

DIARY 2023

March 31st – Friday

Mother told us last night that the wind had been howling across St Buryan all day. I think we had been sheltered here due to the direction and it was much less severe. I like to think that it was more a Sodom and Gomorrah moment, with them being the hotbed of the dreaded lurgi, an' all.

There was no escaping it for us this morning. I had to tuck the bleddy hound in behind the Lifeboat station wall when we went out first thing, else she would have been bowled over. It was raining too and required the application of full metal jacket waterproofs, which had not been out for an airing in some time.

I had rather hoped to open the shop today but with the weather the way it was and with still feeling somewhat drained of enthusiasm as well as other things, I decided to review what was going on halfway through the day. This was probably code for 'begger it, we will open tomorrow instead' but I did not want to admit it to myself. I had to be up early anyway to take in a surplus of pasties and bread. I suspect that we probably will not get through very much of that given the forecast for the weekend but there is no accounting for the desperation of a weary traveller – if, indeed, travellers turn up, weary or otherwise.

The other tradesperson I was waiting for was the waste collection man. After all the deliveries we have had, there was quite an abundance of cardboard to go. On quiet days, we will put all that outside well in advance of his arrival, but had I done so today, the boxes would have been collectable from all over the Beach car park after about five minutes. As it was, I had to leave our domestic wheelie bin strapped to the big commercial one, and even that hanging off its anchorage at a jaunty angle when I went down.

With that out of the way, I had one last chore to conduct but a rest was required first. It does seem to be a feature of the dreaded lurgi that it taps your strength and regardless of the amount of willpower you apply to it, sometimes you just have to give in to a quick half hour zizz.

Not exactly fully refreshed, I hauled my aching frame away from my comfortable chair and headed for The Farm. One of the deliveries during the preceding few days was wetshoes, so I quickly checked if any of the sizes that had arrived were needed in the shop. They were, but there were also other gaps, roughly all the adult shoes, that needed to be replaced. With the first day of the Easter holidays starting tomorrow and the Missus laid up, there was only one way I was going to get them down to the shop.

It was blowing a right hooley up at The Farm but thankfully the direction or the shelter from the tractor shed it did not interfere too badly with barn door that I

wedged open against a brick. Most of my time there extracting the stock was moving things out of the way so that I could get at the shoe containers. I ended up with half a truck full and by the time I got back to the shop, I had once again exhausted my fuel supply. The placing of the stock on the shelves will have to wait until tomorrow but, judging from today's experience, I will not be pressed to do so.

By later afternoon and early evening, we usually see an increase in traffic in The Cove as the first holiday set arrive. It was very quiet. I will not get to see the car park in the morning, but I suspect we will not have had a great influx overnight. We shall see, but it looks like another fearfully quiet Easter looming and I shall be very glad I did not stick my neck out on ordering. Watch this space.

March 30th – Thursday

We had thought to open the shop today but by the middle of yesterday, that did not seem like a terribly good idea. The last two days had not been busy at all, probably the forecast creating a self-fulfilling prophecy. Today was hazy, a bit breezy but relatively warm and largely dry. It was quite pleasant out first thing with the bleddy hound, even if she was a tad early. I cannot blame her overly this morning, what with the Missus and I thrashing about, erm, separately trying to find some comfort.

I had absolutely no intention of moving very fast or very early today. It would definitely be the last regardless of how I felt tomorrow, so long as I tested clear. If we missed the order for pasties today, too, we would not have any for the weekend, so at the very least I would have to let the pasty man in. I decided to garner as much rest out of the day as possible, although with a shop full of boxes that needed to be empties ahead of collection tomorrow, that was going to be a tough challenge.

Leaving it until the middle of the day, I let the pasty order be my starting point. I had to go down to the shop for that, so I may as well start after I finished the order. Opening the boxes is a bit like being a child at Christmas. There are some that you just know are for the adults, the boring stuff. These are the preserves, chutneys and marmalades that take just so long to wade through. When will it be my turn? Just let Auntie Dot open hers a minute – boring old shoes for the middle aisle. Now it's your turn. You know what it is anyway.

Well, of course I do. It is the bespoke new gifts from a company we have used before but forgot about last year. Logo key fobs, bottle openers, pin badges and glasses cleaning clothes. All need to be found a new space on the shelves depending on how small hand vulnerable they are. Having said that, some things I have put up higher have fallen victim to small children in those backpack arrangements and the responsible adult cannot even see what is going on.

I continued with the emptying boxes until my batteries were depleted once more. There is a bit still left to do and we had another delivery today, one being a replacement toilet seat – remember my errant screw, I discovered the hole thread

was shredded – which will have to wait for another day. I need to drop down in the morning to clear as much rubbish as I can for the delivery later in the morning. I would normally put the cardboard out, and there is a lot of it, but we have a weather warning in place for high winds, which I did not expect and could have done well without. It does mean that there will be few people about so maybe I can get away with opening a bit later in the day.

That beginnings of that wind were evident when I took the bleddy hound down to the Harbour beach for a change of scenery. I noticed the seal rescue people under the slipway, but we would be no trouble to them. One of them came over to warn me to keep my dog away. I told her that if my dog had any inkling there was a seal within a hundred yards of her all she would be seeing now is a bleddy hound shaped hole on the beach, dickie legs or no. There was clearly nothing wrong with the seal and the attendants were just there to make sure it made its own way back to the sea.

There was rain when I took her out again last thing in the evening but no sign of the wind yet. Could be a rough night, though.

March 29th – Wednesday

Well, at least I am catching up on my lost hour at the end of the week due to this upset. The bleddy hound has not yet cottoned on to the change in hour and sleeps through until the old time. I did too this morning.

I managed to do the right thing during the morning and had a bit of a restful time of it. I was aware of more deliveries arriving later in day and they would need to be dealt with. One of them turned up when I was resting my eyes for a moment, clearly delivered by a Ninja courier as I never heard a thing when he placed the box inside the front door.

You have to applaud the much maligned council for its dedication to our health, safety and wellbeing. Each month without fail and at great expense they send a truck along with an operative along to check and polish our streetlamp. There is nothing that will stand in the way of this selfless act of duty, not even the fact that it has never worked nor is ever likely to as it is not connected to any electricity.

I could not let such stoicism go unanswered and I set my depleted frame to dealing with the accumulating deliveries languishing near the shop doorway. Many more and we would not be able to get in. The thing that would take most time was the small bags of sweets, so I set to with those and had a fair number done. I would have completed the task save for another delivery that knocked me off kilter. This one needed to be stashed into the truck for delivery to The Farm later or on another day. It appears that the dreaded lurgi only provides for a limited amount of activity and today's limit, it seemed, had been reached. I retired.

Mother had been harangued in recent days by telephone calls from her telephone company asking that was happening to the work that was required for her to have her fibre installed. It seemed strange that they were pressing Mother when the matter was in the hands of its own contractor. Unable to communicate with Mother properly, they sent a message to me suggesting they would cancel the order if I did not respond. It does not take much effort to raise the telephone to my ear, so I did that next.

The very pleasant lady on the telephone was most helpful until she cut me off while looking into what was happening. Why she could not have looked into what was happening before haranguing Mother with calls and messaging me, will remain a mystery. Anyway, the telephone company has been placated but the matter of the wayleave form needing to be signed off by the property company had not yet been resolved. While I was on the telephone, I sent a message to the contractor doing the work and the property company whose permission had been requested.

I received an almost immediate response from the original contact in the property company telling me, and the contractor contacts copied into the message, that the matter had been escalated to the Housing Officer. There must be thousands of much maligned council properties in The Duchy many of which will need wayleave permission for such work. Openreach, is committed to relacing the copper, analogue telephone network across the UK by 2025 – except in Cornwall where, based on current estimates, 24 of the houses requiring wayleave will have been done.

There was much languishing going on later. The Missus took the truck up to The Farm, partly for the delivery and partly to water the seedlings in the greenhouse. She then joined in the languishing as it seems she has caught something too but tested negative for the dreaded lurgi. She clearly saw all the sympathy I was not getting and did not want any either. It is an obtuse world that we live in now.

March 28th – Tuesday

I endured another night of discomfort but shops still need to be opened and bleddy hounds need to be walked. It was halfway through the morning that we rapidly closed the shop again as it seems I have the dreaded lurgi and must have had it for a few days. The symptoms of the dreaded lurgi were nothing compared to the agony of shutting out our customers. It is not the most auspicious start to the season but it will be memorable, I suppose.

The Highly Professional Craftsperson sent me a message this morning to tell me he had got it, presumably from our quiz on Friday night. That will teach me to go enjoying myself in far away and exotic places. I had always heard that they were a dickie lot over at St Buryan. I will not be going again.

If I thought that I would get a bit of a free ride of it today, curled up with a good book, I had another think coming. There were five deliveries scheduled for various times

during the day. We also had a delivery of frozen food arriving that had to be whisked into our freezers as soon as it arrived. At least it gave me time to reprice all the ice creams. I was pleasantly surprised that they had not increased by as much as we were expecting. Lastly, I had sold a pasty to a gentleman visitor yesterday, who had arranged to collect it today but did not give a time. We had to remain vigilant all day for when he arrived – towards the end of the afternoon.

One of our deliveries was a job lot of tea towels that the Missus spent the afternoon packing into bags that our customers will rip open even though there will be loose ones to look at. There were rather a lot of them but it a task right up the Missus's street and she finished most of them during the afternoon. I will have a similar tedious job tomorrow as the 50 pence bags of sweets that the children buy in abundance arrive late in the day. Of course, the Missus may beat me to that. It depends how long I can procrastinate without being obvious.

The shop will be closed for a few days and I am rather hoping I can reopen Thursday or Friday. Any longer than that and we will be in real trouble. I do not think that we missed much trade today. The weather forecast was full of rain and not only that, it rained to in the morning. People stayed away in droves. The forecast for tomorrow is not much better so, on balance, there could have been worse time to have to close.

March 27th – Monday

It was not the most comfortable night and neither was the morning. It really is only a cold but I have not been ill for well over five years and I am sure they did not feel like this. Progress, I suppose.

I thought that I would be considerate to my customers and wear a mask in the shop. Seeing the look of fear on the face of the first customer of the day gave me cause to doubt my reasoning and compelled me to tell him that it was just a cold and nothing more serious. Of course, that led onto the look that said what are you wearing a mask for if it is just a cold. I gave up by late morning.

Next up was the decision whether to go to the gymnasium or not. While it was true, I was feeling a tad ropery I felt that a good blistering session would knock the stuffing out of the cold and make me feel much better. Of course, the alternative was that the blistering session would knock the stuffing out of me, which it did to a certain extent but that may have had much to do with the fact I had not been for a while. I think, on balance it was a good idea and I did not push myself too hard, doing just half the rowing I would normally do and going easy on the weights.

It was a spectacularly gorgeous looking day out there. Sadly, it was just as cold in the shop as it was yesterday but out in the sunshine it was reasonably warm. It encouraged a succession of visitors to camp out on the benches opposite us and the café, enjoying a snack or a meal. The sea appears to have stopped misbehaving for now but have left the beach somewhat denuded of sand again toward the back by

the dunes. It is also rocky at the bottom of the OS slipway I am told but this did not seem to bother a good dozen or so surfers bobbing about at strategic spots in the bay.

The kind weather generated a bit of trade for us on a day that would otherwise have been a little quiet. There are some private schools on holiday and we have seen some of those about at the weekend. We do not expect a rush until the end of this week – hopefully – as the state schools take their breaks.

Into this tableau of quiet enjoyment came a text message from my medical practice, at first perplexed and then irritated beyond measure. It related to my ears, which have become a thorn in my side, so no wonder I cannot hear. When I left the nurse a fortnight ago, I was told that my ears were clear apart from a miniscule bit near my eardrum but she would tick the referral box, nevertheless. The text I received told me the opposite and that I would need to continue with my ear drops for two weeks and go back so she could have another geek. With Easter almost upon us that is not going to happen and the longer this gets spun out the less inclined I am to press on.

After the café closed at four o'clock the street pretty much emptied, which led to a particularly tedious last couple of hours. There is only so much staring at the beach or counting surfers that a grumpy shopkeeper can do. There were twelve if you are interested, dear reader. The bit of weather that we had all day survived into the evening, which was good of it and made for quite a delicious end to the day.

March 26th – Sunday

It was as I was retiring to bed last night that I remembered that I had not wrapped up the unsold newspapers for collection in the morning. This is not the end of the world as the Laurel and Hardy Newspaper Company will take them back a day or two late if pressed. I do not like doing it, though because it is messy and prone to cause confusion. Ordinarily, I would have plenty of time to do it the following morning but with the clocks going forward the newspaper companies, that started their process before the clock change, continue it in the same time zone. The newspapers would be an hour earlier this morning.

Coming back downstairs at the late hour just was not going to happen so I made it the priority of the morning after getting myself ready. As I had hoped, the bleddy hound recked not the change in time and continued to snore after I got up. I shut the bedroom door and hoped she did not miss me and sneaked down to do the newspapers and put out the frontage display. Job done.

The bleddy hound was keen and giving the bedroom door a hard stare when I opened it to see if she was ready to get up. I do not think that she had been waiting long else she would have let herself down off the bed. This is something she cannot do when there is someone there to help her down. So started the day proper, about a half hour earlier than normal.

I had not changed the clock in the living room but was aware that I had not and was mentally adjusting when I looked at it. Having finished my morning chores, with the exception of the day's newspapers, I potted about upstairs as I did not want to be hanging about downstairs too long before we opened. Something, at some point, went awry with my mental calculating and I was suddenly aware I had only ten minutes left to do the newspapers and open the shop. It did not require a panic as the morning would not be very busy, I was sure, but it gave me a bit of a kick to wake up.

We did not enjoy quite the business we had yesterday. Sundays will be the busier of the two weekend days during the main part of the season but in the quiet weeks and months it seems Sunday is a day of rest. We had a fair crack at the pasties, and it looked like I just about finished off all the meat ones after a late surge in the afternoon.

It had been reasonably chill when I took the bleddy hound out in the morning but nothing particularly extreme. It was, however, breezy, which brought the temperature down and probably accounted for the pasty bubble. What I had failed to realise was that I was slowly cooling down. The breeze was not coming directly through the door, so it was not very apparent, but by last thing I was cold to the core. I had also developed a bit of a cough that I was doing my best to ignore and my nose was leaking – apologies if it is your breakfast time – which I put down to the cold rather than illness. I had better wind forward to tomorrow morning in the interests of not spreading panic. It is clearly just a head cold, which probably feels like the crack of doom because I have not had one for at least five years. My temperature is normal, which for me is below the average person's normal, I have a bit of a head and my joints are a little creaky. My sense of smell is still with me, which is unfortunate given the bleddy hound's condition, but I have a bit of a croaky voice, which I put down to actually using my voice for the first time in four months.

I was still reasonably chipper when I returned upstairs for the big party. Of course, there were only five of us for Mother's gathering and enough food to support a regiment through a winter campaign. Mother explained that her Face Page this morning exclaimed that she was 75, which she was delighted with. She almost certainly behaves like a 75 year old despite the additional decades. What a champ.

March 25th – Saturday

After my night on the tiles I did not feel very inclined to get out of the bed when the bleddy hound awoke me from my dozing. However, the thought of a shop not yet ready for admission of my adoring public – and otherwise – drove me on and I hauled myself out to face the day.

It seemed a tad chilly in the living room but when we got outside, the wind had diminished a good deal and it really was not that bad. It was just the odd properties

of our granite and glass construction that keeps on our toes in the flat. The sea was still messed up but certainly it is on the wane and not putting half so much effort into charging over the wall. I am not surprised after the tantrums of the last few days; it must be worn out.

The new format of my workday morning was quite acceptable, taking the bleddy hound out first, then coming back to get ready for the day rather than making her wait. I told myself not to get used to it because tomorrow will be entirely different after the clocks go forward. I am expecting to be up ahead of the bleddy hound and hopefully I will be able to fool her into sleeping in until I have finished my own and the shops early morning routine.

We had left the shop in a state of ordered disarray, meaning that all the rubbish had been cleared away but all the furniture was stacked up to the rear of the shop to allow the front to be mopped. The welcome mat had been cleaned down and I noticed that it had been draped over our box out the front to dry. This needed to be moved ahead of the newspapers arriving – if they were going to – and a sizable greengrocery delivery. I did this while I was down with the bleddy hound, but the rest waited until I came down an hour or so before opening time.

The furniture at the far end of the shop that supports the shoes, swimming costumes and wetsuits needs to be placed just so, providing adequate space on the aisles either side. After several times of moving and replacing the furniture I eventually fell on the idea to discretely mark the floor where each of the items go. Other than my markings being perhaps a little too discrete and hard to find on the floor, it works quite well. I shall have to do the same at the front end of the shop where the bodyboards and postcards go, because I could not recall for the life of me the exact position of those and had to guess.

We never advertise our opening locally. The only prior indications are on the website and in this very journal. I see most of the locals in The Cove from time to time anyway and those I had not will get to know by and by. Visitors are unlikely to make a special journey to see us and if they are in The Cove, they will get to know soon enough. For a first day without advertising, we did very well. We did not go through quite as many pasties as forecast, but that is really not a problem. It was busier than I anticipated helped along by a reasonably pleasant day.

Earlier, and halfway through the morning we had a bit of rain. It was heavy at times and quite persistent. The hiatus it introduced allowed me to finish my breakfast that I had mistakenly started late. I had not imagined the number of earlier shoppers and I will have to make adjustments accordingly. I had quite forgotten such joys.

The slow pace of the morning allowed me to finish off the shelf pricing here and there across the shop. As the afternoon petered out into quietness, I was able to tidy up in the store room a bit and to put out some of the gifts that had arrived with the early buy delivery we had about a month ago. The toy and gift aisle is still packed

from last year and I struggled to get most of it out into places that were appropriate. While there is probably a bit of room available on the lower shelves, placing things down the toy aisle requires some consideration. The main consideration being whether small and destructive fingers might find sport with whatever it is I am placing. I probably should not over-think such things; older fingers with higher reach are just as destructive on the wrong hands.

I found the Missus knee deep in kitchen things when I got upstairs. It is Mother's birthday tomorrow and she is making some tasty comestibles for the hundred and thirty people that have clearly been invited. I was not aware that Mother's circle was so large but the amount of food being prepared is not for just the five people that I thought would be there. It will all be a huge surprise, I am sure, so Mother's the word, dear reader – especially for the boys on the Lifeboat who will, no doubt, end up with the extensive leftovers.

March 24th – Friday

I thought that all the heavy lifting had been done yesterday. Little did I know.

It all started out relatively normal for a grumpy shopkeeper about to embark upon seven months of servitude. This morning was just a teaser with deliveries from the dairy and our pasty company. I was expecting those but the others, though very welcome came thick and fast in the afternoon.

The bleddy hound had me up at sparrow's again. It means that at least I am not running around chasing my tail and have plenty of time to carry out the normal shop open routine. It is remarkably how quickly you forget things that used to be second nature, such as which way around to place the milk bottles to make them easier to lift into the fridge. It took the first carton wondering why it felt awkward before I realised. The shelves on which the bread and cakes are set out is all new, of course. This will mean some experimentation as to what is best with new wider shelves.

I went and got ready for the day and had some breakfast and forced myself back down to the shop again. The plan was to put away anything I had missed and also put in place the new price labels for things that had change – nearly everything then. I had not long started when a delivery driver knocked on the door. He was the one bringing the pallet full of beachware and it was definitely full.

It was a couple of hours earlier than notified, which suited me just fine, which meant I could change priorities and get the delivery out of the way first. Well, second; the truck had to be taken up to The Farm to be emptied first.

While I was at The Farm my brain inexplicably kicked into gear and suggested that it would be a jolly wizard idea to hitch up the trailer so that I stood a chance of taking everything up all at once. It was one of those deliveries where there was not a large number of boxes but the ones that were there were either bulky, heavy or bulky and

heavy. There were quite a number of windbreaks that fall into the last category and the tall ones only just fit into the back of the truck.

By this time, the Missus had joined me downstairs and had started to clear the ice cream freezer. This is the one where we aggregate the contents of all the other freezers and live out of it over the winter. As a consequence, it gets frosted up with the constant opening and closing and requires a good scrub out when we revert it to its primary use. I left her to this while I went up to The Farm to unload the beachware into the store.

The bleddy hound had spent the entire time while I loaded the truck trying to get out of the shop to lie outside, so I took her with me to give her a change of scenery and a run – hobble – around. As is her way, she elected to lie down in front of the barn doors forcing me to side-step her as I carried in the delivery. I took one last look around as it was highly likely the last time before the end of the season that I would spend any time up there – barring barbeques.

It was well into the afternoon by the time we had both finished our chores. During that time another three deliveries appeared resulting from the orders I had placed on Tuesday. It probably indicates an element of fear on behalf of the suppliers or that they have nothing better to do, which is equally worrying.

Today, the boss at the Bank of England asked retailers not to put prices up because it would embed inflation. I get the point, but I am not entirely sure why the entire responsibility for the condition of the economy should fall to retailers. Could he not have asked wholesalers and importers to not raise prices instead? He could also lead by example and not put the price of money up; I am already paying enough for my mortgage, thanks.

It has only been very recently that the consultation for the much maligned council's planned increase in parking fares has closed. It was all over Radio Pasty a day or so ago. I can understand that they would like to rationalise parking charges because it rather looked like they had a separate rate for each of them, which is confusing for both the parker and the administrator. The big idea is to have a few bands. The higher rates will apply in the most popular places, which might be regarded milking it perhaps, and lesser charges for the not so popular.

Season tickets will also rise and follow the same principle. One complainant was aghast that his fee for a year was going up 500 percent. While the increase sounds a lot, he was only paying £100 a year to start with. Even only parking on weekdays and allowing for holidays, he was probably only paying 40 pence a day. I am not often on side with the much maligned council but I suspect in this instance, on the face of it they have a case.

Not that I noticed, but there was probably a fair amount of parking in The Cove today. At low water, the bay was looking quite restrained with bits of white water here

and there and some robust waves heading into the beach. As the tide increased, the character of the sea changed dramatically. Robust changed to downright aggressive and the bay became a roiling mess and none more so that around the Harbour and the wall. It was probably not quite as upset as yesterday and the waves running up Creagle were falling back short of half way.

I have long since been abandoned the quiz at the OS. The dreaded lurgi did for me originally but, having broken the habit, I have been reticent to go back and five pounds a pint or so is doing nothing to tempt me. More recently, the start time has changed to eight o'clock so that the pub can close early, which overlaps with Lifeboat practise. So, it was with a mixture of trepidation and interest that I agreed to the Highly Professional Craftsperson's request to go to the St Buryan community quiz, held in aid of charity. We had attended the last one before the dreaded lurgi and had done embarrassingly well, coming second or third with just the two of us playing. Tonight, we had the old OS team back in place including its question master, so we kept a low profile.

St Buryan is a place of strong community spirit and they have numerous events through the year, always well attended. The icons of their combined efforts are the St Buryan Christmas lights which get better each year and the St Buryan Rally, which attracts visitors from far and wide. It should have been no surprise tonight that the hall was packed, although on the last occasion there were probably fewer in attendance. By halfway through the quiz we were in second place in a field of around twenty teams. A second half bruiser of general knowledge round knocked us back and we came fourth. At least this year we did not have to slink out the backdoor in case we had upset the locals.

It was a cracking night. The fund raising effort, from a number of different events was quite spectacular and funds went to various good local causes and the Cornwall Blood Bikes as the centrepiece. The only crack in an otherwise excellent evening was that it delivered me home well past my bedtime. I shall not be worth a button by morning.

March 23rd – Thursday

There it is, done, at least the bottom two thirds of the remaining raised beds are now full. I breathed a sigh of relief as I tipped the last tub into the bed, just slightly ahead of collapsing in a ragged heap.

The day looked like it had some potential when the bleddy hound and I slipped out first thing. That breeze had learnt a thing or two about blowing overnight and was fair rattling around the corner of the Lifeboat station. The sea, not to be outdone, was twice as fierce as it was yesterday and had completely buried the Harbour wall. It was not the biggest of spring tides but churned up like that and with a bit of wind behind it had caused concern of flooding along the weak points on the south coast.

I wasted no time in getting toggled up for The Farm and was up there well before eight o'clock. I took some tools up there that had migrated to the shop over the winter and salted them away first then got on with the work at hand. It has rained again overnight but clearly not quite as heavily as the day before and the earth I was digging was a good bit drier. Despite that, it seemed just as hard work as it did the day before which I put down to the need for a fortnight in the Maldives being waited on hand and foot.

Just to show how distant that was away from reality, the cloud darkened and glowered overhead, blocking out the sunshine that I started the job under. It was also much more breezy up there, which I had expected and worn an extra layer. At the end of the first run, that layer was summarily dumped in the polytunnel for the duration. As yesterday, I created an interlude between earth runs by finishing off the weeding of the first of our large beds. It was most therapeutic.

No less so was a hearty breakfast when I returned after which I did begger all while my body forgave me for abusing it. With just 48 hours to go before opening the shop is still stacked high with boxes that should not be there and boxes that the Missus had emptied after I flattened the first load she had done. We made some headway into that later on and the superfluous boxes of 'stuff' are in the truck and will be dumped at The Farm tomorrow.

I had made note to call in the order for dairy for tomorrow as it will be easier than doing it on Saturday morning when everything else will be going wrong. You will be pleased to hear, dear reader, that the price of various dairy products are actually starting to decrease. Our dairy has explained that this is more on a local scale and if you shop at Tesmorburys or buy national company products, they are likely to be unchanged.

There was a little panic about pasties because I remembered being caught out at Christmas when I discovered that they were no longer delivering on Saturday. I called them up on Wednesday to check and, sure enough, that is still the same, hence our weekend pasties are arriving tomorrow now. I hope that they revise this arrangement when we start to get busier else we will be ordering more than 160 pasties on a Friday and struggle to find room for them.

By the end of the day, the shop was looking a little more like we might be ready for opening on Saturday morning. There is still a bit to do and we have the whole of tomorrow to do it, apart from the bit where I have to dash up to The Farm in the morning to empty the truck or the bit in the afternoon where we have a pallet of buckets, spades and windbreaks to take apart which will require two trips to The Farm.

There was absolutely no chance of a training launch in the evening. The sea that was fearfully rough in the morning had come back as big as I have seen it in a long while. The waves mounting over Cowloe and just before the wall had to be around

three metres high or more. I watched as bigger waves powered half way up the cliff at Creagle which is around 30 metres, 100 feet high. It was a mighty sea, thundering into the night.

March 22nd – Wednesday

Well, that was certainly a bit of a hell for leather sort of day but, gosh, it felt good.

I was rather hoping for a bit of weather to be on my side today and from the early start I had it did very well. There was a bit of breeze about, especially as we rounded the corner of the Lifeboat station but it was not severe, just a little more poke to it than previous days.

It must have been close to high water when the bleddy hound and I stepped out. She did one of her surprise, 'going for a bit of a longer walks' this morning and we ended up at the top of the slipway. I was very glad she did not fancy going down any further as the sea was swirling in around the bottom of the cobbles as it will on big spring tides when there is a bit of thrust behind it. There was plenty of thrust today; the sea was banging over the Harbour wall and making a right racket. One of the fishing boats had been out over the last few days but today it was hauled up to the top of the slipway, going nowhere.

I, on the other hand, was going somewhere and as soon as I could get away. This meant a quick cup of tea after feeding the bleddy hound her breakfast and into my working togs. I had elected to replace my gymnasium session with a run up to The Farm and this time I was going to push the boat out with two runs of loaded earth tubs.

The sun was breaking through as I went up, which at this time of the year blinds you as you drive up Cove Hill. It also had the right angle on me on certain stretches of Giant Rock Lane leading up to The Farm gate. It was much fresher up the top of the hill than was apparent at the corner of the Lifeboat station but, even so, it was not exactly howling in either. Similar could be said of the temperature; I was quite glad of my coat, but it was not exactly cold and I knew that I would warm up soon enough once I had started shifting the rocky earth.

It does not take very long to get all the kit together and I have forged a bit of a routine to make it easier still. There are only two tools I need from the tool shed, the Cornish shovel and the wrecking bar, from which I am exacting quite excellent value since I purchased it for breaking up concrete. I pick up the tubs from the polytunnel once I have hitched the trailer onto the tractor and set off for the bottom of the field, dislodging a few bunnies on the way.

I had not appreciated just how much it had rained over the last few days. It was noticeable first, by the number of puddles up the lane and then by just how wet the earth was that I was about to dig and load.

The wet earth is probably not quite double the weight of dry earth but it will not be far off it, or at least it felt that way. It also cloyed a great deal to the shovel that needed clanking against a rock every now and again to clear it. Quite helpfully, the bank of soil had collapsed leaving a relatively loose pile ready for shovelling into the tubs. I had been tunnelling out the bottom of the bank first which helped a great deal in this regard.

As a consequence of the damp, the work was also much more strenuous than it had been previously. This was excellent news from the exercise perspective but by the time the last tub was emptied on the first run, a short break was requisite before my body would let me go down the field for round two. Sitting down would have meant probably not wanting to get back up again, so I continued the weeding that I had started the last time I was here.

It was quite irritating seeing that little green shoots have covered the first raised bed we started just after Gladstone retired – well, it certainly seems that long ago. I wanted a small fork but all that was to hand was a small trowel instead, so I used that to loosen the earth. Last time I had finished about a quarter of it and by the time I finished, there is just a quarter left to do. Not much effort was needed but it was extremely satisfying. So it was finishing the second load and being away from The Farm and back in time for an excellent Sennen Cove Café bacon roll.

There was no hanging around and enjoying myself this morning. Once I had cleaned up, bacon rolled and cup of tea'd, I was ready for my next venture which was to head out to the tip, sorry Household Waste Recycling Centre, but first I needed to pick up some items from Mother's. The old greenhouse door had been stashed away for at least a few years. The last helping hand who got rid of some other items could not get the door in his vehicle and assuming that it was that large, I took along the angle grinder. As it happened, it fitted – just – in the back of the truck.

Before I headed off to the, erm, Household Waste Recycling Centre to tip our big rubbish, I had a couple of errands to run in town. One of them was the bank where each time I find myself irked by the fact they only have the one teller station for the majority of customers that go in there. Today, I was dismayed because there was a big sign in front of the teller's station telling us that it was no longer open but there was someone on hand to direct us to alternative solutions. Knowing that there were no other solutions to the service that I need, and probably quite a few others too, had me very concerned. It was not until I reached the front of the queue that the person there told me that it was only temporary because their machine was broken. They had just used the only sign to hand, which was unfortunately misleading. It was amusing to note that without the machine, the transaction I was there for was conducted much more quickly in the manual operation.

I have been trying to purchase a replacement pair of shoes and had thus far been unsuccessful in my search on the Internet. As luck would have it, I passed a shoe

shop on the way to my next errand, so on spec, I dropped in. It was an independent store that perhaps buys up surplus stock 'piled high and sold cheap' except when I left with my pair of shoes I had discovered that piled high it might have been but it was not so cheap. However, it was manned, erm, ladies? by a proper shop assistant who knew her business and was prepared to devote a bit of time and effort in finding me the right shoe. I was in a bit of a hurry, so I did not devote as much effort as she did, but they will do for the shop and scuffing about.

The tip, sorry, Household Waste Recycling Centre has clearly let standards slip in recent months. It is the second time I have been and not been challenged to show my pass. I think that it is that both times I have been parked across from the main bins and they do not want to leave them unattended unless someone slips in something illegal while they are making sure I am not a commercial builder with my commercial builder's truck that every man and his dog has around here.

The whole round took a while and I was back in The Cove just before the middle of the afternoon. Next door at the Ice Cream kiosk a big spring clean and spruce up is underway. While they were at it, they power washed our frontage, which was most kind. We were unable to do it this year because there is still a hosepipe ban in place and likely to be all year. Next door have a commercial supply, while ours is domestic and upstairs only, so they are allowed.

When I eventually got into the shop, the Missus had powered through much of the three grocery deliveries that we have had over the last couple of days. There is more to it than the usual ones during the year as everything has to be re-priced or at least checked. New labels will have to be put up here and there and that will be my job over the next few days and some can wait until we are open.

After clearing all the cardboard boxes that the Missus had discarded – also my job – I retired to upstairs to place a few more orders for stock that will be needed next week. I have put these off until the last minute on cash flow grounds, which is not helpful in practical terms but will stop us going bankrupt before Easter is over – hopefully.

The sea that had been quieter for the main part of the day started acting up again ahead of the evening's high water. It gave us a background of thumping and crashing and was accompanied by a bit of later rain. This is fortunate because I was really hoping that the ground had not dried out any for my next earth moving session tomorrow.

March 21st – Tuesday

The bleddy hound got me up very early this morning. To be fair to her, she must have heard that the nights are getting shorter now. I left her to it and went back to bed. It really was that early and I am not falling for that on my last week of relaxed

mornings. I have no idea why I intimated that things will be different when the shop opens; I was getting up later during the season last year than I have been all winter.

It was just as grey this morning as it was yesterday. We had some rain belting down late last night. Fortunately, it has stopped for the bleddy hound's last walk but it must have resumed during the night because it was wet on the ground when we went out again in the morning. By nine o'clock, however, the cloud rolled away and the blue sky was horizon to, erm, cliff top. It did not last long but it was glorious there for a while.

We were rather hamstrung for doing anything at all during the morning. Very often the cash and carry delivery comes early in the morning, so I could not risk being somewhere else as we get no warning. We were also expecting the posh food delivery and the wine all at times we had not a clue about. Naturally, they all came during the afternoon leaving me with an utterly wasted morning. I even went downstairs at one stage to see if I could do any clearing up in the shop but there really was nothing I could do without spoiling the space we had set aside for the deliveries.

Having done as much pricing on the computer as I could, I turned my attention to an order that I had been putting off. It will result in a pallet turning up and a big bill, which is why I was putting it off, but we will need windbreaks, buckets and spades for Easter, no matter if it is quiet or no. It will probably come at the end of the week when we are panicking that we are not ready and have forgotten things. Gosh, I am so looking forward to it.

Having taken the deliveries in, the big one arriving just as the Missus decided it was time to go shopping in town, I went and sat down for half an hour and had a cup of tea. It was just the thing to do after wasting so much time in the morning waiting for the work to arrive. Eventually, I did stir myself to go and have a crack at it. The wine is my domain anyway and I had that priced and either shelved or put away in the store cupboard.

The posh food was also my idea and has proven quite successful. It also provides all the 'free from' and healthy option foods that I decided that we really should have. I think the only duff product out of all of them was the gluten free bread. It was long life, several months I seem to remember, during which time we sold one very expensive pack. After that it remained on the shelf ignored until it ran out of date and I threw it all away. It was only then we had a few enquiries, obviously.

I did what I could in the remaining time but since it was all late in arriving, there was not much remaining time. I had errands that I could have despatched during the morning and still been back for the deliveries, but they will have to be run tomorrow instead. We have one more expected delivery tomorrow but hopefully the Missus will be in the shop working through the bit grocery order and will be able to take it in if I am not there.

The rain returned in the evening. I am hoping it will be clear for the morning as there is much to do.

March 20th - Monday

It was not my intention to have an utterly lazy day today, but it seems that is the way it turned out. We are unlikely to have the same luxury again until the end of the season, so I will not worry too much about it.

I had been in two minds about what to do this morning, anyway. I was torn between a gymnasium session or going to The Farm for more earth moving. In the end neither were going to happen because Mother had an early appointment that trumped both of them and The Farm would have been out anyway because it was raining first thing. I was also not sure about the delivery I had called in as it was very likely to be during the morning but that too did not happen and was scheduled for Wednesday instead.

Rather than be completely idle, I immersed myself in more pricing for the coming opening. Of all the things that have shifted in price since we closed, soft drinks seem to have faced some upset in certain areas, most obviously from the Coca Cola Company. I started looking into this and opened a can of worms that took far more time than it was worth but made me very suspicious of the cash and carry we have traditionally used that is now owned by one of the Tesmorburys lot.

We opened an account with a competing cash and carry last year because we were dissatisfied with the original company's paring down of its retail stock. Since then, we have noticed quite a divergence in some of the prices between the two companies. The original one is much more expensive in some areas than the other and I cannot see a reason for it other than a political one.

Using a standard 500ml bottle of Coca Cola as an example, the original company has a recommended retail price (RRP) of £1.89 and the competing company has an RRP of £1.65 and a correspondingly lower cost price. In Tesmorburys, and I checked three of them, the bottle is on the shelf for £1.75. There are two findings here: first, the original company owned by Tesmorburys appears to be forcing us to sell our Coke at a price more expensive than in its own stores; secondly if we, a small independent retailer buying a couple of cases a week, can sell the product at £1.75 (purchased at a better price locally) and be comfortable with the margin, Tesmorburys must be making an absolute killing. I shall leave it with you, dear reader, to draw your own conclusions about everything else you might purchase from Tesmorburys.

Since it had taken so long to fix our soft drink prices for the year – you will be happy to note, dear reader, that our price for cans, at least, will remain the same as it has for the last three years – I spent only a small amount of time looking at the prices of

confectionery, which, conversely has shot up since last year. Since there seems to be much worry about the nation's waistline and various governments have tried unsuccessfully to introduce 'fat tax', this may seem like a good thing. I suspect, however, like cigarettes, the hefty mark-up will have little effect.

To spare myself any further fits of depression, I cast my eyes to the outside to see what was going on in our little world on the first day of spring and, or the last day of winter. It was hardly what might be described as inspiring for such a notable day of the year. The rain had cleared up reasonably quickly from the morning, but it had remained grey and damp and not just a little chilly to go with it. It was certainly less than comfortable in the flat.

Being the first day of spring we had big spring tides to go with it, although not the biggest of spring tides and it will take a couple of days to reach the peak. Nevertheless, there was still plenty of beach out there to wonder at and it would seem that we have more sand now than we did a month or two ago, or it has been redistributed differently. There is still a far wider covering of rock under the promenade than we have seen in the past. It stretches almost to the OS slipway. Here, however, the sand has accumulated and now largely covers the two reefs nestled in the corner between the OS and the Beach car park. I fancy, too, that the sand has pushed back and there is less of a rocky skirt to the dunes at the back of the beach and under the Lifeguard hut. I would suggest that it is unlikely to change hugely in the next month and our Easter guests will have something to lie on while their offspring dig it up.

Given that I could bear no more price shifting I sat I chose an unwatchable film to gawk at. I then chose another, that was not much better and wished that I had read my book instead. It almost seems that things are rearranging themselves to slowly guide me back behind the counter. Ain't nature cute.

March 19th – Sunday

Given it was yet another bright and dry morning, I decided to reprise my trick of the day before and head up to The Farm early. The purpose was twofold this time: move earth and employ my angle grinder to lop off the extra length on the nuts I had used to attach the camera bracket to the backing board. The Aged Parent had kittens when I mentioned the chain saw the other day, but I must have mentioned the angle grinder before, a much more serious bit of kit that scares the bejaysus out of me, but without a murmur of concern. I can only deduce that the Aged Parent is worried that should I do myself harm using power tools, I should do it properly.

Anyway, I was able to send a text message to the Highly Professional Craftsperson telling him it was done, so I must have missed a few fingers at least. I told him that I would pick him up on the way back from The Farm but first I would do another load of earth from the rocky pile to top up the raised beds again. I told him in advance

which would have given him plenty of time to come along to lend a hand. He clearly had learnt a lesson from yesterday and waited at home instead.

The trials and tribulations surrounding the project had one last googly to throw, which was that two of the screw holes in the back box were proud, used as locating guides on the original plate. They prevented the new plate from being flush. The Highly Professional Craftsperson asked if I had brought down the angle grinder, which I had not. I did suggest that he was a little laissez faire with angle grinder use and that perhaps we could cut a recess in the wood plate instead.

That out of the way, everything roughly came together except one of the bolt holes did not align completely correctly. The bolt went in after a fashion, which irks highly professionals, I know, but I explained that the whole lot was coming down again in seven months – he should know because he is doing it – and that we would not worry overly on this occasion. It was all over in quick time, compared to the day before especially, and we now have a working camera again.

Not long after we had finished and the Highly Professional Craftsperson was on his way, spurning all forms of payment or reward as usual, the Missus headed off in the direction of Mother's. Given it was Mother's Day, she decided to give Mother's back garden a bit of a spruce up and took some appropriate tools and was gone for ages. I took the opportunity to slip down to the shop as there were a few things to be getting on with.

The Missus posted the big grocery order last night, but we have some ancillary ones, one of which needed posting today. I also thought that I may as well get the other orders done for wine and soft drinks while I was at it and get them out of the way. That only leaves the fresh produce to order in and some local goods that I meant to do last week as there will be a bit of lead time on some of them.

Rumour has it that the local cash and carry that closed around Christmas time has been purchased. The sellers wanted to sell as a going concern, but with no offers had to close down completely. I understand that the new buyers want to reopen as before, but we have now replaced nearly all our requirements with three other suppliers. While there is no doubt it will be more convenient to go back to using the one, much effort has gone in to fixing the new arrangements and much goodwill will be lost. We shall see how that develops.

I am pleased to say, that on an initial trawl through, that many prices have remained stable from last year. There have been some notable hikes here and there but not all across the board as might have been expected from some newspaper reports recently. And look at your Diarist talking shop talk instead of Farm for the first time in a fair few months. It must be Spring.

March 18th – Saturday

It was such a glorious morning that it would have been very rude not to carry out my threat to run up to The Farm first thing. I hardly needed the jacket I was wearing when I took the bleddy hound out, so I did not overdo the gearing up for my early morning effort a bit later.

There was much moisture in the air, witness the layer of mist that hung all along the cliffs from the big beach to Cape Cornwall in varying degrees of thickness. It was sitting atop the cliff when I drove up and swirling a bit on the lane leading up to The Farm gate. The sun was doing its best to burn through and was blinding heading into it. I discovered that it was ludicrously warm, too, in its direct glow when I arrived.

Previously, we had used the truck to move the soil filled tubs from the bottom of the field to the top. The truck is the least well designed vehicle for putting anything heavy into the back. It is high off the ground and as a consequence is also difficult to reach into to any depth. Agreed, it was not designed to have a cover over the back but even then, it would be difficult to lift heavy weights over the side.

Given my recent predicament I decided to play smart and pulled the newly serviced tractor out of its shed. Fitting the tow bar into place I was able to hitch up the small trailer, which proved an ideal arrangement. It is lower, for a start, and I can pull the loaded tubs to the back, or perhaps front, from the side so as not to be leaning over while bearing weight. Not only this but I discovered that I could fit all eleven tubs into the trailer and thus reduce the number of runs required. I had only intended to do the one run anyway, pacing myself to ensure no repeat of the shoulder problem.

The weather was so clement, and it was so peaceful up there so early in the morning that it seemed a pity to leave. I had considered taking my breakfast up there but decided against, but I rather wish that I had now. I was only gone an hour or so and the Missus would not have realised I had left had I not had to call her to make sure I was right in thinking that the seedlings in the greenhouse should be watered. She was most surprised because I thought better about discussing it lest I changed my mind and look silly - sillier.

The next jobs on the agenda were the fitting of the replacement light to the front of the shop and installing the new camera on the modified bracket. The light went in without too much of a fight. I was even pleasantly surprised that the short cable supplied with it was exactly the right length to reach the existing junction box. Conversely, everything about putting the camera in place was entirely wrong or just plain difficult.

As we suspected, getting the cable through the wall with its chunky plug on the end was a trial. Poking a screwdriver through the hole conformed that there was a plug of waterproof filler in the way and the only way to get it out was to take the back box off. I had hoped to avoid this because of the parlous state of the wood cladding that it was screwed to. The screws would have to go back into the same screw holes and I was fearful that they would not hold a second time.

We took a break after taking the back box off and while the Missus rested her wobbly legs, I went down to the shop to drill a hole in the bottom of the backbox so that it would not fill with water again. It was while I was thus engaged that a Highly Professional Craftsperson stuck his head in the door to see what was what. He admitted later that he should have noticed the ladder propped up against the front of the shop and done a runner instead of saying, did I want any help.

An hour later with an unexpected mizzle closing in and getting heavier, we decided to admit failure and pack it in for the day. Had all my tools been to hand we might have finished the job but as it was the bolts holding on the new camera bracket were too long for the backbox and required trimming with a hacksaw or angle grinder. Quite surprisingly, the Highly Professional Craftsperson offered to return tomorrow when I was tooled up to give it another go, bless him. At least we have overcome all the other problems and know the solution to the last. It will obviously be a doddle and I am right sure he still will not accept any payment or reward for his efforts, which is why we did not ask him in the first place.

We had to wait until the Missus ran the bleddy hound out last thing before testing the effectiveness of the new light. I could not get a direct replacement and knew the one I did get was a tad more powerful than its predecessor, however ... When we put the new replacement lights up after the last ones disintegrated in the sea air, I may have commented that they were so bright we were fearful they may confuse shipping in the channel. Au contrair, mon brave and nom de plume, they were mere dim embers, barely aglow compared to the new one when lit. When we get around to replacing the others I am reasonable sure the Lifeboat station will be able to dispense with the slipway lights as ours will more than compensate and keep the passage illuminated all the way to Brisons. As for the newly acquired International Dark Sky Places status awarded to West Penwith in 2021 – hasta la vista, baby.

March 17th – Friday

I managed pretty much a full session at the gymnasium today but with slightly lighter weights. I ploughed through the full 5,000 metres on the rowing machine, a full 30 seconds slower than my usual time. We are getting there. One thing I have yet been unable to resolve is my ability to move my elbow laterally from my body with my arm bent. This has seriously impacted my ability to perform the Birdy Song dance. I am distraught.

This aside, it was rather a pleasant morning. It was unseasonably warm again and I hardly needed the jacket I was wearing out first thing. There was precious little breeze around to trouble the RNLI flag as the bleddy hound and I tramped out into the day. The sea is still anxious, though, and by high water there was still a serious swell, which was slow, ponderous and rolling.

Today on the agenda was the counting of more things in the shop. They were the last things that needed counting as part of the stock take and included the things that were to be thrown away. The Missus had already separated out the out of date or soon to be out of date things and they loaded our little trolley and overflowed on the floor. Some of these will be welcomed in the Lifeboat station as the crew can be a voracious lot and will consume just about anything. Some will go to the needy and greedy of The Cove and some, we could not justifiably give away, will be dumped in our bin.

The Missus and I teamed up to complete everything in probably just over an hour. Originally, she had thought to go and get the order list from the cash and carry so that she could get on with it tomorrow. It did not take long for her to realise that there was actually quite a bit on the list, despite trying to keep it tight for the first order, and getting it on and off the trolley at the cash and carry and into the back of the truck might be a little wearisome. We elected instead to have it delivered next week and hang the expense, which was definitely the right move.

While the Missus ran off to get Mother, I bagged up the goodies that were destined for the bin. I had completed most of it by the time she got back and had dumped three of the bags into our bin. I was roundly castigated for being a bit previous as Mother might have wanted some of the things to be thrown away. I left them to it, rooting through the bin bags like a couple of down and outs.

There looked to be quite a haul of goods to be disposed of. We have over the years become better at managing the stock down at the end of the season to minimise the waste. I wondered if we had tripped up this year. I spent a couple of hours updating the stock files on the computer and finally input the list of disposals. I was most pleased to note that we had ended up with just £252.16 worth shared between the giveaways and the bin, which is about as low as we have been able to get it.

It was a bit of a shame that we had not elected to do something outside today because it has been splendid. There were bits of blue sky about and it was warm enough to venture out without jacket or jumper. The swell had encouraged more than a few surfers into the water in the middle of the beach but off the beach it was remarkably quiet given the weather.

I went to bed feeling quite enthusiastic about getting up early and heading for The Farm to do a run of hardcore earth for the raised beds before breakfast. If that is still there in the morning, I will be most surprised, but we live in hope.

March 16th – Thursday

We did not get down to the shop to start work until the early afternoon. I had by then run an errand into town and called a few people I needed to arrange things with. It was hardly going to set the world on fire. Outside working was off because of the inclementness of the weather that came in heavy towards the end of the morning.

It had not yet arrived at mizzly when I ran the bleddy hound out early doors, so we were lucky once again. It gave me some hope that the rain had missed us because I entertained some idea of a quick run up to The Farm to do at least one load of hardcore type earth for the raised beds. Obviously, that was dashed in short order, so the only thing left was the shop and the Missus was in charge of that.

I suppose that going up in the afternoon was feasible but it took quite some time for the weather to pass and by that time it was a bit too late and the ground would have still been very wet up there. Instead, I decided that I would have a go at putting up the new floodlight for the front of the shop. It is a bit lower than the camera setup and I reasoned that I should be able to reach it. I discovered that it was four rungs up which is pushing my three rung limit but I was doing alright to start with. It was only when I discarded the screws from the old bracket things went a bit Pete Tong – I looked down as I dropped them and that was it.

There is a bit more to it than just replacing the light. I suspect I will have some trouble pushing the cable through the wall – the same trouble that I will have with the new camera cable – and the cable on the new light is also shorter than I anticipated. It will require an additional junction box, that I have, and quick join that I had not planned for. I cannot even do the cabling in advance as I do not know how far the new cable with stretch inside. If I was only able to work comfortably from the fifth rung of a ladder, all that work would have been done by now. It is most frustrating.

The Missus did a sterling job in the shop and we have arrived at the point where all the disposals are separated and the first order of the new season is ready to put together. The first one of the season is always most work as there will be products no longer available and changes to size and so forth that we must accommodate. This year, I am certain, there will be a swathe of price increases to process.

The Missus was still working when I headed over to the Lifeboat station for our regular training meeting. There was no launch again, despite the sea being more settled today than it has been all week. Instead, we ran some GPS testing, which, since Denzil 'Fingers' Angof dropped the station's sexton over the side is so essential. The boat cannot 'see' the satellites from inside the station and has to be dropped out on the winch. This suited us shore side very nicely because the crew who were so recently passed out on the Tooltrak, need to be passed out on the winch operation on the next opportunity and need all the practise they can get.

We end tonight with some good wishes for our station Press Officer who has found himself a brae bit poorly. A hearty get well soon from the crew here.

March 15th – Wednesday

The bleddy hound and I missed the rain that headed in later in the morning. It was probably why she was up half an hour earlier this morning, that and getting her

revenge in for being taken to the veterinary doctor yesterday. She could at least have got the Missus for that; I had nothing to do with it.

I had my comeuppance later when I left the gymnasium. Yes, you heard correctly, dear reader. Feeling so chipper was I this morning I decided that it was, after a fortnight languishing with a sore shoulder, time to get on with the task of living. The shoulder was never going to loosen up by doing nothing, so I set to with a carefully crafted and cut down version of my normal circuit. I had intended to do a full 5,000 metres on the rowing machine, shoulder permitting, but found that 3,756 was quite sufficient for the first time back. I also scaled back on the number of lifts of the weights I used, too. This was the trickiest challenge, and I curtailed that part of the circuit completely.

Later, it was clear that a blistering session at the gymnasium was precisely the right thing to do because the movement in my shoulder was almost back to normal again. This is very good news and I have pencilled in a few days at The Farm next week to finish off the last of the raised beds. I should be able to do the hardcore element by myself over a few mornings and enlist the help of the Missus for the sieved topsoil later.

It is becoming clearer every day that we are running out of time to get all the things we would like to have done, done. The Missus spent most of the afternoon in the shop doing her normal cleaning, which is an improvement on other years when this is done the day before in a panic. This is pretty much a deep clean of shelves and floors, which lasts about five minutes after we open the doors. This year she has decided to spend a bit of time scraping off the old dreaded lurgi signage we had at strategic points on the floor. There is then mopping afterwards. By the time she had finished, two thirds of the shop was complete leaving only the food aisle, which will take a bit more time.

I had inadvertently double booked myself today. I had spent some time with a pull through and a bit of four by two cleaning out my ear 'oles and was pretty certain that they would pass muster at the doctor's. When I called to make the appointment, I was told a nurse would see me as it would not be worth the doctor's time. I could have spluttered and raged because that was exactly my point last time but was told it had to be a doctor who saw me. I could have raged, but life is too short for such things, and I simply permitted myself an inner smug smile instead.

The other task I had agreed to was to wait in for a man from the electricity company who was coming to fit a smart meter inside the gymnasium. I am nominated because I am key holder, which in truth, for many years I have not had to lift a finger for, so waiting in for a few hours was small beer for the advantage of not having to faff with the key safe. Truth is, I had forgotten all about it, hence the double booking, and when the text came to say the man was arriving today I initially thought that it was for the home. This utterly confused me because the company the text came from is not

the company that supplies our electricity. The penny only dropped when I had a text message today from my friend who had arranged it, to remind me.

The notice I had was that the engineer would arrive between 12pm and 4pm which spanned my nurse appointment, almost exactly. Happily, the man arrived half an hour before I was due to leave, so I let him in and told him I would lock up on my way back, which worked out just fine. I had to open up again an hour or so later because he left his pliers behind.

I had the all clear from the nurse. I asked her to repeat it, which I am sure she found hugely amusing. She said that she had no idea how long the referral process took but it would do no harm to book an appointment and sort out any problems that arose later. Thinking this a jolly plan, I telephoned the optician – they do ears as well, being in the same proximity, although they do not do teeth, which is clearly a missed opportunity – to make my appointment and was told they had nothing until April, which was disappointing. Had I known how convoluted the process was, I would have started in November, although the NHS had not kicked me out at that time. I was also somewhat perturbed to understand that the doctor would make the appointment. This seems quite bizarre as the doctor is unlikely to know when I might be available. As it stands now, I shall be available in November and anyone wishing to converse with me in the shop will have to shout or hold up boards – or just throw money, which has always worked.

March 14th – Tuesday

The bleddy hound and I girded our loins before we went around the corner of the Lifeboat station this morning knowing full well to expect a face full of wind on doing so. For some reason she was keen for an extended stroll today, and we ended up on the sand as the tide rolled in on us. It took a while to get down there as she takes a few steps and stops for a minute or two these days. I carried her back home from halfway up knowing that almost certainly she was laughing her socks off at me.

Even at that hour of the morning, grey and misty though it was, the day was slowly turning to a big bright thing. By midway through the morning, we were in blue skies territory. The sea, however, was definitely not joining the party and continued to throw its weight around and send big waves running in towards the shore. It was noisy too what with the waves thumping and the wind whistling in my ear 'oles.

While we did not have an anniversary meal last night, unless an omelette counts, we decided that we would indulge in a bacon roll from the Sennen Cove Café next door. We resort to these as a special treat and keep our indulgences rare. The only problem with this is that they are not currently opening before ten o'clock which is a good hour after my usual time for breakfast. During the season, it can get even earlier and rather depends on beating the expected rush in the shop. It was difficult to know whether this enhanced my experience or spoilt it because I was so starved

by then, I wolfed it down. Whatever the case, I would highly recommend them if you are down this way.

I did try and be a bit industrious today but it was only putting off the moment when I had to actually get off my behind to go downstairs. I had quite forgotten that the hooded sweatshirts needed to be counted and after I remembered, it hung about me like a gannet around my neck – albatrosses are a bit rare hereabouts, nagging me to do something about it. The clearing and cleaning I did in the living room, you would probably not notice unless you had seen it previously but there are things now put away that should have been put away a month or more ago.

It took the Missus heading off with Mother and the bleddy hound to the veterinary doctor to get me downstairs. I should assure you, dear reader, lest you think badly of me, that it was only the bleddy hound that was being seen to on this occasion; Mother went along for the ride. While it is much easier to get to see a veterinary doctor than a doctor of medicine, it is also much more expensive and Mother has also not yet shown any signs of distemper I am pleased to report.

The counting of the hooded sweatshirts took a lot less time than I envisaged. I am not sure why it was so quick this time around because the numbers were not particularly smaller than at other times. Perhaps it was the lack of distraction that was the key. Given the brevity of it, I also cleared the counter to some extent. This was probably a waste of time because I have no doubt that it will fill up again in short order. It is probably something best done just before we open after which there will be no excuse to put anything on it.

I had almost finished by the time the Missus returned. I am very happy to report that the bleddy hound got full marks, despite it all, although she will probably never play the violin again. She is topped up with an injections and pills that will keep her going for another month of living in the style of the super rich, carried up and down stairs and run after by her many slaves. Oddly, she is much more chilled about being left alone these days. She used to get very upset about it and make a huge fuss. Now, I think that she just does not notice as she is too busy sleeping and I was able to slip across the road to a Lifeboat meeting while the Missus took Mother home. It has only taken fifteen years and comes at a time when we rarely have a need to leave her on her own. The very dear of her.

March 13th – Monday

I would not normally wish to share such personal information in such a widely disregarded and unread organ such as The Diary, but it is rather a red letter day today. It is 25 years ago to the day that I was dragged from the London Inn in Causeway Head, where I was hiding with my best pal, to the registry office around the corner in St John's Hall to be bonded in matrimony to the Missus – although she was not the Missus until after the ceremony, which I do not recall anyone pointing out at the time.

We were in prestigious tradition. Dylan Thomas married Caitlin Macnamara there, although not at the same time, or indeed the same building. Like the Thomas's we too retired to an alehouse but unlike them, we had to pay for it ourselves. We also did the whole thing again the following day in a church – this time I had to be dragged out of the Pendarves Arms in Gwithian by the vicar – and we ended up at the OS when it was still a proper pub. I should also mention that we share the date with friends up the hill, so congratulations to them as well.

We had a lovely bright day for it, too. There were blue skies and the sea was so happy for us that it danced and jumped and launched itself over the Harbour wall in gay abandon. It was accompanied by a robust wind that was just as robust as last Thursday night but seemed more punchy. The bleddy hound was being pushed around when we stepped out into it first thing in the morning, so I assumed that it was coming from one of our exposed corners. When I looked a little later, the wind was in the southwest and had been all night. It must have swirled some to blow the bleddy hound over.

I discovered just how breezy it was from that direction a bit later in the morning when I went up to our builders' merchant for the bolts. It is up on the Penwith Moors just outside St Just and us quite high up. Amazingly, I also remembered to take a letter to the fuel merchant up there as well which had been gracing my desk for about three weeks waiting to be sent. I managed to get it into an envelope, then it sat on the table for a further fortnight.

Since the weather was dry and bright I decided that it would be a cracking good plan to replace the CCTV camera hanging off the front of our building. The paint of the new panel was dry but I needed the old panel off the front of the building first to use it as a template for the screw holes. Having reflected on how to attach the camera to the new plate, I decided to run up to the builders' merchant for bolts and washers. Having first made sure what size I was after, off I scurried coming back less than half an hour later with the wrong size bolts. Of course, it would take until after I had drilled the bolt holes before I discovered this small nuance. I went back up to the builders' merchant to get the right ones later.

It was very quickly after I had loosened the first bolt on the original panel – very bravely pushing myself to the fourth rung of the ladder – that I discovered why the camera had stopped working in the first place: the waterproof box was flooded. This threw up two possibilities, either the camera was damaged by the water or the cable was. We had another camera, but I did not have another cable, so we went ahead in the hope that it was the camera. It was, of course the cable so we hurriedly put back the original panel having spent the lion's share of the day engaged in a fruitless endeavour. I have ordered another cable, which is a tricky fit as it needs to go through the wall, and we shall do it all again another day.

Talking of failed endeavours, the saga of Mother's fibre broadband installation drags on and on. We sit in the middle between the telephone company and the housing association. Having thought that we had arrived at a position where all that needed to be done was for the telephone company to send the completed – an typed – wayleave request to the housing association, I was copied into a conversation between the two.

Very roughly, the housing association told the telephone company that Mother's house was nothing to do with them and it was completely different company that looked after it. The Missus and I intervened, both calling and writing to claim foul. What had transpired was that the telephone company had indeed sent the completed and typed forms to the housing company but for a house in Redruth. Wait here for the next exciting instalment.

A simple grumpy shopkeeper can only take so much of such things, so we packed up for the day, not that there was a great deal of the day left. The sea was returning to raging and the wind that had persisted to one degree or another all day, perked up again for nightfall but from the northwest where we were able to feel it more keenly. Well, at least it would be a memorable 25th.

March 12th – Sunday

I had already dismissed the idea of attending the range today. While things are much improved in the arm department, I still need to be a bit careful. It is unfortunate that this week was going to be the last visit ahead of the shop opening.

It was another grey day out there and the sea had changed its mind about being all Zen and peaceful and kicked off again with a heavy rolling swell. Rain moved in at the middle of the day and became reasonably heavy for a while. Before and after that it was merely various degrees of damp and in the afternoon, low cloud closed out visibility in The Cove to obscure the cliffs opposite.

I have been so indolent for the last week it has started to feel normal, which is irritating. Today, I had wanted to push ahead with getting the cctv camera ready, especially after painting the panel it will sit on. The paint was still a bit tacky first thing and leaving it an extra day was probably the right thing to, even if it really sounded like an excuse not to do anything.

The camera hooked up to our network and the software that runs the cctv with no problem at all. I also discovered that I could reach the existing camera from the window above it, although it would be sensible to put the Missus on a ladder under it just in case I dropped it. It would be embarrassing if it dropped on the head of a passer-by; the Missus would probably forgive me – eventually. I had quite forgotten, however, that it uses a micro SD card, although it was not strictly necessary it would be better to install one while it was on my desk that work out later that it would be useful and have to install it when it was ten feet off the ground.

This necessitated a trip into town because I did not think of it before. Apparently, we also needed potatoes, so it was as well that I was going anyway and could pick up Mother on the way back. I do not know whether we would have done without the potatoes if I had decided the SD card could wait until Monday, but at least driving into town was doing something as opposed to sitting on my backside doing nothing – well, it was still sitting on my backside but you know what I mean.

The rain started just as we arrived back home and it did not take much convincing me to leave everything until another day. This was probably a good thing too. I had originally planned to attach the camera to the plywood panel using bolts but as I thought on, it could do with being a bit more secure and a bit more robust. I think it would be a good plan to place some battens at the back and thread bolts through those as well or use coach screws, which I do not have. Come to think, I have not looked for bolts and washers of the right size yet, either. I just assumed I would have something to suit. Best to be slept on, perhaps and get the right bits tomorrow.

Soon, even thinking about doing things faded away and precipitated a complete capitulation of enthusiasm. I will come back stronger tomorrow, I tell myself, although I think that I will force myself down to the gymnasium on Wednesday, which will kick start me in the right direction. For once I only took two minutes to decide on a film to watch – oddly, the highly Oscar nominated film, *Everything, Everywhere All at Once* was available to watch on one of the streaming services, which I much enjoyed.

The watching of a film despatched the remainder of the afternoon until teatime. I shall pull my finger out tomorrow. I shall, I shall.

March 11th – Saturday

It was not a morning to be writing home about. As grey and mizzly mornings go, this one was grey and mizzly and it was only going to get greyer and more mizzly toward the middle of the day. On the bright side, the sea had calmed to a gentle swell and by early afternoon and lower water, it was flat as a dish in the bay. The only waves at all were over towards North Rocks and over a notable finger of sand reaching out from in front of The Beach complex.

The arm that had taken a bit of a beating yesterday from my diminutive, charming and potentially psychotic bone cruncher had given me severe gyp in the night but by morning had settled into an almost normal state. It was normal enough for me to consider breaking free of the bonds of inaction and running up to The Farm to prepare a small section of plywood.

One of the cctv cameras hanging off the front of the shop has not been working for some while. Subsequent to the eventual success of The Farm camera, I decided that we would replace the inoperative camera with a similar one. One of the several

moles in the bowling green of that particular decision was that it would not hang off the same bracket as the existing one. A solution needed to be found.

The new camera comes with its own bracket but I was loathed to take down the metal case that had been expertly installed by the Highly Professional Craftsperson off which the existing bracket hangs. I reasoned that I could fashion a replacement plate that would fit on the front of the case and bolt the new camera bracket to that. There was no particular reason why it should not work although the end result would not be as robust as the original metal arrangement.

I had found a suitable bit of plywood when we dropped by The Farm yesterday so that the Missus could water the seedlings. Since all the tools are at The Farm it was easier to go up there and cut the plywood to size and bring it back to the shop for painting. Naturally, I chose the wettest part of the day to complete the operation and set up in the barn for the twenty minutes it took.

I would have been back pronto, and the plate painted before noon had I not been directed to Mother's because she had left her cheese in the back of the truck on her way home last night. By the time I got back it was time to run the bleddy hound out and then have a cup of tea. While I sat sitting, I thought that we should take the time to upgrade the Missus' mobile telephone as that would only take a few minutes online.

A good hour later, she still grappling with failed logins and poor instructions while I had been down in the shop painting the panel. We perhaps would not have bothered but the company had told the Missus that with her contract coming to an end the price would increase by more than 50 percent. I not only found this odd – I thought that the high price on these contracts was to pay for the new telephone, surely at the end of the contract period the price should go down as the telephone is paid for – but downright disingenuous. In short, we had no choice but to do the upgrade or face the price hike.

Since we could not go the simple route, I started an online 'chat' session on the customer service line with a very pleasant lady who was most helpful. It took one hour and forty minutes to complete, which was something of a marathon but I found the lady on the other end of the text only session to be good humoured and we managed to have some sort of conversation along with the business we were conducting. At the end of sorting out the Missus, she also knocked 86 pence off my monthly bill – my monthly bill is very small indeed. No only do I not get out much, I do not use my smart mobile telephone much either.

One surprising and most welcome discovery emerged during the process. The company has changed its policy and now bills the cost of the new mobile telephone and the usage separately. Once you have finished paying for the telephone, those charges cease and only the usage bill remains. I must conclude that they were

somehow able to read the previous paragraph (which I had written before we started the process).

The very pleasant lady somehow managed to coincide the end of our discussion with the kick off for the rugby. On reflection, she need not have bothered as it was not the exciting, entertaining and uplifting game but at least it had commentators.

March 10th – Friday

The wind had been howling all night, or so I suppose, as I was happily pushing out the zeds for most of it for once. It must have been the excitement of the previous evening, which was pretty much like the old Clash tune, shall we stay or shall we go now.

That ferocious breeze had calmed down by the time the bleddy hound and I stepped out. The sea clearly did not agree that just because the wind had gone that it should also step into line. The bay was a big white mess with large waves marching across it and large amounts of white water launching itself over the Harbour wall as if it was not there. Our nice clean windows were now lagged with a layer of salt and almost opaque. I found the same with the truck windscreen when I set out to head into town a little later.

I had confused myself yesterday as I thought that my appointment with the bone cruncher was after I dropped the truck off. That might have been more convenient as parking at the bone cruncher is very limited and a small vehicle would have fitted in much more easily. I now always leave an extra ten minutes to allow for parking when I get there, although today I almost messed it up by going to the accountant first to drop off the quarter's invoices.

I am quite surprised that my dickie shoulder has remained dickie for quite so long. I must have done a real number on it. In future I will try and remember to give it a rest rather than doing just one more thing. Because it was a spur of the moment thing, I am seeing a different bone cruncher from my usual one. She is very good and knows exactly where to stick her knuckles in to cause the maximum discomfort – sometimes known as agonising pain. I lie there and take it on the grounds that if it hurts, it must be doing me some good. It is, of course, equally plausible that the young lady has a life-long dislike of grumpy shopkeepers and is exacting some sort of revenge. I will never know but I am going to believe in the former rather than go mad with paranoia.

The sessions are mercifully short, although that depends on your measure of value. I was merely considering the pain rather than pounds per minute. I was not considering very much on my way to collect Mother other than the hope that there were not too many obstructions that required energetic manipulation of the steering wheel. Happily, there were not and Mother was collected and dutifully delivered home where, once again we did very little.

Some of the very little I did was to try and chase up the telephone company and the battle of the forms we were engaged in. The man who had rather unfortunately set himself up as contact responded to my request for clarity. I had asked about the completely blank form he had sent for Mother to sign and had been, I thought, clear about that being the point of confusion. Clearly, I had not been clear, because his reply asked what I was confused about.

I spent half an hour trying to compose a message in return then thought it would be far quicker – I hoped – to telephone him, which I duly did. The telephone number I had called, which was on the bottom of his message to me, was answered by a very pleasant lady telling that I had telephone the wrong number. I did not have time to tell her that it was the one I was given before I was transferred to a voicemail extension. I called back. This time I was answered by a slightly more user-friendly very pleasant lady who first wondered why her colleague had included her number in the message and then told me that she would have the rogue call back. I suspected that I might be waiting for some time.

There was not much else to do other than stare out at a rather grey scene of dullness. Pretty as our view is, it is not at its best under a leaden sky, through a salt encrusted window flecked with moisture from an unkind mizzle floating about in the air. At the times I had ventured out it was damp and, more than often, wet, the sort that invades your clothes swaddling you in coldness. The sea state was much improved from earlier, which is often the case at lower periods in the tide but even later, when the tide was on the flood, the angry waves and white water were replaced with a heavy rolling swell.

My reverie was interrupted by the very pleasant man who is our telephone company contact calling me. I explained, in several ways, what my concerns were and then had to explain what I thought the property management company's concerns were. Since he had prepared the response to us, I assumed that he had been the recipient of their letter to the telephone company. Apparently not. I decided to play this with a straight bat, else we would get nowhere, so we soon agreed a plan of action that would mean Mother signing the form again, sending it back to him and he would take care of the rest, which seemed like an admirable plan to me. I sent him the signed form and we shall see what happens next. I do hope the property management company do not reject the form because the signature was not typed, but I am assuming nothing.

With such a momentous achievement under my belt, I settled down to watch some television, since we are still in the grip of lethargy. I am on the second series of a programme called Clarkson's Farm. Now, I am very aware that Mr Clarkson is not flavour of the month or flavour of anytime with quite a number of people, however ... The first series of Clarkson's Farm was lauded by the farming community for bringing to the public's attention serious farming issues. I cannot help but agree as although I like to keep abreast of what is going on about me in this environment, that includes

the farmers hereabouts, there were several things I knew nothing about. I also laughed my socks off and often out loud – to the Missus' consternation (I watch wearing headphones). If you can put aside your feelings for an hour, the programme is well worth watching.

The lump of hake we had for tea was well worth eating. We now have a fishy Friday each week with Mother and the Missus has become most adept and cooking it to perfection. The Missus had lamb; the Missus hates fish.

March 9th – Thursday

One of the forecasters was on social media this morning trying to explain that forecasting the weather is difficult. This was why forecasters said that it was going to be snowy and cold rather than wet and exceedingly warm. It was a mistake anyone could make. On the whole, I am pleased that forecasters decided to be forecasters and not jumbo jet pilots.

There was not a hint of rain when I opened the front door for the bleddy hound in the morning, although it had been raining at some point earlier. It was still warm enough. I fancied that the wind had dropped a bit but it had the rest of the day to ramp up again and it did. We had rain pass through in the afternoon, which was handy after the Missus got back from walking the bleddy hound in the early afternoon. She has rigged up a couple of harnesses and supplemented by her big scarf, the bleddy hound feels more comfortable about walking a bit further - and does.

That rain saved itself for when I collected the truck from the garage toward the end of the afternoon. They had told me that the brakes and discs would need replacing before long, which meant getting it done before the shop opened and certainly before we got busy. The front tyres needed to be changed as well in a similar timescale, so we asked the garage to get it over and done with. We could have done with deferring the expense for when we were actually earning again but then the truck would be far too useful for running the shop.

I am not sure that it was a conscious decision to do begger all for the day but that is what we ended up doing. I made some pretence at doing the last few invoices that needed to be recorded and updating the summary sheet that I send to the accountant quarterly. This collates the headline numbers from the quarter, sales, personal spend from the shop and disposals. Unfortunately, I cannot finish it until the Missus has finished the stock in the shop and because we did begger all today, that did not happen. Maybe tomorrow.

Giving up on any further pretending to do work, I sat down and watched a film in the afternoon. I usually spend about the length of a film trying to decide which film to watch and then picking a duff one. There has been more than one occasion, when limited for time, I had taken so long on choosing the duff one that there was not enough time to watch it. For once, I picked a good one. I have found that, on

balance, the Irish make a decent fist at putting on a good film and this was one of them, although they do tend to be very similar stories.

It passed the time until the truck was ready, anyway and that passed the time until teatime and that until it was time to head across the road for a spot of Lifeboat training. With the sea state deteriorating and the wind increasing, there was to be no launch but our ever so dynamic Coxswain had a film for us to watch, which was inventive. We stopped for a chat first and to listen to new developments that we needed to be aware of, which we do every time we meet. It was during this that an absence colleague sent me a message to say that the Coastguard had heard a 'mayday' call come in on the Land's End mast but had heard nothing more, not even a position for the caller, which made doing anything about it a bit tricky. Since the Coastguard had not yet contacted the station, we proceeded to watch our film which was all about working with helicopters.

We had barely got half way through the film when the Coastguard did make contact with the station bosses to discuss what to do next. No one thought that launching was a good plan when no one knew where to start looking and the available area was unfeasibly large. We all made ready the boat to go, just in case but we all knew with the way the sea state was going, the boat, once launched, would not be back in the station for a while.

Eventually, we were stood down and we all sat about waiting on the latest development. The Penlee Lifeboat was launched to have a geek but again, the area was so large that it would be random to find anything even if there was something out there to find. It looked increasingly like we were not needed so I, being so close went home only to be called back half an hour later when we were once again put on standby.

Another half an hour passed and many telephone conversations with the Coastguard later, we were stood down again. This time most of us went home with the expectation that if it looked increasingly likely something was out there, we might be called back. We were not, which was just as well from the increasing noise from the wind that had already been recorded at 55 miles per hour locally.

The last thing I heard was that the Penlee and St Mary's Lifeboats that had both been given the impossible task had been stood down. I could sleep peacefully.

March 8th – Wednesday

I promise I was being very attentive while the evening weather forecast was on. Mr Braine was telling me, and I know it was me because he was looking at me, that I should expect to be very cold on Tuesday night. So, there I was all expectant, hot water bottle and thermal socks at the ready, but at the same time wondering why it seemed unseasonably warm. Lying in bed just ahead of the painkillers kicking in I

was still feeling the heat, but with the rain lashing at the skylight I felt that being hot and dry may well be preferable to being comfortably cool and wet.

After that, I knew no more until the bleddy hound awoke me at the appointed time, the appointed time that she likes to randomly choose. There was a loud absence of rain lashing going on and, possibly due to the window not being as widely open as it usually is, the air in the room was still much warmer than we have been used to. I was certain that I had turned the heating off because I had to double check last night, so it could only be the ambient temperature.

I did not have long to wait. The bleddy hound and I stepped out into the pleasantly dry morning and my naked legs pretty quickly discovered that the rather fierce wind was indeed, quite temperate. I had been led to believe that the threatened cold would be piling in from the north and last night's blow did certainly come from the northeast. It did a rather marvellous job of cleaning our windows and I made note of how clear the view from them was first thing. Today's wind, according to the RNLI flag on the Lifeboat station, was coming in from somewhere in the west and would ordinarily be warmer than one from the north. Something was definitely awry with our forecasters' forecasts as it was not just a little bit wrong but monumentally so.

Fortunately, I was not alone in my consternation. My reader got in touch later in the day - no, not you, the other one - to tell me that he too was consternated (gosh, I expected consternated to not be a word - who knew) and to the degree that he did something about it. Much rested on the fact that the weather warning for snow in place for the whole of the Southwest had not been withdrawn or modified even dismissing the fact that it had reached 200 miles further than it should. I agree that weather warnings that are patently wrong are not only wrong but dangerous. The little boy that cried 'wolf' springs to mind.

So, roundly ignoring the forecast and relying heavily on the rain radar for today's dress code, we saddled up and headed into the slightly grey yonder. Each year there is a food and catering trade show at the Royal Cornwall Showground at Wadebridge, a bit the wrong side of Camborne. It does not take long to get there but we decided to get an early start as there were things potentially happening in the afternoon that we had to get back for.

As we drove through the roadworks on the A30 between Chiverton Cross and Carlands Roundabout it is worth mentioning that it seems to be progressing at pace. There is an overnight road closure in operation there currently as they do some other major works and a significantly large lump of bridge has appeared since last I was there. The old road is largely unrecognisable and large sections of the new road are being used, albeit as single lane in each direction.

We knew we would not be long at the show as there is only occasionally something there that would suit us - new local producers or equipment that we might want. This year we whizzed around the stalls in no time at all. We had, however, taken our time

getting there as the route takes us past the famed truck stop and café, Smokey Joe's. We had inadvertently enjoyed a similar breakfast type meal the evening before, so we elected to stop just for a bacon roll, which, along with everything else they churn out, was excellent.

Getting out is not something we do very often and less so now that the bleddy hound is getting on a bit. Since it is a rare occasion, we made something of it, or at least the Missus did, and we stopped at a large chain store that has taken over what was once hailed as a Cornish food and produce centre off the A30. That and another stop at Tesmorburys on the way home, the Missus had a cracking good day.

We were now a little on the clock. The powers that be had for some time been planning a Lifeboat exercise with the Coastguard helicopter. This used to be a much more regular event but for many reasons, we have not exercised with the helicopter for some time, possibly years.

When I first stepped out in the morning, it did rather look like it would not be going ahead as there was a fair swell running out in the bay. We had a message not long after to say that it was unlikely, but the situation would be monitored. A little later, another message came through saying it was all on but be aware it may be cancelled at short notice. Sure enough, with the weather worsening and the sea state coming rough again with the flood, we had a final message quite late on telling us it was definitely off. We have no idea whether this was the Lifeboat or the helicopter that has cancelled but the effect was the same. How very disappointing.

On the way back home we stopped off at our tractor garage to see what was going on with the tractor. I was not sure whether we were waiting on the garage or the work had been done and the garage were waiting on us. The matter was clarified quite starkly when I saw that the tractor was in two halves waiting on parts. The garage man will let us know when it is all done, probably Friday. I might well have to sell the tractor to pay for the parts looking at the work that was going on and the truck is going in again tomorrow. The simple life of a hermit is looking quite attractive just now.

There was only one thing for it – beer.

March 7th – Tuesday

The temperature had not dropped as I thought that it might do but the Meteorological Office very kindly issued a snow warning for most of the South and West including those of us in the acknowledged 'safe zone' west of Camborne. It is stuff and nonsense, of course, and very uncalled for, but we will play along for now.

I had quite the stroke of good fortune this morning when the bleddy hound thought to get me up at around six o'clock. Actually, it was six o'clock precisely, so perhaps she has learnt to tell the time. Without much hope in my heart, I told her to go back to

sleep again and, blessed if she took me at my word, gave me another fifteen minutes. I know that fifteen minutes does not sound like very long but at some point during the night I discovered what happened when I stopped taking painkillers for my arm. Those fifteen minutes were precious, I tell you.

It was a morning much like the day before, both the grey of the weather outside and the doing not a great deal inside. I did manage to force myself to do a few productive things but when I stopped to consider that those two remaining empty raised beds could have been filled by now, it was more than a little depressing.

The Missus left it until close to the middle of the day before she went off to collect Mother and took the bleddy hound with her. I waited until they came back, had a cup of tea with them, then headed down to the shop to do some more tidying up and to count the hooded sweatshirts. I was unable to do these at Christmas because the store room was so chock full of decorations boxes and the like, I could not get to them. I also took some time to clear the shop floor a little by moving some boxes from one place to another.

When I came back upstairs I discovered that I had received a message from the telephone company who are trying to install Mother's super-doooper broadband fibre. If you recall, last week the form we submitted was rejected because it was handwritten, despite being perfectly legible. Well, the telephone company clearly knows how to play the game because they sent the form back again to be signed alongside a 20 page document, Form A55, that was stuffed with annotated photographs, diagrams and technical writing of every detail you might imagine down to which circuit Mother was being allocated.

While this process may well have been perfectly clear to highly paid business analysts and fibre broadband providers, it left me flummoxed. What a 93 year old lady was supposed to make of it, I have no idea. The original wayleave form was also included and we were asked to sign it and ring the part that said Mother was a tenant. That being the case, we were also asked that it should be signed by the landlord, giving permission, which is where we started last time. However, last time the form was handwritten and unacceptable. This time the form had been left entirely blank. I was not sure whether this was alright because the Form A55 was superseding it or whether we were supposed to hand it back first to the telephone company for completion, which seemed unlikely as they had asked us to get the landlord to sign it. Confused, I sent it back asking for some clarity. At first I was irked that Mother was being charged £9.99 for the installation cost. Now I am thinking what excellent value for money that is given the shear amount of labour and weight of paper involved and the work has not even started yet.

Finally, today's instalment of the Aged Parent Diaries (I will publish his messages separately, which seems to be the fashion). This will be the last for a while, unless the clamour from avid fans forces a u-turn.

“THE HOME

Our house and shop were at the end of the terrace. Living quarters comprised a very dark kitchen with a dairy (cool) room adjacent, with access to the shop, sitting room with a Cornish range where we listened to the radio - battery powered at first and a front room (for best). Upstairs were bedrooms - a front double for Mother and Father and a single room for me. At the rear was a large room with a sloping ceiling which made it difficult to stand by the window. A ‘Linney roof’ it was called, which was a ‘spare’ and used for storage.

The ‘front room’ contained a three-piece suite and originally an organ Father had had sent from America for Mother before they were married which was eventually replaced by a piano. The room was reserved for special occasions and I loved it when the fire was lit and my Aunts and Uncles came to visit us at Christmas. I recall I also had a bed there when I was ill with measles and strongly resisted the pink medicine which was supposed to make me better.

In the kitchen there was originally a boiler for the laundry heated by a fire beneath it which also provided the water for my tin bath but that was removed and we progressed to a coal fired Rayburn stove for cooking and hot water.

Above the shop was a large room, never used in my memory. Access was by a wooden staircase from the kitchen. At some point the stairs were removed, the access boarded up and the space left to gather cobwebs.

At first, our electricity supply was wired only to the ground floor and we went to bed with candles or oil lamps (and a hot water bottle, too, when necessary), but over the years we progressed to all electricity. Our water supply was an underground tank outside for rainwater, with a well for drinking water at the bottom field. Winding up the bucket was hard work, made more difficult still when the chain broke and the full bucket fell to the bottom of the well. Then Father would have to get out the grapnel and a rope to retrieve it. But how cold and sweet the water was.

Our more basic needs were catered for by an outside closet emptied regularly. Very primitive, but we knew no other.

Outside was a yard with an exit on to Mutton Hill, opposite the School. On one side was a large building, half of which housed the car and the other Father’s lorry. That half also contained a large tank for storing paraffin which was sold through the shop. There were also three stone storage bins used to keep a supply of corn and maize for the cows.

At the bottom of the yard was a large two storey barn. The lower floor was for the 2 or 3 cows to be milked and a separate store of wood for various purposes. Up the outside stone steps was storage for hay and a large and ancient machine for cutting bales of it, but never used. Alongside the barn was space for a rick of hay Father grew in his field.

On the other side was a single storey building part of which was home to the chickens and the incubator used to rear them. Next to that was the sty for the one or

two pigs we kept from time to time. Once, during the war, Father had one slaughtered and shared with friends and neighbours. (Hush money, I suppose, as it was illegal during wartime).

On one side of the yard was a wooden cage also for a few chickens which, on one occasion I managed to set fire to playing with my magnifying glass. Fortunately, it was spotted by a neighbour while we were out one day. Apart from an assortment of dogs and cats which came and went (Mother's territory, that), I had an Angorra rabbit with an abundance of white fur in a cage. Poor thing, I don't think I looked after it very well. I also acquired a pigeon on a visit delivering coal with Father to Mr. Olds who farmed at Menadarva. It soon disappeared - must have been a homing pigeon, I think.

We also had a small front garden with a tiny patch of grass. The gate was of iron-work and the two gateposts were surmounted by large iron ornamental balls. Both the gate and the balls were taken in 1940 for 'the war effort'.

At the beginning of the war, Father, helped by neighbours, dug an air raid shelter roofed with corrugated iron sheets outside the back door. It was tall enough to stand in, with earth seats (bring your own blanket) and lit by a candle in an iron holder driven into the earth sides in true miner's fashion. We, and neighbours, used it several times when the siren sounded, but soon realised home was more comfortable.

Later Father invited a couple of soldiers from Yorkshire who were encamped on the Towans to come for a meal and a drink. They became regular visitors and family friends.

After the war, Father had a greenhouse built on the Shelter site and for several years grew a supply of black grapes for us.

We also had a kitchen garden for vegetables in one of the fields, and Father was the first to grow sweet corn or corn on the cob, remembering his U.S. background."

March 6th – Monday

For some reason it did not seem half so chilly this morning as it had done on the previous days. I changed my mind about that pretty rapidly later in the day when I took the bleddy hound down to the Harbour beach and the northwest wind was whipping up the slipway into our faces. I could count our luck stars and remind myself that it that was a sharp northeasterly, it would have been even colder.

It was almost the day that never was, as nothing at all happened in the first half of it. It looked pretty grey and bleak out, so I stayed inside as much as possible. The morning walk out did not seem so cold and I was in shorts then but it is feasible that we were sheltered from the northwest by the Lifeboat station. There was no call from the garage regarding the tractor, so I presumed all was well. There was no doubting that the garage had seen it because we parked it in front of their doors.

Perhaps it was the sitting around that let the cold have its way. I kitted up in DIYman overalls to go out, which was a particularly sensible option and thus dressed, I felt a bit more like putting some effort into the day. The last remaining bits of the stock take need to be completed and we do not have much time left. Having dropped the bleddy hound upstairs again, I went down to the shop and made a start.

It is often warmer in the shop than it is in the flat, even with most of the fridges and freezers switched off. There must be enough of them chugging away to maintain some residual warmth. Today, however, it seemed that even that modest warmth had deserted us and it was bleddy cold down there. I managed to count all the soft drinks, there were not many, and all the non-food items including what was in the store room. The Missus likes to do the rest because she washes down at the same time, so I left the rest to her and I was grateful to come upstairs.

By the time I sat down again to update the inventory, some blue sky was creeping across the bay. While this brightened up the mood quite a bit, it will drop the temperature through the floor by the middle of the night. The bleddy hound can take herself out first thing.

Quite by chance I caught the BBC television weather for the area in the evening. It showed pretty coloured pictures that indicated that everyone west of Camborne would be basking in ambient temperatures of a tropical nature while the rest of the country freezes. The only limpet in that particular bed of oysters is that we will have their foreign chilly wind to put up with. I will break out the sun oil, although it will have to be waterproof as we have rain coming.

After the outright success of publishing the Aged Parent's memoirs in yesterday's Diary – my mailbox is full of requests for more and the telephone has not stopped ringing all day. Alright, it has not, but I will not let deter me. Here is some more.

“FATHER'S WORK

Me being a sickly baby as a result of being fed contaminated milk (and miraculously cured by a young Dr. Stevens of Station Hill, Hayle - now a family hero), Father bought a cow to supply us with fresh, clean milk and subsequently had a few chickens and, at times, some pigs. Most years he would hatch his own chicks in an incubator warmed by a paraffin lamp and controlled by thermostat (I still have the thermometer) and a job I enjoyed was helping to turn the eggs daily. One year though the thermostat failed and he had to dispose of 3 dozen roast chicks.

Father had a horse called Bob and from time to time he would harness him up to the 'Jingle', a two wheeled, oval shaped cart with leather seats around the sides. Then we would go off to Gwithian Towans and the beach, which I loved, and which is a happy memory. I had a great fondness for banana sandwiches, I recall, which, to me, were the highlight of the outing. A bit of a dampener to the trip was that as we drove through Treeve Lane, Tobias Hosking would often be standing outside his

cottage. Tobias had a long white beard which for some reason terrified me and I would lie quaking in the bottom of the Jingle until we had gone by.

At that time the Towans were dominated by a line of pylons (about 50 feet high, I suppose) which supported cables to which were attached large steel buckets. The buckets carried ore from the tinstream works at Godrevy to Hayle harbour. They were a very overpowering presence. The pylons were taken down soon after, but it wasn't long, though, before the Towans were taken over by the Army who built gun emplacements and pill boxes along the edge of the cliff.

Bob's real work was to pull the cart for Father's business, the coal round. Father would go to the East Quay at Hayle to load up with 1 cwt sacks of coal and bring them back to Connor for delivery. Later on, he bought a lorry, and that was the end of poor old Bob. Much more convenient in many ways, it did nothing to prevent the grindingly hard labour of carrying 1 cwt sacks on his back. The replacement lorry, post War, was an Army surplus one, a model which subsequently became the widely used Karrier Bantam. It was very much lower and consequently easier to load, but the V8 engine was very thirsty.

I remember going with him to Hayle, where he went to East Quay to load up with coal. His first call was at the weighbridge where a gentleman in a suit would weigh the empty wagon. He had only one arm and I remember wondering how he tied his tie and shoelaces. Next we went to the great piles of coal unloaded from the ships from South Wales. Two or three men were employed on filling 1 cwt sacks, weighing them, and loading them on to the wagon. One man, I recall, was so small he had to be permanently looking up to see who was talking to him. They called him Jimmy Lookup but I have no idea of his real name. We were weighed again on leaving to check that everything was above board.

Supplies of coal could be erratic in winter and depended upon the weather and on more than one occasion supplies stopped when the ship grounded on the Bar for several days. Occasionally we would go to the Gas Works next door for coke (once for a bucket of tar) and on even fewer occasions, to the North Quay for another fuel (perhaps it was anthracite). The railway line there from Hayle station was working then with locomotives or great railway horses to pull the heavy loads. From time to time on the way home we would call at the Phoenix Mill at Ventonleague and Loggans Mill for cattle feed or flour, but before that Father would always stop at The Ark Newsagent for his News Chronicle newspaper.

As if all this were not enough, in January, 1937 he bought a car, a second hand Austin 12, registered number YF 8756 fitted with Newton safety glass windscreen for £15 from Allen's Garage at Copperhouse. With this he ran a taxi service ferrying visitors from Gwinear Road Station to Gwithian Towans. He will, though, be remembered by two generations of children he brought from Gwithian to Connor school every day. In winter this could be a very difficult journey as some of the children lived beyond Gwithian village and at that time there were 20 feet high sand dunes on the seaward side of the road to Godrevy which, when the wind was in the wrong direction, would blow sand across the road and block it. Then those children on the Godrevy side would have to walk the mile to the village to be picked up. One

lad lived at a very remote farm at Reskajeage and his journey must have been particularly difficult. But there was never any thought, though, of not coming to school because of the weather.

MOTHER'S WORK

Mother's shop sold groceries, sweets, tobacco and much else. In the days before refrigeration it must have been a bit of a problem keeping things like butter and lard which came in large cube shaped blocks from which she cut the required quantity.

Things became much more difficult with the arrival of rationing when she had to cut the precise amounts due against the ration book coupons. Vinegar came in wooden barrels and customers brought their own jug or bottle. Nothing was pre-packaged and everything was weighed on one of two brass scales, the weights of which were tested regularly by the Weights and Measures Inspector. Flour, sugar, tobacco (St. Bruno was a popular brand) and precious saffron were all carefully weighed and put into paper bags. The most popular cigarettes were 'Woodbine', 'Star', Players and Craven 'A'.

Her main suppliers were Osborn Hall of Penzance and Trounson's of Redruth. Jars of sweets came in a Tuckett's lorry and tea arrived in a very noisy Trojan chain drive Brooke Bond's van.

A curious device attached at waist height to the front of the counter was a small wooden peg about 1 inch long, pointing down at 45 degrees which attracted much rude and ribald comment from the ill-informed. It did, in fact, go back to the days when fizzy 'pop' came in bottles with a glass marble stopper. The idea was that you applied the mouth of the bottle to the peg and shoved, thereby dislodging the marble and allowing you to drink the 'pop'. I wonder whether it is still there?

From time to time a window dresser would call and decorate the shop window with an arrangement of cigarette packets glued into to place on glass shelves. This must have been agreed with the tobacco companies as an advertising display as I'm sure Mother never paid for the service."

March 5th – Sunday

Gool Peran Lowen, or by the time you are reading this, Happy St Piran's Day for yesterday. St Piran, Ciaran when he left Ireland, set up church up north there and we had one of his staffers, St Sennan. I cannot remember if they came before, during or after the Irish invaded this end of Cornwall but, crikey, there was an awful lot of them. Not sure what they all did to become saints; as far I as I know there were no wheels on fire or flaying of flesh while still alive. Perhaps getting accepted as a local in their own lifetimes was enough.

It was an excellent day for having a Lifeboat launch. It was going to happen without me in any case as I would have been at the range but instead it happened without me as I probably would not have been able to open the doors. As it was, there was a good showing from the very excellent Shore Crew – brings a tear to your eye, so it

does. It looked a little light on the Boat Crew side for a while but a bunch of them turned up in a rush, fashionably five minutes late.

I bade them a fond farewell as they headed down the stairs and watched from the eerie of our front room, an impeccable launch. The exercise was being conducted with the Gwennap Head National Coastwatch Institute (NCI) and two of their number came along for the ride to experience their normal operations from our side of the boat rail. The boat was away for an hour and a half practising finding a buff dropped by the Lifeboat crew with their eyes shut and after counting to 100, being directed to it by the land bound NCI staff in the station on the cliffs. Like a game of Treasure Hunt but without the helicopter and without the Boat Crew being dressed in yellow lycra jumpsuits – or not obviously so anyway.

I watched as the boat returned to The Cove to the waiting arms of an experienced crew ashore. From my lofty perch, I was able to establish without fear of contradiction that this was indeed a textbook recovery up the long slip at near enough low water. I was down on the Harbour Beach pretending to tend the bleddy hound as my compatriots washed down and put away the Lifeboat under my watchful gaze. We are, after all, a very paranoid, very excellent Shore Crew.

As the day progressed, I discovered to my pleasure that my erstwhile immovable arm was loosening up nicely. As my bone cruncher promised, a couple of days regression before I noticed improvement. I had to admit that late last night I imagined being laid up for the best part of a week such was the restriction and the discomfort (spelt 'agonising pain' when I moved in the wrong direction). This was good news as I was committed to driving the truck at some point during the day while the Missus delivered the tractor that I refuse to call Poppy to the garage.

It is long overdue a service and after several false starts where we have made arrangements to have it done but not made firm the appointment, we eventually got there. The final straw was that the clutch needed urgent replacement and we were drawing close to the shop being open. We have also asked for the new lower arm stabilisers that I collected from town during the week be fitted and the temperamental kill switch to be overridden. We do not use it anyway and it has started killing the engine when we wanted normal operations. I followed the Missus who drove it away from The Farm and we left it outside the garage today rather than having to collect it early doors tomorrow.

You may have noticed, dear reader, in fact possibly been grateful, that the last couple of Diary entries have been somewhat shorter over the last few days. This has been the result of not actually doing anything and also that typing has not exactly been comfortable of late. I have for a little while been considering inserting the work of a guest writer – we have done it before without complaint (or being noticed, perhaps) – so I thought with my own scribbles truncated, the opportunity was there to do it again. Naturally, having decided upon such a venture, I managed to write

rather more than I imagined. However, I am sure you have nothing better to do and you might find the following rather more interesting anyway.

The Aged Parent, in a quiet moment – or possibly several quiet moments strung together – was inspired (and bullied by certain family members) to scribble down some notable memories from his long and vaguely noble past. The ones from his childhood are relevant to this tattered organ as they are from just up the road (west of Camborne, obviously) and areas that you, dear reader, may recognise from your own travels beyond The Cove.

I will leave you with this for starters and we shall see how we go. I have only lightly edited and removed some names to protect the guilty, some left or needed to remain for context. Other names remain as they are probably beyond the capability of taking legal action– I hope. My italics in brackets but I have not marked deletions.

“THE FAMILY

I was born in May 1932 at Connor Downs to Lilian and Bertie. Mother’s Father was Tom who was at one time Foreman Carpenter at the National Explosives Factory on the Dynamite Towans. Her brother was also a carpenter, and of her three older sisters two went into service at some of the great houses in Cornwall and the other trained to be a dressmaker before marrying and settling around Hayle to raise my cousins.

Mother, the baby of the family, remained at home near Loggans Mill in Hayle, and is famous for once falling into the Loggans River and being rescued by her big sister. One of Mother’s friends at Bodriggy School at Hayle was Fay Compton, who became a famous actress. Fay lived with her brother, Compton Mackenzie, the author (*Whisky Galore*), who was staying at Riviere House.

My Father was one of a Connor Downs family of six brothers and two sisters born to John and Laura. One brother died soon after birth but his twin sister survived, and another, the youngest, Edwin, was killed by a drunken driver who knocked him off his bicycle outside the Post Office one night. His Father, John, worked underground at Dolcoath Mine, some 4 miles away, and for a time walked to work and back again daily. He then bought a donkey and shay which must have made things a great deal easier, but the harsh conditions under which he worked brought about his death at 42 years.

One of Father’s Uncles, Uncle Jimmy, a gentle old man, showed me around his cottage garden one day, But I was too impatient and eager to return to his Grandson’s birthday party to take much in. I very much regret that now.

Three brothers and the eldest sister went to the United States for work. Father remained at home and for a while had a greengrocer business with a horse and cart. He was also employed at one time by Mr. Cock, the Postmaster. Father desperately wanted to join his brothers and sister and eventually did so, sailing from Southampton on the R.M.S. Mauretania in 1925. From what little he told me they all had a pretty wild time of it together in Detroit. In the end only one brother remained

and settled there. Father finished up on the Ford Motors production line where he spent months screwing the caps on car batteries but returned to Connor Downs to marry my Mother in 1929 and bought a shop (the one nearest Hayle – *now residential again*) and a smallholding.

THE VILLAGE

Apart from our shop which was looked after by my Mother, next to us was a wooden shed where a disabled shoe mender (I think Mr. Bryant), worked, then there was the Police Station (P.C. Weary), Tommy Kellow, a one-armed man who cycled up from St. Erth every few days to repair bicycles, the Post Office (Mr. and Mrs Gundry Cock), the Tonkin family at the shop opposite, the Turnpike Inn (Mr. Napper), Mr. Woolcock's barber's shop, a blacksmith (Thomas Oates) and a Garage where petrol was delivered by a hand pump by Mr. Williams.. Attached to the family home in the village was a fish and chip shop run by Father's sister, Bessie, and her second husband, Herbert Sampson. Their son was Freddy Sampson, the great Cornish rugby player who was at one time also into Cornish wrestling. Somewhere in that garden is a block of granite with Bertie's name on it, chiselled out by him when he was 11 years old. (*The Aged Parent asked if I wanted it just before the house went out of family ownership about 20 years ago. I would have had it but had nowhere to put it.*)

Milk was delivered daily by Mr. Hawke from a churn mounted on a two-wheeled horse drawn cart. Fresh meat was delivered on Saturdays by Mr. Stapleton in his four-wheeled mobile shop - an elegant vehicle painted blue and cream with glass side windows - also horse drawn. Our meat came on a Friday delivered by Mr. Hosking from Copperhouse. Mr. Hosking was a cheerful, red cheeked man who always wore a straw hat and brought the meat Father had previously ordered in a wicker basket. His smart Rover car was a somewhat unlikely vehicle for commercial work and contrasted greatly with the others.

An occasional treat was an ice cream from Olds of Camborne which was also brought round in a little horse drawn cart."

The late spurt of creativity also appears to have produced poetry.

*Spring springs from Winter's darkest hours
Daylight lengthens, Sunlight strengthens,
And dormant bulbs awake with flowers.*

*Snowdrop, Daffodil, Primrose and Crocus show,
Grasses grow, Mowers mow, Gardeners sow
To celebrate the arrival of Spring.*

Heaven help us, he will be painting fruit in a bowl next.

March 4th – Saturday

Well, it was a day like someone had robbed me of all my sweets. A day spent unable to do things other than read books and watch television. A day without the

excitement of watching raised beds fill up or post holes being bored into the ground for the gatepost that needs doing. A day of being even unable to climb the walls because some eejit thought just one more job would be alright. Still, those sanded benches look very new and shiny, except someone has written 'just one more job' across the top of them as if to taunt me.

The bone cruncher was correct in her assessment that the next day or two would be regression and hurt a bit. Getting the bleddy hound down the steps was a bit of a challenge but she did not seem to mind very much. Getting dressed is another matter altogether and we must be thankful that it was still dark for that first run out of the morning. It was borderline, though, due to the bleddy hound being kind with her wake up time. It was also cold but still no sign in the forecasts of the apocalyptic freeze we have been hearing about.

The remainder of the last quarter's invoices that have been staring at me from my desk for the last week or so finally got to me this morning. I think it was largely because if I did not do those then there would be nothing to show for getting out of bed in the morning. It is the bitty paperwork that I regard as the dregs of the quarterly administration, the Post Office, petrol and other till receipts that do not come on a nice neat A4 piece of paper or that can be organised electronically. I have to file these in envelopes with the sequence numbers written on the front to save them from being lost. They are done now but I have saved the filing for tomorrow so I can at least have another 'achievement' then too.

Reviewing my electronic mails, I had completely forgotten the one that came back from the property company that looks after the much maligned council's houses. I was required to forward to them the wayleave request that the engineer had filled out when he visited Mother regarding her upgrade to fibre broadband. They need to dig up the garden and the public path outside her bungalow and had filled out the form in biro. I spoke with a very pleasant lady on Friday, I think, and she said that I could send her a scanned copy of the form from my computer, which I did.

Apparently, the form had been forwarded to a business analyst, which seemed very good way of adding fifty percent to the cost of a simple job. As we all know, a business analyst must adhere to the highest standards to ensure that a job is done properly and promptly sent the form back to the supplier. He advised that it was completely unacceptable in its current form and needed to be typed. ... I have left an intentional space here, dear reader, for you to fill in your own next sentence because, inexplicably, words have temporarily failed me.

That would have been it as well had a neighbour not called to ask that I come around and sort her television out. I was dreading the possibility of having to root around into tight spaces to fix loose cables but happily I think it was a power glitch because it was working again by the time I got there. It was also the same setup that we have at home, so it was familiar territory. I am very glad that she feels comfortable enough to call me for such things rather than suffer in silence. I told her I would rather come

out to nothing than not come out and find later that it was a proper emergency. I also discovered she has a significant birthday the day before we open, which was useful information, and something she asked me to keep secret. I am sure Mum's the word, dear reader.

I resolved to be a good grumpy shopkeeper for the rest of the afternoon and evening, which does not make very good copy for things such as diaries. Not that I have ever let that bother me before.

March 3rd – Friday

The state of my right arm escalated a bit towards bedtime last night despite cold compressing it and applying topical pain relief. Further application of malt whisky, internally applied, and painkillers, which are a last resort for me just about zonked me out for the night.

It did not take much movement in the morning to convince me an appointment at the bone cruncher would be in order. Since the Missus would have to drive, I arranged that for the middle of the day. In the meanwhile, I promised myself faithfully that I would avoid doing anything including anything that I thought would be alright, like sanding anything or lightly digging two and a half tons of hardcore soil.

As the Missus was with me our trip inevitably included doing some shopping. For the first time ever I was able to persuade her away from Tesmorburys and to the rather good independent shop in the industrial estate. We needed fresh vegetables and fruit and it seems the independents are the only ones taking a sensible view that paying market rate and having something is better than not and having nothing.

It was a last minute decision made on the way out to Mother's where we would leave the bleddy hound. She does not need the trauma of travelling in the direction of the veterinary doctor and would be better off there. Because it was a last minute decision, the Missus asked if I had money about my person, which I did because I would have to pay for the bone cruncher. What I did not realise was the amount of money she expected me to have about my person. We approached the counter in the shop with a mountainous pile in our trolley and when it came time to pay, the Missus was gone. If she had been wearing a hat, I would have expected it to be still suspended in the air, cartoon style, with the vortex tugging at the loose items on the counter.

Although a bit grey here and there it was an ideal day to be labouring on The Farm, which was a pitiful waste. It is highly probable that the fisherman I saw go out yesterday felt the same way. From yesterday's calm the sea had moved to an uncomfortable ground sea with bigger, more ponderous waves and white water crashing on the cliffs opposite. It was still cold but the wind was no more than a light breeze, which was helpful. We have been threatened with the climatic fridge of

doom, scheduled to arrive in the early part of next week but so far none of the forecasts I have looked at show anything of the sort.

By the time we arrived back home it was a good way into the afternoon. Here, I was a very good grumpy shopkeeper and did begger all, which meant sitting in front of the television screen to ensure I was not tempted to do just a little bit. The most strenuous activity that I committed to was penning these insipid words for you to read, dear reader. I had ventured to try the very clever speech recognition software that the computer has on it. This is a very clever facility where I speak my words into a microphone attached to the computer and the computer prints a whole string of different words onto the page. It is a fascinating process but not quite the effect I was after, so I resorted to stretching my muscles and doing it in the traditional way. I hope you appreciate, dear reader, the suffering to which I am prepared to put myself to bring you my words each day. It is almost the same level of suffering that each of you go through reading it, I imagine.

March 2nd – Thursday

The Missus decided that we would be going up to The Farm today as it seemed it would be yet another good looking one, though cold again. I suggested it might be suitable for me to have another day off and let my right arm rest a bit more, so she elected to go up on her own and spring clean the cabin.

I had been allowed a normal waking up time by the bleddy hound, although I was grateful to get out of bed anyway. It did seem not quite as cold in the flat as other mornings of late but perhaps we are just getting used to it. The girl was a bit more animated this morning and took we took a stroll up to the corner of the Lifeboat station. We watched as one of the fishing boats launched for the first time in quite a while and signalled that the sea state that had been a bit stirred up the last few days was calming down. Hopefully, it was also a sign that the new season is starting to wake up a little.

The fishing boat was not alone in breaking out of the winter hiatus, the café next door is shaking off the dust from the winter and the boys and girls have been working hard for the last week or so. It is not yet open, which is perhaps just as well because I would be in for bacon rolls and I would be about the only customer. I was working outside later on and there were maybe half a dozen couples come by. It is still very quiet in The Cove.

The Missus set sail with the bleddy hound in tow at the end of the morning. I managed about an hour of sitting around and not doing anything after that before being unable to stand it any longer and going down to the shop.

It was almost certainly exactly the wrong thing to do with a worn out arm but those benches opposite were not going to sand themselves. Besides, it was only pushing my clever multitool up and down the woodwork. Hardly strenuous at all. I was glad

that I had bothered to purchase some more coarse sanding sheets as it made much lighter work of it.

What I should have also purchased was another sanding block that attaches to the machine because the one I have is almost out of velcroesque surface, the rest having worn away. I was barely through one seating plank when the new sanding sheet came adrift from the block and would not reattach. Given that the sanding block was a gonner anyway I applied a generous coating of superglue to it and reattached the sanding sheet. It worked like a dream. I was also pleasantly surprised just how long the cheap sheet lasted, too, and I only had to glue one more on top of the first to finish the whole job.

I was interrupted twice during my work, which was welcome first, because it was harder work than I assumed given my condition and secondly, the two people who interrupted me were bringing good news. The first was the wine merchant bringing the wine list and prices that were recommended for us, and they were all fine and the second was a chap who used to work for the closed local cash and carry and now works for a food service company in St Ives.

Most of what they sell is for the catering trade, but they also do soft drinks at a very good price, which is unheard of for a food service company and why we do not purchase them from our currently suppliers. They also filled another gap we had regarding local cider, which only leaves bags of ice, although I am not entirely happy with the arrangement we have for logs, but as yet have no alternative for that.

I finished the sanding shortly after the Missus came back from The Farm. She had been gone hours and told me that she still had not finished the spring clean of the cabin. I know she is very thorough about such things but this is the cabin we are talking about where we go wearing our muddy boots for a bit of a sit down. I can see boots having to be left outside along with dirty overalls and having to drink tea with our little fingers sticking out.

It was only when I had settled for the rest of the day that I noticed that sanding might not have been quite the easy ride I anticipated. I think I might let the gymnasium session tomorrow slip by and replace it with a cold compress, which is this weather will teach me to be a good.

March 1st – Wednesday

On the day I had to be up early, the bleddy hound decided a lie in would be a good idea. It was my stirring that roused her rather than the other way around, although my early was late for her, it was about normal for me.

I am glad we settled that. The reason for my early start was to get the truck to the garage for its MOT test and annual service and make my half past nine o'clock appointment with the doctor. I thought that if I was early enough I would also be able

to drive over to the Long Rock Industrial estate to pick up the tractor parts that arrived there on Monday and getting petrol on the way. I could have picked up the tractor parts on Monday when I drove past the shop door on my way to somewhere else had I noticed the telephone message waiting for me. As it was, I picked up the message after I got home.

Arriving at the garage a couple of minutes before the mechanic arrived gave me plenty of time to do it all and arrive in St Just for the appointment for my ears. To my mind the whole arrangement was a bit cart before the horse. It seemed more sensible to give me the opportunity to ensure my ears were clear before the examination. As it played out, I did not really have sufficient time for the process and low and behold, my right ear is blocked and I will have to go back again before I can be referred to the ear 'ole shop in Penzance.

The trip up to St Just was not entirely wasted as the bleddy hound has run out of dinners. I stopped by the butchers while I was there to collect the order I placed yesterday and the additional items that the Missus had added after I had sent it. I have eventually, more than a fortnight ago actually, run out of my favourite breakfast bread that I had saved in the freezer from when the shop was open. I have survived on sourdough, which is just about edible if toasted, and had that last week. Unwilling to do a second week of sourdough toast I treated myself to an Olds' pork pie and hang the expense.

That and making ready for the day when I got back took care of the best part of the morning. I followed up with Mother's lifeline provider, in case their service is compromised by the switch to fibre broadband that will take place soon. Mother has one of those buttons she is supposed to wear around her neck should she find herself in a spot of bother and unable to reach a telephone. When pressed, the button activates an alarm over a telephone line, and we are alerted to run and help. When asked if she wears the button, Mother will swear blind that she does but on the last occasion the Missus checked and found it had left a mark in the dust that had gathered around it. Mother said she must have put it back in the same place.

I also tried to contact the latest company to send me a pair of shoes. The ones I ordered this time were Quiet Dogs, a reputable manufacturer of footwear, but found that I could not get my foot into them at all despite them having a label stating them to be the size I ordered. The shoes I currently wear are that size and so too were the ones that arrived previously that fitted well but just rubbed a bit at the heel. The fact that I could not actually get my feet into the new ones I took to be a fault and wished to return them.

There was no telephone number listed for the company, which I normally check for before I purchase – how remiss – and when I sent an electronic mail, it bounced as rejected at the other end. One of the last options was to use Twitter, which I duly did as a public message pointing out faulty goods and the inability to contact them. The reply was almost immediate requesting that I contact them privately. I suggested that

if they were that shy, perhaps they ought to provide a telephone number. My private message apparently went into a queue and was answered much less quickly than the embarrassing public message earlier.

After clarifying the issue with them and explaining that to use their preferred return method I would have to make a round trip of 20 miles, they very quickly suggested that I post the item back using traditional Royal Mail postage. I hope that they agree that the issue is one of faulty goods rather than just too small and the former will trigger my postage being repaid while the latter will not.

I am now at a bit of a loss as to what to do. The sensible option would be to visit a shoe shop which probably means a trip to Truro. The ones in Penzance are either really expensive or cheap and unsuitable. When the weather warms up, I will be in my string flip flops but we have a way to go for that.

All that took longer to write than execute and in the meanwhile, I went down to the munitions factory to do the last of this year's reloading. One of my burgeoning priorities is to clear the shop in readiness for opening toward the end of this month. It has been nagging for a while and gets a bit more serious from now on. I suppose it took just a little more than an hour to finish the last two hundred rounds and they are now all boxed off and the kit put away. I will find somewhere on the floor for the lead bullets as there are now quite a few of them and, surprise, surprise, they are quite heavy – 20 kilograms (45 pounds) in a box no bigger than 20 x 10 centimetres (8 x 4 inches).

There is also sanding down of the benches opposite to complete, which I have to do now because I started. Maybe, if we skip The Farm tomorrow, I will do it then.

I settled down to have a zizz after such an arduous couple of hours only to discover that there were some ingredients missing from our chosen tea. Since it was not far off time to collect the truck – assuming that the truck would indeed be ready today – I headed into town and to one of the independent stores the other side of the out of town supermarkets. Here, the shelves were brimming with stocks of tomatoes, and fresh vegetables of all sorts. Naturally, prices were high but not extortionate, but what do we expect for items that are imported from far off places at this time of year. More importantly, I found a loaf of my favourite breakfast bread. On reflection, I should have purchased two and frozen one but wished to avoid the accusation of panic buying despite my panic. I considered buying a tomato and discarding it casually on the steps of Tesmorburys as a symbolic gesture, but I folk cannot see the point of shopping at independent stores now, they never will.

As I settled into my evening of excess and decadence, the Aged Parent called to excitedly point out that at that very moment Venus was about to collide with Jupiter and what a splendid sight it was. I promised that I would have a geek just as soon as I had finished my glass of Pol Roger and eaten the last of the Beluga caviar. That last slice of Iberico ham was probably a mistake as the skies were a mass of cloud

when I got outside and there was nothing to see but plenty of cold to go with it. I shall have to take the Aged Parent's word that it was something to behold.