

## DIARY 2023

February 28<sup>th</sup> – Tuesday

That bleddy hound is at it again and would have had me up at half past five o'clock had I capitulated. I let her down off the bed and left her to it for half an hour. We are definitely not having any of that, thank you very much. It did not elude me either that she managed to get herself up on her throne where normally she will make a big fuss about how she cannot when I am in the room – the little minx.

I was not going to stay very long in bed anyway as I was not very comfortable. Thumping post holders in with a lump hammer on Saturday, followed by shooting with one of the heaviest guns I possess on Sunday and lumping around two extra heavy leisure batteries and a bunch of records yesterday did my right bicep no good at all. I will have to seek a rub down with some Absorbine liniment if I can find a suitable fair maiden to apply it – apparently it is essential as it will not work else.

If I thought that the arm was due any rest today, I had been roundly disabused of the idea yesterday evening. We were heading to The Farm and the main outstanding workload there was filling the raised beds. The two small ones require some rough stuff first, but the others needed to be finished off with sieved topsoil, the decent stuff. The process we have established for this is me breaking down the mountain into loose earth, then shovelling it into the makeshift sieve that the Missus holds over one of our tubs. It is a relatively efficient process, and we can work quite quickly at it. There is then the humping the tubs on and off the truck. We managed six runs and the big raised beds are now complete and ready for planting – if the mice will leave the shoots in the greenhouse alone.

I had expected to be doing all this under a cover of cloud and slightly warmer than the previous couple of days because the forecast said so. That will explain why the sun shone down all day and a bitter easterly breeze was blowing dust and dirt around as we dug and sieved. It was a beautiful day, and I would not be surprised if my shiny pate has gathered a bit of colour from labouring out in the field. Had it not been for the wind I would have been down to a t-shirt as well. The work kept us warm and the breeze cooled us down, sometimes rather too effectively. It was an amicable arrangement and could be mostly appreciated when we stopped for a break and rested in the cabin where we roasted even with the door open.

Now for something completely the same, if you were following these pages ten years ago. Once in a while I would mix it up with a tale out of my own head that reflected a 'this day in history' or a feature in the local news. Clearly, that was in the days when I cared about you enough, dear reader, to worry that you might get bored hearing about shopkeeping day after day or whatever we did instead of farming back then. Now, obviously, I am less sensitive to your needs – sorry and all that.

There follows a passage from 2011/12, the very first year and it was a particular favourite of MM, our International Correspondent, and it is repeated here in her memory really. The fact that she preferred this over actual Diary pages, says a lot about my Diary writing, I guess. For those of you who remember it, sorry for the repeat. For those who do not, sorry as well; it seemed like a good idea at the time.

*I'm sure for many of you hardened surfers this will be akin to being let out to play without parental restraint. But a cautionary tale for all you fit running and sporty types out there: it's bad for you.*

*The Ancient Greeks had an inkling that things weren't quite right. It all started in 490BC with an Athenian goatherd by the name of Pheidippides. He found that all that running around after goats required something a bit more than the average sandal on his feet. Being a bit of a smart lad he fashioned a light pair of sandals from goatskin that he found ideal for moving quickly over the rocky ground.*

*Things started to go a bit awry for him when he was conscripted into the army to see off the Persian invasion that had landed near Marathon. Standing in line while the top brass handed out battle orders one high-ranking officer noticed him.*

*"Nice shoes, son. Can you run?"*

*Being an honest lad he admitted that he could and was immediately handed the job of messenger. As a consequence, he spent the entire Battle of Marathon running from the front to field HQ relaying commands and events.*

*At the end of the day the Athenians had more men standing up and the Persians went home. The elated field commander, sensing immediate promotion, thought it a pretty good idea to let his bosses back at Athens know how well he'd done.*

*Sitting knackered in the corner of the tent was good old Pheidippides.*

*"Nice shoes, son. Wager you're a bit swift in they things. Here, go tell the top knobs back in Athens, I won."*

*Knowing that you don't tell a Greek with a big sword to go hang himself, Pheidippides took off at top speed the 24 miles back to Athens.*

*Arriving at the door of No10, Athens Street, on his last legs by now, the top man waited patiently for Pheidippides to catch his breath. Glancing down he was amazed that the messenger's sandals still looked in good shape after such a run.*

*"Nice shoes, son."*

*Spurred on by the compliment, Pheidippides managed to say with his last breath of life, "Niki", meaning victory in Greek, before expiring.*

*So inspired was the top man by this act of heroism that he decreed that henceforth a 24 mile race, to be called a Marathon, would be run on this day each year. He also decreed that the runners would wear special sandals named in honour of the runner.*

*And although the race has extended slightly and the name and shape of the sandals have been modernised, many runners, to this day, wear shoes called Nike.*

I find that I am obliged to write a footnote to today's strange Diary entry. When Mother left after tea, we discovered a package on our doorstep. I might inadvertently and by accident have written a paragraph a few days ago describing the parlous state of my malt whisky stock. Clearly, someone felt sufficient sympathy for my plight to redress the situation with a 'birthday' present of a nice bottle of Craigellachie some distance from my birthday.

I shared the news of my good fortune with Mother who immediately asked that I write in today's Diary that she is almost out of brandy. We thank you.

February 27<sup>th</sup> – Monday

I had forgotten that the bleddy hound is a bit deaf and probably heard my plea not to get me up too early as the reverse. She was across my legs and keen before six o'clock this morning and while an early start was necessary today, not quite that early thank you.

It was definitely not the morning for early starts. The skies had been clear all night and it was quite the coldest morning we have had for some time. We rarely get frost at any time in the year but there was some at the range yesterday and I had no doubt, plenty where I was heading to today.

The intention was to get a good march on the day and to get away early that would leave time in the afternoon to be productive. Ah well, it is always good to aspire to such things even if you are about to fail miserably in the execution. Even eschewing a trip to the gymnasium, for which I will no doubt pay dearly later, I was still a good half an hour behind my schedule. I suppose it would have helped to do some planning and preparation, such as bagging up the vinyl records that I wanted to pass on. Luckily, the things for the tip, sorry Household Waste Recycling Centre, were in a box already that simply needed transferring to the back of the truck and be tipped together.

I had a quick geek on the Internet last week and turned up a small record store in Redruth. I called the number and spoke to a very pleasant man about buying all my vinyl collection as a job lot and he indicated that he may be interested after he had surveyed them. At some point in the middle of the night I awoke with a big lightbulb over my head that illuminated the idea that the very pleasant man at the record shop might also want the turntable I had acquired to transfer all the vinyl sounds onto computer. I abandoned this idea when I realised just how long it would take to transfer the best part of 100 records and ran out of time after doing just three or four.

The Household Waste Recycling Centre came first where our truck evaded the scrutiny of the security people, and no one asked to clip my ticket. I also managed to get rid of the leisure batteries that no longer held their charge, which was a good result. I set my very clever smart telephone to give me directions to the record shop

in Redruth, which is close enough to Camborne not to matter. It is also a town that is full of tiny back streets, and I am not familiar with even the bigger front streets.

While it seemed like I was being directed through a labyrinth of roads in decreasing sizes of width, the satellite navigation system rather handily announced the arrive at my destination right next to a free roadside parking space. It was mercifully a short walk with a heavy load to the tiny record shop and a very pleasant shopkeeper. He surveyed my collection randomly selecting some for closer scrutiny. It pause at a very old and good quality sleeve of Bob Dylan, The Times They Are A Changing that I got second hand. I knew that some of the records would be worth a bob or two but I had overlooked this one that he seemed most animated by.

I could have sold each of these records individually, which would have meant learning how to grade their quality, photographing them and registering with a specialist vinyl website, then packing them securely for posting. This would have realised me a better return. In the end I agree a very favourable price to the pleasant shopkeeper with which I was more than happy and freed myself from the additional labour. It was nostalgic to have such a collection and to remember where and when I acquired the albums – one from an early girlfriend, 45 years ago - but in truth, I would never have played the records again and was better off without.

Once again I relied upon the satellite navigation system to get me out of Dodge in a hurry before the record man changed his mind. The trip from Redruth to Helston was well signposted anyway, so I probably did not need the assistance. The stop there was fleeting as the PTO shaft for the hole borer was waiting in the office for me and I was away again within minutes. I needed no electronic assistance after that to head back to Penzance down the worst and seemingly longest road I think I have ever travelled.

The much maligned council has replaced the parking machines in the car park in Penzance with shiny new ones. It must have had some money given it for Christmas that it sis not know what to do with because as far as I could tell, the old ones were perfectly serviceable. The new shiny ones allow you to use credit cards or cash at your discretion, it says in a sign on the machine, which is handy because I balk at the idea of using a credit card for £1.10. However, on closer appraisal, the little screen it has showed a message showing “Cards Only”, which was disappointing. I noticed this the other day but then a second machine behind it still offered the choice, so I used that one instead. Today, though, the second machine also only offered service by credit card, which even if I were to be persuaded to use, I did not have one on me.

I was on the verge of despair when a very pleasant lady approached and told me that the second machine would indeed take my cash. The message, apparently, was a ruse that I should ignore. I was dubious but she was spot on the money and I came away with a little ticket to place in my windscreen to prove it.

The much maligned council is often criticised for milking the town centre shoppers for excess funds from parking, just when the high street shops need all the help they can get. I do not know whether the recently advertised prices have been instituted yet but £1.10 for an hour does not seem unreasonable. It just seems that the much maligned council wish to make it as difficult as possible to spend the £1.10 as if to say, 'look, you can park cheaply but you're going to have to work for it'.

If that were not enough to irk a placid and easy going grumpy shopkeeper, the sole reason for wishing to park there was to visit the Royal Mail sorting office, which I discovered was closed. It was not yet the middle of the day. I had received one of those letters from my postie telling me that a letter awaited my attention there. Ordinarily, I would ignore such things but the likelihood on this occasion is that the Aged Parent's manservant send an communication to me without affixing sufficient remuneration for the weight and size of it. Our post lady slipped an advice through the door telling me that unless I coughed up a ransom, the letter would get it. Being left no choice, I have now affixed more than enough recompense – irritatingly not having the correct stampage – for the Royal Mail for release the consignment.

Such things can weigh heavy on a soul, so I awarded myself the afternoon off. I am not sure exactly what I did to fill the time, but I am sure it was jolly useful.

Quite coincidentally, the Missus was watching an Internet programme that referenced Hilton Head Island, which is in the United States of America, somewhat west of Camborne, if you take the shortcut. It took me a moment to recognise this as the home of the famously first of the The Cove Diary's International Correspondents. We had not heard from our correspondent for a while and I assumed that she had retired and was devoting time to her watermelons and clearing cotton mouth snakes from her shed.

It was therefore something of an eerie moment to see an electronic mail mentioning the same, arrive in my mailbox. It was from a nephew explaining very sadly that MM, the Diary's first International Correspondent had shuffled off quite peacefully the last Wednesday.

She was an extraordinary lady and blessed with a fine sense of humour. We had met on a couple of occasions, once very memorably making proper baked beans for an Independence Day (I think we are over that, now) barbeque here in The Cove. She was a memorable lady and will be greatly missed, I suspect by many, and I for one am privileged to have known and had proper baked beans with her.

February 26<sup>th</sup> – Sunday

It was an extremely cold morning again and the beautifully clear sky was definitely not our friend. We need a nice warm blanket over us and that would help a little. I do not think that the easterly wind was present in the strength it was yesterday, but I was not paying attention really.

The bleddy hound has reverted to somewhat earlier wake up calls on me again. There was little else to do other than update price lists from the notice we had in yesterday's post and look for a replacement pair of shoes. I had new ones, for shop wear mainly, less than a year ago and there is a hole in the hollow sole. I would not worry overly for its lack of waterproofness, but it lets in stones and leads me to hobble about if they find their way to the wrong place under foot. New ones arrived just yesterday evening, but they have those high heel bits that rub against your Achilles tendon. They would probably wear in, but I would suffer weeks of blisters first, which I cannot be doing with. They will go back, which is why I was looking for another pair – just in case you were wondering.

I took my own sweet time in getting ready for the range. Today we were shooting with my wartime British service rifle, which is exceeding good fun. It reminds me of time as an Air Cadet, which was almost mostly fun. I maybe get to shoot this particular twice a year, which is not enough and it takes a while to get used to the sights and its handling. It is also very heavy and quite how our boys slogged over desert, jungle and soggy European terrain with one, will be constant source of amazement. My second course of fire was much improved over the first and its firing is very accurate when you get there.

Normally, the wartime gun session is very lightly attended but it seems like many more in the club have discovered the delights of shooting it. As a consequence, we were later than usual finishing and we were pushing teatime by the time the Missus got me home.

I had warmed considerably over the morning at the range. Yesterday, the clear skies and warmth from the sun was disrupted during the afternoon giving me a strange hot and cold experience while I was working on the arch. Today, the clear skies lasted all day and out in the sunshine and out of the easterly breeze, it was pleasantly warm. When we dived down into The Cove and out of direct sunlight, those temperatures dipped again and by darkness they plummeted still further.

Under such condition a pleasant warming stew is very welcome, which is probably why the Missus made a salad – no, I jest, of course. It was stew and very well received it was too. That and a chat with the bleddy hound not to get me up too early the next morning, rounded off the evening nicely.

February 25<sup>th</sup> – Saturday

I can tell you one thing, dear reader, the temperature was just north of Baltic today and bleddy cold with it. The wind has gone around to somewhere in the east and although not the strongest breeze we have ever had, did a remarkable job of knocking several degrees off the ambient temperature. My legs do not often feel it when I step out in shorts for the bleddy hound's first turn but this morning I was fearful for the little hairs lest they break off.

It was the cold that kept me rooted to my seat in the living room when I should have been getting up and about doing things. We had not quite decided exactly what we would be doing today but sitting down being idle was not one of them, although it was exceptionally hard finding the motivation to move.

We have to be very well organised if we both wish to go to The Farm and even more so on days like these. Mother is the lynch pin on which the final decision rests and while she would have said yes in any case, it was far too cold out, so we did not even give her the choice. The result of that decision was that I would go by myself as we would have no one to keep the bleddy hound from being miserable and making herself ill. I have two jobs left and one of those required the hole boring tool on the tractor and the drive shaft for that is still at the menders a year after I took it there. I called them on Friday and told them I would be up next week to collect it. They even remembered me, so I must have made an impression – of some sort.

The other task involved some archery. My how you will titter, dear reader, when you realise that I have hoodwinked you with a clever literary twist that I have been dying to deploy. Of course, there were no shenanigans with a bow and arrow but instead the construction of a decorative arch at the entrance to the decking in front of the cabin.

There, you may all settle down again now. The work was not half as interesting as it sounded, ahem, but I shall tell you about it anyway as you would expect nothing less of me. The Missus had purchased this kit some time ago – it was on my list of things to do last year but we ran out of time. It consists of a trellis each side where the Missus wishes to train her rose bushes and is topped by a double arch over the top resting on each trellis. It was a pretty straight forward build or would have been had it been anyone else putting it together.

The main issue I could foresee, and I foresaw it last year too, was getting the thing in the ground and for it to stay there through the occasional eighty miles per hour winds we have. We had settled on those metal fence post holders that require thumping into the ground to the depth of around a metre. The tricky bit was getting the post holders in precisely the right spot for each foot and hoping that there were no big stones in the vertical drop underground. I drove my trusty wrecking bar in first for each of the holes that hopefully proved the absence of stones and as a side benefit helped drive the post holder in straight.

The driving in of the holders required much effort and the assistance of a sizeable lump hammer. I shall have to concentrate my weight lifting effort at the gymnasium on my left arm this coming week or remain lopsided with biceps the size of tug boats on the right. There was also much concentration on keeping them straight and when its partner went in, making sure that the trellis fitted properly in box holes.

This all took time but I had not reckoned with the additional time closing the tightening bolts on each leg would take, especially when I had left my socket set at home. It would have been much quicker with a ratchet driver but I was lucky that I had to hand the right size spanners and had to manage with them. This was a slow and laborious process made more difficult by having to pack the holders because they were the wrong size.

With time running out on the day, I managed to get both trellises into position and secure. I then needed a step ladder and some more bashing with a big hammer to get them both the last few inches into the ground. I had to leave that last few inches because the front legs had to be cut into the step leading up to the decking. This had added some extra time to the process, but in the end worked out better than I had hoped. I took great pains at the end to ensure that both end of each trellis were level with each other and that so too were each side so that the previously constructed arch would fit properly.

I was hugely please that I had managed to get the trellises perfectly level. What I had not anticipated was that the arch was a complete mess, twisted and uneven. It is a double arch and with one side resting on one end of a trellis the other sat several inches above the other end. Miraculously, however, the I had got the distance between the two trellises spot on. On the opposite trellis it was the same but at different ends. I resolved it in the end by screwing in one side and using a clamp to hold down the other into position while I screwed that in.

The whole construction had not bee too bad with pre-drilled holes for screws and mortice joints cuts for the spars across the two arches. The only one observation I would have made was the pre-drilled holes to screw the arch to the trellis on the inside was directly under the bottom most spar. How you were supposed to fit any screws in that hole, I have no idea. Mine went in at a jaunty angle and twice as many as suggested. It is solid enough and should still be there after a big blow.

I had aimed to finish and get clear of The Farm by four o'clock so that I could watch the rugby game on television. I had omitted to factor in getting ready for the range the next day but happily I had misread the kick off time and managed my readiness ahead of it.

What a satisfying end to the day all around.

February 24<sup>th</sup> – Friday

Despite a marked improvement in the weather, today turned out to be quite unproductive for one reason or another.

I had been roused earlier than the rest of the week by the bleddy hound, but I had been restless anyway and was grateful for the excuse to get out of bed. The absence of breeze was immediately noticeable as was the fact that we were not



getting wet. It also seemed a little less cold, although I am sure that was the lack of wind chill as it was just as cold in the flat this morning as it had been the rest of the week.

I had made my excuses for not attending the gymnasium on the last two sessions but since we had not been heaving soil or doing other strenuous activity for a couple of days, I was not going to duck out of it today. A blistering session works wonders in the central heating department, so I had one and return home a warmer human being and ready for the day. Sadly, there was not much in the day that was ready for me or that I could get to, at least.

The Missus had decided to go to the out of town clothing store near Hayle and left around the middle of the day just after I had taken the bleddy hound out for the second time. I was glad that I had slipped into DIYman overalls as the breeze had kicked in again and was bringing with it chill from somewhere in the north. It was more obvious at the corner of the Lifeboat station that the bleddy hound decided to linger at, just to please me, no doubt. The beach on the dropping tide was empty and we took a short wander in the direction of the sea before we had clearly had enough.

In the absence of being able to go anywhere to do things I decided to sand down our benches across the road. They are now the oldest ones out there, although perfectly serviceable. The Ice Cream Parlour replaced theirs after they were flattened around this time last year by the descending weight of the Lifeboat Station roof. The ones outside the Sennen Cove Café are all from the year before that and still look relatively new. There is nothing wrong with ours, particularly after I had fixed the bits that had fallen off over the years, but they are green in places with moss on the top and white in others where lichen has taken hold. Clearly whoever made them used the north facing bit of the tree to make those bits.

I started to sand them down with my clever multitool but discovered that I only had very fine sandpaper sheets. It could do with an initial sanding with some more coarse grain paper first, which I had no way of getting. It also concerned me that the bleddy hound was sitting outside the shop in her shop bed and although she had a blanket over her, that wind was very chilly indeed.

Calling a day on the sanding, I switched to inside work and manufacturing a few more rounds for my rifle. I only have two more boxes to go, and I can put everything away. In reality, I probably only have three more weekends that I can attend the range and after that it will be me and the shop. In that time I will not use that many rounds, so it is best to clear it away sooner rather than later.

My call from the doctor came in earlier than expected. I nearly did not answer it because it came in as anonymous on my mobile telephone and I do not answer those anyway. I had asked to be called on our clever Internet landline that I can answer anywhere anyway, and that telephone rang next. Anyone who had both numbers is someone we know, so I answered this time. It was the doctor who has a

house in The Cove and we know him quite well. He explained that because the surgery has to refer me, whether rightly or wrongly, they have a duty of care to ensure they are not referring something they are unsure of. In short, I need to see a quack so their backsides are covered.

I think largely because we know him, he said he would see me today but, alack and alas, the Missus had our sole means of transport. We will meet up next Wednesday which gives me the opportunity to clean out my ear 'oles so they are sparkly and clear. I will have my rifle pull-through out at the weekend and can thread that through the opposite ear 'ole and give it a good scrubbing.

I forgot to mention that the Aged Parent had alerted me to the fact that Venus and Jupiter would be in alignment yesterday. I thought for a moment he was going to suggest that I was going to meet a tall, dark handsome stranger, but it was purely on astronomical interest. I had quite forgotten until my attention was brought to the very bright object in the western sky as I went across to the Lifeboat station. I could not tell you that the two planets were aligned at the precise time, but it was a particularly bright body, so it is entirely possible. I like to think so, anyway.

In case you were interested, dear reader, I did not meet any strangers of any stature, shading or of particular aesthetic quality. I know you would worry.

February 23<sup>rd</sup> – Thursday

The weather has taken a turn for the vicious and vindictive. It started during the night sending in sporadic hail showers that bounced small lumps of ice through the skylight above the bed and down my back. Twice I got up to close the window to a little more and even though it was open only a fraction in the end, the little icy drops still managed to find a way through.

I was loathed to close the window all together due to the bleddy hound's propensity to let off, almost on a constant basis. It must be an age thing because she never used to be so prolific at it. Although I admit to it being quite useful on the odd occasion, it is quite an embarrassment if we have visitors as we give them hard stares making them think we think its them.

The hail was still lashing against the front windows when we got up. The bleddy hound has at last settled down to a bit of a later getting up time, just weeks before I need to start getting up early again. Better late than never, I suppose. Nevertheless, it was very gloomy when we eventually braved going through the front door. I had upgraded my full metal jacket waterproofs to the top flight ones I reserve for special occasions and I could hear the sleet cracking off them as we made our way across the road. The bleddy hound, rather less protected, did not hang about and we were back inside minutes later.

As well as the hail we had wind, too. It was still punchy enough and had decided to drop down from the frozen wastes of Newcastle via the North Sea where they were, no doubt, rueing the effects of global warming in their Greta Thunberg t-shirts and shorts. The gulls surfing the breeze close into shore were stark white against the sullen grey backdrop that would have graced any eastern seaboard view. The sea, that appeared a little less boisterous than yesterday, was flecked with white all the way across the bay.

It was pretty enough looking out from the inside, although we do suffer a bit when the wind is to the front of us. With the frequency of the wintry showers pouring in from the northeast, we once again gave The Farm a swerve. I was going to take the bits from yesterday's delivery up ahead of my appointment at the doctor's but just as I was about to leave, I was minded to look at the note I had written down about the time it was booked for. I had myself mixed up with tomorrow's call from the doctor regarding my false ears and the appointment was two hours earlier.

I quickly rearranged my schedule and went to the doctor's first. It was hardly worth going as I was only there for a couple of minutes. Had I remembered the surgery message address I could have sent in the information they wanted but lost the piece of paper they wrote it on six months ago. More recently, they had been sending text messages for me to attend – they clearly had not lost my address – so I thought that I had better make amends.

Wasting no time, I cleared some space in the truck when I got back and loaded up the bits of yesterday's delivery that I had not picked to stay in the shop, which was most of it. It fitted almost perfectly in the back of the truck and I headed up to The Farm. It was blowy up there but thankfully in a direction that kept the barn door open. I watered the fledgling crops in the greenhouse before I left and found it to be gloriously warm in there. Not bad for a rickety, converted stable made out of our own heads. If someone told me twenty years ago that we would be capable of such feats, I would have laughed and told them not to be so daft. Of all the crops, we have prolific growth of aloe vera, about ten pots of them. We sold about twenty pots off last year. They are like bleddy trifids.

By the afternoon, the remains of any wintry showers had blown through, and the sun was starting to emerge. By late in the afternoon, the skies were blue with fluffy white clouds and while the sea was still choppy, there were no charging waves or white water running up the cliffs opposite. It was still chilly but after a bit of activity, humping boxes out of the shop and into our store at The Farm, I had warmed up considerably and stayed that way for the rest of the afternoon.

We had a well-attended Lifeboat training meeting later in the evening and since there was no launch, we on the shore side familiarised ourselves with the first aid kit. One of the crew managed to acquire a whole family of resusci Annies and we practised some CPR moves, which was useful since we are down a defibrillator in The Cove at present.

Quite exhausted by my efforts at the station I returned for a renunciatory malt whisky. I have a collection of five rather decent brews but sadly four appear to have become depleted at roughly the same time. The plan was that I would have enough that I could replace one at a time, since they are quite costly, so I am not sure quite what happened. I read recently that Winston Churchill had his physician write him a prescription for alcohol when he visited the USA during the prohibition years. I am speaking with my own doctor tomorrow, I just wonder ...

February 22<sup>nd</sup> – Wednesday

The bleddy hound and I were lucky this morning. The fact that it might rain had eluded my dynamic risk assessment prior to going out, so it rained quite heavily just as we got inside. I shall not make that mistake again, you may rest assured, and I have added it to my 'prior to going out dynamic risk assessment form'. It is the small things; it is always the small things.

Sometimes it is the big things, like the fearfully cold breeze blowing in from the northwesterly quarter. It was bitter all the way through the day. It was also less strong than it was cold, which is fortunate because I had forgotten to tie our wheelie bin down after yesterday's collection.

The Missus had decreed it a day off, so there was no trekking off to The Farm on the schedule. There was, however, a postcard salesperson coming around late morning and at some point today the second beachware delivery of the season was pencilled in to arrive. This was all the discounted things that we had ordered at the supplier's show we had attended back in December, and they insist that we take the items early because that is the purpose of the discount, to clear out their warehouse to make room for the new stuff. We would prefer not to have these things quite so early – mainly because it means paying for them early, but some of the discounts are worthwhile and difficult to refuse.

I had gone down to the shop quite early, as I had eschewed my trip to the gymnasium on the basis that I had already exercised quite a bit this week. My intention was to clear some of the boxes of detritus that have gathered there over the last few months. I did reasonably well, although could have done better, and I have a least a box that needs to be taken to the tip, sorry, Household Waste Recycling Centre, where it will be tipped. I was halfway through this when the postcard salesperson arrived.

We have known him for many years. He used to work for a big postcard company in the South East of England, east of Camborne, until they discontinued the company. He took over some of the Westcountry stock and joined in with his wife's business that was in a complementary field. He brought the remains of the old stock and some of the new stock so anything we order from now on will be new.

I had just made him a cup of tea and settled at the living room table for a chat when the beachware order turned up. I apologised and went down to unload it and met another salesperson from a wine company we were interested in supplying us. She had turned up unannounced, so I did not feel too badly about putting her off and she agreed to come back a little later as she was seeing someone else nearby.

I spent the intervening time in the shop sorting out the delivery. Some of it will remain in the shop but most will go up to the storeroom at The Farm. I had thought about doing that today when I had finished but it had been decreed a day off and I could not go against such an order. It was also blowing cold, and I did not fancy a trip up there, but it is best to pretend that I was behaving and following orders.

It would appear that our wine supply issue has now been resolved after a visit from the lady I had put off earlier. They have a small store front in St Ives but also a wine import business that feeds several small businesses in the area. They are not a big concern but stock many of the wines we erstwhile sold when our local cash and carry was still in business. It was in fact the boss man there who forged the contact, for which we are very grateful.

I am trying to tie up all our loose ends before we must concentrate fully on the shop opening again. One of these is my false ears that could do with a review. I have had them several years and I sometimes wonder if they are still fit for purpose. The issue was kick started with the letters from the hospital that told me that I was no longer welcome to go there and must seek assistance at one of the opticians that also do ears in town. I stopped by one of them the other day and was told I was not welcome there either until I had been referred by my doctor.

Since I had been referred by my doctor originally it seemed a frightful waste of their time, especially as we hear that they are overworked and underpaid, to be referring someone who had already been referred again. The optician seemed to think that it could be settled at reception, so I called our surgery to ask them to do so. That seemed very reasonable to me, but who I am to think such a thing.

The receptionist was new to her job, which could be one reason, although she went off twice during the call to seek advice, so someone more experienced was also behind it. I would have to make an appointment with a doctor. I questioned the necessity of this, especially as I would need to wait more than two weeks for the appointment. I told the receptionist that if it took that long I would have to leave it until we closed the shop at the end of October and try again. She was most sympathetic and, with advice from someone else, suggested a telephone consultation should be acceptable.

I am dismayed. Clearly, people across the country are facing this change and I cannot fathom why a doctor needs to be involved at all. We hear all the time how hard-pressed they are, and people should not be wasting their time, yet here they are wasting it themselves. This process should have been sorted out at the same

time someone decided deaf head services were to be outsourced. I have to go to the surgery on a routine appointment tomorrow afternoon, so I might have another crack at it then because this is daft, and I cannot be doing daft when it could be dealt with as routinely as a repeat prescription.

So irked was I by the rigmarole that I sat down and watched some television. I should have placed an order with a chap who had made a new Cove design for us but that will have to wait until tomorrow now. I also put the heating on because it was getting bleddy chilly inside. I do hope our building works sorts that out – if and when etcetera and so forth.

February 21<sup>st</sup> – Tuesday

So much for trying to be efficient at making fewer trips into town. I remembered that I had to run an errand to the bank, and it needed to be done today. It could have been rolled into yesterday's trip had I remembered, but it would have added an unreasonable time to my absence at The Farm, so probably just as well I went today instead.

It was a much better day for doing things today. It was grey but there was no sign of mist and the little rain we did have fell in the later afternoon just as we were packing up for the day. The run into Penzance was certainly clear and I went early enough to avoid the main thrust of busyness, I thought. I thought that until I got to the bank where there was a queue. There, a very pleasant lady asked if she could help and I indicated that I needed to wait for the one teller that they have left. She asked what it was I wanted as she still might be able to help, which I knew she would not be able to. I did consider telling her she could help a great deal by having a few more human tellers, but it was a little too early in the day to be too grumpy and was trying to be good. Instead, I told her plainly what I wanted and she told me I would have to wait for the single teller. I would have said, "I know, that is why I am waiting here", but I was in training for my next call and was practising my restraint.

Having spend two days trying to get an appointment via the telephone and discovering that the lines were permanently engaged, I decided that I would have to attend my dentist in person. The last time I went was more that three years ago, when they told me the appointment that they had just cancelled was until further notice. I wondered if in the intervening time they had deregistered me, which would have been fun, and I girded my loins just in case they had. I do not have a major tooth problem yet but there are a couple of niggles that I would like checked out by a medical professional before I do but also knew that I would face some resistance.

The gatekeeping by the pair of receptionists who ganged up on me from the moment I arrived was petty and unnecessary. I simply asked for an appointment and the reasons why I could not have one started immediately, first that they were working through a backlog of children. I explained that I had not expected an appointment in

the near future and if I had to wait six months, I am sure I could manage that since I had already waited three years.

It was not as simple as that, apparently, and if I wanted an emergency appointment, I should telephone at eight o'clock. I said that I was not an emergency case and that I had already tried calling at various times and found that the telephone line was always busy. There was no queue facility, which would have been useful, so I had been forced to come in person.

I was very mindful during the process that I should remain polite and smiley, subservient and grovelling, which was something of a Herculean task under the circumstances and the latter two should not be necessary for any public service. I held my ground through their continued onslaught of excuses and even managed some patience when they asked me what the problem was. It took all my restraint not to say that I did not know, which is why I wanted to see a dentist, but remained vague and pointed to a couple of teeth as if in explanation.

I was negotiating for at least fifteen minutes and in the end one of them weakened and said that she would see what she could do. Lo and behold, a couple of seconds later, she had found an appointment in six weeks' time. Why we had to go through the painful exchange and waste of time that preceded it, when she could have booked the appointment as soon as I asked, I have no idea.

I detoured to pick up Mother on my return then back home for the Missus and up to The Farm. It was still relatively early – it was still morning, just about – and we had a good run at the day. I announced my intention to make a more efficient sieve, the idea for which had come to me in the middle of the night, and the Missus told me that I was going to make the last two raised beds, instead. This left the Missus sieving the topsoil by herself without my clever invention, but it did mean that the manufacturing element of the raised bed project is now finished – whoopee.

I have just two jobs left at The Farm, I am told, and neither of them is making a super duper earth sieving machine, which is very disappointing.

We left The Farm in the later part of the afternoon, much to the bleddy hound's chagrin. At one point the Missus brought the truck up from where she was sieving to get me to help load the full tubs. The bleddy hound, who had erstwhile been tucked up in the cabin with Mother, immediately thought that this must be going home time and came out to wait by the truck door. You have never seen such a look of incredulous disappointment as when the Missus headed off down to the end of the field again after we unloaded.

There were a few spots of rain here and there as we packed up, which probably suggested we did so at the right time. It seems to take an age to put everything away and lock up; I am sure we did not take as long getting it all out. The decking now has

a nice covering of sawdust and looks like a somewhat down-market public house. It will blow away in the next breeze and stick in the grass instead.

At least when we got home we could get in the front door. Yesterday, there was a pile of mail on the doormat. Our regular post lady was off on holiday last week and the Royal Mail decided that we could do without a postal service in her absence. Since they have now removed our last collection of the day, it was unclear if our mail was being collected either. We were not particularly fussed by the absence of the service but our neighbours, who told me about it because I had not noticed, run a business and were adversely affected. I have no idea if any laws were broken – is a postal service a legislative requirement – but it was poor show, especially with no notice or explanation.

What was waiting for me when I returned were two old boys visiting from Mevagissey or thereabouts and were most put out that the Lifeboat station viewing gallery was closed. They spoke with the Missus who very smartly swerved and pointed out that I was Head Launcher that impressed them greatly. It does not happen very often. They were dyed in the wool Lifeboat supporters and had known a previous Coxswain, now shuffled off, and had been there to haggle for the old winch when it was decommissioned for Mevagissey shipyard, which they did not get.

They spoke at great length, which the Missus did well to avoid but were friendly souls and I did not mind a bit. They asked many questions and it is not often – alright, never – that we very excellent Shore Crew are held in such high regard. They spoke of things and people that I had heard of but were long gone, so it was a pleasant interlude. One also had a very thick South East accent and required some hard listening to, which was not easy without my false ears. I hope I agreed in the right places.

I reflected on looking back as I closed the gate behind the truck as we left The Farm. There is still so much to do and there will not be the time to do it. I suspect there is enough there to keep us both occupied part time, at least, through the year, which would be quite pleasant if we did not need to eat or pay the bills – or drink beer, which I suddenly thought of as a very good idea.

February 20<sup>th</sup> – Monday

It seemed like quite a bright idea at the time to replace my Monday morning gymnasium session with moving a ton of heavy earth from one end of the field to the other and to drop it into our remaining raised bed. It suited the Missus to stay behind with the bleddy hound at that time of the morning and, after all, she does not come with me to the gymnasium.

When I announced this on Sunday night it was Mother who was keen to come up later on to look after the bleddy hound while the Missus and I continued. I had hoped by then that I would have finished moving the heavy earth and we could migrate to



sieving and shifting some of the topsoil. That all looked good on paper, not that we got as far as writing it down, as I would collect Mother on my way back for a spot of croust and we would head up as a team.

The first spoke in my oyster was that I had noticed one of the truck's headlights was not working when the Missus came to collect me from the range yesterday. People being too idle to replace dysfunctional headlights is one of my bugbears because it does not take much to change them. In fact, I thought how easy it would be to stop in at the garage at the top of the hill on my way to collect Mother because it was bound to be a standard sort of bulb and change it when I got back home, which I duly did.

Well, I did the stopping off at the garage on my way to collect Mother, but I could not change it at home because it was the wrong bulb. I was pleasantly surprised, however, just how easy it was to carry out the replacement – once I had the right bulb. Very often, the access to the back of the unit is a challenge to say the least. We would check back at the garage at the top of the hill to see if they had the right one and if not, I would drop Mother, the Missus and the bleddy hound at The Farm and head into town.

It was not long before I was heading into town. It was handy that the tractor part I was waiting for was also ready for collection, as that would save an additional trip another day. We also agreed that we could do with some more gorilla tubs and I would buy some of those too, once I had found out where I could get them. Overall, however, it was wasting time that we could have used to do the earth shifting especially as I had sacrificed my gymnasium session for starting early at The Farm.

As I had anticipated, the trip into town took far longer than I would have liked. I purchased the bulbs at the national chain that sells motoring accessories. I learnt long ago that even if only one bulb is out, replace both because it will not be long before the second one goes as well. Of course, the shop only had one of the reasonably priced bulbs that I needed so I had to purchase two of the more expensive ones. They assured me that they were 100 percent brighter but did not say brighter than what. I could have spent even more money and had them 150 percent brighter, but I would not be sure if it was 150 percent brighter than the thing that the 100 percent brighter one was brighter than or 150 percent brighter than the 100 percent brighter one, which would make it very bright indeed unless the 100 percent brighter one was only 100 percent brighter than a glowworm in which case it was probably worth the money.

I spent some time in the car park changing the bulbs because it was already a little misty and could get worse – and I detest people driving with only one bulb when they could have fixed it. I also bought new wiper blades and changed those too as the graunching of the old ones was becoming irritating in the occasional fine mizzle of the day.

We did not do too badly for weather in the afternoon, although I did get a little damp in the morning. It was mizzling on and off on my way to and from town but had stopped when I found the tractor part place that had ordered the bits for my lower arm stabiliser on the tractor. I think that I mentioned that it was a bit of a long shot but the sizes at either end matched with what they were screwing into. They were waiting for me on the counter when I entered the shop, which was nothing more than a room with a counter and a huge warehouse behind it. I could see straight away that they were not going to work. The end that would go into the lower arm had a shank on it rather than being threaded to the end.

I told the very pleasant man behind the counter what I was looking for and explained that I had searched high and low without success. He mentioned a few suppliers, all of which I was familiar with and had tried. He spent a moment on his computer and then made a telephone call to the tractor dealer in the UK and they immediately sent drawings through of the three point hitch assemblies that were available – that in itself was very impressive. I commented on how quickly he managed to find the right place to look and he told me he had been doing it for 25 years, so he knew a thing or two. I should have come here first, clearly.

There were some complications, like the part number had been reassigned that I would never have established by myself. He got a price from the supplier and I nearly bit his arm off when he asked if I wanted to order the two complete lower arm stabilisers, the right ones this time. I do not know how long it will take but as long as they arrive before the shop opens, I will be very happy.

By the time I arrived back at The Farm it was half way through the afternoon. We only had time to move two loads of sieved earth to the raised bed that did not quite finish off the second one. This was largely because the bleddy hound made it perfectly clear that she wanted to go home. She sits by the truck door, looking at it longingly. I put her in the car seat then disappointed her by leaving her there while we moved the last consignment of earth and put the tools away.

The Missus dropped me and her off at home so as not to disappoint her further before doubling back to take Mother home. We will not tell her that we will probably go up there again tomorrow as well, else she will probably pack her bags in the night and run off.

February 19<sup>th</sup> – Sunday

Well done to the forecasters who managed to get a double this weekend. Yesterday forecast wet and was dry and today dry and was wet. That takes special skills, I am sure.

I was lulled into a false sense of security in the morning as the bleddy hound, who had awarded me a lie in, and I got a dry run out first thing. When I say, lie in, it is relative of course, and was still dark outside but it was temperate and gave me some

hope that I would not need to get toggled up in immovable multiple layers of clothing. I chose to err on the side of caution because while we had a moment's sunshine the mizzle came in chill and wet in the afternoon.

Regardless of the weather, and it is always regardless of the weather up on the high side of the moors, we had a splendid time. It was wet in a heavily damping sort of way, but the card targets we used in the afternoon, held up well against it. The paper ones we used in the morning would not have fared so well. Each week the scores from the previous week are posted to the notice board. I was heartened to see I did quite well with my cowboy rifle last week. I may not look at the results next week.

Because of the rosy view of the weather I had been offered I failed to take any waterproof trousers with me that I might otherwise have done. The end result of this was that the heavy mizzle that came and went made all my kit damp and could not be bagged away when I got home. Everything else was cleaned and locked away in better time than I am used to. I think I am becoming more proficient at it, or just less fussy about how well I do it.

There was also less time to do it in. Now the days are getting longer we can spend longer up at the club. The afternoon session was less well attended than the morning but even so took quite a bit of time because of the complexity of the courses. We are very fortunate to have leading member of the club to spend time in advance designing courses of fire to make them interesting and largely different each week. He is on holiday for a couple of sessions next month and we shall have to fend for ourselves. Since I tend to get there early, I suspect that the course design will fall on the few of us who get there first. I do not mind and have done it before, but it serves to demonstrate just how much effort our pal puts in.

Returning to The Cove, there was sufficient visibility to see that the sea state had calmed a little since yesterday. By high water later in the afternoon yesterday there was a fair amount of banging and crashing going on. I never fail to be amazed how quickly the bay can change from one state to another and it is no wonder that even seasoned seafarers can get caught out in the open ocean.

I did not get back early enough for bleddy hound walking duties, which I often do during the shorter days. The Missus discovered that by lifting her slightly on her harness, she was more inclined to walk and managed a stank up Coastguard Row and back. Later in the evening, the Missus tried to rig up a more efficient and comfortable sling but ended up with a softer harness. I have seen dogs with those contraptions with wheels at the front end so the dog can push with hind legs. I think however they are for young dogs and amputees and giving one to the bleddy hound would be like giving Mother a trike.

Time to go, for there are plans afoot for tomorrow.

February 18<sup>th</sup> – Saturday

Naturally, the forecast for today was moderated when the weather forecasters looked out of their windows this morning. Rain? What was anyone thinking? Of course, it was not going to rain just a bit misty and damp is all.

The change in forecast put a rather different complexion on the day, or more my part in it. Not going up to The Farm and moving even more earth about would be such a waste of relatively dry weather but the problem was that we could not go up there together. I think that I had already agreed with myself that it would be a jolly wheeze to go up there and do it myself not to mention excellent, if rather extreme, exercise.

I did not bolt up there straight away but stayed home and made myself ready for the day including the intake of breakfast. By the time I was ready to go, the Missus was up and I explained the course of play, so left her behind with the bleddy hound and headed off.

If was far more misty up at The Farm than down in The Cove, which is fairly usual but at least it was much drier than yesterday. My DIYman overalls remembered yesterday and were still damp as a mark of nostalgia; the mud on my jacket and trousers had successfully dried and looked even more workperson-like. I left off the layer that I had discarded yesterday, partly because I knew no matter how cold it was when I left, I would be super-heated after the first lot of tub filling and partly because I could not find it. I had a notion that it was in the back of the truck but failed to have a look either when I left or when I came back, which was silly because I will probably need it tomorrow at the range.

I had set myself the target of shifting three loads of earth and wasted no time in gathering my tools and getting started. There is an art to using a Cornish shovel, which I am slowly becoming to understand. You need to be standing in exactly the right place between the stuff you are shovelling and the receptacle you are shovelling into. The fact that I am using six receptacles and have no wish to keep moving the current one into a particular position, makes this more difficult. It is also the case that I am working a relatively long earth face in the heap, so the 'stuff' is not always in the same place even when filling just one tub.

The shovel swinging is, I believe, a work in progress and I will probably get there in the end. I did try and work up a rhythm but this was impossible as one moment the shovel slides into a deep pile and the next you hit a solid stone. There is also having to work loose the next pile with the wrecking bar and clear the larger lumps of rock that come away with each major fall. It is for this reason that I only concentrated on the heavy soil. The topsoil requires sieving and is more a two person process.

After I had shifted two loads I took a half hour break and was much revived to start again. So refreshed was I that I completed another two rounds and could have continued to another pair after a further break but thought that might have been

pushing it a bit. I packed up and came back where the Missus had ensconced herself in the kitchen making tea for both today and tomorrow.

I waited until she had finished and made some dinner for tomorrow at the range before deciding to collapse into the electric sofa and watch a film. Either the majority of films these days are rubbish or I am just rubbish at choosing the good ones. I suspect that much of the problem is that the demand for new stuff on the streaming services is so high that the companies are struggling to keep up and that quality has taken a back seat to production speed.

The bleddy hound is struggling a bit these recent days. If I can get her to the top of the slipway she will manage to get to the Harbour beach but I am having to carry it her back up. This is where I discover that stopping the earth shifting when I did was an even better idea than I thought at the time. She is good otherwise and will sleep most of the time in various favourite places in the living room waiting for the time when she can bully me into treats at the end of the evening with a continuous hard stare that would give Paddington a run for his money.

Still, she is sleeping well, mainly, as indeed am I, which right now seems to be a particularly good idea.

February 17<sup>th</sup> – Friday

The day was not quite as bright as I had hoped but at least it started out dry for me and the bleddy hound. She is a tad more sprightly now, thank you for asking, but at that time in the morning, neither of us were at our peak.

With some labouring up ahead in the day, I chose to shorten my gymnasium session, cutting out the weights in favour of aerobic, leg strength and balance exercises. That still resulted in a blistering session, it just did not make my arms ache quite so much.

The Missus had to go back into town again this morning because she had forgotten to get the bleddy hound's dinner biscuits when she went, erm, whenever it was. We were not going to risk the bleddy hound up at The Farm while she was gone even if it was for a shorter time – surely getting one thing was not going to take three hours – so I stayed at home with her and finished my invoices.

It was not three hours, quite, and she came back with more than just Mother and the bleddy hound's dinner, too. I had slipped into DIYman gear but waited until she was outside to put on my over trousers and coat. I could have done well without them the last time I was up there, and in fact had to shed them after a short while, but the weather chose the middle of the day to come back in thick and mizzly in The Cove and it was much worse up top as we discovered a few minutes later when we got out at The Farm.

It was the sort of rain that soaks you through before you notice, so over trousers and waterproof coat were both required. The problem with that is the work we were to embark upon, shifting more earth, is heavy duty and warms you up in no time. It is the sort of work best done in a vest in the dead of winter, although it helps if the ground is not frozen also. Mind, the earth pile we are working on was the heavy stuff that compacts wherever you put it and needs to be broken up with my wrecking bar. I had thought that it would be much heavier because it was wet but the Missus reckoned that it would only be the top layer as the rain had not been heavy enough to permeate through. Unfortunately, she was wrong, and we were only able to three-quarter fill the tubs and still be able to comfortably shift them.

The mizzle only got worse as we laboured and made our efforts harder and more miserable. We managed several runs and had mostly finished one raised bed, losing a tub to a broken handle in the process, before we called it a day towards the latter part of the afternoon. It goes without saying that the mizzle was heavy enough to be an inconvenience but not heavy enough to wash the mud off our waterproofs. I might have given us a spray down when we got home but we are still, inexplicably, under a hosepipe ban. Last time we came home there was mud marks on the living room carpet where our over trousers had dragged. We made sure to remove them this time before we went in but my jacket is lagged as well and I left it like a badge of honour. I shall make a special trip into town tomorrow so I can walk about and look like a proper workperson.

I had not long cracked open a beer, also like a proper workperson, in the evening at around half past seven o'clock when our pagers went off for the third time in a week. We arrived and got geared up to find that we were to be held until the situation developed a little more. The call had been for a missing person somewhere between Land's End and Pedn Men Du and the Coastguard Cliff Team and the police were both involved. It transpired that the person, when found, was a little reticent to go home, so we waited and we waited then we waited some more. There was a good turn out of waiters and it turned out that we are all rather good at it with the help of Internet connected telephones and friendly banter. It all ended at around half past eleven o'clock when our bosses said we had been good boys and girls and could go home now. We also serve who only stand (or sit) and wait.

February 16<sup>th</sup> – Thursday

It was quite a good day to be doing nothing. It would not have been very pleasant up at The Farm as it was mizzling on and off for most of the day, although conceivably I could have done the wood cutting in the polytunnel, which I now wish I had not thought of. Luckily, it was dry for the bleddy hound and I when we went out first thing and it was heartening to note that she had me up at the usual time today and did not need cajoling; there was definitely some improvement in her general demeanour.

We went out again in the middle of the day and ended up on the Harbour beach. It was not raining then either but there was mist on top of the cliffs and every now and

again it would make incursions into the bay. It came back properly toward the end of the afternoon, and we could not see much farther than the end of the Harbour wall. It had, however, completely dried out by then.

My doing nothing did not last very long, although it was hardly unlikely to wear me out. I had been ignoring the slow trickle of invoices that appeared in my messages and through the door. Not to the extent that I did not pay them but they need inputting into the cursed Making Tax Difficult system that takes so long to do. I brought up a new file for them the other day, a mental acknowledgement that they needed to be done, and it had lurked behind my seat at the computer since then goading me to do the work.

I managed about half the pile of papers which included sorting them into date order. I have no idea how they get into not date order because I print them off as soon as they arrive and leave them on the printer in that order. I finished off about forty invoices that now still need to be put into the file before I started to get irritated by sitting down for so long.

There are still plenty of bullets to be made, mainly because I keep on using them, so I went down to the shop after taking the bleddy hound out and started on that. I made good headway as well and finished off two boxes that had been part done and reconfigured the kit for a different calibre and made a start on those too. It got to halfway through the afternoon and thought that I should make some effort to relax. I had started watching a film on one of the streaming channels but had been interrupted by something. It was not a very good film so far, but I thought that I had better see if it got any better in the second half. It did not, but at least I had sat on my behind for an hour or so and done nothing – other than foster a distinct feeling of disappointment.

If every day is a school day, today taught me not to be such a lazy begger and get off my backside and go and do something constructive. I shall heed that advice tomorrow and go and cut some wood or something, at the very least.

February 15<sup>th</sup> – Wednesday

*"First shot missed. Second shot hit," said Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff Mark Milley during a visit to Brussels on Tuesday.*

*"We go to great lengths to make sure that the airspace is clear and the backdrop is clear up to the max effective range of the missile. And in this case, the missiles land, or the missile landed, harmlessly in the water of Lake Huron."*

I have it on good authority that there is a smallmouth bass called Bernard and his family, erstwhile residents of Lake Huron, that might take issue with the 'harmlessly' Mister Chairman.

The bleddy hound was still suffering this morning and did not stir at the usual spread of times that she uses to wake me up. While this might have given me the opportunity to sleep in, I am now so used to being awoken at that time that I lay there awake anyway. I was also concerned, of course, with her wellbeing. I left her a little while then dragged her out of bed anyway. She revived a good deal as soon as I got her outside, so much so we ended up halfway down the slip towards the Harbour beach. She also downed her normal breakfast when we got back, which is a sure sign she is alright and just needs to recoup her energy. I had the same feeling a few hours later.

I was in two minds about going to the gymnasium since I had done a fair amount of exercising the previous day up at The Farm. I told myself not to be so silly and went anyway and undertook a blistering session. I was just coming to the end of it when my pager went off suggesting that I may wish to direct myself to the Lifeboat station to launch the boat.

It took me a minute or two to collect my gear and lock up the gymnasium by which time crew cars were racing past me observing the 30 miles per hour speed limit as is required of all crew whether responding to an emergency or not. My head considered breaking into a run but very quickly the rest of my body dismissed idea as unachievable and ridiculous. I had seen three of the very excellent Shore Crew precede me anyway and in the knowledge that they had the situation under control, made my best walking speed towards the station.

The notion that it was probably the drifting liferaft from the Belgian fishing boat that had evoked the emergency was confirmed by the lack of animated crew activity at the station when I arrived. We took our time in preparing and launching the boat and I took a back seat for this launch, handing over to my colleague, freshly back from extended leave due to a planned operation. I can categorically state that me choosing to conduct my service for this launch and recovery in the dry and warm of the winch room had absolutely nothing at all to do with someone saying that there was a gale of rain on the way. It would be a dreadful slur on my otherwise tattered and tarnished reputation to say otherwise. There was just no one else to do it, apart from two of the other three and they could not possibly do it because of the bags eye rule that I got in first.

Clearly, I felt some sympathy for the rest of the team who had to run about in the wet, hauling heavy equipment about but really, that is what they, erm, we sign up to do and I must say that they managed admirably in sending the boat down the slipway in a timely manner.

We all knew that the operation would not last long, although, in the end, it lasted longer than we anticipated. The National Coastwatch Institute station on Cape Cornwall had spotted the liferaft close in on Cape itself and called it in. Because of the proximity to the shore, the Lifeboat had to deploy the inflatable Y boat to collect it



and it took a little while to manoeuvre it onto the platform at the back of the Lifeboat where the Y boat is launched from.

In the meanwhile, we, or at least the rest of the team, manfully moved things about to ready the short slipway while I pulled a few levers and pushed a few buttons. We could just about see the boat through the mizzle and saw it as it headed back towards us. From my excellent vantage point I could clearly see that we executed a textbook recovery up the short slipway and were done and dusted by some time in the late morning. We are, after all, a very Smithian (Adam, division of labour), very excellent Shore Crew.

I returned home for a well deserved breakfast, well, I thought it was anyway, and pottered about a bit on the computer, paying a few outstanding bills. Having done that I stared out of the window for a bit and then drummed my fingers on the desk for a bit before deciding that I really needed to get up and do something. Since the rain had gone and the day was brightening nicely I thought I should head up to The Farm which would mean leaving the Missus behind with the poorly bleddy hound. The Missus had things that she could be doing at home, so I headed off alone. If this should continue it will hamper progress considerably, but we will take it a day at a time and see what transpires.

It was a little into the afternoon by the time I got to The Farm and I set myself a target of completing the last two large raised beds. I had finished cutting the timber for the sides the day before and just needed to cut the corner supports, which did not take very long at all. In all it took around two hours as it is heavy work. Due to the weight of the completed item, I also finish the construction on site in the polytunnel and it is very warm in there. I left The Cove with my thermal protective over-trousers on and overalls and a coat. Very soon after I started in the polytunnel, I had a pile of discarded clothes lying on the decking that might have any casual observer thinking I had done a Reggie Perrin.

The aligning of the raised beds will have to wait until I can be there with the Missus as the beds are some weight and difficult to shift about on my own. They are at least complete and it only remains to cut the timber and construct the two half sized ones – oh, and fill them all with around eight tonnes of soil.

After a blistering session, a Lifeboat launch and some heavy lifting at The Farm, I might take pity on myself tomorrow and have a day off – if I can possibly bear doing nothing all day, that is.

February 14<sup>th</sup> – Tuesday

What a cracking good day for a bit of romance. I am not necessarily talking personally, of course, after all the Missus and I are married but it was a sparkling day in much the same stamp as yesterday if you were up for such a thing. Nothing

changed much in the bay, either, with a nice bit of surf close in and some heavier waves out towards North Rocks.

The Missus had decided to go shopping and I needed to be at The Farm to give a hand unloading the timber that we had ordered. The only way that was going to work was if the Missus dropped me and the bleddy hound off at The Farm and went on to pick up Mother and go shopping, so that is what we did.

If the bleddy hound had known what was happening she probably would have dug her claws into the seat to stop the Missus leaving her with me. She detests it at The Farm for reasons best known to herself and always has. She does better if Mother is there as she will stay predominantly in the cabin with her. If Mother is not there, she clings onto one or the other of us and gets under our feet or lies down at the point we are working. As I was not doing anything that that she could get in the way of, it was ideal that she stayed with me – for us, anyway.

I have never known the Missus be anything less than three hours shopping, no matter what is on the shopping list. It must be one of the rules of going shopping but oddly, I have never felt compelled to abide by them. This was clearly bad news for the bleddy hound if she had any concept of time and would have felt like an eternity because she has not. I largely ignored her, which she is most comfortable with, and set about finishing stripping the last of the Christmas trees.

That went very well until I exhausted the battery on the chain saw and had to revert to the good old fashioned rip saw. It worked quite well because I had got to the stage that I was cutting smaller pieces of trunk and need to hold onto it while cutting. After my first experience with the wood chipper, the wood being fed into it needs to be of a maximum size and probably the smaller the better even then. I ended up with a bucket of smaller blocks and three or four lengths of whole trunk that were well within the maximum size allowed.

This had taken some time, which was handy as the timber was late in arriving. By the time it did arrive I was busy feeding the trunk blocks and bigger branches into the chipper. I had noticed last time that it was highly advisable to wear ear protection while using the machine and because of this I did not hear the timber truck arrive. So oblivious was I that the poor fellow was halfway through the unloading by the time I noticed he was there. My ear plugs appear to be very efficient.

Happily, I had just about finished the chipping by the time the timber arrived and seamlessly tidied up one and moved to the other task. It was about this time that the Missus arrived back from shopping. The bleddy hound had settled in the shade by where I was working and could not be bothered to even raise her head when they came back. This was unusual and either indicated that she was so affronted with being left being she was determined to be disinterested with the arrival or she was not feeling her best.

It was definitely the latter and it is the second time she has been unwell after such a length stay at The Farm without Mother being there. The first time we thought that it was because it was cold but today, it was warm enough up there today for her to seek out shade to lie in. We came to the conclusion that she was probably dehydrated as she does not drink so plentifully when she is attached to one of us. I carried her to the cabin in the end and she made a beeline for the truck in a clear indication she would rather be at home.

We discussed the options and agreed that I would stay behind and prepare the wood for the raised beds and the Missus would take Mother and the bleddy hound back home.

So it was. I stayed for a further two hours or so and cut all the timber for the sides of the two bigger raised beds and also fixed the latch onto the gatepost with the bigger coach screws that had turned up with the timber. After that I had run out of time and called the Missus to come and pick me up.

Earlier, when I was collecting some tools from the store room, I noticed that the battery health indicator in there was showing red. I did not have a torch with me, so I was unable to determine just how much the battery had reduced its charge by, but I thought that I had better swop it for one of the topped up ones in the cabin. It was concerning because the previous set of batteries had lasted the whole summer season without requiring changing. I immediately thought there was a problem with the new batteries that I would have to spend time resolving.

I had put the thought to the back of my mind during the day but knew that I had better swop the battery before I went. I collected the refreshed battery from the cabin and duly humped the heavy article the thirty or so metres to the store room. It does not take long to change but having done so I noticed that the red light was still showing, which was even more worrying because that battery had been attached to the solar panels until I disconnected it. I thought that I had best have a closer look with a bit of light on it so I fetched my mobile telephone and used the torch facility on that. The little light I had observed showed 100 percent battery and was, in fact, green. There is nothing like a little deuteranomaly (red/green colour blindness to you) to muddy the waters and will explain why the RNLI preferred that perhaps I did not join the boat crew given that navigation lights are red and green.

As if to prove the very point, a Belgian trawler chose my teatime to have a sinking emergency. There was a great degree of fortune in the fact that it was just around the corner from us at Tol Pedn and that the Lifeboat was able to get there quickly. We had launched the boat from inside the house, which shaves at least a minute and possibly two from the launch procedure. We still carry out engine, propulsion and rudder function checks ahead of the actual launch and it is the Boat Crew that release the sliphook, as we cannot reach it while the boat is in house. We probably could not see it either because generally we are lost in a cloud of diesel exhaust smoke.

The boat was on scene when the crew of the trawler abandoned their craft. They were picked up immediately and after some discussion were taken to Newlyn to be looked after by the harbour authorities there.

As the Lifeboat came back past the scene of the accident, they had a quick search for the liferaft but it could not be found. The detour caused us some concern back at the station as the tide was pushing in and was close to the small gap we have on some tides when neither slipway can be used for recovery. We had selected the long slipway but had not factored in the detour for the liferaft search.

Happily, the search was brief and we were still looking at the end of the long slipway, the creeping tide and an uncomfortably feisty increasing swell when the Lifeboat hove into view around Pedn Men Du. At that point, other than making the Lifeboat wait while we changed slips, we had little choice but to go with a long slip recovery.

The Coxswain radioed in and we told him all was set up for the long slipway but there was a bit of activity down on the tow to be aware of. It was only a minute after that when the 'bit of activity' turned into some significant waves thundering in and washing over the slipway tow and the two daft beggars standing around at the end of it. Actually, it was only one of the daft beggars as I was a step or two higher than the other one who had been charged with catching the heaving line thrown from the boat.

It was too late to step away by then and we carried out what was pretty much a textbook recovery in rather extreme conditions up the long slip. There was no hanging about after that and with a good complement of helpers, the boat was all tucked away and the crews debriefed by just after nine o'clock. We are, after all, a very resourceful, very excellent Shore Crew.

February 13<sup>th</sup> – Monday

*"The US military is unsure what three flying objects it shot out of the skies over North America were - and how they were able to stay aloft."* [So, fired missiles at them.]

Somewhere in a quiet little family home on Mars, a young Martian boy goes in tears to his Martian dad.

*Martian Dad:* "Wasson, son? Wass all they tears for."

*Martian Boy:* "I lost my toy drone Father."

*MD:* "What, that new one you got for Christmas?"

*MB:* "Yes, the brand new one."

*MD:* "How did ee manage to lose it, son?"

*MB:* "Me, Denzil and Treeve was having a race, and none came back again."

*MD:* "Where was you racing it to, boy?"

*MB:* "Once 'round Earth then back again."

MD.: "Didn't I tell ee to give that Earth place a wide berth, son. Tis a proper dickie place that these days."

MB.: "You used to do it Father, all the time. You said it was a right laugh with those old saucer drones you had in the olden days."

MD.: "That was then, son. They was daft as brushes back then but they been putting those tin tubes into their orbit since and some of them even got as far as their moon. Zackly how, I dunt know in they tin foil contraptions they got."

MB.: "But we don't do anything to their stuff they send up here."

MD.: "I knaw, son, but they just eld toy Meccano sets and don't do nothing. Most of they break down after a few days, and that's only if they get here in one piece. The Head Chief Council says leave 'em alone cus they'll get bored of their rubbish toys and not bother again."

MB.: "Still got no drone, Father."

MD.: "Talk to your Mother."

*"US Northern Command Commander General Glen VanHerck said that there was no indication of any threat [but blew it up anyway, just in case]. He added he could not rule out that the objects were extra-terrestrials. [Hey, neighbour, we come in peace - boom]."*

What an arrogant race we are. We have sent vehicles into deep space that have our origins and location emblazoned on the side in the hope that some distant galactic beings can interpret them. Some distant galactic beings, perhaps, send vehicles into deep space that announce their presence, or even a reply, in the hope some other distant galactic beings can interpret the signs. We blow it out of the sky, no questions asked.

In other news, it was a corker of a day. There were eventually blue skies and a decent bit of sunshine. In that sunshine it was reasonably warm, eventually, as the bleddy hound and I found out when we ventured down to the Harbour beach in the middle of the day. We were not alone down there, and I chatted with some neighbours' family for a while before climbing back up the slipway on creaking legs. It was hard to know if the creaking was the bleddy hound or me.

I had managed to get to the gymnasium this morning. It was just as chilly at that time than it has been, although that probably is not true. I managed a full session and took time to examine the defibrillator attached to the wall outside. It is definitely out of order if the little red 'x' on the front has anything to do with it, which I am informed it does. Hopefully the draft letter has gone into the brewery by now and we shall wait to see what happens. I am sure that there will be other sources of funding if not, but it may take some time.

On my return and after a bit of breakfast, I called up the supplier that had been recommended to me by my farmer friend at the range. There was a part on the website that I thought may be brought into service in combination with the chain stabiliser that we had already purchased. I spoke with a most helpful and knowledgeable man on the telephone, and we discussed my proposal to use it the wrong way around and with the kit I already had. He thought it a possibility since the diameter of each end was compatible on paper. The only issue might be that the

combination may make it a little too long, but it will be impossible to tell until it has been put together.

The company I telephoned does not retail goods but quite fortuitously, there is a supplier in Penzance. I telephoned them and placed the order which should be with us by the end of the week.

It was the perfect day for working up at The Farm, so we stayed at home and did very little. I managed to rattle off another box of ammunition, which was at least something and then took the bleddy hound out. I had planned venture up to the Farm later as I was told that the timber delivery might arrive today but got a call shortly before I was intending to go to tell me it would be tomorrow instead. I went up to the top anyway as we needed some things from the shop but when I came back returned to doing not a great deal.

Our day persisted in being bleddy 'ansum right to the end. The big, wide expanse of big beach seemed to be well used and there was a bit of surf about in the shore breaks for those that wanted it. Out in the bay, it looked much calmer and a radiant blue to match the sky. It all appeared a bit pastel coloured in the sun at this time of year that is bright but angled low in the sky for most of the day. If you had chosen this week to come down on holiday, you could not have had a better start, although if the forecast is to be believed, you might pay for it a bit later.

When I took the bleddy hound out, rather belatedly for her tea time walk, there was still a glow in the western sky. The mornings, too are brightening earlier. This year is starting to fly.

February 12<sup>th</sup> – Sunday

The bleddy hound did not completely revert to the half past five o'clock wake up time but almost managed a respectable six o'clock. Still far too early, but we must make the best of it.

At least it gives me plenty of time to do things before it is time to leave for the range. I cannot remember precisely what I did but I know that it was really constructive and important. I might have looked again for tractor bits but I resolved to ask one of the other club members who is a semi-retired farmer and has a wealth of experience with tractors. He is a useful person to ask questions about a good many things but quite often the answer involves doing things that I perhaps would not attempt. In today's case I was advised to heat up one of the bolts on the existing stabilisers so that I could straighten it out. Apparently, it is really easy to do. I often feel it probably not advisable to ask how to do the recommended action such as heat something like that to the degree that it is malleable enough to be straightened. He did provide a few supplier names to contact that I would not have thought of, however, which is something I can just about manage.

Today's shoot involved the use of three guns and their associated ammunition – all different – which meant four bags with some considerable weight to them. I must remember to use this information next time I am selling one of our rucksacks because I am using one of them for most of the heavy lead and two flasks of tea and it is still in one piece several years later. As if carting all that up there was not bad enough, I purchased some more bullet heads while I was there adding a further several kilograms to it for my return journey.

I had agonised about whether I should take my thermal over-trousers today or not. The day was forecast to be relatively temperate with a bit of breeze but dry. I decided against in the end, which was exactly the wrong choice as it was colder than it looked and the wind far stronger than advertised. It seemed to get colder as the day progressed and by the end of it, my hands particularly, were suffering. It was a most enjoyable day, however, and the lack of interest in the afternoon session ensured that the few of us that were left did a good amount of running around refreshing targets to stay warm.

There were still a few families around in The Cove when we returned from the range late in the afternoon. I had assumed that everyone would have gone home again until I discovered that the main half term week is the one just coming, not the one just gone as some online information had suggested. I had not bothered to check as it was unimportant to us in the grand scheme of things and the correct data is no less so. We still will not open, and we still have not moved the Christmas decorations. We will make some serious attempt to do so this week as they are starting to irritate me being in the way in the shop.

I rounded off the day nicely by finishing a serial that I had been watching on the television and the book I was reading. Rather fortuitously, I had cashed in a book voucher that the in-laws had very cleverly opted to give me as a Christmas present, and the books arrived a day or two ago.

I seem to be running through books at a rate I might once have thought as impossible and probably was given the amount of time I devoted to alternative activities, not all as beneficial or healthy. I am not exactly sure when the transition occurred but it rather appears that I have at last become a grown-up. I now wonder should I be concerned or pleased.

February 11<sup>th</sup> – Saturday

I was a bit confused with the sudden awareness that this is half term week, which I thought was usually at the end of the month. It is probably something to do with when Easter is. Not that the holiday makes very much difference to us other than The Cove has a few people in it for a week and there is more traffic on the road. We certainly had no intention of opening the shop; it is still full of boxes of Christmas decorations for a start and a few less bags of shredding.

There was no one around when I took the bloody hound out first thing. It was a later first thing than it had been for the previous two days as well, so something must be working. She was up at The Farm all day yesterday, though, and would not have had the opportunity to sleep as much as she would at home. Sadly, there was no all day at The Farm today on the cards so it could be another early one tomorrow.

What there was, in the morning at least, a good deal of sitting around not doing very much. The most constructive I was before eleven o'clock was to make a breakfast out of what was in the fridge with a tin of Cornish sardines and to make something similar for tomorrow at the range. It was during this that I fashioned a plan to head up to The Farm anyway and fit the new lower arm stabilisers on the tractor.

We have much trouble attaching attachments to the new tractor and it is all down to the stabilisers that had been bent to accommodate what it was used for before at the ice rink cleaning company. It is a simple enough task to replace them, they are attached at one end by pin held in place with a split pin and a bolt at the other. What has not been at all simple is finding the correct replacement. After a long and varied search of the Internet – and that after a long and varied search of local suppliers – I eventually found something that might have suited. We had to wait for six months before it was delivered and because that was in the summer, another six months expired before I found time to fit it and that was today.

Given that it would not take very long to change the stabilisers, I took three big bags of shredding with me so make the trip worthwhile. I set fire to the first load while I extracted all the required tools – nice big spanners – from the truck. I had not even opened the package containing the new stabilisers, so that was a jolly wheeze, too. It took hardly any time at all to remove the old stabiliser and even less time after that to establish that the bolt on the new one that attaches to the lifting arm was too big.

We have limited choices of where we go from here because finding the right stabiliser could take another six months. An alternative is to replace the arm and I did a quick Internet search for one and found that just as fraught. Another choice would be to make the hole in the arm bigger but I would need to find someone with a specialist drill and remove the lifting arms. Finally, we could replace the whole three point hitch but even then I have not seen one that comes with stabilisers and we could end up with the same problem and it is quite expensive.

The tractor is going in for a service next month and I will have a chat with our friendly mechanic about what can be done. I also need to go over to Helston to pick up a part that has been outstanding for a year and will ask there too.

Still, I managed to incinerate the three bags of shredding while I was at The Farm and some of the unwanted timber. I also stripped one of the Christmas trees of its branches ahead of putting it through the chipper, so that was something. I am glad that the fire need not need managing with the hose that I had put out just in case.



The pump and the chainsaw use the same battery and by the time I had finished trimming the tree, the battery had run out of power. I used a small bucket instead at the end just to make sure the fire was out before I left.

It had been a pleasant enough day up at The Farm with some brightness struggling to break through the grey. We also had a small mizzle attack, which did not amount to very much at all and was suddenly gone again. As I dropped back into The Cove, with its empty car parks and strings of cars parked along the road, it was clear that the sea was calming after being boisterous for a week. There were enough waves out there for a spot of surfing too, so not bad for the half term week.

I had intended a bit of a zizz when I returned home, having laboured through a couple of hours in the day but just as I settled, there was a knock on the door. A neighbour needed some help with a flat car battery. I slipped into my DIYman overalls as I had recently changed into something more comfortable and I was not sure that The Cove was ready for a grumpy shopkeeper in a sequinned liberty bodice.

I had just settled again when I returned when the same neighbour knocked on the door to ask if I could detect something wrong with the note of her engine as something was not quite right. I went down to have a listen but I told her that it would be difficult to diagnose the problem because I did not have my overalls on. It sounded like the exhaust was blown, in my humble estimation, near the manifold end but I was not entirely sure that would have accounted for the lack of power she experienced going up the hill. I was also not entirely sure that putting my overalls on would have helped, so I apologised and suggested she talk to someone who knew about such things.

Returning once more to my chair, I went to close my eyes once more when the mobile telephone rang. It was an anonymous caller, so I ignored it as I generally do not give out my mobile telephone number to strangers. The home telephone then rang, so I surmised it was at least someone who knew me well enough to have both numbers and it turned out to be the bank manager – on a Saturday, which alarmed me slightly.

He assured me that the call was routine and since he worked flexible hours and many of his clients were busy during the week, the weekend was convenient on occasion for both parties. I did not tell him that this was not one of those occasions - it was probably best not to upset the bank manager too much - and he bent my ear for half an hour after which it was time for me to cook tea.

I shall make myself scarce tomorrow in the hope no one catches up with me.

February 10<sup>th</sup> – Friday

Well, we certainly made up for yesterday's laziness with a day as full as Mae West's brassiere. It started early, too, but probably not as early as the bleddy hound would have had it. Once again, I left to her own devices in the hope that the message will sink in, but I rather think it is more a matter of wills as opposed to education, and she probably had the upper hand there.

I had to miss the gymnasium again as it did not matter how early I was, I would not be able to fit that in as well as everything else. It did not matter overly as I had a more than adequate workout later, although I would have preferred a little more cardio.

Checking the opening times, I headed into town to collect a replacement push button for the toilet flush. Happily, the national chain of hardware stores had just the thing. I did check the local shops first, but they did not. I also wanted to ask if any of them had a small threaded bolt that fixes the toilet seat to the fixing that fixes it to the porcelain part of the toilet. To make it easier than that to ask – it was a countersunk M4 by 9 millimetre, do not ask what sort of thread – I took one of the others to demonstrate. No one had one or even a bag of mixed bolts that contained one. I checked the Internet when I got home, and the Internet only had them in bags of 50 for a small fortune and I had to look long and hard for that. It would have been cheaper to replace the whole seat. I think that is where this is going, to be honest, but with just one screw missing at present, it may last out a while yet but it will break at the most inopportune time.

I collected Mother on the way back who was most surprised to seem me that early. In fairness, it was not that early by then, nearly ten o'clock, but it was a fair bit earlier than I normally manage to get to her.

It has started out a little misty when I left The Cove but by the time I arrived at St Buryan, it has become thicker and wetter, which was unfortunate. Ever since I had washed the truck, the windscreen wipers have been making an almighty racket. It is probably more to do with the gunk that was flying about when the garage did the grinding and anti-rust painting. I will have to get new ones, but I did not have the time during my trip to Penzance and while they make one uncomfortable noise, they are still effective at clearing the screen.

The mizzle became thicker and heavier as we advanced towards The Cove, which is unusual, but we still just about ducked beneath it when we went down to the bottom of the hill. We stopped while I had a cup of tea and some breakfast that I did not have time for before I left. We would really have got stuck into the day had I not spent so long searching for our toilet seat bolt, but we were still a good bit ahead of the posse anyway compared to other days.

Today was earmarked for continuing our mission to load earth into the raised beds and indeed we finished off the first one with the exception of collecting the compost – which just reminded me that I forgot to remember to take the bin from the kitchen up

today as it is near full. We embarked on the second that we had already started by putting some rocks in to aid drainage.

In the short time since we started, we have improved efficiency dramatically. No longer are we sorting the rocks out of the heavy duty soil for the bottom layer, just shovelling raw material, rocks and all, from our 100 ton pile into the tubs and shipping it up to the top of the field. That still requires quite a bit of effort as the crust needs to be broken up with the wrecking bar and even then, shovelling is hard work. The topsoil is a two person job with me spading into the sieve and the Missus shaking and tipping out the spoil. In both cases we can shift two tubs at a time onto and off the truck's tailgate and into the polytunnel. The sequence also breaks up the process so that we are not constantly doing digging or carrying. We are a good team and we have not yet come to blows – it probably helps that we never talk to each other.

We did this constantly for about four hours with a couple of stops for tea. The intention was that I would wait up at The Farm for the new timber to arrive but when I telephoned, the 4x4 which is a special order, had not got to the builders' merchant yet and would not come until Monday. It scuppers any raised bed building over the weekend, but I am sure I can find something else to do.

The mist had plagued us a bit to start with up there but by the middle of the day it started to clear up. This was very welcome and allowed us both to strip off a couple of layers because we were warming up very nicely under our workload. The mizzle held off until around half past three when we noticed it creeping back in up the hill. By the time we finished our last load of the day, we were getting damp again, which was a good enough signal as any to call it a day. We have probably another two trips of topsoil to go and the second raised bed will be finished too.

I was quite looking forward to getting in and collapsing on my seat, but I remembered that I had yet to do the preparation for tomorrow's tea that I rather rashly thought was a corking good idea a couple of days ago. I dared not sit down first else I would never get up again. I had barely started when I realised that we had run out of onions and garlic, which were required, and that I would have to drive up to the shop at the top of the hill – the one we had not fifteen minutes prior, just passed. Even by the bitter and twisted standards of small gods of grumpy shopkeepers that is some wickedness.

Still, I was much pleased by the arrival in the evening of the spanners I had ordered for the tractor and its back box. As spanners go, the larger of them is definitely a spanner.

February 9<sup>th</sup> – Thursday

Golly my gosh, what a lazy day we had. I even told the bloody hound to go soak her head when she got me up before six o'clock and went back to bed again, where I brooded and felt guilty.

It was much less cold than it had been these last days and I have every hope I will not be frightened off a trip to the gymnasium tomorrow. I could not see it, but the sea was still roaring away in the background when I did get around to talking the bloody hound out. It sounded like it was coming over the Harbour wall but since we rarely get as far as the corner of the Lifeboat station on these morning walks, I would not know for sure.

When the day did arrive, we had far more cloud than we have had previously. There was even a little mizzle at some point as the living room windows looked wet and a dog walker going past had her hood up. Look, I cannot always be attending to my surroundings in every detail through every minute of the day. Anyway, I was far too busy ripping the seven CDs to disc that arrived all together yesterday in the post. All those CDs will now be out of the door in short order because I did not want them in the first place. It would be morally and quite possibly legally wrong to sell them, but we will make them available in the shop for voluntary donations to the crew managed comfort fund.

The Missus had suggested bacon for breakfast because we had bought some brioche buns for our tea the previous evening. It is what the café next door uses, and they are exceedingly toothsome. Not that he skimps at all, but I am sure he does not use quite the same volume of bacon that we did, which was a bit naughty but very nice.

Unable to sit and do nothing for very long, especially full of excessive portions of bacon, I went about fixing our other living room standard lamp with a floodlight like I had successfully done with the other. This one proved a little more fiddly but was worth the effort when I finished. I use the first one exclusively now in the evening because it is easier to read by. The second will be less well used but I have set it up as an extra together with our two Tiffany lamps for when we could do with more light and ambience in the room. In other words, not very often.

Before I knew it, I had to leave for my appointment with the bone cruncher. I suppose it was not really essential, but it helps to have a bit of straightening every so often to avert more serious problems further down the line. I really have no idea how long I have been attending the practice, I am sure it must be more than ten years. I am sure chiropody is not everyone's cup of tea and acupuncture even less so, but I find it works for me. I do not really care if it is all in my mind as some might venture, as long as it is not all in my back, on occasion, and shoulder as in this particular case.

The Missus diverted me to Tesmorburys on my way back. My natural instinct would be to visit one of the several local independent stores that do the same things, often more cheaply and with far better grace. The Missus knows this and deliberately asks

for particular variants and products that are not available in the local independent shops. I had neglected to bring a bag, mainly because I did not have very much on my list to start with but then the Missus sent a list of additional items once I was on my way which made one entirely necessary. I had to use a trolley and load it loose into the back of the truck because after all my comments about single use plastic bags I could not do otherwise.

Even hoist by my own petard, I still think we could probably get away with banning single use carriers altogether with a bit of thought put to it.

There was even less to do at home once I had returned than there was in the morning. That was until the very clever push button flush system in the bathroom went wrong again. It is often the problem with very clever things that they are prone to going wrong more often than simple things. Every now and again the button sticks in and the cistern continues to fill, overflowing until some intervention occurs – normally someone being unusually violent with the button works. The longer term solution is to take the thing apart, spray it with easing oil and put it back together again. That worked on this occasion too but just before I went to bed, the whole button assembly came off in my hand when I used it. The plastic shaft had sheared at a weak point and no amount of easing oil will fix that. I shall have to venture into town tomorrow morning to get a replacement part.

Well, that will teach us for staying at home, eating too much bacon and doing very little. It is off to The Farm tomorrow (after shopping for plumbing) for more raised bed filling for us.

February 8<sup>th</sup> – Wednesday

The bleddy hound excelled herself today and had me up well before any self-respecting sparrow was even thinking of passing anything more than an occasional snore. It was that early that I thought she must be in need, so I got up with her and discovered all she wanted to do was slob out on her throne while I steamed. Fortunately, I managed to busy myself with my additional time and had an extra cup of tea. It did not help much and by nine o'clock I was ready to go back to bed again.

One of the things that kept me busy was drafting a letter to the brewery that by its own admission does a great deal for local communities. It would be nice to think that it is driven by guilt for charging locals so much for their beer, but I doubt it. Someone has inserted an 'out of order' note inside the defibrillator box that is attached to the outside of the gymnasium. I have not yet checked the veracity of the message and my contact on the trustee board knows nothing of it, but it is fair to say it is not a note someone would place lightly. On the basis that it is indeed faulty, it would be advantageous if it were replaced.

When I spoke to the trustee, he tells me that all funds they currently have are earmarked for the replacement roof. I had to smile because, despite my in-law's

description of the gymnasium as a hut with a tin roof, the current roof is concrete tiles. One of the replacement options is to use insulated metal sheets. While it might be argued that a defibrillator should take priority, it could equally be pointed out that without some urgent attention to the roof, there may not be a wall to hang the defibrillator on. It is a fair point, I believe, and one that immediately made me think of our esteemed local brewery who do so much for local communities. I volunteered to draft a suitable letter, asking for a freebie and we shall see what becomes of it. Breaths are not being held and I am equally happy to eat some humble pie should one turn up in the near future – however, I still will not buy their over-priced beer.

The sitting around did me no favours at all in trying to fend off the invading cold. The temperature had plummeted overnight and had not yet recovered in the morning. Being inactive was not going to warm me up and I suspect I would have struggled to achieve at the gymnasium, too, and had already decided to give it a swerve today. As a consequence, even with my woolly hood up, I got particularly cold and was very keen by ten o'clock to get a march on the day.

I had wanted to do a little groundwork with the RNLI test person who was taking two of the very excellent Shore Crew out during the afternoon. Things obviously move around me because when I caught up with him one of the crew has already been passed out. The test was not as strenuous as I was concerned about, and I had nothing further to do to prepare. Our second crew member passed out later in the morning, which is excellent news as both are local and will be able to respond to shouts very quickly.

I had met up with the tester on our way up to The Farm to make more earth move from one end of the field to the new raised beds. The Missus was keen to try attaching the back box on the tractor and use that, so I left her at The Farm playing with the tractor while I went and collected Mother. Mother is an essential accessory when we are playing tractors just in case the bleddy hound gets in the way. That is less 'just in case' as she will make absolutely sure she will get in the way.

Sadly, the back box is not wholly compatible with the tractor's three-point hitch that we have and needs some modification. It will hook on but has the tendency to jump out of the hooks over rough terrain, meaning anywhere on the field. We had a master plan on how to fix it, but I lacked the right size spanner – a very big spanner at that – so we abandoned the idea and went back to using the gorilla tubs.

We have two, one hundred ton piles of soil at the bottom of the field. One is true topsoil and the other is from a little deeper and is less rich and more stoney. It resembles earthy hardcore and requires some heavy work with the wrecking bar to break it up. We are using this unadulterated, rocks and all, for the bottom layer in the raised beds and then a layer of the same stuff with the majority of the rocks taken out. Today, we moved to the other pile where we extracted some topsoil and sieved it through some plastic mushroom baskets that proved ideal. I was able to tip a

Cornish shovel load in and the Missus would give it a good shake. We filled the tubs in this manner in no time at all.

The shifting of the rougher stuff takes a good deal more effort and along with doing the topsoil as well I was pretty much done in. It was another reason why I had decided to skip going to the gymnasium in the morning as this was as good as any workout I could have conjured. It also requires some concentration to avoid too much strain on the lower back. It was not for this reason, but I had the comfort of knowing that I had already booked an appointment with the bone cruncher tomorrow.

We laboured long and hard – alright it was hard but not really that long – and we managed to nearly fill the first raised bed. Another trip to the topsoil pile and mixed up with compost, I think we will be finished. That is very good news until you remember that the wood for another five raised beds is arriving on Friday. Happily, through the freak of measuring and table placement, two of them will now be half the size.

With a small success under our belts, we called it a day and I retired home for what I definitely believe was a well-deserved and reasonably priced beer.

February 7<sup>th</sup> – Tuesday

Last night our electrician sent me a message to tell us he was going to be later this morning, which suited us very nicely and let me have a spot of breakfast before he arrived. I sent a message back to tell him that he was obviously not a proper electrician else he would not have bothered to tell us, making us wonder if he was going to show at all or had a better offer. He promised he would do better next time.

I had expected to pitch in and help out with the work but he brought an assistant, which pleased me greatly. I spent a little time with them telling them what I had done so far and what I wanted them to carry on with. They started with looking at my wiring of the new sockets in the living room and then rewired them all. In fairness, they said that the wiring was correct but did not meet our man's rigorous standards and since he was signing off the finished work, that was what counted.

Rather than sit around and watch I decided I was best out of it and went down to the munitions factory to turn out a few rounds. The Missus went off to collect Mother and headed off to The Farm to start some seed planting in the greenhouse. I hope to have enough time after the raised beds to put in a bilge pump to make watering in the greenhouse a bit easier. Perhaps I should ask our electrician to put it in just in case I do it wrong.

He was with us for a few hours as there was quite a bit to do. He struggled a bit with running the new ring main down into the living room. I had anticipated that the cables would come down the existing route and had purchased some bigger trucking to contain the addition width. When he came to look, the hole in the ceiling is forward of

the last A frame, and therefore inaccessible. We could only guess that those wires were installed when the roof was last off. We decided that the cables could come down the last A frame. He seemed to have less trouble than I did making a hole in the right place but, in my defence, he did not have any additional floor to worry about in that spot. He also made such a good job of hiding the cables that when I looked later I thought he must have changed his mind and brought them in somehow else.

The kitchen fan had been done almost without me knowing. I had introduced the fan and what I had done so far with the electrics but had not revisited since. It was not until the Missus had called me up from the shop as the boys had nearly finished that I had realised it had been done at all. On top of that, I went into the kitchen intent on trying out the fan for myself and did not realise until I got to the switch that it was already running. My fears about the noise were completely unfounded; it is near silent. We had to wait until the evening to discover that it was effective as well, although there will be greater challenges when we reach full roast dinner.

I spent a while cleaning up after they went and cleared out any redundant wires from behind the television where most of the wiring is and the bank of plug sockets. Once the two super-size extensions were out of the way and I had vacuumed, it was much tidier and made me wonder why we had not done this long ago.

At last, I was able to sit on my behind and do nothing in particular. At some point during the day a blanket of high level cloud came across our beautiful blue sky and made everything a little grey. By late afternoon it had been moved along into the northwest by the easterly breeze that had kept The Cove very chilly overnight and into the day. By necessity I had not ventured out far all day and I was rather glad not to. I will have to make up for it tomorrow, though.

Quite a swell had developed early on in the bay, which drove waves thundering over the Harbour wall by the second high water of the day. The swell was clean, too, and had enticed some surfers out to have a play. It was certainly not a swell for beginners and even one of the experienced surfers lost his board while he was out there. He was seen later patrolling the beach to see if it had been washed in at the same time as the ever watchful eagle eyes in the Lifeboat station spotted in being tossed around in the bay.

It would eventually have caused a problem for someone, so the Inshore boat was launched to recover it. There were sufficient people milling about the station to launch the boat and I caught up with the story when the boat was being washed down outside the station. Our surfer came along much later to retrieve it with a big thank you, no doubt. I should have been more vigilant and offered to sell him one of the excellent leashes we sell in the shop. A grumpy shopkeeper should never let a chance go by.

February 6<sup>th</sup> – Monday



I would willingly have clung to the bedsheets this morning but the bleddy hound was having none of that sort of nonsense, thank you very much. It was very early so I made her wait a bit. She cannot have it all her own way, even if she is a dowager duchess in her own head these days.

The trip outside was very worthwhile. It was one of the rare occasions that she fancied a bit of a wander on her trips out and we ended up halfway down the slipway. There was not a great deal a beach but there are limits to a morning constitutional and she did not fancy getting her paws all sandy. The upper Harbour is flood lit as a security measure and lights up the old wharf wall. With the still near full moon starting to descend to the edge of Pedn men du, the lighting was set up for a bit of a classic photo opportunity. Photographs of the moon using your average mobile telephone camera are seldom what they look like to the eye but one I took this morning worked out quite well for a change.

Both the Missus and I were keen to get up to The Farm today for slightly different reasons. With that in mind I headed up to the gymnasium as early as daylight allowed and was back, after a blistering session, in plenty of time for a bit of light breakfast and an early start at The Farm – if only life were that simple.

I try not and talk too much about the food we eat in too much detail, but sometimes it is difficult to ignore all the good things we are surrounded by in the local independent businesses hereabouts. I bought some smoked mackerel from the fishmongers when I went out on Saturday morning to collect the mussels for the Missus. I was making a bit of an omelette with some bits from the fridge at home given there was no locally smoked haddock on show, I opted for some packet smoked mackerel instead. It was bleddy awful.

I still had one fillet left this morning and few other options apart from that. I felt that I could not really waste it no matter how bleddy awful it was. I mashed it with mayonnaise and grain mustard and had it with the toasted remains of the French stick we had on Saturday. That worked. The French stick came from an artisan bread shop in town. When we sliced it open it was sourdough. I mean who makes a French stick with sourdough and then does not tell you, like that was normal. Honestly.

During my blistering session, I had experienced a bit of an epiphany regarding having some of my vinyl albums transferred to digital format. I had perused some of the websites advertising such services and all of them priced such a service around fifteen pounds and sometimes more. I am not surprised given the time required to provide such a service, as you cannot really set the process running and walk away. It came to me quite suddenly, although it should have been obvious from the outset, that it would be far more economic to purchase new digital copies of the albums concerned.

Since there was a bit of a hiatus after completing my breakfast, I had a little look at the Internet to see if the albums I needed to replace were available for sale. I was really only after a digital copy that I could download but in every instance I was compelled to purchase a CD which I would then have to get rid of after ripping the contents to my computer. In this day and age of being green and avoiding waste I found this quite remarkable.

Only two of the albums that I would like to replace were not available to purchase. Ironically, there were vinyl copies of the albums in question but no digital copies – and at a price that convinced me I would be wasting my time selling mine. I will have to embrace one of the many conversion providers and send my albums off for digitisation.

We eventually made our way up to The Farm to discover that the latch I had cobbled together had come away from the post. I was surprised because while it was not perfect, I expected it to last a while longer than it did. We wasted no time in setting about our separate tasks, me putting the timber back in the wood shed and the Missus filling the two raised beds with soil.

The wood went back much more quickly that it came out and with much less effort. It was a cracking good idea to use the redundant tables from the polytunnel as I can now see what we have. Clearly, there was only half of what was there to start with, the rest having evaporated over the weekend. I had not thrown that much away, so the tidying up has a dramatic effect.

While the Missus had stopped to make a cup of tea I thought that I would put the chain saw together and give it a go. I had twice now left the instruction manual at home but thankfully I am a real man and do not need such worthless accessories. It was clearly designed wrong and took a bit of fiddling to get the chain on but it was soon together and ready to go. I had misread the amount of oil required, 80 centilitres, and bought a litre and even then a 100 centilitre bottle came with it. Never mind, it worked very well on the thick ends of the Christmas trees that I had to abandon the other day and is much less scary than using a grown-up chain saw. It will be just right for clearing the thick gorse and stalks of whatever the big yellow weed is that grows up during the summer and resists even a brush cutter.

When I had finished playing, I gave the Missus a hand earth moving. We have two hundred tons of soil at the end of the field courtesy of our neighbour. I might have mistakenly called it topsoil, which it mainly is but also contains a considerable amount of granite. The process of extracting the topsoil is slow and requires the use of my hand wrecking bar to break up the compacted piles. We considered hiring the mini digger again but the soil would still need to be separated from the rocks at some stage. We are content at present with trowelling it into our gorilla tubs to ensure we are not transferring too stoney a mix to the beds.

The granite, some of it large rocks, would be suitable as building material for Cornish hedges and the like, so we are keeping a separate pile of that. Quite how we make that available to anyone without risking a convoy of heavy trucks coming into the field and churning it up is another matter.

We managed several trucks full of our own, shifting just short of a dozen tubs at a time. We cannot even fill those up as they become too heavy, so it will be gradual process of a ton a day, perhaps. That is not so bad as the rest of the beds need to be manufactured yet and we do not wish to break ourselves while we are doing it.

One stroke of luck, we will not have to move as much earth as we thought. Having placed the second raised bed and made the first unmoveable by half filling it, I noticed that there is insufficient room for a third of the same size in the row. We have placed a table either side of the entrance to the polytunnel, which affected my earlier measurements and the third bed will have to be a two-thirds scale of the others. Every cloud and all that.

February 5<sup>th</sup> – Sunday

There was the outside chance that the Boat Crew would be able to fix the electrical problem on the boat and be back after an hour or so. I sent everyone home and would let them know the outcome. That took far longer than I had anticipated – not the sending home, that was very quick, the Boat Crew trying to change a fuse - and the boat stayed at the scene for an hour before taking the boat under tow to Newlyn.

I calculated the time for the journey, and a half past twelve o'clock arrival at Newlyn did not seem too late to wait up for, even if it was a 3 ½ hour tow. This turned out to be a very fateful assumption and I should have taken the opportunity for a bit of a zizz.

Having arrived at Newlyn as expected, there was some unexpected delay there that put the estimated arrival back at The Cove at the wrong end of a window of recovery on the long slipway. To make matters worse, the sea state decided to worsen and eventually made a recovery on the long slip an impossibility leaving a wait for there to be enough water on the short slipway to bring it in there. I had a short conversation with the Coxswain and between us agreed that he would head around anyway and we would cobble together an appropriate recovery plan when he got here given our available options at the time.

The new additions to our team on shore have proved most beneficial, with them willing to turn up reliably to lend a practised and willing hand. They are also close by, so when I called in a Lifeboat recovery with no notice whatever, they were on station inside very few minutes. We were also fortunate to have a young lady arrive from St Buryan too, who is Boat Crew but always willing to bolster our numbers on the shore when she is available.

Due to another unavoidable delay at Newlyn, the boat missed the window on the long slipway altogether. We had already set up the long slipway and rallied around to transfer to the short slip. As we were short on numbers and thin on signed off skills, I took to the winch while my oppo took Head Laucher on the slipway. Our remaining team spread out in a bunch and covered everything else.

There was a fair bit of moisture in the air, and it was unseasonably warm too. Possibly, a drop in temperature might have produced some mist, but it stayed clear allowing us to spot the boat arriving around the headland at around quarter past two o'clock. There was a fair amount of movement in the water on the slipway now and again, but much calmer than it was on the long slipway half an hour earlier. We brought the boat up the short slip in what was clearly a textbook recovery and had everything tucked away by three o'clock. We are, after all, a very nocturnal, very excellent Shore Crew.

Three hours later, the bleddy hound, oblivious to my need for just a little more sleep, jumped on my legs with more than a suggestion that I was to get out of bed again. Clearly, the antics of the night before had nothing whatever to do with her and why should anything of the sort stand in the way of her routine. It was a somewhat weary grumpy shopkeeper wandering around outside in the dark, this morning. I lasted a couple of hours after that before I decided that another couple of hours in bed might be a plan.

I had already discounted going to the range for the morning session. Falling asleep while pointing a loaded shotgun is frowned upon in our polite society there. I soon discounted going up for the clay session in the afternoon as well, despite the bright gorgeousness of the day that had developed outside by then.

It remained a beautifully colourful day all the way until the end but stepping out into it was a bit more of a shock to the system. Even up until last night we had felt the warmth in the air. This, the following day, a firm easterly breeze had kicked in and brought with it a sharp chill that instructed a person to wrap up warm or not stay out in it for too long. I subscribed to both requirements for my subsequent visits outside but by and large today I treated as a recuperation day and did begger all.

I will, no doubt, have recouped by tomorrow enough joie de vie to continue my schedule of works that does not seem to get any shorter, especially as I keep taking days off.

February 4<sup>th</sup> – Saturday

I found out recently that the Parish Council has announced a climate emergency, which I am sure is top hole and the right and proper thing to do. It would be even more exciting if I had the first blind clue what it meant. I know that the much maligned council announced one a few years ago since when absolutely nothing has

changed. I rather imagined a few more recycling bins popping up here and there or a smokeless zone over the Duchy, but no, nothing as far as I can see.

Since the much maligned council announced its emergency I imagined that the Parish would be covered by that one, so announcing their/our own seems a bit superfluous. I know that I am sounding just a little cynical about the whole thing, but I really am not – alright, maybe just a little bit. No, you are right, a lot actually. However, it does seem very odd to announce such a thing without one word of explanation, as if it all made perfect sense without it. Perhaps it opens some additional funding stream that we are not privileged to know about or some other advantage, which in itself would be a tad cynical. I shall keep one ear to the ground and hope I do not get run over.

Another rather more worrying announcement is that Scotland is considering a display ban on alcohol. It would be very much like the display ban on cigarettes and presumably would be followed up by plain packaging and bottling, although that has not yet been mooted. A Deposit Return Scheme (DRS) for single use drinks bottles that started in Scotland will be followed in England next year. We can only imagine the same will happen with drinks display ban.

The initiative, aimed at reducing alcohol intake, will mean that smaller shops will need to remove alcohol from shelves completely, while Tesmorburys will get away lightly by being made to move displays to the back of the shop. Frankly, it is unlikely to matter very much for popular brands. People will merely continue to ask for a bottle of Ding Dong whisky or Smirkon Vodka. Where the greatest impact will occur is the artisan industry that has done so well for us in the last few years. People are attracted to the alluring bottle shapes and lively labels. Who would be asking for Squid Ink Gin if they had not first seen the fabulously engraved copper flask it comes in or the deep colour through the heavy, rounded glass of the Rosemullion malt whisky. I should imagine that a display ban would kill off this successful industry in very short order.

Just in case the Parish was planning on closing the borders to stop people using petrol, I headed into town before anyone was awake, well, I am sure they were, but it did not seem like it. It was still a bit gloomy at early o'clock, but I had checked and the fishmongers and the electrical shop were both open at that time. The Missus was cooking some seafood chowder for tea and thought it handy to have some seafood to put into it. We are lucky enough to have a plethora of fish shops in Penzance and Newlyn and two quite close to each other on Newlyn Strand that you can park opposite if you are lucky enough, which I was on this occasion.

From there I headed into Penzance along the Promenade and discovered that here the much maligned council has already implemented a twenty miles per hour speed limit. It is not hugely inconvenient as much of that stretch you would struggle to do more anyway. If you are in a hurry and need to go faster, start out earlier. I arrived at the car park about a minute later than I previously would have done.

I was so early into town that they had not yet turned on the escalator into the deserted Wharfside shopping area, either that or they do not feel it worthwhile with most of the shops there empty. I had decided that it was appropriate to put a fused isolation switch in before the kitchen fan circuit, so I purchased one and a back box to go with it. It will be a pain in the bottom if the fuse ever blows but probably less of a pain in the bottom than the cables overheating if there is a problem. I thought that I would maximise the efficiency of my journey into town by buying some fresh French bread to go with our chowder.

When I went to the car park machine to pay before I left, I was pleasantly surprised that it told me I had already paid. The process requires you to scan your ticket at the machine where it calculates how long you have parked for and the associated charge. On this occasion the message popped up that I was paid up until 08:27 on the current date. It was not until I got back to the truck that I discovered that it was 08:52. I returned to the machine but had the same message and there was no obvious way to pay or do anything else. I decided that all I could do was try and leave, which I did and very successfully too. Had I bothered to check the signage, I would have discovered that parking before 9am is free.

It is all due to change very soon when the much maligned council will standardise parking charges into zones across the Duchy. The busier and most popular destinations will be in the highest tier, so in Penzance we will almost certainly be paid a fiver for parking all day provided we do not moan if the car is up on bricks by the time we get back to it.

I made it back home with plenty of time to spare before meeting the trainee crew person for a spot of practise on the Tooltrak. We had arranged to meet again on Monday but he is quite competent enough as it is, so we decided against it. It was certainly not as breezy as it was on Thursday night doing the same, in fact there was hardly a breath at all today. It was, however, quite grey and uninspiring that reflected in the steely grey sea giving the bay quite a drab look to it today.

We finished off the Tooltrak session in little more than half an hour and I returned home with that familiar itch of the kitchen fan project calling to be scratched. I had purchased an extra long drill bit so that I could at least complete the cable down to the kitchen switch. It still was not easy, but I did manage to end up with a hole in my second most desirable location. I also made a hole in a completely undesirable location when I went into deepen the first hole and missed it completely.

It was not the only hitch in an otherwise reasonably successful venture. Somewhere along the line I had lost the back box to the isolation switch. I could have sworn I had it when I changed the fuse to a lower rating but when I looked around, I could not see it anywhere. I checked the truck and the shop and I even went back over to the Lifeboat station in case I had inadvertently dropped it there. I definitely walked out of the shop with it and placed it in my jacket pocket but have not seen it since. I will ask

the electrician to bring one, but it did mean I could not put in the last but one bit of wiring.

Having established that I had clearly become unhinged at some point after waking up, I decided to call it a day. The kitchen switch is wired up and looking pretty – although I bought one with a light that will never work because it is a switch on the live only. I have done what I can in the loft and we now look forward to it all being finished off.

I was grateful that I managed to finish the seafood chowder in a relaxed manner before the Lifeboat pager went off very close to my ear. We have not had a shout since November, so it was a surprise that I could even remember what the sound meant. It was early enough in the evening, seven o'clock, to elicit a good response from the Boat Crew. Up until recently, a good response from the very excellent Shore Crew was when someone more than me turned up to launch the boat. Today, I was joined by two others in very short order of me getting there myself.

By the time we turned off the leading lights and closed to the doors, we knew that the boat had been called to a yacht that had suffered an electrical failure some fourteen miles northwest of the station. A merchant ship was standing by making sure it was not run down in the busy Traffic Separation System. What we had not appreciated was that it was going to be a very long night on the shore as well as on the boat.

February 3<sup>rd</sup> – Friday

Going to the gymnasium this morning turned out to be something of a surplus to requirements given what I put myself through later. Perhaps it set me up, who knows.

The intention was to get up to The Farm early so that I could empty the timber shed and put the tables from the polytunnel in there. The idea was that it will allow me to put the timber back a little more orderly and therefore a little more accessible. It started off exceedingly well and I was back from the gymnasium before I even thought about going. It did not occur to me to tone down my usual blistering session in favour of having a bit left over for wood shifting.

As it turned out one thing and then another got in the way of getting up to The Farm and we eventually got there in the latter part of the morning. I wasted no time in dragging out the timber but there was lots more of it than I remembered and there was also a ton of small bits and offcuts and a similar amount of just plain rubbish. The Missus invited me to put the wood bits in the 'waiting to join the bonfire' pile but I was dubious for some of it. The number of times I have needed a bit of wood for a wedge here or a patch there, so I kept selected items back.

I knew at the outset that I was under the clock. The despatch company that was delivering the batteries had indicated they would be there in the middle of the

afternoon and given that it was not Doing Parcels Dreadfully, there was an even chance I would get all three. The time allowed me was insufficient despite my best efforts to chivy along. What I had not anticipated, and I really should have, was the amount of detritus that had accumulated under all the timber. I had also forgotten about the big heavy doors – courtesy of some nameless Lifeboat station of yesteryear – that were lurking in the corner. They are extremely sturdy and did I also mention heavy. Heavy was a recurring theme, and I was not sure whether my morning's weight training was being a help or had spoiled me for the work I was undertaking.

The towel was thrown in just as I had cleared out the last of the dead straw, collected earth, heavy duty plastic bags, small bits of wood and rotten vegetation that adorned the floor. I had found one of those big builders' bags that sand and the ilk is delivered in and used that as a rubbish bag. I was not daft enough to fill it up but what I did have in there seemed a reasonable level for such a bag that I had to move afterwards. It was not and I could barely shift it, dragging it in the end to the pile of other rubbish I had collected by The Farm gate.

There is a local waste collection firm that many of the holiday lets use and I have seen them collecting from other households on an as needed basis. I decided that it would be worthwhile engaging them to lose what I had collected as it would be something of an effort for me to load it into the truck and dump it in our bin. I know that the local guys know where the field is because I had to tow one of their trucks out one wet day last year after it had taken a wrong turn.

The wood is still relatively neatly piled up outside the barn door and the tables that are due to act as wood shelves are still in the polytunnel. I had thought to continue tomorrow but I now have an appointment to extend the Tooltrak training for one of the crew. I had a conversation earlier in the day with the Lifeboat Operations Manager who said that the new boys had been booked in to be passed out as fully trained on Wednesday. I am sure that the additional training will not be required but it will do no harm either, it just scuppers an early start at The Farm.

We had to wait an hour after getting home for the batteries to appear. Having three more heavy weighed items to shift was a rare treat after lifting nothing heavier than a teacup in the last hour. Weight training in the morning, shifting a ton of timber and several lumps of sturdy ex-Lifeboat station were nothing but excellent preparation for this finale. Perhaps I will do it all again tomorrow, just for a giggle, after dragging my knuckles up to the Tooltrak shed in the morning that is.

One thing that amused me because we were on the right side of it was that the batteries had arrived next day. The company advertised an 'express' next day option on its website, a premium service. I wondered just how irritated you would be if you had paid extra for a service that is generally available for free.



Given the success of the CCTV camera we had purchased for The Farm, I was interested to note that they do a version that can be attached to our home network. Any issues that we have had the camera have been to do with the power supply, so I was not averse to considering a second camera for the outside of the shop. One of the ones I put outside has given up the ghost and because I painted it against the weather, the warranty will have been voided. It requires replacement.

Ahead of making the purchase, I made an enquiry with the company about compatibility with our backend system. The enquiry was quite detailed, and it took the company a few days to respond. The boss man himself sent me a message today apologising for the delay but answering as best he could my query. I had been keen to get a swift reply because they had said that the price was to go up and I wanted to get in ahead of that happening. As it was, my query answered, the company had run out of stock by the time I went to purchase it. How frustrating.

Just as frustrating as learning that any plans I had to sneak up to The Farm early ahead of Tooltrak training were to be dashed. The Missus has me on a errand into town in the morning, so no heavy lifting in the morning for me. I cannot express my disappointment.

February 2<sup>nd</sup> – Thursday

It would have been another Farm day had it not been for a poorly timed shower of rain while I was picking up Mother. There were two or three showers which seemed to be heavier in St Buryan than The Cove, but it put a stutter into our plans. Since the Missus had to get away from The Farm in the early afternoon to take the bleddy hound to the veterinary doctor in town, she decided to postpone today's visit.

Not to be so easily deterred, I went up by myself having dropped Mother at ours first. Strictly, she might well have gone back home again but someone mentioned having pasties for tea, after which she decided that it would be a wasted trip if she went home too early.

On my way to collect Mother, I had detoured across to the builders' merchant, ostensibly to get those big rubber buckets everyone down here uses to transport their wet surfing gear about. I discovered later that they are called gorilla buckets – I have no idea why – and we were going to use them to haul the topsoil up from the end of the field for the raised beds. We both decided independently – so it must be right – that it would mean only one filling and emptying of the earth at either end. I also picked up some replacement coach screws for the gate latch only discovering when I arrived at the gate and took the old ones out, that they were one size too small. I packed the holes and they will do for now but the next time I am at the builders' merchant, I will get the right size.

That shower of rain that upset today's applecourt was very short-lived. I hardly noticed the first one come through The Cove but I was aware of it. I had seen that the view

to the north was clouded with mist and while it could have just been mist, I rather think it was the first shower moving across. The road was quite wet when I went to the truck that was in the RNLI car park to get my notes about leisure batteries, but it had stopped raining at that point and the sky had brightened considerably. I was under the impression that was our lot for the rest of the day.

I decided to purchase the batteries before I got going as the existing ones are doing no good at present. It was an expense that we could have done without, but we would be without light in The Farm store room without them and the CCTV would not work. The very pleasant man on the telephone yesterday gave me a lower price when I asked how much they were, so I was surprised to find a higher one when I came to purchase them. Furthermore, the recommended battery does not have posts to connect the terminals to, which are extra if I wanted them. I felt that this was a bit much since I was purchasing three and called to discuss, erm, options with them. Another very pleasant man was most accommodating and let me have them for the lower price with the terminals thrown in.

I spent the rest of the afternoon pottering a bit. It was a small gesture, but I installed the fan switch in the kitchen ahead of next week's, hopefully, completion of the project. It reminded me that perhaps I had not tried quite hard enough to get the cable down from the loft and I might give it one more shot tomorrow, especially now I have purchased an extra long drill bit that should allow me to do it. That could go one of two ways, either I will have the switch cable installed and be a shining example to DIYers from coast to coast, or we will have a kitchen ceiling with inappropriate holes here and there.

The sea state had improved a little since yesterday but clearly not enough to permit a training launch of the Lifeboat. There was still a meeting attended but as is the way of such things, it was not well attended. Still, the important people were there and we discussed some issues and plans and the few that mattered went and had a play, sorry, serious training session with the Tooltrak. That may seem like an awful lot of Tooltrak training in the past few weeks and it is. It is a relatively straightforward machine to drive but has nuances that require much practise to master. It must also be born in mind that during a shout at the height of summer, the driver's main concentration must be on avoiding crowds of distracted holiday makers and the driving quickly and accurately must be second nature.

We did not stay long at our practise as there were only two trainees who are now competent enough to be passed out on the task. It was not exactly cold out but there was a robust breeze blowing up from the beach and it is always more noticeable around the corner of the Lifeboat station. The skies were relatively clear, as well, but I completely forgot to have a look for the green tailed comet that has been in the news – not that I could tell it was green, so I do not know why I mentioned it, or indeed where to look.

Oh, I just looked it up and discovered that I would need to get up in the early hours of yesterday morning and seek it out on the northeast horizon. Even if I could turn back the clock and muster the enthusiasm to get up earlier in the morning, I would still need to go to, probably, Pendeen Watch to get a clear view of the northeast horizon. For those of you who could be fagged with all that malarky, I hope you enjoyed the view.

February 1<sup>st</sup> – Wednesday

I do not understand it, I now have a perfectly clear clock at the bedside so quite why the bleddy hound is still insisting on getting out of bed so early is beyond me. Every cloud and all that, I ended up being so far ahead of the posse today I will probably meet them coming back.

The breeze had picked up a bit today, as expected, but it was not as severe as I had anticipated. I think it was the weekend forecast that showed 80 miles per hour gusts for Scotland, which is north of Camborne, so I imagined we would be into 40 miles per hour at the least. I decided to check, just out of interest, and discovered that the forecast mighty wind had reached a mighty twelve miles per hour in Stornoway – even further north of Camborne. It was mightier here, where indeed it was gusting to more than 30 miles per hour.

At least it was pushing in the right direction, helping to urge me along to the gymnasium first thing. It was almost the earliest I had ever been down there. I think when I first started I had tried to do a session before the shop opened, heading down at something daft like half past five o'clock. It was never going to catch on and it was most uncomfortable in the pitch dark. Today I waited until it was light but returned well before a lot of times I would still be considering going.

After my labours at The Farm yesterday, I thought that I would avoid the weight training part of my session having done nothing but lift heavy lumps of timber. When I arrived, I found that I was feeling much more enthusiastic about it and completed a full blistering session anyway.

Having finished breakfast, I wasted very little time in gathering my gear and getting going to The Farm. Last night's delivery of bodyboards needed to be cleared ahead of what we presumed was the arrival today of the balance but I also wanted to finish off the gate latch, which needed to be dropped an inch or two. Also, I knew that it would be very difficult not to finish off the second raised bed since I was there.

I had taken note of the fixings for the gate latch and brought with me the appropriate spanner to take them off. What I should have anticipated was that the coach bolts would have been rusting and mishapen and purchased some replacements. Consequently, the bolts unscrewed quite easily and the multitool made light work of cutting in but the bolts got so far into their new holes and refused to screw themselves in any deeper, largely due to the lack of viable thread on the shafts. The

latch is quite robustly secured and allows the bar to marry up with it, but it is hanging loose. I will buy some more coach bolts next time I am over at the builders' merchant but will not be making a special run of it.

My assessment of my inability to resist finishing off the second of the raised beds was correct, but it did not take very long. The Missus may have to help me position it correctly but it is not too far off where it should be now. It was while I was doing this that the Missus called to say that the remainder of the bodyboards had been delivered.

I had to clear out the back of the truck to get them all in. It was not only the truck I had to clear out. The barn is full of waste cardboard, a product of the Missus and her 'no dig' gardening. I am still not convinced that it works as there are just as many weeds in the sections where cardboard has been laid under the soil as anywhere else on The Farm. If produce grew as readily as prodigiously, we would be market garden millionaires by now.

Anyway, I digress. Now where was I? Ah yes, the barn being so full of cardboard that I cannot fit much else in. The Missus tells me that much of it will be gone soon, some into the raised beds and some on the outside vegetable patches. Sadly, that did not help at all as the bodyboards needed to be accommodated today, so I spent an inordinate amount of time moving bits of cardboard around to try and maximise the use of the space. Everything will need to be moved again when we eventually ship the huge selection of Christmas decorations back up there but for now I managed to get all the bodyboards tucked away.

I decided to retire for the day after that. It was not the most pleasant of days up at The Farm, grey and overcast with a strong wind blowing. In the lee of the breeze, it was quite temperate and I was shedding layers but as soon as I wondered back into the wind I was reaching to put them back on again in moments.

Not that it affected The Farm very much, but despite being under the protection of a high pressure system, a tight low and a couple of weather fronts moving across the north have managed to awaken the sea monsters again. As I was coming down the hill on a couple of occasions yesterday – I forgot the keys to The Farm's inner sanctum the first time and then I had to return for the bodyboards – the sea was banging over the Harbour wall. It was not quite as ferocious as it had been in the previous few weeks, but it was having a good go at it.

I would have ordered the replacement batteries when I returned but the very pleasant man from the battery company had called when I was at The Farm and I had left the notes I made in the truck and could not be fagged to go and get them. He had recommended some modern dry cell batteries for our requirements and a particular brand. It transpired that the brand, that I had not heard of, was their own label, which took the edge off his advice a little – apart from the dry cell bit. I had to do some subsequent research and the company's own brand are relatively well

know, reliable and cheaper than the big brands. They cannot perform worse than the current batteries that are now all struggling to cope.

I also need to consider the timber for the remaining raised beds and particularly the cost of it. Had we done this a couple of years ago, instead of buying the tables, it would have been half the price. Nevertheless, we need to finish the job but I also want to pull out the prodigious quantity of spare timber we have in the wood shed first, to use if there is anything useable there and secondly, we intend to put a couple of the polytunnel tables there that will make the timber pile a little more accessible, even if it will poke out a little more.

That was the last of me doing work things for the day and I settled to watch a film in what was left of the afternoon. It is alarmingly odd how I have to force myself to sit down and do nothing. Whether it is the prospect of the great deal of work we need to do at The Farm or whether I just like to torture myself, it is hard to know. I am rather hoping it is not that I enjoy working so much I would prefer to do it over sitting on my backside doing very little. That would sully a perfectly good reputation for idleness that had taken years to ferment. That would never do.