

## DIARY 2023

December 31<sup>st</sup> – Sunday

Hot on the heels of storm Gerrit we now have storm Henck. It is a bloody liberty. I thought we had a vote about these darned foreign typhoons coming over here especially those knocking our trees over and generally causing havoc. I see all the trees have gone after the last one and they have started on the wind turbines.

At first it was not entirely clear that it was storm Henck. Everyone seemed to be keeping very quiet about it and it was hard to know if this was indeed storm Henck or the tail end of storm Gerrit. There was talk of a bomb cyclone. Of course there was. There is nothing quite like having 'bomb' in your weather report to spread even more fear and alarm to the nation.

Apparently, it started yesterday and carried on into today but would be worse in Scotland again which was still just recovering from the worst bits of storm Gerrit. There was not much in the way of rain with it for us, at least to start with, but the wind was fierce and had already wound its way back up to 50 miles per hour by first thing this morning. It is entirely possible that it sounded much worse than it was in The Cove, and it certainly alarmed the little girl what with the loud howling and the rotary clothes line in the mews spinning around by itself.

ABH went back to bed again and stayed there until the middle of the day; it had been a hard night partying. I sat in the living room staring at the walls and listening to the wind howling in the wires wondering when we would have to go out in it. By and by, I read my book, sat on my thumbs and read some more book. Time moved by in the manner of a tortoise with toothache eating a cabbage patch.

I eventually dragged ABH outside at around midday. We headed for the beach, fighting against the wind every step of the way. It had headed to the west from an earlier southwest and was invading the beach in full strength, which was around 55 miles per hour – or nigh on 80 miles per hour at Gwennap Head, the windiest place in the universe now that someone has fixed the anemometer.

We chased around after bits of oar weed for a while noting just how much sand had been clawed out of the Harbour. Only yesterday the rocks up in the corner were invisible and now all exposed about two feet or more deep. We did not get to check under the slipways but from a distance it looked like the same story there, too. It was when I noticed that ABH was wiping her paws across her eyes that I saw that the sand was being blown about a bit. We made a quick exit up the western slip to have our faces torn off in the full force of the gale of wind.

The car park was full again but mainly with trippers. I think most of our residents have gone home. Their journeys had not been wasted if they had come to admire the sea because, in the brightness of sporadic sunshine, it was a glory to behold.

The ocean beyond the bay was white horses out to the horizon. Spumes of spray exploded around the footings of Pedn-men-du and halfway up the cliff. Around Cowloe and the whole of Tribbens channel looked like someone had emptied an extra large foam fire extinguisher; it was nothing but white as large waves rolled down towards the wall.

We had little time to look as ABH was on a mission to get to the Coast Path. She would have gone up the cliff, too, but it was definitely not the day for that. The wind had been refreshing in my lack of sleep state, but there are limits to such things.

During the afternoon, the showers that had been very sporadic in the morning, came back with more frequency. They were mixed with hail at some points and going out, apart from being a game of Russian roulette, was most uncomfortable and not at all pleasant. It was because of that we limited our trips out to necessity, avoided the beach and tried to keep to sheltered areas, which was nigh on impossible.

Despite the weather, each time we went out it seemed very busy about. There were mainly people parading up and down the street and along the big beach and not so many up the hill. It was not until dusk that The Cove cleared out.

We did not stay up to ring in the new for we are ancient, some of us, and grumpy. There were fireworks somewhere nearby shortly after midnight that awoke me from my slumber. By the time you see this, dear reader, it will be appropriate to wish you a Very Happy New Year.

December 30<sup>th</sup> – Saturday

It was a decidedly mucky day with some heavy rain that took an age to arrive then did not want to go away. It was less mucky at the start of the day and allowed us some latitude about going out unscathed. It was in the afternoon that it all went wrong.

There were in-laws arriving at some point during the day, so there was a modicum of preparation required. This included an emergency trip to St Just to pick up tea for the evening and a joint of meat for Sunday dinner. I picked up the errand of driving out while the Missus made the house look respectable. It is quite astounding how we made it unrespectable in such a short period of time since the last time we made it respectable just ahead of Christmas.

St Just was not as busy as I had imagined that it might be. As we made the rounds mid-morning in The Cove there were people packing up and preparing to leave, so perhaps the party was over before the party this weekend began. Most people who drive into St Just try and park in the square, which is just human nature saving our legs. As most people had got there before me, I had to park in the car park a short distance away, which is free to use.

It does not have more than a handful of spaces free at any time in the week, although sometimes, I am sure, must be better than others. I understand that residents use it, particularly if they are from one of the older streets without parking of their own, which accounts for it always being so full. I did get parked but had to pick my space because the truck is quite long, and I needed space behind.

I noticed going in and out of the car park that there is work going on either side of the entrance. I do not want to start any ugly rumours, but I might be forgiven for thinking that some sort of restriction or barrier is being built there. We do hope not because there would be hellup and insurrection in the streets not to mention a lots of cars parked, too. Despite asking some questions of some of the people that might know, I have been unable to unearth the facts, as yet. You will hear it here first, dear reader, as long as I do.

There was a bit of rain about on the journey to and from St Just. It was but a mere smattering but on checking the rain radar, a huge lump was not far off coming over us. Along the leading edge of the band of rain was a deep line of dark colour, indicating some pretty torrential stuff, so naturally, I decided it would be a cracking good idea to take ABH out when I got back.

I tooled up in full metal jacket waterproofs, leaving ABH to fend for herself, which was, in retrospect, a mistake. We headed for the deserted Harbour beach. Even then, looking out to the west, the gannets were flying like lights against a backdrop as dark as a dog's insides. I rather thought then we were in for it and in for it we were. The rain did not take long to reach full pitch and ABH, usually quite tolerant of such things clearly thought 'begger that for a game of chase the whippet' and was off in the direction of home. She still stopped on command allowing me to catch up eventually and put her lead on. She then started to home again as quickly as she could drag me. I could hardly blame her, as the heavy rain came with a gale of wind, reaching 60 miles per hour at Land's End, and was most uncomfortable where we were too.

It was not long after I had finished her blow dry, she does love a good blow dry, that Mother and the in-laws arrived. Unfortunately, Mother had suffered a tumble as she left her home and had hurt her wrist. It could have been worse as by the miracle of technology, we were able to see on her home webcam - yes, Mother in her nineties has a webcam - that her eldest daughter who was escorting her and slipped first, broke her fall, which helped lessen the impact.

We all felt better by packing her off to West Cornwall's minor injuries unit where, being a Saturday afternoon, there was quite a queue. Five hours later, she arrived back with her arm in plaster having broken it in two places and requiring it to be reset by the doctor and two burly nurses. Other than the broken wrist, which I am sure is quite sore, Mother is fine, dear reader, so please do not fret - send money by all means, but please do not fret.

The accident coincided quite nicely with the Lifeboat Christmas party which the Missus and a couple of other from the team, had arranged to be in the Surf Beach Bar at the end of The Beach car park. The venue is under new management, I am sure I have related, and is trying its best to shed its rubbish image it accumulated under the aegis of the celebrity chef who had it previously. On the basis of the party we had last night, it is doing that exceedingly well.

The Missus had arranged for a buffet style event ticketed at a very reasonable rate. There was a DJ playing some tunes and the bar was free thanks to the kindness of visitors who have donated to our shop counter collection over the year. Most of the current team attended the event including some of the shop staff and also invited were past members of the crew. What was most remarkable about the delivery of the event was the three staff, one in the kitchen, one on the bar and the manager floating between the two. No one was left waiting for excessively for service and the food was first class and plentiful. It was a pleasure to see the venue well-run again and deserve success in the coming season.

While the Missus had to hang on until the end to pay the bill and run a few people home, I returned slightly earlier to rescue the in-laws from ABH. She was no respecter of Mother's condition when she arrived back from the hospital but had settled after her initial excitement. She had been no trouble, which she rarely is, but I took her out for her last run.

It seems I had encountered the last of the evening's rain when I ventured, late, down to the party. Just as I entered the car park, the rain delivered its swansong in another torrential downpour and had me entering the party dripping all over the floor. There were still flecks of rain about as I returned home, and the streets were awash with runoff. The sea that was making a deafening roar on my way down to the party had dropped back a little but was still crashing about out there in the dark.

Just one more day of this lot to go and then we can blame it all on the new year.

December 29<sup>th</sup> – Friday

This was not the most exciting day that we had ever had, I have to admit it. It was a day of chores and walking ABH on not overly exciting walks. What can I tell you, dear reader, not every day is full of derring do and adventures. Perhaps I should leave it there and not disappoint you further but then again, why break the habit of a lifetime.

ABH had us up at four o'clock for reasons best know to herself. Having woken me up and allowed me to get dressed, she then snarled and complained when I went to lift her off the bed. She was not getting away with that and was unceremoniously booted out of the front door regardless. To give ABH her due, she allowed me a long lie in later in the morning.

It was a better day than we had had all Christmas. The day was dry, reasonably temperate and, above all, free of the wicked blast that we have endured for the last week or so. Even the sea had started to behave itself, although not entirely. There was enough angst there to attract a car park full of visitors by the middle of the day at our end of The Cove. It came as a bit of a surprise because the Harbour beach was deserted, and it was only when we marched through the car park that we discovered it was full. It was possible that they were all heading up to Land's End or the big beach, but it made me wonder what was wrong with the Harbour.

There was enough wrong with the Harbour to make ABH and I leave almost as soon as we got there. On the first occasion, the Harbour tractor was milling about and crab pots flying down the slipway. We reasoned it was best to avoid the industry and head around the block. On the second occasion, I had just let ABH off the lead when I noticed a neighbour's dog off the lead down there. He is a bit of a wide boy and on our last meeting was taking rather too much interest in the little girl. I arrived down on the sand just in time as he decided he was going to be even bolder today. She is not that sort of girl, so we left smartly.

That was the second time we were forced to go around the block which was becoming a little tedious. I decided against a trip up the hill again because it was far too busy in The Cove today.

The Missus had taken herself over to the flat to do some ironing. There is a bit more freedom to carry out such activities there and we are still using the flat's washing machine and drier. With any luck it will be the last time for now that we are able to use it because I fervently hope that our builder gets his finger out and starts in earnest on Tuesday. Time is now pressing.

While the Missus was thus engaged and in between ABH walks, I carried out a few administrative tasks that had been outstanding for a while. It had been a few weeks since I was mandated to pay the much maligned council building control for services rendered, or hopefully would be rendered eventually; they insist on payment in advance. It was disappointing to note that the much maligned council are still completely useless when it comes to providing receipts for such payments.

Some years ago, I made a Diary meal out of the grinding chore they created of providing a receipt for the payment for our premises licence for alcohol selling. This went on for years, having to beg and threaten to get some photocopied scrap of paper with the details of the payment on it. Even today, I send the payment having had no demand for it and no receipt at all offered or any acknowledgement that I have paid. True enough, I do not even bother to send a remittance advice on the basis that if they cannot be bothered with the paperwork, neither can I. I even missed a payment completely two years ago, and they did not bat an eyelid. That will probably come home to roost with some council official banging on my coffin lid for the payment. I will pretend I am not in.

Anyway, despite the process for provide receipts automatically may not have improved, it only took a telephone call to get a receipt for the first payment. I was told that the second had not been received until I mentioned the credit card receipt reference. I had used the same online route for payment as the previous one but clearly it had not alerted anyone this time. I had to send the credit card receipt in before they believed I had paid. It irritates me no end that the much maligned council can permit such levels of inefficiency while bleating poverty at every opportunity.

I had intended to start the stock take in the store room after completing my chores, but they took so long, I will do the stock take another day. I had taken so long that the Missus was done with her ironing too, so I helped her back with the folded items and the things from the shop and resolved to do better all for the rest of the day.

On a brighter note, all the first tranche of the books I had ordered arrived together, albeit in two parcels. Quite amusingly the first parcel was due to be delivered between 10:58 and 14:58 and the second between 10:59 and 14:59. That looked remarkably like a software issue that did not allow a second parcel in the time slot once one had already been allocated. I am glad they came together because I can now read them in order and without delay.

I had already started another book before they arrived and sat and read that with ABH on my lap. I used to hate reading books when I was young; I think Janet and John finished me off. The ones I had to read for school, I read slowly and with great reluctance and little interest. It was not until I left that I picked up a book because I wanted to and read *The Hobbit*, the *Lord of the Rings* trilogy and *Silmarillion* back-to-back. For the next thirty years, there was very little time for reading between working and drinking heavily. Save for a small revival when I was laid up with my Achilles tendon it has only been recently that I have started to read in earnest. I now cannot recall the last time I regularly watched television. Dear Majorie, does this mean I am old.

December 28<sup>th</sup> – Thursday

This year is drawing to a close in an awful hurry. I cannot say that we will be sorry to see the back of it. It has not been our finest one way or another.

I have to say, it is going out in grand style as that cursed wind is still banging in from wherever it likes – mainly the southwest today. I had thought that since it had retreated a bit into the 40s miles per hour, we would not feel it quite so much. Well, I could not be more wrong. We were blown off the Harbour beach twice today as ABH is not overly keen on being blown around.

Actually, the first time we came away early was because she had found a bone down there. I have no idea what it was from, but it was not piscine and clearly was a highly prized find that demanded unremitting attention to the exclusion of all else. I do think

had I not dragged her out, she would have been lying there when the tide came in. Having disturbed her chain of chewing, she took herself off in the direction of home and up the slipway. Fortunately, she obeys the command to stop to allow me to attach a lead – and also catch her unawares to whip the bone from her maw and stick it in the bin.

There was not a great deal of doing about the place today. I had intended to head up to The Farm to put a windbreak against the tear in the polytunnel, but that would be best done when it is not so windy. Instead, I sat and read my book while the Missus took Mother home along with her off licence in a bag that she accumulated at Christmas. She will be back at the weekend with the in-laws, hopefully minus the bag.

Talking of books, I have spent the in-law's book voucher, thank you very much, on the next three books of Philip Kerr's Bernie Gunther series. I have decided I like them so much having read the first three, I will read the remaining ten between reading other books. It reminded me that I had another voucher from our payment card terminal supplier for completing a survey for them - £25 for a few questions. It was an odd thing as I had to go through a gift card supplier website to use it. The instructions said to use it like a credit card on the chosen supplier website, which is what I did.

It worked very well but I had chosen £30 of books with my £25 card. I had expected the website to complain and offer me the option of topping up with my own card – but it just processed the transaction. I read afterwards that if I wished to purchase something of greater value there was a different option I should have chosen. I am wondering what will happen now. I suppose I can still read my books in prison.

I put such thoughts behind me as ABH was being restless and wandering aimlessly around the living room. It was most likely because we had cut short our previous walk, so I geared up to take her out again. At the last minute, I put on my walking boots in case she could be persuaded to head up the hill or along to the big beach and up The Valley.

She pulled me down to the Harbour beach at first and we had a short run about, but she was not keen in the wind. We then headed off across the Harbour car park, but I did not really expect her to go up the cliff. I suspect it was because there were other dogs coming and going further up the path that drew her and we ended up going up ourselves.

As expected, it was hellish breezy as we passed across the top by Irish Lady, despite taking the path further back from the edge. There were, once again, plenty of people about up there all being knocked about in the gusty wind. We had no respite until we reached the cycle path having traversed the moor. This took an extraordinary amount of time as ABH decided that today was National Sniff Every

Blade of Grass Day. This also involved visiting every driveway along Maria's Lane but fortunately just on the one side of the road.

I have already explained that the electricity board is replacing all the infrastructure in The Cove. For one pole we came past, this could not come a day too soon. It was swaying quite alarmingly in the wind. It would benefit temporarily from being strapped to the new post that has gone in beside it. What is more worrying is that it is the post that connects to the others going down the cliff that feed the shop. I could do without losing the rest of the freezers.

We enjoyed a particularly sedate rest of the afternoon during which I came close to finishing my current book. This will be most timely as some of the new books are arriving tomorrow. Of course, it is very likely, since the books are arriving individually, that they will come in the wrong order. I was not offered the choice of delaying the delivery until all of the components were ready at the same time, which in this case would have been a more agreeable way of doing it.

It was dusk by the time I took the little girl out on a walk before tea. We did not go near to the edge of the Harbour car park but from what I could see of the sea, it was ramping up for some serious thumping. Large waves were charging down Tribbens and throwing themselves over the Harbour wall. The Harbour itself was a boiling mess from the glimpse I had when we crossed Stone Chair Lane and the noise rumbled in the air interrupted by the crash of breaking waves.

The Missus takes ABH out last thing before bed. Since I have been racing toward the climax of my current book, I stay seated in my rocking chair with a cushion on my lap to support the book – and ABH when she has a mind to climb into my lap. The little girl has of late decided to run in from her last walk and leap the gap from the end of the sofa, maybe two feet or more, and land in my lap. It is seconds from when the living room door is opened to let her in and so quick that I do not have time to lift the book out of the way. It reminded me of the Inspector Clouseau films where Cato launches surprise attacks on his master. It will also explain, dear reader, if you buy one of my used books from the shop in aid of our counter-top collection, why there are paw prints on some of the pages.

December 27<sup>th</sup> – Wednesday

The normal run of morning events is that I get the little girl out as soon as she is ready. I no longer try and wrest her from the bed and risk her displeasure. It was still quite pleasant then, although we do not venture far first thing. I do wonder what will happen with ABH when we return to the flat, but that is current a way off and further off than is comfortable. I have put the work from my mind for now, as there is nothing to be done, but it creeps back occasionally to tap me on the shoulder.

After yesterday's rain, a local forecaster, something like the Cornwall Weather Service, announced that the rain was just a harbinger of a named storm, Gerrit,



arriving today. This had me perplexed as I was under the impression that the names are alphabetical. Actually, it was Pia that had me perplexed, as it had followed Fergus, or whatever it was called, and I did not recall another nine storms in the interim. I saved my perplexedness for Gerrit because I had forgotten to follow up on Pia.

I learned today that Pia was named by the Danes, who would enjoy its effects more than we. Gerrit was named by a confederacy of the Irish, Dutch and UK. Quite why we did not let the Danes join the party, it did not say, and neither did it mention who decides how it is agreed who is going to be worse affected. What happens for example, if we let the Danes name a storm and then by surprise it veers left and gets us instead. A sudden renaming and a bunch of apologies, perhaps.

Anyway, we had the honour of hosting Gerrit with, presumably the Irish, which was most notable down here for the night on seventy miles per hour winds coming in from the south. I had thought that we would be blissfully unaffected by it as we were from the last southerly, whenever that was. I was therefore quite unprepared for the viciousness of it when ABH and I descended on the Harbour beach in the middle of the morning.

There was a collie already there and a gentleman in shorts picking away at the rocks. ABH treated the collie with some suspicion for some reason and gave it a wide berth while barking at it. There was no trouble, as while she can be irritating, she is not daft. In a surprising result, I managed to call her away and we ducked under the short slip and poked around there for a while. It was probably a kinder place to be as the gusting breeze laced with some serious rain was hacking down from the cliff. At times it was pushing the little girl down the beach, especially if she went side on to the wind.

We spent a little time down there, but it was certainly not comfortable even toggled up against the elements. I suggested that we head back home again, and I think for once she was happy and eager to comply.

After the meat and pickles from our traditional Boxing Day meal, there was sizable dish of mashed potato left. It had crossed my mind to make some sort of fishcake or patty with it and bent my mind to the task when we got back from the beach. I had pulled some sardines and tuna from the shop but was unsure which would be best for the dish. I put it to the gathered company, pilchards or tuna, and they both questioned why I had not taken some fish from the freezer. It was a good question, but what I really wanted was an answer to the question that I asked. I would have used fish from the freezer but that would require defrosting and cooking and I did not want the faff. In the end I was forced to make a bold choice. My fishcakes had sardines in them.

I also lacked breadcrumbs – despite being told there was a remaining loaf in the shop freezer and I could make my own. Again, the shop seemed such a long way

away and the sesame seeds in the cupboard were much closer. Long story short, I threw in a bunch of stuff, olives, capers, chilli powder and coriander amongst other stuff, coated them in sesame seeds and put them in the refrigerator to forget until later. They were very toothsome, even if I do say so myself. It must have been all the help I had.

I did not waste much time in suggesting that I head into town and left the scene of the crime almost immediately after that. We had run out of food that ABH would decline to eat, and we needed some more. It is a game we enjoy. We find something that she scoffs down, looking up for more. We then go and buy lots more of it and she never looks at it twice again. Given that all we have seemed to do these last days is stay in and drink tea, we also needed some more milk. At least that would be consumed and not thrown away.

It was after the middle of the day and after the rain of Storm Gerrit had got bored and gone off to be someone else's problem. That is not entirely true as it was fair banging in still in Penzance. I also had Gerrit's little brother that had come in after a pause and dropped a load of rain on my journey back.

I dislike making a trip into town for such a small task but needs must. Very few other people seem to have been bothered to head in and start shopping. I think long gone are the days of leaping on the Boxing Day sales, albeit a day after Boxing Day – perhaps I just missed the rush. I think that the high street needs a different proposition altogether as clearly service alone is not cutting the mustard with hardened Internet and out of town shoppers. Quite what that is, I have no idea but there are bright people out there. I still believe they will find a way.

Perhaps someone will also find a way of building a big wall to keep the wind out. In the last couple of months, it seems we have only had a couple of calm days and it is getting tiresome. Today's wind was very robust. It had started in the south in the morning but had edged around to the west by and by. It was the noise of it more than anything, howling in the eaves and singing in the wires. It did not seem to bother ABH much and we spent quite a time under a power pole with the noise above us wailing and plaintive and quite loud while she rooted about.

I occasionally checked the local weather stations to see what was going on and the wind had calmed a bit during the afternoon but come back again in the evening. We could hear it into the night as it tore around The Cove. Land's End, probably the most accurate had peaked just under 70 miles per hour, although I am sure some local gusts may have been a bit higher. Gwennap Head was maintaining its position of windiest place in the universe by recording near 90 miles per hour at ten o'clock in the evening.

I had to smile when I made a final check the following morning (yes, The Diary is able to see into the future) that it had ceased recording at midnight. I surmised that either the Gwennap Head anemometer had been blown off its perch in the extreme

conditions or the watchers had taken it down to stop certain Diarists taking the Mickey.

## December 25<sup>th</sup> and 26<sup>th</sup> – Christmas Day & Boxing Day

Christmas Day. Gosh. A day so unlike its Christmas card image that you wondered why you were having a roast dinner in the middle of a Monday afternoon; a day that saw small children abandon their new bicycles, scooters and skates in favour of a family game of Jenga that your Aunt Ethel got you despite the fact you had the same game last year from Uncle Herbert; a day parents actually hoped Frozen had been repeated yet again for the middle of the afternoon on television; a day when you did not go for a walk after dinner because your clothes were still wet from the walk you did in the morning. In short, it was a day that, should it be remembered at all, it would be because someone had stolen Christmas.

I really do not remember when we last had so much mizzle in one day. I had taken ABH down to the Harbour beach in the morning, early again, and once more selected the wrong shoes. My jacket, that really does need replacing, was soaked and so too were my waterproof trousers. It hardly seemed to be raining at all but that fine mizzle works its way into the smallest of crevices, wind assisted, and stays there.

The only part of Christmas that went ahead unaffected was the Christmas swim. I could not hazard a guess as to the numbers joining in, but it was in the several hundreds and at least as busy as every other year. Mother would normally watch with us from the flat window, a grandstand view, but this year we made do with The Beach webcam.

While we were thankful that the timing coincided with low water, the sea state still made the event hazardous. I had a call towards the end of it to go and drive the Tooltrak as the Inshore Lifeboat was going on standby. An experienced crew member was down on the big beach in the thick of it and alerted the station to a person in trouble in the water. We waited on the tideline with the engine running for the word to go but the situation had developed quickly and our man on the beach went in fully clothed to carry out the rescue.

It was all very low-key. The response had been managed locally and unless you were there or involved in the launch, you would not have known anything was happening. There will be no medals or accolades nor any sought, just a local young man doing something extraordinary like it was part of his day job and unlikely that you would hear about this outside The Diary.

Sadly, the fasting monks and the starving adolescents did not turn up to help us with the surfeit of Christmas dinner. It is a good job we have industrial size freezers in the shop, even if one of them is broken still.

Boxing Day.

A much better day in prospect, though it did not last. It also took ages to get going, it still being predominantly dark at eight o'clock. So dark was it that I had to check my clock to make sure that I had not got out of bed an hour earlier than I thought I had.

When we went out for our proper walk, after the sun had eventually endowed The Cove with light, we discovered that not only was it dry and a good deal less grey than it was yesterday, the wind had almost entirely gone. We headed for the Harbour beach and immediately came across the bleddy hound's best pal. She has yet to be convinced that the new exuberant interloper is good for anything but snarling at but did much better today with both off their leads.

We were lucky that ABH had her other pal there to play with. That girl is far more tolerant and ABH concentrated her annoyance there mostly. It was only after she had gone on that ABH turned her attention to bleddy hound's best pal. It would be hard to say that it went well but for all the antics ABH employed she left the beach intact, which I am taking as a positive.

It was much busier about the place than it had been yesterday. All those skates, scooters and bicycles coming into their own again. There were a few hopeful surfers out later in the tide and the swell was much cleaner today. Coming back from a later walk, I saw that the Harbour beach was inundated with children and dogs, and I was pleased that we had ticked off that visit early. I had not appreciated that there were quite so many people else I might have held back on that other walk. The fact that there was little else to do today but read my book rather drove me to it.

I asked the Missus to drop ABH and I off at Land's End and we would walk back from there. I chose the cycle path, which turned out to be an excellent plan. The Coast Path is clearly visible from the cycle path, and it was busier than the M5 on a holiday weekend. It was also my reason for choosing to come down Stone Chair Lane rather than cut across the moor and down the cliff.

The choice of route also worked out fortuitously on another matter, too. I bumped into a fellow who I wanted to ask about trimming the hedges down the lane to The Farm. I had seen him the day before setting out the bollards along Cove Road so that people could move them to park. As it happened, our visitors were very well behaved this year. We shall see what happens next year when the cones will not be there and the yellow lines another year more faded. Anyway, he told me that he would see what he could do but I would need to follow him down the lane with our flayer as his machinery would leave big chunks of foliage behind.

One of our weather forecasts had determined that we would be rained upon in the afternoon. I did not worry too much about this as I was wearing waterproofs anyway. It only came into rain at the end of our walk, but the day was so mild I rather wish I had gone lighter dressed. I think that we have become so used to the wind that I

have defaulted to a particular way of dressing for the last couple of weeks and not bothered to alter it.

We shall be back to some semblance of normality tomorrow. Rain coming.

December 24<sup>th</sup> – Sunday

ABH is a little beaut. She wakes me up, mercifully not at two o'clock in the morning today, but close to seven o'clock. Having got me out of bed, she lies down and goes back to sleep again. I have accepted this as my lot. I go downstairs and make a cup of tea. If I am lucky, I will get to drink it before she comes down wanting to go out. This morning, I was not so lucky.

She had me twice today as I usually manage to have a shower – yes, I do wash occasionally - and get breakfast in before taking her on a longer run around our end of The Cove. This morning, I did not get as far as breakfast. She was whingeing by the door, which is rare, so I took her out early.

There was plenty of beach this morning to explore, it being close to low water. It did not take me long to discover the track of a seal and from a little distance I was not sure if it was a coming or going trail. ABH was up at one end of it in short order and I managed to clip her lead on while I had a quick peek behind the rocks up in the corner by the wall. There was nothing there, so I turned my attention to the other end of the trail. It was clear that the seal had not long left the beach and I made properly sure that it was not still there camouflaged amongst the weed and rocks.

Much relieved that the seal had gone we went about having a bit of a run around until ABH noticed her latest new best friend coming down the slipway. Luckily, new best friend did not mind being plagued by a small hound, which was just as well since they appeared joined at the ankle for most of the time new best friend was there.

We tore ourselves away eventually but she wanted to head around the block before heading home. By the time we had come full circle, one of our local friends had arrived with his two dogs. ABH was very keen to go say hello as she has met them before. It seemed unfair to stop her, so I let slip the dog of phwoar and off she tore down the slip again to play with her dog buddies.

It had started to drizzle a bit while we were there and combined with her dips in the sea, I delivered her home damp from head to paw. The Missus dries her because I do not do it right. I was happy to let her while I attended to my breakfast.

We did not pay it much attention because the tide was out during the morning. It was into the afternoon that it caught our attention that the waves were still restless and coveted the need to bash about a bit. The sea state was perhaps not quite as busy as it had been at some stages during the week, but it was still fast running into shore

and the waves were muddled and reckless. When we ventured out in the dusk after four o'clock, there was a family playing dare with the waves as they ran up the OS slipway. I can understand that it is something you perhaps do not notice if you do not live by the sea.

The mood of the day had pretty much matched the mood of the sea. The drizzle came and went all day and we never really advanced beyond gloomy. The clouds were steely grey, and the sea glowered back in slate. The wind had picked up again but remained just south of west but was still in our faces as we ventured around all the low lying areas of The Cove in our many jaunts out.

The Missus spent much of the day removing things from the freezer and preparing things. Her and Mother made one trip over to St Buryan but otherwise remained indoors. It was definitely the day for remaining indoors if you could, although we encountered several Christmas visitor families parading about, wrapped up in zippered coats and woolly hats and wellies.

There was an abundance of dogs, too, most uncaring for a small ABH. I let her loose down on the Harbour just before it went dark as she was desperate to meet a host of black labrador sized beasts running about down there. They all pointedly ignored her, although she did have a good run around trying. Afterwards she was rewarded with a brief but kindly meeting with a more friendly dog at the head of the slipway before she – very carefully – introduced herself to a massive wolf in a Kevlar harness and lead. ABH sniffed and the wolf smiled – I hope.

The OS showed some signs of life for the first time in several weeks and although we went close to the Surf Beach Bar, Beach Surf Bar, the bar at the end of The Beach car park, we could not see in to discover how busy it was. There were signs of people arriving, toting bags of logs that they probably would not need. I read somewhere that it was likely to be the warmest Christmas Eve since 1931. How lucky; how very unChristmassy.

As usual, dear reader, there will be an absence of Diary on Christmas Day, although you will see today's to read before you open your present – should, of course, you be so lucky as to have one. I fervently hope that you avoid the slippers and socks, or worse still the jams and preserves.

Santy very kindly dropped off a very decent bottle of malt (Teaninich 13 year old, in case you should require to take notes, dear reader, although Craigellachie 13 year old Armagnac edition is just as acceptable), which took the edge off the socks situation somewhat.

We will catch up again on the day after Boxing Day and it just remains for me to wish you both, a very Merry Christmas. ABH, Mother and the Missus send their regards, too.

December 23<sup>rd</sup> – Saturday

The answer to our Christmas picture quiz yesterday was, of course, The Scaffold, famous for such melodies as *Thank U Very Much* and *Lily the Pink*. One of the band members was Paul McGear, real name Peter McCartney. GE from Wales, not that The Diary holds that against him, wins this year's prize as first in with the answer. Winner gets free pasties (sorry, MS) for the duration of 2023. (Pasties to be collected in person during opening hours – oh, sorry.)

I really cannot get the hang of the lying in lark. Seven o'clock still seems late to me even if it is dark out there. ABH would have let me lie there longer as, once again, she had me up in the early hours, her routine in pieces. It would be better if she did not, but it does not bother me greatly since the shop is not open and I can catch a zizz later in the day, generally.

I combined our first proper walk around the block, which happens mid morning, with replacing the batteries in the Christmas tree power packs. Once tested out alright when it was changed but the other did not. We shall have to have a proper audit of working and not working lights and power packs before we put them away. I suspect a lot of lights will be heading for the tip, sorry, Household Waste Recycling Centre. It is too late to replace the broken ones now, but it would have been nice if they had at least lasted until the day itself.

ABH seems to be much better at being patient when she is tied up. The last time she was tied to the first electric sliding door in The Cove she chewed through her lead (again) and made good her escape. It is true the Missus was across the road that time, rather than me, and she is not quite so bothered about getting to me, but I took it as progress. It took quite a while, too, because of the batteries not quite fitting in the packs problem.

I was just finishing off when the Missus drove out of the Mews. She was off shopping again, although this time it was to take a friend who had been poorly off to the shopping centre at Hayle. Mother went too and happily they were not too overloaded with bags when they came back. I can imagine that it was utter carnage at the stores on what should usually be the last shopping day before Christmas. Of course, it is not anymore but I do not think it would have made much difference.

On Thursday night at the Lifeboat soiree, I chatted with the GP we have on the crew. He told me he was working the next day and expected to be overrun. The surgery is closed for four days, and he said that it might well have been four months given the 'shopping' frenzy they would get. It is the same in the shops. They will only be closed for two days at worst and yet there will be people buying a month's worth of groceries just in case. I would cite the Missus as an example, but her excessive buying is that she thinks we will actually eat that much not that we might not be able to get any more.

I was definitely not in need of further sustenance. My kedgerie that I cobbled together for breakfast worked out exceedingly well. Despite having to modify the recipe slightly, well, quite a bit, it was a particularly good kedgerie. In fact, it was better than that still, but I do not like to blow my own trumpet. It was also a tad bigger than I had intended with near 300 grammes of haddock, two boiled eggs and a dish of left-over boiled rice. I ate the lot, and I do not care, so there.

Bearing that in mind and having finished an extended zizz with ABH also zizzing on my lap in the early afternoon, I decided that another trip up the cliff was in order. It had crossed my mind that I would take up the Missus' idea and get the bus to Land's End and walk back. I will still do that but given the four hour gap between buses to Land's End, the trip has to be carefully planned. In essence, if we do not get the 13:43 hours bus, we are stumped and since it was 14:10 hours when I thought of it, we will do it another day.

With the tide not playing ball this week, this just left going up the cliff again. The wind had returned after giving us a minor break yesterday. It is odd that we should feel it so keenly today as it had drifted around just south of west. It was certainly marked going up the hill and I decided then that we would avoid coming back across the top of Irish Lady. Even coming back down the hill did not fill me with joy and I thought that Stone Chair Lane would be a better plan.

Rather than head straight there, we turned down the Coast Path for a bit, given the Irish Lady bit a wide berth, and headed for the path across the moor. It was the same trip as yesterday but in reverse, which would make it seem like a completely new walk altogether. Well, it made sense to me but I do not think that ABH was fooled as all the same smells were there and all the same holes to stick her nose in but in a difference order. What was different, however, was the walk down Maria's Lane and the trip down Stone Chair Lane.

The electricity board has been active down there again, I note. They have cut a swathe up the little used spur up to the old hotel. This used to be a narrow cut in the grass just wide enough for one boot in front of the other. No longer. The small digger the electric people are using has carved a broad lane up there. Much easier to find but ankle deep in mud. If we get much rain, you will be able to slide down on your behind – probably quite unintentionally.

Stone Chair Lane itself is hardly free from mud and I had to wash ABH's paws in the sink when we got back. At one point in the path I thought that there had been a collapse. The path here is now exceedingly narrow where the tarmac has dropped away on the downhill side. Exposed in the hole is a thick electric cable, so the absence of path is deliberate. Looking at what there is there it will be some job to put the path back and to shore it up so it does not drop away again. Someone should have oversight of this work as I believe the natural inclination would be to just shovel the earth back and lay tarmac on top.



We preceded the arrival of Mother and the Missus by no more than half an hour. They had enjoyed a whale of a time, not my cup of tea at all, which is what they demanded no more than a few minutes after they got in. They did return with sweet biscuits which I had a hankering for during the last two days – the kedgereee was substantial but not everlasting.

Best leave here with a few select verses of Lily the Pink.

*We'll drink a drink, a drink  
To Lily the Pink, the Pink, the Pink  
The saviour of the human race  
For she invented, medicinal compound  
Most efficacious in every case*

*Mr. Freers had sticky out ears  
And it made him awful shy  
And so they gave him medicinal compound  
And now he's learning how to fly*

*Jennifer Eccles had terrible freckles  
And the boys all called her names  
But they gave her medicinal compound  
Now he joins in all the games*

*We'll drink a drink, a drink  
To Lily the Pink, the Pink, the Pink  
The savior of our human race  
For she invented, medicinal compound  
Most efficacious in every case*

December 22<sup>nd</sup> – Friday

I started the day with a bit of threatening and malice. I had waited for our builder to send me a quote and insurance details so that I could get our own insurance on side for the impending – hopefully impending – work. I had asked last Friday week and again three times since, garnering promises of immediate response. I asked today that he probably would not mind if I delayed paying the first invoices from him for a week or two since he had set the precedent. I had the documents within the hour.

The respite of a bit of westerly wind last night did not last very long. We were back to the northwest again by morning, although, oddly, it did not feel terribly cold when I stepped out in shorts first thing. Actually, it was not quite first thing. I had gone through the early part of the morning waiting on ABH making an appearance downstairs so that I could take her out. I had to tell her I was on the way to the gymnasium and she would miss the boat had she not come at that moment. Quite incredibly, that worked.

We were making a good pace, which we usually do when there is a bit of wind around, when she stopped dead in her tracks just a little way along Coastguard Row. Hanging on the handrail to the first cottage were two brace of pheasants, newly delivered I would guess. They certainly did not suddenly fall out of the sky, that I was sure of unless they managed to tie themselves together on the way down. The little girl was quite put out by them, which she discovered mainly by smell. It intrigued her all through the day even long after they had been taken in.

Quite what drives the effectiveness of my blistering sessions, I do not know. Once again today, I was well ahead of my benchmark row. Could it be the weather, my diet or general rhythm of my metabolism. I do not think I will look it up, but it is most satisfying when the plan comes together. It might have been this that permitted another in shorts run out with ABH when I got back to no discomfort at all.

As soon as I was able, I made my way to the flat so that I could complete the insurance form with the new information from the builder. I mentioned before that having forms in inappropriate formats make the filling out of them awkward or just plain impossible. The insurance form is in Excel and not only that, but it was filed as a shared document. This, I discovered meant that I could not insert an object such as the electronic signature that was required. It took me a good half an hour to think of a way around it. I provided some polite helpful feedback when I sent it in.

The Missus ran off shopping again soon after I finished at the computer. I think that she must have found an order of monks who have just come out of a month long fast and required sustenance. Surely, all those bags of food cannot just be for the three of us. We grew some of our own vegetables two years ago, but I can see why we did not bother again. We do not have a big enough field.

It seemed that I then spent the rest of the day walking ABH. The Missus had met me at the shop just as she was leaving and had the little girl with her. I was going to go back to the house, but ABH was having none of it. She had gone to the trouble of having her harness on and it was not to be wasted by going straight home again.

The walk we had was to make a brief visit to the beach, but I think she must be getting beach fatigue – and it was not that long since we were last there - so she was keen to travel on soon after getting there. We raised our heads above the parapet of the western slip only to have them almost blown off in the breeze. The sea has not calmed any since yesterday and large ponderous waves were thundering down Tribbens on their way to the Harbour wall. There was also plenty of white water dancing and leaping on top of Cowloe in the most alluring manner and exploding over the footings of Pedn-men-du. The sun - yes, we had sunshine today because the forecast was for rain – picked out the white like a washing powder advertisement and set it against the bluish colour of the sea. It was a joy to watch as demonstrated by the collection of cars gathered in the car park.

We had rested until the Missus came back with the groceries and Mother in tow. I had already prepared the fire, which was just as well as it was getting a little cool in the house by then. ABH will normally settle with Mother soon after she arrives but, on this occasion, she was quite restless. Taking her for another walk that did not involve the beach seemed the way forward.

With the tide pressing, a stank in the direction of the big beach was out, so up the hill it was. It was immediately obvious that the wind had diminished somewhat over the course of the day. Down in The Cove it was still quite pushy, but as we climbed Mayon Cliff – that makes it sound like we had scaled the north face of the Eiger, by the footpath, I mean – the wind seemed to have lessened considerably. By the time we reached the top it was pleasantly breezy and not trying to tear the coat off my back. I had also found the climb remarkably easy, leaping from rock to rock like a young gazelle. The only thing taking my breath away was the crystal clear view out across the bay. I think someone must be putting Weetabix in my beer.

I was not entirely sure which route we were going to take having reached the top and started back toward Maria's Lane. I was cautious about returning over the top by the Irish Lady after last time but, as I mentioned, the wind had diminished. It was either that or come down Stone Chair Lane. In the end ABH made the decision and turned down the cycle path that would end up with a run over the moor.

There was plenty of breeze about but not half the windspeed we had experienced before. So pleasant was it that we had time to fall into conversation with a friend, erstwhile casting a lonely vigil on the cliff top. I do hope it was not our presence that stopped him vigilling. We parted company as he was intent on walking down Stone Chair Lane and we back down the cliff from whence we came. Quite by happy chance, well, at least on my part, we met again at the bottom. He had either walked slowly to avoid us, and I was slower coming down the cliff or the route is longer and he had walked quickly but mis-timed it. We will never know, and he was most polite about it, anyway.

With fifty percent clear sky, a diminished breeze and a mercifully dry day, it was an exceedingly pleasant perambulation around Mayon Cliff and the moor beyond. We are exceedingly lucky to have such wonders on our doorstep and we are not ignorant of it. Having a small friend to enjoy it with is just the impetus required, else I might just have stayed at home and missed it.

Mother is staying with us now until after the festivities. We are a small comfortable fit for the duration, although I am not exactly sure just how festive I am feeling at present. There is nothing that I can do that will change things regarding planning, financing or fixing issues with the building works, so I may as well forget about it for a week. There was some left over rice from our meal the other day which put me in mind to be decadent and have kedgeree for breakfast. I already have some haddock out but it means a run down to the flat in the morning for ingredients, but it will be worth it. I wonder if Mother likes kedgeree.

December 21<sup>st</sup> – Thursday

Today we had yet another helping of strong breeze in from the northwest. It is doing a fine job of making us all very cold and even the improved insulation of the house that we are in is struggling against the incessant draught.

It was this rather than some impending DIY that had me reaching for my DIYman overalls before I headed forth this morning. I slipped them on just before I took the little girl out for the second time in the morning.

She had not bothered to wake me, I managed to do that for myself. The Missus and I run a tag team at night because the Missus likes to stay up late. This means we stand more of a chance of the little girl not getting up in the early hours. It seems to have been rather too effective as I cannot get her out of bed at all in the mornings now. While the shop is closed and there is no imperative for dragging her out of bed unnecessarily, I wait until she is ready. It also saves a lot of snarling and snapping going on.

I wondered where all the time went as I got ready to head into town. Since I had been up at seven o'clock it occurred to me that I would get into town and back again before needing to take ABH out again. Looking at the clock just at the end of breakfast I noticed that it was gone ten o'clock. Three hours gone in the blink of an eye, and I did not think that I had been idle, although I was not rushing, either. A quick change of plan then to slip into overalls and take the girl out before I went into town and completely change the pattern of the day.

It was busier than I anticipated on the roads and particularly the roads around town. I had not intended to go anywhere near Tesmorbury's but I ended up having to for one small item that I could not get elsewhere. It was beginning to heave and far more congested than it would ordinarily be on a mid-week day. Something must be on. I scuttled out of there as quickly as I could manage and hurried home with my light fitting.

The Missus was keen to go and visit her friend at the top of the hill when I got back, so I continued my hurrying and hurried around to our neighbour to fit the light fitting. Given that I was still in my DIYman overalls, the job only took a few minutes, but the chatting went on for much longer. The lady is on my wavelength and our conversations can border on the surreal at times. I had the opportunity to look at a photograph of her as a young lady and was put in mind of Lauren Bacall or possibly Hedy Lamarr.

By the time I got back, ABH was keen to have a run out again, so I took her down to the beach that was much more welcoming than it had been earlier. Then, and I forget where we were in the receding tide, but the waves were still racing up the beach a good way. It was good to see that she was keeping an eye on the waves as

they came in and made sure she was well ahead of the advance. She was having a ball, chasing little balls of foam as they blew over the Harbour wall and floated over the sand in the breeze. Her ability to entertain herself and chase random things is going to save us a fortune in balls.

Along with our ridiculously eternal blowing wind, the low pressure sitting to the northwest of us in the form of storm Pia is throwing up some serious waves out there. They were being very serious in the Harbour this morning, enough for me to suggest to our temporary neighbour in the Mews that heading down there for a swim was probably not such a hot idea. I was not much comforted by the response that she was a seasoned cold water swimmer and never went out of her depth. The waves in the Harbour did not look very much like they were respecting depth. I did check before I drove off into town that she had come out safely.

The very pleasant lady from the bank had tried to call when I was driving back from town. She caught up with me when I settled down to have a cup of tea when I returned home with the little girl. Things are never straight forward when dealing with banks and finance institutions and it was no different this time around. I must get my stubby pencil out again and do some more back of a fag packet calculations. Happily, I do not have to decide just now and can wait until the first week in January, a week hence. Obviously, with very little going on in the intervening days, I shall have plenty of time to work on it.

We had an early tea because a small soiree had been planned at the Lifeboat station instead of training tonight. It was a discreet gathering as many had other plans with families in the run up to the long weekend. There were enough of us there to make it worthwhile and have an enjoyable natter.

We had discussed the weather just before we left with an eye on the Christmas Day swim. I noted at the time that the wind at Land's End had topped 40 miles per hour and Gwennap Head, the windiest place in the universe, 52 miles per hour. As we headed past our rattling scaffolding covers I noted that they were not rattling quite as much as they had earlier. Looking again at the wind data I saw that it had shifted to the west, a much kinder direction for us. It will be pleasant to have a little relief, however marginal.

December 20<sup>th</sup> – Wednesday

Well, let me just get this out of the way, first. You will recall, dear reader, because every word I write is indelibly etched on your memory – you poor, poor things, that as soon as we were told that Basho were taking over our waste management I wrote a letter of termination including the words that we held no assets of theirs as the bin belonged to another company altogether. I even specified the company name. Yesterday, included in my parting shot, I stated again that the bin was not an asset of Basho nor was it an asset of the company it purchased. In short, it was not nor even had been, theirs.

This morning, I had a letter from my dear friend at Basho asking me if the bin we have was ours or did it belong to the company that they just bought out. It fleetingly crossed my mind to reply but given that I had very specifically provided the information requested twice previously, I judged that I would probably be wasting my effort. Over the last few days, I have had to respond to several emails and bat away a spurious demand for bin collection and I have not even signed a contract with Basho. Is it any wonder I want nothing to do with them.

There was a bitter wind blowing through The Cove today. It was chilly enough yesterday but today, the wind had got into its stride and the temperature, whether real or perceived, was a couple of degrees below yesterday's and very much in your face – if you were going in that direction. I felt this keenly on my way to the gymnasium but, happily, inside it was more temperate for a change. I very properly managed a blistering session in the upper quartile of blistering sessions despite someone trying to interrupt me by calling me toward the end of my row. It distracted me enough that I did not note my time. I was on track for a better than the benchmark but by the time I went back to look at the reading, the screen had gone dark. There is probably a memory function, but I have no idea how to use it even if there was. I also cannot recall where the instruction manual went.

I had at last collated nearly all the required information that the bank had asked for to further the temporary finance for the building work. The only thing I was missing was the quote from the builder who swore blind that he would get it to me this afternoon. I pre-empted the likelihood that he would not and asked for the headline figures to be sent to me by text and that I would produce a document of some sort and hope that it was sufficient for the bank lady.

The very pleasant lady at the bank called only a few minutes later. There were a couple of things that she needed corrected, one being that the company accounts could not be 'draft' versions, which was probably the more tricky of the issues raised. It became rather more tricky when I discovered that I could not contact the accountant by telephone, possibly due to a fault. I sent a message but had no idea if messages were being received until later when my very useful accountant sent through the requested documents.

The other issue the very pleasant lady at the bank raised was that I had not completed the forms she had sent me. Now, this is where the story really starts. Because we are closeted in temporary digs where the Internet access is parlous at best and the mobile telephone signal near non-existent, my main electronic mail machine is back at the flat. I can still read and send messages from my mobile telephone but there are limitations, such as I do not get to keep a copy of my sent messages, which is sometimes very important and secondly, amongst other things, attachments are not necessarily obvious. It was the latter that had me; I had completely missed that there were two forms to fill out.

She told me that she was going into a meeting for two hours – I seem to recall from one of my many management courses in the past that meetings stop being productive after an hour. I decided it was best to keep this to myself, despite it probably was using my money that they financed such profligate waste, and agreed that I would be at the end of the telephone two hours later.

I thought it sensible that I repair to the flat for the call where I could guarantee the quality of the communications and also be at a computer where I could play with the forms that she had sent. Given that I was there early, I unearthed the forms and started to complete them while I waited.

She was most apologetic that she had kept me waiting for about half an hour beyond the time we agreed. Darkness had enveloped me by this time, and I was glad that I had not taken off my coat, hat and muffler as there is no heating in the flat at present. I told her apologies were unnecessary as the excess time had given me the opportunity to nearly complete the forms she had asked for. She has certainly been the most friendly and helpful – it remains to be seen how helpful – contacts I have had at the bank and certainly the most accessible. I have left it all with her and I know that she will let me know if anything is amiss.

Since we had two hours to wait for the bank lady, the Missus and I decided to run ABH down the road and at the same time post our Christmas cards to our neighbours. The thing that is most noticeable about The Cove is that unless you are going to the beach or the bar, everything is uphill. It was also noticeable that for every card that needed to be delivered, it seemed to be my turn to run up the hill and post it in the appropriate letter box. This will explain why you will never see a tubby postman on our walk.

The last delivery of the day, after a strenuous struggle into the bracing wind as we headed back in the direction of the Lifeboat station, was up Stone Chair Lane, or at least the first part of it. This is followed by a climb up some very steep steps to the front door in question. The lady who lives there is an octogenarian and manages shopping up those steps on a regular basis. The person delivering the card is not and goes to the gymnasium three times a week and needed oxygen at the top of the steps. It is also where the bleddy hound's best pal lives and grieves. She met me at the bottom of the steps, which was handy as it gave me the excuse of a rest before I attempted the West Ridge route to the front door.

I was somewhat alarmed when I could not raise a response at the door, and it was very gloomy inside, but it became apparent that first, my knock and calling were too soft and secondly, the occupants were engaged in some minor repair that distracted them. Eventually, I gained a response and entered to investigate the problem. It was a broken light fitting, hence the reason for the power being off. I suggested that the simplest resolution to the problem was that I would go into town the following day and get a new light fitting and come around in the afternoon having slipped into DIYman persona. I assured them that my rates were reasonable, and my insurance

only recently lapsed. I now have a plan for tomorrow, which is handy as I had nothing else on the cards.

The call with the bank lady had come just as I was putting together the last aspects of the tea I was cooking. I do not get to cook very often, so it was met with some derision that the one time I do it and I deliver late. However, it met with approval and we have some left-overs for another day.

ABH will happily step out in the rain, but the wind is a different matter. I suspect she mere endures the wind and our walks tend to be a little shorter. So it was in the evening after tea. She decides whether we strike left into the darkness of the Harbour car park or right along the relative light of the street. Neither offered any shelter from the wind tonight but in going right she did not have to pass the scaffolding at the front of the shop. Each of the poles is sheathed in a red and white plastic wrapper to alert the unwary pedestrian that there is a pole there. In the wind, the wrapper rattles vigorously and makes a dreadful racket which I suspect is unkind to her sensitive ears.

If the forecast is to be believed, we have this breeze for a few days yet. It will all be over by Christmas, I am sure.

December 19<sup>th</sup> – Tuesday

It had started raining before bedtime and was still raining in the morning. It eventually petered out towards the middle of the day by which time I had done very little to contribute to humanity.

It was not for the want of things to do; I had plenty. Much of it was motivation and some of it was waiting on the builder providing some information that was the last bit required for my submission to the bank. It is most frustrating because I have sent reminders and I have had responses. I have just not received the response with the document in it. If it is not with be by morning, I will have to be very beastly with him, which I only like doing to people smaller, very much smaller, than me as a rule.

I would have been hard pressed to do anything with it the document as it happened. ABH was up late, and I spent much of the morning waiting for her so that I could take her for a walk. Not long after that, our ex-Head Launcher paid a visit and we chatted for a time and when he left it was time to take the girl out again and after that the Missus went off shopping. There was so much packed into the remaining hours of the day that the scaffolders did not get their coffee again. They will be taking it down again if I miss tomorrow as well.



Despite telling the company not to, my nemesis waste collection company business improvement manager called. She was pretty much suited to the company as she did not listen to a word I said, either. I told her that I had already contracted with another company, but she insisted that I might like to try Basho services for a few months to see how it went. Whatever I said resulted in the service continuing, so I had to be blunt in the end.

I had a follow-up message from her telling me that the contract had been terminated from the first day of January. I sent one back telling her the contract was terminated from the day I sent the letter. Any delay would allow them to slip in a couple of invoices that would take aeons to sort out.

As if to prove the point, a little later in the day I had a message from Basho stating that it would service our bin on 3<sup>rd</sup> January, two days after the contract ended. I forwarded this to our lady representative with a tart note underlining that this was a case in point for avoiding her company. She wrote back almost immediately telling me that it was only them picking up the bin.

I wrote back again suggesting she actually read my letter of termination because in it I explained that the bin was not Basho's to take. I was very much less than polite when I pointed out that two reasons to avoid Basho like the plague in the same day must be some sort of record, even for them. I have absolutely no doubt that they will still turn up on 3<sup>rd</sup> January and I will have to chain myself to the bin to stop them taking it away.

The rain may have left us but the unwelcome grey that came with it remained until well into the afternoon. ABH and I did not tarry too long on the beach. The wind coming in from somewhere northwesterly was none too warm and with it being damp too, we decided to keep moving. The tide was not making it easy on the beach, so we tramped around the big block and did not dawdle at that, either.

The Missus brought mother back having taken her shopping. I had thought that it was just the three of us for Christmas, but I must have been mistaken. The Missus had purchased enough for a small village of adolescent boys who had been left to cook for themselves for a week. It was pressing dusk by the time they came back and by that time, I had prepared the dinner for tomorrow and set the fire. I was sorely tempted to start it a bit sooner as the breeze was inveigling itself in through the broken draft excluder on the kitchen window. It is so poor that the blind moves in the draught. Someone had come to fix it while we were out about a month ago but has not returned. I am sure it would be very pleasant in summer.

Despite not being provided with tea and coffee, the scaffolders have pressed on and have come close to finishing the sides of the structure. I imagine that the over the top portion is more difficult and I have been warned that they are not likely to finish this until the first week in January. I suspect that they will not even start it in case they

have to leave it incomplete over the Christmas period and at risk from a rogue high wind or two.

We now have a modernist arch next to the shop spanning the gap between us and the café next door. I might ask them to leave it after they finish because it provides quite a pleasant sun deck across the top. It might be a little high for my liking though.

I quickly dismissed the idea as I went down to the shop to sort the Christmas tree lights that had been out for a day or two. The new spare batteries are just a millimetre bigger than the originals for the power packs and require some brute force to fit them. At least they work and the tree will be good for a couple more days yet. We have made some enquiries about getting a better solution for next year run by mains power from the Lifeboat station as the battery pack solution get worse each year.

For the last two days we have been determined to walk down The Cove delivering local Christmas cards. They are still all sitting on the dining table. There have been years when we have missed the boat altogether. It would be the thought that counted but that only works if the people they were destined for were aware that there had been a thought. I often wondered why we did not just use them the following year, but the following year I am darned if I know where they went. There is also the risk of giving them to couples who are not any longer. Maybe we will get out tomorrow.

December 18<sup>th</sup> – Monday

I had no intention of letting today be a busy day, but it turned out that I had no choice in the matter.

At least I was up at a semi-reasonable five o'clock this morning and was able to slip back to bed again for an hour or so. Had I woken up at the normal time I would have been even more pressed at the end of the day than I was.

Almost before the day even started, I was inundated with unpleasant messages in my inbox. Most of them were after money from me for one reason or another. The most anticipated of these was the quote for the scaffolding, which these days is clearly made out of titanium and the fixings are diamond studded to make them look a little more alluring. I can think of no other reason for it being the price that it is. The highly professional craftsman assures me that it is because they are constantly adding to their stock of steel poles and wood planks. I am dubious that they are buying that much.

I had the choice of lying down in a dark room, drinking heavily or going to the gymnasium to beat it out of me. Since I already had my gymnasium shorts on, they are too good to keep in the dark and I would look ridiculous imbibing in them, it only

left going to the gymnasium. I went to the gymnasium and undertook a blistering session, leaving me too worn out to be worrying about enormous bills I did not have to pay until after Christmas.

When I returned, I was keen to maintain the momentum and hurried to get going on the rest of the day. As I stated yesterday, we had some large bits of cardboard from the new box outside to take to the, erm, Household Waste Recycling Centre where it would be tipped. There was also a list of other errands to run which, since I would be in Hayle, I decided to get as much done there as possible.

The Household Waste Recycling Centre service has been outsourced by the much maligned council to the company we have now contracted to manage our business waste. The company is clearly aiming to win some customer service prize or other because they have flooded the place with jovial characters only too keen to help you. They have a man on the gate managing the flow of traffic into the place. I half expected to be announced once I had been let through because he stopped to have a chat, ask how the garden was doing, if the kids were happy at school, and how my lumbago was. The fact that I had none of those things was apparently unimportant as long as he stuck to the happy script.

My business done, I was rather expecting a 'thanks for my custom' and 'have a nice day' and a wave off down the road. I was very glad it did not happen. They will have them wearing dinner suits and carrying silver platters of complementary cocktails next time I am there. I can barely contain myself.

I hurried on to the cash and carry for a few items that we were missing and while I was parked there, I thought to head to the bank and the butcher shop, which is a mere stone's throw from the cash and carry. I did have an inkling that they had closed the banks, both of them either side of the square, so it was not too much of a shock. The Post Office is also closed despite being attached to a sorting office, so I thought that they might have managed to staff that somehow.

Next up was the butcher, Hampson's, where they used to make a decent pasty at one time. They may well still do but today I was after some steak for a dinner I had planned for later in the week. It did perturb me slightly that there was no meat on display at all in the display cabinets either side of the shop, but I ventured forth regardless. The chief man was there, second generation, I believe, who explained that they were no longer a butcher shop, more of a delicatessen and pasty shop and had been for the last four years.

I knew it had been a while since I was last there, but it came as a bit of a shock. I asked if that was it for butcher shops in Hayle and he said that it was. The rot started when the banks closed at the Foundry end of town and the opening of the Tesmorbury's supermarket rang the death knell. I told him the Aged Parent, an erstwhile local boy, would be spinning in his grave if it were not for the fact that he

was still alive and kicking. Well, alive anyway; the knees no longer allow much kicking. Still, it would be something for him to look forward to.

However, for some reason, our erstwhile butcher had some sirloins vacuum packed in the back of the shop and was happy to part with them. They came from a very good local butcher, but I did not ask why they had them. They were not the cheapest, but they would be top quality and would save me heading into Penzance, which I now had to do anyway because the banks were closed. It was too late by the time I thought of that, but it did save me having to carry them around Penzance.

I checked later and the Hampsen's website says that they are still a butcher shop with two shops in town. Either our man meant no more butcher shops in Foundry or the website is very out of date. One day I shall enquire further but I suspect the latter else the sirloins would have come from the other shop.

Sadly, some of the ingredients for the meal I had planned would only be available in Tesmorburys, so I made that my next call – the one that brought about the demise of the butcher shop. It was largely a wasted journey as they only had half of what I wanted and would mean stopping at another Tesmorbury's in Penzance. I had no better luck looking for food for the fussy ABH and the only one of three meals she will eat. In short, I spent a lot of time frequenting shops that did not have what I wanted. It was most frustrating not to mention time consuming.

So too was my visit to the bank. I have been going to our bank in town to carry out the same transaction each month for several years. Today, they decided that they could not do it. I tried another bank and they could not do it, either. I ended going back to the first bank where I had to set up a new account to be able to complete the transaction. It was a monumental waste of time.

During the time I had been away, the long-awaited scaffolding was starting to go up around the shop. I know some of the boys doing it and they are very quick and well-practised at what they do. When I left, they were just unpacking the poles and setting out the feet in the correct positions around the front and side of the shop. By the time I returned that were up to the first floor and had poles high enough to be starting the overhead part. I was asked if I would be around tomorrow, to which I said that I would. Our boys said he was pleased because he heard that I made the best cup of coffee in The Cove. I can take a subtle hint and assured him my coffee was rubbish, but the Missus made a better one.

When I spoke with the scaffolding boss man in the morning, I reminded him of the two stipulations for the construction on the shop. The first was that we had permission to use the Mews land only if vehicles could still pass up the drive when the scaffolding was in place. The other was that we could still get our 660 litre bin in and out. When I arrived back from my shopping excursion, I noted that the bin was firmly wedged between a pole at the front and the drainpipe at the back. I pointed this out to one of the lads and they assured me that they would fix it. In theory and by

the look of it, a turn anticlockwise and setting it at an angle might suffice. However, by the look of it, a turn anticlockwise will take the drainpipe off the wall. I will observe with interest.

Sitting idly at our dining table later in the day, I noticed that I had not yet returned my cut in half old driving licence. The plain envelopes are in the shop, which is largely the reason for it still being there. So, to speed things along, I used one of the spare Christmas cards and tucked it inside that. I do hope that the DVLA appreciate the effort.

On my last evening stroll with ABH, I noticed that the shop tree is in darkness. I will make amends tomorrow for those disappointed by the omission. I must try harder.

December 17<sup>th</sup> – Sunday

Our mild spell continues. It was remarkably temperate at three o'clock in the morning – again. The little girl is becoming a lady it seems and the process is upsetting her normal rhythm of life. We will persevere, mainly because we do not have a choice in the matter.

Given that today was a shooting day and a Christmas shooting day at that, there was no opportunity for resting with or without ABH. At least I did not have to prepare a dinner to take with me because every year at the Christmas shoot, I provide the pasties (sorry, MS). That sounds a bit grand. I am the mechanics by which pasties are provided, which is more like it, because I get them at cost. The Missus heats them up when she is given the signal and brings them to the range as part of the winding up ceremony for the year.

Ceremony also sounds a bit grand. We have a fun shoot designed by the club secretary who tends to design most of the shoots that we do on a Sunday. He is one of those people who is dedicated to the cause and the vast majority of us are very pleased for it because most of us would not care to do it ourselves. It is not that the rest of the shoots during the year are not fun, of course they are, else we would not do it. No, today we have small team games, and competition between the members and we are ranked at the end of the session.

For much of the day after a warm up session, I manned one of the themed shoots. Two rifles, one with a badly sighted in scope and the other with open sites, used to knock lolly sticks off a board where they were stapled. There were two other galleries, if you like, one shotgun and the other pistol and I was last to go on each of them when I was released from my duties on the other.

Come the end of the shoot, which finishes in the middle of the day, we have our pasty and listen to the roll call of where we came in the competition. As our names are called out, in reverse order, we pick a raffle ticket that is paired with a prize brought in by another member of the club. As seems to be about usual I was about

middle. If it is purely a lever action shoot – think John Wayne Winchester – I have been known to come in the top three. I do like my lever action rifle. Perhaps I should have been John Wayne.

Back home again and it is always time to run ABH out, despite being home at a different time from usual. It gave us the opportunity of heading down to the Harbour beach again just at the turn of the tide. One second the water was slack, gently stirring in the breeze and the streams running off the beach. The next second, a sudden minor flood as the slack water leaps up the beach. It was quite a moment of mystery, as if nature suddenly awoke from a doze and realised it should be pushing the tide in again and got to it in a bit of a panic.

We did not have long to contemplate it as another dog arrived on the beach for a nose. ABH charged up the beach halfway, waited to see what the reaction was, then ran up the rest of the way to her new best friend. Happily, new best friend did what was expected of him and gave chase. The owner told me that he was probably a bit tired having just walked from Land's End. I did think that the four year old was probably just getting into his stride having walked from Land's End but did not like to argue. The games were short lived, but very welcome especially for a little girl who lives for such moments.

I repaired to the flat after, as there are still things to do, even on a Sunday. I also needed more clothes as I had almost run out of the ones I brought up initially. There were also things to consider which eventually spawned a new to do list. It seems that a venture into town will be necessary tomorrow and a run up to Hayle. Since I am going there, I may as well drop off at the tip, sorry, Household Waste Recycling Centre where I have to tip some rubbish.

Just when I thought that my to do list could get no longer, I discovered some of the tree lights are out again on the shop tree. The Memory Tree is doing very well for lights. I think we may have positioned the solar panels a bit better this year as I am sure I was manually recharging the batteries much more last year. I was about to suggest it was because the shop was open and it would have been more convenient to do so, but the shop would not have been open so soon.

This year, I must confess, that time seems to be a bit of a muddle to me. It is highly likely that it is because we are away from home, albeit by twenty metres. And it may very well be that I am not thinking about opening the shop, as I would be on a normal year. The whole Christmas Day thing seems to be as remote as it would have been in the middle of summer. I fear that this year I am dreadfully distracted, and I think this year it will come upon me very suddenly and fade into the distance just as quickly.

Time to wake up. I shall look on tomorrow, the 18<sup>th</sup> of December, as a bit of an overture for a fresh start.

December 16<sup>th</sup> – Saturday

The little girl had a big day yesterday with her new pal, someone who actually wanted to play with her and did not mind too much someone hanging off his ears. It fair wore her out and somewhat upset her equilibrium. The latter was probably the reason why she had me out of bed at three o'clock in the morning and wolfed down a meal and a half before going back to bed and getting me up again ten minutes later.

She reprised the whole thing at just before six o'clock by which time I dispensed with all thoughts of going back to bed again. That did not bother ABH in the least and she took herself back off to bed because she had been up half the night, after all.

I was way ahead of all the others getting out of bed and was ready for my second cup of tea by the time the first of them emerged with B for his early morning walk. The little girl decided that she could not miss out on the action, so I took her around again for a brief run. The mizzle from yesterday had hung on through to the early morning but was starting to dry out a little but the second run. It remained a dull day throughout but there was the occasional patch of blue trying come through. Mercifully, the wind had diminished and when we went to the beach a little later, it was reasonably pleasant.

I was quite surprised when one of the in-laws told me that the fishing boats had gone out. The swell from yesterday was still present and waves were flossing over the Harbour wall when we passed it by earlier. It was either a brave lad or the swell was calming down and I suspect a bit of both were at play as well as the need for income making a good case to head out.

ABH seemed to be suffering a bit of a hangover from her over-exuberance yesterday and was mostly demure for the day. She spent a good hour on my lap dozing, which I deemed an excellent plan and joined her. I am sure we both felt much better for that.

Yesterday, the quote for the newly thought through solar installation arrived. It was timely for inclusion in my submission to the bank. It was a tad disappointing that they had only managed to reach a 30 percent yield. After doing some rough calculations on the back of a handy fag packet, adding a further eight panels would not meet the needs of even the most optimistic cost benefit analysis. I think we are, at last settled, provided that the powers who have an avid interest in our system agree the installation of our switch.

It had been an incredibly lazy day for which none of us were making much of an apology. I ran down to the beach a second time with ABH just to give her a run out and prepared my communal parcel for the Christmas shoot tomorrow. That was the sum total of effort today which was rounded off by the provision of a Chinese meal from St Just. The only Marmite smear in the butter dish of this particular lazy

arrangement is that they do not deliver. It is entirely possible that if they did, I would have been hunting around for someone to eat it for me.

December 15<sup>th</sup> – Friday

I thought that I would probably have a reasonably quiet day today. There was not much planned and after a week of chasing builders, building finance cases and finalising accounts, I thought that might be quite a change. By just before the middle of the day, my to do list that had only one item on it when I first looked at it in the morning, had thirteen.

The builder had suggested that we have a meeting to discuss the start of the works – real progress that, talking about starting – and we arranged a meeting for eight o'clock. I got there a few minutes early and decided not to waste the time but to start to clear the failed freezer, currently full of melted ice creams. I got no further than opening the door, but it was enough to put me on the right track for after they left.

Our meeting was useful for me at least in discovering which bits of ceiling were coming down and which electrical wires would need to be moved. We talked around the possibility of overrun and how we might manage that. It is almost certain there will be an overrun because of the lead time for windows. We just hope we can manage the fallout without too much impact on shop opening.

After they left, I returned to clearing out the ice creams from the broken freezer. There were quite a few and probably around the number I imagined that there were. The biggest disappointment was that we had two cases of the local Moomaid ice creams which are quite a bit more expensive than the others. The most nauseating thing was the smell of melted ice cream that stayed with me for the rest of the day.

The next nauseating thing was the absolute car crash that was the process for getting my false ears sorted out. I received a text message this morning telling me that I had been referred to a 'specialist unit'. This did not quite match my expectation that I would be referred to one of the high street providers, which is what I was told on the previous occasion I went down this route. I telephoned the surgery and was told that I had been referred back to the main hospital in Truro. This is the same hospital in Truro from which I received a letter at the outset of the year telling me never to darken their doorstep again.

I duly telephoned the hospital in Truro to find out more and was put through to 'bookings' in audiology. The very pleasant lady there told me that the hospital had what she called a 'referrals management service' and that they might be able to assist. Given that I was only on number two of my thirteen point to do list, I left the call until later in the afternoon. This was a good idea because, as simple processes for getting a job done go, this was starting to look like not one of them – and I was irritated.



After I had enjoyed a lie down in a darkened room and cooled my head in a bucket, I called the referrals management service, who were most helpful. My worst fears were realised in that this was indeed the process. I shudder to think how many people this process has involved so far. Streamlining and saving money this is not and it is a new process at that. I would suggest that there is little hope for the NHS if this is symptomatic of the rest of it – a bunch of desk-bound eejits thinking up complex solutions for simple problems.

A surprisingly slicker service, the back end bit of it anyway, must be the renewed driving licence service. I only completed the application a few days ago and the new one arrived today. I quickly cut the old one in two lest I upset the equilibrium of the planet and will send it back dreckly.

We have in-laws arrived in the middle of the day, not those ones, different ones. They have a dog. The previous meeting between ABH and B was a little fraught but not badly so. When I eventually came back to the house after striking yet another to do off my to do list, the two were strolling about the place paw in paw. ABH was being ABH and not letting B have a moment's rest, however, it did appear that B was none too bothered and might even have been enjoying himself.

While talking and walking dogs happened other things happened too and by the end of the afternoon, my to do list was down to five and one of those was not mine. It was another mild day and at one point bits of blue sky were trying to emerge. ABH and I managed to get to the beach twice again today, although the second time was exceedingly brief.

On the way down the slipway, I noticed out of the corner of my eye a large plume of spray thrown up at the foot of Pend-men-du. The sea looked deceptively calm for that sort of swell to be present but the waves were making a fair bit of noise on the beach as they came in. There was a young lady collecting things of interest down there when we arrived and we fell into conversation. While we talked, a particularly active wave ran up the beach probably thirty feet and nearly got her feet. It was followed by a very strong draw back and ABH and me leaving the beach for a safer walk around the block.

Our nocturnal walks around the block will also be safer from now on as, low and behold, a light appeared in the, erm, west end of The Cove. The streetlamp that was installed over a year ago and has been maintained by the much maligned council ever since, is now working.

A copy of an official notice that was broadcast on social media by the Parish Council, told us a week or so ago that Cove Road would be closed to traffic from Maria's Lane to the Harbour car park. This spread alarm and fear throughout the land as people who had no intention of coming down the hill wondered how they were going to get down the hill with the restriction in place. People who did not intend visiting the OS, were up in arms as to how they might visit the OS.

In the event, nothing much happened. We envisaged a trench from one end of Cove Road to the other to put in electrical cables but the workers instead dug a trench along the front of the Lifeboat station. They had cut the tarmac from the station to the end of Stone Chair Lane and had even dug a hole outside the Round House in preparation. They were about to extend the trench when someone told them that there was an electricity cable they could use at the corner of the Lifeboat station. They then stood around looking embarrassed for a while and last night, completed the necessary bit of trench.

The electricity board turned up in the morning to connect the wires and to plug the light in. I imagine someone will be along at some point to fill in all the holes again including the ones that did not need to be dug in the first place. I assume that they will pour a bit of tar into the slots caused by the disc cutter from the station to the end of Stone Chair Lane or install a tramway to make it look interesting.

I do hope, dear reader, that it was worth waiting for as these were the works I alluded to at the end of yesterday's Diary. Bear in mind, you were waiting for twenty four hours for the story while we were waiting over a year for our light. At the same time, the much maligned council has announced that it will be turning off streetlights to save money and reduce carbon emissions. The policy will also support the 'dark skies initiative' in West Penwith (where we are). I shall find some deep irony but little surprise if the much maligned council decide that our new light will be one of them.

December 14<sup>th</sup> – Thursday

I seem to be filling my days up quite nicely at the moment, thank you. The only problem is I do not seem to be any further forward at the end of the day than I was at the beginning. Whatever I am doing, it is either not worth doing or I am doing it wrong. Perhaps, and there is a third option, they are just things that take longer than a day to complete.

For example. I have been asked to provide the bank with some details of the forthcoming works. It is, after all, as much their building as it is mine at present. Things like three years of accounts if fairly simple other than the fact that all the electronic versions that I have are stamped 'draft' and not because it is windy down here. It is just that is the way they come. I think they probably need to be certified or something if they are to have that removed.

On top of this I must provide costs from the suppliers, not all of which I have yet. The solar people for example are still working on the final configuration before they can do a costing. I have seen nothing from the scaffolders – including any scaffolding – and the builder brought something he had scribbled on the back of a fag packet when he was last here.

Another request was for the surveyor's report. Well, we did not get one of those. We had three, or was it four, professionals tell us independently that the roof was showing signs of sinking. There was no investigation as that would have meant putting up scaffolding and taking some of the roof away to have a peek. There was enough circumstantial evidence to suggest that these chaps were not making it up and at least two of them would gain no benefit from lying about it. Unfortunately, that is not something I can send a copy of to a bunch of bureaucrats in a bank.

I shall put enough smoke and mirrors around my response to hopefully cloud some of the facts and enough spurious and excess information to put them off the scent. Bull baffles brains we can hope, can we not.

It was a pretty much fine day and far too fine to be caught indoors. I managed to get out to run the little girl down to the Harbour beach twice during the low tide period. The first we must have hit at the lowest point as the tide was not far off the end of the wall. It was more or less a rock pool and ABH decided that it was peaceful enough for a swim and took herself over the few rocks there and had a swim about for a short while. She is so light that when she emerged only her legs and belly were wet, which saved a bit of drying when we got back.

By the time we got down there a second time, the fishing boats had gone out leaving ruts all the way down the beach. Correction: these are not ruts in the beach but a racetrack for hooligan ABHs who just love running up and down them. She also runs around in big circles for variety, I suppose. I had the chance to look at her paw prints from the first visit. The distance between them is huge, around one and a half times her length, and the touch light. She must hardly touch the ground as she races about. It is a pleasure to watch her and such little effort as I do not even have to throw anything for her to chase.

Between times, I ran the truck into town, mainly to drop off the accounts files and to get some teabags that we found we had plenty of when I got back. I also stopped to get a few dinners for ABH. Her eating habits have us perplexed. We can put a particular dinner down for her one day, which she will scoff, then the same the next day that she will spurn. Some days she will not eat at all, although she does have nutritious biscuits that she will peck at.

On her last trip into town, the Missus bought a variety of different dinners, and we tried them all. Sometimes one after the other. There was only one that she ate. When I went in today, I bought a few more of the meal that seemed favourite and one that she had eaten previously. I explained the situation to the very pleasant lady at the till. She said that it sounded more like the behaviour of a feline, which was about all we needed, a hound that identified as a cat for the purposes of eating.

The latter part of the afternoon was a little compressed as an early Lifeboat training launch had been called. It had to coincide with the high tide or there would have been a bit of a wait before we could use the long slip for recovery.

We were a little light on the ground but adequately staffed for a simple launch and recovery. We pushed the boat out shortly before high water into the darkness of the bay for it to perform training things with its predominantly young crew. As soon as it was gone, we set up on the short slip for the expectation of a recovery about an hour into the future. With spring tides, the water level can drop quite quickly and it is prudent to wait until nearer the time before deploying the 'fishing rod' from which the crew pick up the leading line for the span.

We spent the intervening time doing very important things and discussing very important matters over a cup of tea. Come the time to get ready we discovered that there was a fair amount of movement at the bottom of the short slip into which we had to place the 'fishing rod'. I have always considered the task has the potential to be dangerous in such conditions and although we have had worse swell, the waves sweeping over me up to my thighs were heavy enough to make me uncomfortable. If we had not been so light in numbers, clearly, I would have hidden in the bathroom until someone else did it. It was just one of those nights.

We proceeded to execute what was obviously, even to the untrained eye, a textbook recovery in the dark, up the short slip. A quick washdown later and we were done and secure for the night and ready for the next time. I had a quick discussion with the coxswain and the area manager, who just so happened to be in attendance for the launch about our 'fishing rod' issue. I have been banging on about it ever since we had it, as it is a personal irritation. They agreed that in some conditions the deployment could be of concern and agreed that it would be at the discretion of the Head Launcher of the day whether to use it or not. Personally, I am delighted.

So delighted was I that I took ABH for a run around the big block when I got back. It was extremely mild for an evening in December and very pleasant for a stroll out. It was noisy, too, outside the Lifeboat station as works are afoot. These, dear reader, you will have to sit on the edge of your seat for as I have run out of paper for today's Diary.

December 13<sup>th</sup> – Wednesday

I decided that I would not wait for ABH to get me out of bed this morning. I was awake ahead of her anyway and time was pushing on a bit – alright, it was not. I could have stayed in bed another hour with no ill-effect on the day, I am sure, but once I am awake, staying in bed seems such a waste.

There has been so much to do of late that I have taken to writing myself a to do list. It has been helpful because I was starting to lose track and after yesterday, I am halfway through it. For some reason, clearing the melted freezer, keeps dropping to the bottom. I will have to do it and the longer I leave it the messier it will be.

Stupidly, I let the Missus run into town without the accounts to drop into the accountant. I had just written another errand onto the bottom of my list to do it myself tomorrow. It also reminded me that I needed to download and send off the bank statements, so I added that too. I am now less than halfway through my list.

Still, I may have a longer list than the one I started off with this morning but at least I managed to squeeze a blistering session down at the gymnasium into my busy day. It was not one of my best, but shotgun shoulder still plagues me, so I was not too dissatisfied with my performance even if I have had to retire the weights for the time being.

If that were not enough, I ran ABH down to the beach straight after I came back. She was disinclined to run around very much. The wind that had blown me down to the gymnasium and that I struggled against on the way back was being most unkind. It had dropped the temperature by a good couple of degrees and was strong enough to have displaced our new newspaper box outside the shop. You might have thought that I would have learned my lesson after the last one came to grief. I moved it for Carols in the Cove and forgot to put the straps back on when I replaced it.

I was only lightly pressed for time. I had made an appointment for a lady to come and vacuum my ear 'oles so I might have a clear run at an appointment to have my crumbling false ears replaced at one of the providers in town. At the beginning of the year, I had been disappointed that the nurse at the surgery had first told me all was well with my ears and subsequently changed her mind. It was too late to go back again, and I really had endured enough having been to and fro a couple of times to get it sorted.

This time around I succumbed to the process they prefer which is to have a private contractor vacuum the ears out and thus be sure that the job is done to their satisfaction. I was a mite irritated by having to, but the alternative was probably more multiple trips to the surgery, and I really do not have time for shenanigans this time. I had telephoned the surgery, anticipating the procedure to ask if they could arrange an appointment to have my ears given the official blessing. I was told that because the lady who was visiting me worked for the surgery as her main job, they would take her word for it that the job was done and refer me without further ado.

To me, this sounds a far too cosy arrangement. It is convenient, sure, but it rather forces people to fork out between £40 and £80, possibly more just to get an appointment to have their false ears fitted or renewed. Happily for me, I was given a clear bill of ear 'oles before she even got her magic tool out of its case. It still cost me a tenner for the quick look, which I would have had for free at the surgery – not including the petrol or bus fare for getting there. I have no idea how long it will be before I get someone at the provider end to give me a call with an appointment, but I am not imagining that I will hear much before the end of next month.

It was pretty much a lazy ABH day. The wind outside made it quite cold to be wandering about and with Mother in the mix, she was very happy to be curled up next to her for much of the time. I took her out a couple of more times, but it was more functional than pleasurable. It left me time to repair to the flat and to complete the paperwork for the accounts and send it off. I will need to trek into town either tomorrow or the day after to drop off the invoices.

The scaffolding meeting postponed from yesterday did not happen again today. That is another day lost but who is counting – certainly not the builder or the scaffolder. If the project is to come in on time, which it must, the windows must be ordered in the first week of January. That is just a working week away.

Still, not to worry [FX: manic screaming with footsteps running off into the distance, followed by a splash.]

We were just about to sit down for tea when a plumber turned up. A week ago, I had let our landlord know that the header tank was overflowing. It made me feel much better because obviously that is how our builder intends to meet the deadline by working night and day. Phew, what a relief.

December 12<sup>th</sup> – Tuesday

We were a bit earlier this morning but there again, we had not been up in the middle of the night. As a bonus, it was not raining but I had not really thought about it after the pleasantness of yesterday. I only saw later that we had and were due some heavy showers during the day.

I did not get out again until much later in the morning. One of the things that delayed me was making the application for the renewal of my driving licence. I had spotted by chance that it was due to be renewed at the end of January but the Government website had advised the new one would be turned around inside two weeks, so I was going to leave it until nearer the time. Yes, I know, it was probably foolhardy believing a Government assurance.

Anyway, the Government were not taking any chances and sent us both a reminder and rather insisted on us doing it immediately. I had a moment of panic yesterday because I could not find our passports. Rather cleverly, I had removed them from the flat and placed them in a safe place in the house and then promptly forgot that I had done so. I turned what was left of our belongings in the flat upside down before the Missus suggested I look in the house.

You do not need a passport for completing the application, but it is more awkward without one and costs more. It seems that even if you do not intend to travel anywhere, having a passport is almost essential and the Government are using it as a de facto identity card. I only have one because, as you know, dear reader, occasionally I must travel east of Camborne.

I was rather impressed with the process without. You take yourself along to a participating Post Office – alright, it does get easier after that – and they will take a photograph of you there and then at the counter. That is sent electronically to the DVLA and stuck onto your new licence once they have found the Pritt stick.

Despite having to find a participating Post Office, which could be a challenge, I should have gone down that route because the online process was completely baffling. Having provided my driving licence number – which they call ‘driver number’ on the screen for added confusion – it would have been oh so simple to show the existing information and ask for corrections. No, far too easy. Instead, you have to rekey all the information that they currently have. For us, this also includes the address because for some reason the whole street was listed in a dropdown menu apart from ours.

I had to go through the loop three times because if you get something wrong or omit something, you have to rekey the entire form, not just the bit you got wrong. Right at the end we are told to cut our existing licence in half and send it back because woe betide a person has two at the same time. I think it might be akin to Ghostbusters crossing beams of their death rays. As I am a grumpy shopkeeper who not only likes living on the edge and also rails against authority, I thought that I would run this to the wire and hang onto mine until the new one arrives. I have, after all, ticked the box that said I promise that I would and even revolutionaries should keep their promises.

I whizzed ABH down to the beach after that to give her some exercise and preserve my sanity. We were blissfully rainless for the whole trip, although it was a tad breezy again. The big bashing seas of the last couple of days have transformed the beach again. Yesterday, I noted that probably a metre had gone from the western side but so too had most of the weed. Today, some sand had returned up in the back, western corner but a huge amount has gone from under the slipways. I would venture around a metre and a half washed away. I have never seen it so rocky between the slipways and under the short slip.

We had a cracking good run around and ABH discovered the delight of fresh crab, so fresh it was still moving – well, it was until she got her teeth into it. It took me a few minutes to determine what it was and by which time it was too late – for the crab.

I had been promising myself to complete the accounts since last week, but it took second place to everything else that was going on. Since everything else that was going on has now concluded and despite a whole swathe of new everything else going on, I kept my promise. There was not quite so many invoices to enter as I had thought there was, so it only took just over an hour. I still need to download all the statements and send those off which I have to do from the computer in the flat, but that can be done as a catch up.

What could not wait, was a form that the insurance company had sent me in relation to my enquiry yesterday. Why is it that these companies that insist on forms being filled out have not the slightest idea how to create a form. The waste collection company sent me one in Microsoft Word format and the insurance company sent me theirs in Excel format. Neither of these are remotely useful for form filling – well, Excel can be if it is done correctly, which this one was not. It was also not entirely helpful that the version of Excel that they used was about three versions behind the current.

The insurance form also included questions about the detail of the build and structure and about the contractor's insurance cover that I could not answer. It will take me a few days to extract this from the builder because builders like to build – eventually – but form filling is not a forte, I have found. He was due to meet with the scaffolder today for a last minute geek here with a view to starting the scaffolding tomorrow, so I had hoped to pin him down then. This meeting was cancelled at the eleventh hour and thus our scaffolding will also be delayed a further day, at least. I do try not to despair because, as Tolkein points out, despair is for those that see the end beyond all possible doubt. I am close, but not there quite yet.

I thought that we had a Lifeboat operations meeting in the evening and duly turned up at the appointed time. Apparently, it is Thursday instead. My confusion arose because the title of the message was the date, 12<sup>th</sup> December but the content of the message detailed 14<sup>th</sup> December. I only read the misleading title, clearly.

Not one to waste a good opportunity, I spent a while fixing the Christmas tree lights. We have now lost two sets to failure of some kind. I have tried different battery packs on them, so it is the string of lights at fault. When they work, they are very good, but they do seem to have a very short life but there again they are probably not really meant for continuous Force 6 to 8 winds.

I suspect that neither are we. They are getting a little wearisome now.

December 11<sup>th</sup> – Monday

I had a lovely long lie in this morning largely because ABH had me up at half past two on some pretext or other. That aside, it was very pleasant to lounge about in the morning, just once in a while.

I could hear the sea crashing from the mews when we took the grand tour around it first thing – well, as much first thing as it was. I wasted no time in getting organised to head to the gymnasium and cracked on with a blistering session. It was probably not quite as blistering as it should have been as I discovered I had shotgun shoulder from our activities yesterday. I should be more attentive when shooting from my less used left, but it is difficult in a timed competition to concentrate on getting it properly into the shoulder. The lack of blister may also have been due to the fact I only managed to cram in one session last week. I must try harder.



I was scarcely back when the Missus was heading out. She and Mother were heading to the shops as she discovered late yesterday that we had run out of Christmas cards. I was amazed that she intended doing any at all this year because of being unhomed and under the cosh from the building work that never seems to want to start. Indeed, they may yet not be done in time because we have had years when all the cards have been written and something has got in the way of sending them, like Christmas arriving. I would also be very understanding if we received many fewer this year. That last increase in postal costs makes sending many cards a very expensive option. Sorry, I should add, Christmas humbug.

While the Missus was out, ABH and I were very much confined to quarters as I awaited delivery of the battery charging unit for the Christmas tree lights. It would have been an ideal time to carry on some chores such as inputting the invoices that are increasing in number even though we are closed. I had already decided that I would not bring them up to the house because first, I did not want to spread them about and secondly, we already have a table with an increasing amount of paperwork on it and nowhere to file it away.

I also needed to make some headway with our insurer which needs to be informed of our, hopefully, impending works. I had been waiting until it was more certain that it would happen, and I also needed the quotation, which was the sticking point last year. We had the quotation a couple of weeks ago, but I have been so clogged up with other matters to attend to, and not least recovering from the palpitations brought on by seeing it, I have not got around to it.

Even when the Missus came back, I found that I had another errand to run as I had forgotten to ask her to bring home some milk, although she had brought home just about everything else. I also forgot to remind her to take my slippers to the post office to be sent back, so I took myself off to the shop at the top to fix both jobs at the same time. I am most blessed because the Missus also returned with some socks that I need. Mother is buying those for me for Christmas too and it suddenly occurred to me that I have reached that socks and slippers for Christmas stage in life. There is only the homemade preserves to go and I am finished.

Another thing that the Missus brought back with her was news that one of the three freezers we still have running in the shop, failed. It was the one with much of the ice cream freezer stock in it. At first, I thought that I must have left the door open, but it was just that the freezer just decided not to be frozen any more. Everything will have to be thrown out and since we have just agreed the new waste disposal service to start in January, rotting food will have to sit in the bin until then. I will see what value we are talking about and decide if it is worth making an insurance claim.

I repaired to the flat so I could swear loudly unnoticed, beat a few yielding inanimate objects to a pulp with my bare hands and to write to the insurer about the building work. I also needed to conclude the other business arrangements that were

outstanding because, clearly, that is all the remaining excitement I can expect in life having reached socks and slippers stage. I also telephoned the Aged Parent because at least the communications would be more successful from there. We discussed many things, but I forgot at the end to ask that I not be sent any socks and slippers this year.

It was getting dark by the time I had finished. Before I left I felt I just had time to write to Santa.

Dear Santa,

Far be it from me to presume to direct you in the job that you have been doing for a fair few years now. I realise that you strive each year to bring each person the thing that they most desire in life tempered by the reality of what they actually need. It would, after all, bring down the value of Ferraris if everyone had one and sacks of cash do not always bring the happiness people believe they do – although this year, Santa, a few spare quid would help very nicely with the building work, if it ever starts.

No, what I am saying Santa, is that while I do need socks and slippers, I feel that these are more sort of infrastructure items rather than adornments in life. If you get my drift, Santa, it would be nice to get something a bit less practical and a bit more desirable perhaps.

Gosh, Santa, it does seem like I am trying to teach my granny to suck eggs. I am sure you are well aware of the sort of thing I am talking about, so will say no more. Please, just steer clear of the socks and slippers in the Harbour Mews area this year, oh, and perhaps jams and preserves which is more a hence forth sort of request.

Anyway, Santa, I am sure you are a busy guy at the moment, so I will not detain you further.

Best of luck with all those log burner chimneys.

Grumpy Shopkeeper

P.S. A brae drop of malt whiskey perhaps. Just a suggestion, you understand.

**December 10<sup>th</sup> – Sunday**

My dear life. I could hardly summon the energy to place my fingers on the keyboard by the time I had finished at the range and put everything away. What a tiring day.

There was a bit of rain around first thing moving into thick mizzle by the time I left for the range. I had an inkling that it would improve during the day with the passing of

Storm Elin and thankfully, it did. Had I not known where the range was it would have been difficult to find as the mist became thicker on the higher ground.

One of the members had requested a special shotgun day and had done all the planning of the courses of fire for five different variations – six, actually, but we ran out of time. They became ever more complicated as the day went on when I could quite happily have started with the complex ones and had them become increasing easier. It was, nevertheless, well thought out and most enjoyable across the whole day.

Starting out, there were quite a few people to help out setting up the heavy steel plates and ‘falling men’, big steel plates in the shape of a person that fall flat when shot. The latter are very heavy, and the smart money uses a wheel barrow to transport them to the chosen location. There are smaller versions of the same which I used the wheelbarrow for. The smart money, however, does not load all six of these into the wheelbarrow all at the same time despite the fact that they fit. Once they are all in there, the wheelbarrow is a monstrous weight to shift ... I discovered.

By the end of the day, around four o'clock, only a handful of people were left to put everything away again. Is it any wonder that I was on my knees by the time the Missus came and collected me. I would not have missed the day, however, as it was great fun.

Before I left, I had put two more sets of tree lights on charge. They were both working last night when I checked them but one of them refused to come on when I reinstalled them when I came home. I took a long time trying to get the lights to work but in the end I could not work out if the flashing lights were because I had the programme wrong or it was a dodgy connection. It could, of course, have been a combination of both but as the light was fading, I had to give up as I could no longer see what I was doing.

Perhaps I should have started on the lights before I took ABH around. It is rather expected that I take her around the block on my return as first, it is about the normal time for her afternoon walk and secondly, she goes bonkers when I walk through the door and taking her out for a walk placates her somewhat.

There was nothing particularly exciting about the walk. Not only was the tide a good way in, the waves were pushing a good way up the beach. too. Out in the bay it was just as stirred up as it had been over the last few days. I did not make a study of it, but I could hear it crashing around as we gave it a wide berth on our meandering. With all that going on it is likely to make the weed situation on the Harbour beach worse not better and there has been quite a proliferation over the last week. The sand, too, has been coming and going. Because the tides have not been that big it has left most of the sand up in the corner by the wall while it has scoured out quite a bit from the end of the western slip down, leaving a steep shelf at the back. It is a thing of wonder, really.

Talking of which, the Missus had been busy while I had been away. One of the more visible results was the lights adorning the windowsills front and back of the house. There is also a burning bush at the front of the house, which by a very tenuous link, reminded me it was time to take one of my pills. I am a man barely alive, kept together through the wonder of modern medical science, I will have you know. Anyway, it all looked very understated and very festive, I am sure. Must be Christmas.

December 9<sup>th</sup> – Saturday

The rain that I did not notice had gone by the time we stepped out in the morning. Our stepping out was very brief and ABH went back to bed again but came back occasionally to check on me downstairs. It had been a late enough start that it was time to get on with the day that had absolutely nothing stamped on it to say that anything needed to be done.

I thought that I would leave the trees to their own devices today. A charging of batteries would not go amiss but I really did not get down there early enough, as I found other things to amuse me. One of them was stripping the abundance of chicken thighs, left over from Thursday night, of their meat. I am not keen on eating such things as they are such a fuss, and I am way too lazy with my food to be bothered. At least with the bones and gristle out, I could use the product without the fuss, and I needed some dinner to take to the range the next day.

It is remarkable how quickly taking ABH out comes around again, so I toggled up against the breeze and headed out with her. The breeze has come and gone over the last week or so, mainly from the west or southwest and at various strengths from strong to very strong. Today was ramping up nicely for the latter. I did not hear until later that it was a named storm coming our way - just the windy bit, no rain.

Our trees have taken a proper beating ever since they went up and at a couple of points the wind stopped work on them altogether. It is the second year for two trees, but we have been doing the shop tree outside since we have the first electric sliding door in The Cove installed in 2019. We learnt a lot from that year as it was windy then, too. In fact, it has never not been windy at some point during the tree's tenure. We must be doing it right because we have not lost one yet, although they do need the occasional straightening up.

ABH and I headed to the Harbour where the tide was still pushing in. If anything, the bay was even more restless than it had been the day before and the strong wind just added to the mystery of it all. We did not tarry long down on the beach as the little girl is none too keen on the wind, I feel, and was keen to push on. We went up the western slip and along the front of the Harbour car park by the sea wall. The sea was putting on the Ritz for sure, gearing up to start on the Harbour wall and toying with the footings of Pedn-men-du.

I shall hate myself for admitting this, but as we reached the end of the car park a veritable flock of Choughs flew in below us and went to rest in garden of the end house beyond us. They were queuing up to use the bird table close by the patio windows of the end garden. I looked about but I was darned if I could see any unicorns. That cheese I had for supper last night is going in the bin.

There were some chores to do in the shop, so I went up to the flat to print the return label for the new slippers I had ordered off the Internet. I would much prefer to purchase them in a shop having tried them first but slipper shops in Penzance are few and far between and I am not driving further again this week. They were very smart slippers but for a size nine to ten, far too short and therefore had to go back. I will order the next size up that will probably fall off my feet when I try and walk and end up having to go into Exeter when I am there in early January for the trade show. Mother was going to get me a pair for Christmas, but I beat her to it – well, I did not know. She has offered to pay for them instead, which is most kind.

With time to spare in the afternoon, I decided to take ABH up the cliff again. I had so enjoyed our trip out yesterday and despite the increased breeze today, I could think of nothing better to do – after I had enjoyed a half hour zizz in one of the house rocking chairs.

Heading into the wind going up was not so much of a problem and did not feel too severe either. Unlike yesterday, I had decided that we would double back down the cycle path and cut across the moor and back to the Coast Path, just for a change. I also wanted to avoid the muddy feet from yesterday. It seemed like a good plan at the time.

It should have been adequate warning that the breeze had increased more than I had anticipated. We were fair pushed along coming away from the lookout and I should have heeded the signs. I was already getting pushed in one direction by the wind and pulled in various other directions by the little girl. This had the effect of destabilising me, throwing me off balance as I was buffeted by the wind. This was not too bad to cope with over the moor but on the rocky path, it was getting more difficult.

I knew that the wind would get much worse as we crossed along above the Irish Lady where the wind will channel up the cliff in mighty gusts. Today, those gusts were easily sixty to seventy miles per hour. It was even worse coming down the first fifty yards from the lookout. With ABH pulling me down at a variable rate and the gusts of wind pushing from behind with variable force, I felt most uncomfortable with the situation. A man must know his limitations, says Dirty Harry and clearly had watching me coming down the path in mind when he said it.

That venture out was the sum total of my contribution to health and well-being for myself and ABH, who probably does not need it anyway. I do feel like we are

cheating her, though, if we do not have a proper stank out even just a few times a week. With our focus almost entirely on our building works this winter, I cannot help feeling that work at The Farm may slip into a long second place. As the little girl travels very well, I might take a few trips out as I did with the bleddy hound and go and explore here and there. I think she is old enough to learn that there are places to see beyond the borders of The Cove. I will draw the line east of Camborne as there is no reason to worry her with things like that.

We had a pleasant evening in after that with the wind still howling outside. I did one more trip out with the girl after tea when the wind had reached its zenith. It was a speedy trip around the big block and a stop in the RNLI car park to look to see what was banging outside the house kitchen window. We are accustomed to the extractor hood's outlet making a noise but could find nothing else suspicious, so went on.

I would have stood to admire the myriad of stars and planets twinkling about us in the clear sky but ABH was in a hurry to get back. Having a clear sky in the middle of a storm was most bizarre, but I will take that over rain any day.

December 8<sup>th</sup> – Friday

This was always going to be a lazy day, so I wondered at the end how it managed to get so busy.

ABH was not much interested in getting up very early and we both left it until gone seven o'clock. I went down to the shop straight after dropping her back home to put two sets of battery packs on charge. I never did get around to buying the additional batteries and charger yesterday as I ran out of time. We had three batteries to charge and only two points at which to charge them and they will take all day.

It was just one of the things on my list to do in the morning. I had also picked up an urgent request from the solar panel company for usage data from our flat and tariff information so that they could work on how many panels we would need. There was also the waste contract I had been sent to review and a couple of other matters that would be better sorted sooner rather than later.

All of those things would have been much more easily completed if we had an Internet connection and the use of a telephone. The Internet router, which is next door, had gone into some sort of spasm and would not even let me attach to it remotely to restart it. It needed someone turn it off at the wall and back on again. Since it was too early to contact anyone who might be able to assist, I repaired to the cold of the flat to do the work there.

I managed to complete most of my tasks inside the best part of an hour. It was most fortuitous that our landlord called to ask for my help with one of the other properties in the mews. He would arrive inside half an hour, and he would also have the key to next door with him. I waited for his arrival and while he was busy on another matter, I

reset the router. I also brought him the good news that our header tank was overflowing and may well need some attention. I am sure he was delighted.

With our Internet connection was working again, I could move back to the relative warmth of the house. Since so much time had elapsed since I dragged myself from my pit, I decided that it was too late in the morning to head to the gymnasium. If I were to be lazy for a day, I may as well do it properly.

There was some difficulty in getting hold of the contact at the waste collection company. When I did eventually, it was to discuss the collection of our loose cardboard. I explained the variable nature of the beast and that some weeks we would have an inordinate amount and others nothing at all. She suggested a fortnightly collection and to put a number on it we would have an allowance of one cubic metre. We talked around the practicalities of me being able to form a cubic metre of cardboard with waste from boxes of enormously different sizes. It seems, though, that she fully understood that we would be putting out loose cardboard and was perfectly happy with that. It just needed to be called a name for the contract. I think the driver will understand too once he starts getting hot pasties (sorry, MS) on a regular basis – I just hope is on his own or it could get expensive. That was also disappointing; we will start having to pay for the service now and bribe the driver.

At some stage during the morning, I managed to fit in ordering some additional batteries and a charger. We will be able to charge six at a time, which will make life much easier. I also resolved to cut up some ply so that we could wrap all the Christmas lights around a piece to stop them from getting knotted. We will also have a box for the power packs and solar panels so they are all together. It remains to be seen whether we will actually get around to that.

When Mother was staying with us, we burned through quite a few logs. I knew we had one bag left and, after my morning in the flat, I started the fire with a few logs out of that. The in-laws would be with us later, and the old dears would probably want a bit more heat during the afternoon. Yes, I know they read *The Diary* and yes, that was a joke, honest guv. There is nothing dear about them – ooh!

I had intended to buy four of the large bags that we had used until now from the same supplier that we had the previous ones from. Unfortunately, when I got there, there were no big bags at all of any sort. Taking economies of scale to a new level, there is another fuel merchant right next door. It was not one that I might have chosen to use but the alternative was going off to St Just, which was well out of my way. The only logs I could get were the more expensive birch logs and in a bigger bag than we were used to. I had intended to have four to save going back for a while but ended up with two. Perhaps I should not be too harsh; we have logs for a week or two.

ABH was waiting impatiently when I got back. I had told the Missus I would take the little girl out on my return, and she must have overheard me. It had been a pleasant

enough day, if you like high wind and a bit of sunshine, and with rain coming for later on and probably overnight, I thought that I would indulge her a bit.

Slipping into something more comfortable, in this case not a negligee but my waterproof trousers to keep the wind out and a pair of walking boots, we set out up Mayon Cliff for a bit of a longer stank than around the block or cavorting on the beach. The beach was out anyway because of something of a ferocious sea that had blown up quite early in the day and was pounding in on the Harbour beach. Up the hill it was then.

I forget what a pleasant trip it is even only going as far as the lookout at the top of the hill. I suspect we are not far off a walk to Land's End and back again but today was not the day to prove it. The in-laws had arrived by this time, and it was already quite late in the afternoon as far as available light goes. The view going up the cliff of right across the bay and the full length of the beach is something to be wondered at. Arriving at the top, you can see the sweep of the bays all along to Land's End and Longships lighthouse, today beleaguered by waves exploding all about its tower. What is there not to love about that.

The wind maybe, today. It was fair bruising as it slapped us about on the way up and even more so when we arrived. Land's End said that it was around 40 miles per hour in gusts and felt every bit of it. It does make you wonder what the boys who built Maen Castle were thinking when they put it on the edge of the cliff at the head of Castle Zawn. Of course, they might have looked a bit daft if they built it at the top of, say, Greeb Zawn. Perhaps they built it during the summer and only when winter came, regretted the positioning.

We walked back along Maria's Lane, which she definitely would not recognise today. There are properties along there now that might be more commonly seen on Grand Designs. There are also garages along the other side of the road that have plumbing, presumably so you can wash your car while it is there and room in the loft for a second car.

I avoided my error from last time and steered the girl down Stone Chair Lane. I thought at first that another motor car has tried to make the descent, but I think the Internet map company might have adjusted its directions. There were definitely tracks but it soon became apparent that it was the electric company installing new poles down the whole length of the lane. I had met a man from the electric board in The Cove a week or two ago. He explained that they were renewing all the infrastructure here over the winter, so it was clear that they had already made a start.

Whatever the whys and wherefores, the fact remained that the lane was muddy and little furry paws were doing a great job of picking much of it up. I must have some Gypsy in my blood because I could foretell that we would be in deep trouble if we ran into the house with muddy paws. There is a spring at the end of the lane that ABH cannot help herself but dive under when we come anywhere close to it – apart from



today when I wanted her to, of course. She was reasonable compliant when I dragged her back and washed her feet. It was not perfect, but it was better than she had been.

The in-laws stayed for a bit of fish dinner from our seeming endless supply of fish in the freezer. I might have overdone the last order a bit. There is a proliferation of hake, of course, and haddock and pollack, too. I am sure that we can put a good dent in it even if I have to eat fish a few more days of the week. It is down to me and Mother, though. The Missus hates fish.

December 7<sup>th</sup> – Thursday

Today saw me in foreign parts again, which was most inconvenient given that it was Carols in the Cove day but despite that, things did not work out too badly.

Remembering the utter carnage that is the new Chiverton Cross junction arrangements, I gave myself extra time to arrive at the solar power people's address. As a consequence, I arrived half an hour early for the meeting, but I think that the people I was meeting were quite happy about that as they had a meeting following on from mine.

It is unlike me to leave the entire journey unplanned but with five minutes to go before I left, I occurred to me that I did not know where I was going. I did look up the address but thought that I would leave the entire journey to satellite navigation for once. I spent twenty five years working at the forefront of the technological revolution; I should know better.

Like the last time I was up that way on Monday, the weather was atrocious, and traffic followed suit. It was, however, not a patch in Monday's traffic but busy, nonetheless. It rained so much that we started to see large puddles of standing water appear on the roads. I was caught out by one of them on the way back at the end of a blind bend with a big truck coming the other way. It is quite disconcerting to be temporarily blinded by a deluge of puddle water on the windscreen with the bright lights of a juggernaut bearing down on you.

Just to add to the misery my super clever satellite navigation system randomly told me that it had lost the GPS signal and therefore did not know where it was. It did this in valleys and on top of hills with an uninterrupted view of the stars – had it been nighttime – and presumably any passing satellite. Thoughtfully, it left a map on the screen, and I can read maps, which is what I should have done in the first place. I also used some logic regarding the business park name, Quintdown, and the place on the map, Quintrel Downs, to make a broad assumption that they were probably in the same general area, which they were, thankfully.

The meeting we had was very positive and as long as the National Grid give their blessing, we should be able to move ahead. At least I know now that the people at

the company really are on our side and not just playing along. In fact, the whole atmosphere at the company was most refreshing. The office on the first floor was a large open plan area where all the employees sat together. Most notable of all was the number of dogs wandering about. I asked if it was 'bring your dog to work day' and was told that everyday is bring your dog to work day. I sat in the meeting with a spaniel who rather insisted on having his head in my lap. I should have brought ABH; she would have had a field day but I rather suspect that there would not be much left of the office at the end of it.

On the way back I was instructed to drop in at the cash and carry to get some cups for the teas and coffees and some smaller ones for the mulled wine. Clearly from the volume of cups I was asked to get, the Missus had rearranged the concert in the Hall for Cornwall. Oddly, at the end of the evening we had some left over.

I also had breakfast on my mind and rather hankered after a bacon roll of some kind. Perhaps I should have stopped at Smoky Joe's on the way back but was now stuck looking for somewhere I could park near as it was raining heavily, and I did not have my waterproofs with me. I failed miserably in finding somewhere and ended up with a pasta salad, which was most disappointing.

More errands ensued until I made it back home in the early afternoon. The rain had made a last appearance on my way back from Penzance and happily stayed off. There then ensued a reasonable and sedate getting all the things ready for the event aided in the late afternoon by the arrival of crew volunteers and other volunteers preparing refreshments, awnings, power and lights. We even had a chap arrive to help with some lights he had donated for the occasion from Mousehole lights, which was most welcome as he was clearly very professional. We had lanterns strung out from the Lifeboat station to well past the shop tree.

The event went remarkably well but was less well attended than last year which was not only disappointing but wholly surprising. It seemed that people were more than happy to pitch up in the lashing rain and howling wind but not so keen under a starry sky, a bit more temperate and, alright, a bit of a breeze. The bit of a breeze caused some problems for the organists' sheet music that would not stay put until some bright spark suggested the use of pegs. It just so happened that the local store was open, sort of, and had some available.

Those who were there had a rare old time listening to the choir and after some encouragement and the application of a few cups of mulled wine, joined in towards the end.

We had dropped the boat out onto the slipway for the event, bedecked with coloured lights. At the end of the evening some volunteer very excellent Shore Crew, pulled the boat back in again and secured it away for its next use. By the time we emerged, a different set of volunteers had taken down the awnings, the power and the lights and cleared the street of rubbish. There was efficiency for you.

Some of the clearing up in the shop was left for tomorrow. We would have nothing to do else.

December 6<sup>th</sup> – Wednesday

ABH excelled herself this morning with a monumental lie in until gone seven o'clock. It still amuses me that she goes to the effort of waking me up then complains vociferously when I try and pick her up to take her out. Anyone unused to such shenanigans would think that they are about to have their throat ripped out. She does place her jaws around your hand but never – yet – applies any pressure. It is all wind and no trousers.

The gymnasium was a much more welcoming place now that our temperature has increased again, and the wind diminished some more. I would not exactly call it a pleasant stroll down there, but it was quite tolerable. I was interrupted after my 5,000 metres row on Friday and had to skip Monday's session because of my trip abroad. It might be expected that after such a rest that I would be on top of my game again, but it was not so. It was however a pleasingly blistering session and did me the power of good, I am sure. Never stop believing, wherever that came from.

It was immediately out with ABH when I came back again. We had to skirt what there was of the Harbour beach because the bleddy hound's best pal was down there and she has not yet come to terms that ABH is our new girl in town. Best pal still waits at the bottom of our steps when she comes by, which is quite heart-tugging. We are slowly getting her used to ABH but ABH is not helping very much in this endeavour because she is just too enthusiastic about it. It is like going out for a quiet drink and meeting Michael McIntyre in the bar.

When I got home, the Missus was just leaving. Due to my unthinking arrangement of a meeting with the solar people tomorrow, she had to get the shopping for the Carols in the Cove evening in today. This actually worked out in our favour in the end because she forgot to get the paper cups for the teas and coffees. I shall collect them and anything else that is remembered on my way back tomorrow. Since the meeting must end by eleven o'clock, I should be back in plenty of time to lend a hand in the getting everything ready process.

Yesterday, I threw some doubt over the sincerity of the new waste collection company I was applying to. The first message I had from them seemed to confirm my worst fears. It simply said, thank you for the enquiry, this call is now closed. I had intended to call the customer service line again but before I got there a second message arrived with the quote.

On the face of it, the service is much cheaper than anything we have had for years. Reading a little more closely, the company charge a rental for the bin but only a token amount and the stated weight is much less than the quote from the smaller

now bought out company I also applied to. So basically, it is one of those cheap airline ticket deals where everything is extra including the seat.

The most worrying development was the additional note that said that the Government had a stated aim of making businesses carry out some sort of recycling. I do not think it is mandatory yet, but we do have a lot of cardboard to collect during the season. The new company made the helpful suggestion that a further bin could be supplied for things like cardboard but the bin they suggested was laughably small.

We have been most fortunate over the last few years that the drivers who turn up to empty our 660 litre bin, throw any cardboard we have on top and we do not get charged. I think our new big friends would not be quite so accommodating and we will have to be up front about our needs.

The problem we have is that the amount of card is variable. Sometimes it is a huge mountain and at other times, just a few boxes full. The new company would want some way of measuring it, I am sure, but we have no space for an additional bin. I tried to call but had to leave a message instead. That was in the middle of the day and by the end of the day, I had no response. Oh woe. This has the look about it of an issue that could run and run.

On the good news front, our builder telephoned us. Believe me, that is good news compared with the response we have had from our previous three builders. He also delivered a message that was quite balanced between good and bad, so I am unsure if I should be grateful. Let us say, yes, be grateful because I do not think I have enough beer in the house not to be.

We are told that the second scaffolder came back with a quote and that it was 30 percent cheaper than the other one. Hooray. He will start next week. Also hooray, if it happens. Sadly, it is unlikely to be fully implemented by Christmas. Very much boo. However, the builder told me that it does not stop him from starting work inside the flat while the rest of the scaffolding is being finished. This is a tentative hooray but begs the question that if he can start before the scaffolding has been finished, why has he not done so already. Boo.

The Missus returned when I was out with ABH and started to unpack the mountain of goodies for refreshments for the hordes that are bound to turn up on the night, we hope. It took me a while to catch up with her as we were the far end of the Harbour car park when the call arrived. By the time I got there she was in the process of clearing a space in the front for our servers to get in and out. I joined in, cleaning the fridge that I did not know she wanted to use and cleaning the pasty warmer, for the mince pies maybe.

I followed the Missus up to the house a while after she had gone on before me. She was in the throes of preparing the food for the workers that will be available in the crew room at the Lifeboat station during the interval and afterwards. It looks like we

will have more helpers than visitors judging from the wealth of comestibles. She also put together the programmes. We spent a good hour looking for the long stapler that she had purchased last year for this job – it reaches to the middle of the pamphlets. I am sure that I had seen it a few months back but that was before we packed everything up to move house. It is somewhere, clearly, but quite where we have no idea. The Missus struggled on with a normal stapler which hampered her greatly.

At sometime during the late stages of the afternoon, I took ABH out again. I had automatically put on my waterproofs but I had not appreciated that it was properly raining and had, once again, omitted to put on waterproof shoes. We plunged out of the door to discover that it was hacking down and with the little girl pulling to get on, too late to change my shoes.

We did not dally too long about our walk and neither did we later in the evening when it was still pelting down. We hope that the pelting and hacking is getting itself out of the way for tomorrow night as we do not want a repeat of last year. Two forecasts have it as dry and breezy for tomorrow. We just hope they are right.

December 5<sup>th</sup> – Tuesday

Gosh, dear reader, a day without The Diary. How did you cope.

I shall gloss over the events of the previous 24 hours as they were not all that exciting, and I was living them. I can imagine that reading about them would probably be even more tedious but there again, you read The Diary every day, so you are probably inured to such things.

The journey out was horrendous, and I would prefer that I never have to undertake a trip under these conditions ever again. It was dark and windy to start with and then became dark, windy and rainy. The rainy bit became more severe and stayed with me for the rest of the way. It never did get properly light and even when I arrived at half past ten o'clock, half an hour later than I should have done, it was still pretty gloomy.

I had stopped at Smoky Joe's café for a bacon bap on the way, which was necessary and took me out of the queuing traffic heading towards the new arrangements at Chiverton Cross roundabout. It had not entirely escaped my attention that at the time I had to leave, I would arrive at this very hotspot of traffic mayhem at rush hour. The short stop for a bacon role did nothing to take me outside this busy period and I joined the queuing traffic from the Blackwater direction.

This is the same Blackwater that came up repeatedly on the Radio Pasty traffic bulletin as a spot to avoid. I suppose there is a psychological benefit in being forewarned that you will be sitting in traffic for a while, setting a certain level of expectation. The advice to avoid getting into it in the first place is only really useful if there is a viable alternative, which in this case there is not.

I have looked previously for a customer travelling home when even bigger works were going on at Chiverton. To avoid it completely takes the driver along a complex arrangement of B roads skirting by several notable 'Porths' on the north coast, such as treath, Towan, Chapel and a Perran not to mention a 'Bottom', two Goons and St Agnes. The driver would need a competent and probably local navigator in the co-pilot's seat as I would not trust any of the English satellite navigation systems not to get you lost in the first two miles of it.

Anyway, talking of getting lost, where was I? Ah, yes. The rest of the journey was not that great either, especially as I lost one of the lenses out of my driving spectacles when I tried to clean them as I was driving. That did not matter a great deal because I could not see much beyond the end of the car bonnet for the spray kicked up by the heavy traffic on the motorway.

The journey back was much improved as the rain had largely gone away. I had raced through the warehouse, which even then had taken three hours and I had to whizz through again with the sales representative to make sure I had not missed anything they wanted me to see particularly.

Needless to say, I slept pretty well. It had helped that I had been out of contact for the day as there was no way I was going to answer my telephone even hands free in those conditions. I did have a message from our solar installation team suggesting that they really were not going to install our switch because the National Grid had stuck their oar in and told us they would not support anything that even remotely brought two supplies together. Apparently, they insist on including a switch that takes a feed from each system even though the mains power would never come anywhere near it.

I had taken some time in the night to consider the impact of this message and decided to garner a second opinion. I spoke with another crew who confirmed that this outcome was very likely even for them. I will definitely not mention the name because the very pleasant and very knowledgeable person I spoke with was also very pragmatic. He said that his company would happily install all the various pieces of the jigsaw but stop short of installing the switch. What he did not say, not ever not even once, honest guv, was that what I did with it after they left was nothing to do with them. Had he said that, which obviously he did not, ever, not even once, honest gov, I would have felt somewhat heartened by the news. We shall see what the outcome of my meeting is on Thursday but know that a blank refusal there may not be the end of the road entirely.

There were several other tasks that I had to clear out of the way including chase up the scaffolding situation that hopeful will meet its endgame today. There was also the matter of signing off on the estimate for the steel, which is a very big number indeed – I could almost purchase battery powered motor car for the amount, a very small one, granted, but nevertheless it is in that order of magnitude. I await the invoice for

the deposit, which is fifty percent of the total, which is most likely to arrive tomorrow. It is a drinking day tomorrow. I may start early and find a darkened room somewhere to spend the ensuing hours.

The only other matter to resolve (hah! I just re-read that. The *only* other matter as if they were just mere bagatelles) was our waste collection service. I sent a very polite and very brief letter of termination to Basho. I could not trust myself with a longer letter of termination. Almost immediately, I had a response from someone telling me that she had raised a request for a business improvement manager to contact me. I know, I know, I should not have but I just could not help myself, or rather I did help myself to a large response of schadenfreude. I suggested that the business improvement manager would be better served by looking inward rather than outward in a strong case of physician heal thyself.

It is unlike the small gods of grumpy shopkeepers to let such an overt display of hubris go unrewarded and therefore, if we are to continue with misquoted biblical aphorisms, pride cometh before a fall.

It seemed like a sensible move to talk with the company that we were subcontracted to a while back and whose bin still resides outside the shop. There was a small disappointment in the proposed offering that was we would have to pay a rental for the bin during our fallow period for four months. I am not keen to part with money in respect of no service being offered but when I mentioned this it was pretty much take it or leave it. When I received the quotation, it was less than we were paying at present, so probably no harm done.

But for a chance meeting over my domestic wheelie bin, I might never have discovered just how caught out I was in my approach to our old waste service provider. As I brought our domestic wheelie bin back to its new resting place, there was a chap fixing the bin next to it which belongs to the supplier I had just spoken with. The anomaly was that he did not belong to the same company but one of the bigger national ones. Noticing my confusion, he told me that his company had just bought the company I had just been speaking with.

This has thrown all manner of big metal tools into the grinding machinery of life. It did not seem particularly sensible to contract with a company that had just been bought out, unless the contract being offered was significantly better than the contract the new parent was offering. I contacted the big company and confusion reigned. I was already a contact on their books, probably because I had been this route some years previously. I left more details for them to ponder and expect a call back at some stage. In the meanwhile, we have a 660 litre bin at the front of the shop that is full and needs emptying.

I just remembered why we did not pursue a contract with the big national company. I left all my details last time and they never came back to me. This does not bode well.

Leaving all that behind, I threw in my lot with the Missus who was continuing with her battle to get all the decorations and organisation ready for Carols in the Cove on Thursday evening. We had more trouble with lights again. There are 100s and 300s, coloured lights and white lights and each have their place, apparently. We also have problems charging the battery packs as we can only do two at a time and it takes all night. I also discovered that some of the other lights had broken wires that will need soldering. There was no time to do those so we focused on what we did have time for. There must be better solutions out there for what has become a more commercial or perhaps professional display but I am yet to discover it.

White the weather had improved, there was no rain and the wind had diminished, it was still cold for being out for most of the day. With Mother having gone home to entertain visiting in-laws, there was no built-in ABH sitter, so she had to come and sit outside with us. I checked he after a while and she was getting cold but stalwartly sitting outside rather than in the relative warmth of the shop. I took her for several walks to warm her up, which seemed to work but distracted me from helping with the decorations. I suspected that after multiple instructions to walk ABH, fetch this and that and go and make the coffee that my not helping was seen as beneficial. I tried not to have hurt feelings over this.

We, mainly the Missus, worked through into the darkness when it was easier to see how the lights were performing. Mostly this looked alright to my untrained eye apart from the bottom set on the shop tree. I think this was because we had not waited for the battery to fully charge. This will be an ongoing issue, trying to keep all the batteries topped up in some semblance of order.

There will be more of this activity tomorrow and right up to the point that Carols in the Cove is over at which point there may be some time for a moment to relax. I must work on my comparing because the chap who would normally do it and is much better at it than I, is away this year. Perhaps when I have finished my meeting with the solar people, I should just stay in Newquay until it is all over – but there again we have stayed in Newquay overnight before. Perhaps not.

December 3<sup>rd</sup> – Sunday

Now, here is a question. Why do painters and decorators wear white overalls? Surely, they cannot all be painting white things. Do they still wear white overalls when they are painting different colours or do they have to get someone in who has blue, red or green overalls for particular jobs? There must only be white walls around here because I have never seen a painter in anything other than white.

I was minded to ask because there is a painter in one of the houses in the mews who appears to be staying there. I have only ever seen him in white overalls. Perhaps I shall ask him if the opportunity arises.



We had a dry morning here and the cold snap seems to have been banished completely for the time being. There was rain on the way and one of the forecasts had some idea that it might start in the middle of the day and be horrid until well into the night. A shower that arrived in the middle of the morning while I was down the Harbour beach with ABH caught me unawares and wearing the wrong shoes again. It was only a light shower, so I got away with it this time. I made sure I changed my shoes when I got back.

The Missus made a start on the second tree, the shop tree, in the late morning. The pair of us rallied around to set it up and secure it to the railings opposite the shop. I was then tasked with finding two sets of coloured lights that the Missus would string up on the tree after she had finished with the other decorations.

This delay was crucial. The first sets of lights I brought forth were no good because they were not long enough. Unfortunately, they were the only two sets of lights that we had the foresight to wrap around a board so that they did not get in a tangle. The long set that I found were in a nest with some candy cane solar lights, several solar chargers and a lantern. It took me the best part of an hour to get all the items free and then only to find that the long string of lights did not have a battery pack attached.

I have also had to charge all the batteries separately and I only have two charging cables that are the right fit. This is not too bad as I only have two spare USB sockets on the computer to charge them from. They might charge a bit faster attached to the mains, but I do not have the appropriate adapters in the shop. We have some at the house but most of those are being used for various bits of equipment. They will need charging every couple of days, so I am going to have to leave the computer in the shop on permanently and make a visit each day to swop over the charging.

Ideally, I would have a leisure battery and run everything off the same power source. This will require some thought as each set of lights has its own controller to change colour and sequence, etcetera; most are not 12 volt, so transformers of some sort would be required; the controllers are not set up to accept an external power source. Apart from that, it would be a piece of cake.

I managed my workload with one eye on the clock. With so much to do, I had cancelled my visit to the range for the day, but I had to attend the clubs annual general meeting at two o'clock, particularly as I am a member of the committee – before you ask, I did not step back quickly enough when they asked.

I had managed to fit a couple of trips out with ABH in between untangling lights and charging batteries. Yesterday, or it might have been the day before, she had chased a wagtail up the western slip. I had followed her to try and stop her running into the car park – as if I had any chance of catching her – but she surprised me by doubling back when the wagtail flew off to the west across the Harbour wall.

It is most comforting that ABH knows to stop at the edge of a precipice and did not try and fly after her. It was not so comforting that she doubled back past me and ran around to the Harbour wall. We read that poodles, part of her make up, were intelligent and she very quickly worked out how to get up on the Harbour wall. This worried the behootie out of me, first lest she fall or get stuck and secondly, because there was very little chance of me going to get her. It is higher than the second step on a ladder. She came back for a treat, which was a relief because just calling her was of no use at all.

I had thought that the wall episode was a bit of a one off, so it was most disappointing that she headed into that corner again today. Despite being called back, she continued onto the wall and disappeared the other side. I am sure that ABH could think of no reason why she should not explore, the same as she could think of no reason why she should obey a command to come back. Seeing her disappear did rather fill me with dread, so despite my concern that I might not be able to get back down again, I climbed the steps onto the wall.

She had not gone completely down the other side and she did look up when I called. I gave it my extra stern voice, which obviously struck fear into her heart, and she came back to the top of the wall again. My relief was short lived as she then decided coming back my way was a silly idea, and it was much more exciting to head out in the direction of the end of the wall. Clearly, sympathetic to my concern, she did eventually come back and nonchalantly dropped down the steps to the beach leaving me to consider the best way of getting myself down a set of wet and slime covered steps with further damaging my arthritic knee.

It came as some reprieve when the time came to run away from it all to go to the range for our meeting. I could spend more time away still by venturing into town to see if I could find some cable ties so that more baubles and tinsel could be attached to the trees.

I shall not dwell on it, but the only shops open at that time on a Sunday that might hold stock of cable ties, were the big out of town stores. The one that was suggested to me to try keeps all manner of goods, largely at low prices and does attract a good number of people regardless of the time of day or day of the week. Add to that the time of the year and the shop was in chaos with hordes of people buying Christmas decorations mainly. I think I may have been the only anomalous character buying something that was not.

It was getting dark by the time I ventured home, which was mostly to do with the weather, I think. It was raining on and off but by the time I got home, it was mainly off. The forecast for heavy rain all afternoon was somewhat inaccurate and for much of it there was no rain but sullen, heavy grey skies.

It was around six o'clock that the big guns started. Heavy rain fell in abundance and also in The Cove and continued to fall for some hours to come. It had started at

about the time that the St Buryan lights were to be switched on. The grand plan had been that the Missus would take Mother to see the switch on and would go home from there. The plan was abandoned as it would not have been terribly pleasurable sitting around in the rain.

Mother had come to stay with us because I would have the truck all day Monday and the Missus would not be able to get to St Buryan else. I will still have the truck all day but Mother decided to go home anyway making her stay here somewhat puzzling. Still, it is always pleasant having Mother around and she looked after ABH while the Missus and I played at Christmas trees. I have also been able to hone my fire-making skills even if it has meant we have been a little warmer than we might have had it ourselves now and then.

I took an early bath to prepare myself for my sojourn east of Camborne tomorrow. All the things that I needed from the shop to take with me are still in the shop, despite numerous visits to pick things up that I had forgotten. I just hope that I do not forget them in the morning.

There is unlikely to be a Diary tomorrow unless something really exciting happens on a trip to the east and a visit to a warehouse and back again. I also shall not be arriving home until late in the afternoon which gives me little time to make things up, erm, write things down – I always get those two mixed up.

December 2<sup>nd</sup> – Saturday

It started out a very pleasant looking day but still with the cold hanging on for one last fling. As a consequence, when I went out a little later in the morning for an extended time, I put on my overalls, which are exceedingly warm wear even if you do not intend to be DIYman.

I put them on at first for taking the little girl out. This occurred before breakfast because she was already climbing the walls by half past nine having been out earlier just before seven o'clock. It was worth it because the tide was just relinquishing some of the Harbour beach to play on. It did not quite allow us to dive under the slipways and play the racing around the pillars game but there was sufficient to cavort on.

The fishing boats were out again and not that much before we went down there. At present they are taking each day as it comes and if there is the opportunity to go out, they will. They are still targeting squid, which will account for the lack of any waste bits lying about the beach for ABH to get her teeth into.

I had to make a dash over to St Buryan in the middle of the morning. Mother had run out of one type of wool and was at a bit of a loss the previous evening as to what to do. It was a pleasant jaunt over there with no evidence of the snow we had on Thursday. There was, however, ice in the puddles and this was more evident when I

ran up the lane to The Farm on my way back. The Missus had requested I drop up to the cabin to pick up her lined, waterproof trousers, so she might work more comfortably on the tree.

At some point around the middle of the day it started to rain. The forecast from the previous day had suggested showers but what we had was more sustained, and quite heavy at one point. I had set out for a third time with ABH down to the beach without realising just how heavy the rain was. With a double layer of trows on and a waterproof jacket I did not suffer too badly but my shoes were slightly less resilient and I came back to the house with damp toes.

Before I went back out to help the Missus with the tree, I pulled my waterproof trousers on over the top. It was a bit of a struggle with two layers of trousers underneath and my pager prevented me from completely pulling them up to my waste – yes, really. It was expedient, which was the main thing and I also had to change my shoes for more waterproof ones. This was all very well in the timesaving steaks but I found that I was getting exceedingly over-warm as the day progressed – helped along by the increasing temperature of the day. Not only this but I my movement was hampered by the thickness of my garments and getting around was getting to be an undue effort.

I did achieve putting a new lock on the utility box door where the electric meter is housed, so that was something. The new lock arrived at the start of the week but I had not got around to fitting it. The old lock had broken on my first attempt to open it to read the meter. It did not come with instructions and I had forgotten to have a quick look at the Internet to see if it gave a clue. It comes in three pieces so how hard could it be. The presence of a spring that was clearly intended to be an integral part of the mechanism threw me a bit. That was four pieces, which was a tad more complicated. I also had forgotten to bring a key with me to test my handiwork afterwards. I will see if the job was a success next time I come to read the meter.

It happens every year. The battery packs for the tree lights need to be charged but we must also establish which battery pack goes with which lights. I cleverly marked up on some that they were for 100 light strings. The problem with that is identifying the 100 string lights. Also, I had one of the control units on the counter for the best part of a year. I had eventually decided that I had better put it in a safe place and now I cannot remember which safe place I put it in. The last conundrum was the battery packs without batteries. I do vaguely recall purchasing some new battery packs and some batteries to go with them last year but again, I do not remember where they went.

After one of my excursions out with ABH, there was some mail stuck in the letter box. Our postie has very kindly redirected our mail on a casual basis, although on this occasion I rather wish she had not.

We have spent the last at least fifteen years trying to avoid a national waste collection company, the one that the much maligned council uses. We shall call them Basho, which is close enough. We did start off with Basho but found them, how shall I put this, completely useless at everything apart from picking up the rubbish. Trying to get hold of anyone competent at the firm is impossible, customer service is non-existent and I do not believe we have ever been invoiced correctly by them.

They have followed us around like an evil stalker and every time we find a new company to collect our waste, they buy over the company and we are back with them again. I really thought that we had cracked it this time around. We went with a management company who did not pick up the waste themselves but contracted in a supplier to do the job and they managed the service. This went swimmingly well. Even when they decided that they too could do waste collections and took us in house, the service ran incredibly smoothly. If we needed extra collections, no problem. Suspending the service when we were closed, no charge.

The letter hanging from the broken letterbox of the house looked suspiciously Bashoesque. Sure enough, although they used the old company letterhead, they fawningly welcomed us to their bosom and told us what wonderful things we had to look forward to, how nothing would change, the same terms and conditions would apply and the charges would be the same. On no it bleddy will not. We have been here before.

First thing on Monday, no, I am away Monday, at some point tomorrow I will pen a very blunt note to Basho telling them that our contract is terminated with immediate effect and with extreme prejudice. As last time they will try and tell me that I must give 30 days' notice or wait until the anniversary of the contract or some such nonsense. As last time, I will tell them my contract says no such thing, despite not knowing if that is true, in the certain knowledge they will not know either.

I am hoping that the company that used to collect our waste when we first went with the management team are still keen for us to join them. They were when we got pulled back into the clutches of the management company who set us up initially. As a bonus, I can talk to our neighbour to ask them to refer us and split the £100 reward if they are still offering it. All we must hope now is that they too do not get swallowed up by Basho.

I have to wonder just how many more marbles the small gods of grumpy shopkeepers have left in their armoury to throw under our feet. It is becoming quite tiresome.

Because I like to torture myself from time to time, I also sat down with the data provided to us by the solar company and our electricity usage figures from last year. I hoped that I could make enough sense of it all to be able to talk with some confidence at the meeting we have arranged for next Thursday. I wanted to go

armed with an inkling of how many solar panels we would need and what sort of return we could expect in terms of kilowatt hours.

At some time in the last few weeks, very possibly looking at the ceiling at three o'clock in the morning, I had a bit of an epiphany. It had come to me that we were not trying to target all the electrical usage in the shop but only the part during which there was light sufficient to make the solar panels work. This reduces the target kilowatt hours by roughly half, even more if we exclude the winter, which we must. Armed with this and having their data as to how much electricity we might expect from the panels, I have been able to roughly calculate the number of panels required. I suspect that their figures were also all year averages, so we are likely to have better output looking at just summer performance.

I am hoping that the technicians I am meeting on Thursday will be able to verify and correct my rough results and we will come out with a definitive configuration. My initial figures suggest a high number of panels and I suspect that will be costly. I must also have a notion of how low I am prepared to go in terms of output for a compromise solution that is also worth doing.

Well, I do not know about you, dear reader, but that wore me out just talking about it. I am glad I had this opportunity to discuss it with you because it has been driving me nuts and it is so good to share.

Quite by chance, I fell in with the Highly Professional Craftsperson on my evening stroll with ABH. He often perambulates around The Cove and surrounding area, even after dark it would appear. I passed someone on the opposite side of the road that I thought might be him, but it was dark and I was not sure.

He must have doubled back because he was waiting for me outside the OS when we got there. He said he recognised my lumbering gait, which I told him was nonsense as we do not have a gate. We walked back together studiously trying to avoid the building work which he will be undertaking with his chums. We did not manage that so I asked him why our scaffolding price might have doubled because I was under the impression that the scaffolding company had a big yard full of scaffolding already and I doubted that they workforce just had a big wage increase. Being a very pragmatic Highly Professional Craftsperson he ventured that the company would be continuously buying new scaffolding and the boards that go on it probably come from Europe. I am still dubious, but we have little option other than to cough up and quickly.

We parted company at the bottom of Stone Chair Lane. I suggested that he might like to hurry home because within half an hour a geet lump of heavy rain would be upon us. The Missus confirmed this was true later when she looked outside the door of the house a while after we got back. Happily, it was just a passing line of showers and by the time she took ABH out for a last spin before bedtime, it was all over. As indeed is this rambling, shoddy report for the day.

December 1<sup>st</sup> – Friday

With the risk of sounding like an advertisement for food, it was crisp and dry this morning but very cold. It was a cursory venture out before dawn despite letting ABH out at one o'clock the previous night. I had encouraged her to lie in a little while longer but it was still only seven o'clock when I got up.

I was, now what is the word, erm, let us say tentative about going to the gymnasium in the morning. The day looked much more alluring with blue skies and sunshine but it was still cold and it would very likely be colder still in the hut with the tin roof. There was a good bit of manning up being done and loins being girded before I headed out of the door. In the end, it was not too bad, although I was halfway through my 5,000 metre before the last sweatshirt came off.

I did not get to the end of the session because a neighbour called for some assistance in a bit of a hurry. Knowing that there would be assistance in the Lifeboat station, which was closer, I called there and followed on as soon as I could. It was not a particularly serious casualty case but sufficient that the right help was needed and was gratefully received.

It is expected of me to take ABH out as soon as I get back from the gymnasium in whatever condition I am in. Since this last week or so the outing has been to the beach, so I changed my shoes as I do not want my plimsols all sandy. Any of my shoes with laces have to be put away in the cupboard, not because I am a tidy sort but otherwise they are targeted by ABH. The entire shoe changing process is hampered by ABH jumping up and down in close proximity to my laces and my nose both of which I am trying to protect.

There is so much difference between yesterday with the threat of rain, cold wind and sullen skies and a day with bright skies and roughly the same cold and wind. It just feels so much more attractive to be out and about in it. Later on, the wind eased off a bit that also made a wealth of difference and had people out and about on the big beach and along the road.

The trip to the beach was maybe not quite as exciting as some we have had this week. There were no friends to play with, but ABH does a grand job of making her own fun, much of which revolves around eating stuff that is probably no good for her. The stuff is also usually small and difficult to identify from a distance or even close up when she is moving fast which she invariably is when I am close to, trying successfully to avoid capture.

Most times she merely takes something in her mouth to throw it about a bit, so it is hard to determine whether to take action or not. Today, she came across something that could have been solidified palm oil, which is no good at all for young pups and I had to try and wrest it from her. Fortunately, it was one of those throw-it-around

things which I managed to get from her. Unfortunately, it was one of the things that she would obsess about because she was not allowed to have it and would return to it time and again. It was time to leave the beach.

It was also time to leave the beach because the Missus wanted a hand putting up the real Christmas trees in position opposite the shop. It started out well and the memory tree is now secured in position. I say 'secured', this is a variable condition based upon the amount of string used, the effectiveness of the knots and the prevailing wind direction and strength. There is also a wood star on the top denoting it as the memory tree – the real one has a fairy, or possibly angel depending on the angle and your viewpoint – which is also now in place. Unfortunately, this is roughly where everything stopped.

I had been dismissed, as the Missus was to progress with the decorating of the tree and I am insufficiently skilled, I understand, to help with such a task. Instead, I ducked into the shop and started inputting a few more invoices. It was more for something positive to do because there is no particular hurry as my accountant has gone on holiday. Before she left she made sure that I was apprised of the tax payment calculation that she had striven hard to produce in time. It is such a comfort knowing that your suppliers have only your welfare at heart.

Midway through my inputting, I also recalled a telephone conversation with our builder in the morning. I promised that I would let him have the latest drawings of the solar panel positionings on the roof. Not that I had omitted to send them before, but I am sure busy people lose things all the time. It is a good job that my time is free and I have nothing better to do.

Actually, in this case I did not. I also found myself recalculating the solar panel arrangement, which was a distraction, really. I had also spoken with our solar panel contact in the morning during which I had become uncharacteristically animated when he told me he had still not arranged a meeting with his technical people I had asked for three weeks ago. If you really wish to be pedantic, I had asked for this meeting a year ago, although not quite as specifically as I had asked for it three weeks ago.

When your client is in full flow it is probably not the time to bluster and start thinking up excuses. I suggested, quite forcefully, that three weeks was probably enough time to arrange a meeting between heads of state, let alone a few technicians in a small company, no matter how busy they were. I left it with him that he might consider completing his task by Tuesday morning or I would, at first escalate my complaint to the managing director on my way to enquiry from competitive firms to see if they were any more helpful.

I had quite a long message from him late in the day. It appeared he had made more headway in a few hours than he had for the last three weeks, however, all he managed to do was antagonise me further. His gambit was that they had arranged



an internal meeting to discuss the issues and went as far as listing them. I sent a message back explaining that this was precisely why I wanted a meeting as the issues he had listed were entirely off on the wrong track. Crikey, what an assertive grumpy shopkeeper I have been today.

When I eventually returned down to the shop, the Missus was on the way out. She told me that the cold had made it impossible for her to do finicky things with her fingers which is what is necessary when every bit of tinsel and every bauble needs to be attached to the tree with small cable ties. It is not exactly the most eco friendly of processes but then again neither is allowing your plastic tinsel and baubles to fly off and litter the beach. It is very difficult to imagine a different solution. After trying to dress the tree for an hour, she was giving up for the day.

I had started the fire in the house – in the wood burner, perhaps I should note – quite early in the morning. Part of the problem is that I must leave the door to the hall open so that ABH can wander in and out and this, unfortunately, lets in the cold. It is only when we are all up and in the same room that we can close the door by which time, the warmth from the storage heater has fled.

We had somehow managed to keep the fire going all day, despite Mother being alone looking after ABH for much of it. Not only that, but it was not insufferably hot in the room – well, not until quite late in the day, which I might attribute to the comings and goings, perhaps. It had used a fearful amount of logs and I am even less convinced that it is an economic alternative to any other form of heating. We had no plans to install a log burner in the flat, despite having the opportunity to do so during the build – whenever it might start – and I see no reason at all to change our minds.

With the main job of the day scrapped, we repaired to the house and amused ourselves with less constructive pastimes. It is a bit of a blow for the quite tight schedule before Caroles in the Cove but the rest of the weekend looks like it might be more temperate and conducive to finishing off the job. We will keep our fingers crossed once the frostbite eases a little.

There were more trips out with ABH. I looked with envy at the big beach from the Harbour because it was bathed in a, slightly, warmer golden light from the dipping sun. Nevertheless, we had a decent enough run of it but I sense I will have to take her on another run out somewhere or risk Harbour beach burn-out.

Right at the last knockings of the business day I heard back from our beleaguered friend at the solar panel company. He had miraculously put together a meeting for next Thursday. It is, or course, unlikely that he orchestrated the meeting for Caroles in the Cove day as an act of revenge and I could hardly ask him to change it. I will have to hope that the timing falls kindly and I am not needed, nor indeed the services of the truck, during that time. Oh begger.

