

DIARY 2024

May 1st - Wednesday

The scaffolders and the builders turned up this morning to make a start after a two week hiatus. The builders were here to move all the various bits building materials they had carelessly left where the scaffolders wanted to put scaffolding and the scaffolders to reconfigure the scaffolding into the bits the builders had vacated. Fortunately, no horseshoe bats had moved in during the break and the collared doves were quietly taken away and murdered. (Not really, Mr Packham, if you are reading. They were asked politely to move on.)

It was a cracking morning for such things, too. The sun was shining from the very off and it stayed dry and reasonably temperate. Almost miraculously, The Cove filled with trekkers passing through and more casual visitors mooching about and occupying the tables of the café opposite. Quite what they made of the merry sound of power drivers undoing bolts is anyone's guess, but it was soon very testing on my false ear enhanced hearing.

I called the cash and carry people early to try and resolve our outstanding credit and got to speak with the elusive lady in accounts. I did not fully understand what she was saying at the time, but it amounted to the issue having been resolved and I should no longer worry. What passed for 'resolved' was two further invoices for services that had hitherto not been raised for both orders amounting, very roughly to what they owed me for goods not delivered. Both invoices detailed 'handball' charges, that is the carrying of stock from the cages into the shop. Of course, had I known that this was being charged, I would have sat back and watched our man bring the delivery in by himself.

One of the invoices had a 'delivery' charge on it, which was odd because the company adds delivery to the price of each item and therefore I had effectively been charged twice for it. Being a somewhat cynical grumpy shopkeeper, it struck me that these charges that had never been raised before on our deliveries, had been added to avoid paying the credit. Furthermore, one of the invoices related to the order placed at the start of April and was therefore an afterthought. Naturally, our lady in accounts was unavailable when I called back to discuss the matter. I am now very glad that our original supplier has come good, else we would be stuck with these crooks.

The boys really cracked on with the scaffolding. The new lengths at the back of the property will wait until Friday, they told me, but all the rest was nearly all taken away. We are left with one storey at the front and similar halfway down the side opposite our steps. It looks very strange indeed without and I had a sudden sense of insecurity with it gone. I told one of the boys it was like having a bushy beard for 40 years then shaving it off.

It had not been a particularly quiet morning and getting away for the afternoon would have been pleasant had it not been to a shuffling off ceremony. Two of us had been asked to represent the station for our ex-winchman whose turn it was up at the venue in Camborne. I took one of our neighbours who was short of a ride. On balance, I think it would have been preferable not to take the truck which has not been washed for some time. I know that we were not exactly going to be part of the motorcade, but it seemed embarrassing, nonetheless. I was going to park a little distance from everyone else but when we arrived, we had no choice. Our man was very popular and had known a lot of people in a number of jobs over the years.

We congregated at the place where they take our man away and replace him with fond memories, and they did it very well. As it turned out there were at least a dozen Lifeboat crew there, past and present, and together we formed a guard of honour and one of our number joined the pall bearers. All very nicely done even if not one of us knew what we were doing.

I had not realised when we left that the truck was low on fuel. My plan to fill up on the way was scotched when we fell in behind two tractors at the top of the hill and followed one all the way into town. It necessitated a detour through Hayle on the way back to a small independent fuel station that I favour. I also had plans to stop at the post office when we got back to post a parcel to Brittany where a regular visitor had discovered that we sell goods on our website shop. You may have seen labels for it, dear reader as you pass by on your way to read The Diary each day. Just thought that I would mention it in case it had eluded you.

With two additional stops we were already behind everyone else leaving the event. We were further delayed by heavy traffic along the route and narrowly avoided being involved in some sort of incident that had blocked the Longrock bypass. In all it took us much longer to get back than our fellow mourners for which I was roundly admonished. Well, that is life being a grumpy shopkeeper.

Despite it all, it was quite a lovely day and warmer than we had had it since the middle of December. We had been in short sleeve order up at Camborne and walking around The Cove later in the evening it was still perfectly temperate. We do rather hope that this is no flash in the pan.

May 2nd – Thursday

Oh, well, that was disappointing. Our little taste of better weather yesterday was fleeting, a mere tease. Today we were back to grey and the breeze from the northwest was chilly though mercifully light. It was a good job I had not cast any clouts, well, not permanently anyway.

Just for added measure we got a shower of rain at the end of the morning. Mother had told me the forecast that she had seen suggested rain for yesterday and today.

The Meteorological Office had decided it was not going to rain on either day, so between them they got it bang on.

It certainly did not help encourage anyone into The Cove and we were quiet the whole day long. There were a few more people around in the afternoon but through the morning I was denied any human interaction at all – and no customers, either.

I thought that I had better do something rather than nothing and finished off the barcodes for the jewellery stand. I then went around the shop to see if I had missed anything and discovered that of the few things we have been selling, the fishing lures had taken a bit of a beating. It is mainly a small group of local boys responsible for the depletion. They are in several times a week when the sea state is suitable and head off to the end of the Harbour wall. It is heartening to see a group like that finding some harmless pastime to consume their free time and they are all good and amiable lads. I saw them later in the evening. One had grabbed a spider crab by hand, no snorkel and mask, just dived down and got it. Pleased as punch he was and told me his mother was mortified.

The last time I placed an order for lures and jigs, the supplier stepped in to recommend some. It was a bit of a risk, but it paid off and the ones they sent have been very popular. It is comforting to know that there are still suppliers out there who know what they are about and have their customers' best interests at heart. I reordered a bunch of them to replace our missing stock.

The afternoon saw a clearing of our cloud blanket and a broad arrangement of blue sky and white fluffy clouds. It apparently offered not the slightest encouragement to visitors to come and enjoy it and we were just as quiet as we had been for most of the day. By the afternoon, I had also run out of things to do, or things that I felt I needed to do and found myself at the bottom of a bored stupor. I was not even compelled to rage at the thirty percent mark-up our pet insurer had deemed necessary to levy onto next year's cover for ABH. She has not materially changed much in the twelve months since I commissioned it, although conceivably she might be thirty percent bigger. I will consider this overnight and just pay up because it will be much easier than filling out numerous online quotes and forever more battling away the ensuing avalanche of messages and telephone calls asking why I did not sign up with the companies I enquired with plus all the one they sold my details on to.

It was a good job that someone had organised a launch of the Lifeboat for a spot of Thursday evening training. At the very least it was something constructive to do and made me feel so much more valued – even if it was me doing the valuing. Mind, I probably get a better rate that way.

We launched both boats into the calm bay and a rising tide at around seven o'clock for them to go tearing off in two different directions. We have not got quite as far as full spring tide, in fact we are halfway between neaps and spring, so there was plenty

of water in the Harbour to launch the Inshore boat. For a change and because we were a little light on numbers on the shore, I took the Tooltrak out. It was perfectly mild for a change and I eschewed any additional layer when I went out to launch the boat. Unfortunately, I thought the same when it came to recovery when the temperature had dropped some and the northwesterly breeze had kicked back in again. I was down there in the cab for some time, too, waiting on the boat because someone said it was coming in when it was not.

Aside from that we fell into our respective roles and executed our duties with calm professionalism. We even managed to maintain some decorum when the boat arrived back in the bay, enough so to carry out what looked like a textbook recovery up the long slipway at around a quarter to my bedtime. This extended a bit because there was some fuelling up to do and I eventually got away as it was going dark at around half past nine o'clock when I took ABH for her last walk. We are, after all, a very dedicated, very excellent Shore Crew.

May 3rd – Friday

I might have expected a bit of a corker today when I was out with ABH in the early evening yesterday. It is just that so many times it has looked good the previous day and turned to rubbish the following morning I wondered if I should dare hope. It was therefore most gratifying to find the sun shining and there being some real warmth in it right from the outset today.

It would also have been pleasant if the upturn in the weather had translated into a material improvement in business, but it did not. We did see additional people today and perhaps I should not be too fussy on a change over day at the beginning of May, but it is frustrating, nevertheless.

I managed to slip away to the gymnasium after missing out on my Wednesday session. As it transpired, I would not have been able to go on Wednesday anyway because someone with a big drill was making a hole in the floor where my rowing machine usually resides. Given the amount of concrete dust and mud across the floor and on the walls, it was a big job. I still managed to undertake a blistering session, but no records were broken today.

I understand that the Sennen Cove Recreation Centre, for that is its proper name, has won its planning permission to knock the place down and put up a two storey building in its place. The plan has not found universal approval and I was not overly delighted to note that they intended to put the gymnasium upstairs. I will have enough exercise in the gymnasium without having to struggle up stairs to get to it. Anyway, I presumed that the drilling was part of the preparatory work.

If you are interested in such things, dear reader, the people involved have done much work in securing funding from various sources to pay for the rebuild. They

need to raise some funds themselves, as it is not done to be seen to be wholly reliant on handouts. There is a crowdfunding page which launches on May 8th or your hard earned can be sent direct – which might include paying for a stairlift for grumpy shopkeepers.

I had come back to the shop shortly before the middle of the day having spent fifteen minutes taking ABH around the block. She is nearly back to normal after her little operation but still needs to wear her romper suit for another week. She has made no particular fuss about wearing it and is now completely at ease wearing it – but what do I know. She might be harbouring dark thoughts about it even now as I write.

Let us hope not and instead think about the afternoon that passed without hardly being noticed. It also passed with the shop being hardly noticed, either. We had a few people coming and going, but I had enough time to distribute the fishing tackle delivery to our shelves. It was absolutely astounding that it had arrived at our door less than twenty-four hours after I had placed the order. They either had very little else to do or were super efficient. It is more than can be said for the combined building trade sorting out our build. We have had three weeks of nothing happening but one day of frantic scaffold knocking down. It is not even in the configuration that will enable the back end of the roof to be done.

I sent a message to our builder to ask what my expectations should be for the coming weeks or possibly months and where, perhaps, we should hang the Christmas lights. He advised that he was just as irritated with the scaffolders not turning up as I was and apparently they are serving other clients before us. I was sort of expecting a bill from them for the reconfiguration, but I have heard nothing. It leaves me in a bit of a difficult position. I do not want to cause too much of a stir in case they had intended to do the reconfiguration under the original terms. I also dream of winning the lotto and believe fairies will come and do the housework overnight.

Having it all finished by the half term would have been a 'nice to have' but I think that is now out of reach. There is therefore no imperative to having it finished in a particular timescale as there are no cost implications that I can think of. We are losing out on saving by not having the solar panels installed but what we do not have we are not missing is possibly the way to think about that. In short, I have reached the point of ambivalence about the whole thing.

It was so pleasant in the evening that I took ABH out twice. It was also because she had been stuck inside for a good proportion of the day while the Missus continued her decorating of our bedroom. She set a target of moving back in there at the weekend, but I think that was a little ambitious. Again, there is no particular hurry other than we are both fed up with living in squalor. It was a bigger job than the other rooms, too.

We have a very serious damp issue in the corner that I suspect came from when the mews behind us was built and the gap at the back of our wall was filled in. It needs proper tanking against the damp that has the wall paper soaking after a few months. We might get around to that one day but in the interim the Missus put a couple of coats of PVA glue on the wall as an undercoat. We shall see how that works out, but she is single minded about it and it will certainly be finished before the weekend is out.

In the meanwhile, I shall gird my loins for a busy weekend – just as soon as the fairies have finished mopping the floor.

May 4th – Saturday

It was glorious again at the very first thing this morning, but we had rather more cloud turn up shortly after that took the edge off slightly. We were also blessed with a southeasterly breeze that due to our local phenomenon, blew in through the first electric sliding doorway in The Cove and made grumpy shopkeeper life a little chilly. The breeze must have started up after I had taken ABH out for a walk because I was fooled into thinking I could get away without a fleece. I thought very wrong and scurried up the stairs after half an hour of being open.

My coldness was not a result of being idle. Despite the breeze, we had an uplift in the number of customers frequenting the shop from early on in the morning. So much so it interrupted my breakfast. Ahead of any inkling of improvement I had diverted my attention to our ball display outside. I had been aware that my balls were dirty and could do with a brush off but more than that they were deflated after sitting out unattended for so long. I took the ball pump to them and then thought that while I was at it, I may as well bolster the meagre stock that was there with some more balls. This turned out to be a remarkably prescient as we sold all the additional stock by the early afternoon.

I was quite surprised that we also sold a number of swimsuits, flip flops and other beachware items. The additional cloud slipped away at some point leaving a much sunnier afternoon but even then, that southeasterly appeared to be keeping the temperature down. Perhaps it was a bit more sheltered on the beach and it was only in the shop it was Siberian.

I must have found my enthusiasm button because I managed to stock up the soft drinks fridge. It was mainly because we had a delivery from the local cash and carry that somehow manages to outprice the big boys on several items that we buy regularly. Had I not put the drinks out I would have struggled to find space in the store room that still has various boxes from upstairs clogging it up. I was very pleased with myself that I managed to clear the pile between customers.

I was also spurred into action regarding our display of keyrings and souvenir badges and patches. A lady came into the shop early on and asked if we had any of the 'tacky bottle opener keyrings'. I assured her that we had plenty and that they could be found down our tacky product aisle. She was duly delighted and bought one.

Many people might feel that we should have been offended by the use of such inflammatory language regarding our carefully selected and high quality products but frankly, what's in a name. That which we call a keyring bottle opener by any other name will still open bottles – until the soft metal it is made of shears off after a couple of goes - and as long as the customer shells out the appropriate number of shillings and is satisfied, why should I care what they call it.

The one thing I did care about was the parlous state of the display that was much depleted. I had avoided buying any such stock last year because I had plenty from the year before. This year, we have finally come to the end of most of the overstock and investment is required. There are two suppliers of such things that we use and so I fell upon their catalogues with a pad and pen at the ready. Once again, between customers, I cobbled together a couple of lists and will pursue these on Tuesday with the relevant supplier. Bit by bit and very carefully the shop is filling up in readiness for the season.

Just to add a little excitement and mystery to the day we had an almost launch of the Inshore boat to an injured party over at Gwenver in the middle of the day. It amounted to nothing for us, and the Cliff Team extracted the casualty over land and family took her along to hospital. In these parts waiting for an ambulance is only an option if you are not going to get better without one.

The mysterious part of that was a shout that actually happened later in the day. I had no customers at the time and was first to the Tooltrak and drove it down to the Harbour. I handed over to one of our keen and eager supplementary Tooktrak drivers, we have several, and having done the heroic bit went back to the shop. Because I abandoned, erm, boat so quickly, I never did find out why we were launching the Inshore boat. I do know that it headed up around Cape Cornwall rather rapidly and was then stood down after twenty minutes. I might find out later if I ask the right people, but it was clearly nothing particularly serious.

The shop coasted into closing time just as a rather pretty looking catamaran coasted into the bay under sail, which perhaps is not coasting but I shall claim poetic license. I seem to recall a similar one being here before but did not get a close enough look to confirm if it was our regular visitor. I thought that it might have moored for the night but had gone later when I looked.

Once again, I took ABH out twice in the evening. She was climbing the walls after tea. It must be most frustrating for a young pup being constrained to a slow amble around the block when what she really wants, and needs, is a good zoom around the

beach, chasing and playing. We are stuck with this until Thursday when I hope we will be given the all clear.

I did find out later why the Inshore launched. Someone had reported a fishing net in the water which was on the rocks by the time the boat got there. Still, the boat needs a good run every now and then and the youngsters that now respond to the calls are full of enthusiasm for it. Bully for them.

May 5th – Sunday

I was not expecting rain. Well, that is not such a surprise as I rarely look at the weather guess, but I do vaguely recall the Radio Pasty's weather guesser saying that it would be dry for several days. It rained during the small hours of the morning, which should not have really mattered very much. Indeed it would not have unless you have a small errant ABH who decides that two o'clock is a perfectly reasonable time to need a run out.

The rain must have carried on a bit, too, as the street was very wet when I stepped out again four and a half hours later. The sky then spent the rest of the morning trying to shirk the thick cloud that had come over us in the night. It was doing alright, too, as we had bright spells on and off and the whole day was lifted by the absence of that cruel easterly wind. That did try and make a resurgence later in the day, but it was a half-baked attempt and far too late to be a bother, in the shop at least.

It took a little while to get going in the morning but when it did there were a fair few people milling about for most of the rest of the day. Oddly, it all changed very suddenly. One moment the street was empty and the next I had a stream of people coming into the shop and there were people gathering on the tables of the café. It was like someone had opened a gate where a crowd had been waiting to come in.

The continued busyness took me rather unawares and as late morning and early afternoon came on, pasties (sorry, MS) started to fly out. The early spring bank holiday is not known to be ever so busy, but we seemed to be doing better than I imagined. It is most likely that I had some very low expectations after the last few weeks. As the pasty buying increased in pace, a quick assessment told me that we would undoubtedly run out before peak time. We have frozen and uncooked in the freezer, which we have found to be the best place to keep frozen and uncooked pasties, so I slipped some into the oven for their hour-long cook. Incredibly, I got the timing spot on, and they were ready just as we were into the last few delivered ones in the pasty warmer. It does not get better than that.

I do not get out much during the season – which might be entirely obvious from the restricted circle of subject matter in The Diary – so when I do, I rather enjoy it especially on a sunny Sunday afternoon. There is no such thing as a free lunch, so the licence that I was out on was dependent on making a grocery delivery to our

neighbour a little way up Stone Chair Lane. Do not get any sudden ideas, dear reader, that the shop is doing home delivery now. This is purely because the lady is a deserving case – although the offer of suitably large amounts of cash to perform a similar service would also, quite possibly, find favour.

I tarried rather longer than might have been appropriate having dropped off the groceries mainly because it was so delightful standing in the warmth of the sunshine and looking down on the Harbour and the rooftops all about. We also have a chat about all manner of daft things which is largely a ruse so that I can get my breath back after the hard climb. It will all be different when the chairlift is installed and working. It would be even better if it started at the bottom of Stone Chair Lane instead of the bottom of her garden.

It was back to work soon enough, and it remained busy in sporadic surges throughout the rest of the day. We even had a five minutes to closing rush, which is always a good sign. It was the first proper bit of business since Easter and does raise the hopes that it might be the start of the climb into the season. It certainly left me with some rather large restocking orders from our fruit and vegetable supplier and our 'farm shop' cash and carry, which I missed out last week.

The Harbour car park was still busy when we went though in the early evening as it was at the same time the previous evening. The late gathering is probably to do with sunset potential, although it did not look like it might amount to much today. Despite it being such a reasonable day, there was still the threat of rain about and there were some threatening looking clouds out to the east of us. It had tried to rain in the middle of the afternoon, but that came to nothing. Perhaps it had seen the forecast and realised it was in the wrong place, or the right place at the wrong time.

When I came back from a run around the block again at the last knockings, I noted that someone had left four empty bottles of beer outside our door. It was not even beer that we might have sold earlier, which might have been vaguely understandable. No, if the busyness in the shop was not an indicator of the start of the season, the arrival of folk who cannot walk twenty metres to the nearest bin certainly was.

May 6th – Monday

ABH had decided early on in the night to decamp to the living room. The Missus checked on her before she went to sleep, and she was quite adamant that it was where she was staying. She vocally let me know she was awake around half an hour before I would normally have woken up but at least that was not two o'clock in the morning. That was good enough for me and I will make sure we close the bedroom door on her tonight.

I never got as far as the gymnasium this morning. One of our deputy launching authorities put his head around the corner and told me that there would be a shout any minute. It was early enough for us not to have inconvenienced many potential shoppers, although the milkman had just arrived and was about to deliver. I asked him if he would kindly close the first electric sliding door in The Cove behind him, which I assume he duly did. The Missus had taken over by the time I checked back after the launch.

The boat was tasked to a drifting empty RIB spotted off Land's End. Such things always have the potential to be something more than just an abandoned boat, so we launched the boat into the stillness of the bay pretty smartly so that they could investigate. It was unclear to us on shore exactly who had reported it in, but it was found quickly and seen to be very Marie Celeste, with fishing gear on board and the engine switched on by not running. Further investigation revealed that it had been up the coast as far as Gurnard's Head and someone else said that it had been spotted at Porthcurno. Our Coastguard reasoned that the sharp about turn at Gurnard's Head was worth looking at in greater detail and despatched the Inshore boat to have a look.

In the meantime, the Boat crew had a good geek around the abandoned RIB and found some ownership documents. The owner, it transpired, was French and came from France as indeed did the boat. What was even more astounding was our token Liverpudlian on the boat crew had been put on board and he managed to translate the document into Scouse and then into English. Our Cornish Coxswain, then relayed the information to Falmouth Coastguard. We take our inclusivity very seriously in The Cove.

There must have been some complicated communications going on between Falmouth and whoever they spoke to in France but eventually the message came back that the owner and driver of the boat had been rescued off Brittany yesterday. The French Coastguard could not take the boat in and it had been left, it was not certain whether it was under power or not, but eventually it had been drifting around our coast. Knowing that there was no longer a casualty at risk let everyone relax a little. The Inshore was stood down and the RIB was towed back to The Cove where there were all sorts of questions and very few answers about what to do with it.

After much discussion, it was hauled out of the water and whisked off to a local farm for, erm, safe keeping until the matter was properly resolved or everyone had forgotten about it, whichever came sooner.

When we heard that the search had been stood down, we arranged ourselves at the bottom of the long slipway to wait on the big boat coming back. We had been a bit premature and underestimated the time it would take to sort the political issue of picking up a drifting boat at sea. It was pleasant enough down at the bottom of the long slipway with the tide out on a spring tide. We watched as slack water passed and the tide started coming in again under a mostly blue sky with some high level

cloud. It was a bit chilly down there as the wind that had been swirling about all over the place for the last few days, had gone to the north today.

Eventually, the boat came into view towing the RIB. It handed over to the Inshore to bring it in and lash it to the breasting buoy just outside the Harbour. Not letting such things distract us, our attention was fully on the big boat that gently nudged onto the bottom of the slipway toe where we executed what was clearly a textbook recovery in calm conditions. The Inshore boat took a little longer while the fate of the RIB was decided. In the end, one of the fishing boats did the honours of pulling it in and it was loaded onto a flatbed trailer and taken to a local farm until what happens to it is decided. We are, after all, a very flexible, very excellent Shore Crew.

It was probably as well that we have some excitement in the morning because very little of it in the afternoon. Yesterday was obviously the jewel in the crown of our bank holiday weekend and today was the paste replica – that had fallen out of its fitting. There had been a few around in the morning but I had missed all of those and the afternoon rather fell on its face. No one was laughing, least of all me.

To add insult to injury the northerly breeze picked up in the later part of the afternoon and it became very chilly. I had omitted to bring down a jacket or a fleece since the earlier part of the day had been comfortably temperate, and because it was late, I thought not to bother. By the time we closed, I rather regretted that decision and was happy to get out of the draft in our new highly insulated living room.

After being distracted by having to run the shop during the morning, the Missus returned upstairs to start on shampooing the carpet in our proper bedroom. It is nearly ready to move into and, if the carpet dries as expected, I have no doubt she will be pulling out the stops to have the room set up to move into by the end of tomorrow. We are slowing inching towards normalcy, whatever that looks like.

May 7th – Tuesday

It looked a bit bleak early on today and it was reflected in the absence of people for the first part of the morning. It bucked up considerably by the middle of the day after the sunshine came pouring down the hill and over the cliff. It was followed by our visitors who mingled with the sunshine and brought joyousness to The Cove. Alright, that might be a bit of an exaggeration, but it was more joyous than it would have been had it been piddling down.

Our builders turned up again this morning, which was good. They commenced, sawing, sanding and nailing things with a nail gun. The latter sounded very much like a shot being fired and would have had me hiding under the table had I not known better. It would seem that our visitors were quite used to being in shot firing environments and completely ignored it. Either that or my false ears accentuate such things.

Just to add a little interest to the day we had a delivery from our 'farm shop' cash and carry. It was not a very big order but filled some gaps in the shelves where we had actually sold things. Yes, it surprised me greatly, too. One of the gaps that we had been unable to fill, however, was the little long life tubs of hummus that were extremely popular. I had at least two customers ask why we had run out after the last one went at the end of last week, so I called the company to find out why it was out of stock. They too were aghast that they had run out as it sells very well but it seems they are having trouble having it supplied as well. They said that they will contact me when they know more. An hour later they knew more and reported that it would be back in abundance toward the end of May. If indeed it was back in abundance, it would be here too before long.

One thing that will not be coming back again for sure is our somewhat iconic black wood frontage. I spoke with the builder this morning and he has been trying for several months to source a supply of replacement planks with the distinctive wavy edge. The only thing similar he had been able to find were in oak. This came with two issues: one was the weight that might be a problem and the other was the price tag, which was frankly, unaffordable. The last option was to use some thin pine panels than were meant for fencing, but these were unlikely to last more than a couple of seasons and would probably look awful.

The builder, the Missus and I discussed this and we felt that it was better that we have something completely different rather than try and emulate what was there before with some cheap substitute. We settled for some composite cladding that will be uniform across the front and the sides. Ah yes, the sides that I had spent some hours meticulously sanding and painting two coats on, which are now firewood.

It had not taken me long to clear the small order that had arrived. Mindful that our commercial waste is collected tomorrow along with our cardboard I tried to clear as much rubbish and card from the store room as possible. This led me on to rationalising some of the fishing gear that had spread to a couple of boxes on the shelf and some loose items that I managed to get down to one box. There were a few old display items that had not been used in a couple of years that once they are taken away will become utterly necessary, of course. It was when I had cleared those that I noticed a box on the shelf that I could not put my finger on why it was there and what was in it. I was therefore most surprised to find half a dozen copies of The Cove Diary 2 or The Last Cove Diary Book Ever (Honest!) in all their pristine but far too chunky loveliness. I put a couple out of the shelves to see if there was anyone daft enough to want to purchase one.

Anyway, tidying up and making space in the store room very quickly became tedious, so I settled for sitting behind the counter scratching my behind instead. As business days go, it was busier than a similar day before the weekend but, of course, the weather was not as pleasant last week. We were busiest just after the middle of the day through to the middle of the afternoon. The order of play after that

was hit and miss and consisted mainly of ice cream buying since the ice cream kiosk next door was closed today.

A neighbour alerted me to a stop me and buy one ice cream vendor who has secured the spot at the top of the OS slipway. His unique selling point is that the ice cream is homemade. The unique selling point of the kiosk next door was a dollop of clotted cream on top until someone suggested to the street vendor chap that it might be a good idea if he did too. The vendors at the top of the OS slip never seem to last very long, which gives me cause to wonder if none of them have long term business strategies or they just vanish in the night.

It reminds me of an advertising strategy employed by a famous manufacturer of prophylactics that used the term 'buy me and stop one' at one point. It was the same company who had British Leyland Mini motorcars with advertising on the side, 'the small family car'.

Moving swiftly on, in the doldrums in between customers in the afternoon, I remembered that we needed an order from our St Just butcher. We had run out of bacon a while ago, but since we have a cheaper alternative, it was more convenient using that than worrying about the expensive stuff going out of date. I was also painfully aware that I had been missing the deadline for our local bread, so I sent it early today to make up for it.

With all in order, I did very little in the run up to closing. As soon as we had, I took ABH out for a spin. She had the company of Mother and the in-laws for most of the day but since the Missus was busy in our bedroom and making tea, she had not been out. It was perfectly pleasant for a walk around even though the breeze that had been unnoticeable all day, ramped up again but I did not need a thick jumper or jacket. The car park was not as busy as the previous few days but there were still several cars parked as The Cove is slowly filling with staying visitors.

There was only one thing foremost in our minds during the evening: sleeping in our own bed again for the first time in six months. It is a huge leap forward and suggests we are in the end game of our works. Utter bliss.

May 8th – Wednesday

It was a wonderfully welcoming bed that I climbed out of this morning, but ABH and the needs of a small, independent shop rather insisted upon it. In fact, she went further and bothered me for the rest of the morning before I had to go downstairs to open the shop. I am wondering if a four minute plank with ABH on your back is some sort of record.

I was wondering also just how hard it could be to get some fish from our very good wholesaler in Penzance. I had spoken with the very pleasant lady on the front desk

about it yesterday. She had seemed uncertain, so I had pressed her, particularly about the oysters for which I had taken an order, but she failed to convince me that everything was in order with words like 'I assume'. I had tried to impress upon her that I was more concerned with my customer order than the bigger order I had called in for the shop and had been forgotten about but by the end of the conversation I was getting nowhere, so gave up and trusted to luck.

This morning, I was pleased to have a telephone message left for me from the very pleasant lady on reception. I would have been more pleased if I had managed to accept the call because when I called back, all I got was an engaged tone. When I get this several times over a fifteen minute period, it is more a concern that the telephone system is broken than someone is on a very long call and so it turned out to be.

I managed to call the boss, but he was frantic that the problem was affecting his business, so I called back in the afternoon. He was still frantic but told me that our order would be available at four o'clock. I explained that this was for a customer order and the reason I was keen not to tie the two together. He called back a few minutes later and told us it would be ready by two o'clock. I felt it best not to press him on the oysters and called around other suppliers as a contingency in case they were not present.

The fraught half hour in the morning did not stop me from heading down to the gymnasium, although I decided a shortened session might be appropriate under the circumstances. It is clear that no one has been in there since the drilling in the floor and on Friday when I go down there, I will put everything back as it was. I still undertook my 5,000 metres of rowing, which is the main bit of exercise and threw some weights around but cut out most else. I had not had my call back that I was promised, which is why, when I came back to the shop, I called them.

Our merry band of working boys are charging ahead with the launders, the porch and other things they can do while the scaffolding is incomplete. They must be doing something because the second skip, or is it the third, is now full and I had to organise another, which is coming tomorrow according to the very pleasant lady at the waste company. Two of them are working on the flat roof that gets a lot of sunshine from the middle of the day onwards. Looking at them with their wide brim hats and sunglasses it might have been easy to mistake them for holidaymakers. I almost wish that we did deckchairs in the shop because it would have suited them well.

We had spoken some while ago about the satellite television cables that run the length of the building from the dish at the back. They were conveniently run through the launder that runs to the back. I was told by the Highly Professional Craftsperson that it was very untidy and that, being Highly Professional Craftsperson, he would run the cables inside the roof where they would be much neater. That was until he

forgot all about it and one of them asked yesterday what I wanted to do with those annoying white cables lying abandoned on the roof.

The Highly Professional Craftsperson, clearly keen to recover some command of the situation, told me that having a satellite dish was so yesterday and that the same service from the same company could be had through the internet. This was a very good idea since it would mean being able to get rid of the unsightly dish – that once rusted off the wall every year until we discovered ceramic ones – and not have to worry about the cables. Instead, we could switch our contract to have the service delivered across the Internet instead.

I investigated the supplier by looking at our account with them on their website but was sorely disappointed by the lack of information available. I could, for instance, discover that we had two packages but it was impossible to see what channels those covered. If we were going to change service, it would be rather nice to know we were getting like for like. There was an option to select the service we wanted. This led me to a second page where the only option was to select a service that we did not want.

Eventually, by not logging into our account, the website worked properly and I could select the correct service. It is not quite as simple as it looks nor as cheap as the headline rate. Part of the attraction was that we would have one less box under the television to plug in but that is not true. The system requires a different box, albeit smaller, and that needs the same plugs and cables as the existing. There is also a £40 set up charge for doing better all and the ongoing charges are similar to what we are paying now. I shall deliver the bad news to the Highly Professional Craftsperson tomorrow so he can run the cables down the launders again.

Leaving such issues aside, the Missus headed into town to collect the fish. She collected the in-laws on the way as they clearly needed to be there while she purchased new blinds for the newly decorated bedroom - I had wondered why it seemed so bright in the room this morning. Since I was not overrun in the shop, I set up the vacuum packing and weighing machine in readiness for the arrival of the fish. I had looked out my oyster shucker last night and established that as long as I did not sever the oysters from the shell, they would last a good ten days shucked if they were not picked up immediately.

We had drifted into quietness during the middle of the afternoon and I was left to discover the truth about dishless satellite television viewing. Then the fish arrived.

It was the moment that the small gods of grumpy shopkeepers was waiting for to release, one at a time, a succession of shoppers into our little store. They had clearly hand-picked the sort of people that would cause most disruption to a grumpy shopkeeper wearing fishy rubber gloves and packing fish. The browsers and perusers came and lingered and when they were done, the question askers arrived. Sometimes we had question asking browsers and perusers just for added interest.

With some purchases, I can just about manage to work the till and the card payment machine with my knuckles, avoiding the need to remove my fishy gloves. Clearly, there is not much entertainment in that, so the small gods of grumpy shopkeepers sent customers requiring their shopping to be bagged and packed after removing my fishy gloves. One customer purported to have goods that did not need packing and then, right at the end asked for stamps, which definitely requires some dexterity. It made me regret not having the old stamps that required licking.

Given some enough warning, I can remove my gloves carefully such that they may be used again. In every instance during my fish packing session today I was caught out and had to tear off my gloves and having to use new ones when I resumed. I was still working well after closing time but at least then I could do so without interruption and far more efficiently.

The regular ladies who ordered the oysters insisted that I have some of them. I do like a good oyster and since they insisted, it would have been churlish to refuse. Taking the oysters upstairs to eat seemed an unnecessary complication, so I had them while I worked with just a dusting of black pepper. They were sublime if a little sharp edged. I shall have to practise my shucking.

May 9th – Thursday

If we kept the windows and doors closed, it was a fine day. The breeze however had gone around to the east then southeast and blew constantly through the first electric sliding door in The Cove.

The Highly Professional Craftsperson and his reluctance to reroute our satellite television cables and his suggestion that the same service could be achieved across the Internet led me down a veritable rabbit hole. Having met a blank with the current supplier, I looked at others. The company providing our Internet connection seemed like a good place to start but we were tripped up because we have a commercial agreement for the Internet and could not mix it with the consumer television service they offered. Enquiring from one provider it was suggested that I could get a clever box from Tesmorburys that would do the job but on looking afterwards it seems such things have been discontinued.

In the end, I took a step back and considered exactly what we needed from a television in our living room. The answer to that was very little as neither the Missus nor I watch very much on it and after a brief discussion with the Missus we resolved to do away with the current contract altogether. We would rely solely on what the free provider could give us across the Internet and purchase a recording box if we wished to save anything. If we really find that we are missing any essential televisual excitement, we can always start afresh.

With all the fish in the store room freezer awaiting transfer to the shop, nothing in the way of regular orders coming in during the morning, I had very little to occupy me for the majority of the morning. It gave me the opportunity to chase the Laurel and Hardy Newspaper Company to see if they were going to send newspapers from Saturday at the end of this week as I had requested. Given that I had also requested an acknowledgement and did not get that, I did not hold out high hopes of getting newspapers either. I sent another message with a 'read receipt' request attached to see if I could generate any response from them. At least I know that someone has opened the message. Whether or not we will get newspapers is another thimble full of tin tacks altogether.

I got the impression by the middle of the day that the breeze was either easing off or had changed direction. Whichever was the case, I was much more comfortable behind the shop counter. Perhaps I had just got so used to it I no longer noticed it. Regardless of the breeze, the beach had looked resplendent in the bright sunshine under a cloudless sky. The spring tide, low water gave us acres of sand and pastel coloured sea through which you could see right to the bottom with precious few waves disturbing the surface. Further across, at North Rocks and Gwenver, there were some waves and some surfers, so it looks like there might have been something for everyone.

There were precious few feet disturbing the sand, too. In the middle of the day, there were no more than a couple of dozen people down there and a dozen of those were a surf school. I was reminded by one enquirer that the dog controls on the beach are only a week away now. It is still a divisive topic. I think it is possibly a little early but on our beach it is designed to encompass the half term, which can get very busy. Starting and stopping it for half term to be introduced later would just be confusing, so I think that the much maligned council has done the best it can under the circumstances – if only they had followed the same thinking for the bus times. The control itself is also a compromise, starting at ten o'clock in the morning and lasting until six o'clock in the evening. Depending on the tide, that is not a bad deal but is still viewed with derision by many dog owners. The ban used to be complete, so it is an improvement over that. I guess some people are difficult to please.

The building boys have pressed on with the outer parts of the windows and the completion of the outside of the porch. I had asked for an overhang – twice – but looking at the completed roof it was near enough flush with the door. It seems they had forgotten like they forgot the satellite cables. I was told that instead of an overhang there was a raised lip that would prevent rain water from dropping in front of the door. I remain to be convinced and will ensure that the culprit who made the executive decision not to have an overhang, is kept waiting at our door if it drips the next time it rains. Forgetting my satellite cables is one thing, withdrawing my overhang, quite another. Perhaps I should consider myself lucky that they remembered to put the roof back.

I tried to hide my disappointment by involving myself in unpacking and pricing our latest delivery. I had discovered that our keyring display was not all it could be a while ago and those remaining keyrings might be described as tacky. I aimed to resolve this situation by placing an order for replacement keyrings, some tacky, some remarkable not tacky at all along with some soft toys to bulk out the order a bit.

As we know from our fish packing yesterday, attempting to concentrate on such things only results in a sudden surge of customer business and today was no different. I did, however, manage to put out the soft toys, some pasty (sorry, MS) magnets and one type of keyring. I will have to be sharp about it tomorrow to finish off because I am expecting another delivery of a similar ilk to arrive tomorrow.

The Missus had provided dinner for the boys when they stopped for a break in the middle of the day. I did point out that we were already paying them handsomely and that providing dinner, especially one that used two pots of crab meat, seemed a little extreme. I brought this up with the boys, really to remind them how lucky they were that I had a soft Missus, and they pointed out that not only were they getting fed, but I was paying them to eat it as well. I was able to appreciate this in far greater quality when I sat down in the evening to my bowl of rough gruel.

May 10th – Friday

It must be a good day. I had a response from the Laurel and Hardy Newspaper Company after three weeks and a last minute prompt. A little more certainty would have been nice but what I got was, “You would start receiving the deliveries from 11th of May”. There seemed to be quite a lot of room for a ‘but’ in there, which was worrying, ‘but we cannot be bothered, so you may not’ or ‘but we are so bad at the only job we have to do that you may not through our incompetence’.

I think we stand a pretty good chance of getting newspapers tomorrow because I copied the managers at Redruth depot in on my request. We may not get everything that I had asked for, but they usually cobble something together for us.

Buoyed by such great news, I sent off the contract termination letter to the satellite television company. The terms are that we must give notice either to expire in 31 days or at the end of the initial contract period if it is later. I have no idea when the contract expired or is set to expire as the bit of the website that has that information did not work. When we agree on a date, I must send the recording box back and the remote control, which is currently on the missing list after all our moving.

Also on the missing list is the Surf Bar or Beach Restaurant as was. It is closed for the foreseeable future and after a little digging, it appears the company went into liquidation on the basis they had no liquidity, which I have always found odd. The original family who built and operated it seemed to have had little trouble and it existed as a classic restaurant for some while. It was then leased to a ‘celebrity chef’,

and I use the term advisedly because it appears his celebrity centred around being adept at turning any viable business into failure in a short timescale. He went on to run a gourmet inn on the Helston road into the ground in under a year.

The Beach stuttered along after that picking up raving reviews and changed hands during last year. There seemed to be some hope and the Lifeboat station enjoyed a well-organised Christmas party there last year. It fell upon hard times, rallied and failed again partly due to some bad luck with its financial backer.

Without knowing too much detail, such as how much the lease is, it is difficult to imagine any venture there falling on its bottom. It is in a prime position and is flooded with potential customers all through the main part of the season. Like the rest of us, it suffers in the off-season, but with innovation, I am sure there are things that can be done to sustain it during the quiet months. The biggest loss to The Cove is the absence of much needed serious competition for the OS. We wonder what will happen next in this long running saga.

It must have been the start of one of those sorts of days today. We had four grocery deliveries due in the morning and three of them arrived at the same time. It kept me occupied for a while and we even had some customers to go with it. It kept me out of trouble until the Missus came down to let me go off to the gymnasium. She had come down early to see off the in-laws who were going home today, so I was able to get ahead of the posse for a change.

I was quite happy to leave the environs of the shop today. Our builders had chosen today to carve geet chunks out of the concrete they so carefully laid a few months before. This work required the noisiest tools in the box, and it went on for quite some time. I was glad to note that my false ears accurately amplified the sound so that I had maximum benefit of it. I did ask the Highly Professional Craftsperson why they had not made provision for these grooves when the concrete was laid. It seems that they had not anticipated a different brand of cladding. The old planks were thick enough to support a different attachment, I was told, whereas the new cladding needed batons behind it to latch onto. Of course, it could just be that none of them were as clever as me thinking ahead far enough. I thought I might keep that to myself.

The day had started out quite glorious and had gone on to improve in measures as the day went on. I had taken ABH around the block on my return from the gymnasium in my two sweatshirts and had been a mite hot under the collar by the time I reached the end of Coastguard Row. I did not waiver from my long trouser selection for shop use today, as it has been generally colder in the shop than it has been outside all week. For the last couple of days, the easterly breeze has made it chiller still, so I had no expectation of it being any warmer today. By the middle of the afternoon, however, I was starting to regret it but with Radio Pasty making it clear the world would come to an end next week, it was not time to change direction – unless, of course, they are wrong.

We were busy and quiet in equal measure throughout the afternoon. There was a bit of going home present buying and some grocery buying from those still intent on staying around. There was quite a bit of sun lotion buying, which was not a surprise and earlier in the day, quite a lot of aftersun buying. This did not surprise me either as the wind yesterday kept the temperature down while those under the sun burnt to a crisp unknowingly.

Our builders did quieter things in the afternoon, which was something of a relief. I busied myself with the remnants of our yesterday's novelty delivery and the new delivery that arrived while I was at the gymnasium. The Missus had salted away the fresh crab meat delivery that also arrived at that time and I had quite forgotten about it. I came across it in the fridge close to the end of the day and quickly labelled it for the freezer. This activity was small beer compared to what the Missus was up to in the flat.

I ventured upstairs for a cup of tea in the early afternoon and had to fight for space in the kitchen while she measured up the window for wood venetian blind that had been there before work started. The window space has shrunk during the works and the blind needed to be shortened. The next time I came up on an errand, the Missus had the blind on my toolbox with a circular saw in her hand. I was pleased to see The Highly Professional Craftsperson on hand to provide advice, but he was gone when I heard the saw start up again when I was at the back of the flat. If this carries on, I will have to handover my pink DIYman overalls to her.

The shop day ended after the what is usual now hit and miss sort of afternoon. I telephoned the Aged Parent with the good news that we had sold, via the local auction house, some of the chattels we had run away with when we visited two years ago. Some of it fetched a good price and there was still some left after the auctioneer's cut and, of course, our own for facilitating it. I think he was delighted and when I asked what he would do with his cut, he told me he would marry my mother.

Hold tight, dear reader, there is more.

Just when I thought that the day was nearly over and I was takin ABH around the block while the Missus took Mother home after tea, my pager went off in my shorts that I had changed into. I was the other end of the Harbour car park at the time and had to run from there to the station. My evening shorts are none too tight around the waist these days and with my mobile telephone in the pocket, threatened to entertain the few amblers and dog walkers I met on the way. ABH was also quite bemused but sat patiently in the crew room while we launched the boat.

It seems many crew, like me, were scattered abroad when the pagers went off and we were thin on the ground for a while and the boat left with a thin crew, too. It was a timely launch to some paddleboarders out by Pendeen Watch that some casual

observers thought may be in trouble. They were not but when the boat arrived they were advised that with strong current and offshore winds, they were not in the most risk free position where they were. They duly headed for shore while the Lifeboat saw them safe and came back.

I was not ever so mindful of the time, but I was back home before nine o'clock and the pagers had gone off at twenty minutes past seven o'clock. By the time the boat arrived back in the bay we were at full strength on the shore and we had set up the short slip while we had waited for the excitement to pass. With the sun on its way to setting, we brought the boat up the short slip in what was clearly, even to the casual observer, a textbook recovery. We are, after all, a very just-in-time, very excellent Shore Crew.

I found myself taking ABH out on a fruitless mission at near midnight. I met a visitor staying on Coastguard Row who is friendly enough especially with ABH. He asked if I had seen the aurora earlier in the evening. Darn it, I had not even thought to look but there again it might have just been the bright city lights of St Just as they party big time up there, I have heard.

May 11th – Saturday

Well, the newspapers arrived today, so there was that. If I were to nitpick, the numbers were not quite what I asked for but the fact that we had them at all was quite an achievement. I had specifically requested not to have magazines; I would sort those out the following weeks. The delivery driver, being smarter than the people further up the food chain told me that he had refused to bring the magazines that had anyway been allocated to us. They were issued on Tuesday and would be returned on Tuesday. Anyone who had wanted one would have already bought one, which is why I asked not to have them. I will be charged anyway and although I will get the credit the following week, the money will go out of my account in the interim.

Restarting the newspapers did make me realise what it was that I disliked about doing them: everything.

Perhaps it was the newspapers, but we were quite busy first thing this morning. Some were buying things just before they left on long journeys but others were clearly newly arrived. There were quite a few pasties (sorry, MS) that went out the door early on, so I brought forward my timing to have some in the warmer. We even had a young man buy a large container of fabric softener. I am sure it was a great comfort to him.

Today's subject du jour was the northern lights that everyone in Cornwall saw apart from me and the chef next door. People even reported seeing them in Mousehole and that faces south. It is much the same as 'did you see the dolphins last evening'

when we had dolphins turn up occasionally. The chef next door and I reckon people are just trying to gaslight us and the pictures we have seen, fakes.

I concerned myself instead with what I could see between customers. The day was a little more hazy than yesterday and the breeze a tad more robust. I still warmed up considerably in the afternoon and will have to think about wearing flop flops in the shop again soon. I may change my mind next week so I shall wait and see. The beach was as crowded as I had seen it in a long while and there was a small line of camps along the high water line. If you had come to surf, I think that you would have been a tad disappointed as the bay was largely flat. There was a little bit of action out toward North Rocks or so at least a bunch of a dozen hopeful surfers thought, anyway.

There was probably a little more action on the tables opposite the café and we too saw some fits and starts of business into the afternoon. A couple of young lads had plans for barbequing later and asked if we had any charcoal, which we did from last year. They enquired if it the sort that was self-lighting and I told them that I hoped not and indeed the shop still standing was testament to the fact that it had not yet done so. I suggested that it probably needed a match to help it along. I think that such humour sailed freely above their young heads, and they decided to look elsewhere along with their search for self-cooking burgers.

Somehow, amongst it all, I managed to clear the last of the gift deliveries that had arrived over the last couple of days. It is all priced and what can be out on display has been put out. I deliberately kept the orders to a sensible minimum so that there was little in the way of overstock. There was no particular advantage to buying more and some disadvantage at having to find space for it. Spurred on by such a success, I advanced to topping up the small sweet packets that disappear so quickly there are gaps before you know it. There was no stopping me after that and I moved onto restocking the crisps and had just finished with the shampoo when, inexplicably, I suddenly became terminally bored and sought solace back behind the counter doing bigger all.

Thankfully we had a few more customers in the run up to closing that kept me occupied. In fact, we had a lot more customers in the run up to closing and a proper five minutes to closing rush. I shall have to top up our drinks tomorrow morning as the gaps are significant now, after putting it off each time I thought of it.

I took ABH around the big block after we closed. I only needed a t-shirt in the warmth of the early evening and was perfectly comfortable. The Harbour car park was still at least half full with no sense of a major exodus any time soon and I suspect it was sunset watchers queuing up for the main event and a few late day swimmers.

The Missus said she was staying up in case the northern lights came on again, but I think that particular horse had bolted. I do not think I could have stood another day of being asked if I had seen them, anyway.

May 12th – Sunday

Even with a bay full of thick mist through the morning, it was not unreasonably chilly. In fact, quite the opposite. Where skin made contact with the damp air it was refreshing rather than uncomfortably cold for a change. It was warm in the shop, too, on the cooler side of the street and I soon had to go and put on a short sleeved shirt for the first time this shop year.

Both the Missus and I forgot about the Lifeboat training launch this morning. It was a customer who reminded me by asking if it was still going out. Fortunately, for me, it was early enough for me not to panic but for the Missus who had arranged to go and visit her friend at the top, it was a bit more complex. I duly attended and discovered that we were over-manned on the shore for a change and being the kind and doting sort of grumpy shopkeeper I am, I bowed out of today's duties to let the Missus go and visit her friend. I arrived back at the shop to be told that it was far too late to be changing arrangements. I agreed and did not go back.

The Lifeboat exercise included a contingent from Gwennap Head (windiest place in the universe) National Coastwatch Institute. We alternate such activity with the staff at Cape Cornwall where a buoy is thrown into the water and the NCI guide the boat to it. Today ramped up the jeopardy of such an operation by no one being able to see the buoy more than a few yards distant in the fog. I am sure it all went well, assisted by a gradual lifting of the mist during the later part of the morning.

Over the last few weeks our every move has been scrutinised down to the last detail. We have a volunteer photographer on board the team compiling photographs and moving pictures to combine into a rolling film for use in the viewing gallery when it is complete. It will be cunningly devised to entertain the public and drive the shop staff up the wall through its repetitiveness.

On Friday we had a drone hovering around our heads like an insistent fly while we were setting up for short slip recovery. Today, as well as the drone deployed at launch time, our man was on the slipway with his long lens as the boat came into the bay at the end of its exercise. I had missed the conversation, but there was clearly some last minute agreement to film the boat as it sped away across the bay thus making me wonder if it had received a shout just as it came in.

After showing off for a turn or two across the still waters, it returned for what looked like another textbook recovery up the long slip at around half past twelve o'clock in the afternoon. We are, after all, a very camera-friendly, very excellent Shore Crew.

It is a good job that all the photographic work was done in the morning and the early part of the afternoon because later on, the mist thickened up a bit and cloud rolled in. I was still comfortable in just a shirt in the shop, but I think the edge went off the day

outside with no direct sunshine to bask in. There also seemed to be a little damping in the air which did not seem extreme enough for the rain ponchos I found myself selling. It was only a few minutes later that the damping turned to wetting and cleared the street in an instant.

The wet bit did not last very long but our visitors did not return in great numbers after that. I found my enthusiasm button again and carried on with restocking the grocery aisle. I had started the day filling the drinks fridge, so that was an achievement I could be proud of. I also discovered that we were quite well provisioned and at present, we did not really need a cash and carry delivery. However, under the new regime, we will be delivered on Saturday and unless we want to have a big delivery on the first day of the, hopefully, busy half term, we have to get it done this week.

During the process I frequently check the cash and carry website to see what products are available. I had tested this out when the manager of the Redruth store said that he had redirected our login to them. It worked just fine. At some point between then and now, someone else had changed it again so that we were pointing at the old, no longer of any use, store in Hayle. It was a little irritating but thankfully we picked this up now rather than when we were actually doing the order.

I will have to sort it out with Redruth in the morning, but I was distracted from my restocking anyway by a small resurgence in customer activity. It took me almost until closing time when I automatically brought in the display from outside. In doing so I noticed the newspapers sitting on the shelf and remembered that part of the newsagent role we have again, is counting them and wrapping them up for collection. I will get the hang of it eventually.

May 13th – Monday

I think that ABH had the right idea. She tried to get me out of bed at half past five o'clock this morning, which was before the rain really kicked in. I, however, made her wait until six o'clock which was after the rain started to come down a bit more heavily.

There was not much avoiding it at some part of the morning and ABH was not too badly wet with her little waterproof coat on. I still have to dry her chest and paws but normally wait until she had jumped all over the Missus still languishing in bed. I had to venture out in it twice more. Once was to get all the display out to the front of the shop and the other was to head for the gymnasium where I had to be careful where I went because the floor was flooded.

The rain was easing off when I stepped back out again after my blistering session. Actually, it was not that blistering as I was not feeling quite on top of my game today. It might have something to do with being kicked out of bed at ten minutes to six

o'clock after being kicked out of bed the previous night at two o'clock. Even after all that I was still good enough to take her down to the Harbour beach when I got back.

I think that it was the first time I had been down to the beach since the shop opened. The rain was just tailing off and the beach was consequently empty. She has never been one to chase a ball, although a lump of seaweed stalk will do for a couple of throws. If there is another dog handy, well, that is her day made especially if it is willing to play chase. If not, she is quite adept at making her own entertainment and today it was finding a small lump of crab shell. This could be rolled over, thrown up in the air and run with from one side of the beach to the other. When it came to lying down and chewing it, I intervened, which itself turned into a game of chase.

We ended up going around the block to prevent us from being on the beach until the tide came back in again in the evening. The rain had well and truly gone by then – although it did make a light and brief appearance an hour or so later – and the sun put in a muted appearance through the full cloud cover. We remained bright and not so bright for the rest of the day but at least it remained mainly dry.

As you might imagine, we were not blessed with a rush of customers during the morning. This improved probably more than we might have expected after the rain stopped as people emerged from their hiding places. I thought to chastise them for being fair weather shoppers but then again, they might have run away, so I restrained myself.

The quietness of the morning allowed me to chase up our cash and carry person so that we might have access to do our ordering again and I also spoke to our local interest book man. I had called him several weeks ago, which perhaps I should have done when we opened, and he told me he was going on holiday and would organise our stock of books on his return. He had either been on a very long holiday or he had forgotten his pledge, which was what had happened and he promised me again that they would be here tomorrow or the next day.

In the quietness of the afternoon, I got on with refilling shelves and writing some more things on the list for the grocery order. I have also been compiling a list of beachware that we need from the store at The Farm and from our supplier for the things I know we do not have. I now have lists in notebooks and on sheets of paper here and there. I had better write a list of all the lists I have so that I may keep track of them.

Yesterday when I walked ABH around the block after I shut the shop, the sea was misbehaving after some time of quiet calmness. Waves were thumping over the Harbour wall and attracting a few onlookers and the bay was running with swell. It had largely gone when we walked around this evening. It is quite amazing how quickly it can change from one state to another.

I imagine it was all to do with air pressure, which had dropped a little from late on Saturday. I know this because grandfather's barometer is definitely working. Well, the arm that shows the current air pressure is going up and down. Whether it is pointing at the right numbers is another matter altogether and I must confess that I have not spent any time checking it. I will add it to my to do list.

May 14th – Tuesday

It had been raining some more during the early part of the morning and there was still some in the air when I stepped out with ABH first thing. It then proceeded to rain quite heavily from time to time catching out the few people who had foolishly thought they might get away with it today. It gave no long term respite for the rest of the day but in between the showers there were some bright and warm spells in the strong sunshine. Some refugee from the south coast reported that the wind was quite strong down there, so we should be glad we were out of it.

Even without the wind there was not much warmth going on in the shop and having slipped into something more comfortable for the day I found myself running upstairs for a fleece halfway through the morning.

At some point during the morning, I managed to resolve the issue I had with the new cash and carry website. Thus enabled, I started to work my way through the grocery list that I had compiled. It did seem like a good idea to try and whittle away at my list of lists and since this was the biggest it was a good place to start. While making good progress on that list another of my lists was coming home to roost from The Farm.

The Missus postponed her journey up there yesterday due to the weather. There was no particular hurry for the items, but it was quite an extensive list and in some areas not very specific. I would regret the not being specific when I was inundated with flip flops because I did not realise we had quite so many up there. I still had not finished the grocery order when she returned but dropped that in favour of emptying the truck which luckily, she managed to park outside.

I really could not recall writing a list that long. I suppose some of the items came in bigger bags than I remember and, as I just mentioned, a plethora of flip flops. With our shelves, or rather hooks, in the shop empty I did suppose that we did not have that many in the store. In fact, the stock count had suggested as much and I have to conclude that somehow they were missed off the count. Many will have to go back up to The Farm as we do not have enough space down here for all the ones that will not go out. So far, though, I have managed to squeeze out all the men's ones.

I had to abandon my work there in the end as I ran out of time. We had the obligatory irregular succession of shoppers throughout the last hours of the afternoon that had slowed me up a bit. It only leaves the shoes that need some processing before they

go out, stuffing taken out and hangers arranged to dangle them by. Perhaps the fairies will do it in the night or the Missus while I am at the gymnasium tomorrow morning and frankly, I do not believe in either.

I attended an Operations Team meeting in the evening over at the Lifeboat station. Thankfully, it was mercifully short and quite short enough for me to return home just as the Missus was taking Mother home. It meant that I was able to run ABH down to the Harbour beach and around the block afterwards. I had taken a fleece but really did not need it. We were still sheltered from any prevailing wind and, in the sunshine low in the sky, it was still very warm.

It was not a particularly long walk and both the Missus and I were able to get back and settled early enough to watch the television programme, 'Saving Lives At Sea'. David Attenborough films Lifeboat people in their natural habitats and explains the strange things that they get up to. David usually manages to highlight rescues without being too over-dramatic but, of course, it does need to capture some excitement to make it watchable.

Tonight, it showed our very own Boat Crew in, erm, action. The programmer makers had chosen the call-out to the Mazarine, a huge cargo ship, which briefly parked itself on Wolf Rock lighthouse back in July. I wanted to watch the programme to discover how they would make the Lifeboat standing by for eight hours look exciting. I have to say it was very well done and they even used a short moment of very excellent Shore Crew conducting a textbook recovery. For those sharp-eyed enough you will have noticed I was using a stunt man for this event.

May 15th – Wednesday

I do not have one but if I did have a list of things that I did not really need to happen, chief amongst them would be ABH destroying my false ears.

Normally, I leave my false ears in the shop at the end of the shop day. I have no need for them in the evening when I am alone with the Missus. Last evening, because I had been to the Lifeboat Operations Meeting, I had left them zipped up in their little pouch on the dining table in the living room. ABH is constantly berated for climbing upon it and nosing around, so I should have been more careful.

However, at around midnight, the Missus woke me to tell me that ABH had got hold of my false ears, the main concern being the battery. The one false ear she had still contained its battery – they are more difficult to remove than the old ones – and when I found the other in the living room, that too was complete. In my sleep infused state I noticed only that the little tail that goes into the ear was chewed and useless and reasoned that I would need to drop into town in the morning for replacements. Sadly, when I looked again in the hard light of morning, the unit was also chewed and inoperable.

I telephoned the shop that did them for me and, as I imagined, there was a punitive charge for replacement. I shall be withholding treats and chews until she has paid it off. She was lucky as the alternative was nailing her paws to the floor.

I seemed to manage perfectly well without false ears before but since having the new, super loud ones, going back to not having them is like trying to listen with my head in a fishbowl with the fish still in it. The new ones will not be available for another seven to ten days. If you are in the shop during that time, please point and shout. I will probably be able to hear you, just, but it will be mightily amusing watching you gesticulate while bawling at me.

Perhaps I should not have been quite so uncaring about the good folk of Mousehole yesterday having to put up with a mighty wind coming off the sea. The wind went around to the southeast today and blew through our doorway all day long. It was not especially cold out today, but the incessant breeze kept the temperature in the shop just above the point where hyperthermia sets in. It varied a good bit during the day and consequently I was taking off my fleece one minute and putting it back on the next.

Mindful that our waste collection service called today, I set to early on with the remaining shoes and flip flops that were in large cardboard boxes in the store room. There was also a mountain of plastic packaging involved which had to be removed and thrown away. It amuses me in a perverse sort of way that the manufacturer has gone to some lengths to provide a cardboard hanging tab for each pair of shoes to demonstrate how eco friendly it is and then wraps each individual pair in plastic cellophane with plastic foam around each toe post and a glossy label that probably has plastic in it held on by a plastic cable.

Still, the job is done now, and we have a respectable looking flip flop and slides display. Not only that, all the cardboard and waste plastic was in the bin or ready for collection by the time our bin man arrived. Just out of interest, he is the same man who used to empty our bin two years or more ago. We have been through two changes of supplier since then, three if you count a brief moment with Basho, and he through one change of ownership. Waste collecting seems to be a very incestuous industry.

After all the effort put in with the stock, it would have been rewarding to see a few more customers today. I had to wait until five o'clock before we sold some flip flops but the whole day was a bit of a struggle. I am sure that the wind will have had an effect and during the early part of the day we had a bit of rain to contend with – well, people that were outside did. I was perfectly dry where I was. The afternoon was even more disappointing, although the surfers may have argued about that.

The swell had not really gone out of the bay all week, but it had been more moderate the last few days. Today, it looked like it might be quite reasonable for a spot of

surfing, especially with a bit of offshore breeze. It even looked like there might have been a bit of choice between easier and more intermediate surfing waves out the back of North Rocks. I certainly saw one surfer sail in on a long run in the middle of the beach halfway through the afternoon.

We are starting to get some visitor enquiries now and then, most often about the bus service, which is hardly surprising given the pig's ear they have made of it this year. Who in their right mind would have instituted four changes to the timetable through the busiest time of the year, least still had one of them last a week before changing it again.

Other enquires are more mundane (no, really) and might concern the whereabouts of the nearest public convenience but when in this country did we start calling them bathrooms. I stand to be corrected as I did not have a look in the ladies' half of the toilet block in the Harbour car park, but I am reasonably sure that there is not a bath in there or even a shower. I understood what this lady meant but only after making an assumption that she alluded to something else. Surely there is no embarrassment about calling them public toilets and much less risk perhaps in 'public convenience' but restroom I would expect from an American cousin and 'bathroom' just seems contrived.

Anyway, on a brighter note, never let it be said that we do not give our customers what they want, and we constantly strive to meet new expectations of fashions with extensive research. Take today, for example. I am putting the finishing touches to our grocery order that arrived on Saturday, well, it will if I ever finish it. I came to the last section which is tobacco, an area I treat carefully because it represents as much spend as the entire rest of the order put together.

We started selling vapes last year after I discovered the obscene margin that comes with them. One vape product that had become very popular after we starting doing it a month or so ago is the watermelon flavour vape. Sadly, this is not available with our new cash and carry arrangement, so I had to choose an alternative. Clearly, the best way to do this was to consult one of the buyers and near the end of the day, the very young man I needed to see came through the door.

I explained the situation and questioned him at length regarding the best replacement for the missing flavour. There were pros and cons to each of the available flavours I listed but after some considerable consideration, he suggested 'strawberry kiwi' as the flavour of choice and the one that he thought would sell most readily. I promptly put down three on the order form and thanked him for his help in the matter. It was not until he was leaving with his groceries that he told me he was giving up and probably would not be buying any. I suddenly wondered if I might have left a change of career a little late in life.

A jacket did not feel quite as out of place as it did the last evening I walked ABH around the block. We started on the beach, but the Missus had spent some time with

her down there earlier in the afternoon and it clearly had lost its appeal. We went up the western slip and around the block from there. It is that time of year again and the Missus warned me that adders are sometimes seen on the patch on ground at the far end of the Harbour car park on the cliff edge. It is on the route that ABH likes to take, so I am very careful to look closely and stomp a bit as we go across the wall. Even if we could, I would have stopped taking her on the cliff path by now for that very reason. A bigger dog would stand a chance, but ABH is far too small and has a propensity to stick her head into any hole she finds. We are best off on the beach and the circuit we know for now.

Since she spurned the beach, we were not out very long. It is a feature of our summer life that our evening after the shop closes and we have had our tea, is gone in a flash. My book reading takes twice as long as it does in winter, which saves on book buying. I also have had no time to go through the box by my desk that everything that was on my desk before we moved went into. I am sure much can go into the bin, since I have not missed it in six months. I fear it will still be there come winter. Happily, it does not keep me awake at night. I have a small errant hound for that.

May 16th – Thursday

We were met with a decent looking day when I ventured out in the light of morning with ABH. She had me up twice in the night again, which is just rubbing salt into the wounds after destroying my false ears the night before. The freshness of the early morning woke me up quite nicely.

The other reader informed me quite early on in the day that our main beach had won a Seaside Award run by Keep Britain Tidy. I was busy for most of the morning, and it was well into the afternoon that I had a look at the list of the great and the good. We were listed as Sennan Cove. You would think if you were a prestigious (and old) environmental organisation handing out awards, you might at least check the spelling. I also noticed that a seaside award went to Redcar Lifeboat Station, which is north of Camborne. There is a beach on the opposite side of the road so, they must bring an awful lot of sand back with them from an operation is all I can imagine.

The Keep Britain Tidy website also suggests that the organisation looks after the Blue Flag awards because they have those awards listed as well. Sennan Cove beach used to fly its Blue Flag each year until the much maligned council stopped paying for it having realised after five years, it was not their beach. The queue of people willing to stump up the then £600 to pay for it suddenly became very short, the consensus being that it was probably not worth it. If memory serves, a not so local brewery paid for it for a couple of years before deciding not to – perhaps we were not drinking enough of their beer. Ever since, we have been blue flagless, although the water quality is regularly checked and reported upon.

The much maligned council it appears still forks out for a number of its own beaches, so I am guessing they must be flush with funds. Perhaps they get a discount for a job lot. I am with the school of thought that it is probably not worthwhile. Our beach is pretty well known and regular visitors will know the quality before they get here. For new visitors, there is sufficient recommendation in books, guides and on the Internet to convince that we have a clean beach.

It is a reasonable theory, but it did not seem to be working today. Despite the decent weather we were having it was quieter than a grave that had dug a bigger grave and buried itself again. Alright, perhaps not that quiet but we certainly were not going to holiday anywhere exotic on the profit of today's business. We had some better moments, but they were far outweighed by worse ones.

I cannot exactly recall what kept me busy during the morning but towards the end of it I was doing some exciting things like paying bills. I had to pull out our collection of invoices to check a detail and one thing led to another and I ended up sorting them into date order and keying them into our accounting system. There were quite a few more than I had imagined, and it was the middle of the afternoon by the time I had finished with them. I still have the building ones to do but they can wait until tomorrow.

I found time to send our builder a note, wondering how he was as we had not seen each other in a while. I know that he is hamstrung by the even longer absence of the scaffolders but they boys all left last week with the porch half done. I asked if some of them at least could come back just to finish that so that we could get our carpet man back before he forgot he owed us or expired through old age. I did not get a reply.

It is a common complaint that scaffolders will leave scaffolding behind and only take it down when they have another job nearby. I have never heard anyone complain that the scaffolders have not turned up when money is on offer as it is in this case. We need it reconfigured to complete the job.

There was no further worrying about such things when there was a Lifeboat to launch in the evening. Due to the tides it was called in half an hour earlier than usual training commencement at half past six o'clock. I do not mind this even though it means cramming some tea in before the shop shuts as we finish ahead of my bedtime and with an ABH this is very important as I get to sleep in the first part of the night.

It was a pleasant evening to be launching Lifeboats. There was a bit of sunshine about, and the air was comfortably temperate once we had our kit on. The sea was behaving again at low water at least with very little swell to make life difficult at the end of the long slipway. We had just enough crew on shore to spread over launching the big boat and the Inshore at the same time, although there is a slight delay between the two as we do not want them getting in each other's way.

Once the boats were away and we had set up, I took ABH around the block for a spin. We started on the Harbour beach where she almost immediately found a bit of spider crab shell to play with and gnaw at. I had to point out a couple of jackdaws on the slipway for her to chase to break her out of her singlemindedness; we were out for a walk, not a lie down and chomp. She took herself up the western slip after a snorkeller who had just emerged from the sea. He must have been aromatic or just her kind of snorkeller because she followed him to his car. It suited me because it was time to move on around the block and back home so that I could get back to the station.

The boats returned to the bay at around eight o'clock. The tides this week are not big and the movement from low water when we set up the slipway was not significant. I had stopped the cable at just the right place and when the boat came in the heaving line dropped into my arms without me having to move. The fact that it was aimed at my colleague a metre to the front of me is hardly worth a mention. Despite the small flaw, it was a textbook recovery up the long slip with just a little rise and fall running up the toe. We washed down the big boat and put it away before I slipped out the side door to help wash down the Inshore that came in a little behind the big boat. We are, after all, a very multi-functional, very excellent Shore Crew.

May 17th – Friday

We had a communique from our Tasmanian correspondent, NC, this morning when I opened the electronic post. He sends his regards. I know he will be embarrassed by me saying this, but he displays the sort of mettle and determination that we expect from our International Correspondents. According to the time stamp, he was up at five o'clock this morning posting his report. Now, there is dedication for you.

Our man has clearly been following our Cornish news, although he is a few days behind, as it must take a while for it to reach there, and notes the reports of our sighting of the Aurora Borealis. He particularly highlighted the mention that the resident of Mousehole saw the lights despite facing south. He postulates that what she might have seen were the Aurora Australis because they were particularly well defined on the occasion he saw them. Indeed, when he stays in the city the light pollution is such that he has never seen them before.

Back on our northern shores, things were a little less exciting, at least to start with. It has been a peculiar week where we have sold hardly any sliced bread, although we have had some turnover of the cobs, and we have moved a few scones here and there. Pasties (sorry, MS) have been hit and miss, sometimes having to resort to frozen stock and sometimes having to throw excess away. I will be happier when we move into more consistent business when I know what to order.

I consoled, or possibly more likely, distracted myself with some effort to clear the store room of boxes and the like ahead of our grocery order arriving tomorrow. I had a moment of panic first thing when I realised that I had forgotten to add beer to our shopping list. Hopefully I was not too late by adding it this morning. The store room was relatively clear by the time I scurried off to the gymnasium but when I returned another delivery had come in and the floor was stacked with cases of soft drinks.

It was the warmest day that we had enjoyed for a while, or it might have been my imagination or the lack of chill breeze blowing through the doorway, and my session at the gymnasium was truly blistering. It was a short but intense session as the Missus had to take Mother to an appointment, which cut short my time. I still managed to whizz ABH around the block when I came back but we avoided the beach as they can tend to be time consuming if we hap upon a shell or an interesting bit of seaweed. It was very warm by this time, assisted by my sweatshirt, hoodie and woolly hat, but at least I was in shorts.

It occurred to me earlier that we are probably not too far away from shorts weather. I might have elected to slip into a pair of shorts for the day, but I seem to recall that my flip flops have gone missing. I also seem to recall that they might have been suspiciously close to a pile of things being thrown out and since we have been absent from any notion of knowing where things are for six months my hope in finding them is exceedingly slim. I think that I may have to indent for another pair.

I had just cleared the store room of the soft drinks when the wine order I had placed yesterday turned up. I was about to clear that too when my Lifeboat pager went off requesting the Inshore boat be launched to a person cut off by the tide around at Porthcurno. At the time I did not know this and closed the shop, which was empty at the time, with the expectation of returning after the launch and possibly sooner if one of the other Tooltrak drivers turned up early. I was halfway up the RNLI car park to the ILB shed when the pager went off again requesting the big boat.

As fortune would have it, I met a Tooltrak driver as I made my way down to the Lifeboat station and tasked him to take it out while I attended to the big boat. I had pulled the boat back on its cradle to free the retaining strop and was just opening the doors when a few more very excellent Shore Crew turned up.

Since the boat was being released from inside the house on a quick launch, I sent one of the others out to help with the Inshore boat. While opening the Lifeboat station doors I had noticed that the Harbour beach was full of revellers and utmost caution would be needed while driving the Tooltrak among them. Despite what people may say, we do take care not to squash too many small children while going out to save lives at sea, although it not being in our remit to save lives on land as well.

I do realise that my description above may sound like a good deal of work, but it is all over in a trice or even sooner. We all undergo meticulous training to ensure that we

can slip into any role at a moment's notice. I am not sure whether it would be unfair to point out that the Boat Crew just have the one role to carry out, but I think that distinction needs to be made for the purpose of clarity.

We made the assumption that both boats would probably not be very long about their service, so we made to make ready for their return. Our biggest decision was which slipway to choose for the recovery. With neap tides just commencing, there was probably just enough water on the short slip and probably just a little too much on the long slip. The tide would resolve that, so I elected to use the long slipway and hoped that the boat was away long enough for the tide to recede to a point where it was the right decision.

During the service I kept a keen eye on proceedings, largely to ensure we knew when the boats were returning and to ensure we had the relevant cover on the areas we need to, erm, cover – and also to keep tabs on the two that went off to get ice creams from the new vendor by the OS slipway. I withhold their names and descriptions for their own safety. As you may know, there is a perfectly serviceable ice cream kiosk opposite the shop that these two elected to avoid. I would hate to think that two valuable members of the crew were to be found one dark night with ice cream cones stuck in their backs.

The boats were not gone that long. They both arrived back in The Cove not far apart from each other. I had hoped that was not the case, but the Harbour beach had cleared considerably from the launch time, so I was able to redeploy crew to the big boat recovery, which was ideal.

It was actually very pleasant waiting at the bottom of the long slipway. There was still warmth in the air, very little breeze and still quite bright, although the cloud was increasing by and by. There was a bit of run at the bottom of the Lifeboat slip, maybe around fifteen feet, so I told the boat ten so as not to frighten them. It had been perfectly calm before the Lifeboat arrived in the bay, which is often the case. It would appear that the Lifeboat causes the issue but that just seems so unlikely. Anyway, we were not faint hearted and conducted a textbook recovery up the long slip in unchallenging conditions. We are, after all, a very steady, very excellent Shore Crew.

If business were an animal at our end of The Cove in the afternoon when I returned to the shop at around half past three o'clock, it would have been a dodo – possibly a whole family of them. With one notable exception when the shop filled with at least four people in one go, we had hardly any customers at all. One young travelling lad gave me high hopes for a sale, but it transpired that a banana had spit in his rucksack and he was after some paper towel to clean it up. I was happy to ease his troubles and tore off some sheets of 'blue roll' which we use for all manner of cleaning operations. I drew the line of disposing of it for him as I cannot abide the smell of bananas.

Before all the shenanigans started, the Falmouth Divers arrived on a flat barge to service the Lifeboat marker flags. These flags, floating on a small buoy, mark the dug out channel that the Lifeboat follows when it launches and returns. They are chained to the seabed to hold them in position but during rough weather they are sorely tested and sometimes come adrift. It would seem that buoys will be buoys in that regard. The Falmouth Divers had chosen today as the barge can only get about in clam conditions.

The barge made a remarkably swift exit when the pagers went off. My guess is that they had been tipped off by the Coastguard as they were clear by the time the boat launched and we were not slouches in getting it away today. They returned while the boats were on service to replace the breasting buoy and were gone again by the time the boats returned.

We cruised through to closing time and enjoyed a brief heavy shower of rain just before we did. If it had not already been quiet, that would have just about killed off any potential trade we might have had. When I went outside to bring in the display, the street was deserted.

It made for a pleasant walk around after a run around the beach after tea. The air was clear and it was dry enough again for a couple to enjoy a barbeque on at the bottom of the slipway. We are hoping for a few more people to be around over the weekend but not too many after sliced bread because I forgot to place the order.

May 18th – Saturday

The first part of today went marvellously according to plan and probably slightly better. The new cash and carry delivery arrived at around eight o'clock. He told me he would have been even earlier had he not forgotten where The Cove was and gone charging off in the direction of St Just. It took us around fifteen minutes to get it all unloaded. Come the busy part of the summer this will be ideal as we will avoid any customer complications. The driver confirmed that we are a special case being delivered to this neck of the woods. It leaves us in a precarious position if some senior manager suddenly decides we are not worth the trouble anymore.

The newspapers had already arrived and I just had enough time to stuff them and put them out before opening time. We are still not selling enough to make it worthwhile, but I am sure this will be resolved shortly. The newspapers are also in a precarious position. If the laurel and hardy newspaper company put the delivery charge up again this year, I will almost certainly stop them altogether.

During the course of a very quiet morning, I worked my way through the delivery. There was still plenty left when the day started to get busier, and I had to abandon my work in favour of serving customers. I also diverted my attention to a box full of fridge magnets and postcards that had arrived yesterday. I had waited a while for

this order due to printing issues with the postcards and by the time they arrived our fridge magnet display looked very thin.

It looks quite fat now, but sadly the price had to increase this time. They have been the same price for several years, so it was no surprise and an increase in production costs was probably long overdue. It has put paid to our popular but oddly confusing three for five pounds deal for the plastic ones. We have metal ones that were not included in the deal, but people seemed to have a hard job distinguishing the plastic from the metal. There is still a difference in price between the two, so no doubt I will still need to explain. And people think being a grumpy shopkeeper is the easy option.

A lady today who had asked how I came to be running a shop in The Cove said how lovely it was that I could retire from a proper job early to be a shopkeeper!

If I were to have predicted today's weather on the basis of what it looked like first thing, I would have been quite upbeat about its prospects. What actually happened was that a cold easterly picked up and there was enough damp in the air to have a thickening mist. Happily, the breeze did not affect me in the shop, and I did not have to rush off to get a jacket. I was also kept warm by running around the shop and store room trying to clear the delivery. Demonstrably, I cleared the whole lot by close of play.

Once again, we were less than satisfactorily busy today. If however you had arrived shortly after two o'clock, you would be forgiven for thinking that we were run off our feet. It might have been the bus had just arrived bringing a contingent of visitors, including our London suburbs correspondent, TL, whom I had not met before – The Diary finds that it does not pay to be too familiar with correspondents lest they feel confident enough to ask for payment. He was dressed for walking, and in truth it was a decent day for that sort of thing and begger all use for anything else.

One of the chefs at the OS dropped in as usual before his shift. He told me that the Land's End Coaster bus has been packed these last few days. So much so that one refused to take in passengers at Polgigga, leaving the hapless travellers to wait two hours for the next one. The schedule is clearly insufficient but it will change – twice – in the next couple of weeks and become more frequent.

I am asked for copies of the timetable on a daily basis, now, but since our usual supply dried up, I need to find another. I asked one of the bus drivers if the specific Land's End Coaster sheet was available again this year, but she did not know. She also complained that she was at a loss with the frequency of the changes, especially as at each change they are so completely different. If the people driving the route are confused, what hope is there for our visitors.

Perhaps I should include running as a pastime today. I saw some runners passing by early this morning as I came down to wait for the cash and carry delivery. They came into the shop later, still in their running gear. I recognised them because one of the

ladies had bright blue and pink hair – nature never fails to amaze. Surprised by the fact they were gone for so long – as well as the hair – I asked where they had run to as I had assumed they were just out for a jog. They laughed at the expression and told me that they had run to Cape Cornwall and back. I am not entirely sure I would be doing that for fun but they did not exactly look on their knees, as indeed I would had I attempted such a thing.

Instead, I ambled ABH down to the beach for a run about before tea this time. We met with another small dog down there whose owners were happy to let off the lead. ABH and I were delighted that she would have a playmate to run around after but the other dog was having none of it and clung to the owner's ankles. Disgusted at such wimpishness, ABH stormed up the western slip in high dudgeon – after digging a few holes in the sand to poke her nose into – and we finished with a walk around the block.

The Missus took her out later and she had a swim and a proper run around on the beach, all by herself. On reflection, had we known ABH's character when we got her, she would have been much happier with a playmate. The bleddy hound was content being an 'only child'. It is a little late to consider now and quite apart from the fact that it would be the ruin of the Missus and me.

Finally, by the time this is in front of your eyes it will be the Aged Parent's birthday. Happy Birthday, Aged Parent.

May 19th – Sunday

Today, the morning did reflect the day's full potential right from the very outset and achieved it as the day went on. Indeed, I even debated wearing sunglasses when I took ABH around the block in the full glare of the sun rising above Carn Olva.

It turned into a day aspiring to rip gribbler status but not quite getting there. It suffered a small impediment of a bit of a northerly breeze which took the edge off the total warmth that might have ensued otherwise. I do not think that it particularly spoiled the day, and we were busy from the middle of the morning through to the middle of the afternoon, which probably said something about it. We sold sun lotion, sunglasses and brimmed hats in abundance. I am reasonable sure that tomorrow will bring sales of aftersun lotion, too.

Not that I was especially disappointed by the long awaited upturn in business, but I had rather a lot on today. The secondary grocery order needed to be done this week and I noticed yesterday that we were running short of ice creams and in fact had run out of some altogether. For the last couple of days I had been working on two beachware orders, too. These take a while because I have to be sure of what we have already and because I did half of the stock take at The Farm earlier in the year, I had some notion and recall of what was up there. The inventory is nearly reliable,

but I know that what I wrote down then made sense at the time. Coming back to review it some months later, some of it I discovered is open to interpretation.

The Missus had to go up to The Farm today anyway to collect a wheelbarrow for a friend and neighbour up the hill. I wrote her a list of the items to check and with half term bearing down on us, another list of things to bring down. Predominantly on the list were swimsuits and shorts, so I do hope that the half term week is blessed with good weather else the journey and my subsequent work have been wasted.

Between customers for the rest of the afternoon, I unwrapped bikinis and swimsuits to put out on sale. Some of these items have been in the store for some while as overstock and sizes that did not sell well the first time around. I am hoping that they will sell the second time around and to help them along, I have reduced the price. Yes, I know, dear reader. I did have to lie down in a darkened room for a while after that. Of course, I have put ten pence on everything else in the shop to compensate.

Despite having other things to do, I very much enjoyed the busyness and the day slipped by almost unnoticed. Busy though it was, we did not meet our pasty (sorry, MS) expectations and had very poor sales over both days. Having forgotten to order sliced bread from our local bakery on Friday for the weekend did not seem to upset many people, although they just might not have told me that they were upset and stomped off never to return. Having missed the deadline on Friday, I was determined not to make the same mistake again and promptly made the same mistake again when bikinis and a rush of shop busyness made me miss it again. I cannot do the bread order early in case I forget in case I get a customer order. I shall just have to set an alarm for tomorrow and hope I do not forget to do that.

So pleasant was it out in the evening, I took ABH out twice, before and after tea. We are both constantly on the lookout for playmates and on the longer of our two walks after tea we met two, both wholly unlikely. The first was a big black dog that chased her off in an unaggressive manner and the second, moments after the first left was a huge woolly creature. He completely ignored her but liked to run around the beach trying to get some peace from a pesky little hound, which amounted to playing chase as far as ABH was concerned. It suited me too, as we try to give her as much exercise as possible before bedtime in the hope that we get some peace during the night. It does not work, but it is worth a try.

It really was a pleasant evening to be wondering about. The northern breeze seemed to have diminished, except around the corner of the Lifeboat station that seems to have its own wind system. There were several acquaintances who clearly felt the same that we met on our way around our end of The Cove and I rounded off the day nicely by disposing of the soft furnishings from our old window seat in the so far empty skip – well, the builder do not appear to be using it.

The Missus continues to plough on with organising and clearing the flat and spent most of the day in the single bedroom that had remained unexplored for six months.

It was full up to the door and required a machete and a team of bearers to penetrate deep into its dark heart. I am sure that there was much throwing away and much putting away, but it did rather look like everything that was in there was moved into the hall and the double bedroom. I kept tripping over things. Clearly, this was not mentioned and I await further development.

It has been two months since we moved back in, and we are still not all square. One day we will look back on this and laugh – or just leave it and buy a tent.

May 20th – Monday

I will concede that today was indeed a bit of a rip gribbler. The northern breeze had gone completely in the morning, and I looked later to see where it went. I checked with the Meteorological Office which was telling me it was in the southwest. I would have been satisfied but for the flags on the Lifeboat channel markers, newly installed last week, blowing to the west. For a bit of reality, I decided to look at the Land's End weather station, which did nothing to ease my mind. Its page told of an average windspeed of seven miles per hour from the east southeast and a gust in the last ten minutes of 14 miles per hour from the north. It was at this point I thought it best that I stop looking.

Excelling at my morning exercises, perhaps because I did not have ABH on my back or jumping over my tummy, I was looking forward to a blistering session at the gymnasium. I had to wait because the Missus was a tad tardy in coming down to relieve me this morning and, as it turned out, it was probably best that she did.

When I came down to the shop first thing, I discovered that the Laurel and Hardy Newspaper Company had shorted me on supply. This was not an accidental miscount; they had deliberately dropped two of my titles. I took some time to sort this out so that it did not happen again tomorrow and, while I was logged into the system, I upped the numbers for next week when I hope that we will be much busier.

It was during mucking about with newspapers that I remembered that I had not cleaned the fridge ahead of the pasty (sorry, MS) delivery, which was due shortly and it was during cleaning the fridge that I noticed that the oven could do with a bit of a scrub and that the bin needed emptying. Before I knew it, the shop was open and the pasties arrived. I cleared the delivery and saw our man on his way. So far, so good.

Flushed with this success, I decided that it was quiet enough to telephone the one of our beachware suppliers whose windbreaks had inexplicably risen in price to £10,000 each on its website. I had keyed the internet order for everything else I needed yesterday but baulked at ordering the windbreaks. I would call them today to sort the windbreak issue out and place the entire order at the end. The cracks in my seamless day started to appear at the point that I picked up the telephone.

First, customers started to turn up, which was alright initially because they were just browsing. Then the greengrocer driver turned up, which was also alright because I did not need to interact very much with him, just tell him to leave the box on the ice cream freezer, which reminded me I needed to make sure that the Missus had placed the order I sent her. Then the milkman entered with an arm full of milky type things, so I paused on the telephone to ask him to drop it in the middle of the floor. Then the first of the browsing customers stopped browsing and brought some purchases to the counter. I asked the very pleasant lady at the supplier to hold on and duly prepared to serve the customer. This required somewhat more interaction than I had anticipated which I might have got away with but at that moment the butcher turned up and he would need paying.

I told the very pleasant lady on the telephone that I would call back and dealt with the remaining customer in the shop and the butcher. Before I called back, I put away the dairy order and cleared the greengrocery to the store room to deal with later.

In the ordinary scheme of things, I would have been done with the telephone call before the first customer turned up and I would have been able to take care of the deliveries in a more orderly manner. What had extended my call was the order I had placed the day before had disappeared from my shopping cart. Not only that but the sixty units of sun lotion I had ordered had now been snatched by someone else and only 36 were now available. I spent extra time ensuring that I had a back order in place for the remaining units at the same price, which was the reason I was buying from them in the first place.

I was mightily pleased when the Missus showed up and I could escape to the gymnasium for my blistering session after baking in the morning heat on the pavement on the way there. I also baked on the way back and also down in the Harbour beach where I took ABH when I came back. The bay was dead calm and there was not a ripple on the water in the Harbour and at the time, the day was absent of a breeze from any direction. ABH took the opportunity to dip in belly deep and I felt somewhat aggrieved that I could not follow suit – to ankle level at least. I asked the Missus if she had seen my flip flops during her clearing up and reorganising and she told me where to look. Sadly, I could only find the one, so it was another day of long trousers and shoes for me. She found the missing one but too late to be useful today.

Yesterday, I had been into bikinis and today I transferred my loyalties to shorts, although at the end I slipped into a few swimsuits for good measure. This was the overstock from our store at The Farm, which is sore needed as I noticed that our men's shorts were down in numbers. We did have a full box of spares, but they are just the one pattern in two colours. Since our beachware order only just went in I added some more shorts, so we can have some choice – and more overstock.

The one big issue we have with selling clothes, and I can only imagine everyone else that sells clothes is the same, is there is always one size that does not sell well. My guess is that the big clothes sellers have some detailed data that helps them order the right mix. We small retailers are stuck with buying a block of, say, shorts that has a spread of sizes that someone else thinks is about right. As a consequence, we are left with a small mountain of XL size shorts. I mentioned last year (at length) our glut of ladies' size 16 shorts that we have. All of the other shorts sold out completely.

It raises the issue of pricing because clearly, we will never sell out of the one size and will eventually have to be thrown out. We either have to sell each individual pair at an unseemly margin to cover the ones we do not sell or sell the consignment at a loss. I was very pleased to note, therefore, that one of our suppliers is selling men's shorts in block sizes and we were able to avoid the extra large one. It is fairly limiting in that they are plain colours and not very exciting, but it is a start.

I had pretty much finished the beach clothes by the end of the day. We will have two big deliveries mid-week and probably on the same day, so I shall gird my loins for that. I will be able to concentrate on the groceries now and we should be set for the coming week.

One of our dairy suppliers has rebranded its offerings and extended some of the ranges. We sold quite amazing amounts of its large pot of natural yoghurt, and I was disappointed at first that this was being replaced by another version. One of my regular customers tried the new one and gave it her blessing. She also suggested a cracking combination of the new strawberries and clotted cream yoghurt and fresh strawberries alongside each other in our fridge. I think she has a point and we will do this by the end of the week.

I took ABH out for a brief run just ahead of tea. The beach was quite busy at the time, so I avoided it. The Missus took her down later when the beach was clear and for a longer run. She came back dripping after some cavorting in the sea so that we might both enjoy a damp ABH for bedtime, I presumed.

May 21st – Tuesday

We started the day misty, cloudy and a sight cooler than the spankily good day that we had yesterday. It was nothing at all to do with deciding that today was the day to make the leap to little boys' trousers and the newly found flip flops. While I was regretting the whole cool breeze around the knees situation, the frozen order turned up with cold air pouring from the refrigerated truck's open door.

The sun did try and make incursions through the cloud and mist from time to time and, in all, it was a very pleasant day. I was not too uncomfortable in my shorts and flip flops and there will certainly be no going back from here until the end of the season.

I was not quite as pressed as I was yesterday morning, which was all the more surprising that I had completely forgotten the mental note to remember to do something when I put the display out the front first thing. There were no calls to make or orders to follow up on and the deliveries were fewer and better spaced. I did have a computer starting up problem that caused a bit of a stir while I was trying to restock the drinks fridge. It went into repair mode and presented a screen that asked for a 'recovery key' that really took me unawares. It did tell me where I could find this recovery key, a 48 digit code that I had to write down and rekey. Fortunately, I got it right first time and it restarted after a kick. Eventually, I managed to finish with the drinks fridge but left some of the large water bottles to do later.

After the delight at yesterday's good weather, today seemed to be treated with a little disdain. There was no glee and excitement in the air and there was much aimless wandering about. Trade was not encouraging with no panic buying of sun lotion and protective hats, an all-round disappointment. We did have a late rush of visitors into The Cove, a group of around 60 all sitting on the benches opposite us. Sadly, they were all under eleven years old and had not brought any pocket money with them. One of the teachers purchased ten soft drinks. I was not sure whether the children had to share them or whether the teachers were going to drink them to demonstrate that rank has its privileges. It did seem the chip shop had some business as they all sat around eating fish and chips into the evening.

The quiet of the afternoon gave me the chance to tuck away the 'farm shop' cash and carry delivery that arrived in the early afternoon. There was nothing new or exciting there, so I resolved to start the new yoghurt and strawberries offering from tomorrow. These will be available from early doors tomorrow and, at first, stocks will be limited. I think it would be fair to restrict purchases to one combination per customer, although slipping the grumpy shopkeeper a wink and a fiver usually oils the wheels of commerce I have often found.

Come closing time, as I dragged the display in from outside, I suddenly remembered the mental note that I had forgotten about in the morning. Not only had I forgotten what mental note it was but the fact that I had made a mental note at all. It all came flooding back when I spotted that the ball stand – custom made by my own fair hands – was missing balls in the lower tier. I had meant to remember to pump up some more balls. I could not do this immediately as the compressor makes a fearful sound and I did not want to disturb our neighbours until a more reasonable hour. I made a mental note to do it tomorrow morning at a reasonable hour.

The Missus had taken ABH out not that long before tea, so I took her out later when the Missus was taking Mother home. We headed for the beach that she was unable to get to earlier because of the tide and it being far too busy with small children. I knew that the beach was busy with small children at that hour because half the Harbour beach is along the food and drink aisle in the shop.

The beach is half dry powdery sand and half wet at present. ABH likes to dig a small hole in the powdery sand and stick her head in it. I have no idea what that is about, but it appears to be harmless. The novelty of that wore off soon enough and we headed around the block. I am glad I wore a jacket despite it looking reasonably bright because a cooling breeze had struck up from the northwest which was apparent as soon as we opened the front door. It seems that will be with us for the next few days and I am now wondering whether I really needed to order in quite so much sun lotion when perhaps I should have ordered fleeces instead.

May 22nd – Wednesday

I was interrupted in the middle of my 5,000 metres row by a telephone call. I could see it was the supplier that was to be delivering a pallet load of beachware later in the day, so I answered it. The very pleasant lady asked if I would not mind awfully postponing our delivery until tomorrow. I agreed and it turned out to be the best decision I had made in a while.

As it happens it was not the first interruption during my row. I had inadvertently put a couple of series of the Radio Four show, I'm Sorry I Haven't a Clue on my smart mobile telephone and one sketch came up while I was mid row. It was lucky I was in a slow section of the row as I was in kinks at a couple of the jokes. I made a mental note to take those series off.

The day had started well, if slowly. The mist had largely cleared out, probably blown away by the persistent northwesterly that was bringing down the temperature. Anyone with any sense would have packed up and headed for the south coast beaches where they could bask in the off and on sunshine without such annoyance. It seems most of our visitors had some sense.

We had our strawberries delivered as planned and the smart strawberry yoghurt to go with it. Our friend and neighbour took pity and bought one pair in the marketing coup of the year but by the end of the day, the rest were still there. There was little else to be concerned with in the morning. It was the afternoon that took the brunt of the action.

Quite unexpectedly, our local interest books arrived by courier. I had tried to call the supplier late yesterday because I had been expecting these last week but I must have just missed them. Four boxes duly arrived today and took a while unpacking. I was looking for the delivery note that comes with it so that I could check off the contents as I put them out. Having opened boxes one of four and four of four I eventually found it in three of four. Who on Earth puts a packing slip in the penultimate box.

Anyway, all the books were present and correct with some surprise titles we had not seen before, including a teach yourself Cornish primer. It would have been a bigger

surprise to find a teach yourself Hindu primer, so I should be grateful. What was more than slightly disappointing was that the books that fit into our display carousel number only enough to fill a third of the stand. It looks like a half decorated Christmas tree where the needles have fallen off. There is another supplier that will have books the right size, but it is all rather too late to fix it for the half term.

I already knew that the smaller of the two beachware orders was now not coming – how could I forget after the call disrupting my row. I had no idea when the larger would come and I had it in mind to give the company a call to find out so that we could prepare. I still had that in mind at half past two o'clock when the van with the 42 boxes on board arrived. The company has its own van and uses it first whenever it can, resorting to couriers when it has to. It was therefore an amiable unloading with a husband and wife team and we unloaded in no time. I pointed to where most of it would go and by the time we went to the van, picked up the first boxes and brought them inside, a customer was standing just where we intended to place them. Given that we had not been flush with customers all day, this veritably took the biscuit.

At first, 42 boxes does seem a little daunting and I suppose it is. Fortunately, not all of it needs to be opened, priced and put out and at least half of it could be packed up and sent off to the store at The Farm. These I put outside, waiting until either I or the Missus could bring the truck around to fill it up. The rest went into the store room and I will have to set to on them early doors to clear them before the postponed order arrives.

As luck would have it, I caught the Missus as she took ABH around for a walk in the later afternoon. She brought the truck around, flung open the back door and we suddenly remembered the boxes I had put in there the day before, which was the remnants of the swimsuits and shorts I had dealt with on Sunday, I think. Not one to be deterred by such things, the Missus set to with squeezing the new boxes in around the existing ones. We will have to clear the truck early tomorrow so that we can move the next delivery up there later in the day.

Just when we thought it was all over, our bone china mugs delivery turned up unannounced. It was only five boxes, but they are chunky. Fortunately, there was just enough room on the store room floor to accommodate them. They will need to be opened and the mugs priced and put out tomorrow along with all the beachware and before the new delivery turns up. I think I might just have a very full morning tomorrow.

The Missus had torn herself away from painting the single bedroom to make tea. She had spent several days leading up to this point clearing the room for this very purpose. She went back to it after tea while ABH decided that she had enough inactivity today and demanded attention for the rest of the evening.

I was about to retire for the evening when I had a message from a colleague on the very excellent Shore Crew telling me we were due a launch very shortly. An antique

wooden yacht had sprung a leak further up, a long way off Padstow. Padstow Lifeboat attended and had successfully put a pump on board but was escorting the yacht that needed some dry dock attention in Penzance. We were tasked with taking over this duty at around nine o'clock and escorting her in or until possibly Penlee took over. We launched and waited – me with my eyes closed in bed.

To be continued ...

May 23rd – Thursday

It was just about Thursday when one of the crew dropped me a message to let me know that Penlee Lifeboat was indeed coming out to take over the escort and our boat would be back in the bay at two o'clock. I roused myself and replied that we were all just a bit sleepy and that we would be there at around eight o'clock after breakfast and a cup of tea. Sadly, he thought that I was joking, so I had little choice but to raise a crew to muster at around half past one o'clock.

As expected, the boat had taken five hours to get to us at its steady rate of six knots. There must have been all sorts of people listening in to the broadcasts in the middle of the night because we were inundated with volunteers. Seven of us watched from the top of the slipway as the various lights converged as we had already set up the slipway earlier. I commented that I had never seen so many of us gathered in the middle of the night and was answered that we had not seen that many during the day, either.

We listened to the handover then saw one of the lights break away from the others and head for the bay. I had handed over the reins to a trainee Head Launcher who carried out his duties under the watchful eye of another colleague. It did cross my mind that I could have slipped away to my bed unnoticed, but it was probably not seemly for the Head Launcher to do so. It is a heavy burden I carry.

Had I gone home, I would not have witnessed the boat come astern onto the slipway in a blaze of light and to be brought up in what was clearly a textbook recovery in the small hours of the morning. We were washed down and refuelled and home to our beds by three o'clock. We are, after all, a very over-populated, very excellent Shore Crew.

ABH did me the honour of waking me up roughly at my normal waking time. I might have over-slept without her, but I have been getting up at the same time without an alarm for a very long time, so it was unlikely. I especially did not want to over-sleep today as I wanted to get on with the mountain of boxes in the store room ahead of the pending delivery of more beachware in the afternoon.

I managed to storm ahead in the morning with very few customers to divert me from my purpose. It became trickier as the day progressed and at some points impossible.

There were distractions along the way such as the Laurel and Hardy Newspaper Company supplying just one Times newspaper. I have a customer who has ordered one, so that left me with none to sell. The same thing happened a couple of days ago and I corrected the volume for the rest of the week. Some eejit at Smiths News clearly thinks that they know more about what I sell than I do and put it back again. I bleddy hate doing newspapers.

Labouring long and hard, I eventually got to the new bone china mugs. We had very few out on display and I had rather wished that I had placed a bigger order. A good deal of the present delivery went out on the shelves, and I squeezed them in to get out as much as I could. Clearly, I had chosen the right day to do this on because I lady came back late in the afternoon and bought ten of them. We do love it when a plan comes together, although now my bone china mug display is going to look a tad thin by the middle of the season. I should place another order now otherwise we will have nothing to offer by the tail end of the season.

The Missus ran the truck up to The Farm in the afternoon with all yesterday's boxes which she would have duly dumped in the store there. When she came back, nearly all the most recent delivery of windbreaks and buckets, was put into the truck for transport up there tomorrow along with the pallet it came on. There are still several boxes left in the store room but I do not consider the remnant at all indicative of poor performance on my part; there was a lot to get through in a partially busy day. I will attend to the rest tomorrow, but I think we are as ready as we might be for an onslaught – if one is coming – this weekend.

I do hope that the weather pulls its socks up before everyone arrives. Actually, I wish that I had pulled some socks on today as it was what several people today called fresh. I might have used the term 'bleddy cold' for what it was standing in the shop all day with a robust northwesterly blowing through the doorway. From my experience walking ABH out first thing, I had already decided on wearing a mid-layer rather than a shirt and by an hour into opening I had to dash upstairs for my fleece. It stayed on all day, even when the sun came out later in the day. It certainly made no difference in the shop.

After all the successes of the day and the herculean effort clearing the store room, come the end of the day when I brought in the outside display, I thought, balls. Once again, I had forgotten to replenish the stock of footballs and mini balls that adorn the lower tier of the incredibly imaginatively built ball stand. It has weathered some severe beatings from the weather over the years and large dogs being thoughtlessly tethered to it. After all that, I still cannot remember to keep it filled with balls.

I took a tennis ball with me down to the Harbour beach in the evening as the Missus suggested that ABH might play a bit of ball chasing. She did not. In fact, she was not particularly interested in being on the beach and we ended up walking around the block instead. We would have been playing Lifeboats – me, not ABH – but after

playing Lifeboats for six hours last night the duty Coxswain decided that perhaps no one would want to play tonight as well and cancelled the training.

The Missus continued her painting of the single bedroom. She decided that instead of buying extra paint, she would use the various left-over paints from the other rooms. When she said that I imagined each wall a different colour. She obviously has a much more refined imagination - one wall now has stripes of the various colours and resembles wallpaper. Smart Alec.

May 24th – Friday

One hundred and fifty pasties (sorry, MS), 30 sausage rolls, four gem lettuces, 2 cucumbers, 6 punnets of strawberries, 8 punnets of mushrooms, 24 litres of juice, 48 cans of coke and diet coke, 48 small bottles of water, cakes, scones loaves of bread, 34 litres of milk, 10 packs of butter and 10 packs of speciality cheeses plus everything we already had. I was rather hoping that would see us through a busy weekend as I was also hoping that the weekend would indeed be busy.

Happily, all of the orders arrived with a bit of space in between that allowed me to distribute the various items to their correct shelves and storage fridges. Not so happily, I noticed that the strawberries had increased in price by a whole pound per punnet since yesterday. This very effectively scuppered my yoghurt and strawberry combo deal after just one day of trials. Everything went yesterday but only two pairings were sold, which is fifty percent if I wanted to be a glass half full kind of grumpy shopkeeper.

One of the enduring features that keep grumpy shopkeepers grumpy is the Laurel and Hardy Newspaper Company repeatedly fiddling with my newspaper volumes. Earlier in the week, when it had sent me just one Times newspaper. I went through and upped all the remaining days to their current number plus one – twice when the same thing happened yesterday. Today again I got just two Times newspapers – someone had gone in and changed my numbers down again.

Today, I wrote to our contact lady who has been less than responsive since I argued with her about the increase in delivery charge last year. In fact, she has declined to answer any of my messages so far, which is a bit rude. I asked her to put a block on changes to my volumes – something she has done before. I might have also mentioned in passing that because of the excessive delivery charges I need all the sales I can get to cover the cost. I know it was not strictly necessary in the context of the issue, but I just could not help myself.

I did refrain from including the quite stark statistic that last year delivery was ten percent of my retail value. Given that I only make on average 20 percent profit from selling newspapers, this equates to 50 percent of my margin. I had not calculated

that before and now I wish I had not. It does make a mockery of the whole newspaper selling lark.

Pasties secured in the store room fridge and everything else scattered about the shop in the appropriate places, I scurried off to the gymnasium for yet another blistering session. It seems that me heading down the road must send off some 'all clear' signal. The street is empty as I head down to the hut with a tin roof but invariably when I come back a little group – sometimes a larger group – are gathered about the tables opposite the café. I do not know if it is because I tend to head down the road at the same time each gymnasium day or people just feel safer with me out of the way.

The cafe might have been busy, but the shop had been fairly quiet all morning. The Missus sold some more mugs, so I must have made some good buying decisions in terms of style just not enough volume. When I took over again in the middle of the day, we had bit of business with comers and goers but with gulfs of inactivity in between. It is early yet, but I was hoping for better.

In a blinding stroke of luck, the optician called to say that my false ears were available for collection. The Missus was about to run off to The Farm – like running off to the circus but without clowns – and over to St Buryan to collect Mother. She had to go to The Farm first because of all the stock in the truck meaning there was no room for Mother. I asked if she could trek into town and pick up my ears and also steal some Air Mail stickers from the post office. I ordered some more international stamps yesterday and the Royal Mail shop people still have not relented about not letting me have any official ones.

It had been a little gloomy in the morning, but the cloud broke up a bit from the middle of the day and we had some sunshine in the afternoon. The robust wind from the northwest had lost its punch but there was still a bit of a breeze from that direction early on and I wore a fleece in the morning. When I came down in the middle of the day, I braved a short sleeve shirt but by the middle of the afternoon I was once more in a fleece that I collected from upstairs having got chilly later on.

Despite a bit of a breeze swinging from everywhere in the top left before going around to the southwest, the sea was dead calm. All the ground sea that had struck up through Wednesday and yesterday was completely banished and the surfers had to make do with bobbing about a bit. The wing surfer who was out yesterday was out of luck as well with not enough breeze to drive his wing. At least with low water in the middle of the day there will be plenty of beach for our hopefully expected visitors this week.

There were certainly signs of an upturn towards the end of the day. Familiar faces appearing at the counter, which is always a good sign. I had one chap in for a box of 30 pence matches and realised that he could not pay by payment card because of our minimum – is paying 30 pence by credit card really reflex these days. He

purchased a bottle of drink, and randomly, a cricket set. I asked him if he intended to set fire to his bails for his own trophy, but I think the moment was lost. Perhaps he just misheard me.

Towards the end of the afternoon, things began to stir in The Cove. There was a general increase in hubbub and customers started to appear more frequently. To my experienced, hopeful and optimistic eye, this was a great arrival commencing, indicated a little by the buying of groceries and ordering of newspapers. The till at the end of the day showed a marked improvement in shopping, which is just where it mattered. I just hope I did not confuse a great arrival with a great going home.

The Harbour car park was busy with cars when we passed through twice in the evening. The Harbour beach, what was left of it, was pretty busy too and we avoided going down there. There were a good number of people milling about in the car park as well suggesting that the busyness was most likely the sunset watching brigade rather than a host of newly arrived residents for the week.

Having shivered in my, erm, flip flops in the shop for most of the day, it was gratifying to note that it was pleasantly warm in the dying sunshine of the day. It was also pleasant to look at with pleasant people to meet and make a fuss of ABH. It was also pleasant to see the work the ladies at the end of Coastguard Row have carried out on the bit of ground just before the Coast Path.

They have used native plants that merge well with the wild surrounds have taken care to complement and not replace the natural growth there. There is a lot of shades of green rather than a mass of crazy colour which no doubt the overrunning montbretia will provide later as the white of the tri-cornered leek recedes. I will not let the little girl loose there again until winter for fear of adders, which one of the ladies confirmed were there in abundance.

It was not until I returned home on the last run out at night with ABH that I remembered I had not packed away the day's newspapers. It is the third time since we have started having them that I had forgotten. I think I am subconsciously trying to block them from my mind and if true, my mind is doing a grand job of it. Darned things.

May 25th – Saturday

I was ahead of the posse in so many ways today largely thanks to an early call from ABH. I should be grateful, it was half past five this morning, half an hour later than yesterday. I made a mental note to have a larger hound next time around supposing it would come with a larger bladder.

Getting downstairs ahead of the newspapers I was able to put out some drinks that needed doing and clear the bread order that arrived way earlier than I had imagined.

It is a new driver and he had been very late the last week. I think he just got the hang of it today. I thought that I would be smart and cook some eggs for my breakfast last night as I would not have time in the morning. The Missus was smarter and cooked some chicken, mainly for ABH. She said that I could have some to go with my eggs, but I declined. I would not know which one to have first.

What was most surprising this morning was the appearance of the scaffolders at half past seven o'clock. They announced they would be drilling some holes in our granite wall and wondered if they would be disturbing anyone in the holiday lets next door and nearby. I said that since it was the start of one of the busiest weeks in The Cove there was a pretty good chance that there might be a few holidaymakers enjoying either their last night or their first night after a long journey here. They promised to drill very quietly, so that was alright, then.

It was halfway through the morning when I remembered my balls. Under the cover of the drilling on one side of the building, I fired up the compressor on the other. If push came to shove, I would blame the noise nuisance on the scaffolders – no, really, they started it. Anyway, I let the machine fill up then pump up balls until the tank is expired before switching it on again. This stops it starting and stopping every few balls. Operation successfully completed, we now have a much better display for outside. We did not sell any, of course.

The day started just as it should have done, possibly excluding a tardy scaffolding operation, with sunshine and a bit of warmth coming through. It was not long before a few customers started turning up and during the morning, it all looked very positive. Then the cloud started to roll in. Our customers went from buying beach games and buckets and spades to rain ponchos and playing cards. Then some rain came, the street emptied, and I sat in the corner and sucked my thumb. I felt much better after that.

The Laurel and Hardy Newspaper Company still manages to haunt me even at the weekend. I had a reply to my complaint to the customer services team asking to leave my volumes alone yesterday. They apologised profusely and told me that they had set my volumes to eight between Monday and Saturday. I sent a note on return pointing out that I had asked that they leave my volumes alone, not change them. They had now disrupted my volumes that I had increased for the coming week, so I asked that they put back the volume I had asked for on Saturday and Monday and I would correct the rest of the week.

My reply that I sent at half past twelve o'clock elicited an automatic reply some hours later telling me that I had sent my message outside normal office hours and it would get a response as soon as they went back to work. Someone must have gone into the office today because I had a reply. Whoever it was must have cut and pasted the previous response, because despite the question being different, the answer was the same that they had reset my numbers for the week to eight. Alright, they win. I give up and will see what numbers turn up on Monday.

The constant rain that the Meteorological Office imagined would plague us for the afternoon lasted about an hour. There was then a little more as another band of rain crossed us and at half past two o'clock, it disappeared for another lengthy absence. It either came too late to rescue our afternoon or the football that I was told was happening had drawn the big money away elsewhere. If that had not done it, then the brisk easterly that kicked in after the rain had temporarily vacated the area did it. Of course, it could have been the unfortunate combination of threatening rain, football and easterly wind. It was almost as if the small gods of grumpy shopkeepers could not make up their minds which damaging strategy to employ and so tried all of them.

It would seem that the ire was not just pointed at grumpy shopkeepers. The passengers on the 16:10 to Penzance were not faring all that well, either. One lady passenger who dropped in to ask for a beer and a packet of crisps – who could blame her – told me that a mechanic was on the way. It was down to chance whether the mechanic or the 18:10 would arrive first. Ten minutes later another couple came in for beers. I could have sworn I heard singing when the bus eventually got going again and headed up the road.

The bus times change to 'peak season' from tomorrow, which will mean an hourly service, except on a Sunday when it is still two hourly. I am sure that the bus company had the statistics that show significantly fewer people travel on a Sunday during the peak season. It still seems unreasonable, though.

The rain returned for an unwelcome reprise at around four o'clock and stayed for the rest of the evening. It was not particularly heavy rain to start with, but it was enough to keep most people at home. We went through a bit of a revival when the beer at home ran out and people came out for reinforcements, but it was never going to set The Cove on fire.

It is unlikely that any fire would have taken anyway. When I took ABH out for her last run, it was hacking down. Welcome to the bank holiday weekend, all.

May 26th – Sunday

Disappointingly, we appeared to have reverted back to winter this morning. It was grey, bleak and chilly. The rain that had not that long cleared out still left its ghost in the air and a feeling that it could come back at any moment if it wanted to. The sun was trying hard to reverse the trend but clearly not hard enough to make a difference for a while.

The morning was slow to get off the ground, which seems to be the trend of more recent years. It was not so long ago that we were fighting eager shoppers off at the door before opening time as they made a bid to get at early newspapers. Perhaps

the first electric sliding door in The Cove is a bit more intimidating or just that people are just no longer desperate for a newspaper that early. It was nearer the middle of the day when the street started to look a bit more populated accompanied by a bit of sunshine.

There ensued a busy few hours when the oven was constantly on to facilitate a steady flow of pasties (sorry, MS) that justified the large order I placed for the weekend. The flood started at the right time because any later I might have tempered my order for Monday. I was pleased to see that I had not lost the art of keeping pace with the demand but there again, it was fairly consistent which made it easier. I even plotted the end game quite successfully when we segued from full on to sporadic sales. There was only one hiccup when I went to collect pasties from the oven only to discover that I had only imagined that I had put some in earlier. I should probably go to bed earlier.

Modern youngster.: “Do you have any vegan pasties?”
Grumpy shopkeeper.: “No lady, they’re all from Cornwall.”

Despite an insistent southwesterly breeze, the beach seemed to be an attractive proposition - ‘we came for a beach holiday, and we’re darned well going to have one.’ There was a small line of camps strung out along the high water mark and plenty of people cruising the beach and even more swimming or surfing. Do not ever let it be said, our seaside goers do not know how to look like they are having a marvellous time in the face of adversity. The crowd did thin out a bit after the first shower in the afternoon and a bit more after the second. To be fair, the second did come towards the end of the beach day and the tide was by that time, pressing in.

We benefited greatly from those two showers when people pushed into the shop for shelter and felt obliged to buy a few things. They were mixed up with people who would have bought their groceries anyway, just a little sooner than they might have intended. It was a good combination along with a swathe of present buying and pocket money spending and amounted to a very busy day in the shop, thank heaven. Everyone was pleasant and friendly, and everyone was in a good mood, even – mostly – the grumpy shopkeeper behind the counter.

I was kept busy right through to the last hour when with more showers threatening and a southwesterly that had gone from irritating to howling, the crowds finally gave up. I had quite forgotten our visitor’s propensity to clear our beer shelves in short order and missed an opportunity to order in some more bottles. We have cans and enough other options, but there will be gaps. I had to rush around just after we closed and gather the lists for greengrocery and dairy as we had taken a beating there too. Where I continue to be amazed is the exodus of our expensive bone china mugs. Where did we go right.

It had been a gratifying busy day despite the weather’s best efforts and long. It leads to the days end being a perfunctory tea, hound walk and bed, while the Missus laid

the carpet in the single bedroom with spare left over from the rest of the flat. Well, it beats watching Country Antiques Talent News on the television.

May 27th – Monday

Talk about starting the day with a challenge; I certainly was not prepared to be answering difficult questions like, did I work here. The lady thought I was being petulant when I did not answer immediately, but having been told just last week that it was not a proper job I had to consider carefully, was I actually working. She resolved the issue for me by assuming that since I was filling shelves, I did. Perhaps I do have a real job, after all.

It was still fresh in the morning as we stepped out. It looked like the rain had not long left us and I was rather hoping it would not come back. Radio Pasty somewhat gleefully announced that we should expect rain again from four o'clock. In the meanwhile we should enjoy what there was which was predominantly dry and relatively warm, although the sunshine was hit and miss. It was probably this that lulled me into a false sense of security that had me on the Harbour beach just as the heavens opened.

I had dismissed the spots of rain appearing in the pavement and it was hardly noticeable under my post-gymnasium hooded sweatshirt. ABH found someone to play with, so when the rain got a bit heavier, it seemed a shame to break up the game just for a few drops of rain. I hardly noticed when the few drops of rain turned into a veritable flood and when I did, it was easy to tell myself that it would be over in a moment because I could see blue sky just at the edge of the black cloud that seemed to be the problem. I was soaked through by the time it became apparent that the black cloud was not moving very quickly and being somewhere else seemed a grand idea.

There was a sheet of water cascading from the Lifeboat station roof. I had suggested when they replaced the roof a couple of years ago some method of saving this water might be a good idea. It would also have saved ABH and I from having to walk through the deluge as we sought to avoid a car driver working out if their vehicle had a reverse gear as it tried to turn around by the RNLI car park entrance. The rain stopped five minutes after we got back to the shop.

I would venture that it was the weather that put a dent in the proceedings today. There were long periods of dry but there was always the impression that the rain was lurking nearby. It was not particularly warm either and having a jacket was order of the day unless you were young and carefree when a wetsuit open to the waist and a swimsuit was perfectly alright. I went and got my fleece, but it was late in the afternoon, in my defence.

It was also late in the afternoon that heist of the century occurred and in broad daylight, too – and no smart comments about it being a regular occurrence in the shop. Our Lifeboat mechanic was seen taking his toolkit to the telescope that has adorned the railings opposite the café for decades. I used to see someone in a van turn up to empty the cash box and give it a bit of a polish probably once a year but in recent times, it has been ignored. It took a bit of hammering and jemmying and the last I saw of it was on a sack trolley heading west.

Clearly keen that I should only report the facts, one of the Parish Councillors had a quiet chat with me. I was told that the telescope company was no longer contactable and further, it had not paid its rent for a considerable time. A grant had been, erm, granted to replace the telescope with a free one that will take its place in due course. Of course, the councillor could have just been in league with the gang and been paid handsomely for keeping the truth out of the public domain – I hear corruption in politics is rife in recent times. I will make further enquiries.

That was later in the day when I had time to stop and stare. The rest of the day was relatively busy but not as busy as yesterday. The promised rain at four o'clock was mostly mizzle with a bit of heavier rain here and there. It forced a few customers our way as they took shelter in the shop and our beer and wine took another battering in the latter part of our opening. I had quite forgotten how quickly those shelves are emptied and will take note to make sure my ordering is a little more timely later in the season.

We had returned to bleak for the last run out with ABH. I did not need a rain jacket but there was damp in the air. There were a few cars in the Harbour car park but no sunset watching tonight and our walk around the block was strictly unremarkable. The forecast suggests more unremarkedness tomorrow. What joy.

May 28th – Tuesday

You just have to admire the weather forecasters at Radio Pasty. Faced with a day of incomparable greyness and misery they insisted that while we would have showers moving east amongst the impenetrable low cloud and dampness in the morning, the afternoon would be much improved with just impenetrable low cloud and dampness.

As you might imagine, dear reader, the sort of day described above did not foster the sorts of inward migration of visitors that we had hoped for during this short week of holiday. In fact, I might venture that it had the opposite effect. Those risking being abroad on such a day were the brave, the sea using and those whose only other option was to lock themselves inside with small children.

Probably, the only group getting any sort of enjoyment out of the day were the surfers. The sea had got a bit miffed yesterday, charged up by that southwesterly turned westerly. It had nearly scuppered the fishing boats going out but in the end

merely delayed them. The ferocity of the sea state had diminished since then and there were some usable surfing waves left over. The fact that I could see them at all spoke of an improvement of some kind in the weather.

I was sorely tempted to fritter and waste the unexpected free time I had but we had seen enough action over the last couple of days to warrant some shelf restocking. I managed to get quite a bit done and even cleared our smaller cash and carry delivery that turned up halfway through the morning. I started in the grocery aisle, took a left at the fridge magnets that looked very thin and by special request brought out the missing wooden pegs and washing line I did not even know were absent. I was a man on fire and probably should have put myself out much earlier.

It must have been the euphoric news that the Laurel and Hardy Newspaper Company has slashed our delivery charge by £4.17, which is more than it increased it by last year. Quite why I have been singled out for such largesse, I have no idea. It is unlikely that I will find out either, given that the company did not choose to inform me that it had been changed. I seriously doubt that it is because I complained about it because I did that last year to little effect. The balance is still outrageous but about ten percent less outrageous than it was.

It put me in a good mood to complain to our much maligned council councillor about the buses. The times changed to peak on Sunday but because the peak service does not cover Sundays or bank holidays, the hourly service did not come in until today. So, in effect the upgraded service to meet the demand of the half term holiday only covers five days of the potential eight days people are here. I also tacked on a bit about not being able to get timetables and because my previous message did not get through added a paragraph about the new bins as well. There, that will teach them.

My complaint was really prompted by the number of information requests that I had received over the last couple of days. It floored me to discover that the hourly service did not come in on bank holiday. Much of the consternation has been caused by the bus company not changing the timetable at the bus stop itself. They would have to change it again next Sunday, so presumably they thought that they would not bother. It is an absolute pig's ear of a service and not even the mobile telephone 'app' works properly. It will give you a list of the next four buses but says they are all going to Penzance. This is essentially true, but some will take one hour via Land's End and the other three hours as they divert through St Ives.

Towards the end of the day, the weather made a real effort to buck up. The mist had cleared significantly and it was dry apart from the damp in the air. It was disappointing therefore, when I took ABH around at last knockings that it had gone all mizzly again. There is a general acceptance from the customer I met that there will be sunshine tomorrow with bluebirds swooping about in a clear sky as unicorns cavort on the lush green hillside. I have agreed, of course, as I do not wish to burst

any bubbles, but I do think that the obese lady has not yet finished the opening stanza let alone finished singing.

May 29th – Wednesday

I admit I had concurred with the common opinion that today would be blessed with better weather. It was something to do being told that it would be by Radio Pasty and various online weather forecasts a few days ago. I think that subconsciously I believed it because it was what I wanted it to be. What we got was a dank, grey and mizzly morning with more promises that it would get better later in the day. It could not get much worse and we are running out of days when it will be useful.

Cheering me up was a lady who had decided to mount an unsupported expedition to Land's End and was after a map to help get her there.

Grumpy shopkeeper: "You really do not need a map to get you to Land's End, lady."
[Proceeds to provide directions while lady rifles through tourist leaflets.]

Intrepid lady: "Are there no maps in any of these leaflets?"

Grumpy shopkeeper: "No lady but, really, you will not need one. The path is marked and very clear and there will be about 100 other people going the same way."

Intrepid lady: "You sure none of these leaflets have a map? This Land's End one, perhaps?"

Grumpy shopkeeper: "No lady. If you really want a map, there's one here for £3.99."

Intrepid lady: "Oh, I don't want to spend that much."

Grumpy shopkeeper: "!"

Intrepid lady: "So, I just go along this way, and I'll get there."

Grumpy shopkeeper: "Yes, lady, and up the hill to the lookout. You will see Land's End from there – erm, through the fog. Keep the sea on the right."

The mizzle did slowly clear up leaving the day slowly improving. The mist and grey took much longer to clear away and the sun eventually broke through after four o'clock in the afternoon. By that time, many people had got fed up and gone home, at least from our end of The Cove. What surprised me most was a series of small camps set out above the high water line under the now glorious sunshine. Quite when people rushed down there to enjoy the beach, I have no idea.

Our visitors must have had advanced notice of the skies clearing because they were piling into the shop long before the sun arrived. Fair enough, they had deserted us for the entirety of the morning, but we shall let that pass as they did spend quite a bit in the afternoon. I did not mind at all the fact that the very things that I had topped up on the shelves earlier were now being shipped out in abundance. I had a good mental grasp of the stock levels which was a good thing because I had commenced another cash and carry order.

I was in two minds about placing the order because the payment for the last one had only just left our bank account and it was no small amount. The somewhat slower than expected trade had also not put that much of a dent in our stock but I felt we could make a decent enough order and leaving it another week would probably mean running out of some lines. We also did not need much in the way of tobacco, which would have added a big expense to the order, which I would rather avoid just now. In fact, it had only just struck me that we have sold significantly fewer cigarettes this season and significantly more vapes. It is probably a fairly representative sample of one social category or other, so make of that what you will.

I have previously mentioned that the Missus has been working on the single bedroom in the flat. It is the last room to be decorated, although the porch needs to be seen to next. When we lived in exile, I had become accustomed to using the small bedroom there as a sort of dressing room. It was very decadent and exceedingly convenient, and I jested that I wanted one when we got home. Well, lo and behold, the Missus did her big reveal having worked long into the evening each day this week. I have my dressing room. Perhaps she does like me, after all, although there is a single bed in there so it might just be an eviction.

Trying hard not to think about it, I finished off the cash and carry list. What I was unable to do through the busy afternoon, was transfer the list to the website. We still have a day in hand, and I should be able to complete it in the morning. However, what also happened during the afternoon was a surprise 14 box delivery of wetsuits and shoes. The Missus had to run around and got the truck so that we could clear the order from the shop. In the furtherance of my comfort, she had cricked her back putting a castor onto the bed. I may have to run the boxes up to The Farm tomorrow to save her back.

After a five minutes to closing rush an hour before we closed, we slid into a more relaxed run down to closing. It seems that the general opinion was that we closed at six o'clock when, for this week only, we are closing at seven o'clock. It is a bit disappointing, having put in the effort to close later, that most people are happy if we closed earlier. I shall have to take this into consideration when we do the hours for next year. Of course, we could always take a leaf out of the bus company books and just not change our timetable, so no one knows what hours we are keeping.

There is no such thing as a free lunch and as part of getting my dressing room I had to sit down after tea and go through my clothes, some of which I had not seen in years, which I guess was the reason for going through them. I now have half the wardrobe I had before but will in all likelihood not miss the half now in the charity pile. There again, I will almost certainly need at least one of the items soon after they have been turned out.

There was still a bit of sunset going on – one that you could see - when I took ABH around for the last run out. The Harbour car park was busy as was the Harbour beach, which we avoided. It was how it should have been all week but for the

inclemency of the weather. Perhaps we have a few days now to see what we were missing.

May 30th – Thursday

Now, what was I saying about no such thing as a free lunch. Today the small gods of grumpy shopkeepers said, 'Here's that sunshine you've been waiting for and 'ere, have a forty knot northwesterly to go with it.' Thank you, so much.

Despite that, we had a busy day – in parts, largely because it was the last full day for many, and they were determined to enjoy it. Against the normal pattern of business, many of our pasties (sorry, MS) went out before the one o'clock deadline for us to order for the next day. So busy with pasty selling was I that I came very close to missing the deadline. I had to keep a customer waiting while I squeezed it in with just three minutes to go. It was useful, however, because it would have otherwise been very difficult to determine just how many we would need for the weekend. As it was, I did not have too much time to think about it.

After a typically quiet morning, business came in fits and starts. Some of the starts were quite intense at times and we were close to being into queue territory were it not for lightning-fast keyboard skills on the jangling till – I never said accurate. This kept up for most of the day with reasonably lengthy quiet bits in between. It made me wonder if our visitors have a small get together and agree to all go shopping at the same time or just how else it might be coordinated. Given the number of times it happened during today I cannot believe that it was coincidental.

There was already some ground sea out in the bay. The robust northwesterly flicked up the wave tops and filled the bay with white horses earlier in the day. As the day progressed and the wind diminished a little, the white caps started to thin out, but the waves still looked quite big close in to shore. There was not much surfing material with the wind onshore, but it did not dissuade an army of contenders piling in with their boards at the ready. Having much more success near the bottom of the tide it seemed good enough for a wind surfer to cut a dash across the beach. Once again, there was a small set of camps up on the high tide line even though they would be long gone before any waves bothered them.

We were supposed to empty the truck of our delivery during the day. The Missus still has her cricked back and could not do it. We had thought that I could head up there while she ran the shop but even that was not looking likely. I have to trip out to Camborne tomorrow morning – I know, I have been doing some yoga breathing exercises to keep calm during the day – so I will do the emptying on my return. It is not something I can put off either, so the Missus will have to steel herself for an hour or so. Come to think of it, so will I.

We stepped down to the Harbour beach on our last run out, ABH and me. It looked deserted, but there was a family nestled close into the western slip having a barbeque and trying to shelter from the breeze. We like to say hello as we pass people by but misery must have descended on The Cove as the lady we met going up the slip and later at the bottom of the Coast Path ignored us completely and the boy heading fishing with a look of grim thunder on his face did too. An old chat at the head of the slip scowled as we wished him good evening. I do realise that people sometimes have good reason to be sad but that seemed an awful lot of unhappiness all in the same place. We were heartened by a friendly wave from the barbequers as we left the beach.

I retired to my boudoir to get ready for bed. I have considered that I shall need a batman to assist me next. Perhaps I will find one in Camborne.

May 31st – Friday

My trip to the far east was hugely successful. I went and I came back again. I suppose that I ought to come clean even if it will send the Aged Parent into apoplexy, especially if I do not manage to telephone in mitigation before The Diary is read.

When I had my ears surveyed, the very pleasant man at the optician's told me that there was some sort of anomaly in the readings, and he would tell my doctor. That was a good thing because I think that me and my doctor have fallen out – he does not call, and he does not write, and he certainly had not wanted to see me for a very long time. He did not want to do any of those things this time either and left it to the hospital to write to me.

It turns out that the complaint is so insignificantly minor that the hospital did not want to see me either and sent a questionnaire and some physical challenges I should undertake, such as marching up and down with my eyes closed. They suggested that I should have someone trustworthy with me when I did so lest I walk into a table or fall down a mineshaft, which is much more common that you think around here. In fact, I think they might have put a warning on the instructions such as 'do not do this near mineshafts' – or was it tables. It was a while ago. Finding someone trustworthy was more of an issue until I told the Missus that my life insurance was not worth a penny ha'penny.

Anyway, the upshot of it all was that I might have a complaint that makes me dizzy on occasion, something to do with my ears for which there was no ointment or medicine and in any case it would do me no harm apart from possibly falling over but that would be very much dependent on where I fell over which was nothing to do with them now they had told me. Oh, and if I was feeling dizzy, perhaps I should not drive. Oh, and just in case they were wrong about everything they had booked me in for an MRI scan and could I drive there on the appointed date.

I had reasoned I would have no problem with an early start since ABH has woken me at five o'clock or thereabouts all this week. In a display of obtuse contrariness, she slept in, although I still managed to wake up without her. So, at early o'clock this morning and before the shop was open, Camborne here I came. Our pasty man (sorry, MS) gave me directions which I followed to the letter. I was most surprised that I could park there for nothing, too, but I suppose this is Camborne and not posh Truro. I was also able to park right in front of the mobile scanning unit they had parked in the same car park and since there was no waiting room, this was highly convenient.

My invitation was very detailed on what to expect. Judging from the repeated pre-procedure questions they had a real bee in their bonnet about metal – carried, worn or internal. Given that it is one very big magnet, that is probably understandable. I removed all my fillings just in case and everything went swimmingly. The very pleasant man who showed me where to lie down issued me with earplugs and ear defenders. This seemed a little extreme at first but after the machine got up to full speed, it then seemed very reasonable. It was very noisy.

Noisy it might have been, but it was also exceedingly comfortable. The loud resonating drone, joined a minute later by a higher resonating tone, was constant and strangely soporific. When they wheeled me out of the tube so many minutes later, I was mostly asleep. The very pleasant man asked if I was alright, to which I answered, very, then asked if he could put me back in for another half an hour.

The results will not be available for a couple of weeks but since it is largely a bottom covering exercise, I am not that apprehensive. I looked over the shoulder of the technician who confirmed that it was indeed an image of my head, a slice across it to be precise. I asked him what the big empty space was in the middle, but he told me that he was not allowed to comment.

It was another of those days that we were told was going to be impossibly wonderful. The sun would shine, the clouds would scud away, and warmth would ooze from the very cracks in the pavement, at least in the book according to Radio Pasty. They have been saying this for the last couple of days and so far, well, let us say that they have not been exactly right about it. Given this pathetic track record I had little hope that they would be right for today and they were not.

The day start well. I had sunshine in my eyes half the way to Camborne but as I got closer, the cloudier it became. I put this down to the distance that I was putting between me and the known world but when I went back again, the cloud had got there too. I even felt a few spots of rain while I was out east, which was not a good sign at all. By the time I got back, towards the middle of the day, our wind had returned, this time due north and was bringing down the temperature – not that we had much to start with. One lady assured me that it was going to get sunny by the

end of the day. She was right. At half past five o'clock the sun broke through the low cloud and mist that had enveloped the bay for most of the afternoon. What a relief.

On my way back from Camborne I stopped off and collected Mother from St Buryan. We detoured via The Farm so that I could unload the boxes that we had loaded up two days before. On my very dear. I should have realised from the abundance of flora that decorated the lane back from Mother's that our lane to The Farm would be equally affected. Along with the grass sprouting up from the middle, the hedges were near enough meeting from the sides. When we reached our gate, I hardly recognised it and after pushing away the growth from the latch, struggled to push the gate open against the growth the other side.

Inside the gate was even worse. We have completely ignored The Farm over winter, and it is in a pitiful condition. We are lucky that we can get to the store, but the tractor is besieged as is the tool shed where the strimmer is. In the field and around the polytunnel, the grass is certainly as high as an elephant's eye and it probably has already reached the sky, the sky being so low with cloud. The polytunnel itself is falling apart at the far end. With the polythene gone, there was nothing to hold the structure together and it is tearing itself apart at that end. The door is already hanging off, frame and all. I hope that it is recoverable but if it is not, we may need to reconsider what we put in its place to serve the same need. The weather there is brutal, and I think it has suffered both sun and wind damage which will happen again if we replace it with another polytunnel. I felt badly for the Missus who has put so much effort in to make the place look neat and to make it functional.

There was much going home present buying in the shop during the rest of the day. It was a clear sign that our visitor numbers will be declining rapidly from this weekend, and we will be back in the doldrums. It should be busier than it was before the holiday, though, as the season starts to kick in, but will be very weather dependent.

Talking of which, the increasing northerly blast did us no favours at all and like yesterday, brought the temperature down four degrees from its potential. The wearing of coats and woolly hats on the first day of summer is not exactly what we might expect. Still, it was a reasonable day of trade given the conditions and there was much giving of farewells all around.

ABH managed to find a willing playmate on the beach later but it was short-lived. There were a few people milling about still on the Harbour beach. Earlier in the day, the big beach had been busy with water users, again taking advantage on the last full day of the holiday. With the sun now lighting up the bay you might have been forgiven for thinking that we had enjoyed a full day of it but the mist still hanging in the air rather gave the truth away. Obviously, now the holiday is over, the small gods of grumpy shopkeepers can let rip with the proper weather. Oh the frustration of it all.