

DIARY 2025

January 1st – Wednesday

Sandy, the bleddy hound's best ever pal, shuffled off last night.

*Out of the day and night
A joy has taken flight;
Fresh spring, and summer, and winter hoar,
Move my feint heart with grief, but with delight
No more – oh, never more!*
Percy Bysshe Shelley

If today was supposed to represent the new beginning, a fresh start and a clean slate, it could have tried a whole lot harder than it did. When I opened the shop at half past eight o'clock, it was still dark and by nine o'clock it was raining heavily. Welcome to 2025. Yes. Thank you very much.

I was fortunate enough to take ABH around in the relative dry first thing. She had woken early doors seeking some assurance that the end of the world had not actually arrived and that the howling and the blind rattling in the window was merely down to a stiff breeze from the southwest that had somehow managed to creep over the cliff. Having been comforted, she went back to sleep again and decided to remain in bed just as long as she could. Even when she did eventually slink out of bed, she was not overly enthused to go outside, and I really could not blame her.

At first, I was going to leave the outside display where it was, indoors, since the wind would be coming around to the northwest at some stage during the morning. I then looked at two forecasts which assured me that while the wind would indeed be going northwesterly – they could not agree when – it would drop to a mere 30 miles per hour from its hardly worth a weather warning 60 miles per hour that it peaked at a few hours earlier. I managed to get the display out the front just ahead of the heavy rain drifting in.

The rain band was pencil thin – looked at from very far away – and dead straight all the way up the country from just beyond the Isles of Scilly to the other side of The Wash. It was a cold front too, and the temperature in the hour that followed its arrival dropped four degrees.

Our neighbour, in every day when we are open, told me that she had been listening to the radio this morning. Whichever programme it was had a feature about the shipping forecast. She told me it had started 100 years ago. I said that they must have been reading very slowly.

Given that things were a bit slow first thing – and later thing as well, it transpired – I took to finishing off the stock count in the shop. It did not take that long to finish the gift and beachware items and even the ones lodged in the store room. It left me with the t-shirts and hooded sweatshirts to count but there is only so much enthusiasm a grumpy shopkeeper can muster on a day such as the one we had. By time I had finished it, we actually had some customers come and go. Most were stopping off in motorcars but there were some stalwart souls doing a bit of walking with sodden dogs and distraught children. I expect that it was better that they were distraught outside than distraught in an enclosed space at home.

My friend from frozen Vermont, very far west of Camborne, visited again this morning. She has taken to heart the clarion call to support your local grumpy shopkeeper and has almost single handedly kept the wolf from our door through her prodigious purchases. She bought some logs alongside a myriad other goods which I said I would deliver. It was the very least I could do. I was going to drop them around after the shop closed but since the shop was as good as closed by the middle of the day, I left the shop to mind its own business and walked the logs around. There is a front and back door to the cottage and neither one looks a friend to constant use and therefore does not lend a clue as to which one on which to knock. I gave up and left the logs in the open utility room. Really, dear reader, this paragraph is only here so that my friend from frozen Vermont, very far west of Camborne knows where I put her logs. Perhaps if I had announced that at the start of the paragraph, you could have skipped over it. My apologies.

We coasted for most of the rest of the day with sporadic visits from very damp people and many dogs. It got sufficiently gloomy by three o'clock for me to turn on the outside lights to at least indicate that we were open. Of course, it might have just indicated that some eejit got security lights for Christmas and had the opposite effect. At half past three I gave up and froze our remaining pasties (sorry, MS) of which there was not a huge number. While I may have got the pasties a bit wrong, the milk was spot on, and the greengrocery was not bad at all. There were some eggs, bacon and cheese but what we will not eat ourselves we will, out of the kindness of our hearts, sell to poor people in the parish.

It took a while to close down and mothball the shop. I still have the greengrocery fridge to shutdown, but the in-laws are leaving tomorrow and may help themselves to some of it. With a cursory look about to make sure I had remembered everything, I turned my back on the shop until the start of the new season.

I had been asked several times during the day when we would reopen again. I confessed that I had not really thought about it but for the last two years we have opened as close to Easter as we could manage. That may be a little tricky this year because Easter is at the back end of April, and I am not sure we could get away with opening that late. I think that we will probably open at the end of March and hope for the best.

It had stopped raining by the time I had closed the shop today, which gave me a reasonably pleasant run around with ABH. It was, however, still very gloomy and noisy, with the sea running high and launching over the Harbour wall again. The ground was wet, obviously, but after so much rain over a prolonged period, there was no standing water to speak of. Out of interest I looked at the Land's End weather station data. I do not generally look at how much rain we have had, so I cannot say whether it is more or less than usual, but we had half an inch all day yesterday of which 0.11 of an inch fell between nine and ten o'clock in the morning.

I can tell you that none at all fell during our after tea walk and there was still none when I took the little girl out for her last spin. I had been cold all day after that morning drop in temperature but as I walked the block during the evening, the temperature seemed to have moderated. It was comforting to have some good news because just before we went to bed, we discovered that the kitchen sink waste pipe was leaking under the kitchen units. Happy bleddy new year, indeed.

January 2nd – Thursday

The vindictiveness of the small gods of grumpy shopkeepers knows no bounds. Today, we had brightness - sunshine even - wide expanses of clear blue skies streaked with wispy cirrus cloud and a crisp freshness to the air. For most of the day it was busy, too.

I was up early because it does not take long for me to acclimatise to a shop opening routine but an age to climb down from it. This allowed me all of the day to regret not opening for today and tomorrow; the weekend would have been pointless. On reflection, it should have made a lot of sense, but I could not see past our tradition of the last however many years of closing after the first day of January.

Yesterday, I mentioned that it appeared to have warmed up in the evening after a day of chilling in the shop. I checked with Land's End weather station and the temperature had indeed picked up by a couple of degrees late on but dipped away again after midnight. The additional chill today was very noticeable, but the air was dry, and the coldness felt a lot cleaner, somehow.

It was certainly cold enough down on the Harbour beach in the late morning. The in-laws had left with Mother an hour earlier and cleaned out some of our excess stock before they went. I took the remainder of the fruit and vegetables next door and no doubt they will be converted into a bacon roll next time I am in there. The thought imbedded in my mind, and I was forced to have a very naughty toasted bacon sandwich with both the bacon and the bread fried in butter. I will beat myself with birch twigs and tighten my cilice later, which will make everything right again. In the meantime, I revelled in its naughty loveliness – is that really so bad.

Anyway, if penance was required, it started on that cold Harbour beach down at the water line. ABH had struck lucky with a young golden retriever who was happy to

play with her. Sadly, she was just leaving when we arrived. The retriever had just extracted herself from the deep weed that now sat across the width of the beach on the tide line. Thankfully, after nearly a week, the rest of the beach was clear with the weed either having floated down to the end of the Harbour or had been buried in sand, evidenced by the stalks of weed sticking up, looking like the burnt-out trunks of trees on a battlefield.

Somehow, ABH managed to belt around on the weed bed like a little motorised machine that must have been excellent for the thigh muscles. She also chased what looked like a wren around the rocks – the wren won but in my view had cheated by flying. The seal pup had now gone on the spring tide, which is a relief until it turns up slightly more worse for wear on the big beach.

I called the Cornwall Wildlife Trust a couple of days ago to ask about the process of reporting dead marine life. My initial expectation was that once reported, they would come along and take it away. Having noticed that they had not in this instance, I thought that I would discuss with them what the process was. When I called initially, the very pleasant lady was busy dealing with another incident, but she told me she would call back. She duly did in the evening, which was very dedicated of her.

She confirmed my suspicion that the Wildlife Trust turn up to check on the condition of the animal and then inform the landowner whose responsibility it is to dispose of the body. I understand that they had indeed informed the Harbour Commissioners in this case. Suffice to say, we were lucky it was not a whale. When I asked, they agreed that they sometimes have a problem when the position of the animal is borderline above or below the average high water level. Above is private landowner, below is Crown. She also scolded me for suggesting that the tag they put on the beast is plastic when they use wood. I thanked her very much for her time and for providing me a better understanding of the role.

While on the face of it, reporting seems to be a waste of time, at least the Wildlife Trust will know which landowner to contact, even if the landowner completely ignores them. I have some sympathy with that response as I would not know what to do with a carcass, either. You can hardly put a dead dolphin in the public waste bin – it would not fit through the hole for a start.

We finished our walk out with a run around the block and returned to the flat where I could finish off the stock count work by inputting the numbers I had written down. It is during this process that I remember all the things that I missed and will have to go downstairs again to finish them off.

This took a little longer than it should because I had a few interruptions. For one, our year end tax and accounting information had started to come through. Our accountant has elected to use a technical facility to transfer documents – it allows us to sign them rather than posting paper to and fro. That is highly commendable, but

the accounting staff are unfamiliar with it and for documents that do not need a signature, it is overly complicated.

The one document I was keen to get my hands on was the one that set out how much we have to pay the Revenue men. When I met with our accountant, I was very pleased to note that we did not have to pay very much (more, having paid an excess last time). But there was no mention of the tax rebate the Missus had received – of which I was hugely jealous – so I was not sure whether I could now trust the figures I was given. I am sure someone will tap me on the shoulder eventually if we are found to be short, so perhaps I should not worry.

Another matter was the headband of my regularly used headtorch. So regularly used was it that it had become loose and had reached the extent of its tightening. I do not have a particularly small head, but it seemed to me that even when I had it new, there was not much play left to tighten it then. I sent an enquiry to the company explaining that I had tightened the adjustments either side to no avail and wondering if there was more than one replacement size available. Apparently, there is not, and the respondent apologised that I had found this difficulty with the product. Very helpfully, did I know that there were adjustments either side of the band by which I could tighten it!

Hopefully, our new regular plumber will be able to fix the kitchen waste pipe leak. I contacted him this morning, but he will not be able to come until Monday, which is better than Tuesday and eminently an improvement on not at all. The leak is in the most awkward of places under the kitchen units. The last person who fixed it was a chum from the Lifeboat who is a professional kitchen fitter who never swears until he tried getting at our leak. I thought best not to ask him again, although if I see him tomorrow, I might ask how to remove the kitchen unit that sits on the problem in case our plumber is not familiar.

Come the middle of the afternoon, the day was so perfectly lovely it would have been a crime not to take ABH for a stank out in it. With the beach looking resplendent but narrowing in the tide, I decided to do the Coast Path walk to The Valley and back down the beach. I had some reservations, mainly that the World, her civil partner, the adopted children and their Eastern European rescue dogs were all out doing much the same thing.

ABH is getting better, no doubt, but out on a walk, she will wait for dogs coming up behind, pull after dogs ahead and veer left or right for dogs either side. If there are no dogs, people will do. Today, there were dogs and people behind, in front and either side and we had to wait or veer or rush after all of them. It took twenty minutes to reach the end of the road. Crossing the car park may as well have been an expedition to find the Northwest Passage and once we were on the elevated path, we had to stop to observe the twenty or so dogs in view.

As I suspected, all our visitors had eschewed the Coast Path for the beach and we had a clear run all the way to the Valley and down to the beach. Once on the beach, we were amongst the crowd, and I really do not recall the last time we were on the beach when it was so busy. I was pleasantly surprised that ABH demonstrated exemplary behaviour and did not once chase after unsuitable dogs, play nicely with a few who were keen to play as well and came back when called. I think that she may well have been overawed by the numbers of people and dogs and was a brae bit nervous as well.

I took met an old pal as we walked back, someone who on reflection I have known for 30 years. He used to be part of the management of the OS when it was a proper hostelry, and customers were treated with respect. As they were walking in the other direction, we did not tarry long but I see him from time to time around as we go about our business.

The little girl collapsed in a heap when we returned. She has not had a proper stank out for a little over a week and come to think neither have I. I also have not been to the gymnasium for almost two weeks and now face the prospect of going in the morning on what promises to be the coldest day of the winter, so far. I took some practise later in the evening after ABH had recovered. The skies were clear, the stars shining bright and the mercury was dropping like a stone. What joy.

January 3rd – Friday

It turned out to be almost the day that never was. It just disappeared before my very eyes.

I suppose not getting out of bed until nearly eight o'clock did not help but clearly, I was starting the day with one of those devil may care attitudes before I was even properly awake. It was hardly enticing to leave the warmth of my pit when there was icy cold air dropping through the window above me. ABH did not seem to give a fig and was not at all bothered about bothering me to wake up. I did that all by myself and it was guilt alone that eventually drew me out of bed.

It was cold outside, sure enough, and I really had to steel myself to the prospect of heading down the road to the gymnasium. Taking ABH around first thing was all about putting a virtual toe in the virtual water. I was looking for signs of frost or ice covered puddles but did not find any. I concluded that the temperature did not go below zero as we were warned in the forecast last night. Even the much maligned council gritter came down to The Cove as a precaution. We did not used to be on the list of roads to be gritted until someone pointed out that the Lifeboat crew would need to use the road in an emergency. That is all very handy, but the crew still need to get to the road that is gritted from roads that probably are not.

Given that it was not that cold out, I thought that I had better man up and get down to the gymnasium, pronto. Using all my manning up reserves, I undertook a blistering session without a moment's mucking about. I discovered that actually, it was not that cold or uncomfortable at all. I even surprised myself by hitting an average score on the rowing machine which was not at all bad after two weeks of abstinence. I returned home a better man and immediately took ABH out again to prove it.

I did check with the Land's End weather station at some point in the morning. I also saw that Benson, in Oxfordshire, some way east of Camborne, had claimed the day's 'coldest place' place by recording -8.1 degrees centigrade. It put my concerns about losing toes to frostbite in the hut with a tin roof and getting out of bed into perspective; Land's End had a balmy 6 degrees on its thermometer.

We would normally have taken a bit longer about the post gymnasium run down to the Harbour beach, but time was pressing. With a placid sea and blue skies above us, someone had suggested a training Lifeboat launch and we had only an hour or so to clean up, have breakfast and get over there.

I mentioned when it happened that the mechanics had replaced the winch cables on both winches. While they endeavour to wind up the cable in an ordered fashion it is not all that easy when the cable is not under load. They had also fiddled with the workings so that when we came to pull the boat back to undo the stop, the winch did not move. After a confused couple of minutes, I went up into the winch room and fiddled a bit with a few levers like I knew what I was doing. It impressed the crew greatly that I managed to get the controls working again. It had astounded me, but no one needs to know that.

After the boat had gone, we unwound most of the cable off the long slip drum and stretched it down the long slipway. With some burly crew members hanging onto it we managed to exert sufficient load on the cable to wind it back onto the drum properly. It took two attempts, and it was fortunate that the tide was a long way out as we could unwind the cable all the way to the end to untwist it.

After half an hour of mucking about with cables I manage to sequester my kitchen fitting pal to come across and show me how to remove the kitchen unit that sat above the waste pipe leak. Not only did he show me in great detail how to do it, he also pointed out that the 45 degree joint in the waste pipe run had a crack in it. I fancy that the water is also coming from one of the joints, so there may be a bit more work than just that. I have sent some pictures off to the plumber so he can arrive with all the right bits on Monday.

We waited a little longer than expected for the boat to return. A relief coxswain is joining us next week as our permanent man is going on to other things. The old was taking the new for some familiarisation of our patch. It is useful to see it at low water when rocks and features are visible that are covered at higher states of the tide.

They were gone for going on two hours covering both the north and south coast around to Porthcurno. We were waiting patiently having prepared for the boat's return and recovered it up the long slip on a pushing tide in what was obviously a textbook recovery. Once again, I had let our training head launcher and training winch operator loose to do the job. The head launcher is doing an excellent job but for the last three launches there have been problems with the winch or the winch cable. We have decided that once our man is passed out, he will never see the inside of the winch room again because he is obviously cursed. This, of course, is the soft option for him after we discussed locking him in a wicker tower and setting fire to it. We are, after all, a very superstitious, very excellent Shore Crew.

When we had refuelled the boat and finished our debriefing, I caught up with ex-Head Launcher and ex-Second Coxswain who were sitting on the bench outside. We had an excellent chat for a while but when I looked at the clock on my smart mobile telephone, I could not believe that it was already three o'clock in the afternoon.

I bade them farewell because I had every intention to walk ABH up the cliff after we had finished. By the way the time was going, we would be doing it in the dark. It certainly did not help that it took twenty minutes or more to get to the lookout as every blade of grass and hummock had to be sniffed at least once. On the way back down Stone Chair Lane we met some acquaintances. It was getting on for dusk and they mentioned that our walk seemed to be cutting it fine. I pointed to ABH and told them that it had not started out that way.

Once again, with the sea a calm as it has ever been, the silence in the silent valley was absolute. It is very difficult to describe exactly how that is, so I have taken the trouble to record it for you dear reader. Listen very carefully ...

... there. Quiet, int it.

January 4th – Saturday

It seems we have found a common understanding to not get out of bed too early in the morning, which is just fine at present. At least there was no cold draught descending on me, so I imagined that the cold snap must have snapped and gone away.

I was not up very long when I discovered that aside from the lack of draught, it was just as cold as it was the previous day. After walking ABH around, I concluded that as well as being cold, it was damp too, and in my book that was worse. I did not really warm up until late in the morning after I had done some running about and had a second but longer trip around our end of The Cove with the little girl.

We ventured down to the beach on our second outing because the tide let us. We were both surprised to see a sizeable group of people collecting there, some intent on getting wet it seemed. One carried a military banner, which was related to the Marines, and many were sporting green berets and, in some cases, little else. I asked a lady apparently with the group what was going on. She told me that one of the Marines had pledged to carry out 31 swims in 31 days for some charity or other but had shuffled off in September. I was not sure whether he had achieved his aim or not and it seemed impertinent to ask, however, the ex-Marines there gathered were there for a swim in his honour. They were fully prepared, as you might imagine a bunch of ex-Marines would be, including a bottle of Glenfiddich poking out of someone's bag.

While yesterday vanished before my very eyes, today lingered to taunt me. This was largely because I was frittering away its time doing nothing in particular and being ever so lazy. I do suppose that is allowed now and again but it does not make any better Diary reading and does not get jobs that need doing done. I decided not to care for a while but eventually got my backside in gear and that is when I discovered that doing so warmed me up a little.

The Missus must have been in the same mind as she had announced the intention to dismantle the Christmas decorations today but did not start doing so until the early afternoon. While she was about that, I made some space in the shop for all the decorations boxes and set to with counting the things in the shop that I had not counted. I finished off the sunglasses and the t-shirts but did not even attempt the hooded sweatshirts as by that time ABH was climbing the walls because she could see but not be close to the Missus. It was at this point that I gave up and took her upstairs. I would, of course, have thrown in my lot with the Missus and helped with the decorations but I was told that my assistance was not required in a tone of voice that made it entirely clear that my assistance was not required.

With nothing better to do, I sat down for a further rest which developed into a bit of a zizz with ABH on my lap.

Just before we headed downstairs for our separate roles, the damp in the air has decided to up its game. It started to rain and continued to rain for the rest of the afternoon. By the time I was ready to take ABH out again in the later afternoon, it was not only hacking down but a pretty fearsome east wind had started up. That increased rapidly as the afternoon went on and made for a very uncomfortable time of it, not least for the Missus who persisted with the de-decorating.

I took ABH out a couple of times more both of us in full metal jacket waterproofs, although mine were rather more full than hers. We were dripping coming back on both occasions and we had not spent any more time than necessary outside. The Missus, who had spent the entire afternoon out in it discovered her waterproofs not quite as waterproof as she would like. However, she had done 90 percent of the dismantling, and one tree is down but both are denuded. The string of lights down

the road will have to wait for the lights man to come and take them down as they are his. Also, the Santy and tree on top of the fuel store will require some extra assistance removing and since it is higher than the second rung of a ladder, I am not the man for it.

There will be some scurrying around in the morning as there are things to do and I am away deep in the middle of the afternoon. It means going east of Camborne, so I shall try not to fret too much during the night.

January 5th – Sunday

It was a mucky morning in The Cove, but at least it was not raining – or not very much to speak of. ABH was not that keen to hang about outside and I agreed that it was not all that inspiring. So uninspiring was it that I dawdled my way through the morning despite having a few chores to do before I left on my travels.

My knee consultation is tomorrow morning and because the city of Plymouth is a very long way off and the appointment very early, I elected to stay the night at a close by hotel. One of the very excellent Shore Crew admonished me for doing so, telling me that it was less than two hours driving to Plymouth and I could just have got up early. I had not really considered it, but after he told me I did think that perhaps I could have done. I think my reasoning was that I did not want to risk being late for the appointment and the journey was unfamiliar.

Before I left, I had to sort out the recycling which is being collected tomorrow morning. I am sure that the Missus could have done it but after the in-laws' stay, the bags were heavier than usual – including the glass box – and the Missus still has her dickie shoulder to consider. I left the recycling in the usual place at the bottom of the steps so the only thing the Missus had to remember was the food waste box.

More important than the recycling was the removal of the kitchen unit so that the plumber, arriving tomorrow morning first thing, could access the affected bit of waste pipe. Despite my pal's instructions, I still approached the removal of the unit with some trepidation. The screw he pointed out was not actually a screw at all and other possible fixings also turned out to be false as well. I managed to find only two small screws holding the unit in place, which given that it was pretty firmly jammed into position, were more than enough.

With the screws removed, the only thing left was to wind down the legs so that the unit could drop and thus be pulled out. I very quickly discovered that only the front two feet were properly attached to the unit. The two at the back were just levered into place. Given that it does not get much movement or abuse, this probably does not matter too much. The last thing that surprised me was that our very experienced lino fitter had cut around the front feet rather than winding them up and sliding the lino underneath.

I had just enough time after putting everything away to sit down for a cup of tea and a bit of cake kindly supplied by the café next door before bidding the Missus and ABH adieu and heading for the door.

If I thought that the weather was mucky in The Cove, I was to be assured that it was far muckier for almost the entire journey to Plymouth. Before leaving I had studied the map to prepare as much as possible for the journey into the unknown. Using the very handy computer facility that permits you to actually 'drive' the route in advance, I was pretty confident that I knew the few turnings on the route that were necessary to take. It also very usefully told me what the Saltash Bridge toll would be when I got there, which I would have forgotten else.

Given that I left in the early part of the afternoon expressly to ensure I got to my destination in daylight, it was pretty gloomy when I arrived. After all the preparation, I missed the right hand turn to the hotel at the last minute. Fortunately, there was a roundabout immediately after it and I was able to u-turn and take the left.

I have no idea when the hotel was built but it all looked very new. It also looked opulent and expensive, which I was not expecting as the room price was around the more well know travel hotel chains prices. I only chose it because of its proximity to the hospital but it would do very nicely at first look. I was a little taken aback at the size of the reception area. The reception desk was so far off I considered hiring a Navajo guide to find it for me. As it turned out that might have been appropriate as I was told that in order to get to my room, I should take the elevator to the first floor. I could only see a couple of lifts, so I took the stairs instead.

The room was equally, erm, roomy. You could easily have fitted another double bed in there leaving enough room between the settee and the television to have some ballroom dancing lessons should you have felt the urge. What also surprised me was the lack of power points. There were only three by the bed and two of those were round pin for the lights.

I had not sufficiently girded my loins when I went downstairs again for some tea. The hotel had gone some way to have the restaurant and bar look as posh as the gigantic reception area. The space was empty when I arrived save for a welcoming bar person, which was a good start, and a lone waitress. Given that by the time I ate there were still only two other tables occupied, they were probably over-staffed.

I was shown to a table in the middle of the restaurant that satisfied me that perhaps I did not look quite as shabby as I thought I did. The waitress already had the menu in her hand and explained what the soup of the day was and that the pan fried hake with chorizo & bean cassoulet was off.

She was gone before I took a closer look at the menu which was when I discovered that the price of each dish was merely a number. The prices could easily have been

in Turkmenistani Manats for all I knew but somehow, I did not think I could be that lucky. At £16 (there, I can type a £ sign), the burger was seriously overpriced, which made me glad that the hake was off the menu because I would have resented that even more.

There was absolutely nothing wrong with the meal when it turned up, apart from the price, but it made me wonder if the waitress should have been topless to compensate. On reflection, I am very glad she was not. I considered sending my compliments to the chef on his ability to safely open a packet of burgers and slip them under a grill. He or she had also managed to take the already halved burger bun out of its packet, which was an added bonus. At the price, I would have appreciated at least some effort being made in the kitchen such as making the burger or using an artisan bread roll. I needed no further reminder why the Missus and I do not eat out anymore. In what I regarded as a final blow to my sensibilities, a ten percent service charge was already added to the bill when it arrived. I suppose that having it brought to my table, I should be grateful.

I returned to my room much poorer for the experience. I also discovered why the room was so poorly lit. The wide screen television, the faux marble top in the bathroom and fake teak desk and dressing table combination were just smoke and mirrors. There were two mirrors, one in the bedroom and the other in the bathroom but they reflected badly on the things that were covered up. There was water under the tiles on the bathroom floor even before I had used the shower, the mattress was no more than a wobbly brick and full of lumps, electrical points were held together with tape and the carpet was stained with things that I would rather not guess at.

Still, it is one night and did not cost a fortune, although the food did. I really had no choice about that because the close by alternatives were either run by a clown or a chap with a big hat and a goatee. I do not think I will have to stay there again but Mother and the Missus might when I come back to have my dickie knee, erm, undickied. I will leave that to them.

January 6th – Monday

While trying to avoid the water under the floor tiles in the hotel bathroom, I did something unspeakable to my lower back. It was not the best start to the day even if I had slept surprisingly well on the odd mattress. At least I was going to a hospital, although when I got there, they told me it was not something they could do anything about. What sort of a hospital is that.

I decided to walk down to the hospital from the hotel as it was less than half a mile and I had been warned that parking was at a premium. The hospital was purpose built, so why they did not allow for enough parking is quite a mystery. It is a private hospital so perhaps the patients arrive in chauffeur driven limousines that are then driven away again. I should make it clear, dear reader, lest you think that I have

been over-charging for our pasties (sorry, MS) that I am the equivalent of a scholarship attendee and am not shelling out a bean for any treatment I might have there. I will, or course, expect to have second hand scalpels used and anaesthetic gas left over from a rich person's operation. I must hope that the rich person before me did not use it all.

I must say that since I was the only poor person in the waiting room - you can tell - they were all frightfully polite to me and I was seen straight away by the consultant, although I had to stand up as the chair was only for paying patients. He asked lots of pertinent questions like, 'why was I there', which was a little worrying but after I explained that I was rather hoping he could see his way clear to replacing my dickie knee with a new one, he was most accommodating. He then told me that he could do it in February.

Once I had confirmed that he actually meant this year, I reminded him that I was not a private patient at which he laughed and told me he had meant 2029. No, no, I jest with you, dear reader. It really was February this year. This all became rather embarrassing at this point. I explained about the shop and how a November operation reduced the risk of being unready to work 12 hours a day standing up. I also told him that the reason I was attending a consultation now was that I was working on information that I had been given on waiting times. My expectation was that there would be a considerable gap between consultation and the operation.

Our man, being a consummate professional told me that this was not a problem and he would write me down for November. I have no idea how that will be remembered but can only trust that it will be.

The good consultant told me to wait in the waiting room again and a nurse would be along to process my assessment. This time I had to wait half an hour but was eventually called to a machine that weighed me, measured my height and took my blood pressure. It was at this point that my preferred timing of the operation came up again. I could tell that this was as welcome as a dolphin in a car factory, and I was taken to the headmistress's desk to explain myself. Three of the senior nurse types gathered to explain just how upsetting this was to the smooth running of the hospital. All manner of allowances would now have to be made and I would still need to make myself available six weeks before the operation to allow them to carry out the assessment.

Having created such a fuss, some sort of recompense would have to be extracted to appease the hospital gods. I rather think that the nurses and administrators just wanted to teach me a lesson for being so annoying. They conferred briefly before agreeing that a blood sacrifice would probably be sufficient and would I mind awfully baring my arm. Just for good measure, they would also wire me up to a polygraph, at least that is what is looked like, so that they could check if I had a heart. I did suggest that a simple call to the Missus would have confirmed that in the negative

along with the assertion that I was born somewhat in advance of my parents' wedding.

I had chosen to walk to the hospital in my shorts. It seemed a pragmatic solution as I assumed the consultant would want to see my knee and removing a pair of trousers is not only undignified but such an awful fag. While walking about in little boy trousers around The Cove in the depth of winter, I am seen as just another nut at the end of the Christmas stocking. In the busy metropolis, I garnered some interesting looks but at least cars stopped for me when I wanted to cross the road. Happily, no one called out the police or doctors from the psychiatric unit of nearby Derriford Hospital.

Neither was it the best weather to be walking about in little boy trousers. The lashing rain of the previous day and evening had ceased at some point in the small hours of the morning. I knew this because my room looked out on the flat roof of half the reception area below. The rain cascaded noisily from somewhere above onto the paving stones that someone had thoughtfully placed outside my bedroom window. The cessation of the rain had been met by the increase of a fierce northwesterly and fearsome chilly it was too.

The journey home was unremarkable, and the wintry showers held off until I was approaching Hayle, that was very appropriate. The route is about as simple as any 86 mile route could be: there is one right turn and one left turn and only three A roads having joined the A30 at the top of the hill. The only tiresome bit is the A38 through the Glyn Valley which is twisting and subject to average speed cameras. This was no great inconvenience as the weather held us all down below 40 miles per hour on the way there and a well-place lorry to similar speeds on the way back.

I stopped at Tesmorburys on the way back, not as further penance for upsetting the hospital staff, but to get some food for our fussy eating ABH. We have found that more often, not always, having fresh meat along with dog food is more acceptable than dog food alone. Even then, it is hit and miss. If we vary the meals, we seem to have more chance because the second day of the same food is met with derision. Even then, we throw more of her meals away than she eats.

Since my lower back was still an issue, ABH was constrained to a few runs down to the Harbour beach and around the block. Although the showers diminished and eventually gave up all together, the cold northwesterly continued and it was not all that pleasant to be strolling about in no matter how dressed up against it I was.

The wind was not severe but brisk enough to push things around in The Cove. When I arrived back home, our recycling bags were halfway down the street and the food waste bin, scat sideways and in front of the shop. The new plastic box for our bottles was nowhere to be found. While the wind had much to do with this, I have noticed that the recycling collectors are none too fussed about tidiness or security when it comes to replacing the bags and boxes they have emptied. It would not take much

effort to tuck them back in the sheltered spot they were placed out in. Instead, quite often they are cast down carelessly and, like today, at the mercy of the elements. I had intended to indent for a new plastic bin but subsequently forgot all about it.

We spent the remainder of the day cowering in the warmth of our newly insulated living room. I managed, at great personal risk, to replace the kitchen unit as the plumber had been and fixed our leak. He suggested that part of the problem was the tightness of the space behind the unit closing on the pipework, so I was especially careful putting it back. I left the kickplate off and will monitor the pipe for a few days to make sure we have no further problem.

I had really hoped to get on with things at The Farm, but I will leave it an extra day to see how my back performs. I know, dear reader, you have been champing at the bit to read day after continuous day of Farm exploits now that the festive season is over. I can only apologise but I can promise the day is not far off, for which I am sure you are delighted.

January 7th – Tuesday

At some point in the early morning, I heard the wind whistling in the eaves. It woke me up, so I assume that it had just started. I am not entirely sure of the timing, but I do not think that it lasted half an hour, at least after I was awake, that is. It must have been some squall.

There was still enough breeze around in the morning to bring the temperature down a fair bit and I was pleased when we got back inside again. The breeze was dropping off when we went out again near the middle of the day, but it was still a brae bit cold even wearing long trousers and a bit more wrapping on top.

Despite the cold, I had made my mind up to head up to The Farm today. I am away to the trade shows next weekend and the stock needs to be complete by then, so I know what I am looking for. I had only intended to do the stock that was in the barn today and ask the Missus if she would give me a hand with the store room tomorrow. I also wanted to take some measurements around the polytunnel.

I had spent some of the time in the morning working on some more detail regarding the structure that would replace the polytunnel. The details had emerged from my previously dormant brain at around three o'clock in the morning and I wanted to get them down on paper before they retreated to the dark recesses again. I now have quite a sketch of how the building will be constructed, although I will run it past the Highly Professional Craftsperson first. I will then start all over again after he has told me it is rubbish.

One of the key parts of the plan is the width of the building which will be limited, for simplicity, to the longest bit of timber I can get hold of, which is 4.8 metres. Since the

roof will have a single pitch, the width of the building on the ground will be dictated by Pythagoras about 2,500 years after he popped off. That is some reach. Anyway, given that the angle of the pitch is not great, the maximum width of the project will be 4.7 metres. I wanted to check if we could keep the metal structure of the polytunnel and build over it, as it would save some time and anguish. Sadly, it needs to come down.

Before I went to The Farm, I put everything I needed in the back of the truck then trundled off to collect Mother from St Buryan. It had started out as a reasonably bright morning and by the time we were heading back to The Cove, the sun was out, and the day had started to look quite good. The same could not be said of the sea state that had ramped up in the morning and was looking a tad agitated half the day later. It looked pretty though. The Missus told me later that it calmed considerably by the later stages of the afternoon.

I should not have worried about the cold. By the time I reached The Farm, I was quite toasty, and I was looking at mainly blue skies. Not that it mattered all that much as the sun does not shine in the barn and I very quickly realised that the lights in the store room would not shine for too much longer either as the battery had nearly run out of electricity. I had brought the battery flood light regardless because while the permanent lights are sufficient for everyday use, they are a bit dim for label reading and other detailed work. The battery change could therefore wait until I had nearly finished.

As it was, I decided to change the battery anyway because I had remembered that I had charged up one of the original batteries that had seemed in better order than the other old ones. I had taken those to the Household Waste Recycling Centre a while ago where they could be tipped. Trying the remaining old battery was a bit of a waste of time because it could only make 60 percent of the charge. It will go the way of the others when I can be bothered. I left it in place while I did the count and fetched one of the new batteries and connected that before I left.

Fortunately, the damage I did to my back yesterday was much improved today, which given I lumped about a heavy kitchen unit yesterday and then four trips to and from the cabin with a heavy battery today, was somewhat remarkable.

Once I had counted everything in the barn and discovered that it did not take as long as I had thought, I started in the store room. Once I had started, I rather lost myself in the work and before I knew it, I was halfway through. With plenty of time left in the day, I decided to continue for a bit and when I left there was only the swim clothes, hats and shoes and buckets and spades left to count. I will recruit the Missus on a last push to have that done on Thursday.

Quite soon after I arrived, I opened the tool shed to retrieve the chain saw so that I would not forget to take it with me when I left. It will be needed to rearrange the Christmas trees in The Cove so that they fit in the truck more easily. I noted that I

also needed some oil for it which I thought was in the cabin. Since I was not yet planning to go to the cabin, I thought to collect it before I came home. Naturally, I forgot and will have to go back to The Farm before I can use it.

I pay little heed to forecasts these days but there seemed little doubt that tomorrow would be nasty. A robust northerly laced with rain looked to be particularly uncomfortable, even if we were not to have knee deep snow that much of the North was likely to get. I also had no doubt that Christmas tree cutting and visits to The Farm to complete stock counts could be put on the back burner for a day. Obviously, if it turns out that I need suncream and tropical whites tomorrow, as well as being incredibly surprised, I may change my mind.

January 8th – Wednesday

It was the sort of day that the term bone idle was created for. It certainly was not for a want of things to do but simply that the weather encouraged, well, bone idleness.

ABH played a complete blinder this morning. She woke me up at seven o'clock, which was not unacceptable, and I duly got up. She stayed in bed. I considered that she would probably catch me up, so I took my time putting on a jacket and unlocking the door and, yes, she duly appeared. As is now customary, I chased her around the living room in a dance that we do before I manage to get her to the door. After a minute of that I picked up her harness. If she had winked it would not have surprised me, but she bolted back to bed leaving me hanging, fully dressed and harness in hand.

I stood myself down. I headed for the kitchen fully aware that if I made a cup of tea, she would be there immediately ready to go out. I waited a while by the kettle but she did not appear, so I made my tea, sat down at my desk and seconds later, ABH was at my feet. The little minx.

By the time we had completed our second pre-going out routine, it had started to rain. It had at that time not yet started to very seriously blow from the north as it was promised to do. The wind at that time was actually in the northeast, which was bad enough and the rain was very chill indeed. I was very keen that we did not spend an inordinate amount of time in it, so ABH decided to spend an inordinate amount of time foraging. She had, as a ruse, cut across the RNLi car park which she is wont to do when the weather is poor, which encouraged me to think she was keen not to stay out either. She is a wicked tease, that little girl.

I had nothing else on my agenda to occupy my time unless you include inputting all the data I collected yesterday. I did not, so I did exactly better of any use. I took ABH out a further two times after the rain had eventually diminished. It was still cold and I, at least, took no pleasure in it. It was certainly not the weather for a stank up the hill so we mainly stayed indoors and annoyed each other.

The highlight of the day was a hurried Lifeboat training launch. The station managed to track down an assessor to sign off on a trainee mechanic. We on the shore have been waiting on an assessor to sign off our trainee Jonah winch operator and head launcher for quite some time. We unfortunately missed out on the last opportunity due to an inconveniently timed holiday. Our pass outs will happen tomorrow.

At the end of the activities today, I also learnt that the head launcher role now need re-evaluation every five years. I am very happy to report that the station Head Launcher successfully passed his re-evaluation today and will not need to again for a further five years. If access to assessors has not improved by then, it is very likely that I will be retired from service first – that is if they let me back in after my false knee has been fitted.

We launched the boat at around half past three o'clock in the increasing chill of the increasing northeasterly wind. With a thin crew I had the opportunity to stay in the winch room as nominal winchman to the trainee but given that we also needed a nominal head launcher, I elected to stay outside. I have not long finished reading the Boys' Own Book of How to be a Hero, which showed that such things are required from aspiring heroes. Having spent half an hour outside at the top of the slipway I wished that I had read How to Cheat and Still Look Like a Hero, instead.

The boat was out half an hour less than advised and we were caught napping and having tea in the crew room when we noticed the boat returning to station. Naturally, being a very excellent Shore Crew we were constantly alert and ready to be scrambled at a moment's notice. Had you been there, dear reader, it would have been very reminiscent of fighter pilots running to their aeroplanes like in the film Reach for the Skies, except we made sure we finished our tea and biscuits first.

We very quickly assumed our positions and brought the boat up the long slipway in what was clearly a textbook recovery. Thankfully, the rain held off, but the cold held on. I meant to ask the boys assigned to the bottom of the slipway if it was super-cold down by the water, but they came back with a full complement of fingers, so I did not bother. On the shore, our meagre numbers were bolstered by some assistance from one very willing member of the Boat Crew, and we worked as a finely tuned and integrated team. We are, after all, a very inclusive, very excellent Shore Crew.

At our de-briefing, we learnt that the trainee mechanic won his stripes and that we will also be signing off two crew on the Tooltrak tomorrow. The assessor is an old friend and is happy to put some effort in signing off as many outstanding roles as possible during his two day visit.

I returned home to find our wheelie bin on its side. I had cut it loose from its mooring last night because the commercial bin collection was organised for today. We had filled the bin to capacity since before Christmas and I had loaded the loose cardboard on top. We, well mainly I, was exceptionally lucky that the wind had

chosen to desist overnight, otherwise I would have had to have been up early doors to meet the bin man. As it was, the rubbish is gone, and we are clear until we build up another head of steam. I am hoping that we can fill the bin again with Christmas decorations from The Farm that we will never use again. We can all dream, can we not.

January 9th – Thursday

The thermometer they have up at Land's End weather station reported that the temperature had increased by four degrees between eight o'clock and midday. I begged to differ. I had been out with ABH twice in that time and on both occasions there were icicles trying to form on my eyebrows. Perhaps those tropical temperatures were just taking their time to come around the corner.

The fact that it was not raining and looked a pretty decent day held no water at all when it came to venturing out to do things. The Missus made it clear that we were not going up to The Farm to finish the stock count; we would do it tomorrow. Unless I pull my finger out pretty soon, the building of the greenhouse to replace the polytunnel will be still waiting at the end of next season. I really must get a grip – next week, perhaps.

We had come full circle to bone idleness again, although I did manage to get the data inputting done. For all the main headline things like wetsuits, shoes and bodyboards I like to see how sales have gone during the year. I do sometimes miss keying in all the sales from other things, but in the main, the data for the important things is quite accurate. This is why I was alerted to the numbers of the bodyboard sales, which looked awry. I thought perhaps I had not keyed in the purchases we had made in the year but when I enquired of the company, they told me we had not bought any. Our own sales figures I was looking at really were as bleak as they seemed.

I forgot to mention on Tuesday, that I had indented for a new recycling box for our glass waste. Alright, I might have mentioned it but what I did not report was that the replacement box was delivered the same afternoon. The message I had sent can barely have dropped on their virtual doormat when the chap was banging on our door with the new one. I do not know whether to admire the much maligned council for its efficiency in this matter or castigate them for prioritising such minutiae over the important things they fail to do. Anyway, it took me a few days to put it out the back of the flat, which I did today when I put out our collected recycling from the kitchen. Not half an hour later, when returned from a walk with ABH, I noticed that some kind soul had found and returned our original box. I will have to drink more bottled things to make use of the additional capacity.

With nothing more to do to advance world peace or make our greenhouse appear more quickly, I took to the sofa for a quick zizz. Ordinarily, I would not have bothered

but ABH likes a kip in the afternoon and will wait until I am on the recliner with a cushion on my lap. I did it for her, of course.

I awoke with just enough time to gather myself for a trek into town. I had arranged to meet the optician who looks after ears to fit me with my repaired false ears – at least I hoped they had been repaired. It seemed sensible, therefore, to detour to pick up the several years' accounts paperwork that had accumulated at our accountant's office in town. I had previously supplied them with two containers for the purpose but had not considered how heavy they might be. I left with just enough time to do both and was lucky enough to be able to park right outside.

Moving on to the car park in town I noted that the free parking they had allowed over the Christmas period had been rescinded. It does not cost a great deal to park in the Wharf car park anyway, especially for a short period and I had not intended to be very long.

I was happy to see that both the up and down escalator into the Wharfside Shopping Centre were working today. A person with a dickie knee finds the steps a trifle deep otherwise. Anyway, such thoughts were short-lived because gathered at the top of the escalator were three chaps uniformed in working fatigues. I thought at first that they were policemen or community support officers, but the lack of headwear quickly dispelled that notion.

As I got closer, it became clear that they were US Marshalls. I am sorry, dear reader, that was an easy mistake to make. They were Town Marshals, as denoted by the words on the back of their stab vests. They sported utility belts bristling with, erm, utilities and wore big, heavy work boots with gaiters, or possibly cycle clips, pinching the bottom of their trousers. I supposed that this was a defence against the possibility of attack by a business of rabid ferrets.

Whoever had selected the uniform had clearly watched too many American cop shows because apart from the lack of M16 automatic rifles, they resembled a small S.W.A.T team. They were huddled together like one too, so I could not see if they were wearing a silver star pinned to their chests. I have no idea where to look to see if the crime rate in the town has diminished since the boys were deployed but if it has, I imagine it is not because all the criminals are living in fear but rather unable to commit crime from snickering behind the marshals' backs.

I do apologise if you are one of the Town Marshals, dear reader. I am sure that you do an excellent job of whatever it is you are there to do. I have no idea of the remit of a Town Marshall but the uniform makes it *look* like all that is missing is a big stick and they can go about beating citizens into submission whether they need it or not.

I was ahead of my appointment by a good fifteen minutes, my passage presumably spurred on by the presence of marshals on my tail who were no doubt searching every gas station, residence, warehouse, farmhouse, henhouse, outhouse and

doghouse for me. There was no one else in the shop other than two employees and I was seen straight away. I had always assumed that consummate professions such as the optician who does ears do at least some preparation ahead of each appointment. I was therefore somewhat surprised and a little alarmed when he asked how I was getting along with the new devices. I told him not very well since I did not have them yet and when he realised his mistake had to go and fetch them from the shop.

The good news was that the repaired false ears work marvellously. Perhaps a little too marvellously because on one of our preceding visits, when he did not believe that they were not working, ramped them up to full stadium volume. This is still in place and when he spoke it sounded like someone had placed a Paddington Station Tannoy speaking next to my ear. It was a little distorted too, but I can adjust the volume down which is what I did rather than have him fiddle with them again.

I can now hear pins drop in Tavistock and listen to small birds thinking. On the escalator I was quite alarmed as it sounded like a group of schoolboys were right on my shoulder about to burst past. When I looked around, they were at the top heading the other way. It was most disconcerting. I was most careful to remove them before I got home. You know how it is dear reader; you are able to hear things once and people expect it all the time.

Once again, we were called to the Lifeboat station for training. The assessor was here again and this time to pass out our trainee head launcher and our trainee winch operator. Both passed with flying colours, at last. Earlier, when I was flying to the big city, two more passed out on driving the Tooltrak. While all this was going on in the evening, the Missus and I and a couple of happy volunteers, cleared the rest of the decorations and the fencing on which some of them were suspended. All I have to do now is dispose of the trees.

I had noticed that rain was once more on the way. ABH and I had avoided it on the first walk out, just after I had finished at the Lifeboat station, but we just caught the edge of it when we went out first thing. Happy, at that stage it was not severe and for once the little girl realised the urgency and was quick. Hopefully, it will be gone by tomorrow because we definitely have to go out and no excuses.

January 10th – Friday

We were quite pressed for time this morning. Like beer, it is remarkable how quickly it disappears when you think you have enough of it.

Since I shall be away deep this weekend, I decided that I should do something about my back which came back to haunt me when I thought that it was getting better. It has happened before but previously it has got better after a couple of days of hard

drugs and not being too naughty with it. I have always had good results from our bone cruncher in Penzance so thought to rely upon them again.

I turned down a perfectly good appointment yesterday because it was at the same time as the one to have my ears back. As it worked out, I came away from that appointment early enough to have made it to the bone cruncher on time. It would have saved me the trouble of getting there this morning and definitely spared me the grief of trying to get the Missus out of bed.

She had postponed going to The Farm yesterday to continue the stock count and told me she would go today while I had my bones crunched. I would pick up Mother on the way back – she is staying with the Missus while I run off to parts foreign – and collect her from The Farm on the way back. That was all very well but required a timely departure from The Cove and as I had not built in any slack to the plan, even the five minutes we were delayed, cost dearly.

I veritably flew down the A30 to Penzance and although I it is not really possible to exceed the speed limit, it is possible to drive faster than is sensible. It is also possible to drive far slower than is sensible, even if you are a learner driver, and I was less than sympathetic when I found myself behind such a student doing 20 miles per hour. Fortunately, I did not encounter many more delays and was again lucky to find somewhere to park immediately upon my arrival. I made it to the chiropractic door with three minutes to spare.

Now centred, stretched and pricked with acupuncture needles, I stand the best chance of being fit for my journey and a lengthy trip around two exhibition spaces over two days. The drive there will also be slightly less stressful thanks to my decision to cut my losses and purchase another pair of windscreen wipers, the second in a month.

I had purchased the first from a national chain of motoring shops judging that the price indicated a mid-range product. I had never heard of the brand, but I looked just a moment ago and discovered that the company is huge and global. That may be the case, but they make rubbish windscreen wipers, which squeak from the outset and make a poor job of scraping rain off the windscreen; they only have the one job. I bought another pair, returning to the top of the range ones I have always used.

By the time I had collected Mother, and we had gone on to The Farm, the Missus had completed the count of shoes that she had intended to do. There are still a few other items there that need to be mopped up, but I have enough now to help me through the trade shows.

The day had been less than attractive from the outset. It was grey and moody, although that might have just been my reflection in the window as I looked out. There was mizzle too, which was not heavy enough to require full waterproofs but made everything damp as we went about. Certainly, ABH was wet all over when we

collected her from The Farm, but my guess was that she had also been running around in the wet grass, too.

I had considered the day a wash-out after we came home and thought that I would probably update the inventory with the new figures. I took a little zizz, this time without ABH on my lap – I get relegated when Mother is here – and when I woke up half an hour later, the skies looked vaguely blue in places and the bay looked bright and alluring. It came to me in a sudden flash that it was the sort of vague blue skies and brightness that looks far better from halfway up a cliff than it does sitting in the living room looking out of the window.

I grabbed my hat, coat and ABH and hurried out of the door before the day changed its mind. There was only the one walk available since the tide was in and that was the cut-down walk to Land's End, which is always a pleasure when there is no wind to speak of that would blow us off the path. The recent rain had done the path no favours and the dip at Castle Zawn that I reported a while ago and had been poorly fixed, was getting thicker with mud again. The two streams we cross were in spate, and the little girl decided a mountain stream dip was in order. She made me feel cold just looking at her.

The weather was just right for a little stank and the earlier mizzle had clearly discouraged anyone else from venturing out. We did not see another soul, on foot at least, from the moment we stepped outside our door until when we got back. Here Mother was waiting with a towel for a cold and wet ABH; I had to take care of myself.

We were relaxing nicely after I had taken ABH out for her post-tea walk and was enjoying the inner warmth of some very pleasant Cornish whisky. It is a running joke that either during or shortly after our friend, the Lifeboat assessor visits us, we have a Lifeboat shout. It should not have been a surprise, therefore, that my pager went off calling us to arms at nine o'clock, halfway through my night cap.

The call was for the assistance of the big boat in locating a foreign national for whom the police had some concern regarding his whereabouts. He had last been seen in Mousehole and some further information must have led the search to Land's End. The boat was initially tasked to do a detailed search of the coastline between Land's End and Nanjizal, which it duly did, twice, and ended up in Gamper Bay. Here the crew informed the Coastguard that the search had been hampered by the mizzle which reduced the quality of the search to 50 percent. The mist cleared a little while the boat bobbed about off the point and so it was tasked again to do the search from Pedn-men-du to Nanjizal. Having got there, it was further instructed to head on to Porthcurno where it was to be stood down if nothing was found.

Two Cliff Teams and helicopters were deployed in the search and when we left the scene at one o'clock in the morning, the Cliff Team and the helicopter were searching the beach and the bay.

On such deployments, we on shore, must dutifully wait at the station to observe developments. With the boat so close, when it is stood down it will be only minutes away from returning to the station. The game is to try and predict when the stand down will be from information we garner from listening to radio chatter. Since the boat was close at hand, we were lucky to hear both sides of the conversation; often we only hear the Coastguard which makes the prediction even more difficult.

I had assessed that we had until midnight to be able to use the long slip for recovery. At one stage the stand down seemed imminent, and we set up the long slip with the cables and span. Some while later we had to haul the cable and span up the slipway ahead of the increasing tide. Eventually though, the tide beat us to it and with just enough water on the short slip, I made the decision to swop over.

As luck would have it, the boat appeared in the bay just as we were finishing off setting up. It was marginal that we could have still used the long slipway but with the sea state deteriorating and a fair bit of movement over the toe, it was certainly preferable for us to be on the short slip. I had elected to be winchman for the event. Nothing at all to do with the cold mizzly conditions outside and the nice dry warmth of the winch room, and everything to do with giving the newly signed off head launcher some real-world experience. Would this face lie to you, dear reader. Honest guv.

We brought the boat up the short slip in what was from my eagle-eyed view, a textbook recovery. We had a proper dream team on duty, too, including two of our newest recruits who fell into the way of things with hardly any instruction at all. We are, after all, a very adaptive, very excellent Shore Crew.

There is a strong likelihood that the boat will be sent out again tomorrow in daylight to resume the search. We fear that sadly, by that time, there will be no urgency to it.

January 11th – Saturday

It was a struggle getting out of bed this morning having stayed up well past my bedtime. ABH gave me a nudge at the usual waking up time, ensured I was awake then went back to sleep again. I shall have to remember to reset her next time.

I had anticipated getting a message from the Lifeboat station with a time to revisit the search from last night, but it never came. This was probably just as well because the sea state deteriorated towards the middle of the day with waves breaking over the Harbour wall. A little earlier the larger, better formed waves called a herd of surfers to the bay and for a while, the waves looked pretty crowded.

The boat was called to action about an hour after I left The Cove by a sharp-eyed Cliff Team member who had spotted something in the water between Land's End and Longships. When the boat arrived on scene, they discovered it to be a dead whale and left it well alone.

I conversed with the team that stepped in during my absence just to make sure everything was tickety boo. I was duly informed that the small team who were close enough to make the exceedingly tight schedule, carried out what was clearly a textbook recovery on the short slip. The timing was fortunate, as I think a long slip recovery would have been tricky.

There was not a great deal to be done during the morning and when I was not doing not a great deal I was packing my meagre belongings to take with me on my long sojourn to the East. I had checked the weather and was informed that I would be leaving sunny spells and mild temperatures for mizzle nearly all the way and a colder climate. Duly armed with thick socks and even woollier hat, I left The Cove at the scheduled time of half past one o'clock. I never like leaving The Cove, but I would have felt much worse about it had there actually been sunny spells and mild temperatures. Instead, there was much mizzle and as I progressed eastwards, the mizzle continued until I left Cornwall when it became drizzle and mist.

At least last week's journey had a right and a left turn. Today's journey had no turns at all, just the A30 all the way until nearly at the hotel. Now that the dualling of the stretch between Chiverton and Carland Cross is complete there is no interesting single lane road either. Given that I had overstayed the day yesterday, I was struggling to keep awake on the tedious stretch of road. It was a good job that someone had invented I spy and make phrases out of registration plate letters to pass the time and occupy my brain. I spy was a bit brief, though.

A seasoned Diary reader would know that I have stayed at the same hotel for quite a few years. It is very convenient for the trade show and has been consistently good during that time. Of course, there are the occasional issues and the heating system in the block I usually stay is nothing of the sort. Quite why they do not heat the room ahead of occupancy on cold days will always be a mystery, much like the mystery of how to kick it into action and why it takes the best part of an hour to increase the room temperature by two degrees. Of course, there was always the likelihood that it was not the heating system that increased the room temperature but my presence and the one time I operated the kettle. I could have well been right about that because it took a further four hours to rise another four degrees. Yes, it was that cold in the room to start with and was still below what the Energy Saving Trust calls an average room temperature.

I thought to look a little more closely at the menu this year. It is a matter of jest that I eat the same two meals each time I visit. Since I am here only once a year, that is hardly a cause for criticism but this year I bucked the habit of several years and had a curry instead of the burger on the first night. If I had ordered the burger, I was concerned that I would have spent more time making comparison to last week's burger than enjoying my meal. I did look at the menu description and was pleased to note that it came with a pretzel bun and bits that the kitchen would have had to work at to make happen. I was slightly disappointed to note the absence of £ sign ahead

of the prices but at least they had two decimal places even if they were zeroes that make it look a bit more like a price rather than a random item number.

Having read enough book in the restaurant, I returned to my room and watched a film that was utter rubbish. I selected it especially so that it made the other rubbish films I had watched seem a bit better and therefore less of a waste of time watching them.

There was no particular preparation I could do for the tradeshow, although I have perused the exhibitor list and singled out some I would like a closer look at. Walking up the cliff with ABH is as good preparation as any for traipsing around a trade hall, although even then this one is a tenth of the size of the old ones we used to visit. I am also hoping for dry weather so that I do not have to carry a jacket around with me. There is nothing worse than being encumbered while trying to write lists and examine products.

One day, I will be able to don a pair of virtual reality goggles and walk the aisles of the trade show from the comfort of The Cove. I am not entirely sure, though, that I would be able to convince the Missus to dress up as a waitress and serve me food and beer all evening.

January 12th – Sunday

I was lucky with the weather. It was grey all over but mild and rainless. This was ideal as I could walk to the show hall from the truck with minimal wrapping and thus less to carry around with me. We experienced show goers know how important that is as whatever you are carrying at the start is constantly added to as you go around. These days it is brochures and price lists. In the old days it was samples too. The days of free samples are long gone.

Today, I was flummoxed from the outset. It is the trade show's sixtieth anniversary, which was very much a surprise to me, and a very pleasant lady at the door was giving away goody bags. I had thought you only had goody bags when you were leaving a party, but I had one thrust into my hand on arrival. It was a weighty item, largely due to an unwanted (by me) can of energy drink therein, and having gone to some trouble to ensure I was slimline and lightweight, I decided to return to the truck and leave it there while I went around. This turned out to be an excellent plan.

Being at the show early doors, I was able to park fairly close to the show entrance. I was ably directed to a parking spot that I could probably have identified for myself by an enthusiastic youth. Enthusiastic youths are not in short supply in a university town, and I imagine this one was picking up some useful pounds that would see him through at least one Saturday night on the town.

This year we were directed through the route that is usually the exit and the parking was organised north to south. For the last however many years the parking has always been west to east. I asked the young man what determined the parking orientation, but he assure me such a decision was way above his pay grade. I did not doubt it because it is a matter of the gravest consideration, I am sure. I might write to the organisers and see if they know but I rather suspect that the decision is outsourced, and I will end up down a labyrinthine rabbit hole in my enquiries.

Relieved of my weighty burden of gifts, I returned to the show and commenced the carved in stone order of play. Traversing the aisles one side at a time concentrates the mind and avoids the innate desire to whizz through everything and go home. Even then, it is possible to miss things and I find a final sweep up and down each aisle occasionally beneficial. It was the case this year when I came past a gemstone stand. It is not something we do in the shop, but I noticed that it had displays of boxed fossils, pocket money gifts we usually get from another supplier. Not only were the boxes a similar price but there was also a wider range and they sell very well.

Despite my thoroughness and delaying tactics, I was out of the show hall by the middle of the afternoon. I had met with some new suppliers and uncovered some information about another that it is going into administration which given we still have some of their stock on sale or return, might be problematic. I had also met a couple of old friends, salespeople we have known since we came to the shop 20 years ago, and successfully avoided a pushy salesman I rather hoped I did not run into. So far, it is still worth a visit and a stay close by.

I had considered whether I could run off and do tomorrow's show in the afternoon but it would have been cutting it fine and although three quarters of a day mooching about a trade show does not sound very tiring, I was quite weary at the end of it.

I will not bore you – anymore than usual – dear reader, with the details of the remainder of the evening. Suffice to say I stuck with my age old menu choice of fajitas in the evening. One venture into the unknown in a weekend is quite enough adventure, thank you very much. The series that I watched afterwards was a much better choice of viewing, too – oh, and I finished my book. Job done.

January 13th – Monday

This was not much of a day for reporting things. There was a visit to a supplier a little up the line from where I was staying and a long journey home. Not even your Diarist and his, erm, inventive style could make much of that.

The most exciting thing was waking up later than planned and for many years at this hotel, had to scrap the notion of going to the gymnasium. This gymnasium is air conditioned and does not have a leak in the tin roof. It does not even have a tin roof.

It does not have exactly the weights I am used to, nor does it have a roll I can do my squats with against a wall – it has a wall, though - but it is sufficient for a blistering session even if I do not know what all the machines do.

The lack of a proper exercise did not prevent me from having a decent breakfast, although obviously I would have felt much less guilty about consuming all those calories if I had. I will not let it spoil my sleep and will exercise twice as hard in the hut with a tin roof on Wednesday. I will probably have to if wish to stay warm in there.

I may have been a little late in leaving the hotel, but I arrived at the supplier's premises in good time – even if I could not remember what time I was supposed to be there. It was in good time to do a circuit of the goods and get home before dark, which was the aim. Similar to the game plan at the other trade show, I peruse the show space slowly looking only at the wall on my left as I go around. I complete this pass and record all the things that we might be ordering and take photographs of other things I can show to the Missus and discuss jointly. I then ask our representative to come around with me and answer questions I have thought of on the way around and recommend any best sellers I might not have been aware of. The whole process takes about three hours.

Then there is the drive home. It made a huge difference being able to combine the two trade shows over two days. Previously, I would have had to drive to this one and back on the same day, a round trip of 270 miles or five hours driving. The weather is usually poor, too but over the last three days it has behaved itself and been relatively mild.

ABH put on a good show of being excited at my return. It could have been a put up job to make me feel better about myself but I did not think that the Missus could have been fagged to organise that. I took ABH around the block just to wind her down a bit and also check to make sure that I had left my waterproof trousers in the truck as I could not find them in my baggage – such as it was. They were, thankfully, as it was a long way to go back for them.

The sea was fair throwing its considerable weight around. There was a mighty ground sea running and the waves were alternately coming over the entire length of the Harbour wall at about six feet and over a third of the wall at around twelve feet. I do not recall it ever making so much noise either. As we walked along the sea wall in the Harbour car park, the churning water on the rocks in a crashing that was almost deafening. It was not until we arrived at the end of Coastguard Row and listened to what I thought was probably a robin making some awful bleddy racket that I remembered I had not removed my false ears.

Short of unpacking and fending off an insistent ABH, there was little to do for the rest of the evening. It got dark and did not appear to get any colder. It did make me

wonder why I get dressed in the same layers to go out as I did when it was colder but I was too tired to get all analytical about it.

I must be very determined about starting up at The Farm tomorrow, so I expect that it will be hacking down. I have not checked. Onwards and upwards, hopefully.

January 14th – Tuesday

I think that my absence upset the little girl's equilibrium, and she was up for a lengthy period in the very early morning and as a consequence, so was I. It did not stop her waking me up at the appointed time, either and then going back to sleep again. Minx!

In those early hours of awakedness, I resolved to head up to The Farm later in the morning and get a march on the preparation work for the new greenhouse. Before I can do anything else, the remains of the polytunnel must come down. The remains are, in the main, the steel frame which is very sturdily built. It was only the polythene cover and the insubstantial doorway construction that let it down.

I decided that I had to get up there as soon as possible in the morning. If I waited until after breakfast, I would surely find some excuse to delay my departure, or the Missus would think of a good reason why I should not go. I took ABH around, had my cup of tea and did an exit stage left before I could change my mind.

The day could not have been better for such a venture, dry, warm and bright. I was not that early out of the blocks, so the countryside had properly woken up before I went charging through it. I had spent a small amount of time thinking about any tools I might need and then failed to take half of them. Alright, that was not exactly accurate. I discovered another set of spanners and sockets would be useful if not necessary as most of the polytunnel is held together by nuts and bolts.

At the top of the agenda, were the doors. In truth these should have come off months ago, probably a year, as not only would it have saved them being bent and twisted in the wind but with them not in place, the wind would have simply passed through the tunnel instead of ballooning it out and causing severe damage. Having said that, the doors other than being a little twisted are in remarkably good condition. They are sliding doors, happily not electric and probably not the first and nor are they in The Cove. To remove them meant removing the rail at the top and sliding the doors off the end. For now, I have placed them against the cabin, but they will probably be better stowed at the back and out of the prevailing wind.

With the doors out of the way I had a free run at removing the remaining polythene. This is wired into grooves on the frame at the ends and at the bottom all the way around. The wires come out given the right encouragement, so I provided it and was able to pull the polythene away from three sides of the structure. The fourth side, around the back, is crowded with weed and largely inaccessible. There is not a great

deal of polythene there anyway, so it will wait until I have done the clearing. That was enough doing before breakfast. I did not wish to fade away on the job and besides, I needed those additional sockets and spanners.

I had gone up to The Farm in some serious work clothes including my pink DIYman overalls, which are barely hanging together now. I did try a spare pair of overalls that I acquired from somewhere, ahem. They are completely inappropriate anyway as they are zipped up the front rather than press studs. Access to my underlying layers without removing everything else becomes problematic should I need to for some reason. I might have to actually buy some, but there is still some life left in the originals.

Anyway, I digress. Now, where was I. Ah, yes, being over-prepared. I discovered that the day was blossoming nicely and while my sturdy leggings were useful against the vicious undergrowth at times, I was seriously overdressed for labouring. I very quickly dispensed with my coat and after a while, my hat too. When I returned later in the early afternoon, I was much more streamlined and discovered that a cooling wind had struck up. It did force me to work a little harder, so that was probably a good thing, but I probably came away a little earlier than I had intended.

I returned home for breakfast and to let the Missus know where I was; she was asleep when I left. I was not even encouraged to take ABH with me because she was tucked up back in bed as well. One of the other things that crossed my mind in the early hours of the morning was how I might use a bit of bread that I had taken from the freezer, a pack of bacon and some cambazola cheese. I had looked forward to it all morning and it met every one of my detailed expectations. It might have benefitted from a little cranberry sauce, but I substituted some grain mustard that was just as good.

Thus invigorated, I set back off to The Farm armed with some additional tools and ABH who I thought might come in handy for something. I did not know at the time, but it was entertainment. She likes to get on top of things, mounds, hedges, rocks, etcetera. It was not long before she got on top of the raised beds too, so she could be in the way while I worked.

Wasting no time, I ploughed straight into dismantling the steel frame. The wind had done the first hoop for me and having unbolted the ends holding it to the ground. I was able to lower it to undo the upper section bolts. I was not so lucky with the rest of the hoops. First, the ends were embedded in earth that I had to clear away before I could get at the bolts and the upper section is a brae bit high. I had taken a step ladder with me from the shop, but it sank into the soft soil and became unstable.

I managed to lower the whole second hoop to the ground intact because it had already disconnected from the hoop behind it. It was not ideal because it is heavy and I had to be careful lowering it as ABH was in the way. The next hoop was connected to the one behind it and needed to be unbolted. This time the steps found

more substantial soil to sit on but I also found I could easily step on top of the raised beds – brave, ain't I - which was a great help.

While I was up there, ABH, not to be outdone, joined me on the adjacent raised bed. At home, she likes to climb on flowerpots that are full of earth – none of our flower pots have plants in them because the Missus kills them off shortly after they are planted. There are several of those rubble tubs, large rubber buckets, filled with earth up at The Farm. There was one on the raised bed she was on, so, in order to be higher than me, she jumped into the middle of it.

There was a loud crack as the thin crust of detritus that was floating on top of a tub of brackish water broken under ABH's weight. I half expected her to salute as she slowly sank below the waves. I do not know if the look on her face was surprise, embarrassment or simply said, 'laugh and I'll bleddy bite your ankles', but I laughed anyway.

I wondered for a moment how she might extract herself from her predicament. I need not have worried, as she jumped out seconds later with very little effort just as I made my way down the steps.

The sun was sinking low through the broken cloud which I mistook to later in the afternoon than it actually was. I had managed half the polytunnel, but it was much slower going than I anticipated and since the weather looks alright tomorrow, will complete the job then. I had cleared away all my kit by the time I got to look at a clock and realise I could have gone on for another hour, so I cut my losses and headed home.

We were a couple of hours at The Farm and in that time it appears that I had managed to break the little girl with very little effort at all. She had been on the go all the time while we were up there investigating every nook and cranny and did a bit of running around, too. She went straight to her bed when we came back and stayed there, barring a reluctant walk around the block with me after tea, for the rest of the evening. I had great difficulty persuading her out for her last run and she did a great impression of a Tasmanian devil without all the running around.

She will now, no doubt, be up half the night again.

January 15th – Wednesday

There is a lot of buzz in the press these last few days about the booted eagle pottering around Marazion way. I came past there on my way back from abroad late on Monday afternoon and all the telescopes and telephoto lenses were lined up on the verge like a row of cannon at some Napoleonic battle. There was a whole host of twitchers there and a group of them decided it was perfectly reasonable to walk up

the middle of the A30 from where they had parked. Getting a glimpse of a rare, booted eagle is well worth the risk of being run over by the T1 bus.

Marazion was not alone in having a rare species of bird at hand. There were some, but not quite as many, bird watchers in The Cove around the same time. Apparently, we were host to a Bonaparte's gull, just to give Napoleon another mention. It came to mind this morning as ABH and I headed to the Harbour beach for a run. She likes to chase the gulls on the beach, and I wondered how popular we would be if we chased off – or worse – the only Bonaparte's gull for decades.

Keeping up with the wildlife theme we seem to have found ourselves in this morning, I note that the oar weed that has been present in lumps at the top of the beach is now spread across the lower parts of it. Higher up, much has been buried under the sand, evidenced by the stalks sticking up. I mentioned a while ago that the dead seal pup had gone. What I did not mention, to save scaring off the more sensitive amongst you, is that it was back minus a head. This too has now gone again, sort of. As I examined the beach this morning, among the stalks of weed poking up from the sand is the end of a tag. [Cue dramatic music: dum, dum, daaah]

Given that I had missed my gymnasium session on Monday, I was pretty determined to go today. Ideally, I would have skipped it as I did not want to lose the good weather today and the opportunity to take down the rest of the polytunnel, but I reckoned we would probably still have enough time if I could get my bottom in gear early enough.

Happily, getting out of bed reasonably early is not a problem in a household that has an ABH. It is what I do afterwards that counts, and I am prone to procrastinate and dither with no impetus behind me. Somehow, I managed to get my act together and ended up at the gymnasium at just after nine o'clock which was not bad going for a procrastinator. I now cannot remember the last time I was there, probably a week ago but that was the first time since before Christmas, so that is not a great record.

It was sharp this morning after a cloudless night. The stars and the planets last night were a wonder to behold – so I beheld them and wondered. There was already some dew forming then and by this morning the streets were damp from condensation. It was cold in the hut with a tin roof, but I have known it colder, and it did lend itself to a blistering session even if no records were broken. I think I was quite lucky to complete my row in lower quartile timing.

After a quick breakfast, I recruited the Missus to ride shotgun with me and we took ABH for yet another exhausting Farm session. She is perfectly contented to wander about while we both work which is fine as long as we do not think too much about what she is getting up to. I set about dismantling the remaining hoops on the polytunnel and the Missus went and got the strimmer so she could change the traditional head for the steel brush cutter I had ordered several weeks ago. I should clarify, dear reader, that our undergrowth up at The Farm is not so hardcore that it is

made of steel. The brush cutter is made of steel to dispense with particularly thick areas of growth. We cannot use it while ABH is up there, but it is now ready for the next time one of us goes up on our own or we can shut her in the cabin.

Having removed all the hoops, with assistance from the Missus – both sides need to be lifted out together, else one side will lock and be impossible to shift. I took away all the fixings and piled the poles, bolts and fixings in separate piles. It became clear that the back of the polytunnel is in desperate need of strimming before I can think about commencing construction. Since this is all fern, thick brambles and bushes, the brush cutter will be the tool of choice to cut it down. I had a look after the Missus had installed it and it looks fearsome.

We now have clear view of the lower parts of the polytunnel hoops, although it will be better when I have cleared the weed and the soft beds either side. The hoop ends have been screwed into the ground and are immovable unless unscrewed again. I know; I tried. I decided to leave them in place as they will be an excellent guide for the posts and side of the new greenhouse.

I remeasured now that I could get to every part of the outer edges. The poles now sticking out of the ground are indeed excellent markers for the new project. The width is bang on end to end but the back and front lengths are 20 centimetres out, for which I will need to compensate. I can get to all four post holes at the front with the auger I can attach to the tractor, but I think the rear might be inaccessible and they will have to be dug by hand. I will know better when I have cleared some of the shrubbery. I also note that I will have to narrow the width by 20 centimetres to accommodate the longest spans of wood I can get. The Missus was not happy with that because it would stop her using one side for tomato growing. I would see if we can get away with losing 10 centimetres either side but that might make both sides useless for growing. Thinking caps are required.

We were at The Farn for longer than I was there yesterday afternoon. We are mindful that ABH gets very tired as she will not rest while we are working. Somehow, she managed to get soaking wet as well that probably did not help. Like her predecessor, she has the uncanny ability to be in exactly the wrong place at exactly the wrong time. If I am digging a hole, she is not only looking into it but her snout is right down inside it so I cannot dig any more. Cutting away the polythene with my Stanley knife, her nose is practically on the blade and when I come to pulling away the freed polythene, she is still on top of it. Bless her.

The sun was setting beautifully on The Farm as we packed up to go. We had stopped work half an hour before to have a cup of tea. The cabin is nearly always warm and although it is quite spartan and industrial, there is some pleasure to sitting there. We can look down the field to the sea and watch the various birds as they criss-cross above us and enjoy the fresh breeze and the sweet aromas wafting over from the neighbouring sewage farm. Ah, a countryside idyll.

Back to The Cove then where the swell was beginning to pick up is the bay. The street had not really dried up all day, which should be of no surprise since direct sunlight has abandoned us until February. Still, even with no direct sunshine the solar panels are doing well and on a cloudless day, we managed a healthy eleven percent of our daily use today. Even with the heating on all day, which it was when Mother was here, between six and eight percent of our usage we generated ourselves.

It has not exactly been cold here during the last few days. We were into double figures while we worked up at The Farm and I had to dispense with a layer at one point. When the sun dips away, the temperature can drop four degrees in a few hours which is very noticeable, although it is not actually cold, it feels like it.

When I eventually managed to drag ABH out for a walk some while after tea – she had been dozing for hours – we were treated to a sky full of stars and planets again. There was one out on the western horizon as we set off which I think must have been Saturn. Up above, close to a waning moon, were Mars and Jupiter and I gave up naming the rest because ABH was keen to get on. She had been less trouble last night than the night before despite sleeping since we got back from The Farm. We hope for better tonight since I played with her relentlessly since she woke up. I may not even notice because I will go out like a light.

January 16th – Thursday

The day commenced just as glorious as it had ended yesterday and just cried out for a bit of Farming to be done. Far be it from me to deny such a clamour for attention, so I geared up early doors having taken ABH around and headed for the wild frontier.

There really was not much preparation to do, just fire up the strimmer and get on with it. I had reasoned that I should remove any known solid objects as I wished to avoid hitting one with the blade. I imagined that it might well shear and spin off and embed in something soft, like my ankle. The Missus had replaced the guard at my request because I am squeamish that way, so at least there was some protection. Sadly, she had not tightened the screw that held it in place, and it dropped off on first use. It momentarily crossed my mind that I should check the brake lines on the truck, just in case they had been inexplicably severed with something sharp.

After its service, I had very little trouble in starting the strimmer with the fearsome blade. There was, however, an extremely uncomfortable vibration that I assumed was perhaps normal. I stopped the machine a little way into the job because the engine tone and wobble both changed making me think something was wrong. The blade was intact but there was some narrow tape, like cassette tape but narrower, wrapped around the spinning head.

I took the machine back to the cabin where I collected some tools together and removed the head. The tape came off easily enough and when I spoke to the Missus a short time later, she suggested that it was from the anti-weed matting that had frayed. When I mentioned the vibration, she told me that it would do that if the blade was not aligned properly, which made sense. When I took the head apart, I discovered that the blade did not fit tightly on the spindle and that centring it was a matter of guesswork. It was not a problem and when I got the hang of it and the vibration went away. The only problem was that every time I hit an obstruction or even the ground or a persisted stalk – the machine draws the line at gorse – I had to stop and realign the head.

I got through what I needed to do, but it took longer than I anticipated and the constant stopping and starting was an irritation. When we bought the machine, we thought we were entering the strimming big league but the chap who serviced it for us parted with a throw away comment that it was only a domestic garden machine. It was something of a disappointment to realise that we bought the landscaping equivalent of a child's toy.

I finished what I wanted to do but it took two hours, and I was rather looking forward to a bit of breakfast. First, though, it was time to take ABH out again. We headed for the beach this time as we had been excluded by the tide first thing in the morning. There continues to be large quantities of weed covering the lower reaches of the beach. These need to be negotiated to get to the sea, should we so desire, or if the little girl gets there and I need to find out what she is up to. I must therefore either climb over the top myself, I must walk to either end to get around it. I cannot remember the weed being so persistently plentiful before. It turns out that apart from munching on a stalk she was up to very little which left me at a loose end to wander the beach alone. Eventually, I encouraged her to leave the beach and walk around the block.

I still needed to clean up and perform my ablutions which made my breakfast even more distant than it was before. I sensed the hand of the small gods of grumpy shopkeepers at hand, and when my Lifeboat pager went off while I was still – ladies, look away now – in a state of undress, my fears were confirmed.

You can look again, now, ladies. I cannot have wholesale swooning on my conscience. There is enough weight on it already.

Naturally, I had delayed my Lifeboat pager response until I was almost properly dressed. Happily, my yellows cover a multitude of sins even if they are quite cold to the touch at first. On the shore, we arrived in a small but perfectly formed unit and launched the boat close to low water. The sea state had been quite rough earlier with an eight feet swell registered at Seven Stone buoy. Even as we launched there was a wave boarder plying a handy curl off the east end of Cowloe which unfortunately was right in the middle of the Lifeboat exit path. He moved and the

boat proceeded to its task which was to standby while the Cliff Team and the rescue helicopter carried out its own tasking off the cliffs by Nanjizal.

Since the boat was just around the corner and liable to be stood down anytime, we hung about the station drinking tea, eating ginger biscuits, very thoughtfully provided by one of the shop staff fortunately present today, and making small talk. Frankly, on the edge of consciousness from the lack of nutrition, I was grateful for the biscuits. They hardly constituted a proper meal and therefore I was very happy that the boat was out for less than an hour.

The tide was on the push when the boat arrived back in the bay. We had already anticipated its appearance and had set up the long slip in readiness. The tide was still out sufficiently that my oppo at the bottom end of the slipway had to step down onto the rocks to receive the heaving line that this time was adequately thrown. The Boat Crew hauled up the heaving line and hooked it up to the deck cleats and we in our part executed a textbook recover up the long slipway in reasonably benign conditions at near low water.

With just four of us present, we all fell about our duties like we were born to it and the boat was washed down and tied down in the boathouse for its next use. We are, after all, a very effective, very excellent Shore Crew.

I for one was a very hungry, very excellent Shore Crew member and hurried home in the hope of rectifying that situation immediately. The small gods of grumpy shopkeepers relented, and I packed away a tidy meal. As is usual in such circumstances, there is the tendency to eat too much – and I did. I also ate very quickly because I was mindful of the pressing tide and my desire to take ABH out on an afternoon stank that involved coming back on the beach.

I cannot remember exactly the time, but it was late in the afternoon by the time we set out. The glorious day had diminished into a grey, overcast and a little damp later afternoon and I was envious of the line of brightness that still lingered on the western horizon. I estimated that we had a little more than an hour if we wished to end up on the OS slipway. Even with ABH's propensity to walk double the distance and sniff at every blade of grass, this would be more than enough time without having to hurry at all.

As it was, the sand had been eroded quite a bit from the southern end of the beach and we were forced to walk in a line that took us close to the advancing sea. We were still half an hour from getting out feet wet, but it would have been more convenient to have left earlier, as I had intended but was defeated by the Lifeboat shout.

I had been on my feet and active from around eight o'clock in the morning and had lunched from one task to the next without remission. Even breakfast, when it came, had been a bit of a chore to squeeze in before taking ABH out. So, when I came

back from the walk, I had rather hoped that I might have a little zizz. I felt it to be a reasonable expectation and had been part of the planning in taking the little girl on a longer walk rather than just around the block.

No sooner had I put my desk chair back into its zizzing position and closed my eyes when I felt two front paws land on my leg. It heralded an evening of bored ABH wanting attention without pause. We played games, had chews, ran after balls and not bring them back, empty the toy box and play-fight. The only time she lay down and rested was when it was time for an after tea walk around the block. Actually, I had eaten breakfast so late, I skipped tea altogether.

When we came back from our walk, she started again. I am going to take her up The Farm tomorrow and leave her there for the day. I will pick her up in the evening and she can sleep until bedtime and then sleep some more.

January 17th – Friday

I had earmarked today as a rest day. In truth there was not very much more I could do at The Farm until I had spoken with the Highly Professional Craftsperson. With this in mind, I set aside some time today to develop my cunning and highly detailed plan of how the greenhouse should be built. One of the leading questions I had to ask was about how to plant the main supports into the ground to ensure it did not fall over or blow away in the wind.

Long before I had any time to set aside, I ventured down to the gymnasium for a blistering session and had one. I reckoned that it was colder than the last few days and when I checked late in the afternoon, I discovered it was, but only by one degree. I suspect it must have been our overcast skies that supported the illusion that it was much colder than it was. Surprisingly, after a couple of days of hard graft at The Farm, I managed a reasonable time on the rowing. Perhaps I am just getting back into the swing of it again.

ABH and I had made a small incursion onto the Harbour been first thing, but when I came back from the gymnasium, there was much more beach to explore. I am sure that we should have called her Dora because she loves to explore. Yesterday, she was up on the old path that runs along the edge of the dunes on the big beach. It is largely defunct now having been eroded by the sea, but she found her way up there and stuck when the path ran out. She also likes to go up on the Harbour wall like she did today. She must know that I will not follow her up there, partly because it is high and secondly the dickie knee makes getting down the steps difficult. I fully intend never to let her loose on the moors. She would be down a mine shaft quick as a rabbit.

In the back of my mind, just lurking there to unsettle me, was the notion that perhaps I should have used today to slice up the Christmas trees that still lie behind our

benches across the road. After all, I had gone to the lengths of bringing down the chainsaw and then the oil to lubricate it. I might have just used the excuse that the Missus was going to pick up Mother and go shopping, so I would not have use of the truck. It worked for me.

The Missus did go off on her shopping marathon – it is always a marathon; I have never known her be less than three hours. This gave me the time to work at the details of the greenhouse build. I had contacted the Highly Professional Craftsperson earlier to arrange to meet him tomorrow. He quite surprised me by turning up at the door a little time after the Missus left and I showed him my etchings. I had expected to have my plans ripped to shreds and be made to eat the pieces as a lesson not to be so silly in future. Quite the contrary, I was told much of it looked reasonable and that I should go ahead. He suggested some changes that would make things easier and, indeed, cheaper and more robust and I will build those into the plan. It is very helpful and good to know a highly professional craftsperson, especially this one. I can now blame him if it all falls apart. Ideal.

I can now relax a bit and make some firm arrangements. One of these will be to hire a mini digger again because some of the ground will need to be levelled before work starts. It also means we can clear a path to the rear of the site so I can use the tractor's auger to drill all of the post holes, which is a huge relief. I do not put much store in the forecast, but if it is to be believed, the first days of next week are looking alright to make a start.

Soon after the Highly Professional Craftsperson left, I gathered my walking gear and took ABH for another stank down to the big beach. The tide was much further behind us today, so we had no pressing need to be on the beach in a big hurry. This was just as well because she took her time, perhaps more so than yesterday. It was as we were walking down to the big beach that the enormity of the scouring out became apparent. It was point driven home as we crossed it on foot half an hour later.

The back of the beach at the mouth of The Valley and to the north is probably a good twenty feet higher than the sand in front of it and around 100 metres wide. As you go to the south, the higher section gets rapidly narrower and lower until it is just bed rock towards The Beach complex. In front of that, there is no sand at all in a wide and deep field that stretches around 100 metres toward the sea.

As we walked up the Coast Path at the back of the beach and looked down, the scouring out was even more stark. The post-war cables are visible, looking like a pair of android snakes in their sectioned armour. Alongside these are around 20 other cables which are almost certainly the very early cables here from the 1920s. I tried to do a quick search for more accurate information, but it is buried deep on the Internet. The modern cables that head up through The Valley, laid in the late 1990s, are still buried this time, although they do occasionally get uncovered. These carry our communications to the USA, Ireland, Netherlands and Denmark. Another set of cables terminate at Skewjack, which started life as part of the Chain Home Radar

network during WWII, thus maintaining its technology connection for more than 80 years.

There is still some sand at the bottom of the OS slipway, which is something of a miracle, since all the sand around it seems to have gone. I have seen huge overnight changes that transform the beach but this scouring out seems to be very persistent. I recall we had a far less pronounced loss of sand in the 2015 season that affected trade a bit. I sincerely hope this year's loss is at least partly rectified by Easter or we will have our visitors heading off to sandier beaches in droves.

Quite unintentionally, I coordinated our arrival home with the Missus. I took up the substantial haul of shopping up to the kitchen to be ferreted away. I must ask which small country we are hoping to feed this week as we could not possibly get through all that ourselves, surely.

Amongst the grocery shopping, the Missus had purchased some challenging toys for ABH to keep her amused and to stretch her intellect. One was classed as a level one intelligence toy and the other level four. The Missus tried them out soon after getting back. ABH defeated the level four game in under five minutes and treated the other with utter disdain. Quite where we go from here, I have no idea. Is there such a thing as a canine escape room, I wonder.

Part of the Missus' shopping was to pick up more fish. If you recall, dear reader, I had sold most of our stock to our friend from frozen Vermont, very far west of Camborne. She is most welcome, and I do hope she is still enjoying it. It is no problem for us to get more as we have transport. I rather wish that I knew in advance that she was going that way because I fancied some smoked mackerel. I will pick some up next time I am out that way.

Not long after we settled down in the run up to tea, ABH started to get a little needy. I was trying to get a few things done and did not need the interruption. Perhaps it was the mental exercise of her treat challenges that set her off, but I found myself taking her out again ahead of tea for a run on the beach. I took her again after tea when the Missus took Mother home and again just before bedtime. It was only just before the last walk that her little inner spring had wound down. I have heard stories of small children being hyperactive after eating too many blue smarties. I will be checking her food and treats for E numbers first thing tomorrow.

January 18th – Saturday

ABH had the devil in her all night. Not wanting to go out, not wanting to settle, up every so many minutes and waking us up in turn when she was bored. I still think it is E number in her food giving her naughty child syndrome. Happily, you can still beat errant hounds. She very nearly got a lot worse when she woke me up again at the usual time and promptly went back to sleep again.

The morning appeared to fly past. I had intended to cut up the Christmas trees, get them into the truck and take them up to The Farm. It did not feel like I was dragging my heels during the morning, and I was actively engaged on doing positive things. I had a breakfast that took no time at all to prepare, and did not dilly dally eating it but by the time I considered getting ready to do the trees, it was already eleven o'clock.

Although we fitted both trees whole into the back of the truck, they were hanging out the back. It is much more convenient to cut them into smaller pieces when disposing of them as they will be cut up anyway up at The Farm. I filled the chainsaw with oil and set about shortening them. I had to strip the bigger one of lower branches to get at the trunk and the chain saw makes light work of it. The biggest problem I have is dividing the trunk so that it becomes thinner strips as it will not fit into the shredder else. This process is a labour and would probably be more easily dealt with by burning it. I reminded myself at this point that our home made incinerator, made of industrial tumble dryer, is no more and we have nothing to burn it in.

I was distracted in my efforts by the arrival of ex-Head Launcher and, having finished cutting up the trees, I sat with him for a chat outside the Lifeboat station. The day had returned to being glorious and at this time of year, the sun lights up the benches in front of the station. We basked in the sunshine and put the world to rights – our world, that is, which is roughly a mile in each direction of the station. I did not bother too much about the time but when I was told a little while later that it was only half past midday, I was quite surprised how slowly it had gone.

I said my farewells, emptied the back of the truck to make room for the trees and packed the various bits in solidly. I could at least close the back gate which we could not when the trees were whole.

It would only take me a few minutes to unload the trees; I would leave the shredding until I had a day free. Since it seemed wasteful of a trip up there just for a few minutes, I decided that I would run the flail mower on the back of the tractor over a few areas that would be helpful when I came to start on the greenhouse. I do not want to be walking through long grass carrying weighty timbers about. We would also need somewhere to leave the timber such that we could find it again.

As I anticipated, the trees were unloaded in no time, and I moved the truck out of the way. Going back to the tractor with the key, I spent the first ten minutes working out how I had tied down the makeshift tarpaulin that I covered it with. It is in fact the remnants of our scaffolding covers. I thought that it would be nice to have a memento, something that would remind me just how much it had cost. It brings a tear to my eye every time I see it.

One of the things I took out of the back of the truck to make room for the trees was the box of useful things we keep, just in case. Things like the flood lamp, my welly boots and the battery pack. I was wearing my wellies, and I really had no use for the

floodlight, but the battery pack would have been immensely useful to start the tractor with. Turning the key in the ignition barely yielded enough power to light up the dashboard panel. We have some extra long, heavy duty jump leads at The Farm but even in their extra longness, they would not stretch between the battery at the front of the nose first parked tractor and the truck even parked as close as it would go. Sadly, I had to give up. I would have to remember to bring my headtorch as it is dark under the bonnet of the tractor – or indeed the floodlight.

I returned home close to taking ABH out again time. It was turning into one of those days that afforded a grumpy shopkeeper no rest at all but would yield little of substance for the effort put in. Before we set off again, I needed to make some dinner to take with me to the range tomorrow. Greenhouse build or no, I had not been to the range since before Christmas and was keen to show my face again.

Planning just a filling for a sandwich, I ended up with enough in the bowl to make one of my signature salads, so I bulked it up with one of the gourmet rices we have in the shop and added extra virgin olive oil and fresh lime juice. I will half it and add some sardines tomorrow morning. One day I will put the recipe up on our webpages for everyone to ignore.

ABH was hanging around my feet during the latter stages of my meal construction. It really does not take that long, and I was ready to offer her my undivided attention shortly after. Since we had done the big beach two days running, I decided that we should go up the cliff today. It may seem a little tedious, particularly to a reader, dear reader, that I have defaulted to just two walks with ABH over this winter. I wholeheartedly agree that it is sheer laziness on my part and that with a little thought and effort, I could introduce much more variety. The truth is, dear reader, that I have rather a lot on my plate since the decision to go ahead with the greenhouse and the two default walks make life so much easier.

I was only halfway up the cliff when I realised that I was wearing one layer too many. I had thought earlier that it seemed a little chillier today but after sitting in the sun with ex-Head Launcher, I might have warmed up without noticing too much. When I got up to The Farm, I was forced to put my hat back on, so the day had some confusing signals to make sense of. The only option I had was to remove my hat halfway up the cliff, which seemed to alleviate the immediate issue, and I continued.

The chilly southeasterly breeze made a bit of difference when we got to the top of the cliff by the lookout hut. It was still not enough for me to put my hat back on and with my jacket half undone, the rest of the journey was reasonably comfortable. I do not know if I should have felt some concern when I met some friends up on the path who asked, was I not cold in my shorts and open jacket. I really was not cold at all. They thought it strange. Should I seek help?

We met various other walkers, probably more than we have seen for a while on that journey. One very pleasant lady and her dachshund dog, which she carried past us,

wished us a good day and proceeded ahead of us. ABH, if she knows someone is behind us will wait until they catch us up. If there is another dog involved, she will then tear off after it. So, one minute we are ambling along, sniffing every blade of grass, then we are waiting for ten minutes, then moments later we are in full pursuit.

I managed to hold ABH back long enough to let them get out of sight and luckily, they went on to Land's End while we diverted to the cycle path. Somehow, when we reached the end of Maria's Lane on our way back, they were ahead of us looking slightly lost. We were hailed and it transpired they were looking for Stone Chair Lane, which is always further along than you think. We walked together since we were heading that way ourselves and by the end ABH had stopped trying to scrap playfully with the other dog and my arm could relax its iron grip. I had also had a very pleasant chat with the very pleasant lady, which means that I still have the remnants of some latent social skills. Well, that may be a subjective opinion, of course, but she did not seem to want to run away.

I was quite happy to spend the remainder of the afternoon into the evening doing very little at all. ABH slept for the entirety of the evening and will no doubt be active all night. I shall be doing even less to tomorrow save throwing lead at steel targets and hopefully thoroughly enjoying myself and leaving the real world behind for a while.

January 19th – Sunday

It was cold and grey first thing when I was woken up. At least ABH had mostly slept through the night. Apart from waking me at the appointed time – really, how does she do that within a few minutes of the same time each morning. She did go back to bed again but only tarried to try and wake the Missus up, which, obviously, she failed at miserably.

We were out with just enough light not to need a headtorch, although I had one on me anyway. It looks so much darker outside through the windows for some reason. They are not tinted, as far as I know, and even if they were, the tint would be on the outside looking in. I will not dwell on that too long. There lies madness.

I give myself just enough time to get ready to head up to the range. With no margin for error, if there are errors, we are late. The most likely error is failing to get the Missus out of bed but on this occasion, I must have taken too long making my dinner or the flasks of tea. We were not that slow in leaving but the others at the club were unusually early, so it looked like we were later than we were. I will not lose any sleep over it.

We had the most riotous time without actually rioting. The members there present were all regulars and we all get on well together. We were also shooting with John Wayne cowboy rifles today, which is my favourite gun in the cabinet. I am

reasonable adept with it, too, which helps. The afternoon was my Dirty Harry pistol, which is also good fun, but I am not quite as good with that. I lack practise with all my firearms because I am only at the club during the few months of winter. This is what I tell myself, anyway. Despite that, unless I have a really bad day, I am usually ranked somewhere in the middle of the assembled company.

There were a few spots of rain during the day, so few in fact I was not entirely sure that I had not imagined them. It brightened at one point in the middle of the day, which was encouraging, but quickly went back to overcast again. It really was not that cold, Land's End had nine degrees, increasing to 10 at midday, but as time went on a chill started creeping into my bones. No amount of running around putting up targets and patching bullet holes helped much. I could have put my coat on, but it would have been uncomfortable instead. I was quite grateful when half time came and I could have a warm in the clubhouse.

From the top of the hill, out to the west looked a sight clearer than the sky over the range. When we arrived in The Cove there was blue skies above us and the day looked a bit more cheery than it had all day while shooting. It felt warmer, too. It might well have been colder up at the range as the only reference point I had was Land's End which is maybe a couple of hundred feet lower down.

We might well have a cooler reaction from our visitors this coming year, too. Not only do we not have much of a beach anymore but First Kernow, the bus company has decided not to run the open top Coaster service any longer. They cite cost savings. Since I cannot fathom how costs are saved by replacing open top with closed top buses, I can only guess that the open top fleet have reached end of life and the closed top buses are cheaper to get hold of.

I do not have any facts to hand, so it is a guess that perhaps this will reduce the number of visitors wanting to bus to St Ives from here and will take to their polluting cars instead. For a much maligned council that pledges allegiance to the altar of carbon net zero and all things green, they do not seem all that keen to be trying to get us out of our cars and onto public transport. Perhaps they imagine we will all have electric cars this time next year.

They seem very keen on making cycle paths and think that bicycle riding will be a panacea. Since none of them look beyond the city walls of Truro, that might be achievable. I am not altogether sure how that works for my trips to the cash and carry, twenty miles away with a truck load to bring back. I will have to go into training for my trips to Exeter in January. At least the roads will be completely free of traffic. All the electric cars will be parked in six mile queues outside each of the dozen charging points in the Duchy.

It was after dark when I took ABH around next. We used Shanks' pony which we time share with the half dozen other users in The Cove. We are all right behind carbon net zero, green, emission free, global warming and especially rising sea

levels policies here in The Cove but no one in the world is going to convince me to ride my bicycle up Cove Hill.

January 20th – Monday

The day commenced just how we left it, bright and glorious. There was cloud about but there was enough blue sky and sunshine to make it a very pleasant day to be out and about in. I might have guessed early on that there was just not enough day to go around.

My primary objective of the day did not seem like to would take up very much time at all. Just get the tractor started, do a bit of mowing and set out the greenhouse boundary. This did not suggest to me that I would need to hurry to the gymnasium for a quick blistering session, consume a light breakfast and be gone. Since it was not suggested, I did not bother but there again, I did not exactly procrastinate either. What a mistake.

It was cold this morning but not uncomfortably so in the gymnasium. It did encourage me to put in a little extra effort to warm up quickly. My rowing time was average, which was just about satisfactory after an all day shooting session yesterday, but by the end I definitely felt that I had blistered until I could blister no more. I was hugely distracted on my way home by the blue brilliance of the ocean to my right and the stark whiteness of the surf. There was still some ground sea running, enough to push it over the Harbour wall at high water.

The Harbour had calmed enough to attract a couple of swimming groups by the time I took ABH down there. I do not think that they had organised to be together as one was leaving as the other was about to go in. ABH went and greeting them all as they changed in opposite orders over by the western slip. We then went about our business while the ladies went about theirs. I did not need to see when they went into the water; the shrieks could be heard from Gwenver.

There is still plenty of weed strewn across the whole beach, but it is nowhere near as deep as it had been recently. I met a visitor later in the afternoon who said she had never seen so much weed around on the beaches. I am inclined to agree that there does seem to be more this season than ever before and for longer. It can be quite tiresome.

With ABH fed and watered, I headed up to The Farm. It had gone one o'clock by this time and my intention was to return with enough time to take her on a longer walk. My reasoning was based on the tractor starting first time, which it did not. It is the first time that that our little magic electric brick had let us down. The engine was not even turning over, so I wondered if it was something other than just the battery. Given that it worked last time in December with a nudge from the battery pack, I was pinning my hopes on it being the battery.

In truth, I do not know what we will do for maintenance and servicing in future. We had a letter from the garage in the village telling us that the mechanic who had held it together since the owner fell ill and then sadly shuffled off, was retiring. The family who had had the garage since the wheel was invented had decided to close up. It is a huge blow to the local community who regularly had their vehicles serviced there. I am sure we were also not the only ones to drop in for advice and emergency help every so often, either.

Had I known the battery was going to be so troublesome I would have brought up the ammeter so I could see what was going on. Assuming that the battery was completely drained, I decided to try the old leisure battery, the one I could only charge to 60 percent. Of course, I was not completely sure that it had not run down in the few weeks since I had used it, but I thought probably not.

It took a further while to work out how to get the existing battery out of the tractor. It transpired that the front grille, headlights and all needed to be removed, which involved unplugging the lights and unscrewing a couple of wingnuts. That done, I set the battery to charge in the cabin and rested the leisure battery that was too large to fit into the space, on the weights on the front of the tractor. I hooked it up and tried to start the tractor again. Nothing.

In a last gasp, I put the battery pack back on and tried again and again, I had no response. I packed up some of the tools I had used and put them away. I had to leave the tractor front disassembled, planning to return tomorrow to replace the original battery. Just before I moved onto new things, I gave the key last turn and instead of just a click, the engine coughed, just once, but it was enough to renew my hope. I jumped into the seat after putting the battery pack back on and resolved to keep trying it until the battery or the battery pack or both expired.

After five minutes of key turning, the engine sprang to life, so I set the throttle high and left it for a bit. I was now faced with a dilemma. I did not want to stop the engine in case I could not get it running again but the front of the tractor was off and the leisure battery unsecured. If it fell off it might damage the electrical cables. I could probably have removed the battery altogether, a point made when I decided to strap the battery to the frame with some string. While doing so the negative terminal connection fell off and the engine continued unaffected.

I went with what I had. A working tractor until it stopped. I moved the truck out of the way and ran the tractor mower over the bits of grass I wanted shortened. I did a few extra bits too to make access to the cabin a little easier if we had Mother coming up at some point. Satisfied, and aware of just how much time the whole sorry episode had taken, I put the tractor away with the aim of putting it back together with the proper battery tomorrow.

I did not want to leave before marking out the greenhouse boundary. We had decided to hire a mini digger for a couple of weeks on the proviso that I was not allowed to drive it. The Missus likes to have all the fun. With the boundary marked I could leave the Missus to level the extra ground at the west end of the greenhouse that I had promised her after losing some width. I would have finished it all but there is still the one remaining table in the way. I really must prioritise clearing that and all the rubbish around it.

There was no time to do that today. I was already running late and too late to take ABH on a longer hike, so she just had to be satisfied with another run down to the Harbour beach and around the block. At least the tide was out, and she had a bit more space to run around on. Luckily, a couple of greyhound type dogs appeared down the western slip one of which was keen to play chase with the little girl. They had a good ten minutes run around and when the second dog joined in and ABH thought the odds a bit skewed against her, she jumped into the sea to even the balance.

I do not know if she was terribly bothered about not going for a longer walk, but she did not take any rest for the rest of the afternoon and into the evening. The thing about that is that if she is not taking any rest for the rest of the day, then neither was I. She made sure of that.

We plan to up at The Farm all day tomorrow, so hopefully that will sort her out.

January 21st – Tuesday

Things did not quite go according to plan this morning. The plant hire company delivering the mini digger told us to expect them in the middle of the morning. I had already taken precautions, just in case they were a little earlier than announced but I was halfway through getting The Diary ready for publication – yes, behind the smoke and mirrors is a dedicated team drinking tea and filing their nails and somehow The Diary emerges, full formed – when the truck and trailer bearing our mini digger arrived outside. By the time I pulled on my DIYman overalls and slipped into a pair of boots, our man had gone.

The problem had been that the Missus gave the men at the hire company her mobile telephone number, which cannot reach a signal from the bedroom. I called the company from the home telephone, and they managed to track down their driver for a second attempt.

The delivery driver was a very pleasant man and most accommodating. I explained that he should follow me and when I turned left down a lane, he should park up and unload the digger. I went on to tell him that I would have to park the truck at The Farm and walk the half mile back. Hopefully, he would not have to wait too long. Had things gone according to plan, I would have dropped the Missus off at the entrance

to the lane and gone on to collect Mother. Still, I picked up a good pace, even for a chap with a dickie knee and found our man had parked the mini digger at the start of the lane.

He explained the various buttons and levers. It is a man's mini digger and does not come with a book of instructions that, of course, would be superfluous. Having used a digger before, most of the functions were familiar and there were just a few extras and differences to be aware of. One of the major differences is that we asked for a mini digger with a cab as I am aware that next week is forecast for poorer weather. It also has a heater. What luxury.

The first major hurdle was that it was a good bit higher than I expected and there was no discernible step into the cab. Our man had also parked it flush with the hedge that made mounting the machine even more tricky. I managed but it was an effort, and I reasoned that I would not want to be getting in and out very often. Of course, the Missus has already explained that I am not allowed to drive it and the only reason I was in the driver's seat at all was because she was still in bed when it arrived. She will already have read the manual online, cover to cover – twice.

Despite having a 'sport' button it seemed to take an interminably long time to get to The Farm. I also had to concentrate on keeping the tracks on the grass centre of the lane. Slipping off caused it to lean dramatically, which probably was not a problem but having once been in a small jeep that rolled several times down a steep hillside and finished with a dramatic fall off a six foot wall at the bottom, I am a tad nervous of such things.

Just before I set off down the lane, the Missus had called and asked me to drop her at Mother's who was feeling a brae bit poorly. I left the digger just inside the field and took the Missus and ABH around to Mother's where they spent most of the day. This left me to head off to our building supplier at St Just where I wanted to discuss and place the timber order. Some of the wood needed to be ordered in and I said I would wait until everything was ready before they delivered it. If we are lucky, it will be tomorrow, otherwise it would have been Friday but since Friday is not looking great on the weather front, that may well mean next week.

After running my errands, I returned to The Farm. I wanted to clear the last pile of detritus that was in the way of the build. I will also have to dig up the screw in anchors of the polytunnel. I tried to unscrew a couple of them, and they were having none of it. I left them for the time being and used the wheelbarrow to shift the various pots and bags into the seeding shed. This was, until two seconds ago, the greenhouse but for the sake of clarity, it is now the seeding shed, previously known as the greenhouse. Like the BBC, dear reader, which irritatingly uses the 'previously known' suffix for every name change for a minimum of ten years, I will do the same until I hear you screaming at me over the ether.

Anyway. I digress. Now, where was I? Ah, yes, moving the pots to the seeding shed, previously known as the greenhouse. Actually, I think I finished that and having passed the tractor twice, I remembered that I had to replace the battery that I had lovingly charged overnight in the cabin.

It did not take long to put the battery back and discover that I had no better result with it fully charged. At least it was my assumption that it was fully charged because, once again, I forgot my ammeter. Just in case, I put the battery pack back on but that made no difference at all. To cut a long story short, for which I am sure that you are exceedingly grateful, dear reader, I discovered quite by chance – that is by pulling every lever and pressing every button – that it was the forward/reverse selector at fault. I need to take the front off the dashboard and lubricate the lever mechanism. There appears to be an engine cut out if the lever is not correctly in neutral.

Having spent longer on that than I had hoped. I moved to the end game which was to put the mini digger away somewhere less conspicuous. I also wanted to see if it would cut a neat post hole, which partly because I am inexpert and partly because it is a sledgehammer to a small nut, it would not. I then spent the next half an hour clearing the growth from the less conspicuous place that we used last time. I cannot deny, dear reader, that it was an enormous amount of fun which culminated in very nearly putting a hole in the seeding shed, previously known as the greenhouse. Verily, I had to tear myself away from such enjoyment, which I am sure was partly due to the knowledge that it was illicit. I trust you not to let on to the Missus.

Talking of whom, she called coincidentally when I was packing up to come away. I had been momentarily diverted by the arrival of a neighbour from the village walking his dog. We had a chat and a catchup and, as he is a builder, I mined him for advice on the build. We bade our farewells, and I headed off to collect the Missus from Mother's.

We enjoyed an uneventful late afternoon and evening. ABH slept for the entirety of it. It does appear that if she does not get a sleep during the day, she is very weary by the end of it. I shall bear this in mind and instead of taking her for long walks, poke her with a stick at irregular times during the day. Since I feel like I have been poked with a stick all day, I shall retire to my pit, thank you.

January 22nd – Wednesday

If I was looking to fill every unforgiving minute today with, erm, stuff, I think I probably did very well even if it had a bit of a shaky start.

My furry alarm clock did not go off and although I was awake at the appointed hour, there was no one sticking their tongue in my ear insisting I should get out of bed. I dozed, therefore, and eventually got myself up at gone eight o'clock. The morning routine things took as much time as they took and by the time I was ready to dash off

up to The Farm before breakfast, it was already late enough for breakfast. The Missus did not need to try very hard convincing me that I should have breakfast and do the things I would have done after I came back then, and we would both go up to The Farm after I had finished them all.

We were not sure how to manage ABH while the digger was digging, so we started off with her in the cab. She was not ever so keen on that, although she had put up with it for an hour or so while the Missus levelled the extended area at the end of the greenhouse. While she was doing that, I cleared and marked out, on one side, where the post holes were going to go, which took longer than I imagined. Having done that, I thought it a good idea to try and find all the bits of the hole boring auger to attach to the back of the tractor.

I knew exactly where all the bits were: right at the back of the front of the barn behind two years' worth of accumulated stuff. Some of it heavy stuff. It took another half and hour to assemble all the bits and then another ten minutes to find the PTO shaft that transfers power from the turny bit at the back of the tractor to the transmission box on the auger. I had to return this to where we bought the kit because it was too long and set the boring auger at an angle, so it was in a different place to the rest of the kit.

What I distinctly remember from the set up last time that I did on my own was that it would have been very helpful and hurt a lot less if two people did it. I thought that I remembered that it was fitting the auger that was the challenge, lifting it and trying to bolt it on at the same time. With that in mind and the Missus still in the digger, I thought I would do all the other bits first.

Of all the components, the arm from which the auger dangles and which pivots off the back of the tractor, is the heaviest. This arm must be lifted while the component that pushes it up and down is pinned onto one of its slots. This involves lifting the really heavy arm on the shoulder while already holding the support in one hand – you cannot reach the support else - allowing the other hand to insert the holding pin. It was only when I came to attach the auger bit at the end of the process that I remembered that it was the lifting of the arm bit that I needed the help with. I fitted the auger bit by myself, because it was relatively easy to do single handed.

While I might have congratulated myself on achieving the installation without assistance, the first thing I noted was that the auger bit was hanging at an angle. The PTO shaft was still too long. Given the angle was not much different from the previous installation of the kit, I surmised that it had not been shortened at all. I had handed over the shaft near the beginning of the shop season and told the shop there was not hurry. I collected it at the end of the shop season, and I suspect that they had forgotten all about the work. It is still usable but takes a long time to set up straight and is less effective when used. With the garage at the top closing soon I imagine they are really busy, but they are also incredibly nice, and I will leverage that somewhat unkindly to see if they will fit it in for me.

Since I had set up the auger, angled or not, I was going to run the first hole just to say that I had broken ground on the project. Time was pressing and the sky, after being bright and sunny all day, was clouding over in a very threatening way. Just as I started to drill the first hole, it started to rain quite heavily. It was just a shower, but it lasted a while, which made life in the tractor without a cab, a little uncomfortable.

In the meanwhile, with ABH now shut inside the cabin, the Missus had progressed to clearing out the back of the cabin where she intends to grow beans. She had scat over one very large bit of bush when she suddenly realised that it was her eucalyptus that she had planted a couple of years ago. She had not realised that it would have grown so large. She was at the same time delighted at its size and mortified that she had bulldozed it out of the ground.

Fortunately for her, it had come up roots and all some of which were buried under the IBCs, which I am sure you recall, dear reader, are the Intermediate Bulk Containers we catch rainwater in. As an aside, the pallets we placed these on have rotted and broken underneath and some are leaning over at an alarming angle. They will have to be emptied and put on a more robust platform. Another job to add to the list.

Apologies, I digress. Now, where was I. Ah, yes, the Missus' eucalyptus tree. If you recall, dear reader, it was still raining and while the Missus sat in her nice warm and dry cab, I was recruited to replant the tree in the hole she had dug out with the digger. This involved holding the tree upright while she swung the digger bucket around me at an alarming speed. I held my nerve for a short while before I told her that I would go and get a spade and do the reburial manually.

Time was pressing and we needed to make a quick exit. We had let ABH roam while I was still on foot and the digger was doing its work. She carefully avoided getting in harms way with the digger and it is unlikely that at the speed it moves that we would run her over. She did however like to have her nose almost at the end of my spade just to see what I was doing which was, of course, nothing because I had the nose of a small dog at the end of my spade.

Our big hurry about getting away is that someone organised a Lifeboat exercise for four o'clock in the afternoon. It was the only time that the tides and sea conditions were any good for the rest of the week, so we all duly mustered fifteen minutes before hand.

I elected to drive the Tooltrak and launch the Inshore boat on this occasion while there were more than sufficient on the team to take care of the big boat. We had some additional duties to perform while the boats were out. The new long slipway cable had not been wound on properly and needed completely unwinding and winding on again to try and fix the issue. It is a bit of a catch-22 because if we cannot rewind the whole cable with the boat attached and yet it needs the boat's weight on it

to wind up properly. We did what we could and will have to wait until next time it is deployed for recover to see if what we have done had helped any.

The station had also had our original Inshore boat trailer returned to us. It had been taken away for refurbishment and regalvanising and had been delivered coincidentally today. Having finished playing with the long slip cable, the team lent a hand switching the two trailers about in the RNLI car park. It did not take very long and I returned the Tooltrak to the beach where a little later it would be used for training.

It was dark just before six o'clock when both boats returned to the bay. It was getting a tad cool down on the beach waiting, so we were grateful for their prompt arrival. Once again, I commanded the Tooltrack and up in the station, out of the corner of my eye, I noted that the team there conducted what looked very much like a textbook recovery up the long slip. Both boats were washed down and tucked away by twenty minutes past six o'clock. We are, after all, a very efficient, very excellent Shore Crew.

January 23rd – Thursday

I was not expecting the weather we woke up to this morning, mainly because I was focussing on the latest over-hyped storm heading in. It was looking like that storm would come in overnight and the winds being southerly would not affect us much in The Cove, anyway, although they would interrupt proceedings at The Farm. So, when the wind started to howl around the eaves shortly after I got up this morning, it came as a bit of a surprise. It peaked around the middle of the morning at 60 miles per hour from the west and had thrown some showers at us as it went.

By the end of the morning, the sea was fair raging with white capped waves right across the bay. There was not much white water going up the cliffs opposite and at that stage in the tide, there was no water going over the Harbour wall. It did not look like there was much ground sea but approaching high water it changed. Larger waves started charging in and waves were topping the wall.

I had no plans to hang around. There was no particular hurry to the morning but a throw away comment by the lady up at the building suppliers in St Just yesterday made me think we might have a delivery today. I was mistaken and she must have been talking about a delivery to them today. There was not much I could do until the timber arrived. I had already decided the drilling the post holes will be safer when the wood is there as I can lay out lengths to make sure the posts are going in the correct places. There was, however, some 'draft' measuring out I could do and, having borrowed a hole digging spade from one of our friends on the Lifeboat crew, I wanted to try it out.

It was still blowing some when I left home. The showers had passed, thankfully, and there was a good deal of blue sky again. My first stop was the Lifeboat station to beg a 20 litre drum for diesel. The amount of digging that the Missus did yesterday was bound to put a dent in the amount of fuel in the tank. We have some diesel at The Farm and a spare drum, but they have been used for 'red diesel', the reduced tax stuff for proper farmers. The digger hire company would be less than pleased if it was found there were even traces of red diesel in their tank.

After yesterday's issue with the PTO drive shaft for the hole borer, I decided to stop by the garage at the top to ask if they would shorten it for us. As I pointed out yesterday, they are very nice people, and of course they would do it for me. When I got to The Farm, I had a good look at the whole set up. It was clear that the PTO shaft had been shortened, so I apologise for maligning the company we bought it from suggesting that it had not been done. I think it might be that the bit that pushes up the arm is latched into the wrong slot and the next one forward might be a better choice. It will require taking most of it apart again and this time I will ask for help. Mind, that and the combination of everything else I was doing yesterday ensured that I had slept straight through, the first time I have done that in some while.

Having established no chopping up of the PTO shaft would be needed, I turned my attention to the post holes. The trial hole bored yesterday had back filled when the auger came out. This is largely because it is not straight and hits the sides on the way out. It was the main purpose of borrowing the post hole digging spade and I put it to use straight away. How I had lived my life without one of these tools now amazes me. Gosh, what a useful implement it is. I used it to tidy up the widen the hole and then went around each of the other hole sites to make a starter hole for the auger to sit in. It is hard on the biceps, and I would not like to dig an entire two foot hole with it, not in our ground anyway, but it is a very effective tool. I sent a message to my pal expressing my delight and thanks. He sent a message back saying he supposed he would not get his tool back again. I sent him a message in return, 'what tool?'

There was not much more I could do without some assistance to reconfigure the hole boring setup at the back of the tractor. Besides, I would have had to take off the tarpaulin which is a bit of the scaffold cover from last year. Since it is not built for purpose, it takes a while to take off and put on and tie down. With a big wind on the way, I thought it best to leave it for now.

The Missus had called to ask me to pick up a cauliflower (broccoli, white in Cornish) from the shop at the top. They did not have any but since I needed to fill the new drum with diesel, I thought that I may as well go into town. The Missus needed coffee too, which amongst the shipping order she came home with the other day, she had forgotten. Stopping only to let the garage know I no longer needed their services for the PTO shaft, I headed into town.

The only place I could get the coffee was Tesmorburys, the same with the diesel, so I resolved to get the cauliflower there as well. It seemed churlish to drive a further mile to a local independent store just for one cauliflower. I would put up with it this once. I had to call the Missus when I was confronted with a dozen different jars of similar coffee. It says something about lack of observation, but I handle the coffee jar every day at home. In my defence, the Missus does decant the larger jar into a different smaller jar.

On the way to the coffee, I had come across the cauliflowers. I had no price comparison in my head, but I was definite that I did not want to be buying a cauliflower the size of a tennis ball. There were 'extra large' cauliflowers on display, wrapped in plastic at 50 percent more money for 10 percent larger fruit. I declined. However churlish it might be to drive an extra mile to a local independent shop, I would rather be a churl than be treated like an eejit. At the local store, I got my cauliflower. It was twice the size of the one in Tesmorburys and 20 pence more.

With diesel sloshing about at the back of the truck, hopefully still in its drum, coffee jars on the cab floor and a big cauliflower rolling around the back seat, I headed back home. The Missus had already taken ABH down on the beach for a windy walk, so I was able to relax with a cup of tea. We will go to it again tomorrow up at The Farm and hopefully get some holes bored. The timber is arriving late in the afternoon, but I think I will not have time to do anything with it. Once I have posts in the ground, I will feel that we are really on the way. I am frightfully aware of the adage written by some writer bloke from up North somewhere that there is still plenty of opportunity to spill your beer down your jerkin before it gets to your mouth. Since I do not wear a jerkin, perhaps I should not worry.

January 24th – Friday

As far as this neck of the woods is concerned, it was the storm that never was. I had narrowly missed a downpour after taking ABH out for her last walk before bedtime yesterday. I would have been blissfully unaware of it had the Missus not told me. I would also not have noticed the wind had I worked a bit harder during the day and slept through the night again. As it was, there was some howling above us but no buckets and dustbins flying about in The Cove.

By the time it came to take ABH out again in the morning, you would have been hard pressed to know that there was any sort of weather event at all. The main bulk of the nastiness went across the island of Ireland and the only note in the news was that Mace Head in Galway registered 114 miles per hour. I suspect that they are at the top of a cliff similar to our weather station at Gwennap Head, windiest place in the universe, where the wind accelerates up the cliff face and skews the data. I see that Gwennap Head, windiest place in the universe, has intermittent wind speed records again. Of course, it did not register at all during the night knowing that I would only take the Mickey again, or perhaps afearred that it might be knocked off its

metaphorical perch by some Irish upstart. Land's End weather station neared 70 miles per hour on its recorder.

It was only the sea that indicated still had any evidence of storm activity. I said it was raging yesterday and now wish that I had not because I have painted myself into a superlative corner. Ahem, the sea was even ragier today. All those white caps from yesterday were blown out, filling the bay with joined up pools of white water. More waves were piling in, racing down Tribbens, boiling over Cowloe and exploding over the footings of Pedn-men-du. The wave direction was such that the cliffs opposite at Aire Point and Creagle were spared much excitement on this occasion but the waves troubling the Harbour Wall probably made up for it.

I had already decided that we would not go to The Farm until later in the morning to avoid any storm remnants. As it was, there were none and we could have set out earlier. ABH probably thanked me for that as I get the impression that she is becoming less enchanted with visits to The Farm. To start with, she was happy to range and explore but the grass is too long to range far, and she has explored all the near field there is to explore. I am very happy that she has not yet discovered the rats, to my knowledge. When I was searching yesterday, or was it the day before, for the auger PTO shaft in the barn, a sizeable brown rat shot under the barn door and under the store room floor.

ABH is spending more and more time in the cabin, which for us is a good thing. Today, the Missus spent the entire time in the digger cab, and I was on the tractor. Fortunately, she does not come near the moving machines, and I think she is happy to stay away and otherwise go where she wants. Occasionally, I shut her in the cabin like when the timber arrived in the afternoon but she made no big fuss about it.

By the time the small lorry arrived laden with timber, I had completed nearly all the post holes. I will not go into too much detail because that is just boring. Oh, please yourselves. I am here all week, too. Getting at the hole sites at the back of the project was every bit as difficult as I thought it would be. The ground is an uneven mess and where the holes were going was higher than where the tractor was. The Missus and I had reconfigured the setup which made the auger lower to the ground. In some places I had to dig a channel so that the auger could get to the hole site.

The drilling took the rest of the afternoon. I only stopped to help unload the timber and then went back to it. I am aware that some of the holes will be shallower than others where the auger bit met some immovable object underground. I think, though, that all the holes made a minimum depth of 600 millimetres, or two feet. The three that I did have time to measure were all at least 700 millimetres. I did not have time to go around with the manual hole spade to clear the backfill but will get around to that tomorrow, hopefully.

I had originally specified 4 x 4 inch posts for the uprights. When the Highly Professional Craftsperson suggested 6 x 6 inch posts instead, it seemed like a very

good idea. That was until the 6 x 6 posts arrived and I discovered that I could not lift them by myself. Not only do I need to get these to a post hole, I also need to lift them upright and even before I do that, I need to lift them onto a work table to cut them to size and mitre the top. I had thought to sit them in the post hole where I could measure them, move them to the work table to saw them, then move them back to the post hole. On the grounds that I could not do that to one of them, let alone eight, I think I need an alternative strategy.

Enter our neighbour in the village, the one who came up to the field the other day for a chat, who turned up just as I was considering this dilemma. He is a builder, which was a happy coincidence. While his dog gave ABH some much needed company and lively chase, I quizzed him about my predicament. His advice was to plant the posts regardless, then when they were seated, measure them and lop the top off at the appropriate height with a chainsaw.

This had much appeal but there are just two problems with that. The first is that chainsaws are meaty, beaty, big and not so bouncy and scare the living behoomins out of me. The second is the first, plus using one up a ladder more than two rungs above terra firma with the emphasis on terror. I suppose I could add to that the concern that I would make the cut in the wrong place or bog it up some other way. With the post cemented into the ground, there would be no place for errors. Rather sensibly, the local hire company where I looked to see if they had chainsaws, will not hire out one to clueless eejits like me. I know of someone with a chainsaw who would happily come and help but I do not know if he has the skills required for this job. I will ask around.

It had started out feeling cold this morning, although I am not sure that it actually was. The sunny spells that we had been promised for today did not materialise and by late in the afternoon there was full cloud cover, and it felt just as cold as it had earlier in the morning. It must have warmed up at some point in the day, probably shortly after I did a bit of weightlifting when we reconfigured the hole boring setup, because I had removed my hat and coat. I think I noticed when we stopped to talk with our neighbour from the village. At any rate, the cold was sinking into my bones, I was concerned about ABH getting cold too and suggested to the Missus in her nice warm cab that we begger off home. Thankfully, she had got to a good stopping point and had the good grace to agree.

Even though ABH had not spent an inordinate amount of time exploring her environment, she had much of the environment on her fur. Our natural environment might well be a thing to cherish but on occasion, and this was one of them, it smells something rotten. Our little girl was lined up for a bath as soon as we got in and no mistake. The Missus did the bathing, and I did the fur drying after with the hair dryer, which works a treat and ABH seems to quite enjoy.

As is always the case when Mother is not here, we were pretty clueless about what to have for tea. Happily, the Missus is quite inventive, and she also knows with some

intimacy what is in the larder and usually comes up with something toothsome. ABH was not really of a mind to care as she almost immediately curled up on my lap and fell asleep. I had to move her while I had some tea, and she continued to sleep on the sofa next to me until it was time for her last walk out.

I think we had best afford her a day off tomorrow or at least a change of scene with perhaps a stank up the cliff. That does not mean, dear reader, you get a break from Grumpy Shopkeeper's Farm. I am sure I can fit that in too as I know how disappointed you would be else.

January 25th – Saturday

I awoke lazily this morning. ABH jumped on me at the appointed time but immediately curled up and went back to sleep again, so did I.

When I eventually stirred myself to take her out for a spin, we were faced with the outset of an improving day. There was not much breeze to speak of but there was cold in the air. I noted later that the temperature had dropped considerably at the end of yesterday evening and had not recovery by the end of the morning. It would be cold up at The Farm where I had intended to go later, but I would be gainfully employed in manual labour, so I would probably not notice too much.

There may well have been much Farm in The Diary recently and perhaps I have given the impression that is all that has been done in the world of grumpy shopkeeping. I can assure you, dear reader, that I have also had to push forward the preparations for shop opening even though that will not be happening until the end of March, a whole nine weeks away. While there is no hurry, I have placed advance orders with a couple of the companies I saw at the trade show. I would rather them have to remember than me – I know I shall forget – and I need to do it while it is still relatively fresh in my mind. There are several other companies I need to contact but that must wait until after I have replicated the inventory system for 2025, and I cannot do that until all the stock has been counted. Yes, there are still some items I have not done. That will have to wait until the greenhouse is done, so I better get on with it.

There, just as you were expecting a lecture on ordering things and perhaps a run up Mayon Cliff, I go and surprise, or possibly disappoint, with a run up to The Farm instead. I had left it quite late. I was in two minds about breakfast but opted to make fish cakes, grumpy shopkeeper style. This roughly means throwing things into a bowl that might possibly go with the left over mash potato, which was the whole reason for doing it in the first place. Even though I say so myself, I rather excelled myself in producing a very toothsome set of patties coated in sesame seeds in the absence of breadcrumbs. The only downside with the whole venture was that it took a bit of time which had me exiting for The Farm halfway through the day.

On top of that, the Missus asked if I could buy some bread from the shop at the top. We had in-laws arriving and nothing to put on the table for later. Since I did not know when they would be turning up, or more relevantly when I would be returning from The Farm, I came back to the flat with the bread and went back up again.

My sole intention was to empty the post holes of the backfill that necessarily happens with the hole boring tool. It is not too onerous because it is all loose earth and comes up easily. It does however take time and a good deal of effort because the manual hole digging spade only picks up a little earth at a time. As the arms become more weary over time, the spade has the tendency to clip the edge of the hole and send more earth down than you have just pulled up. This as you can imagine, dear reader, is somewhat tiresome and has the effect of eliciting a spontaneous exclamation on occasion, such as, 'oh dear' and 'what a shame'. This happened with increasing frequency as I moved from hole to hole. Oh dear, what a shame.

I took a break halfway through the seven holes on the menu because my throat was getting sore from all the exclaiming but I started the back three with renewed vigour half an hour later. All the holes now exceeded the 600 millimetres deep minimum and most nearly 700 millimetres. Just one was nearly 900 millimetres deep, all of which I could live with having embraced the strategy of installing and lopping off later. In the back of my mind all the way around was the challenge of hefting the 6x6 posts into the nine inch holes. Several times before we closed and a few times since, the chef next door has offered his services if we needed anything during our closed season. It occurred to me, at three o'clock in the morning as I planned such things, that I should take him up on his very kind offer. Knowing him as we do, the offer was indeed genuine, and he will be a more than willing assistant. I suspect he has muscles too, which will help tremendously.

Come the end of hole clearance, it crossed my mind that I should at least try to move one of the posts into position, you know, to see if it could be done single handed in theory. I lifted the end of one of the posts, which was encouraging, and the nearest hole was not that far off the end of the post if I pivoted it around from where it lay. Then, surely, it would not take much to drag it to the top of the hole. So, I tried.

I then thought, surely, I have enough strength to lift the post into its hole because I am not exactly lifting the entire weight of it. I remembered just in time that I needed to scatter some gravel at the bottom of the hole to aid drainage and took a little time to find some. I then came back to the same conundrum about strength and considered, surely, it would be possible to lift it that little way up with the help of gravity and before I knew it, the post was upright in the hole.

So, there I was, suddenly, with my post in a hole twice the size it should be and holding it from falling over. My plan had been, had I been following one, to have at my disposal some supports that I could nail to the lower parts of the post to stop it falling one way or another. I did not want to let go of the post lest it fall over and take

a geet chunk out of the side of the hole, thus making it even bigger. In the end, I discovered that I could rest the post in a position against the side of the hole which appeared to leave it relatively stable. I then went about the preparation that I should have done before doing something daft like lifting the post into the hole.

My first thought was that I would nail some suitable lengths of gash timber to the post. The video I watched about post erection had the demonstrator using just two. On the grounds that my post was taller and bigger than his, I thought at least three and ended up using four. It was at this point that I discovered the big tins of nails that I thought we had in the tool shed were not there. In fact, there was not a nail in the place, which I thought odd as I do not recall using them all. I decided therefore that I would have to screw the supports lightly to the post which would be perfectly adequate. I went to the back of the truck to collect my screw case only to discover that I had not replaced it after I had emptied the truck for the Christmas trees.

I decided that this was not going well at all and perhaps I should not have been tempted 'just to see' if I could lift the post. I concluded that I was way too far down the line now to back out and luckily found some screws in the tool shed. It was a tad tricky holding the post and screwing the supports on at the same time but somehow I managed it and the post was relatively upright too. I had gone to the trouble of purchasing a post level which had two spirit levels a 90 degrees. Using it on two corners, making the post perfectly plumb was relatively easy and to my relief the supports held the post in place.

Now, I really should not have started on the first hole I bored. I had bored it in the wrong position and had to dig it out forwards. This made it twice the size of the other holes and I had made a mental note to insert a shutter when it came to pouring the concrete and backfilling with earth. Given that all my other plans had gone out of the window, this one followed. I had left the estimate of bags of post mix to the supplier, and he had allocated two bags per hole, which should have been enough. I used four bags on the first hole and even then, could have fitted in another. I do not think the post will be going anywhere soon but will test its rigidity after the concrete has gone off.

Standing back to admire my handiwork, the post looks decidedly squint. I panicked a bit and reached for the level again. The post, it assured me, was perfectly straight and the visible lean is merely an optical illusion based on the fact that I had left the old doorway in place and that is definitely leaning.

I had taken ABH around before I headed off and we had passed one of the fishermen in the back of his boat in the car park. I advised that he probably would not catch much from there and he told me that all the boats had been removed from the slipway as a precaution. The first and biggest of the big storms occurred in 2008 with seas big enough to hammer on the Lifeboat station doors and run up the slipway onto the road. Our man told me that something similar was to be expected on Monday with 28 feet waves predicted for Seven Stones wave buoy.

When I came home in the late afternoon, I had a little look at the forecasts. Along with the waves, there will be a gale of wind for the best part of the week, thankfully for us, from the south. If my post is still standing at the end of all that, I will feel quite confident to proceed with the other seven. It will be an utter disappointment if we are washed away by a big wave before I get there.

January 26th – Sunday

I will speak quietly for the benefit of readers north of the border. For clarity, I mean the far north of the UK rather than north of the Cornish border, which would be roughly the Bristol Channel. In that far flung land they celebrate one of their poets who wrote stuff in an unintelligible dialect that I suspect even the broadest of Scottish speakers find hard to understand. I understand that much whisky would have been consumed with the innards of a few sheep.

Burns night did come to mind a few days ago and I just fancied a bit of haggis. I am sure that a few of the butchers hereabouts would do a fair impersonation of one or even import them and I thought to go and buy one. Of course, with product ordering and post driving I forgot all about it. It is likely there might be one left over on Monday, hopefully at half price.

Since I did not have a Burns Night hangover, heading up the range for a bit of a shoot seemed an ideal thing to pass the time. The Missus and I had independently been up half the night with the little girl again. We suspect she had a bit of a chill from the day at The Farm. The last disturbance was mine and she had me up at five o'clock. She had not woken me at the usual time but the sound of rain on the skylight did that for me instead.

It was still raining when she eventually got up and we had a short walk out and got a bit wet. It was also still raining when I headed to the truck to be on my way, although perhaps not quite as heavily as it had before. I was aware that it was supposed to be a tad breezy but had been blissfully unaware of it in The Cove. As I drove up the hill, I could feel the truck being pushed around and the hardly shrubs along the side of the road looked like a row of dancers shaking their bottoms in voluminous skirts.

I was the first up to the range and wondered if I might be the only one. It takes a lot of weather to cancel the event and while I took my time lifting the netting at the front of the firing point the ringleaders arrived. Not long after that there was enough of us for a decent bit of shooting, and we knuckled down and got on with it. Even as we were setting up the courses of fire, the rain was starting to finish altogether, and the wind was diminishing. I briefly checked with Land's End weather station and discovered their peak was 72 miles per hour at nine o'clock.

Apart from a bit of breeze that was inconsequential mainly due to its direction, the weather did not play against us too much. For the wetter first half of proceedings, we fired from inside the firing point only stepping out to reface targets or setup metal plates. Later in the piece, we ventured outside and only had to pause for twenty minutes when another band of heavy rain blew through.

I was not party to the type of shooting being carried out in the afternoon, so I departed shortly after having a spot of dinner and some social time in the clubhouse. ABH was waiting for me when I got back, and I took her around the block. There were a number of people coming and going from the car park to have a geek at the stirred up sea conditions and it variously flogging and crashing over the Harbour wall. I imagine there will be a whole host of weather watchers tomorrow, although it seems likely it may not be quite as spectacular as 2008 for a number of factors.

We avoided any more rain for the rest of the afternoon and into the evening. It was the sort of afternoon for staying in and being lazy, but our alarm system had other ideas. At around four o'clock the outside sounder went off. I went to the repeater alarm panel in the living room and discovered that it had completely lost power. I headed to the shop and the master panel to silence the alarm and found that although there was power to the unit, it would not let me reset the system.

After trying for several minutes various combinations of buttons I called the service engineer. A very pleasant man answered the telephone and he also had me try various combinations of buttons which presumably had a better chance of success than my combinations since he probably knew what he was doing. If he did, he had no more success with his combination of buttons than I did. He said that it was a likely to be a short circuit for some reason, possibly weather related and that the alarm sounder would go off in fifteen minutes as it was on a timer.

An hour later, the alarm was still ringing in my ears, so I called the very pleasant man back and he promised that he would be with us as soon as he could. The Missus said that she wondered how long it would be before someone knocked on the door to ask if we knew our alarm was going off. It was not a knock on the door, but one of the very excellent Shore Crew who was passing by telephoned to ask if we knew our alarm was going off. I told him I had trouble hearing him as there was a klaxon ringing in my ear and I thanked him for pointing out that it was our alarm system sounding off because otherwise I would never have known. He said I was welcome, although it sounded a bit like 'fantastic wit', although it was a bit garbled by me being deaf and a bell ringing in my ear 'ole.

It was after dark when the engineer arrived having driven in poor conditions from east of Camborne. It did not take him long to nail the problem down to the LED light strip in the outside sounder box. A drop of water had wormed its way in and had sat astride two LEDs and shorted the circuit. He removed the LED strip, which we would have asked for when it was installed had we remembered because it looks tacky glowing there on our nice new fascia.

The rain was just starting to set in again when our man was up his ladder fixing the alarm. He narrowly avoided getting too wet because it came back with a bit of a vengeance after he left, chased by the rain all the way. Fortunately, it dried up again just ahead of taking ABH out for her last run. How lucky am I.

January 27th – Monday

At some point during the night a thunderstorm passed by waking me with the initial flash of lightening. It did not last very long and judging by the rumblings of thunder, it was not that close either. I checked later in the day when I had five minutes and three or four strikes were just west of Longships out to sea and one around Crown Mines. That being the case, it was most deceptive as I would have said they were south of us.

The lighting came with some hail that clattered on the skylight and disturbed ABH. She took a little while to calm down again, but I took longer. I had been in a deep sleep and the sudden awakening had obviously disturbed my equilibrium and set me thinking of putting posts in the ground.

We were all late getting up, although some of us were later than others. When ABH eventually surfaced I took her for her morning walk. She was not keen and even less so when she discovered that the southerly breeze that we should righteously have been sheltered from, was fair near blowing her ears off. It was not doing much for the stability of my hat either and I could not blame the little girl for making a quick detour into the RNLI car park. We were back home two minutes later.

I had not attended the gymnasium on Wednesday or Friday last week in favour of having more time at The Farm. I also reasoned that the effort I was expending there equated to a blistering session at the gymnasium. Whether that was true or not, it sounded pretty good to me. When my dickie knee started complaining toward the end of last week, I surmised that although my upper body was getting enough exercise, perhaps my legs needed a better work out. With that in mind, I resolved to go to the gymnasium this morning.

I did not need any particular inducement to go, as I still enjoy my visits, although perhaps less so when it is bitterly cold. It was not particularly cold this morning but out in the breeze that was robust to say the least, it did feel somewhat nippy. I was glad to close the door of the gymnasium on it, but it still took me half a session to warm up a little. I had thought to only do exercises related to my legs, but my routine is so ingrained, I did everything anyway and felt much better for it. My rowing time was abysmal, but I reckoned that should be expected after the effort put in at The Farm.

The day was shaping up nicely by the time I came away from the gymnasium. The skies were relatively clear but for microscopic particles of spray floating everywhere and dancing in the wind. Even just an hour after low water, the sea was churning in the bay and completely blown out by the wind. I had completely forgotten to look at the swell direction – southwesterly, I discovered later – but I do not think knowing would have made much difference. It was chaotic out there. As I approached home and came into view of Tribbens, the channel between Cowloe and the shore, giant and intimidating waves were piling in towards the Harbour wall. They were a while off coming over the top, but already there were several cars in the car park here for a peek at the threatening sea and to see if waves would come over Pedn-men-du.

When I slipped out with ABH soon after I got back, I thought it best to avoid the beach. At the top of the slipway, I changed my mind because there was plenty of clear sand and the seas state our side of the wall was still relatively well behaved. For the first time in weeks, it was also devoid of a single strand of weed. I warned the little girl to stay clear of the water, nevertheless, and like a small child, she did exactly what she was told not to do.

She was there long before I had got halfway down the slipway and headed straight for the tideline. She was never in any danger, I was just being overprotective, but the waves were running up the beach a fair way forcing her to quickly jump out of the way. When I looked down Tribbens to see a huge set travelling in towards us, it did give me pause for thought and thanked Mother Nature for giving the little girl paws for running smartly away.

We walked around the block after that. It was safer and less likely to give me palpitations. I was still amazed that a south southwesterly wind was packing such a punch this side of Pedn-men-du. It was not like it was overly severe, reaching 55 to 60 miles per hour gusts consistently through the day. As we came to the top of the western slip, I was very nearly sent back down again as one of the stronger gusts caught me off balance.

I had no intention of going to The Farm. Putting up posts in this weather would have been no fun and trying to stand still enough to balance a post upright, impossible. The Missus, however, was keen. I took her point that our time with the digger was running out and wasted time was wasted money. Happily, the work she wanted to do was preparatory, clearing enough of the barn for me to get the tractor in and extract the tipper trailer we have in there. While she did that, I removed the boring tool from the back of the tractor so that it too was ready to hook up the trailer.

By the time we left home, the skies were already darkening and started to look very forbidding. The sea state was ramping up nicely with bigger waves racing across the bay in a disorderly tumble. I would suggest that as fierce as it looked, it did not really meet expectations and came nowhere near matching the maelstrom of 2008. I had hoped to stop at the top of the hill with my proper camera on the way back to take

some pictures of waves topping Pedn-men-du. Indeed, as we went up, there was already a small knot of photographers with big lenses set up at the side of the road.

As we neared The Farm gate, the worst of the rain came is sideways across us. So thick was it the lane ahead became no more than a notional idea. The gate opened by itself once I had undone the catch. The wind was still punchy but not extreme and the showers persisted on and off while we were there which just made our work uncomfortable rather than difficult. It took us no more than an hour to do the preparation, and we are set to get straight to it tomorrow.

I did not bother stopping off for photographs on the way back. We had missed the height of the waves, and the light was not conducive to taken memorable pictures. I am sure that there will be a slew of computer enhanced photographs around on the Internet later. I am afraid I am still of the view that a photograph should reflect the reality of the shot and if the photographer is any good, the picture should not need enhancing. There again, I am a grumpy shopkeeper who did not get to take a picture at the right time.

We sheltered at home for the rest of the evening. There were a couple of run outs with ABH, and it was clear that although it was still breezy, the wind was abating and the showers lessening on frequency and weight. The roar of the sea was still a constant background rush but like air traffic when you live next to an airport, it somehow fades from the consciousness eventually.

The wind is set to diminish further tomorrow but is set to go northwesterly eventually, so right in our faces. Something to look forward to, then.

January 28th – Tuesday

As promised, the wind came around to the west this morning and was just edging towards the northwest by the end of the day. Land's End recorded a slowing down of the wind from yesterday into the mid 50s miles per hour. St Ives did a little better – or worse, as you please – at just over 60 miles per hour. After I had been out in it in the afternoon in our most exposed areas, mid 50s seemed about right for here. After months in exile, it was good to see Gwennap Head, windiest place in the universe, back online during the day with speeds above 80 miles per hour.

ABH was not quite so brief this morning with her first walk out, although she clearly is not overly keen on a brisk wind. We made it down to the Harbour beach at the end of the morning too, where she enjoyed a run around on the weed clear sand. It is evident that the sea threw the baby out with the bathwater and got rid of about six feet of sand as well. I forgot to look at the big beach to see how that fared. It is hard to imagine that it could lose much more sand from the lower portions of the beach, at least. I will check at the next low water if I remember.

I had thought that we would be heading to The Farm today, which was what all that shifting about yesterday was for. I must not have had the memorandum because apparently it was a shopping day and taking Mother to the opticians (for eyes) in the afternoon. That left me in a bit of a pickle, first for having my expectations knocked over like a toy brick tower and left in pieces on the ground, and secondly for what I was going to do instead. I had thought to pick up a few of those scattered bricks and head up to The Farm anyway with ABH in tow. There is still some counting to do there – post erecting was out of the question – and I could see up the supports to be used for later post erecting. However, the Missus would be gone for some while, and while I would have been happy to walk home, I was not sure it was the best use of my time.

Instead, I decided to stay at home. The decision was made shortly after I returned home from my late morning walk with ABH. It is possible that discovering the punchy westerly had inveigled a fell chill in my bones after such a short trip might have had some bearing on that decision. It was not as if I would be sitting around scratching my behind, there was shop stuff to do.

After my trip to the trade shows, I had a list of new items and repeat orders from new and existing suppliers. Our main beachware supplier would be expecting our order for the show specials, discounted items with a limited time to order, which needed to be with them sooner rather than later. Making a list might seem a simple thing to do but there are considerations and dependencies surrounding the process, like do we have enough money, and will there be customers for such and such an item if we order it early or can it wait.

It means sitting at the computer for a few hours with the lists, brochures and prices beside me and Internet windows open for various websites and price lists. Putting posts in the ground is far more fun but this too needs to be done and if the weather had been better, it would not have been.

When the Missus is away, ABH becomes very placid and generally I do not get a peep out of her. It seems that even separation anxiety has its limits and a while into my work I was being pawed and pestered at my seat. A couple of minutes smoothing sends her off for another half an hour, which becomes fifteen minutes after the next one. Eventually, something needs to be done and feeling it too, I decided that a decent stank somewhere was required for both of us.

Going up the cliff was out of the question unless I wished to be pushed all the way to Land's End. The usual walk to The Valley and back down the beach was also out of the question because there was no beach to come back on. That just left walking down to The Valley and turning up the hill to the path that runs across the top of it. We would come back across the top field, along Maria's Lane and down Stone Chair Lane. We would still be exposed to the wind but at least not subject to accelerated gusts channelling up the cliff and knocking us off our feet.

Kitted up in walking shorts and my best weatherproof coat I felt quite chipper about the whole venture. I did sense a certain reluctance from my friend who started to drag her heels a little halfway down the road. She took much coaxing to get her onto the Coast Path in the Beach car park but after that, erm, she took less coaxing. It was not until we were heading along the footpath at the top of The Valley that she sensed we were heading in the direction of home and picked up the pace a bit.

It was blustery. There was no escaping the fact. We were buffeted every step of the way until we were coming down Stone Chair Lane that was a little sheltered by the shrubbery either side of us. It was not unpleasant but unsteady on my pins on stable ground in light airs, standing upright and moving forward in a straight line was a challenge. ABH may not have had the beach to run on, but we met with a neighbour and his dog at a convenient spot on the Coast Path and lost the pair of them to play for ten minutes off the lead. She had another galivant in the top field which is a perfectly safe place to cavort when the car park is not in use.

She pulled me most of the way after that. We still arrived home ahead of Mother and the Missus, and I thought that I might have time to finish off my ordering work. The walk we did is probably a little more than two miles and with the wind battering us, was quite energetic. ABH clearly did not think so and plagued me for attention and games all the while until the Missus got back. If she does fancy a rest in the afternoon, I must settle on the sofa with a cushion on my lap so she can curl up there. It sounds very cute but when I have work to do, it is not in the least helpful.

We had avoided the rain on all our ventures out. By the time we went for our walk in the afternoon, the rain had cleared out and we had some brightness from time to time. As the tide returned and the sea still in flux and bashing on the rocks, there was enough spray in the air for it to feel like drizzle. Our remaining walks around the block required some light waterproofs.

By the look of it I will need my full metal jacket waterproofs tomorrow and we are definitely heading for The Farm to gain maximum benefit.

January 29th – Wednesday

ABH decided to get me out of bed an hour earlier than usual today. I have no idea why. Revenge perhaps for dragging her around The Cove in a force 8 gale yesterday. In turn, we were a little earlier heading out around the block first thing, which was perhaps fortunate. Very shortly after we got back in the rain set in and was with us all day. Perhaps we have a psychic hound.

We had already put off going up to The Farm yesterday so it looked like we may have made the wrong choice of days. It was already miserable enough to be working in but a short while after the rain set in, so did a bitterly cold northeasterly wind. It was not as punchy as yesterdays but twice as cold and more direct.

There was clearly no hurry for getting up there as the Missus and ABH stayed in bed, and I really could not blame them. I got on with the work I was doing yesterday and knocked out three orders including the big beachware order which will come just ahead of opening. The latter is a bit of a draft just now as I will have to work up the courage to commit to such expense, there are big scary numbers involved.

Talking of big scary numbers, I spent some time yesterday trying to get to grips with our interim tax payment that is due at the end of Friday. We required confirmation from the taxman as to just how much we owe. The accountant has provided us with how much they have calculated I owe but I like to wait for my form SA302 from the tax office, which confirms it. Given that it is due on Friday, the tax office is cutting it a bit fine and if I do not have it, I will have to pay what the account thinks it is.

I had the notion that I would be able to login to my tax account on the Internet. It tells me that I can enquire through this portal on the information that is on my SA302, so I had a go. I pressed the appropriate buttons, and it informed me that my self-assessment had not been filed. In a panic I called the accountant and she informed me that my self-assessment had indeed been filed in December. I looked again at my account on the HMRC website and it states that it will only show the SA302 information if I had filed my self-assessment through the portal, which I had not. The accountant had through some other route.

I was quite dismayed. Surely, if the tax office had received my self-assessment it should be evident on the website no matter how it was filed. So too should the information about how much I owe. It troubles me greatly that the taxman insists that I pay my tax on time – it will sanction me else – but apparently is not compelled to provide me with timely information that allows me to do it.

It was becoming apparent that The Farm was off for the day. I cannot say that I was mightily upset about it but the wet and particularly the cold would have made the event exceedingly uncomfortable. The Missus would have been alright in her covered and heated cab, but my role would have been on and off the open top tractor and once off, would be getting back on a wet seat. On top of that, the ground would churn up under the tracks of the digger and there were several more excuses we thought of between us that made us both feel better about not going.

ABH too must have sensed that there was something not good about going out. I had taken her out earlier in the morning than usual and it was into the afternoon by the time she was keen to go out again. A while ago I mentioned that I had had consistently worn the same clothes when taking her out around The Cove. I said then that I would rue not dressing up and down for the weather – as Mummy used to say, 'you'll not feel the benefit'. How right she was.

It was bleddy bitter down on the Harbour beach. Anyone with any sense had stayed at home. That was everyone, because the car park was empty and there was not a

soul about. We hung about on the beach for a little while and, for a change, ran about a bit. It was not so bad with my back to the wind but when I had to walk in that direction it was like getting a slap in the face – not that I have had any slaps in the face. Maybe I have just not met the right person.

There was not much change to the beach from yesterday. We did explore a bit wider and discovered that under the short slip, right at the back against the Lifeboat station wall, there was a huge accumulation of rocks. Quite often when rocks appear on the beach there is a common misconception that they have arrived from somewhere else when, in fact, it is the sand that has been scoured away to reveal them. In this case, not only has the sand been scoured away but huge boulders have been piled up. The power of the sea is definitely not to be underestimated.

While the Missus and I cowered away in the semi-warmth of the flat, the workers of the much maligned council's arms' reach contractor were busy opposite working away in the rain and wind. They had been there Monday as well in the teeth of the gale doing essential works to keep us safe and the fabric of society whole. On these two occasions, the workers were there to remove the defunct telescope that has sat against the railings for possibly thirty years. In its place they erected two telescopes, one for tall people and another for short people. There is not even a requirement to put 20 pence in the slot to look through them, either. These are a free provision organised by the Parish Council, bless them.

Today, the workers arrived in three trucks – there was only one to erect two telescopes on Monday. I cannot possibly tell you what the division of labour was, perhaps one to deliver the timber another to construct the information board and the third to install it on the pavement. There is no information on the information board as yet, not even who did what. It is a big board, and I cannot imagine how they might fill it unless they use big print. When I took ABH out just before teatime, I had a squint through the tall persons' telescope. The field of view is tiny, and the depth of field is such that everything near and far is in focus, which is just as well because there is no adjustment that I could determine. It crossed my mind that in the summer I should put a collection tin beside it. I would imagine that I would do quite well. I did have a look in the bathroom mirror just in case I had been left with a comedy black ring around my eye. I had not, but the next person might.

I put on my wet weather lined work over-trousers when I took ABH out before tea. They are made by a Swedish company and do the job. I wish I had thought of wearing them earlier. When I came back it was only gloves and a ski mask that would have completed the fully insulated trip out. I have gloves in the truck but no ski mask, having never felt compelled to go skiing – or rob a bank. I will just have to suffer.

It was not until the last time we went out, just before bedtime that the wind had started to diminish. It had a last fling at us from the north just before it went and launched a 50 miles per hour offensive, knocking our bin about and, by the sound of

it, several of our neighbours' bins too. The rain had stopped earlier but the cold extended into the night. We hope for better tomorrow.

January 30th – Thursday

At last, the weather was on our side. It really was quite, well, Farm type weather, so we dutifully and variously stayed in bed, fiddled with websites selling things and generally procrastinated for half the morning.

At least it was only half the morning, and we did get to The Farm and actually started doing things from before the middle of the day. I left the Missus there getting going with her digger while I went over to St Buryan to collect Mother who was joining us being as the weather was kind. When the sun is out, it really is quite toasty in the cabin with its south facing windows and the sun was properly out between the occasional fluffy white clouds. So warm was it that I had to strip off two layers before I could continue working.

I was under strict instructions to stop by the shop at the top – again. We had already been once for milk when the Missus remembered that I would have to stop to do Mother's lottery ticket. I think it is the Thunderball that she participates in and is very successful, too. Anytime I have been in to renew her ticket and check the previous week, there have always been some winnings to collect. It is so frequent that the two shops comment about it and we have a bit of a joke with her any time we are collecting on her behalf. Today, low and behold, she won another prize. The till machine plays a little tune just so the whole shop knows you are about to walk out with money. I can just see how useful that might be in a rougher area than this one. I told the ladies at the counter that when Mother shuffles off, I will have her foot made into a keyring.

Fortunately, I was not mugged on the way out of the shop, and I think we are quite safe at The Farm. Naturally, the first thing to do on arrival is to have a cup of tea, which is why we stopped for milk. I went to the trouble of installing a gas hob in the cabin, so the Missus uses a portable one instead. It reminds me that I need to replace the gas bottle outside at the back that I made a weather proof box for. It might tempt the Missus to use the plumbed in ring, perhaps.

I had thought that we would plough straight into earth moving, which is why we freed up the tipping trailer in the barn. I had already opened the double doors and taken the cover off the tractor when she told me she had some more work to do with the digger before we got to that stage. I left everything as it was and cleaned the tractor seat of the pool of rainwater that has collected there. The whole purpose of the makeshift cover, the covering from our scaffolding last year, was to prevent that from happening. I had gone to some lengths to strap it down to stop the sheet being dislodged in the wind, so that was very disappointing. It was only later when I was

putting it back on again that I notice the large hole in the sheet right above the seat. I shall remember to bring up some gaffer tape tomorrow.

With the Missus clearly distracted for a while, I decided that I may as well get on with planting the 6x6 posts. Once they are in place, I can crack on at pace. The back four were always going to be tricky because I would need to get the heavy posts over the raised beds and then at a steep angle into the post holes. With the near ones, and indeed the rear ones at either end, I could get the end of the post lined up with the hole then walk up the pole raising it as I went.

I could not walk all the way up to the two middle ones at the back, being that they were behind the raised beds. For these I heaved the post across the raised beds then, standing between the rows, lifted the post into the hole as far as I could get it. I had expected gravity to take it the rest of the way but clearly, for the small gods of grumpy shopkeepers, it was far more fun suspending gravity at that precise location for the duration of my efforts. The post stuck firm at the lip of the hole at an unreasonable angle.

Considering my options, the only way I could see to push the post the rest of the way was to use a substantial stick. The bad news was that I could not now let go of the post lest it crash down and ruin my head or worse still wreck the post hole. Fortunately, there was good news in that the area of the old polytunnel is strewn with detritus a part of which was a plank within grasp. There was further bad news because the plank was rotten and as likely to snap as it was to allow me to push the post the rest of the way. Happily, it held firm, and the post popped into the hole without too much damage to me or the hole.

I ensured that I was properly supplied with a stout stick when I did the next one. Also, I made sure that I could not only reach the support posts that I had arrayed within arms' reach while holding the post upright, but also the impact driver with which to screw the supports to the post. It is good to note that I am learning as I go along and the next time I have to put eight 6x6 posts into the ground for some project, I will get someone else to do it for me.

My next consternation was that despite not having over-extended the post holes for the remaining posts, two bags of cement still stopped a little less than 100 millimetres from the lip of the hole. Probably another half a bag each would have done the job but given that the first post seemed solid, I wondered on the efficacy of doing so. I sent a note to the Highly Professional Craftsperson for advice, and he called me straight back. He reasoned that, given my holes were deeper than the minimum, it would almost certainly be sufficient. The only proviso being that concrete to the lip would prevent the accumulation of water at the base of the post and thus help prolong its life. It was only afterwards, most probably at three o'clock in the morning, that I realised that all the posts would be on the inside and I concluded back filling them with earth would be fine.

As a small aside, I should note that I had asked the building supplier to estimate the number of bags of concrete to send me. He had allowed two per hole which would have been spot on had I not made my holes deeper than the recommended minimum and not had to extend one. I will need to go back to purchase another two bags as will run out at the last post.

As the Missus chugged on with her digger work as the sun dropped in the sky, it was apparent that we were not going to get around to earth moving today. Since my post planting and concreting had reached a smooth and efficient rhythm, I concluded that I probably had time for one more post. I finished my day having planted three posts and now have just four to go. Had I not to go and fetch more concrete, I would have high hopes of finishing tomorrow but that will all depend on how long the earth moving takes.

The clouds had rolled in not long after I had shed my two additional layers. I found that I needed to put one back on and also shut the door to the cabin to keep Mother warm. We have a gas heater that we can deploy – and a carbon monoxide alarm – but it was not cold enough yet for that. I was warm enough planting posts and wrapping the tractor back up, which was when I noticed the hole in the covering. As the Missus tidied up her work, I ran ABH down to the end of the field for a bit of exercise.

It became apparent, especially as we will be working at the bottom of the field tomorrow, that I should have run the flail mower down there while it was still on the tractor. I fancy it is too late now. Walking down the field was strenuous having to lift my feet high on each stride to get over clumps of grass. Even then there was resistance and if I felt further leg exercise was required because I had again skipped a gymnasium session, this made up for it.

What was entirely unnecessary and certainly unpleasant was ABH finding, and subsequently taking delight in, rolling with extreme conviction in some mire a wild creature had left behind. We endured the company of this country aroma all the way back home. How truly blessed we are living in such an unspoilt part of this country – and being in possession of a hose with which to remove the unspoilt country from another bleddy hound.

January 31st – Friday

The Meteorological Office pushed forth a social media message late yesterday informing us that the high pressure we had yesterday was a fleeting thing and how it was all going to change. It then went on to say that a band of rain was on its way and that we should be most disappointed.

I was disappointed for all of five seconds when I worked out that the band of rain would push through during the night and all would be hunky dory by morning tide.

True to their word, ABH and I had a completely dry, if a little cold, walk around the block first thing. The day blossomed not long after with extended periods of blue sky and sunshine and by the end of the day, it was utterly glorious and had been for most of the afternoon.

This lucky break could only mean one thing: Farm Day, you lucky, lucky people. We would have gone anyway unless the weather was a proper stinker at which point I am sure the Missus and I could have convinced ourselves again that it was in the interests of world peace to stay at home. As it was, we had the bit between our teeth. I had posts to plant and the Missus had land to clear, anti-weed matting to deploy and earth to move. The only pilchard in my custard was that I would run out of cement before the last post, which was a tad irritating.

We headed Farmwards in the late morning – we are dedicated but not compulsive – both set on our individual courses, which we set about the moment we arrived. ABH must be a little disconcerted by this division in which she is excluded. She seems to do alright and pleases herself by exploring, resting in the truck or wandering about the environs of the cabin. The Missus and I met occasionally for cups of tea and a short sit down out on the decking – it was far too warm in the cabin - during which ABH would join us. We would then disperse to our separate roles again.

I finished off the remaining post on the back four and the other corner post at the front. I reviewed the line up of the back four and was hugely disappointed that the second one in is out of alignment. It was obvious after the third in a row was installed but when there were only two in the row, they looked perfectly right.

I have used posts in the ground and taut string between them, measured and measured again and still I slipped up. I also forgot that the original polytunnel was skew-whiff and as well as lining up in a row I was supposed to be lining up across, too. When things look perfectly straight, they were actually not, and it is immensely hard to try and overcome perception with reality. The errors, while irreversible – the posts are set in concrete – can be overcome as the cladding is flexible and I can insert wedges, if necessary, when attaching offset beams.

Perhaps I should not berate myself so. I am a grumpy shopkeeper and not a builder and if this greenhouse remains upstanding at the end of the project and is fit for purpose, I should be happy with that. Since the grumpy shopkeeping did not go all that well last year, maybe I should keep quiet about that claim, too.

By the middle of the afternoon, all but one of the posts was in the ground. I had adequate time to complete the last one, but no concrete. I had also promised to help the Missus with the earth moving. We had a short discussion about what was to be done when and decided that I had sufficient time to run off to the builders' merchant for the concrete. I also needed some beam hangers that I thought were on the list I left for delivery but obviously not. There were also brackets and smaller nails for use

with the 3x2 timber for making frames where they were needed. I then hurried back to The Farm.

The sun was sinking in the western sky all the while I was on my way to St Just and back. I arrived at The Farm with enough time to assist with the first load of earth to be shifted. My main role was to keep ABH out of the way while the Missus drove the tractor and trailer down to the end of the field. I shut ABH in the cabin where she settled into her bed on the table where she can see out across the field while I cleared up my tools and equipment as there was no time left for my last post. With the sun low on the horizon and my aging frame ready for a beer, it was time to bring farming to a close for the day.

Meanwhile back in The Cove – this is The Sennen Cove Diary, in case you were thinking you took a wrong turn a while back, dear reader. Earlier in the day, the much maligned council's arms' length contractor reappeared in The Cove. Having only been there on Wednesday to set up the empty information board, they had returned to take it away again. I surmised that it was to complete the information that is to go on the board. I have spent time in my life doing what used to be called 'time and motion'. When I did it they called it business process consulting or engineering or somesuch. Very roughly, I might have kindly suggested a monetary saving by making a single trip to do some work instead of two or three. I was sure then that it would never catch on.

I mentioned that I was not sure what information might adorn such a large display in The Cove. The Missus informed me that there is another, also now missing, at the end of Maria's Lane and another at Mayon opposite the garage. If I am puzzled about the information on The Cove's board, I am utterly perplexed about what information they might have on the other two. I must assume that someone on the Parish Council is blessed with a vivid imagination.

I did remember to have a look at the big beach when it was low water today as I said that I might earlier in the week. I had to rely on a photograph from about a week or so ago as I could not recall without it. It is still not exactly definitive, but I would say that the area of rocks is slightly smaller now, although there is not a great deal in it. At least it did not get noticeably worse.

By the end of tomorrow, I am hoping that the greenhouse will look a bit more like a building. It will rest on how much help I have to give the Missus as judging from the impact of one trailer load of earth had on the cleared space, she will need many more. Well, it beats staying at home in front of the television or knitting socks.