

DIARY 2026

April 1<sup>st</sup> – Wednesday

Another change in the weather today, this time an improvement. The mist had cleared away by the time I got around to looking out of the window first thing. It did not look likely that we were going to get any of that lovely Penzance weather, though; we had a cover of grey cloud today.

Apropos of nothing at all, I saw a van drive by as I served the first customer of the day. The company name on the side was Nurture. The tag line stated that it was a pest control company, which struck me as, at the least, misleading or just inappropriate. Perhaps the company used to sell fertilizers and discovered along the way that they were better suited to murdering rodents.

I had quite forgotten that Wednesday is visit St Ives day, even if it was not raining. Perhaps it was raining in St Ives. After yesterday's upturn in business, it was very disappointing. Monday and Tuesday had both picked up from the middle of the day and at two o'clock today, I was still waiting for it to happen.

It did not mean I was idle. Alright, it did not mean that I was entirely idle. We had a large delivery from our supplier who supplies from a large number of other suppliers such as our Furniss biscuits and Buttermilk fudge. The delivery used to be early along with the milk and pasties (sorry, MS) but for a year or two now, they have been arriving mid morning. This is not much of a problem for us but for cafes and restaurants who need their fresh produce early, it is. I know that next door has mainly stopped using them because of it.

All was well with the delivery until I got to the Kernow chocolate. These are the artisan bars of variously flavoured chocolate we keep on our local gift food shelves. They have inched up in price over recent years in line with the increases in cocoa prices. I expected an increase this year, too, as we have not had a delivery from them since the end of last season but when I looked, the 70 percent cocoa variety had leapt up by £1 per bar. I checked the original supplier's website where they also sell their own product and noted that their shop price had not changed.

We have had issues in the past where a supplier has increased their price to us but kept their website price the same. It makes it impossible for us to compete. However, I suspected that this time it was with the intermediary supplier where the problem lay. So, I dropped a message to the original supplier to ask if their price had changed and quoted what we had been charged. I was suitably impressed to get an almost immediate reply telling me that we had been woefully overcharged and to take it up with our supplier. If we needed help, the original supplier would be please to intervene on our behalf.

The very pleasant lady I spoke with at our direct supplier, agreed that the pricing looked incorrect and she would pass it onto our sale contact there to resolve. I had expected a more timely response but by the end of the afternoon, I was still waiting. At least we know that it will be resolved and that we will not have to charge a fortune for our chocolate bars. It is a good job I am here. People will not realise just how close they came to paying five pounds for a 100 gram bar of chocolate.

With all that excitement I had quite forgotten that we were to expect a visit from our posh mug supplier. I checked when he called to see if it was worthwhile his turning up. While we have quite a bit of stock, we also have some gaps that could do with filling, so I saw no harm in inviting him over since he was in the area anyway. I would normally have printed off a list of the current stock and been prepared for his visit but, as it was, I had to run around doing it all when he got here. How very unprofessional. I felt so embarrassed I ordered another sixty mugs.

It was a very sedate afternoon with a sporadic flow of customers. Many reported that it was chilly today, but I had not felt it down on the beach this morning. The ambient temperature at Land's End was a none too shoddy eleven degrees. The wind had gone around to the west and was about the same as yesterday, around 15 miles per hour. It was not until the later afternoon, having stood around doing very little that I decided that they were right.

It was gone five o'clock when it eventually turned into a lovely day. The cloud cover cleared to blue skies as if nothing had happened. Someone, clearly, was having an April Fool joke with us.

I have long since removed myself from the desire to include such foolery in The Diary. For a start, you will not be reading this until the next day when it would have lost its merit. I did not bother to look in the mainstream media for such things either. These days, it would be almost impossible to determine the fact from the fiction.

It is best to draw a veil over a day that for its tedium tested your Diarists resolve and purpose to the limits. Actually, I was unaware that I had a purpose. Forget that bit.

## April 2<sup>nd</sup> – Thursday

I had heard that today would be the best day of the week. The sort of day that Penzance would have been proud of. In fact, the sort of day that you rather hoped Penzance was not getting and that we would have the opportunity later to go to Penzance and tell them what a marvellous day we had.

The rumour was not wrong, and we were looking at blue skies, along with a bit of cloud, from the very outset of the day. It had started the previous evening as we took our last walk out. The Harbour was looking lighter than usual and when I looked up, a big near full moon was illuminating the bay from a crystal clear sky. For once,

nothing had intervened to spoil it for the following morning unless you can count the breeze going back to the northwest again.

There were very few signs that things had changed on the ground, too. Just a few people that I had not seen earlier in the week coming in for bread and breakfast goods and the fact that bread and breakfast goods were moving a little more quickly than they had in the preceding days. I had fully expected things to amble along until the early afternoon and then see a few visitors haul themselves out into the day for a pasty or two (sorry, MS) and a few ice creams. So, a rush in the middle of the morning took me completely by surprise.

If I had any idea that I might be permitted to feel a little euphoric at the sudden windfall it was easily tempered by the arrival of a mother and her four children. The instant she asked me how long I had been here I knew what was coming. Yes, I was indeed the same grumpy shopkeeper who served her as a child. I am going to have to consider lying in response to such questions. As if being remembered by an adult, now with four children of her own, was not bad enough, there is, of course, the possibility that I traumatised her as a child and she was seeking a lifetime's compensation. I could think of no greater ignominy.

The influx heralded the arrival of a few families preparing for a day at the beach. Buckets and spades, balls and games and a few trinkets and holiday gifts to go with them. Inevitably, pasties started to go as well, along with a sausage roll or two. It was one of those situations where we reached the point that more pasties needed to go into the oven, but I had no chance of getting to the oven to put them in. I think that we still would have missed the overlap even if I had managed to get away because the remainder of the pasties went very quickly after the point of replenishment.

It was also rather inevitable that I would note how quickly pasties were selling, assess that we would run out before demand did and take out some frozen pasties to fill the gap. What would happen five minutes after the frozen pasties were in the oven is that demand would dry up and I would be left with more pasties than I needed. Such is the plight of the grumpy shopkeeper who thinks he can get one step ahead of the posse by being a smart Alec.

With low water tripping over into the afternoon, it means we are at the outset of spring tides. They are not the biggest of springs, that will come later in April, but they are big enough to make a wide open space of a beach under a bright sun, quite glorious. Not for the first time, there is a huge sandbar over towards North Rocks that does not quite get uncovered by low water. It allowed for a bunch of would-be surfers to saunter out and look like they were walking on water well away from the main body of sand on the beach.

Today, there were not so many surfers around at low water; the better surf would come later in the tide. Even then, with an onshore breeze, it would not ideal. Most of the bodies down there were messing about in the surf at low water but there were

less than a dozen. There were quite a few wanderers spread across the beach with one group, chairs out, camped dead centre on the sand. The families had set up camp further up under the car park and along the rocks to the Lifeguard station, expecting to be there for the duration, I imagine. The Lifeguards start tomorrow, I think.

In the meantime, the Lifeboats were starting today. The exercise had been called early due to the timing of the tide and consequently I missed the briefing but just about managed to make it for the launch. This was just as well because I had nominated myself as head launcher for the Inshore boat. It is a nominal role at our station, so it did not matter a great deal that I was late arriving. As it was, I shut the shop early as we looked a little thin on the shore side. Naturally, attempting to shut early evoked a cynical response from the small gods of grumpy shopkeepers and they sent me the first five minutes to closing rush of the year.

I had made whole crewing effort more difficult for everyone by doubling up some of the roles. Our newly passed out members of the very excellent Shore Crew are very keen to progress. This effectively means training to become winch and Tooltrak operators. The training entails, initially, sitting, or standing, and watching while the experienced crew do the job thereby removing two people from essential other duties. I set this in train then turned up late letting everyone else deal with the fallout. It seems to be the way of it these days, so I was glad I was keeping current.

What also seems to be the way of things is for more crew than we have ever had before turning up for training. There were so many that the Inshore had to launch twice to accommodate everyone. We might have been spread thinly on the shore but with excellent management, ahem, and a good deal of goodwill, all our bases were covered.

The launch coincided with high water which gave the big boat a couple of hours after which it would have to wait on the tide abating more to recover on the long slip. There is a period in the tide when it is too low for short slip recovery and too high for the long slip and it was this that the early launch time was trying to avoid. They had taken a number of people from Trevedra campsite as a thank you for a splendid fund-raising effort last year. I am not sure that those who came felt altogether thanked as there was a significant swell out in the bay that would have made the trip somewhat uncomfortable, I would say.

The big boat returned at around eight o'clock and with just sufficient numbers in place, the boat was subject to what was clearly a textbook recovery up the short slip. It was then winched to the top of the slip for a washdown before being refuelled and lashed down for its next service.

Dismissing the big boat crew, I went to do my head launching for the Inshore boat that was practising recoveries in the Harbour. This was useful for us too as our trainee Tooktrak driver had extra experience. Since everyone else had beggered off,

It was down to me to washdown the Inshore boat and see it into the RNLI car park where I abandoned the driver and trainee to put the hose away and lock up. I can only suppose the Tooltrak was put away unscathed as we are, after all, a very trustworthy, very excellent Shore Crew.

Then it started raining.

## April 3<sup>rd</sup> – Friday

Oh, how very disappointing. We stepped out into mizzle this morning. Probably the same mizzle that we ended up with last night except that I could not see the misty part of it. If that were not enough of a kick in the shins on a looming Easter weekend, Radio Pasty jollily announce a gale of wind on the way courtesy of Storm Dave. As if we would ever use the familiar form of the name for something so vindictive. The storm itself is heading up over Scotland, and we will only get the windy part of it and not the rain, apparently, so that is something. Perhaps it would be better named Hamish.

It was not just the weather that had changed. The sea that had permitted Lifeboat training and a textbook recovery last night had evolved into a raging beast. The bay was in a chaotic turmoil of its own design and there was much flogging over the Harbour wall even at lower orders of the tide. It continued to bang away all day and gave the surfers some decent play when the tide charged back in during the later afternoon.

Business was noticeably quieter than our previous days. I thought that we had a breakthrough yesterday and we were into the holiday big time. It seems that it was more of a break off and it was a cosy up and take shelter day today.

Since there was nothing much else doing, I took a stroll around the shop to survey the damage from the first week. I had been pleased to see some of our more risky purchases making it to the counter, the 3D printed dragons for example had done particularly well. We are also selling some of the new stock of greetings cards which I had taken pains to find new suppliers from the local area.

We have a bit of a reputation for having different greetings cards. We try as far as possible to use as many local artists as we can. One we have used for a few years now, lives at the top of the hill. This is very convenient, especially as her cards sell better than any of the others we have. I had a conversation with a customer a week ago about it and she suggested another local name that I had not heard before. She told me this artist produced some local landscapes that we were good.

I had forgotten all about it but yesterday I found the name I had written down on a notepad. I thought that I had better follow up on it before I forgot again, so I resorted to the Internet to see if I could track the artist down and have a chat about supplying

us with cards. It was a more difficult job than I had envisaged; the man shuffled off 25 years ago. While getting hold of his cards may be possible, enjoying some new ones every now and again may be a little more tricky. I do not wish to be discriminatory, but I think we will give it a miss.

For the last couple of days, greetings cards had been the least of our concerns. The Missus had ventured into Penzance on Wednesday with, among other things, the intention of fuelling the truck. She managed to get all the other things but diesel, it seemed, was in short supply. Actually, diesel was not generally in short supply; I looked it up – just dear. It was just here where many people had decided the end of the world was nigh and they had best fill up every container larger than a thimble that they possessed, just in case.

We had looked at alternative sources and kept our ear to the ground but by the end of yesterday, nothing had come up and news was the local stations were empty. I tried calling the petrol station in Trewellard, which is a good fallback sometimes, but they had taken their telephone off the hook, and I cannot really blame them. It would be a bit risky driving over just to find them closed.

This morning I put a message out on the Lifeboat crew group chat. I had quite forgotten that one of them works for Tesmorburys and she sent a screen shot of their system that shows how much of each fuel type they have. They had diesel, just not very much. I despatched the Missus with due haste in their direction and she managed to fuel up around the middle of the day after rolling into Penzance on fumes.

Yesterday, the Missus spent some time at The Farm clearing all the remains of last year's produce from the greenhouse and the outside vegetable patch. The cabbages did not look their best but were perfectly good inside. She decided to cut them up, blanch them and freeze them in to bags for the shop. There was an abundance of rocket, ten bags of which is now in the shop fridge and the other half next door in the café. There was also enough for six bunches of spring onions which are in our salad fridge. The field is now clear for this year's growing.

Towards the end of the afternoon and nearing high water, the sea upped its game somewhat. The waves thundering in on the beach were huge and powerful. The Lifeguards had not red flagged the beach and seemed happy to watch the half dozen surfers out there get pummelled under the onslaught. It was utter carnage as I watched surfboards flying into the air and surfers disappearing into the foam. I do not think that the fun lasted more than an hour or perhaps we had just run out of surfers. When I looked later, the decent surf had gone and so had all but one of the surfers.

Our day had brightened bit by bit and the afternoon was a much more user friendly than the morning. We had a slight increase in the number of customers in the shop during the latter part of the afternoon. They were all intentional shoppers, stepping

out for this purpose alone. The street was largely empty as no one was particularly keen to wonder about under and uninspiring cold grey sky.

I have not entirely given up on the weekend despite the weather forecast. We will have the better of it on the north coast, although I suspect it will be marginal. Nevertheless, I placed some additional orders for tomorrow in an unusual display of blind optimism. What was I thinking.

### April 4<sup>th</sup> – Saturday

For some reason I had thought that the weather would look a little better than yesterday. I suppose it did as the wet had gone but it was still pretty grey out there, but I guess I was expecting a more marked improvement. It was not in the least breezy when I took the girls around the block first thing and the cold that came with the wind of late was absent today – along with the expected customers.

The shop morning was entirely bleak. Nearing the afternoon, there were quite a few in the street mainly lining up for the café but there seemed to be a great avoidance of visiting the shop.

Of the few people that we did see were a family who came in to ask about the Lifeboat shop which at that time was not open. I did not notice at first but the two small children in the party had jackets covered in Lifeboat badges from various stations around the country. Around their necks were a couple of lanyards each hardly visible under the plethora of pin badges. The word, enthusiast, did not really cover it. Since the shop was not open and, I suspected, may not today, it felt a bit churlish to let them go empty handed, so I went and got my key for the station.

There are usually a few things lying about, lanyards, pens, badges and so forth that I could filch and admit to later. Today, nothing. Someone had been diligent in their cleaning up and I could find nothing in the office or crew room. Eventually, I found a box of random bits that I plundered gratuitously. It was not ideal, but at least a gesture and the children were very polite about it. We wish them better luck at the other stations they will visit.

Talking of luck, I have been selected to be one of 50,000 people in the country to take part in a study by University of Exeter. They were looking for people with a brain, so I was glad that they did not ask too many questions before accepting me. The purpose, over a period of 25 years, is to determine details about cognitive decline as people age and were looking for people over 40 years of age. Clearly, my cognition is unlikely to decline very much, being very near rock bottom as it is, but it will still be fun doing their tests every year.

As part of the test, I must nominate a buddy, someone who knows me well and can answer questions about me put to them by the people running the study. I must say I struggled with this because, obviously, I needed someone who would not be too

brutal with telling them things, such as the truth, for example. I have not yet done the test but one of the benefits of joining the study is that they will monitor my results over time and should my cognitive decline look too dramatic, they will send me a message to tell me to seek help. This is really useful because I have always relied upon you and the other reader for such things, and I am not overly sure that you would notice, dear reader.

I did very much notice that our business day did not really get going until the middle of the afternoon. As is frequently the case, the café next door was busy and we were not. However, we started to see some overspill in the early afternoon, which was encouraging. I have never really worked out why our pasty sales (sorry, MS) seem to pick up well into the afternoon. I can appreciate a pasty going down well late morning if breakfast has been missed or the middle of the day as a suitable dinner. Why though, would people start eating pasties at half past two o'clock or later when they are a stone's throw away from having tea. From a grumpy shopkeeper point of view, I am very grateful for the sales, but the timing is a complete mystery to me.

The late rush made an appreciable dent in our stock that has started to again look like a day or two's worth of pasties too many. I would have kicked myself to order too few, but I had hoped for better out of this weekend and ordered accordingly. I unloaded some to the freezer in the back end of the afternoon confident that I would not need them tomorrow. Tomorrow, I will be cooking them from frozen when we inexplicably face an unprecedented run on pasties at two o'clock in the afternoon.

While we may not have all the customers or visitors that we would like, there are clear signs that the season has begun. One of those is things being left behind. I can appreciate leaving a glove that might have fallen unnoticed from a pocket or a hat blown away in the wind. It is a bit more of a stretch, however, to understand how a person leaves an entire rucksack behind. I left it a while before rifling through it to find a foreign driving licence and no idea how to contact the loseee. Fortunately, she arrived soon after the Missus posted a message on the community face page. She had not seen the message but had remembered where she left the bag, which was a happy result.

Restoring my faith in human nature, my friend from up the hill, with whom I have such wonderfully abstract conversations when she comes to the shop, sent me a message. She thanked me for the cake I had sent up with her daughter who had come into the shop earlier. She told me that there had been a fox in her garden and that she feared for the Easter Bunny, so I promised to warn it when I saw it next. She also said that she was going deaf and had lost her glasses. I asked if the two might be related and that she should check if she still had ears. It went on some after that. I dare not relate the conversation as my cognitive tests may be imperilled.

The day may have been quiet but the late afternoon in the run up to closing was brutally silent. There was however a five minutes to closing rush – if you can call two people a rush - which this time I was open for. It is the little things that count.

When I took the girls out last thing, the wind had really perked up. It had been coming in southerly for most of the shop day but when we stepped out at gone nine o'clock, it has moved around to the southwest and was a bit more noticeable in The Cove. It had ramped up to near fifty miles per hour, so I took the girls along a more sheltered route. It was howling in the wires, which spooked the little girl a bit and she was constantly racing after dead leaves that whizzed by. We did not tarry long. It is due to go around to the west by morning, so I hope it has calmed a bit by then.

## April 5<sup>th</sup> – Sunday

The sea was already in a state of anxious fury this morning, throwing itself over the Harbour wall and churning up in the Tribbens and on Cowloe. What it did not need was a force eight wind giving it a healthy shove from behind as it went over the wall and sending the resulting body of water halfway across the Harbour. You did not need to see it, either. There was a loud slap followed by a lengthy rush as the droplets cascaded on the water below. It might have attracted a few people out to watch it but for some sporadic heavy showers that were blowing through, marring the occasional sunny spells.

One group who were clearly not bothered made their way down the road early doors, well before the shop was open. I had not appreciated their purpose, but a neighbour told me later that it was a congregation from a local church on their way to the Harbour where they intended to baptise a person. I do not know about you, dear reader, but if I was the intended subject, I would have taken one look at the Harbour and very suddenly decided that Buddhism was a better prospect.

With all my focus on pasties (sorry, MS) and numbers of visitors and when and what they might want to eat and buy, it was very easy to forget the true meaning of Easter. It was only when a lady came in this morning that I recalled that children love a good Easter egg hunt on the Sunday morning. She was after some additional eggs because she found herself five short. We have long since not bothered with Easter eggs but always buy a shipping load of crème eggs. The manufacturer only produces these at Easter, but we buy enough that they are available all year, which pleases some folk greatly. I am sure that Mr Cadbury would take a dim view, but we will not tell him, eh?

By a sheer fluke I had put some pasties on the heat quite early on, even before the street saw the first early wonderers of the morning. The pasties were barely ready when a customer came in demanding one. It is interesting the different approaches during the day. After late morning, we are asked, do we have any pasties left. Early in the morning, even just as we open, customers clearly expect pasties to be ready immediately. They are genuinely surprised when I suggest we wait until it starts to look busy before heating them up. I would have to wait until much later to discover whether I had left enough out of the freezer for today.

By the middle of the morning, the showers had blown through, and the clouds went with them leaving us with clear, pastel blue skies. The wind had indeed gone westerly and diminished a good deal leaving us cold but looking good. It did the trick and soon our end of The Cove was bustling with visitors and they were buying things. We had an absolutely corking day, about what I was expecting on the last couple of days. The onslaught started in the middle of the morning and continued all the way until gone half past three o'clock. There were some small breaks in the flow that allowed me to do my farm shop cash and carry order, which, two weeks on from the last one, was sorely needed.

This year I have almost admitted defeat on payment cards sales. Last year, I softened a little allowing card payments of greater than two pounds but would not go below it except in extreme circumstances. This year I have been beaten into submission as more and more people only have a card or a telephone about their person. If I turn away a few transactions because they do not meet our criteria, that is not too bad. It was now looking like I would now be turning away more than a significant number and the arithmetic did not make sense anymore. I still will not accept a payment card for less than a pound and I will leave our £3 pound sign up for those who can read but otherwise, anything goes.

I am sure that you have been on the edge of your seat, dear reader, on tenterhooks waiting for the outcome of the pasty situation. Allow me to put you out of your misery forthwith. The crowds very quickly dissipated in the run up to four o'clock like someone upstream had turned off the tap. This was just as well because I sold the last of the Cornish pasties at around twenty minutes to four o'clock. I did not have to delve into the frozen, although had the timing been different and I had foreseen the last of the little rushes earlier, I might have got them out and then would have been left with them. As it was, the number I put away worked out near perfectly. Where I did have to seek reinforcements was on the cheese pasty side. I had put these away last week and needed them to make up for the shortage. It was a big vegetarian day today, obviously.

For some weeks now, I have noticed that my new warm woollen jacket has a hole on the pocket. I must have snagged it on a small dog's baby teeth. The hole had started to irritate and like a sore tooth, could not keep my fingers away from it. I asked the Missus if she had some appropriate wool and it was she who recruited Mother to the task. Today, I left my jacket upstairs and when I went up later it was on a chair with a needle stuck in where the hole used to be. This was just as well because it would have been impossible to see it else. She had matched the original stitch for stitch and I was amazed. It is like having your own personal elf. What a great thing Mothers are.

I did not have a great deal of time to gaze down upon the beach but when I did, it was busy. The sea was full of revellers right through the low water period and slightly less full of surfers as high water approached. There was still a heavy ground sea rolling in and the surf was reasonable for the more experienced. It was not long

before it was coming over the wall again, but I think it was less chaotic than in the morning. It was very relaxing to watch the heavy roll across the bay. Just right for the end of a busy day.

## April 6<sup>th</sup> – Monday

We kept our clear skies from yesterday, lighting up the bay in the morning. The sea state had diminished and was looking largely flat, and we traded our chilly west wind for a chilly east wind of the same strength. What was not to like? Oh yes, standing behind the counter with the chilly wind squirting at me through the doorway.

Maybe it was the chill that kept our customers away, but business today was not a patch on the day before, or so it seemed. Most of the morning was spent in the doldrums with only sporadic flurries of activity. The beach looked busy with maybe not so many in the water as yesterday, but there were very few people parading the street. We watched and waited.

When I found that I had watched and waited enough, I called the Missus down to guard the shop while I went off to the gymnasium for the first time in a week. I will spare you the sordid details, but I managed to strain my anterior tibialis, and it had taken a while to heal. I suspect my betters and those that know, will tell me that standing behind the counter for ten hours a day is probably not the best method of bringing my leg back to full fitness. However, needs must when the devil wants so much in taxation and a grumpy shopkeeper cannot hide everything, so work he must.

Well, I say work, most of the time it is fighting off the boredom. It was still a bit like that when I came back from the gymnasium an hour later but starting my breakfast sorted that out in no time. It was late in the morning by that time and business had only just begun to stir. Late starts like that make pasty ordering (sorry, MS) fraught. It is too close to ordering time to know if buying will take off or remain slow for the rest of the day. The only thing to do was to assume the former and order accordingly. As it turned out, we sold through all the pasties I had ordered for today and I had to fall back on some from the freezer. I have ordered the same number for tomorrow, so who knows if that will be enough or too many.

So sorry, to disappoint but that was the only excitement of the whole day, such as it was. There were no christenings in the Harbour – which is a shame as the weather and sea state were much more conducive to it – and there was no derring do in the large surf. Customers behaved themselves impeccably and no small children were left behind to amuse themselves in the toy aisle. It was just one of those days.

It was just one of those days when your friendly local fisherman sends you a message from somewhere in the bay to ask if we would like a lobster or two, ones that had evaded an octopus only to be caught for cooking. The Missus would normally be the master of such decisions, but this was a very early message, and the Missus does not do early. I took a punt and said, thank you very much and would leave the Missus to cook them later on. At least it only cost cash this time instead of cash and several pasties. Bargain.

The Missus spent a few hours up at the Farm planting and whatever else she does up there. I sent her another list of requests for goodies from the store as we are selling things that need replacing, which is good in my view. It would probably irritate her less if I could put everything we need into the one list. This being the second day of things that I forgot on the first day of things. I will probably find more tomorrow. If I do, I might just leave it a day or two before asking. Just out of interest, we sold a windbreak today.

The other thing that the Missus brought down was the last of our swede that anyone down here would call a turnip. There were about ten of them. The cabbage she brought down a week ago is now on sale in our freeze and it will be the same for the swede from tomorrow. She spent the evening cutting them up, which beats watching television these days.

I was most surprised when I closed the till at the end of the shop day; we were only a hair's breadth off our business for yesterday. Our customers must have practised ninja shopping as they were so stealthy, I hardly noticed. It might have been that there were fewer but more notable spends but I am sure I would have remembered. I decided that it was best not to analyse too deeply, smile and take the money, which I did. We do love it when a plan comes together, even if we have no idea that we actually made a plan in the first place.

## April 7<sup>th</sup> – Tuesday

The calmer sea had been replaced overnight with a ground sea that at near high water was sending large waves hurtling towards the beach. As they crossed the bay, they met the robust easterly breeze coming the other way. The result was a sea filled with marching waves curling back at the top with acres of spray reeling out behind them. The shoreline from Cape to Gwenver was a mess of white water with waves jumping up Creagle almost to halfway. Gwenver could not be seen behind the wall of elevated spray.

Once again, the morning was slow going. So slow was it that I said to a local boy who I had not seen for a while that I was surprised to see him two days in a row. It turns out that it was earlier in the morning I had seen him, not the day before. Even the beach took a while to fill up as the tide was in for a fair part of the morning. After that, the Lifeguards had the beach red flagged. I thought that they might relent at low

water but there was nothing doing. At low water, the waves were running in long and flat, so there was not much there even for paddling. Excellent for a bit of skimboarding though.

Our farm shop cash and carry arrived in the middle of the day which gave me something to do. We had, of course, started to get a little busier by then but not so busy a little diversion was not welcome. Over the years the company has supplied us with some interesting and popular products. I have of late, however, had cause to be a little irritated at them as they have stopped stocking certain of our favourites. It seems that we just get into our stride with a product, the little tubs of hummus being a prime example, when they suddenly decide not to stock it anymore. I am sure they have good reason, but it is frustrating nonetheless when we cannot find a suitable alternative.

I have just ordered some tubs of pate from them. They will either still be on our shelf at the end of the season, or they will sell tremendously well and be discontinued by the middle of summer. On the subject, our little tubs of fish that attracted some interest last week have now stopped moving and the Cornish pasta has stirred no interest at all. The former I expect to shift as soon as the families go home but the pasta, I fear, may have been a mistake.

What has not been a mistake is sticking with some of our local artisan gins and other spirits which continue to sell very well. Against the odds, our most expensive gin, the squid ink one in the copper flask, is still the biggest seller. Hot on its heels is the new boy in town from Mount's Bay Distillery. It comes in ceramic bottles and has sold extremely well since we started doing it last year.

So well has it sold that we ran out yesterday and I planned, not only to order some more of their gin, but to order some rum as well. I had not put any particular priority on placing the order, but when a customer came in and asked when we would be getting some more, I told him I would call today and expect delivery by the end of the week.

Since I could not recall what the minimum order was and I also wanted to discuss which of their rums was selling the best, I decided to telephone rather than sending a message. I was answered by the lady owner in the partnership but was struggling to hear her with some background noise at her end. I had barely started the conversation when she told me that they were on holiday and could I possibly place the order next week instead.

I cannot possibly explain how miffed I was by this. The more I thought of it, the more my miffedness escalated until I became very miffed indeed. We had taken a punt on stocking their product, a new startup and local business, and they had let us down at a crucial moment. If they had run out or had technical problems, fair enough, but to be off on holiday in the middle of one of the few busy times of the year – what!

There are few busy times during the year, school holidays, basically, and local businesses know how important they are. You either want to run a business in Cornwall or you do not and if it is the former, you do not go on holiday in the middle of peak times. I will leave it a day or so to go off the boil and consider whether I explain this to them. I will also consider, based upon their response, whether to continue stocking their products. While the loss of us as a customer will probably not concern them at all – although it should – if we cannot rely on a supplier when we need them most, they are not worth having.

It did not help a grumpy shopkeeper's subsequent demeanour one jot that the expected upsurge of afternoon visitor visits did not arrive. Certainly, for Friday and Saturday and to some extent, Monday, our customers had started to frequent the shop in the early part of the afternoon. I had no reason to expect today to be much different, but the early afternoon became the middle of the afternoon with no appearance of our illusive customers. Surely, they cannot all have gone to St Ives a day early.

As if to say, 'there is no point in hanging around if no one wants me', the sun duly beggared off too. We spent the entirety of the afternoon under cloud, which did nothing to mitigate the chill of the easterly breeze. Having said that, the chill was not as chilly as yesterday; we gained a good few degrees on the day before. Rumour has it a veritable heatwave is on the way, but you will excuse me if I do not hold my breath for it.

Then the sun came back shortly before we closed. Of course it did. It prompted a small five minutes to closing rush, for which I should be grateful. When I took the girls around last thing, I noted that several of the holiday lets were in darkness and their residents gone home. The big Easter rush is over, which is disappointing especially as I ordered another busy day's worth of pasties (sorry, MS – I expect you thought you got away with it today).

## April 8<sup>th</sup> – Wednesday

The bay was showing all the hallmarks of something in the region of a rip gribbler of a day in the making. It was obvious that the sky was clear blue even though it was masked by a thin veil of mist that covered the entire bay. It was like a new sports car under a silk cover, waiting to be revealed to the world.

There was enough beach to take the girls for a spin down on the sand in the Harbour in the morning. It was still a little chilly, but it was a dry cold, and the air was particularly fresh like it had been scrubbed clean ahead of a new day. I probably did not need my woolly jacket, and I certainly could have done without my hat. I am not sure that the sun had risen but it was very bright. I was all for going straight back home but the girls wanted to walk around the block, so I let them. Like them, I found

myself sniffing up the air and the fragrance from the three cornered garlic all up the hillside.

The sea was still pounding a bit but not in yesterday's league. I had not expected it to be pounding at all because our Coxswain had called a training exercise tonight. Apparently, it was the last weather window before the end of the week and Thursday would be too rough. Anyway, at least the Lifeguards had not red flagged the beach today.

It was just as well that they did. I think that there would have been insurrection had they not. When I looked at the outset to the afternoon, the beach under The Beach car park was a mass of small camps as much akin to a summer's day that you could get. The rest of the beach was dotted with surfers coming and going and people just enjoying the space. There was a whole host in the swimming and bodyboarding in the assigned area, most of which had come through the shop on the way down there.

We had been quiet in the morning as the mist cleared and the glory of the day revealed itself. It was still quiet when I headed to the gymnasium halfway through the morning and it was also quiet when I came back. When it started to get busy was the second I unwrapped a brae bit of chicken to have with my morsel of bread. It then when stark staring mad – obviously.

After yesterday's mass abstinence, the resulting glut of pasties (sorry, MS) and a similar number arriving this morning, I had decided not to place and order for tomorrow. By midday, I was starting to waver on that decision and by half past twelve, after an astonishing run of pasty buying, I capitulated and ordered a similar amount for tomorrow.

As is ever the case with beach days, we hit a slow patch during the middle of the afternoon when everybody had bought their bucket and spades, snacks, drinks and wherewithal and settled at their chosen spot on the sand. On summer days when they are down there earlier, we jest that a shower of rain in the middle of the day would be useful to get them back into the shop again for a while. It also generally ends up with a bit of a rush at the end of the shop day when they all pile off the beach to go get some tea. I therefore thought it prudent to have a bit of tea of my own before the fight started as I would have to rush over to the Lifeboat station as soon as we closed.

I was getting a little concerned by half past four o'clock. We were still quiet and there was no sign of a beach exodus. At five o'clock we started to see a few, then a few more. It was all looking very promising when it all collapsed again. There was not even the smallest of five minutes to closing rushes but it did allow me to close up on time and head across the road.

As I have explained before, I assign roles now before we arrive at the station. There are so many on the very excellent Shore Crew qualified to run the winch, drive the Tooltrak and carry out the head launcher role that they need to be rotated fairly. Most of us use the station chat group to indicate if we are attending and I use that to determine who is next to fill a role who will also be available. This is sometimes thwarted by crew who sign in late or just turn up at which point I sometime have to rearrange assignments at short notice. This evening, I had to do it three times.

Again, I had the new recruits shadowing experienced people in the roles of winch operator and Tooltrak driver. This meant that again we were short, particularly on the big boat launch and I found myself on my own with the head launcher. Given that I am in the ultimate position to arrange things so that I do very little, this did not work out at all well. Fortunately, the Inshore boat launched ahead of the big boat and the crew from there returned to help with setting up.

Once again, the boat would return to the short slip for recovery. The tide was three hours out from high water and as we are going off spring tides we did not expect the short slip to be overwhelmed with water at any point before the boat came back. The sea state, however, was a little feisty and even two hours ahead of high water, there was a little flogging over the Harbour wall. It caught out a father and young girl who had wandered to the end and were just returning. It stopped them in their tracks for a second before they hurried back ahead of the next wave.

The Inshore boat returned first and the big boat half an hour afterwards. This again was useful as one of the Inshore team came free to help with the recovery. I was particularly grateful because until then I was on my own again with the head launcher directing from the long slip. From where I was standing at the top of the short slip I had an excellent view of what was clearly a textbook recovery in moderate to rough sea conditions at the end of the slip. Since I would be the person recovering the 'fishing rod' line deployment tool from the bottom of the slip after the boat was in, I had the opportunity to set it up a little higher than we would normally do. It meant the boat crew having to use a boat hook to recover the line but most importantly it meant that I would not get my wellies wet when I went down to retrieve it. We are, after all, a very forward-thinking, very excellent Shore Crew.

## April 9<sup>th</sup> – Thursday

All change: blue skies and sunshine, one step back; full cloud cover and mizzle, take centre stage. Still, there were no waves coming over the Harbour wall, so that was something. The heat from yesterday was but a mere memory, spirited away by a stiff northwesterly that kept the temperature down for the rest of the day. At one point it sent a line of squally showers through which was definitely not as advertised.

Our visitors duly stayed away in droves, certainly during the morning. I took the opportunity to clean the pasty oven (sorry, MS) a task that was outstanding since we

opened. I had no interruptions and even when I started my breakfast, I was permitted to complete it in peace. We had a few customers coming and going by the time our soft drink order arrived. I had left this for a week or so and consequently it was quite a bulky order. Even this I managed to get the majority of out and into the drinks fridge so that it would not clutter the store room. By the middle of the day, I felt like an achiever and, my, it feels good.

I think, on the whole, I would have preferred to feel like a successful grumpy shopkeeper but there was no chance of that during the morning, at least. Also, at the middle of the day, the outside world brightened considerably, although the wind continued to hang in there. We did start to see an increase in our customer appearances, but the visits were sporadic and variable in quality. I had one lady turn up for a small purchase and struggled to find her payment card. She told me it was lost amongst the too many loyalty cards she had. That struck me as ironic, or at the least a contradiction in terms. Surely, having multiple loyalty cards is the exact opposite of loyalty.

The big beach was a different place to yesterday as well. I spotted a couple of little camps down under the car park, wrapped around with windbreaks, but that was it. The Missus took the girls down there in the early afternoon with acres of beach mainly to themselves. Given the stiff onshore wind there was not much in the way of surfing either and only the committed – or possibly those that had been – were likely to be taking a dip today. Having said that, there were two young ladies doing just that in the Harbour this morning when I took the girls down. It was a bit more sheltered down there, but they even made *me* feel cold when they ventured in.

I did not need anyone walking into the sea to make me feel cold by the end of the afternoon. The wind that had been banging in from the northwest all day somehow managed to swirl around the doorpost and squirt directly at me. I do not know if it actually did, but it seemed like it had got colder as the day progressed. Perhaps it was just the continual onslaught, instead. I checked the weather station at Land's End, and the wind had increased a little as the day went on and the temperature, an ambient 10 degrees, was registering as a 5 degrees windchill. No wonder I was cold.

The latter part of the afternoon brought us some wandering souls, fed up with staying indoors or who had been out all day and were in search of succour. Sadly, we were clean out of succour, but we had some pasties and for a thin day, we did quite well and very much in line with my estimations and my order for the weekend that I had placed at around half past midday. Of course, my estimations still need to be proven over the weekend, so I will not celebrate just yet.

Quaintly, we had a five minutes to closing rush, which having been quiet for much of the day, was most helpful. As is quite often the case, the till reflected a much better day than it had looked. Regardless of the weather being unhelpful, there are still visitors about and if they filter through slowly, I tend to forget the cumulative effect. Shopkeeping in The Cove and probably in wider Cornwall is all about averages, not

just over one year but several. I rather suspect, though, that this five years will be rather more difficult than ever before.

I consoled myself in the evening with a rather large malt whisky. Well, why not.

## April 10<sup>th</sup> – Friday

We get a daily price list from one of our fish suppliers during the working week. It comes with deal of the day in the headline. Today was double sucker octopus, which is probably just the arms of a big one. Allowing for a reasonable margin, available to you dear customer at around £16 per kilogram. You could have a whole small one at £13 per kilogram. On the other hand, your average lobster which last year you could pick up for £25 per kilogram is now – wait for it - £45 per kilogram and I would have to cut my own throat to sell it for such a tight margin. Gosh.

That, dear reader, is about as exciting as it got today. If I had said it was quiet other days this week, I was grossly understating the term – or was I overstating it, erm. The quiet today stretched from early morning right through to near the end of the day. It was interrupted spasmodically by a few families or people just leaving who had forgotten a present or two to take home. If this was a change-over day, it rather looked like everyone was changing and going home. I think that part of the problem is that not many people are staying in The Cove. The lets here are still very expensive and I suspect money is tight.

Another highlight of the day was a visit from our fire extinguisher maintainer. He has been coming for 23 years and I think has represented three or four different companies in that time. We only see him once a year, but he feels like an old friend, and we get to chat about this and that while he is here. He lives over in Hayle, which is common talking ground and he fills me in on changes that I might not have been aware of. Apparently, there had been none in the last twelve months, so it must have been a slow year.

We had a little flurry of activity in the middle of the afternoon, but it was indeed a little flurry. It happened just after I started doing something long and detailed on the computer, so that will teach me.

Another element not in our favour was the weather. The morning was horrid. We managed to get to the beach and back for our morning walk out and I got the shop ready, but shortly after we opened, it started to rain. It rained quite heavily at one point and was still going a little bit when I took the girls out again after I got back from the gymnasium. For the first couple of weeks of opening, the ten hours of standing were clearly not doing my ex-dickie knee leg any favours. This week, however, there has been much improvement and the leg movement on the rowing machine was much more equitable across left and right. We are getting there, me and my legs. Together we will rule the world one day.

While I revelled in the wonders of my new leg, the weather outside improved a little. I had spoken with a walker last night looking for somewhere to set up his tent along the Coast Path. I told him that much of it was National Trust and they frowned upon such things, but I think we both agreed that it was dark at night and the likelihood of rangers being out was slim. At the time, the wind was in the northwest, but when I looked at the next 24 hours for him, it was clear the wind was going to veer all the way around to the southeast by the morning. If he had set up camp on the north coast he would have four hours on belting northwesterly to cope with and if he set up on the south coast, the first four hours would be sheltered but after that he would have a belting southeasterly to enjoy. We settled on somewhere near Nanjizal where he might possibly find shelter from both.

Fortunately, I did not get to feel much of the southeasterly in the shop. In fact, it was so calm that I was surprised when a youth came by later and told me that it was blustery out and about today. It was still not exactly warm in the shop. To think that on Wednesday I had almost considered retiring my woolly jacket. I was back in it again yesterday and definitely needed it today. A good book to read would have helped as well.

Just to show that we should never despair, because according to Mr Tolkein, despair is for those who see the end beyond all possible doubt, we had an 18 caret, veritable five minutes to closing rush. We were truly inundated for a while there. One of the parties inadvisably purchased – although I was not the one to advise them – a couple of fishing rod kits and some stronger line and lures. Later we spotted them at the end of the Harbour wall. I do hope they had fun.

## April 11<sup>th</sup> – Saturday

Some huge excitement today: the bus times changed. The first I knew of it was a local lady who had to go to the shop at the top of the hill because the pesky local shop in The Cove refuses to do newspapers until he can make some money out of it. The temerity of it. She had arrived at the bus stop at the previously appointed time and discovered that the bus arrived at a different time altogether.

On the one hand, the bus company *had* set an end date of yesterday to the current, temporary, bus timetable. It was based on the expectation that Chywoone Hill would be open again and that buses would be able to resume their normal route. On the other hand, the company had done this previously for 20<sup>th</sup> March. The work had not finished and the temporary timetable continued. I can understand that it must be a bit of a fag visiting every single bus stop to change the posted timetable in a timely manner. If only the company had a vehicle that was visiting every single bus stop on a regular basis, the driver could change them on the way around. Perhaps I shall write and suggest it.

For anyone posting anything lighter than a brick, they would need some extra strong glue or big nails today. The wind had been howling in the eaves all night and we woke up this morning with it still howling in but from the southwest. I had noticed this in the forecast yesterday but had dismissed it as a cause of any concern because southwesterlies generally fly overhead. I was therefore very surprised that the girls and I were buffeted about on our trip to the beach and the dry sand was being lifted and blown down the beach with some force. It was also bitterly cold. Given the conditions, I had thought that the forecast had it wrong and that it was coming in from the northwest, but when I checked Land's End weather station it was truly southwesterly and around force five to six or force seven at Gwennap Head, windiest place in the universe.

It was all down to a big lump of low pressure sliding over the same route that Storm Dave did a week or so ago. Quite why this was not worthy of a name, I could not tell, but along with the wind, it brought some sea chaos to the bay. There was much white water over Cowloe and around the fringes to start with but as the tide increased so did the amount of white water. It looked spectacular under large amounts of blue sky edged to the east by huge clumps of cumulus and to the west, high level cirrus. There were large waves running in across the bay, rolling over the Harbour wall, churning up over Cowloe and flattening against the cliffs opposite. They all fell apart 50 metres off the beach and cascaded in the rest of the way in a blanket of foam.

It would appear that last night's arrivals were pretty thin on the ground or that they did not fancy venturing out in what was a very fresh day. I suspect the former. We were exceedingly quiet during the whole day, and we were not even graced with a five minutes to closing rush. We did sell some hats and multifunctional scarves which given the conditions seemed fair. Otherwise, I was pretty much left to my own devices which was satisfactory to some degree as I had been meaning to top up the sunglasses stand for the best part of a week.

It is one of those tasks that is easy to put off because it seems tedious or tiresome or something, but when you actually start doing it, the job is not as bad as I imagined. I was on a roll and would have carried on with other toppings up, but I was interrupted and that was the end of that. It was near the end of the afternoon when I remembered that I had also been meaning to place an order for our locally produced, fragrant soaps. Fortunately, a late sale pushed me into action and hopefully we will be better stocked by the end of the week.

Over the time that we have used this particular company they have changed to selling more expensive jewellery and homeware products and the soap seemed to be sidelined. Since we are always on the lookout for new local products, I decided to see what other local soap companies there were and surprisingly there were more than a couple. Some seemed expensive but one in particular looked like a close fit for our shelves. I do not intend to do more than one soap, and the current one

continues to sell very well. I did add a note to our order though to ask the company if they intended to continue their soap range long term, which seemed sensible.

It was probably unnecessary, but the distraction took up some time that I would be otherwise wearing out my thumbs by twiddling them or my behind by scratching it. I did some more bay watching and considering what I would do with the glut of pasties (sorry, MS) that I was looking at each time I opened the fridge. There are generally no orders to place on a Saturday, so there was no point in looking to see if we were running out of things. I did, however, make some preparations for our big cash and carry order that we will need to call in next weekend.

Before I knew it, the time had arrived to pull in the outside display. I had very wisely not set out our flags as they would have blown away taking the fixings with them. Everything else out there is either tied down or too heavy. It was a great relief to close the shop not least because I could go somewhere warmer than behind the counter.

I am rather hoping for some improvements tomorrow in both weather and customers. I also bought a lottery ticket, which I suspect will be more likely to provide a return.

## April 12<sup>th</sup> – Sunday

Very suddenly, at ten forty-five o'clock precisely, the wind stopped blowing. Alright, it might have been a few minutes either way, but I only said it for dramatic effect. The temperature also suddenly increased but that was very likely to be the absence of windchill. It was actually quite pleasant.

It would have been pleasanter if the variably bright morning had not been peppered with heavy showers of rain pushing through and it would have been pleasanter still had there been a few customers willing to dodge them.

We spent the morning in light and dark as the rain-filled cloud scudded overhead. The showers were wintry in nature, particularly in the earlier part of the day when it was windy. The sea had not calmed a great deal since yesterday, but it did look like there was less swell in it and it seemed to flatten as the day went on. I was called to observe a young seal under the slipway by a concerned visitor. It was resting under the long slip and with the tide coming in I was not about to venture down there for a closer look. We agreed that if it was still there after the tide had come and gone, I would call it in.

In the absence of hardly any business at all I decided that I would get the cash and carry order out of the way. This entailed running through the store room for spares of things that I could put out on the shelf and thus determine if we had sufficient left for the coming weeks. When we are relatively busy, we order every two weeks. The current stock had come from the order we placed before we were open, three weeks

ago. We have had the intervening Easter holiday and after I completed the list, we were still struggling to make a minimum order up. The only reason we need to place the order at all is that we are missing some key items that we cannot get elsewhere.

I will hang fire on placing the order until later in the week just in case we have a major rush that would make me regret going early. As long as I do not lose my list, we will be fine.

We were a bit more upbeat in the last couple of hours of opening. The weather had improved, the rain had stopped, and without the windchill the few people who were here were happy to walk about for a bit. The sea was putting on a bit of a show that attracted a few to come and have a look but overall, it was pretty poor show for what was still Easter holidays for many. As if to prove the point I put an equal number of pasties (sorry, MS) in the freezer to those I had ordered in for the weekend. Had they not gone out of date, we could have managed on the ones we had left at the end of Thursday.

It is difficult what to make of the forecast for the coming week. It looks like we will have some respite tomorrow but after that another big low pressure system reaches us from across the Atlantic. The way things look, we will be relying on a bit of sunshine here and there. It will be a wait and see week in many ways.

## April 13<sup>th</sup> – Monday

Well, ain't that just pretty. We have sunshine, brightness and a bit of a dodgy sea. So dodgy was the sea that the fishermen who had gathered first thing with a view to going out took a long geek at it and decided to come back later on.

The girls were not so fussy, mainly as they were not going to go into or on it. It also meant that they could run around without fear of the tractor coming to disturb their play. There was also no sand flying about on account of there being very little in the way of wind to help it along. BB was keen to explore and hang about a little more today. Unfortunately, I was not as I had a shop to open. We compromised and we hung about for a little because it was rather pleasant down there.

The shop morning had a better feel about it, probably much to do with a lack of showers passing through and sunshine. It had rained overnight and quite heavily judging from the standing water in the street. This dried up relatively quickly under an increasing temperature and a light breeze from the southeast. You certainly cannot say that the wind had been predictable over the last week or so, one day in northwest and the next the southeast then back to the southwest and in varying strengths. It has been a great partner for the sea that has been equally volatile over the period.

It must have been good enough at some point to allow the crabbers out to collect some crab. I had taken an order for some white meat at the early part of last week. I had explained that we might not be able to get any because of the octopus problem but I was aware that next door was getting some in sporadically, so I chanced my arm. When I called in the middle of the week to place the order, the voice message told me that no crab would be available until Monday, today. I took a punt and placed the order not knowing if we would get some or not. The biggest gamble was on the price, and I ordered blind.

The order arrived while I was at the gymnasium today and we got all that we had asked for. The biggest surprise was that the price was exactly as it was this time last year, which I thought entirely decent of them. In the current conditions they could probably charge what they liked.

The blue skies slowly covered over during the day with a mix of cumulus and high level cirrus blocking out the direct sunshine. The sea evened out to a deep, rolling ground sea that was good enough for some classic surfing late in the tide. Gone were the white tops and the crashing waves, which was all jolly good news for the planned Lifeboat launch in the early evening.

Late in the afternoon, the Cliff Team were called out to a casualty over on Aire Point near the Coast Path. They spent some time stabilising the casualty and called in the Coastguard helicopter for an air lift. The helicopter made several passes, dropping the winch guy down and returning a few times to hover over the scene. I was up in the Lifeboat station crew room by then, watching with the others.

The great and the good had gathered just after six o'clock and I joined them as soon as I had closed the shop. We had enjoyed a better day altogether from either day of the weekend but with no five minutes to closing rush, I managed a timely exit.

This was probably just as well because we were a little thin on the ground and I had put myself in the driving seat, shore side, for the big boat launch which left suitable bodies to do things like run the winch and drive the Tooltrak. I avoided the pitfall from the previous week by not running shadows on the Tooltrak and the winch which would have given me two extra people had the shadows actually been present, which they were not. So, I was no better off, really.

Once organised and we all spread out in a bunch, it all went swimmingly and boat boats launched on time. With the spare bodies from the Inshore launch, we set up the long slipway and retired for some serious considerations and debate about all things worth considering and debating. That and the consumption of much tea and many biscuits passed the time while the boats were out

The Inshore came back first, which was highly convenient as the crew from there were able to return for the big boat. They need not have hurried – and in fact they did not – as the big boat took its time to come back. By the time I ventured to the bottom

of the slipway, the tide had receded more than I anticipated, and we hauled a bit more cable down. The boat came back into the bay just as we finished out preparations. The swell had completely died away and there was no more than a gentle rise and fall on the slipway toe. It allowed for what was clearly a textbook recovery in benign conditions up the long slipway. There were sufficient of us to make for a comfortable wash down and refuel before retiring for the night. We are, after all, a very efficient, very excellent Shore Crew.

## April 14<sup>th</sup> – Tuesday

I would have started by telling you what the weather looked like but since I could not see it, I decided it was best not to try and make it up.

Whatever the weather was behind the wall of fog, it was of a reasonably mild sort. I had noticed this the previous night when I was taking the girls out for their last spin after I came back from Lifeboating. We were unable to take to the beach because the tractor was down there unloading pots from one of the fishing boats. I had heard yesterday that they had lost a fair few pots, smashed up by the lively sea late last week and over the weekend.

The weather presenter on Radio Pasty told me that we could expect it to be brighter later in the day but that we would pay for the privilege with rain showers passing through. I discovered this to be true when, exasperated at the end of a chain of quiet moments, I decided to hose down the windows that I could no longer see out of for salt. At first, I thought that I was just being splashed by rebounding water from the hose but then decided that it was too consistent and that it must have been raining instead.

While I had the sum total of three customers during the morning, the only crowd I saw was a surf school down on the beach. They were all youngsters presumably learning the rudiments of how to surf when there was no surf to surf on. To many of us this is called getting cold and wet on a stationery surfboard. All surfers must be taught how delightful this is from an early age given the number of older surfers seen doing it throughout the year. The surfing equivalent of the emperor's new clothes, perhaps.

The mist lifted a little towards the middle of the day and we had some brightness. It was very encouraging. It lasted about an hour, got mistier and rained, which was not. It did coincide with a sudden rush of around a dozen people quite a few of whom wanted pasties (sorry, MS). Since there had been no demand for pasties all morning, I had only a few in the warmer and promptly ran out. I put some more in the oven, whereupon the demand dissipated and I was left with a warmer full of pasties. There was very little prospect of anyone fighting their way through the rain to get to them.

During the afternoon we enjoyed only sporadic customer visits. The return of the mist and damp really put the boot in to any proper business. Rather than do nothing, I keyed in the cash and carry order. I will send it at the end of tomorrow which gives me and the Missus a chance to add anything I might have forgotten. I also added a new item to the online shop. In case you missed it, dear reader, we have web shop where many of the alluring items we stock in the shop can be purchased without having the fag of attending the store. You will find the button next to The Diary button on the website front page. Today, I added an 'online exclusive'. We have a notepad that has a picture of the beach in the front and a pen that has the words "I <heart> Sennen Cove" written down it with the <heart> replaced with a picture of a little red heart. You can purchase the very alluring combination for an even more attractive £7.50 plus postage and packing. It is a deal not available to customer in the shop, although if my arm is twisted, I might be persuaded.

The supplier of the items described above called yesterday to tell me that the remaining items of our customised order were available. They will be arriving tomorrow, so you should look out for more alluring products appearing on our web shop pages in the coming weeks – once you have found the button on the website front page, of course, dear reader.

We nothing better to do, I returned to a conundrum that had plagued me for a week or two. For some time I have been seeking a solution to the ever increasing number of photographs on my mobile telephone. They are not actually on my mobile telephone; they are in the 'cloud' in a free space provided by Mr Google. However Mr Google's largesse is limited, and he keeps reminding me that I am running out of free space and would I like to purchase some more – which I do not.

My solution was to use the very large storage space that I have at home which is regularly backed up to another space in 'the cloud' that I do pay for. The storage space comes with some software which looks very like Mr Google's photograph software and I can copy from one to the other. There have been a few issues that needed to be resolved, and it has taken a good year, on and off, to iron them all out. A couple of weeks ago, I transferred all the photographs and backed them up, then promptly had a problem that wiped out all the photos. Thankfully, I had a backup.

In short, what I am trying to say, dear reader, is that it was so quiet in the shop during the afternoon I was able to dedicate sufficient time to the remaining issues that they are now all fixed. I will let the solution run for a week or two to make sure, then, girding my loins, will delete great swathes of photographs from Mr Google's space to make him happy and to stop him sending me notes.

The other very good thing that happened today is that I sorted out the flowers I purchased for the Missus imminent birthday. I had ordered these a couple of months ago from the very good independent flower shop in Penzance. They had delivered the flowers I had ordered for the wedding anniversary in a time manner but had delivered the birthday ones yesterday. They clearly mixed up the birthday date with

the anniversary date. Had it been just that, we might have let it ride, but the delivered flowers, lilies, were already in bloom and would probably expire in a day or two and well before the birthday itself.

I called the flower shop today and spoke with a very pleasant lady. I explained the two issues that we had, starting with the date. I had barely finished explaining about the flowers in bloom before she immediately gave me a very sincere apology and told me they would send some more flowers on the correct date. Just like that. No argument or fuss. Just, sorry, here is a fix. Warmed the heart that sort of response and a lesson many more prestigious organisations could do with learning.

That resolved my day very nicely, thank you.

### April 15<sup>th</sup> – Wednesday

We narrowly avoided a soaking this morning. It had not occurred to me that it might rain despite seeing the forecast the day before which showed it would rain all day. I stand by my theory of taking a geek out of the window in the morning and taking it from there. There was a bit of galivanting on the beach and then we returned home so that I could get on with my chores. The next time I looked out of the window, it was dotted with raindrops.

It was not particularly heavy rain. That came later when I had to dash out and lock the bin after it was emptied this morning. By then the skies had gone steel grey and definitely looked the part of a miserable and rainy day in the middle of a holiday. It took until I came out of the gymnasium to clear and when I opened the door there was bright sunshine and a fair amount of blue sky.

The Missus told me she had no intention of heading up to The Farm today. She had spent a good deal of the day up there locked in the greenhouse with the girls. The Missus came back tired, and the girls came back lagged in earth. I do not know about the Missus, but the girls were hosed down until they were sparkly clean. As a result, it was a staying at home day today which meant me taking the girls out after I came back from the gymnasium, which I duly did.

All plans were put aside after our beach and giftware supplier had been while I was upstairs. We might have coped were it not for the 576 crab buckets with Sennen Cove on them; they were a tad bulky. I had the call before I came down to bring the truck keys so that we could load the truck and the Missus could take all the excess and the girls up to The Farm. They would not be going into the greenhouse, so the hope was we would still have relatively clean girls when they came back again.

After the Missus went, I unpacked the boxes that had been left behind. There were indeed some rather alluring goods that had arrived, all with Sennen Cove emblazoned upon them. We have the crab buckets, as mentioned, leather friendship

bracelets, more pens and a nail file with coloured glass handle. The latter will be on the web shop by the end of the day, dear reader, the button next to The Diary. Perhaps I mentioned it.

We were a bit busier today, especially while I was trying to unpack the boxes and get some of the gifts out on the shelves. Much of the busyness was to do with the improvement in the weather. The brightness we had, stayed with us for most of the day and stirred things up quite nicely. There were still some showers passing through and on a couple of occasions we were plunged back into gloominess as they passed.

The wind had been belting in from somewhere near the southwest first thing. It was a bit breezy in the Harbour but nothing like it was earlier in the week. Same direction, similar force but different effect in The Cove. That was strange. It came with a moderate swell in the bay but as the day progressed, the wind eased just a little, but the swell increased right through to the end of the day. The bay was filled with deep blue and heavily rolling sea, white at the fringes where it came up against the solid cliffs at Creagle and Aire Point.

The brightness was a bit on an off in the latter stages of the day. We had some notable customer visits but very sporadic. The most notable of all of them was one family with children over a reasonably large range of ages. One boy, perusing the fishing tackle while the younger ones chose ice creams. While I concentrated on pricing ice creams there was a bit of a crash from the fishing tackle section. Dad went to investigate and led the boy away after picking up a couple of weights off the floor.

They paid and left and I was minded to have a look at the fishing tackle, just in case. The boy had dropped one of the containers we use to display the weights in, and it had broken – weights scattered a bit. It was only a plastic box, so great problem, but I needed to tidy up the weights a bit. That was all. So, why not mention it? ‘Terribly sorry, box broken’ was all it needed. I can understand the child not saying but what an example Dad showed.

I would certainly not be losing any sleep over it but before I demonstrated that, I took the girls out for a last spin. Even at gone nine o’clock, there was still an echo of some light high up in the western sky. The breeze was still hanging in there, so I was glad I still had my hat and woolly coat but nevertheless, the season is definitely changing and there is a feel of spring about the evenings. It is very welcome.

## April 16<sup>th</sup> – Thursday

It has been for some while that I had been meaning to mention the additional rocks at North Rocks. Usually, there are two spurs of rocks coming away from the cliff of roughly equal size with the sands of Escalls Vean or Little Gwenver in the middle of

them. For the last several weeks, many more rocks have been exposed on the southern side of the feature making the nearer spur easily twice the size of the other.

It was only yesterday that I noticed the sand has come back and re-covered a good deal of what was uncovered, particularly the bit away from the cliff. There is still a sizeable portion of rocks at the back awaiting their turn. Conversely, over on Gwenver, even more sand has piled up at the northern end at the back. It looks like it is slowly climbing the cliff.

It is entirely possible that these observations were all the more obvious under the glare of some decent sunshine. It has started out quite hazy or misty, perhaps, and has slowly developed during the morning into something far more pleasant and attractive. Having said that, it was not unattractive down on the beach in the morning. It was just that we needed to dodge the incoming waves and having had enough of that, walked around the block. There was a little bit of breeze, but nothing compared to the previous morning or even the evening.

The morning was quiet enough that I was able to deploy the new towels that have a Sennen Cove monogram on them. I needed to unwrap one so that I could hang it up and the rest found a home with the similar towels but without the monogram. Yesterday, we discovered a whole case of 300 Sennen Cove surfboard keyrings tastefully decorated with the name, CROYDE. These will be particularly handy when we open our North Devon branch, whenever that might be. We will also have to consider our options in Dorset as some of the towels were labelled, SWANGE BAY. I think our potential there might be quite limited as there were only two towels named thus. However, we have not checked the other box of towels which the Missus took up to The Farm yesterday.

Talking of far-flung regions, we have a couple of senior visitors from Camborne staying this week. They have never been as far as The Cove before, so I have been treating them gently and have given them a warm welcome. They were very pleased to understand that our pasties (sorry, MS) come from closer to them than to us. We do like to help our customers feel at home.

And there is more still. Our International Correspondent from frozen Vermont, very far west of Camborne, is no longer our International Correspondent from frozen Vermont, very far west of Camborne or even from unfrozen Vermont. She sent me a message the day before yesterday to tell me that she was escaping, sorry, I meant travelling to New Zealand, which is an incomprehensible distance from Camborne and a direction that I would not wish to hazard a guess at, south perhaps. She should be arriving there today given a fair wind and a following sea, metaphorically speaking we hope, as she was flying. We look forward to hearing all about, erm, sheep.

With air travel on my mind, I was rather looking forward to the flyby of a spitfire on its 90<sup>th</sup> anniversary flight. It is flying around the coast, I believe, and in stages and

today's leg was from Newquay – ahead of the much maligned council closing it – accompanied by a modern A400m, which looks a bit like a Hercules. It was expected to leave Newquay at around ten o'clock and I calculated that at approximately 300 knots, a speed that would be comfortable for the Spitfire and the A400m, it would pass over us between 15 and 30 minutes later. I either missed it by being distracted by some other event or it cut the corner and did not come close to us. I am sure that I would have heard it had it been close enough. I learnt later that it was two hours leaving Newquay and very much cut out the Duchy, let alone our end. Most disappointing.

I truly cannot remember if we had cloud cover or not at the time, either. At some point during the morning that haze or mist had gone and we had a very bright few hours. Then, as we moved into the afternoon, the cloud cover increased, and the mist came back. It spoilt the vibe somewhat and the fairly buoyant day that we were enjoying collapsed into drab quietness save for the appearance of some walkers.

It does seem like the walking season has begun. There are walkers who come through all year but in the early and late shoulder seasons, there are rather more than at other times. Today we enjoyed the company of people from France, south of Camborne and from Kent, east of Camborne and also some Americans who told me that walking along the Zennor stretch of the path, as they had done two days before, had reminded them a bit of the trails in the Rockies, which is where they came from. They were no spring chickens, either, but seemed robust enough and unaffected by their journeys. We had an interesting discussion about beer and what the heck a 'pale ale' was. I told him that he would need several before falling over and he told me that was of little concern because he had a stick.

Right at the last knockings of the shop day, the skies cleared again. They made the increased swell in the bay sparkle with excess energy. It was a very clean swell with the only white water at the fringes and over Cowloe where the waves were really piling in. Naturally, the Harbour wall was an exciting place to be for a few brave youths where they enjoyed being dashed off the wall by aggravated waves of some power.

A young lady, late to the shop and representing a very singular five minutes to closing rush, told me that she had been down in the Harbour watching it all. She had been sitting on the Western slip, safely out of harm's way when her friend asked if she had noticed a young man was next to her wearing no clothes at all. She said that she had not realised and risked a glance and indeed, there was a young man without clothes hard on her right side. Averting her gaze was unnecessary because the young man, she believed on some dare, rushed off along the Harbour wall where he tossed himself off in the most dramatic of summersaults, tumbling into the Harbour surrounded by a huge wave. She averted her gaze some more when he emerged unscathed, sporting a huge smile and little else. One must assume some casually draped seaweed in the manner of Botticelli's Birth of Venus, covered the young man's dignity.

I must say, dear reader, I am quite breathless imagining such excitement and must immediately retire to collect myself. I apologise, of course, if the exacting detail of my description has caused any distress, discomfiture or discomposure among the more sensitive of you but I would be remiss in my duties not to report such an incident. It is important that future visitors are made aware of the full breadth of dangers that might await them when visiting The Cove.

## April 17<sup>th</sup> – Friday

It had rained some just before I took the girls out last thing last night. It definitely rained some more in the night, and it was still raining, although very lightly, when I took the girls out again this morning.

We were very early off the mark this morning. Mother is with us on her holidays again and the girls are on tenterhooks for every sound she makes in the quiet of the morning. It was however fully light, so it was not that early, and bright enough to see that we would not be able to attend the Harbour beach because the sea got there first. It was still not happy but happier than it was the previous high water and there were no unclothed men jumping about in it. We walked around the block instead.

I have noticed that we have a new milkman. He shares the round with the other milkman who seems to have been doing it for several years without so much as a holiday. He does get Sundays off. The new boy is super keen and arrived this morning even before the girls were out of bed. As helpful as this is, the disadvantage is that it fills the newspaper box before I have a chance to clear it. This morning it was full with just the dairy and the greengrocery deliveries and it was lucky we had not placed a bread order and we are not doing newspapers at the moment. I will have to bear that in mind next time I place a milk order that I will need to get up earlier to clear it.

The day struggled to meet its commitment to bring us a brighter later than the weather lady on Radio Pasty told us about. Personally, I do not think it was trying hard enough. It certainly did not give the impetus required to get our visitors wandering about and visiting shops, although it was busier than I was expecting. I put it down to a few Friday change-overs, and very welcome they were too – provided that they were reciprocal.

In the quiet that ensued, I attended to some administration related to the second end of year forced upon us by Making Tax Difficult. We have to count various financial doings between the VAT year end at the end of February and the accounting year end at the end of March. I was doing just that when the balance of our chutneys and preserves turned up. The delivery was most welcome since we had sold quite a bit of the first part of the order over Easter. The jars are perennially popular, and I am very glad that we sorted out our differences with the supplier.

I had not even broached the first box of that delivery when a very pleasant young lady turned up with the Rosemullion spirits order. They must be doing well to have employed a very pleasant young lady to do sales and deliveries and I am very glad for them. The product and the back story are both solid which make them easier to sell. I was pleased the delivery came today because I have an interested party arriving at the weekend who may wish to buy some of it.

Unfortunately, by the time I had unpacked it all, I discovered that two cases were missing: the spiced rum. I am rather hoping that is not the product our visitors are after. I did try telephoning, but I think the company only works four day weeks – nice work if you can get it, I imagine. Happily, later in the day, the boss responded to my call anyway. He provided the necessary information I was after regarding pricing and also assured me the balance of the order would be despatched next week.

The unexpected, or partially expected deliveries, distracted me from my administration which was very nice but only put off the inevitable. After I had put everything away and cleared the floor of the store room, I returned to the number crunching. Part of this is to count the cash in hand. What should happen is that the actual cash lying about the place marries up with the numbers on various bit of paper that say how much cash there should be. This seems to be such a fag to do all the paperwork *and* count the cash. I looked at the paperwork and made the assumption that the cash was probably somewhere. Job done.

I need not have worried about being interrupted by customers during my administrative binge; there were very few. It was about the same number as there were surfers surfing going towards the high tide. It looked to be quite a fine shore break but with rather large and lumbering waves. It was about the same time one of our fishermen came in. It surprised me that he had been out. He said that it had surprised him as well but needs must. He also said it was not very comfortable. He was targeting octopus, which he said was about the only thing out there. We agreed that it was astounding that it was holding its price with such an abundance but apparently Spain has an unlimited appetite for it. It is not clear whether the feed their children with it or to it.

It was only a couple of hours after he came back in that the sea registered its displeasure with his incursion. It was a repeat of yesterday, with large waves pounding Cowloe and lumping over the Harbour wall. Large, lean waves rolled across the bay, breaking late on the shore and on the rocks under the promenade. They were clearly waiting for the skies to clear again because no one likes a performance that is not under the spotlight – in this case the descending evening sun.

Later, as we took our last run out, there in the middle of the deepest blue western sky was a very bright Venus. Bleddy 'ansum.

April 18<sup>th</sup> – Saturday

We ended up with a plum cracker of a day, with wide portions of blue sky, plenty of sunshine and a bit of a cool breeze from almost the northwest. It really was quite chilly when I took the girls around but then again, it was quite early, too. I had to somehow coordinate walking them around the block and being at home when the cash and carry delivery turned up. Since I had very little control over one and absolutely no control over the other, it was always going to be try it and hope.

I hedged by bets a little by getting up earlier than I might otherwise have done. This allowed me to dispense with my ablutions and be as ready as I possibly could be. It worked out well. I had a short time after bringing the girls back before the cash and carry arrived and it was early enough for us to unload and give me a few minutes after as well. That was most welcome.

It was not our biggest order of the year, but the bill was still quite substantial. I worked out what I thought had shoved it up the scale when I discovered that I had ordered a case of four cases of half bottles of vodka instead of just one case of one. Still, that was only £100 more than it would have been, so it must have been tobacco again. We have cut our stock to the bone, and it still is more than a third of the total bill.

The delivery would be the centre point of the day. I got a good head start clearing it during the morning then picked at for the remainder of the day.

What slowed me up with the cash and carry was a very welcome increase in customers. At this time of year, it is all about the weather and today we were blessed. We started seeing an increase in footfall during the middle to later part of the morning, and it just got busier into the afternoon. Even when I placed the order, I was of the opinion that we would have too few pasties (sorry, MS). The grand plan was to erode the stock in the freezer. If it had not got busy, we would just about have enough for the weekend and the frozen would be untouched – unfortunate but not a big problem. If we got busy, as we did, I would pull suitable numbers from the freezer and add those to the stock.

We are starting to see some regular visitors turn up. Some have arrived out of kilter with their usual times for one reason or another. One such couple had to make arrangements around a knee replacement appointment, something we were aware that we had in common. Naturally enough, there was some comparing of notes. I said that there were still things I was discovering that I could do now that I could not do before. One of those I had discovered when I was topping up the crisps in the lower level baskets. I used to let the Missus do it because I could not get down there. I said that we would not trouble the Missus with the revelation as she might stop doing it for me.

The sea state changed again today. We started the day with a deep swell in the bay and waves topping over the Harbour wall. It kept the fishing boats hanging about waiting for the tide to drop back a bit. They eventually went out a little way into the morning accompanied by a strong constitution and were back in time for pasties just into the afternoon. The swell dropped out almost completely but remained moderate to rough in the northwesterly breeze. It completely ruined the good but serious surf of the last couple of days, although there were a few down there making a decent fist of what was there late in the tide.

By the end of the afternoon, I had completely squared away all of the cash and carry order. Strung out over the day, it hardly seemed much effort at all probably because most of it fitted on the shelves and I did not have to spend much time finding room for things in the store room. The effort had dovetailed quite precisely with serving the inflated number of customers we had today and I was kept out of tedium's arms for most of the day. Heaven knows what I will do tomorrow.

The Government had caused me some concern, more than usual, over the last few days. It sent me a reminder that my vehicle tax was due and that it would extract the funds from my account on the due date, thank you very much. What it had failed to do was to inform me which account I had permitted them to plunder – the last time they did it was a year ago. How was I supposed to remember that long ago. The other issue that they failed to resolve was exactly how much they wanted to deprive me of.

I knew that the rates had changed this year but other than that, I had no idea what the news rates were or how they were applied. I discovered quite quickly that the rate is determined by just how many emissions your vehicle makes. Since I had never stopped to count them, I had no idea how many our big-engined lump of a truck produced. I endeavoured to determine this by looking at the Internet, which I discovered was not very helpful at all as there are various years and different models which make a difference.

It seemed sensible to go to the horse's mouth and make my enquiries of the Government's own online resources. First, I looked up the DVLA record for our truck and discovered that the emissions are recorded as 233 grams per kilometre. Armed with this detail I looked for the tax rates for the band that included our emissions rate and discovered to my horror that we would have to part with £760. It was only a couple of hundred last year.

There was only one thing for it. After I had taken a large brandy – while I could still afford it – and had a lie down in a dark room, I thought that I had better do something else as well. It had become a little more important to discover which account the Government were aiming at emptying. Events conspired to distract me from my cause for a day or two; I had discovered that the money would not be taken until May 1<sup>st</sup>, so the urgency was a little less, erm, urgent. My attention was brought back to the issue today when the Government sent another message this time detailing the

account and, indeed, the amount. Reading the detail, I was relieved and surprised in equal measure to discover that the money would be deducted from the business account and that the Government would only seek to remove a trifling £360.

Now, far be it from me to look a gift horse in the mouth, although it was me that went to its mouth in the first place, but I could not for the life of me determine why the tax rate was what the Government had determined it to be. I checked again at the rates on the Government website and £360 is the rate for vehicles emitting a paltry 176 to 185 grams per kilometre. Unless our truck has been on a crash emissions diet, I cannot imagine how its 2.5 litre diesel engine puffs out such a meagre amount. Now, obviously, I shall keep mum about this, just in case it is an emission omission and try and make myself very small so that I will not be noticed cowering in the corner.

I am now, of course, worried that I should feel guilty and also live in a state of fear that my sins will find me out. I did not bother with a lottery ticket today as scoundrels like me would never win. I will spend the entirety of the rest of the year looking over my shoulder, a haunted man.

I decided to have a beer and quite forgot all about it. I walked the girls around after tea into a very pleasant early evening in The Cove. There was still enough power in the sea to send a few waves over the Harbour wall, but it was a big lacklustre, even I could see that. Later still, on our last walk of the evening, we were met with the perfect picture of Venus and a waxing crescent moon hanging over the Harbour in a midnight blue sky. And it was not even midnight. What a delight.

## April 19<sup>th</sup> – Sunday

At some point during the morning, the very light breeze went around to the southeast. I cannot say it bothered me very much, although we would normally freeze our toes off as it blasted through the doorway. I noted that the temperature had increased by three degrees during the morning, which probably saved my toes from dropping off.

It was an altogether sparkler of a day. There was quite a bit more cloud around than yesterday on and off, but it must have kept out of the way of the sun because it seemed quite bright throughout. I had, of course, thought that the sunshine would have brought out the crowds, but we were suspiciously quiet all morning and into the early part of the afternoon.

I would have been able to sidle off to assist with the launch of the Inshore boat in the middle of the morning had I known how quiet it would be. I would not have been needed because it turned out to be over-subscribed when it came down to it. The boat ran off to Porthcurno with two helms on board and a couple of eager volunteers and were gone for an hour or more. It gave the very excellent Shore Crew an opportunity to practise some with the Tooltrak, honing our recovery skills.

It was one of those days when the paradox of having no customers to keep me busy breeds laziness and despite being bored, I did little to alleviate my condition. I did spend a little time consolidating and rationalising our computer backups and set up a new backup regime. I had been meaning to look at an alternative to the old system that I had used for some years, but it had always looked like too much effort. My hand was forced when the contract ran out and rather than renew it, I went with some software that came with our huge backup drives.

I also paid little attention to the vintage bus day that started in the morning. In previous years I have been alerted by the squeal of brakes as they manoeuvre to turn around. They must have had all the brakes serviced before they started today because I did not hear one of them. It was only by chance I was coming down from upstairs as one was turning around that I saw it and remembered what day it was. I have previously jested that they provided a better service than the scheduled one, but it is less humorous when it is that close to the truth.

Eventually I got bored with being bored and went in search of something to do. I was interrupted by a senior lady looking for a walking stick and in going outside to collect one for her noticed that our display of balls was looking a bit thin. Once she had gone, I scurried off to the store room and switched on the compressor and selected some balls to pump up. I very quickly decided that inflating the balls was far more productive and satisfactory than scratching them.

It provided the impetus I required to go off and make a count of the hooded sweatshirts. It was while I was serving our best customer of the day that I discovered some of our selected colours and sizes were running out and that I should place an order sooner rather than later. It was in fact the second count I had done. The previous one was at the end of the last season, and I had studiously ignored it. It is now out of date, and I had to do it again. With that completed, I can now process an order that will be with us in time for the start of our main business towards the end of May.

That pretty much brought me to the end of the day. The work was delayed a little by the arrival of a lame lady who had hurt her ankle on the Coast Path the previous day. She asked if she might shelter in the shop out of the east wind while she waited for the rest of the party who had walked from Botallack without her. They were just passing Gwenver at the time. We fell into conversation between customers of an early five minutes to closing rush – I blame the clock changes.

She told me that she came from Surrey and even without a fringe on top that is a long way east of Camborne. It seems she, her husband and some friends are avid walkers and are doing the South West Coast Path for the second or possibly third time, I do not recall which. They had also walked the Pennine Way, the South Downs Way and probably this way and that way, too. She told of walking up Snowden, which is now called something unpronounceable and Ben Nevis which, as far as I know, is still Ben Nevis. By the time her husband came to pick her up I was quite

exhausted and my legs ached. We wish them well as they finish their walk over in Lizard in a few days' time.

It is still reasonably light in the sky gone nine o'clock when we venture out on our last walk. The moon and Venus revised their display but slightly higher up in the sky tonight. I might have tried another photograph but ABH somehow managed to slip her harness when she got all excited when we met another dog at the top of the slipway. It was an appropriate place because she slipped away into the gloom at the top of the slip and I had to go and find her, the little rogue. I can do without such excitement at the end of the day.

## April 20<sup>th</sup> – Monday

It looked very pretty again this morning, but that east wind is going to be a bit of a begger. Certainly, it will be tomorrow and the day after if the forecast is to be believed. It was merely noticeable today but I really, I would rather not have noticed it at all because after a while, it became an irritation.

I had not expected very much from today and I was not disappointed. There are a couple of regular families staying and they shop with us, which is very good of them and there were a few trippers passing through during the day. Otherwise, it was a day for gazing down on the wide expanse of pastel coloured sand.

There seemed more of it today, although yesterday's tide was bigger. Maybe it was due to the lack of waves and silky smooth sea, the first in more than a week. It is just as interesting and alluring than if the sea was big and bouncy but just in a different way. For example, the west end of Cowloe was dotted with small white seabirds. They had been here before, so I suppose they must be returners. As the tide came on, they floated as one body westward down Tribbens. Holding on like that with the breeze the way it was and the current, they certainly showed some tenacity. It was difficult to see if they were happy being there; they seemed quite taciturn.

Oh, come on. It has been at least a year.

I had put off calling in some orders to replace the goods that had gone during the Easter holidays. I did not want them coming ahead of the cash and carry order, cluttering up the store room, so I called them in for today. It had worked out quite well because we only ran out of some of the lines over the weekend and no one was inconvenienced by the absence of anything. I cleared the wine order when it arrived but left the soft drinks until I could be bothered. Again, the lack of customers had fostered a spirit of utter laziness in me which I was not very determined to fight.

Because it does not take very much effort, I checked the prices of the crisps and soft drinks. I had omitted to do so when we opened and only now discovered that there had been some increases over the winter that I maybe should have put into place

ahead of Easter. No matter, they were not of great importance and have been done now. I suspect that actually the prices have only just increased as a result of the tax increase on sugary drinks and snacks, so I would not have seen them prior to April 6<sup>th</sup>. I managed to keep the price of cans of pop the same, but bottles have increased by ten pence.

At least the bottles have not been reduced in size. On Saturday while putting out the chocolate bars I noticed that the size of the Snickers bar had shrunk quite dramatically. There is clearly no pretence at subterfuge; the new bar is quite obviously smaller than the old bar. I had to check in case I had ordered the wrong product entirely. The new bar is 40 grams, which is eight grams lighter than the old one and, obviously, still the same price. I suppose we should be grateful that they do not do that to clothes, and you find four inches off the leg of your trousers.

I had a flurry of activity late in the afternoon. No, it was not customers, but I had noticed a small deficiency in dog ball launchers and a few wetsuits and spades. The Missus had gone up to The Farm, so I asked if she could bring some replacement items back with her which she duly did. It kept me busy for all of half an hour.

There must be a bit of a fight going on between the ambient temperature and the windchill. Because the easterly wind is not exactly in my face, it swirls a bit. Sometimes I get its full force and sometimes it cannot bend in the necessary direction to get me. As a consequence, I spent the entire day taking my jacket off and putting it back on again. Then, with a bit of running about stocking the shelves, I warmed up a bit more and removed my jacket. Ten minutes of sitting on my stool behind the counter later – bleddy freezing again and back on with the jacket.

I made the mistake yesterday of doing my mental agility questions after tea. This is the study into brain activity I agreed to take part in for the University of Exeter. I had already decided that I would wait until I could magic some time in the morning before my brain had been beaten into submission by a thousand varying demands during the day. Unfortunately, despite having a deadline in June, the system kept sending me reminders which cajoled me into getting it done sooner. It was a mistake. I can probably expect men in white coats arriving at the shop to take me away any day now.

Sitting at the window at teatime, we took in the utter serenity of the bay at high water. It is glorious to watch the sea in all its fury, waves crashing up cliffs and thumping over rocks. When it is quiet like it was in the evening, it engenders an inner peace and relaxation and with hardly a soul about, there was nothing to break the spell. Sleep like a log tonight, I expect.

## April 21<sup>st</sup> – Tuesday

I turned the first electric sliding door in The Cove to automatic quite soon into the morning. The easterly that had been ramping up all night got into its stride during the

morning blowing chilly air at me through the doorway. A grumpy shopkeeper knows his limitations and that was one of them.

The easterly also did an excellent job of killing off trade in The Cove. Even the Coast Path walkers were not interested today, and any day trippers probably got straight back on the bus they arrived on once they had felt the chill. Fortunately, the fishing tackle I had ordered arrived yesterday, so that kept me occupied for an hour – I did it very slowly. One of our local greetings cards suppliers prompted me for an order because she was getting some printing done. Her cards sell head and shoulders above the rest of the stock, so I had not qualms about putting together a sizeable order that will probably see us through to the summer.

The lady was up at the farmers' market at the community centre when she received my order. She told me that it was quiet up there too, which made me feel a little better about our day. She also said that she would be working at The Minack Theatre later on the gate. The wind is expected to improve its game later on so I suggest that she would have to rope herself to something – or someone – solid. She tells me she has someone in mind.

I did not need to feel the wind to know that it had stayed roughly the same strength for most of the day since the middle of the morning. The sea in the bay that was remarkable for having hardly a wave upon it, today was flecked with white as the wind flicked the tops of every other ripple. It gave the effect of the whole bay moving at pace to the west. The few waves that dared disturb the status quo, right down by the shore, all had their tops pulled back as they made the effort to push east. If there were any seabirds out there today, they would have blended in with all the other white dots that stretched to the horizon.

Given that I had topped up all our shelves and done all the chores on the last dull day we had, I had very little else to do but twirl a thumb or two. I did manage to finish the transition of our data backups. The system that I had used for a few years had for some time failed on individual files, which was odd. It was not so much the failing that irked me, it was the lack of available information I could use to determine the problem. I had contacted the supplier and they had instructed me to follow some intricate procedure to produce a log file that only they could look at.

It was quite by chance that I noticed the very large storage devices we use come with their own backup software. I had used it before for discrete backups but thought that I could easily use it for our regular security. It took a couple of days to set up and test, but I can now save myself the price of the renewal on the old system. The whole thing distracted me sufficiently that my climbing of walls and scratching of my behind was kept to a minimum.

I also posted off our order for hooded sweatshirts and determined from the supplier that they can now do shorter runs of t-shirt production, which is very handy. I knew that we were short of certain sizes but remembered that previously we were

constrained to purchase 300 at a time, spread over ten sizes. That only really worked if we were low across the range. Today, I really only need 50 of a couple of sizes and small top-ups of the other. Obtusely, I ran out of time to do the order today, so it will wait until tomorrow.

Looking back, I suppose the lack of business did allow me to concentrate on things that I might have found troublesome with customers. I would have preferred to have those things still left to do and had the customers instead. It would have saved a bucket full of tears that I shed when it came to do the till when we closed.

I was not the only one upset by the weather. When I took the girls out last thing, the wind had really stepped up its game. It was proper howling in the overhead cables and rattling any loose around us. The girls were on tenterhooks throughout and skittish at every gust. They practically dragged me back home at the end, which I admit I was not too upset about. All I am hoping now is that our cardboard which I had to strap down outside the shop is still there in the morning.

### April 22<sup>nd</sup> – Wednesday

I have often acknowledged that we have been here so long now that many of our regular visitors and customers have become friends. It is therefore with sadness that we heard today that TL, a great man in stature and character, a long time visitor and Diary reader, has shuffled off well before what could reasonably have been expected to be his time. We send our heartfelt condolences and a big hug to A his partner.

*Were all stars to disappear or die,  
I should learn to look at an empty sky  
And feel its total dark sublime,  
Though this might take me a little time.*

W H Auden

We had a bit of cloud cover to start our day. It was thin in places to show some blue but not in the right places to show some sun. At least it was a bit more suited to the conditions today. Yesterday, the sunshine was completely wrong with a blistering easterly wind blowing. It should have showed some respect and clouded over then.

The sea was still moving westward when I stopped to look at it this morning. There seemed to be some mist hanging about. It was either that or dust blown off the fields to the east of us. I was rather hoping it was the former. Neither were as much of a surprise as the Falmouth Divers' working platform steaming in across the bay. Our neighbour in the café came running around to ask what I thought it was. At a distance it looked like a juggernaut driving across the bay, all square and bulky, almost completely covered in spray.

The flat bottomed rig needs reasonably calm conditions before they can move about. While the sea looked in some turmoil, there was very little in the way of swell or ground sea, so they clearly assessed that they could make their way here without issue. It just looked tricky. After they steamed into bay, they came and parked up at the end of the Harbour wall while they replaced the breasting buoy. It looks a tad smaller than the one that was there and a few metres further west. I cannot remember the last time it was used by the Lifeboat, although I think the Inshore uses it for training.

Talking of things Lifeboat, we had a little launch today. The big boat's compass had been playing up of late and required some attention before the boys discovered they had landed in Norway by mistake. It is a process known as swinging the compass performed by a group more commonly known for swinging the lead. The Institution hired an expert who looked like he might be called Ahab for the job, and the slimmed down crew took him afloat at around twenty past eleven o'clock. We were pretty slimmed down on the shore as well, until we tucked into the quiche that one of our latest recruits brought along. Until today, I think, she has brought cake, so today made a bit of a difference. She brought salad and pickles too. It was probably a good job that we were thin on the ground else the quiche would all have gone before the Boat Crew returned else.

Of those present, only two of us were signed off for head launcher and winch operator. Since I did head launcher last it seemed appropriate that I take to the winch. Clearly, the decision was based on rotation and had absolutely nothing to do with the blasting and chilly easterly and the sudden onset of a bit of rain. I displayed every sympathy for the other three who had to go out in the weather and not ever, not even once did I mention that the winch room was cosy and warm. Not once, not even a little bit, honest guv.

As I mentioned earlier, there was hardly any swell to be concerned with at the end of the long slipway. However, where we would normally set up on the eastern slide of the slipway toe, today we set up on the western side. This would make it easier – in theory - for the Boat Crew to throw the heaving line into the wind and for it to blow westward where we would catch it. It took a couple of attempts before the Boat Crew worked out just how much to throw their lines into the wind.

From where I was, in my eyrie at the top of the slip, we clearly performed what could be described as a textbook recovery, with a falling tide on the long slip. We brought the boat up to the top of the slip to release the span and to attach the sliphook or sea hook and bring it safely back into the boathouse for its next service. I took absolute care not to mention how cold the others looked after we had finished, in fact I hardly mentioned it at all. We are, after all, a very empathetic, very excellent Shore Crew.

Radio Pasty had suggested that we, in the Far West, would enjoy some rain during the day; everyone else would be exempt. They were spot on, too. The rain appeared while we were waiting for the boat to return and continued on and off for the rest of

the day. There was not very much of it but enough to soak the cardboard that I had carefully put out for collection and tied down against the wind.

I had strapped the boxes filled with broken down boxes to the wall with string. When I judged that the collection could not be far away, I untied the string, which was a mistake. The collection did not arrive and the next I knew was a passer-by informing us that the cardboard, or some of it at least, was halfway down the road. Earlier, I had called the supplier and was told that there had been vehicle problems, but they were still on the way. I called again later on when it was clear that we had been missed again.

We are contracted for fortnightly collections, although, we are generally serviced weekly – mainly because neither I nor the drivers can remember which week is on and which is off. The very pleasant lady, sharp as a tack, informed me that it was our off week this week. Given that the response earlier was that the truck was on its way, one these respondents was not playing with a straight bat. I called in our local firm which was the easiest solution as I was not putting soaking cardboard back into the store room. It will be picked up tomorrow or Friday for an additional fee.

Once again, The Cove fell into the realms of a fairy tale. I am guessing that there must be a princess somewhere who pricked her finger on something sharp and is snoozing with all our customers until some handsome prince gives her a quick snog. Since I seem to be the only one awake ...Not sure the Missus would be too happy about it.

The wind started to drop out a little in the afternoon. When I took the girls out last thing, it was much more relaxed than the evening before with no moaning in the wires at all. We are promised a better weekend, but I am not putting away my woolly jacket just yet.

## April 23<sup>rd</sup> – Thursday

The front page news on the BBC website this morning is that high street shops are selling cocaine, cannabis and prescription drugs under the counter. I am disgusted; I cannot imagine why I never thought of it.

If we were going by looks alone, we had the perfect day in The Cove. Blues skies and full on sunshine right from the very outset of the day should have provided us with a modest increase in footfall. Sadly, while the easterlies had moderated from the last couple of days there was still enough bite in them to force me to once again close the first electric sliding door in The Cove.

It did seem to get a little more use than yesterday during the morning. There were a few postcard sales and some going home presents were leaving the premises. I even sold a couple of pasties (sorry, MS) early on. This was remarkable as sales had been suppressed all week. I had sold one on Tuesday and a couple on

Wednesday. I did not bother ordering since Monday and was surviving on frozen stock. The forecast weather for the weekend looks pretty good so ordering for the next three days was a bit tricky. I suspect that I have under-ordered but still have plenty of frozen to fall back on.

The big beach looked rather spectacular under the bright sunshine. It also looked spectacularly empty. I would have thought that in the shelter of the dunes it might have been quite warm down there. Indeed, there were less than half a dozen people clinging close to the dunes and some with their backs to big rocks. Perhaps it was not as sheltered as I imagined. There was one person in the water with a surfboard. I might have said, 'surfer' had there been the slightest hint of a wave. This person was definitely more of a clinger on, as he held tight to his board not far off the shore.

The colours in the sea were worth mentioning, although perhaps I am not the ideal person to describe them. Out deep, the waters were azure whereas in the shallow end and over the sandbars, they were more aqua or turquoise, maybe. Whatever they were, they were glorious.

Despite the slight increase in business over the last couple of days, it was still pretty quiet. Having exhausted all the additional duties and tasks that I could think of and quite a few more that I could not, the day became exceedingly tedious. Standing about twiddling thumbs or scratching my behind seems awfully wasteful. I could be out saving endangered species from extinction, resolving homelessness, helping aged people across roads, teaching small children how to tie shoelaces or fostering world peace. Alright, the small children one is a bit far fetched but you get my drift.

We get these periods each year. And things will eventually improve. Perhaps I should save some tasks over the course of a year so that I some have to do when we are not busy. Indeed, we will be busy tomorrow when the balance of our beachware – wetsuits and shoes and so forth – arrive tomorrow. The salesman turned up yesterday to pick up some wetsuits that had been delivered in error last time. He also showed me some new wetshoes in the hope of getting us to stock them. They were indeed rather alluring.

They look like trainers but are designed to be used in the water. Unfortunately, they come in shoe boxes, and we would very quickly discover that we had no room for anything else. Imagine a standard shoebox. Now imagine that we would need a minimum of 48 in the shop at any given time to have enough on hand to meet summer demand. That is about 500 cubic metres of space to find and then double that up at The Farm. I demurred on his kind offer.

For something constructive to do, I had to wait until after we closed. The Lifeboat Coxswain decided that since so few people were involved in yesterday's launch and the fact that it included no training at all, it would be a great idea to have another exercise launch this evening. He was not wrong because at least fifteen people responded to the suggestion in a positive manner.

We mustered at seven o'clock for a launch twenty minutes later. I had arranged our resources as best I could given signed off status and availability and found myself assigned to drive the Tooltrak by necessity. In case you were wondering, dear reader, our wind blown head launcher from yesterday was assigned to the warmth of the winch room this evening. I know, I am all heart, me.

The launches all went without issue, and we retired to the crew room for tea and biscuits, filling in of records and discussing great things. I suspect that the sea conditions in an easterly that had ramped up during the day to 45 miles per hour again, drove the decision to return the Inshore boat early. I was most put out as I had barely had a sip of tea. We did radio to tell them to wait but they were having none of it.

It turned out to be fortunate that the boat arrived back early. It gave us sufficient time to clear the Inshore boat away and return to assist with the big boat that came back not ten minutes after we had finished clearing up.

The result was that we were comfortably resourced when the boat came back and we execute what was clearly, even to the casual observer, a textbook recovery up the short slip. Because it was on the short slip and the 'fishing rod' was deployed, there was no issue with the incessant breeze blowing heaving lines off. The Boat Crew picked the line off the fishing rod by reaching out for it.

While the others washed down and scurried about, I took it upon myself to fetch the fishing rod assembly from the bottom of the slipway. My intention was to get there before the tide advanced too much, but I was a bit tardy or the tide too quick and I got one welly boot wet. Obviously, I did not tell anyone, but I knew, which was enough. I did try not to let it spoil my evening too much. Fortunately, another crew member spotted me down there and took the fishing rod assembly off me as we went back up the slipway. If she did notice, she never said anything. We are, after all, a very stalwart, very excellent Shore Crew.

## April 24<sup>th</sup> – Friday

Today looked and felt very much like a repeat of yesterday in terms of the weather. Once again, it looked a stupendously beautiful day but that wind that the BBC insisted was only 15 miles per hour, came banging in again at 45 miles per hour and felt stronger than that, even, in The Cove at times.

It did nothing to improve the number of customer visits, so I did not feel in the least that my trip to the gymnasium would inconvenience anyone but the Missus. She was very inconvenienced, but I had taken off my false ears by then, so I did not hear her inconvenience. It was a blistering session.

We were expecting a fairly substantial order from our beachware supplier as noted yesterday. We were lucky that it had been scheduled for delivery before midday, which would give the Missus ample time to take it up to The Farm in batches. The wetsuits would stay behind so that I could put them on hangers and label them – something of a time-consuming and balls aching task if ever there was one.

Since we did not know the order of events, I was despatched to take the girls around as soon as I returned from the gymnasium. The wind was ramping up nicely by that time and when we arrived at the beach, we discovered that the dry sand at the top of the beach was in flux. I could feel it on the back of my legs, and it would be affecting the girls down at ground level. We stopped only briefly, and I took them around the block instead.

The delivery had not arrived by the time I got back but as soon as I retired upstairs to prepare to go back to the shop, it sneaked in while I was indisposed. I can tell you it took a lot of manoeuvring to be indisposed at exactly the right moment. Still events got their own back on me when I came down with my breakfast as I had to immediately go and get the truck to start loading it up and thus putting my breakfast back half an hour.

It got put back even more when, after loading the first consignment for The Farm and sending the Missus off with the first load, the Coxswain put his head around the door frame to tell me that the pagers were about to go off. This gave me a few moments to get ahead of the posse, close the shop and arrive at the Lifeboat station before our pagers actually did go off.

Both boats were requested to conduct a search for a missing gentleman whose car had been found at Pendeen Watch. He had been missing for four days, but his vehicle was only found this morning. Both boats may have been requested but, initially, we only had crew for the big boat, so we launched that into the bright and shiny day, and it headed off to Pendeen. It was tasked to conduct a shoreline search while the Cliff Team conducted a search of their own on land. We struggled to put enough Inshore Boat Crew together and in any event the Tooltrak failed spectacularly with a burst hydraulic hose which scotched any further attempt to launch it.

The Missus has returned while I was away launching the boat and had opened the shop. I strongly suspect that no one would have noticed that I had closed it and she told me that she had no customers but we did see a few after I had come back again.

Having assessed the nature of the shout, I stood down our crew. Searches of this sort can take less than an hour or they can take all day. Rather than hang around, I thought it best that we all go and do other things while I monitored the situation from the shop where I could listen to the scanner and hear most of what was going on. There was a moment when it looked like we were near the end game and I

suggested that we set up the slipway. When I arrived at the station, the two who had elected to stay behind had done most of it before I got there. As it transpired, I got it wrong, and we had to wait a while longer. The bit that had been set up, was good to stay where it was anyway.

The boat was eventually stood down at around half past three o'clock having performed a detailed search from Cape Cornwall all the way up to Zennor in sections. The police helicopter was also involved at one stage but after three hours of searching nothing was found on the shoreline and the Lifeboat was stood down. The search on land will continue until some satisfactory resolution is reached or the Coastguard call it off.

That east wind was once again and absolute menace. This time around, I could not install myself in the winch room and had to venture down to the end of the long slipway. Here, the sea was messing around a bit with a good ten or fifteen feet of rise and fall on the slipway toe. The wind was banging in at 40 miles per hour or more and pushing us around as we waited for the boat.

Our greatest concern as we waited was for the safety of our tin hats which threatened to part company with our heads at any moment. Losing our tin hats would not have been a disaster but the concern of them flying off was a distraction that we could have done without as we tried to concentrate on our respective roles. Thankfully our hats remained on; the first throw of the heaving line met its target – us; and we hooked up in one smooth operation. This is otherwise known as a textbook recovery in bleddy windy conditions with some movement on the slipway toe – mainly us swaying around like wheat in a field.

By the time we arrived back at the top of the slip a merry band of additional crew had joined us. I can imagine how Baden Powell felt at Mafeking when the reinforcements arrived. It was all rather splendid, really.

The rest of the recovery went according to plan and convention, and we washed down the boat, strapped it down and made ready for the next service. We are, after all, a very fastidious, very excellent Shore Crew.

When I returned to the shop and for most of the time in between launch and recovery, I had tried to process the wet suits. I got most of the way through the first box, labelling and inserting hangers. Fortunately, these are mostly children's wetsuits that we can use metal hangers for. We have either run out of the wooden hangers or they are hiding where I last put them. Darned if I can remember.

Anyway, at the last, I ran out of time and will have to finish them off tomorrow. In the meanwhile, the store room is a mess of wetsuits strewn about the place and I will have to move them about as we have some deliveries tomorrow.

It is entirely disappointing that most of the deliveries are as a result of the existing stock having gone off or gone by its best before date. I had to throw out some apples, lemons, sandwiches, bread and half a box of flapjacks, although the Lifeboat crew benefitted from those. I even had to throw out some natural yoghurt and that takes some doing as it is already off milk when we get it.

I pushed such thoughts aside as I sat down to tea and gazed out over the beach. The waves were gently running into the beach in almost perfect geometric arcs, breaking in one spot and dissolving. The sand was a light pastel yellow, and all the light was softened in the diminishing sunlight. There were a few on the beach, enjoying the solitude and a few surfers coming and going – mainly going with the lack of surf. I always think that they look at that distance like ants from one of those nature programs carrying an unfeasibly large leaf.

It would have looked the perfect summer scene had the Lifeboat channel markers not been bent flat by the insistent easterly breeze. A bit like smooth concrete with a paw mark in the middle.

## April 25<sup>th</sup> – Saturday

Down in the Cornish Bat Cave, Robin perks up and looks out across the bay. “Holy hat pins Batman, the Lifeboat channel markers are sitting straight up.” Batman knocks an inch of ash off his Capstan Full-Strength, casually brushing it into his PVC cape as he kicks his crushed Special Brew can under the Batmobile. Things have not been the same since the much maligned council cut backs. “You know what this means, Robin?” “Go on, then,” says Robin, worriedly looking at a ladder running up his tan tights. “Bleddy east wind has dropped out and my cape won’t get blown around the Bat Pole again.”

The wind was on its way out when I took the girls down to the beach this morning. There was no sand rushing about our ankles, and we were able to have an unimpeded roam about. Even then, as the breeze subsided but was still obvious, it had all the hallmarks of a bit of a rip gribbler in the making. When I disposed of my jacket five minutes into opening the shop, it was pretty clear things were looking up.

There were grocery deliveries to deal with for the first time in a week. They took a bit of time to clear, and I was still tying up the loose ends after I had pulled back the blinds and slid open the first electric sliding door in The Cove. That door was going to stay open today and that was for sure.

It was not long into the morning when I decided I needed to clear the remaining half of the wetsuits and rash vests I had made a start on yesterday. It took me the rest of the morning, but I was largely left to my own devices and was able to press on quite

efficiently. Having said that, there were interruptions and somewhat more than I had enjoyed earlier in the week it is just that there were not enough to break up my flow.

It was quite satisfying to stand back at the end and look upon my works and not feel one iota of despair. Not only had I a heap of wetsuits to look upon but also a veritable pile of cardboard that will rest outside until the middle of next week when our recycling collector can forget to pick it up.

Come the end of the morning and into the afternoon, we were busier than we had been all week. That is not to say we were busy, but it was a welcome change. We certainly sold more pasties (sorry, MS) than we had all week combined. This was not hard to imagine because it would have been very difficult to sell fewer pasties than we had all week. It was a good mix of customers, too. Walkers in groups and individually, trippers and foreign visitors all piling in.

What there were not many of was beach goers, largely on account of high water now being in the middle of the day. While the bay was mainly flat there was enough of a shore break to encourage several surfers in for a half decent game. As my attention was drawn to the beach, I noted that Carn Keys, the black huts on the dunes the other side of The Valley, was at last getting its rook repaired. We had a couple staying a few weeks ago who had to find alternative accommodation due to the leak. It is an odd construction, too. It looks like plywood overlaid with roofing felt. We gave up on that up at the field because it was none too robust and put metal sheets over the top. It might be a bit different on a pitched roof, hopefully.

I hardly noticed that very slowly high level cloud started to move across us. At ground level, it began to look a little hazy and by late in the afternoon, the bright sunlight had gone completely. That stunning weekend that the BBC forecasters had appeared to promise us, disappeared before our very eyes. I went back to check on the website for clues only to discover they had taken it away from tomorrow as well. Well, I cannot say that I am very impressed. All that money we give the Corporation in licence fees and they cannot even give us a nice bit of weather.

They must have heard me because the sun made a bit of an effort in its last dash to the horizon and broke through the clouds. It made for a very pleasant evening. I could feel the chill creep back into the place and had to reach for my jacket that I had done without all day. There did not appear to be many willing to perambulate into the evening, so it cannot have been that attractive, but it is a start. I will not break out the bunting just yet – I did not even get to put our flags out – but I will allow myself to dream.

## April 26<sup>th</sup> – Sunday

We were teased through the morning while the sun decided whether it was going to go against the forecast or not. We had some brightness for a while as the high-level cloud broke up but the cloud mended itself and blocked out the sun in the end. It was

a mite disappointing, but we quickly learned to live with it, although it did nothing to encourage our visitors. We remained quieter than yesterday.

The girls were in good form this morning when I took them down to the Harbour beach. The tide was just about out and the sea pretty much as close to a millpond as you could get. BB had decided that she rather likes getting wet and dives into rock pools on the slightest whim. Today, she felt that the sea looked very much like a rock pool in its calmness and after she had finished shouting at a rock that she decided should not be where it was, took herself off for a swim. The Missus was delighted, I am sure, when they came charging back to leap all over her in bed.

I made myself scare and hid in the shop. No one found me, not even any customers. It took a while for The Cove to wake up and even then, we were hardly on fire all day. It gave me the opportunity to peruse our shelves and determine that we could do with a farm shop cash and carry order being placed. For some while we have been unable to get hold of our very popular hummus dishes. I had thought that it had been discontinued and then, suddenly, I was getting messages from the company telling me that it was back in stock with new flavours.

There are a few locals that had been asking about it. Not only that, it was a top seller, too. It would have been a great disappointment not to be able to get it again. It had been available last week, but we did not really need anything else. This week, we had some other gaps that needed to be filled, so from Tuesday we will be fully stocked again. I do hope that the regulars have not gone off it. I also refreshed the mackerel pate that flew out last time; we shall say nothing about the Brussels pate. I think I will be eating the rest of that.

The other thing that has been slipping away almost unnoticed has been the sun lotion. This is remarkable given that we have not had much in the way of sunshine since we have been open. I can only think that the messaging championed by the campaign groups regarding skin care and health have had some effect. It is not possible to remember exactly but I would say that the majority of purchasers have been young to middle aged adults. Other than children, I believe that is the target group, so someone is doing something right it seems.

Our foreign visitors do not think that we have got our coinage right. They find it very confusing. It seems that we might be the only country that does not have ascending values matching with ascending sizes of coin. They cannot assimilate that the twenty pence piece should be more valuable than the larger ten pence piece. They sometimes fail to appreciate that the silver and copper coloured coins represent different levels of value, too. Happily, there is a grumpy shopkeeper on hand to assist the confused foreigner in the spending of their collected coinage and to resolve the problem for them by taking it away. Aye thang yew – kerching!

We did a bit more of that in the afternoon and pleasingly we sold through all our pasties (sorry, MS). I even had to bake some from frozen, but I should not have

bothered. The brightness returned on and off, which probably encouraged a few and the beach, as much as there was, seemed busy. There was nothing much in the way of surf and the only movement on the water's surface was later in the afternoon when the breeze went to the northwest and caused a few ripples. I am surprised that the Lifeboat channel markers knew how to bend to the east having spent so long bent to the west.

The cloud was breaking up some by late evening. I could see Venus out to the west and Jupiter above us. We had about a half moon, much higher in the sky than before and there was enough light around to make out most of the Harbour beach as we passed along above it. We are told the clear skies will last through tomorrow. I will wait and see.

### April 27<sup>th</sup> – Monday

We were in proper early season rip gribbler territory today. Our visit down to the Harbour was in the most glorious of conditions, sun beating down out of a clear blue sky, the very lightest of airs from the northwest and sea as flat as a dish. Further out, the bay was mottled under that breeze, the only movement on the water. Once again, the girls took advantage of the wide open beach, the exposed rocks to explore and the clear, still water to dip into. I cannot blame them for the latter; it did look enticing. I did hear from two people who had been daft enough to stick a toe into it that it was bleddy cold.

It would appear that I was the only one who thought the day worth stepping out into. The morning was exceptionally quiet, and it was not until near the middle of the day that we started to see numbers of visitors milling about. The big beach, while there was still some of it to enjoy, attracted a number of dog walkers and walkers in general in the run up to higher water. There seems to be plenty of sand in the middle and northern sections, although at the south, under The Beach car park, there is quite a bit of the reef there exposed.

*Customer.*: "The ice cream kiosk next door is closed. Do you have ice creams? I'm looking for a plain ice cream."

*Grumpy shopkeeper.*: "Yes, sir. In that freezer behind you, there."

*Customer.*: "I was after just a plain ice cream."

*Grumpy shopkeeper.*: "We have a vanilla and clotted cream one from Moomaid of Zennor. In those little round tubs. It is about the plainest ice cream we have."

*Customer.*: "Yes, a vanilla one. I want a vanilla one. Just the thing."

*Grumpy shopkeeper.*: "The vanilla ones are the one right at the front."

*Customer.*: [Selects an ice cream from the middle.] "Yes, vanilla. Ideal. Just a plain ice cream for me."

*Grumpy shopkeeper.*: "I think you just picked out a Strawberry and clotted cream tub there, sir."

*Customer.*: "Strawberry? Oh, that's alright. I'll have a strawberry one, then."

[Brings tub to counter]

*Grumpy shopkeeper*: “Ah, no. That is actually a Belgian chocolate ice cream.”

*Customer*: “Yes, Belgian chocolate. Just the thing.”

*Grumpy shopkeeper*: “!” [Hears voice from distant past – ‘smile and take the money’]  
“£2.60 please, sir. Spoon is in the lid. [Grinning like a Cheshire cat]

We may not have had many customers turn up during the morning, but we did have a waterboard van pull up outside. It had now been about six weeks since I reported the leak in the middle of the street outside. After the second time of reporting it, the waterboard sent someone along with a long pole listening device and confirmed that it was indeed a leak. He sprayed some blue paint on the road. A little while later, I was informed, having been the primary reporter, that work was being scheduled to dig up the road and fix the leak. A request had been lodged with the much maligned council and would be scheduled in due course.

The chap in the van who turned up today, also had a long pole listening device and did some more listening. I imagine that there is a bit more to listen to now because the leak had become worse - or better at leaking. We now have a trail of water down to the drain. Our man also had another device that looked a bit like a metal detector and came with headphones. He also had a can of blue paint and put some more marks on the road. Perhaps if they put enough blue paint on it, the layers will eventually stop the leak.

There was not a great deal doing today which is just as well as I had an errand in town. My, it was warm in the big city. I had taken a jacket and did not even need the mid-layer I was wearing. I had a couple of places to visit and while I was there managed to get rid of the small foot treadmill I had purchased for my recovering knee. I had barely used it, so it was, in effect, new. I had not expected the good volunteers in the charity shop to prostrate themselves in front of me in thanks, but a slight glimmer of gratitude or a mere ‘thank you’ would have been welcome. All I got was a ‘if we really must’ attitude when I asked if they wanted it. Next time I will take it to the tip, sorry, household waste recycling centre.

I was not back long, and the Missus had taken the girls out for a run when one of the Boat Crew stuck their head in the doorway and told me we were about to get paged again. Since there was no one about to be inconvenience, I made to close-up the shop and head over when the Missus came back, which was convenient. The boat was tasked to attend a casualty five miles northwest of Pendeen, which was conveniently in direct line of sight of The Cove.

On the shore, the crew arrived in dribs and drabs and by the time the boat launched we were well stocked with burly helpers ready to, erm, help. So many, in fact, that one took the Lifejacket off my back and told me that I was managing and the rest of them would do the running about. I did not know whether to feel gratitude or patronised. I decided on the latter and told him to begger off.

The operation was exceedingly well organised. The casualty was taken on board the Lifeboat which duly turned to head back to The Cove. While it was cruising in our direction, the Coastguard helicopter dropped a medic down to attend the casualty and then was picked up again. By the time that was over, the boat was back at the top of the bay. There had been plenty of time to set up the long slip at about the earliest that we could in the tide. The waves were still lapping at the top of the concrete toe and even half an hour earlier, it would not have been possible.

There was little movement in the water at the bottom of the slip, and the boat was taken up the long slip in what was clearly a textbook recovery. The casualty was taken off and the boat secured for its next service with hardly anyone noticing. We are, after all, a very discrete very excellent Shore Crew.

I had closed the shop early for the operation. There was no one about anyway. After we had finished, I returned just to clear up the last bits of the day and there was still no one around. It was still a beautiful day. I imagine people were just appreciating it from inside.

## April 28<sup>th</sup> – Tuesday

The small gods of grumpy shopkeepers have a lovely sense of humour. 'Here is some more of that clear blue sky and sunshine you have been banging on about, Grumpy. Oh yes, have a feisty northeasterly to go with it.'

It had started as a northerly later yesterday and moved around a bit by this morning. Radio Pasty took great delight in informing us that it will improve its game as the day went on. If we were lucky, it would bring some cloud along for company and if we were very good, we might get some rain to go with it as well.

I decided that in the meantime, I would sit back and enjoy the blue sky and slightly hazy brightness through the morning while I still could. If I tucked myself into the corner by the pasty warmer (sorry, MS) I could keep out of the breeze without having to close the first electric sliding door in The Cove again – at least until it started raining later on. By the middle of the day, some of the darker cloud had come and gone leaving a few white fluffy cumulus behind. More importantly, the wind had adjusted itself by a few degrees and was no longer blowing through the doorway. I discovered that I was quite warm and needed to remove my jacket. Of the rain that we were promised, there was no sign, but it was yet early to be dismissing it completely.

I was expecting the delivery of our hangers today. This would permit me to make a start and hopefully finish the next lot of wetsuits the Missus had brought down from The Farm on her last visit. She had spent some time in preparing the stock so that she knew where everything was if I asked for it in a hurry. The wetsuits needed to be labelled so that they could easily be identified; the original label on them is too small and not in the right place for quick identification.

I might have been expecting hangers, but what arrived first was the farm shop cash and carry order and hot on its heels, the Pullins Bakery flapjacks and cakes. It was handy that they had arrived together because they kind of go hand in hand and go on the shelves in roughly the same areas. I mentioned that I was pleased that the hummus pots are available again, all we need now are suitable customers. Actually, any customers at all would have been quite nice today.

It was very likely the wind that came in quite chill through the day that put a lot of folk off. I girded my loins for an afternoon of receiving news that it was like a summer's day in Penzance. Of course, I could have attended to my wetsuits but the hangers did not arrive until near closing time. They will have to wait until tomorrow when I will, no doubt, be run off my feet with something or other. What a bitter disappointment that was.

Since there was not much else going on it was quite exciting to see the waterboard turn up again. Clearly, digging a hole to fix a leak is a more complicated thing than we mere lay people understand. I am slowly learning the complexity that requires one highly trained professional to identify that there *is* a leak, another to come along some weeks later to determine exactly *where* it is and then a third person to come along to assess the work required to dig the hole in the designated area. He also had some spray paint, too, but in white. Of course, it would be impossible to train one person with so many skills and the use of two colours of paint – they would need a brain the size of a planet.

I watched carefully as this man measured the distance from the kerb to the nearest side where the hole would be. He then measured the road width and, just in case the previous two people had got it wrong about there being a leak at all, listened with his long pole as well. I had so many questions, so I was very grateful that he came and had a chat with me. He asked about the sort of traffic that used the road and whether any heavy goods vehicles regularly came by because when the work started no heavy good vehicle would be able to come through.

He had mentioned closing the road at one point. In retrospect, I think he meant for big vehicles because I told him that Lifeboat crew would need access. It was then that he said that the rules are that 3.5 metres of carriageway were required, or the road should be closed. We only had 2.7 metres. In mitigation, the fact that no heavy good vehicles regularly went by meant that we could get away with it.

I suggested that the Harbour Commission would probably appreciate a heads-up as it would affect the Harbour and the car park. Apparently, there would be no notice. The waterboard would arrive, special forces style, set up, dig the hole, fix the leak, repair the hole and be gone. I imagine that they would be all in back with ski masks on. I was told that they could turn up at any time now. Gosh, how exciting.

Equally enthralling was the fact that our duty Coxswain decided that our weekly training launch should be brought forward to this evening. We do occasionally have to move the regular day due to weather and on this occasion it was down to the tides and expected sea conditions that would be more inconveniently timed later in the week. I learnt later that Thursday's Scillonian crossing had been cancelled due to the forecast and it was causing chaos with the Gig Championship on the Islands.

We duly gathered at half past six o'clock with enough crew for launching the big boat only. Unfortunately, there was enough very excellent Shore Crew for both boats and a rugby sevens tournament. When I pointed out that there would be much scratching of behinds for the unemployed with no behind scratching benefit to support them, a few decided to retire gracefully. We were left with an adequate sufficiency and enough to allow a shadow on the winch operation for one of the new guys.

The big boat launched without issue with a small crew and went around the corner to Nanjizal out of the breeze. They performed many training tasks including a slow time fire drill and a play with the Y boat, a small RIB, that nestles in the rear compartment of the big boat. They were gone until after eight o'clock during which time we left behind retired to the crew room for tea biscuits and philosophical discussions of great import. These are the sort of discussions that could shape the future of the planet if only any one of us could remember a word of which we spoke.

Just ahead of the appointed hour - we are all naturally attuned to when appointed hours are even though they are flexible – we gathered down at the top of the slip and made final preparations for the arrival of the boat.

The sun was well on the way to setting when it steamed north into view and turned to enter the bay. The northeast wind was chilly and robust but not as intense as the previous week and we were able to set up on the eastern side of the slipway as normal. The bay was a little choppy in the breeze but there was no appreciable swell and when the boat came astern onto the concrete toe, it looked like a textbook recovery even from a distance at the top of the long slip. We brought the boat up for a good washdown and strapped it down ahead of its next service in a seamless sequence. We are, after all, a very slick, very excellent Shore Crew.

## April 29<sup>th</sup> – Wednesday

I had some scurrying around to do this morning as I had to deliver the truck to the garage first thing. The Missus had noticed that the exhaust had blown, and the pipe was rattling a fair bit. She had asked the garage to have a look-see and they had confirmed the problem and booked it in for today.

Leaving the Missus to open the shop, I headed down to the garage which is most of the way into Penzance. When I arrived, they seemed surprised that I had asked for a loan car which they had not organised. I was surprised that they had not organised it

because first, I had asked for one and secondly, in the 23 years we have used the garage we had not once not had a loan car.

It was a bit of an irritation but in 23 years we have not had many blips if any and they said that they would have a car later if I came back in the afternoon. There was a bit more complication when I got back because the Missus had to take Mother to an appointment at around the same time as the car was due in, but we would arrange ourselves around it without too much upset.

The bay definitely looked the part of a holiday resort. Unfortunately, the northeast wind had other ideas. It was getting lively last night down on the slipway and this morning it had dug in for some proper blowing. During the morning it had the added benefit of being particularly chilly. In the afternoon, it had warmed up some but increased in ferocity to compensate. It was keenly positioned to blow straight through the doorway and at the grumpy shopkeeper behind the counter.

I found some benefit in hiding in the store room for a few hours while I labelled and put the wetsuits the Missus had brought down a few days ago on hangers. I finished them off after I came back from the garage having had the call that they now had a vehicle we could borrow. It was a model that I had not driven before, and it took me until I was halfway back to determine where the fuel gauge was and that the reading in it was nearly empty. I would just about have enough in the tank to get me back to the garage. I am very glad I am not the person borrowing it next. They will be wishing that I was not the sort of person that had it before them.

Once again, I think that it was the unsavoury windy conditions that kept our punters away. The gusts were particularly strong and noisy and ultimately were very wearing. Quite why the Missus chose today, but she has been meaning for a week or two to take the bus to Land's End and walk back with the girls. Actually, I imagine today was quite pleasant for walking, if you were not exactly in the teeth of the gale of wind. The ambient temperature had reached 17 degrees, so without the wind, walking would probably be uncomfortably warm. It was only after she left that I remembered that I had to go and collect the truck at some point. I am sure that they would not mind waiting for a bit.

It was the first time BB had taken a long walk anywhere but the beach, so I was quite jealous. It is very likely that, despite her age, she did better than ABH because she has much longer legs. Apparently, it took an age to walk a few paces because they both wanted to sniff every blade of grass along the journey and there are quite a few of those. The walk from Land's End would take half an hour if you dawdled. The Missus came back over an hour after she left.

The call to return to the garage to pick up the truck did indeed come before the Missus had returned with the girls. It was only about twenty minutes later that I left to pick it up. It should have been a quick turnaround, but I got chatting with the mechanic about this and that and it took much longer. What was the conversation

should have consisted of was learning that while the back box section had been fitted successfully in the end, our overhead foxbat four point flange had been found to be corroded on both sides.

They had cobbled it together onto the mid section with spring washers and all sorts and it will hold together as long as we do not bounce up and down rough tracks – like the one that leads to The Farm, for example. If we have to replace the mid-section it would be exponentially more expensive as it contains sensors and whatnot. If the join does part company, they would be happy to find another bodge to try and hold it together until we can get rid of the truck altogether and replace it with a van, as we intend to do. I think we will just try not to think about it and hope it holds out.

The rest of the afternoon was particularly tedious. The wind was not only terrifically gusty but was noisy with it. It was the sort of wind that made you feel like you had been slapped across the face with a wet sturgeon while balling in your ear 'ole. I could have closed the first electric sliding door in The Cove, I suppose but it was so boring in the afternoon that I could not be bothered to stand up to turn the switch. I was immensely grateful when the clock eventually ground its hands around to closing time.

Mother had joined us for tea after her appointment. After all, she had not come around on her normal day because of the Lifeboat launch, so we owed her one. For the last week we have looked out upon a bright and attractive bay, but the cloud had been thickening all afternoon. By the time we sat down to tea, we had full cloud cover, and it was looking pretty bleak out there.

The rain that we had been threatened with yesterday arrived 24 hours late and was clattering against the windows at the front when it came time to take the girls for their last run. When I opened the door, our steps were completely dry, so I assumed that the rain was not that heavy and consequently had not steeled myself against the face full of water I received when I stepped into the street. Our steps, it seems, were completely sheltered from it. We did not tarry.

## April 30<sup>th</sup> – Thursday

The rain that came in last night was still with us in the morning. I had thought that it was on its way out because it was reasonably pleasant, dry and bright when we headed for the Harbour beach first thing. We had even held onto some of the temperature that increased during the afternoon yesterday, although when I checked later, it had only felt like it. The temperature had decreased by five degrees, but the wind had also dropped out and gone a bit more southeasterly, which made all the difference.

It made absolutely no difference at all in the shop; we were still deprived of customers. Also not helping very much was Radio Pasty announcing that there would be more rain to come through the day. They did offer some glimmer of hope

that it would brighten a bit later and especially in the Far West and on the Islands. The big mistake that I had made was that I finished all the wetsuits yesterday and now had nothing to do to pass the slowly drawn out hours.

We are on the cusp of another spring tide, so by half past eleven o'clock the big beach was broad and long and almost entirely empty. I am certain that the Lifeguards would have been at least as bored as me if not more so. I at least had a customer every three hours to break up the monotony and a shop I could walk around to notice all the jobs that did not need doing because I had already done them at least once.

There is some ordering to be done; we will need shorts and bikinis fairly shortly. Buying things is the first port of call when there is nothing much going on because the only way to look is forward. However, when there are no customers and no money coming in, buying things is the last thing we should be thinking of. On the other hand, leaving the buying too late might mean missing the sales when things do suddenly pick up – as they are wont to do when you do not have the stock to sell. That is either a paradox or irony and I am never quite sure which.

In the end, I compromised. I had a look at our current stock in the shop and up at The Farm and compiled a couple of orders. They will sit there until I adjudge the time to be right and send them off nervously hoping the stock will arrive before we need it and the bill will need payment after we have some money. It turned out to be an inspired choice because the work took the rest of the afternoon.

The problem with ordering clothes is getting hold of the right sizes. We have been here before, and I have explained that we have a huge surplus of size 16 shorts and swimsuits. There is absolutely nothing that we can do about either and the orders I put together today will simply increase the number. It also means increasing the cost of the other suits to cover the expected loss. If you see any size 16 ladies walking about, you can blame them if you think our prices are too high.

We require swimsuits sizes 8,10 and 12 but must purchase boxes including size 14 to 16 or 18. There are no alternatives, and we will just add to the mountain of size 16s. Boys shorts too are available in boxes that do not sit well with our needs. I managed to find a box of 36 covering age 5 to 13 but perhaps not the most alluring and not the ones I would have had by choice. Still, the process took some time to complete, and I will place orders in the next week or so because we will need them for the half term at the end of May.

With my synapses starting to fire up on the left side of my head, they reminded me that I had not yet sent off the request to restart our newspapers again. I try very hard not to think of the Laurel and Hardy Newspaper Company unless I really have to and most especially when we are not selling newspapers. With the numbers of people asking about newspapers increasing and the need to give the company at least a

few weeks' notice, I was rather forced into it. I think that 18<sup>th</sup> May sounds like a terrific date to start some self-inflicted aggravation.

There were several occasions during the afternoon that the sun broke through the cloud, and it looked like we might have some relief from the gloom. Sadly, the bright spells were very short-lived, and the cloud closed over again. Earlier, there had been a few waves down on the beach providing just enough of a shore break for a few surfers to have some fun. Even that did not last very long and as the tide came in, the waves diminished, and the sea was once again as flat as a dish. Unless it is very much different on the south coast, I am not entirely sure why the Scillonian was cancelled, if indeed it was.

I went around the shop last thing and noted that we needed some greengrocery. This is less the result of gaps from selling things and more because the current stock had been sitting there so long it was going off. The same with the bread. All of it, three large loaves, sourdough and six packs of rolls all were on their last 'best before' day. They will be perfectly good tomorrow, and I will offer them for a song (we do not use the D word in the shop – my psychiatrist advised against it) but no one will want them because they will be poisonous the day after the stated 'best before date', obviously. It will all be in the bin this time tomorrow.

Five minutes to closing rushes are mere concepts in time these days. I closed the shop on time on a completely empty street. I do not believe that there was anyone on the beach, either. I could almost hear The Specials playing Ghost Town in my head. Any more of this lark and I will have to start talking to myself for company and I am confused and bewildered enough without having to put up with that nonsense. Still, May tomorrow and all will be well.