

DIARY 2025

May 1st – Thursday

It is not usual that the arrival of an electricity bill is cause for jubilation, but I made an exception today. We used 34 percent less electricity this month than we did the year before thanks to our solar panels and a handy bit of sunshine. Had we still been paying the same inflated rate that we were last year, the saving would have been enormous. As it was, with much cheaper rates, it was still more than a little pleasing.

I have mentioned before, I made no expectation of 'paying off' the capital over a particular period. As one celebrity commentator put it, you do not look at 'paying off' the investment in a new kitchen, for example, so why do it for solar panels. I agreed, happy to just take what I imagined would be a chunk off the bill each month. Having reviewed the performance of our solar panels so far, it is likely we will see the 'pay off' in less than five years. That is hugely satisfying.

Based on the level of business we had this morning it is also hugely necessary as well. If we had a dozen customers before the middle of the day, I would be most surprised. As usual in quieter times, we had to wait until the middle of the day to see any action at all and even then, it was a tad slow. I blame the weather.

We had started out with some brightness but as the day progressed the cloud cover increased. It went from a bit hazy with thin cloud to having our brightness dulled with a blanket of thicker cloud. It made the day a bit humid and slightly uncomfortable. The breeze continued from the east, but it had decided today not to blow through the doorway when it would have been rather pleasant if it had. See, dry and warm: terrible weather.

Possibly part of the reason that it was a bit quiet today was that it was Padstow Obby Oss Day. It would have attracted quite a crowd from a large catchment area. I had not thought much about it; it is a bit remote from The Cove and I have never been. There again I have not been to Flora Day in Helston either or indeed Montol in Penzance, and those are a bit closer. I could not miss the Padstow event today because it was all over Radio Pasty. One of the attractions of Radio Pasty is the variety of news stories but today, there was just one. After about the fifth vaguely similar interview, I went and did something else instead.

It was a customer who reminded me that this coming weekend was a bank holiday one and that the Isles of Scilly Gig Championships, the 34th would be held over on the islands. That is also likely to draw customers away from The Cove, although it is not like it will be a spontaneous decision to trip over there. I suspect that if you have not booked your accommodation by now, you will be sleeping on the beach.

On the Harbour beach this morning, I noted that the spring tides are in retreat. There was soft sand up in the far corner by the wall and is the first indicator I generally see that the tide has changed. It is remarkably how quickly the tide changes. I should have noticed by the moon last night that hung in a perfect crescent in a deep hued blue sky alongside a bright Jupiter. I find a crescent moon to be the most alluring of all the phases especially as it was presented last night. I could stare at it for hours but then again, I would probably fall on my face as I had an ABH tugging me around.

Knowing that I had endured a tedious day, the Lifeboat people laid on a bit of a training launch to revive me. Alright, they did not do it for me, but it made me feel good for a while. For a change, it was the Boat Crew who were a bit thin on the ground, erm, deck maybe and on the shore we were over-manned. We gathered at half past six o'clock and both boats launched into a bit of swell shortly after.

We set up for the short slipway as the tide was still coming in. High water was set to coincide with the expected recovery time. I held back on deploying the 'fishing rod' from which the boat picks up the heaving line for the span and main cable as it was unclear exactly where the water line would come to. If we deploy it too early and too low on a rising tide, it could be swamped by the time the boat comes in.

In the interim while we waited for the boats to come back, I attended to some administrative work while the rest of the crew had some tutorial on tying knots. It has been a while since I did the knots and had I realised that is what they were up to, I would have joined them. I consoled myself that at least I had a cup of tea and a couple of biscuits while I administrated.

The boat returned at roughly eight o'clock and because I was not doing it, the Inshore boat came in first. It should be noted that recovering the Inshore at high water, especially at spring tide – even if it was in retreat – is a more tricky operation than at low or during neap tides. The Tooltrak needs to be manoeuvred over to near the western slip where the angle of attack is shallower. To make matters worse, just ahead of high water, the swell started to get a bit feisty and there was a heavy run of sea racing ten to fifteen feet up and down the beach. Our Tooltak man who always seems to pull the short straw on such occasions managed exceedingly well, particularly as the Inshore crew wanted to do some inappropriately named 'dry' runs at getting the boat onto the trailer.

The swell was not such a nuisance on the short slip. We set the 'fishing rod' up at the highest feasible point on the slipway. Even there, the step was being washed by the occasional wave. Had the tide been any higher we would have to have waited for it to abate. If the water rises to the level of the rollers in the keelway of the slipways, the boat will simply roll back out again when it comes back onto the slipway. With the water lower down, the keel of the boat rests on the special surface in the keelway on the concrete tow and friction generally hold it there.

Being Head Launcher and head launcher of the day, I was in the perfect position to observe what was a textbook recovery up the short slip at the highest permissible tide. It is such smooth executions of procedure that almost bring a lump to the throat and a tear to the eye.

After a wash down, we brought the boat back up onto the cradle and reset the turntable to the launch slip for its next service. It takes a bit longer and a little more care than a long slip recovery but with enough trained crew operating in perfect synchronisation, we soon had it done. We are, after all, a very harmonious, very excellent Shore Crew.

May 2nd – Friday

The cloud that built up yesterday during the day was still with us this morning. We had retained our temperature and it was still very pleasant stepping out with the little girl first thing. I heard on Radio Pasty that the temperature was set to drop on Sunday, so I had a little geek at one of the weather forecast websites. It is set to drop by ten degrees! I think we might feel that a little bit. I had only just switched to wearing a short sleeve shirt today, too, after being a little warm yesterday. That will teach me.

It might not have escaped your attention, dear reader, that I had been at a loose end now and then over the last week or so. Instead of spending my time gainfully ordering stock, or tidying the store room or something equally businessy I have been dabbling with producing The Diary in the spoken word.

Fear not, dear reader, that I might pop up in your living room to read from my latest script or even read by request over the telephone. That is not going to happen. Instead, I have been leveraging technology to bring the day's Diary to you in an audio file.

I had the idea when, quite by accident, I pressed the wrong button in the word processor document I was working on. I suddenly could hear a lady's voice reading out what I had just written. It took me a more than a moment to work out what it was and a while later, how to stop it. It took even longer to discover the button that I had pressed that made it happen in the first place. When I did, I played the text again and was surprised to find that the very pleasant lady who was reading it to me did so in a pitch and with inflection that I might have applied had I read it aloud myself, albeit with an American accent.

That was some time ago and it has taken a little while for the seed to mature in the empty space that my brain used to occupy. If I were to pursue the experiment of producing an audio file to go with the publication of The Diary, it would have to be right. There were several issues to overcome and the first of those was did the word processing software provide the facility to capture the voice into an audio file. I would

also need to find a male and British voice, preferably with a bit of a regional accent. Perhaps not a broad Cornish accent as I wanted people to be able to understand it.

Another consideration was how it might be received. After all, I know that reading The Diary might well be a clandestine affair, read in small rooms around the country. Having it read aloud would be the last thing a reader might wish for.

I quickly discovered that the word processing software did not create audio files, nor did it have a suitable voice. I tried two of the top ranking software programs that converted text to speech and tested them extensively. Things were looking very positive with one of them which even allowed me to clone my own voice to allow the AI engine to read my own Diary words. After letting it loose on a few Diary pages and tweeking it for pitch and rhythm, I thought that I had the answer. Unfortunately, it had the tendency to miss words and phrases out at random. The other top program I tried also had the same problem.

I have not entirely given up on the idea. There are other programs to try. I was very impressed that the ones I tried manage to read the word 'geek'. This would indicate that the AI engine constructs language like we do, from sounds, rather than having an enormous lexicon to work from. Either that or they have a Cornishman chained up in a room somewhere being forced to read texts sent to him.

As if she could read my mind from that distance, our American correspondent, our friend from frozen Vermont, very far west of Camborne submitted her latest report as an audio file. Well, she also submitted a video of the sunrise view from her veranda, or possibly stoop, as she spoke to me. She pointed out various features in view which would be very hard to replicate in the written text, so I shall not try. What I did do was to use my computer to translate one passage of her submission into text. If I could not do text to speech, I would do it the other way around instead.

I had to make a few corrections as even an American word processor could not understand her American accent, so I apologise to her if I got some wrong. To set the scene, our correspondent was telling me that having fixed the fence for her horses, she was going to leave them out overnight for the first time this year – frozen Vermont not being all that frozen any more. She mentioned that the deer would probably visit but that the horses would not mind the deer having seen them about in the forest.

I will let our correspondent from not so frozen Vermont, very far west of Camborne take it from there.

"It's so funny when they see deer in the forest, they are never very much afraid of them. They notice them but they don't start with them the way they do with a moose. Oh my gosh, if you are riding a horse when you see a moose, then hang on for dear life because moose really scare horses. They will act like they are in a complete panic, well they are in a complete panic, all the way back to the farm no matter how

far away you are. I was in moose territory yesterday when I rode. I was keeping a pretty sharp lookout although, you know, I was riding Kimberly who is Mr Adventurer and he might have thought, "Oh that's interesting," and gone up to the moose but there's something like... have you heard of the uncanny valley? It's when something is just about familiar enough and not familiar enough to be just amazingly spooky, like mummies that have come to life. For a horse, a moose is squarely in the uncanny valley. They're just built all wrong. They are too big, they have too long legs, they have ridiculous shaped heads, and their noses are bulbous. I mean they must seem incredibly ugly and terrifying to a horse. Of course, I want to hang around and look at the moose but, yeah, that's not what happens."

Talking about farms, the Missus spent all day up at ours yesterday planting things. She reports that she planted another 306 lettuces. Previously, she had planted some 430 and is not finished yet. Mother is still potting away, so there are cherry tomatoes, tomatoes, spring onions, spinach and all sorts to come. She must have had enough of farming because today she headed off to the big metropolis to do some shopping.

It would have been welcome if a few more people felt the same and did some shopping around The Cove. We were fearfully quiet today, especially in the afternoon as the change-over day took effect. I had been pleasantly surprised yesterday when we closed up on the day before, despite the day before looking busier. We must have sold higher priced goods to fewer people, which was clearly a plethora of going home presents rather than pasties (sorry, MS) and buckets and spades. Today, we had the opposite. It felt busier but the end of day was very disappointing.

We may not have had customers, but we had a bit of weather return to us later in the afternoon. Unseen, by me at least, the cloud had been breaking up and somewhere after half past two o'clock we started to see a few bright patches. By half past three o'clock the sun had properly broken through. Out in the bay, the surfers had some luck, too. It did not look like there was much swell but there was a small party of about a dozen picking up some very surfable waves from out the back.

A little after four o'clock I watched as a single cloud descended over Escalls and Sunny Corner Lane. It slowly enveloped the top of the cliff and began working its way down. What I had not realised was that it was a ruse; a feint; a distraction while the main body of fog approached from the sea in the north. That was on us by five o'clock but just as quickly vanished. In the meanwhile, the cloud from Escalls had reached the beach.

While I was watching the next cloud of mist arrive from the north, the cloud on Escalls Cliff had retreated a little and had made a blanket hugging the edge of the cliff down to Gwenver. It is May and May is famed for its mist covered days in The Cove.

The mist continued to come and go and make strange shapes all about us well into the evening. When I took ABH around after tea I had hoped for a pleasant walk in the sinking sun. Instead, I got to walk about in some chill air wondering at the fog patches swirling about. By that time there were more patches than clear, so perhaps it was foggy with clear patches. It would be useful if it was gone by tomorrow as it can play havoc with business; it would most likely be clear a mile away on the south coast and our visitors would migrate there. Unfortunately, May mist can last for days. Fingers crossed, I think.

May 3rd – Saturday

Yesterday, our friend from not so frozen Vermont, very far west of Camborne, brought the phrase ‘uncanny valley’ to our attention. I had never heard of it, so I looked it up. The phrase came from an essay written by a Japanese robotics professor, Masahiro Mori, which was entitled, *Bukimi no Tani*, translated as ‘valley of eeriness’. He argued that as robots became more human-like we initially find them interesting and appealing but at some point, the likeness will become too close introducing feelings of uneasiness – the uncanny valley. Of course, you already knew that, dear reader. It is only me who does not get out much. I know exactly what he means, though. I get the same feeling when I look in the mirror.

We started today with some proper potential for a good day. ABH had decided that since it was light outside, it was time to wake up. It seemed that only applied to me because when I eventually had enough of having my face washed by an insistent tongue and got up, she stayed in bed and went back to sleep. I was having none of that and plagued her until she got up also and we were out on the beach as the sun was struggling to climb above the cliff.

The sun was making a bit of a song and dance of it, too. The eastern horizon was aflame with colour. Unfortunately, when it eventually got above the top of the cliff, it found some more cloud to sit behind, and we did not quite enjoy the glory of the sunshine that looked like it might brighten the place up a bit. We had to wait until into the afternoon when the sun eventually worked its way free and then had to contend with a sharp northerly breeze that gradually picked up during the day.

The weather was not the only thing with potential. We had been surprised by an early dash for a few pasties (sorry, MS). Someone had asked for a couple of pasties early on to take with them on the journey home. Since there seemed to be a few people gathering outside, I slipped some additional ones on, alongside the cheese ones and the sausage rolls. I was glad that I did as we went through a fair few orders before the middle of the morning. It then raised the concern that perhaps I had not ordered enough for the weekend. I decided not to be too premature with my response and it proved sensible because later, the day went very quiet in the afternoon.

I had estimated that the weekend would not be very busy for a number of reasons. First, it is not a busy time of the year despite the good weather we have been having. The Isles of Scilly would have taken a chunk out of our visitor numbers with the World Gig Rowing Championships which also would have taken a number of local families out of the equation. Probably more of a draw was the Porthleven Food Festival that is normally held in April, but this year put back to avoid Easter, I presume.

The Missus made today a visiting day. She was gone for several hours. ABH had a very lazy day of it, staying in the flat for the first visit and then with me in the shop for the second that was altogether longer. I started her off on the throne inside the door where she was able to bark freely at all passing dogs. The bleddy hound used to be ambivalent about such things and shouted at very few. ABH is clearly less tolerant, which is unfortunate as it puts me on edge if customers with dogs want to run the gauntlet and come into the shop.

I left her where she was by the first electric sliding door in The Cove hoping that the immersive experience would soften her resolve. I feel that it could be a work in very long progress. Halfway through the afternoon, I moved her into the shopping trolley bolstered by an upside down shopping basket and lined with her bed. It was getting a bit frosty for her inside the doorway.

I had recognised this because it was getting a little frosty for me too behind the counter. After the success of short sleeve shirt wearing yesterday, I had decided to repeat the experience but soon after the middle of the day, I decided that enough was enough and went and pulled on my mid-layer for the remainder of the afternoon. I held on until the Missus returned at five o'clock to rush back up to the flat to get my woollen jacket which by that time was much needed.

That northerly draft was punchy and insistent. By the end of the day, it was becoming quite the irritation and did not invite visitors into The Cove. I was grateful when it was time to bring everything in and head up for my tea. I was less grateful that I had to take ABH out after tea but whether the wind had decreased or I had just got used to it, the breeze seemed less severe.

We spent a little time on the beach then headed around the block. The beach was empty and the car park was only sparsely occupied. There were, however, a few groups of people heading down the Coast Path some of whom were the climbers that had availed themselves of pasties earlier in the morning. If ABH sees anyone coming down the path, we have to wait for them because they might want to say hello to her, or vice versa. There were three couples coming down the steps from the currently superfluous gate at the bottom of the path. It took a few minutes for them to come down and pass us. I thought that we had completed our waiting but, no, she had seen another couple halfway down the cliff, so we had to wait for them too. When they got to us, they completely ignored her.

We were lucky today. She had not seen the two more couples just leaving from the lookout at the top else we would have waited for those too. She is a strange girl.

May 4th – Sunday

We were treated to a very pretty morning today. The best thing about it was that it was not laced with a robust northerly. The wind had gone around to the east and had lost its power. This set the scene for the day and although we had some cloudy moments, for the most part we basked in sunshine and pleasantness.

Halfway through the morning we had a visit from the other reader, which was a pleasant surprise. Well, it was not a total surprise because I had been warned in advance of their impending visit, just not exactly when it would be. They even purchased some of our alluring and high-quality gifts and novelties to mark the occasion and later, came back for pasties (sorry, MS). It means that I shall be able to afford a pinch of salt with my gruel in the morning. I can hardly wait.

It must have been the day for visits. In the middle of the afternoon a very pleasant lady came and introduced herself as the niece of the grandparents of L&L, hello girls, who live north of the border that is very far north of Camborne and in a foreign country, although not really. I think that would make her the girls' aunt, although family trees have me foxed. My own family tree has lost so many branches in recent years it is more a family stump.

What with all these visitations we were quite busy in fits and starts today. In fact, the starts were more frequent than the fits, unless the starts refer to the quieter times at which point it is the other way around. Due to yesterday's unexpected demand for pasties I decided to cook our frozen stock for today – we would need at least some pasties to sell. I decided to go big because they take an hour to cook and there would be no coming back from running out of a smaller supply and having to cook more. It did the job, but demand dropped off early today leaving us with some left over. It was better than having none at all.

In one of the quieter moments, I set about the boxes of hooded sweatshirts that had arrived yesterday. It was a top-up order to bolster the stock of full zip sweatshirts in the navy. We had purchased an experimental quantity to see how they sold at the end of last year. The fact that we are buying some more should explain that the experiment went rather well. I suspect that whatever colour we choose to get would sell well as they are a particularly high quality and desirable garment. We have been selling them for more than several years and, so far, there has been no real let up in the volume of sales.

To make it easy to identify the sizes of each package in the boxes we keep them in, we stick a small but clear size label to the front of each. I also pack them in size order, small to large, front to back in the box so that mostly I can put my hand in and

come up with the right size. I have taken to going into the store room for a packaged one when a customer brings one to the counter. This may seem like an attractive customer service feature that makes me look an attentive and caring grumpy shopkeeper. It is, however, in truth sheer laziness on the grumpy shopkeeper's part. Each of the hooded sweatshirts in the shop is displayed on a hanger and has an old fashioned parcel label strung to it. If I were to sell the shop displayed one, which sometimes I have to, the label needs to be removed for reuse, the garment taken off its hanger and finally neatly folded. The label then needs to be reattached to the replacement hooded sweatshirt and the garment re-hung on the hanger. It is such a fag and best avoided – still, no need to tell the customer that, dear reader.

We ended the day about as bust as the day before, which was reasonably satisfactorily. As I have reported before, we have no great expectations of the bank holiday at this time of the season. I was also quite pleased to be able to close as the temperature had taken a sharp dip in the latter part of the afternoon and the sun had decided not to help very much by hiding behind a cloud.

I wrapped up a bit to take ABH out for the after tea run and discovered that I probably had not needed to. The sun had come out for its last drive to the horizon and it was relatively temperate down on the Harbour beach where we first went. I was a little cautious because the Harbour tractor was manoeuvring one of the local owners' punts into its summer position on the western slip. It was just finishing the job, so we stayed on the beach that looked like it had been trampled by a million feet during the day. The effect is helped by the tide now not reaching the upper area of sand on the beach.

When we had enough of wandering around on the sand, we went up the western slip to meet the local boatowner, who happens also to be a member of the very excellent Shore Crew. His mother was there, too. She is a neighbour from up the top who I had not seen for a while, and we tarried for half an hour and had an exceedingly pleasant chat in the warmth of the setting sun. When we moved on, we met one of the ladies who lives in the end house on Coastguard Row who has done such a cracking job of cultivating the area of wild ground next to their property. They have their detractors, she tells me, but I think that it looks absolutely splendid, using plants that blend in nicely with the wildflowers all about. It is like our very own Gardens of Heligan or Eden Project and is free to look at and admire.

Our Eden Project is not quite as mature yet, but the Missus and Mother are still planting seeds. Some of the seeds are old and have been planted just to see if they grow but there are plenty more that have a better chance. The Missus has certainly gone big after a year when we could do nothing. Hopefully, it is a sign of optimism for the year to come in general. I do hope so, but it would not be hard to enjoy improvement on the year before.

May 5th - Monday

It is a sad fact that more than our fair share of lost souls migrate to these parts in the Far West. We have, erm, entertained one or two over the years in the shop and in the local news there frequently appears the search for one person or another. Much of the initial information is listed on Face Page, which I am not allowed to subscribe to, at least unsupervised, so I generally miss it until someone whispers the latest in my shell-like. So, it was something of an unwelcome surprise to be in almost at the outset of the latest hue and cry and also the reason it has taken until now for The Diary to catch up on the news.

On Saturday morning, I was asked by a young gentlemen to call a taxi for him. He was not being as clear as I would have liked to my somewhat dysfunctional ears, but I determined that he was in a bit of a hurry due to some domestic emergency. We are often called upon to perform such tasks, mainly for those whose first language is not English and for others, such as this gentleman, who did not possess a mobile telephone. Also, it is fairly commonplace to request the taxi to take them to Penzance to the railway station or, especially now that the much maligned council has cut off the bus service there, to St Just. Definitely not commonplace, and a vague indication that things were perhaps not as right as they might have been, was a request to travel to a city in the north of England.

I reasoned, quite reasonably, that the local taxis, of which there are three, would not be keen to make such a journey. They need much encouragement to travel east of Penzance and I felt that a journey north of Camborne would probably disturb the space/time continuum in some awful way. I called a large firm in Penzance, explaining that if they could not provide the service directly, they almost certainly would know someone who would. I was correct on both counts and wrote down the suggested contact number I had been given.

When I put the telephone down to talk with the gentleman again, things took a turn for the even more, erm, unusual. We came to a mutual agreement that I could provide no further assistance and he walked off in the direction of the OS. It was late last night that the Missus informed me that someone matching the description of my visitor had gone missing in the area. I passed on the information I had to the sheriffs as requested by the online wanted poster. The Missus told me later that a full-scale search was underway in St Buryan where he had last been spotted and I was very pleased this morning when I was informed that the young gentleman had been found safe and well.

I did not feel particularly safe or well when our brisk easterly became more brisk as the day went on. We had beautiful sunshine and if you were looking at today through the helmet of a space suit you were wearing you might think, how wonderful. The rest of us, however, were soon shivering in our boots and finding corners of public houses to sit in for the rest of the day. Grumpy shopkeepers were not so lucky,

especially when the wind went northerly at some time in the afternoon and did a reprise of Saturday.

We were decidedly quieter than yesterday. There was no real surprise there. I spoke with a visitor in the late afternoon who has escaped to Porth Chapel on the south coast for the day. He said that it was perfectly sheltered there and warm in the sunshine. That was what we were up against and stood no chance. At least the allure of a hot pasty (sorry, MS) worked for those visitors who were clearly blissfully unaware that there was a south coast to sit on. When I placed the order yesterday, I had it in mind that it would probably be good for two days. While I could be proved wrong tomorrow by a sudden pasty-fest rush of demand, at the moment it is looking pretty good for my judgement.

Another reason why our visitors were eschewing our own beach might well have been because there was not much of it. Additionally, what there was appeared to be cut off by exposed rocks. While the tide is of the small neap variety at present, there is still enough of it to hog most of the beach when it is full as it was in the middle of the day today.

The previous tides have stripped out some sand again, especially on the southern end of the beach. This has once again closed the gap at the top of the beach above the rock field to the north of The Beach car park and also above the reef at the bottom of the OS slip. Both are passable but not as easily as when there is sand there. Conversely, there appears to be plenty of sand up the back of the beach from the new Lifeguard palace, sorry, hut all the way to North Rocks. It is just difficult to get to.

Even at low tide, the beach is bisected by a gully that runs up to the rock field from the tide line. This causes some problems with rips at certain stages in the tide cycle and while most beach users are aware of it currently, if it is still there during the summer, which is likely, many visitors will not. Swim between the flags, for sure if you intend to go in at all. Personally, I find it far too wet.

With the lack of customers, I found myself being lazy again when, really, there are things to do. Half term is creeping up on us and more summer stock needs to be ordered to meet the inevitable, we hope, demand. I have been putting off the next beachware order, balancing it against cash flow conditions – most of it is flowing out. It is a leap of faith, but we have to place the big, expensive order soon or miss out.

I spent some time during the afternoon running down my list. It is fairly well organised, and I can see at a glance what we used last year and what we have left – or had; we have sold some of it. I also noticed, and I missed it at the time, that some of the items at the show discount rate did not show up in our last order. I will need to telephone the company to enquire about these. It will be very poor show if they were not available then but are now because they will want to charge the proper rate for them. I almost telephoned there and then before I realised that it was a bank holiday.

Having eased myself into actually doing something business-like, a number of other things and orders came to mind. I have a couple of orders already made up and ready to send, waiting on the right moment, which is probably this or next week. There is also the small matter of newspapers. I sent my request a fortnight ago and asked for an acknowledgement that they had received my request; I have not heard a dickie bird. I am torn between sending a reminder and waiting until the due date and having a fight with them if they have not delivered. The latter is tempting but might delay my newspapers further and the number of enquiries I am getting is increasing daily now.

Once again, I was happy to close up in the face of the northerly gusts plaguing me. Oddly, it did not seem so bad when I took ABH around the block later in the evening. There was no one to stop and chat with this time around and the Harbour car park was mainly empty. There were no walkers coming down from the lookout to wait for nor any neighbours to meet. Everything looked gloriously colourful in the late sunshine, and we had time to admire it and we stopped and started around the block. How very lovely it all was.

May 6th – Tuesday

That chill from yesterday must have settled in my bones. I found it just as chilly this morning as ABH and I took a wander about, even with a very light easterly blowing in again.

I was not to be fooled by that light easterly, either. That was how it started out yesterday and look how that turned out. When I went down to the shop to open up at around eight o'clock, I wore my woolly hooded sweatshirt and was in it all day and needed it, too. It was certainly a pretty day to look at and I did a lot of that; we were very quiet once again today.

The free time allowed me to finish off the beachware order, although I will not be sending it off until next week. I also sent off one of the pre-prepared orders for a much lesser amount and that will arrive before the end of the week and give me something to do. Later, around the middle of the day, the 'farm shop' delivery arrived but it was one of the smallest orders we have placed with them. It did not take long to clear at all. I had decided over the weekend not to pursue a big cash and carry order even though it is the week for doing so. We would struggle to make up a minimum order, so I let the cash and carry people know we would be skipping a week.

The delivery that had arrived on Friday containing the playing cards and other Cornwall novelties and souvenirs had sat untouched in the store room all weekend. Since I had so much time on my hands and the need to use it for things other than

spending money or simply frittering it away, I decided to open the box especially as the cardboard would – or might be – collected tomorrow. Perhaps I should have opened it sooner as I discovered that it was missing the small flags I had ordered. At least it gave me something to do chasing them up. That did no good either as they were out of stock and would be for the rest of the year. We have an alternate supplier, however.

I had been left in two minds about making a further fuss about the lack of bus service north of the village. I had already written two letters to our local councillor and while he expressed sympathy, there was not a great deal he could do except make our point, which I believe he did and at the highest level.

Two things decided me to write again. Each day I have half a dozen complaints or comments of disbelief that the bus service has been ceased. Many of our walkers use it to bus out and walk back from various points on the Coast Path. Others just for day trips to The Cove while they stay in St Just or the surrounding area. I welcome the comments as it reinforces the detrimental impact the change has had. It is, however, frustrating that I could do little about it but agree.

What clinched my resolve was our neighbour from the Sennen Cove Café who was late to the party in realising the service had stopped. He highlighted the damage that it would do to our businesses, which I had not properly considered before. He was right, of course. Previously, with a direct connection, we could count St Ives as part of our catchment area. No one is going to go through the fag of changing at Penzance to get here, although they might going back the way.

Another factor was that we have just had our local elections and the powerbase at the much maligned council has changed. It is currently in flux while they draw straws to decide which group is going to sit at the top table. Given the mix of parties, that could take some time. Some of the children in the playground do not want to play with certain other ones because of the colour t-shirts they are wearing. You would think that they could settle their difference to act for the good of Cornwall and its residents, but I suppose they all have different ideas of what that is. We await developments.

As expected, the wind ramped up a bit during the day. It also made a broad sweep of the north, starting in the east. I fancy it spent more time than was strictly fair in the northeast blowing at a grumpy shopkeeper minding his own business behind his counter. I was cold for most of the day before the wind moved on through the north and ended up in the northwest and far lighter than it had been earlier.

ABH must have had a bit of a day of it because she made it very clear that she did not want an after tea walk around the block. She had stayed in the shop with me while the Missus went off to an appointment in The Cove. As usual while the Missus is away, she sulked and mainly slept between shouting at passing dogs. When the

Missus came back, she was whisked into town on a errands trip and thence up to The Farm.

The Missus spend the rest of the day finishing off her beans and peas project. This is eight large frames up behind the cabin on some ground she took time to prepare to minimise the incursion of weed growth. She covered it with anti-weed matting and covered that with subsoil which we noticed has not promoted much growth at all at the end of the field where we have 100 tons of it dumped. At least it has found some use.

The frames are filled with topsoil and she has built a bunny proof fence around the whole lot. That was the bit that took a lot of time because we have not had much rain lately and the ground is rock hard. The result is a thing of wonder, and all without DIYwoman overalls on, which will clearly tarnish the brand and was no doubt done on purpose. We will be selling and eating beans and peas if all goes well until we are sick of them.

ABH saw the error of her ways before last knocking and let me take her out for a final spin. Usually, this is mercifully brief but because she had not gone out earlier, she had me around the big block. A police car passed us into the Harbour car park, which is not that unusual, but the policeman decanted and made his way to the Coast Path, which is. One of the ladies from the corner house was chatting with a friend there and the policeman stopped to ask if they had seen someone. I lost the thread at that point because the friend's dog started barking at ABH, but it did seem that another search for a missing person was underway. I mentioned that it was a frequent occurrence down here but usually there is a bit of a gap between them.

I left them all to it and hoped that the matter would be resolved and not involve the boat at all; my bed was looking very attractive after the tedium of the day, which is oddly very wearing.

May 7th – Wednesday

I had a call from my doctor last evening just before I sat down for my tea. When we live in a world where trying to make contact with your doctor requires the sacrifice of your first born and a wheelbarrow full of used notes, having the doctor call you is a mite worrying. He very quickly assured me that there was nothing to worry about, which only made me fret some more. Doctors say things like that just to placate their patients and to avoid expensive law suits when their patient keels over with shock at having been told bad news. He insisted that there really was nothing wrong and that it concerned my recent birthday bloods episode.

I was in two minds about including this in The Diary but since you know more about me than I do myself, and I had already explained the birthday bloods experience, it seemed no harm would come of it. Besides, it would be cruel not revealing the

outcome of my story, a bit like telling you my foot was stuck in the sand with the tide coming in without telling you that I was nowhere near the beach. So, here we go.

In a frightening coincidence, I had already looked at the results of my blood tests online that very morning. We have an NHS app on our smart mobile telephones through which we can order our prescriptions. We can also see our medical records, if we are brave enough, which includes the results of blood tests.

Not that I am expert in these matters, but all my results looked stunningly ordinary. I do not need to understand the significance or meaning of each because there is a little diagram that shows the upper and lower limits of the desirable range and my result highlighted by a little red arrow. All were well within the limits set out by whoever sets out the limits. In fact, my doctor mentioned that I have the results of a man much younger than myself. It might be the case, of course, that my bloods were mixed up with some high performing athlete and thus they were indeed the results of a much younger man, but we will hope not, hey.

It was not actually the bloods specifically that my doctor wished to discuss. He had completed something called a QRISK on my behalf, which was very good of him, which takes all manner of data, including my bloods results, my age, weight and height and produces a percentage risk result of the likelihood of me dropping dead while serving a pasties (sorry, MS). Under ten percent is ignored and over 20 percent they send for an ambulance, or a hearse depending on how much over 20 percent you are. Between the two, you get a call from your doctor.

Since my bloods are all good, my weight and height do not ring alarm bells by themselves and I visit the gymnasium three times a week, the only aggravating element that pushed me to an unreasonable twelve percent, was my age. My doctor acknowledged this but nevertheless, recommended that I try eating statins. I did ask if the Missus could grow these at The Farm but apparently it is some sort of pill that will reduce my risk by probably four percent and therefore put me in the ignored pile.

He made it sound all very reasonable and with only a minor risk of side effects against a whole raft of benefits he heartily recommended taking them. That was all very well, but it was not him that was taking them, it was me – potentially. I said that I would research further and if he could add them to my prescription list, I could order them if I decided to. He was very happy with that and so was I and he reiterated that this pill really was the wonder of the modern age.

So far, I have asked two people who were keen to discuss the matter with me and who already had taken these pills. One told me it had given him a stomach ulcer and the other said that he had never felt better. I admit that it was not the conclusive research that I had hoped for.

Hoping that you are still with me, dear reader, we shall move on to matters of the day. The first being that the clear blue skies that we closed the day with yesterday

were still with us this morning. Very oddly, when I took ABH out at the last yesterday evening, there was the distinct smell of rain in the air. Oddly, because there was not a cloud in the sky but even more oddly than that, the ground looked slightly damp. This morning there was no such weirdness, just blue sky and dryness and a complete lack of breeze – at last. Not that it did last.

The Missus was super-keen to get up to the Farm, so I managed to get to the gymnasium a good hour before I would ordinarily have done. I had missed out on Monday, so I was pleased that I was able to complete a blistering session today but still in the lower quartile of my performance. Perhaps a good dose of statins will get me back into a more average ranking. I shall enquire.

As is usual, I ran ABH down to the beach afterwards and mindful of the Missus' desire to get up to The Farm in a rush, we did not tarry – well, too much. Much of my tarrying involves bumping into people and having a chat. It is rude to just walk away I feel but possibly detrimental to my health to talk for too long, especially having been told to get a move on. Naturally, there was someone on the beach that I knew, and they had a dog that ABH likes to play with. Well, she does the playing, and the other dog studiously ignores her. When I came off the beach a while longer than I intended later, there was someone else who I could not just walk by and ignore. How I am still here is somewhat a relief, but I am sure I would hardly have even noticed if I had been taking statins.

While I was absent and just before I came back to the shop, the Missus took in two deliveries for me. One was the normal irregular grocery that I had placed an order for yesterday and other was postcards that I had ordered more than a week ago. Had the postcards not arrived today, I might have called to find out what had happened with the order. I dismissed the idea that they were waiting for cards to be printed because this company seems reluctant to print more, especially of the ones we are missing.

This came into stark focus later. With nothing better to do today, I attacked the delivery, aiming to fill up our postcard display as much as possible before the start of the season. Most of our best sellers, postcards of The Cove, were there but half a dozen others were out of print. One of these was out of print last year and very possibly the year before. I telephoned the company to see what was going on. They told me that they would need to print a thousand of each postcard to refresh them. Our alternate supplier manages to get around it by printing collections of postcards to make up the 1,000 minimum run. Why this company cannot, I do not know.

The end result is that we are losing postcards gradually. I am not keeping 'out of stock' markers for postcards that will never turn up and have removed them. The display was looking a bit thin anyway and is now looking downright sparse in places. Hopefully, the renewed stock on the other supplier's stand will compensate. We have three postcard stands and I would like to reduce it to two. Perhaps I should view this as an opportunity.

By the time the end of the day came around, it was clear it had been the quietest day we have had for a while. The street had been empty for most of it and the only bit of action we had seen was near the end of the morning. The weather was reasonable, although much high-level cloud had moved in soon into the morning, and the wind had remained light, so it cannot have been that which put people off. Mind, initially, I had come back to the shop in a short sleeve shirt. A couple of hours later I changed up for a mid-layer because I was feeling the chill. It is possible that in that time the afterglow of my blistering gymnasium session had worn off. I am sure that I would not have felt it had I been on statins.

Later, I looked up one of the local weather stations and discovered that during the morning, the wind had been in the east. It ended the day in the northwest again but today it had traversed through the south to get there. I was feeling warm in the later stages of the afternoon but could not be bothered to go and change again.

With the postcards almost completed, I still have mugs and coasters to deal with, another delivery turned up. This had been very quickly turned around from an order I placed two days before and contains some novelties and gifts from a regular supplier of ours. It will give me something to do tomorrow but at present, the boxes crowd the store room and will make the bottling up that I have to do in the morning more difficult.

ABH was a little more keen for her after tea walk today. The event was so ordinary that I cannot remember much about it. I recall that we avoided the Harbour beach because a lifesaving club was down there practising their skills. It must have been successful because I did not see them having to carry anyone out of the water. We left them to it and walked around the block instead.

It will be busier tomorrow, and I must gird my loins, but only a little bit, I suspect. Of course, I would not need to bother if I was on statins.

May 8th – Thursday

First, I am delighted to report that we were much busier today. Perhaps 'delighted' may not exactly be the word to use as it was nothing to do with an upturn in trade. I had 'things' that needed to be done and they piled up rather and had me very busy indeed. As far as customers were concerned, like yesterday we had very few and for a going home present day, that was a bit disappointing not to mention concerning.

We had none of the regular orders in the morning so, I set to clearing the remainder of the postcard delivery which included a number of stoneware mugs. I also spent a little time judging whether I could pare down the postcard displays to one stand and decided that, just yet, it would be a bit of a squeeze, so I will leave it as is for now. My next task was to have a crack at the novelties and gifts that arrived last thing

yesterday but in order to get some of those out, I would need to reorganise the gift shelves to make some room.

Before I could tackle that, we had two more deliveries. One was the drinks that I had ordered yesterday and was fairly easy to put away and the other was the frozen. I always get into a bit of a pickle with the frozen because, obviously, it needs to be put away in a timely fashion. Not helping this time around was the fact that I had chosen the time of the delivery to call my electricity provider to resolve a charging issue. Had I only just started the call, I might have hung up but as it was, I was fairly close to a resolution and did not want to go through the fag of calling again and starting from scratch.

As I put down the telephone to start organising the delivery into which freezers it would go into, we were flooded by the first and only customer rush of the day. Had the order been as small as the one I had written down for the Missus to post, I might have managed more easily. What I was unaware of was that the Missus had added a second order to it in preparation for a planned crew barbeque at the end of May and there were double the amount of boxes I had expected.

With the orders away, I was able to concentrate on clearing the gift delivery and making room on the gift shelves as I went. It was as arduous as it was tedious. I cannot tell you how many snow globes and decorative gulls I unpacked. The outer boxes were packed with bubble wrap in abundance that needed to be slashed with a sharp knife to deflate sufficiently to fit more readily into a refuse sack. The items themselves, many were boxed in polystyrene foam as well as being individually wrapped in small bubble wrap pouches and were excruciatingly fiddly to extract. Each one also had a barcode label attached by elastic. As we do not use the barcodes, each label had to be removed.

It was time consuming and by the time the wine order arrived, there still seemed to be as many cartons of gifts as there was when I started. Because the boxes occupied enough of the store room floor to make the wine delivery in the way, I had to switch to clearing the wine order before I continued with the gifts. Then, having removed the barcode label from a proliferation of small gulls, I realised that the gulls were too small to attach a price label and I should have left the barcode label on so I could use it to attach the price label. Oh, woe is me.

Under our new Coxswain, we seem to have settled into launching Lifeboats on training earlier than we were before. It suits everyone better and allows more time at sea for training and since we are hampered in the winter by poor sea conditions, it is a sensible move. It does mean, however, that I must cram some tea before the shop closes and since I was knee deep in wine and gift cases, bubble wrap, polystyrene and plastic that was a little awkward. It also meant bits of broken polystyrene in my cheese and pickle which was less than ideal.

I made it to the muster time with everyone else and we wasted no time briefing and getting ready to launch. While the duty head launcher went about his business, I introduced a potentially new member of the very excellent Shore Crew to the ways of the very excellent Shore Crew. She is different from all the other members of the very excellent Shore Crew as she is a very pleasant lady and a nurse too – although that is not to suggest that some nurses are not ladies – erm, except for the ones who are men. Anyway, she has only just applied which means she could not join in but I led her through the various aspects of pushing the boat out and, later, pulling the boat back in again.

While the boats were out, we gathered in the crew room to discuss all manner of matter arising from Lifeboat type things, new popes and famous people who have visited The Cove. Since our new very pleasant lady had not run away when the boats came back into the bay, we might assume that she is either very polite and was waiting to run away later, or was not yet put off wanting to join in.

Both boats arrived back in the bay at roughly the same time, gliding across the bay on perfectly calm waters. We had set up as soon as the big boat left earlier and only required to haul a bit a cable to make up for the ebbing tide. From where I was at the top of the slipway with our new member, I was very able to point out to her what was clearly a textbook recovery up the long slip, near low water and in benign conditions. We were not overrun with crew, especially as we had to furnish the Inshore launch with three to comply with the new measures, but it did not take us long to wash down, refuel and make ready for the next launch. We are, after all, a very inclusive, very excellent Shore Crew.

May 9th – Friday

It started off as a smashing little day, if a little cool, which was very good of it then proceeded to go downhill after that, which was not.

ABH and I swerved the beach for a second morning in a row. There was the Harbour tractor to contend with and it was easier to avoid it by heading up to Coastguard Row. The tri-cornered garlic are in full force now and have been joined by quite a proliferation of pinks or thrift. They are strange looking flowers and look like a collection of fancy headed pins in a pin cushion. Alright, maybe that is just me, then. ABH likes to jump up on the wall where the two sit side by side. She moves nimbly between them and takes her time having a sniff.

I was early to the party this morning as we have quite a few deliveries on a Friday ahead of the weekend; I like to get them out of the way. Unfortunately, my enthusiasm was wasted as two of the bigger deliveries, the pasties (sorry, MS) and some groceries, were late. In fact, the pasties were so late that they arrived after I had gone to the gymnasium and the Missus had to deal with them, much to her chagrin. Chagrin is an odd word; there was definitely no grinning involved.

Despite the clouding over and the persistent cool breeze, we were busier than yesterday and, indeed, the day before that – probably put together. We had seen some arrivals during the day, but they had been countered by some departures in the morning. There does not seem to be any definable reason to these fluctuations, so we just have to ride the waves the best we can.

This seemed to be exactly what a small group of surfers were optimistically trying to achieve sat out just off the shore break heading toward high water time. I would say they were having about as much luck as I was over the last couple of days. At least they had more of a choice than I did and could have gone home.

Taking of being optimistic, I came back to the shop after my blistering session at the gymnasium in a shirt again. You would think I would have learnt my lesson from the last time that I did that on Wednesday. Fortunately, today the wind had gone around to the northwest and was not banging through the doorway at me. I was quite chilled but not sufficiently to force me upstairs to change my top but that was largely because I was too idle. ABH and I had taken a walk down to the Harbour beach after I came back from the gymnasium and had found it perfectly temperate there. We had met with a couple setting up a couple of beach chairs over by the wall out of the breeze. Of course, we stopped to talk, and I was captured again on my way back to the shop. It does not seem possible to have just a short walk.

The Missus was away to The Farm just as soon as she could after I came back to the shop ready to work. She mooted last night that we might convert the brick built outhouse of a compost shed into the bee shed.

The compost shed, if you can remember back that far, dear reader, was built to exacting specifications to house three silos so that compost could be rotated between them. Please do not ask me, I have no idea. The shuttering for the silos was particularly complicated because the Missus wanted to be able to remove the bottom layer of one silo to add to the next silo in line. It took many three o'clock in the morning eureka moments to design, so I was a little miffed that she wanted to now get rid of it.

On the other hand, I have been keen that we look at the beekeeping again as it is the only thing up at The Farm that makes any serious money. At the centre of the suggestion is that the compost shed has a concrete base. No one told me that it should have been down to earth for compost and the Missus even gave me a hand laying the concrete. It is the very thing that makes it not very good as a compost shed that is making it ideal for the bee shed where she can keep all her beekeeping equipment.

The Missus has been actively building and fixing things in the last few days and last night explained how she was slicing off rusty bolts with the angle grinder. Her confidence is at such a level that she now is aiming to get to grips with the bee

house – if I can build a 40 metre greenhouse then it obviously cannot be that hard to convert the compost shed into a bee house. I have asked for detailed pictures and measurement and have insisted she start wearing overalls.

Late in the afternoon, I had enough of being manly about wearing a shirt. Land's End weather station told me it was getting warmer in the afternoon, but my body begged to disagree. I had lasted half the day but when I went up for my last cup of tea of the day, I slipped into something more comfortable.

Just when I thought that the whole day would be sedate and unremarkable, I had a last minute visit from a lady twitcher. She reliably informs me that The Cove is host to a group of migrant whimbrels. I am sure that I have heard that name before and I am equally certain that if I trawl through the last 14 years of Diary entries, I will find another, equally exciting entry mentioning them. It is a bird very similar to a curlew but smaller, which is no help at all if you are unfamiliar with what a curlew is. As our very pleasant lady described it, the bird has a curved beak, mottled brown feathers, a white chest and a dark strip across its eyes. She left me the mental image of an ornithological Lone Ranger. Apparently, it is only here briefly. Hi-Yo Silver, away.

ABH was keen on adventure when we took to the street for a walk around after tea. She had me halfway up the cliff to the lookout, but I was not wearing my boots and with a dickie knee, that was not such a good idea. It took some convincing her to turn around as she was quite determined. I will wear my boots tomorrow and she will want nothing to do with it.

It was a splendid bit of evening for a stroll, too. The cloud had cleared away, or rather the sun had moved to where it was not cloudy, the sea was blue and still very flat, and they were very possibly choughs dancing about ahead of us on the Coast Path. The unicorns must have left earlier. It is a shame about not having my boots on as I could have fancied a little stank up the cliff and around; it was such a perfect evening.

Quite what happened in the interim, I have no idea but ABH ended up with one of her tummies and dragged me out so she could eat a mess of pellitory-of-the-wall as she does and as the bleddy hound did before her. It must be a bleddy hound thing. It did not augur well for a peaceful night.

May 10th – Saturday

As glorious mornings go, today's was definitely one of them. It was the morning that all the other mornings this week had alluded to and finally they got their act together and delivered. We will forgive it the little bit of easterly that it has been promoting all week. I am still not clever enough to fathom how it manages to end up in the northwest every day unless it is some sort of local variation. I stopped thinking about it because it was making my head hurt.

Friends have arrived, two brothers who normally holiday in separate weeks are here with their respective wives together in the same week. The first time ever. I asked if we should expect any cataclysmic event from such confluence, such as the arrival of four horsemen or the sea turning to custard.

They were followed by two early walkers passing through on their way to Pendeen. They were from Canada, which I believe is one of the biggest states of America. It happens occasionally that you find a natural affinity with customers and enjoy a convivial conversation that goes beyond mere politeness. I am sure much of that was due to not sharing my 'knowledge' of their country which might have produced a slightly different outcome. They eventually tore themselves away to continue their journey blessed with knowing that Pendeen is the home of the North Inn that produces excellent home-made curries.

We were satisfyingly much busier than in the last few days. It was a very low bar to beat. Quite where everyone had come from, I have no idea, but it seemed that they were mostly visitors derived from the fact that they were buying gifts and souvenirs. We also tore through some pasties (sorry, MS) in the late morning and in the middle of the day. I do not think I need fret about tomorrow as I upped the number for this weekend. It was also very pleasing to see visitors buying their groceries from us even though it demonstrated that I had not ordered enough sliced bread.

The busyness might have had something to do with the weather. My friend and neighbour from up the hill told me that it was much warmer today. It took me a minute to process that because the east wind had ramped up through the morning and was then blowing in at twenty miles per hour. Earlier in the week, I would have been chilly behind the counter in such a breeze but today I was reasonably comfortable. Since I had not been out, I must assume that he was right and especially given the number of people wandering about in lighter attire.

Business dropped off after four o'clock when the café closed. Our busyness is closely tied to their operation. Up until then we had seen some very pleasant customers pass through the shop. At this time of year, we have time to enjoy their company and today seemed to have more than a fair share of happy meetings. It is one of the many things about the job that makes it worthwhile. Like the lady who told me that she hoped our pasties were like her mother used to make and when I asked where Mother was from, I was told Michigan. I was able to tell her that my grandfather has spent some time in Michigan in the 1930s, mining, making cars and being a milkman, from what I can understand. There is clearly a Cornish ex-pat community there. I am not entirely sure that grandfather had anything to do with that, but it is probably fortunate that it is a bit too late to ask.

I had watched, passing by, an increasing number of motor cars dressed to kill and with stickers on the side. I had assumed some sort of rally and as many were sports cars of one sort or another, I also guessed it was a race. When an old Cornwall Fire Brigade Land Rover stopped outside, I took the opportunity to go and ask the driver.

He was bedecked in a most un-fire brigade purple wig and bright caftan and told me it was a one-day tour of Cornwall involving challenges and quizzes and all in aid of Cornwall Air Ambulance. It appeared to be a good deal of fun and I emptied my pocket in their favour – fortunately, I was only carrying loose change at the time. Well, there was no knowing if some other needy charity might call by in the last hour of shop opening and then where would I be.

The last hour was exceedingly quiet and more obvious against the busyness of the day. The Missus was late coming back having spent the day cleaning the cabin and afterwards taking Mother home. Consequently, I was a little tardy taking ABH around after tea when it was obvious that the day had become a little tired and tarnished from its opulence earlier. As we came back along the back nine, I could feel small flecks of rain in the air, a portent of the end of our little run of fine weather.

It was still dry later, however, when I took ABH out again for her last spin. I reflected that if we did have poor weather tomorrow it would be my own fault for ordering more pasties than last week. Bet it is not raining in Michigan.

May 11th – Sunday

A few days ago, someone alerted me to a forecast that suggested that today would be full of rain. I had a geek at the Meteorological Office website which informed me that it might be a little cloudy on Sunday but otherwise dry. The BBC on the other hand did indeed commit to showers on the day. More people made the claim yesterday, so I looked again in the late afternoon. The Meteorological Office had relented and reluctantly shown a concentration of heavy rain in the middle of the day. Conversely, the BBC entrenched their original position and extended the period that that said that the rain would fall, but it would still be showers and not that heavy. Good, that is settled then. Oh, and yes, Michigan had blazing sunshine and 18 degrees.

I stuck my head out of the window first thing and confirmed that it was indeed raining out there. It was a very early first thing, too, because ABH was clearly champing at the bit to get out into it – until she had to get out into it and then changed her mind a bit.

The rain was not all that heavy, but it was continuous. I thought to check the rain radar since I had spare time in the morning and there was some particularly heavy stuff, highlighted in red, between us and the Channel Islands. It was heading our way, so the Meteorological Office may yet have the upper hand in the battle of the forecasts. It did not matter all that much to me; I already had far too many pasties (sorry, MS) for the day.

As expected, we had very few customers during the morning. Along with the rain, there was a forceful easterly blowing straight at me over the counter that sent me scurrying for a fleece not long after we opened.

Things started to pick up in the late morning after the rain had gone but it was a bit of a flash in the pan. Both the BBC and the Meteorological Office were way off the mark today, which is why I do not bother looking at their websites with any regularity or confidence. While that came as no surprise, the customer in the vanguard of the post rain rush – term used advisedly - threw in a bizarre request. Actually, it was more unusual than that but bizarre sounded better than unusual in my head. The gentleman of the couple asked if we sold hair driers. At the time there was a healthy breeze blowing in from the east and I asked if they really needed one.

Alright, I admit that flummoxed me for a moment and the jest bought me some time. I was, however, not to be outdone or knowing undersold – I have no idea what it means, but it sounds good. We keep a hair drier in the shop to defrost the freezers at the end of the year when we mothball them for the winter. I said that they could borrow that for the week. Phew, another satisfied and slightly bemused customer. They came back later and told me that the landlords of where they were staying had provided a better offer. Perhaps they opened an east facing window.

The rain stayed away for the rest of the day, but it remained grey and overcast. It looked like it could rain at any minute, and I suspect that our visitors did not want to take the risk. The other aspect of the day was that it just did not look very inviting and although we were busier than the morning, it never really gathered enough pace to make it interesting.

With plenty of quiet time on my hands I made a start on the cash and carry order that I had put off a week. I got as far as all the non-food items before a few sparse customer visits put an end to it for a while. I was going to start on it again but one of our regular visitors turned up and made enquiries about our posh mugs. She had broken one that she had bought from us previously and was looking to replace it. It is a familiar story. The trouble was, she could not quite remember what it looked like exactly. As luck would have it, I had the supplier catalogue to hand, so I lent her that to have a look at to see if anything jogged her memory.

A little while later she came back none the wiser. Knowing that our mug display was in dire need of refreshing, I emptied the store room of the three boxes of the type of mug she was after and announced that it was the choice that we were able to offer. She called in reinforcements in the shape of her husband who made the choice for her. The event was sufficient to highlight the deficiency of mugs on display in the shop, so I spent a good part of the afternoon rectifying the situation. It took a while because there were quite some gaps and demonstrated how popular our Dunoon mugs are despite the premium price. It is one less thing to be concerned about in the run up to half term which we are hoping will be very busy.

The lady with the mugs advised me that back home, her neighbours were being advised to stay indoors and not exert themselves. Home was north of Camborne in a place where they have fights over trivial things such as the colour of a rose, I am

told. A weather warning was in place for hot temperatures of greater than 25 degrees. This struck me as a temperature that would be uncomfortable for working in but not sufficient to be injurious to health.

I recall a couple of years ago temperatures into the 30s that were a bit more severe and warranted such a call. Perhaps the people north of Camborne are more used to a colder climate and therefore more susceptible to even moderately high temperatures. I can understand the people of the Northeast struggling because they routinely go about in winter in vests and nighties. They would certainly struggle to find sufficient clothing to remove to stay cool.

We hobbled along until the end of the day and closed down with a whimper. It was certainly not our finest hour, and we hope for better – starting tomorrow. We were told that more rain was on the way which we would enjoy overnight, which is alright by us as long as it was gone by the morning. It was even better that it had not started when I took ABH out for her last stroll of the evening. Sometimes, very occasionally, things work out in our favour.

May 12th – Monday

It had not occurred to me that it would still be raining when ABH eventually crawled out of bed and decided that she would rather like to go for a walk. I had looked out as well but had failed to notice the weather other than it looking a bit gloomy. I just had time to grab my light waterproof as I was dragged out of the door.

Thankfully it was an improving picture and the rain that was not very heavy anyway, had cleared out by the time I went downstairs to make ready the shop. I had time to send off a caustic note to the Laurel and Hardy Newspaper Company before I went down. I had sent the original request three weeks ago, so they have no excuse for not sending an acknowledgement. By the end of the day, I still had not heard anything. I sense we might be having words soon.

Judging from the increasing number of enquiries, I think I may have overcooked our delay on newspapers by a week. I have made a mental note and will get them a week earlier next year.

The other thing that I managed to send off just in time was my response to the fact-finding consultation regarding the proposal to turn The Farm lane into a bridleway. I think it is the Ramblers Association or some such body's proposal. Based in southeast Cornwall, I mean practically Devon, they must have poured over a map and selected likely looking routes.

The lane is not a right of way, it is an access road for the landowners along it to access their property. I cannot imagine anyone local clamouring for the route to be made official or to have it extended as a few already use it for a stroll without any

complaint from walker or landowner. Why they cannot just leave the status quo, I cannot imagine.

The proposer, however, wants to extend the end of the lane across private land to Brew Lane on the other side. The temerity of it. This will increase traffic down the lane and since we spend our own hard earned maintaining the lane, this will just make it worse. I cannot see the much maligned council, the parish council or the Rambler Association spending any money on it, so they can all begger off.

I noticed on Saturday, but failed to mention it, that the surf was looking pretty good. The sea that had been fairly flat up until that point attracted a bit of swell and with an easterly offshore blowing away, the surf boys were in, erm, clover – seaweed, perhaps. I did not do much looking out there yesterday but today, the surf was still there and so too were a small collection of surfers plying a pretty decent break halfway to North Rocks.

In the absence of much to do at times – many times during the day, I finished off the cash and carry list. It does not need to be completed by Wednesday or Thursday but if I get most of it done now and leave it on the website shopping cart, I am in a good position if we get busy or I get distracted. I also sent off the new beachware order and the order for wet shoes and wetsuits. That had been ready since February when I finished the stock. It was easier to get out of the way then and I knew that the position would not change much even after Easter.

Getting these orders away and the deliveries planned should put us in a good position for the half term in a couple of week's time. Even if it is not as busy as we hoped, it should be busy enough to cover the bills when they start coming in.

The Missus had spent the day up at The Farm again doing some more clearing up. We have a handy pile of old tyres left from the previous owner who kindly left them all for us along with a pile of asbestos. The asbestos has gone but we still find tyres and old bits of machinery. There is a local private waste company that will come along and collect – for a price – but it will be worth it to get it out of the way. It is the same one we used for our building work, and they are very accommodating. Not everyone would be happy to come up the lane to do the collection.

She has also hired the digger again and it is arriving tomorrow morning. We have two outside growing areas – alright, we have two and a half acres of growing areas but two we have prepared for planting things in. One is next to the potting shed previously known as greenhouse where there are three standard water butts. The second is halfway down the field and has no access to water at all. The Missus, quite rightly, thought that one a little closer to the greenhouse and its water supply would be a smart move. To take the turf off, a digger is required. I would have said, any excuse to get her precious toy back, but she put in a good argument.

The Cove is still quite empty in the evenings for my walk around the block with ABH. It is exceedingly pleasant. I must make the effort before the night starts to put on my walking boots and take her up the cliff. After a long day at the tin stove, it is going to take a monumental force of will to get me there before I set out with her. It is not until I get to the bottom of the Coast Path that it looks so very appealing. Must try harder as all my teachers and most of my work bosses used to say.

May 13th – Tuesday

I had been quite comfortable in a short sleeve shirt all day yesterday – well, all day from when I came back from the gymnasium. That was clearly far too much for the small gods of grumpy shopkeepers who cannot abide to see a grumpy shopkeeper comfortable at his work. An easterly breeze carrying a bit of chilly air with it blew through the doorway at me all day. I could not be fagged to go and get changed, so I stood there and suffered for most of the day – I could be fagged later when I went to make a cup of tea and changed.

It looked pretty enough out there. The skies were blue and dotted with white fluffy clouds, about half and half. The meteorologists would say four eights or oktas, I think. I used to be able to count quite successfully in octal when I were a young computing lad but there again, I had a good teacher. That was before they invented hexadecimal. The sea joined in the blueness but looked like the swell might have decreased. It was just about right for the surf school out there just ahead of low water in the middle of the day. When I looked later, the swell had definitely dissipated along with the number of keen surfers.

Once again, we were not overly busy, although we did have our moments with a several customers in the shop all at once. So not busy were we that I completely failed to meet the deadline for the pasty order (sorry, MS). I was distracted by one thing or another and when I looked at the clock, it had just slipped by the allotted time.

One of the distractions, or maybe it was another, was trying to find acrylic risers to better display our posh mugs. The risers allow me to place the ones at the back of the shelf at a higher level than the ones in front. I use a slightly shorter riser for the one in the middle. I thought of doing this last year and put it off so often that it did not get done at all. I think the one thing holding me back was, in the back of my mind, the fact that I vaguely remembered some years ago throwing away a couple of sacks full of the very thing I needed now. The guilt and horror of having to purchase them again is obviously at the root of my subconscious reticence.

I had thought that there would be a proliferation of them on the retail shop fitting websites, but I was sorely disappointed. There were several sites that had the 10 centimetres taller ones but the shorter, 5 centimetres ones were very hard to find. It took a while but eventually I discovered a company that I had never heard of and

took a risk. The website showed the transparent risers that I was after but alongside were the same sizes but in gaudy colours. I would have dismissed these out of hand but for the fact they were labelled 'limited stock' and on sale for 40 pence less per unit than the others. Given that they were far more expensive than I imagined, this was an attractive proposition. I bought a selection of all the colours available thinking that at least a couple would be less offensive on the shelf.

Obviously, now that I had not ordered any, we sold more pasties today than we had for the last two days together. I do not think we are in any danger of running out tomorrow, but it will upset my ordering for the weekend on Thursday. As you know, dear reader, pasty ordering is a lost art form and requires precision, daring and, erm, other things.

I remembered the bread order, mainly because we did not need one and when the end of the day came along, there was greengrocery to order as well as milk and other groceries. Just because I had a very important meeting across the road at the Lifeboat station, I was delayed leaving the shop.

The Operations Management meeting is a big and important meeting where all the big and important Lifeboat people discuss big and important things. I think they only invite me, a lowly Head Launcher, along to make me feel better. It does not but I nod in all the right places and tell them how happy the very excellent Shore Crew are, even if they are not.

The meeting does not last very long, and I was out taking ABH around the block only a little later than I would otherwise have done. She was looking a little under the weather when she returned from The Farm and Mother said that she had been lolling around with her for much of the day instead of exploring the field as she would normally do.

She was not overly keen about going to a walk but soon found her usual pace. We met with the ladies at the corner house on Coastguard Row where she will get a treat if they are about. Where they are gets the last of the sun of the day and is a sheltered spot. They had a couple of visitors, and they were all sitting about on the granite flags high up from the lane and amongst the generous flora about them. It looked remarkably English, like tea on the sprawling lawn of a country house, but far less formal. I wish I could think of exactly what it reminded me of but in the absence of that, the tea party will have to do.

By the time we got back, ABH had found her mojo again and plagued me for the rest of the evening. I had only five pages of my book to read and it took me until bedtime to read them. It was a seminal moment too. It was the last of Philip Kerr's fourteen Bernie Gunther books which I have enjoyed immensely. I have only ever read one book twice, the Mortdecai Trilogy by Kyril Bonfigliani which strangely made it to a film, since no one had ever heard of it, with Johnny Depp. I may make Bernie Gunther an exception.

May 14th – Wednesday

How long is a piece of string. Or more specifically, how long is the piece of string that we haul the Lifeboat up on. Actually, we already knew how long it is, or the engineers who turned up to fix our problems with it did. It seems that its length was part of the problem.

It was a beautiful day for finding out about lengths of rope. It was the sort of that that a grumpy shopkeeper might have chosen to slip into little boy trousers had he only known. The fact that yesterday he was ruing wearing a shirt rather put a dent in the confidence that it might be worth making the jump. Instead, I spent the afternoon ruing not making the change.

I was informed yesterday that the Lifeboat engineers would be coming today to look at the long slip cable. From the moment the new one went onto the drum it was not right, and it had become less right the more it has been used. We have various theories about what went wrong but whatever the cause, the rolled up cable resembles an untidy bird's nest and does not end central on the drum when the boat is in. We have tried unwinding it and winding it back on a couple of times but to no avail mainly because the cable itself is now misshapen where it had wound up in the wrong position.

The plan today was to let the engineers have a geek and to see if we could all come up with a master plan of what to do next. In order to get the cable run out and off the drum, we had to launch the boat. Being the middle of a working day, we were a bit thin on the ground on shore side, so we borrowed a member of the Boat Crew, who was most obliging.

We then spent the best part of an hour letting the engineers look and ponder. I joined them to offer any information I might be able to give and to also learn how they saw things. It was most informative. It had been determined that the old cable did not sit central on the drum when the boat was on the cradle. I had idea that this was viewed as a problem or why, but they told that by resting at an angle it put additional strain on the sliphook, or seahook as they called it. This is the steel jaw that allows us to launch the boat at the pull of the launch wire.

Someone with a clever ruler determined that one wind of the drum is 2.6 metres of cable. Knowing how many winds that would fit on the drum and the length of the slipway allowed them to calculate the length of cable required that would come to rest, fully rolled up, with the cable in the middle of the drum. They also factored in the lowest tide and, hey presto, we ended up with a new cable that was 150 metres long, making it a little less than one drum width longer than the previous one.

The consensus was that the extra wind on the drum exerted a greater force on the bottom layer of cable than it was able for. It may not have been the root cause of the problems, but it was certainly contributory.

They asked that I pull out what I determined to be the maximum length of cable we would even need on the lowest of tides. This they would use as the baseline for their calculations. We were heading towards low water on a spring tide but not the biggest. I hesitated for a moment because if I got it wrong, conceivably we might end up with a cable too short for the lowest tides. Then I put on my bravest smile and gave it my best guess, erm, cleverly calculated estimate, I mean.

After all those shenanigans, we still had to bring the boat back in. The engineers did their best to wind on the slack we had pulled out, using a big hammer to make sure it aligned as it wound. When we had the right amount of cable left for recovery, we put our own man back on the winch and I took our Boat Crew volunteer down to the bottom of the slip to await the boat's return.

The crew on the boat had undertaken some training while they waited but they did not stray out of the bay. We were mostly set up on shore to bring them in and they were quickly on scene and at the end of the slipway in no time. Despite being only three, we executed what was clearly a textbook recovery at low water, bring the boat up the long slip and into the boathouse in a well-practised sequence of procedures. We are, after all, a very slick, very excellent Shore Crew.

The Missus had given up time on her digger to cover the shop for me while I Lifeboated. She was even less pleased that while I was away our beachware supplier dropped thirty boxes of new stock at our door. I was not exactly delighted as it had come with no advanced notice. What was more concerning was that we had received notice that the wetsuit and wetsuit order was being delivered today as well but that was coming with Doing Parcels Dreadfully later in the day.

With the Missus being very keen to get away, I hurriedly sorted out the boxes staying in the shop and those that would need to go up to The Farm with the Missus. Loading the truck was further hampered by someone choosing to park opposite the shop, so we had to wait until they were gone before being able to park outside ourselves. That also was further hampered by the truck not being entirely empty from some of the transportation that the Missus had done previously and we had to squeeze and cajole the boxes into the remaining space. Even then, some boxes had to remain behind for the Missus to pick up on her return.

We had been quiet for the first couple of days of the week. Indeed, the whole morning had also been quiet, and it was not until the delivery that we started to see an increase in customers arrive. It became even busier, of course, when I opened the boxes and started processing the contents in order to get rid of some of them to make some space that we would need later.

The biggest boxes and the ones that I wanted to get out of the way first were full of flip flops. We had already started selling some of the remaining stock and the wetshoes had started to sell in some abundance as the weather improved. The

delivery was therefore necessary and timely. The main time consuming issue with the flip flops and indeed the wetshoes as well is the abundance of packaging that comes wrapped around them. Each pair has its own cellophane wrapper that needs to be removed, and each pair has a polystyrene ring around the toe post. The purpose of the polystyrene ring is a bit of a mystery but the process of removing them is fraught – it skins your fingers around the side of the nail. Apart from the risk of industrial injury, it is also a balls-aching task.

Not that I would have wished them away, but the task was extended by the number of customer interruptions that seemed to increase as the afternoon went on. Then, a couple of hours before closing, the wetsuits and wetshoes order arrived – well, half of it did. You must remember, dear reader, that this order comes via the inscrutable machinations of the Doing Parcels Dreadfully company. On this occasion had sent notification that they had split the delivery but that both would be delivered within an hour window starting five minutes apart. If I had wished to spend any time wondering how they might achieve such a feat, I would have wasted my time because they did not bother and delivered only one of them without telling me.

I shall no doubt receive the second half of the delivery when I least expect it but, in the meanwhile, the first half threw up its own issues. I have repeatedly told the supplier that we do not want products coloured pink. The reason for this is that boys and girls will have a blue or a red shoe if there is no other choice. No boy in his right mind will wear a pink shoe lest his mates find out, even if he was inclined so to do, and not all girls will wear pink either. Therefore, I would rather have a shoe colour that 100 percent of my customers seeking a size 12 shoe would buy than a colour that on 30 percent of them would choose. If we had the space, it would not be a problem, but we do not, and it is.

Therefore, I was less than pleased when opened the box that contained the shoes to discover that 30 percent of the stock was pink. It was actually 100 percent of the stock that had been delivered, the other colours must in the other half of the delivery. When I was already pressed for time, having an avoidable issue thrown at me that I must now spend time resolving, was irritating in the extreme. If I had not been so busy I might have been inclined to call our man at the company and rip his ears off – metaphorically speaking, of course, dear reader – if he had been present that might have been different. Luckily for him, I will call tomorrow when I may be a little more polite.

We remained busy until the end of the day and I was still processing and putting out the flip flops well after we closed. It is the first sign of the summer season and how quickly we forget the trials and tribulations of large deliveries. I will be busy all day tomorrow putting away the remaining stocks of toys, gifts and sun lotion. The store room now needs to be kept clear for a large cash and carry delivery on Saturday.

ABH was not all that keen to take an after tea stroll. Not that she was under the weather again, but the Missus had not returned from The Farm until late and she had

not long been running around the field. I took her out as usual at last knockings and found that it was still light, it was still warm and there were people still enjoying the Harbour. It was certainly that sort of day.

May 15th – Thursday

At six o'clockish when I took ABH out for a spin, I noted that our easterly breeze was back. It was this that made up my mind that I would stick with my big boy trousers for the time being which is also the reason the wind moderated and went around to the west and the shop was an oven making me wish I had worn my small boy trousers.

I do not think that I would find much argument in suggesting that today was probably the first rip gribbler of the season, although the day before yesterday was also a contender. Clear blue skies dominated with a hint of low cloud out to the north and a few cumuli in the east but not a one to bother us in The Cove. Our solar panels were melting off the roof and I half expected a call from the National Grid asking us to tone it down a bit.

The beach was looking resplendent in the sunshine and with no swell and a westerly, not a surfer in sight. I noticed yesterday that our rock field is back with a vengeance and there is not much sand between the back of the reef and The Beach car park wall. There is plenty of sand piled up from the back of the rock field to the dunes in a steep escarpment all the way along to North Rocks. There was someone camped there yesterday morning presumably having spent the night. I am not sure that I would camp on the beach for all the critters jumping about in the sand but there again, I am of an age when camping does not feature on any bucket list or life plan. I am sure it was a memorable experience for whoever it was.

We are generally quiet in the morning, so I set about clearing away the last of the bits I had kept behind from the delivery to adorn the few slim spaces left on our shelves. It took a little rearranging to get everything out, but it is done now, and the inventory is updated with the relevant prices and volumes. I had also been meaning to move our display of geodes and rock gifts out of the middle aisle as they are not selling there. It might be because no one wants them but moving them was worth a try.

I moved them to the gift aisle where they sit closer to similar products. Part of the problem is that they are high up. However, the loose geodes will go missing in small hands and the delicate gem trees will not last five minutes. I sort of knew that before I bought them, but I thought I would take the risk that they would sell higher up. We will know after half term, and I might have to make alternative arrangements and be prepared to lose a few.

Yesterday, while I was busy sending stock up to The Farm, the Missus was busy bringing stuff back. I am not sure how she ended up with an excess, but she brought

down around 40 tomato plants and a dozen cucumber plants to put on sale outside the shop. Obviously, these need to be brought in at the end of the day and wheeled out in the morning. They also need to be watered, which was lucky that I had nothing better to do with my time, ahem. They will also be in the way come Saturday morning, so I am going to have to find somewhere else for them to go on Friday evening. Actually, I decided to put them where the newspapers usually go but from Monday, they will be in the way again because we will have newspapers – bring out the flags and sound the hunting horn.

We were not quite as busy as yesterday, so in between customers I called our wetsuit company representative to have a chat about pink shoes. Apparently, it was my fault for not specifying. I could see his point. I placed the order though a general order route and they have many customers and could not be expected to recall that we did not want pink. We agreed that we would run with it and if we have an abundance of pink shoes left at the end of the season, he would take them back, which was very fair.

I was about to put the invoice away but decided to check the prices before I did so. It was only then that I discovered they had sent the wrong ladies' wetsuits. I asked the Missus to check the rest of the order, which was as well she did. Not only did we get pink shoes, we also got pink shoes of the wrong size. I must put my hand up to the confusion there because I specified size 12/31 when it should have been 12/30. They sent size 31 which is UK size 13. Admittedly, they could have asked but since we need to sort out the ladies' wetsuits for the right type, I will ask that they send a volume of the correct size shoes – in anything other than pink.

On a day such as today, there was nothing else for it but to have a bit of Lifeboat training. Days like this are made for pushing the boat out. We were lucky and have two to push out.

On the shore we were much better staffed but not much. Once we had covered the Inshore boat with the regulation minimum of three, we were left with just two of us plus a winchman to launch the big boat. Launching the boat was fine, but we had to put some effort in to set up for short slip recovery. I do confess that it requires quite a bit of effort to conduct a textbook recovery with just two on the team plus one in the winch room. Having done it yesterday, I was hoping that the boat recover would be staggered.

It was very much a case of being careful what you wish for. It had been ordained that tonight our boat would team up with St Mary's Lifeboat from the Isles of Scilly for towing exercises. As you might imagine towing exercises are not much fun on your own and it is always better with someone else you can actually tow. St Mary's, however, is a bit out on a limb and we agreed to meet them sort of halfway at Seven Stones Lightship.

It takes the best part of forty minutes to get to Seven Stones and, unfortunately about the same back again. Therefore, we did not see the boat again until gone nine o'clock, which is a long wait. Happily, one of the new very excellent Shore Crew brought cake, which made the idling so much more acceptable. It also meant that the Inshore boat was back well ahead of the big boat and we were able to make use of the crew when they came back after putting the boat away.

Even though the big boat was late coming back, there was still sufficient water to execute what was clearly a textbook recovery on the short slip with the remnants of the setting sun on the horizon. It did not take us long to wash down, bring the boat into the boathouse and fuel up for the next service. However, it was well past my bedtime when we finished, and I was glad to get home. We are, after all, a very sleepy, very excellent Shore Crew.

May 16th – Friday

Just when you think that the weather is getting into its pace, it goes and lets you down again. After a reasonable start today, we got covered in high level cloud that lasted all of the morning. It broke halfway through the afternoon but by that time it did not matter overly.

It has been much busier this week. I only really noticed in review as it has crept up slowly. It is how May goes, and we are only a week away from the half term. It is also the reason that I have been calling in orders to bolster our stock ahead of the holiday. There are a couple of more things to order, and I keep meaning to write a list of things for the Missus to bring back from The Farm but so far, I have not managed to get around to it.

I sent off a message to our wetsuit company man having counted all the things that arrived. The ladies' wetsuits were the wrong type and some of the shoes we wanted did not turn up because I had been confused by the European shoe sizes. I had a message back from him this morning pointing out that we had not specified the product number in our order and that we had used the wrong words to describe the wetsuits which led to the confusion their end. He sent some order forms for us to use and also suggested that we could order from the website.

I was a little miffed that he had placed the entire blame onto us. We had been ordering in the same way for multiple years without issue and all of a sudden it is a problem. I decided that I would try and be polite as possible as it was not worth falling out over. However, I was not going to take it completely lying down and suggested that in case of confusion in future, they might want to give me a call instead of guessing what I wanted. I tucked that into the middle of lots of niceness, so it did not look as bitter as I intended it to be.

I filled out the forms, which would be a pain in the bottom for a bigger order – they are two forms to start with – and asked if they could set me up for online ordering, which I hoped would be easier.

I left the Missus champing at the bit again while I slipped away to the gymnasium for a blistering session. ABH was keen for a run down to the Harbour beach after I came back and this time it was not my fault we were delayed; she refused point blank to come off the beach. It was only after I went up to the top of the slip that she eventually came and joined me and only then because there was a coach party coming by and she wanted to meet everyone.

The Missus was away to The Farm almost the second I came back. Yesterday, she brought back the first consignment of rocket and baby spinach. These are, sorry were, bagged up and available for purchase in the dairy fridge. Hopefully, this will just be the start, although when she came back today, she came back empty handed. Outside the shop, the tomato plants are selling well, which surprised me. Who takes someone back a tomato plant for looking after their cat? The cucumber plants have not moved at all. You definitely would not take a cucumber plant back for someone feeding your tortoise.

We have in-laws visiting – mine, not hers. They had spent some of the day with her at The Farm yesterday and their dog and ABH had a whale of a time I am told. She looked pretty worn out yesterday and refused to take a walk with me when I came back for her while the boats were out. Today the Missus went up on her own but came back early when they headed over to the shop which is why the Missus was keen to get away smartly in the morning.

In the meanwhile, I was increasingly tied up with customers in the shop. Earlier in the day, I had managed to top up the preserves and chutneys shelf from excess stock. I am getting quite enthusiastic and efficient about all this preparation. Do not worry, dear reader, it will not last. By the end of the day, I had also successfully cleared the storeroom floor ahead of the cash and carry delivery tomorrow. In fact, the whole day came together rather well.

I did realise that I would have to pay dearly for such a marvel and the recompense came in the form of my right false ear failing quite early on in the day. It is the same problem as before where the unit powers up but then failed to amplify any sound. It led to a day of utter frustration where I was unable to hear customers and had to constantly ask them to repeat themselves. I imagine that it was as frustrating for the customers, too.

It is an irritation in the extreme and just before a busy week. I am waiting for the left ear to die as well, which it surely will. Even if the optician who looks after ears believes me this time around, it will take six weeks to have them sent off, fixed and returned. The worst case will be if the left one does not break down soon. They will only send off the broken one which means repeating the process when it does. I will

be without full hearing for the entire busy season. I doubt very much that I will be able to convince them to replace the units entirely, which would be the sensible solution but from my experience so far, there is nothing sensible about them.

We had full sunshine for the last knockings of the day, and it was an exceeding pleasant walk around the block after tea. It was still exceedingly pleasant in the late evening, too, with one family hanging on to the sliver of beach down in the Harbour. Unfortunately, they had a dog that seemed to bark incessantly. I know most dogs bark at some time, some more than others but this one went on constantly, and I mean constantly, for the best part of an hour. It clearly disturbed ABH enough for her to respond in kind which was not helpful when I was trying to sleep. We came to an agreement in the end that if she stopped, I would stop kicking her backside.

May 17th – Saturday

Very quickly this morning I discovered that my left false ear had stopped working as well. This was a positive event as I can now return both at the same time, so I thought to call the optician that does ears immediately. I had to look up the telephone number on the Internet. I also very quickly discovered that I probably need the optician that does eyes as well. There are two shops of the same name in Penzance and I had called the estate agent in error.

Exactly because I was handicapped for the foreseeable, the small gods of grumpy shopkeepers sent me a proliferation of question asking customers, just to rub it in. They started early, too. So far in the season, our customers have not been bothered to stir until the middle of the day with very few exceptions. Today, they all mounted an assault from much earlier on and I was busy right through until the middle of the afternoon when it started to slow a little.

Making me even busier was the cash and carry delivery that arrived not long before we opened. Last year, the drivers were much earlier, which was useful, but as long as the driver arrives before we open, it is fine. Of course, not knowing when the driver would turn up, I had to be up at sparrow's when not even ABH was interested in getting out of bed. I was all ready for the day and my cup of tea drunk by the time she put in an appearance, and we took to the Harbour beach for a quick run out.

Even at that point in the day it was looking glorious. There were cloudless blue skies all over and the sun was sitting above the cliffs in the direction of Escalls, although it might not have been that far over. It was warm then, but that stiff easterly breeze was back and lasted until the end of the morning – or some other unspecified time because I really was not paying much attention.

By the end of the day, I had managed to clear most of what was clearable of the delivery. The things like the cases of water, and excess cans of things will need to be moved to less obtrusive positions when there are less obtrusive positions to move

them to. There are drinks left behind, too, but those will wait until the morning when I can put them out without customers about. Given the sunshine we had today, there will be plenty of bottling up to do in the morning.

The late afternoon let the side down a bit. I had not really noticed, but the sky slowly clouded over at some point and by closing time it was looking a little dull. Most of our visitors had cleared out by then but there were still some milling about and stopping by for groceries that they had forgotten from their Tesmorburys deliveries. One lady a few days ago just caught us before we closed, and I was happy to let her in since she said she knew what she wanted. Sadly for her, we only had bags of potatoes in one or two kilogramme packs and were unable to sell her the one potato she had come in for. I have made a mental note to see if buying single potatoes is a new thing and may have to adapt accordingly.

The restrictions for dogs on the beach kicked in from Thursday just gone. Apparently, that is the start of the official bathing season. It is a relatively new thing that came about in reaction to the EU Bathing Water Directive and is when water monitoring for quality starts in England and Wales. I just hope that we do not have any Scottish bathing water leaking in this direction as that would really upset the apple cart.

For some, and probably many, the restriction of having dogs on the beach only before ten o'clock in the morning and six o'clock in the evening is a notional concept. Today, the beach was littered with dogs running about. I had been asked recently, 'if I bring my dog to the beach, will I be caught by the dog warden'. I struggled to restrain myself from saying that my crystal ball was in for repair and simply reiterated the rules and that attendance on the beach with their dog was a matter between them and their conscience. It seems an unwritten law that those who care not for the ban are unlikely to be caught but if I went down, for example, the dog warden would magically appear out of the dunes to arrest me.

We avoided the beach anyway, even though it was well after six o'clock when we headed around the block after tea. The cloud had gone again by that time and we strolled around under blue skies and with the sun in our eyes. The car park was a third full with all the motors parked along the sea wall for a view of the impending sunset. The sea, that had looked at a glance, reasonably calm all day, was a bit more animated and banging in on the rocks under the sea wall when we passed by. It was perfectly temperate too despite a bit of breeze knocking about again.

There was no barking dog to keep ABH on her toes later in the evening for which I was very grateful. It has been a bit of a day and sleep was calling quite insistently. It seemed rude to disappoint it.

May 18th – Sunday

The day started off as I would have rather liked it to continue, with blue skies and sunshine and just a little by way of breeze chopping in from the east. The busyness we had at the outset yesterday morning seemed to be a flash in the pan, although we did have a small peak at one point before ten o'clock. It was at least the late middle of the morning before we saw any serious shopping going on.

I had come down to the shop early to get the bottling up done. There was more than I thought and finished it off just after pausing to open the shop. It was as well that we were a bit quiet. I did an assessment of the number of pasties (sorry, MS) we had left from yesterday and thought that it was probably borderline that we had enough. I decided to bake another half dozen from frozen to bolster the numbers because it would be hard to do later. As it happened, we had six left over at the end of the day. I am still glad I cooked them as it would have been far too close for comfort, else.

The Missus parked the truck outside and together we brought in and distributed the stock I had asked her to bring down yesterday. She had everything apart from the wetshoes. We would not miss them yet as the order was really to make sure we had a good starting point for the half term holiday. We have enough on display for our current needs with the exception of size 12 for children that we learnt earlier in the week is size 30 EU size. What an education it is reading The Diary.

Having left me fully stocked, the Missus left me to go diggering with her digger. She picked exactly the wrong week to hire it because she has been distracted with all manner of things going on. With just two days left before it goes back, I do not think that she will be out of it for a moment. She cannot have been best pleased that I have to take my false ears into the menders on Monday but at least I will cancel the gymnasium.

I had my own set of distractions today. First, we were busy again, although possibly not as busy as yesterday, which kept me behind the counter for a lot of the day. Secondly, I was mindful that time is slipping by, and we are woefully short of shorts and have barely any bikinis. If I get an order away tomorrow, the stock should be here for the end of the week. There is, of course, the distinct possibility that the sun will run and hide with so many children on their holidays, I know I would if I had the option, and they will not be needed at all. We do hope that there will be at least a little sunshine to tempt them out.

During the day, I also made up a label for the Boathouse Farm produce. The old label no longer worked because the label software had been updated. It was only a little thing but took a little while to get right. I had also been meaning to top up the balls in the ball stand and to update the price list on the front of the stand. As this would require the use of the laminator, I also did the information pages that the Missus had asked me to put with the tomato plants on sale at the front of the shop.

I have been placing the trays of tomato and cucumber plants where the newspapers usually go. This has been convenient, but the newspapers arrive tomorrow, and I will

need the space. When it came time to close up, I struggled to find new places for them. They are now officially a pain in the rear. If they were not selling so well they would be growing at the bottom of the sea wall.

I finished the laminating and took the wrapping off the balls that they are delivered in and, since we seemed to be having a quiet half hour, decided to pump up a few and top up the stand while I was at it. I had turned on the compressor to let the tank fill up and just as I was about to do the first ball, my Lifeboat pager went off.

The boat was called to the assistance of some kayakers around at Tol Pedn – Gwennap Head, windiest place in the universe – who had got themselves in a spot of bother. They had launched from Porthgwarra and had struggled to get back there against the tide. The Lifeboat picked them all up and took them back, launching them one by one from the back of the Lifeboat. After making sure that everyone was in fair health, the boat was stood down.

Back at the station, we were aware that the boat would not be that long and had set up the long slip for a low water recovery. We acted on information received as well as our own cognisance but found ourselves a little premature. Two of us were waiting at the bottom of the long slipway when we were advised that the boat had not yet commenced its operation of unloading the kayaks. It was such a lovely day, and it was a very long way to walk back up the slip that we decided that we would sit down and wait there. I think that if it had not been such a fag to remove our leggings and boots that we might possibly have dangled our feet into the unfeasibly clear and enticing looking water lapping around us. As it was, we had made ourselves so comfortable it was a chore to rouse ourselves when the boat hove into view.

We quickly steeled ourselves, that is to say we found our mettle, and performed what was clearly a textbook recovery up the long slip in near perfect conditions at low water. We had launched with the barest minimum of crew but by the time the boat returned, we had gathered a complement of skilled operatives ready to lend a hand. The very excellent Shore Crew were there too and between us we had the boat away and ready for its next service in no time. We are, after all, a very efficient, very excellent Shore Crew.

I will never know how many customers I missed but it had become exceedingly quiet in the half hour before we launched at half past two o'clock. I returned to the shop at near four o'clock and the street was largely empty. I am sure that many of our visitors and locals were down on the Harbour beach because we saw how busy it was there while we were launching and waiting. There were probably quite a few on the big beach as well, but they were spread out and maybe looked fewer than they were.

We did not really recover business after I came back to the shop, and we ambled through to the end of day. Nevertheless, it had been another busy day overall, although yesterday was slightly busier. I managed to note down our farm shop cash

and carry order and keyed it in after tea. The beach clothes order is drafted, and I will get that away tomorrow. Later in the evening, I remembered we needed a delivery from our very good butcher in St Just and sent a message off to them too. Things are definitely hotting up but I have long since stopped trying to compare to previous years as it is difficult to do and meaningless when you do. As long as we are paying the bills and slowing increasing the bank balance, things are doing alright.

I had no trouble getting the little girl out for a spin after tea. In fact, she was quite keen and again she was asking me later on instead of having to be cajoled. I really must get myself a pair of sunglasses as the sun in the evening is right in the eyes. It is not like we do not have a big stand of them in the shop to choose from – I just keep forgetting to take a pair upstairs. My rather nice Ray-Ban glasses, donated by some kind customer who did not return for them, have been missing since the building work disrupted everything. I have no idea where I put them.

There was no need for them on the second trip out. The sun was resting on the horizon with a dozen avid sunset watchers gathered at the head of the harbour to observe its last moments. I did not hang around for the green flash. First, it never happens while I am watching and even if it did, I probably would not know it had. I left them to it and headed for my bed.

May 19th – Monday

The weather was a little more glorious first thing than it was later in the morning. It was also attended by an easterly breeze that was clearly just learning how to blow first thing because it got better at it as the day went on. The encouraging number of customers that we had seen over the weekend seemed to evaporate today, perhaps seeking shelter from the breeze in some less windy spot.

I had laid on a bit of excitement for my morning which meant the Missus covering for me. I softened the blow by promising to change the bucket on her digger up at The Farm. She had told me last night that she had problems trying to do it herself. It must have been this that had her downstairs early doors, encouraging me to head to the big metropolis with my broken false ears in hand.

News travels fast and I was much encouraged when I got to the high street, to see the other reader there, waving me on. How very thoughtful.

On Saturday, speaking with a very pleasant lady at the optician that does ears, she had told me that I would be able to drop them off and they would take care of, hopefully, replacing them. Unfortunately, on arrival I was pointed at a not so very pleasant chap who seemed keen to justify his employment by asking all manner of impertinent questions.

He asked me to sit down because he wanted to check them. I asked was that because he did not believe me when I said that they were not working. It perhaps

was not the perfect way to an ongoing happy relationship. He turned them on, pressed them to his ear, listened as they whined some feedback at him and looked at me questioningly. There, I said, they turn on but do not amplify sound once they have finished their start up routine. This is very hard to determine just by holding the unit to your ear, so I knew it was impossible to challenge my assertion. Short of calling me a liar, he had no option but to believe me.

“What caused them to stop working?” he asked as the first of twenty questions that became increasingly tedious and irritating because they were all the same. I told him that if I knew of something, I would have told him and also not done it again after the first time they stopped working. Had I got them wet? No. Had I stepped out of the shower and put them on without drying my ears first? No. Perhaps I had left them somewhere too hot, too cold, next to something electrical or maybe they were affected by the electromagnetic radiation from a passing alien space craft. Not to my knowledge.

Seeing that I was becoming slightly agitated he took a passive-aggressive approach – which I think means that instead of punching me on the nose, because his customer service course told him that was bad - he told me that he was only trying to help understand. I suggested that asking me the same question twenty times, albeit slightly differently, was not helping him understand anything. Actually listening to my answer that I gave to the first question, that I could think of nothing that might have caused the fault – other than the NHS probably chose a cheap and shoddy alternative supplier to the ones I had originally - would have been the most helpful he could have been.

I think he could see at the end things were not going to improve and told me he would send them off. I can see how this will end up, with ‘fixed’ ones that will fail again in three months and the cycle repeating itself again. In the mean while I will practise lip reading and maybe do without them altogether.

Returning quickly to the car park, quietly seething, I pondered on the reason why the much maligned council had removed the car park system of paying on exit. There were machines that could calculate how long you had been there and charge you according and a camera on the exit that opened the barrier if you paid. It is now a pay and display car park with expensive new machines and an attendant who presumably visits every now and then.

I would like to presume that the lease had expired on the machinery, or the maintenance contract had suddenly and unexpectedly increased in price, but this is the much maligned council we are talking about. It is just as likely that someone on the car parks team got fed up with the colour of the old machines or the car park attendant’s union was giving someone high up a hard time or a holiday in the Maldives. Whatever the reason, I seem to recall parking there being a tad cheaper than it was this time around. Well, someone has to pay for the new machines.

With the extra funds, perhaps someone could give the parking space lines a bit of a repaint. Where I was parked they were completely invisible, so I parked in line with the parking spaces in the row ahead of me and guessed I was far enough back or forward. Others had decided that the spaces were slanted and parked at an angle. There was nothing, other than my memory of it, to say they were wrong, although I strongly suspect that they were dicing with a parking ticket for doing so.

While it was tempting to stay there to get my money's worth, the Missus would have taken a dim view of my cost efficiency, so I moved on. I had to stop at Tesmorburys for fuel, so I also called in to get ABH some more dog food trays. We still buy dog food for her even though she does not eat it – or not very much of it. We put it down with some cooked chicken, beef or lamb, which she will eat, in the hope that she will have some of the dog food too. Very occasionally, that works but more often she will very carefully pick the meat out and leave the dog food. We throw away much more than she eats but oddly still persist.

My chores complete, I headed to The Farm. In the short time I have been gone from there, the flora has exploded all around. Very shortly, the lane will need a trim and in the field itself, the tractor is surrounded by big, bushy nettles. There are buttercups all over the near part of the field, and the hedges are overrun with countless and nameless wild things. Thankfully, the entrance to the tool shed is clear as was the access to where the digger was parked.

The Missus had told me that the bucket she was using had come loose while she was using it. It seems that the split pin holding the retaining pins in place came out or was not there in the first place and the upper retaining pin had dropped out. She had tried to replace the original bucket but could not align the hole on the arm and the bucket. We had a spare split pin, but she was unable to get the lower retaining pin out, which is why I was there.

I substituted the use of a mallet that the Missus had with my lump hammer and a metal pin and by imagining a suitable target to thump hard, had the pin out in no time. To fit the slightly lower second bucket - I am sure there is a professional name for it – I had to make a minor adjustment on the digger arm. The two retaining pins slipped in without resistance – there is not much resistance when using a lump hammer – and I secured them with our split pin.

I did not delay very long but while I was there, I had a look at the handiwork the Missus had been at for the last month or so. It all looked so much better in the sunshine that had broken through while I was there. The pea and bean frames are a wonder but are already sporting some weeds growing in them. I suspect that the Missus will have her work cut out for her keeping them at bay during the growing season.

There is a fence all around the frames to keep the bunnies out. It has worked quite effectively for the other growing areas we have previously used and the Missus has

perfected how to do the fencing after several iterations. Our correspondent from not so frozen Vermont, very far west of Camborne, tells me that she has to hoist her growing pots and suspend them in the air. Her predators are groundhogs, which while looking incredibly cute are a bit more of a challenge than our humble rabbit. I do not think that the Missus' fences would do more than provide them with an interesting climbing frame to sharpen their appetite before they got to the beans.

I got back to the shop not long after the Missus would usually be heading for The Farm, so my little escapade cost her no time at all. She also wasted no time at all in packing up and heading off to do another full day or digging. Having finished the new growing area outside the greenhouse, she intended to clear the area to the rear and the west of it. Currently, that area is all overgrown and certainly at the back of the greenhouse it was important to clear it out to reduce the ingress inside.

Back at the shop, I revelled in the arrival of the first newspapers of the year. It was not perfect as we were missing the Daily Mail, one of the biggest sellers. I reserve comment because it is possible that I left that title off my list that I sent them. I would not be able to check until later when I went back upstairs to view my 'sent' messages. It was a simple enough task to add them to my list and we will start getting them from tomorrow. I also added the Financial Times as I do not want to miss the product of my interview.

I had specifically asked that the Laurel and Hardy Newspaper Company not send any magazines. I asked that last year and they sent two boxes worth. The problem is that the ones they send are all from the previous week and therefore out of date. I have to send them back almost straight away and in the meanwhile, pay for their rental. What I prefer to do is order the specific titles using the online system the company provides. That way I get what I want, and they are current when they arrive, although many of the old weekly magazines are now bi-weekly.

I was already on the system to add the Daily Mail and the Financial Times so I used the 'magazines' tab to start ordering those. I knew something was amiss when I searched for the more popular titles and the system came up with 'not found'. After selecting several titles and not finding them, I sent off a message to the helpdesk.

It was not until later in the afternoon that I had a reply. The helpdesk not very helpfully informed me that my access to magazines had been suppressed and that I would need to send a request to the same people that I had already sent a request to, asking for newspapers and the ability to order magazines, to unsurpruss me so that I could order magazines. Here we go again, I thought.

I am not sure what happened today; it was exceedingly quiet. After the busy weekend the lack of customers was more obvious. Radio Pasty had told us this morning that the day would brighten as it progressed; it did the opposite. Coming onto five o'clock, there was a big dark cloud over the bay, threatening rain. I'm not sure we actually got any but at least it would have watered the tomato plants outside.

There were certainly no customers to be chased away, so it was most welcome to do what it wanted – which was brighten up toward the end of the day.

Even the beach was largely deserted. I could no longer blame the wind in the afternoon because it had gone. There were also no waves our side of the bay, so at least the surfers were as disappointed as I was. Over on Gwenver things were looking better and even on Escalls Be-ans (still not sure how to spell that), usable waves were rolling in. It made me wonder, then, why two surfers were sat at the back this side of North Rocks at the absolute flattest part of the bay.

The Missus was later than usual coming back from The Farm. She was keen to wrong every last minute of use out of the digger rental. She intends to get up to The Farm early tomorrow to use it a bit more before it goes back. She obviously did not intend to cook but instead volunteered to drive to St Just for a Chinese meal from the take-away there. Who was I to argue.

Due to the lateness, ABH did not get an after tea walk because after tea was too close to last knockings walk. Life is suddenly getting complicated.

May 20th – Tuesday

We were talking about flora at The Farm yesterday which reminded me of the news story that storks are to be reintroduced to Cornwall. Last seen wild in the UK in 1416 - the year, not the time – some smart eye thought it would be a spiffing idea to bring them back again. I am not sure why they are being brought back other than some chap up Wadebridge way, which is north of Camborne, had a few spare and wondered what to do with them. I am not sure that I particularly see it as a benefit, but presumably we will see a population increase and, as a by-product, a fair few more gooseberry bushes.

The sun was shining and the birds singing in the bushes when eventually I stepped out with ABH in the morning. She refused to get up under her own steam this morning and I had to tear her kicking and screaming from her bed else I would have been late opening the shop. As it was, I had to come down by myself to get the outside display ready as she was still snoozing. That sun stayed with us for most of the morning and then cloud started building during the afternoon. Radio Pasty gleefully informs us that rain is on the way just in time for the half term holiday. Sweet joy.

We had a visit from a representative of a company that we already enjoy the services of. She was most apologetic, but we soon discovered that her visit was quite useful because she came with a list of products that I was unaware that the company supplied. We fell into conversation about business in general and having

had a most amicable chat, we bade each other goodbye. It was then that I realised that I had not looked at her business card and discovered that she had a most unusual name. I asked, as you do, where a name like that had originated from and she told me that it was the name of a garden in London. Very quickly, I could see where this particular part of the conversation might be heading and quickly changed the subject. It was a close run thing, I can tell you, dear reader.

It had been on my list of things to do for several days but today I managed to get a start on looking to see the bus timetable changes for the rest of the season. The bus company had told us that the current timetable expired on 23rd May which was also the day before the bus to St Ives would start running – for a week.

I printed off the new timetables before the weekend but had not had time to look at them. I find it easier printing them, despite the waste of paper, as I can annotate the hardcopy where I could not on the screen. I also printed a template of the sheet that I display in the window so that I could easily fill in the boxes and transfer it to a typed sheet later. It was as I penned the first couple of services of the day that I noticed a striking similarity to the current sheet. Sensing impending doom and wishing to save myself wasted time, I checked some random times across the sheet. It became clear immediately that there is no change to the timetable at all for the busy summer period.

If you are headed to Penzance, the headline frequency is four buses an hour. Look a little more closely and there is an hour and a half gap between the pairs of services, one going direct the other via Porthcurno. If you are only interested in travelling to Land's End or Porthcurno, the service is once every two hours. In the shoulder seasons, it is barely adequate. In the busyness of the summer season, assuming that it will be busy, the service is downright shoddy.

The bad news keeps coming, too. I checked on the Go Cornwall website, the company providing the barely worth it service between Land's End and St Ives, to see what their times would be. I am hoping that it is an administrative error but the only times showing on the timetable are four buses a day all coming from St Ives. The only service available leaving from The Cove is to Land's End. Surely that is not right. I have written to the bus company, but it wants ten days to think about it.

Thankfully, the company responded very quickly with a copy of the correct timetable with buses heading both ways. There are only four a day in each direction. I do not know why the much maligned council bothered.

My day was brightened when the Missus returned home with a bounty of mixed lettuce leaves and rocket from the Boathouse Farm. This Produce of Sennen is now available to procure at a very keen price from The Old Boathouse shop if you care to stop by. I do apologise, but they will not be appearing on the online shop, dear reader. That is the online shop whose button is right next to The Diary on the website home page, just in case you missed it.

Annually, a party of around 50 junior school children gather on the shop and café benches across the street. They are from the same school in Reading, which is east of Camborne, although they are probably not the same children each year. Hopefully by prior arrangement they consume a tea of fish and chips and then are gone. Last year we saw a few of the braver children and one of the teachers come into the shop for sweets.

The Missus arrived just as the children were finishing their meal and while she packed the salad leaves into bags, we saw a few of the children come in for sticks of rock. It also coincided with a five minute to closing rush and for a while I was quite pressed trying to dovetail the two streams at the till as well as print labels off for the salad bags. Word at the school must have got around last year that the shop they had sat opposite for several years in a row, sells Cornwall rock.

I found myself serving an almost inexhaustible line of children one stick of rock at a time – two and three sticks for some of them. I had made the error of putting the first few sticks into a gift bag each and therefore had to do the same with all the subsequent sales. We do like to maintain the gender stereotypes and have pink bags for girls and blue for boys. I think I got one wrong, but it was a mistake anyone could have made as he really did look like a girl and they all wear bleddy trousers, so how was I supposed to know. Anyway, the line seemed to go on forever and I was grateful that most of them had the right money, which sped things along.

Just when I thought that I must be close to the end of them, a teacher came in and said, he knew we were trying to close but there was another dozen children who had not yet come over. It was only then that I realised that the teachers had been complicit and were organising the children into batches to come and get their rock. A sale is a sale, no matter how small, so I told the teach I would be happy to stay open a little longer.

The end of the line was marked by a couple of teachers who purchased a quantity of fudge between them. And then they were all gone. There was not one wrapper of anything left behind and apart from one slightly limp grumpy shopkeeper, you might never know the children had been here at all.

May 21st – Wednesday

Any rain that we had during the early part of the morning had disappeared and dried up by the time I stuck my head out of the door first thing. In fact, had it not been for the small damp patches here and there and some residue on top of the newspaper box, I would not have thought it had rained at all. Even the cardboard that I had left out for collection overnight was barely damp.

The Missus had informed me last night that the forecast she was looking at had suggested a diminishing quantity of rain from earlier forecasts. Hers was definitely shorter lived than the Meteorological Office and the BBC forecasts which had pegged the rain as lasting most of the morning and a good deal heavier. It is a fair bet that such a forecast drove our customers to seek alternative entertainment today and would explain why business was as flat as the water in the bay.

When I looked at the rain radar, there was a geet lump of rain covering most of the Southwest and we had escaped by a whisker it would seem. If our visitors had strayed very far east of us, they would have been in it. That will teach them to desert us on rainy days.

There were a few people passing through today but busy, it was not. I would have spent the day twiddling a thumb or two but for the arrival of some orders. The most time consuming of these was the delivery of swimwear. The men's shorts, particularly, take a mind numbing age to process because they need to be priced and have hangers attached. Years ago, they used to come already hung but in this cost saving age, we need to provide the hangers and attach them ourselves.

This is not true of the bikinis. These have a cheap and very brittle hanger already and are a lot quicker to sort out and put out on the shop rails. As explained in a previous Diary page, some sizes sell better than others. For bikinis, we are swamped with size 14, so I had to take some off the rail for storage and mix in the new ones. It makes pricing difficult because the fact that a proportion of garments will not sell means that the retail price must include a provision for that. I do not know how bigger clothing shops manage but my guess is that the margins are very high.

I did the easier to deal with bikinis first, which gave me a quick win to feel better about. It also makes space to deal with the shorts. The shorts were a different matter altogether and take a tediously long time to find the right hangers, attach them and then to find that the size label on one type was not very clear at all. I had to print some suitable labels for them as well.

In the middle of doing them, a customer asked if we had any size Large as he could not find them on the rail. I told him that as luck would have it, I was just unwrapping some more, and he was welcome to choose from those. Unhappily, the ones I was working on did not meet with approval, so I opened another box and removed a different style which was more acceptable. He chose a colour, not exactly a match for the black ones he asked for, after which I had to find his size and then, very quickly, calculate the price.

I was still fiddling with men's shorts when the Missus turned up. I had thought that she might lend a hand, but she went upstairs to cook pasties (sorry, MS) for our tea. Between us, we had more pasties than I sold all day. Earlier, I had debated whether to place a pasty order for tomorrow as we did not have a wealth of them delivered

today. I thought that I was taking a risk by deciding not to do so but the way it played out, it was exactly the right thing to do.

We are playing host to an American lady of senior years, currently. I thought she was just passing through because she was dressed for walking. She had come in yesterday to ask if we had blueberries and avocados. We have sold blueberries last year and I had quite forgotten about them. I told her that we would have blueberries tomorrow, but was probably too late but avocados were not available in West Cornwall as being too exotic and may corrupt the innocent youths hereabouts. In truth, I ordered avocados when someone asked a few years ago. I got them in, and he never returned. It took a couple of weeks and the determined efforts of Prof, as she was visiting at the time, to get rid of them all. Anyway, our American friend missed the turning on my oblique sense of fun and told me she had some in Penzance the other day. I still was not going to order them though; I am too psychologically damaged from the last time.

I had not expected to see her again, but our American friend was back again today and bought the blueberries I had ordered in for her. She was already chuffed that I had got them, and she was over the moon when she discovered our Boathouse Farm lettuce and rocket. So pleased was she that she told her pal, an equally senior lady who came by later and bought some more. The original lady asked that I keep her purchases, which included a cross-section of the fruit and vegetables that we sell while she ran up to the shop at the top.

Putting her purchases in our fridge in the store room, I did not expect to see her again for a couple of hours, but she was back inside an hour. She had been up the top and back and still looked sharp enough to do it again before teatime. Her pal seemed just as sprightly. It reminded me of Mr Motivator from the television of the 1980s who was on television again very recently. He too was just as fit and keen as he was then while he must be pushing on in years a bit. What an inspiration they are. Actually, it just made me feel old and decrepit.

It made me consider a diet of salad, blueberries and avocados. Then the Missus put a couple of pasties in front of me and very quickly, I stopped considering it.

May 22nd – Thursday

Today came with the prospect of dealing with more shorts which did not fill me with glee. The weather, on the other hand played an absolute blinder and offered up a complete and unexpected rip gribbler and, for a change, hardly any breeze.

The weather had shown its hand from the outset of the day. I was down on the Harbour beach with the little girl early doors, and it was glorious even then. I had

only bothered with a jacket because it had pockets. I really could have done without it else. Over on the big beach wisps of mist hung in the air as the warmth mixed with the cold air over the water. It could not have been any lovelier if I had tried and I sensed that it really was not trying very hard at all.

There were visitors milling about from quite early in the morning, which was encouraging. It was even more encouraging when they started coming into the shop and buying things. I made a start on the shorts very soon after finishing my breakfast, which for the first time in a while had taken longer than I anticipated. I eventually managed to finish the shorts off late into the afternoon. There is another box to go, so I am two thirds through the order.

Some of the delay was caused by me heading off for the second time in a week, to the big metropolis. I had an appointment with my bone cruncher - well, she more of pin sticker these days – to sort out my slightly tricky back. There was an incident with ABH – I will not embarrass her by parting with the detail but suffice to say the outcome required a cocktail of hard drugs, a night on an inverted plank and a couple of stiff whiskies – and I mean bottles. Two weeks later, it was still making itself a nuisance when I lifted anything heavy, so I resolved to go to the pin sticker,

When the bone cruncher first proposed using pins, I was indifferent to the notion. I had no particular view on their use or their efficacy. With no expectations or prejudice, I awaited the outcome and was pleasantly surprised by its effectiveness and continue to be so.

When I returned to the shop around an hour later, in the middle of the day, the Missus was busy at the till. While we were busier today than yesterday – it would have been difficult to be quieter – there was no danger of running out of pasties (sorry, MS). The Missus had some success with them in my absence but subsequently, we hardly sold any at all. We did part with quite an assortment of going home fudge and biscuits and I had to place an order at the end of the day to replace them.

In fact, I placed several orders to bolster our stock ahead of what we hope will be a busy weekend. The forecast is not all that encouraging, but the forecasters always paint a worse picture than the reality, so I will rest on that. There are more blueberries coming although we did not see our super fit senior citizens (albeit of a different country). I have also ordered in other fresh vegetables as well since there is more chance we will be able to sell them before we have to throw them away. I think we will be prepared, but there is always something that I miss.

I certainly was not prepared for our five minutes to closing rush today. Three ladies, originally of California – very far west of Camborne – one now living in Corfu – very far south of Camborne and one living half her time in California and the other half in Tewkesbury, north of Camborne all related and gather for a family reunion. They were all in high spirits and decided to buy some. They were intrigued by our Squid

Ink Gin which comes in a highly desirable copper flask. It is our most expensive gin and also our best seller. One asked why it was called Squid Ink Gin – because it contains squid ink – so I broke out my spare flask, a leaker from a while back, and poured them a generous sample. Three flasks later they rolled out of the shop along with a healthy collection of our greetings cards.

Two minutes later, a more local visitor – he was from England – bought a premium bottle of rum, a hooded sweatshirt and a t-shirt. The combined purchases in the last fifteen minutes of opening amounted to around 20 percent of our sales today. It almost brought a smile to a grumpy shopkeeper's visage.

However, there was no time for revelling in such pecuniary delight. There was a Lifeboat to launch – two, in fact. Tonight, it was my turn to drive the Tooltrak as I discovered I had not done so since February. It did not start all that well and in front of a Harbour beach audience with cameras rolling. I had just reached the bottom of the slipway when I noted that our head launcher had not arranged for the attendance of a banksman.

While the role was covered by the Boat Crew going down, we would be exposed after the boat launched. It was enough to distract me and I neglected to raise the blade at the front of the Tooltrak and it consequently buried into the sand, tipping the Tooltrak on its nose. I recovered well, calling the head launcher over to discuss an 'important matter' and gesticulation to make it look like a normal part of the operation. I backed up a bit, raised the blade and bounced over the big hole I had dug with a look of utter nonchalance on my face. Nothing to see here.

I reversed out having let the Inshore boat go and turned some circles at speed, demonstrating my complete command of the machine I was driving. I think it might have been wasted as, by that time, all eyes were on the big boat being launched.

The boats were not out as long as last week, although it seems whenever I am involved in the Inshore boat, the helmsman is always tardy getting back. I will have to see if there is some vendetta going on there. By the time we recovered, had the boat and Tooltrak washed down and put away, the big boat was all tucked away, too. I was assured that the team had conducted a textbook recovery up the long slip about an hour after low water. We are, after all, a very dispersed, very excellent Shore Crew.

May 23rd – Friday

It was a bit of a helter skelter day today. I think it was mainly down to how the deliveries fell and kept me on my toes until the early part of the afternoon.

The day had started out all sunshine and smiles but as it progressed into the afternoon, the cloud thickened, and the sun disappeared. It was warm throughout the day, maybe a little warmer than yesterday and as the cloud covered us it became a

little muggy. There were plenty of people around initially but since it is a change-over day, we saw the crowds diminish into the afternoon then come back again as holiday people started to arrive.

There were more deliveries than usual today and some of them were large. I had half expected all of them to turn up at once just to test my nerve. If the pasties (sorry, MS) and the frozen order had turned up together I would have been sorely pressed to get them all away in a timely manner. The frozen obviously needs to be dealt with quickly and the pasties need to be put away so that the driver can take the empty crates away. Happily, they could not be further apart, although both were later than normal, the pasties mid-morning and the frozen in the early afternoon.

I was particularly not looking forward to the frozen delivery because much of the freeze space is taken up with buns and burgers for the Lifeboat barbeque. This was supposed to happen on Saturday, but the decision was taken yesterday to postpone it for a day with better weather. This did not help as the freezers will remain full until then.

Up until the middle of the afternoon, business was quite buoyant which added an extra dimension to trying to get the orders put away. As it turned out, the deliveries mainly fell kindly into quite spots during the day. The frozen was always going to be a problem because there was quite a lot of it and it takes a bit of time to put away. I found myself dashing between the till and the freezers trying to fit everything in before ice creams started dripping.

As you know, dear reader, I still have a third of our remaining packaged shorts to sort out. Having indulged in tedious distribution of orders for much of the day, the prospect of spending an hour or more sorting and labelling shorts that I had no room for on the rail, did not appeal in the slightest. Instead, the tantalising bag of surf jewellery sat on top of the shorts box urging me to deal with that instead.

We have had sales representatives from this company before. They are not in the least pushy and for one reason or another, I had not seen one for some time. It has not mattered very much; we are happy to place our own orders online. Recently, we have had a very pleasant lady call by to introduce herself. At the time, the stand was pretty full, and she left, and I did not think that I would see much of her again. She very properly telephoned a few days ago to ask if she might come by, which placed her in high esteem, in my view. I could not really refuse such an offer, but she arrived quite late, and I was keen to close up. By this stage, the stand was looking quite thin, and we were due an order. She asked if she could place the order for me, which was an attractive proposition but worried me slightly that she would order products that we might not particularly want.

It took me a little while to warm to the idea, especially as I would have had to create some time to do it myself. I had to think very quickly how this might be achieved and scribbled some parameters for her on a scrap of paper. She took some photographs

of what we currently had, and she went on her way. Although I had asked to see the order before she sent it, she completed the order that evening and all I could do was wait to see what happened.

It actually worked out rather well. She has stuck within the price range I had set out and only ordered products that we would ourselves have ordered. I might have been a little more adventurous with a few products and she clung rather to the 'shells' type that I said sold well – I would have mixed it up a little more. However, if I feed back these thoughts to her, I think I would be more than happy to let her at it again.

I spent some time in the quiet of the mid-afternoon topping up our stand. It is now full to the brim for the little angels who will be flooding through the doorway during the coming week – we hope.

Talking of which, as we closed upon the later stages of the afternoon, we started to see the arrival of familiar faces attended by small children. I do hope they all brought their pocket money with them – and the children, too.

May 24th – Saturday

It was the first overcast and dull morning we had seen in a while. It might have been the reason why ABH did not want to get out of bed. I found myself having to go downstairs on my own to drag the outside display out of the shop and bag the croissants from the bread order that has been arriving at around five o'clock this week. I suspect that the usual driver is off and that the boss is doing it himself again straight after he has finished the baking overnight.

That must have been an interesting deliberation when he and his wife decided to set up business down here. He works nights, six nights a week and she works days, taking care of the orders and administration all year long. Perhaps it is the key to a happy marriage – not seeing each other. It is not that much different from me and the Missus. She works up at The Farm while I stay in the shop but that is only seven months of the year. We manage alright for the remaining five months as long as we refrain from conversing.

During neap tides ABH and I go down to the Harbour beach first thing. For some reason I had not noticed before, but the last spring tides dropped a geet load of sand on the upper parts of the beach and particularly on the western corner. I only really noticed today because the rocks next to the western slip did not appear to be so high and when I looked to the west, I could see over the Harbour wall. I must have been elevated at least three or four feet. There is quite a bit of sand on the eastern side but nothing as dramatic. The overall effect is quite a slope down to the sea at low water.

The same cannot be said of the big beach, although there have been changes there, too. I do not think that the reef and rock field have diminished any, but there is plenty more sand up at the back of the beach and at the north end. There is also more sand lower down, especially at the southern end of the beach. Here I have noticed that at mid-tide, bathers are able to walk out a long way when, a little further to the north, swimmers are up to their necks at the same distance out.

It took a little time to get cracking in the morning once I had opened the first electric sliding doors in The Cove to the public. We were on the outskirts of mid-morning when we started seeing the breakfast goods starting to shift. There was a bit of early gift buying too before we settled in to drinks and pasties (sorry, MS) nearing the middle of the day.

The surf schools clearly had some business during the early part of the flood and with the numbers there, the sea looked quite busy. The sea state later did not encourage very many experienced surfers in and with not much to write home about on the weather front, the big beach generally was largely deserted. It looked like none of the businesses of The Cove were going to have much of a day of it except maybe the OS.

That might have changed in the afternoon if the weather forecasters had any notion of what constitutes an accurate forecast. A few days earlier, we were warned of rain and this being the worst day of the weekend. This slowly developed into overcast with rain in the evening, so when the sun broke through halfway through the afternoon, albeit for a short time, everyone had already made alternative arrangements. The only part of the forecast that was vaguely right was a bit of a breeze starting up mid-morning. Even then, it was nowhere near as robust as the forecast had warned and for us in The Cove, it was no great shakes anyway being in the southwest.

At least there was no beach to laze around on, certainly later in the day. It forced anyone who was still here or had just arrived to wander aimlessly. It gave us a chance to haul them into the shop and empty their purses. Towards the latter part of the afternoon, this was working quite well, and we had moments of busyness that were most pleasing.

It was also the first of our later opening days. It only adds an hour, but feels longer and makes the shop day nearly twelve hours, which is probably psychological too. It followed the same profile as it usually does by having a quiet hour before the extension then busier again in the last hour. I do hope it is appreciated and/or useful and not a complete waste of time. If I look back, and I would rather not, we used to open until nine o'clock in the summer. I was young, foolish and full of vim then.

Lessons learnt from today: do not trust the weather forecast (again) and get in more posh white bread. We have an abundance of cheap white bread, the Mother's Pride sort, and not one loaf has been touched. Hopefully, with no alternative since the

posh stuff went, we might sell a few. The wholemeal bread has not been touched either and will not gain any attention until I stop ordering it in.

The new forecast, I cannot remember which iteration it was, had it that we would see rain by seven o'clock. It was rain, but hardly as we know it, more a light drizzle, although it looked heavier on the rain radar. It rained a little harder when I took ABH for her last run, obviously. Even then it hardly bothered me without a rain jacket but ABH scurried home a little quicker than she might otherwise have done. The wind was ramping up, too. Apparently, it is going around to the northwest tomorrow, so we will feel it a bit more – just as we are supposed to get a little sunshine. This is not the start to the holiday that we were hoping for.

May 25th - Sunday

ABH surely keeps me on my toes. She had me up at half past sparrow's this morning and out the door soon after. The street was still damp from overnight rain, but I suspect that the wind that was upwards of 30 miles per hour and now in the northwest had much to do with drying it out. We avoided the beach, probably because of the wind and there was not much of it either as we push into spring tides.

As well as there being more water in the tide, it was big and rolling too. At first, it seemed too blown out for any proper surfing, although it did not stop a few of them trying. There was, however, a big swell running. Even an hour off low water, it was banging up Aire Point and there was a good spread of white water over Cowloe. Later, despite the wind, the swell formed some surfable waves, and a small band of more experienced surfers took to the sea. For mere mortals, however, the beach had been red flagged.

We had to wait until the middle of the morning before seeing any decent trade, but it was the middle of the afternoon before I managed to break away for a cup of tea. Perhaps it was not what I would call busy, but the trade was fairly continuous through the middle part of the day. We hit a good run of pasty selling (sorry, MS) and by the end of the day we were completely out of cheese pasties and had only a margin for comfort left on Cornish pasties. I was quite pleased about that as I had ignored a potential surplus from today and ordered for a full day tomorrow.

The wind that moved around to the west early on, prompted some windbreak sales. One lady told me that it was quite comfortable on the beach behind it. We also sold some wetsuits before the sea got all moody and some of those not sheltering behind windbreaks or in tents bought some hooded sweatshirts from us. We even sold wetshoes that I had come down to the shop early to put out. It was heartening that the effort was not wasted. The grocery shelves started to take a pounding in the later afternoon, and we even made a dent in the cheap white bread that I was concerned about yesterday.

The big waves had effectively closed off the beach access by about half past two o'clock. While there was a body of beach goers content to make a later escape along the Coast Path, the majority elected to leave early. This, I surmise, accounted for a noticeable increase in people wandering about and promenading at our end of The Cove. It was all very pleasing especially as many of them dropped into the shop. We do love it when a plan comes together.

Those big waves became a major feature of the late afternoon and early evening as high water brought them to a peak. The whole bay was a big rolling mass of them and was oddly mesmeric to watch. We have not had waves thundering over the wall for some time, and that drew a crowd as well. In fact, it is possible that the big sea did us a favour as we were unusually busy in the later afternoon and early evening today.

The wind had diminished a little by the time I got around to taking ABH around the block. We are skipping the after tea walk now because by the time I have had my tea, it is too close to the last walk of the evening. The Missus is coming back from The Farm later, so that compensates quite well. I rather wish I had worn another layer, though, as the breeze was not exactly warm. There was hardly a soul about which was a distinct change from last week when we did a similar walk around with the smoke of a hundred barbeques in our nostrils.

The weather has done nothing for the tomato plants still lodged outside during the day and a complete pain in the rear for having to be taken in and out of the shop. I watered them yesterday, but they were dry again by the middle of today, having been in the strong wind all day. I watered them again in a quiet moment, but I think that some of them are beyond help.

The aloe vera plants that seem interminable in numbers are selling well. The Missus is trying to get them out of the potting shed, previously known as greenhouse, as she is running out of room. She has already put in a request for an extension. She sees no reason why I cannot build a small, crooked village up there now I have cut my teeth on the greenhouse. Good job I got myself new overalls.

May 26th – Monday

As you may have discerned, dear reader, I do not put much store by the weather forecast and even less for the forecasters forecasting it. The farmer of the family is more interest in it than me these days and when she said that it would not rain before eight o'clock in the evening, I believed her. It was therefore with some surprise that I had to stop at the doorstep this morning and go and fetch my lightweight waterproof jacket. I did not fetch it on a whim, or just because I look good in it – I do, by the way. No, it was proper raining outside and clearly, I would have been more alarmed had it been raining inside as well.

It stayed raining on and off until the shop opened. It still looked pretty bleak for an hour or two, then started to brighten up. Our customers, many of whom do not appear to get of bed until the middle of the morning, probably hardly noticed. It was still quiet when I headed to the gymnasium for the first time in a week. Between various appointments and a distraction, I missed all the sessions last week. I do not think it made any difference; I was still as rubbish at it after a break, but it was a blistering session, nevertheless.

Things took a turn for the busier when I came back. So busy was it that I nearly lost continuity of pasty availability (sorry, MS). It is the sort of thing that has the potential to pickle practically any practising professional pasty purveyor. We had three larger orders in quick succession that emptied the warmer. I had seen it coming but had underestimated the size of the pasty rush. Having emptied the warmer, I was already selling futures in the pasties in the oven. Happily, the demand suddenly fell away, and I breathed a sigh of relief with a warmer stacked full. The respite was only brief and three orders later and the warmer was empty again and I was running around playing catch up once again. Lesson learnt, I kept a rolling supply coming. Even then I nearly tripped up because I had forgotten someone had ordered four pasties earlier for later collection. I remembered just before I put the last of our pasties in the warmer. Our orderer was concerned because last time he recalled we had run out and he was disappointed. I had told him not to worry as we hardly ever ran out now!

We were not only selling pasties, but it was them that commanded most of my concentration. I had placed my order for tomorrow before the fight started and in the middle of the second drubbing, I thought the number I had called in woefully inadequate. I managed to place my revised order a couple of minutes before the cutoff time. I baked some frozen toward the end of the busy period so at least we had some spares to cover the last few hours of opening. We needed them, too. It is unlikely that we will be busy on pasties tomorrow as it does not work like that but at least we will be better prepared.

Despite the busyness, there was still time for a jolly jest with some customers. One lady asked if we sold penknives and I told her, sorry, but I was not allowed sharp implements in the shop. She seemed to take this as a regulatory type of matter, so after a dramatic pause, I added, 'not since the incident'. It drew a momentary look of horror on her face before she realised I was indeed in jest. Or hoped I was.

I did not get much time to gaze out of the window. I was aware that at lower tide the sea had been busy with bathers and surfers of one ability or another. Knocking on high water, the Lifeguards once again red flagged the beach but while there were big waves, they did not look quite as usable as they had yesterday. Still, one or two surfers insisted on trying them out. A little later still, when all was quiet on the street, I put my binoculars on an object I had seem floating close in. It was half a surfboard snapped in two. The Lifeguards generally have good reason to close the beach on big seas.

We have a number of visitors here this week who are old friends since we have known them for years. During the previous weeks we also had time to chat to others we have known for a long time and become fond of seeing. It has the feel about it of being visited by extended family members who have come to remind us that they are still there and often it with some regret we see them go again. In many cases it will be a whole year before we see them again. It is a most peculiar circumstance of running a shop in a place that attracts so many return visitors. If I were to reflect on one thing that made the whole enterprise worthwhile, I think perhaps that would be it – with the possible exception of seeing small children returning as adults, and that I could do well without.

Again, I was late enough home that ABH did not get her after tea walk around the block. The Missus was very late back from The Farm with ten backs of mixed leaf lettuce to sell in the shop. We may have to reign back on the rocket next year as it has not sold as well and we have an abundance. It is not like we can pause the its growing while we catch up, either. Yesterday, we took a trip around the big block but the southwest gale that had been blowing all day and had not affected us in The Cove, was eventually making its presence felt. We were back after a brief foray for which I was very grateful as it meant an early bedtime.

May 27th – Tuesday

The CIC Normandy Channel Race commenced on Saturday with a large number of class 40 yachts (do not ask) leaving Le Harve, which is south of Camborne. This will be why my pager went off at four o'clock in the morning suggesting that I might like to go and launch the Lifeboat in support of one of the yachts that had carelessly lost its mast.

All the yachtspeople in the race are professionals or at least very experienced amateurs, and in this case had already strapped their lost mast to the side of the yacht and were making their own way to Newlyn. The Coastguard had decided to task the Lifeboat but when it came to it, the yacht made it clear they did not need assistance. They probably thought that it was wise, just in case there were any vengeful fishermen on our crew keen to get even for the latest agreement with the French on fishing in our waters.

The race has been changed this year and extended to make it much more challenging. Starting in Le Harve, it rounds the Isle of Wight and onto Wolf Rock lighthouse and this time heads south to Chausee Du Sein, a cardinal marker off the southern nose of Brittany. Rounding that, the yachts strike north again to Fastnet Rock then on to Tuskar Rock, a geet granite lump on the southeast point of Ireland then head south again. The final legs are down to Wolf Rock again and back home to Le Harve. I did not measure it, but it will be significantly more than the website's stated 1,000 miles that does not include the southern leg. I am with W.C. Fields on this one: all things considered, I'd rather be in Philadelphia. Having never been to

Philadelphia, I reserve the right to change my mind; Philadelphia might be an awful place.

I also had not considered being in The Cove today. It definitely was awful. It even looked mizzly and grim out of the window. Going out, merely confirmed it. ABH decided that sniffing at a leaf for fifteen minutes was a good use of her time as we stood in the heavy mizzle getting wet. The day did not improve with age either. It was the sort of day that no matter how mediocre the rest of the week was, it would always look better than today.

It seems that most of our visitors thought much the same. We had an exceedingly quiet day with people either staying in or choosing to go to St Ives or Land's End in the case of one close-by family. I was definitely not expecting a pasty day (sorry, MS) like yesterday, and did not get one. The surplus pasties are refrigerated and will be fine for tomorrow, so I moderated the order for tomorrow to compensate.

Left with very little to do, I made a start on the cash and carry order that will be due at the end of the week. I had expected to easily meet the minimum order amount but struggled to do so. I think that probably I over-ordered last time for the holiday in mind and we are only three days into the half term, so there is still potential for the volumes to change. I do not need to send the order off until Thursday, but at least the donkey work is done.

We saw a bit of busyness around four o'clock. My theory is that the people who ran off to wet weather activities here and there were coming home for tea. The ice cream kiosk had given up and gone home by that time, so we picked up some pasty and ice cream trade along with a few surprise gift buying groups. It was, however, small beer.

Making the most of the poor sea conditions that had waves lumbering into the bay for most of the day were some Harbour wall jumpers. Some half a dozen youths were variously on the wall or in the stormy waters below. There must be enormous thrill in standing on the Harbour wall, being lumped in the face by a ton of water and scat backwards into the dancing waters of the Harbour. I am sure it has been going on for more than a century and I am not aware of any casualties. There was one a couple of years back, but that was a chap who tried it with the tide out.

I had thought that the wet had abated for the day but was disappointed when it came back again in the late afternoon. A large lump of heavier stuff passed to the north of us, for which I was grateful, but we did not escape it entirely. My main concern was the putting out of our waste cardboard, although the wind would have been more of a problem. It looked like it was staying in the southwest but would still be robust and a rogue eddy – you have to watch out for rogue eddy – would have it halfway down the street. I had to risk it anyway as the collectors come randomly early. I did want to try and catch the general waste man because I suspect he is emptying our bin by hand

instead of tipping it and left some items behind last week. I am getting up earlier this week anyway, so will keep an eye out.

By half past five o'clock, with an hour and a half of opening to go, my will to be a grumpy shopkeeper left me and I was keen to close the first electric sliding door in The Cove and shut out the world. It was either sheer determination or utter idleness and unwillingness to get up that kept me at my post until the bitter end. I was not even rewarded with a five minutes to closing rush, so it must have been the latter. Oh, well.

May 28th – Wednesday

Thanks to ABH getting me up at half past five o'clock, I managed to catch the general waste collecting man. Even then I nearly missed him because I was in the kitchen cooking the bleddy princess' breakfast because she will not eat dog food and had run out of chicken. I caught up with the bin man just as he was clearing off. I asked about the hand clearing our bin and leaving some of it behind and he told me that the bin was difficult to move, and he did not want to make a noise. I told him not to worry about the noise because I was already awake.

I helped him to move it. Yes, it is more difficult than if the wheel went around but not overly hard work. He told me that he had reported it twice over the last couple of weeks, but the company did not like to come out unless they had several in the same area to deliver. I made a note to contact them later to see if I could change their minds.

Since I was already up and the administration done upstairs, I came down to the shop early to get a march on the day. It turned out to be fortuitous that I did. There were the normal deliveries of newspapers and bread to start me off as well as topping up the drinks fridges. While I was doping that a large greengrocery order arrived minus the invoice, so I had to root around to find the price of things. Most of the order required weighing and pricing, which took time and just before I opened the pasties (sorry, MS) and the milk turned up.

There is normally a fair amount to do in the morning but today seemed to take a long time to get through. There was more of it because it is a busy week, despite yesterday's weather, and then there was the waste cardboard to deal with. I had been kept busy from the moment I came down to the shop. With an early run of customers too, I was grateful to get to the gymnasium for a rest.

By the time I emerged from my blistering session and headed to the Harbour beach with ABH, the sun was making a decent fist of being bright and shiny. I had eventually borrowed some sunglasses from our stand in the shop and needed them down on the brightness of the sand and the sun reflected off the water. There is a fair amount of weed collected at the bottom of the beach which was not a surprise

after the seas we have had for the last few days. The sand at the top corner of the beach has gone, too; I can no longer see over the Harbour wall.

The shop was busy when I got back. It stayed that way for most of the rest of the day. It led me to my first three hour breakfast this season. Once again, my pasty strategy went out of the window and I will have to carefully manage volumes tomorrow. However, I did not let myself get caught out as I did on Monday and had a rolling supply going as soon as the balloon went up.

Down on the big beach there was a proper beach day going on. Not far off low water, the shallows in the swimming and surfing zones were packed with wet people purportedly enjoying themselves. It was not just the water that was busy, either. A large camp, normally seen only during the summer holidays, grew up along the dunes. The predominantly blue of windbreaks and beach tents looked to be three tiers deep and there were just as many people wandering about on the beach.

Usually, on such days, we see a dip in busyness after everyone has purchased their beach goods for the day. Today, we must have had surplus numbers because we were busy throughout the day. We then continued to be busy as the tide pushed most of the people off the beach and back onto the street again.

As if we did not have enough people milling about, a coach arrived in the later afternoon with yet more people. It was a large coach and like most, paused when it saw the chicane between Tinker Taylor cottage and The Roundhouse. I once saw a double decker bus make it through there in both directions (it could not engage reverse to turn around) but it was not a pretty sight. The difference was, the bus driver did it in extremis, the coach driver did not even consider that it was too narrow and fraught with obstacles. One traffic jam later and half the port side windows stove in, he managed to reverse the coach out.

Quite by chance, our local bobby had arrived ahead of him and was trying to get out of the Harbour car park when the incident happened. An eye-witness later told me that the driver complained to our bobby that there was no sign telling him he could not drive through. He has a point, as many coaches get to outside our shop before realising they cannot get any further. On the other hand, nearly all the other coach drivers realise they cannot get any further.

The passengers, no more than twenty, were left waiting across the road while replacement transport was found for them. It had been very busy on the benches across the street when it happened and one of the regular visitors helped clear up the broken glass. The passengers were the only people left on the benches at half past six o'clock when the replacement coach turned up.

The incident had added to a very full day. I was lucky that I managed to get away for two cups of tea during the day and on both occasions, I had people waiting for me on my return. In between serving customers for a wealth of different goods across our

range, I also fielded multiple enquiries regarding the bus services. Every one told me that the bus times posted on the bus stop are impenetrable – tell me about it, I took at least an hour writing our summary and I am used to it – and the bus times for the one-week-only bus to St Just and St Ives is absent completely. If I were the cynical sort, I would say the bus company is trying to make it as little used as possible so that they can support not running it in future.

I was very grateful to be closing the first electric sliding door in The Cove at seven o'clock as I was pooped. As I did so, the Missus arrived back from The Farm. It seemed that she had enjoyed a busy day too. We abandoned the planned evening meal and had a sandwich instead. We will have to man up and gird our loins as this is just the first busy week. Right now, that means heading to bed. I can do a lot of girding my loins with my eyes closed.

May 29th – Thursday

How very disappointing. I was on a roll from yesterday and keen to get back into the saddle of another busy day, unfortunately the world was not playing along. There was a great grey wall outside the window, as impenetrable as a much maligned council bus timetable. Radio Pasty assured us that it would clear off and allow the brightness back, but it took its own sweet time in doing so.

Clearly, our visitors were not overly inspired to hang about and wait for it. They could not even bring themselves to come out for breakfast goods and newspapers until nearly the middle of the day and it was gone half past ten o'clock when the tables outside the café started seeing the occasional customer sit at them.

I had endured a much quieter morning in setting up as well. There were fewer deliveries this morning and those that did come were smaller and easier to deal with. I was finished way before opening and topped some shelves up while I was waiting. According to Radio Pasty, there was nothing much going on in our world, either, so I was not alone.

Yesterday, and through all the excitement I neglected to mention it, Radio Pasty had a bit of an article on regarding bus services in the Duchy. It was current because Go Cornwall, the other bus provider in the Duchy, had just cancelled the Bodmin to Liskeard service through insufficient use to make it viable. The radio station interviewed representatives of the much maligned council and a lady from a pressure group that I never knew existed and now cannot remember the name of. There was a lot of talk but what I distilled at the end of it all was that the much maligned council had given up any pretence of operating fair and balanced bus services across the Duchy and that any service not paying its way would be discontinued. This rather means rural communities have been abandoned and the only services left are city and large town routes.

We started to see a little more action after the middle of the day but the mist, although thinning, showed no signs of going away. It brought a chill to the air and was also damp. It was definitely a day for plodding around town and I think many people took that option. I do not think we saw any of the resident visitors after first thing and the majority of our visitors for the rest of the day came from outside.

Shortly into the afternoon, our postcard order arrived. This is the one that had our own photographs turned into postcards, so I was quite keen to have a geek and opened the boxes straight away. Naturally, as soon as I started working my way through them and rearranging the stands, we started to get busy. It really was immediately after I pulled one of the postcard stands over to the till. You cannot tell me that is coincidental. I am not sure that I should say 'fortunately', but the infrequency of customer visits allowed me to put the cards out as well as serve.

It took a couple of hours. I had to print 'out of stock' labels for each card and stick it into the place on the stand where the cards were going. I also had to check the order as I went but still ended up with three of one sort and one of another on the stands rather than two and two as I had intended. It was not a surprise as there were twenty new images and I was dividing my concentration between the task and serving customers. The stands are now at the fullest they have been in two or three years. It is a bit of a gamble with the price of postage going up, but so far there does not appear to be a reduction in sales on last year.

The mist was still hanging in there as we entered the last couple of hours of shop opening. It had thinned a good bit and even Cape Cornwall was just about in view, but the chill in the air remained and it was still only on the bright side of gloomy. The sun eventually broke through at eight o'clock with some blue skies briefly in the west, which was very good of it. It shone down on the Lifeboat boys who were engaged in a bit of first aid training. The launch was decided against earlier in the week due to the continuing poor sea state. Having worked a 12 hour shift without a break, I did not feel inclined to join in. I saw the photographs later and it looked like a well-organised bit of hands-on practise, with fake blood – I hope – and all sorts.

The best I could manage was taking ABH out for a last run and heading for my bed. I will have to get in shape to do all this extended hours lark for six weeks in the summer.

May 30th – Friday

The May mists are plaguing us. It was misty again this morning and again Radio Pasty insisted that the afternoon would be sunshine and clear. What do they know. A customer told me that the south coast was had clear blue skies yesterday afternoon, all the way to Penzance. It does not surprise me, the mist at this time of year is often very localised. It can last for minutes or days and is driven by warm and moist air hitting the cool sea on the lee side of the coast and with a southwesterly, that is us.

Perversely, I chose today to slip into little boys' trousers and flip flops. It had been a long time coming and I am very tardy this year. I am not even sure why I waited so long and on a less than perfect day, too. It just seemed right.

It had been a quiet morning up to the point I went off to the gymnasium. The mist was still halfway between being fully thick and gone completely and showed no signs of changing, although it did seem brighter than yesterday in the fog. It made no difference to me on my rowing machine as I was going around in circles anyway – in my head. I had a better session than recently although still in the upper quartile of my averages but it was a blistering session, nonetheless.

The sun was shining through some tattered remnants of mist when I came out again. It took the edge off the direct sunlight but was nevertheless very pleasant down on the Harbour beach where I headed with ABH. She had a run around with a flat coated retriever who totally ignored her while I had a chat with the owners who are regular and frequent visitors. The little girl is less persistent now when another dog does not play back with her, and she got bored after a while and sulked. It was not long after that when I returned her to the shop and went and got ready to swop with the Missus.

We were busy initially with the flood of going home present buying. The beach was busy again and so were the benches opposite. I got the impression that the visitors had decided upon one last day at the beach despite the less than ideal weather. The sunshine that I had enjoyed on the beach was very short lived and by the time I came back to the shop, it was misty again. There were moments of brightness through the day, and it was not overly chilly, either, so a fair day for all those on the beach.

Down on the big beach where our last dayers had gravitated the population was split in two. Up on the high water mark were the camps of beach shelters and windbreaks. Families were gathered there and young children playing in the sand. The older ones were to and fro with body boards to the other faction on the beach who were largely in the water, planning to go in or just coming out. Upwards of twenty in surf school lessons were out on the southern side of the beach, the bodyboarders, swimmers and paddlers were next messing in the surfy shallows. A little way out the back were the surfers, hopeful in a hopeless sea. I thought that it might improve in the flood, but it did not. Ther surfers, hopefully not the same ones, were still there when I looked at near six o'clock.

One of our more popular gifts is a small bottle with a cork in the top. On the side is the legend, 'Sand from my favourite beach, Sennen Cove'. During the school holidays we sell quite a few, mainly on the going home days. Today was no exception but I do not recall selling quite so many in a single day. I think that there was probably enough, if used for the purpose they were designed for, that the

amount of missing sand would be noticeable. I do hope that they took the sand from the back of the beach; there is more of it there.

Unlike yesterday, business went flat during the bulk of the afternoon while people enjoyed the beach, so much so that they took some home with them. I had no big orders to deal with, although I did have to prepare for the arrival of a large cash and carry order tomorrow morning. The store room was still littered with bits of the last delivery that we had failed to use, and I had failed to find space for. Piecemeal throughout the day I slowly worked through what was there and managed to find a gap for most of it and the rest I piled up at the end. The store room remains that clear looking for a little over twelve hours each week. I had to keep going in there to admire it.

We caught up with our beach dwellers again at the end of the day and were busy for the last couple of hours. We even had a proper five minutes to closing rush on the last of our later openings. Tomorrow, we go back to closing at six o'clock and it will make a wealth of difference. The Missus complained that she would have to come back from The Farm earlier. Self-preservation tapped me on the shoulder to remind me to resist the temptation of suggesting that she could go up an hour earlier.

The little girl wanted to go out a little earlier for her last run out and we ended up going around the block for the first time in a while. Although there was only a sliver of sand available in the Harbour, a couple of families were making the best of their last evening in The Cove. The swimmer I had met earlier in the day had told me that the sea temperature had dropped again from its unusual warmth last week, but it did not seem to bother the children cavorting in it in the evening.

We took our time traversing the block and I managed to get in an early night. I will be at the peak of fitness for the delivery tomorrow then ruin myself by lifting into the shop two cages of heavy stuff.

May 31st – Saturday

I got my false ears back today. The Missus went in to collect them for me. I can hear again, but the company is determined to make it as difficult as possible for me. I asked for size 1 tubes that fit, so they sent me size 2, "because they were recommended for me", that do not. Not only am I mistaken about my false ears stopping working, I also have no idea of the size of tube that is best for me. The Missus insisted they provide some size 1 tubes. They supplied size -1 tubes. Luckily, I had my old ones that I hung onto despite the fact they are a bit ragged for just such an occasion. One of us will have to traipse back into town for some new ones at some point. It had probably best not be me.

The other good news was that the mist had eventually cleared off. There was a remnant or two hanging about first thing and we had a little damping early in the

morning. By the middle of the day, we had some identifiable blue skies here and there and quite a bit of wispy cloud. Sadly, all our customer beggered off home. Alright, that is not exactly true and one of them told me that it had rained heavily in St Ives during the morning. It was quite busy but not in a holiday sort of way. I was very glad that I had remembered to clip our hours today rather than tomorrow as I have done in the past.

It was cash and carry delivery day, as you may recall, dear reader. It kept me occupied between customers for most of the day. Last year, the drivers were turning up before seven o'clock but this year it has been closer to eight o'clock. The earlier time is preferred but the later time is just fine at present. It may be more problematic in the height of the season as I may have to repel boarders as the first electric sliding door in The Cove will be open and we will not be. Still, I am grateful that it is before opening time. The trouble is I have no idea which driver will turn up and I have to be vigilant from before seven o'clock just in case they put one of the old early birds on.

The supply from the Redruth cash and carry has been largely without issue and generally we have been able to get what we need. More recently, however, I have noticed some items being out of stock for multiple weeks. To make it worse, they are things that we cannot get elsewhere and for which there is no alternative, such as salt in little pots. We already had to migrate to a pair of salt and pepper grinders and now we cannot get them, either. It also looks like they have discontinued the range of herbs and spices we have only just started doing. Darn it.

We may not have had many customers, or stock to sell but there was plenty of sunshine in the afternoon. Radio Pasty seemed to take great pleasure in telling us that the good weather brought about by a ridge of high pressure would come to a blunt end on Tuesday when it all became horrid again. As if to prove it, the swell that was already diminishing in the bay yesterday became even less, erm, swelly today. There were some last gasp surfers out the back bobbing about and a fair number of other ranks in the shallows and the breaking waves but the numbers from the middle of the week are long gone now.

Towards the end of the day, new arrivals started to appear. I had heard of trouble on the M5 which closed the motorway and would have delayed many getting here. We had already had a good turn of bread buying in the morning and the late rush, finished it off. I had gambled on brown bread with the children going home but was obviously wrong. If folk want bread in the morning, they will have to put up with wholemeal because that is all we have left.

We had said our fond farewells to the leavers and welcomed the arrivals, and I am sure there will be a few more tomorrow, just not as many as last week. I was not aware that I had shut anyone out by our early closing, but we did have a proper five minutes to closing rush again, which livened the soul.

The little girl did not fancy an after tea walk even though I was early enough to provide one. Instead, we combined the last run out with a walk around the big block with a big red sun dropped towards the horizon in the west. I did not hang around for it, but it looked like it might have been a corker of a sunset. Maybe next time when I was not so keen for my bed.