

DIARY 2021/22

April 30<sup>th</sup> – Friday

What an exceedingly pleasant start to the day with a bright sun shining out from the east and just a few white clouds dotted about. Fishermen were out in the bay, for pollack quite possibly given the number of gulls surrounding the boats as they came in, and all was well with the world. All that is apart from the bleddy hound who has a bit of a problem and would later be visiting her least favourite place in the world – the veterinary doctor.

The bleddy hound notwithstanding, it was a bright and positive sort of day helped along, not least, by some of the people around and about. We have seen some regulars this week and some more arrived for the weekend, who are always good to see. One in particular stood out for making my day. It was odd because he was a fairly ordinary sort of customer and our conversation was hardly going to shake the world. Nevertheless, after he left, I felt much uplifted and ready for the rest of the day. It is the sort of thing that makes being a grumpy shopkeeper such a pleasure.

There were signs that the weekend might present some more lively business than of late; the street was thronging for most of the core of the day. I had the pasty numbers just right, too, which was a bit of a bonus. The flow of business was a bit up and down leading some customers to remark just how quiet it was today while others were surprised how busy it was. Gosh, that was a bizarre affair.

I heard that the OS inaugural opening went very well, especially if you do not mind ordering your beer by mobile telephone while connected to the OS wifi network. I am not ever so sure what you do if you do not have a smart mobile telephone. Perhaps you need to get friendly with someone who has. It seems that it is a procedure that will require some getting used to and one customer from last night reported that you would not wish to arrive in desperate need. I cannot help but think of the bar scene from Ice Cold in Alex where John Mills et al gaze in suspended anticipation at their condensation dripping pints before tucking in.

I also heard there was an invitation only free beer event the night before. My invitation must have been lost in the post. While it is obviously inconceivable that I was left off the guest list, I think I might have suffered apoplexy realising I was quaffing free beer ordinarily at five pounds a pint. I think my ale house session days are well and truly over. Mind, my pint would never empty as I would be too busy crying into it.

Our new card payment machine arrived today. It is much more complex than the current one and will required some heavy getting used to. It is a shame that we had to change as apart from its obvious lack of stability, the old machine was just right. However, the new machine has more functionality that you could shake a Swiss Army knife at and I am sure that we will come to love it.

I had quite forgotten that I had placed a bunch of orders recently and they seemed to all come home to roost at the same time. We now have an abundance of St Ives soap and those smelly sachets you put in drawers. I am not the world's greatest fan of smelly things – they make me sneeze – but I have to say there are some fragrances in this company's offering that are most alluring.

Not satisfied with being overrun by the recent deliveries, I set about by seeking some more. We abandoned the distillery that started off our expansion into local alcohol last year, to my disgrace, so I set about to make amends. They produce a vodka, and other brews, from distilling their potatoes grown on their farm. The vodka is the closest thing that I have tasted to genuine poteen and their gin ain't too shabby, either. While talking to the main man there, he told me of their new invention which is vacuum packed sachets of cocktails – just add ice, apparently. I could not resist, even though I might have to knock a wall down and put up another shelf to accommodate the addition.

The business day petered out towards closing time with just one mad dasher at five minutes to closing. As is usual on Friday, with Mother at the helm, we sit at the table for tea and watch the bay as the sun slips away. Well, someone has to do it.

April 29<sup>th</sup> – Thursday

The morning was hanging heavy with portent as I opened our virtual curtains this morning. Out to the northwest the sky was a deep grey, which seemed to meld with the sea that was remarkably flat through to the horizon. Anything vaguely white in that direction stood out starkly, lit by the rising sun trying to fight its way through the thick but broken cloud in the east. Sea birds and the occasional tiny wave glimmered like tears in a backlit curtain. It was quite mesmeric.

As threatening as it looked, I cast caution to the wind and took the bleddy hound around without even thinking of taking a rain jacket. Fortunately, it very kindly waited until we had returned before it started to rain and then rained with a vengeance. There were further showers during the morning each of which lasted fifteen minutes or more. We were warned that in the afternoon those showers increased in frequency and length. Naturally then, the afternoon brightened up and was dry as an old stick.

It was not the best day for business and especially not the selling of pasties. I got into a bit of a muddle with our pasties and have an excess. I thought we had sold through the large amount we had on Tuesday and ordered a further large amount for the following day. It was only after that I discovered there were some left in the box. Still, we will have spares in the freezer for when we run out another time.

The change in conditions brought some waves into the bay but they were not the best for surfing and in the later afternoon it went flat as a dish. This did not put off

about a dozen hopefuls but I had some more hardcore lads in the shop in the middle of the day who had a different view. They decided that the only thing that their boards would be useful for today was fishing off them. They bought some mackerel feathers to give it a shot. I wish them well, but I did say that the mackerel were not in abundance recently. All the same, they concluded it would be better than surfing.

It became so quiet in the early afternoon that I resorted to doing my invoices. This kept me amused for an hour or so and after that we had a bit of a flurry of business. I am very pleased we took the jump into our wide range of gins and now rums as we sold quite a few today. The range of more vegetarian friendly products from our new supplier are also beginning to gain some traction, which is good to see. This was a bit of a risk at this time of year as our core customer base tends to be the same in the shoulder seasons. It is also a bit more interesting for us seeing new things come across the counter rather than the same old packets and tins.

Casting all thoughts of gin and rum aside, a merry bunch of Lifeboat people gathered at the station for a half past six o'clock launch. With the large number of available crew we have at the station, numbers for exercises are selected in advance as not everyone would be able to get on the boat. This is not so much of a problem for the very excellent Shore Crew who are short in numbers to start with, and some are even just short. Happily, we have a new recruit who is on the doorstep local and willing, so hopefully this will make a lot of difference when he is up to speed.

The boat had to slip away somewhere quiet to conduct a shuffling off duty for a benefactress before returning for some training activity. It was gone for more than an hour during which we short in numbers on shore, bolstered by some Boat Crew volunteers who made up our averages by being very tall, set up for the short slipway, it being high tide an' all.

It was, in fact, a big high tide and our clever 'fishing rod' that permits the Boat Crew to collect their own span, did not fit very well on the upper grilles of the slipway. We made it secure enough and when the boat returned in the blaze of the setting sun, we conducted what was very clearly a textbook recovery up the short slip. We are, after all, a very long, short and tall, very excellent Shore Crew.

April 28<sup>th</sup> – Wednesday

Oh, how disappointing. After what seemed like weeks of sunshine those big black clouds have come rolling back in. The Missus told me that after the rain that fell on our faces, even more turned up during the night. She was happy because even half an hour of moderate rain will fill the water butts and give a good fill of the IBC fed from the cabin roof. We must pull our finger out and get more water butts or a second IBC for the greenhouse roof, which is bigger than the cabin and an ideal collector. At present there is only a small water butt doing the job.

There were still some showers around in the morning but the bleddy hound and I missed them all during our run around the block. Either the tri-cornered garlic does not smell when it is not sunny or we got used to it very quickly but the aroma was not quite so in your nostrils today. It might also have been the resurgence of a boisterous wind, this time from somewhere in the north – I do not think that even it knew where it was coming from today – which battered us about all the day long.

It looked like it did not bother our good friend, ex-Head Launcher, who dropped in at The Farm for a visit. He could be seen on our CCTV system basking in the shelter of the cabin on our decking there in the mid afternoon. He got here when the Missus had nipped off on an errand and was about to leave when she came back. I think that actually he was just waiting for someone to make the tea for him.

The slightly adverse weather put a cap on the numbers in The Cove. Sitting outside the café would have been none too comfortable as indicated by the lack of people doing it. We had a few people breeze through but nothing of any substance. This was probably just as well because our card payment terminal played up yet again. I was feeling a bit of a cad for planning to terminate their contract after only six weeks but the failure today gave me better justification. I gave the go ahead to the other party and hopefully we will have a more stable platform by the end of the week.

The robust northerlies and lack of any decent surf did not upset everyone. For most of the day there were a couple of windsurfers scooting across the bay, back and forth. Later a wingsurfer came out to play. I do not know whether I mentioned it before but the board the wingsurfer uses has a hydrofoil of sorts, like the super yachts you see Ben Ainsley and the like sailing. It seems untenable that someone can scoot at such speed across the water, apparently levitating above the chop of the waves.

Just as I was closing up the shop, a bunch of swarthy Lifeboat types started to arrive in a bit of a hurry. Some of the crew get a heads up a bit before the pagers go off, so this was definitely a shout in the coming. I closed up and headed across just as my pager went off. I had barely opened the first of the slipway doors when we had another page to tell us the whole thing had been cancelled. What a bit tease that was but we had an alarmingly good turnout. Those boat boys are keen as mustard.

April 27<sup>th</sup> – Tuesday

For the first time in what seemed like weeks we had a still and warm morning. The sun was doing its best out of a clear blue sky and there was hardly a breath of wind from any direction. Naturally, it did not last but for a long morning, at least, we revelled in the springness of it all.

One of the most remarkable things about the day was a hint of scent hanging in the air. It was not immediately apparent what it was or even that it was not just

something imagined but when we rounded the corner at the end of the car park the full force of it hit our olfactory senses head on.

We had chosen to walk around the block this morning given that there was very little beach to plod across. It was exceeding pleasant to do so too, and I do not think that I even needed the jacket I was wearing. When we turned the corner and advanced on Mayon Cliff the smell of tri-cornered garlic was thick in the air. I do not think I have ever seen quite so much of it up the cliff all the way up to the old hotel. It was a sight to behold but there was definitely more beholding of the aroma than anything else.

We turned quite busy during the day – in a comparative sense. This was presumably predetermined because I had ordered a big haul of fish to be delivered during the day. The smaller order arrived first and was fairly easy to deal with but the larger order came in during the afternoon when there were more people milling about. With the Missus at The Farm all day, there was no help coming for me, so I managed to do the vacuum packing piecemeal between customers. Where I could, I served one handed but on other occasions I had to take off my surgical glove as both hands were needed. I think we will need a new box of gloves on our next order as I did go through them a bit.

It was all worthwhile because as well as the first fish orders of the year, we also have a freezer stock to offer including some pie mix, hake, haddock and ling. The way I have set things up now with two suppliers is that we can have deliveries twice during the week. This will be much more convenient for our customers as neither of the deliveries falls on a Friday. I am very pleased that we were able to continue with the supplier we were using last year. There is nothing wrong with the restaurant cuts we get from the new supplier but it is still great to get more, erm, rustically cut and often larger fillets. These will mainly adorn our freezer while the new supplier will feed the fresh orders as they are more conveniently packed.

The afternoon disappeared in a rush. It did seem as if we had been much busier today, but it may also have been because I was busy too. I had taken off my warmer jacket – the wooly pully has been relegated to the wash now – but on and off it started to get chilly again. There was a breeze blowing up from somewhere, but I could not say from where, and the skies had started to cloud over. I might have to start looking at the weather forecast again to see what is going on because right now, I have not a clue.

I still did not have a clue until, lying in bed half asleep, I started to get rained upon. I think there may be some showers on the way.

April 26<sup>th</sup> – Monday

It was exceedingly refreshing this morning to discover that the robust easterly wind had dropped to somewhat less robust during the night. The warmth in the sunlight on the Harbour beach was pleasant and today, not whipped away by the easterly. The

tide has jumped and there was much less beach today at the same time as there was yesterday. The tides are also heading into some of the largest of the year again with evidence that it has recently been six or eight feet up the stone of the slipway without any appreciable swell.

The upper part of the beach looked like it had been ironed and we were the first to sully the virgin sand. First, that is apart from a couple of gulls, Kitiwakes possibly, one sitting on the water and the other paddling on the edge. I watched the one on the beach for a while and noticed that it was dodging the waves as they came in. It was either having a jolly wheeze or the gull was afraid of the water. The bleddy hound settled the issue by chasing it into the air after which it had little choice but to land on the water with his mate who probably said, 'There, I told you it was lovely.'

I had a visit during the weekend from a fisherman from Lizard who was a tad agitated. He had been awarded a parking ticket in the Harbour Car Park having inadvertently overstayed his welcome. He was not happy. In truth, he had not noticed the new charges in the car park that had been implemented very recently and paid the old rate thinking he then had plenty of time. It was possibly a case for leniency as it was an honest mistake. However, for the parking companies that patrol the car parks, matters are black and white.

It minded me that it might be useful if you are planning to visit to explain that the charges for parking in the Harbour car park have changed significantly. The first three hours are £1.30 per hour. Parking all day, until midnight is £6 and for 24 hours it is £9. It will also be worth mentioning that the toilets in the car park are still closed.

The disappearance of the wind was most welcome. The street was much more alive than it has been for a while and we did not have every customer who came in mention how unwindy it was. I took my leave while it was still relatively quiet and undertook a blistering session down the road now that I can use the gymnasium again. It is far more comfortable than the hut with a tin roof - outside, of course.

The Missus ran off to The Farm in the afternoon. It was going to be a long one because she left me in charge of tea. There is only one sort of tea that I can cook down in the shop and that is pasties, from our frozen stock, I suppose, at a push, I could have made a salad in between customers or cooked some fish in foil – except the Missus hates fish. Pasties it was, then.

If you ever wish to torture yourself, dear reader, just be moderately hungry and be in the same room as the oven while you cook some pasties from frozen. They take an hour and the aroma flooding from the oven will in short order have you climbing the walls. There is the consolation, if you are a grumpy shopkeeper, that the smell also attracts similarly hungry visitors from miles around keen to appreciate a pasty or two as well. The satisfaction is particularly poignant when you ran out of pasties some hours earlier and have none to sell them.

April 25<sup>th</sup> – Sunday

The big beach was looking rather grand in all its loveliness during the early part of the morning. A large sandbar has diverted the stream out of the Valley to add a little interest to the view and a line of rocks at the back of the beach marks out how much sand has been scoured out below it. At low water, the sandbars reaching out into the bay can clearly be seen as light patches in the darker areas of sea and still it all moves to the left under the incessant east wind. Looking at the breaking waves, there is not much depth of water about 100 yards off at North Rocks and made for some interesting surf conditions there.

Our card payment machine was showing the same signs of the problem that it had yesterday. Once again, I could not get through to the helpdesk to check that the machine was still alright to use. It has been best practise for years to have a voice message on the telephone system and messages on websites when major outages occur. This not only helps the customer understand that it is a broader issue than just theirs but relieves the pressure on the helpdesk. I was not particularly chuffed at this failure. I think it may well be time to call it a day with this crowd and have written to the opposition to start a dialogue with them.

We were busier than we were last week, although I found that we had more than enough pasties to see us through the day despite not having a huge stock left. In the battering and wearing breeze that continues from the east, even the café tables were deserted for most of the day. On the bright side we did a roaring trade in windbreaks, woolly hats and hooded sweatshirts all of which I would have felt better wearing myself. By the middle of the afternoon I regret to say that I resorted to the first electric sliding door in The Cove to save me from hypothermia.

The quiet of the afternoon allowed me to piece together some more orders. I also tried to track down some short windbreaks as a stop gap until our original supplier got them in but to no avail. I also had the same problem with tennis balls would you believe, and the only ones I could find from our alternative supplier were twenty pence each more expensive, which is a lot for a normally eighty pence ball. I think that this probably calls into question whether Wimbledon will go ahead this year, nothing to do with the dreaded lurgi, just lack of balls.

The Missus took Mother out for an impromptu jaunt up east in the afternoon. She had found someone selling ground stabilisers second hand and going for a song. These are the mats we put down to stop the tractor mashing up the earth outside the woodshed, which cost us quite a bit and did not cover half the ground we thought it might. We will have to wait until the earth gets a bit soggy again, but it will save a fortune when we are able to plant them.

They went straight up to The Farm to water the plants on the way back. It seems we still have some water in the butts and our big IBC and we only need a short shower to fill them up again. It will also help lay the dust, a covering of which adorns the

truck from its numerous trips along the rough lane. We are not fussy about the type of rain we get as long as it only happens overnight.

There was no chance tonight as the bay was still looking resplendent in the soft light from the setting sun. It is quite a distraction when you are sitting at the table for tea. We can cope with distractions like that all day long if we must.

April 24<sup>th</sup> – Saturday

There is nothing quite like the failure of your card payment system to wake you up in the morning. It was entirely fortunate that the first card customer of the day asked for a printed voucher else I would not have found out. The machine was looking like it was taking the payment but looking at the recorded transactions, there was nothing there.

To compound the problem, the support line was permanently engaged and there was no helpful recorded message either on the telephone or the website – a big support omission. I checked with next door who have the same system and they were blissfully unaware that there was a problem.

There was a likelihood that the transactions were going through and that it was just the reporting system at fault, but it was a huge risk just to assume that. With no other choice I telephoned the original sales representative who sold me the system in the first place. He called back to tell me that my assumption was correct but it was still a bit concerning using the system again, blind as it were.

After the first hiccup in the system a week or two ago, we have kept the backup machine on the counter. I resorted to this while I was waiting for the thumbs up on the other system. Since I have not heard back on the fault we reported and having learned that next door has the same issue, I think it is time to ditch the new boys on the block and go for a more, battlefield tested alternative.

At least the problems with card payments distracted me from enduring the easterly blast that continued unabated today. It did seem much lighter when I took the bleddy hound down to the Harbour but when I was greeting the pasty man later on, the wind had perked up considerably. Understandably, it has generated a bit of interest in our windbreaks – the ones we have – and we have sold several in the last few days.

That pesky wind increased in measures during the day and saved its worst until last. I am glad that there was no one around to witness me trying to bring in the windbreak stand and the net bin, both appeared to be fighting back as I wrestled them through the door.

Once again, we had reasonable business today. If we have reasonable business tomorrow I will run out of pasties in short order. The normal run of events now is that we all go quiet from around four o'clock and we coast in to closing from there. Our

new neighbour from the Sennen Cove Café has, I think, been put here to lead me astray. It is the second time he has offered me free beer. The first time was way before the sun was over the yard arm and I found it relatively easy to turn down the very kind offer. Today, he pitched up at just after he closed at four o'clock with a similar offer and I must confess I was sorely tempted. I managed to resist but if he asks again toward the end of a more rigorous day, I may well capitulate. What a terrible, terrible thing it is to turn down free beer.

Probably some good news, at least for those after a hand drawn pint of beer, that the OS will be open this week. I had it from, if not the horse's mouth, a good friend of the horse, that the bar will be open again later next week. There has been some movement of tables and chairs into the newly created outdoor spaces. It will be good to see them open again as we could do with some rain - and let us face it, it is going to rain as soon as they open - up at The Farm.

I was glad that I turned down that free pint as the next customers required directions to Maen Castle. They all very kindly wore masks despite being deaf and the mask hampering their communications. I needed some concentration to convey the directions to the 'castle' without speaking and it was not at all easy. Even being able to talk, directions are complex as it can easily be missed. With the three deaf ladies was a small boy. He had clearly taken up the challenge of compensating for the non-verbal communication of the others by talking ceaselessly and seemingly without pausing for breath. It was a different and pleasant interlude at the end of the day.

I normally try and round off the end of the page but you have not had a picture in a while, so I hope that will do instead.

April 23<sup>rd</sup> – Friday

Our regular stand-up comedian is back in The Cove. His jokes are rubbish, which obviously means that they are right up my street. I should not really let his material out of the bag but I can sense, dear reader, that you would not forgive me for keeping just a few examples from you.

He told me a friend of his used to do installations in shops. It was going well until he was arrested for counter fitting.

He said he saw a television advertised in a shop for a pound. Thinking it possibly too good to be true he went inside and asked why the television was so cheap. The shopkeeper told him that it was in perfect working order except that the volume was stuck on full. My friend told me for a pound he just could not turn it down.

He's here all week, too. Aye, thang yew.

Anyway, moving swiftly on. As expected our somewhere in the naughty east quarter wind persisted today. First thing it did not seem too bad but after the Missus has

spent an hour at the counter, she insisted that the first electric sliding door in The Cove was put into action. I continued to practise until I became a little hot under the collar, several collars to be accurate, and opened it again in the middle of the afternoon.

It was not the busiest of days, although the Missus must have seen some action while I was off having another blistering session of exercise as all the cheese pasties had gone when I came back. Of course, that might have been all she sold in the period while I was gone, which would have been pretty abysmal since I had cut back on numbers of cheese pasties during the week.

I was not overly concerned about the flow of business. For an out of season week in normal times, it has been better than average. It has been easy to forget what 'normal' was even though it was only here two years ago. The other comparison to make to really cheer up a grumpy shopkeeper is that it is immeasurably better than this time last year when I was counting every penny in and out. If I need grounding, that is worth remembering.

The lull in trade allowed me to stock a few shelves while the Missus retired to The Farm with Mother to plant 200 kale, turnips and something else. The challenge she has at the moment is getting hold of earth for the no dig method of gardening she has adopted. The plan being to put cardboard down to stop the weeds and piling compost or earth on top to start the plants off in. I put my foot down regarding the buying of compost for the project on the grounds that we have a 3 acre field full of grade one agricultural earth and do not need to buy it. The problem with that theory is getting at the earth, which is buried. She has used all the earth that our neighbour at the top dug out of his garden for us and now needs more. I do appreciate that digging it out of the field by hand, especially having to get through about six inches or more of turf first, is not easy and are looking for sensible solutions.

We have applied our combined minds to the issue and concluded that we need a digger. The units with caterpillar tracks are a little beyond our pocket and while less expensive versions are available for attaching to the back of the tractor I refuse to call Poppy, we are not sure that it will be needed more than once. On the table currently is the suggestion that we hire a mini digger for the weekend, but we need to look at that more closely as there will be issues regarding getting it to The Farm and how quickly the Missus can learn to operate it. Whoever thought that there would never be a dull moment in owning a field at the end of a half mile lane.

We ended the day in a very sedate manner, which hopefully is the calm before a busy weekend. I have been reasonably cautious about orders for the weekend as I rather suspect Sunday will do the same as last week, if my theory of a gap in changeovers is correct. If it is not, we are in trouble. There is an acronym for it that they use in the forces, which begins Situation Normal.

Never mind, there is always a bright side. The Missus took the last of the haddock and whiting out of the freezer that was there from the end of last season. You might think that fish, particularly, would suffer after six months but I can assure you, dear reader, it was some 'ansum, plain cooked in a fish dinner. The Missus had a bacon sandwich; the Missus hates fish.

April 22<sup>nd</sup> – Thursday

It was a cracking day to look at through the window. The trouble was the bitter east wind that came with it sending people scurrying for their thick jumpers and heavy coats. I was back to my extra layer for taking the bleddy hound out and even on the relative shelter of the Harbour beach, it was still mighty chilly.

Had that wind been in the east I would not have minded so much. The fact that it was a couple of scats south of east made all the difference and kept me shivering in my shoes behind the counter. It also blew all the loose papers around on the counter and irritatingly rustled the polythene on the windbreaks all day long.

For all its brisk wind and chilliness, there was remarkably more people around today than any other during the week so far. It is as if our visitors were slowly discovering coming out and walking about. I know that living in a strange property can be confusing for a while, but I did not think it would take people that long to work out where the doors were.

Perhaps it is the previous evenings to blame. Our late afternoons, after the café has closed and everyone has gone home, seem to be reserved for wine, beer and spirits. We are continuing our interest in local gins and expanding our rum collection this year and sales continue to be strong. It is also great fun finding the most outrageously shaped bottle or container, of which the Dr Squid copper tin still holds the cup. Our visitors have been taking quite a bit of advantage of our offerings of late.

Our delayed washing machine man turned up today. He had brought the most likely replacement items in his car for the job, and he identified the problem within a few minutes of getting the back off the machine. I noted our surprise that it was eight years old, and he confirmed our expectations that although the replacement heating element was not very expensive, the rest of the machine probably had six months of service left in it. A new one is required.

We trust our man's knowledge and experience so were happy to follow his recommendation for a replacement. There was only one in the range that suited our requirements, so it was very easy to choose. The biggest problem was finding a supplier that had one. We tried a local shop that we had used before, but he could not help so had to purchase from the only chain store that had one. They promised delivery inside seven working days and then gave us a delivery date of 3<sup>rd</sup> May. I hope that they are better at installing washing machines than they are at counting.

Towards the end of the afternoon custom tailed off after quite a buoyant day. One of our customers told me that the wind was dying down. I cannot say that my frozen hands had noticed. It had remained bright throughout the day and the bay looked resplendent in the sunshine. The sea was deep blue but other than being flecked with little white wave tops, it was flat as a dish. Another customer had informed me that one of her family had come down expressly to do some surf photography. Well, that was not going to happen today.

What was going to happen, however, was a Lifeboat launch into that deep blue, white flecked sea. We had a call quite late that a surprise exercise was planned for shortly after the shop closed. It gave me enough time to sample what warm felt like before I got cold again hanging about in a force seven blow at the bottom of the long slipway. However, I stole a march on my oppo and got my dibs in for winch duties before he even took breath. There is no doubt now that it will be my turn next when the rain is lashing down along with an icy wind.

The boat launched a little after the planned time and ran out for about half an hour or just over. It was probably so that the Boat Crew could have their pictures taken on the bow with their hair blown back in the breeze, those that had some, that is. I could think of no other reason for it to head out in what had become a howling, icy gale. It looked some 'ansum, though, with the wash turning into spray behind it as it cut across the bay.

It seemed that no sooner than the boat departed than it was back asking to be recovered and we were keen to oblige. We brought the boat up the long slip in what was clearly a textbook recovery in slightly tricky conditions. We are, after all, very flexible, very excellent Shore Crew.

April 21<sup>st</sup> – Wednesday

I spent some of the morning spending money we do not have. That is always so much fun and the anticipation of seeing if we have the funds when the bills are due is, frankly, electrifying, edge of the seat stuff. I am sure you can understand why it would be so difficult to stop being a grumpy shopkeeper; I have become an adrenaline junkie.

I eased myself into the day by running the bleddy hound down to the Harbour beach as is usual. It was bright, in a hazy sunshine sort of way, and there was breeze coming from some indeterminate direction that was bothering no one. I am pretty sure that breeze turned easterly during the day but when I went out in the street it seemed quite a temperate air flow.

It was downright warm earlier on when I went and took my regular exercise. I certainly did not need a blistering session to get warm, although I had one anyway.

When I headed out that way the street was empty as it had been all morning but when I returned an hour later, there were people all over the place.

The Sennen Cove Café, previously known as Little Bo Café, was a little epicentre of activity again. It was reasonably clear from the outset that the couple running it have their heads screwed on the right way. The inclusion of beer taps on the counter rather underlined the fact and he has started with a short but inclusive menu. The fact that he is the only bar in town currently cannot do him any harm, either.

We are loosely interlinked with the café. Economies of scale kick in when one of the three businesses down this end are busy and we all benefit. Currently, other than the Beach kiosk, there is little at the far end to commend it, which is probably as well that we are not busier in The Cove. On reflection, it may be why we are not busier in The Cove but that might be a bit of a stretch. I am slowly acclimatising to the grumpy shopkeeper role again after a long absence. I have put my Farming days behind me for now lest I become a blubbing wreck, but on fine days such as it was today, the absence is torture, I tell you, utter torture.

The wind increased into the afternoon and brought with it a flurry of windbreak requests. We had anticipated some activity in this area and windbreak stock was one of the first things on the list having run out early last year. Despite being on the ball and ahead of the posse in mixing our metaphors and placing our orders, only half the consignment arrived. The short windbreak and the most popular had not yet arrived in the country. We were expecting this to be remedied in early April but ironically, the mammoth container ship bringing them hither was knocked askew by a light breeze, the reports said, and seriously delayed.

Of course, it might have been the ship behind it for all we know, and the incident is also a heaven sent excuse for late deliveries everywhere. It compounds problems that we already had and heralds another year of excess customers and lack of things to sell them.

If the Missus's effort up at The Farm translates to output, we should at least have some vegetables to sell the arrivals. She is racing ahead with planting out the seedlings that seemingly were only potted a week or two ago. The lettuces in the polytunnel seem to be doing well but the potatoes, out on the field, have some issues to content with. Whether it was the bunnies, foxes or badgers that we see on a regular basis on the camera up there, we do not know. It does not appear that anything was eaten but some potatoes were unearthed. I might have to spend an evening up there to demonstrate some shock and awe. My only worry about shooting at wildlife is that at some point in evolution the little beggars are going to learn how to shoot back.

Talking of biting bullets, it has been a while coming but with increasing enquiries about fish I have placed an order with two suppliers. I had quite forgotten about the company in St Ives that we used to do business with. I was unhappy with some of

the product and stopped using them several years ago. After a brief conversation with our new neighbour in the Sennen Cove Café who is using the company, I decided to give them another go. They are the only company left standing that will deliver small amounts and are thus just who we need to revive our fish ordering service again.

The company in Penzance that we discovered last year are too good to abandon altogether so I have decided on a two pronged approach. For fresh orders, we will use the company in St Ives but restrict ordering days to two a week so that we are ordering sensible amounts. I will top up our freezer with fish from the Penzance company simply because it is cracking good gear. Hopefully, this will fix the problem of only being able to get deliveries on a Friday, which is no use to anyone.

The breeze from the east was increasing when I came to close the shop and bowled over our net bin. It had been tousling hair since the mid afternoon and the Lifeboat channel markers were leaning over by increasing amounts. It will be warm socks and extra layers behind the counter tomorrow. I can hardly wait.

April 20<sup>th</sup> – Tuesday

My double bluff of getting my invoices out to attract customers failed miserably. I was able to do all fifty or so with barely an interruption. I was surprised how quickly I got back into the swing of it having only had a few to do in the last quarter. It is still a veritable pain in the bottom, though.

I fancied that it was, perhaps, a little warmer today or maybe the wind was just in a more comfortable place. The sun popped out here and there which can make all the difference in a psychological sort of way. The café previously known as Little Bo Café was back open today and there were a constant little knot of people enjoying its offerings from the moment it opened to when it closed at four o'clock. This is probably no surprise as the Beach Bar was closed again so Sennen Cove Café, as it now stands, was the only show in town. It is refreshing to note that they are serving a few fresh fish meals on the menu as we are constantly asked where people can find fresh fish being served.

There was a bit of wind coming from somewhere. I could not feel it, but the bay was full of ripples and very little surf again. We have reverted to paddle board territory once more with a few kayaks thrown in, although there were not many of either out today. It was also not a day for camping down on the beach as all the people I saw down there were on their feet with a board of some type or a dog leash in their hands. Slowly, the profile of these 'in between' weeks is starting to form. We will have it nailed down in no time.

The Missus headed off to The Farm half way through the morning with the aim of watering the plants and then returning to be here when our washing machine man arrived. It was shortly before she was due to come back that our man called to tell

me he had broken down on Paul Hill, of all places, and would have to reschedule our appointment. I was able to catch the Missus before she came away from The Farm to give her the good news that she could stay all day. Delighted, she was.

We ended the day in glorious sunshine, a chill northerly breeze and an empty street. That building a beehive in between customers is looking more of a reality each day.

April 19<sup>th</sup> – Monday

Well, all I can say is, how very disappointing. We have had a huge amount of hyperbole suggesting that we would be mowed down in the rush as locked up and locked down citizens of everywhere rushed to the Duchy for a holiday. We were all lulled into a false sense of security when, last week, a good quantity of holiday makers arrived on our doorsteps. It was, of course, the tail end to the Easter holiday but even then we imagined that there would be enough people about to continue the buzz after the schools went back.

So, the tumbleweed from yesterday had barely toppled off the sea wall when the empty streets of another day ushered in the next lot. There was some wandering about and buying in the morning but the afternoon sunk like a stone. If it does not pick up tomorrow I shall fetch the workbench down from The Farm and start building the last two beehives.

On the bright side, our washing machine repair man said that he could come tomorrow in the afternoon. He is particularly good at what he does and will not go about fixing something if he feels it is not worth fixing. Since the problem occurred just after I had washed all the clothes I needed to wash, I feel that there no need for a big rush. I do not think there is any need to explain the Missus's thoughts on this, whose clothes are piling up in the washing basket.

The weather did a pretty much repeat of yesterday for us. It had turned a little chillier than the last few days, but it was not the sort of cold that might deter visitors. That said it was not doing grumpy shopkeepers very much good having just got used to something a little less frosty behind the counter. The grey skies did nothing to help in the morning, but the brighter afternoon was very welcome and helped stir up some latent business.

Whether it was the improving look of the place or not, the street started to get a little busier towards the end of the afternoon. Perhaps it did yesterday, too, and I just missed it when we closed early. That would have been just about right. Whatever the case it was clearly postcard writing day because we sold quite a number during the latter part of the day. We also started selling pasties again in the hour before we closed. We have a strange bunch staying here or they are just keen to break through our pitiful expectations of repetitive customer behaviour. You can almost hear them saying, 'I am not a number'. Never mind, our oversized beach balls will get them later.

In the absence of a workbench and the beehive kits, I resorted to collecting the accumulated invoices, which numbered quite a few. The arrival in the post of the annual bill for the accounting software prompted me to remember that they all need to be recorded and doing it piecemeal is far better than having to do them all at once at the end of the quarter. I will have a go at keying them into the computer system during the quiet of the morning tomorrow – when, of course, it will be the busiest morning we have seen since last week. We love our set of obtuse visitors – in fact, I will take them in any flavour at present.

April 18<sup>th</sup> – Sunday

It was a bit of a birthday celebration day today as the Missus and a couple of others in her family have birthdays about the same time. A grand gathering was planned, as the rules permit, up at The Farm where open air abounds and eating can be done outside as indeed can the cooking with the newly tried out barbeque machine.

It was a bit of a disappointment then that after an initially bright and sunny start, the skies clouded over. I did not particularly notice a drop in temperature from yesterday while standing behind the counter, which was a relief for me but several customers commented on how the day was cooler without the sunshine. Such niggling detail as a small drop in temperature would not, however, deter the Missus from her path nor would the restriction in gathered numbers prevent her from preparing food for three times the heads counted.

The candidates appeared on our doorstep closing on the middle of the day and with the Missus in the vanguard they headed off to The Farm. Here, Mother had been left holding the bleddy hound, unexpected the family to descend, so love and joy all about we might conclude. All about, that is, except for the bleddy hound who has an almost lifelong aversion to border terriers, one of which she had a dust up with when she was little and, being Cornish, has never forgiven the breed since. This is pertinent because the brother-in-law and wife are on their second border terrier and had brought Barney with them. The previous one the bleddy hound had browbeaten into submission and it would cower and whimper in the corner in her presence. The bleddy hound was unlikely to get such an easy ride with the new one but I would have to wait until later to find out what went on.

In the meantime, back in the shop, the pace was a little slower than I had anticipated. By the middle of the day there was little in the way of business, although the street had slowly become more full as the hours went by. Not even a double Lifeboat exercise seemed to animate the assembled crowds into doing a bit of shopping after the entertainment of launch and recovery.

It was some while ago that a slimmed down selection of crew members had undertaken a bit of CPR training with the station's nominated doctor. There had hoped to be a Lifeboat exercise following that session to emulate a real emergency.

It had been cancelled in the light of new dreaded Iurgi rules that deterred unnecessary crew gathering. As restrictions have been lifted and more training can now take place, the training and event had been resurrected for today.

There were two launches to include as many crew as possible and the Shore Crew were included, taking care of the casualty once it – the dummy is of indeterminate sex, natural or chosen - had been delivered onto dry land. This required the very excellent Shore Crew to not only carry out what appeared to be a textbook recovery up the long slip but shortly after, and with no respite in between, carry on the CPR for a further forty minutes to represent the journey into Penzance. Quite why the very excellent Shore Crew would be required to accompany a patient with heart failure all the way to hospital was not clear. One might expect there to be a perfectly good ambulance to hand to turn the patient over to. Still, if nothing else, it is very good exercise.

As might be apparent, I was not on board for today's exercise. With the way business is at present and especially given today the birthday thing going on, attending exercises for the foreseeable will be tricky for me. You may still expect to be thrown out of the shop should our pagers go off for real and on the rare occasion that insufficient other bodies are available for an exercise during the day. We are, after all, a very amenable, very excellent Shore Crew.

The day's business was dire to say the least. A good many pasties were consigned to the freezer and many to the bin. It was the quietest day that we have had including the previous Saturday before restrictions were lifted. It is impossible to say what exactly caused the drop in busyness but it may be that for many holiday lets there is a necessary gap between one family leaving and another arriving. We shall monitor very closely what happens next.

The pause in business allowed me to close the shop early on account of the gathering at The Farm. I doubt that anyone actually noticed, to be honest. I still missed the main cook and nibbled on cold meats and fish. There did not seem much point in having the Missus revive the barbeque for a second cooking just for me. It was almost normal seeing the family again and with a three acre field to distance in, all very acceptable. We were not together long after I arrived before they all had to go home, and I was left to help Mother clear up. I conclude that barbeques are terribly messy things and grill tops, once used, will never be properly clean again regardless of how long they are soaked, how much scrubbing they get or however many times you put them through the dishwasher on its most rigorous cycle.

Nevertheless, it seems that the celebration day was much enjoyed by all and could easily be repeated for fun – once the grill top is clean again.

April 17<sup>th</sup> – Saturday

During the week our suppliers conspired against us to arrive all at the same time to see how I coped with being overwhelmed. This morning, they all arrived late – and together - to see how I coped with a bit of time pressure and being overwhelmed. I do hope that I passed muster.

It did not matter how hard our suppliers tried to make life difficult, it was hard to spoil such a glorious day. Our neighbours must have thought so too as I met them down on the Harbour beach putting out their punt for the first time in the season. I gave them a hand hauling it down to the water, but I suspect they probably would not have noticed had I not – those gardening muscles are fading fast.

For the first time since we opened, I have not felt chilled to the bone in the shop, so I am supposing that a little warmth has crept into our side of the street. Looking out across the bay this morning it was as if time had stood still overnight. The tide was not far off the same state as it was when I last looked yesterday and the whole bay was still with hardly a breath of a breeze floating about. It would have been easy to say that there was no movement in the water last night, but a few white splashes out by North Rocks indicated just a soupçon of swell kicking in.

Today, it looked just as flat but down by North Rocks there were around 30 surfers cruising while less experienced water lovers were lining the shore near the middle of the beach. The white water down the far end there was showing a marked improvement and while not the best surf in the world, better than it has been for a week.

Things had started to go swimmingly with an unexpected increase in customer traffic from the middle of the morning. Pasties were selling at an alarming darn-it-we-probably-have-underordered rate and general sales were picking up, so naturally, a power failure upstairs that stopped the Internet happening for card sales was par for the course. I went to investigate and discovered that something in the kitchen was tripping the breaker. It is going to be difficult tracking it down because as I investigated first the dish washer and then something else triggered the break. I decided to leave the kitchen off for the moment because we could not afford the disruption to the shop card payments machine.

Having moved the kettle to the living room as an essential measure I returned to the shop to carry on business and contemplate salad for tea. It all turned a bit quiet in The Cove in the early afternoon while, I suspect, everyone was watching the grand Duke being politely ushered off the stage. The Missus stayed in upstairs to watch the ceremony too, which was full of colour, pomp and plenty of circumstance, she told me. I recall being taken to London as a small child to see Trooping of the Colour or one such pageant. It was a thing of splendour and wonder for a small boy – and me too - to be recalled so many years later. The British seem to be very good at such things.

Whatever the reason for the absence of customers during the afternoon, business did not recover again. We had a few casual drop-ins for tea components and a few more came in for evening beers otherwise it was a very sedate run down to the five minutes to closing rush, which was such a damp squib it really could not be counted as such. Perhaps it was the Beach Bar that had opened its doors this evening that had drawn all the customers down to that end, fearful that it might close again at any minute.

Fearful that we may not be able to have a cooked tea ever again I thought that I should have another go at tracking down the electrical problem in the kitchen. First, I had to shut down all the sensitive computer equipment that would be upset by the power going on and off so quickly. After that it did not take long using a methodical approach to nail the issue down to the washing machine. It will be a call into Mr Washday Blues on Monday and hope that he is allowed to come and fix it. With time now pressing, we microwaved the remnants of the previous night's Chinese takeaway meal. We know how to push the boat out down here.

April 16<sup>th</sup> – Friday

There was a bit more cloud around today generally but first thing it was bright as a shiny button, if indeed anyone polishes their buttons these days, in which case it was shiny as a button from some years ago. The bleddy hound still seems content to challenge the tide down on the harbour beach and its small footprint of sand. It suits me because we do not spend as much time, but she could do with a proper stretch of the legs in the morning.

I had thought that the newspapers were late, but the driver had sneaked in while we were down the beach. As a consequence, I wasted ten minutes waiting for him to arrive when he already had. It was not a complete waste as I managed to send some electronic mails that had been pressing for a day or two. I had whizzed down to the shop earlier because I had completely forgotten to put out yesterday's newspapers for collection. If the driver arrived when I thought he did, I only just made the connection. It is a bit early in the season to be falling apart.

In a futile attempt to save myself, I ran off for a blistering exercise session. It was needed as it was still quite chilly in The Cove, but the effect did not last very long. It is at least the fifth day in a row that I have emulated one of our ice lollies by standing largely inert behind the counter for hours on end. Working from home is all the rage, I believe, but it is a shame that it does not apply to tilling the field because that would certainly keep me warm.

If I had not needed to manually apply myself too much during the peaks of the week there was certainly no animation required for today. If it had not been for a brewery delivery I probably would not have needed to move from behind the counter at all. I sensed a lot of goings home both today and last night, which has left The Cove near empty for hopefully just a short while. The jury is still out on what happens next so

ordering for the weekend was a complete stab in the dark. I did not hear anyone say ouch, so I either nailed it or missed completely.

The Missus ran off to The Farm again, which I am thinking of calling 'the circus' because it has a much better ring to it when talking about running off to somewhere. She has put in some effort up there in the last few days and potatoes have been planted and earth prepared for planting, er, more things that I cannot remember. So wrapped up is she in the growing malarky that she has completely forgotten to bring down the stock items that I asked for at the beginning of the week. We have managed without them thus far but a couple of shelves are now looking like we are having a closing down event – we do not use the 's' word, thank you very much. I issued an ultimatum for today, which I might as well have issued to the breeze but at least it made me feel better for a while.

I was sent a picture by the Missus, proudly displaying the first planting in the polytunnel. She said it was a record but I am sure people have planted things in polytunnels before. Apparently, it is a rekord, a type of lettuce that she planted. I do not need to know such details unless it makes them very expensive lettuces; I only have to sell them when they are fully grown. Given the amount of sweat, blood and tears that have gone into getting to the point that we are planting rekord in our polytunnel, they are very possibly going to be a record price.

The Missus arrived home bearing gifts of shop stock, for which I was very grateful. All we need now is for people to turn up and buy them and that is about as certain as selling record lettuce in a few months' time.

April 15<sup>th</sup> – Thursday

There was yet another bright and shiny morning waiting for us as we stepped out for a bit of an amble first thing. The bleddy hound insisted on heading for the beach even though there was only a sliver at just about high water. We managed without getting our feet wet, which was handy.

All our morning suppliers conspired against me today. They must think it a jolly jape to all come at approximately the same time and there were five of them, all bearing goods that required varying amounts of labour to make them ready for sale. I had to quickly prioritise and reasoned that despite there being temperature sensitive goods among the deliveries, newspapers were probably the most important at that moment. Perhaps I should just get up earlier, although given the time they all arrived that would simply give me more time twiddling my thumbs waiting for them.

The Missus was hot out of the blocks again this morning. She had clearly got a fire under her concerning getting the polytunnel ready for planting. I think it is because she had quite a bit more seed planting to do and the greenhouse is getting full of things now ready to be transferred and planted out. She left the bleddy hound in the shop because she was going to do some tractoring and that does not mix well with

bleddy hounds who have no road – or field – sense. Mother was having a haircut and was thus unavailable for bleddy hound constraining duties. Mind, it has been some while since she has been stuck in the shop and to be fair, it was not for that long, although for such a short stay she attracted a disproportionate amount of attention.

She also had the benefit of getting additional treats. We have numerous visiting dogs who have become accustomed to getting treats when they arrive. Clearly, I cannot treat visiting dogs in front of the bleddy hound without sharing some with her. Fortunately, she takes her time over the particular biscuits that we have and can be munching on one while the visitor gets three or four. The problem was that we had three or four such visitors today and we would prefer the bleddy hound not get any fatter.

After belatedly increasing our pasty order yesterday, I imagined that we would be in a good place for supplies today. I had clearly failed to realise that it was 'Cove have a pasty day' and that the world and her half sister's grandfather who had invited all his mates and their families, all would be wanting a pasty during the morning. We promptly ran out of sensible quantities by a little after half past twelve o'clock and were left bereft. Naturally, I have ordered even more for tomorrow when everyone will have gone home and not want one.

Also not wanted today was the letter we had from the Laurel and Hardy Newspaper Company. It told us that it was changing the way it credited missing supplies of magazines. Currently, it told us, any claim was credited straight away. In future, an investigation will be mounted and the depot will be asked to pass judgement on whether the credit should be allowed or not. So, let me see if I got this right. I get short changed because the depot made a mistake and put two instead of three magazines in my magazine box and I make a claim. The person that made the mistake now gets to pass judgement whether I am lying, or they made a mistake. Let me wonder how that is going to turn out. No, I do not need to wonder at all because the letter states that "this new process will remove the vast majority of claims recharges". Yes, I think that is probably perfectly accurate.

It was another perfect, if chilly, end to another perfect day. Just time for a bit of wall jumping before tea and a silent pray to the small gods of waves for just a little surf tomorrow before everyone goes home. It remains to be seen just how busy it will be next week. With only holiday lets available and very few campsites, the opportunity for day trippers here is slim, so we are likely to be reliant on local visitors only. Suites me for now.

April 14<sup>th</sup> – Wednesday

It has been groundhog day here for the last three days, in terms of the weather, at least. There was no discernible difference between yesterday morning and this

morning but it had been much colder through the night; logic might suggest that today was a little colder.

There was a fair bit of t-shirt wearing during the day, so I guessed that it must be getting a little warmer day by day. From my standing doing hardly any moving in the shop it did not seem so. I did go and sample the other side of the street at one point and yes, it was definitely warmer over there.

It was not quite as busy as yesterday, although we steamed through all our pasties by the middle of the afternoon, but I sensed that it was a beach day today. We were definitely not breaking any records today but hopefully we managed to pay a bill or two.

Obviously, I used my spare time to good effect by pushing back the barriers of shopkeeping and developing new business ideas that would make us millionaires in no time. Then I discovered how pleasant it was sitting on my wobbly stool, my feet up and looking out of the door at the wide open beach and decided not to bother with all that.

It was indeed a very fine view. The tide was a long way off being in and the beach was littered with surfer dudes wondering what to do with a perfectly flat sea. Quite a few had discovered the gentle art of paddle boarding with a small child mascot sitting at the prow – is there a prow on a paddle board, we wonder – while others just pretended on body boards. At the top of the beach little groups were camped behind their windbreaks. It looked sparse but when I had a closer look there was quite some gathering down there. It was definitely a beach day today.

I had thought that our quietness might have something to do with the Beach Bar drawing in the crowds with its heaven sent large open area at the front. I was about to write that quite unbelievably it was closed but Mr Weightyplunge has missed quite a few of the busy opportunities in recent years. The biggest surprise is that the OS did not open, especially after apparently spending a small fortune on refurbishment and clearing space in what was the car park and the elevated terrace. Rumour has it that asbestos has been discovered, presumably during the refurbishment. Given that the asbestos has not just been put there, we must have been living and drinking in its presence for the last 50 years. Perhaps it is only dangerous when you know about it. The Missus had heard an alternative rumour that all the South East Cornwall brewer's managed estate had been left closed. The plot thickens.

As well as hearing rumours, the Missus was determined to have us barbeque at The Farm in the evening. She managed to beat the new barbeque construction into submission but it had taken most of the day. She collected me from the shop at closing time, which fortunately was on time, and whisked me off.

The barbeque was indeed fully formed in all its stainless steel glory. That should rust nicely by winter time. The one thing she waited on me for was to connect it to the

gas bottle. She had tried and failed and I followed suit, concluding that it was a different fitting. I panicked a little when the instructions stated that it ran on LPG until I discovered that LPG was also called butane. The gas bottle we have is a few years old so perhaps the connector standard has changed. Happily, we had the regulator from the old rusted heap of a barbeque still there. It put up a bit of a fight when I tried to get it off but eventually I freed it and put it on the new barbeque.

It cooked very quickly and has a much larger cooking space than the previous one. The Missus managed to get everything done in a trice. During that trice I admired our setting and realised that I was warm for the first time during the day. The temperature soon tailed off as the sun dipped away but it was still temperate in the cabin where we ate our meal. It was a glorious end to the day and a glorious place to be for it.

April 13<sup>th</sup> – Tuesday

I opened our virtual curtains to another bright and glorious, if slightly chilly, day. The breeze that died away yesterday was resurrected but had returned to the east, which was a little kinder to us than the north and north east we had suffered over the previous few days. The view from the office window was spectacular all day, staring out over the placid green-blue waters of the bay and the azure blue, cloud spotted sky.

We were not alone today on our trip around the block with some early morning walkers about the place and one or two naughty campers overnighing in the Harbour car park. It was pleasant enough, nevertheless, although we had to feel our way across the back nine as the sun was so bright in our eyes we could see little of the way forward. I am no stranger to not knowing exactly where I am off to.

We seemed a little busier from the outset today. I had been wrong footed with our bakery supplies as most of the bread we sold was after the order cut off time yesterday. It lead me to believe that we were over-stocked so I reduced the order in response today. What a schoolboy error that was as we promptly ran out in the morning today.

Business became quite animated towards the end of the morning and we were getting small queues of customers. Naturally, it was at this point that our shiny new card machine decided to play up. It produced a quite meaningless error message that could quite easily have mean that it was not charged or that the card was not charged. The error was so persistent and resisted all forms of remedy that I hauled out our backup machine. This insisted on name and password before it would perform then told me the password I entered was wrong.

We eventually concluded that the new machine required the card to be placed manually into the machine and a PIN entered. This appeared to work but would not let me get into the transaction menu to see if it had been accepted. It was only after

we had a bit of a lull and time to get the backup machine working that I felt any confidence in using the machine again. I suspected at that point it was more a card issue, but with a new machine and not very helpful error messages we have a lot to get used to.

Thrown into the first of the busier days of the season came two salespeople. We really cannot blame them for trying but their timing was not great. One was expected but we had arrived a day early and I cannot say that I had a meaningful discussion with either of them. I managed to encourage the expected one to go and review his prices as I had been trying to for more than a year with his predecessor. I wait with bated breath to see the result of that.

The afternoon in the shop was a bit more sedate. We had sold a few wetsuits from our meagre supply but one of the major complaints at present is the lack of surf. One visitor asked what had happened because there are always waves at this time of year. The culprit is a thumping geet high pressure system with nothing much forecast to change until the weekend. The downside is, of course, hardly any breeze, clear blue skies and, hopefully, a bit of warmth creeping in. What utter bad luck.

With such loveliness abounding, the Missus suggested that we defer to The Farm again after the shop shut. This time it was not to move anything heavy but to indulge in the first barbeque of the season – if you discount the chulha cooking a week or so ago. At least the gas was not likely to go out, unless the bottle emptied. The barbeque machine needed to be built first and herein lay a problem, one of the important screws would not go into a misaligned hole. The Missus worked at it for some time but in the end, gave up.

She arrived back home having called ahead to announce plan B. It was a bit of a setback, but the end result was the same in that we were fed. I was late arriving at the table anyway because I had to call the technical support desk of our new card terminal company. The problem I had earlier raised its head again right at the last gasp of the day. Fortunately, I had set up the backup terminal and I was able to use that.

I almost ran out of patience waiting for the support desk to answer after being cut off twice. They redeemed themselves by having someone who knew what they were talking about answer the telephone without having to go through endless options. Because the fault is intermittent and not easily replicated, I knew that we would not find a resolve then and there. Logs have been collected and the problem escalated to the development team, giving me more confidence that I would have had from a most helpdesks I have had to speak with. I still have the option to reconsider our supplier choice since we are on a one month rolling contract and I have an alternative waiting in the wings who are somewhat more established.

The telephone rang three times while I was on the telephone with the card people resulting in a few more jobs to add to the list tomorrow. I had quite forgotten the joy of grumpy shopkeeping but am rapidly being reacquainted with it.

April 12<sup>th</sup> – Monday

The bright aspect of the day seems set to carry on for a while. I was looking out to blue skies in the morning with just a few fluffy white clouds dotted about. I was very pleased that the wind appeared to have dropped out, although the early part of the day for the last couple of days the wind has been light. Today, however, it managed to keep to itself from beginning to end, which was something of a relief while standing behind the counter later.

We were consigned to wander around the block, the bleddy hound and I, since the tide was all the way in at the appointed hour. I had rather expected a few more cars in the car park from the overnight arrivals but there were only three cars I could not account for. The other arrivals clearly felt the need to be clandestine or were merely a figment of my imagination – or, indeed, had somewhere else to park. Whoever was here must have also felt the need for a lie in as it was just as peaceful as usual as we completed our walk.

Conversely, our first hour of opening was filled with our regular visitors turning up in some abundance, well, more abundance than we have been used to in the recent past. It was comforting seeing happy and friendly faces to start the season off, something I would hope that we could continue throughout the rest of it. It was of particular comfort seeing the smiling and happy faces willing to part with a bit of cash for products and services that we have on offer – all at exceedingly keen prices, as you might imagine.

I left the Missus to it half way through the morning while I partook in some exercise. It was a blistering session, which will become increasingly necessary now that I am not heaving bags of earth, wielding heavy hammers and tilling the soil by hand. It had not occurred to me just how much additional exercise I was getting over the last six months. I dare not go near the beach this season as I will have muscle bound oafs kicking sand in my face left right and centre.

The flood of customers, comparatively speaking, was given a bit of a coup de grâce by the arrival of a sharp shower of rain toward the middle of the day. It was a heavier and longer sharp shower than any of us would have liked and cleared the street in short order. The absence persisted until the middle of the afternoon when we started seeing small groups returning to amble about and drop in for the occasional purchase. It only then came to me that it was possible that the street cleared around the time for dinner. Unless you wanted a pasty, or I found out a little later, fish and chips, you were pretty stuck for something to eat. You were also constrained to eating whatever you could find in the open air, which at the time, was a bit wet.

The Missus left me to it early into the afternoon and headed up to The Farm with Mother. I sent her off with the first list of the year for items we needed from our store shed. I had not previously noticed that we were looking a little bereft of buckets and spades, unless of course, the Missus had sold a shelf full in my exercise absence during the morning. Perhaps it was less not noticing and more not expecting buckets and spades to be on shopping lists but there were more children about than I was expecting. It was only a week ago, but I had already forgotten about Easter and the fact that the school holiday carries on for many. I believe that some will still be on holiday the following week as well, although the numbers will be negligible. Still, we should be prepared for all eventualities and will, no doubt, be on top of our game by the end of the season.

The Missus returned early from The Farm with a call for help. She was trying to extract the back box, a sort of large container that fits to the back of the tractor, from the barn but had found it too heavy for one person. It is secreted at the back of the barn and getting the tractor in to move it would have been as much effort as trying to do it without. The box is required to move all the earth that I helped our friend and neighbour shift in the last couple of weeks. It crossed my mind that it would have been such a jolly jape to get the Missus to give him a call to see if he would help her shift the earth to its new home. Our friend and neighbour is not given to the use of rude words but I suspect that even he might make an exception in the circumstances.

I was quite surprised just how far the Missus had already moved the box by herself. It was exceedingly heavy and I struggled to move it a few inches – which just proves my point that I have become a weedy, grumpy shopkeeper again. I put a strop around it and the Missus manoeuvred the truck closer in to drag it to the door. We were then able to man (and Missus) handle it into a position where we could attach it to the tractor.

The job had taken a little while and the evening sun at The Farm was glorious. We might have been a little earlier with it but we had our first five minutes to closing rush of the season to cater for. Once again, had there been facilities to eat up there, we might have tarried. It would have completely upset the bleddy hound, however, as her tea was still at home. We were already in the dog house as she was looking daggers at us when we left the shop, which was already beyond the appointed time. You would have thought she would have been used to us by now.

April 11<sup>th</sup> – Sunday

Well, there was a blue sky, which I thought might be a good start to the day and it was. Once again, there was not a great deal of breeze first thing and I got away with running the bleddy hound down to the beach and back still feeling reasonably comfortable in the clothes I was in. It was only after a few hours behind the counter that the cold began to creep in no surprise, really.

It was just about the time we opened when a vicious squall blew in from the north. I was expecting the off chance of a little rain but what fell from the sky, angled to enter the shop doorway at maximum velocity, was hail – or big sleet if you want to be fussy. We have the first electric sliding door in The Cove for a reason and it was promptly closed to avoid being flooded with ice. Not really paying much attention, I could suppose that this was when the breeze picked up and my big freeze commenced.

Most of our customer activity happened in the morning and revolved around newspapers. There was a bit of grocery buying and some beachware went out of the door but in all it was sufficient to stop me from running upstairs to fetch another layer to put on. There was also not a great deal of running around involved, so that did not help, either. I did consider keeping the first electric sliding door in The Cove closed but it does tend to put people off and also reduces the airflow when we do have customers in, which is a factor to be considered in the age of the dreaded lurgi.

Other than serving customers, most of my morning was taken up by trying to get the cctv cameras to record again. During our closed period we had replaced the discs that they used to record to and this it seems really upset the software. I spent far too long on trying to get it to point to the replacement set of discs but it was having none of it.

The same group that produced the software we use has a new and posh version out. I did try it before, but it used a phenomenal amount of CPU and brought the computer upstairs to a grinding halt. I thought it worth a try on the laptop in the shop since the computer is used for little else other than having access to the inventory file. This took some time to install and get working. The first camera installed recorded very nicely but the subsequent cameras refused. It took a while to find out that the system set up the subsequent cameras differently from the first – why would it do that?

Anyway, having spent a ridiculous amount of time setting all the cameras up it became apparent that nothing else would run on the computer with the cameras recording. I persevered for a while but in the end, I had to remove the software completely. This was exceedingly irritating as I have just had six months to look at alternative software products and it is only now I get the problem.

I left it for a while to concentrate on opening some more boxes and putting out our new gifts. This only distracted me for so long and I was drawn back to testing and looking for a suitable solution. It took me until nigh on five o'clock to find a way to install a fresh version of the original software and solve the problem I started with. Gosh, that really got my goat.

It was obviously not a pasty day for our customers and I ended up throwing away the contents of the warmer. I did manage to sell all the remaining bread, so overall I was not too disappointed. The same applied to the till at the end of the day, which was an

improvement on yesterday. It is heading in the right direction and the rumours of holiday lets filling up already, we have great expectations.

The Missus headed off to The Farm in the afternoon with Mother. It would have been a sight warmer in the greenhouse than in the shop, which is where they spent all their time. They planted kale and other things that I cannot remember, and I strongly suspect that in another few days we will need a bigger greenhouse. I have already had enquiries about honey, so I might have to nudge the Missus in that direction as with the blooming going on all around, it is likely the bees have started production.

I think we will have to hold onto our hats as it looks like it will be a busy season all around.

April 10<sup>th</sup> – Saturday

I managed to haul myself out of bed at the appointed hour this morning with very little trouble and without any help from the bleddy hound who was fitfully sleeping. I momentarily toyed with the idea of sticking my tongue in her ear to wake her up but very quickly thought better of it.

We were expecting a bit of a north easterly blow but first thing in the morning it had barely got going and I rather thought that was it. It was not until later in the morning that it got its act together and started to get serious. I had quite forgotten just how irritating the wind is when it constantly rattles the polythene on the windbreaks and was very quickly reminded. The tiddler nets also spent most of the day flattened and the balls that I had forgotten to place under the netting were almost lost and saved at the last minute by an astute passer-by.

I had ensured that most of the hard work about opening the shop in the morning was already done – milk delivered, green grocery priced and in the fridge. This just left me to put the displays out and rope them down and to concentrate on the newspapers which thankfully arrived. After all that was done the shop was opened on time to some gritty early birds who had presumably camped out to be the first through the first electric sliding door in The Cove.

It seemed churlish not to sample one of Mr Prima's excellent steak pasties after they arrived in the morning. It was definitely a stab in the dark wondering just how many to order in but at least we will have one less to throw away or put in the freezer. I definitely messed up on the bread front because we were very quickly out of white bread and the multi seed cob that I would have had one of myself, went too. Still, there is no point in using the weekend as an indicator for what to order for Monday, as we suspect that that will be very much busier.

Today was no slouch for the first day of opening. We are used to seeing one or two people when we first start out, but we are a month later than usual. Custom was not exactly steady but there were small numbers in fits and starts throughout the day.

There was a bit of a hiccup with the new card payment machine at first, but we discovered that this was user error, not placing the card in the appropriate place on the machine to be read by the contactless reader. It is rather odd to have the reader at the back of the machine, especially as you would generally offer it for use facing the customer so that they can see the screen. We have also noticed that it is not that sensitive and will take some getting used to.

Bit by bit during the day I worked my way through the boxes in the store room. The Missus joined in at the early part of the afternoon and attacked the local interest books that has arrived last knockings on Thursday. There was still some to do by the time we called it a day, but it should still be quiet enough again tomorrow to finish that off, especially if that robust north easterly keeps battering in.

I had not noticed until the last hour or so of the shop day that I had been slowly chilled to the bone. I added an extra layer, which could have been useful much earlier but was essential while bringing in the outside display. It then occurred to me that it was traditional, but usually in March, to have a cold wind from somewhere in the east when we first opened. It is good to know that we can still rely on some things. We only now have to rely on customers turning up with bulging wallets and we will be away.

April 9<sup>th</sup> – Friday

We were hot out the blocks this morning with plenty to do. That is not why we were hot out of the blocks this morning, however. We were hot out of the blocks this morning because I had a bleddy hound lying on my head deciding that it was time to wake up by licking my ear 'ole.

There is no defence against a bleddy hound's tongue in your ear at that time of the morning, so I got up. It was not important that I met the milkman as it was cold enough in our newspaper box out the front for the dairy to stay in there an hour or so but it if I did, so much the better. As it turned out one of the grocery deliveries beat him to it and the bleddy hound and I were finished our stretch on the beach and having a cup of tea by the time he came and went.

I decided that I would get a blistering exercise session out of the way first and therefore be at the peak of my fitness to price and put away the milk. There is nothing new and exciting on the dairy front but I have ordered in our usual peak operating products like the Cornish camembert and brie, so if it does not get sold I will have to eat it myself. I put the grocery order to one side while I went and cleaned up after the session and had a spot of breakfast. This has become slightly easier with shop stock to plunder, thank heaven.

The Missus beat me to returning to the shop to continue with everything else. Not only did we have the grocery orders to put away but more was on the way, which completed the grocery arrivals and we are now a shelf full shop. The wine will have

to wait until the morning as, by the time I was ready to put it in the fridge, the Missus had mopped that bit of the floor. I dare not set foot on the wet floor regardless how important having cold wine was.

In truth, there was a sheer mountain to climb to get all the recent orders out. We focused on what was important to get the shop open tomorrow, which meant cleaning the ice cream freezer that we had been living out of all winter and putting it back in its place. Once that was out of the way, all the other postcard stands, body board boxes and book spinner could be put back, too. I struggled to remember where everything went and shall have to remember to take a picture of it before we close next time. It was not only which order everything went in but the exact place on the floor given that we pack everything in as tightly as reasonably possible without compromising the passage ways for wheelchair access. I will have to put markers on the floor next time, which I will only remember when I am trying to put everything back the following year.

I told one neighbour who asked if we were ready that of course we were. We just had three days' work left and we would be absolutely ready to open tomorrow. It was not far from the truth, either.

There was some reason to the headlong rush to have the shop operational as soon as possible, other than being able to open tomorrow. The Missus had told Mother that it was a Farm day and that we would pick her up in the middle of the day. Despite there being quite a bit of gift stock still to clear, I was also quite keen to have one last afternoon up at The Farm that would last me the rest of the season. I think I am getting to the point that if The Farm paid sufficiently to keep us afloat, I could give up the shop for that – but only on nice days. Alright, I know, that is not ever going to work – unless marigolds and cress suddenly triple in price - but I can dream can I not.

We did make it up there but not until close on three o'clock. The trouble with the clocks springing forward is that we are still not naturally aware of the time. Previously, I was beginning to be able to tell the time by looking at the sun, but that went down the pan. We all set about various activities as soon as we had a cup of tea and pottered about doing them. After completing the essential stuff of battery swapping around, I went and got a garden fork and started work on another strip of soil. After only a few days the ground had dried up and hardened; it was rock solid. It was the second blistering session of the day while the Missus and Mother planted another several thousand green things into pots.

I prised them away shortly after five o'clock, as tea was calling. I think that we all could have stayed a while longer, but I also think that we would have regretted having a late tea. It was a splendid evening up there and if we had the wherewithal for an impromptu barbeque, we would have done that instead – if the new barbeque was not still in the box. I can feel investigating how we keep frozen food up there with very little electricity – bury it deeply?

As it was, we came home to fish and chips. Having emptied the ice cream freezer, the Missus found some more haddock, which was a happy result – at least for Mother and me. The Missus hates fish.

April 8<sup>th</sup> – Thursday

It was another long day of doing lots of things related to trying to get the shop open on Saturday. So long was it that I could barely remember what happened at the start of it other than, at last, I managed to get my scrambled egg on toast with black pudding. Even then it nearly came to disaster when I was distracted by a neighbour while the butter was melting in the pan. It was a blackish colour by the time I came back.

The wind had completely dropped out today and as a result the air temperature was much more tolerable than it has been for the last few days. The bleddy hound is still a bit wary about going down to the Harbour. She would sniff about and wander all over it before seals invaded her pitch, now she can hardly wait to get away. I thought that I was in trouble yesterday as she spent a lot of time sniffing the air while heading down the slipway. That turned out to be a dead gull over by the short slip, which I managed to steer her away from.

Our main cash and carry order was short of a few items, particularly my beer, which could have been something of a disaster. It needed to be remedied, which required a trip out to Hayle to replenish the missing stock. The Missus decided that there were a few more items needed to be collected on the way and Mother had indicated a short while ago that she needed some greetings cards for upcoming birthdays. She agreed to take care of the bleddy hound while the Missus and I sallied forth.

My simple trip to the cash and carry and back became a drop off at a busy Tesmorburys for the cards and a stop for Costalot coffee along the way. I then dropped the Missus at the Hayle garden centre for even more plants to grow while I went on to the cash and carry. Happily, there were no detours on the way back, other than to pick up the bleddy hound, and as soon as we returned, we set to in the shop with some more shelf filling.

You would think that this is something of a finite process where there are a number of unpacked boxes and empty shelves. As the goods are put on the shelf the pile of boxes diminishes until the job is complete. Progress can be measured and appreciated the nearer to the end you get. That all works splendidly until you factor in the arrival of more boxes during the process. Instead of the pile of boxes diminishing as you complete the job, the pile gets bigger and is disconcerting. We had three deliveries during the afternoon amounting to an extra twenty boxes or so.

We reached a plateau, where the work that was left seemed easily achievable with a small amount of effort the following day. I had just retired upstairs to collapse in a

heap before tea time when yet another van turned up with eight big boxes. I am sure lesser men would have wept.

Having girded my loins and had my tea it seemed a shame to waste all that girding, so I went across the road to the Lifeboat station where some bright soul had organised an exercise launch. It was just a hint of normality – training on a Thursday night but this one would not be followed by a dash to the OS for a good quizzing. I suspect that will be a distant memory only for some time to come yet.

The boat launched with good numbers in attendance at seven o'clock and on schedule with the Inshore boat following on. As usual, we on the shore set up for the recovery and did a good deal of thumb twiddling until the appointed time that the boat came back. We were just about at minimum numbers and looked a bit thin on the ground compared to other recent launches.

Between the boats leaving and coming back we retired to the crew room where, we were told, samples of our shiny new kit had arrived. Our esteemed Coxswain had eschewed delivery of the XXL size on the basis that most of us are fit and lithesome examples of very excellent Shore Crewmen. My current trews are medium, I shall have you know, dear reader, but I struggled with the large size in the new kit as indeed did we all. The clothing is made by a company more famed for producing smart fashion equipment for yachting sailors. Perhaps these people are all small in stature – even the very big ones. Anyway, all of us - of which I am neither the largest or smallest – settled for the XL version on both trews and rather posh jacket that comes with a removable fleece and waterproof inner layer.

Once this shiny new kit would have lasted five minutes before it was lagged with grease from the heavy equipment and cables we hauled about. I will give this new gear a couple of weeks at least before we have taken the shine off it.

In no time at all, which was quite a long time really, the boats were ready to come back in. We had watched them in the flat as a dish bay in the evening light come and go, practising things and it was just turning to dark when they headed into the station. It was gloomy at the bottom of the long slipway but I eat a lot of carrots and to my mind it rather looked like a textbook recovery from a perfectly still pool at the slip's base. With so few numbers, we all fell in with equal workloads and brought the boats in and tucked them away. We are, after all, a most very thin, very excellent Shore Crew.

April 7<sup>th</sup> – Wednesday

It was not just bitter cold this morning, although wearing sports shorts probably did not help, it was bitter cold and wet. I did not in the least appreciate that we were to get any rain but there it was, just in time to take the bleddy hound for a spin.

The rain on the window suggested that these were just light showers blowing through and nothing too much to be alarmed about, especially as I was already wearing a wind proof jacket that also did the same job with rain. I could see the rain approaching across the bay and it did not look too bad and sure enough we had a light, wind blown shower dancing on my back and pinging into the bare backs of my legs. It was as we were heading off up the slipway that it reserved its cascade of heavy rain. It accumulated in a bit of a torrent as it came off the Lifeboat station roof at the top corner. With the wind behind it, this dropped an especially heavy curtain right across the road. We ran the gauntlet. It left my gauntlets alone and dropped into my shoe instead.

There were smaller showers throughout the morning, so I avoided going out very much at all except for a bit of a blistering exercise session early on. The rest of the morning I tied up with some local orders, like from our excellent butcher in St Just and letting the dairy know we would be ordering right soon.

I also tracked down a supplier of freezer shelves, although I had to try again in the afternoon before I actually spoke with someone from the parts department. I was pleasantly surprised that first, the very pleasant lady at the other end of the telephone knew exactly what she was talking about and secondly, the shelves were considerably cheaper than I was expecting. The only downside in the whole enquiry and ordering lark was that they would not be in stock until the end of the month or early the following month. Since this company is about the only supplier of this product in the country, I placed the order.

We had tentatively agreed with our earth moving friend and neighbour that I would come and move the earth with him again today. We decided that moving Heaven could wait for another day, although it felt like we had done both. What I did not appreciate was that the meeting time I gave him was almost upon us and I hurriedly had to get ready and run up to meet him.

There was only earth for two runs today and after that the work was finished. He showed me where it had come from; I had seen it earlier in the piece as well. The transformation was incredible, and the area was now flat and level with the rest of the garden. He had discovered he had an inspection cover he did not know about, which was a bonus. That was a monumental piece of work that he had carried out all by himself and quite an achievement. I was worn out just looking at it.

The cold seemed to be going off by the end of the second load and the wind appeared to be dying down. We took tea on the decking in the shelter of cabin and basked in the sun for a while. It is likely to be the last of my daytime visits to The Farm for a while, for which I am sure, dear reader, you will be grateful – that is until you get fed up with tales of grumpy shopkeeping.

I returned home just in time to meet the Missus coming out with the bleddy hound. She had intended to start work in the shop a little earlier but I had secreted the keys

in my sports shorts. We retired upstairs after she came back where I was able to update all the prices for new stock including another delivery expected tomorrow. I also checked that our local cash and carry still had our regular orders and will be placing the order with them tomorrow for Friday.

With a bit of a session tomorrow down in the shop we should be set to open on Saturday. Friday, perhaps we can have a day's respite but I imagine we will find something that needs to be done, even then.

April 6<sup>th</sup> – Tuesday

I was a little pressed this morning with expectations that the freezer service man would arrive during the call I was expecting from our backup software supplier and that our second grocery delivery would cap it by arriving, too.

The run out with the bleddy hound was, thankfully, brief – she must have sensed the urgency – which was also a relief because it was still extremely chilly in the robust northerly breeze. I made a mental note not only to wear a wind proof jacket but to also wear an additional layer when I took her out again. With the few minutes extra that I had, I risked my ablutions hoping that there was not a knock on the door from the freezer man.

I made a real error in planning my breakfast which was going to be scrambled eggs, toast and black pudding. There was no way I was going to squeeze that into the schedule that was developing. I cooked some eggs but nearly messed the timing up all together when the appointed hour for the software company to dial in crept up on me.

Letting other people onto our main computer always carries with it some element of risk, no matter how competent we think the engineers might be. It was for this reason that I wanted to be present for the entire session so that I could see what was going on. It was also for this reason that not long after the session began, the fridge engineer turned up.

It is a little obtuse not to trust a software engineer on our computer where there is little that can be stolen or misused and to let a fridge engineer loose in the, now, stocked shop to do what he wants. In my defence, the fridge engineer is the same chap who has turned up for years and we have quite a rapport. Secondly, if he should nick a bottle of coke or at worse a high value spirit or two, the lasting damage is negligible other than financial but if the software engineer messes up the computer, it would take hours to put it right and make moving ahead with opening the shop much more complicated.

So, having pointed the engineer at the only thing that was out of the normal for his visit, to fit the handle on the new freezer door, I was able to leave him to it with a

promise that I would bring a cup of tea as soon as I could. Returning to the computer, progress was apparently slow.

Some of the analytical routines can take a while to run and the resulting files that need to be uploaded, are large and take time to copy. I was exceedingly disappointed to note that the only procedures that the engineer was undertaking, were ones that they had asked me to undertake more than once before. In my feedback from the last problem I had with their software, I reported that I did not think that their escalation process was clear enough. I was promised several times that the problem was being escalated but it never really happened. We ended up going around in circles of doing the same data capture for weeks. I found a solution to the problem myself in the end and I already have a work around for the current problem. I can see this going the same way.

The dial in took some considerable time. Not only has the fridge engineer completed his job and gone but the second grocery delivery arrived during the process as well. As the Missus had just stopped half way through last night, the store room was not ready for another delivery and I hurriedly created a space, which I should have done earlier, really. Between the driver and I we lumped the boxes inside and by the time I got back upstairs, the software engineer was still going.

I was exceedingly grateful after she had finished so that I could at least put together some semblance of breakfast and a cup of tea. I found the running between the three requirements of the morning had left me quite worn out and in need of sustenance – and a cup of tea.

Later, I managed to get down to the shop to actually do something towards our opening at the weekend. Some of the outstanding packages that had been sitting on the floor for a week were the first on my list. I had to pass by the new freezer on the way to their new home and I was taken aback by the sight. It is like a big spaceship type thing, shining like a beacon of frozenness in the darkness at the far end of the shop.

The bright light made it exceedingly obvious that it was missing a couple of shelves. We have a wide range of stock and every inch of space in the shop and the freezers is used to good purpose. Having wide open spaces in our freezer is wasteful, although I would wager that the freezer company insists it is for efficiency of operation and that way, they sell more freezers. I have forayed into addition shelves before and discovered that they were deterrently expensive. This time, I will look more thoroughly and even if they are expensive, it will be cheaper than an additional freezer that we have no space for anyway.

I decided to relax in the evening and put all thoughts of shop opening to one side. Unfortunately, I kept thinking of things that still need to be done. I have a list now for tomorrow, so at least I should not be bored.

April 5<sup>th</sup> – Monday

It was bright and exceedingly breezy today. The wind was banging in from the north or thereabouts all day and probably came from somewhere very cold. I discovered this when I took the bleddy hound to the Harbour in the morning. I ensured that I had some protection against the wind as well as a hooded top next time I took her.

As a consequence of the wind, any visiting was almost certainly reserved for the south coast and The Cove stayed empty all day. This was, of course, a bitter disappointment for the Ice Cream Parlour and must have been more than a bit tedious for the girls running it. The quietness did not bother us very much, particularly as we had planned to stay in The Cove all day.

Things took a turn away from the strict plan we had formulated when I had a call from our main grocery supplier asking if we would not mind them delivering today rather than tomorrow as they had a free slot. It did not bother us in the least and by half past ten our store room was chock full of grocery items. I had to do some quick tidying up as we brought the items in so that we could squeeze it all in.

The Missus was going to clean the shelves today ahead of putting out the groceries but instead she did a bit of both. Once she has the bit between her teeth it is difficult to stop her, and she returned to the shop after tea to finish it off. I had thought that she might want to get stuck into it today, so I spent the morning checking all the prices, a process that had me glued to the computer screen for an hour or more and practically dropping off on the keyboard by the end of it.

We both headed downstairs as I had intended to clear the wetsuit and rash vest delivery from a few days ago. Quite a bit of it was destined for the store in the barn but I wanted to extract as much as I could for the shop first. We have always struggled with hangers for the wetsuits, so I bought some metal ones to use instead. They are not completely ideal as they bend down with not too much effort, however, in normal use, they do the job quite nicely. All the addition wetsuits on the rack now have the new hangers so hopefully they will keep their shape better than the crumpling plastic ones.

Unpacking the order and sorting it took far longer than I anticipated and consequently, it was about the only thing that I did. The remaining boxes I piled into the van and now have sufficient room to move the shop furniture back to its proper place. This is on the cards for tomorrow, although I foolishly double booked myself in the morning and if the new grocery delivery turns up at the same time, I shall be properly in a pickle.

I took the bleddy hound out in the middle of all this shenanigans but remembered to take a wind jacket this time. She elected to avoid the beach and headed for the Harbour car park instead. There were a few cars parked but not like the numbers from the weekend. The Cove was definitely not the place to be today unless you like

being buffeted about and frozen. We headed for the circuit and since we were last around this way, which was probably only a week or so, the tri-cornered garlic is out in abundance and a few Spanish bluebells have bloomed at the foot of the footpath up Mayon Cliff.

I did some tidying up when I returned to the shop. We are already amassing cardboard and plastic wrapping and we have only just started for the season. We are also gathering other forms of waste and our big commercial bin, which was already half full, was brimming at the end. It is a good job that I have asked for collections to recommence from Wednesday. One thing I had overlooked was the additional stock wastage from our extended closed period. When I checked the dates at the end of last season, we were due to open in March, now it being April we have more groceries that have gone out of date in the meanwhile including nearly thirty litres of fruit juice. That was some fruit cocktail down the drain.

I sat, tortured by guilt while the Missus labourer downstairs and I merely watched some television. Did I 'eck? I was up and working while the Missus snoozed in the morning. All is fair in love and shopkeeping and we have to do it all again tomorrow.

April 4<sup>th</sup> – Sunday

It very nearly was not someone's day today. It also turned out to be an object lesson on why outboard motors come with kill cords.

The bleddy hound and I had not long returned from our morning run down to the beach and I was enjoying my first cup of the tea of the day while cleaning up and posting yet another page of Diary. I did not see the initial problem but something in the Harbour must have made me look and I just caught a runaway RIB thumping bow first into the Harbour wall. The boat rebounded and turned, narrowly missing the erstwhile crewman who was floundering in the water. I think we both breathed a sigh of relief.

The boat headed out of the Harbour and did slow turn to port, completed a full circle and heading out to sea again. This time it went straight as an arrow heading in the direction of Brisons. A second RIB that had launched a little earlier tried following on but it had two on board and a smaller engine by the look of it and stood no chance of catching up. Fortunately, the runaway did another slow turn to port and headed into the rocks under the car park. I lost sight of both the RIB and the followers on as they went behind the Lifeboat station.

I paused, waiting for my pager to go off but there was little the Inshore could do at present. This is when I saw the duty Coxswain arrive and assumed that he had an advance call from the Coastguard, so I went and met him. It turned out he was here only coincidentally, so I apprised him of the situation and we both went into the car park to see if we could establish what had gone on subsequently. The crewman of the runaway had caught up with his boat that had come to rest amongst the rocks.

He had shutdown the engine and was attempting to push the boat out to sea, which he eventually managed. We trusted that this time he had attached his kill cord, which would have stopped the engine when he initially fell out and saved him a whole bucket of effort – not to mention avoided the possibility of the boat running over him.

I returned to finish my cup of tea. So, if you are wondering why your eagerly awaited episode of tales of everyday folk was late, I could not possibly tell you, but it explains why The Diary was late this morning.

I was full of assumptions today, 'eagerly awaited' being the first. The second was that we would be heading to The Farm at some point as it was such a luscious day, it would have been very rude not to. I knew, however, that it was of great importance that we completed the two grocery orders before we went as we would not want to do them after we got back. Also, if we did not do them today, we would have missed the boat and the shop could not open for another week because we would have hardly any groceries to sell.

The Missus is usually lead on the grocery front but on this occasion I decided to head down to the shop to prepare the list. It is also different this year because we are switching some supplies to the new supplier and picking up new products along the way. One of the main problems with the original supplier is that they could not supply and there is nothing worse than a supplier that cannot supply. In particular, it has failed us on several important non-food lines, such as soap and toothpaste and many toiletries, too. These we could not pick up from our alternate supplier as they are food only, but they were doing a good job in filling the food gaps that we had.

It was after I had made our lists, including all the things we thought that we could not get that I retired upstairs to check the online larder of both suppliers. I ventured an Internet query to see if there was anyone out there who could replace our non-food lines. I was very surprised to see in the list returned, our stationery supplier. I knew they did some household goods but it transpired they did most of the items we were after, although we would have to compromise a bit on pack size and brand. The items were a little more expensive, but we expected that.

So, it was with a song in my heart and great expectations that I headed to The Farm with the Missus. While I laboured long in the shop, she had gone over to St Buryan to fetch Mother so there was not hanging about when she arrived back home.

My sole aim for the day was to complete the beehive – oh, and not look in the cupboard under the sink, just in case. I fully expect that my Farm opportunities from this point forward will be very limited until the end of the season, so I wished to make the most of the day.

All I had left to do, and I really wish I had not used the word 'all', was to complete the last super, which would have been more appropriately finished on Wednesday, and make the roof. The base and stand come complete and just require the varroa floor

and drip tray slipped in and there is a queen excluder and hive top to insert. I set to with the super, as I had done those before and the roof looked the most complex of all the structures so far.

I had closely examined the instruction video during the morning and referred to it again – several times – during the build. The roof frame is less robust than the other sections and it took some dexterity, which I possess in toothfuls, to glue and nail together, ensuring the corners were square. That done the laths need to be nailed in to strengthen it. This is where the story really starts, dear reader, for the reality on the ground started to depart from the instruction video and the instruction sheet.

There is a round hole at the gable end of the roof and the gable end lath is supposed to sit underneath it. It is also supposed to be half an inch from the base of the roof and in the video that works just fine. On the example I had in front of me, half an inch had the lath passing straight across the round air hole. If I dropped it, the structure would not sit securely on the roof so, stuck, I asked the referee for her decision as to where it should be nailed. We elected to have the lath cross the hole, which was almost certainly the right move.

It did not get a whole lot better after that, either. The apex batten required some pernicky measuring and angling of the nail going in, which I got completely wrong and bent the only four two inch nails that I had. Then, having been using one inch screws with abandon, realised that some of them were wire nails and not lost head and were for the aluminium roof. Fortunately, I had enough wire nails left to do the job and supplemented them with a few lost head nails, which still worked regardless.

At the very end, I placed all the constituent parts together only to find that they were from three different types of hive. I jest, of course. The finished article actually looked like a hive, thank heavens. The frames, where the honey is deposited, still need to be made and that rather looks like a labour of love and there are so many of them. I may well have to enlist the help of the Missus for that.

The Missus has taken to naming the hives. The first was after Mother and her Father, Horrie and (H)Ivy, which I thought quite inspired and this one, the Missus decided to name after the Aged Parent, maternal division, and is calling it Barbee. She will paint the name on the side, happily long after I have left the party. I just hope that she finds time to put it into production.

We hurried home where the Missus cooked a roast dinner in record time. I think both Mother and I were exceedingly impressed. As usual, when Mother is with us, we sat up at the table for our tea where we can look out across the bay. The evening was just as ridiculously fabulous as the rest of the day had been, but it had been a tad cool in the breeze for most of the day and in the evening the temperature had started to dive.

There were a few sea birds standing on the rocks down by the tide line, the rest seemed to have drifted off. I spotted quite a few black backed gulls directly in front of us, which is very lucky for you, dear reader, as I do not know any jokes about black backed gulls.

April 3<sup>rd</sup> – Saturday

The year is really bowling along, helped by another glorious day in the offing with the sun poking me in the eye from over Carn Olva as we went out first thing. For all that sunshine and blue sky it was some sharp, aided by a brisk north easterly breeze and that continued for most of the morning.

I slipped over to St Just early doors as the Missus had some clever plan for cooking a meal over an open fire at The Farm in the evening and needed supplies. I went early, partly to avoid any potential crowds – I dislike shopping on a Saturday – and partly because I fancied one of the butcher's very excellent pork pies for breakfast. All of nature was alive and vibrant in the strong early morning light and by a stroke of luck the sun was not in my eyes at any point in the journey.

When I returned, the Missus had the bit between her teeth in some rabid preparations for the meal and an early start up at The Farm. My only plan of the day, to continue beehive building, was being slowly elbowed out of the way by additional activities such as installing the rainwater system to make the tap work in the cabin. To be fair, this had been on the cards for some considerable time and the wiring was already in place and the holes in the cabin wall, already drilled and filled with pipework.

It was where I started after we arrived at The Farm and since most of the wiring was already there, it did not take long to set up. What took longer was drilling a hole into the top of the IBC so that we could pump some water into the tap's reservoir. I was a little taken aback that the whole thing worked first time. It was not until later that my little moment of triumph was trampled into the dust as I discovered that the cupboard under the sink was soaking wet. The tap connector was leaking at the join. We scouted around for some plumbers' tape, which we thought we had but none could be found. The tap was back to its original use for the moment, an ornament.

In the meanwhile, I had set about finding and starting on making the beehive super. What I did not appreciate earlier is that the super is the same as a brood box, although the way the Missus has it set up is that the brood box, of which there is one, is bigger than the other supers in the hive. So, not really caring whether I was making a brood box or a super, I set about making the box that could be called either, but in the Missus's case, only the large one was going to be the brood box. I did that first.

If you are confused, dear reader, think about me; I was making them.

As with the far simpler lift, the super comes in a kit but with more pieces that have to be constructed in a particular order. Also, some of the clearances are important when it comes to putting in the frames later on. What I also should have appreciated sooner was that I needed some wood glue. I had spotted a bottle with a nozzle at home and meant to bring it with me but since I had spotted it more than 24 hours earlier, I had forgotten all about it. I realised that I had not brought the bottle when I got to the stage of needing the wood glue.

Fortuitously, we have a five litre container of wood glue at The Farm. Not very fortuitously, it is almost impossible to apply the glue from the container, even decanted into a smaller container, in an accurate and non-liberal sort of way. I discovered this by trying to. Happily, the water leak in the cabin had resulted in a whole roll of kitchen towel being soaked through, which was exceedingly handy for mopping up spilt wood glue.

At the earliest opportunity, which was before I commenced the second super/brood box which was definitely going to be a super because it was smaller, I dropped back home to collect the bottle with a nozzle. This I discovered was blocked and took about twenty minutes to unblock. I sensed some hidden force working against me, here.

Between gluing and water disasters, the Missus and I has a go at tightening the polytunnel polythene at the back of the tunnel. This had worked loose through successive big blows, so we made attempts to secure it a little better than it was before. With the polythene doubled up in the fixing groove it is very difficult to bend in the stiff wire securing loop. It is even harder to put a second securing loop in, which we discovered adds a good deal of resilience to the fixing. We managed only after we had both had turns and pressing the wires home.

The Missus had started to prepare for cooking by the time I started the last super, which on reflection I should have done on Wednesday, but I estimated I had time for it now. The process required the Missus to construct a chulha, which originally was a horseshoe shaped clay oven, covered in dung. Being only a stone's throw from a waste water treatment plant, we probably had better access to one of the ingredients than most but sadly we had no clay. The Missus found some old bricks with which she fashioned the oven and used some twigs for the fire.

As I watched the Missus labour over the new, steaming pan precariously balanced over the makeshift fire pit, sorry, chulha, I could not help wondering why we had spent about a month researching and half a fortune buying, a new gas propelled barbeque. For my own sanity I dismissed such thinking and for my own safety, kept very quiet and went instead to fix the water intake on the cabin sink tap.

I had brought some plumbers' tape from home where it was lurking close to the wood glue and had already wrapped it around the inside of the connection. I had to try twice to get the wrapping thick enough but on the second attempt the connection

seemed much more secure. I was just about to start screwing tight the jubilee clip when I was alerted to a conversation on the radio scanner that we routinely have on in the background. The Coastguard was assuring a vessel that their failed engine would not be a problem as the Coastguard would ask the Sennen Cove Lifeboat to come out and assist.

We all know that Lifeboat shouts do not happen when you are casually lazing about doing nothing with no commitments for the foreseeable future. No, Lifeboat shouts happen when, you have organised a barbeque, sorry, chalha; you are just about to open a beer; when you are about to screw tight a jubilee clip to repair a leak and/or all of the above.

Given that I was in a field a half mile from the road and a further mile to the Lifeboat station, I made haste even before the pagers had been fired off. My pager sounded just as I was passing the shop at the top and well on my way down to The Cove. I am very rarely in a position where I have to drive to a shout, but I am well aware of the problems that others have.

We have no blue or any other colour flashing lights to alert other road users and pedestrians to our cause. Some crew do have a visor sign that says we are on call that cars in front are unlikely to be able to see. We must obey the rules of the road, no speeding, but it does help if other drivers on the route do not slow down to look at the view or take umbrage to an urgent beep of the horn and actively seek to impede your progress. At the height of the holiday season it is ten times worse, where cars are parked along the length of Cove Road and sections are single file. I was lucky, and only had a few slow drivers in front of me, but I had a flavour of it.

It was not the most urgent of launches, anyway. The yacht that it turned out to be, was in sight of the station with sails set and heading north. They elected to be towed and when asked where they were headed, replied Plymouth, which was in the direction they were heading away from. Nevertheless, the boat took them in tow back to Newlyn and made good time in getting there.

We returned to the station for around half past eight to set up for the boat's return. We had already done the lion's share of the work as we guessed which slipway would be required. In doing so I noticed that the terns had multiplied and a five or six were sitting on rocks nearby. They looked like they had been here before; many happy reterns.

As the boat's lights hove into view at around nine o'clock, we were sitting twiddling our thumbs with all our work done. For once we were gathered in numbers, which made light work of what appeared to be a textbook recovery up the short slip. The boat was all tucked up and we were away by close to half past nine o'clock. We are, after all, a very ever ready, very excellent Shore Crew.

Despite the hour, I forced down the beer that I had promised myself earlier in the evening. Just after the launch I had returned to The Farm, much because tea was up there and so too were the Missus and Mother. I just had time to finish screwing up the jubilee clip and to ascertain that the leak was fixed. I could not think of a better reason for being worthy of a beer at half past nine o'clock.

April 2<sup>nd</sup> – Friday

I girded my loins today against the possibility of disappointment if it turned out to be really busy today. I suspect that it could have been as both car parks were busy and the ice cream parlour reported some good business. During the few times I was in The Cove, however, the street looked remarkably empty and the beach was not exactly packed with revellers, so I took comfort from that.

The weather held together well. Blue sky dominated the day with fluffy white clouds dotted about here and there, sometimes bigger than you would have wished for on a day with a bit of a chilling north easterly. Despite the light breeze, it was not as cold as we had been led to expect and I found myself stripping off layers again up at The Farm in the afternoon.

We had not particularly leapt into the day with vigour and urgency. In fact, the morning was quite sedate after a bit of a blistering exercise session that I was pleased did not leave me in a groaning heap. We ambled up to The Farm after collecting Mother and pottered about a bit, the Missus trying out her new hardcore brush cutter on the strimmer and me setting to with the first of the beehives.

I was keen to get at least one beehive finished before I became a grumpy shopkeeper again. The Missus struggled a bit last year with just the one hive and all the growing going on but unfortunately, the honey is the only thing up there making any money at present and needs must. At some point the tax man is going to ask to see some return on all the investment we have claimed in the name of The Farm, although I am hoping that he is rather more busy on bigger matters than ours.

The company from which we purchased the beehives has produced some very useful videos demonstrating how to construct the various elements of the hive, of which there are several. I discovered that this was just as well since the instructions that came with the packets were just a little basic. I would have struggled had I not watched the film before I read the book and thankfully they did not change the ending.

Since I did not know what was in each box that has languished in the barn for some months, it was something of a lottery as to what I would start with. Just my luck and a very good reason why I do not buy lottery tickets, the first box I picked out contained the feet and the roof bits, neither of which need anything doing to them. I was a little luckier with the second box, which gave me a little lift, in fact, a whole box of lifts. I had hoped it would be super, as I thought supers would be a lovely place to

start but supers are more complicated and perhaps it was for the best that I got the lifts instead.

The kits seem to be remarkably well constructed, requiring only to snap the sides of the lift together and to use nails from a supplied bag to secure them. There was some care required in making sure the dovetails were closed and the corners at right angles but otherwise it was straight forward. I managed to build four lifts in two hours before I had to finish off for the day. One of the packages was missing the screws but luckily, we have some spares in the tool shed that suited. Hopefully, I will have some time tomorrow to be super with the supers.

I would have continued a bit longer into the afternoon, but I received a message in the morning telling me that the delivery that I thought I was getting yesterday, was turning up today. I left the Missus and Mother behind as I went to attend to the delivery. They were content to carry on with planting and knitting. If the plants do not grow, we can always sell shawls and scarves.

In all it had been something of a glorious day. When I drove down the hill to The Cove it could easily have been a high summer day except for the empty spaces on the beach. The sea was a flat as a dish, which probably gave the Lifeguards no pleasure at all on their first day of operation since last year. I was there at the wrong time of day but there was no one at all in the water in the morning or in the afternoon when I returned.

There were, I observed as we sat and had our tea, several flocks of sea birds out across the bay. Many were too far off to see exactly what they were but closer in, sitting on the breasting buoy, was a lone tern. I could get a good geek at it through out powerful binoculars. The beach had nearly emptied completely on a pressing tide but for our Coxswain, his missus and dog out for a stroll along the tide line and a few smaller groups – I presume less than six – possibly having a picnic tea. When I looked back, there were two birds on the breasting buoy. I assumed one was a retern.

April 1<sup>st</sup> – Thursday

I was expecting much the same sort of day as yesterday, not due to reading any weather forecast the previous day but simply after having several days in a row that are the same, that is what I expected. Imagine my surprise when the bleddy hound and I were nearly blown down the road when we stuck our heads outside the door.

It actually looked very much the same as yesterday that added to my surprise, although the mist had largely gone, leaving behind a bit of a heavy haze hanging in the air. The wind was not that cold when I stopped to examine it in detail but because it was whistling in at such a ferocious speed, it seemed much colder than it was. It stuck with us for the entire day and into the evening and seemed to be

increasing as it went. Thankfully it was easterly, which is not something I am usually thankful for, but it is kinder on the polytunnel from that direction.

The plan of the day was to fire off a few more orders before most of our suppliers closed down for the long weekend then hold firm and wait for the orders already placed to arrive today. Well, what a waste of time that turned out to be. The first promised order was clearly someone else's, which I did not appreciate until I was putting it out on the shelf and the second did not show up at all.

The day was not an entire waste of time as I set to doing some preparation things in the shop. The Missus, heading to The Farm with Mother, took some boxes from an order dropped yesterday as well as a heap of cardboard, which helped clear the decks in the shop but there is much more left to do. She also helped put out the out of date drinks that I meant to do a little while ago. I had planned to be a bit more organised than just putting them out on a bench and was going to get the Missus to put a message on FacePage so that everyone had a fair chance of getting some. As it happened, most of it disappeared during the afternoon as there were quite a few passers-by passing by, helping themselves.

It is too late to worry about it, as the shop will definitely not be opening until next weekend, but there are stirrings that suggest it may be a brae bit busier this weekend. The weather is looking half decent, too, if a little cooler than we might have been used to of late but if local visitors are arriving, they are hardy souls and will not care too much. I rather put my money on the 12<sup>th</sup> being the start point but I never was much of a smart gambler.

In preparation for when we do open and because I had little to do else while waiting for the deliveries, I started to wash down the shelves. Ideally, I had hoped to get the order that turned out to be wrong out of the way on the shelf but that turned to dust before it began. Nevertheless, since I had the bucket filled and the cleaning gunk in it already, I set about doing as many shelves as I could in the time I had to me. In fact, I could have done quite a bit more but when I looked at the clock it was ten minutes to four. Having been fooled by that once already and knowing that the shop clock had not been put forward an hour, I packed up my chattels and locked up. It was not until I had thrown away the cleaning water and gone upstairs that I realised that the Missus must have corrected the shop clock when she was down earlier.

Still, it permitted me to sit about and not do a great deal. I did manage to get through to the company who had delivered the wrong order, which they are now resolving but clearly that will not now be until next week. I spoke with the Aged Parent who had slept for 24 hours after his second vaccination. That is the modern world for you, everything must be done in such a rush. The last person it happened to was a princess and she slept for 100 years after getting her jab. I do not think there was some 'ansum prince involved either, just the fact that he was getting peckish for a bit of tea.

My tea time was no fairy tale, either. The Missus was so wrapped up in being at The Farm she forgot to home until late.