

DIARY 2022/23

October 31st – Monday

I had the day meticulously planned, starting with a bit of a lie in because the bleddy hound would not be disturbed by my getting up early and would stay in bed until the sun came up. I was to fix the lights in the bathroom that went off when the LED driver expired just at the start of the season. That required some parts I had identified as available from Penzance and I would stop at The Farm on the way back to collect my tools and measure up for the CCTV installation coming soon. Yes, that was all meticulously planned.

The bleddy hound first rests a paw on my leg to wake me up. When that apparently does not work, two paws are used and finally her chin. She then works her way up and down my calf until there is some response. I was expecting this but not when it was still dark outside.

There is no choice about getting up because the bleddy hound escalates but the game is up generally well before she goes nuclear. I can merely prolong the agony by not moving but it is a war of attrition. At some point I will become uncomfortable and have to shift. When I did this morning, I discovered that it was half an hour earlier than I would wake when the shop is open, although to her, it was half an hour later because of the time difference. I capitulated and took her out.

I would have been up reasonably early anyway because I wanted to see the newspaper man. I had asked that he leave a spare box for the magazines I would need to send back. He offered two but I told him that one would be enough. It was not and the one box I had was stuffed full and very heavy. I thought to give him the opportunity to split the box with another but he said it was not necessary. I went back to my cup of tea.

Next up was a trip to the gymnasium that had to wait until it was properly light. It is dark enough in there anyway and any gloom outside is amplified inside. I suppose I could switch on the electric light, but it seems churlish to do so when I can simply go later and save the club the cost.

I had delayed updating my computer to Windows 11 for about ten months as a matter of course. As an old computer man, we would never apply the first implementation of a revised operating system because it was usually rubbish. It was true with Windows 11 and several commentators advised waiting, which I did. The next major revision received better reviews, so I used the time I had waiting for the light to install the upgrade. It went very well – on the second attempt.

What I should have done, of course, was to order the bits I needed for the light in the bathroom. That way I would have known that one of them was not going to be available until tomorrow and make alternative plans while rowing my 5,000 metres.

Instead, I waited until I came back from the gymnasium full of confidence and no plan B and discovered it then. Not only did it scupper my plans for going into town but also my trip to The Farm and thus the ability to plan the installation of the CCTV camera. All my dominoes fell over in a nice sequence.

I had tried to call the Aged Parent last night but was only able to contact him this morning. He has moved house and now resides in a different town, which was quite a feat at his age, and visiting now is a whole different can of worms. I would normally venture up with the Missus but this year various things have conspired to make that impossible. I will have to go alone but that will mean leaving the truck behind for the Missus to use. Luckily, the Aged Parent is close by town, so I can manage without.

It was a revelation booking the train journey. GWR suggested booking on my mobile telephone because that it was the modern thing to do and paper tickets were so yesterday. With the money they save perhaps they put an end to all the strikes because I had to carefully plan around them. The journey necessitates a change at Exeter, which I will have to be awake for and then find another train that will take me the rest of the way.

There was an option to reserve a seat on both legs of the journey. I thought that a very good idea, especially on the second leg because that was likely to be busier. I would be getting on at the terminus for the start of the journey, going out, at least, so I should have no problem in finding a seat then. I reserved a seat anyway and found that it automatically reserved one on the same leg of the return journey, which was very clever. What was less clever is that it refused to reserve me a seat on what was likely to be the busy bit. Fortunately, the second leg is just an hour, so if I cannot get a seat, it will not be too much of an inconvenience. Perhaps the train will have a bar to stand in. Do they have those these days. They used to, packed with commuters swaying and spilling their beer. It was worse still when the train was moving.

Another job that is coming very soon is the replacement of the shelving units running up to the spades, if you are familiar with the shop layout. It currently comprises some very old shelves on one side and some mismatched wooden shelving units and a bookcase on the other. I have ordered uniform shelving units to replace it all and some hangers that will at last allow us to display the fishing tackle properly and hopefully avoid the problem of people not being able to find it even when it had been pointed out.

Before all that happens, the current shelves need to be cleared and the shelving taken down and shipped out. Hopefully, someone local will have the wooden shelves which are in reasonable nick, as is the bookcase. The ancient metal shelving will be scrapped, and we have just the man to take it away.

I had not planned to do that today. After finishing what I had planned to do, I would take the day off and sit in a comfortable chair and do very little. I actually did that, but after twenty minutes discovered that I was bored and headed for the shop. It was

early afternoon by then. The Missus came too because it is her job to empty all the freezers into the two chest freezers so that we can turn everything else off. This takes our monthly electric bill from £500 to £50 so needs to be done as soon as possible, especially this year when it is at least double the big number.

This took us the rest of the afternoon and it is still not all finished but at least most of the shop fridges and freezers are off. There will be some meltwater to clear up tomorrow but if we leave it long enough it will dry by itself.

We had settled down to tea by the time the weather decided to kick in. I had not looked at a forecast and do not listen to Radio Pasty in the morning when we are closed, so missed the warning that a geet northwesterly wind was expected. By seven o'clock it was howling viciously and I had to run down and secure our bin. By nine o'clock it had been lashing rain as well and other bins we scat over and travelling down the street.

We had one family of Halloweener earlier in the evening, who had luckily missed the weather then, unsurprisingly, nothing. The Missus had gone to the length of acquiring a pumpkin, too, which amazingly stayed lit through it all. She has some talent, that girl.

October 30th – Sunday

The rain that we were promised yesterday came today, instead. The Meteorological Office was still insisting it was going to be a sunny day but the BBC had a closer take on it. Whenever I have mentioned the complete inaccuracy of the weather forecasts, I am told that it is a microclimate here and very difficult to forecast. That would be far easier to swallow if the forecast went something like, 'rain/sunshine today except for the Isle of Scilly and the Far West where, because of the microclimate we do not have a blind clue, so just ignore us if you are going there'.

Fortunately, the bleddy hound and I avoided the rain on our run out. The extra hour in bed that I had looked forward to was never going to happen of course, because we had neglected to tell her that they clocks went back. She clambered over my reposed legs when she had decided that the normal time for her getting up had elapsed and it was high time that I took her out.

I had not bothered to adjust any of the clocks in the house and thus, when I got up still half asleep, the time confused me even more, especially when I mistook seven o'clock for five o'clock and took away one hour. Apparently, I still had a couple of hours still in bed due, so I was most disappointed when I returned and the Missus broke the brutal truth to me. When I was able to distil the facts, I judged that I had probably managed twenty minutes extra in bed.

The grey and the wet did nothing for our final day morning business. I scarcely saw a soul before the middle of the day and even then, it was disappointing. The boredom

led me to invest some time in reading the *Western Morning News* (did I mention I once had a review ...). There was nothing of particular note and I was about to put it away but decided to look at the property section just for fun. At the end of that was a property news column that described the star turn at a recent auction that was a cabin set in the middle of nowhere in some Devon wood. It was the sort of place that you would drop out of society to live the dream of self-sufficiency, raising chickens, goats and a few pigs, tilling the rich Devonian soil and growing heaps of organic vegetables. I confess, therefore, that it gave me much amusement when I read 'the vendors had moved from Essex to pursue their rural dream of breeding budgies'.

The day brightened up in the afternoon much like it did yesterday. It made little difference to the very poor turn out and cemented our conviction that closing today was the right thing to do. We had some fond farewell visits from our locals, which was entirely pleasant and also good of them to be so understanding of our position – until tomorrow when they remember they should have bought milk.

It was dark, too, when we closed, which I definitely would not have liked if it had gone on too long. It feels completely different running the shop in the dark, more like a corner shop in the suburbs than a seaside holiday shop, like I should be selling copies of the Evening Standard and half ounces of ready rubbed. Thankfully, that is all behind me and you, dear reader, have four months of Farm to look forward to. You lucky, lucky people.

October 29th – Saturday

I thought that I would quickly check the weather before I headed out with the bleddy hound. We had some rain in the night at some point but it was not raining at that moment and I wanted to know whether I should take a waterproof with me. I was quite surprised to see only a small lump of light rain to the south of us, which I would probably avoid, and a huge lump moving up the countries from the west of Ireland across to the east coast of England.

It was spitting a little when we went out and in the light of my head torch it looked a tad misty. The light rain to the south was coming in a little faster than I had anticipated but we were back before we got wet. For fun I thought that I would check the weather forecasts again and looked at the Meteorological Office website first. It said we would have a day of sunny spells, including the current time when it was mizzling outside. Radio Pasty had clearly looked out of the window this morning and noticed that it was a bit wet here and there and concluded that there would be showers all day. There was not. It turned out mainly grey through to the middle of the day with a few patches of blue poking through every now and then, so even diametrically opposed, they were both wrong.

We have all manner of customers and visitors to The Cove. Some are quite talkative and do not mind spending some time having a chat and some do not want to waste any time and come straight to the point. A lady came to the counter in the middle of

the days and said, "Land's End point", so I did. She looked at me quizzically, so I thought that I had better explain verbally as well where it was. I do not necessary find the lack of nicety first rude, just a little abrupt and I have not started listening until halfway through the sentence. The first, 'hello' or 'excuse me' can often mean 'head's up, I am about to say some more' at which point I am alerted to the possibility of having to listen a bit – unless it is the Missus, at which point I run away.

The afternoon turned a little brighter with a bit more in the way of blue fighting to get through a higher level cloud. In all, what you might call not a bad afternoon at all. What it did not do was attract a great number of visitors who had clearly, in the main, gone home from a blinding half term week. Many agreed that if they had purely gone by the weather forecast for the week, they would not have turned up. It is fortunate that the majority of the half term contingent are regulars and know the score. We may have to wait until tomorrow to see if anyone has turned up for this week.

We had to wait until gone four o'clock before the sun eventually broke through and lit up the beach. If that was not going to attract the crowds just before it went dark, nothing would – or did. The lack of any decent surf at any point in the tide did not deter surfers from trying. The last time I looked there were a fair few trying their luck out towards North Rocks and not finding any. It was that sort of day.

Darkness fell rather abruptly, I felt. It might have been because I was not paying attention. It will fall even more abruptly tomorrow but, at least, I have an extra hour in bed to look forward to.

October 28th – Friday

Today was a shiny brand new day and had that aura of good about it. It might possibly be tinged with the fact that we only have three more days of shop opening left, which is odd because I am usually in two minds about it. For some reason, this year, I am quite keen. I still acknowledge the inconvenience it means to our loyal local shoppers and the burden of guilt weighs heavy throughout the winter – well, some of November, anyway.

It was an unusually bright morning, which clearly added to the feel-good factor, with a lightening of the eastern sky and still dark enough in the west for a good sighting of stars and a very bright Mars. I was fooled again by a further bright celestial body that at first looked static but when I looked again it was moving at some pace across the sky. I had it in mind that aircraft lights flashed and this one was very bright and not a flash about it and also moving very quickly. It was not the space station, I checked, but perhaps might have been one of Mr Musk's mini satellite jobs.

If it had been an aeroplane, I had no chance of hearing it for the bashing of the sea in the Harbour easily drowned it out. While there was little chance of getting down there yesterday that was absolutely no chance of doing so today and, indeed, it would have been foolhardy to do so. The waves were swirling up high onto the

concrete with some force behind them. Usually, the boats have been pulled up much higher, so I have no idea if this was unexpected or the Harbour Master is becoming more laissez faire in his old age.

Customer.: “Ooh, are those vegetarian sausage rolls?”

Grumpy Shopkeeper.: “No madame, proper meat from a pig.”

Customer.: “Oh.” [sounding disappointed] “I’ll have two steak pasties instead then, please.”

On the other hand, a lady came in during the afternoon to purchase some scones. She told me it was a dilemma as they had some jam and cream left over, so they just had to buy more scones to finish it off before they went home. I told her that could be problematic as what if there were now too many scones. She would need to come and buy more cream and more jam to use them up to which she replied it was a vicious circle that she would just have to endure. There are some very sensible people about, I have noticed.

Today was the day where the pasty order for the weekend had to be spot on. There is no safety net as all pasties must go before the end of Sunday and not only that but there must be pasties until the end of Sunday. It was the only time recently that I had a good geek at the weekend weather forecast in the hope that it had some semblance of truth about it. Saturday is likely to be a write off, so both that I looked at showed, so I only factored in Sunday. Job done. Everything will be perfect. What could possibly go wrong.

The sea did not look half as threatening come low water or close to it. In fact, it looked quite benign until you looked at the shore break where sizeable waves were crashing onto the sand and a white froth running in towards North Rocks and Gwenver. Occasionally you could see it bounding up the cliffs at Aire Point, just to let you know it was lurking and waiting. As the tide pushed in the swell became much more visible in the bay and later provided some excellent jumping off the Harbour wall conditions that did not go unnoticed.

It had been a glorious day from the off and with a noticeable decline in the number of visitors, although looking at the beach when there was some, you might not have thought so. If this was your last day here, it was a memory worthy of taking home with you.

October 27th – Thursday

It was a thoroughly mucky morning that extended all the way to the middle of the day and beyond. It was looking very much like my efforts to bolster our pasty stock would be utterly wasted. What a surprise.

As expected, we were pushed off the beach by the tide this morning, Even the bleddy hound knew the game was up and did not even try and head down the

slipway. It was pitch black as we headed to the Harbour car park. The households had not yet awoken and with not a light (or streetlight) to guide us, I relied on my head light to make sure we were not tripping over anything.

We only got as far as the car park before heading back. I was not disappointed as it was damp and mizzly and not a great time for exploring and looking at things. We could not have seen very much anyway until we headed up to Coastguard Row. They clearly are a bunch with more influence there as they have streetlights.

There was very little action during the first half of the day, which was not a great surprise in the dank air and soggy streets. Most people who visited during the morning were geared up for a monsoon, which was perhaps a tad extreme. It was, after all, very temperate and quite possibly more so than the day before. I am very glad that I had persisted with my small boys' trousers as I might have been most uncomfortable else.

In the early afternoon, the grey and mizzle turned into bright and sunshiny, which was helpful. The crowds came out, fickle that they are, and we started to shift some pasties. The morning had thus far been confined to going home presents, which was good enough, but the volume was thin, which was not. I counted up the pasties at the end of the day and, yes, we would have had the perfect number without having to bother my frozen stock. I have ordered more frozen for tomorrow. They are for us during the winter – there are some perks to the job, you know.

There was some good looking swell in the morning and during the day at lower tide, it was still looking pretty fair. The wind had gone offshore again leading to a whole host of surfers taking to the water. There was one group out towards North Rocks and some more on the southern side of the beach. There were still no black and white flags out so I think that the Lifeguards have given up and anything that is not the swimming area is fair game.

There was no launching of Lifeboats in the evening but there was a gathering so that we could give the station a bit of spit and polish. There is a quarterly inspection due and the place needs to look its best. Usually, an advertised event such as this would incur a lot of suddenly remembered prior engagements but the Coxswain played a bit of a blinder by arranging a post meeting gathering at the F&L for this very day. Anyone attending the station for the clean up would get a few free drinks later and everyone else would be paying.

It was probably the first social gathering of recent times. The dreaded lurgi had interrupted such things for the last few years so the Missus had got involved to make it all start happening again. A bit of light snackery had been laid on and the drinks for the crew paid for from the counter collection what we have maintained for several years now and the Lottery bonus ball that all the crew subscribe to.

The gathering was not huge but suitably social for the first run out. It was also the first time that I had entered on-licensed premises in nearly three years. Given that I had been frequenting them and working in them for the best part of half a century that was some milestone. Oddly, I had not missed it at all, except the quiz on a Thursday night and even that I had learned to get along without. I do not think that now I am even in the least tempted to return, especially at more than £5 a pint. I think we may possibly have reached my tipping point on the old adage, 'I don't care how much they charge, as long as they don't stop making it'.

October 26th – Wednesday

Let me start today with the bar-tailed godwit, a bird of some determination and stamina it appears. I have a report that one, all on its own - possibly, flew non-stop from Alaska to Tasmania, 8,425 miles in eleven days for reasons best known to itself. The average speed was 31mph. These birds regularly fly super long non-stop flights from Alaska to New Zealand, the previous record being 7,258 miles in eight days. Examining the averages there, it was pretty knackered on that extra 1,100 miles. Our bird looks like it might have missed a crucial left turn – “No, guys, I just know it's this way. Trust, me.”

It arrived in Anson's Bay in northeast Tasmania a couple of days ago and is a juvenile bird of about five months. The Diary's Tasmanian correspondent will, I am sure be on the case, although he may need a boat to get there. Not so long ago he sent through some moving pictures (pictures that moved as opposed to ones that were emotional – although I am sure if you were personally involved that might be true in both definitions) of the flooding that had occurred on his land and that had swept away part of his access lane. He was not there at the time, which was jolly lucky. The bird report stated that it was still raining heavily. Our man in Tasmania already has a bit of a menagerie so the addition of a lonely godwit, albeit one with a dodgy sense of direction, probably would not make much difference.

A bit closer to home, the weather was behaving itself again. It was still ever so temperate as the bleddy hound and I set off in the darkness of the morning to the beach that was not there in the Harbour. There was a handkerchief size piece of sand that the tide had relinquished in the hour since high tide, which we made full use of. Happily, the swell was only enough to produce some gentle lapping near our feet, although it was flushing over the Harbour wall on occasion but there again, it is a very high tide.

The morning dazzled again as it progressed. Apart from yesterday, we have been very lucky with the weather this half term, especially as it was a week forecast to be unkind. Our visitors this week are slow starters it appears, and it took them until near the middle of the day to start gathering in numbers. They clearly had ganged up after they saw me head off for a break and cleaned the Missus out of pasties. On this basis we would be short again for tomorrow, so I baked off twenty of our frozen stock that had only arrived this morning to bolster our position for tomorrow. Obviously, all

the pasty action will migrate to somewhere else tomorrow and we will be left with excess. It is a crust we have to bear.

The surf improved in the afternoon from being quite flat at low water, but the wind had gone onshore today and rather ruined things. It did not stop a dozen surfer dudes from hanging around bobbing off the back at North Rocks and everyone else was having a bit of a lark in the shore break closer to the middle of the beach. I am not sure if the Lifeguards had lost their surfing area flags but I could not see them on the beach. The very narrow swimming area was marked and there seemed to be people surfing either side of them. Regardless, it looked like a summer's day down there and even quite a few in bathing costumes living it up in late October.

As business days go, it was a bit of a stonker. Not only is it difficult switching from busy mode to quiet mode at the end of the main season, it is equally hard to go the other way and can take a few days before our ordering levels catch up. Sadly, since we only have this week of busy and now only four days to go, probably two of them less busy, there was little time to make the adjustment. In short, that is my universally respected excuse for running out of stuff, which absolves me from any culpability or liability.

October 25th – Tuesday

I was little later off the mark this morning. The bleddy hound did not seem to mind and, for once, we were down on the beach in a better light than we have been used to. The delay was due to topping up the soft drink fridge, which actually did not take long at all because there was not a great deal of topping up to do. It is a tricky job of trying to guestimate just how much to put in there as the dates on some of the bottles will not see us through until we are next open.

It is even more of a skill to try and get the numbers right on the perishable goods. People will forgive a missing soft drink more readily than they will a pint of the milk that they want or a pack of bacon at breakfast time.

The day blossomed into quite the pretty little thing with blue skies edged with bits of cloud out to the north. In the middle of the morning the sun was lighting up a large expanse of beach, lapped by a none too excited sea. There was a bit of an easterly airflow that just took the edge off a perfectly temperate day, keeping it fresh.

It was all just waiting for a geet lump of rain moving up from the south to spoil the show with all those astrological gazers hoping for good geek at the solar eclipse scheduled for the middle of the day. Just what we needed, a guts of rain and the sun blotted out by the moon.

There appear to be some odd shenanigans going on at the much maligned council. It has been in the news less recently for pulling some funding for the Royal Cornwall Museum at Truro. Reading between the lines the criticism might have been a tad

unfair because it did look like the museum had fluffed its funding application and was deflecting the blame. I have heard that doing the funding paperwork can be tricky, which is why there are people out there that do that as a profession. We will perhaps never know the truth, but the two organisations are at least talking now and the museum is out of trouble for a short while with some temporary funding from elsewhere.

A bit more up to date is the news that the Cornwall Aviation Heritage Centre is being evicted from its rented home on Cornwall Airport's land at Newquay. They have some rare aircraft up there and are now having to look at scrapping them because moving them is not an option – first with nowhere to go and secondly, the cost and logistics of moving a dozen aeroplanes by road, including a not too tiny Vickers VC-10 airliner. Reportedly, at least one scrap specialist has refused the job because they did not want to be responsible for scrapping such a rare aircraft.

The much maligned council has so far refused to say why the eviction is necessary other than the space needs to be used at the utmost efficiency for the taxpayer. Since the Centre is paying good money in rent and no other purpose for the site has been specified, this seems like an odd judgement. I am not often moved to action on such matters but aviation heritage is a pretty good cause to get motivated about – inherited from the Aged Parent, I suspect. I signed the petition.

In terms of our embarrassment over the lack of pasties, we were very lucky that the rain came when it did. The pattern of sales has been fairly consistent during the year with the majority falling more towards two o'clock than dinner time as you might expect. Given that the rain started toward the middle of the day, it served us quite well, although, all things being equal, I would rather be in Philadelphia.

The rain settled in for the long haul and killed off any semblance of business except for the occasion hardy soul and bored at home family. It left me little choice than telephone a very pleasant lady at our insurance company to have a friendly chat about how our policies had been arranged. The latest renewal had caught me by surprise, mainly because the premium was two thirds more expensive than I had expected it to be. What had happened was that all the buildings and contents at The Farm had been rolled up with our household insurance. This is a little inconvenient because one is paid by the business and the other from our personal accounts.

I had already alerted the insurance company to our concerns by electronic mail, which occasioned a string of responses back and forth. A further message indicated that this was best resolved as a conversation, which is why I telephoned. I told the lady that we had plenty of time because we could fix the issue for next year and in the meanwhile I could resolve the charging issue administratively. She said that since she had started, she should really finish, and I said that if she had the time, then that would be fine.

Before we finished, I reminded her that she had asked some questions in her last message to me and we went through those. The last question regarded public liability which was currently set at £2.5 million but would I like to increase it to £5 million because £2.5 million was not what it was and would not go very far these days. I said that I often found that while I was out shopping and that it did not go as far as it used to and agreed that we increase it on the revised policy.

I should note, dear reader, that this policy is not yet in force and that any coming into the shop and 'tripping' over some contrived hazard and pretending to hurt yourself is not going to get you very far. You would only get £2.5 million, which is hardly worth the effort.

October 24th – Monday

It is not often that we are tripped up quite so comprehensively but today is up there with the best of them.

The bleddy hound was up almost with me this morning for some reason. I took her out before I went down to set up the shop and as a consequence it was properly dark down on the beach. There were still stars in plain view up above us, the brightest Capella and Sirius on the horizon and a little further west Orion being obvious. There was even a shooting star, although it could have been the red eye into Heathrow. It was clearly an omen.

It turned out to be one of those days that tricked the unwary into venturing out in inappropriate clothes, with a good deal of blue sky about and it being impossibly temperate for the time of year. Just as everyone had settled down outside with a cappuccino or started off on a journey and were far enough away from a bit of shelter, a heavy shower would materialise out of nowhere. We sold all manner of emergency clothing on the basis of the wearers own clothes had received a good soaking and were no longer wearable.

These poor surprised souls were not the only ones caught out by the unexpected. Having suffered two days of poor pasty eating, and having a plethora of pasties already in our fridge, we decided it was best to eschew a pasty order for tomorrow on the basis that we would have plenty for today and tomorrow. Au contrair, mon petit eejit, have you learnt nothing in twenty years of pasty selling? Clearly not.

Things were going swimmingly to start with. Hardly anyone wanted a pasty and although it had started to look busy in the street, there was no indication that this was just the advance party. In true grumpy shopkeeping fashion, the general pasty eating public waiting until the deadline for ordering pasties had expired before launching an all out assault on our stock of pasties. We were cleaned out completely. No pasties tomorrow, then.

It was a busy day. The sort of busy that we would expect from a half decent day in the middle of a half term week. It was the weekend that had gone against type and fooled us into believing that we were going to have a quiet week. Despite the best efforts of the showers we were busy from very late morning right through to when the café next door closes at four o'clock. We even had a bit of a five minute to closing rush. Oh, what joy.

October 23rd – Sunday

This morning's routine came together quite conveniently. I was just about to close the first electric sliding door in The Cove and retire upstairs for round two when the newspaper man turned up with the papers. I was just finishing these off when the milkman arrived and I managed to sort that out too before I went up for the bleddy hound. I do like it when a plan comes together because with everything done, I can slip down with just five minutes to opening to throw back the curtains.

It was a particularly fine morning to throw back the curtains on as it happened. There was quite a bit of blue sky and it was sunny, when the sun decided to show itself. This deteriorated towards the middle of the day with an increase of cloud but not before we had managed to squeeze a Lifeboat exercise in.

The exercise was long overdue, well, since Thursday anyway, but Sundays tend not to draw a large turnout in crew as many have families and other arrangements. We were enough both off and on the shore to be comfortable and we launched the boat out at ten o'clock. Given our own shortages and despite the fact it was not raining, I elected myself winchman of the day while my compatriot ran the show as Head Launcher.

While the boat was gone, we took it upon ourselves to run out the extra length of hose that attaches to the power washer we have in the Lifeboat station. We have waited a while for enough hose to reach the bottom the of the long slipway on a low tide so that we can wash away the slime and weed that makes long slip recovery often quite perilous. This work was previously done with chemicals, but we are keenly aware of our impact on the environment. It will not be long before the Lifeboat is converted to run on AA batteries using the same technology, but upscaled, that they use in the toy boat that is available in the RNLI shop.

The boat was gone for two hours and hove back into view half an hour before it was due. We were already set up for its arrival, because we are efficient that way, but it had one last job to do before it came back in. One of the channel markers is slightly askew from its ideal position and we wanted to see if it could be dragged across a little. It cannot, it transpires, but the boat did as much hauling as it dared.

Since it was already near the bottom of the slipway it did not take long to turn around, take the Y-boat back in through the stern doors – stern because they are at the back not because they are serious – and line up on the slipway. From my eerie, I

could clearly see that this was a textbook recovery using as little water on the long slip as possible so as not to waste it – all part of our commitment to the environment. We are, after all, a very ecological, very excellent Shore Crew.

It had become very grey in my absence from the shop and all the blue had gone out of the sky. I was not back for long when a couple of ladies came by with umbrellas up. I did not think that it was raining but apparently it was. We do not see umbrellas down here very often, although we sell them, as rain here usually comes with a geet bag of wind making them inoperable.

The rain persisted for a few hours, obviously during our peak pasty time, and effectively closed us for business. There were some brave souls moving about but I rather think that they were ones that had been caught out in it rather than people who had come out regardless.

The rain cleared away at three o'clock, as forecast, which was pleasantly unusual. It brought out a reasonable response from our visitors, not exactly pouring onto the streets but more dribbling. It left us with a disappointing supply of pasties but the late response was better than I imagined and we sold through quite a few that I thought lost. We also had a pleasing number of families buying groceries from us, although some were clearly things that they had forgotten or were missing from main shops elsewhere, but it all counts.

We finished the day with a roast dinner. Our hand-reared Brussels sprouts and cabbage made all the difference. Hand-reared lambs have not been mentioned in a while and I am keeping quiet.

October 22nd – Saturday

It was at least the middle of the day before we started to see any action then we started to roll. How pleasant that things turn out as expected.

Radio Pasty transmitted the usual warning to visitors in advance of the holiday to be careful in the sea. There was a lot of interviewing Lifeguards and Coastguards as there is before every holiday here, but much was being made of the swell and the winds today. I had to look at the forecast because I thought that I had missed out on some forthcoming storm, but I had not. Quite why the media feel the need to exaggerate so is beyond me, but I worry that they will not have the language available to them to convey its importance when something genuinely big turns up.

You can, of course, dear reader, rely upon The Diary to always tell it like it is in a quiet and understated way and not telling any little fibs not ever, not even once.

In truth, I had not expected a great deal out of today. Many of our visitors would be arriving during the day and would take time to orientate, especially if they had not been before. There were children in abundance, or at least a greater abundance

than we have been used to over the last couple of months and it did not take them very long to start spending pocket money. The adults take a little longer. I would like to say that we flew through our pasty stock but that would be more of a lie than an exaggeration. We hope for better tomorrow.

The rain that was forecast to make an appearance in the middle of the day never materialised. It could have gone either way, to be fair, as there was a geet lump of it down to the southwest. I did not look too closely but it rather looked like it missed us by a whisker, and we did get a bit misty for a while as it went by. After it departed, the skies cleared to blue again and the sun shone through for the rest of the day, doing its best to envelope The Cove in warm shades toward the end of the afternoon. If it was trying to impress our new visitors, I think that it probably did very well.

Our small friend, Robin, turned up late today. He must have been hiding from the increased number of people about. It is not terribly convenient later on as it requires some effort to evict him before we close the doors. He has definitely become bolder more recently. I stood in his way to stop him getting into the store room and he merely slipped through the gap between me and the door post undeterred. He went of his own volition in the end, but he had excluded me from the store room while I waited for him to leave and I did not get the chance to bag up the Boathouse Farm tomatoes that the Missus brought down with her.

We have a cucumber, too, that is straight rather than curly and some mini tomatoes which are tiny and Mother's I am told. She also brought down a savoy cabbage that looked perfect and the first of our Brussels sprouts. These will not be going out in the shop because there are so few of them and we would hate to make people competitive or jealous. We will brook no squabbling in the aisles. It would be rather good to expand production but I know the Missus is sore pressed as it is. I have suggested we employ small children and pay them in turnips but she will have none of it.

I shall report on the Brussels tomorrow after tea for you, dear reader. It is the closest you will get, I am afraid.

October 21st – Friday

"It was howlin' over Pendeen last night", so one local maid told me. It happens in Pendeen. It is even worse when it's a bit windy.

We were pretty much sheltered from it in The Cove and that howling would have been going way over our heads. It did rain a bit, though, and it was still trying when I came down the stairs in the morning and it was dark, darker than usual. It was still dark when we headed down the slipway to the Harbour beach and had not changed much when we headed back up again. We could still tell from their shape and

swagger, the two ASBO girls, Ronnie and Reggie, heading down to meet us. They do not bark at us, just everyone else.

I was expecting the rain to last all day, mainly because I heard someone on Radio Pasty say that it would. Naturally, the day brightened up at around half past nine and stayed clear for much of the day afterwards.

Early on in the day our nominated timetable man arrived with some bus timetables for the Land's End Coaster that is the only bus around these parts. Better late than never, much like the bus, although for us it was just in time for the half term holiday, which would be helpful. The winter timetable was fraught in its delivery. The first printed effort was incorrect and left out the important early bus from Penzance. A few people here use that to get to work. It was ages before they discovered that it was actually running and in the meantime there was hellup.

I was unaware that it had been missed until someone pointed it out. I had taken our updates for the summary timetable we paste in the window from the Internet and that was correct – sort of. It listed the early bus as 08:30 when it was nine o'clock which is better than the other way around. Ours in the window is now incorrect but more accurate than the first effort printed by the much maligned council.

I decided that the one that arrived today would benefit from a bit of scrutiny, just in case. It was printed by the bus company, so I cannot blame the much maligned council this time. This one correctly lists the nine o'clock bus out of Penzance but later in the day it has a bus arriving in The Cove at 17:51 and departing 17:42. This is extremely helpful if it knocks you off your bike on the way up the hill as you can make sure you avoid it nine minutes later when it arrives – or is that the other way around?

Now, this clearly works better verbally, so you will have to humour me. A more senior lady came in to purchase postcards today. I did not particularly look at them as I put them in a small bag along with some stamps. She told me that she was sending them to some Canadians specifically for the picture on them as, "there is no sea in Canada" she explained. My immediate thought was that, yes, there was right at the start but almost immediately realised that she meant 'sea' not 'C'. I made matters worse by trying to explain that to the lady but with her insisting that there was not any sea. My excuse was that I am very weary at this end of the season.

I reflected on the matter later and thought that really there is rather a lot of sea at either end. I concede that perhaps if you live in Winnipeg that was probably academic. Nevertheless, it is no different from living in Birmingham, just on a different scale and I would not necessarily go out of my way to buy someone from there a postcard of it to fill them in on their deficit. Just as I would not expect someone there to send me a postcard of the Grand Union Canal because we do not have one in Cornwall – except Bude but that is east of Camborne and practically in Devon.

While we wait for Budeonian rocks to be thrown through our windows I can tell you that we had some rain in the early afternoon. It was more of a long shower really, but it was wet nonetheless and gave way to some more of the bright sunshine and blue skies that we are used to. It did not make a spark of difference to the number of visitors milling about or the number of customers wanting to drop in – there were precious few of either. I am not sure that I recall that we even had much of a going home present buying; it had been largely quiet all day.

The quiet of the afternoon, well, the whole day really, left me enough time to send out electronic mails to our regular suppliers to let them know we were closing. I also thanked them for the good service we have had through the year – we are very blessed with our suppliers. Some, I do not understand how they do it. Our milkman, for example, is there early six days a week and rarely seems to take a holiday.

Sometimes things go awry, however. I had sent a quite explicit order to our sandwich suppliers asking for more sandwiches and more delivery days next week for our expected increase in trade. I was surprised, therefore when our sandwich man turned up on Thursday with additional sandwiches. I had asked for a Thursday delivery but not until next week. I did recheck my message and it would have been very difficult to misconstrue it. I had to do a quick restructure as those not sold we have to throw away.

It probably pays not to have too much spare time as I can end up doing unnecessary things and complicate matters. If I had left the sandwiches alone, we would have managed without the extra, I am sure. Hopefully, I will not have spare time from tomorrow, or Sunday at least. There was some sign of arrivals in the last couple of hours of opening, so I am allowed to hope – and to have a beer, I reckon.

October 20th – Thursday

Well, as Thursdays go, this one pulled out all the stops to outshine all the others. It was bright and shiny and while the breeze was still somewhere out in the east, it had slowed down and ceased to blow at me through the first electric sliding door in The Cove. Cloud, such as dared appear, was thin and wispy and only there to make the blue of the sky look better and the day was perfectly temperate. If our visitors did not turn up for this, there was no hope.

Over the last few weeks, we have noticed that our milk has occasionally arrived in different shaped bottles. The first time it happened I merely thought that they had changed their supplier but the following order it reverted to the original bottle again, which suggested availability issues. It has happened a few times since and is a bit problematic as customers can clearly see older and newer dates and select the newer. Today, it came to a head because there were no bottles at all. I was told that the litres would be available again tomorrow, but we were nearly out, so we were

forced to have pints instead. Obviously, we did not sell any and would have been alright to wait. Darn it.

The bleddy hound is clearly done with waiting now she is an old lady. She is quite set in her ways and knows what she wants and when she wants it. She has also become quite adept at communicating this to us – a hard stare if she wants water or a tap on the table to get our attention first. She is not prone to wondering off and we have become lax in attending to her being tied up all the time. The Missus omitted to tie her up as she sat outside the shop today. The Lifeboat mechanic surprised the Missus at the counter a short while later and asked if she was missing anything. The bleddy hound had taken herself off to the kiosk next to us but one to wait outside the door where oft times she gets an ice cream.

There were a few people around today but not many were surfers, at least not earlier in the day. There was a bit of underlying swell out in the bay but to the casual eye it looked flat and calm. It also looked an incredible shade of blue thanks to the clear skies and the bright sunlight. We can be blessed with days like this from time to time right through the winter although we would need to step away from the cliff behind us if we wanted to be in the sunlight. The long shadows of the seafront buildings in the middle of the day suggested that we were already on borrowed time.

Any surf that was to be had near high water was from the middle to the southern half of the beach. This was not much use as the break ended in a rocky reef. Where the surfers moved out, the gulls moved in. As the sea pressed on to the top of the tide there were at least 100 gulls nestled on the water in a big group. Over time, this spread out, but they were far enough away to make it difficult to identify. After close examination, I could make out the majority were herring gulls with some black backs out on the periphery. There were probably other makes and models in there but that was beyond my powers of observation and gull knowledge. They seemed quite content to sit there in the gentle swell, little white dots flecking the blue.

There seemed to be a little gathering of visitors at our end of The Cove through the middle of the day and into the early afternoon. We even enjoyed a small pasty rush, which was frustrating as it often takes us by surprise. Very few people signal that they want a pasty in advance and then they all want one simultaneously. We try not to have too many queued up in advance as they dry out in the warmer if they are there too long but then we find we do not have enough for a sudden rush. The trick then is to work out when the rush is going to stop to make sure we do not over-pasty.

Anyway, despite having been caught on the backfoot, I managed to throw enough into the oven on a rolling run so that not too many people had to wait for them. Then, by three o'clock, the street had emptied and not another pasty was sold. What a strange way of earning a crust.

I struggled through the tedium of the rest of the day until it was time to head over to the Lifeboat station. There was no launch planned, with the hope of a joint exercise

on Sunday with the National Coastwatch Institute (NCI) at Cape or Tol Pedn. Instead, the few that turned up ran through our launching procedures and cradle turning operations. As dull as it sounds it was immeasurably more fun than the last couple of hours trading in the shop.

I had avoided the rain that arrived in the evening. The Missus copped it twice, once when she went to the Lifeboat station ahead of me to collect dues for our crew bonus ball game and again on the last run out with the bleddy hound. Some people are just unlucky, I suppose.

October 19th – Wednesday

It is remarkably just how quickly the light invades the morning after it gets going. The light had just begun to seep into the eastern sky when I took the bleddy hound down to the beach but by the time we came back up the slipway, my head torch was superfluous. I am quite getting used to it now, but we will see how we get in when the tide is in this time next week.

There is a saying locally that Cornwall is like a Christmas stocking; all the nuts fall to the bottom. There is some truth in it. Over the years we have endured our fair share, though mercifully not for a while. It must have been our turn today. When we are busy, we have much more opportunity to duck out of an engagement but when we are quiet, we can be stuck for ages. We are quiet at the moment.

The weather had not changed since yesterday, except that it was possibly a bit brighter today. The breeze that had gone a smidgeon more to the east continued to squirt through the first electric sliding door in The Cove. The temperature was definitely better than average for the time of year but the incessant nature of it blowing across us was chilling. Today, I wore something a bit thicker on top, which was a bit more comfortable but it was clearly not ideal for entertaining visitors and, once again, they stayed away – apart from the one that you would rather wish had stayed away.

It was a strange day and not more so than the afternoon. All day we had spells of brighter grey and then some more dull but I had checked the rain radar and despite Radio Pasty asserting we would get rain, there was none inside 100 miles at the time. Some very dark clouds passed over in the afternoon followed by about five minutes of sunshine and a patch or two of blue sky. It still did not encourage any visitors out.

The west was certainly brighter than the east during the rest of the afternoon and as the tide receded a usable swell developed for the surfers. I do not think it was much for the big boys but a couple of surf school students had something to write home about on the south side of the beach. The sand that I thought might have come back across the beach had not. A late couple of customers commented on it and I looked again at the exposed reef running almost the length of it. It even looks worse

because of the oar weed there at present, which in addition makes it slippery and tricky under foot. Hopefully we can avoid any twisted half term ankles.

I must apply myself to cancelling some of our regular orders. With the tedium setting in over the last fortnight I almost forgot to cancel the newspapers. I am sure there are others. I will apply myself – tomorrow, maybe.

October 18th – Tuesday

There was mist sitting on the cliff tops as I came down to prepare the shop this morning. There was a high humidity to the air which is unusual with a south easterly wind. We certainly knew that it was southeasterly today because it was blowing at us through the door. Thankfully, it was not cold else I may have doubted my little boys' trousers strategy.

If our visitors were not all over us yesterday in the sunshine and pleasant conditions, they would be actively avoiding us today, which they did in numbers. The low cloud from first thing lifted a little but not by much and the sky was overcast and grey all day. I may not have thought it very cold but word on the street was that in the teeth of the wind, somewhat more robust clothing was required. We were in for a very quiet day compared to the very quiet days that we already endured over the last week or so.

The worst of it is that there is really nothing left to do. There are several projects waiting in the wings up at The Farm but they require measurements before I can proceed. The projects for the shop, the replacement of the shelves in the first aisle and the changing of the cigarette storage cannot be progressed with people still using the shop. Once I would read the newspapers but these days that is as far from entertaining as you can possibly get. Even the stalwart *Western Morning News* (did I mention I once had a review ...) is less than edifying now. I would read a book, but I would resent the interruptions of visitors who do turn up, which would be a bit self-defeating.

As a result, there is now nothing in the store room that could be squeezed out onto a shelf. Indeed, there are some gaps on the shelves where items have sold quicker than we anticipated. Unfortunately, we will not be rectifying the shortages for a week and a half of shop opening and the small likelihood that the items might be missed. Going to the carry and carry to get them would only guarantee that not one customer would ask for them.

There were a couple of orders that I will put together despite the fact we are closing. One, we should have done at the start of the season for customised gifts that we regretted not doing and the other for tea towels that we ran out of early in the season and I put off so many times it became too late to do so. There would be no harm in doing it now so that I do not forget it next season. It will pass some time at least.

It did indeed pass two minutes before I discovered that the owner run business that we used for customised goods is no longer around. That is a blow as it was the only place we knew that did Sennen Cove bumper stickers.

The other thing I am regretting is buying such a big clock to remind me just how slowly time passes with nothing to do.

October 17th – Monday

I approached the Harbour with much trepidation this morning but the bleddy hound's early seal warning system is very sensitive and even she could not tell that there had been a seal on the beach yesterday. She might, of course, have considered that if she made a fuss about latent seal scent then she might be dragged around the block instead and decided to keep mum about it. She is a smart dog, but I think that might have been a bit complex even for her. There was definitely no seal down there, lurking in the dark, just geet piles of oar weed.

Once again, the dark morning turned into a bright and sunny day. It was just right for a run down to the gymnasium for a right good, blistering session, so I did just that. The breeze looked like it had gone westerly again today but it was so light I hardly noticed it at all coming back to the shop, just the searing heat of the mid October sunshine. Phew, what a scorcher.

Scorching it might have been, well, relatively speaking, but the sea was not playing ball for the surfers, at least when I looked out in the middle of the day. With low water dominating the useful part of the day, this was perhaps not much of a surprise, but it did not stop half a dozen hopefuls from heading out to get wet. It became much more inviting later when the wind went offshore and pushed the disorderly waves into something much more suitable. It was a day for everyone, it seems.

Everyone apart from grumpy shopkeepers, perhaps, as I spent much of the day fighting off the tedium. It is the time of year for such a thing. It took only five minutes to top up some empty slots on the surf jewellery stand and another five to place an order for the gift soap that we sell. I have placed these on our web shop, so we will need stock for the winter in case anyone finds our online shop. You may not be aware, dear reader, that we sell some of our high quality and reasonably priced goods on the Internet, next to the pages on which you find The Diary, in case you were wondering.

I had precious little else to do until just after halfway through the afternoon when a few customers decided to come and have a shop or browse. Somehow, we had managed to work our way through nearly all the pasties that I had ordered for today, so we must have had some customers earlier as well. My theory that there were some half termers about was correct, but the numbers here made very little impact on us. I must conclude that if a day as glorious as this one did not bring them in, they are not here to be brought.

It was really a shame. I stepped out just before closing the shop to attend to the bins for the mews behind us. The sky was clear and pastel blue save for a clump of cloud roughly over St Just, which is usual. The breeze had shifted around to the southeast but remained hardly noticeable and the air was short sleeve temperate. This is some autumn.

While I was distracted appreciating the weather something weird happened in our flat. I locked up and returned upstairs to find the place deserted and looking like the Marie Celeste. We do not have a huge apartment and it did not take long to discover that the Missus was definitely not there, and neither was the bleddy hound. Of more concern was the Missus had left her mobile telephone on the table and the bleddy hound's lead and harness were still in the corner by the door. I had a quick geet down at the Harbour because occasionally the bleddy hound will lead her down there on her short outing before tea.

The flat was completely undisturbed and the truck keys were in their usual place. The truck was too because I saw it when I went to have a look down at the Harbour beach. There was only one reasonable explanation: she had been abducted by aliens. I was distraught. They took her before she had even started making my tea. I decided to check our CCTV footage that covers the front door and as I was doing so I heard her encouraging the bleddy hound up the stairs. What a relief. I would get my tea, if a little late.

The Missus explained that she took the bleddy hound out as usual for a pre tea walk and the bleddy hound took it into her head to visit the big beach. This, of course, was once her most favourite place in the world before we stopped taking her on longer walks because of her arthritis. The Missus reasonably felt that it would be unfair to stop her but as she did not have her mobile telephone on her, she could not let me know where they had gone. She did bump into a neighbour who joined her on the run out and she borrowed her telephone. Somehow, I had managed to miss all three calls she made.

As I said, this is some autumn.

October 16th – Sunday

It was a bright and glorious morning, when it eventually arrived. The sea was having none of that and decided to trump glorious with spectacular, which would not have looked half so good without the glorious. It came thumping over Cowloe and the Harbour wall at high tide and beyond, crashing up cliffs and throwing itself in lines of rolling and cascading waves in towards the beach. It was the white, resplendent in the bright sunlight, that really did the trick, however, brilliant against the blue of the sea and the grey of the cliffs.

Even earlier, before the sun had got going, the moon despite being just a half left was still throwing quite a bit of light around. When it was full it had been sharing space with Jupiter, which I missed, but now it was attended by two bright stars, Capella close by and Sirius just above the cliff behind it. As I looked more closely, Mars was visible between the two and had it been bright enough, Uranus was out on the western horizon. I felt quite refreshed after seeing it, after all, a Mars a day ...

We were warned by the nature people a few weeks ago to be alert for seal pups hanging around on the beaches in the area. They come in for a rest and will make their own way back to the sea when they are ready if they are healthy. We had our first one down on the beach this morning, mercifully after the bloody hound had come and gone. A regular lady visitor told me it was there and was concerned. Since we were quiet, I went and had a geek to make sure it was not injured, which it did not appear to be. It was making its way back to the water when I left. Someone had obviously called in the cavalry because there were a couple of ladies with hi-vis jackets on, 'Marine Mammal Medic', said one, watching the waves for an hour a little later on.

The excellent weather brought out a wealth of visitors including our regular motorcycle gangs. I had suspected that we might see some early half term action but I had also heard that those with two weeks off would have them the last week of October and the first week in November. The doubt had caused some indecision on Friday about pasty buying for the weekend and contributed to us running our early today. It was difficult to tell from just today whether the upturn was school or weather related – or both.

The fact of the matter is that there are still tourists around at this time of year and some from further afield. An elderly American gentleman stopped into the shop to ask if he was at Land's End. I told him that he was a mile away and pointed him at the footpath. He said that he had already been up there, still of the opinion that he was at the land's end, and was not keen to go back up and indeed another mile. He then asked about buses and I regretted to inform him that he had at least another hour to wait for the next bus heading in that direction.

He was clearly irked somewhat that he had got off the previous bus thinking this to be Land's End. I could not help but agree with him. The bus is a tourist bus, after all, and it would be sensible and at the very least polite if they announced where the bus was at any given point. The buses have clever electronics on board including GPS so I cannot imagine it too costly to have an automated voice making the announcements if the driver did not want to do it.

We had a visit from the Highly Professional Craftsperson during the afternoon. I had not seen him for a while because Sundays he is usually out on his boat murdering some fishes. The weather had been kinder on Friday, so he went then. We caught up on all manner of things including how odd it was that whenever I try and entertain a guess for a chat, the number of customers increases. Perhaps I should employ

friends to come and have a chat more often, of course, I would need to make some first.

The later afternoon became dull: the flow of business as usual and the weather on this occasion. Some darker cloud had drifted across us under the white cumulus, although there were still patches of blue here and there, which rapidly disappeared under the onslaught. Rain was waiting in the wings to come in and ruin our night, which incidentally it decided not to do, but I was just rather grateful it had not ruined our day, instead.

October 15th – Saturday

Well, we did not wait very long to not care about going out in the dark. I had barely got up when the bleddy hound followed me into the living room. I took her down to the Harbour before I even got the shop organised. It is not very dark down there anyway. There is a powerful light above the side door on the Lifeboat station and another lighting up the boats on the slipway. It is a bit more shadowy on the beach itself but I took my head torch. It is probably the way of it for the next couple of weeks and at least we will not have to worry about the spring tide until the end of the second week.

There seemed to be no reason for a very late paper run this morning, but they did not turn up until well after we had opened. The pasties arrived unhindered before then and I had already processed a small grocery order that I placed as well. At this time of year late papers do not matter all that much but it is still inconvenient to have to pack them in the store room on top of the freezer there.

I was quite alarmed by some very heavy rain that hammered on the bathroom window before we went out in the morning. I looked at the rain radar and discovered that quite luckily it was a fast moving band of rain passing through. It was also a weather front that ushered in some brisk westerly winds that persisted through the day and assisted in making it feel a bit chilly.

For all that, there were a few people about mostly keeping warm by walking and passing through. The sun was out, so it must have provided some warmth for those brave enough to be sitting for some al fresco teas across the road. While there was some decent surf at times yesterday, today's waves were all blown out leaving the beach exclusively for wandering about and dog walking.

With nothing much better to do today, I took some time to examine the signed for package that arrived yesterday. I already knew it was the replacement barcoded stamps for the ones that I sent off last week but did not have time to do much about it yesterday. We had sent off a veritable cross section of about every stamp the Royal Mail had ever produced with a price on it. I was keen that we get something a bit more practical back and had asked that they replace what we sent with first and second class but did not hold out much hope.

It was a pretty hefty envelope that came back, after all we had sent off more than £500 worth. The first ones I came across were 2p stamps, which did not surprise me as we had a few that probably did not add up to much else. I am not sure what their thinking was in carrying out the replacement or even if thinking came into it. It was not the best we could have hoped for, there were no first class stamps there, but thankfully, they had not gone like for like exactly. We ended up with just short of 550 second class, which would last a fair while if we were just sending our normal three Christmas cards and the picture of the Johnny Seven gun to the Aged Parents – not that I am obsessing about it at all.

Oddly, they sent a smattering of second class large letter and about 80 £1 stamps. The latter looked like a direct replacement for the £1 stamps we had sent but the rest looked like they had given up trying and plumped for the easy option of second class. It was not the best result it could have been but at least we can now sell nearly £400 worth of stamps directly where before they were sitting idle waiting for the rare occasion when someone would need something odd sent.

The Royal Mail had urged that we use as many of the stamps as we could before the deadline at the end of January, but I am rather glad we went early. First, I have no doubt we would have just as many stamps at the end of January as we had now and I suspect that there will be a bit of a rush come the time.

We had seen some action during the day, but it was certainly not our busiest. Any business we did have tailed off in the latter part of the afternoon and left me to twiddle my thumbs a bit.

One thing that has been quietly trundling along in a rather understated way is the launching of the first ever rocket and satellite from the British Isles. It will happen in Cornwall from Newquay's airport. The rocket will be launched from a high flying and modified Boeing 747 called Cosmic Girl that arrived during the week to a small fanfare and limited national coverage.

There is much moaning and groaning about Cornwall's sole reliance on tourism and the low paid seasonal and unskilled jobs and how something else is needed. Someone decides to bring space to Cornwall and there was much moaning and groaning about it not being green and would only employ outsiders. I wonder if the same was said about Goonhilly Earth Station, which has been and continues to be hugely successful. There is no doubt that this first launch of a satellite is hugely significant and if successful will lead to much investment from national and international players. It is pure supposition, but I would find it hard to believe that it did not enhance skilled job prospects for local people both directly and indirectly where currently there is just poorly paid seasonal work. We wish them well.

It was very easy to put such things out of our minds as the end of the day drew on. There was a surprise shower that blew through The Cove shortly before we closed,

which almost interfered with me taking the bleddy hound out for a quick spin. It had gone by the time I came downstairs with her a few minutes later and the declining sun had lit up the beach as if it were a star in a stage show. A glimpse of rainbow showed at the top of the cliff behind us and all was well with the world. Must be time for a beer.

October 14th – Friday

We are very lucky to have a bunch of regular delivery drivers who are most amiable and now that we all are less busy, we have time to chat. I have a particularly good relationship with the early bird pasty delivery man, T.

This morning we were talking about clearing out attics, probably in regard to preparing for our building work, should it ever happen. He told me that he had commenced the clear out of his after a pipe leak and the plumber noticed how full it was. He was all for taking it all down to a charity shop as an easy solution but his wife, like the Missus, is happy to take time sorting through things and she did all the hard work of photographing it and putting it onto online auction site to sell. She had some marked successes. Then he mentioned his Johnny Seven gun from his childhood that had been found.

Well, that stopped me in my tracks. The Johnny Seven O.M.A (One Man Army) was *the* toy of my childhood, the one toy that every boy of the mid to late 1960s aspired to have in their toy cupboard – if they had a big enough cupboard. More importantly, it was the toy that I most coveted but was not permitted to own. My friends had them and even on visits to their home I was not permitted to come anywhere near this item of desire, so fiercely was it cherished by its owner. My pasty driver friend thought that he remembered it costing £5, a mega fortune in its day and probably part of the reason why one never came my way.

Sadly, the mere mention of the Johnny Seven has opened old wounds that I thought long healed. I was clearly brought up a deprived child, which will explain everything you need to know about grumpy shopkeeping. Naturally, I curtailed the conversation I was having with our pasty man and sent him packing, never to darken our doorstep again. I will not have my childhood-in-metaphorical-rags nose rubbed in it by someone who clearly grew up in privileged bliss and a life of plenty. The only spark of light in this whole sorry story is that I have not yet purchased a Christmas card for the Aged Parent. I shall send a photograph of a Johnny Seven, instead, just so they know I have not forgotten.

I have resolved not to care about how dark it is when I take the bleddy hound out in the morning. We only have to suffer it for another couple of weeks, provided she does not kick me out of bed before it gets light when we are closed. There was enough of a sliver of beach down in the Harbour for a small foothold, so I let her loose much to her delight but mainly relief. We did not hang about because the water was lapping at our heels. We shall have a better run at it tomorrow.

It had been heavily drizzling when I came down to set up the shop. By the time the bloody hound and I went out it was merely damp if we avoided the drips off the Lifeboat station roof at the corner. The day after that improved no end until we have about the same sort of show as yesterday. There was perhaps a little more of breeze than there was yesterday, slipping around the corner at us from the southwest, but the sea remained flat and calm, not really much for surfers unless you were one of the two desperate sorts out towards North Rocks. There was much better for them later, a couple of hours before high water when the numbers out there increased to about twenty.

I had expected our new clock to be delivered today, which it was but not until later. After all, there is no present like the time – I am here all week. Instead, we had three boxes of hooded sweatshirts that stole my time for the rest of the afternoon as I labelled and stored them away. It was just a top up order but there were still 90 items in the delivery, so it took a little time to clear. We are all set for a busy half term, so let us hope we have one.

The clock came next, turning up in a huge box towards the latter part of the afternoon. I joked with the driver that I hoped it was not my wall clock because I would have to get a larger wall. It was my clock, and it was very large, about 15 inches diameter (or 38 centimetres if you prefer). The existing clock was about 8 inches (20 centimetres) across. It is a clock for telling workers when their shift ends as it looms over their factory or for hanging above a concourse of a busy railway station. I should be concerned that young men might wait under it with rolled up copies of The Times under their arms and red carnations in their lapels. When I had selected the clock from the Internet shop it had looked just the thing and it had not occurred to me that it would be a different size to the one we already had. It did not look that big on the screen.

It did not automatically correct itself when I first put batteries into it, which was disappointing but not surprising. The instruction sheet suggested that the best time for it to update is in the middle of the night when the signal from Anthorn radio station in Cumbria, which is north of Camborne, is strongest. Had I known that before I spent my money I would not have bothered. How is my clock, big though it is, supposed to see Cumbria from here? There is a geet lump of Wales in the way for a start. I set it manually and will trust it stays accurate.

It was not exactly a rip roaring day despite the weather being seductive for most of the it. We often find that a poor forecast, that was originally pencilled in for today, becomes a self-fulfilling prophesy and people plan for other things to do. We had found some activity earlier in the day and, indeed, we had cleared out the day's order of pasties but later on the street emptied save for the occasional passer-by.

Just before I closed up for the night, I put the clock wrong by an hour. This is either going to correct itself in the small hours of the morning when it connects with the

National Physical Laboratory's clock, or it will scare the pants off me when I open the door in the morning and think that I am an hour late for work.

October 13th – Thursday

The bleddy hound was up at at 'em early again this morning and I was consigned to another venture around the block in the near dark. It is not going to get any better while the shop is still open. This morning she did not even make it to the car park. Because she will not wait, she makes her own way off the bed and we suspect she hurt her leg doing so this morning. I had to carry her back home. She improved as the day went on.

For a day that the weather forecasters had advised us to bring a snorkel and mask to, it was remarkably dry. There was a cloud covering for most of the day but it was bright as a new pin – a slightly dull new pin – and the sun broke through on occasion. There was nothing much wrong with the temperature, either, and there was hardly a breath of wind all day. The sea held a gentle swell for some casual surfing and the tide was out for the main part of the day allowing for plenty of beach for the few that wished to use it.

You could hardly say that custom was brisk, but we had some joy with the going homers with gifts for looking after pets and gardens. We also cleared out the pasties, which was not too difficult as we only had a few left from the day before. I had not bothered to place an order for today on the record of the previous few. The Missus sold the lion's share and she told me that everyone who had purchased one had come back to say how good it was. They may not have been 'fresh' that day but we do look after them to ensure they are in top condition when they are sold.

Over the course of the day I managed to finish off the latest pile of invoices, keying them into the system. As I discovered when I was looking for how much we had spent on wine, the system is very one sided. It is all geared to input and standard accounting reports. It is a database system, so it should be relatively easy to write a query to extract whatever information has been put in arranged in whatever combinations you like. That is clearly not available on the interface I am privy to and I have passed the request to our accountants for their help. I am yet to hear anything, so I suspect it was not something easy.

While I was away for a shorty break, the Missus was entertained by a couple of geriatric Hell's Angels in their mobility scooters. You can just about get a standard wheelchair around the shop and sometimes we need to move things out of the way to make it easier. The mobility scooters are somewhat bigger and less manoeuvrable, and they were causing carnage. The couple saw the futility of it in the end and one went and sat in the car parked opposite and the other took a walking frame around.

The couple are regular visitors, memorable for the fact they are here no more than five minutes before they start shouting at each other. Clearly a marriage made in South Wales by the sound of it. I was back by the time the lady came to the counter asking about Cornish cheese. She was trying to signal to the other half what sort of cheese he might want, so he got out of the car to hear better and promptly dropped his keys down the drain he was parked over. Cue the Missus to step into the breach with the immediate thought to screw a cup hook into the end of a gash windbreak pole. After five unsuccessful minutes of fishing with that, the drain cover came off and she went at it again with a tiddler net.

It took several minutes more of thrashing about with the net and depositing much black mud from the bottom of the drain onto the road before eventually the keys came up. By this time the process had attracted a small crowd of onlookers and the customers of the café gave a round of applause when the Missus came up trumps. Yes, I did charge for the net.

It was such a lovely day that it would have been churlish not to take the Lifeboat for a spin in the evening, so we did. At around half past six o'clock, I supervised the pushing the boat into the water, letting a team of enthusiastic very Excellent Shore crew do the pushing and pulling of things, and we all stopped to wave it off into the distance.

The boat was not gone for very long with a short list of specific duties to carry out. In the meanwhile, we set up the short slip to welcome the boat home on as it would arrive back roughly at high water. While it was away darkness had fallen, and we lit the candles up on the hill to illuminate the leading lights there. This is left to the crew person who has been properly trained in the use of matches, for health and safety reasons. It is an important job as the nominated person must test all the matches first to ensure they work. It would be silly to get all the way up there to find out they were duds. The leading lights are lit up diamond shaped boards that align when the Lifeboat is in the correct position to enter the bay without scraping the bottom. Not so much on an elevated tide but essential lower in the tide when there is a bit of swell.

Arriving back in the bay on schedule, we brought the boat up the fully prepared short slip in what was clearly, in the glare of the flood lights, a textbook recovery. Deploying the pressure washer that we have special dispensation to use under the hosepipe ban, we washed down the boat ahead of tucking it away safely until it is next needed. We are, after all, a very fastidious, very excellent Shore Crew.

October 12th – Wednesday

I cannot cope with this inconsistency. Yesterday, it was perfectly light at the time I took the bleddy hound around and this morning it was still trying to be dark. It was not as if we had heavy cloud all over the place, it maybe was not as clear as yesterday but it was not far off. Why does it do that.

It obviously upset the bleddy hound's equilibrium too because she made it as far as the entrance to the Harbour car park and decided that she was going no further. She is a little old lady now and you do not argue with little old ladies; I turned around and we went back home the short way.

Falmouth Divers made an early start of it. It was proper dark when they got going on their flat bottomed platform, lit up like a Christmas tree. They had been joined by some land crew because we saw their trucks in the car park before we turned around. It did not take very long to reposition and embed the Lifeboat channel markers and they were gone again inside an hour or so. With some bigger swell predicted for later in the day, I suspect that they were grateful to be getting gone.

I had shortened my gymnasium session on Monday, so I was determined that I should have the full blistering monty today and I was not disappointed. Clearly, such dedication at the temple of fitness and health required a breakfast that was complementary to the regime I had set myself for the day. Fortunately, the Missus had ventured out to a local butcher a few days ago and purchased some healthy, unadulterated by E numbers and preservatives, hogs pudding. Lightly fried in some natural oil, it was just the ticket with a chunk of multiseed loaf and lashings of local butter. I am sure you can feel the health benefits just wafting off the page, dear reader.

Radio Pasty warned this morning that we might see some rain today. We did later but initially some low cloud drifted into The Cove in the middle of the afternoon and made things a little damp. For a while we could not see beyond Gwenver, so it was not the thickest mist we had been witness to, but it served to disappear the remnants of the few customers we had earlier on. It certainly did not put off the surfers who had eschewed the reasonable surf at low water for the somewhat more robust waves that came as the tide increased later in the afternoon. It was very much just as well that the Falmouth Divers had left when they did.

With some spare time at my disposal I looked at clocks. Not to say that I went around seeking out timepieces to stare at but the clock in the shop had stopped, which reminded me that it had been losing time for at least a couple of years and did not appear to have an adjustment switch on it anywhere.

I decided to purchase one of those radio controlled clocks that take their time from an atomic clock somewhere, reading off a radio transmission. I had thought to be really clever and get a wifi clock, but they were prohibitively expensive for some reason. It did not occur to me until after I had ordered it that we are poorly served for radio signals in The Cove, compounded by the fact that the clock will sit in a building with 2 ½ feet thick granite walls. In all probability, I will have to end up taking it to the top of the hill so that it can read the right time off the St Just transmitter, which will be even more irritating that having to take it off the wall and correct it manually every couple of weeks. I will console myself with the fact that the new one has the date on it and the temperature of the shop, which I have always been keen to know.

The afternoon otherwise was mind-numbingly dull. As if to sympathise with my plight, it was even dull outside and, if it was not quiet enough, the rain got into its stride and killed off any remaining trade that I might have had. If you are looking for a happy ending to today's Diary, dear reader, I can tell you it stopped raining so that I could clear up the outside display without getting wet. Heart lifting, ain't it.

October 11th – Tuesday

We have signs written here and there in the shop in the vain hope that customers will read them and be informed. Things like the t-shirts hanging up are for seeing what each size looks like so tearing open the packaging on the ones for sale is unnecessary. I never thought for one minute that I would need to write a sign to ask people not to test our pens on the envelopes we have for sale there. I also noticed that someone tested a permanent marker on the wall. Crikey, there are some strange ones out there.

It was not a surprise, though, that the bleddy hound and I had to walk around the block this morning. I did not have to do much pulling her away as she can see that the tide was swirling around at the bottom on the slipway but she very clearly did not have to like it. A slow march around the block ensued, apart from a quickening of the pace as we neared home.

The day was looking good from the start. There was hardly a cloud in the sky with the sun yet to arrive, which gave us enough light to find our way around the block. As the morning fully arrived we were very grateful for some warming sunshine. It was the first morning in some time that felt properly cold and made me wonder if it was time to give up my flip flops for the season. Surely not. It is still only October.

The sunshine brought out a more serious contingent of visitors - although it was sunny yesterday too, so what was the difference – who actually wanted to do a bit of shopping. I was rather hoping it was not one of those days that looked busy but the till at the end of the day said otherwise. On the basis that we sold more pasties today than in the last two days combined, it should have been contentment enough.

As the day pressed on, cumulus cloud started to gather in increasingly dark shades of grey. I do not think that we had any rain expected but it blotted out most of the sunshine. It had, however, become much warmer through the day and even on the chilly side of the street I was able to divest myself of a jacket that I had on. It could obviously have been the fact that I had been more animated with double numbers of customers to serve.

I may have mentioned that one of the boxes of new drawers that will serve as our cigarette stash had arrived at the weekend. I was expecting two sets of drawers and the Doing Parcels Dreadfully driver had explained that the other was coming with another driver. I clearly have not learnt not to listen to a word they say. I had tried

and failed to get hold of the supplier's customer service team but the tracking system it uses declared that the order had been completely delivered. It was only then that I remembered thinking that the package was a little on the heavy side, so it might be worth opening it to see what was inside. Sure enough, both drawers were in the same package, so I had saved myself some embarrassment by not trying too hard to get through. They will be in the way if I make them up now, so the drawers can remain in their boxes for now.

That northerly wind had completely evaporated today and the sea was almost completely calm. There was sufficient swell for some gentle surfing but sufficient calm to allow, at the end of the day, the Falmouth Divers' crane platform to arrive into the bay.

A little later a couple of likely lads came into the shop for a bunch of snacks. They were heading for the chip shop next when one of my other customers asked what the platform in the bay was for. I was about to tell her when one of the boys beat me to it and explained. The two lads were off the platform, which was handy because I was not sure if they were waiting on the tide or were going to start in the morning. It was the latter. They spent the night on the moorings just offshore ready for action in the morning.

Despite the significant gaps in the cloud cover, the cold of last night and the morning did not return. I knew it would have been a mistake to retire my flip flops. It also means my shoes will not get wet. Rain coming.

October 10th – Monday

There was a right proper spring low tide today; the passage to Gwenver was wide open. Acres of sand were up for grabs on the big beach and if I am not mistaken, a change to the amount of sand in the right places. It does rather look like some of the exposed rocks have been covered over with some more sand around the bottom of the OS slipway as well. I shall observe closely.

There was a fair bit of cloud around first thing, although there were enough large breaks in the cloud that the big full moon could show off on its way to setting. I had started later than usual this morning since it was a gymnasium day and by the time I collected the bleddy hound, there was plenty of light to see us to the Harbour beach.

We were a bit pressed for space down there today and the sea was being a bit fractious. I suspect either tomorrow or the day after it will be around the block again for a day or three. Unlike previous days, we were not alone. A group of bathing people were in a huddle just the other side of the western slip taking photographs of each other. I might have missed them altogether but for the movement of their yellow bathing hats. I am not sure that I recognised any of them but I was also trying not to stare. That is always a dilemma because if I did know them and failed to wave, they might have thought me rude.

Before I headed for the outside in the morning, I could hear a bit of commotion. It could have been the sea making a fuss but I discovered pretty quickly that it was the breeze. A northerly draught had started up at some point during the night and was making a bit of a scene by the time I stepped out into the day. So fierce was it that I decided that it was best not to put out our flags but stopped short of tying up the wheelie bin as the wind was not in the direction that would cause it a problem.

One thing is certain, the fresh conditions pleased our growing wing surfing community no end. There were four of them out there in the middle of the day racing across the bay at some speed on the hydrofoil boards. It seems to me that there is a great deal of legwork involved with the sport and I imagine you come out feeling like you have done that Atlantic Coast Marathon a couple of times. I also suspect the requirement for excellent balance, a skill that has eluded me my life long and possibly the key to my problem with heights and insusceptibility to seasickness. I shall not be wing surfing, I feel.

Our Saturday trade was clearly a bit of a flash in the pan; people leaving taking a last minute advantage of pasties and going home presents to boost our trade. Yesterday emulated the Marie Celeste and today was not much better but it was a blinding day to look out upon. It seems our wealth of visitors have all gone home and we are left with nothing more than a small sample. It is time to readjust again and then be taken by complete surprise when the half term hits us square between the eyes.

In the morning, I had taken the truck to the garage to have its number plate reinstated on the front grille. It fell off when the fixings rusted through. We have another, bigger issue at the back that requires some welding. The MOT picked it up and we have been back several times to arrange the work to be done. Oddly, no one at the garage could remember what it was that needed doing, so they had it in today to see what it was.

I had thought that they would fix it as well but when I went to pick it up I discovered that they need to lift the body off the chassis at the back to get at the bit that needs doing, a three day job. Not only will this take away our transport to and from The Farm at a time when we both will be going up there on most days but three days also sounds expensive – very expensive.

Trying hard not to think about it, I did some more playing about with the new CCTV camera. I messed about with the settings and it will now set off a recording when it spots a human being, which is very clever of it but I suspect that the Missus will also want it to record pictures of the cuddly creatures that criss cross The Farm at night, which means turning off the feature. That also means sending more data up the wire so that it costs more for the link. We may have to negotiate.

It took me a good while to work out that the camera was successfully sending files back to our home server. It does it using a special service called File Transport

Protocol (ftp). What I had not realised was that I would not be able to see those files from the computer without some special software that looks from the ftp side. I discovered that quite by chance and once I had, it was clear that everything was working as it should. The only thing remaining was finding another piece of software that could read the video files sent back, which were in an uncommon format. I have done that now too. It is not pretty, but at least if someone nicks the camera I should have a picture of them doing it.

The work day ended as it had started – with a whimper. There was a small rush toward the end but nothing to write home about – except I just did – and once again I shall not to placing orders to replenish stock. I have noticed that the gaps in what we are ordering and what is being delivered from our local, closing down, cash and carry are getting more profound. I cannot get some wines now and some soft drinks are missing. It was expected, even if the boss told us that they would be keeping fully stocked to the end. That would only have happened if they had found a buyer willing to commit to continuity.

We shall have to look at alternatives more quickly than we thought, although we only have three weeks to run, some of the missing items are key ones. We had thought that at this stage we would be winding down concentration on the shop but it seems to be ramping up. Ah, well, it keeps us off the streets and I do detest being bored.

October 9th – Monday

There was cloud overhead this morning. Not that I could tell at the time, but it was bright and high cloud not heavy and grey. It persisted through the day but the air was still, it was not cold and it did not rain, well, not until later. That was good enough for most people.

The Harbour beach was soaked in a rosy hue this morning when we went down. It was odd because the sky had not coloured at all. The rest of the weed had been cleared entirely from the beach our side of the western slip but beyond that the sand was still littered with the stuff and right up into the corner by the Harbour wall. It was, once again, extremely pleasant down there with just the two of us in the utter peace of it all.

Peace seemed to be the watchword of the day because there were precious few customers to disturb it all day. I had fretted yesterday that we would run out of pasties after having a bit of a run on them, but we sold two all day, which is unheard of. I seldom have to throw many away but today was an exception. It was quite laughable that I actually considered placing an order with one of our grocery suppliers. We did need some supplies that it provides us with but we would come nowhere near a minimum order, so I abandoned it.

Our bone china mug salesman paid us a visit during the previous week. I was not sure that we needed anything without doing a stock check but they had some

alluring new products. Rather than lose out he said that he would reserve some space in the next production run, just in case. This resulted in us getting an order acknowledgement for far more mugs than we would need and of types that we did not want. It worried me a bit just in case they would actually supply them at some point if we did not change it, so I knuckled down and did a stock check last week.

As I expected, the stock check revealed that we had much stock remaining, although the sale of 90 high end mugs is not too shabby, we did place quite an order for this year. We also wanted to refresh the stock with the new designs, so the Missus and I cobbled together a minor order that, with the lack of customers today, I managed to translate into an order to send off.

We started to see a few more people from around three o'clock. Sadly, these were very unlikely to be shopping as they variously sprinted, ran, jogged, walked and dragged themselves through The Cove – in that order of appearance. These were the runners from the Atlantic Coast Challenge who had started at Constantine Bay on Friday and were in the process of completing three back to back marathons when they ran through here. It catches me by surprise every year.

As we had no customers and with the only bit of ordering done, I set to with inputting some invoices. We had built up quite a collection since the end of August and my last marathon effort to finish the inputting in time. This quarter I decided to get ahead of the posse and start early. There will, of course, be far fewer to do this time around and if I finish these off now, there will only be a small number to finish off at the end of the quarter. I made rapid headway with no interruptions and standing up at the computer I seemed to be able to work more quickly.

I do not know if the cloud became thicker, or greyer, or time is fleeting ahead of me but it got dark much earlier than it did the previous evening. It was impossibly gloomy by half past five and nearly dark when we closed at six o'clock. There was some light moisture in the air that damped down the street and forced me back into a fleece when I stepped outside.

While the daylight left us more quickly than we thought, the night seemed to refuse to get dark. The clouds cleared in the early part of the night and a big full moon appeared, the hunter's moon and kept the bedroom light into the night. Ain't nature a pain in the bottom sometimes.

October 8th – Saturday

I was certainly kept busy this morning. If I had customers as well, I do not know what I would have done.

I cannot say that the milk was late, it just did not coincide terribly well with the taking the bleddy hound out schedule; I met the milkman on the way back from the beach. It was too late to do anything about it then but I resolved to come down in time to do

that, the newspapers and the pasties all in the same sequence before opening. As it happened, the newspapers were late and the pastyman did not turn up as early as I had anticipated, although the gaps between finishing the milk and the newspapers arriving was pleasingly brief.

The prize for getting all the chores out of the way in a sensible time was being able to get the mackerel smoking out of the way before the main fight of the day started. I guessed that we probably would not be too busy first thing, so as soon as the shop was open I went upstairs to rinse the fish after their overnight soak in brine and collect the smoking gear and the portable gas stove.

As expected, no one interrupted me and I had started the smoker going before the first customers of the day arrived. This coincided with the smoker getting up to operating temperature, which had happened a bit more quickly than I imagined and I had to rush out to turn it down before someone called the fire brigade out on me – or a bunch of Sioux warriors arrived. In the end I turned it down a little too much and the fish took longer to cook than I planned. I had finished my breakfast as well as everything else by the time the fish was finished and I managed to tidy everything away – to be washed up later – before the first serious flow of customers commenced.

The day was glorious even before the sun came over the cliff. The bleddy hound and I were down on the beach in the gloom of the first vestiges of light and it was exceedingly pleasant down there. It required a jacket against the overnight chill but there was hardly a breath of breeze, most useful for the smoking operation later. The first of the bigger spring tides had swept the beach almost clear of the piles of oar weed that were there yesterday and the sand was smooth and firm. We had quite the potter around down there in the peace and quiet.

It was the promise of a decent day that brought out the crowds, I am sure. Perhaps there were rather more staying this week as well, but that is always hard to determine. There was a reasonable crowd for breakfast next door in the middle of the morning and by halfway through the day, the joint was jumping a fair bit. The activity lasted through to the afternoon and did not really peter out until after the café closed at four o'clock.

The beach was busier than most of the days during the last week, too. A regular customer and I observed it in the morning and commented that the surf was looking pretty good for the first time in a few days. That was at the turn of the tide and I noted that our surfers in some numbers were out for most of the day after that. As the tide came in, the swell increased and by high water there was a fair lump in it with a bit of a southeast breeze down there to help things along.

There was no running off to The Farm for the Missus and she stayed at home to do housework. My concentration is slowly making the transition from the shop to The Farm in advance of our closing at the end of the month. I have to be careful not to

take my hands off the wheel altogether but there is much less to do now to keep the shop running. It was also difficult to ignore the solar kit for the new camera as it is huge. Ideally, it needs to be shipped off to The Farm but the website says that the battery can be charged ahead of its use with the panel, so I wanted to extract that from the box.

On examination, the panel, the frame and the battery are all connected together ready to be deployed straight out of the box. It is a refreshing approach to these kits that usually come with an unintelligible sheet of instructions and missing bolts. However, on this occasion it means that I cannot separate the battery to charge it while the rest is taken away. It is also not clear how or what to plug the battery into to charge it. I did find a switch that illuminated a small display that read 91.1, a percentage perhaps, but since it was still in the box it could equally have been 1.16, amps?, as I was not sure of the orientation. I will have to enquire.

In the meanwhile, I have partially tested the camera and got to the stage where we can see a picture on a mobile telephone screen and test that it can attach to our home storage server. Since I have to hold the camera up with one hand while I do this – and it is heavy – it is not ideal and requires some more time. The trouble is that I have to contain myself no matter how keen I am to install it as I will not get to The Farm before the start of the new month.

When I brought the till up in the evening, I noticed that the newspaper vouchers were spilling out from under the cash drawer. Their processing, which is drudgery, is easily ignored or put off until this happens. It seems that I can bring myself back down to planet shop tomorrow by doing some counting and form filling to send the vouchers off next week. You can always trust the Laurel and Hardy Newspaper Company to provide the necessary slap in the face to bring you back to reality.

October 7th – Friday

Our robin had a dust up with another robin this morning. The bleddy hound and I were just going around the corner by the Lifeboat station and our robin was there to greet us. Clearly, he had stepped into another robin's patch and I understand that they are viciously territorial. He got told off and headed off to the shop where he waited for me to open.

It was the start of a very pleasant morning, although perhaps not so much for the robin. There were a few clouds about but largely the sky was clear and would let the sun in as the morning drew on. It had not even presented itself above Carn Olva at the time we went out. There was not much in the way of breeze, either, although around the corner I understand that it was pretty brisk.

I was already feeling pretty chipper when I headed for the gymnasium in the morning for a good blistering session. When I came back, obviously I was on top of the world and celebrated with a bully beef breakfast, which slowed me down a bit. While I was

away, the solar charging part of the new CCTV camera arrived. It was a brae bit bigger than I anticipated with a full size solar panel and clever battery and controller combi box, which I probably will not now use – for the camera at least.

One of the things you get to do while you are rowing 5,000 metres, which now takes me just over twenty minutes, is to think of things. It helps pass the time that would otherwise be fairly mind-numbing. One of the things that I thought of today was the deployment of the new camera and thinking that I could attach a shorter post to the cabin rather than having to dig a hole and have a full length post. With it attached to the cabin, I could run the power from the cabin batteries which have more than enough spare electricity to service the camera. I will be able to use the panel, control unit and battery that came with it to power the lights in the store room, which is something I have been looking to do for some time. That all might change during my next rowing session, of course.

The clear and pretty morning evaporated somewhat when grey cloud rolled on during the middle of the day. I had not anticipated rain but there again I had not looked but the Missus said in passing that it was going to rain at four o'clock. The BBC certainly seemed to think so when I looked at its weather website, but the Meteorological Office had decided that it would not and that sunshine would persist. At two o'clock with no sunshine in sight and the rain radar showing a weather front approaching from the northwest, I was thinking that the BBC probably had the edge on this one.

The Missus had taken off into the grey to collect the balance of the fish order we had early in the week, except this was more the principal than the balance. I had been quite surprised by the amount of fish that we had sold since the last big order from our rather good Penzance wholesaler. Probably alarmed might have been a better description as much of this fish is stock for Mother and me during the long bleak winter. The world would clearly come to an end if we could not have our bit of fish on Friday as indeed we did in the evening today.

It was just as well that we were quiet through much of the afternoon as there really was an abundance of fish. I am becoming more proficient at the packing of it and squared away the hake in record time. The haddock were an awkward size, perhaps a little too big for one bag but not quite enough to be split into two. Nevertheless, they had to be cut into two anyway as they were too big for my bigger bag, so I fudged my way through and some were made into smaller than I would like small packs and others bigger than I would like doubles.

I delight in selling fish, especially when it is this fresh and even frozen, it is just as good as when it came through our door on the day I packed it. Our customers in the last few weeks seemed to think so when they were buying copious amounts of it and I did not even have to try and persuade them. I am hearing rumblings of discontent about fish and chips from those disaffected visitors who wish to talk about it. A portion will set you back more than a dozen pounds at a chippy hereabouts, which

might account for the increase in demand from our freezer. It is difficult to test our prices in comparison to proper wet fish shops but I suspect that we might be slightly lower but even so, fish is no longer what you might call a cheap option.

It is still frightfully good, however, and I am going to have to prove it by finishing off the mackerel from the fridge that did not sell. I am not keen to freeze mackerel, as I do not believe it survives the process well, although I know some that disagree. I will smoke ours tomorrow outside the shop to make everyone jealous but mostly to stop me getting it in the neck about the smell of 'stinking fish' left behind for days in the kitchen. The Missus hates fish – even the smell of it, although I agree the smoking process is strongly aromatic.

October 6th – Thursday

I escaped the gravitational pull of The Cove for the second time in a week and once more to have a hole put in my arm. Today, they were taking out and not putting in and as long as they did not take out what they put in on Saturday, it would be alright. Well, when I say, alright, alright as it ever can be allowing myself to be bled by a medical professional, which on the face of it is altogether more alright that being bled by some dodgy character in a dark alley.

The changes in the way in which doctors do not see you any more is quite plain to see. Not so long ago, I could turn up at just gone half past eight and the waiting room would be full. Today, it was empty apart from the receptionist. I am sure that there is a long list of advantages from the new system but it is hard to see the net benefit for the customer. I was even more put out when I learned that I was not going to get a cup of tea and a biscuit after my ordeal. The nurse told me that was for people who had given more blood, which is ridiculous because she took a whole three tubes full from me. How much more is there to give.

Fighting off the faintness, I made my way back to the shop where the Missus had opened for me. She was keen to get away for The Farm for a particular project she wanted to complete, so I took my break early so that she could go. There is a second gate into the field that we wanted to open up so that a neighbour could temporarily park some hardcore there ahead of surfacing the lane. The Missus' part was to clear the gate using the flail mower on the tractor. It all came to grief when the tractor refused to go forwards. We will have to call out our local friendly mechanic from down the road but unfortunately, he is on holiday and will not be back until Monday.

It was a glorious day to be running around in the morning and being disappointed at The Farm by broken down tractors. The wind had died down a good deal as well, but the sea had other ideas and became quite ferocious up towards high water. The Lifeguards red flagged the beach at some point and I was met with disappointed beach goers wishing to take a dip on the last day or two of their holidays. I pointed them at the Harbour, which is normally friendly in such conditions, although

sometimes it is not. Today, even with the occasional wave thumping over the wall, it was relatively benign in the Harbour.

The day attracted quite a few visitors, but they were well spread out throughout the day. I am not surprised as the bay was looking particularly alluring in all its bright colours and finery. A late run on pasties surprised me greatly, so greatly that I was ill prepared for it and lost some sales. Normally, and certainly in the last week or so, it is all over by three o'clock, but our big late rush came between three and half past four when I had slowed down putting out fresh stock. I cannot say that I would be any better prepared if it happened tomorrow as well. It is just not the done thing at this time of year.

We had a trickle of customers well into the last hour of the day, too. It was a very pretty evening to be wandering about and mild, too. That said, it was a lot cooler than it was even a couple of days ago but it did not seem to deter a bit of late afternoon walking in the sunshine down on the big beach. Sunset would have been pretty too had I seen it.

I was a bit caught up in testing the new Farm CCTV camera that arrived today. I am assuming that the solar charging unit will be arriving separately. I think I would have been most disappointed had it fitted into the small package that arrived, so I was grateful that it was not in there. It did not stop me plugging the camera into the mains for a bit of testing, though. During the research phase, the company had told me that it would not work with some cellular data cards but I was not sure that it was one of those we had in the existing camera. I hoped not. The existing one is £4 per month and the one they supplied, £10 per month so it was worth testing but it transpired it was one of the ones that did not work. So sure was I that ours would work, or hopeful perhaps, I had not researched the cost of a replacement – an additional £72 a year, which is annoying.

I did not activate the expensive card as we cannot use the camera in anger just yet and a tenner for a bit of testing is a bit extreme. Instead, I consoled myself with a Prima steak pasty cooked from frozen, which we have found to be a more than adequate substitute for one of my homemade, award winning, pasties. I tried to ignore the fact that Mother was sitting opposite with a bottle of brown sauce in front of her. It will be the reason we do not dine off jamon iberico or slices of bluefin tuna with beluga caviar, either.

October 5th – Wednesday

Now, I am sure you will have been on tenterhooks, balanced on the edge of your seats since yesterday when I told you that I had been delving into how much we spend on wine. If you were not, dear reader, you should have been because it is really exciting stuff.

I have not mentioned this before, but it is quite common knowledge hereabouts, now, that our local cash and carry provider, the one that delivers every day from Penzance will be closing down early next year. It is a devastating blow for us and for them I would imagine but has been brought about by a lack of succession, mainly. The company is trying to find a buyer that will carry on the business but in the meantime, we cannot just wait in hope.

The company supplies all manner of essential goods that keep us operating through the busy periods. Without them we would have to store a huge number of products garnered from weekly suppliers. Some of the supplies we can more easily replace, such as greengrocery and logs. Where we will have problems is with soft drinks, – a huge problem – and, yes, you guessed it, wine.

Neither the Missus nor I drink the stuff and while I did (in some abundance) years ago and could tell a good Chateau Neuf De Pape from a mediocre Merlot, those days are long gone. We have relied solely on the proprietor of the local cash and carry to recommend wines in a certain price range and he has been exceptionally good at it. That sort of service will be very hard to replace.

There are only two suppliers in the locality that I have identified as being able to help and I contacted one last night. Part of the approach was to tempt them in with our annual spend on wine to help them make the decision on whether they might be interested or not. We await development and will keep you apprised, dear reader, as I know that you will be beside yourself with the anticipation of it all.

My anticipation this morning was that we would miss the impending rain by quite a margin. I had not reckoned on it travelling quite so fast in our direction and the bleddy hound and I ended up getting a good soaking when we went for our morning perambulation. The weed that had built up in geet heaps a few days ago is dissipating, or perhaps just spreading out a bit, which is just as well because the tide will not carry it out for a few days until the spring tide reaches a bit further up the beach. Despite the fact it was raining and a tad breezy down there, it was still relatively warm and while my gymnasium shorts were getting a bit damp, it was not altogether unpleasant.

The rain had stopped by the time I came downstairs but the breeze ramped up. I had dropped down especially last night to tie up our wheelie bin because I thought I heard it tumble over but it was the Tesmorburys delivery driver making a racket. It was probably just as well that I did because the wind that started in the southwest early in the morning made a rapid swerve up to the northwest as the weather front passed through. Eventually, the breeze dropped to the west and became a little more moderate and a little less an issue for us, although I could still feel it swirl into the shop every now and then.

The wind stirred up the sea magnificently. The little white caps and breaking waves look so much more impressive when the sky and sea are blue and the sun is lighting

everything up. If you want your whites whiter than white, take a look at the bay on days like these and wonder. Which is probably what the surfers were doing, wondering where the waves had gone, blown out in a force 5 to 6.

It certainly did for most of our visitors who elected to stay at home or be somewhere else. There were hardy sorts around, wrapped up against the blow and we had sporadic trade, mainly through the afternoon. It left me at rather a loose end as I had run out of things to do and things to plan. I resolved to apply myself to the conundrum over a beer or two in the evening – not too many, as the medics want to drain my arm of blood tomorrow and will not be best pleased if there is a head on it.

October 4th – Tuesday

It was some mild out there today. I had left my fleece in the shop but really did not need it when I went down to do the shop preparation and take in the milk. I only took it with me for the bleddy hound's walk because it has bigger pockets than my small boys' trousers.

During the course of the morning, I idly listened to Radio Pasty. On Monday they give a five-day weather forecast, which is interesting for its entertainment value. Anything forward from right now appears to be merely a random selection of a weather types and something to say. Even right now can be a bit of a stretch, it seems. It was as a consequence of Monday's listening that I rather expected some rain today but today, when the forecaster read the weather this morning, it had moved to tomorrow.

Looking out of the window today, I can tell you that it was a little grey out there and continued to be in variations all day. At first light, and reasonably before I would imagine, the streets were quite damp suggesting that we may have had some rain after all. Despite the greyness, it was a reasonable day, warm, as I mentioned, and dry too, which is always a bonus. What it was not was sunny and for some reason this makes all the difference to the volume of people milling about on the streets. We were not busy, but we had our moments during the day even after a bit of a shaky start.

I had a lovely letter from the hospital people today regarding my false ears. I had discovered recently that they no longer did tests and things in Penzance hospital and if I needed to have my hearing checked I would need to go to Truro, which being east of Camborne is practically the other side of the country. Since it has been several years since I last had anything to do with them – the hospital, not my ears, which still find reasonably useful – I had considered it was about time to see if my false ears were working as well as they could. I would probably do something about that after we closed.

The letter that the hospital people sent to me told me that they were changing things, which was translated as not providing an ear 'ole service ever again. I would be

'discharged' from hospital care and transferred to a new provider to start a 'new hearing aid pathway'. This alarmed me greatly. I have never had a pathway for my hearing aids. Why did I need one now? The letter asked me to complete a survey so that the hospital could assess my needs, which seemed odd since they wanted to discharge me.

Even more oddly, the hospital would continue to tend to my needs provided that I had no needs to be attended to. If my hearing had not changed, I did not need new false ears or did the existing ones need repair, they were happy to carry on as usual. I think that means they have a few batteries left they need to get rid of before shutting down completely.

I realise that this all sound pretty grim; another sector of the hospital people being franchised out to the private sector but it is actually worse than that. I was at first heartened by the fact that I now could have my false ears seen to in Penzance. Sadly, there are only two listed suppliers, one is a recognised supplier of cheap spectacles with a dubious quality record and the other is my erstwhile supplier of spectacles that I fell out with when they sold me overly expensive and unnecessary lenses for my driving glasses.

I had a quick conversation with a private supplier of the service who would make my ears work if I left a kidney behind in lieu of payment. Putting a megaphone on the counter is looking like a serious option.

The Missus had a busy day. Early, she stood by in case Mother needed help with an electrician that had arrived to check the house wiring for her and then headed into town for fuel for the truck and to collect a fish order. I had decided, given the downturn in trade that we would have to suspend our fish orders because of being unable to make minimum order with the supplier. Unfortunately, I forgot to tell the Missus. She then went on to collect some 'red' diesel from our supplier in St Just.

The rules surrounding red diesel, the slightly discounted fuel for industry, have changed and those without farms, boats or other allowed industries are no longer permitted to purchase it. We, given that we have The Farm, regardless of its small scale are eligible but the Missus was refused service the last time she went. I had a conversation with them and discovered that we needed to fill out a form with them and all would be well, which it was today when she collected fuel for the tractor.

I was assured that she would return to town later to purchase a quantity of curry from our favourite curry place there. I was quite looking forward to it but when she discovered that it was late o'clock when she returned from her errands, plans changed. Ear 'oles and curry, two disappointments in a day was almost too disappointing to bear. There was no consoling me, so I dredged through our accounting records to see how much we had spent on wine with our wine supplier. That made me feel so much better.

October 3rd – Monday

The darkness of the morning and having very little to do is becoming quite a problem. I do not want to hang around upstairs where the bleddy hound will hear me and want to get out and there is nothing to do downstairs – or at least not very much. I have resolved to take an extra half an hour in bed on gymnasium days to ease the problem. On non-gymnasium days I take time to make myself more beautiful for my public, which obviously does not take very long but longer than not doing so.

For some reason this morning I could find no impetus to get going. I was going to say a general malaise had settled on me but it was more something had left me than something added. It could have been a reaction to the dreaded lurgi injection, but I was quite certain a blistering session would sort me out and it did. The hardest part was summoning the energy to take myself down the road in the first place.

I was trying to make up my mind whether it was busy or not. I think that it was busy in parts, especially through some rather good weather in the morning but by mid afternoon it had started to cloud over. I think that is when the rot set in. We ticked over gently after that which gave me time to order a new CCTV camera for The Farm.

The other camera had given up the ghost. I suspect that the battery was shot and it was not replaceable. We spent a bit more on the camera this time which comes with a better charging unit and a better battery – which is replaceable. There was also more choice on the market, which was helpful. It had taken some time to test out the groundwork – whether we could capture active video streams on our home server, which in theory we now can. We know roughly where it will go, which is a change in location from before but the jury is still out whether it goes on a post – that I will have to erect – or a pole. I had considered using a length of drainpipe filled with concrete because getting hold of a scaffold pole might be difficult, but I have no idea if that is the done thing or not. Whatever we choose, it needs to stand up to a good blow.

Crikey, I had many idle moments in the afternoon and looked up using a plastic pipe filled with concrete. Who knew – other than all those structural engineers out there – that it would be so complicated. What I learned is that the plastic would offer nothing to the strength of the concrete, which was not my intention, but would strengthen the plastic pipe no end, which was. It would, however, be more work than, say, knocking a scaffold pole into the ground and using that. That is probably the preferred option, if I can get hold of one, although probably not the best fit aesthetically. The problem is I think that the Missus will want it and want it now and sticking poles in the ground will not happen for another four weeks. Stayed tuned, dear reader.

Radio Pasty in the morning warned of rain by tea time and they were not wrong. It was exceedingly light rain, more a heavy dampness in the air like you get with mist but without the mist but it was rain nevertheless and arrived shortly before we closed. If you blinked, you probably would have missed it and shortly afterwards the

sun filled the bay as if nothing had happened. It was a splendid sight with the sepia colours painting the cliffs from Carn Olva to Cape Cornwall. The swell across the bay was subtle and the only reason you knew there was any at all was the breaking waves heading for the shore and the host of surfers waiting for them.

Out by the reef that runs from Brisons to Porth Nanven there were little white dots of the ring netters, I guessed, that were responsible for the skanky pilchards on the Harbour beach. I hope they take them all with them this time.

October 2nd – Sunday

It was a morning for full metal jacket waterproofs that was for sure. It was enting down, hardest we have seen it for some time. I think we have had heavier in the recent past but I did not see it, so it does not count.

There were no deliveries to wait for this morning apart from the newspapers and very little topping up of the drinks cabinets, so I was all done in the shop with it still dark outside. I was loathed to take the bleddy hound out before it got a little bit light and was aware that there was a gap in the rain coming shortly. I found some additional things to do to pass the time and headed up to fetch her.

The rain had not eased off as I had expected but could not really wait any longer. By the time I had her harness and lead on, the rain had all but stopped. What a lucky pair we are. She even avoided walking close to the corner of the Lifeboat station where the rainwater was still cascading off the roof. There was a bit of single-mindedness to her progression to the beach and it took a moment to realise that the whiff of skanky sardines was probably still in the air – and on the beach, too. Sure enough, I soon had to follow her about closely ready to pounce when she found one.

I do not recall exactly, but the sun broke through early in the morning. It still looked a bit damp for a while but before long, you would never have known that it was a mucky and wet early part of the day. It was such a sparkling day that it brought out a crowd, similar to yesterday and we had quite a busy time of it for a while, comparatively speaking. It was a slow start, however, with our first customer not surfing until half past nine. There were quite a few on the beach, mostly walking but a few taking to the waters, although I could not see much surfing going on when I looked. Maybe it was not that sort of day.

It did not occur to me that with so few customers that we would have any, erm, complicated transactions, but how wrong could I be. This one tested my diplomacy and ability to find appropriate words in reply that did not sound too patronising. You must understand for the purposes of this illustration that we have two kinds of fridge magnet, a plastic one and a metal one, cheaper and more expensive.

Customer.: “I would like to buy this fridge magnet, please. Here is the money.”

Grumpy Shopkeeper.: “Certainly, but I afraid the proffered funds are insufficient to cover the purchase cost of this product.”

Customer.: “Oh, it says over there that this is the correct money for one of your fridge magnets.”

Grumpy Shopkeeper.: “Ah, it is sufficient for a plastic fridge magnet but, alack and alas, you have chosen a more expensive metal one.”

Customer.: [and here commences the crux of the matter] “Oh, so which ones are the plastic ones, then?”

Grumpy Shopkeeper.: [digging deep into his lexicon of politic customer responses] “They will be the ones that are not made of metal.” [breathes sigh of relief, certain that no further confusion could possibly exist.]

Customer.: “Which ones are those, then?”

Grumpy Shopkeeper. [!] “Erm, they will be the ones that are different from the one you first selected ... erm, and are made of plastic.”

Customer.: [Customer fortuitously picking up a plastic magnet] “What, like this one?”

Grumpy Shopkeeper. [wrapping magnet and taking proffered funds as quickly as was polite] “Yes, just like that one, goodbye.”

Happily, the remainder of the day ran relatively without issue. We found that we had ordered just about the right number of pasties and we did not run out of anything else either. That may not be exactly correct tomorrow because I misjudged the sales of brown bread and we will be deficient tomorrow.

I made the error of leaving one of our grocery orders for the next day until I got upstairs. This invites the Missus to add things, which are sometimes less than specific, like coriander. How much do you want? Well, what do they do it in? I have no idea. It is not something we order regularly. Well ask. It is an answering machine. Get what sounds right - ! And then there is cob nuts. Who asks for cob nuts anymore? I have no idea what will arrive in our box tomorrow morning, but it will be fun finding out, I am sure.

October 1st – Saturday

The day turned out a bit milder than yesterday, I noticed. The bleddy hound and I were down on the Harbour beach in the middle of the day and I neglected to bring a jacket but it was comfortably warm there in the sun. What was more of a problem is that it was littered with skanky sardines, evidence of some ring netting going on in the bay. The bleddy hound found them irresistible despite the fact she has a mild tummy upset thanks to some medication she is on. I spent our time there dragging her off them.

There was too much tide down there in the morning for the fish to be any trouble, if they were there at all. It was also not clear what sort of day that we would be having, either, as there had been a sprinkling of rain when I put the shop display out earlier. We ended up with a bit of everything with the occasional light shower drifting in

across the bay under a much kinder westerly airflow. There were some decent sunny spells, too, like the one we were part of down on the beach.

The sudden appearance of sunshine brought us a much welcome increase in the number of visitors. It had been a pretty slim week all told but I was informed this morning that a few more holiday lets were occupied from last night. This was apparent from the number of people buying newspapers first thing, so hopefully a better week altogether in prospect.

Still, it was not so busy as to deter me from spending some money. The Missus and I agreed that the current arrangement for hiding away cigarettes like we are supposed to, is a pain in the rear end. They are in a cupboard under the pasty warmer in boxes bent to the purpose and difficult to see into or get things out of. We have put up with this makeshift arrangement for some years, so it has taken some time for the Missus' forbearance to crack.

I had visualised what we could do as a replacement that met with approval and as luck would have it, I happened upon the very thing, a tower of cigarette deep drawers on castors, by chance. I had deferred purchasing them at the time because we were busy and we could not implement the change until we were closed. In the idle moments since then, it struck me that the units I had seen might become unavailable if I left it too long, so I looked again today.

It was just as well that I did because the unit was being actively marketed as the company's 'best seller', so I thought I had best buy them sooner rather than later. There is an additional drawer set that we need for some of the other items that live in the cupboard, so I went looking for that as well. There will need to be some clever space sharing going on in the cupboard as we also have a network storage unit in there as well. There is nothing quite like a bit of a challenge and those are beginning to accumulate weeks in advance of our closing the shop. There is nothing quite like a bit of planning ahead when there is a bit of a challenge going on.

Before I got bored enough to start buying things, I made to wrap up the stamps swap out with the Royal Mail. I had found an appropriate envelope and printed out the labels and it was while I was doing this that a customer asked for a stamp that we keep towards the back of our stamp file. It turned out to be a timely intervention because I discovered another 83 high value stamps lurking in a page that I had missed yesterday while amassing the stamps that needed to be changed. We are now close to £500 of stamps that we will struggle to use because of their denominations, which range from 2p, through various £1 and somethings to £1.70 that were the remnants of last year's international stamps as indeed they all were. I might include a plea with the form we will send back to ask if we can get the equivalent value in first and second class. Maybe it is worth a try.

The time to get going up that hill crept up on me without me noticing. I had not been behind the wheel of the truck in a couple of months either, so perhaps I should have

had a refresher course before I left. I got there without incident – and without map – and found that there was a queue out the door of the surgery. I do not think it would have mattered one iota what time I arrived – and I was early – because it was a production line and as long as you were registered for it, you got your dreaded lurgi injection whatever place in the queue you had found yourself in. I was rather alarmed when the lady who had delivered the injection told me not to drive afterwards. She must have read my look of aghastness because she swiftly added, ‘for fifteen minutes, not ever’ and I breathed a sigh of relief.

The Missus had completed most of the closing sequence in the shop by the time I got back. It was she who pointed out that no one would be able to tell if I had been brave or not because I did not come back with a badge like I did the first time out. I know the NHS are trying to save money, but some things are important.

I had to improvise a bit for my tea this evening. I had an order for some fish that was supposed to be picked up on Thursday but the customer called to say that she was now not going to make it. Mother and I had consumed the hake I had defrosted last night which just left the ling. There was only one thing to do with that and that was to have an impromptu curry. The Missus had clams and ham; the Missus hates fish (not seafood) – and curry.

