a raft of things that needed doing and the fact that in just three days, the shop was open. I got up.

Alright, it was my fault that today I had decided to have eggs and smoked salmon on toast which takes a little longer to prepare than the normal stale bread and water that I have. The gathering of the statements and the concluding of the finances took far longer than I had hoped. Our personal bank – I still have to submit statements from my person account – had decided since the end of last quarter to ‘improve’ its online banking facility. I used to be able to specify a start and end date that gave me all the transactions in that period in a single file. The ‘improvement’ is that I can no longer do that and must download individual months separately.

When I had finished the work and pleasure bits, it was nigh on dinner time. I had yet to make the journey to our cash and carry the wrong side of Camborne – just - to get the few necessities I had yet to specify for the shop. I had been meaning to write my list, checking it twice, for a couple of days, so I forced myself to go downstairs and make a start on it. We did not need much. The Christmas opening is a threadbare thing of smoke and mirrors. We will have the essentials but no frills. Currently, my mindset is in shop closed mode and it is very difficult to concentrate on what needs doing and when. For example, it was the middle of last night that I woke white and sweating that I had not ordered pasties (sorry, MS) for the weekend. I was panicked unnecessarily, but I had not made a mental note to order them on Thursday morning, my last opportunity to do so.

Armed with my list, I headed off to town. I had one false start when I realised that the girls needed to go out before I left, so I was once again delayed leaving. The last coffee that I made for the Missus highlighted that not only had we run out of whitener – we buy it in sacks from the cash and carry, she drinks a lot of coffee – but also coffee. It is available only in Tesmorburys, unfortunately, so I arranged to stop there on my way out.

It was a further delay that I could have done without and eventually made it to the cash and carry in the middle of the afternoon.

It was quite the muckiest day we have had for some time. The weather warning was from ten o'clock in the morning which I had confused with the onset of rain. It was raining when I took the girls out first thing, which was a disappointment. It was even more upsetting that with a wide open beach and no seal to spoil our fun, it would be no fun going down to the beach in the tipping rain. We walked a half way around the block and went straight home again.

While the rain eased a little in The Cove in the middle of the morning, it was followed by a constant mizzle. I made the mistake of taking the girls out and spurning the use of waterproof trousers. I was damp through when I eventually got into the truck and headed east. The mizzle in Penzance was considerably thicker and under the weight of the hefty breeze from somewhere in the south, it was smoking across Tesmorburys car park. It got worse the further east I ventured. By the time I got to the cash and carry car park, while the rain was not torrential, a day more dark and dismal you would not wish to countenance.

With my knee feeling much more ordinary, I do tend to forget that there are still limitations. I would maintain a robust defence that the walk from the car park to most of the shops at the lower end of Causeway Head, where I was shopping yesterday, was less far than the distance from the Tesmorburys entrance to the coffee section. I had to do it twice because I had purchased the wrong thing and had to go back to change it. By the time I had finished walking around the cash and carry – I had to go all the way around because they had changed it since I was last there and nothing was where it used to be – I was feeling exceedingly weary. I was quite looking forward to getting home for a rest but then I remembered that I would have to unload the truck.

There was not a huge amount to unload but with the shop being full of half empty boxes of decorations, I struggled to find somewhere to put it all. I concluded I was in no fit state to put it away as well, so I left that for another day and went and put the truck up in the RNLI car park. It was as I mounted the steps on the way back that I noted that it was nearly time to take the girls around again. I will be glad to open the shop for a break.

I gingerly reminded the Missus about sending Christmas cards at the start of the week. I made sure Mother was there so that I could hide behind her. I was told, shortly, that I had now told her and not to mention it again. I did not. At the end of the day today there was still no sign of Christmas cards even being in evidence let alone being written and I fear that we have now missed the boat – again.

It is no surprise. What with Carols in The Cove, a long bout of poorliness, doing seven Christmas trees, organising the Lifeboat Christmas party, organising for the arrival of family over Christmas, the shop opening and some bloke with a dickie knee

getting in the way, doing Christmas cards kind of fell by the wayside. Apologies to those of you who might have expected one – you will be disappointed, possibly again, this year. It is clearly difficult for those who are not the other reader who will never get the message and now think we are very rude or have forgotten and abandoned them. Sorry, but we have – abandoned you, that is. For those of you saying, ‘cannot a grumpy shopkeeper step in and lend a hand?’, do not go there. Just do not.

Instead, I gave another try and getting the mobile telephone app to see our CCTV cameras at the behest of the support person at the camera company. I cannot help but think we are heading up blind alley, but I will comply with the instructions for now. I must hope that our support person knows when he has exhausted his reserve of knowledge and knows when to escalate. It reminded me also that I have not yet ordered the hanging bolts I was after. I shall add it to the list of things to do tomorrow, which is already lengthy.

December 18th – Thursday

They say the darkest hour is right before the dawn.

Bob Dylan was almost certainly standing in our porch at half past four on a winter’s morning when he wrote that line. I found myself in the exact same position at the exact same time, letting one or it might have been both girls out into the roof garden. My, I am not sure that I have seen it so dark. It was impenetrable and you could not see through it, either. It was like someone had dropped a big black curtain at the end of the roof. Of course, someone might have dropped a big black curtain at the end of the roof. I did not think to check.

It was much lighter when I took the girls around at late o’clock this morning. There was no surprise that it was late o’clock because they had been up and out just a few hours earlier. It was light enough to see that the rain was coming down in big heavy raindrops – lots of them. We were not out very long, and we all came back soaked, although the girls were a little more soaked than I was, I suppose. I did not need to be dried off with a hair drier, for instance.

The weather forecast had the geet lump of rain that was giving us all the problems as hanging about all day. When I looked at the rain radar to see the truth of the matter, it was indeed a geet lump of rain and we were about halfway through it. It covered an area the size of the greater South West. That was quite big enough.

With now just two days until shop opening, it was probably a good plan to get cracking on the shop. The Missus had vouched safe to clear all her decorations but given that was a couple of days ago and they were still there, I thought that I had better do it myself. I even got a blessing to do so and to squeeze them into as few boxes as possible and in random order. Even then, the number of boxes and loose decorations left over would never find room in the shop and leave me sufficient

space to open. Well, we could have opened, but nobody would have been able to get in.

We thought to put as much as we could into the back of the truck and anything left over could be squeezed into the end of the store room, provided that I would not need anything from back there during the opening hours over Christmas. The one thing preventing that was the box that the five additional plastic Christmas trees had come in. Very sensibly, the Missus wanted to keep it intact so that she could stow the trees away once we had finished with them. The problem was that the box was bloody huge and filled the back of the truck all by itself.

The original plan had been to take it to The Farm temporarily but that had not yet happened. It had been in the back of the truck before I went to the cash and carry, and I had to take it out to get the cash and carry good in. The only thing to do was to take it and anything else that needed to go to The Farm there first then fill the truck with everything else. So, I did just that. It was another reason why I miss not having a van.

The lane to The Farm was a lot wetter than when I went up the last time. The flooding alongside the tennis courts – apologies, dear reader, I said it was the tip last time – was back with a bit of a vengeance. Not a problem for the truck and probably not for a van either at this stage of the winter. I was only up at The Farm for ten minutes then on my way back with a bit more room in the back.

I would have appreciated a bit of a sit down at this stage as I had been on my feet for quite a while. I considered that I would be on my feet a lot longer from Saturday, so I pulled the truck up outside the shop and collected as many boxes and bags of decorations as I could squeeze into the back. I then considered it time to go and put my feet up for ten minutes having put the truck back into the car park.

Earlier in the day, I ran another test for our CCTV camera man who had been helping us try and fix the problem that we cannot see the cameras while not at the property. The problem had presumably persisted since they were reinstalled after the building works. I assumed, but could not remember for sure, that they were working prior to that. The last trial I was asked to complete did not fix the problem, so there was only one thing left that we had not tried: completely reset the cameras to factory settings and reinstall them using the software. It worked.

It was probably the first thing that we should have tried, in retrospect. I should have known better even if our support man did not. It has cleared the way for purchasing replacements for The Farm. The outdoors 4G wifi box arrived yesterday. It is about three times the size that it looked on the Internet. The Power over Ethernet box arrived, too. That is three times smaller than it looked on the Internet, so I suppose that evens things out. I will not be able to do anything about them now until we close the shop at the outset of the new year. It will be my first post operative project and a good trial of the versatility of my new knee.

The coming days, from Saturday, will be a good trial of the resilience of my new knee when I have to stand up for nine hours. If I have got this wrong, and I cannot stand for nine hours, I will be able to change my mind 12 days later. In other words, hard luck. I am sure it will be fine and I have a stool I can sit on in the shop if need be. Else, I will just tuck my ankle behind my ear to give it a rest. Anyway, we have to open on Saturday because I remembered to order the pasties (sorry, MS) and they will be delivered tomorrow morning. I had toyed with the idea of ordering the milk as well, but I think I will leave that for Saturday morning.

Having taken my statutory ten minutes rest, I returned to the fray. This was moving all the movable display items – the ball stand, net bucket, postcard and sunglasses rotating displays and the windbreak stand – back to their normal resting place. Each year I promise myself that I will mark the floor where they normally sit so that I know where to return them to. Each year, without fail, I forget and the Missus moves them all down the shop to make space to work on Christmas decorations. I know roughly where they go but I always am left with the impression that I had more space previously.

I definitely had more space previously this year. There are the Christmas tree and decorations that did not make it to the fuel store roof at the Lifeboat station this year. I ran out of space in the truck and the store room so they are stuck cluttering where the newspapers normally go. It makes passage through the gap a little challenging for the larger shopper. At least we have some seasonal cheer inside the shop as the grumpy shopkeeper will not be providing any.

The other cheer we were expecting during the day was a delivery from our wine merchant. We had run down our stock quite successfully at the end of the season and now we were a little short. It is not that I expect to sell a great deal, but Mother's wine was almost out. I was close to finishing my work and it was almost dark, the girls needed taking around and the wine delivery had not arrived. I had failed to point out that the shop was closed and while I had been around all day, I had no idea if they had arrived and made the assumption no one was in or they were running late.

Happily, the delivery driver called to apologise for his tardiness, but he was seasonally very busy. I told him that I was grateful for the call as now I knew when he was turning up and that I had not missed him. I was able to take the girls around and meet the driver on my return. I will have to price and put the bottles away tomorrow, but that is no great hardship.

We were fortunate indeed that the rain here had stopped roughly in the middle of the day. It stopped at about the exact time that I needed to take our welcome mat out and give it a good beating. I think I have mentioned before just how much dust and sand it takes on between beatings and today was no different. All the robust breeze was in the south today and there was nothing in The Cove to take the clouds of

choking dust away when I thumped it. I had to endure being cloaked in it, although beating seven shades out of a rug is quite therapeutic.

The rest of the day was largely dry in a not raining sense but grey, damp and uninviting. The rain, in the form of a heavy, wind-blown mizzle chose the exact moment that I chose to take the girls around in the middle of the day to make a reprise. I had initially thought that it was spray; the waves were making a stupendous display out of thumping into Pedn-men-du and shooting up maybe seventy or eighty feet in the air. By the time we got to the end of Coastguard Row and the wet was still following us, it was clear it was coming from further up in the sky.

We had made it to the beach for a short while today. The sea was raging then, too, and the waves were running up the beach at us. Sometimes, the big waves rolling across the bay that we can see from the beach look slow and majestic as they run in. Today, they were racing and tumbling as they went with some force and ferocity. I am sure you do not need to be told that later in the time they were fair banging over the Harbour wall and up the cliffs opposite and Cowloe was jumping with crashing waves and white water in turmoil. Lifeboat training was cancelled.

As things calmed in the hold from manic cleaning and tidying, the Missus tells me that she will send cards celebrating the new year this year. Happily, if these arrive in March, they will still not be too late.

December 19th – Friday

D-day minus one. I forget how much effort is required to get all the cogs of shop running turning in complementary unison. I spent most of the day in the shop cleaning shelves, cleaning and working out which fridges we needed on and working out orders. The orders were the last thing, the first was the pasties delivery (sorry, MS).

I was not going to miss our man this week. I did not want him banging on the door again and giving the girls a false alarm of going out. I have to be sparing of my knocks on the door because sooner or later it will cease to bring ABH running when I want to take her out. Our man was a little later than I had anticipated but I expect things are getting a little busier now and there will be other shops like us, opening ahead of the Christmas week.

Having dispensed with pasties, I was free to take the girls out. It was a very fine day in prospect, but it was some chilly out first thing. It did not improve a great deal over the course of the day, either, and I found myself having to wrap up against it. The breeze was not in our faces again but there was enough of it seeping in from somewhere in the south to make itself felt in The Cove.

We were able to make two forays to the beach today, first thing and in the middle of the day. I am very wary of the potential for seals being on the beach now. I noted some tracks at the bottom of the slip first thing and scanned the slipway for a body. They blend in quite well and as the girls were being as cautious about going down as I was, made sure I had looked at every inch of the slipway – twice. The tracks were clearly from early when the tide was higher and the beast had thankfully come and gone.

On both occasions the girls' performance was a bit lacklustre. Sometimes they tear around the beach like mad things for ages. I am happy to wait. It might be the cold, but they seem less inclined to run at all and when they do, it is not for very long. In the end I take them up the western slip and around the block. There are usually a few cars and a few people about after a midday galivant, but we are firmly on our own in the mornings.

After a breakfast of left-over, a welcome break from cold gruel, I repaired to the shop to spend most of the rest of the morning and some of the afternoon doing stuff. I have said before that being in the shop brings on a different mindset – I am in grumpy shopkeeper mode. Organising the orders for the following day was almost reflex while I stood behind the counter or in front of the relevant fridge. I am utterly lost and have to concentrate very hard if I try and do the same upstairs. I find that most curious, although perhaps not surprising. Even then, I almost forgot the potatoes.

The other thing that I quickly discovered is that most of our suppliers are shutting down, not only over the normal Christmas days but the weekend as well. I can understand that it is the proximity of the holidays to the weekend, but that weekend is likely to be our busiest. The only exception is our milkman who seems almost never to take a break, but all the other suppliers will be closed until the Monday.

I can work around this for pasties as I can freeze cooked ones for use later or bake frozen ones. Things like scones and cakes have sufficient shelf life to last the period but fresh bread is a real problem. As you might be aware, we use the services of a multi-award winning local baker. The bread is top quality but the freshest delivery before Christmas will not last until the end of the weekend. I had toyed with the idea of ordering extra and freezing it, but the stated dates would all be wrong. I will put a notice up to see if anyone wants to order and freeze their own or, indeed, we could freeze it for them. Otherwise, it will be 'plastic bread' only for that weekend.

I did my rounds more than once checking for things I might have forgotten. As I did so I topped up the drinks and beer fridges and in doing so noted that I had forgotten to buy more Guinness. We have an abundance of beer, which is why I ignored the beer cupboard when I was writing my list. Even checking it twice failed to alert me to my grievous omission. Sadly, Guinness drinkers, it is too late now.

The Missus sloped off in the early part of the afternoon to collect Mother and to go shopping for the last bits for the Christmas party and all the vegetables for our own Christmas with the family. I am very pleased to report that she went to a local independent greengrocery store for the latter. We have a very good one – in two shops, one in town and the other in the trading estates. The produce is fresher and local where possible and much cheaper pound for pound than Tesmorburys.

I had taken a small zizz in the afternoon in her absence after walking the girls. It was either that or leaving them on their own for an extended time. They are very good on their own but we do not resort to it unless we have to. That is my excuse for an afternoon zizz. I am sure you have your own, dear reader.

On her return, the Missus spent the entirety of her time making preparations for the Christmas party – except when she was cooking tea. I was about to say that will be the end of events for a while, but we have Christmas to get through, then clearing away the decorations. Then there is the stock take and then ...

December 20th – Saturday

Another day, another bleddy seal. Except we did not see this one until the very end of our beach fun.

I had taken the precaution to set an alarm for this morning. I did not need it. The girls had, for some reason, a disturbed night and had not long resettled when I got up. They were not interested in the least about leaving the bed for a good hour or so after I got up. BB was a little more inquisitive and came out a couple of times to see if we were going out but soon went back to bed again.

We were closing in on my having to go down to the shop when I eventually got them out. I had already been down to put out the outside display – you can never be too sure when you might go selling windbreaks. In fact, it was the noise from that which had them out of bed in the first place.

The beach was smooth, virgin sand when we headed down the slipway. There were no seal tracks and no signs of one on the slipway. The girls were a bit tentative but soon were chasing each other over the beach. We had been down there for twenty minutes when it seemed appropriate to head off. We were halfway across to the western slip and high up on the beach, and ABH took a few steps up towards the corner and started shouting. It was only then that I saw the dark shape of a seal nestle into the western slip wall and lying on top of some old shackles there which it blended into nicely. I think that the only reason I saw it then was that it half rolled over and flapped a lazy flipper at us. It was either 'hello' or something that the lack of fingers could not convey.

I whisked the girls away quickly and took them back home. I just had time to go back and take some photographs and call it in before we opened. The British Divers duly turned up not an hour later looking for it, but it had gone. They said that I should not be deterred in future because they would prefer to turn up unnecessarily than not be called and find out later that it would have been best if they had. The organisation is the British Divers Marine Life Rescue. The couple who turned up in pink dungarees – well, she was - looked nothing like divers, British or otherwise. Diverse, certainly, but there was not a lead boot or brass helmet between them. They could have been anyone - other than the fact they were looking for a seal.

That was the chief excitement for the morning, at least. I had plenty to do during the morning even if it was not serving customers, although I did have a couple. On day one of opening, we have to order in the full gamut of stock from bottles of milk, packs of cheese and butter, fruit, vegetables and drinks. Some need to be weighed and priced, all need to be unpacked and placed onto shelves. It takes quite some time.

The day was looking quite welcoming when the girls and I hit the beach first thing. The sky out west had a bit of cirrus cloud floating about in it but was otherwise clear. We did have that yellow tint to the morning with something weird happening to the sun in the east. Perhaps that was the harbinger of doom.

It rained a bit in the morning but in the middle of the afternoon a proper, heavy band of rain drifted up from the south and took its time moving through. It was a shame that it was not the other way around in the day because we started to see some arrivals towards the latter part of the afternoon. It certainly had better potential for business than the morning, but the rain put paid to that. The Missus cunningly waited until the rain was in full flood before taking the girls out. We clearly operate on different wavelengths.

Happily, the rain was drifting away by the early evening which was the run up to the Lifeboat Christmas party. I had to drop the Missus up at Land's End so that she could start her preparations, putting small posies on the ladies' places and setting the name cards. While she was doing that, I took the girls around to Mother's in St Buryan. She would look after them for the duration. The in-laws are there ahead of Christmas, so it was some party squeezed in to Mother's small bungalow. It would clip the girls' dashing about activities and they would have to behave.

By the time I got back, there were already people gathering. Less than half an hour later everyone had arrived and people were mingling nicely. We were called to the very professionally dressed and organised tables shortly after. What you might want to say about the Land's End experience, the hotel knows how to throw a party. There was sufficient staff to make serving smooth and efficient and no one was left with the impression of waiting for courses or for vegetable to join the main course already delivered. In short, the service was exemplary.

The meal, a choice of two meats or a vegetarian option, which came in three courses was delivered hot and the food was excellent. It was even more remarkable as Land's End have been operating out of a field kitchen since a fire destroyed the proper one back in the summer. It was the night before the ILB naming, so memorable for that alone. We enjoyed the last night that the venue was open before they closed to have the kitchen rebuild over the winter.

Eating over. The tables were cleared away to make room for a dance floor and the music started up. It was my signal to slip away quietly as my false ears preclude joining in with conversation with a lot of background noise. It was a thoroughly enjoyable evening, nonetheless, and I understand that the party went on into the night.

I drove back to St Buryan to pick up the girls then back to Land's End so that the Missus could drop me home and keep the truck for later. I was able to drive because I had not had an alcoholic drink, a first for me at any Christmas party. I shall have to make amends. The Missus rolled in very late. We will have words in the morning.

December 21st – Sunday

The weather was not quite as unkind as yesterday, although it was not far behind. At least the rain kept off while I was walking the girls again first thing and as an added bonus, there were no grey seals to bother with. I suspect we will be consigned to go around the block tomorrow as the tide was only just in our favour.

We were a bit later down there today, too. Only about ten minutes but it was a bit close to shop opening time. The only reason that I was not too bothered was that we had no deliveries we were expecting. I had already been down to put out the outside display which again got the girls out of bed so that I could take them out.

It is very easy to be lazy at this time of year in the shop with few customers to keep me alert and little in the way of imperatives to press me. It was therefore something of a feather in my cap that I got off my behind and cleared the remainder of the cash and carry order and the geet pile of drinks delivered yesterday. I also had some novelties that were in boxes and in the way that needed to go out and I did those as well. A veritable man on fire was I, for all of, possibly, the best part of an hour.

I was very mindful of the approaching deadline for ordering pasties (sorry, MS) for the next day. In fact, it was not just for the next day that concerned me, it was all the days that we would be open through to the following Monday. I had already explained that the pasty company were closing down for five consecutive days. Understandably that included Christmas Day and Boxing Day the latter of which was what would have been delivery day for the weekend. This would leave us bereft of pasties for the weekend unless I did some serious pre-planning.

All the pasties we would need until the end of Sunday next would need to be delivered on Monday and Tuesday. This clearly meant deploying my patented precision perfect pasty predictor to define exactly how many pasties we would need – including cheese ones and sausage rolls – for the five days we would not be getting deliveries. I will not go into details but clearly it involves complex mathematics, quadratic equations and the like, a fair amount of star gazing and the use of tea leaves. Usually followed with a couple of paracetamol for the headache it invariably leaves behind.

I took the number spat out by the predictor and divided it by two so that I could order half for delivery on Monday and the other half on Tuesday. Initially, I had decided to order in cooked pasties and freeze them. When we ran out of pasties today and I fell back on our frozen but uncooked stock, I changed my mind and decided to order in cases of frozen steak pasties instead. Because of the smaller numbers, the cheese pasties and the sausage rolls will still be ordered in cooked and frozen down for use later. Obviously, we will now have precisely the right number of pasties to see us through until the end of Sunday. I will then mess it all up by ordering a silly number just before we close and get left with them. Something to look forward to.

Talking of looking forward, I did a bit of laying the groundwork for getting the 4G wifi working at The Farm. As I mentioned, the first thing to do was to get the CCTV post converted to be a moveable feature. I had determined the simplest way – I thought – to do this was to install some hanger bolts so that it could be removed by undoing a few nuts. Having decided on a plan, I then discovered that I could not easily acquire the hanger bolts and would need to resort to the Internet. I had then been distracted.

Now, a week or so later and with all the kit now arrived, I thought that I had better pull my finger out and find the hardware to make it all happen. I noted that most of the immediate results pointed me at the Amazing Internet company that sells everything but is a master in none of them, so I looked further. On my second try, I found a fixings company, suggesting that they may have a clue or to about what they were selling so that if it all went wrong, I could telephone and speak to someone about it.

They were more than slightly more amazing than the Amazing Internet company in that their clever website led me from the actual hanging bolts to a tool for screwing them in, the nuts and washers I would need and the drill bits to make the holes. It was not a next day service, but I cannot use the fixings until after we close anyway, so it did not matter. Another task ticked off my list.

I had thought to progress to another unopen box, this time postcards that have sat there since the middle of November, but I was overrun with customers. Well, we had a few customers here and there and certainly more than I was expecting over this weekend. It was definitely more pasty business than I anticipated, hence the baking of some frozen stock.

The upturn was due to the arrival of Christmas visitors. The profile changes each year according to when Christmas falls during the week. Most times we are busier between Boxing Day and New Year's Day, which is why we generally do not open until as near Christmas as possible. Last year, I avoided this weekend and regretted it. This year, despite my suppressed expectations, it seems to have been the right thing to do. Many of the visitors we are seeing will leave by Saturday. It remains to be seen if we will have a large influx for New Year the following week.

With all these people around – relatively speaking – it was almost inevitable that we would have a five minutes to closing rush. We were lucky we managed to squeeze it in. It was the year's shortest day, after all. Happy Winter Solstice.

December 22nd – Monday

Our Lifeboat leader very optimistically suggested a Lifeboat launch for eleven o'clock this morning. It was optimistic for two reasons, first that the swell that had been persistent in varying degrees of ferocity over the last week would have diminished sufficiently to recover the boat and secondly, that there were enough crew who had finished work for Christmas and had not gone away. The latter worked out very well, but the persistent swell persisted and scuppered the plans from early doors today.

It was not the only disappointment of the day. I had been very much hoping that the rain that had been with us on and off for the last week or so would give us a break. The small gods of grumpy shopkeepers must have read my mind and, after a tantalising last bit of rain in the early hours of the morning, some clear skies emerged. Little white, fluffy clouds dotted the pastel blue, and some sunshine was allowed to brighten the scene. You could almost see them rolling around on the floor laughing as they replaced the rain with a chilly easterly blowing straight at me behind the counter. I had to switch on the first electric sliding door in The Cove to stop bits freezing off me.

A bit chilly it might have been, but it was a fine looking day and brought a few people out for a wander. There were quite a few out on the beach yesterday and today, under a bit of sunshine, quite a few more. There was certainly plenty of spring tide beach to be exploring and with the tide well out, the full extent of the sand scouring out was laid bare. Nearly all of the damage had been confined to the back of the beach with wide fields of rock in front of Carn Keys down to North Rocks and from The Lifeguard hut down to The Beach car park. In contrast, there seems to be much more sand on the lower reaches and the big ramp at the back of the beach has evened out. I certainly do not think that it bothered the beach wanderers much.

Those who were not parading on the beach were up with us eating pasties (sorry, MS). I had budgeted for fifteen Cornish pasties today and we sold just short of twice that. I shall be taking back my perfect pasty predictor because it clearly does not work. Alright, I might have used too many tea leaves, perhaps that was it. Anyway, it

has thrown several hamsters among the wildebeest and completely upset my carefully calculated plans to conquer the world one pasty at a time. I think I will be alright for numbers but another pastyfest like today would certainly have me a little nervous.

That swell that cancelled the Lifeboat exercise earlier paid dividends for the surfers a good bit later in the day. With the tide on the flood, there were some good breaks in the middle of the beach held up by the east breeze. There was at least a dozen keen and eager besuited players out on the waves as the light dimmed. The cloud had been rolling in from the east for a couple of hours and we found ourselves getting darker earlier than the day before. So much for the days getting longer.

At least it showed off the Christmas lights and the Christmas trees to good effect. The trees opposite are finding good use during the day as a backdrop for selfies. Like the Land's End signpost, perhaps we should be jealously guarding the trees and charging for the privilege of having a photograph taken in front of them – for charity, of course. Well, some of it.

I had imagined, or perhaps hoped, that the lightshow that the Missus' humble one tree beginnings a few years ago has spawned would foster a drive for others along the front to join in and add their own. It seems to have had the opposite effect and with the notable exception of a few of our neighbours who have made some effort, most seem to have not bothered. Even the OS with its mighty all-pervading company behind it does not seem to have made any effort at all outside. It is rather disappointing, even for a less than Christmas enthused grumpy shopkeeper and that is really saying something.

Still, all over in a couple of days and we can all go back to being grumpy. Happy bleddy Christmas.

December 23rd – Tuesday

The first electric sliding door in The Cove was barely been open thirty seconds and the grumpy shopkeeper is just turning on the display and fridge lights at the end of the shop. A slightly built stranger enters the shop and approaches, brandishing what is clearly an empty drinking container.

Wandering waif.: “Could I fill my water bottle here, please?”

Grumpy Shopkeeper.: “You would be most welcome, my 'ansum, but we do not have a tap in the shop.” [Then, to be unusually helpful – it must be Christmas or something] “The OS at the end of the street or the Surf Lodge beyond it will be your only potential options.”

Wandering waif.: “Oh, thank you. What about the café, next door.”

Grumpy shopkeeper.: “Oh, how very stupid I am. I cannot imagine why I did not think of the café next door and suggest that you go there instead. No, wait a minute. Ah

yes, I remember now why I did not mention it. It has been closed since the beginning of November. That is why I did not point you there.”

Wandering waif.: “Ah yes, I see. How about the RNLI?”

Grumpy shopkeeper.: [Getting into his stride now] “Gosh, how remiss of me to not think that the RNLI might be able to help, after all, they are the fourth emergency service – or something like that – I am sure that they would pull out all the stops to help you refill your water container and their tagline is ‘respect the water’ is it not. No, I forget, the reason why I did not think of the RNLI is that there is no one there yet.”

Wandering waif.: “But the door is open.”

Grumpy shopkeeper.: “Lummy, I am not doing very well here, am I? I cannot imagine why I did not notice that the door was open and that would clearly indicate that it is open for people wanting to refill their water containers. No, wait a minute. That would be the door to the viewing gallery that has no one in it nor does it have a tap that is free to use by the casual visitor.”

Wandering waif.: “Oh. The OS, did you say?”

Grumpy shopkeeper.: “Yes, my ’ansum. I am not surprised you can’t remember; it was a while ago I told you. It is also likely that you might meet some more people on the way. You could ask them, just in case I might have forgotten half a dozen other options that did not occur to me when you asked.”

The thirsty stranger wandered off in the direction of the OS eventually but not before he had gone over to the Lifeboat station to check for himself. I will have to work on my honest face as it clearly is not working.

It was a brae bit chillier today but there seemed to be less wind. I found out later that it had gone around to the northwest and was indeed a little lighter than yesterday. I survived the first couple of hours in the shop with the first electric door in The Cove open to the elements before I had to switch it on. It was a daft thing to do, first because there was no one around to think that the shop was closed and, secondly, I had gathered about me a bitter chill that refused to go away for the rest of the day.

For most of the day, there were blue skies slightly obscured with high cirrus cloud. Around the middle of the day, a blanket of thicker cloud rolled in for an hour or so before sliding away unseen and giving the higher cloud back the sky. Just as I thought that might have been the end of it, the cloud rolled back just before the end of the shop day and gave us a light sprinkling of rain.

The sea state has smoothed almost entirely by low water in the middle of the day. It made for ideal conditions to launch the Inshore boat, which had been mooted for the day before. Our Coxswain thought it best to wait a day, and it paid off. It would have paid off a little earlier had the boat not encountered some engine problems at the start of the exercise. It took a while to resolve the issue and a while longer to complete the training as there were so many eager young things keen to get out for a race around the bay.

The Lifeboat crew has gone from predominately mature to predominately youthful in just a couple of years. The Coxswain is young and enthusiastic and clearly is a beacon for the youngsters in the locality who are legion by the look of it. For some reason, they all jump at the chance of being on the Inshore boat rather than the big boat. Perhaps it is a bit more exhilarating and there is a touch more freedom dashing about in the small high-powered craft. For all those reasons, our very excellent Shore Crew neighbour volunteer found he was hanging around for a good part of the day. We are, after all, a very patient, very excellent Shore Crew – well, one of us is.

Gosh and crikey, how on Earth did I forget about this. You might recall, dear reader, a while ago I was delighted to discover the advent of mobile saunas in the Duchy. I noted that the closest was in Newlyn. I was a little concerned that it seemed, perhaps, a little distant from the sea making the cold plunge a bit far off for comfort – although you might argue that ‘comfort’ is an inappropriate word to use in that context.

Well, I had chance conversation with one of the chefs at The Surf Lodge a couple of days ago and, blow me, they only went and installed one of these saunas in The Beach car park. I do not know what made me think about it just now, but I fumbled for my binoculars and had a quick peek at it. The unit is not much to look at but I am sure aesthetics are not the chief concern for the venture as long as the thing gets hot inside. It also appears to be centrally placed and roughly equidistant between the OS slip and the one by the kiosk. It perhaps not optimum for access to the beach, it involves a bit of a stank in your knickers in either direction, but at one end it would block the entrance and the other end is not level. However, by carefully picking a time close to high water, it is certainly no worse than the Newlyn one and, I fancy, much better.

I am painfully aware, dear reader, that I have set myself up quite nicely, having gone out of my way to extoll its virtues, to give it a go. Clearly, I am only available during the winter months when the hot inside will be very welcome. The other side of that particular coin is a very cold plunge indeed. I will have to study the tide times for next year to determine the best date. I am rather hoping that by some strange quirk of nature, there will be no convenient high tides until the end of March, when we open. It would, of course, be highly inadvisable to run the depth of the beach at low water with my underdeveloped knee. In fact, and I have only just thought of this, it is probably not a good thing to get salt water near it lest any metal bits rust. Yes, that will be it. Much as I would like to test it out, I cannot on medical grounds. Phew.

December 24th – Wednesday

Christmas Eve. By the time you are reading this, of course, it will be the big day itself – all supposing you are reading this ‘live’ as it were and not some delve into the archives in the middle of June one random year of my future. It is likely, by now, you will have realised that the last 30 days of hyperbole were just that and you are sitting

there with the slowly dawning realisation that it is all a bit of a disappointment and anticlimax. That is unless you are five years old and have just opened your main present, the Max Super Dooper Overhead Foxbat Death Blaster, and are currently engaged with attempting to atomise the neighbour's cat. If that is the case, you probably have another couple of days of elation and awe. Good on you.

Never mind. The Diary comes at you with a poignant reminder that the day before it was still all to come. You will recall that, down here at least, we started the day with a sky full of cloud, a boisterous northwesterly breeze and a fearful drop in temperature of around 6 ambient degrees or, in the teeth of the wind, at least 11 degrees. I felt every single one of these as I took the excitable hounds around the block first thing in the morning.

The in-laws arrived yesterday for the Christmas few days and BB, particularly had gone into overdrive. She still has an unshakable confidence that everyone will be overwhelmingly delighted by her presence and proceeds to leap all over them. Just because there may have been only a few minutes since the previous time that person saw her is no reason not to do it all over again. If you are not a fully committed dog person, this can be tiresome, I am sure. Sorry, she is unconcerned about your feelings and, besides, this is not a legitimate response to her attentions. Suck it up – as some might say.

We were a little earlier than normal heading out but I rather suspect that it was the thick cloud creating the gloominess rather than the time. I had taken my headtorch, which I needed once, but again I had been fooled by our windows that somehow make it look darker outside than it actually is. A good layer of salt on them from the previous days of high seas and wind probably does not help. I had thought to wash them down yesterday but just as I was about to start, I was distracted by a customer or a random thought and missed my opportunity. It is unlikely that I will think of it again until I really cannot see anything through the windows.

It took until into the afternoon for the cloud to break, the temperature increased a couple of degrees, but the wind hung in there all the way through until the end of the day. It was a first electric door in The Cove closed day right from the outset and a hat on too as it was a mite chilly in the shop, even without the breeze blowing in.

Our visitors this week clearly do not do early in any of its many forms. I saw no one for the first couple of hours and then only a few after that. Most of the action, such as it was, seemed to be concentrated into the afternoon. We had some busyness, but it came in fits and starts but at least we had some. One lady enquired about the sense of doing the Christmas swim. I told her that there was none but, if you were down on the beach in the thick of it all, it was difficult not to be swept up in the moment. Once you were in amongst the crowd, you no longer felt individual and when they all started running, it was enormously difficult not to run with them. I suggested it was worth doing at least once to experience it.

Clearly, I had quite unintentionally sold the experience. The lady returned to the counter laden with Christmas swim paraphernalia and purchased some beach shoes and towelling robes. Naturally, I felt very guilty about using my limited experience of such matters to the degree I convinced a customer to spend so much more than they had intended when they had at first entered the shop. It says here, honest gov.

Since the day seemed to be going nowhere today, I decided to do what I had been trying to do all week and open the postcard delivery that has arrived several weeks before. This was simply going to be a case of filling up the empty slots on the display frame and putting the rest away. We are in stock taking time, so as well as putting out I decided to add the delivery to the inventory system. I had remembered counting postcards at the end of the shop season, so fully expected all the numbers to be up to date. When I checked, it appeared that I had only done the one supplier's cards and not the one the order came from. I spent the next hour counting the cards on the frame and updating the system. Well, it gave me something to do and took my mind off the chill still seeping into the shop.

The day ended in an unremarkable sort of way, and I retired to join the rest of the family upstairs. Sometime during the day, one of the Missus' nephews had turned up for a visit and was stopping for tea. The Missus is quite undeterred that he is a noted chef running quite a prestigious restaurant – alright, it is in Birmingham, but nonetheless – and delivered a table full of food that would have fed the restaurant's average clientele for a week. I demurred on most of it because I had other plans.

A couple of days previously, we – both the Missus and I – had received an invitation to a soirée close by with one of our neighbours. With guests of our own, we could not attend together but rather than decline the invitation altogether, we agreed that I would go on my own.

It was a very discrete gathering with just our neighbour a couple of family members and their friend. They very kindly did not show the obvious disappointment that it must have been with me turning up on my own. It is something I am very used to. The Aged Parent were very good at it having sustained it for twenty years that I lived with them. I admit to some feelings of trepidation being the only guest, but I was made to feel very welcome, and we passed a very convivial couple of hours in conversation with a supply of comestibles that was more closely aligned with the number of consumers.

It was very near the end of my visit that the friend told us that she had been born in Connor Downs – just the right side of Camborne. There was almost a prickle of electricity in the air when I said that the Aged Parent was also born there too. It seems that the friend and the Aged Parent would have missed each other by half a dozen years, but she remembered my grandfather who ran the local shop. She used to get sweets there. We spend the next half an hour exploring our overlapping memories of the village which was rather fun. It rather excluded the others in the room, other than a viewpoint of curiosity. I did not think of it at the time, so apologies.

When I returned home, the nephew had departed and our own guests were arranged in the living room, unattended. The Missus had ensconced herself in the kitchen and was waist deep in vegetables and preparing them for tomorrow gargantuan feast. I am hoping that the weather will be kind because, obviously, we will have to seat all the other people the Missus is expecting on all the benches opposite the shop.

Happy Christmas to you and the other reader. The Diary team hope you both have a splendid day.

As usual, there will be no Diary delivered on Boxing Day and possibly the day after that. There will be an omnibus edition – late and two arriving at the same time – at some point when I am sober enough to get around to it.

December 25th and 26th – Christmas and Boxing Day

Our esteemed weather heroes had issued a weather warning for cold on Christmas Day. No merde Maigret, it was bleddy freezing. The temperature, including wind chill, had introduced a drop of eleven degrees from the day before, which was a bit dramatic, bringing it to below freezing. My beshorted legs did not seem to mind too much as I took the girls on an extended walk around the block first thing, but I made sure I had leggings on later when I took them to the beach. I think that, in the main, it was alright with the wind behind us, it was just when we came back and headed into it, it felt a bit sharper.

With little else to do and no shop to open, we had plenty of time to watch the build up for the Christmas swim. It was only three hours after high water but there was just about sufficient beach to accommodate the gathering provided that they spread out in a bunch out toward the Lifeguard hut. Maybe it was because they were a bit spread out but there did not seem to be the numbers there were last year. It is difficult to tell for sure but come the arranged time, eleven o'clock, they filled the near-shore with rapidly bluing bodies quite effectively. There were some reasonable waves pushing in, so anyone thinking they could just get away with a bit of an ankle wetting were sadly mistaken.

It was all over by midday, and I presume the OS enjoyed some busy merriment for a short time afterwards. When I took the girls out again at just gone twelve o'clock, the street was empty. We found a small puppy waiting for us on the Harbour beach who seemed to enjoy the girls' attention for a bit. While the wind was still howling in from the northwest, it was not too uncomfortable down there wrapped up against the elements. We tarried for a while before heading around the block and another battle down Coastguard Row against the wind.

I am sure I do not have to explain in graphic detail the workings of a family Christmas afternoon without the catalyst of small children thrown into the mix. It is likely the

same from one end of the country to the other. We spare a thought, of course, for those whose living rooms have been turned topsy turvy and the peaceful air pierced with excited screams and those households with children, too. We have had cards and messages from some of the children who are regular or irregular visitors of the shop. L&L thank you, and we hope that you have had a great time of it, as well. Parents: we do hope you have retained your sanity

Some of the grown-ups survived the onslaught. There were children abroad this morning racing various automotive devices up and down the street. Such things used to be slow enough for the attending adult to grasp a saddle or coat collar. Parents these days need to shape up or get mobile themselves.

It seemed almost warmer this morning or perhaps that should be less cold. I suspect that it was because the wind had dropped as it often does overnight. I took the girls to the beach where there was a bit more sand for the first time in a few days at that time. They were able to run around and expend some pent-up overnight energy.

It having been a year since I last opened the shop at Christmas, one tends to forget how the whole thing goes. Initially, I had thought that we opened until two o'clock on Boxing Day but then had a recollection that we closed at midday. I amended our stated hours accordingly.

The day had been pretty slow going since I had opened. It was not surprising after the excesses of the day before, I suppose. I had not long put pasties (sorry, MS) in the oven and we were fast approaching the closing hour. Quite fortuitously, the Missus walked the girls early today and stopped by the shop on her way. I mentioned the closing and she was able to correct my thinking and assure me that we should close at two o'clock. The midday thing came from when I used to go to the Boxing Day clay shoot that no longer is a thing.

This was a huge relief on the pasty front. We did all our business between midday and two o'clock and sold through all the pasties I allocated for the day. I had hoped to have some left for the weekend and I now fear that we will probably run out part way through Sunday.

When we eventually closed at two o'clock, we had seen the best of the day. It had been busy with people parading and children racing their toys for those two hours. The beach had been busy as well. Quite suddenly, they all disappeared – or perhaps I just was not watching any more. We shall see a changing of the guard now and I hold my breath to see if the after Christmas is as buoyant, unexpectedly, as the pre-Christmas week was.

December 27th – Saturday

It did take more than a moment to establish in my head which day of the week I was waking up to. Not that it particularly mattered all that much. The shop would be opened at half past eight o'clock whatever day it was. I suppose the only thing that was important was the lack of deliveries, especially of the bread and pasty (sorry, MS) sort that would affect people most.

Since pasties take an hour to cook from frozen, I started cooking those half an hour into the day. I usually like to leave a bit of a gap between pasties otherwise they stick together and leave an uncooked bit where they touched. However, thinking that I would probably need around 30, I wanted to get as many done as possible at the outset. I was painfully aware, that I should have ordered another box and that by the end of Sunday, quite possibly the busier day, we would be close to running out. Darn it.

It was a positively balmy five degrees today – three degrees with windchill, so take good care of yourself. The wind had dropped out considerably and I was optimistic enough to believe that the first electric sliding door in The Cove would not be required today. It took all of five minutes to find out how very wrong I was.

Mind, I was not the only one with an overgrown sense of hope. One of my first customers of the day, although that was quite late on in the morning, was on his way to Mousehole along the Coast Path. It is fair journey of around 14 miles, and we find that only the seasoned walkers undertake that in a single leg – as opposed to *on* a single leg, which would be even harder. The 14 miles does not sound a lot but there is much up hill and, erm, up hill involved and by the time you have done that a few times, the 14 miles is more like 20.

Our man purchased two small bottles of sparkling water for his journey. Since, at that point he had not told me his destination, I merely ensured that he had not intended to purchase still water, instead – we find that happens a lot and tend to mention it as a matter of course. He then wished to confirm directions to join the path and almost as a throw away comment at the end he told me he was going to Mousehole – two and a half hours, he said.

It took a moment to register what he said and quickly called him back. I explained that two and a half hours would see him at Porthcurno, if he struck up a reasonable pace and did not dilly dally anywhere along the route; he would be lucky to see Mousehole while it was still light. For a person who had just received a piece of information that put a fairly fundamental change on his expectations for the day, he did not seem particularly ruffled. He did not even take pause; he simply walked out. I must assume that he either did not believe me or he really did have no concept of what he was about to experience.

It is difficult to see how he could have made such a serious error. Even a cursory glance at the map would have shown that it looks a long way. A quick Internet search would have confirmed it. It was no wonder then, that on reflection, our man

did not seem very well prepared at all. The South West Coast Parth Association calls the route moderate to challenging and has elevations up to 235 feet. I suspect it will be a revelation to him at some point after the fourth hour or possibly sooner. At least there are several points at which he can cancel his tour and walk back to the bus route. His even bigger challenge then would be finding a bus.

While there were a good number of people wandering about in the afternoon, from their numbers it was clear that the pre-Christmas contingent had gone home. Any New Year visitors had either not arrived or were not coming. It was hold your breath time for grumpy shopkeepers but it was likely that we would not know for sure until tomorrow. Perhaps I should innovate more and diversify.

I do applaud a good bit of left field thinking and the recent proliferation of mobile saunas is a very good case in point. I shall need time to consider, however, the latest seaside 'must have' that the other reader drew my attention to today. They had gone for a seaside walk, which is not an unusual activity I am led to believe, since they live near the south coast, east of Camborne. It was here they came upon a Dog Wash Station. Yep, I have not taken leave of my senses, and neither was that a typo or the nocturnal effect of some strong cheese: a Dog Wash Station.

The very smart unit is modelled on the self-service car wash stations you see at some Tesmorburys and independent petrol stations. An inserted coin gives the user a finite amount of time to select washes and rinses from a menu of buttons. When the time expires, more coins are required. The Dog Wash Station is a smaller version of the car wash with an attached bath into which the subject hound is placed. Whether waterproof smocks and long gloves are supplied for the operator, it did not say.

I had a quick look at the supplier's website, which is exceedingly succinct. There is one line at the top of the page with country of origin – they are made in the Netherlands – and contact details. There is also a button where user reviews are displayed, and this tells the viewer that most of these stations are in the USA where I am sure they were less of a surprise. I also note, and this is the most important point, that most are in pet stores or shopping malls or the like. As far as innovation goes, I might reserve that accolade for the application rather than the unit itself which is no more than a resized version of the car wash. No, I will have the rosette go to the person who thought that putting one at the entrance to a beach – or even better, a muddy country walk, although access to a water and electricity supply might me more difficult – was a blindingly good plan.

I cannot think of a better place to leave the day after Boxing Day Diary, except for one small mention, because I like that sort of thing. It was late in the day and a family who had spent a gratifying large amount on Dunoon mugs and other gifts had just departed. At the tail end of the family line was a gentleman who told me that he currently lived in Hayle but had a close friend who lives in America – the United States bit of it. He told me that she reads The Diary every day, which is feat of

endurance all by itself. More than that, and I make the assumption that the lady is a native of that country, she will only ever likely to understand less than half of what is written. Lady, I commend you for your tenacity and forbearance.

I was told that the lady lives in a place called Washington, the state not the city, which is very large and very, very far west of Camborne. It may even be closer, east of Camborne, I could not be fagged (that means bothered, by the way) to check. We are very happy to have you as a reader, TW. There was a recent television programme here that was set in Washington. It is a very pretty place to be. Thank you very much.

December 28th – Sunday

I was minded to think that it was a bit colder this morning. Not so much first thing when I took the girls out but a little later when I was behind the counter in the shop. Apparently, it was all in my imagination. I did try and tell my feet that, but they were having none of it. The grey skies did not help very much and the air felt damp. I am sure that was much to do with it.

Despite it being dark, I went with letting the girls loose on the Harbour beach this morning. My clever headtorch has a spotlight option that has quite a long reach to it, so I used it to check for seals hanging about. Although I could see none, the girls were not over-enthused about rushing down to the sand and mooched about at the top end of the slip. I walked down a bit further, which is when the girls both kicked off. I did not so much see the seal in the spotlight but more the absence of reflection off the granite flags. We scarpered for a much safer walk up Coastguard Row.

I had planned to go back to the seal and do the customary taking of photographs when I went down for the shop, and it was daylight. It was less than an hour later when I went down to put the shop display out and to open the shop. I spotted a lady coming off the beach with her dog, so I asked if the seal was still there. She told me she had not seen one, which was good enough for me and saved me some trouble.

Trouble came anyway, as I suspected that it might with the first half dozen customers all of whom required bread. The idea that I would freeze the leftover loaves from before Christmas and have at least an option for desperate customers fell on its face when we sold all the bread. We even sold all the cheap 'plastic' bread that I had called in as an alternative. The frozen bread idea was not much of a goer anyway, as I would have to sell it off at a reduced price when there is not much margin there to start with. I shall just have to live with the fact that I disappointed a bunch of customers.

I might well have redeemed myself on the pasty front, however (sorry, MS). I did not work to any master plan, but I baked and heated my way through the remaining cooked and frozen pasties. Somehow, I managed to keep the stock in the warmer

topped up so that only a couple of people were left waiting for their choice and then only for ten minutes. Also, while I would have preferred to have had some more frozen pasties to fall back on, we closed the day having baked off every pasty in the place and emptied the warmer leaving no one disappointed. There were five sausage rolls left.

It had been a busy day, much busier than I had anticipated. Again, there was not much doing in the morning, and we only started to see a building of busyness near the middle of the day. After that, there was a fairly continuous flow of customers buying a healthy cross-section of goods from our depleted but reasonable stock. I was lucky that the pasty sales were spread quite evenly through the day, which helped. As we drifted into the afternoon, the bread enquiries shifted from immediate to planned and we were able to take orders for tomorrow. It was useful seeing the potential numbers we had about the place because it would inform my ordering later in the day.

We were still seeing customers arrive as we approached closing time. It might be construed as a five minutes to closing rush but I do not think in general people are aware or concerned with our early closing. It is getting gloomy by then and most people are tucked up in their accommodations. Many of these will be sitting in front of a real fire or a log burner at the very least. We sold more logs than you would see at a beavers' damn building contest today and more kindling than you could, erm, shake a stick at. I made an emergency order for another damn's worth and hope they got delivered tomorrow.

It was a very pleasing ringing up of the till at the end of the day and almost worth the hypothermia and the loss of a few toes to frostbite. Rather more pleasing was the fact that there were plenty of customers to meet and have a chat with. There is nothing worse than being cold and suffering alone. I had wondered, after such a surprising busyness before Christmas, whether we would get another crack at it afterwards. It seems that we will and that our visitors are here in numbers. All we need now is for the weather to behave.

December 29th – Monday

The shop morning was all a bit of a rush. I had placed four orders the previous evening to make up for being unable to order anything for five days. It was not like Tesmorburys was closed for one day and I felt like I had to panic and overcompensate. This was in response to not having our staples for five days and having emerged victorious from the pasty shortage (sorry, MS) and maybe not so victorious from the lack of bread, this was serious restocking.

It took quite a time to price and put everything out. There were some bread orders that needed to be made ready and available for when the shop opened, so obviously, I did those first. The dairy and the greengrocery had to wait a bit, but it was a good half an hour after opening that I had the first wave of deliveries finished.

The last delivery was from our food service wholesaler. I had only really resorted to them because I had run out of wholegrain mustard, which I happen to eat rather a lot of. I had tried a few that I had found online and some from local shops but none of it met my exacting standards and quite a few of them were poisoned with salt and quite inedible as well as being fearfully expensive.

Anyway, our local foodservice wholesaler sold our usual brew of mustard and rather than just call in one box, I ordered some more gift fudge bags and biscuits and some sea salt that I had kept forgetting to order previously. All of it would still be saleable when we reopened at Easter, so there was no problem if it did not sell over our Christmas opening.

In recent years I have noticed that this supplier has edged up prices rather more than is comfortable. In some cases we have no alternative but to accept it unless we wish to cease supply and in the case of greengrocery, we found a new supplier altogether. For this reason, I keep an eye on the invoice to see if there have been any price increases since the last time we ordered. It was just as well that I do because both the fudge and the biscuits had both increased in price – by a lot.

I was a little taken aback because it is less than two months since I placed an order for the fudge. It is a big seller, and we order relatively frequently. I am reasonably sure that we had a price increase near the start of the year but this one leapt out and bit me on the nose it was so fierce. I am aware that confection prices have been subject to unusually high increases this year, our chocolate bars went up an unprecedented twice in the year and not by small amounts. However, that was connected with chocolate prices; there is no chocolate that I am aware of in our clotted cream fudge. There is clotted cream in there and sugar but neither of those products separately have gone up, so I was quite intrigued as to what caused it. So aggressive was the increase, some 20 percent, that I thought that I had better check that it was not a mistake.

Herein lay a problem: I could telephone the food service wholesaler, but they are merely an intermediary although they would be able to confirm that the price was not a mistake. The originating company has long since outsourced its deliveries and was clearly not very inclined to take direct contact with its end clients. This was very apparent from the lack of telephone number on its website and when I did find a telephone number, I could only leave a message and they would call back. I elected to leave a written message and await a response.

On the basis that the price we were charged is not likely to go down regardless of what the underlying reason for the increase is, I changed the prices of our fudge bags, which was hugely disappointing at this point in the year. We sold several packets later during the day without one eyelid being batted, possibly suggesting that the Great British public have become so inured to big price tags on their food, they no longer notice.

As a short aside, some young lads came to the counter with a selection of confection from the normal shelf. There were a few packets of sweets and some chocolate bars. The price came to £7.99, which once would have been a ridiculous amount on sweets for two boys. They looked a little taken about and I was about to be defensive about the price of cocoa when they told me they were from California and for a similar haul, they would be paying at least twice as much. Everything is relative, I suppose.

I consoled myself by getting involved to a small degree in the launching of the Lifeboat on a training exercise. This had started out as an Inshore boat only launch until some smart eye – one of the very excellent Shore Crew of all people – suggested that there would probably be enough interest to launch the big boat as well. Both boats launched almost simultaneously at around half past nine o'clock into the moderate waters of the bay. My own involvement was some allocation of resources to meet the needs of the training regime. There were a couple of trainees who also needs some direction, so I was not completely out of the picture.

Several people subsequently noted that the boats had appeared to leave in a bit of a hurry and were concerned that it was an emergency launch rather than a training session. I asked after they got back about it and was told there was no apparent reason, just the chap at the helm with a heavy hand on the throttles.

The boats were gone for just short of a couple of hours which brought them both back at high water, or thereabouts. We are just out of neap tides so not much less that high water would have negated the use of the short slip. I did not see it myself, but I may rest assured that the team present executed what would have been a textbook recovery up the short slip. I knew it was all over, however, by the sudden arrival of crew coming in for hot pasties; it must have been a tad chilly out there. We are, after all, a very sympathetic, very excellent Shore Crew.

We were not as busy as Sunday, which was not really much of a surprise. We continued to sell numerous bags of firewood, so it was just as well I had called in what I had hoped would be a supply sufficient to see us through to the end of the week. Judging from what we sold today, I am now not so sure. Logs aside, we did quite well for a grey day between festivities and I discovered that I had ordered just the right number of pasties, too.

Late in the day, a Newlyn fishing boat slipped into the bay. We had some of this last year. Someone must have tipped them off that there were pilchard shoals in the bay. The boat was still there when we went to bed and will probably still be there in the morning, too. Some of the local boys are sometimes on the crew; it is a hard-earned living and none too consistent at that.

All things being equal, with the overnight temperature set to drop to four degrees and that nor'westerly ramping up again, I would rather be a grumpy shopkeeper. It was cold enough in the shop all day, thank you very much.

December 30th – Tuesday

I will only mention this one, else it might sound like sour grapes: I have been passed over again on the New Year's Honours List – mind, I have not yet read to the end of the list, which is quite long, so there is hope yet. At the very least I was thinking OBE for services to literature by not publishing another book. After all, that tall bloke from television got one and I started not publishing years before he did. I will give it another year and then all bets are off.

The ring netter from Newlyn was still in the bay at seven o'clock this morning. It had been joined by three others at some point during the night. I cannot imagine that there are many pilchards left in the bay after that. One hundred and some years ago, the bay would have been filled with Cove punts, red mizzen sales keeping them to the wind while they hauled in seine nets.

The punts would have been filled to the gunnels and brought back to the Harbour beach where Cornish women-folk would be waiting to pack and salt them down. They would then be shipped off to London on steam trains – the fish, not the Cornish women-folk. Now, thanks to huge advances in technology and thinking, the sardines are packed into lorries and shipped off to where French women-folk can pack them into cans and send them back to the UK to be sold at inflated prices.

We seemed a little quieter today for some reason. One day of the week is usually down on the others while our visitors decide that they really need to go to St Ives or Penzance. They learn very quickly and are here again the next day, usually looking glum or sheepish. Of course, it may just have been me with an over-inflated sense of expectation because we seemed to do alright on the pasty front (sorry, MS). For the customers we did have, we had to wait until late in the morning and into the afternoon. The timing, at least, seems to have been consistent throughout this period. It would be tempting to say that we would open from eleven o'clock in future years. All that would happen is that I would sit upstairs all morning, fretting with every person who walked by that they might have been a potential customer.

Mind, I could not really blame anyone for wanting to stay out of the weather. I had noted last night that the wind had struck up again and it was getting a bit sharp. This morning, after leaving the overnight temperatures behind we went though the day clinging to 2 degrees with a nice east northeast wind introducing the wind chill element of it. It meant that the breeze more effectively came through the doorway when the first electric sliding door in The Cove opened and kept me on ice all day. I too would have stayed in roasting my feet over an open fire if I had the choice.

The in-laws who left on Saturday left a present behind. Mother and the Missus have succumbed to the influenza. Mother is rather better off probably because she had the flu jab some weeks ago. The Missus has gone down with a high temperature and

a general feeling of horridness. I patiently await my turn and hope that it gives me the latitude to finish in the shop before it comes to get me. It is a salient lesson for us all not to let Johnny foreigner – the in-laws are from Devon, for heaven's sake - into our homes however friendly they appear to be. The season of good will to all men is highly overrated.

Whilst I am in such a good mood, I shall wish you all a merry New Year 2026 because the next time you hear from me it will indeed be the new year. I also want to thank all those who contributed in some way to our 2025 in word or deed, the shop and The Diary do not work without you.

December 31st – Wednesday

We lost five or six degrees on yesterday's temperature today. To be brutally honest, yesterday's temperature really did not have the fat on it to go losing such an amount and it left today fiercely bleddy freezing. It turned out to be a fabulous day, so no one minded all that much apart from grumpy shopkeepers who had to keep a frozen vigil at their unheated shop counters.

One kayak angler was taking bit of a gamble, I felt, when we met him on the beach before the day had shown its hand. Down at the water's edge it seemed even colder, but he seemed wrapped up and well prepared. At least the sea state was in his favour with the merest ripple on the surface in the middle of the bay. Down on the beach during the flood, there were enough waves later in the morning to keep a few surfers happy too.

Having mentioned the consistency of customer appearances confined to the late morning and afternoons, we started getting busy from early on in the day today. Much of it was breakfast goods but I decided that it would be worthwhile to put the first of the day's pasties (sorry, MS) in early. I did not get bowled over in the rush, but we sold a few before later morning which, looking back, I should have taken as some sort of portent but I missed it completely.

It was not just for the obvious reason that I was glad it was a bit busier today. The cold had really set in and standing still really was not the greatest plan to ward it off. The irregular appearance of customers at least had me standing up to welcome them if nothing else. As the morning drew on, there was a burgeoning interest in our pasty offerings, and I was making sure I was keeping a sequential baking going which was starting to look like I need to move to an overlapping baking.

I was mindful that I would, at some point, have to close the shop to walk the girls. With the Missus at the worst – we hoped – of her poorliness it seemed a little churlish to send her out to do it. I had picked the middle of the day as a starting point but as we approached that time, it had started to get a bit busy on the pasty front. There was a gap in the traffic at around half past twelve o'clock, so I quickly closed

up and headed upstairs but not before putting some more pasties in the oven to heat in my absence.

I did not want to hurry with the girls despite the shop closure, and we spent some time on the beach before a leisurely stroll around the block afterwards. Cold it might have been, but it was a splendid day. There was a bit of cloud around the fringes of the bay but otherwise we had clear blue above us and plenty of sunshine. It was the sort of day for taking the air and there were plenty of people doing it; it was very busy. By the time I returned to the shop, the visitors were circling and not long after I reopened, the sluice gates opened.

The pasties I had put in the oven before I went out were now ready but lasted mere seconds. There had been enough time to put some more in after I had taken those out. They had ten minutes to go and were sold before they left the oven. I had taken the precaution of putting some more in after that, but I was playing catch up while more customers piled into the shop. The problem had been family groups buying four or five at a time. It makes it very hard to manage two or more families in quick succession.

It was a proper pasty fest, and I was struggling to keep up with the pace. No one had to wait more than ten minutes, but I would have preferred that they did not have to wait at all, of course. Also in the back of my mind was the volume of pasties that were leaving the shop. I had planned for 70 for the two days and was already approaching 50 sold. At the rate we were going there would not be enough for tomorrow even if I baked off the frozen that I had ordered in. A proper pasty predicament.

While the pace has slowed a bit and we returned to more manageable sales of one or two, they continued almost to the end of our day. I had seen a report earlier that told that 40,000 new year revellers were due to descent on St Ives. Quite how they determine such things, I have no idea but given the numbers we saw in The Cove today, I could quite believe it. St Ives used to be the party capital for New Year's Eve but in recent years it had tailed off, much to the relief – and quite possibly strenuous efforts to stop it – of the few locals left out there.

I had no intentions of partying the night away; I am far too grumpy for such things these days and the beer far too expensive. I imagine that the OS was busy and hoped that the new Surf Lodge did well as the competition is sorely needed.

(Competition is one thing, but I am told that the OS has recently added fish finger sandwiches to its menu, an item from the Surf Lodge menu. That and it installing the pizza hut for up-market pizzas, which again the Surf Lodge was already doing, is not reacting to competition, it is copying, lacking in imagination and innovation and is abhorrent – so there.)

As I took the girls around at half past five o'clock, someone up the cliff decided that it was a grand plan to fire off some loud fireworks. The bleddy hound could not be bothered with such things and ABH, while a little less cool about them, soon recovers but poor little BB took great fright. The bangs were quite close and despite my reassurance, she and ABH fair near tore my arm from its socket dragging me home down Coastguard Row. As I said, ABH brushed it off, but BB was quivering in her boots for the rest of the evening and was reticent to go out for the last walk. I will have to consider taking her up to the range for some shock therapy when I get back there again. A month or two of that should cure her we will be able to hire her out as a gun dog. I have no idea how she would shoot it, though.

I was a little premature in my best wishes for the new year yesterday, so let me make amends – Happy New Year.