

DIARY 2022/23

September 30th – Friday

The bleddy hound forced the issue about going to the beach this morning. There was a pocket handkerchief size bit available to run on and, besides, there were two young ladies in swimsuits taking a dip and if it was alright for them, it was alright for her.

It was pretty grey in the morning and a spot or two of rain came through before I headed for the gymnasium shortly before ten o'clock. The day had been earmarked by the forecasters for heavy rain from late morning and that we should all build arks or perhaps rent one from the many ark rental companies that sprang up overnight. Naturally, although we did have some rain, it was a pitiful example of the weather type and should have been ashamed of itself. Ark renters were rubbing their hands with glee with their watertight, – well, you would hope so - no refund clauses. Most of the persistent rain went north of us leaving us with bands of rain several hours apart.

Our robin was back almost as soon as I opened the doors of the shop. He did not stay long but came back in the early afternoon and made himself comfortable in the store room again. I was not too bothered as he lets himself out when he feels like it. It is only if he is still here at last knockings it is a problem as I cannot shut him in. I should be grateful, I suppose, that he is not a gull or a gannet.

After I had gymmed and had my breakfast I came back to the shop again to take up where I left off. There had been a few people around before I headed off, last minute present buying and the ilk but after the rain started and even after it had stopped again, The Cove was deserted. I did have robin to converse with, but it was a bit one-sided and I think even he got bored and beggared off.

Of the few customers we had, there was one very important one in the afternoon who delivered some surprising and pertinent news. She came in to purchase some stamps – occasioning a financial loss, let us not forget – but in doing so she informed me that the Royal Mail were discontinuing the validity of all stamps without a barcode on them from end of January.

This initially caused me some concern. We have a huge pile of stamps that were once used for sending postcards to foreign places but had been made redundant by successive increases in price. The Royal Mail had, so far, refused to let us return these stamps and thus we had been using them for the occasion when customers had asked for odd postage amounts. Their value amounts to several hundreds of pounds. We suddenly faced losing their limited use altogether.

I sought solace in the Internet and looked up the demise of ordinary stamps as I had erstwhile heard nothing of this move by the Post Office. It was the first thing to leap to my screen and I avidly read that the Post Office were offering an amnesty on old

stamps and would replace with stamps of a similar value. I had rather hoped that they would have taken the total value and replaced them with first and second class stamps as compensation. That was not to be but at least we would not suddenly face a loss of £300 or more in value of stamps, even if they were next to useless.

I downloaded the form that needed to be completed and assessed the stamps that we have tucked away. The counting and calculating value did not take long but then I read on in the long list of instructions. Could we please, ever so nicely, group the stamps in ascending order of value in plastic see-through bags of no more than 50. "They should be batched by the stamp value and colour in clear plastic bags of no more than 50 stamps per bag", a statement that was perfectly understandable. Then they added, "Stamp numbers of less than 50 should be collated together in value order [not caring about colour this time, note] and placed in a clear plastic bag". Had they not said that in the previous sentence or was there a subtle difference between 'no more than' and 'less than'? Furthermore, the form had a specific box for "Number of bags of 50 stamps", so was I to split denominations so that I could make up bags of 50 or was I supposed to keep stamps of equal value and colour in bags together – unless they numbered more than 50 and only then split them. I will send them back and hope for the best.

I had a lucky run with robin this evening and it left the store room of its own volition well before closing. I put the curtain up across the doorway, which on its own is insufficient as the clever little robin scoots underneath, so I put some baskets in the way in case he came back. This then gave me a problem for the remainder of the day because I could not easily get in and out of the store room. That little bird is more troublesome than I ever could have imagined.

We had a few customers drop by in the final few hours but closing at four o'clock had looked very attractive at the time. Only in extremis have we closed outside our stated hours as I believe that people who have taken the time to examine the shop hours and turn up within those, should be respected. The quiet time can be quite dangerous as I get tempted to buy things but today, I picked up the telephone instead.

I called our medical clinic as they have been bugging me to come in so that they can drain me of blood. I have no idea what they do with it because the last time I went, in the early part of the year, they took an armful, and I never heard another thing. The first call came in the middle of the summer and since then I have had notes, texts and threats made against my person to turn up. I thought that I had best arrange something before they sent the boys around.

I now have an appointment for later in the week but before I went they also tapped me for my next dreaded lurgi injection. No time like the present, I am in there tomorrow at five o'clock and I must gird my loins, not for fear of needles but going up the hill for the first time in months.

September 29th – Thursday

Big dark clouds followed us around the block today. The rain radar suggested that they were not rain clouds but I wore my waterproof because they still looked like they were. That breeze from wherever it is coming from today just keeps coming. Surely it must run out sometime.

We were given to believe that today would be filled with sunny spells and had been earmarked as one of the better ones this week but, frankly, it was better yesterday. Our visitors must have thought so too because they stayed away in droves, and we had but a trickle of customers here and there throughout the day. I have fallen into a reasonable rhythm with the bakery order, which will no doubt catch me out now that I have said it. We have not needed any of our daily grocery or gift food deliveries at all this week, which is no surprise.

What did come as a surprise was our solar panel supplier telling us yesterday that the panel that they recommended and quoted for would not be available until the first quarter next year. Given that they were supposed to turn up next month to install them, that came as quite a shock. I prepared quite a sharp response but softened it before I sent it off as things are never quite how they appear in written messages. Sure enough, in the response to my response, the salesman told me that they were victims of their supplier who had underdelivered on their promises to start with.

The thing that I am struggling with is the salesman repeatedly asking me what size system we want. If I knew that I would have bought the kit and done it myself. I rather thought the reason that I went to them as experts was that they could tell me what I needed – and for me to knock the excess 20 percent off it. I did try and telephone, but they are 'experiencing a higher number of calls than usual' so I will send a message, which is asking for trouble. We struggle on.

Must be the time of year but we have our tame robin back again. He has been in a few times over the last couple of days but today he upped his game. It seemed that every time I looked around he was just there in the corner of my vision. I evicted him three times and he left of his own volition a few more but each time he slipped in under the radar.

He is a clever little beast and hops in across the threshold of the first electric sliding door in The Cove. My vision is obscured by the counter, so the first I know about it is when he goes a bit higher or hops into view on his way to the store room, which appears to be his favourite place. I might understand it if he was into any of the foodstuffs in there, but he simply sits on a box and fluffs himself up. It might also be because it is next to impossible to evict him from there because I cannot get behind him.

There was no Lifeboat launch in the evening as the sea state was not the best. We had hoped to do an exercise with the Coastguard helicopter which has not happened

for a while but that had been called off too. There was a gathering to receive the latest updates on Lifeboat business and to set out some of our cables for inspection tomorrow but it was a short evening.

Before I went over, I had to stop by the shop to evict the robin again. He had settled in the store room at closing time and refused to come out, so I turned the lights off on him and closed the shop. He had foolishly come out of the store room when we returned and he is easier to get out from the shop. I suspect this show will run and run. Who will rid me of this turbulent sparrow?

September 28th – Wednesday

It was not looking that great again this morning as we took our tour of this end of The Cove but there again, it was barely light. There were some flecks of rain in wind, which was a little reduced from yesterday as was the ferociousness of the sea state. It was still coming over the Harbour wall but only at the near end and might just have been someone with a big bucket on the other side.

There were some noticeable showers through the morning but there were also signs of breaks in the cloud and some brightness flooding through. Those showers came and went through the day, but they were so light at times you would scarcely notice them. It was still unseasonably cool, or at least so Radio Pasty told us this morning. I am not sure that I would have known had they not told me, I just thought it was not warm. Still, we have a ways to go yet before the little boys' trousers need to be replaced.

I had not really expected much from today and was not disappointed. The bakery order has been slashed to next to nothing but we did have some dairy delivered early on, so someone is buying something. At this time of year it gets a little awkward when we run out of just one thing from a range from a particular supplier. It is difficult to call in just one item especially when there are minimum order levels for some of them.

Since it was so quiet, I indulged myself with some technical investigations regarding a new CCTV camera and recording data away from The Farm. Such services are available for a price from third parties, but we have an intelligent storage device here that is technically able to provide it too. I just needed to determine how to make it work. Setting up the facility on the clever box was easy as it was well documented and did not require my knowhow. The difficult bit was finding out how to let an outside user in to access it.

I had hit a brick wall last night and gave up frustrated but went at it again this morning with renewed vigour. It took a while to find the key bit of information on the Internet, where anything can be found if you know where to look and are prepared to have some patience trying different search terms. It took a couple of attempts but the last was a sudden breakthrough that became a matter of some elation. We can now

have our choice of CCTV camera at The Farm providing it had a configurable facility to send data to a remote server.

I managed to slip away to the gymnasium in the morning and I am sure it was that which sharpened my intellect for the technical challenge a little later. Of course, it might have been the locally smoked duck breast that I was forced to have for my breakfast because it had failed to sell in the shop before its sell-by date. Sadly, I shall have to force some down tomorrow as well as there was far too much to consume in a single sitting. That still leaves one breast that will have to go into the freezer for another occasion when I will have to slum it.

It was only by chance that I remembered to cast a critical look down on the big beach after last night's stormy sea. Although the tides are fairly big at present, there was still quite a bit of water covering the upper reaches of the beach, partly due to the wind and partly because I missed low water by a couple of hours. Nevertheless, there did not seem to be any change at all in the shape of the beach or the amount of sand. For all those who had hoped against reason that the heavy waves would have brought sand back to cover the exposed rocks, a huge disappointment, no doubt.

Just one last note and this is for L&L who live north of Camborne in a place called Scotland. We received your lovely letter this morning thanking us for the small bags we sent and you are most welcome. Thank you for the photographs. We hardly recognised those girls in the pictures, you have grown so much. Take care, all.

September 27th – Tuesday

It did not seem quite as blowy this morning as it did yesterday. I had heard it on occasion in the night howling away, but it had lost some of its ferocity by morning time. We were walking into it as we crossed the car park having been chased off the beach again by the tide, so I also fancied the wind had come around a bit more to the west again.

Radio Pasty promised rain in the afternoon but as we gazed about during the morning, the sky had the appearance of being about to rain at any minute. It held that look all day as far as I could tell and for some while during the early part of the afternoon and again in the late afternoon, it fulfilled that promise.

Naturally, all that grey and brooding did nothing for our business day. The lack of people on the street before we opened no doubt did us a favour as the cash and carry delivery arrived ten minutes before. The driver was pretty switched on and between us we had the contents of the van inside the shop before it was opening time. The pasties arrived shortly after and all deliveries were complete fifteen minutes after we opened. We do love it when a plan comes together.

Sadly, not all plans are so well behaved. After a couple of years of use the security camera up at The Farm gave up the ghost. It was very likely the battery that had died, refusing to charge up with the solar panel. Not very cleverly, it is not a replaceable item in the unit. Summer intervened and now we are looking again and this time for a more robust and fit for purpose model.

Things have moved on in a couple of years and the number of solar powered discrete units available on the market has increased. However, missing from all of them is a sensible remote recording option. It is absolutely no use having all the recordings sitting in the camera on an SD card with pictures of a villain on it if the villain has nicked the camera. It seems somewhat fundamental to me but the option to record elsewhere is ominously missing from all the units I have looked at so far. I am looking at setting up our own 'cloud' area to store the data. The setting up is very straightforward but the getting access to it from the Internet is proving the difficult bit. This might be a long haul, I suspect.

At least it gave me something to do because shopkeeping, grumpy or otherwise, was off the menu today. I dabbled with the grocery deliveries and managed to make a bit of a dent in it, but this is the Missus' forte and I would hate to deprive her of it. As if to demonstrate, she came down to give me a break in the early afternoon and when I returned an hour later, it was done and the store room reorganised.

I continued my research during the afternoon as there were few customers to serve. The sea had other ideas and the increasing noise and tempo of crashing waves disturbed my train of thought. Later, as we sat around the table having our tea we watched in fascination at the spectacle. Waves were thumping over the Harbour wall in huge barrages of water and the whole bay was boiling with angry sea. It will be interesting to see if it has made any changes to the shape of the big beach as it is the first serious water we have had since the last serious water, which seems long ago. There is something to look forward to and if anyone out there knows anything about ftp hosting, I would be glad to hear it.

September 26th – Monday

If nothing else, our luck with the rain seems to be holding out. There was plenty around first thing but the bleddy hound and I slipped down to the Harbour beach untouched by it all. What we did not manage to avoid was the punishing wind that somehow ramps up at the corner of the Lifeboat station nearly bowling us over. It is right in our faces there but down on the beach it was more a westerly affair.

It took a while for me to look out over the bay. This was partly due to the intense shower that followed us home and came crashing against the windows. This had two effects, the first being that it obscured the view of anything and secondly, after it had passed through, had cleaned the windows so that the view we had was crystal clear. It did cross my mind that with the slippage of our roof project there is very likely to

come a time when there is no window there at all when the wintry squalls come blowing in. It quite made me shiver.

There was a fair amount of shivering today. That wind was incessant and every now and again it would curl in through the first electric sliding door in The Cove and give me a quick lashing. From near due west it had veered to the north, northwest, a very unkind direction for The Cove, and filled the bay and as far as you could see with bright white caps. Someone expressed surprise that the Scillonian had sailed into it on its scheduled run this morning. While the sea looked pretty stirred up and forbidding, it was all wind driven and there was not a great deal of swell with it.

Here on shore, the wind put off most of our pleasure seekers and left The Cove to those seeking other entertainment, mainly consisting of walking. Those we met were all dressed up for the trail and seeking pasties and refreshment as well as the occasional postcard. We also sold a good many more stamps than we are used to, which gives cause to a minor irritation.

I have known for some time that we do not make any money from selling stamps. I have also suspected that if they are paid for by payment card, we make even less. It was only this year, however, since the change in prices that I was pretty sure we were actually making a loss. Once, we would not accept card payment for stamps alone, but they have reached such a price now and alongside the proliferation of card use, it has become difficult to adhere to such a rule.

Anyway, it was only recently that I managed to make time to look more closely at it and the pricing is worse than I feared. The Post Office applied different levels of discount to different stamps, the worst by far being second class where the discount is less than 2 percent. It actually costs us money to sell stamps to people paying by card. What jolly good eggs we are. Of course, we could choose not to sell stamps but since we sell postcards it would be difficult not to and something of an inconvenience to those buying them. At present, we do not sell that many stamps without other goods that help mitigate the loss, but I feel a letter to the Post Office coming on in a quiet moment of winter.

The wind decreased as the day drew on. It had peaked at around 50 miles per hour at around ten o'clock. The sea that had looked pretty benign apart from the stirring up the wind had achieved had slowly transformed towards the middle of the afternoon. By shop closing time, quiet a swell had developed and came tumbling over the Harbour wall at times. I spotted one surfer out by the front of the sandbar but I suspect it was less because it was good surf and more 'because I can'.

There were a few people pottering about in the last hour of opening but I doubt that we would have been missed had we closed early. One lady had missed the last St Just bus, which is just before four o'clock. She argued that the timetable listed another two buses after that, which is true but they both terminate at Crows-an-wra, a small hamlet, which is just plain bizarre – unless you live in Crows-an-wra in which

case you have cracking little bus service, thank you very much. We were trying to reason what happened to the bus after that. Even if it headed straight to Penzance, could it not pick people up on the way or maybe divert via St Buryan where some travellers might be grateful.

With hardly a soul stirring outside it is time to close the doors on today, I reckon.

September 25th – Sunday

Had it been high summer I think we might have been expecting a bit of a scorcher judging from the sky we had in the morning. In fact, the morning did not turn out too badly at all with sunshine and a drop in the ferocity of the northerly breeze. We will not talk about the afternoon.

As seems to be the habit, things were pretty slow during the morning. Our new visitors chose to come out for a sniff about toward the end of the morning and into the afternoon. They all got the hang of it by about the middle of the afternoon and formed a seething mass of about half a dozen all at one at one stage. Fortunately, we are used to such crowds and fed them pasties in a bigger abundance that I could possibly have hoped for.

The pasty eaters were not the only ones having a good time. During the morning our surfers crowded into the water out towards North Rocks. The breeze was certainly kinder as was the direction at the time. There was smaller group later in the day, too, but by then the best of it had gone and the wind had backed to the northwest.

Despite the change in numbers of visitors, I noticed a thinning of our grocery shelves as I wandered our aisled today. I had already surmised that the Missus would have to trip out to Hayle and our closest cash and carry during the week to top up some key items that we could not get elsewhere. When we looked more closely, there was sufficient missing, even with just five weeks left to run of shop opening, to warrant a grocery delivery. It will almost certainly be the last this year unless we suddenly get a rush of unexpected proportions.

A covering of cloud had rolled in during the afternoon which took the edge off of things a bit. Heading towards closing time, however, the low and heavy clouds drifted away leaving some high level cloud still with us but with plenty of gaps of blue and brightness. The increased breeze encouraged a couple of wing surfers out on their clever hydrofoil boards, cutting across the bay at speed. I saw one come to grief yesterday, fortunately not at full speed, but it looked like it must have hurt some as he hit the water with quite a clatter and with no stopping distance at all. I recognised one of them today, it was the chap who has been practising in the Harbour on calmer, windless days. It certainly looks like all that practise paid off.

We spent Sunday tea time around the table with Mother watching the gannets diving on a shoal out towards Brisons. Several knowledgeable people have told us that fish

are in abundance in our inshore waters recently. No one seems to know quite why but the tuna are having a field day. There were a couple of anglers out at the end of the Harbour wall who did not seem to be there very long at all. Perhaps the tuna had eaten all the fish.

September 24th – Saturday

The bleddy hound and I were super lucky this morning that we did not get wet. There was a line of heavy and vicious showers heading down from the north and we managed to get out between them for our visit to the beach. I largely avoided being dripped on when I brought in the deliveries for the morning as well, which pleased me no end.

It remained blustery from the north for the rest of the day but the rain had passed in that early morning period and did not return. This was particularly good news for one local boy who was getting married in the afternoon and having a bit of a shindig in a marquee erected in the top car park in the evening. In nearly twenty years, I have only met him a handful of times as he spends most of his life abroad driving posh yachts for rich people. We wish him well.

The northerly did nothing for the surf scene, either, although it did not stop a few going out for a try. The whole bay was disordered and choppy, which made me wonder why anyone would want to venture out in a small rowing boat. Two lads set off from the Harbour and I watched their progress with interest. They were thrown around a fair bit and I thought that it could not be comfortable or in the least pleasurable. I do hope they caught the fish they were there for to make the effort worthwhile.

The mere fact that I had time to watch rowing boats heading into the choppy waters might demonstrate that we were not the busiest we have ever been. It did nothing to resolve our over-pastied situation, which was a huge disappointment but not really a surprise. I suspect that all the smart money was sitting on the beach in Porthcurno in a bit of warm sunshine and sheltered from the breeze and who could blame them.

It was bound to happen, many of the Boat Crew were up at the wedding, we had learnt that we were covering for Penlee Lifeboat, which was off service and a visitor had just asked when the last Lifeboat launch was. One of those alone was sufficient to temp providence let alone all three.

At half past three o'clock the Lifeboat pagers went off for a call to a catamaran off Pendeen somewhere. They had problems with sails and, while making passage, were being driven into shore. The crew on the boat was thin and we on the shore were short but we managed to get the boat off in a timely manner and it made good and probably uncomfortable progress across the bay. We all reasoned that this would be a tow back to Newlyn and estimated that we would not be recovering the

boat until at least nine o'clock, so we closed the station doors and retired to watch things unfold.

There had been few visitors around to watch the spectacle and even fewer in the shop to kick out when the pagers went off. The few that I did return to conclude their transactions, which was good of them and I listened in to the VHF broadcasts and watched the progress on the marine traffic website. I sent a quick note out on our group message app to let any available helpers for the shore know what was going on.

As I watched the progress of the Lifeboat on the computer, I was bemused that it seemed to be heading further and further north and had passed Pendeen and was going past Zennor. A few minutes later and it was still heading north and when I checked the speed, realised that it was towing. I discovered later that they had found the catamaran much further north than reported and so it made sense to tow it to St Ives rather than Newlyn. This did us all a favour given our reduced numbers and the boat would be back with us much earlier than at first thought.

We quickly recalibrated and I called muster at the station for half past five o'clock. A good tight team set up for short slip recovery, which, given the sea state, was far preferable to being at the end of the long slip in choppy waves in the dark. Our discrete team execute what was clearly a textbook recovery up the short slip at around ten minutes to six o'clock and were home for our teas by half past. We are, after all, a very driven, very excellent Shore Crew.

Oh, and a very happy wedding anniversary to the Aged Parents, which I failed to acknowledge with a card. I cannot say the number of years, although the Missus appears to think it is fewer than my age.

September 23rd – Friday

We entertained an America person this morning asking for postcard stamps to the USA. We were happy to oblige, of course, and having commented on the stamp format with its code down the side I told him about the ability to attach a video via the app to send to the recipient. He was as bemused as anyone else I have told about the feature, completely aware that a video could be sent for free to a recipient with a telephone capable of running the Post Office app anyway. After a short conversation about how the boffins at the Post Office might have thought this facility worthy of time, cost and effort, we have, I think nailed it.

The boss of the Post Office visits the design brainstorming session for the new stamps. He is bristling with excitement having woken in the middle of the night with a brilliant eureka moment idea. 'How's this,' he tells an attendant group of underlings, 'we write a computer program that allows the public to send a private video message along with the letter', then looks around the room expectantly for looks of amazement and acceptance. We reckon he saw the amazement, possibly some

forced grins of enthusiasm, probably not Brian poking Samantha, new girl, in the ribs as she was about to say 'but can't you already ...' then a mumbling of 'great idea, boss', 'getting onto it right away, boss', echo around the room. He almost certainly did not see the group forehead slapping the moment he walked from the room.

There. Solved.

Gosh, let me just get this out of the way a second. A couple who just spent a few minutes walking around the shop looking for something.

Couple: "You don't do hot drinks?"

Grumpy Shopkeeper: "No. Just cold ones and hot pasties."

Couple: "Oh, where can you get a coffee around here, then?"

Grumpy Shopkeeper: "You could try next door with Sennen Cove Café written above the shop front. The one you just walked past with people outside drinking coffee and tea."

Couple: "Oh, is that a café?"

The morning was transformed from the night before and even the day before for that matter. There was no rain and only a few clouds in the sky but it was much chiller than yesterday and it had a very autumnal feel about it. The bleddy hound called the shots this morning and we headed to the beach before I had been down to the shop. It does not really matter very much which way around I do it but it helps if it is at least a little light when we go down there.

Yesterday, that was even more important, although it did not work out. Of all the strange requests we get the latest was up there with the strangest. A lady called out of the blue to ask for help. She was preparing a lecture and needed a rock showing orthoclase crystals, which I took to be what I call quartz, the white crystals often visible in granite. She used to live in Pendeen and had left her samples behind. Could I help?

Always up for a challenge ... alright, sometimes, mmm, occasionally when I am in the right mood up for a challenge, I set to it using our trip to the Harbour beach as cover. Unfortunately, while she is usually keen to follow where I lead, the bleddy hound was having none of it yesterday morning. I resolved to have a look under the slipway after we launched the Lifeboats, another reason why I elected to launch the Inshore boat that would put me on the beach at the appropriate time.

I found some suitable candidate rocks in short order and later in the evening took photographs to send the lady so that she could peruse the samples and first, confirm that was what she was looking for, which fortunately it was and secondly, which of the samples best suited her needs. I messed up the order of photographs a bit but she found her way through them and selected one of the rocks so that I could send it to her. It is, as I write, winging its way to her door in the bag of a postperson

grumbling under the additional weight in the sack of otherwise innocuous and lightweight letters. The impossible we do at once, etcetera.

Despite the upgrade in the weather for the day, sort of, it was a particularly quiet one. Whether it was the weather, which had become much cooler and accentuated by the northerly breeze, or just everyone had gone home early, we will never know. I do know that we will be overrun with pasties by the weekend and we will run out of white bread. We just love this time of year for ordering things.

Without any excitement in the shop, I was beginning to regret skipping the gymnasium in the morning. I had ducked out so that the Missus could head into town on a number of errands in the morning and still get up to The Farm in the afternoon. I decided that I would have to do some rigorous reading in the evening to make up for it but was not exactly sure that would work. I might do some rigorous beer drinking while I considered it.

If I thought that it was quiet during the traditionally busy part of the day, the last hour of opening was dire. A couple of times I stood by the doorway and did not see a soul in the street in either direction. The only movement was cars leaving from the Harbour car park. Truly, we have been spoiled over the last couple of years when even this time of year was buoyant and we shall have to get used to the new order of things.

One thing that thankfully has not changed, indeed it has been refreshed with our recharged stock is Friday night is fishy night with Mother. One of the errands the Missus had to run was dropping the insulated boxes back to our fish man in Penzance. There she picked up a couple of lumps of ray wing, going for a song. Mother does like a bit of ray and it is not something I ordinarily order. The Missus, too, had some of that frozen 'pretend' fish that comes in a box in the frozen food aisle. She will eat that because 'it does not taste like fish', a concept that eludes me. The Missus hates fish.

September 22nd – Thursday

Well, the day started out all right, it was just that the cloud rolled in by the middle of the day and introduced some rain towards the end of day, which was disappointing – and very wet.

It was far from disappointing as we headed for the Harbour beach having completed a much reduced set of chores in the morning. I am contemplating not getting up quite so early, but I am torn. The extra half an hour gives me leeway to get any chores done without rushing and if there are no chores, extra time for a cup of tea with my feet up. This morning it gave me time on the beach with the bleddy hound without having to chivvy her along. She did not need it, but it was there nonetheless.

There was definitely no rushing our customers during the morning who had really not got going at all. Even in the afternoon there was not the usual buzz around the place and the café tables opposite were sparsely occupied throughout. It gave me the opportunity to do an audit of our hooded sweatshirts that had been due since the tail end of August when I was struggling to find the colours in sizes that were requested. I had placed them in the boxes in reasonable order, so they should have been easy to find. When I had finished the count, there were no sizes completely absent but we are down to one in some cases, so I was just in time – with the count, at least. The order and delivery takes a few weeks but we should be good for half term and online purchases during the winter. Did I tell you, dear reader, that we have an online shop nestled next to the online Diary, just a click away in case you were wondering.

One task that I had set my mind to today was to speak with the planning consultant regarding our roof project. I was concerned and frustrated that the scope of the work kept expanding and the commencement seemed to be slipping. In all the discussions that we had with the builder, the weather played a major part in relation to the scaffolding particularly, the longer it being left the worse the expectation of the weather.

Our conversation was lengthy but reassuring. We are not using a consultancy for fun, it removes much uncertainty and, especially, risk from the project and we are pleased to have this company. The long and the short of it was, and came as no surprise, that the current roof structure, indeed, the structure of the whole first floor is jerry-built. Modern building regulations require some changes that we could not get away with and we are facing a complete rebuild of the front half of the flat. This includes part of the kitchen and bedroom that we had earmarked as sacrosanct. We may well need to find alternative accommodation for the period, which thankfully will now occur outside shop opening time. An additional cost to add to the budget, which actually does not yet exist. To quote or paraphrase a popular film of the 1980s, it looks like I picked the wrong week to give up drinking heavily.

The bay that had been so quiet over the last few days had started to wake up. Drawing up to high water, the shore break that starts at the sandbar was sending white water all the way to the beach. Out along the cliffs, little plumes of crashing white waves mounted the cliffs around Aire Point, Creagle and all the way along Nanjulian Cliff. The wind had gone westerly at some point and some rain had already fallen, with the swell in the bay picking up all the while, it was heading for an interesting evening.

As last week, Lifeboat training abutted closely the closing of the shop but with rain falling I had no customers and little ordering to do, so this week I was early. This meant that I was able to bags eye driving of the Tooltrak to launch the Inshore boat. I did this on the pretext that I wanted to try out a new method for high water launching but I had been watching the increasing swell all afternoon and was well aware it would be, erm, interesting at the bottom of the long slipway for recovery. It took a

while for my colleagues to understand that I had played a blinder and that age and treachery still triumph over youth and enthusiasm.

I had reckoned without the heavy rain that persisted into the evening and found much of my time standing out in it. The Inshore boat also arrived back well ahead of the big boat and I was able to complete the task of tucking it away and returning to the boathouse to help there. Despite the swell, it looked pretty much like a textbook recovery from where I was standing in the shelter at the top of the long slipway. We were a bit earlier than last week, too, and were all finished off by just after eight o'clock. We are, after all, a very efficient, very excellent Shore Crew.

September 21st – Wednesday

Before anything else happens, this photograph was supposed to adorn your daily Diary yesterday to demonstrate the colours of the sandbar. Here it is, a little delayed.

The colours of the morning sky were to be wondered at this morning. The photograph is not omitted, I just do not have one and the spectacle was so short-lived it had gone by the time I went up from the shop to fetch the bleddy hound. I bumped into bleddy hound's best pal the instant I reached the foot of our stairs and her walker who had been out in the dark of the morning wandering the hills. The walker is also constrained by shop opening hours as she works in one on Penzance. We squeeze in our dog walking when we can.

By the time I got out with the bleddy hound, the colours in the sky had softened to a light blue. There was not a cloud in sight to reflect the glory of the sunrise, but it was a perfect morning nevertheless. There was a bit more movement in the water and one of our surfing friends said later that it was just right for the more gentile type of surfer, which he is. The air was clear and still and it really did not need the jacket I was wearing that I grabbed mainly for the convenience of more voluminous pockets than were in my shorts.

I had slept well but my get up and go had slowly deserted me as the morning set in. I felt that a blistering session was just the tonic and so it proved to be. The biggest challenge of the enterprise was convincing my body that it was a good idea to get it to move in the direction of the gymnasium. There was some tricky negotiation but it all worked out just dandy in the end and I spent the rest of the day on top of the world.

The day did not seem quite as busy as the day before, though oddly it turned out to be better paid. There was no major piling in of customers in the afternoon and the morning had been quiet as usual. The beach had seemed a little busier, which is understandable given it was the first surf in several days. The poor lambs must have been desperate. The rest of our visitors could really care less, I would say, because it is the time of the season to relax and take a slower pace at life. The sitting around

on the tables opposite with a beer and a sandwich, cake or coffee or all four demonstrates that rather neatly.

It is the time of the season to have a chat with people because there is a little more time for such niceties. Every now and again you strike little nuggets, which brightens up the day no end. This morning, for example, a lady told me that she was heading for Lizard today to visit the places she knew as a child.

She had moved here during the war with her mother because her father was otherwise engaged. They lived in a gypsy caravan and later stayed in the cable hut at Kennack Sands alongside the cable that runs out to Spain from there. I asked if she had written down her experiences, which thanks to the confinement of lockdowns, she had. I suggested she deposit her story with Kresen Kernow, the Cornish archive, and she looked surprised, but I assured her that such memories were important and that the archive had conducted all kinds of projects to capture the memories of ordinary lives. Having read some of the memories there and those scribbled by the Aged Parent of his childhood and life through National Service they are filled with interest and perspective that broader national histories miss.

It is not just matters related to Cornwall that we get to hear. A lady was buying some fudge to send to her daughter in Canada. I questioned whether such things were allowed, and she assured me that it was things like dairy products that were not, which was a shame because they were not readily available there. It was my turn to be surprised. Apparently, cheese is remarkably rare and exceedingly expensive, particularly in Ontario where the daughter lives. I was even more surprised that it was unavailable in such a metropolis. By the time she left I was already considering my options of buying a dairy farm in Ontario or perhaps setting up an illicit cheese smuggling operation and I wondered if that might be a cheesewring. The Diary once had a correspondent in the Winnipeg and if he is still listening in it would be interesting to see what the availability of cheese was like in a different area.

We apologise to any Canadians reading today as that last paragraph must have been excruciating.

Moving swiftly towards the end of day and the Missus was off twice today on appointments and not one of them was to The Farm. There is less urgent need from the shop perspective to run and restock our shelves. The collection of buckets and spades we have in the shop is barely dented by the sales we have currently, so the Missus is off the hook in that regard. We do have some vegetables still to harvest but few customers to enjoy them and much now goes to the surrounding community including some small runs of bramble, bramble and apple and pomegranate jelly. The latter, obviously, from the good season we have had on our pomegranate trees up at The Farm this year, ahem.

Clearly beer required, dear reader, and an early retirement.

September 20th – Tuesday

I had a rude awakening this morning when the alarm went off. After one day I had already got used to having a lie in. I can appreciate the bleddy hound's position, it was dark and not at all conducive to getting out of bed. I left her there and went downstairs to start the day off. She had got herself out of bed by the time I got back, which I think is a case of FOMO, Fear Of Missing Out, because she was quite happy lying there yesterday until it got light.

We had a good wander around the beach of which there was plenty this morning. The tides have just jumped in the direction of the next spring tide and will soon be trying to squeeze us out again. I was lucky the other morning because I had her on a lead as the tractor was moving about. When we got to the top of the sand she found a large wrasse abandoned there which she would have had. Aged as she is, she still has not learnt that old, skanky fish are not to be eaten.

It seems to be the order of things that we are quiet until at least the middle of the day. Despite the rather lovely morning, heralded by a colourful sky out to the east first thing, our visitors seem to be slow starters this week again. I do not know if they are favouring extended lie ins or just coming from further afield once they have registered the condition of the weather. Our afternoon, particularly the later part of it was very busy today and we had a good couple of hours of continuous flow of customers. This was very welcome after closing our doors to them all yesterday.

The only concession to the surfing community was some ripples in the water across the bay today. So, once again, it was paddleboards and swimming if you wanted to use the water for anything at all. It was pretty good for paddling, too. There are a couple of interesting sandbars at the southern end of the beach and two or three hours either side of high water you could 'walk on water' out a fair way. It also produced the phenomenon of the shore break happening a good 50 meters from the shore and the colours shifted from blue to pale yellow here and there where the sand was highest. It was a pretty view that I could have watched interminably.

After seven months of standing up, my feet need a bit of TLC as you might expect. We are lucky here to have a foot lady who will tend to my every podiatric need and I called her hither last week for a bit of service. After half an hour of cutting, slicing and grinding my feet were good for another long standing. She admonished me for my choice of footwear, sort of strap on flip flops that are most comfortable and close to wearing no footwear at all. While good in a natural sort of way are no good for standing for long periods. I shall have to consider my options for next year.

The woes of roof fixing continue. I am acting as project manager currently, coordinating the various suppliers involved at this stage. The planner has come back to state the rather obvious that I should have seen earlier that the roof raising will have to move further back and involved the spare bedroom and the kitchen. The spare bedroom was to be our sitting room and the only warm room in the flat and the

kitchen, well, it is the kitchen. It is a set back and may mean moving out for a period, which brings a wealth of other issues – and costs - as the business still needs to run, although the project start is slipping closer to the end of the shop open season. Fortunately, I have more time to devote to it now and it looks like I will need to and I have long since let it be a worry to me.

The last half hour of opening is beginning to stretch a tad. It is fearfully quiet and seems to take forever to slip by. I shall have to find some useful endeavour to fill the time, which will naturally incur a flood of customers, so I am looking for a useful endeavour that I do not need to do. The paradox of grumpy shopkeeping.

September 19th – Monday

The bleddy hound, bless her, awarded me a lie in this morning. It is as I suspected only because she hears me going about the flat in the morning that she gets up in the dark anyway. There is not a great deal I can do about that.

The fishing fleet had gone out much earlier in the morning and there were only deep grooves in the sand where the boats made their way to the water. One of the Cover's boats had also managed to cadge a tractor launch it looked like whereas normally they had to pull the boat by hand using a rolling roadway to get their boat afloat. I gave them a hand once and it is not at all easy. I run and hide if I see them both heading that way now. They were not in sight this morning when we got to the beach and neither was anyone else.

It was still the same when I headed for the gymnasium a good hour before the usual 'work' time. There were just three other people on the street and there were none at all on the way back. Perhaps they had also hidden fearful that they might be called upon to carry me home.

As if you needed reminding, dear reader, the shop was closed for the day as were the shops around us. The OS opened at 3pm I understand, and I am not sure about the chip shop but I did see people with take away cups garnered from somewhere. The closures led to a very sedate sort of day, and the numbers of people about were few even at the peak of the day.

Naturally, the weather was the best that we have had for quite a while. When I took the bleddy hound down to the Harbour again in the middle of the day, we discovered that it was warm in the sunshine and I had brought a jacket. There were very few people enjoying the beach with me but quite a few had taken to the water, which was dead calm and serene. The inner bay was dotted with paddleboards and not a few swimmers and snorkelers. It was an almost surreal picture of people aimlessly drifting while elsewhere, the world had come to an end.

My world had not quite come to an end, but I was not at my best for the day after eating something that disagreed with me at breakfast, I determined later on. The

Missus suggested that it was withdrawal symptoms from having to close the shop for a day still in season. The poisoning was not severe but had left me nauseous and washed out for most of what should have been a day of careless abandonment. It was definitely not for me the best of days for a lady at Pednvounder to injure herself and require a medivac by Lifeboat – or indeed for her, I would guess.

Being somewhat short handed on the shore, we launched the big boat while the crew launched themselves on the Inshore. The operation was swift, and we set up the long slip to bring the big boat and the casualty back to the station. It was determined to be a quicker solution than to try and get the Coastguard team to get her up the cliff. We understand that ambulances here will not turn out at all for anything less than a life-threatening condition and even then you need to book a week in advance, so the family headed to the Lifeboat station to take the injured party to hospital by car.

Happily, my relief arrived before the boat did and I was able to retire poorly while my compatriots conducted what appeared to me to be a textbook recovery up the long slip. We are, after all, a very supportive, very excellent Shore Crew.

September 18th – Sunday

I am going to have to get a thicker jumper out if the bleddy hound insists on going out so early. Happily, there was little in the way of a breeze but it was still a good few degrees short of where we were a few days ago and it is very noticeable. I was very bullish about staying in the flat when the work starts and we have no roof or windows but suddenly I am a lot less certain. I have started to scour the online clothes shops for very thick woollies.

Our business day took a long while to get off the ground. I suspect that our visitors quite sensibly noticed the cold and stayed in bed until it got warmer, a salient lesson there perhaps. At least we had a full suite of newspapers to sell to the customers who were not there, and they all had supplements this week. I had one lady ask me if all the papers would be complete this week. I did not like to tell her that I had no idea if we would have papers at all let alone complete. I promised to save her one nonetheless.

I would guess that my next customer would have shied away from the Sunday newspapers because of the weight. She told me she was going on a walk and did not want three bananas - we pre-weigh and price bags of three as we cannot do this at the till, especially when we are busy. She would take the one banana out but pay for three then changed her mind and had two bananas. It was a bit of posturing that irritated, so I irritated back -yes, very childish - and made a performance out of insisting I weigh the two bananas and charge her correctly. That last banana must have been some heavy to make a difference on her walk.

If I needed my frown turned upside down, I did not have to wait long. One of the local children woke me from my reverie part way onto the afternoon asking if we had a particular type of confection, which we did. Transaction complete he returned a short while later with some more coins. He told me he had found them on the floor of his mum's car. I said how lucky he was and that perhaps he might like to share the knowledge of his good fortune with his mother. He assured me that he would – right after he had spent it.

Word must get around that I am a soft touch. A short while later I was harangued by a group of four local children of a range of ages from quite small to a little less so. They had an overly optimistic notion regarding the value of money and one brought to the counter £1.40 for a £1.80 drink, one of our most expensive soft drinks. This may not have been so bad had the funds not been intended to be shared across the group – quite a tall order but possibly achievable with a bit of Boathouse magic and application of compromise. Unfortunately, the child with the expensive drink was quite determined and returned with an additional 40 pence, enough for her but leaving the others somewhat short.

My main problem in this matter was communication. I would ask one a question about what they actually wanted and would get three different answers from the others and all at the same moment. In the end I had to point at each one to find out what they wanted and then negotiate a deal. I was close to tears at the end of it; they had defeated me. I am glad that there were not more of them, we would go bust in a fortnight.

The afternoon was full of peaks and troughs as the promenaders came and went, some stopping off as they drove off for the end of the day. The beach looked quiet with just a few small camps set up on the sand and hardly anything going on in the water. There were a few surfers out there but they had to be the most optimistic surfers alive.

It was nothing to do with optimism that I played an absolute blinder on the pasty front. Things were not looking too good around the middle of the day for numbers but we had a late rush in the middle of the afternoon that fair near cleared us out. Given that we would be closed tomorrow, I could not have planned it any better – I mean, I planned it perfectly, of course.

There was another bit of a rush in the last hour or so of open time, which gave the business of the day a little boost, thank you ever so kindly. It also helped to pass the time because I had run out of interesting things to do, like stocking shelves and placing a minor grocery order. We should also remind reader that are here on holiday or just here that we will be closed tomorrow and any desperate provisioning from our store should have been done earlier. Perhaps I should have noted that sooner.

Anyway, here is a sign of me saying that we are closed. I put in the last line to see if anyone actually read it – just one, a sharp local lad who was mightily amused. I hope that the shop at the top is open, even for just a few hours to help out the needy. I have heard it told that they are far more accommodating than we down in The Cove, after all, they are open all through the year whereas we close at the end of October – tomorrow is just a teaser.

As a footnote to the day, I have mentioned before that this year has seemed more normal than the last two with familiar faces arriving again at the normal time of year for them. One, a daughter who for years arrived with mother in tow, or perhaps the other way around, is back but without mother. I am disappointed at the absence of VP but heartened to know that she is safely at home. I doff my cap in your direction madam. I would tug a forelock, but mine has long since deserted me and I could find no other willing volunteer.

September 17th – Saturday

The Laurel and Hardy Newspaper Company excelled themselves this morning. We had all the newspaper inserts but the only actual newspapers to turn up were the Daily Mail and the I. There was no information about the absence of the other titles on the website that they encourage us to use instead of telephoning and as a consequence I claimed for all the missing ones.

I did not bother to write a notice this time, because we know from the last time that no one would read it, so spent the rest of the morning telling people the newspapers had not arrived and their expect time of delivery would be about ten minutes after the van arrived. They eventually turned up at gone eleven o'clock, which was no use to anyone by then.

It was chilly down on the beach first thing with the bleddy hound. It was a tad lighter than it was yesterday because we were later but I will soon have to arm myself with the head torch on our morning run outs. That chill declined as the day progressed and blue skies and sunshine emerged to provide us with a passably pleasant day. Even the northerly breeze diminished to a mere waft out of the east.

From time to time, the press will come up with a comment that many town children do not know where their food comes from. Meat and vegetables are available in supermarkets in sanitised and anonymous lumps and hard to know how anything grows or even if it came from an animal in the first place. It is not just children who seem to be losing touch or just get lost in the readiness of pre-packaged goods.

On several occasions this year I have been asked if we have any lemon juice. I play this with a straight bat because I am interested to see the response. I tell the customer that we do not have bottles, but we do have lemons in the fridge. There is usually a bit of hesitation followed by something like, 'that might work' or 'I don't

know, I suppose we could try it'. I wondered if they get home and are flummoxed that there is no cap.

Along the same lines and a perspective I was not expecting. It was a lady with an accent tinged with a bit of North American. I am not sure what she had heard about Cornwall but she asked where we got our water from. Perplexed, I asked if she meant the bottles we sell in the shop and she said, no, the stuff we use domestically. Was it, she asked, from a well? I must confess, I nearly fell off my stool. I know we are a little remote from the big cities and it was not that long ago that the hand pumps that are still in evidence were the only sources of potable water in The Cove but we are in the 21st century now. If the shop was not so busy I might have asked her where she was from and why she thought our infrastructure might have been lacking. I answered kindly and assured her as an answer to her second question that we also did not throw our waste from buckets over the promenade wall – we let the water companies do that instead. I think she left most impressed by our advanced society. I did not have time to tell her that we had also stopped burning inquisitive visitors in straw effigies on Mayon Cliff.

Those surviving visitors came and went in some numbers today. Our busyness at this time of year tends to follow the sun and we had a good helping of that today. It encouraged some camping on the beach, although only for the very hardy it seems, but little in the way of water activity with probably not the best of surf conditions especially in the later afternoon. Our guests were not in a pasty mood, either, and we must hope for better tomorrow. We sailed close to the wind with the numbers last week and the weather being apparently better this week, I ordered a good number more.

We slid quietly into the closing hour with a few latecomers stopping by for beer, logs and treats. It was a very civilised way of rounding off the day and shutting myself down for the evening.

September 16th – Friday

I was up early, the bleddy hound was kicked out of bed early and the chiller boys arrived roughly on time. What could possibly go wrong?

I was up earlier than early because some goon telephoned at half past five o'clock. My mobile telephone ignores such calls unless it is someone in my contact list and only the less smart telephones in other rooms rang. I would have missed it completely but it woke the Missus up, which was some unusual, and she alerted me just late enough for me to get out of bed but miss the call. The number was withheld, but whoever it was had to press '0' to wake someone up – our night message actually says that – so it was a malicious act to not leave a message.

At some point during the night I had woken myself up concerned that the height of the first electric sliding door in The Cove was a tad lower than the door that was

there when the old chiller was delivered nigh on twenty years ago. It was the first thing that I checked when I arrived in the shop and discovered that there was a deficit of 50 millimetres. The old chiller and the new for that matter would have to go out lying down – as indeed probably shall I. This was of no concern for the old one but I am aware that fridge coolant needs to settle before use and I really did not have the time for that this morning. We risked turning it on anyway and, so far, it seems happy enough.

The delivery team were very professional and had the chillers exchanged with the minimum of fuss but for some gouges in the lino that has seen much worse in its many years of service. They knew their way round the new box and effectively commissioned it before they left. I was just left with trying to find out why there was a flashing 'dor' sign in the control panel and the unwrapping and positioning of the shelves.

The latter of those things was the hard effort of removing several miles of bubble wrap encasing the wire shelves. This done, the fittings on which the shelves sit had to be positioned where I wanted them and to this end, smarty that I am, I had recorded the heights of the old shelves, which made the job fairly easy. Easy it might have been, but it took a while, mainly because I was distracted by the flashing 'dor' sign which I reasonably took to mean that the door was open. That was all well and good but the flashing 'dor' sign persisted even when the door was shut and having fiddled a bit, it was clear that with the 'dor' sign flashing, the chiller was not getting any chillier.

I switched the box off at the wall – or in this case the ceiling – and it sprang to life, fans blowing and cooling happening after a brief pause. Naturally, as soon as I opened the door, the flashing sign came back on and the chilling stopped. With time pressing, I finished positioning the shelves as quickly as I could so that I could close the door again, reset the chiller to leave the temperature to descend enough for me to get the milk, the large delivery of which sat in the box outside by this time, into the new unit.

In the meanwhile, I looked for the instruction booklet that would surely have been supplied with the machine. I eventually found this, which consisted of a woefully inadequate instruction sheet, one page, mostly of warnings like do not stick your fingers in the spinning fan. There was not a hint about the door switch, which I established afterwards as being on the left sliding door – the right sliding door did not warrant one apparently – and I surmised that this was not working correctly. Using the wealth of electrical and mechanical knowledge I have amassed over the years I did what any good engineer would have done and stuck some gaffer tape over it thus resolving the problem.

The chiller reached optimum temperature about twenty minutes before opening time. This just about gave me long enough to pull in the dairy delivery from our box at the front of the shop and ship it into the new chiller. I then replaced all the other goods

that had been distributed to other chillers and fridges and opened the shop with mere seconds to spare. And this, dear reader, will explain the tardiness of this (yesterday to you) morning's Diary.

Our dairy supplier is run by a happy bunch of boys and girls. Their yuletide telephone answering message normally makes me laugh so much when I first hear it, I have to call again. Today they sent out a letter concerning bread deliveries on Monday, the fact that there would not be any. The content of the very long letter is unimportant but it was signed, from this small outfit, by Molly – Head of Bread Ordering. I wondered at the enormity of their bread business that required a whole department dedicated to it.

With the bread and butter taken care of we turn our attention to the day at hand. The complexity of chiller deliveries put me back away and I spent the next couple of hours catching up. This scuppered my visit to the gymnasium and I will have to do some catching up on my next visit. I do hope there is no more catching up to do because I am already quite weary of it. The chores of the morning acted as a poor substitute but I did have to chase after a box of upset cardboard up the road.

I had noticed a bit of a blow going on when the bleddy hound and I slipped down to the beach in the half dark of the early morning. I paid it little heed as my mind was elsewhere at the time. As the day brightened and it brightened considerably, it was clear that a brisk northerly wind was at play. It was this that caused my morning dash down the street combined with our need to put our waste cardboard out for collection today. It was a particularly brutal gust that caught me out but happily they moderated as the afternoon drew on.

We may never need to worry about brightness every again as the new chiller is lighting up the shop like a science-fiction spaceship. The trouble is it puts its neighbour, the drinks chiller to shame. Inexplicably, I failed to mention a visit we had last week by a group of Buddhist monks, complete with saffron robes and entourage. As they entered the shop en masse, the place lit up as if with ethereal light and the shop was transformed into a well of tranquility. I glad they came last week because if they arrived today, I would not have been able to see for a week.

Whether it was down to the brightness of the chiller or the weather but we had quite a good day of business. Of course, much of this was going home present buying, which always swells the coffers a little. We are told to expect a pleasant weekend by the weather forecasters, so I have reduce the number of pasties, and battened down the hatches. There are no flies on me, I tell you.

September 15th – Thursday

It was not all that easy to tell because it has not got properly light when I looked outside but it looked rather grey. On the other hand, it was not raining, which in my book was a proper bonus, especially as I was caught out by the bleddy hound again,

keen for a walk out. A chill settled over us yesterday and it was still worthy of a jacket this morning, although it could hardly be called cold. Our visit to the beach was brief in any case.

There were a few things that I had thought about, waking white and sweating in the middle of the night, such as measuring the heights of the existing shelves in the fridge so that they could be duplicated in the new one when it arrived. I set to with these tasks in the morning when I arrived at the shop as I had deliberately not ordered milk in order that the dairy fridge was as close to empty as we could get it without selling our customers short.

The early morning routine is a synch now that we are not busy. In truth, I could probably laze in bed for another half an hour but I have always found that I can get so much done in the morning before anyone else is up (notwithstanding bleddy hounds). I have done this all my working life, adopting a preference for black coffee quite early on as I used to arrive at work before the milkman. That would not work now as I only drink tea. I even get up early if I am on holiday, so ingrained is the habit and it transpired later, that was just as well.

Drinking tea is precisely what I did this morning having run out of morning chores quite early and the bleddy hound having been exercised first thing. The only problem with this is that it is very easy to do, and the time slips away before you know it. Even trying to keep an eye on the time I just about finished the newspapers before it was shop opening time. I am sure Einstein would have written a formula for it but as business in the shop decreases, the impetus required to get me going increases by an equal amount.

The day commenced a very long waiting game. The delivery man for our new chiller had telephoned yesterday, or the day before to tell me that he would be delivering today and would telephone an hour before he arrived. Given our reduced stock of pasties, I had hoped that he would arrive at peak pasty time to give us a fair chance of making it through to the end of the day without running out. I was to be disappointed on this first score but, as it happens, the demand for pasties was much diminished today and although we did run out, it was respectably late in the afternoon when we did.

The lateness of the hour that the delivery driver called was not respectable at all. It was close on five o'clock to tell me that he was not arriving today, which I had rather guessed. He asked what the earliest time was that he could deliver in the morning, and we agreed half past six o'clock, hopefully after I had taken the bleddy hound out. It was a time that would give me a very narrow window for all that was necessary to do before the shop opened.

In order to get ahead of the posse, I decided to do all the moving of shop furniture after we closed today. This was necessary to give the delivery people a fair chance at an easy run up the middle of the shop with the old chiller and the same route in

with the new one. Some of the displays require a bit of effort and some a bit of care and it took us around half an hour. The Missus lent a hand by emptying the little that was left in the old chiller into the drinks chiller that I had earlier created some space in.

It was pure chance that we finished these tasks with enough time for me to arrive at the end of the pre-exercise briefing for the Lifeboat launch planned for the evening. The earlier start time was to allow for the boat to arrive back in the bay ahead of high water.

We were comfortable in numbers on the shore with a compatriot taking the lead. After a spectacular launch, the boat speeding away into the kind light of a declining sun, we set up for a short slip recovery in a leisurely manner and then waited.

The boat returned at the nominated time of eight o'clock into a bay sloshing with a little lively swell. This meant one of the very excellent Shore Crew risking life and limb – well, risking getting wet trousers at least – to put out the 'fishing rod' that the Boat Crew collect the heaving line and span from. This was even more fraught after the recovery when the 'fishing rod' had to be collected again with the tide even higher up the slipway. This task is usual left to the most obviously idle person at the appointed time, which unfortunately turned out to be me. As I risked even wetter trousers than the crew member who put it out I was happy in the knowledge that at least I had witnessed as my last dry experience, the textbook recovery up the short slip. We are, after all, a very derring-do, very excellent Shore Crew.

September 14th – Wednesday

A lady came into the shop wearing a sweat shirt with 'Bath Sailing' across the front. Dear reader, you will be very proud of me: I did not say one word.

I also managed to contain myself when asked in the middle of the day if we were closed. Our chiller is arriving tomorrow and we will close the shop for a couple of hours, first to clear some space and carry out some preparation and then to do the exchange, old for new. I wrote a sign to the effect that we will close and added the date below it. Our customer read the headline 'CLOSED FOR 2 HOURS' and no further. The shop was bustling and I was behind the counter serving. I despair.

I was out very early with the bleddy hound this morning, pre-empting any escape plans she may have been harbouring. There was a modicum of light to see by, but I also turned on the outside shop lights to help things along. They did not help much when she decided that it would be a jolly wheeze to head to the beach as well. At least the tide allowed us some sand to play on, but we never got that far. It had been spotting with rain when we stepped out, a continuation of last night, and it became heavier the longer we were out. The bleddy hound saw the light – or rather felt the wet - and headed back home a bit sharpish.

The rain persisted through much of the morning but had largely gone by the time I came out of the gymnasium. The afternoon brightened considerably and when I came back down from the flat having changed and breakfasted, the street was lined like it was a summer's day. The only fly in the ointment for me thinking that I had stepped back in time was a chill northerly breeze keeping everyone's jackets on.

The sudden influx meant that the surplus of pasties that we had thanks to a poor day yesterday, resolved itself today. This would have been much more gratifying than it was because I had earlier intervened with the surplus and ordered a reduced number of pasties for tomorrow. By the time it was clear how many we were selling it was too late. We will have a very short pasty day tomorrow but there again we are closed for two hours, so it may yet work out.

The Missus went up to The Farm as there were a few chores she had to carry out. She also had to see a man about some topsoil he wanted to get rid of. He is our neighbour at The Farm and had done some work on his field that left him with an abundance of soil. Since we would be using quite a bit this coming winter, we said that he could drop it over our hedge. It helps him out and saves us having to dig up bits of our own field for it.

There has been some movement on the progression of our roof project but not necessarily in the right direction. The structural plans that the window man is waiting for will not be ready for another two to three weeks. The windows will follow that by around six weeks which puts availability in the middle of November. I was at first very alarmed but on consideration, my project manager should be able to reschedule other parts of the project to take up the slack – I hope.

Our bumper harvest of visitors did not hang around for long and our busyness petered out into the afternoon. I was not entirely idle in the quiet bits that developed as some of our suppliers are pressing us for orders for next year. One of our suppliers was pressing us for a decision on an order for Monday indeed – the Laurel and Hardy Newspaper Company.

I had not considered our position for Monday, Her Majesty's shuffling off parade day. The Laurel and Hardy Newspaper Company changed that by demanding, with just four hours' notice to let them know if we would require newspapers. I ignored their impossible deadline but had a quick call around our daily suppliers to see who would be supplying or not. Only one, it transpired would be working, our milkman on the basis that the cows were not taking a day off either. While we could work around this, only the OS in The Cove is remaining open, so we shall close too for the day. Apologies to those who may have been relying on us.

September 13th – Tuesday

We had many comments last week, largely from the departing holiday makers in a grudging sort of way, that we were in for good weather this week when last week had

been so poor. I did not take much notice as we know from experience that weather forecasts more than 24 hour ahead are fanciful imaginings on the part of the forecasters. Quite often 'forecasts' for the weather that is happening now is abysmally awry quite often. This will explain why I sit here completely unsurprised that there is a howling easterly blowing laced with occasional drops of rain.

I had left the front door open when I first went downstairs to make ready the shop this morning. I had the kitchen rubbish bag in one hand and the till on the other. Closing the door was beyond me on the downward journey and while I had intended to close it before I went into the shop, I forgot.

It was not long before I had decided that the shop preparation had finished and that I would go and fetch the bleddy hound when I discovered that the bleddy hound had already fetched herself. I had shut her in the bedroom on the grounds that she would be undisturbed by my early morning messing around but that had clearly not worked. The Missus had let her out unaware that the front door was open. Well, she is old enough now to know what she is up to. If the shop door was open, it is most likely she would have come and got me.

We took around the block again with the waves still washing the flags of the slipway. The car park is much emptier overnight now, as people presumably have found cheaper places to park or are having shorter breaks and have gone home. There were spots of rain in the air, but it did not amount to very much and by the end of the rainy bit we still had not had a proper shower. I had a customer in later in the morning who told me that St Just had a heavy downpour earlier. It was very good of St Just to take one for the team – not that it did us that much of a favour; we were still quiet all morning.

We did not help ourselves all that much, either. There were several couples who we had sent up to the farmers' market in the community hall. I do not know if there are many or any farmers who sell directly at the market and the name remains because most people know roughly what one is, I suppose. Regardless of what it might call itself, we still get agreeable feedback about the breadth and quality of the available goods. People rave about the samosas that can be purchased there alongside other Indian foods, very often there is a wet fish stall and artisan breads as well as a whole host of arts and crafts. It has won awards in the past and is well worth a visit still, although it has been a while since I was there last. The returning parties assured me it was worth a visit, which was a relief having recommended it.

Our big grocery delivery from the newer cash and carry comes toward the middle of the day. It is the price to pay for a different selection of stock and if all had gone according to plan this year, we would only be using them once a month, alternating with the original cash and carry. In the past, the company had sent out a message letting us know that the delivery was on its way and on some occasions even the estimated time of delivery. This week, we had nothing. I left it until the end of the afternoon and called the company, which at first did not answer the telephone either

and then some half an hour later I spoke with someone who told me that the messages were no longer sent out. They might have sent a message telling us that they were no longer sending messages but perhaps they thought that might have given the wrong impression.

The delivery turned up in the early part of the afternoon. It was not our biggest grocery order of the year and only filled three cages, which the driver had to push down from the ice cream kiosk as there were cars parked over the road from us. One of them was ours in an effort to secure some space for the delivery but by the time the lorry arrived it had the opposite effect and encouraged three other drivers to park there. With the hour now too late to tuck the order away and with our fudge boxes arriving shortly afterwards, the tucking away would have to wait until tomorrow.

I mentioned a few days ago that for the first time in a while, in years to be more accurate, we had an order placed for oysters. It was more cajoled that placed, to be fair, but that is another story. The long and the short of it being I was asked very nicely if I would not mind shucking the oysters, which indeed I did not. I was once fairly proficient but, as I say, that was some years ago and not only had the proficiency left me, the shucking knife was not where I had expected it to be, either.

The fumbling through the shucking of a half dozen oysters in front of the expectant customers should have been the worst of it, although I did avoid stabbing my securing hand. No, the worst of it was the unexpected ire of the Missus who had come across the devastation that I had occasioned in the kitchen while looking for the knife in the first place. To leave the subject on the positive, I had regained some grace in the art of shucking when it came to the remaining six, which I had to suffer alone because Mother did not fancy them and the Missus hates fish.

Having waited all day, it came to proper rain by the time darkness fell. It rounded off the day nicely, I felt.

September 12th – Monday

The devil makes work for idle hands – and mouths too, it would seem.

The pasties were unusually late this morning. It happens sometimes when we are on the round that includes the pasties going off on the Scillionian. Any hiccups on that schedule and we are relegated. The event promotes the possibility of increased numbers of ‘when will your pasties get here?’ questions. Oh, the fun I had.

It was short-lived, however, and the last laugh was on me. The van was indeed late and the pasties in the oven as quickly as I could. While they were heating up I had a seemingly endless series of enquiries about how long it would be before they were ready. I sensed that perhaps I had not put quite enough in the oven, so I made a quick dash and slipped in some more.

I did not find out exactly whether I was right to do so because the Missus came down to let me run off to the gymnasium. I discovered later that we had almost the exact number for the day, so I cannot have got it all wrong.

The gymnasium session this morning put a capital B on blistering as I returned to my full session with no cut corners. It was not quite as horrific or draining as I thought that it might have been and, after all, I had been building up to this last week and a bit before. Maybe I am just not pushing myself enough and I ought to spend another hour in there blistering some more. I will consider this. There, I considered it. Maybe not.

I was putting away a healthy breakfast after I came back when our fisherman in Penzance called to say he was on his way with our order. I did not ask where he managed to get it all from on a spring tide but the fish are perfectly good and in an abundance that I was not really expecting despite being the one who ordered it.

It can take some time to pack, price and put away. Even longer if I have to portion them like I did with the extra large haddock last time. If they had arrived yesterday, I would have had plenty of time between customers to do the job but, would you not just know it, we were busier than we had been for a fortnight today. The time between customers was fleeting and added to each interruption to serve someone was the time to remove my fishy glove and put it back on again. It took about four hours before I got to the ling at the bottom of an extended list of hake, haddock, pollack and scallops.

The fish is prime, and I marvel at the ability of the processors to consistently portion the cuts the way we like them. We ask for domestic portions of between 250g and 300g where all the other suppliers find it hard to break away from restaurant portion of between 180g to 200g and the 200g being rare. This is tiny, and scarcely worth having and in a restaurant you would pay dearly for it. Our man in Penzance was a real find, the only disadvantage being he does not delivery ordinarily but is happy to with bulk orders. Frankly, that is a price worth paying as his fish is not only the right size for a growing lad (or Mother) but top quality, too – if you do not mind buying it frozen. If you do, I suspect you have been misled over frozen fish. I would wager you would not tell the difference on the plate.

It was close to closing by the time I wrapped up and cleaned up. Despite that the store room is still a mess and we have a large order arriving at some stage during the day. I will have to spend some time in the morning clearing up. It is clear we are not quite yet at the end of the season when I can relax a bit and I have to keep reminding myself. I will get used to it one day.

September 11th – Sunday

It was dark again at the appointed walking time, so I left the bleddy hound snoozing and took myself down to the shop to do what I could with topping up before the

deliveries arrived. It soaked up enough time for the day to be ready for us and once again we took to the car park circuit. The bleddy hound was not overjoyed by this but we had little choice with the waves still swirling up onto the slipway.

The newspapers were tardy again and incomplete. We had a hastily typed letter to explain that because volumes had increased there were insufficient supplements to go around. This particularly applied to the one newspaper that advertised on its front page 'FREE INSIDE Glossy 48-page picture magazine'. No doubt a big draw for some. It did not take much imagination as to who, almost certainly unnecessarily, ordered vast numbers of extra newspapers and snaffled all the magazines.

I placed a sign of my own, stuck to the shelf above that newspaper, explaining the lack of supplement. It hung so that it would need to be lifted up to gain access to the newspaper underneath, so naturally, I spent the entire day explaining why there was no supplement because nobody saw the sign.

Having had a rather decent day yesterday, the weather decided that was enough Mr Nice Guy and rained quite heavily in the morning. Not only did it remain grey and damp for the rest of the day, low cloud descended and blocked out the view as well. I think a big sign outside saying 'closed for business' would have attracted more trade.

I knuckled down to the business of placing our order with the new cash and carry. With some of the list already drawn up it did not take too long to complete. I took the opportunity of dissecting the tinned goods shelf where everything had been mixed up over the busy weeks. It was just not possible to determine exactly what was there. At least now all the tins are grouped together, which will last until the next order arrives are we are desperate for space.

Given that we are around six weeks from closing I found that the order I had put together was larger than I anticipated. I asked the Missus to check my work when she came down in case I had over-ordered anything. When I came back after a break, the list was even bigger. She is a past master at our run down to closing, so I have utter faith in the order we now have. We still need to lump it into the shop and spend a day unpacking and putting it out. There will probably be one more after that, too.

I took a tour of the shop to see what else was missing from our shelves that we should do something about. We could do with some ice creams and some frozen food but we need to be even more careful with these volumes as storing them over winter brings its own set of problems as we try to minimise the number of freezers still working. I was also keen that we did not place the order so that the delivery coincides with the big grocery delivery, something that we inadvertently managed to achieve for the last three deliveries.

Some things we just expect to stop like selling of sun lotion and sunglasses but oddly, we are still selling quite a bit of both. I did take the opportunity to remove the

parasols from the net bucket as I think that may be just a step too optimistic. We have some in the store room, just in case.

Business slowly petered out towards the close of play with just the merest hint of five minute to closing dash a good hour before we closed. That is just sheer laziness or preparedness on behalf of our customers and just not on. A grumpy shopkeeper has enough to contend with without an upset to the great order of things.

September 10th – Saturday

Those small gods of grumpy shopkeepers played an absolute blinder this morning. You have to hand them credit as it must have taken some planning.

The best bit was that I had no inkling of what was to come with a somewhat perfect morning in the offing as we headed for the beach. It is quite surprising how much difference the absence of dark clouds made as it was quite light at the time we went out today and exceptionally dull yesterday. We were, however, excluded from the Harbour this morning as the tide had beaten us to it. It was on the way out but quite rough and using up more beach than it was rightfully entitled to. We, sorry, I made the executive decision to go around the block instead.

There were quite a few cars parked in the car park indicating that perhaps we should still be quite busy. I noticed later, quite an influx of new faces, so it may well have been the new contingent parked up having arrived last night. There was nothing remarkable about our journey and everything was pretty much how we had left it last time we were along this way.

The milkman had already been when I got down to the shop a short while later. There was no sign of the newspapers arriving and having checked with the Laurel and Hardy Newspaper Company website, they were not due until opening time. I topped up what needed to be topped up then retired until I could bear it no more.

And this is where the story really starts and the small gods of grumpy shopkeepers put in motion their heinous plan. The pasty man arrived first, and I had almost got to grips with that when the newspapers turned up. This, of course, was nothing new not even the fact that we were five minutes open with the blinds still drawn. The coup de grâce was the arrival of a local stray dog that decided it was treat time and plonked himself in front of me. Giving him treats was probably the wrong move because he decided to stay and once I had a lead on him, he was more of a handful that without.

With the newspapers still begging to be built and the first customers coming through the door, I managed to call the dog owners to come and collect him. I started getting demands for newspapers and had to ferret around to find all the right parts which are in different bundles. To make matters worse, a couple of newspapers had additional supplements, which I only found out about when they were left over having finished the other titles. It was carnage for about half an hour.

Eventually, with the newspaper squared away I managed to draw the blinds and make the shop at least look like it was open even if the grumpy shopkeeper was a frazzled mess. The assembled company of visitors decided to let me have a slow build up to the day and we did not really get cracking until almost the middle of it. It was then we had a very sudden clamour for pasties, which took me by surprise. One customer bought out the stock in the warmer leaving those following to wait until I could heat through some more. Once I had the succession flowing we were alright but I was caught off guard by the initial order.

My intention today was to get most of the grocery order ready so that we did not have to spend Sunday night doing it. I had time between customers to restock some of the shelves and get some bearing on what was missing but getting the order down was a challenge too far. We were far busier than I had anticipated and even been used to over the last week of poor weather. It was disappointing for our leavers who had suffered the weather all week to be leaving on a bright, warm and dry day but that is sometimes the way of it.

It was in the run up to closing that our pagers went off calling for the launch of the Inshore boat. Mercifully, I only had the one pair of customers in the shop at the time and was serving them when the balloon went up and arrived at the station quickly thereafter.

The boat had been called out to two anglers on a rock out at Aire Point that someone had alerted the Coastguard to. They were cut off by the tide but neither cared nor felt themselves to be in peril, although they were at a place where anglers had been lost before, surprised by larger than expected waves. The Lifeboat crew was reluctant to leave despite the anglers not wanting to be rescued, but with the tide and the swell declining, the boat being unable to do so anyway and eyes from a little further away watching over them, the Coastguard stood the boat down.

It had been an awkward launch at the peak of a very high tide. The angle that the boat entered the water was not ideal and perhaps we need to look at ways of getting the trailer across to the flatter area near the western slip next time. It was here that nearly an hour later we recovered the boat and took it up for a washdown and return to its boathouse.

The whole episode proved, if nothing else, I can still just about run up a hill in wellies when I need to, although my knees are suggesting that I do not make a habit of it. I discovered what a comfort beer is after such events.

September 9th – Friday

It was still raining this morning when I opened my sleepy peepers. If the hose pipe ban is still on this time tomorrow, we will all wonder what they have been doing with all this bumper harvest of rainfall we have been having. Happily, all the wet stuff had

gone away by the time the bloody hound and I slip down to the beach. We did not even get dripped on at the corner of the Lifeboat station, a little annoyance that I might have hoped that the roofers would have seen to when they repaired it. Some of us had hoped that the powers might have invested in a rain collection system which would have been much more useful than it dropping down the back of my neck but it was not to be.

The geet sandbank on the western side of the beach behind the western skip had smoothed over since I noticed its appearance. As such it has slipped from my mind as a feature until today. The tide has increased in size and pushed up the beach and has now been carving chunks out of the bank leaving behind, for now, a miniature model of Death Valley, Arizona – sort of. There are no saguaro cacti growing on the Harbour beach yet but we are told the temperature is increasing, so it is only a matter of time.

The day was down as being sunny with spells and so it was. It took a while for our customers to get the hang of coming out after being shut in by the rain, which made for a better afternoon than morning. We were then busy for a bit, in a relative sort of way, which gave me time to fill a few shelves here and there between visits.

After I had returned from another blistering session at the gymnasium, the first chore on my list was to contact our new cash and carry to make sure that they had arranged our direct debit after six months of asking. I had noticed on the website the appearance of a new button, 'cash on delivery', which I surmised might be it, but it was a tad misleading. I telephoned to find out that the misleading button is indeed the one that will trigger the direct debit option. I sympathise with the web designer's plight because I took could not think of a better name for a 'pay on account' or 'direct debit' button either.

A while back we had a spate of vehicle battery problems. I think much of it was vintage tractor related and I recall having to borrow the Lifeboat station's booster pack, which was a suitcase size battery with leads. A little research showed that technology had advanced to the extent that a small box the size of a house brick and weighing not much more would do the same job as the suitcase sized one and more.

Things moved on for us and we did not need it so much ourselves but during the summer we had a visitor trying to vacate his holiday let at the end of the period and finding his battery was flat. Our clever box was nearly drained as we had not attended to it for some time but it started his lumpy 4x4 without a problem. Gratitude abounded and we were pleased to help since it is no trouble at all to carry a house brick up the hill.

Today, we had much the same request, a flat battery in the car park but the Missus was up at The Farm and she had the house brick. As luck would have it, as I was explaining this to the gentleman, she turned up. Given that he was in the shop telling me he had no help elsewhere, I assumed that he was in the Harbour car park but he

had come all the way from the Beach car park, so I was a bit bemused he had got to us before finding any assistance.

I drove him back to the car park and deployed the house brick again. I noted that it had lost some of its power but was in better condition than the last time and it started his car without a thought. I am really very impressed, and I think that our man was, too, as well as being very grateful. We really are quite a useful bunch, down in The Cove sometimes.

Mother and I usually have fish on a Friday from our selection in the freezer. Not so today, we have run out of fish. I had a chat with our best man in Penzance but he told me it was not a good week for fish, weather and all that, and the early part of next week will not be ideal either with thumping big tides that will keep the netters in port. He will supply when it is best to do so and in the meanwhile, we wait.

Enter a couple of ladies who come every year and love their fish, especially the more robust sort, bass, hake and this year they asked for halibut, which needs to be ordered in as it is not a local fish – you can easily tell because it has a slight Northern accent. They also asked for oysters, a half dozen when our suppliers only supply by the dozen. We are happy to bend over backwards for our customers and if that means having to force down half a dozen oysters so that they can have six, we will take it on the chin and grin and bear it.

A while later, they had clearly driven to Newlyn, deciding that they could not wait for the order and collected some wet fish from there, which was a grand idea – we are only here for those who do not want to bother with such venturing. They sent a text to tell me that they no longer wanted their order and I sent one back saying that I was 'relieved' that I did not have to eat the half dozen oysters. For some strange and curious reason – perhaps I had spelt 'relieved' as 'disappointed', it is an easy mistake to make – they changed their minds and reordered the oysters. Oh dear, how sad, never mind. Oysters on Tuesday, maybe with a glass of Guinness. The hardships we put ourselves through for our customers, you just would not believe, dear reader.

September 8th – Thursday

Fifty percent of yesterday was very pleasant, just like a summer's day. The only problem was the other fifty percent was heavy rain and the two were randomly interspersed. At least today you knew you were going to get wet if you ventured out before the middle of the day and had a pretty good chance of it in the afternoon, too. The showers seemed endless. Just when you saw the sky brightening and you thought that was the end of it, another heavy dose would come bulldozing through.

The sea joined in the party; the orderly rolling swell, a distant memory as the punchy westerly wind made a complete mess of the bay. The tides are demonstrably getting bigger and towards high water. I watched a big buoy fender, probably stolen from the

Harbour, head in towards the big beach driven by the wind. All of that together did us no good at all.

With it being so quiet, I find that I am distracted by my thoughts of other things and when a customer comes in it is quite hard to flick back to grumpy shopkeeper mode. That sounds better than 'when it is quiet my brain hibernates and it is very difficult to wake it up again', which is probably closer to the truth. It therefore does not take very much to confuse me.

I listened very carefully to a customer who proffered a twenty pound note for a £1.40 purchase and asked specifically for a £10 a £5, some pound coins and if possible could he had a fifty pence piece in the change. We often have people who need change for the car parks or washing machines on the campsites and so on, so we keep plenty to meet the need. As I struggled to concentrate on this customer's specific requirement it rapidly became apparent that this combination of change was exactly the combination of change that he would have got had I been running on autopilot that I was trying so hard to shake off. Talk about confuse a person. It fair near scrambled my head. It is like telling someone to move forward by putting the left foot ahead of you, shift weight onto it, then move the right leg past the left and place it on the ground ahead and shift the weight from left leg to right leg, when 'walk' would have been sufficient.

The business day did not recover at all from its rainy morning battering. Our customers had either beggared off to St Ives or some other wet day attraction leaving us to flounder hopelessly. The only way that I could think of to get a few customers through the door was to make a telephone call that would take a long time and one that I could not easily interrupt. As part of our roof works we need to temporarily move the communications fibre that is attached to a part of the building that will not be there very shortly. The telephone company need to come and do this and were ideal candidates for the telephone call I needed to make.

I knew that this would take an inordinate amount of time as I was pushed from one department to another and all the time I was on the telephone, customers would be vying for my attention who would not have been there had I not had a telephone pressed to my ear. To my surprise, it actually worked although it was helped along by yet another line of heavy showers powering into The Cove forcing people who had gone out thinking that the rain had ceased into the shop. I was also surprised by the alarming efficiency of the telephone company telephone agent who, after a brief consultation with a colleague, resolved my request in a single bound – we have a business contract that makes a lot of difference in this regard. We will now have our fibre cable moved to the back of the building in time for works commencement – all supposing it starts on time or at all.

It really was a drab day both in terms of the weather and business. It was our worst day of trading this year by some margin and we could really do without another such upset. It will not help the budget for the roof works very much, which would have

been better resolved last year when we would have been in a more solvent position. The builder, who promised faithfully that he was interested and would see the job through before going incommunicado, should be thoroughly ashamed especially if a bunch of youngsters now in the driving seat pull it off successfully.

A dear little old lady shuffled off today. Whatever your views about the club she was head of, her integrity and dedication to duty were absolute and undeniable. Quite extraordinary, in fact.

God Save the King.

September 7th – Wednesday

Today's rain had come through earlier and the bleddy hound walked straight to the door when she got up so there was no decision making about when we would step out. It was still quite gloomy in the flat still but light enough when we got outside. The breeze looks like it had slipped around to the west but was easy going and not obtrusive at all.

There was quite a bit of weed down there yesterday but this morning it was pushed up further and much less of it. We are likely to be chased off the beach in a few days' time that will put the bleddy hound's nose out of joint but she did not have to walk around last spring tide, so it will make a change. That will not cut any ice with the bleddy hound who will be sulking until she gets her breakfast.

Our morning was fine and dandy. It encouraged our visitors out on the street and for the way things are currently, we were quite busy for a while. I managed to get away to the gymnasium, although I was a tad late and did, pretty much, a full session, which was alright given that I was unsure whether I would go or not. There is nothing quite like getting back into the full three days a week blistering sessions. It sets you up for the entire day – apart from the end bit where you collapse in a heap.

The morning's dry spell disappeared around the middle of the day in a scattering of mixed showers. Some of these were particularly heavy and cleared the street for a while. It is quite amazing how quickly the vacated seats fill back up again afterwards when the sun came back out.

Out in the bay quite a swell had kicked up. There were white explosions of spray over at Aire Point and Creagle and little white horses riding in the outer parts. Closer to shore, big waves were rolling in with much roaring and white water boiling in the area around North Rocks. A handful of more experienced surfers sat behind the shore break but were not collecting much heading towards high water in the middle of the afternoon. It was just after, as the tide receded that the waves kicked back in and gave a couple of local boys a few good waves under the chip shop for about half an hour.

There was more rain to come and a little rush in the shop at around five o'clock that woke me up. The brightness and showers persisted right through to the end of the day and you were either lucky or you were not. The Diary horticultural correspondent, down for a few days away from growing things, remarked that the rain seemed awful heavy. I had not really noticed – I do not get out much – but on reflection, I suppose there was rather a lot of red in those rain radar images I look at on the Internet. Our IBCs (no, surely not) have filled up nicely, thank you for asking, as they will not miss a drop no matter how hard it comes down. My regret is that I did not get to link up the two IBCs by the barn, the most prodigious collector of rainwater nor did we find the third IBC for that location. It is in the wrong place, really, but the Missus has sufficient hosepipe and a pump that will transfer the water from there up to the polytunnel, although never tested. All projects for the winter once the roof is finished and the redecorating done and the last of the plaster dust settles five years later. There is much movement on that front and I am hopeful.

September 6th – Tuesday

The decision about when I should take the bleddy hound out was made for me this morning. I heard heavy raindrops on the skylight and immediately abandoned the plan and rescheduled our excursion for a little later. It turned out to be exactly the right thing to do, which surprised me too and something I will no doubt pay for later.

Although we escaped with a dry run to the Harbour it was very clear it was going to be a wet morning with the arrival of the first shower. There was a more persistent period then showers blowing through afterwards. Towards the end of the morning, the showers cleared away and the sun popped out for a bit before some cloud rolled back in again. Some of our walkers were pretty sharp cookies and read the runes spot on, deciding on the time to head off to Cape Cornwall and bravely removing their waterproof leggings.

We were devoid of customers apart from the very brave, see above, and foolhardy for much of the morning. This changed in a trice when the sun came out and coincided perfectly with the arrival of a surveyor from the solar panel company. I would have had all the time in the world for him in the previous few hours but I found myself trying to divide my time between a flow of fair weather customers and his requirement for information.

Initially, I was a little peeved as I was expecting the visit in a couple of days' time. Then I was peeved with myself because when I checked before getting all self-righteous – we long in the tooth do that, you know - I had misread the date. The awkwardness of his appearance in the shop and trying to serve customers increased a notch when we had to go upstairs to survey the domestic arrangements. Fortunately, the Missus came down to fill the gap while the surveyor and I discussed locations for things and cable runs.

The young man that turned up was exceeding pleasant and more importantly knew his onions. He also knew about solar panels, which was an odd combination of experience but we came up with a workable and slightly cheaper set of plans than had originally been mooted. I asked about battery backup for the domestic supply, really so that we were not sitting in the dark or cold if our power went off as it quite often does. The price tag for such comfort and peace of mind was eyewatering and would buy an awful lot of candles and woolly jumpers. If we were sitting in the freezing dark of a February evening as we were not so long ago, waiting on the electric company to fix our burning power line, I almost certainly would have come to a different decision. I opted for the candles and Guernsey sweater.

I tried hard not to think of the *Financial Times* article that said Civil Servants were learning to use carbon copying so that they could still work in the event of 3 of 4 day black outs. If it came to that I think we would have rather more to worry about plus the fact we would be afraid of turning on our lights lest we caught the attention of covetous yobs and got a brick through our window.

There had been a flurry of messages coming and going from the planning consultants subsequent to the survey being completed. They have leapt into action and all sorts of communication is going on between the project team, the window people and the planners and now the solar people. It actually looks like something may be happening and I am holding out all hope that we can commence our long awaited roof work on time at the end of September. This will, for sure, impact on customers coming and going and we may have to close one day while the communications fibre gets moved. It is a sad inditement on modern living that we cannot contemplate selling a few groceries without an available credit card machine.

I must have done something for the rest of the day but I cannot exactly remember what it was. The Missus headed off to The Farm as soon as she could after the solar surveyor had gone and returned much later with a truck load of produce. Once again we have an abundance of goodies right after everyone has gone home despite some fierce planning and determination at the start of it. Even with a polytunnel we are unable to force nature's hand very much – plus we did have the disaster of trying to grow on the tables to save the Missus' knees. It also demonstrates quite clearly how reliant we are as a nation on imported goods for timely appearance of groceries we cannot wait a season for.

Some of the goodies that the Missus returned with will find their way to our shelves, so if you are here, keep your eyes peeled. The rest we will eat to supplement our bowls of gruel now that our income had slowed to a dribble. Being a grumpy shopkeeper may look like a bed of roses to happy holiday makers here for a week or two. Just remember boys and girls, those roses come with thorns. Ouch!

September 5th – Monday

I took some time in the middle of the day to stare out of the window at the brilliant sunshine to contemplate all the comments that I had received from all and sundry about how poor the weather was going to be this week. I wondered just how long this awful weather would last.

It was pretty dreadful down on the Harbour beach this morning as well. It was so bad that they bleddy hound and I had another extended wander about down to the tide line which was just a bit beyond the level of the short slip. The tides jumped today as we head towards some pretty sizable spring tides come the weekend.

Many of our visitors took full advantage of the good weather and occupied the streets. There was a proper street café culture going on for a while and some slipping into the shop for a few supplies and a few pasties now and then. They were definitely better off this side because just around the corner it was blowing a south easterly hooley. It was more south southeast when I checked, which made sense since a proper southeasterly would be hooked around and blowing straight in through the doorway at me.

We were not exactly busy, in fact the poorest day for some time, but our customers gave our pasties a good battering, which was helpful. I took the opportunity to head to the gymnasium in the morning only to discover that the gig club had brought back its rowing machines. It does not matter overly. I am glad that I have my own in there as I know it will be there when I need it and the community hall will get it eventually anyway, I am sure. I continued to build up towards my full session and will have to decide whether I recommence Wednesday sessions again or leave it until next week.

The Missus was champing at the bit when I got back to go into town to do some shopping. She had run out of sugar, having used quite a bit in the last few days. It is the time of year that our biggest yield from The Farm comes to fruition and it is a crop that the Missus has no hand in growing at all – blackberries. Previously, she had frozen them and sold them in the shop. Last year she made some bramble jelly, which I do not think any customers had a look in on and this year there is bramble jelly and bramble and apple jelly, the apples courtesy of a neighbour in a reciprocal arrangement. While there was quite a lot of it, I do not think we have hit production volumes yet and only a few lucky ones who like that sort of thing are going to be blessed.

You may also wish to know, dear reader, that the Missus has grown melons this year. A friend was telling me this morning how he had fallen into conversation with the Missus about them earlier today. I will tell you that they are gala melons and have attained prodigious growth and we will leave it at that. There will be no talk of the Missus' huge melons and neither will I tolerate any snickering in the back. This is, after all, a family Diary I shall have you know.

It was towards the latter part of the afternoon that the skies started to darken out towards the west. We had escaped all the rain so far but geet heavy lumps had driven up over Penzance and up towards the Hayle estuary with tales of torrential rain coming down. The stuff coming up just off Land's End looked just as angry but was on a course just to clip us. The rain, when it came, was heavy enough, but I suspect that we got away lightly.

The rain was largely gone inside half an hour leaving behind an affronted bleddy hound who had only just moved to her throne in the doorway and got dropped on. There were a few showers on and off after that which did a marvellous job of clearing the street of any further serious trade. I used the time to top up the food freezer and wasted the rest. Lack of customers breeds laziness.

September 4th – Sunday

I heard the first clacks of rain against the skylight last night and thought I had better close it as it had been wide open for the heat. I might have drowned in my bed else. It must have been some torrential because the channels cut in the sand down on the Harbour beach were both deep and wide. One of the neighbours said that it was short lived, though.

It was pretty much still t-shirt weather when we eventually headed out this morning. The bleddy hound was sparko when I first got up, so I went down and prepared the shop first and came back up for her half an hour later when the light had improved a bit. She was up and waiting for me when I went back upstairs. There were still some dark clouds about and it started spotting with rain while we were on the beach, Happily, it did not amount to very much at all and we headed back after a longer than usual mooch about on the sand.

The sun broke through just before I opened the shop, which was a bit of a surprise since it was supposed to be showery today according to our illustrious but fairly useless weather services. It turned out to be quite a pretty day in all and brought out our visitors in numbers. There were even quite a few on the beach camped out for the day and even the surfers got a treat with a few waves over by North Rocks. A happy day all around.

Well, maybe not all around. There was a fair bit of consternation and misinformation about the impending change to the bus timetable. I do not know who was spreading the misinformation but it was aided and abetted by at least one service being dropped. It was at the end of the day that I discovered that I too had added to the confusion. I had told people that the timetables changes were from 4th September, which was entirely accurate, but I was speaking from the position that I thought that was Monday, whoops.

I had finalised my draft of the plan for the replacement of the next run of shop shelving and wanted to run it by the Missus for executive approval – and, of course,

to spread the blame. When she came downstairs to let me take a break, we were busy and we were again when I came back before she went off to collect Mother. I actually managed to start explaining when she came back again but a friend wanted a chat at that moment. We gave up in the end, so I will not be ordering the shelves just yet.

It had been a relatively busy day and as we ran down towards closing time, it started to get busy again with a flourish at the end that was the five minutes to closing rush. It was a good enough day and probably the best we can expect from the new season. I had been telling those that had asked that the whole feel of this year was back to normal, the usual people coming back and a more sensible level of business. I had time to look at the numbers from June and July and, indeed, revenues have dipped. This, of course, is disappointing until we think of everything that came with it.

It did not figure at all as we sat at the table for our tea and watched the rain starting. Clouds had been gathering, sweeping in from the south in the later stages of the afternoon. Mother told us of the thunderstorm warnings in place for tonight – she has her finger on the pulse of local news and the various feeds she gets on social media. I looked later and the main bulk of the heavy rain was piling up the Tamar Valley. We had a bit, but it was short lived and not a hint of thunder and lightning. I think I got over the disappointment as I finished off the last of the latest pile of invoices. Just one more to go, the tail end Charlies, and that will be this quart finished. Whoopie.

September 3rd – Saturday

It has been ages since The Diary has had a little poke at the much maligned council. Let us address this forthwith with a little bit of fun with buses.

Radio Pasty announced that Go Cornwall will be withdrawing services across the Duchy. The new company that the much maligned council had brought in to operate the less economic services across the Duchy has found that the services it was running were uneconomic and in conjunction with the much maligned council, has decided not to do them anymore. A spokesperson from the much maligned council made it clear that it was still their stated aim was to double the number of people on the buses. I guess, in theory, that if you remove half the buses the number of people on them will double, so that is a step in the right direction. One of the services that it has withdrawn from is the early morning one that runs out of The Cove to Penzance. You know, the one that people working in Penzance rather rely on if they do not have a car and more frequently, school children rely on to get to school or college.

The much maligned council had already withdrawn the rather useful service earlier in the year, the number 7, that ran from Land's End out to Morvah and down into Penzance. This was the service that did for our community bus service because it was not allowed to operate on a commercial route. I am told that the local bush telegraph was alive with indignation at the removal of the remaining service – except

it had not been removed at all. A little digging showed that although Go Cornwall would no longer run the service it would continue under the First Kernow company, who were running it originally. It was an operation that was working perfectly well until the much maligned council decided to fix it. Anyway, it prompted me to write up the winter timetable, so some good came of it.

I had endeavoured to get the bleddy hound out of the front door a bit earlier today. It was not actually earlier, it just looked it because it was darker than she was used to. I had expected a guts of rain to come howling through and was keen to get her out for our morning beach run before it properly set in. She was having none of it. I went downstairs to get the shop ready and came back ten minutes later on the basis that she might think that I had been an hour. It worked.

It was raining a bit when we went out but not enough to worry either her or me. It turned out to be a good plan because it came down much heavier a bit later and I would have struggled to get her out at all. Despite the wet, we had quite a showing of customers during the first part of the morning, many collecting presents and pasties for the journey home.

Normally, when things ease off and because it does not matter any longer, all our deliveries are suddenly timely. For some reason, this morning's paper delivery was very late arriving, well after we had opened. Luckily, I had just finished building and putting them out when the pasty delivery arrived. We were also short of very early customers and I got away light.

There were surprising numbers about despite the rain. Quite a few were leaving and getting supplies and snacks for the journey but there was also a decent number of new arrivals testing our waters. I certainly was not bored, and it took a little while before I managed to clear even the meagre deliveries that we had today.

While boredom is a way off yet, I did have time to get some more of our mugs out onto the shelves. I was quite surprised that we had so many left after quite a busy summer, although they are high value goods and tend to sell better in the shoulder seasons. It may be that I placed a bigger order than usual this year after the bumper sales of last year and that may well have been because we had begger all else to sell. It will not be a problem as they do not exactly go off or out of fashion and we will simply order less for next year if they do not sell in this one.

I also managed to finish off specifying the new shop shelving. Inspired by our success down the gift aisle last year, I have decided to replace all the shelving where the bread and crisps are on one side and the fishing gear, mugs and books are on the other. This started out as just replacing the fishing gear display. It is a set of shelves from a Nordic furniture store and was there when we took the shop over nearly twenty years ago and as far from fit for purpose as doing the Dakar rally in a punt with no oars. My project has suffered some serious scope creep. I ran the

concept past a friendly pair of ears this morning and he said it was a good idea. If it all goes wrong, it is his fault now.

The rain petered out in the late morning, or possibly the early afternoon, I was not paying much attention. The afternoon, the bit where we were all supposed to build arks and float away on the flood according to the forecast, was relatively bright, warm and dry. It encouraged out a good number of visitors – once they realised they had been hoodwinked – and we had a good post season bit of business.

There was a slow decline to the end of the day and a small five minutes to closing rush. The closing an hour earlier makes a difference bigger than the sum of its parts, sort of thing, and I find I have some quality relaxation time instead of a rushed half an hour at the end of inputting invoices. Ah yes, I also ignored my invoicing duties but I should now had some time between customers to do those during the daytime in the shop. Another month from now I will be thinking that I should get a proper job that involved working.

September 2nd – Friday

You forget the meaning of the word, 'quiet' after six weeks or more of being battered about the head with hundreds of people moving through the shop on a daily basis. I know I have used 'quiet' before in that period, but that is a different thing altogether. This is proper quiet.

I suspect that it will be quieter still in the coming days, given the weather we have had forecast, whether it happens or no. We were the lucky ones today, there was so much sunshine in the sky it was queued up to arrive here. The wind had dropped out as well and we had people from further up telling us how drab it had been when they left. It was a right glorious day and even the more so from knowing that it was poor on the other side of the fence.

We had no grumpy customers today. In fact, very few customers at all at times past the last minute gift buying of those going home. I busied myself for some time with deliveries that will probably now take some time to sell through. Nevertheless, things like the small sweet bags that are oh so popular with the children had been depleted to the point the stand is almost empty. Local boys and maids partake of them too and they would be grief stricken if we ever stopped doing them, so the Missus placed an order today to replenish the stands. Not to be left out, I placed an order for the postcard fudge boxes. There are some of those left but will soon disappear.

In the early part of the part of the morning, I treated myself to a blistering session down at the gymnasium. Now that things are quieter, I have commenced the long(ish) journey back to full sessions again, added a further six minutes to my rowing and longer sessions on the weights. My, it is good to be getting back to it again. A customer told me, when I arrived back at the shop, that he did not recognise me dressed as I was in a hoodie with the hood up and a mask. I told him that it was

a health and safety measure to prevent ladies from swooning in the street at my inflated biceps and quivering pectorals as I passed. He seemed the sort of chap who would understand such fears.

After I had rested, I returned to the shop and my little bit of delivery clearance. Later in the afternoon, feeling a tad restless, I flicked through a food supplement that came with one of the broadsheet weekend newspapers. I do like a good recipe but unfortunately I was faced with some very weird stuff instead. Beetroot and cheese curry, blackberry and barley salad and celery, saffron and white beans (a bit more normal) – surely just a list of random ingredients in a competition to see who could get the most bizarre and outlandish combinations.

I came to a page that promised 'kebab shop classics', which I thought a good step in the right direction until I read of cold aubergines with some other ingredients that first I had never heard of and even if by some remote chance I fancied cooking it, I would never find this side of the Exe, let alone the Tamar. Some yoghurt and garlic thing came next and something that included sweet peppers, tomatoes, mint and pomegranate molasses – what! If they tried serving any of that in a kebab place in Penzance we would find the owner pegged out on Longrock beach the following morning with sweet pointed peppers stuck in his ears and covered in pomegranate molasses. If that is what they are eating up country these days, I am staying west of Camborne.

The day stayed glorious until the bitter end – of the middle of the afternoon - which was good of it. There was an expanse of beach heading towards five o'clock and a fair few people enjoying the placid waters. There were at least fifty people getting wet in one way or another from paddling to trying to surf. It probably was quite pleasant in the last warmth of the day and just the thing on the last day of your holiday or maybe even the first. It was clouding over by then and becoming a little more grey.

Later, we watched at our leisure from the table as we enjoyed some tea that the Missus had cooked – a very pleasant fish pie with pickled prunes and glace peacock eyeballs.

September 1st – Thursday

The latest advice on water conservation we are advised by Radio Pasty this morning is to shower for four minutes. I do not know about you, dear reader, but I will not spend four and a half times longer in the shower for anyone.

While we are on the bad news section of today's Diary I should tell you that worse is to come – you will not even be able to drink yourself into oblivion soon, at least not with beer, anyway. The latest news is that one of the country's largest fertiliser producers has decided not to produce CO₂ any longer due to spiralling costs. It is worrying not only that there will be no more canned anything or fizzy pump beer but

also that an entire industry decided that it was alright to gather all its eggs from the same basket. Things will sort themselves out, I am sure, but not before certain breweries not a million miles away slap another £2.50 on a pint just in case.

We started the day in sunshine under a blue sky and ended up looking a bit grey with the sun blotted out by cloud. Sorry, that did not sound very much like good news, either. It was a pleasant enough day, nonetheless – there, that is a bit better – and there were a fair few people milling about from later in the morning and into the afternoon. There was not a huge amount of swell but it was better than yesterday and possibly there were more camped out on the beach, which was fairly ironic given the gloomy sky.

We are pleased to entertain a wide range of customer sorts who, in the main are happy and polite individuals. Occasionally, we have unhappy customers but very, very rarely we have those who really should not be out on their own. One such entered the fray in the middle of the afternoon.

Thankfully, he chose a quieter moment to ask how much frozen pasties were. I told him that they were the same price as hot ones to which he argued that they should be cheaper given that I had not expended any energy in heating them up. I asked him how he thought I was keeping them frozen, which he ignored. He then proceeded to tell me that he would take two frozen pasties for a discounted price. When I turned down his kind offer he asked were our pasties ‘world champion’ just because they are called that; what other things we had in the shop and were those ‘all the fridge magnets we had left’.

Happily, I had disengaged from his inane ramblings on at the point ‘discount’ was mentioned. Grumpy shopkeepers are traumatised enough without having to hear such foul language. I do not know if he realised that I was no longer paying much attention but the final straw was refusing his payment card for three postcards, which I told him he was saving ten pence on as part our our multi-card deal, because it did not meet our minimum price. He left muttering under his breath, which was for the best I felt.

It all became a bit frantic after he left with half the Cove coming in for going home presents. I had to top up the postcard fudge boxes half way through and still ended up with big gaps in them after round two was over. If that was a last horrah, it was a good one.

For the first time in six weeks I was able to attend a Lifeboat training session. I let the youngster loose on doing everything, after all, they need the practise and I wanted to make sure that they had not let our poor standards or miserable reputation improve while I was gone. Clearly they had not. One of the team had a prior engagement before recovery, so I had to do some work after all.

The boat was out for just over an hour and returned to the bay at around eight o'clock and high water. If you have been paying attention all these years, dear reader, you will know that in the intervening period, we set up the short slip on which to bring in the boat. Even with someone else doing it, it looked to me pretty much like a textbook recovery up the short slip, a quick wash down and a turning around to the long slipway again for the next launch. We are, after all, a very consistent, very excellent Shore Crew.