

DIARY 2024

February 1st – Thursday

It seemed a pleasant enough day as I looked out of the window on the morning. There was blue sky and brightness and hardly any breeze that I noticed when I eventually ventured outside. A shame then that I would spend much of it in the truck dropping off on errands here and there.

This first thing to do was to try and get to the bottom of the mystery of the missing bin. I knew in my heart that it was Basho what dunnit but like any good sleuth, it had to be proved and I had to wear some weird and charismatic item of clothing. Not wishing to embarrass myself by jumping to conclusions – alright, I had already done the leaping but no one knew about it yet – it seemed sensible to check with the current supplier if they had taken it away. It took a while to get the right number and the right person but after I did, they confirmed that it was not them.

It was at that point that I told the very pleasant lady who I had ended up with that it must have been Basho. She seemed incredulous that might be the case because, she said, it was not their bin and had writing on the side to say so. I pointed out that this was Basho we were dealing with, and the small details of rightful ownership and labelling would not necessarily stop them. She giggled. I do like it when I can brighten someone's day to the extent that they feel compelled to giggle on the telephone – or even face to face, I am not fussy.

Anyway, apparently bin wars are commonplace it seems, and she told me not to be concerned about it. They would provide a replacement bin, no questions asked.

Perhaps I should have heeded the advice, but it went against my innate sense of fair play and justice to let Basho off the hook. Perhaps I also secretly enjoy poking a stick into the hornets' nests, especially when I am wearing a bee keepers' suit. I sent a message to my erstwhile contact at Basho and asked ever so politely if it was at all possible that they might have mistakenly thieved our bin despite it having a company name on the side that was not their own and having been told repeatedly by me not to.

I will give the lady her due. I had a response a couple of hours later, 'hands up for soup, I cannot tell a lie, it was me that cut down the cherry tree', except she wrote maliciously thieved your bin instead of the cherry tree thing, Alright, she might not have used those precise words, but I knew what she meant. She also arranged to have it delivered back today, hopefully emptied for free.

With that out of the way, I prepared for a trip to the Household Waste Recycling Centre wearing my overalls of righteous gold. Alright, they are pink but righteous, nevertheless. I only had an old laser printer, the defunct compressor from the shop

(shush, if asked, it was used to inflate my very domestic inflatable boat, nothing to do with business at all, honest guv) and a couple of domestic flood lights that had once lit up the domestic part of the front of the shop before they fell off when the brackets rusted through.

The biggest mistake I made, was to mention to the boys working in the flat that I was heading out that way. The Highly Professional Craftsperson suggested that I take the lead from the roof since I was heading in the direction of Wheal Alfred, the scrap metal merchant. The presence of lead on our roof took me by surprise rather as I had only associated lead on roofs with churches and our humble abode is as far from church-like as you can get in all sorts of ways. I was even more surprised by the amount of it but was suitably encouraged by hearing that I would get some recompense from the scrap yard for such an errand.

Clearly, I must have looked far too keen as I ended up loading all the roof felt – though why sheets of rough plastic are called ‘felt’ I have no idea. This filled the remaining space in the back of the truck, and I made a swift get away when they had finished loading it.

Because it is vaguely on the way, I dropped in on Mother. She had been having problems with her pull switch for the shower and I promised to have a look and see about getting a replacement in Penzance. I dislike pull switches immensely as they are prone to such malfunctions when the cords are not snapping. It did not occur to me to take the cover off and have a look inside. Had I done so I might have saved myself the trouble of buying the wrong replacement.

Just as I was leaving, she called me back and asked, since I was going to the Household Waste Recycling centre, could I take some items there to tip. With the truck already full, I was dubious but managed to get some into the back seat and the long airer just about fitted on top of the roofing felt.

Anticipating some raised eyebrows at the tip, sorry, Household Waste Recycling Centre with nigh on 100 kilograms of lead in the back of the truck, I decided to go to Wheal Alfred first. I could not have picked a worse time to go there because the road up to it is closed. The diversion pointed me through Hayle and then to turn left by The Cornishman ale house in Copperhouse. The back streets there are unfamiliar territory, at first winding around two hundred or more year-old streets before merging into modern housing estates that are no less complex.

The route was made more challenging by arriving at a T-junction that had evaded any diversion signage. My sense of direction is reasonably good and turning left seemed logical. It was, of course, not the correct way although it was in the right direction and led me a merry dance along housing estate closes fraught with speed control chicanes and bumps aplenty, no direction signage and lined with parked vehicles. I did emerge back on the diversion route but with more luck than anything.

It was fortunate that I had about me some photographic identification, as it was required at the scrap metal yard. I had been several times before but not to trade, simply to dump. I think I was expecting some dodgy character in a sheepskin jacket a fat cigar and a fist full of used fivers that I would have to haggle hard to prise from his iron grip. Instead, a very pleasant lady at the office window explained that these days controls are in place to ensure trade is entirely legal and above board and in any case, sheepskin did not suit her, and she gave up the fat cigars at Christmas.

I did come away with a virtual fist full of dollars, but they had been electronically placed in my bank account. It gave me a sunny disposition for the rest of the day and an irrepressible urge to glance covetously at church roofs as I drove by.

It was not very busy at the Household Waste Recycling Centre, which I thought might be a disadvantage if I wished to remain unnoticed in the crowd. Despite having a truck full of very obvious roofing felt, no one battered and eyelid at all. The same applied when I moved the truck over to the electrical skip to get rid of the printer and the compressor. The compressor did give me a moment's hesitation. Was it electrical or just metal. I did not wish to ask lest someone ask me awkward questions in return, so I took the decision that since it had a plug on the end, it must be electrical. I did manage to stop myself from wheel spinning the truck out of the compound like some bank robber making a quick get away, but my relief was palpable.

You already know, dear reader, that the pull switch that I purchased on my way home was not the correct one for Mother's wet room pull switch. That is a meaty, beaty big and bouncy one with more terminals than a city transport network. It would also require removing from the ceiling and using the same screw holes, so, since it is a much maligned council property, we felt it best to call it in for one of their people to make a mess of it.

It was quite late in the afternoon by the time I returned and not much time to do very much. I still have to translate the information I had from the builder yesterday onto a calendar to make sense of it. Additionally, there are numerous tasks and bookings that are down to me and urgent. I shall attend to these tomorrow.

I was heartened on the last walk around with ABH just before tea that our big waste bin had been returned, which was sterling work by our contact at the company. Just when I thought it was all over, right at the end of the business day, I checked my recently arrived messages. Basho, the little darlings had not only stolen our bin and returned it a couple of days later having been found out, but they had invoiced me for the privilege. Oh, very dear.

February 2nd – Friday

I always thought that irony was the opposite of plasticity until I had a telephone call from my mobile telephone company this morning.

I was not particularly in need of cheering up but at times over the next hour there were tears of mirth running down my cheeks. It is just a shame it all ended up on a bit of a sour note, but we will come to that.

A week or so ago I had a telephone call from a representative of my mobile telephone company. He asked if the signal we had was any good and I told him truthfully that it was rubbish. In fact, in the house it is nigh on non-existent but a little better in the flat, especially now that there is no roof, windows or walls. I suspect that in future it will be very much worse when we are sitting in a mesh of steel. I think that they call that a Faraday cage.

I had no idea if the gentleman was a genuine representative of the company but *since he asked for no personal information, I took it at face value. In fact, I did not understand all that much of the call as he had a thick foreign accent. It became apparent that he thought the same of me and quite how he manages when talking with a Glaswegian or a Geordie from Sunderland, I would not wish to guess.*

I am almost certain that the same person called again today. He told me who he was and what my company had been up to in order to resolve my issues with signal. I confess, I had not noticed any improvements.

Mobile man: "Hello, yes, we have upgraded your phone to 5G and will put some credit on your account."

Grumpy Shopkeeper: "5G? I did not think that London had very much 5G yet, let alone the far flung corners of this nation."

Mobile man: "Yes, yes, we have upgraded your phone. 5G. For free. It will work much ..."

Grumpy Shopkeeper: "Thank you very much. Hello, hello."

[two sharp pips sound on my telephone telling me the call is cut off]

The telephone rings again a moment later.

Mobile man: "Hello. Yes we were cut off. It is me again. We have upgraded your phone and will put credit on your account."

Grumpy Shopkeeper: "Yes, I believe you already said that."

Mobile man: "Yes, yes. First, we must verify your identity."

Grumpy Shopkeeper: "Yes, and I must verify yours."

Mobile man: "I am from your mobile phone company. Can you tell me your email address, please."

Grumpy Shopkeeper: [Letting pass his identity for a moment. My email address is in the public domain anyway, so no harm done.] "Yes, my email address is info@old-boathouse.com"

Mobile man: "Can you read that to me phonetically, please."

Grumpy Shopkeeper: "Sure, India, November, Foxtrot, Oscar ..."

Mobile man: "You're breaking up. I have India November."

Grumpy Shopkeeper: “Yes, Foxtrot Oscar ...”

Mobile man: “Phostrate Offcar?”

Grumpy Shopkeeper: “No, Foxtrot Oscar ... hello, hello”

[Line dies again]

I could go on for the full half an hour here. It would fill up some serious Diary pages, that is for sure. You can be certain that it took another ten minutes for me to convey my email address and a further three reconnections. He called nine times in all and there were several other codes to convey phonetically, which were equally tortuous. Thank goodness that the line had been upgraded and I was on 5G. I hate to think how long we would have been else.

It turned out that the electronic mail address I had given him was not the one they had registered, and he sent a message to that one. He also sent text messages from the company with verification codes. He knew all sorts of information that only a genuine employee would have access to, so I was beginning to believe that the call was indeed genuine.

That aside, it was when he told me that he would like to pay me a generous compensation figure that things went slightly awry. He was almost certainly our man at the company, but he then asked for my debit card number. I asked him why this was necessary since I pay my bill by direct debit. He had already read out my bank information and I told him that was all that he needed to put money into my account. He continued to insist that he needed the card information and I continued to insist that I was not going to provide it and suddenly the comedy went out of it. He accused me of wasting his time to which I reminded him that he called me, so the next time the line died, I did not get a call back.

Most of all, I was sad that our man did not share the humour in his conviction that the line was much improved while continually having to call me back and ask me to repeat what I had said because the quality of the line when it was there was so bad. I might follow it up with the company in case it was an elaborate scam – a very good one at that. There again, life is very short.

The Missus had run off just before the start of this episode. Mother had a doctor's appointment, and they were going to take tea afterwards at Land's End Airport to watch the aeroplanes come and go. That plan was confounded by thick mist again which stopped any flights in or out and they were back earlier than anticipated.

This found favour with me because I had a number of chores to carry out at the computer in the flat. I still manage all my electronic messages out of the desktop computer so that I can keep records properly in one place. The telephone signal, both Internet telephone and mobile are also much better in there and I had a few telephone calls to make.

The first was to the electrician to book him to put all the wires back that he took out before we lost the roof. The appointment date is an educated guess and part of the reason why I had to speak with the builder. We hope that there will be enough structure for him to thread wires around and enough wall for him to attach electric sockets to by that time. The real likelihood is that he will be dancing around builders as they put bits of building in place.

Another required appointment is putting our Internet fibre back to upstairs again. This will be tricky because the bit of building, which was effectively window frame, that the fibre will be attached to, will not be in place when the engineer turns up. I am hoping that somewhere in the new roof structure there will be an anchor point that was not there before. It is a risk booking it so early but an even greater risk leaving it too late. It is booked now for early March by a very helpful and very pleasant man with a thick Northern Irish accent, which I largely understood.

There was also a heap of invoices to print off and mark up and there were probably numerous other tasks that I completely forgot about. I had intended to have a chat with the builders after I had finished, but they had all gone when I poked my head outside the office. I had a quick look at the work they were doing, pouring concrete into our floor. These are beams that might have been helpfully installed forty years ago when the shop was extended forward. I am probably glad that I did not know of their absence earlier. I was sorely tempted to etch Highly Professional Craftsperson woz ere into the wet concrete but was not sure it would go down well. Someone spent time making the surface as smooth as glass.

I had spent so long about my duties that by the time I returned to house it was time to take ABH for a spin. We were lucky enough today to match our little walk out to the big beach with nearly low tide. As with last time, we explored the rocky area to the west of the OS slipway first for its interest value. ABH is already an accomplished mountain goat and was all over the rocks, gracefully leaping from one to another. We headed further to the north after that and had the good fortune to meet a dog of similar size and age game for a bit of chasing.

Also like the last time I took her to the big beach we headed back along the Coast Path behind the beach. We did not meet anyone on the path, but the beach was relatively busy for the time of year. It being Friday it was possible we saw the arrival of some weekenders as the season stirs into being.

The day had been grey from start to finish but relatively bright. It was pleasant enough on the beach and although we had some heavy mizzle at the start of the day, the late morning and afternoon had remained dry. The sea has not let up harbouring a robust swell all week. Not even during the high pressure of last weekend did it relent. The waves are not huge and pounding but there is enough to keep the fishing boats on the slipway – or in one case in the shed for maintenance – and a few surfers happy. There were a couple heading out when we were on the beach in the middle of the afternoon.

By the time ABH and I came back to the house, we were both ready for an afternoon of quiet laziness. It was almost as if we had nothing better to do. I expect that we shall find something tomorrow.

February 3rd – Saturday

It was a benign sort of day that expected everything else to follow suit. The sea did its bit by being the best behaved that it had been for a week and although it did not encourage any of our fishing fleet out, there was an angling boat bobbing about just off Pedn-men-du in the late morning.

There was not much encouragement required for me to join the party today, I admit it. I was not particularly late out of bed despite not being nudged out by ABH, which these days is commonplace. If we get past four o'clock, I am pretty safe until at least eight o'clock. I spent the morning idling away, well, not entirely, but mostly. It is not something that I take great joy in usually, but the mood of day was upon me. I blame that.

It was, for a change, the Missus who was champing at the bit. She had got it into her head that she would re-grout the shower tiles in the bathroom and nothing was going to stand in her way – apart from the absence of grout. She was onto the Internet to see where some might be purchased on a Saturday morning and decided on one of the national DIY stores in town. Here, the item can be ordered online and collected in person a little later if it is in stock.

The small matter of how much to purchase was not a great concern as she would buy an abundance and worry about any excess later on. I stepped in at this point and suggested that we might measure the area as I was sure there would be some product guidance about how much it would cover. There was, 0.8 metres squared. I dropped down to the flat with expanding rule in hand and roughly measured the offending area – 1.1 metres squared. The Missus will either have to find some more tiles to grout or I would be taking two thirds of a tub of grout to the Household Waste Recycling Centre in ten months' time. Quite how the Household Waste Recycling Centre would recycle rock solid grout, I have no idea. Tip it probably.

There were groceries to purchase as well, and the Missus was off in a flash. Left to my own devices, I dropped down to the shop to collect some bread for my dinner at

the range tomorrow and some frozen meal for my tea in the evening. It has been an annoyance for a while but one of the LED batten lights in the storeroom flashes like a strobe when turned on. It needs to be replaced, which adds yet another item on the to do list. Since the Missus was heading to the very place one might be procured, I hurried back to the house to order one that she could pick up while she was there.

For a day of sheer laziness, I was already far too animated, so I decided to continue with it and take ABH for a spin. There was sufficient Harbour beach to run around on and we did just that. We did it some more with a bit more enthusiasm when another dog came down that seemed keen to play for a bit. It is always quite useful as ABH is sometimes not inclined to run about by herself. The other dog was quite a bit older and tired quickly, but the running around had served its purpose and in the meanwhile I had enjoyed a pleasant conversation with the dog's owners.

I took to doing a bit of dinner preparation for tomorrow's shooting day. This took longer than you might imagine as I very rarely have just a simple ham or bully beef sandwich. Tomorrow is a concoction of olives, capers, gherkin, radish, lettuce, coriander, toasted pinenuts and sesame seeds and tuna. I ran out of things after that.

ABH curled up in the hall, sulking because the Missus was in the flat. After an hour she decided that she had enough sulking and offered me a peace prize of pink pig, which was good enough for me. I rewarded her by getting tooled up to have a stank up the hill. We met the Missus as we headed down the slope as she wrapped up for the day looking like she was wearing much of the grout she had applied to the shower tiles. Perhaps there would not be so much to throw away, after all.

We did not go the whole hog and a trip to Land's End. I thought that it would be sufficient to cut across the moor and down Maria's Lane, returning down Stone Chair Lane. Even then, that took an hour. Much of our time is spent going over the same ground discovering smells we did not discover on the first pass, that and consuming things that are best left unspecified.

It was still a very pleasant - stroll is probably the right word - with light winds blowing what would have been my hair if I had any. Visibility was reasonable – we could see all the way to Cape and probably beyond if there was anything beyond it to see but the airport and Carn Brea was lost in the low cloud. As we ambled down Stone Chair Lane, the air turned moist - lighter than drizzle but heavier than mist. It was quite pleasant after warming up on our walk.

I had tried my best to get through the day doing nothing at all. It seems such a difficult thing to do. I must try harder.

February 4th – Sunday

The forecast was spot on for today, although I only looked at it first thing in the morning. It quite accurately predicted gloomy grey clouds the whole day long. They were indeed gloomy and grey but on the whole, it was not a bad day to be out and about and definitely not a bad day for being up at the range shooting.

I was up and at 'em reasonably early but there again I am up and at 'em early every morning. I just cannot seem to get the hang of this lying in bed until late lark even though ABH is now something of an expert. If I looked upon it kindly, I could say that it is a lie in of sorts since I would be up a little earlier if it were a shop day. Still, I do manage to get a few things done and think about things that still need doing during the day and by being up early, I have time to do them as well.

There is no mad panic about getting up to the range. Everything is prepared the previous evening apart from making my flasks of tea, so there is no rushing about. I have committed myself to get to the range early to open up because otherwise people would be waiting outside. I can also get a moderate amount done so that when the person with a wider range of keys than me and the order of fire arrives, they can get straight into that without hesitation.

With the main man on holiday for a few weeks, the rest of us muddle through quite well. I am sure that it is the same clubs and societies across the world, there is always one person who takes the lead and on whom all the rest gladly rely. There are enough people to step into the breach on a temporary basis, but I guess none of us want the responsibility longer term. We are very glad that our main man takes the reins so that we can just follow orders and complain about it every now and again.

Nevertheless, we had a splendid time of it all day. The surrogate organiser today is very good setting up for practical shotgun, which is shooting at targets with single barrel shotguns. The courses of fire were quite complex, and it is always good fun when a fellow club member makes a mistake to the raucous banter from the rest of us. We are all good natured fellows of both sexes, which is just as well when we are all carrying guns.

Along with the grey, we had a fair breeze blowing up at the range. It was not enough to cause any problems or to bring the temperature down uncomfortably but on occasion when I had to stand in it for any length of time, I had to pull up my hood.

It certainly did not interrupt a run down to the Harbour beach with ABH when I returned in the middle of the afternoon. We are in the midst of neap tides and the beach is consequently more littered with weed and detritus as high water stops short of the top of the beach. There is also markedly less swell than yesterday and that too affects what the tide brings in and out or leaves on the beach.

We were not there long when we were joined by a small Jack Russell and a scotty dog of some description. The Jack Russell and ABH hit it off very quickly and were chasing each other around the beach for a good long while. The scotty tried to join in

here and there but could not keep up with the speed and agility of the other too. He was quite grumpy with the Jack Russell when they made contact but left ABH alone – largely because ABH gave him a wide berth.

We moved on when the Jack Russell started to get a little fruity by which time both had enjoyed a good blast of exercise. We continued our walk around the block afterwards but there was no hanging around on this occasion.

The Highly Professional Craftsperson and his buddies choose Sunday to submit their fortnightly labour charges. It is always a delight to receive their chunky invoices in the electronic mail. The Highly Professional Craftsperson's was chunkier than the rest because he had chosen not to send me a bill two weeks ago. I did wonder if he was saving it up so that it would bring especial fright and alarm, but he swears not. I think they choose Sunday to submit their bills on the basis that I may have had a quiet and restful weekend and therefore more inclined to receive them favourably. It does not work.

Still, it is two weeks before the next of their bills, so I can face the coming week with renewed vigour. Well, we will see how that goes.

February 5th – Monday

It looks like we are in for a bit of a grey and damp week if the forecast is to be believed, which it is probably is not. It was, however, largely correct about today and we stuttered through a most uninspiring number of hours before it was bedtime again.

I had thought to take the remaining Christmas decorations up to The Farm today, but the boys were mixing concrete in the shop doorway again, which restricted the access somewhat. I should have done it Saturday when I first thought about it because they were not working then but I decided to be lazy instead, if you recall, dear reader. Let that be a lesson to us all: be lazy for a day and you will find someone blocks up your doorway with a cement mixer.

The cement mixer nor the weather prevented me from heading to the gymnasium this morning. I am going to have to contact the owner of the weights that I assume he took away. First, to make sure he took them away and not someone else and secondly, to get confirmation of how much weight each carried. I still have a suspicion that the ones I have put together are heavier. It is either that or my muscles have wasted away in the week the weights were missing.

I might just leave it on the grounds that I must surely get used to the new heavier weights eventually. Heaving them around did not, however, stand in the way of

executing a blistering session. Even my rowing time was back to something like it was a week or two ago. Quite what it was that caused the drift I cannot imagine, but my time has been out by ten or fifteen seconds over the last week or so. Possibly the trauma of losing the weights.

There was still some beach available at the Harbour for a romp around when I returned. There was no one to play with but we had a mooch around and a sniff at various things. ABH did most of the sniffing. We did not tarry long as she was not much interested today, and the walk had served its purpose.

I was advised by a very pleasant chap at the mobile telephone company to contact my bank after I reported the attempted scam of Friday. It seems the bandits had managed to get into my mobile telephone account but had caused no damage there. I pay the account by direct debit, so my bank account details had been exposed. I know this because the scammer read them out to me.

The first surprise was that I could not find a telephone number to call my bank on. There was plenty of writing on their website telling me how I might detect that someone had fraudulently accessed my account. I would have thought that the sudden lack of money might be a fairly good indicator. I am sure it was all useful stuff but nowhere on the page did it tell you how you might get hold of the bank to ask them for help in preventing or fixing it.

In the end, I tried the general number which advised me to contact the bank using the mobile telephone 'app' as they did not very often answer calls using the traditional method. This seems to be a trend. They have taken most of the real people out of the bank branches – those that remain open at all – and replaced them with computers. A person might get the impression that they do not want to talk to their pesky customers.

Fortunately, I do have the 'app' on my mobile telephone and by pressing the button, it used my telephone to call the bank. It did add a bunch of other information as well as calling the number when I pressed the button.

It was not surprising that I was presented with a range of options to choose from by pressing a number on my keypad. I did what I always do with these things and forgot to put the telephone on speaker. This meant that the screen, on which I might press the appropriate menu number, was pressed to my ear. By the time I fixed that the very pleasant automated response was repeating whether I actually wanted to choose a number or not. It was surprising, however, that there was no option for reporting fraud, and I had to choose the 'anything else' option to speak with someone.

I should have realised by this time that my bank seems to take a somewhat laid back approach to fraud. I considered that this was either because it considers its systems so secure that no fraud could possibly be perpetrated upon its hardened shell, or it

did not give much of a fig. In my humble opinion, I might suggest that it is the latter. The very pleasant lady that I did end up talking with told me that the baddies could 'not do very much' with just my account number and sort code except possibly set up a direct debit. Well, what a relief that was. I should keep an eye on my account for the next few weeks and if I noticed that all my money had disappeared, I could call again, so that the bank could sympathise greatly and point to all the advice on their website about preventing such an occurrence.

The mobile telephone company was more attentive and a man from their dedicated fraud team called twice yesterday while securing my account and sorting out any issues. Of course, there is always the possibility that he too may have been a baddie, lulling me into a false sense of security before his colleagues in crime pounce. I will try hard not to think about that too much.

I thought that heading into town might distract me sufficiently, so I did that. My slip-on shoes that I wear for nearly everything including standing long hours behind the shop counter were around a year old. They have become so loose in the wearing that they are making it difficult to walk properly. It took quite a while to realise what it was as the shift was subtle and it was not as if the shoes were falling off my feet. I was unconsciously walking to compensate for the effect of my loose shoe. I intended to go back to the same shop in town because the lady there is happy to dedicate time to making sure her customers leave the shoe satisfied.

You might consider that a pair of shoes should last considerably longer than one year. If I had spent considerably more money on them and not worn them every day, I would agree. However, I had worn them every day and for all manner of duties and, as I said, they were inexpensive. I repeated the same philosophy this time, although it took much longer to choose.

I must have tried on ten different pairs of shoes in different sizes. Many, I would not have chosen or even found in the crowded shop but the lady serving me tirelessly sought out different styles, sizes and fits for me to choose. On a couple of occasions I announced that I was happy with a pair that she had brought, but she insisted that I try others, just in case. I will, of course, go back for my next pair – provided the ones she sold me do not fall apart on my feet in the next day or two.

Before I left home, we had scratched our heads yet again about what to have for our tea. The Missus decided that she would finish the ramen noodle dish she had made for herself on Saturday while I had a curry – the Missus hates curry - which left me tealess. I had already decided to go to the butchers to get some ingredients for breakfasts during the week, so it seemed sensible to start there. It is remarkable what a little time pressure can turn up and I made the snap decision to get some minced lamb and mozzarella so that I could fashion some lamb burgers.

At the risk of repeating myself – some might say droning on and on – we are blessed by having a good range of independent high street shops, though declining, and

some of the best food available on our doorstep. If you have these where you are, dear reader, use them aplenty as I know I would miss them dreadfully if they were not there.

Apart from the trip into town, we were an entirely lazy pair once again. It was no real excuse that the shop was roughly inaccessible as I am sure there were things that could have been done at The Farm. ABH did not get a long walk out today or yesterday for that matter, although I did consider a stank up to Land's End before I had decided on the town visit. The big beach is not on the menu this week because the tides are not helpful.

On our last, smaller walk of the day, I met with ex-Head Launcher outside the shop. The boys were just clearing up from having been concreting all day. We stopped for a catch-up and discover that there was not a great deal to catch up on, so discussed other exciting matters instead.

We watched as the area was tidied and washed down. All the concrete pads are now complete, and we have just under a week for it to 'go off' before the steel arrives, in all likelihood next Monday. I am told that this will take three days to install and after that, everything can start to go back again. This means that I can now set out the schedule for the remaining weeks of phase one of our work. It includes the scary bit of having everything ready to open the shop at the appointed time without all our living room furniture being in it. What could possibly go wrong.

February 6th – Tuesday

Now, what was it I was saying about lie-ins. I was roused by ABH at nearly eight o'clock this morning. I should not leave myself hostage to fortune like that. Mind, she had me up at three o'clock and probably considered four and a half hours more than adequate for a person to rest. The worst thing about being got out of bed by her is that she does not necessarily follow you out and quite often goes back to bed again.

I am sure that if I had got out of bed earlier and of my own volition, I probably might have met the day with more enthusiasm. As it was, I could not be bothered to do very much, or at least very much that required some effort. On the contrary, the Missus got out of bed a little while later and announced that she was going over to the flat to finish off the grouting. Then she was gone.

Before she had got out of bed, I decided that I should make an attempt at getting some of the things on the to-do list done. One of these was to order the replacement lights for the front of the shop. This may seem a little premature as there are several weeks before they are needed but a cunning plan had crept upon me at one of my three o'clock in the morning examinations of the ceiling.

We have a big problem with the lights we attach to the front of the shop. The brackets from which they hang rust through in very short order. The lights themselves are thickly coated aluminium but the brackets are thin and poorly protected. The excellent job we had done of our windbreak stand by a local fabricator made me think that we could ask him to either galvanise the existing brackets or have him fabricate more robust brackets and galvanise those.

It will not be cheap, however, and the lights are less than £20 each. It would probably be more economic just to replace them. However, replacing them is a pain in the bottom. They are higher up than I care to reach, and the cables need to be pulled through the cladding and the hole resealed afterwards. Whatever the cost of the fabrication and galvanising, it will be worth it, I am sure as well as the social economy not throwing away perfectly serviceable lights.

The other stunning decision that I came to was to ditch my master plan of installing footlights on the steps. It would involve awkward cabling and channelling out of the wall, which I really was not looking forward to. Instead, I would use the last remaining floodlight with a new bracket attached and have it installed on the side of the cladding above the steps. Genius.

With the Missus involved with the grouting in the shower, it was left to me to go and collect Mother. I might have combined this with extracting the decorations from the shop and taking them up to The Farm on the way. I might have done that but one poking of my head outside the door told me it was breezy and far too breezy to be heading to a field fully exposed the robust southwesterly. I have been very successful so far finding excuses why this chore should not be done. Perhaps I should see just how long I can put it off for and make a challenge of it.

Since I could not leave immediately, it was Mother's hair day after all, I took ABH for a spin around the block. She was not in the least interested in heading for the beach – I suppose the repetition can get quite tedious, even for small hounds – so we headed around the block. We noted that the work on the Harbour car park toilets is coming along quite well. There is to be a disabled facility on the gentleman's side and the ply walls were being installed. Much of the pipework had already gone in. Since the situation on ownership and refurbishment of the Beach car park toilets still in the air, the Harbour toilets could be an important feature in The Cove.

After I delivered Mother safe and sound and the Missus returned after completing her grouting, I returned to my idling the day away. It was not quite wholly without purpose but eventually I weakened and made plans to take ABH out on a longer walk.

The beaches were not in the running, although I was not entirely sure how far the tide would have dropped back on the big beach. If it had slipped back far enough, I might have elected for a shorter walk, coming back along whatever sand there was. As it was, there was not.

We started out along the Coast Path to The Valley and struck up the hill. We did this walk the last time the tide was being a nuisance and it is a pleasant enough stank with plenty to take an interest in. The little girl takes an interest in every inch of ground that we cover and more besides. If we make six paces forward uninterrupted, then we are doing well. It is exceptional if we make six paces forward without having to take three back. All this needs to be factored into the timing of a walk. If we leave too late in the afternoon arriving back home before dark is merely an aspiration.

The breeze hardly bothered us at all; we must have been in the lee of the land just about right all the way around. Not even in the top field where the car park is did we feel remotely affected by it. Oddly, it was not until we arrived back in The Cove at the bottom of Stone Chair Lane that we received a face full. It must eddy and swirl in The Cove because it was still in the southwest. It is a strange and curious thing.

Not only strange and curious but it was a matter of concern to ABH who was spooked by it when we went for a walk while the Missus drove Mother home. There was no stopping and sniffing then, I can assure you. She was even less inclined to stop out long later when, not only had the wind reached its crescendo but the sheets on the scaffolding were rattling at their most fierce. All that and it was raining, too. She was back in the briefest of flashes and I could not blame her. Even I am disconcerted by the racket from the scaffolding.

February 7th – Wednesday

At quarter to ten o'clock this morning, I reported to the Lifeboat station with a good deal of trepidation and nervousness. And the certain knowledge that someone else should really be there instead of me. How I came to be there is a long and sordid tale, which I am sure that you do not wish to know about, dear reader. So, I shall tell you anyway.

The Lifeboat station has for years done its bit for spreading the sea safety word out into the local community. Indeed, our outgoing Press Officer and a gentleman used to run regular sea safety events in local junior schools. I attended one once with him at St Buryan school. I might have said, helped, but I think that may be an exaggeration.

Schools have also in the past attended the Lifeboat station itself to be shown around the boat. This came to a sharp conclusion a few years ago due to safety concerns of small children slipping through the handrails and coming to grief below. I could never quite see the problem as there are so many small children and they bounce quite well I am told.

As with many of these decisions, time changes a great deal. With proper risk assessments and mitigation in place, there should be no reason for alarm. It seems

someone else thought so too and a message went out late yesterday on the Lifeboat Crew noticeboard and discussion group asking for volunteers to assist a visit by a party from St Levan school. I did my own risk assessment and concluded that grumpy shopkeepers were probably the last sort of volunteer required so such an event.

Normally, messages are responded to by a host of happy, irreverent and often humorous responses, so I roundly ignored the message and left it to people more suited to the task at hand. Well, an hour passed, followed by another. Only two messages had come back, both with reasonable excuses as to why the individuals could not help. Then, an ocean of deafening virtual silence.

I could almost hear the whistling and looking away, the 'was that my phone, no can't have been', 'I thought I had left my phone on', 'reception is really poor where I was'. Eventually, I could leave it no longer and neither could I think up a reasonable excuse as to why I could not be there – I did not think being allergic to small children would cut it somehow.

In the crew room there was some discussion ahead of the arrival of the children as to what we might do with them. I had some ideas, but I was reasonably certain that they would not be aligned with the general thinking in the room, so I kept quiet. The problem was that it was a long time since this had been done, we had no idea the ages of the party arriving or their expectations, although there was a plan in place and a risk assessment had been carried out.

Our station mechanic came up with the bright notion that we should strap the little darlings into the Lifeboat seats and drop the boat out onto the slipway. There, all the lights, buzzers and buttons could be sounded off and lit up before the boat was winched back into the boathouse. At least, the thinking was, there was something happening other than some boring adult talking to them lots.

After much discussion whether this would be acceptable both to the teachers who accompanied the children and as a risk that the boat might inadvertently launch, we decided to go with it. We concluded that even if the boat did launch, the little darlings would be safely strapped in, competent and qualified crew would be on board to stop the boat coming to grief and the assembled company aboard would probably be delighted. It also let me off the hook of actually doing anything other than opening the doors and operating the winch. I cannot express how much of a relief that was.

The other surprise, although there is no reason why it should have been, was the entertaining performance of our Coxswain. He held the children in thrall as he explained the protective clothing a Lifeboat Crewperson wears and the equipment that is carried by each of them. The children were happy to ask intelligent questions and answered a few demonstrating that not only were they listening to the delivery but understanding it too.

The whole of the event had taken about an hour during which the children were impeccably behaved. There were nine of them, and three teachers, so they probably were relatively outnumbered anyway. I have no idea what ages they were, only that they were small, able to walk and dress themselves and comply with basic instructions. I was still glad to step away at the end of it, but I think that we had set a benchmark and operational plan for future visits.

I do not wish to make too much of a song and dance of it, but I had to sacrifice my Wednesday morning blistering session. This clearly played on my mind for the rest of the day not to mention the detrimental effect on my physique and well-being. It did not matter a fig to ABH who was pleased that I had arrived home roughly at the same time I would have had I attended the gymnasium as usual. I was therefore pressed into taking her out for a quick run out when I came back.

The tides jumped yesterday, and we are heading into spring tides again. This was clear from the evidence on the beach that the tide had driven higher up it than it had at the same time the day before. There was still plenty of sand to play on as we were a good few hours off high water. There were also a couple of very small dead crabs down by the tide line which ABH discovered quite quickly and proceeded to play with - for heaven's sake.

I had quite forgotten with all the excitement that Mother had an appointment at the hospital in the afternoon to have her plaster removed. This, once again, scotched any plans I might have made regarding taking the decorations up to The Farm. The Missus was gone for much of the afternoon, and I understand that the doctor is very pleased with Mother's recovery. He mentioned that the movement she has in the wrist was far better than he expected and after discovering that Mother knitted near constantly during the mending, put it down to that.

I had not particularly planned to take ABH on a longer stank today but given the absence of the Missus, it seemed rude not to. It seems reasonable to me that we do not do the same walk each day lest it become tedious. I have no idea whether she gives a jot or not but in her shoes, if she had any, I think that I probably might, which is why I try and vary our walks.

Before we went, I went down to the shop to collect some items for tea. I met with a retired Coxswain as I came back, walking his dog. In all the years I have known him, I have never seen him walking his dog. We fell into conversation during which it started to mizzle a bit. He said he had been thinking of walking off to Land's End but might now change his mind.

I had thought much the same thing. I went home to be mauled by a welcoming ABH since I had been absent more than two minutes and checked the rain radar on my computer. There was a lump of heavy rain just on the doorstep, the harbinger of which we had just felt. Behind that was a more vigorous lump and bigger too, which almost made me change our plans entirely. Instead, I changed them a little.

It occurred to me that I was already wearing my full metal jacket waterproofs and that once we were out there ABH would not care terribly much. I did decide to shorten our walk and to cut across the moor and back down Maria's Lane and Stone Chair Lane rather than go all the way. That was more to do with the time than the weather, however.

In the event, we were not much troubled by the rain. I checked when I got home and discovered that the great line of rain coming in from the west, parted Red Sea style and went north and south of us. Had I been carrying a long staff and been blessed with a big beard I might have concluded it was me standing on Pedn-men-du that occasioned the event because we did not see anyone else up there. We had felt a light shower as we approached the end of the cycle path but it was short-lived. Call me lucky. Perhaps I should buy a lottery ticket later.

Quite by chance, we happened upon the Village Elder. For those of you new to The Diary or just with short memories, you will have to go back a long way to see him mentioned here. He is a Cove luminary and we used to saunter home from the F&L after a good Saturday night banding along with his minder, Chum. I rarely see him now, so it was with good cheer that we chatted away for a while.

We were not long home when the Missus arrived back. She came bearing gifts but for ABH not me. I consoled myself with a beer from the fridge.

I considered that I had done my bit for humanity today, or rather perhaps had not set it back any, so I concluded the evening with a rather good malt whisky and a read of my book. I suppose that I should have been sitting in a wing back chair by an open fire to round off the scene, but we do not have a wing back chair and it was far too temperate for a fire. It turned colder later and started to rain, too, but by that time it was too late to start the fire and the whole effect was ruined by a damp ABH landing on my lap just before I got up to go to bed. I do not think I will bother with that lottery ticket, after all.

February 8th – Thursday

I fear that all the excitement for the week and quite possibly longer all came and went yesterday. I had no particular plans for the day although the decorations in the shop lurked in the background of my consciousness as it has for a few weeks now.

It had rained for a bit during the night I think but for once, I did not have to venture out in it. I did not have to venture out too early in the morning either and it took a bit of encouragement to get ABH out of the door.

By this time, the workforce was in the flat and removing the necessary parts of the frontage to get the steel in. Our THE OLD BOATHOUSE in stainless steel letters

lies, cast aside in the remnants of our living room. I had often wondered how they were attached to the front of the building, and I am still not precisely sure. The pins from which they hung still protrude from the woodwork that is left at the front. I think I may conclude that I am very lucky that it was not me removing them or, indeed, having to put them back again.

I spoke with our steel man – as opposed to our man of steel – who came later on to check everything, and he assured me the steel was arriving Monday. By the end of next week, we should expect that the steel structure to be in place and the small matter of rebuilding the front of our property begins in earnest. During the morning I presented the builder with the written plan using the data he gave me about how long things took. I suspect he would do well to put plans on paper because in short order he was backing away from his earlier verbal assurance that the scaffolding would be down for our shop opening just ahead of Easter. We had a very short conversation about contingency if it was still up. Mmm.

Trying to ensure that I did not miss a deadline, I sent off my niece's birthday card. I have had in my mind for some while that it was her fortieth birthday coming up and wrote something appropriate in it. Just as I finished writing the line, it suddenly occurred to me that I was a year out – on the wrong side – and it was her fortieth last year instead. I quickly added that she would already know that things improve quickly after reaching the age of forty. Unfortunately, I wrote, when she got to my age they fall rapidly apart, being unable to remember birthday ages being a prime example. I do hope I can be forgiven.

I thought that some fresh air might help, so I took ABH out for a spin. We headed to the Harbour beach as usual where she met a more mature retriever tethered to a lead. I do not think ABH could quite understand why the dog did not chase her as it seemed keen to play. The owner explained that the dog ate seaweed and thus could not be trusted off the lead on a beach, that and it was ten years older than ABH. ABH did not seem to worry too much and continued to pretend that the dog was indeed chasing her. Such an imagination.

Since I had been on the go for most of the morning, I decided that a sit down and rest was in order. So, I did that for a bit. When I awoke from a small zizz, I was overcome by the desire to pull on some DIYman overalls and get the decorations out of the shop. The small gods of grumpy shopkeepers take a dim view about such spontaneous activity and sent a great shower of rain to make it as awkward as possible for me to carry out my duty.

I have already explained that the scaffolding had been designed to concentrate any rainfall into a line just outside the shop doorway. When the drips are not continuous as they were today, they can very easily catch the unwary out with a well-timed drip down the back of the neck. Today, however, it was just a curtain of rain rather heavier than the average around us that I had to pass through with each box being shipped into the back of the truck.

My intention was to get it loaded and head to The Farm with my best girl by my side, but I do not think that ABH would have appreciated being dragged around a field in the pouring rain. I headed up there on my own.

We had called upon our St Buryan farmer friend to trim the hedges up the lane a couple of weeks ago. He was unable to do it at the start of the summer because his flayer hedge trimmer was out of action and consequently, the lane hedges were in a dreadful state. I was very pleased to see that he had done the work in the last few days and the difference was like between driving on a footpath and a dual carriage way. It only needs doing once a year and by doing it now, we will not have to worry about the spring explosion crowding us out.

Naturally, it had mainly stopped raining by the time I got up there. I still would have been left with a very wet ABH had she come, so it is probably as well she did not. It was also just as well that I did the clearing up in the barn last week because there was plenty of room to dump the decorations. The Missus will have to come and sort them out because they have filled the tipping trailer rendering it unusable for now.

The whole episode took less than a couple of hours from loading to driving away from The Farm. I had clearly overdressed for the occasion and could hardly wait to lose some of the layers I had put on. I had the impression that it had become warmer after the rain had pushed through but when I checked Land's End figures, it had remained constantly mild all day. I was much lighter clad when I took ABH around the block when I returned. It could not be avoided as she was waiting for me.

There was still damp in the air as we walked around the big block. Warm and not very breezy, there was plenty of mist and low cloud making it feel very muggy. There was more rain to come, although I had not bothered to look. It was piling in from the southwest and some of it was very heavy. I avoided getting wet as I headed to the Lifeboat station for evening training, but we sat and listened to a deluge not long after. Happily, it was gone by the time we all fell out just over an hour later.

It was not overly apparent, but there was sufficient swell out in the bay to stop us launching the big boat. Given that we would still be a couple of hours off low water when the boat came back in had it launched, it would have been tricky on the long slipway trying to recover it. We could not even run the Inshore boat out in the Harbour as the tide was too far gone, which is just as well because it would have got wet in the rain. Instead, we did naming of parts on the Boat Crew's lifejacket, which counts as a unit on our new training regime. I had my hand up lots during the session as we had done something very similar with the school children the day before and I knew all the answers. I will probably get a gold star later.

ABH's life was turned upside down after I came home as the Missus went up to bed before me. This never, ever happens and she was torn between stopping downstairs with me or going upstairs with the Missus. When I eventually did go to bed, she

would not settle and played up for the next couple of hours. If something as simple as that upsets her equilibrium, we do not look forward to the upheaval of moving back to the flat might bring. It may never happen, of course, if the builder does not pull his finger out.

February 9th – Friday

I had clearly expended all my energy and joie de vie yesterday when I moved the decorations from the shop. Or, it might have been to do with ABH acting like a spoilt teenager and keeping us up half the night. Nothing was going to be the order of the day today, but of course, it was not quite like that.

I did scramble enough enthusiasm together to get myself to the gymnasium. This was a necessity since I had missed out going on Wednesday. I was also keen to adjust my new weights. I had come to the conclusion that there were indeed heavier than I was used to and planned to swap the outer weights with lighter ones, making the total eleven kilogrammes instead of 12.5 kilograms. You would not think that 1.5 kilograms would make much difference, but you would be very wrong – my four inches longer arms say so. I still managed to execute a blistering session but without any record times.

ABH was ready to pounce as soon as I walked in the door, so I had little choice but to take her out. Our timing was immaculate as a couple of Jack Russells that she has knocked about with before were heading to the Harbour beach at the same time. They had a good run around for half an hour which left me off the hook for entertaining her. We were almost scuppered before we started because I noticed some seal tracks running across the beach.

Unsure if the sea was still there, I hooked ABH back on her lead while I followed the tracks. It had started either on or near the western slipway and made its way across the beach. I do not know if it was undecided or just fancied a bit of a tour, but the tracks zigzagged as the seal crossed from one side of the beach to the other before joining the tide just short of the short slip. Satisfied that the interloper had gone, play resumed at some pace.

Over the last few days, quite a bit of sand has come back onto the Harbour beach and particularly under the slipways. I took a photograph back when the sand had been scoured out and another yesterday and the difference is pronounced. Not that you would know that the sand is back because the main part of the beach, all the way across, is a field of pebbles and larger rocks. No wonder the seal came across the beach. It was trying to find a soft spot so it did not scrape its belly on the way out.

I hastened off to collect Mother after I came back. One of the things we had to remember was to take the money for our St Buryan farmer pal who trimmed our hedges in the lane. I forgot. I had some money on me, so I asked Mother who

normally has a bob or two about her person, but her cupboard was bare as well. The Missus will have to drop it over on Sunday and hope our chum is not in a hurry for it.

Someone who was in a hurry was our electrician. He called me yesterday asking if the plan for where all the sockets were going was complete. I had a completed sketch by the end of the day yesterday, but I still wanted to check a couple of things with the Missus first. One of the ways that we will make the wiring a bit easier is to put trunking around the room. We trialled this with the cluster of sockets that I put together for the abundance of equipment between the television, satellite and DVD player and the computers bits. It looked tidy enough and not too obtrusive, so I suggested we put trunking around the front of the room instead of skirting board. It seems we have the green light to do just that. I think it was green, anyway.

That out of the way, I was back at the house just in time to take ABH for a longer walk. It almost did not happen because as I headed for the flat to do my little bit of business, it started to rain. The clouds had been looking threatening all day, but we had been lucky with a bit of brightness as we did our walking and running around in the morning. In retrospect, our little bit of rain and poor weather was short-lived but as it was still trying to rain when I headed back the house, I assumed the worst.

The next time I looked out, the sunshine was in charge. It could have been an entirely different day with blue sky and bright sunshine. In fact, the sun was so bright it made heading up Mayon Cliff – at the top at least – quite difficult. I pulled over to the side of the path when I spotted two figures coming down as I could not see quite where I was going.

ABH was very keen to meet the ponies, or they might have been horses, I am not an expert in such matters. They have a leg on each corner and look like a 'oss. I tried to explain that it probably was not such a good idea as despite her being a friendly sort, the 'osses probably were not. I kept ABH on a tight leash until we had passed by, and we headed off in the direction of Maria's Lane. It was the same trip that we did the day before last but I thought if we did it in reverse and came back down Mayon Cliff, it would at least seem different.

It was a decent enough walk, warm too with the sun beating down but not so warm that it was uncomfortable. We were also not walking at such a pace as to generate any heat from our efforts either. We met up with the 'osses again on the way back. ABH was super keen to meet them, so I held her steady and we watched from a reasonable distance. While I was telling her that they really did not want to meet her, two of them looked in our direction and headed our way. I thought that this might be interesting in one way or another and we held our ground as they approached. Well, I held my ground as they approached. My diminutive friend was a blur as she rapidly left the scene. Hopefully, I have cured her of wanting to meet a 'oss.

We returned to the house to watch the Missus languish on the settee. She awoke yesterday with a sore tooth and as today unfolded it turned out to be an abscess. I

had refrained from my usual litany of abscess jokes as I was in close proximity at the time. She managed to get the number of an emergency dentist which she was told to call after half past five o'clock. After waiting for half an hour, she was answered by a very pleasant lady who told her that the place she had called did not have any dentists, which made me wonder, well, it made me wonder a lot of things but mainly why give someone the number of a place where there were not any dentists. However, she was told to report to a dentist in Truro tomorrow morning.

Given the parlous state of dentistry in the Duchy, I suspect that she was exceedingly lucky to get that appointment. I did have a manic chuckle when the Government announced recently that they would bribe dentists to take on more NHS patients at their practices. I am on an NHS dentist list, and I cannot get to see an NHS dentist. By adding more patients to the list I will be even less likely to see a dentist.

We will gird our loins for an early start tomorrow morning. To make matters worse, the A30 is closed this weekend. What joy.

February 10th – Saturday

Getting up at half past six o'clock in the morning would not have been so bad had we not had to content with naughty teenager again. She had been out more times than we could count – counting is not a strong point as many of our customers will testify to – had some more scoff – she does not hold with regular eating times – and bedded down with chews to gnaw on.

The final straw was her kicking seven shades out of the waste bin in the bedroom in a fit of pique. I banished her to the single room and shut the door. It is as black as pitch in there I and we never heard a peep out of her for ten minutes. I was a bit afeared of falling asleep and leaving her there all night, so after ten minutes I went to get her out. She was sitting looking at the door as she must have been since she got thrown in there. It is a good job that I am a heartless grumpy shopkeeper, else it would have proper twanged the heart strings.

We got our own back by throwing her out of bed early doors to get the Missus to the dentist on time in Truro. It was probably as well we were doing nothing else because the weather was fit only for staying indoors. We had frequent showers there and back, although the sun was trying its best to break through but failing miserably.

The leaving early was a precaution as we had been advised that the A30 was closed from just before the turn off to Truro at Chiverton. It was also closed beyond that but for us today, this was of no concern. I had been through Chiverton with the road closed just before Christmas and again in the middle of January. On neither occasion was it particularly onerous but the traffic did slow me down. I had left an extra hour to get there today and because the traffic was so light between eight and nine o'clock, we were in Truro a good 45 minutes early.

We waited twenty minutes or so and I suggested to the Missus that she push her luck and see if she could get in early. While we waited, I took ABH around the car park to stretch her legs. She is still very much attached to the Missus and dragged me to the clinic doors to see if she could be found. She was not wholly satisfied that she could not see her and was not allowed inside but she followed me back around the car park anyway.

We did not have to wait long. I will spare you the details, dear reader, but I think that the procedure would have brought a tear to the eye of the most stalwart character. It could have been much worse, of course: it could have been me.

The journey home was as complicated as the journey up was straight forward. When we reached Chiverton, the only sign for Redruth and the journey west pointed at a closed off road. While the journey east was clearly marked, all we had going the other way was a sign for St Agnes, wherever that is. We followed it anyway because it sounded better than Bodmin. I have come back this way before, but it was a long time ago. There were no further diversion signs and nothing to indicate the correct way of getting back onto the A30. We had no real option but to travel through the heart of Redruth – obviously with the doors locked and the windows up. I also hear that not making eye contact is very important as well. I followed my own route and joined the A30 at the Avers roundabout, which is where we should have joined it but from a different direction. We had come around the long way.

The Missus suggested we stop at Hayle where there is a national pharmacy chain at the shopping centre there. I was dubious because parking there is tricky during the week. I was right about it being busier on a Saturday and there was nowhere to park save a few spaces where the neighbouring vehicles had misconstrued the purpose of the white lines they had parked over. We decided to move on to Penzance, where the parking spaces are so numerous you can park in two of them without anyone noticing.

I made use of the same pharmacy chain in town. There was a big notice on the front of the desk announcing that there was a temporary delay of thirty minutes for the delivery of prescription medicines. I reasoned that the delay was probably not that temporary if they had to print a sign about it. The time they committed to writing the notice might have been better spent fixing the process that caused the delay. It is my own view, of course, and they clearly knew best.

It has been the same for as long as I have been collecting prescriptions from a pharmacy – the inexplicable wait. I had always assumed that there was a team of busy scientists in the back room mixing medicines and counting out the requisite number of pills into a bottle. It has only been in my later, perhaps more cynical years, that I have questioned the purpose of this enforced delay. Even if a qualified pharmacist has to check the prescription, surely that does not take twenty minutes however busy they are.

When I handed over the prescription that the Missus had given me, the very pleasant lady behind the counter asked me to wait to see if they had some of the medicine prescribed. I watched as she took the box from the shelf and put it in a little tray with the prescription. She then thanked me and told me to come back in twenty minutes or so. Why? The prescription was there before my very eyes.

As luck would have it, I had the opportunity to test my theory that the wait is purely contrived. The very pleasant lady who served me and told me to wait, went off duty soon after serving me. I needed some other non-prescription medicines from the same counter, so asked the replacement very pleasant lady to serve me. When she had finished, I explained that I had left the prescription there. She told me she would check and two minutes later brought it to the counter. I had waited no more than ten minutes to complete the transaction. I rest my case.

We had been rushing around since the moment we got up. It was high time for a zizz and more importantly, some breakfast, which I took first. It was also probably time ABH had a run since she had been very good cooped up in the truck for two hours or more during the morning. On reflection, it might have been better to have a longer zizz or left breakfast out altogether. An energetic walk so soon after eating was no good at all.

As it transpired, ABH did not seem very up for it either. I had already had to change the plan as I had left it too late in the tide and could no longer cut across the beach to go back up the Coast Path. This was also scuppered by the sand having been scoured out from under the Lifeguard huts leaving a sizeable field of boulders. Instead, I headed up the Coast Path from the other direction, but it had already taken us an inordinate amount of time even to get there as ABH was dragging her paws along every yard of it.

By the time we reached the steps going up the hill to Carn Olva, I decided that had we carried on to The Valley I might possibly have lost the will to continue any further. Despite some misgivings about doing so, the only option was to head up the steps.

I had last taken this route several years ago but only ever downhill. I had complained bitterly about the state of the steps near the top that were so deep, abseiling was looking like a better option. I stopped using them then. I had noted that the much maligned council had done some work since then in reducing the drop by adding extra steps but by then the bleddy hound was not able for such walks anyway.

It was disappointing therefore, that when we reached the steps in question, they were just as deep as I remembered before. The works carried out had not lasted long and the erosion on the sandy path is ferocious and swift. The roles now reversed as I watched ABH bound up the cliff-like steps while I groaned and clambered up behind her. By the second step, I had already struck this route from our list of options around The Cove.

Things around the Cove were suddenly transformed when we returned from our sojourn out east. The café next door is open again for a couple of weeks and when I set out with ABH in the afternoon, the place was alive with visitors. With the swell making an inviting spectacle, the Beach car park was busy with vans spilling eager surfers out onto towels and mats as they creaked into their wetsuits and headed for the waves. It is half term week – or fortnight, if you are posh – and a swathe of holidaymakers have headed our way. No wonder it was raining.

February 11th – Sunday

We were not entirely sure how today would pan out. It hinged on how the Missus felt after her tooth and abscess trauma of yesterday. I was definitely going shooting but it was unclear whether she would take me as usual, or I would drive myself and if I did, would I go the whole day or pick Mother up halfway through.

All became clear two minutes before I was due to leave when the Missus announced she would prefer to stay home. I had volunteered the half day solution. If we had put Mother off until tomorrow, it would conflict with the arrival of the steel and it would be utter mayhem down here. It had not occurred to me before, but with all the additional people and traffic in The Cove, our having a telehandler down here shifting steel about was going to be fraught.

As if to rub salt into my wounds, there was the potential of a Lifeboat launch as well. I had already ensured that I would be covered if I did not show up, but it was unclear whether the launch would go ahead anyway. Late yesterday afternoon, the sea was swirling around excitedly in the Harbour and our view from the top of Mayon Cliff as we came down yesterday saw meaty waves running down Tribbens and flossing over the Harbour wall. The prognosis was that it probably would not be much better today.

The launching authority and the Coxswain left the decision on the launch until the last minute, after observing the sea state as the tide receded. I heard later that the launch was poorly attended, probably due to the short notice but had gone ahead smoothly. The boat was only out for half an hour and brought back in by a small but perfectly formed team in what was reportedly a textbook recovery up the long slip. We are, after all, a very skeletal, very excellent Shore Crew.

We were not exactly over-manned at the shooting in the morning, either. Only eight people turned up for the centre-fire session that permitted me to use my cowboy rifle and Dirty Harry pistol. It was all over by the middle of the day. In truth, I could probably have collected Mother, dropped her home and gone back for the .22 pistol in the afternoon, but it would have been a bit of a rush and not entirely certain.

Instead, I took ABH for a run around the block in the sunshine that had developed during the morning. There was enough Harbour beach for a run around on the sand and we met up with the Roundhouse dog for a bit of a chase about. The ladies that swim in ice cold water were down there too, about half a dozen ready for a good freezing. It made me cold just to look at them. To think that I was debating whether to wear a jacket or not because it was warm in the shelter of the mews in the sunshine. Even in the relative shelter of the Harbour, the wind was cutting across us and was chilly enough, thank you.

I noticed too, that the sand had been scoured out again. I mentioned yesterday that quite a lot had gone missing from the back of the big beach yesterday but it was clearly Harbour beach's turn today. I had not really had time to study the sea state at high water because I was leaving as the tide was going out and it was a little way off when I took ABH around. At low water, there was definitely some swell, but it was hard to see if it was better or worse than yesterday.

It did not seem as busy as I had imagined when Mother and I drove down the hill into The Cove. There were a few people on the big beach taking a walk and the Beach car park was relatively busy, too. If there were crowds here, they must all have been settled at home or in the OS or Surf Bar for a spot of Sunday dinner and the breeze was probably to blame.

I have not looked at the forecast for the coming week, but I trust that it is fair enough for our steel installation. It is a psychologically important point in the work that is being done and marks the beginning of the end. Also, I could not bear another disappointment.

February 12th – Monday

It was heartening indeed to see a neat pile of galvanised, shiny steel sitting on the back of a trailer when I headed down the drive on my way to the gymnasium this morning. I was expecting the steel girders to be much longer, especially the ones running back from the front to the end of the windows. Either those had not arrived or, more likely, they were in connecting lengths as well as the one across the front.

I had wondered how the steels, particularly the long ones, would be manoeuvred through the complex of scaffolding bars. Our steel man, when I met him told me that they would be guided through from the gap in the side of the scaffolding, but I could not see it then. Now I know they are in shorter lengths, all is clear.

It was not the morning for waiting around to see steel being lifted into place. The air temperature had dropped a few degrees from last week and it has made all the difference. It looked good, though. Wide expanses of blue sky let the sun shine through and with little breeze to talk about, it was actually quite warm in the direct sunlight as long as you kept moving.

This clearly did not include the gymnasium that, like most of the buildings nestled against the cliff, does not get much in the way of sun during the winter. It is getting better and had our solar panels been in place, we might have been generating a kilowatt or two. I was left to generate my own electricity in the hut with a tin roof and set about doing so in a blistering session. I even met my benchmark time on the rowing machine, so a weekend of barely doing very much had clearly restored my gusto.

In contrast, the little girl was not overly enthusiastic about being on the Harbour beach when I came back. We spent a little time down there and she garnered some interest from a couple of Asian ladies who detoured via the beach on a run up to Land's End. ABH was keen to follow on as they went up the western slip and we finished off by heading around the block.

The Missus had issued instructions that I should return with a bacon roll from the café next door now that it is open for the holiday. I regretted my cleverness at ensuring that I already had a breakfast lined up this morning, else I would have had one too.

What I did not regret was a call from our window people, expressly the man who scheduled installations. He told me that our installation was pencilled in for the 26th. I was disappointed momentarily until he told me that he had meant February not March. A cause for some celebration.

We celebrated by taking ABH down to the Harbour beach again; the two of us this time. The Missus decided to run a search pattern of the beach looking for sea glass leaving me to entertain the little girl. Not that she needs much in the way of entertainment that she does not provide for herself. The hour at which we went, too, meant that she had a whole new world of low tide rocks to explore. She has never been down when the tide has been so low and there was lots to explore including some sizeable rockpools.

It is not until you are down at the level of them that it becomes apparent just how high the bedrock reaches up at certain points. It is then you realise why that when the Lifeboat comes in at high water to be recovered on the short slipway, it clings to the wall side of the Harbour. We are aware of it too when we launch the Inshore boat at lower tides and we have to drive the Tooltrak out to near the end of the Harbour wall.

ABH ran off at one point to meet a couple of new arrivals on the beach. I know that her boisterousness is not always welcome, but I doubt that it requires her to be angrily shooed away. Nor, being a just short of a year old pup does she represent the sort of threat that requires an owner to swiftly pick up their own dog when ABH was still ten feet away. Fortunately, she comes away when she is called now,

because I did not feel the urge to rush to 'save' the incomers from the vicious attack they were under.

Happily, the Roundhouse dog came down again shortly after that episode and the two of them played well together for half an hour. They both ranged over the exposed rocks and reef in the Harbour and dipped into the rock pools for a bit of variety.

Part of the reason we explored the beach was to pass the time ahead of another voyage out a little to the east of Camborne. Two years ago, now we helped the Aged Parent move out of his rambling mansion to a more suitable accommodation in a nearby town. Part of the job that the Missus did so well involved boxing and wrapping some potentially valuable items such as the family stainless steel and various heirlooms handed down from the dawn of time with famous makers names like Winfield and St Michael. We promised we would launder them through our local fence and hand over any readies that may be forthcoming from the transaction.

Clearly, we needed to wait until the market was ready for such an enterprise as well as the hue and cry calming down from possible ownership claims from scurrilous families that may erroneously, suggest that they belong to them. Today seemed as good a day as any, particularly as I had telephoned our fence last week to make an appointment at his lock-up in Scorrier. We invited Mother along for the ride as we would look far less suspicious with a little old lady riding shotgun, although it might have worked better if she had left the violin case behind.

Obviously, we had to bribe Mother to keep schtum and offered to take her to Smokey Joe's after our business was done. I had planned that it may take an hour with our fence given the amount of booty we had about us. As it happens, the whole arrangement works on trust and our fence takes everything we had without even looking at it and will hand over the dosh when or if the goods are sold. This took me aback slightly and left us free to go and eat at ten past four o'clock which is a bit early in the afternoon for anyone having a bit of tea.

We discussed our options, which were plainly, kick our heels for an hour in a somewhat industrial neck of the woods, go home or eat there and then. We opted for the latter and ended up at the famous Smokey Joe's roadside café at around twenty minutes past four o'clock. Because of my gymnasium attendance, I had already had a late breakfast and elected to have a light 'standard breakfast' that the café is famed for. Mother and the Missus chose the spare ribs special that arrived looking like something from the opening sequence of The Flintstones cartoon series.

Mother ate rather more than the Missus but both ended up asked for a box to bring home their left-overs in. I had left my fried potatoes but there again I am not keen of fried potatoes or chips and could have done well without them in the first place. It is as that we emptied the truck of several boxes of goods as I am not sure the springs could have handled the extra weight, else. What is more, because we had no

immediate funds from the sale of our goods, Mother very kindly offered to pay for it all.

We had rather hoped to go and have a look at the steel works in the flat when we got back but it was getting dark when we dropped Mother off at St Buryan, so we abandoned the plan. As we descended the hill, it looked like our scaffolding tent was lit up but I discounted it as a reflection from the remaining glow in the western sky. Up close it was clear that the boys were still working. We parked the truck, and I went to investigate. I am pleased and quite amazed to say, that all the steelwork is now in place after just one day. There is fine tuning work to do but the boys aim to start the timber work tomorrow, which will shave four days off my revised plan and schedule. All your good wishes and lit candles have eventually paid off, dear reader. Thank you, so much.

February 13th – Tuesday

A grey and grisly, mizzly start to the day today. It had half crossed my mind – only half, though – to get a start on sanding down the black cladding planks that erstwhile fronted the shop. I was trying to work out how best to do it because I did not want to use the space that was our front room in case I became a hinderance to the work going on there. Doing it outside would be commanded by the weather and I would need to bring down both my workbenches from The Farm. The mizzle this morning made the decision for me.

It dried up a little as the day went on but remained damp and unattractive throughout. It was so uninspiring that I demurred on going out at all after the first quick run out with ABH first thing. I felt compelled towards the middle of the day and visited the Harbour beach. We fell in with a local person who I vaguely knew but their dog was of an age not to want to play with the little girl. She got marks for persistence, but this eventually became harassment, and I called her away. (That was harassment NOT harassment by the way – if I ever meet Michael Crawford who I blame solely for the corruption he will wish some mothers never had him.)

I am trying to keep on top of our invoicing, which means regular trips to the computer in the flat so that I can print them off. So far, I have been successful, but the printed invoices have been building up. Despite having an extra month this quarter due to Making Tax Difficult and the alignment of our business year to the fiscal one, this will coincide with the shop opening and Easter and thus I will be distracted. I felt it best to get ahead of the posse and get as many invoices into the accounting system as possible and filed away. Hopefully, I will only have a handful to do at the end of the quarter then.

I brought the current collection of invoices back to the house with me and prepared to re-familiarise myself with inputting them. To make things a little more interesting this quarter I felt that it was probably advisable to keep the building invoices separate

from the normal business ones. If there are any objections to them being business expenses, I will be more easily able to separate them out.

I have made it sound like I was industrious throughout the morning with my printing and inputting and walking ABH. It is the benefit that I have in conveying the facts into the written word that I can be flexible with the presentation – gosh, I almost said ‘truth’ there and that would never do. Every word of The Diary is the truth, dear reader, as well you know. Honest guv. So, I should come clean and explain that there may have been a few small gaps between ABH walking, printing invoices and keying invoices into the system. There may even have been time for the occasional zizz in between one or two of them, I confess that I lost track rather.

Anyway, what I am trying to say is that before I knew it, the time had arrived to take ABH out again and this time for a proper stank or something that closely resembled one. It was exactly the right thing to do and most timely. I can only describe the condition I was feeling as stagnant and a good sucking in of fresh sea air was just the tonic for it. Of course, had I realised this earlier, I would not have hung about procrastinating, fiddling with accounts and zizzing all over the place.

We headed for the wide expanse of big beach today. I have previously described our feelings about a simple walk across the beach, being a bit boring for the little girl, as there is very little for her to do. With this in mind I decided that we would start on the Coast Path and hang in there until The Valley, then join the big beach where the stream meets the beach. The path down by the Lifeguard hut still terminates in a wide field of boulders as does the path down from Carn Keys, the black huts. I might have been persuaded to go for the latter had it been sandy, but the Lifeguard hut was a bit previous. The Valley path it had to be then.

On the way out we had narrowly missed meeting with a close neighbour who had gone down the OS slipway just ahead of us. I thought it possible that we might meet as we came back across the beach, but I did not make it a target. As usual it took us an age to move in a forward direction, but it had the desired effect of keeping the little girl’s interest for the whole of the outward journey.

As luck would have it, I spotted our neighbour and her dog down by the tide line just slightly ahead of us. I tried pointing them out to ABH who recognised the dog’s name but failed completely to identify them a way off. We closed the gap as we cut across the beach but despite this, ABH was clearly being obtuse about recognising her friend. He met up at the bottom of the OS slipway where our friends had stopped for a chat. We almost did not make that rendezvous as we were intercepted by a very friendly young Alsatian who clearly wanted to play but ABH was not that sure she did not look like dinner.

Despite the grey and the damp, it was a pleasant enough walk and dropped us back home around an hour before tea. Mother and the Missus both had the remains of the spare ribs they could not finish at Smokey Joe’s yesterday. There was still easily

enough there for a second meal, even for Mother who has the appetite of a small plague of locusts. I got by with something from the freezer laid down back in September. It made me feel nostalgic for the old days when we still had a home.

Wiping a small tear from the corner of my eye, I repaired to the Lifeboat station for our Operations Team meeting while the Missus took Mother home. We are blessed that the little girl does not seem to mind being left home alone. Her mood changes if the Missus has gone and she is left with me, but she just sulks in a corner and waits. She appears not to care too much that I go as well, which I have found to be a fairly common reaction to my absence. One gets used to it.

At least the rain held off for the rest of the day. I could have sanded and painted some of those panels after all. Ah well.

February 14th – Wednesday

A grey and grisly, mizzly start to the day today. See, I can recycle along with the best of them. In fact, it was even more grisly and grey and damp and cold than it was yesterday. Same as yesterday, the it had got into my bones by the middle of the morning, which was odd because it was not especially cold. It was, however, quite an active morning and by the time I had done some running around, I was feeling much better by the afternoon.

I had to give up my gymnasium session for a short notice attendance of our refrigeration engineer. The company had called yesterday to say that our service was due and would this morning be alright. If I had put it off for another day it is just as likely that would have been inconvenient as well, so I told them today would be perfect and arranged for the engineer to arrive at around nine o'clock.

Toward the end of the conversation, I suddenly remembered that our freezer had broken down with the ice creams in it. This was one of the newer ones, too. We seem to have more trouble with those than with the fifteen year old ones, which should not really be a surprise. Anyway, the very pleasant lady I was talking with told me that it was probably unlikely the visiting engineer would be able to fix it because he only did maintenance calls at present. It turned out that he could not fix it and a service engineer would be scheduled by and by.

I let our man in after he arrived and largely left him to it. Up above, our small workforce is steaming ahead with the timbers for the roof, expertly crafting them onto the steelwork. I had ordered some fixings to enable this process which were supposed to turn up between two o'clock and three o'clock yesterday afternoon, however, Doing Parcels Dreadfully clearly felt that would be an awful lot of trouble and decided to delay it by a day.

The Missus and I did a bit of thinking ahead, well, the thinking ahead had already been done, but the getting the right people involved in the doing, was still outstanding. We have decided to keep the same living room carpet which is of such high quality it would be foolhardy to replace it. Unfortunately, the living room will be slightly smaller than it was before, so we would need an expert carpet fitter to put it back into place. I had asked our Lifeboat community if they knew of such a person, and they came up trumps.

I telephoned our recommended man in the late morning and left a message. When he called back, we discovered that he was a most amiable gentlemen and knew all the right questions that we did not, such as did we have underlay and grippers, which we did not. This gentleman will do all the suppling and fitting at a commensurate cost, I am sure, but it is one less thing to worry about and comes highly recommended by a person we trust. We need to give him only a week's notice, which is ideal.

Similarly, we fell back on a tradesman that we had used before to sand and paint the cladding boards for the front of the shop. Yes, I know I was going to get in there myself but based on how much availability I have had over the last few weeks, it is very likely that I would have been very pressed to allocate the time to it. Our man was unable to commit to the work there and then but has assured us he will call back once he has been able to arrange things.

With two quite large things ticked off the to-do list, I gathered myself to trek into town. The most import thing there was to visit the electrical wholesaler to make sure that they had all the items we were likely to need next week for the electrician's work. I also needed some cable to fix the light in the store room that is still flashing away annoyingly every time it is switched on. The circuit needs to be changed from serial to parallel because the new light I purchased has cables only at the one end. It is irritating because it is the devil's own job to knock cable clips into the type of ceiling we have; they just fall out again.

Since I was heading that way, I would also run an errand in town and, when the Missus got wind of my mission, added a number of shopping items to my list of things to do.

Things went quite swimmingly, especially as I managed to get most of the grocery items from the small independent shops in the town centre. There was no appreciable queue at the bank or at the butchers or at the greengrocer. I did not even have to put my bag in the bagging area and my bag was kindly filled for me while I had a pleasant conversation with the human being doing it. I also knew that the products I was buying came from a reasonably local source and had not been halfway around the country before they got to me. Just thought that I would mention it.

There are roadworks in abundance going on in the centre of Penzance and on the outskirts, too. The road to the out of town shopping centre and industrial estate where I was heading was down to one lane with drivers in the open lane seemingly unwilling to yield to those in the closing one. I am so glad we live in the land of the spirit of goodwill and doing to our neighbours as we would have them do to us – but doing it first, lest they get one over on us.

The roadworks on the way out of town I knew about but the ones that scuppered my plans were in the centre. I had already had to detour around a temporary one way road that I forgot about but when I went the long way around to get to the other side of it, that road too was blocked off with a 'road closed' sign. I would have been better going back to the by-pass and had I been blessed with second sight I would have done.

Eventually, I made it to the electrical wholesalers where I noted down the part numbers that I supposed that we would need. I also purchased the cable necessary to convert the store room lighting circuit. My feeling very pleased with myself that I had been so clever and prepared in planning these purchases lasted all of an hour or so. When I got back, I spoke with the builders regarding the timing of the carpet fitter arriving and in doing so sparked a conversation regarding the wiring. Apparently, we will not be having trunking around the room and instead of sockets appropriate for trunking we will be having flush sockets with recessed, galvanised back boxes. It made me wonder why I had bothered to draw a wiring plan and send it to the builder for his comments. I have asked the electrician to come along a few days ahead of his working visit to discuss the final position next week.

It was looking a bit misty when I set off for town in the middle of the day. I was not there very long, less than an hour in the town centre my parking ticket told me, and not long outside either. By the time I headed back, the mist was thickening. It came properly into its own as I drove up the incline at Tregoneris and stayed that way all the way into Sennen village. I mentioned the last time I mentioned that it was foggy that many drivers do not feel compelled to light their vehicles such that they may be seen in weather like that. The Missus will tell you, should you care to ask her, that I mention the driving lights every time it is foggy – mainly because it irritates me each time.

What perhaps I have not mentioned, or particularly noticed before is that the newer cars that have their bright LED lights on all the time. There seems to be some complacency that because of that, additional lighting is not required and, from the front, they are probably correct. What they fail to appreciate, or perhaps care, is that the rear of the vehicle is completely unlit and therefore nigh on invisible until you are nearly upon them. Alright, I will shut up now.

Allow me to lighten the mood with a little romance. Let us enjoy a bit of Keats, the poetry writing bit. 'Tis St Valentine's Day, after all, who was romantically clubbed to

death and beheaded, it is said. This bit of romantic poetry, one to all the Emmas out there.

*O come, dearest Emma! the rose is full blown,
And the riches of Flora are lavishly strown;
The air is all softness, and chrystal the streams,
And the west is resplendently cloathed in beams.*

*We will hasten, my fair, to the opening glades,
The quaintly carv'd seats, and the freshening shades;
Where the fairies are chaunting their evening hymns,
And in the last sun-beam the sylph lightly swims.*

*And when thou art weary, I'll find thee a bed,
Of mosses, and flowers, to pillow thy head;
There, beauteous Emma, I'll sit at thy feet,
While my story of love I enraptur'd repeat.*

*Then why, lovely girl, should we lose all these blisses?
That mortal's a fool who such happiness misses;
So smile acquiescence, and give me thy hand,
With love-looking eyes, and with voice sweetly bland.*

February 15th – Thursday

A grey and grisly, mizzly start to the day today. Lummy, any more of this and I will just refer you to the previous day. Actually, today was very similar indeed to yesterday including the mist in the afternoon. What today had that was largely missing from yesterday was an abundance of rain.

The very kind people at the forecasting office were so very keen that we should know it was going to rain they issued a rain alert. In the olden days, we used to call this a forecast. I cannot deny that on this occasion their forecast, or alert if you prefer, was spot on. I should not take the Mickey too much. In the old days if they forecast rain we used to go out with an umbrella; now we move everything to the first floor. Well, some of us do.

It was not raining when I took the little girl out first thing. For the second day in a row, I had to hurry along as I was meeting someone at nine o'clock. Today it was the fabricator who I wanted to ask to make some more robust brackets for our outside floodlights. Just as a small aside, you may think that 'outside' in front of floodlights was somewhat superfluous. Well, it is not. You may recall, dear reader, that a few years ago having struggled with finding the right bulbs for our bright uplighters, I eventually resorted to installing floodlights in them. The mark two versions of these are brilliantly successful.

Sorry, I digress. Now, where was I? Ah yes, waiting for Dan, Dan the fabricator man to peruse our new floodlights for the front of the shop and the later of the old ones for the side instead of our step lights. He told me that he would be there at nine o'clock but did not arrive until ten o'clock. In his defence, he did say that he would telephone me when he was on his way so that I was not waiting around for him. It was me who took him at his word about the time and went down to wait.

Rather than sit around doing nothing, I thought that I would have a little look at the work required to replace the store room strobing light. This, before I knew it, was turning into removing the old light because that would only take a minute and set me up nicely to putting the cable in place later followed by the new light later still.

The only problem with this is that it took rather longer and more effort removing the old light than I anticipated. I had to unwire each end from the terminal blocks and, I only discovered after ripping the light from its brackets, that I should have removed each end of the lights so that it would glide effortlessly out of those brackets without all that ripping. It did not matter too much as there was no collateral damage and the whole unit and the brackets were going in the skip that we rather conveniently had hired just across the road.

Of course, now that I had opened the junction boxes and unwired the old light, I may as well wire in the new cable to link one junction box to the next. If I did not do that then we would only have the one light in the store room until I did wire it in. Surely, that would only take a minute anyway as the length of cable that I had guessed at in the wholesaler turned out to be pretty much precisely the length required.

The only gristle in this particular omelette was that the lights in the store room are on the ceiling. For the avoidance of doubt, dear reader, this puts them just about in reach of a six foot tall grumpy shopkeeper standing on the second step of a stepladder. The second step on a stepladder for this particular six foot high grumpy shopkeeper is the outer limit of highness that this particular grumpy shopkeeper is willing to go while, in the common vernacular, pushing the envelope and, most importantly, hanging onto something solid.

It should be noted, then, that to strip cables and insert wires into terminal blocks and screw them tight, unless one is exceptionally dextrous, which this particular six foot tall grumpy shopkeeper is far from being, requires the use of two hands. You will therefore have worked out, dear reader, the conflict that arose at this juncture, standing on the second step while holding onto something solid and using two hands to wire the terminal blocks. Something had to give.

The presence of four burly workpeople not a couple of feet above my elevated head who not only could probably climb higher on a stepladder than I could but could also do it without gripping with whitened knuckles the nearest solid object did not escape me. I dismissed asking them for help quite rapidly; we need our roof finished and

they are pressing on very quickly. We have our electrician coming at the end of next week, but I had already removed the old light, largely single handed, leaving just one light in the corner, which was probably not good enough for a week worth of store room visits.

I cannot say what spurred me on. It was too early for an abundance of alcohol that would almost certainly have solved the going up a ladder crisis but might have introduced a dexterity issue. Instead, I clenched my resolve, braced my legs against some part of the stepladder that I was not going to look down to identify and pressed on regardless. It left me a puddle of quaking jelly but had the wiring job done. Had it been at ground level, it would have taken half an hour all told but had me quivering for more than an hour instead.

During the final stages of the wiring in of the new cable it became very clear that it would have been ridiculous to omit installing the new light at the same time. I was turning the final screw in the final terminal block when the fabricator man called to say he was on his way down the hill. All that remained after he left with samples of the brackets that required replicating, was to replace the covers of the junction boxes to finish the job.

We now have three brightly illuminated LED batten lights on the store room ceiling and a smug but broken grumpy shopkeeper gazing up at them. It is not the prettiest job ever done, as mentioned, cable clips just drop out of our ceiling, but it is functional and in the store room, no one can see us screaming, as it were.

The whole episode had worked out rather well. It was not raining when I headed down the slope to the shop. A short while into starting the lights, I looked out of the door and noted that it was teeming down. It was partly this that drove me to continue to finish the lighting job as I had failed to bring a rain jacket with me. By this time our man was half an hour late and having waited half an hour, I may as well wait until he arrived or I had finished the job, whichever came first. And, I should note, all this before breakfast.

I managed to get a run out with ABH before the rain started again. We headed for the Harbour beach soon after I had finished that breakfast I had waited for. We were potentially fortunate that there was another dog waiting at the tide line for its family who were cold water swimming in bathing suits, bless them. ABH made a semi-cautious approach and when the dog saw her, it chased her, which was the object of ABH's exercise. It became clear quite quickly that the object of the other dog's exercise was to chase ABH off, although not viciously, for which we must be thankful.

To ABH this did not matter at all. Another dog was chasing her; the purpose was immaterial. Obviously, with such a dichotomy of views, it was not going to last and, indeed, did not. ABH, though, had achieved her goal, albeit for a limited period and

was good enough to come away when I determined what was going on and before it all came to grief.

We seemed reprise the situation shortly afterwards when a similar sized dog tore down the western slip to the tide line. Its family were following on more slowly. It mattered not a jot that the new dog was completely oblivious to ABH's presence, the fact that it was running back up the beach to the approaching family was, in her mind, that dog chasing her. She repeated this several times and even when the dog launched into the sea, ABH paddled a bit and waited for it to come out.

When all the dogs had gone, ABH ran around the beach by herself for a while before collapsing in a heap at the bottom of the main slipway. She looked so crestfallen that her pretend friends had all gone home. I did feel sorry for her; Janey no mates.

Feeling sorry for her – perhaps I had forgotten that she had me up at half past three o'clock in the morning. It was almost certainly this that had me collapsing in a heap of my own on a chair in the living room when we got back. I confess that my short zizz did inadvertently metamorphosise into a rather longer than intended zizz from which I emerged a new, fresher and wider awake grumpy shopkeeper.

Unfortunately, I had broken out of my chrysalis just at the time ABH might require another run around the block and just at the time that the proper rain of the day had arrived. The Missus had gone to the shop en-route to our neighbour who had been a brae bit poorly over the last few weeks. She was taking bread pudding made by her own fair hand a couple of days before, which would either fortify him or sink him without trace. As I went past the shop with the rain coming down in a curtain from our careful designed scaffolding, she was still in there as Hawkeye ABH also spotted. We had little choice but to detour and ended up walking around to the neighbour together.

We arrived home twenty minutes later, our respective full metal jacket waterproofs soaked. They were still wet on the outside when I wore them again just before tea when we headed for the Harbour beach again in the apparent dusk that had come early. It was unsurprisingly deserted but at least the rain had eased off. The downpour had carved deep gorges in the sand to the east of the slipway and had formed a large delta on the sand a little further west.

The mist in the form of low cloud had either descended to just below the level of Mayon Cliff shrouding the old hotel and houses of Maria's Lane. It left the bay relatively clear and the lower reaches of the cliffs opposite and the air was still and temperate. We did not tarry long.

I had intended to get to work on the slippery cobbles alongside the Lifeboat station using the station's pressure washer when we attended Lifeboat training in the evening, but it was cancelled at the last minute. Instead, I did nothing at the house

until it became apparent that ABH was getting a little bored and restless, so I decided a quick run around the block was in order.

I might have reconsidered that and let her sort herself out had I realised that it was raining quite so hard again. It was too late by that time, and we arrived back just as wet as we had been earlier. Nevertheless, it did the trick and we ended the evening in relative peace. Over the last few months we have not often had all day poor weather and we have had possibly less than our fair share of rain. We are, of course, very grateful – until the next hosepipe ban.

February 16th – Friday

A grey and grisly, mizzly ... wait a second, is that blue sky? The day started as it meant to go on with some acreage of blue sky and bright sunshine to set things alight. The little girl took a bit of persuading that things were, indeed, a tad more cheerful today but she came out briefly before I headed off to the gymnasium.

As you may remember, dear reader, I missed my session on Wednesday due to the arrival of the refrigeration engineer, the naughty fellow. Clearly, I had been completely restored after such a lengthy break and I was able to achieve at least a benchmark performance on the rowing machine. A few weights tossed around here and there and some stepping with weights strapped to my body and another blistering session was complete in no time. I even swept the floor before I went – at least the dry bits of it.

I think that we had been lucky for the last few rainy days that it had not seeped into the hut with a tin roof and the floor had remained largely dry. When I went in this morning, that was not the case and the area under the hole and a little way around was covered in a drying puddle. There is no mop resident in the club, so I had to make do by simply avoiding the area, which was conveniently the other side of the room from where I undertake most of my exercise. I am sure it will be dry by the next time I am there, hopefully on Monday.

As usual, ABH was waiting to ambush me, Cato-like, on my return from the gymnasium. I have taken to unlacing my plimsols in readiness as her welcome is so enthusiastic that I would otherwise be hamstrung trying to change into my walking out shoes. Even then it is a trial as she jumps up and threads herself between my feet, wagging her tail and presenting whatever was closest to pick up in her mouth. I thought that I had her this morning, as I timed my entrance for when a helicopter was passing overhead. No, there she was coming down the stairs like a little rocket the second I had pressed the front door into the jamb.

We would have headed for the beach had there been any beach to head to. With high water now in the morning as we head toward neap tides, the sea was swirling around in the Harbour and flogging over the wall. At least in contrast to yesterday it

was a blue colour and the water washing about on Cowloe was brilliant white in the sunshine. Most of the fishing boats are up in the Harbour car park out of harm's way and one is in the shed under maintenance. None of them would have been able to get out for the last week in any case as the sea state had been in turmoil all that time to one degree or another.

There was not a huge amount to see as we walked around the block that we have not seen a hundred times before. I had debated taking my rain jacket with me primarily because of the shining sun but also because it was still damp from yesterday. I probably did not need it, but it was a little chillier than it looked. It gave a chance to dry the jacket a bit more, so it was probably worthwhile. I did venture out without it for a late afternoon walk and it was perfectly temperate, which is not bad for the middle of February. There were a few spots of rain in the air that turned into proper mizzle in the evening, long after we got back home.

The work in the flat continues apace with roof timbers all in place and one of the walls started. There was quite a bit of timber in the skip as well and quite a bit less after the mechanic from the Lifeboat station had dipped in there with a wheelie bin. The boys announced that they would be working on Saturday as well, which is probably fair play since they started late, although probably not to them.

The Missus had run off shopping with Mother and came back with rations for a small army preparing for a lengthy siege. I had waited for this very moment to head over to the Lifeboat station to take action on those slippery cobbles that I could not do last night. I let the Lifeboat mechanic know what I was about since he had been left in charge of the station and he said that he would lend a hand. We took about an hour to scrub and wash down the cobbles all along the side of the station and down to the beach.

It had kept me out of trouble for a while and when I returned to the flat, I took ABH out again. I had been less than idle all day and had earlier organised our alarm people to come and visit while the building work was still in train. I told them that it was a perfect opportunity to review the implementation we had and to recommend changes if they were necessary. Offering a sales opportunity would hopefully encourage them to send a surveyor without charging us for the privilege.

Earlier still, I had a chat with a chandler's store regarding putting a VHF antenna on the new roof of the flat. It is immensely useful to listen to the Coastguard and the Lifeboat during operations to see when the boat is coming back. With all the steelwork in place, I anticipated that the signal in the flat, which was already poor before, would be hampered even more. It remains to be seen how effective it is, but it had to be tried – the Missus who does much of the listening told me so.

Shortly after I returned from the gymnasium in the morning, our refrigeration company called to tell me that they had despatched an engineer to come and look at our broken freezer. I had left him to his own devices after I let him in shortly after the

Missus had run off to the shops. We have no issue with leaving the engineers unattended as I am sure they are fine upstanding chaps, one and all. To be honest, I had forgotten all about him as I passed the door in the latter half of the afternoon and dropped in to see if he was still there. He had left a note pinned to our empty shelves of expensive gin thanking us fondly.

Of course, that is a jest, dear reader. In fact, had he done so it would probably have cost us less than the note that he did leave. The freezer, which is the newer of all the freezers that we have requires a new compressor, a new drier – whatever that it is but you may be assured it is expensive – and refilling with gas. They will send a quote before they proceed with repairs, but I am willing to bet that it will be more cost effective to replace it, which is just what we need at the moment.

It is at moments like these that I am very grateful to the Church or perhaps more precisely, the monks. It is these boys who, most likely, for the want of something better to do while they were not talking to each other and in between tightening each other's celices, invented beer – or at least made a lot of it.

February 17th – Saturday

A grey and grisly, mizzly start to the day today. Yes, here we go again.

Perhaps it was not so bad earlier on in the day. It was the afternoon when the rain really came in with all its actual wetness. We had managed two walks out, ABH and I, in the interim albeit the first being very short indeed. The second, once again, we were consigned to walk around the block because the tide had taken over the beach.

There were a few people around due to the continuing half terms across the country, I presume, but none of the busyness that we had seen in the middle of the day yesterday. I had not checked the local holiday dates, so with The Cove being largely empty for most of the week I assumed that the main holiday was next week. I was disabused of this thinking when I met a mother with school-aged children yesterday. I suppose it should not have been such a surprise that Friday was the only busy day because the other days of the week were, ah yes, grey and grisly, mizzly days one and all.

There were more cars in the Harbour car park than would have been the case outside a holiday and a number of people milling about. They all disappeared very quickly after the rain started. It would appear that they were a bit more observant than me because I kitted up to take ABH out for a proper stank in the early part of the afternoon completely oblivious to the change in weather.

I had to double back outside the door to put the little girl's coat on as it was raining quite hard. Nevertheless, I thought that we could still have a bit of a walk around the block to blow away some of the cobwebs of boredom that had accumulated since

our last walk. I let ABH off the lead at the top of the Harbour slipway fully expecting her to charge down the slope but instead she turned around and headed for home.

I cannot say that I blamed her but felt we could at least have a short and functional walk, which we managed to do. It was back to the house after that and some more slouching around and doing very little.

Actually, it was only ABH who was slouching around and doing very little. The Missus had got a march on our tea for tonight and had also prepared all the vegetables for roast dinner tomorrow. I had settled down to power through the invoices that needed to be input into the system. I had already spent half an hour or so over at the flat printing off and recording numbers. I am keeping a close and real-time check on the project spend which means capturing invoice data as it comes in. I was halfway through inputting the building invoices into the system when I was suddenly struck with a chronic case of boredom and spots before the eyes. It was then that I decided to take ABH out and discovered it was raining.

Looking at the rain radar, that was it for the day. That rain would keep coming right into the evening and into the night. It would not prevent a longer walk but I really do not think that either of us would have had much enjoyment out of it. We would almost certainly suffer later when she was not tired enough to go to bed. It is something of a hard choice or perhaps no choice at all.

I had laboured a little through last night and some more this morning, defining an order for our Dunoon, high quality mugs. The salesman is coming next week, so I thought that I should be prepared. It is always a difficult job as I have to guess other people's tastes or at least have a good cross section of designs to spread my bets as it were. Our man will no doubt sway me with how sales have been in other areas advice, but we have noticed before how sometimes our trends in The Cove seem to buck the average. No wonder I am a grumpy shopkeeper.

Even with these few distractions the lack of a decent stank and its repercussions nagged at me through the afternoon. At just after four o'clock with the weather not set to improve any, I changed my mind and fetched the little girl's hat and coat. I fetched my own, too, and thus armed we stepped out into the maelstrom – it was not but the word popped into my head, so I used it.

My intentions were merely to reach the big beach where the tide was out and see what happened next. A stank down the Coast Path did cross my mind; I could not really be that unkind, surely. Well, it does seem so, but it really was not all my fault. We paused at the corner where left took us down the OS slipway and right across the Beach car park and the Coast Path. It was ABH who chose to go right. I rest my case, m'lud.

We did not make bad time but, in the rain, it would appear that new smells or more enhanced old ones emerge and we spent some time sniffing them. I could not smell

a thing, so I left her to it. I have mentioned the field of boulders at the exit by the Lifeguard hut, so we were compelled to travel on to The Valley and down the traditional path to the beach. I had let her off the lead at the top of the sandy path down as there is not too much chance of deviation.

It was when we reached the beach that she seemed distracted. I had heard that there was a seal or dolphin carcass up in the mouth of the stream, something unsavoury and worth rolling in if you are a dog. It was a while back, but I had no intention of ABH finding out that it was still there. She took some convincing but is she very good with the word 'stop' now and did so, only edging in that direction as I caught up with her. After some guidance advice, we were back on the main part of the beach and she was able to cavort, which she duly did.

The rain had not ceased for the entirety of our walk, but it was less noticeable with the breeze, such as it was, behind us. On the way back across the beach I could hear it clacking on my hood and stinging my face. It was not raining all that hard but enough to leave our garments, however waterproof, soaked at least on the outside. Her little coat was also wet and very sandy where she had decided to roll about. We will have much vacuuming and sweeping to do before we exit the house for the flat, whenever that might be.

It was half past five o'clock and getting a bit dusky by the time we arrived home. I found her wrapped up in a blanket when I came back down from shedding my dripping full metal jacket waterproofs. She has long since got used to being dried by hair dryer and is most compliant in moving this way and that. In fact, she is most compliant in most anything we wish to do to her from grinding her claws to clipping her fur. The only time she shows some resistance is when the clippers or scissors near her face, and that I can wholly understand.

I am sure you expect me to say, dear reader, that after all the fuss I made earlier about walking in the rain, I was entirely wrong about not enjoying it and it was much better than I imagined. Au contraire, dear reader. Au contraire. It was every bit as tedious, irritating and uncomfortable as I expected it to be. It was, however, the right thing to do as the little girl would have been bored witless and restless for the evening had we not gone out.

It did not stop her being a little madam in the early part of the night after we had retired to bed, as she has been for the last few nights, but that is another story. However, after the Missus spent half an hour playing with her on the floor of the living room in the late evening and after I had taken her for another walk after tea, she was much better. I suspect, though, that we were more spent than she was.

February 18th – Sunday

I will not say it. I will not, I will not. It was, erm, not terribly bright first thing when I looked out of the door, and it must have been raining until quite late on as the path was still wet. The air was not all that damp, but it was still quite hazy.

We quickly realised why it was hazy when we drove up the hill on the way to the range and promptly disappeared. There was quite the thickest fog we have seen around here for some time and visibility was down to fifty metres. There were not that many other cars on the road at that time but perhaps that was because we could not actually see them. Me? No, not saying anything at all.

It seemed unlikely that it could get any worse but when we got to the range, the butts at the 25 metre line were only just visible. It must have been clearing all the time. An hour later, after the others had arrived and we had set up the order of fire, we could see right across the range. The damp that came with it inveigles itself into everything. The seats at the back of the firing point were soaked and it cannot have been the wind blowing it in as it was coming from the wrong direction.

By late morning and certainly by the middle of the day, the sun had burst through, and it had become an exceedingly attractive day. It made the shooting with our cowboy rifles a little more pleasurable and despite there being not quite the usual numbers we might expect, the shooting still took us into the early afternoon. The second section was where we suffered, as there was only three of us left for centre-fire pistol shooting. It also meant the range set up that the combined efforts of a dozen people helping, only had the three of us to take it down.

Despite there being so few of us, we did not get finished at the range until nearly four o'clock once we had put everything away. It helped that it was three sets of experienced hands as we knew where everything went, else we would have been there much longer.

The Missus came and fetched me. She had not been idle in my absence and had set to and finished the cleaning of the grouting in the bathroom she did last week or was it the week before. She had also taken ABH up to The Farm for a run around as her overalls were there – the Missus, that is, ABH wears dungarees when she is grouting, which are different. By the time we arrived back it was time to take ABH out again, so I took her in the direction of the Harbour beach for a shortened walk.

It might have been shorter still but for the fact we fair near tripped over a resting juvenile seal down by the Harbour wall. It had hauled itself up from near high water some two or three hours earlier as its tracks were still very visible. We missed all these indicators mainly because the sun was low in the sky and in our eyes as we moved up the beach. The little girl stopped in her tracks and leaned forward, and it was only then, when I looked where she was sniffing did I see the seal not three feet ahead. It looked healthy enough, and was rolling about and moving its flappers it I called it in anyway and let the experts make a judgement on it.

Because I was out and about with ABH on the lead in one hand and no spectacles, I managed to dial the number for seals in trouble in error. I had left a message and shortly after had a text message back.

"Marine strandings network, did you try and call?"

"Yes, Sennen Cove harbour beach. Juvenile. Looks healthy. Thought let you decide."

"Alive?"

It crossed my mind to ask whether corpses can look healthy but then realised I had called the wrong number, so their expectation would have been different despite me using 'healthy' in my description. Mind, they could have been asking about me at which point I might have asked for a second opinion.

I missed the call that came back from the British Divers Marine Life Rescue (BDMLR), the correct people to call, so I called back a little later. They told me that a team was already on the ground, and all was well.

I had thought that it was a very quick response. I received a message sent later in the evening from BDMLR crew. It was a copy of a message that went out on their social media page. A team from Essex was in the bar of the OS and had received the alert and had responded. They helped the sea back into the sea and returned to their drinks. That is some efficient network that they have.

There had clearly been a few people around during the day, it being quite a pleasant afternoon and all. By the time ABH and I happened upon our seal, there were mercifully few people around to disturb its peace. The Harbour car park was still quite full for the time of year but most of these must have been up the cliff or down on the big beach, which still had a few people milling about on it.

The early part of the night enjoyed some clear skies as well. I took ABH around the big block after tea and the sky was studded with stars, with Orion to the south and a big bright Jupiter close by. My big bright head torch spoils the view rather, but it is not useful to lose sight of the little girl for too long. Despite the clear sky it was still quite temperate. It will be breaking out the shorts if this carries on.

February 19th – Monday

A grey and grisly, mizzly start but anyway, that is not important right now. There I was at half past three and a third o'clock, looking up at the ceiling thinking about yesterday's seal because, if I did not think about yesterday's seal, who would. What I was thinking was, did it really want to be rescued. I mean, it looked quite happy where it was and had not etched SOS or anything help-like in the sand. It had gone

to the effort, and I presume dragging yourself fifty feet over sand is a bit more effort than gliding effortlessly through the waves – albeit with one eye over your shoulder watching for any hungry orcas kicking about. So, having dragged itself up the beach and finding a nice cosy spot against the wall, settled in for the seal equivalent of a cup of tea and a Woodbine and a bit of a snooze. Then some well-intended nosey begger calls in the sodding cavalry to drag you back to the sea that you, not a couple of hours since, dragged yourself out of because it was a brae bit rough out there. You know, dear reader, I would be pretty miffed and probably pull a face similar to the one the seal made when it was being manhandled off its comfy bit of sand. I shall think twice next time.

There was very little thinking of any sort this morning. Nor was I in any particular hurry for very much, although I did make it out of the door to the gymnasium at a reasonable hour. It was a blistering session, without a doubt, but there were no records today. By the time I had finished and tumbled out of the door of the hut with a tin roof, the day was beginning to brighten a little. The sea was still in a somewhat agitated state without being in a proper tantrum for a week now, although there has been sufficient swell to disrupt training launched of the Lifeboat and fishing activities.

There was breakfast to have, bills to pay – there are always bills to pay and more so with the building work – and bills to print off when I dropped into the flat. I checked in with the builder who was there with the boys driving on with the timbers making up the roof, ceiling and walls of the living room. The ceiling will be a few inches higher than previously, meaning some clever adjustment where it meets the original back wall. I told the builder that he had set himself a bit of a hard time this week. The steel and roof timbers installed last week made a big visual impact which made it look like they had moved mountains. I said that whatever they achieve this week will look like they have been slacking by comparison.

Early into the afternoon and the weather was making a decent fist of it in The Cove. Some blue sky had opened up above us and to the west which was just crying out for a bit of walking under. There was nothing for it but to lace on my walking boots and head for the hills.

We had not done a Land's End walk for a while and the day was just perfect for it. It was also tricky in the extreme deciding exactly what to wear. The layers I had been used to were definitely going to be too many, but I also did not want to be left with too few. Had I been assured of a brisk walk I would have dropped some more but I knew it would be the six steps forward and three back with a rest for sniffing in between. In the end, I was just about alright, if a little warm, but at least I was able to open my jacket and there was enough breeze to provide some much needed cooling.

There were a fair few people doing the walk in one direction or the other and quite a few with dogs. We did not have to do too much waiting for dogs coming the other way but for dogs in front of us, we were off like a greyhound to try and catch up to

say hello. When it is like that I have trouble keeping up and my arm is fair near pulled from its socket as she tears away.

The weather was near perfect for such an adventure. There was a big blue circle of sky above us but haze out towards the west. To the east, the grey cloud hung and shrouded Chapel Carn Brea almost like it could not breach the border to the magic kingdom at the gates of Sennen. We enjoyed the sun, the light breeze and all that comes with it for all our journey. However, as we descended Stone Chair Lane, the blue circle above us was closing in as the thickening haze from the west encroached from Land's End.

The rain had left muddy bits on the Coast Path. I am very familiar with where they are as they are always in the same place. Miss dainty paws managed to find most of them but also washed off in the two bigger streams that intersect the path after Maen Castle. We both found the mud again as we reached Land's End and the cycle path had plenty more. She was particularly well lagged by the time we reached the end of the cycle path, but we were lucky enough to find a cleanish puddle down Maria's Lane where I was able to stomp and clean my boots and she her paws. She then made a meal of going the whole length of Stone Chair Lane in the muddy ditch than runs alongside it.

I called ahead for the Missus to fill the sink. I threw her into the living room and closed the door when we got home. Always good to have a plan, I find.

With ABH smelling like the boudoir of a lady of dubious morals – not that I ever, you understand, dear reader – we settled down for a peaceful rest of the afternoon. I had left later than intended and it had taken at least two hours to make our circuit. The beautification of ABH had taken another half an hour at least, so there was not a huge amount of rest of the afternoon left. The latter process had also revived the little girl and she did not rest as she might otherwise have done. If we thought that this might lead to a more ordered night, we were gravely mistaken.

There was one more circuit around the small block and a bit of Coastguard Row to navigate after tea. Again, we were under the stars with a bright half moon shiny away. In my torchlight, it seemed the thicker blades of grass and leaves of various wildflowers were taking on a silver sheen as dew started to form as the temperature dropped away. It was still not unpleasantly cold, although I could see my breath wafting away. The Missus reported that there was some light mizzle about when she went out later, which was most likely heavy moisture in the air as mist formed. I wondered if it might lead to a morning of grey and grisly mizzle, but we do try not think of such things.

February 20th – Tuesday

It was a bright, sunny and blue sky morning, with birds tweeting and grass growing. Alright, it was not but I was not going to write grey and grisly, mizzly start again – oh, darn it. Unlike yesterday, there was no happy ending with blue skies, not even in the magic kingdom, although it did brighten up a little before it all came to grief.

What we did have was a noticeable drop in temperature and a chill wind to make it seem colder still. It was odd, as the temperature was only one degree short of yesterday that had seemed so warm. The breeze was coming in from the southwest, so should not have affected us much in The Cove but we did feel some of it. It was best we did not put our heads above the parapet of Mayon Cliff all day.

Not that I had particularly planned it that way, but we had three suppliers and tradespeople turning up today. To make it worse, two of them would be arriving within an hour of each other. To make it worse still, the first of those, arriving at midday, called to say he would be late. The third was a wild card. I had no idea when the electrician would arrive and neither did he; just when he finished his previous job.

I filled the morning few hours with keeping up to date with the invoices, keying the remaining ones into the Making Tax Difficult system. I was feeling smug about that until the envelope where I keep all the petrol and small till receipts fell out of the back of the file. I will do those another day.

I also took ABH for a spin down to the Harbour beach. The sea was disturbed some more today and was throwing waves up on the beach in a fit of temper. It gave ABH something of a surprise when she went too close, and the next wave nearly swamped her. She is very fleet of foot, and it will be a very quick wave that catches her out.

There was no hanging about today. The Missus had plans to head into town after collecting Mother and to go to the paint shop. After grouting the shower, the next item on the agenda is painting our logo onto the front of the counter in the shop. The paint job on the woodwork has not been touched since we moved the counter some years ago, quite how many eludes me now. Since then, it has had stickers applied to it and various knocks that have taken the paint off and it looks a little uncared for, which is precisely what it is.

I missed the electrician's visit. He came and went and cleared up all that was required with the boys in there working. That is the beauty of having people you know and trust working: for all the technical stuff, they just get on with it. I followed up with a message to him confirming a couple of changes that he needed to be aware of. Much of the preparatory and cabling work will happen Thursday and Friday now.

I had it in my mind that I had seen somewhere that we should expect rain today and by the middle of the afternoon wondered where it was. I sneaked a peek at the rain radar and a geet band of it was slowly heading our way. Much of it had already piled

up the Bristol Channel and thus avoided us but the trajectory showed it to be on us at around six o'clock. That was not bad timing as ABH and I were getting gently rained upon at half past six o'clock when we took off for a stroll while the Missus took Mother back home.

It did not look like the rain would become particularly heavy, just go on for a long time. And so it was five hours later when ABH wanted to enjoy a midnight wander. One day she will get the hang of sleeping through the night, probably around the time I lose it – alright, lose it some more. I have a sense of humour but someone somewhere has a better one.

February 21st – Wednesday

Now then, how shall we begin. Ah yes. A grey and grisly, but today, wet start to the day. We should be grateful for small mercies, perhaps.

I am sure there are a few people out there who find it necessary to wear wellies to their respective gymnasiums due to where they live and the prevailing conditions of the environment during wet spells. I would wager, however, that there are precious few who have to wear their wellies inside the gymnasium when they get there. It is things like this that make The Cove such a special place.

There was a bit of a puddle on the floor on Monday when I went down there. In the normal run of things, I might have expected this to dry out without assistance. I think because of the frequency of the rain this week and a little breeze behind it last night, the accumulated effect has left a river running through under my rowing machine on the back end of the room. I did take my plimsols, but they get slippery with a bit of water on them and for some of my exercises a bit of grip is essential. Maybe it will be better by Friday.

It is not very often that I have to wear waterproofs to the gymnasium either, for which I must be grateful. The rain was a heavy drizzle by the time I had completed my blistering session and headed back in the direction of home. It was, however, in my face on the way back and therefore more troublesome than the rain on the way there.

The sea also was stirring up for a bit of a fight later. Already, shortly after low water, it was banging in on the beaches and ABH elected not to go down to the Harbour for that very reason, sensible hound. Instead, we headed around the little block but ended up going all the way down Coastguard Row. The breeze had ramped up considerably on yesterday and had gone around a little more to the west as well. We were getting buffeted as we went along Coastguard Row and soon ABH was keen to come back again.

I had not mapped out any great works for today. We had no appointments and my daily visit to the boys working in the flat turned up no issues. I am a little disappointed that there has only been the two of them this week especially after the builder's pledge to 'throw everything at it' once the steel was in. I keep meaning to take some more photographs of the progress but when I get in there, I get distracted and forget all about it.

The Missus arrived in the kitchen from upstairs sporting the latest in DIYwoman dungarees. She had been threatening to make a start on the counter front and clearly decided today was the day. When I caught up with her in the early afternoon with a cup of coffee, she was covered head to foot in fine wood dust. She looked like a poorly made-up Miss Haversham from a village amateur production and make-up had got a little over-enthusiastic with the grey aging powder. She was going to need a good carpet-like beating to get all of that off her before she came back into the house. I scoured the cupboards for a besom in anticipation.

I left the coffee with her as I set off with ABH for a longish stank along The Cove. I would have headed out sooner, but ex-Head Launcher turned up for a bit of a chat and a coffee. He went on to sit with the Missus who, rather fortuitously would have been much longer at it had one of the boys not lent her a better sander than the multi-tool attachment we have. I left them to it and headed up the road.

The idea of any access to the beach was curtailed before it began. Despite it being neap tides, the waves were fully up on the beach and thumping into the rocks at the edge of the dunes. Walking anywhere near there would have been foolhardy in the extreme, so we took the usual route up the Coast Path to The Valley.

ABH necessitates that I frequently look back the way we have come, either because she is yet to catch up with me or because she has dashed back for some aroma or other that she missed as we passed by. In doing so, I watched the sea as it danced and jumped over Cowloe and battered the footings of Pend-men-du. One particular set must have struck the rocky outcrop just right. The first explosion, a bit like news footage of marine ordinance being blown up, threw white water up from lower down the cliff. Another, smaller eruption followed halfway up then seconds later and almost in slow motion, a tower of spray reached up at least fifty feet above the lookout at the top and collapsed like volcanic lava washing down the cliff face on The Cove side. As far as I am aware, it only happened the once and, of course, it was when my mobile telephone and its integral camera were safely in my pocket.

I tried to call the Missus when we reached The Valley because I suddenly realised that I had the house keys that I meant leave with her still in my pocket. The noise from the sander probably meant that she could not hear the call, so I carried on up the hill and hoped she did not have to go back to the house.

I took a short cut up to the upper car park field and wished that I had not. There were a couple of large steps on the path to negotiate, which I did not do too well with. I

shall stick to the official path next time, but had I done so this time I would have missed ex-Head Launcher and his dog when we got to the top. Having already met for an hour, it was a surprise that we had anything else to talk about but, I guess, you always find something. We were going opposite directions, so I bade him farewell after a short while mindful that I still had the house key.

One of the advantages of a walk up The Valley and the Coast Path is that it is sandy and largely free of mud. The same is not true of Maria's Lane – particularly from the road in – and Stone Chair Lane that has a muddy ditch running beside it. Thus it was that an ABH having been washed not two days prior, needed another hose down when we arrived back at the house again. She was not in the poor state she was in coming back from Land's End, which was a relief, but her paws up to her fetlocks, if dogs have them, were caked again. I thought that I had done quite well having dunked her in the sink and splashed some water around but when I saw the muddy towel afterwards, I supposed not and did it again.

The Missus did not make an appearance until well after five o'clock and probably nearer six. I still harboured the idea that the Missus may benefit from a beating to remove the sawdust powder from her clothes and hair. There was still a nagging doubt that an explanation that I was trying to be helpful, that seemed perfectly reasonable in my mind, may instead have been seen as an act of aggression, perish the thought, and worthy of a retaliatory clip around the ear 'ole. Bravery does not figure greatly in my family lineage, in fact, quite the opposite and may have indeed reached its evolutionary peak in me. This will explain my reluctance to pursue the urge to carry out the act. She went and had a shower, instead.

The skies had brightened up a bit in the afternoon but there was still a grey cloud cover that persisted through the day. It was clear still there as I took ABH around early in the evening but thin enough for a waxing moon to shine through. Tea being late, we headed around before we ate and I did not need to sally forth again. We did not need to be out there though, to hear the sea thumping over the Harbour wall. It is a fierce thing when it is riled.

February 22nd – Thursday

Oh, for Pete's sake. Yes, one of those again.

We had a fair bit of rain thrown at us in the morning, as well, but the main feature of the day was a bit of breeze. It had shifted around to the west and spilled a bit to the north of that at times and right in our faces. On top of that the temperature had taken something of a drop and made the day a tad uncomfortable all around.

I was told that the freezer repair man would be with us first thing. We obviously had a different idea about what first thing meant but by half past nine o'clock I thought that I had better have a nose around our building site. The electrician was due, and

although he had a fairly hardy idea about what was required, it is always best not to assume, especially as I had not seen him on Tuesday.

We had a good half an hour with the builder and the electrician deciding on cable runs and outlet points, which was very valuable to all. One thing that I did not appreciate and will be exceedingly frustrating is that the wall points now have to be halfway up the wall. It is a building regulation that also means that light switches need to be a foot or two lower as well just in case someone in a wheelchair wants to use them. We would also need wheelchair access up the flight of concrete stairs to the front door so that the wheelchair user could actually get into the room with the wheelchair friendly sockets and switches, but that did not seem to be a concern.

The builder told me that the building control officer had also called yesterday. Because it is forbidden by law that they leave without giving some mindless instruction, we now have to insulate the outside of the steel supports that stand between each of the windows. I can only presume it is just in case the steel gets cold during the winter. The steel was already going to be insulated on the inside to keep us warm and to stop 'cold bridging' onto the windows. Well, at least I had paid money for a visit and that would have been a waste had he not turned up.

The freezer man turned up just as I was finishing with the builder and the electrician, which was handy. As before, I left him to it after warning him of the wood dust hazard the Missus had left behind yesterday. It is everywhere despite her putting up plastic sheeting. I went back to have some breakfast but was rather surprised to see the freezer engineer at the door again only about half an hour later. He looked apologetic and indeed was. The parts they had given him were the wrong ones and he will be back again when they have the correct compressor.

The Missus had already informed me that she had nearly run out of sandpaper sheets. Since she had filched them from the builder, she thought that we should replace them before handing back the sander she had borrowed. I thought to head into town, but the Missus suggested the builders' merchants on the road out of St Just, which was closer. I duly headed out that way with ABH in her seat looking out at the lashing rain that was blowing in squalls across the moors. When we got there the shed that serves as the shop was in darkness. Apparently, the electric cable cross sometimes in the wind and trip the switches – and I thought that we had electrical problems. Our man there had to find the sheets for me since they were tucked away in one of the dark corners.

Having run my one and only errand of the day, it was time to take ABH for a run about since she had been cooped up all morning. There was still enough Harbour beach to play upon and the rain showers seemed to have gone away. At first, she was unwilling to head down but on the arrival of a border terrier also heading to the beach, she could not get there fast enough. The couple with the border terrier are regular visitors, although I did not recognise them at first. What was more important

was that the border terrier was willing and he and ABH scampered about our deserted bit of beach for the best part of half an hour while we chatted.

If the sea was looking unfriendly yesterday, it was looking downright spiteful today. There were big angry waves dancing all over the bay and there were white horses out as far as you could see. The tide was advancing on us but was still quite low but even so, the waves were quite aggressive in the usually quiet Harbour.

Later, the sea went full bananas with large lumping waves running down Tribbens and throwing themselves over the Harbour wall. It was something of a spectacle. There were a few people lined up in the Harbour car park to have a geek and take a few picture or two. The car park was more exposed to the wind than most places in The Cove and the wind was keen enough to sting the face as we made our way across it. I had thoughtfully provided ABH with her coat on all the occasions we went out, but she was still eager to get around and back home again.

With the wind rattling the sheets on the scaffolding and coming through the window vents in the house back window, it was time to light the fire. We had done without the fire lit for a good few weeks now, but it was definitely worthwhile tonight.

I still had to take ABH out in later in the evening and the wind was proper howling in the wires by then. It probably was doing that in the day, but it is far more effective and spookier at night. As vicious as it seemed, it had peaked in the mid 40s miles per hour at Land's End. Obviously, that was small fry compared to Gwennap Head, windiest place in the universe, where it reached into the 70s miles per hour. Here, it was still punchy enough to cause some damage in The Cove: the rotary clothes line in the mews has fallen over.

February 23rd – Friday

Yes, one of those mornings again. 'nuf said.

Cold, did I mention it was cold? I took a peek at Land's End temperature data from overnight. Oddly, the temperature climbed a degree at three o'clock in the morning and then spent the next couple of hours dropping like a stone. The 'feels like' temperature for the morning was zero degrees centigrade and they were not far wrong about that.

I took a punt about heading to the gymnasium in my plimsolls this morning. It had rained some more, obviously, since Wednesday but the wind had changed, and I was betting that no more rain had seeped in because of that. I was right. There was still water on the floor, but much of it had dried up and despite the chill, I opened the windows to air the place a bit, which hopefully dried it out some more. There is nothing like a bit of chill in the room to encourage a bit more effort in the exercising and a proper blistering session ensued.

Not that I noticed at the time – I was too busy blistering – but a shower had blown through while I was in the gymnasium. It turns out that I remained lucky all day and while the showers continued to blow through until the early afternoon, I missed the lot.

As I returned to get ready for the day, the Missus was leaving to continue with the painting of the counter front. She is having to put more coats of paint on than she anticipated which I suspect is a result of sanding down to the wood. She spent the rest of the day preparing the stencil for the logo that she intends to paint on the front of the counter.

I had been tasked with collecting Mother from St Buryan while the Missus did her painting. On the way to the truck – it is more a detour, really – I dropped the keys to the house off. While I was there, I went up to inspect the latest on the building front, which was as well that I did. Our electrician had made a small error in placing some of the points. They would end up beside the desk and unusable if they stayed there. It is not too late to change them, so not a great problem and part of the reason I am in there everyday. I had a chat with the electrician later and we agree where they would go.

It was a hive of industry up in the flat, which might easily have been confused with a modicum of panic. The windows were due on Monday and three of them were working flat out in making ready for their appearance. One of the invoices I had arrive this morning was for concrete dolly blocks, which threw me for a while. I now know that concrete dolly blocks are concrete bricks on which the windows will sit. Whoever said that reading The Diary was not an education.

In the back bedroom, some welding was going on – no me neither – but this engendered its own drama when the Highly Professional Craftsperson announced that he had run out of oxygen. Fortunately, he could still breathe but unfortunately, he could no longer weld. The assumed problem was getting some more as they thought that there was not a local supplier. After some running around and some exploratory telephone calls, we found one in Penzance, which was a stroke of luck that I was heading that way when I had stopped off to chat.

Yesterday, when we lit the fire, I used the last of the kindling. We can manage without it, but it is much easier with. I also noticed that we were short of logs and with the cold weather set to continue for a bit and Mother due to visit a couple of times over the weekend, I decided we should get some more. I had not intended to go to Penzance for them, but it was as good a place as any and gave Mother a trip out.

I was most surprised in the builders' merchant that they did not want the empty oxygen canisters. They are a substantial item, although miniature versions of the ones you might find in hospitals or on a scuba diver's back, with welded seals and must cost a bit to make. I know that there is a world shortage of butane type

containers, but it seems no one at present cares about the oxygen. I reported back that I had been able to source them, which brought a sigh of relief. What brought and even greater sign of relief was the window people letting me know that they would be delayed by two days. The weather had held them up, presumably on other jobs, that had knocked them back a bit.

I was also surprised to see white ice patches in the verges up at the fuel merchant in Penzance. Mother had said that they had torrential rain in the night that sounded as if it could have been hail. When I quizzed the young lady at the fuel depot, she told me that it had been severe, and she had heard that snow was on the way from Scotland. It had already visited Yorkshire and was on the way here. I told her not to worry as it would never be allowed west of Camborne but she was unsure and said it was going to be like the 'beast from the east' a few years back. Ah well, it will keep the flies back for summer.

As if it might have been left out of all the poor weather, the sea upped its game today and became fearfully animated. I could hear it in the night roaring away in the background with the occasional thump of it crashing over the Harbour wall. Even at lower parts of the tide it was dancing and leaping all over the bay and huge waves were running in to the beach.

Towards high water ABH and I went around the big block twice. On both occasions the waves were having a game to see which one could overtop the lookout on Pedn-men-du. The second time we went around the water in the Harbour was milky white where it had been churned up and over the whole bay there was more white than blue in the sparkling sunshine between showers.

We may not have got wet in the showers but there was a near constant run of spray in the air as the waves coming over the headland dispersed in the wind. The front of the car park was lined with cars and people with big cameras were jostling for the best view of the dashing waves in all directions.

While it is a bit out of our sphere, it would be difficult to ignore the upset a 70 year old bomb was causing in Plymouth, some way east of Camborne. At 500 pounds it was a big one and the authorities had evacuated an ever widening area as they recalculated the impact it may have. There was talk of damage in the tens of pounds if it went off, so they decided to move it and detonate it at sea, which is not far off.

The Cornishman in the guise of its online persona, Cornwall Live, threw a commensurate amount of resources to Devon to cover it – one shabby looking chap and a camera. To give him is due he hung in there for about five hours broadcasting on the Internet and we watched a bit of it. I am sure there is only so much you can say about waiting for a bomb to be driven past on an empty road. The most trouble our man in Plymouth seemed to have was finding someone else to aim the camera so that he was in shot.

In the end, he almost missed it as a large, almost anonymous, military truck was driven by in the background. It was driven by a nervous looking soldier who had not stepped back quickly enough when his platoon was asked for volunteers. It was not the best weather either to be taking a boat out with a 500 pound bomb lashed to the deck. I am sure our intrepid reporter will be front of the queue when they let it off with his camera pointed at a seagull.

February 24th – Saturday

I could not see what the weather was like at half past six o'clock in the morning when I ran down to the Lifeboat station after my pager went off. I had my suspicions, but I kept them to myself. I had barely got there when another page came through to tell us that the launch was cancelled. Someone's personal emergency beacon had gone off, but it seems it was noticed early enough to inform the authorities that it had. At least we know that the pagers still work even if we do not know if the boat still launches.

For the last several days I have been looking to take down the supports that the boys put up when they were throwing concrete under our floorboards. It was a precaution, actually probably a necessity, to stop the concrete dropping through into the shop below. The concrete has long since set but the supports remained and will soon be in the way of getting the shop ready for opening.

I have not been able to get down over the last week because the Missus got there first with her sanding and painting. We would not leave ABH alone for an extended period and with the state the shop is in, it was probably best not to bring her down with us. Therefore, I waited for a morning such as this when I was early up and had time to do my work before the Missus needed to be there.

Naturally, DIYman overalls were required for such a task and it all mostly went according to plan. It took a moment or two on both sides to understand the order in which the various planks and supports went up; some of the screws were not accessible until others had been removed. There are some decent bits of timber amongst the odds and ends used for the purpose, so, since I have paid for them, I will whisk them off to The Farm where they will be used one day, no doubt. I also had the screws as they were in reasonable condition after I took them out.

I changed places with the Missus on my return and she hurried off to the shop to start her artistry on the counter front. I was a bit uncertain about the image as the logo has had to be stretched to make any sense on the counter front and to me it looked a little distorted. It did not help that the printing in such a large format had blurred the image.

The Missus took a photograph of it, which very cleverly sharpened the image and made it look a lot better. Clearly, my tentative endorsement was insufficiently

positive, and she took her photograph to the builder and the boys for their opinion. They apparently cooed and aahed over her artwork and gave it their professional blessing. It is what happens when you bring work people cake now and again.

I accompanied her down there with ABH in tow and we took off to the Harbour beach for a bit of a play. We found some local acquaintances there including two small girls who delighted in her company and she in theirs. They went off to play and chase while I looked on.

The raging sea of yesterday has scoured out at least four feet depth of sand from the back corner of the beach. There is a notch at the bottom of the western slip where the cobbles have been washed away over the years. It is quite often revealed after such stormy seas, but I have never seen it quite as exposed as it was today. I did not realise that the notch was that big. The sand over the rest of the beach was fair near perfect and few people had gone across it since the last tide. I did not get to go too close to the Lifeboat slipways, but it was clear from afar that the sand under those had suffered greatly.

We finished with a quick tour around the big block, taking time to look at the sea as it boiled and churned around Cowloe and over the footings of Pedn-men-du. There was still a fair breeze blowing, this time out of the northwest where it seemed a bit more robust. I checked later and the gusts in the late 30 miles per hour, which was much softer than yesterday.

We returned to the house for a well-earned rest. Well, I thought so at least and after having been rudely taken from my bed at early o'clock by my Lifeboat pager, I deemed that a little zizz was in order. I might have accepted a counter argument if it was just me, but ABH curled up on my lap and fell asleep too. There is no arguing about that.

Well, there was clearly having too much of a good thing and had been woken by the Missus coming back for her paintbrushes. She had finished the tracing work and was ready to start the intricate painting. It is a fairly simple logo on the face of it but to get down and paint each line and curve is a bit of a challenge and, I imagine, very tedious work. It is the sort of work that the Missus enjoys, after all, she does jigsaw puzzles and there is little more tedious and pointless than that. I saw it later and it is coming along nicely, although at a speed I would find excessively frustrating.

ABH had not had a decent stank out for a few days and come to think of it, neither had I. We find it convenient to do such walks in the early part of the afternoon after we have cleared any work-like things in the morning. This puts us at the mercy of the prevailing tide and today meant that we were excluded from the beach. On another day with the same tide we might have been alright but the swell, though diminishing, was still pushing the waves high up the beach making it largely impassable at the southern end. In the opposite direction, up Mayon Cliff, the wind would have made the journey uncomfortable especially around the Irish Lady.

The Beach car park was busy. Quite a few people were still heading for the beach despite the pushing waves and high water being just a couple of hours away. There was one couple taking a two very small children down with buckets and spades which raised me an eyebrow or two. I think they quickly realised their error as I saw them later at the Harbour end of the promenade without the beach gear.

With our beach options thus limited we headed along the Coast Path again and up The Valley. It is a particularly pleasant route with lots to see along the way and the scenery changes distinctly from one part of the walk to another. We start off along sandy dunes then enter the sub-tropical Valley with its palms and huge-leafed plants, then along the rough scrub across the top of The Valley then the meadow like top-car park.

Spring flowers are starting to poke through here and there, too. They probably were last time we were this way, but I just failed to notice them. Daffodils were coming up in The Valley; campion; the wonder, gorse – grows everywhere and is always in flower; and down Stone Chair Lane, the white drops of the tri-cornered leek are coming through. It seems obtuse to me that ABH is not seduced by the various floral aromas. She prefers the grasses and branches along the way and if there is any sort of hole, her head is down it in a flash. There are also a couple of small culverts along the way that divert spring water and run-off, no more than drainpipes, but she cannot seem to resist sticking her head under them.

We avoided getting too muddy on the way back, which was a relief. She was pleased as ever to see the Missus in the shop, paintbrush in hand as we passed by and had our orders for a cup of tea. The Missus had ordained that I should run off to St Just for a Chinese takeaway for our tea, so I filled the intervening time with watching ABH curl up and doze. I also lit the fire, as the chill was settling upon us again. It is cold in the shop, and I guessed the Missus would be grateful when she came back.

We had not long gone to bed when my pager went off again. The Coastguard helicopter had come over low a few minutes before, which is always an ominous sign. This time we went all the way and launched the boat into the dark just ahead of low water. We were fortunate indeed that we had not had to do this the day before as it was unlikely that we would have got the boat back again.

The call was for another radio beacon alert. If the facts from the morning's alert were all correct, then it cannot have been the same one. However, having two in the same area only hours apart was highly coincidental or suspicious. The helicopter had gone ahead and located the device in the water just off Gwennap Head, which could have been a lot worse. It meant that the boat would not be out very long.

I assembled a small but perfectly formed team and given the state of the tide, set up on the long slipway. The boat took its time coming back but the sea state at the end

of the slipway was benign and we executed a textbook recovery with little fanfare. The boat was tucked away and made ready for the next time almost on the stroke of midnight just before we all turned back into ordinary folk. We are, after all a very fairytale, very excellent Shore Crew.

February 25th – Sunday

One of these days I will wake up and the sun will be shining throughout the land, birds will be tweeting in the trees – if we had any – and natural bounty will abound in all directions. Today I woke up to grey, grisly and rain again.

The rain was quite a feature of the morning and it stayed with us in fits and starts until the middle of the day when it gave up. It must have been raining heavily in the night too as the roads were flooded here and there on the way to the range. Streams were cascading down the slope when we arrived and there were large puddles of standing water in the usual places around the range itself.

I think it is the last Sunday that I need to arrive early to get the place open and make a start on getting it ready for a shoot. Next week the main man is back, and he arrives a few minutes before I generally do. I am not entirely sure I will be able to go next week as the clock starts ticking toward shop opening and having to vacate the house. I suspect that we will be very busy.

Since I was going to be there all day, the Missus drove me up with plans to collect Mother and go shopping. It is quite useful being at the range first as the Missus reverses all the up to the firing point which means that I do not have to carry the heavy kit more than a couple of feet. I will definitely miss that if I go next week as it is shotgun week, the heaviest week of the month.

In line with previous weeks the shoot was not well attended, and we managed no more than a dozen in the first half of the day and just five in the afternoon. The latter only garners a few people anyway as it is bolt action .303 rifle, which is a bit specialist these days. The morning session is usually the most popular of the month, .22 rifle, or as The Highly Professional Craftsman calls it my Desmond rifle. I am sure you will get that if you think about it long enough.

Even during the morning, the sun was trying to break through now and then. In the afternoon it managed much more successfully. I thought that I had heard it would remain cold for the weekend but having set up the courses of fire, I was exceedingly warm and was peeling off layers. I checked the temperature later and we were up several degrees on yesterday and the day before. It remained temperate for the rest of the day.

It is necessary to take ABH around the block when I return in the afternoon; she has come to expect it. I did not notice the sea state which rather means that we are back

to near normal otherwise I would have. There was a bit of swirling going on in the Harbour as we passed by, but it was not particularly loud or aggressive. There were a few people milling about in the car park but if they had come to see the show, they were at least day late and may well have been a dollar short. I did not ask.

Then evening sneaked upon us. The Missus noticed first that the rain was lashing against the front window, which we have not had before. I used the word inappropriately the other day but when I took ABH out after tea a maelstrom awaited us outside the door. The wind, peaking at 50 miles per hour at Land's End, was making a fearful racket with the sheets of the scaffolding. ABH was not happy about this at all. The wind was battering in from the east at first and then the northeast, finally resting up near the north laced with heavy rain.

I checked the rain radar and saw that the rain that had piled through from the southwest in the morning, was all coming back again from the northeast. I thought this rather unfair since we had already been drenched by it once. Rather unusually, a low pressure system had swerved and passed us to the south and followed on up the English Channel. Whatever the reason, it had brought with it a sudden and vicious storm that was best endured from the comfort of living rooms or under the covers of beds. I felt nothing but sympathy for the Missus whose turn it was to take ABH out last thing.

February 26th – Monday

Good grief! Sunshine. And an unforgettable bit of breeze that stayed with us all day.

That wind had been howling all night and rattling the sheets on the scaffolding. ABH was pretty fearful of getting anywhere near it and I could not blame her. It was reasonably scary for big grumpy shopkeepers, too. I had taken her down to the shop first thing to collect some item or other that we were in desperate need for. I carried her back, and she was quivering like a jelly.

It was a bit of a fight heading down to the gymnasium in the morning. At least there was no more rainwater on the floor and what was there is drying up nicely. Had I been a little braver with the temperature, I would have had both windows open for the duration, which would have dried it out some more. As it was, I opened the front window to let in the swirling breeze only after I had nearly completed my blistering session and had warmed up a bit. Actually, my performance was rather less blistering than normal. I strongly suspect that shooting the day before is somewhat more wearing than it appears at the time.

I dropped in to see the builder on my way back to the house. They probably needed ear defenders just to stand under that sheeting; the noise was incredible. Work continues to place the insulation in between the rafters, something we have not had before. Not that it even crossed my mind, but we could probably grow, erm, herbs in

the loft under hot lights and not be noticed by a passing, say, thermal sensing helicopter.

We also spoke about the type of slate to use on the roof. He said that the Brazilian in most common use was found to have a life of 30 to 40 years. The Spanish tiles were better quality and lasted longer. A decision was difficult without knowing the price of each and he said he would come back to me later. When later duly arrived we discovered that the Spanish was two and a half times the price of the Brazilian slate, which rather made its own decision. I did clarify that having Brazilian slate did not mean we just got a strip of them. I hope that they outlast us but, on the other hand, I hope they do not.

The little girl got two beach trips in today. We went down to the Harbour beach after I came back from the gymnasium. It was deserted, which was not a surprise, as the wind was blowing straight in there and the legs of my shorts were flapping like they were on flagpoles. ABH was delighted with so many small objects racing up the beach for her to chase and she duly chased as many as she could. This lasted as long as there were bits flying around, which was quite some time.

The Missus went down to the shop to finish off her artwork as soon as we came back and we did not see her again until the end of the day – well, just once or twice for the occasional coffee or tea. Mindful of the state of the tide, which was a bit kinder this week for our walks out, we got ready to venture once more into the gale of wind at around midday. As previously explained, I do not like to spend the entirety of our walk on the sand as there is little for ABH to do. We headed up the Coast Path once again in the hope that a new range of things to sniff at might have accumulated since Saturday. We had noticed earlier that there was much less swell in the bay and the movement that we had was mainly chop from the incessant wind. It looked spectacular with all that flecked white against the bright blue of the sea.

There was, however, no hiding from the breeze wherever we were on the walk. Obviously, on the beach was far more exposed than up on the path. It was very clear as soon as we stepped out onto the loose sand that we had made the right decision about which order to take our walk in. All that loose sand was blowing across the beach at ABH eye level and would have been most uncomfortable if we had approached from the other direction.

We were not exactly crowded down on the wide open space of near low water on a spring tide. There were probably not more than half a dozen other eejits down there willing to come out in fifty miles per hour winds. To be honest, with our backs to the breeze it was quite pleasant with a blue sky and a bright sun warming us from the front while being pushed along by a chilling wind from the rear. One memorable sight was a small bird of prey, possibly a kestrel, as it hovered in that wind without moving an inch off position.

The little circuit had taken just short of a couple of hours. Time then to steal a quick zizz before the Missus came back two hours later – not that we dozed for the entire time, obviously. Honest guv.

There will be a big reveal of the artwork once the masking tape comes off, but it is very good. I know because I saw it three times during the evening what with walks out with ABH and errands to the shop because we had forgotten things.

Our problems with freezers continue. The ice cream freezer, the one with the glass top that sits at the front of the shop when we are open, has regular problems with the sliding doors freezing shut. The glass is only single glazed and in the right conditions, condensation occurs, drips down around the corner of the sliding door and promptly freezes. If it is caught early enough, a sharp pull normally frees it, otherwise we have to be a little more robust. After a few years of this, the beading on the glass now comes adrift too and needs to be carefully refitted.

Once the door has been freed, the most effective way of removing the ice, short of defrosting the whole unit, is to use a mallet. This we do not recommend you do at home, dear reader, but we have been properly trained in the vicious and violent – and also quite rewarding – art of smashing geet lumps of ice off the top and inner sides of the freezer. We only spent £1,800 on it, so it is our own fault for buying cheap. It is no wonder I am a grumpy shopkeeper.

February 27th – Tuesday

The sun we had yesterday was a one day wonder but at least there it was neither grisly nor mizzly – well, not in the morning anyway.

We were all hot off the blocks this morning as the Missus had an appointment in town reasonably early doors. Breakfast had to wait until our return, but we extended our stay out by stopping off at Tesmorburys for some easy to cook tea, so that the Missus did not have to cook. We collected Mother on the way back.

ABH had waited long enough for her run out but just as I was about to get ready, the alarm people called. They had dropped some cable down so that, if necessary, we could do the cabling ourselves. This would only come about if the plasterboard was going on before the alarm people themselves could turn up on Monday. I had a quick chat with the boys later and we decided that we would let the alarm people lose with it since it was included in the not insignificant quote. The boys would be on hand to advise on routing, which was an ideal solution.

It was still quite pleasant when we dropped down to the expanse of Harbour beach. The wind had dropped and had gone around to the southwest and it was still dry and relatively bright. There was a family with a small girl child sitting at the bottom of the western slip having a picnic and naturally ABH gravitated to them. She is much

better than she used to be and stands off a little until she is invited closer. She had a bit of fun with them and seems to recognise to be gentler with the small child.

We did not stay for long and I took ABH around the big block after the beach. Work continues on the Harbour toilets with a suitable floor being installed it would appear. Despite the lack of rain yesterday there is still plenty coursing off the cliff in the usual places. We took our time, which was just as well for there would be no long run out today.

My primary aim for the day was to get the side panels from the shop sanded down ahead of painting on the next dry day. I thought that I would probably get all the side ones done but the front would have to wait for another day. Before I got as far as that there were several administrative things to do and bills to pay. The first among the latter was the second deposit for the windows to ensure that they turned up – eventually. We had already been informed of a delay as it was supposed to be happening today. It had been rescheduled to Wednesday and then this morning, rescheduled again until Thursday.

There was also yet another skip to pay for and the renewal of our “Cloud Phone” telephone system that permits me to answer the home telephone anywhere from my mobile telephone, provided I have sufficient bandwidth. It also provides an automated receptionist that intercepts calls and asks for an extension number to be keyed to get through. It is a bit of a pain for legitimate callers, although I try and soften the blow with a cheeky message, but many rogue and nuisance callers hang up when they get to that stage. Well worth the money, which is not a huge amount more than the normal telephone service.

The whole thing took longer than anticipated because I had some mailing trickery to contend with. It took me ages to sort out and since it was working properly the last time I used it with no interim changes, I have no idea what happened.

Sorting all that left me what I deemed might be short of time to complete the sanding. Why I thought that seemed obtuse since I did not know how long it would take me. I started anyway. I decided that I would do both sets of side panels being the easiest option. Also, the much longer front panels are in a parlous state and I need the builder to decide which ones are worth keeping. I will do those after I finish the sides.

They all needed to be dropped out of the bedroom window, or at least where the spare bedroom window will be on Friday. Due to the slope of the drive on that side, I could easily lean out and place them. I dropped out the first four to see how long that would take. After that there was another six or possibly eight, I really was not counting, and since it did not take long to do the first ones, I carried on. Having finished half of them, I moved them into the shop to wait until we had a good day to paint them.

Despite using the scaffolding cover, it was still not completely dry and as the afternoon went on, so the rain increased. Nevertheless, it was far better than doing them in the open and, for sanding at least, it was good enough. As well as the sanding there were a few nails to remove and some foam and filler to slice off. By the time I got around to the last panels, I have quite a range of tools gathered about me.

I stopped by the flat just before I finished to catch up with the boys who had been continuing with the insulation in the rafters. It seems to be taking an inordinate amount of time, but each piece needs to be measured and cut and there are two per gap. I have to say, it is not a job I would relish. I told them about the delay in the window installation, which did not bother them unduly and it was at this point that I noticed the wire fence.

The boys had been using it to secure the flat in the absence of walls and windows. It is around seven feet high and at least ten feet long. Since the roof had gone on and the walls reinstated, we no longer have a seven by ten feet hole for it to be removed by. At least it looked that way. They assured me that they had noticed their error and would as a last resort cut it up to remove it – it is not our fence and the ownership is unknown. Several have been kicking around since the roof came off the Lifeboat station and unfortunately missed us by a whisker. Our work would be done by now if that had happened – although I might not have a head anymore – a soupçon inconvenient, perhaps.

The conversation turned to the frontage panels and the attachment of The Old Boathouse lettering. I could never work out how they had been attached since they appeared to be bolted onto pins sticking out of the woodwork. I was sort of pleased that it had foxed The Highly Professional Craftsperson, too, although it leaves the conundrum of how they will be reattached when the time comes. I shall watch this very carefully as The Highly Professional Craftsperson told me he had been thinking of anagrams.

Just for fun I put The Old Boathouse through an anagram generator. There were quite a few 'beheads', which was alarming and a 'bloated hothouse' and possibly 'old toe bathhouse'. I do not think I shall share any of these with The Highly Professional Craftsperson as I do not wish to encourage him.

The rain had set in by the time I had finished the sanding and it had not become too wet where I was working. It gives some hope, provided the wind stays where it is, that I might be able to do the painting regardless of the wet.

It eased a bit in the evening for taking ABH out, which was fortunate. She had taken a liking to tea and waits impatiently for the Missus to finish her cup so she can have the dregs. To avoid such drama, the Missus made her a small bowl of her own brew. The upshot was a more frequent and prolific need to step outside for a while. She will not be getting her own bowl again, or at least not such a big one.

A few weeks ago, the Aged Parent told me that they had been invited to a St Valentine's Day luncheon as part of a promotion locally. The Aged Parent (paternal, particularly) was not greatly looking forward to such a thing as they would have to perform for the cameras and make like they were having such a joyous time. I told them that there was no such thing as a free lunch but to grit their teeth and bear it. I was told that this was impossible, and I asked if they had no resolve. No, I was told, 'no teeth'.

February 28th – Wednesday

The drizzle that we were warned was coming during the day today, looked remarkable like rain to me. A brae bit of drizzle I could probably do my painting in but the stuff that was falling from the sky today, was proper wet and falling through the cracks in the scaffolding. There would be no painting today or until the weekend if the forecast is correct.

I discovered the rather large gap in the understanding that the Meteorological Office and I had regarding drizzle when I headed to the gymnasium. I would have worn a rain jacket else but did not suffer too much in my orange hooded sweatshirt. There was no further ingress of rain in the gymnasium itself and none of these conditions impeded my blistering session that was more blistering than it had been on Monday. I rather think that this confirms my theory that shooting on Sunday wears me out a little.

I was compelled to take ABH out in the continuing wet when I arrived back at the house. She did not particularly relish going down to the beach but was content to run out around the big block instead. We did not hang around and, it seemed, no one else was keen to either. There were some people working in the Harbour toilets, which appear to be coming on in leaps and bounds, and one of the Harbour boats was under maintenance in the tractor shed in the car park. Other than that, the place was deserted.

Keen to avoid the Missus cooking again in the evening – she has temporarily poorly wrists – I suggested that I would head out to St Just for provisions including something I could cook. Contrary to popular believe, I do actually cook, it is just that what I cook tends not to be what the Missus likes to eat. I might, for instance suggest a fish curry; the Missus hates fish and curry. Tonight, we compromised on beef in oyster sauce that we have not had for a while, which required the purchase of some beef; we already had oyster sauce.

I find that St Just is a perfectly reasonable place to do most types of shopping. In fact, the only challenge about St Just was finding it in the thick fog that enwrapped the whole of our part of the peninsular. There are plenty of independent shops and most importantly, two butchers and a grocer/greengrocer. There is also a Co-

operative supermarket, which I try and avoid as the independent shops are cheaper and have local provisions.

I always thought and it has been commented upon that we seem manage to stock more than we apparently have space for. If you wish to see a masterclass in this art, Stones in St Just is the place to go. They have near enough everything you may need unless you want something particularly exotic but even then they manage to keep the small packets of sesame seeds and pinenuts, which were on my shopping list.

Not only was the shopping trip successful and reasonably painless but I also met with the ex-Head Launcher who had come up to acquire a sandwich for his lunch from the excellent sandwich shop in the square. We compared notes about the despicable practise of parking on double yellow lines – ex-Head Launcher's smart BMW was a prime example. Then we exchanged just how many cars we had seen with no lights on at all in visibility that was down to 50 metres – ex-Head Launcher's smart BMW did have his head lights on. I would have kept him talking a bit longer had I spotted a Traffic Enforcement Officer about because that would have been a jolly jape, but as there was not, I went about my shopping and he about his sandwich.

On my return, I did a little preparation as all good chefs do. Not for one minute I am suggesting that I am a good chef, I was just saying that is what they do. It also saved me from the panic of trying to get everything done by a certain time with a hungry Missus lurking in the corner.

That done and the rain of the morning a distant memory – it was also supposed to be raining in the afternoon, but we will let that rest – I thought it a great plan to run ABH down to the big beach. She thought it was a good idea as well because she went from curled up by the Missus to sitting waiting for her harness to be put on in moments after I slipped on my jacket.

It was an extremely pleasant excursion we discovered. With the fog sitting over us like a big thick duvet, it was perfectly temperate down on the beach. There was a light breeze blowing that kept me from overheating in what was probably too many layers. Probably no more than ten people had decided that walking along a huge expanse of flat sand was a good idea. There were few other dogs, so ABH had only a couple of meetings neither of which were particularly successful in terms of play, so I kept to the rocks so that at least she would have some variety along the walk. I just hoped that there were no unpleasant surprises amongst the stones, which often there are.

We walked as far as the Lifeguard hut, maybe a bit further, before turning back. At the mouth of The Valley, someone has erected a telegraph sized pole. It has been there more than a week so they must have buried it quite deeply. Some people find a feather to stick in the ground. It is just a matter of scale, I suppose.

We stuck to the rocks on the way back more closely than going out and crossed the reef under The Beach car park whereas we skirted it on the way out. I had purposely avoided the Coast Path just to keep it different and because we were a little shorter of time today. I think that if I had relied on just my eyes to determine whether I went out or not, I probably would not have gone. I am rather glad that I did because it was a very splendid trip out for no other reason than it felt good.

All the while, the sea was roaring in our ears. It was some distance off but it had not completely settled from its last upset. It was sufficient for some youngsters to give surfing a go and they were joining the beach as we were leaving it. I cannot say if the waves are big enough to be topping the Harbour wall as high tides are either end of the day when we are not around. I do not think that the sea is quite that stirred up and the indications are that worse is on the way.

I stopped in as usual on our builders to find them nailing some OSB boards on our ceiling. It surprised me as I imagined it would just be plasterboard going up, but it is the new thing to put the board up first, apparently. Actually, I am rather pleased because it is tricky trying to screw anything into plasterboard with any confidence. The lights can now be screwed in with longer screws that will bed into the OSB board and be much more secure.

We are now two and a half weeks from having to move back in, although we may have a few days leeway. I am still disappointed that we are only seeing two people on site each day. I have been told to reign in my concerns as two may be more efficient than the full team. I am dubious and it certainly does not align with the builder's assurance that he would be 'throwing everything at it' after the steel went in. We shall have a conversation about this when I see him again.

In the meanwhile, I shall be very excited that our windows are being installed tomorrow. I do hope our windows are installed tomorrow. We shall all just have to wait and see.

February 29th – Thursday

Our window people kept us on tenterhooks this morning. I am sure they will charge through the work despite only starting halfway through the morning. Well, they did come all the way from east of Camborne, so I could hardly blame them.

I am glad that I could explain about the windows first as it saved me having to start with it being a grey, grisly and mizzly morning again. It does not feel quite so bad putting it in the second paragraph. At least the Meteorological Office was a little more positive because according to them, we were having sunny spells. I made it sunny

spells in my head, and I felt much better even if I did have to put a jacket on to go outside.

We did get our sunny spells eventually but had to wait until into the afternoon for them. I had by that time dismissed any thought of doing the painting because I had already diverted onto other pressing matters.

One of those was running ABH down to the Harbour beach for a bit. We were lucky enough to find a suitable playmate of around the same age for a change. The pair of them charged about the beach and absolved us of any further involvement in dog welfare for half an hour. There were a few more people in the Harbour car park than yesterday when we cut across it. Perhaps they too were waiting for the sunny spells to arrive.

While I was out, the Missus headed to the shop to slap a couple of coats of varnish on the artwork at the front of the counter. In between coats, she cleaned up some of the sanding dust which is everywhere. We will set to this over the weekend because it is time we started on getting the shop ready. It will take longer this year because of the mess in there and the amount of furniture yet to come out.

I took care of some more invoices and keyed them into the accountancy system as I am keen to keep on top of them. Before I knew it, the Missus was back and it was time to take ABH out again. I am sure she probably does not need such frequent or long walks most days of the week, but the winter is soon over and she will get much less as the season goes on. Besides, I quite enjoy a good stank around The Cove. It has crossed my mind several times that it would be good to go elsewhere too, but as yet I have not got around to it.

Today, pressed for time again, I decided to run up the Coast Path to The Valley and back down the beach. Had the tide been different, I may have gone around the longer route, but this was fine for today. Despite the sun being intermittently out, there was a chill breeze blowing in from the northwest keeping the temperature down. Nevertheless, it was just as pleasant being out today as it was under the mist yesterday. Again, the beach was largely deserted and although there were one or two candidates for a bit of a run around for ABH that we observed from the Coast Path, we missed them all by the time we got to the beach.

I had noticed from the Harbour beach that there had been an abundance of sand dumped at the top of the beach. The rocks that had been fully uncovered in the western corner a day or two ago, were completely covered. The notch at the bottom of the western slip had also disappeared. There did not appear to be any such recovery on the big beach. Big fields of rocks lay uncovered down from the dunes cutting off Carn Keys in the north and the Lifeguard hut in the middle of the beach. The northern access to The Beach car park was accessible and there was not a huge step up to the path as there is sometimes. The reef to the south of the beach, under the car park there, is still fully uncovered.

To my mind, the sea state looked a little calmer than it had yesterday. There were still waves piling in on the beach making a bit of a roar, but they did not appear as threatening. Given that we do not have a launch planned for the evening, the sea state is set to worsen towards high water, it seems.

We came back home in the later afternoon and ABH collapsed in a heap with the Missus. Because I am made of sterner stuff, I went back to the flat to print some more invoices and sort out my messages. I also wanted to see how the window boys had got on.

They had been delayed this morning because the Penzance by-pass had been closed and they had to circumnavigate on unfamiliar roads. They wasted no time in getting on with the job, but this necessitated an involved conversation with the builder about clearances and measurement that I did not understand. Well, I might have understood more had I been able to hear everything, but I was not wearing my false ears at the time.

Come the later afternoon, when I looked in on them, they had put in all the frames down one side and the kitchen, flat roof and spare bedroom windows were all in place. During a previous conversation with the boys, we discussed that when everything was finished, it would look pretty much as it had before the building work commenced. The Highly Professional Craftsperson had said when the wrapping comes off, it will be the world's most rubbish reveal. If we had harboured any hope that the windows may have been the defining factor in any new look, it was dashed when I took my look around. They are pretty much the same as the ones that were taken out.

I had thought that we might be able to run the Inshore boat down to the Harbour beach for some limited exercise. I stole a look down there before I went into the station for training and it was in turmoil with waves coming over the wall. The wind, then, was full in my face from the northwest and increasing. Later it would turn wildly to the south before an almost instantaneous switch to the west as we changed pressure systems. It was a most confused situation and had 50 to 60 miles per hour winds howling all night. Ah, go on. I know you want to know. It was 85 miles per hour at Gwennap Head, windiest place in the universe.