

## DIARY 2024

December 31<sup>st</sup> – Tuesday

There, dear reader, we have arrived at the start of the last day of the year – or the end of it if you are a late reader – so, I think you should congratulate yourself with a hearty pat on the back, if you can reach. If you have only just started reading this collection of random words thrown together in a tattered pickle of hope that they might mean some sense to someone, or indeed if you were only born halfway through the year and are having The Diary read to you, I am so, so sorry. We hope things can only get better.

If you are a seasoned reader, you will know that The Diary eschews the habit that some other journals adopt which is to rehash memorable events and notable items from pages throughout the year. For one, it is sheer laziness and for another, The Diary is a little short of memorable events and notable pages to rehash and for another, if there were, I really could not make you suffer all over again, dear reader. No, today's Diary will be all new forgettable events and unremarkable items for you to find tedious enough to go and paint the living room ceiling or do whatever chore it was you were trying not to do on the only extra day off this week.

The breeze had already started to pick up when I took ABH around first thing in the morning but apart from the wind chill, the temperature seemed to be holding. It was still dark, so we did not venture far and were back way ahead of having to get ready for shop work. For the last few days, I have found myself a bit pressed and having to rush to get down to take in deliveries. Good to see I managed to get organised just a day ahead of the last day. As it happened both deliveries I was expecting today were late.

Rather than waste the free time I was unexpectedly in possession of, I carried on with my stock counting. I managed to get down most of the first aisle before the drinks fridge turned on which it does at opening time. I abandoned everything to draw the curtains and open the shop and never did get back to the stock count.

Not long after I opened the shop, the milk and greengrocery arrived. It was shortly after they had gone when the pasties (sorry, MS) arrived. I had ordered an abundance, which would probably turn out to be an error because I was fed up with running short and having to dip into the frozen stock. I also ordered more frozen, just in case, but it is more likely that we will have the fresh left over rather than have to cook more. It was a tough call today because the forecast was fluid and not to be trusted anyway and tomorrow, whichever forecast you looked at appeared to indicate a wash out.

What had partially stopped me going back to the stock count was the appearance of two friends out and about and stopped by for a chat. That passed some time and was a pleasant distraction because there can be no one that does stock counting for

fun, surely. This was interspersed with the occasional customer turning up to buy things, which was even more pleasant and given that it was during our fallow morning period a great surprise. It also gave me a chance to gaze out on the wide expanse of spring tide beach that seems to dip in the middle. It is almost certainly an optical illusion, but there, the lake that sits between the rock field, which is now sizable, and the sea is back, although from the shop looks less deep than previously.

The sea state had changed again from yesterday, most probably chiefly by the strength of the wind. The waves were running in flatter, trailing long wakes of white water behind them. Because they were breaking earlier, the whole foreshore was predominantly white water to around 100 metres out. There were less than half a dozen surfers desperate enough to give it a go and the rest were down the OS watching, no doubt. The swell increased later and the waves under the promenade provided some excellent surf for a couple of experienced local boarders.

It is highly likely that the dire weather warnings for today, however unfounded and latterly changed, thinned the crowd considerably. This was not desperately helpful for our pasty sales, and it looked increasingly likely that I would be left holding the baby, so to speak. There were enough people around, though, for one of them to entertain me with one of my most enjoyable questions. Faced with the choice between “Sennen Cove Café” and “The Old Boathouse”, we appear to be favourite on occasion to be asked if we do tea or coffee. In truth, I is probably the pasty sign that confuses but I think if it were me, I would still opt for the café as most likely.

By three o'clock in the afternoon on our previous days of opening, the day was just starting to mature nicely. Today by three o'clock it was game over and I spent the remaining hour watching the sea state deteriorate in the increasing breeze. There was a bit more flogging over the Harbour wall that developed into a bit of pounding later and the waves were dancing over Cowloe. I am sure if we had stayed open long enough we would have had some sock sales from those caught out by unexpectedly large waves on the big beach.

I will probably end up saying it again tomorrow mainly because it has the advantage of padding out a thin Diary entry should it need it but by the time you read this it will be the new year. So, a blissfully Happy New Year from all at The Diary: the contributors; the editors; the proof readers; the typesetters – not that we use typesetters anymore but the union insists we have some; oh, the union rep; the char lady; and the small boy I hire for a pittance to polish the nib of my pen. I am sure he would work for less and I might well propose it as part of his Happy New Year package of benefits. He does get to work indoors these days, after all.

And we must not forget it is Happy Hogmanay, because New Year is a Sassenach construct and not to be trusted, for those so far north of Camborne the distance is unfathomable – which is an unfathomable thing to do to a distance – but anyway, especially to two not so little anymore elves, L&L, whose wonderful Christmas card I forgot to mention a week ago, naughty Diarist, and to whom we wish the biggest

lump of coal on their doorstep from their 'first footer' than anyone else around and enough to keep them warm all winter. There, for those of you who have not expired through lack of oxygen (on, come on, there were commas), you can breathe now, dear reader.

Happy New Year.

December 30<sup>th</sup> – Monday

The day started well enough. The little girl gave us a better night than the previous one, which was very good of her. It is probably the change in routine that has her all aflutter. She so likes the company of people that she is beside herself and cannot wait to be in the crowd again. It is probably nothing of the sort, but it sounded good.

The weather was an improvement on yesterday. There was brightness here and there – mostly there, on the horizon, it must be said – but the air was clear and there was not the slightest hint of mist or drizzle. It was also relatively mild and for the first day since we opened, I did not have a burning desire to run and get a hat. The sea state was about the same as yesterday and there were about the same number of surfers out there struggling to find a wave.

We spent the first few hours of the morning struggling to find a customer. It seems to be the order of play for each of the days that we have been open. I can understand a slow awakening and a lazy breakfast; our visitors are on holiday, after all. I would open, maybe, at half past ten o'clock but we have early deliveries that I have to be there for, and it would shred my nerves seeing even a few people turn up and be disappointed.

I had little expectation that the very pleasant man at the optician that does ears would ever call me back, so I made another enquiry this morning. They sounded busy but a very pleasant lady who answered the telephone told me that she would make enquiries and call me back. It was late in the afternoon when, being at a loose end, I decided to make another call since I had not heard back. It was quite a coincidence that my mobile telephone started ringing in my hand as I looked up the number to call.

The very pleasant lady told me that the false ears had arrived a couple of days ago, but they were waiting for someone to programme them. After that I was welcome to come and collect them. I told her that the ear man who does not listen asked that I see him for the handover, so I booked an appointment. I half expected to have to wait a few weeks at which point I would have collected the false ears as suggested but I managed to get an appointment for next week. It will coincide well with my forthcoming trade show visits, which will be helpful, but it would have been more helpful still to have them during this week's shop opening.

I have news for all those doubters out there who question why I would want to display our windbreaks in the middle of Christmas season. Alright, there have not been any doubters, but if there were I could happily report that I sold a windbreak today. The buyer told me it was to stop his dogs looking out of the window of his holiday let. Apparently, it looks out onto a field where there are horses and it had been driving the dogs nuts.

The much maligned council must have spent a few quid on producing a very pretty Christmas booklet on recycling and waste collection. Being a dutiful citizen, I read it from cover to cover. Not only did it set out when waste and recycling collections would occur in the coming year, it also specified what to do with excess food waste that they had anticipated might be produced over the Christmas period. The latter was particularly handy since we had produced quite a bit ourselves that did not fit the provided container.

It seemed that I was in the minority of households that had taken time to read the booklet. It was the number of general waste bins put out to meet the Monday collection that gave it away. Also specified within was the fact that the much maligned council had ordained that the normal Monday collection had been postponed until Tuesday this week.

As if to punish me for such smart Alecery, the small gods of grumpy shopkeepers once again sent rain to greet me at the closing of the shop and the running around of ABH after we shut. It came down quite heavily this time and gave us quite a soaking. Fortunately, I had the foresight to be wearing full metal jacket waterproofs. Sadly, ABH was not. That will teach her not to forget her hat and coat next time.

December 29<sup>th</sup> – Sunday

That wicked little hound had us up all night. She refused to go to sleep no matter what we did. She went out several times and had fresh dinner put down which she did not eat. We have no idea and spent the day fighting sleep.

The weather was not here to do us a whole lot of favours today, although according to the weather forecast, it was better that what may be coming down the line. We had a roller-coaster of wet and dry. Damp, grey and chilly one hour and then much brighter as the mist lifted in another. We even had large patches of blue sky just to confuse us even more.

Our surfers are suffering just a little more indignity each day as the surf was once again downgraded. Some stalwarts hung about to make the best of it but there were about half the numbers of recent days. My money was on the OS having just a few more customers than it did a few days ago.

Despite the erratic weather, business took a step change today and most certainly in terms of pasty sales (sorry, MS), which took off. I was in danger of running out even

having cooked a further twenty yesterday to ward off such the situation. I thought that we may have a few precooked and frozen ones lurking in the freezer and, for a change, luck was with me. Hoping that the early sales push would not die off prematurely, I cooked another dozen. Thankfully, I was not far off the mark, but half a dozen less would have been better.

While the sea state had a little less swell in it, the increased tide height allowed it to floss over the Harbour wall or perhaps a little more robustly at times, it seemed. I was blissfully unaware of this condition in the Harbour until a visitor came by and told me that someone had been washed off the wall a little earlier. He made it sound like it was not intended, so I asked if the casualty was wearing a wetsuit, and he confirmed that he was not. Having earlier seen one of our lot head down that way with a fishing rod, I wondered if it was he. I think it highly unlikely because he is a smarter cookie than that, but I shall make enquiries later.

There was a five minutes to closing rush again but this time it did not extend long into our winter closing time of four o'clock. It allowed me to very finely time taking ABH out for exactly the time a cloud of mizzle came in. The drizzle element of it was perhaps not quite so heavy as it was earlier, but it was wet enough, thank you very much. Happily, we had better luck after tea.

I have not check previous Christmas openings but I sense that this one is a little below par. Our visitors have just three more days to make amends and I just hope that they take with a pinch of salt the Meteodoomwatch Office's forecast for the next few days.

December 28<sup>th</sup> – Saturday

The early morning mizzle that ABH and I walked around in first thing disappeared by the time I opened the shop. We were still grey, damp and chilly but at least we could see that we were grey, damp and chilly. One of my first customers delivered the news that the rest of the country was shrouded in fog and several airports were closed. I should have kept the 'ha, ha, yaboo sucks' to myself because by the middle of the day I could no longer see Cape Cornwall and the cliffs opposite were fast disappearing.

The surfers out in the bay were having their third day in a row of decent surf but much diminished in strength from Christmas Day, which is now long ago in history. Closing in on the top of the tide, the surf had almost gone completely, and the surfers were replaced by paddleboarders cruising about.

The café next door opened its door again this morning. It was good to see them again and it invited a few more people to congregate down our end of The Cove. I cannot say with any certainty that we were busier today because of it, but it is usually the case that we feed off them during the season. The day followed the usual pattern, however, with the majority of business crammed into the last two hours of

our open day. It may well be people just arriving, so we look forward with eager anticipation to tomorrow when it will be busy all day.

So buoyant were we in the afternoon that I feared for our pasty stock (sorry, MS). I had ordered what I considered to be sufficient for two days but found that I had been shorted by nearly ten pasties. Even then, I do not think that would have saved us. I had the foresight to order some more frozen pasties, so late in the day, I cooked the lot. I think that we should be set for tomorrow now.

I had also bought in a fair amount of greengrocery that I had only just remember to order last thing last night. The delivery, along with some dairy, kept me busy for half the morning. I am sure that half of it will end in the bin or in the café's recipes if they are staying open longer than we, but it is worthwhile because I cannot abide the thought that we have unreasonably let any of our customers down. Not having lark's tongues in cream sauce is one thing, not having a bulb of garlic or a few tomatoes, quite another. Fortunately, the tins of armadillo toes are still in date from the end of last season; we would be a laughing stock without those.

Since it was a tad quiet in the run up to the afternoon's big rush, I continued with the stock count. More precisely, I continued with keying the results of the stock count onto the inventory sheets, which is far less stressful than perusing the shop and writing down names and numbers. I did some of the latter because I had quite forgotten about the fridge magnets in my haste to work my way down the shop. You will be pleased to know, dear reader, that these are now accounted for.

It was good to see some familiar faces amongst the crowds who turned up through the day. The Christmas break always used to be the regulars, the holiday let owners and second home owners gathering for a holiday. This year, and it might well have been last year too had we been able to open, there are more new faces than old, and I can but wonder what drives such change.

Two of the fishing punts went out later in the day. I had seen one of the Harbour Commissioners arrive early with some heavy plant which I surmised might be to clear some of the weed on the Harbour beach. I tried to keep an eye on proceedings but was distracted at the crucial time. When I looked again a single lane had been opened through the weed between the slip and the sea which the Harbour tractor could have managed alone. I am therefore no wiser if the heavy plant that turned up for the weed or some other project, darn it.

The mizzle, which turned quite heavy in the middle of the day, left again just as quickly as it came and left the afternoon to some busyness. It was much later in the afternoon that we saw some pasty action that had me topping up with small numbers one after the other. I have to assume that it was late arrivals because three or four o'clock seems a bit of an odd time to be selling lots of pasties. It all turned into a five minutes to closing rush that morphed into a half an hour after we closed rush. I was

in no particular hurry to chase people off and let business do what it would, which turned out to be worthwhile.

In laws – different ones to the ones that came before Christmas – arrived during the day and will be here until next year. While they are very pleasant company, I am glad I did not write that in August. As usual, the Missus prepared a sumptuous feast which we will still be eating next year as well. I rounded off the day with a couple of runs around the block with ABH. It is still very mild and happily dry again. We are only open for a few more days so it would be entirely pleasant if the weather held together for it.

December 27<sup>th</sup> – Friday

Gosh, that all went rather quickly. So did our mist that decided that now Christmas was over, it would begger off and leave us with a clear view of the other side of the bay. There was still a bit of haze, and it was grey, cold and damp but I was somewhat surprised when Radio Pasty told us that flights from Land's End Airport had not yet resume because of the fog. Alright, I cannot see it properly from here, but it did not look that bad on top of the cliff in that direction.

Once again, the shore break was littered with surfers. It looked big and not quite as healthy as it did yesterday. My friend from frozen Vermont, very far west of Camborne, remarked that the surfers were probably better friends than they were surfers from the amount of time they spent bobbing about in close proximity to each other waiting for a suitable wave.

It has been mild over the last few days but a bit chilly in the mornings. It was no different today when I came down a little earlier than usual to get the shop ready. We had two deliveries that I was expecting but the milk, the first to turn up, was a little later than I had hoped. At least it did not clash with the pasty delivery (sorry, MS). Ordinarily, I would not have been bothered by a late milk delivery, but I had misjudged the previous order and we were starting from a clean sheet.

The pasty delivery was much later than I expected, so I thought I had better call them up to make sure that my order had been received. It was therefore with some surprise that I discovered that there would be no delivery until tomorrow. This threw me just a tad. I had frozen stock to fall back on, but I would usually prepare this in advance. It was still early when I called our pasty people, so I quickly sorted out some pasties from the freezer and started off the cooking process. It turned out to be quite a pasty day, comparatively speaking, and I had to clear the rest of the frozen stock to meet the demand. Happily, no one went without.

While we sold some gifts as well as groceries, it was not quite as busy as I had imagined. Thinking about it, I supposed that it was a changeover day, which might have accounted for the downturn. It has been very hard to keep track of the days this week – calling them Christmas Day and Boxing Day instead of Wednesday and

Thursday really did not help. I am hoping that it will perk up a bit from tomorrow, which is hopefully a Saturday and puts us back on track for a normal(ish) week to come, although we are only open for half of it.

Since we were none too busy and I did not fancy sitting around in the less than toasty shop scratching my behind, I decided to resume the stock count. Seeing as I am such a brave grumpy shopkeeper, I started with the pain in the bottom things which are traditionally the swimsuits and shorts. The problem with those is the proliferation of sizes against types. Over successive years we might have three different sets of shorts all with a different breakdown in sizes. More recently, I have been known to cheat and as long as the cost price does not vary significantly, I group types together in sizes. It is much easier now than it used to be.

I completed the swim clothes and counted all the gifts in the gift aisle but stopped short of the t-shirts, which can take some time. I am sure that I will have plenty of time tomorrow to continue. In the meanwhile, I entered the data I had collected on the inventory system, which is much easier than traversing the shop and counting things. I have now finished the swim clothes and the stationery, which was a bit more complicated than I had hoped and have only the last gift aisle to count. The store room might be trickier as it takes me out of view of the shop counter and these days I do not always hear a customer's footfall. Calling out 'shop' usually gets my attention and normally elicits the response 'yes, it is', but little else. It can also upset my arithmetic calculations at the counter – usually in the grumpy shopkeeper's favour.

Closing time crept up rather more slowly than I would like and by which time the chill in the air had become somewhat more pronounced. It was the sort of chill that would ordinarily be mitigated by the wearing of a hat. It does not quite look right wearing a hat in the shop and I try not to. Besides, it was upstairs and far too far away to be bothering with a trip to get it.

I was grateful, therefore, that ABH was keen to have a trip around the block after I finished work. I had been static for some time, other than a tour of the shop floor, and a walk around the block would refresh both of us. There was still a moderate number of cars in the car park and a few sea gazers to go with them, but the core of the day was ebbing away. We avoided the Harbour beach because there was so little of it. That which was not covered by sea was covered with weed. It does not seem to be in the least interested in floating out where it came from, and the forthcoming sprint tides are not huge.

As we took our last couple of walks around the block later on, our mizzle had returned. The mist did not seem as thick as it had been previously but there again, it had only just set in. Perhaps we should just be grateful for the one day without it but it is getting a little monotonous and the damp is getting into my bones. It might also be getting into my brain because I almost forgot about the greengrocery order and had to drag myself out of the warm bed I had just got into. You will have bananas tomorrow but it was a close run thing.



December 26<sup>th</sup> – Thursday (Boxing Day)

Today was national surfing day. Who knew? It was fortunate, therefore, that good old Neptune threw a whole raft of surfing type waves into the bay for the several dozen surfers who ventured out a few hours before high water. They were there through the afternoon as well, although I cannot say that they were the same ones. At least we could see them. The mist was a little thinner in the bay than the last few days and we could vaguely see Cape Cornwall and Brisons.

We only open a few hours on Boxing Day so that people can get a pint of milk they forgot or a pack of butter. It was probably a bit daft doing pasties (sorry, MS) but I tried it anyway. Yes, I discovered it was a bit daft doing pasties for a few hours. It was probably daft opening at all for a few hours but there were a few people who came in for last minute forgotten groceries. For them, it was very worth it, which is why we did it, so that was alright, then.

As soon as we closed, I took ABH around the block. My, it was busy. The Harbour car park was packed with cars and people milling about. Later, we discovered that The Beach car park was equally full, and I wondered first, why the shop was not very busy and secondly, if I should dash back and reopen the shop again because I had closed too early. The thing that I noticed most was that for the numbers of cars in both car parks, there did not seem to be a corresponding volume of people. Surely, they could not all have come in one car each and if they did not, where were they all. It crossed my mind that a good number were in the OS but even then, it seemed a bit of a stretch.

We started along Coastguard Row and were flagged down by one of the ladies at the house at the end. She offered mince pies, which she thus upon me after an initial polite refusal. They had a house full, and I had dirty shoes on, so ABH and I remained on the doorstep. I was then offered a mulled wine. I have long held a deep distain for hot alcohol. I will always maintain that it is best from the refrigerator or at room temperature depending on its type. I therefore refused but was told that this particular brew was non-alcoholic and a paper cup containing a sample was pressed into my hand. It was very toothsome, and I made a mental note to have some more at some point.

I enjoyed another zizz on my return home. It compensated it some part for my disturbed night. ABH had slept all through until evening when we came back from our walk yesterday and had therefore felt it reasonable to be awake half the night. I had no particular intention to take ABH on another stank today but when I awoke from my little slumber, I reasoned that it maybe a worthwhile exercise to wear her out to avoid a second sleepless night. I was a bit concerned that the beach looked a little crowded but thought that, as it was late, it may thin a bit by the time we got there.

We avoided most of the crowd by heading up the Coast Path that was largely deserted. Sure enough, by the time we hit the beach, the crowd had thinned considerably. With the car park still predominately full, I had to assume that there were either a lot of submerged surfers out there or they were all in the OS, or very possibly a bit of both. Anyway, it left us enough beach to cavort on. ABH had come a long way from her early days of chasing anything in a tail and now stays away from inappropriate dogs – or mostly. Unfortunately, they were nearly all inappropriate dogs and she did not get in any chasing or running around at all. Instead, she had to mooch around while I fell into conversation with a local lady and her daughter who I had not seen for a while.

It was glooming by the time we headed back down the road with our Christmas lights lining the way. We did not make the same mistake of letting ABH sleep after she returned and took it in turns during the evening to poke her with sticks. No, not really for any animal lover tuning in, and they were not very sharp sticks anyway.

Then it was all over. All that hyperbole and false bon homie, gone in a flash and the decorations will soon be a distant memory. Here is some advice: if you were to have a 'one hit wonder', do not make it a Christmas song. You would only get royalties from plays one month of the year. Must dash, I have to charge the chain saw batteries.

December 25<sup>th</sup> – Wednesday (Christmas Day)

Some happy person, far, far away, who had a problem sleeping sent the Missus a message at half past five o'clock in the morning. It made a jolly tune on her Bramley computer tablet that woke up me and ABH. ABH duly decided to make sure I was awake first and once satisfied that I was sufficiently awake to make a fuss of her, switched her attention to the Missus. The Missus dropped ABH out on the flat roof and both returned to bed. She and ABH went back to sleep again, bless them.

I dozed on and off until it was time again for ABH to wake me up. I resisted for a short while but, to be fair, it was much later than she usually wakes me up. I got up and she went back to sleep again. I am sensing a pattern here but refuse to acknowledge it. If I do that it may not really exist.

Besides, it was Christmas morning and Santy had been, and we were all very excited, of course. This involved, eventually, taking ABH out for a walk which meant heading for the Harbour beach and discovering that the Harbour beach had a four foot wall of oar weed between us at the bottom of the slip and the rest of the beach. We, sorry I meant just me, had to walk almost as far as the western slip to circumnavigate the weed and get to the sand. With the seal pup still up above the tide and unlikely to go anywhere without assistance, we decamped and went around the block instead.

I had quite forgotten, it is only once a year after all, that the residents in the last house on Coastguard Row ensure that Santy leaves big white footprints up to their front door. I am sure that they must have done that when their children were small and now that they have small grandchildren home for Christmas, they are there again. It evokes a household of Christmas wonder and tugs righteously at the heartstrings and proves that John Lennon was right about your parents lying to you, although he was a bit brutal about it. Perhaps he did not have snow footprints leading to his door at Christmas.

The Christmas swim was well attended as usual. In fact, it was very well attended with people squeezed in behind the advancing tide all the way from the car park to the Lifeguard huts. It might have looked busy by dint of the fact that it was an hour off high water this year, but I really think it was very busy as well. We watched from the comfort of our highly insulated living room through windows that resisted even a last minute hosing down so that Mother could get a decent view of it. Even the CCTV camera trained on the beach did not have too much of a crystal view of it. There were no incidents this year, but the team were watching with a careful eye from the Lifeboat station forecourt as usual.

There was a flurry of telephone calls and video calling after that. All family contacts contacted, and Christmas wishes wished, our day fell to peacefulness at last. I even managed to get the Missus exactly the same card as I did last year. Those are skills that only a man married for many years and has developed a protectively short memory can attain. After my early waking, I had a little zizz. I took ABH around the block first to secure some undisturbed time to do so. Later, with nothing much on the horizon and the street now empty of happy revellers, I decided to take ABH up the cliff for a bit of a stank.

The mist has returned on and off during the morning. In the bay it was patchy but seemed to thicken out to sea. It was however a fluid situation, and that assessment could easily change within the hour. It was not particularly cold, although walking into a misty patch could drop the temperature by a few degrees. It was shorts and coat without a doubt and it seemed entirely appropriate as we marched up the cliff.

We were in the clear going up and we could look down on the bay with a haughty disdain at the clumps of mist down there. Even around the lookout it was clear as well but as we advanced along the edge of the cliff, we were heading into mist, looking like a Hound of the Baskervilles film set. It was even in black and white. Creeping along beside us atop the moors above us, it swirled menacingly. As we crested the slope before the descent into Castle Zawn, the valley of silence, the mist started to envelop us. The valley, silent for our last couple of visits, was sliced by the plaintive sound of the Longships lighthouse foghorn and the thunder of a heavy swell tumbling into the zawn and beating up the remains of the wreck of the Mulheim. Gosh it was eerie.

We stayed in mist of varying thicknesses for the remainder of the journey although when we arrived at the cycle path, the sun found a way through it. Immediately the temperature climbed, and I found that within a few yards that I was fearfully overdressed. It was just one of those awkward things because I would not have been without those layers on the Coast Path. When I make my fortune, I will have a boy who waits at exactly the right spot to carry my coat for me. I suspect by the time I make my fortune, I will need a team of boys at the outset of the journey to carry me the whole way.

It took me a while to cool down after returning home. Mother watched some people mend stuff on television, ABH fell asleep next to her and Christmas resumed.

December 24<sup>th</sup> – Tuesday (Christmas Eve)

It was ‘tales of olde London Town’ this morning as the fog swirled around the Lifeboat station light. It could have been smoke the way it curled and twisted in the breeze. The lights from the houses up the cliff had to fight hard to be seen through the thickness of it but I cannot help but feel it would have been spookier at night.

It seemed timely, then, that we had a communique from our Tasmanian correspondent, which is always well received. He apologises for the lack of previous reports but tells me that he had been a brae bit poorly. We wish him well. He reports that the weather in Tasmania is hardly behaving, either ranging from a comfortable 29 degrees one day to a frosty 19 degrees another, which will no doubt have the populace in woolly hats and jumpers – of course, many of the populace *are* jumpers – oh, come on, I am just preparing you for your cracker jokes later.

Tasmania shares names with those in our own dear Duchy, such as Launceston, Stinking Creek and Humbug Point, little known places south of Camborne. Who would have thought that it also shares a comparably adept public services body. Our correspondent tells me that two ferries, commanding the Bass Strait between Australia and Tasmania, were ordered without corresponding facilities to berth them.

I took the opportunity to consult one of the news channels on the Internet for more information. The idea was to increase tourism by providing bigger, faster and more efficient ferries across the Bass Strait. Unfortunately, the size of the ferry terminal at Devonport in Tasmania had not been factored in, or at least not in time. This left the two ferries, already over budget by £50m and one already completed in Finland, looking for a temporary berth. It has been moved to Leith, which is north of Camborne in the UK for fear that ice in Finland could damage it. Leith will pick up £24k per week for the privilege. Aye thang yew.

Work is now progressing on proper sized facilities in Devonport, Tasmania but costs there have quadrupled from an original estimate of £45m. In short it is a bit of a mess-up and the chief protagonists in the government and ferry operator have already fallen on their swords. It is all strongly reminiscent of the time the much

maligned council and the Isles of Scilly Steamship company etc al, decided to upgrade the ferry service to the Islands including rebuilding the Penzance terminal a few years back. That did not go well, either. Clearly the officials in Australia are far more honourable as none our ours resigned over it. They just blamed one another for a long time.

We are very grateful to our Tasmanian Correspondent who got up especially early at five o'clock to send in his very informative report.

Our mist started to clear a little by the middle of the day, which was pleasant. I am sure I saw some blue sky, too. Just after the middle of the day, it came back again. It probably made no difference at all to the run of business for the day which was about on par with the day before. We finished off all the pasties (sorry, MS) which pleased me greatly, a little prematurely, which did not. I could not remember when the deadline was for placing the next order that would be delivered on Friday, so I placed it today, just to be sure. It was a reasonably substantial order on the basis that we expect things to hot up considerably from Christmas on. I am a little nervous of such an assertion after the poor year we had, but best not prepare to fail. The pasties will always freeze if necessary.

Having successfully put it off yesterday, I decided that it would probably be bad form to put off doing some of the stock take again today. I did all the greetings cards, which sounds good until you acknowledge that I had let these run down to the lowest volume I think we have ever had. Not that many people have said, but I think that our eclectic card collection is quite an attraction and people do seem to come back time and again to take advantage of it. We also do not sell them at town centre card shop prices, which again, must be a draw. It will need a bit more of an investment this coming year than usual but that will have to be carefully planned.

Quite by accident, I worked my way down the centre aisle and ended up having completed the shoes and flipflops as well. It was not a huge step forward but was enough to stay that I was not completely bone idle. Given that we had run out of pasties, I cooked some more for Boxing Day when we shall be open just for the morning. I would open for a couple of hours tomorrow morning to tap the Christmas Day swimmers who arrive in abundance but had been warned against it if I valued my soft bits. I should have to satisfy myself having sold a couple of swimsuits, wet shoes and a wetsuit today to compensate.

Earlier in the morning, I remembered to telephone the optician that does ears. Someone suggested that I given them a call regarding the repair of my false ears that were sent off about five weeks ago. I spoke to a very pleasant man who told me that the repair record was not on his system but might well be on the optician who does ears' system, which he did not have access to. He would have asked the optician that does ears, but he was on holiday – again.

What the very pleasant man was sure of was that the repaired false ears had not arrived in that morning's delivery because he was the one who had opened the parcel. Perhaps I would like to call again when the optician that does ears was back from his holiday, he said. I told the very pleasant man that I had a better idea. Since he would know when my false ear arrived, perhaps he could telephone me rather than me calling in randomly just in case. I explained that this probably worked better for both of us since he would not be bothered with my repeated but wasted telephone calls and I would not need to make them. While I thought that it might probably be a revelation to him if I told him this was called 'customer service', I thought it might be a little patronising even if it were only me who thought so.

Our fog persisted throughout the afternoon and if anything got thicker. Our friends and sometime neighbours from up the cliff disappeared into with their dog it in the direction of the big beach. It might have been the smell of cooking pasties, but they managed to find their way back later on with news. They told me that they had witnessed a strange phenomenon, in the north that was unusual for the time of year, and it was too bright for even the brightest stars yet. They said that instead of a star they had seen a white rainbow, which they surmised was due to the moisture drops in the air being much smaller than rain. They sent a message later and confirmed their investigation that it was a 'fog bow' – unfortunately really – and it was indeed due to the size of the water droplets.

I had similar problems with the size of the droplets later on in the evening. When I switched on my headtorch in the darkness as ABH and I went around the block, I found that I could not see anything but a white screen in front of me. The water droplets were so fine and close together that they reflected most of the light back at me. I had to tilt the torch up out of my direct vision to make my way at all. And, yes, it was much spookier at night.

It only remains for me to do the usual at this time of year and wish you, dear reader, a Merry Christmas. I do hope you have a wonderful time because, according to the song that I heard for about the tenth time in a week on Radio Pasty, it is the most wonderful time of the year. I am supposing that it the only Christmas song left whose lyrics do not offend someone.

There will be no Christmas Day Diary as even Diarists along with grumpy shopkeepers have a day off occasionally. I know, I know, you wish it could be longer. Well, actually, and sorry to disappoint, there probably will be a Christmas Day Diary, just not until Friday. I think it would be dangerous not to write down the utter bilge and nonsense that is in my head because it will back up like a blocked drain, which, come to think is probably a good analogy. It will be forced to come out somewhere else – or my head will explode.

Anyway, I digress. Now, where was I? Ah yes ...

MERRY CHRISTMAS

December 23<sup>rd</sup> – Monday

It is quite remarkable how quickly you lose the ability to get out of bed early. I had spent seven months leaping from my pit at some unearthly hour and that only ended not six weeks ago. This morning required the concentration of a temple full of Zen Buddhists to tear myself away from my warm and comfy sheets. ABH did her utmost to evict me having been disturbed by the alarm, but it was a half hearted effort after which she went back to sleep again.

I had even allowed myself an extra hour on the basis that there was only the dairy and the pasties (sorry, MS) to arrive. What I had not taken into consideration was the enormity of the dairy order given that we were starting from a blank sheet and likewise for the pasties and cakes. I had also dismissed the amount of time required to switch on the fridges and reset the wireless timers that control them. I made it down for opening time, just, but it was a bit of a rush. I will leave the alarm time as it is, mainly because I have run out of Buddhist Monks.

It was perhaps a little too hopeful that I would have early customers, which rather made all the rushing about a little frustrating. It needed to be done, just in case and besides, I had not yet put out the recycling which the much maligned council informs us must be on the doorstep – if you have one – by seven o'clock or risk the ire of the administrators and their all seeing eye. I had also forgotten to empty the collecting bin in the kitchen and that added time to the whole process.

It would be helpful if the much maligned council told us what happened to our recycling efforts beyond their initial reception at local depots. The new products my can of beans has been turned into and the bits of world saved by our toeing the line. Perhaps I am being naïve, because deep in the back of my consciousness, I am seeing all the plastic being loaded on a slow, oil guzzling ship bound for some poor Asian state where the container loads that have not slipped over the side in stormy weather are piled up for poor people to sift through to make a pittance. No, surely not.

We were lucky that the wind from yesterday had almost completely dropped out and also gone around to the southwest where it could do us little harm – other than bring all that slipped over the side plastic back to us. The sea state also calmed, which given its ferocity yesterday was a wonder to behold. The morning had started out in very good humour and allowed us a dry and peaceful walk along the small block. The reasonable weather had contributed to an unexpected flurry of customer activity from around the middle of the morning, but southwesterly airflows are notorious for bringing rain and the rest of the day was coated with mizzle that was not very helpful at all.

Just about my first customer of the day was my friend from frozen Vermont, very west of Camborne. I do hope that she will let me know when Vermont ceases to be

frozen as I do like to maintain a level of accuracy no matter how tatty this ragged journal might be in the grand scheme of things. Anyway, I digress just slightly. Ah yes, from frozen Vermont who had pointed out some seabirds in the Harbour yesterday.

She suggested today, after some thought, that they might be terns, which is The Diary's favourite seabird, largely because of its fun value. I was suspicious of this suggestion, even though there were two of them fulfilling the assertion that one good tern deserves another. There was something about the bird that was familiar and that I had looked up before. I did note to my friend that it looked a very stern tern and might even be a tacitern, because I just could not help myself.

I looked it up again today, it being the little black spot behind the eye that reminded me and found it to be a black headed gull. At first the nomenclature might seem misguided, but the bird we saw with its predominantly white head was wearing either its adult mature non-breeding plumage or its immature plumage. This, at least, is what the very clever Wetlands and Wildlife Trust thinks, who are so shy about their name it took me ten minutes to find it on their website. The pictures on their website are very convincing on the matter. I will leave it there unless my friend from frozen Vermont, very far west of Camborne, thinks otherwise.

The mizzle stayed with us for the rest of the day and if anything, got worse. It was not the most advantageous sort of weather to have for our first day of opening and by three o'clock any semblance of life in The Cove had beggered off to the pub, probably. We are opening on short hours, which from experience is a sensible precaution. It certainly paid off today and we closed at four o'clock. This would have given me time to drop the groceries off to our neighbour up the hill, the one with the outside stair lift that I jealously eyed as I toted the bag of groceries up the steps last time I was there. It proved unnecessary, however, as the lady in question turned up in our last hour of opening. I admonished her greatly about making such a trip in grim conditions and she admonished me back for being such a mother hen. She then told me that she had forgotten her payment card which gave me the upper hand and the opportunity to ace a last admonishment.

It has been a grim first day of opening made delightful by the people in it. The day ended with the opportunity to inform you, dear reader, who has spent this entire time dangling on tenterhooks, waiting to see if my efforts on the electricity panel timer across the road paid off and the Christmas lights turned on automatically. They did and I apologise for the disgraceful anticlimax of that announcement.

Thus satisfied, with the lights at least, I retired to take ABH around the block in the rain that has just started up as we closed. Happily, by the time I took her out again, it has returned to just mizzle, although I had dressed in full metal jacket waterproofs for the occasion.



There was enough light not to require assistance from my headtorch which I brought just in case. We certainly did not need it to see the carcass of the small juvenile seal that was still on the beach. It had been tagged, which I did not get close enough to read but I did wonder why it was still there. It seems odd that the Cornwall Wildlife Trust welcome calls to inform them that the dead animal is there, attend to tag it and then begger off leaving it there. It is not as if it has been drawn away from the tide awaiting some other body to collect it. It has been left such that the tide might do the job for them but then again, why tag it. I might call and enquire in a dull moment.

The weather got no better during the evening but thankfully, it got no worse, either. I risked a call to Paul's Bread who supply our expensive but top quality bread in the shop. We did rather better than I imagined on bread sales and groceries generally and while we are only open for a day tomorrow before we close again, I did not wish to be without, otherwise what is the point of opening.

We will find out tomorrow.

December 22<sup>nd</sup> – Sunday

It seemed that the wind did most of the heavy work during the night. Come morning, it sounded at least like it was calming down a bit. Land's End had it in the mid sixties and St Ives clocked in at the low seventies in miles per hour at peak. We were somewhere in between in The Cove and the bay was filled with big waves and white water. The forecasters started the bidding at 80 miles per hour, just to get us all a bit worried and ended up where we eventually were. Someone told me later that it looked worse up the north coast than it did in the bay.

I am sure that I have now kept you on the edge of your seats long enough, dear reader. I am sorry to report that the lights across the road stayed on all night; I had pressed the wrong button. Never mind, there are still five left, although I can probably discount the ones that are marked M+ and M-. I pressed the one with a little clock on it which, last night, I took to be the button to manipulate the start and end times. I pressed it once and nothing happened. I am hoping that something does at four o'clock or we are back to manual again.

There were some heavy showers blowing through first thing. ABH quite sensibly chose to go back to bed after I had taken the time to get dressed to go out. She came out of the bedroom twice more after that, but it was only on the third occasion that she deigned to come out with me. She was bang on, however and we made it out and back again between showers. We kept to the sheltered spots, too, as we were nearly bowled over as we came past the top of the Harbour where waves were thumping over the wall.

The rain had largely gone by the time I headed off to the range for the Christmas shoot. The wind, despite the direction, was not a great problem for the shoot either, but it held the temperature down all the while we were there. Given that all the

courses of fire were out in the open, standing about waiting for a turn at each course of fire, I was pretty chilled through by the time the Missus turned up with the pasties (sorry, MS). It was a most enjoyable session, designed not to be too serious and in affable company.

We were back home by half past one o'clock. It was still blustery in The Cove and almost as soon as I got back, I was tasked with taking ABH out for a spin. Heading for the Harbour beach we happened upon our visitor from the United States of America. It was the second time this week we had met and previously she had informed me that she came from Vermont, which she assured me was a very long way west of Camborne. It was, she told me, also very much colder and they were in the grip of a big freeze there at the moment.

Descending onto the Harbour beach we fell to conversation while ABH was entertained by a small child over by the western slip. Having discussed matters of great import, we decided that running away from the cold and bluster would be a good plan and we parted company. Before I hauled ABH off to get some movement and thus some blood pumping around my chilly frame, she took me up to the far corner of the beach next to the Harbour wall. She was most disturbed to see a deceased seal pup by the steps and made a swift exit, barking. I caught up with her and we left via the western slip to walk around the block and back home where I called our find in.

We had a family visitor in the afternoon shortly after I arrived home, which was a pleasant interlude. The young man is a great nephew of the Missus, which makes her very old and revered – not in my eyes, obviously. Although still young, the nephew has served some time in the forces and seen a bit of the world. He now has secured a good country job that he enjoys doing, which is about right all around.

He was here when the Christmas lights were due to come on but, sadly, they did not. I gathered myself and put my thinking head on this time and looked at the panel anew. The button I had pressed last night to put on the lights was indeed the correct button but had multiple functions. By pressing it twice it selected on and automatic, which sounded about right.

I was not intending to wait until midnight to find out. Dear reader, we shall all have to spend the night in suspense. To be continued ... same time, same channel tomorrow.

December 21<sup>st</sup> – Saturday

Happy Winter Solstice – feel free to dress up like a druid, paint your face and hug a rock.

Anyone who subscribes to the rather irritating phraseology that there are so many 'sleeps' left until Christmas clearly does not have an ABH in their household. She

woke me up at five o'clock this morning and variously tried to do the same to the Missus – no chance – slept a bit, fidgeted, lay on top of my face, licked behind my ear, walked up and down me. Trying to turf her out of bed with the thought that the reason she woke me up was that she needed to go outside is met with a snarl. She probably did need to go outside because nearly two hours later she let me put her on the roof but was too idle or having too much fun trying to wake us up to bother. Even after having put her out on the roof and going back to bed she did not desist but I held out until my usual getting up time.

Franky, I am not sure that I should have bothered getting up, not for the weather at least. It was the greyest and most unwelcoming sort of day you could imagine. There was the beginnings of some punchy wind out to the west and the air was laced with mizzle on and off throughout the day. It improved a bit in the later stages of the afternoon and so did the wind.

We avoided the beach first thing as the tide was still milling about down there. We managed to get down in the late morning to discover a huge mound of weed roughly the width of the slipway and about four feet high – or deep, depending if you are standing near or on it, I suppose. ABH tried both. If there is a high thing somewhere near, whether that be a hedge or pile of weed, she has to be on top of it. Maybe it is being small that encourages her thus. Anyway, that was not very satisfying nor was ranging over the rest of the beach that was near enough clear. I suggested we go around, and she duly headed for the western slipway.

After such a strenuous morning, I decided on an upgraded breakfast. A book I had been reading recently referenced a meal of chickpeas and chorizo, which sounded interesting. I had rescued a can of chickpeas from our shelf downstairs that had gone rusty at the bottom because of our kitchen leak earlier in the year. We also normally have chorizo in the fridge because we have cosmopolitan and cultured food tastes, I shall have you know, dear reader. I found a recipe on the Internet that used both items and added a few ingredients for good measure.

I had intended to consume the finished article with a hunk of bread, but disappointingly discovered that the bread had gone mouldy. Instead, I removed a couple of slices of Paul's bread from the freezer, toasted them and put the resulting chickpeas, chorizo, olives, coriander, red onion and mushrooms on top. Crickey! Rick Stein, hold my coat.

Mother was coming to stay for her Christmas holidays and as the Missus was ironing the bed linen for her, I was despatched to collect her. I was also instructed to reset the Christmas lights timer that had gone askew when her breaker went yesterday. It seems to flip off when the toaster finishes. We have changed the toaster, so it can only be the socket it plugs into. We will have to inform the much maligned council's agent that looks after the property. Having looked at the untidy collection of cables feeding the Christmas lights and the two extensions blocks that feed them, I would have thought that the toaster was would have been the least of the problems. I had

to extract the cables and the timer from an air vent into which they are stuffed to reset the timer. I then could not get it all back in there again without a bit of an effort and then I noted that the cables prevented the door from closing, and I had to start again.

I had chosen the wettest part of the day to go and collect Mother. The drizzle was fairly intense there for a while. It stopped as we drove through Trevorian Farm, which I thought the end of it but as soon as I turned off the windscreen wipers, it started again. Happily, it had near stopped by the time we got home when I had intended to take ABH on her second run of the day.

Since I would be at the range for the relevant time tomorrow, I had to call in the bread order today and leave the message on the answering machine. Before I did that I checked with our neighbour up the hill if she wanted her usual bread order and she replied with an entire grocery list. It caught me a little off guard but most of it was what I would get from the milkman and included some items that I had forgotten, so it was quite fortuitous that I had asked her.

It is most disconcerting when calling the number you have been calling for years results in an unusual response. I called again and got the same thing which did not announce the company name. I left the order just in case it was correct and also sent my order as a message. I might see if I can verify that it had been received tomorrow from the range, but I would need to remember to take the order details with me in case it had not.

I attempted to have a little zizz in my chair in front of the computer, but ABH was having none of that. I moved to the settee and discovered that she was having none of that either. I managed to hold her off for a short while, but sustained resistance was useless, and I had to consider taking her off for a walk to run the mischief out of her.

With the weather the way it was, although it did appear to be improving, I was reluctant to do one of our longer walks, but on the other hand I did not want to just run her around the block at our end of The Cove. I resolved that I would take her down the far end and if it looked probable, might take her along the beach as well. I put my boots on for that very eventuality but when got halfway down the road, I found that the weather was much improved, and a usual stank along the Coast Path along the back of the beach looked rather enticing – to me at least.

We took the high road which as usual took an age. We spent as much time retracing our steps as we did going forward. It is frustrating but since we had plenty of time, it did not matter in the least. The frustration is watching her sniff a blade of grass for ten minutes then advance ten feet, pause, and return to sniff it again. Worse than that is when she charges onto the beach and within five minutes finds what I propose to be something unspeakable that a seal left behind and rolled in it. It was exceedingly aromatic, which may not be exactly the word I was reaching for, but it

was bad enough that even she thought it necessary to roll in the sand to try and get rid of it. I did try and scrape some off that was clinging to her harness but to no avail and I then tried with a handful of spaghetti seaweed, that was also useless.

When we got to the OS slipway, I called the Missus and told her to clear the sink as we were coming in hot. We arrived back and I held her at the door where I removed my boots but not before realising that I had some adhered to the sole of my boot that was now on the carpet. While the Missus addressed the girl's needs, I sorted out my boots and the carpet which was not the best ending to a stank on the beach ever. We shall endeavour to do better next time.

I was just settling in to a relax that might part way replace the zizz I missed earlier when the Missus drew my attention to the Christmas lights across the road, or lack of them. They should have come on at four o'clock but neither the ones in the station window at the top nor the lights along the road had done so. I reasoned that the analogue timer in the station had gone askew like Mother's when the power was lost there yesterday. It would simply need the time to be corrected. I had assumed that the reason the other lights were off was due to the breaker having tripped.

I corrected the window lights' timer and that fixed that issue. Both the breaker in the station and the one on the outside panel had tripped and I reset them. However, the lights failed to come on. I looked again but could see no other reason why they had not come on. My poor befuddled brain must have been stuttering along in the background because half an hour later, I had a eureka moment. I considered that since the power had been restored after the coming on time, the electronic timer had not triggered the switch on. I went back to the panel but none of the six buttons available to me had 'press this button' written on them, which was most unhelpful. I chose the biggest button and the lights came on. Whether they will go off again is another matter and I was not intending to wait until midnight to find out.

Dear reader, we shall all have to spend the night in suspense. To be continued ... same time (a little earlier, in fact as the shop is open), same channel tomorrow.

December 20<sup>th</sup> – Friday

At least the wind had moderated by the time I gathered myself this morning. My gathering was rather more in earnest than any previous days because we had a slew of deliveries coming during the morning. Pasties (sorry, MS) for one had to be met as they needed to be transferred into the fridge and the freezer straight away. Two of the deliveries could go into our box outside if I missed them, which I duly did for one reason or other.

Just when I needed her first walk of the day to be out of the way early, ABH decided that she would lie in this morning. That did not stop her from waking me up first at the usual time but when I got up, she went back to sleep again. The eventual time

she chose was right in the middle of pasty delivery time but thankfully we were back well before the van arrived.

The rain, not that I was expecting it, arrived just as we set out around the block. The viciousness of the wind might have gone but there was enough to drive the cold rain in sideways. This did not give ABH the impetus to get a move on that I might have thought it would, and she sniffed and procrastinated for the entire length of the shower. Because it rather caught me off guard, I was wearing my flannel shorts that soak up the rain as effectively as a sponge. How marvellous.

The far end of The Cove suffered power outages during the afternoon yesterday. We and our neighbour are the last two properties on a different segment of the supply that was unaffected. It did, however, affect the barrier across the RNLI car park entrance. It seems to be constructed of the least resilient set of materials known to man and has variously fallen apart in light winds and stops altogether at the slightest hiccup in the power supply. It also does not recover well.

Consequently, the truck spent the night out on the street, and it was a stroke of luck that I met with the station mechanic when I went to try and fix the thing. He beat me to it, which was as well because he would have a better idea than I on how it might be fixed, and we both managed to get inside. The one other resident inside the area could not leave for work because the barrier was set shut. By the time I got back to the shop, I thought to start work while I waited for the pasties to arrive which they did ten minutes later.

I spent the rest of the morning and into the afternoon, dispersing the deliveries to the shelves and clearing things away to the store room. I now cannot move in the back half of the store room and will have to shift things out of the way if we have a sudden run on hooded sweatshirts or soft drinks. On the subject of the latter, we had a couple of cases of price marked cans that we purchased as donations to the village get together than was planned at the latter part of the summer. It was postponed due to poor weather. I am not sure how long 'postponement' is before it becomes 'cancelled', but I thought that we had better use the drinks before they went out of date.

I think that nearly everything is tickety boo for Monday – provided that I remember to order the pasties and the dairy on Sunday. On reflection, I will have to order the pasties on Saturday because I will be at the range at the appointed time on Sunday. It crossed my mind that if it looks busy on Saturday, I would have the option to open on Sunday, provided I brought forward the dairy order. It would mean missing the Christmas shoot, but needs must and all that. Later, on reflection, the wind forecast for Sunday is severe. I will have to bring the newspaper box in and the ball stand and outside display would have to remain indoors and it would make for a very crowded shop. Perhaps not, then.

ABH had been reluctant to move since her last trip out. She spent most of the afternoon curled up next to Mother. I could hardly blame her as the weather was atrocious and I was certainly not looking forward to taking her out in it. That was disappointing as it was the last chance of a proper stank before the shop closed again in the new year.

Then, just after three o'clock and a particularly heavy downpour, the skies cleared to blue from the west. The timing could have been better but I grabbed the opportunity along with my hat, coat and boots and coaxed ABH from her comfy spot alongside 'Nanny'. We struck out up Mayon Cliff with the sunset not far off but with plenty of time before we lost any light. Well, that said, it took the best part of half an hour to get three quarters of the way up the cliff as after rain, smelly things apparently are much more alluring than before. When we eventually got that far, we spotted a neighbour walking his dog who descended the cliff behind us. It would have been rude not to say hello, so we reversed back down the cliff for a chat.

The breeze was evident as it had been all day but not sufficient to make walking difficult. That was until we got to the top of the cliff and walked on towards Maen Castle. I have long known that the wind channels up the cliff above Irish Lady, just past the lookout at the top of Pedn-men-du. It is the same problem I think they have at Gwennap Head that makes it the windiest place in the universe. Certainly, today the effect was very evident as we walked across the top of the incline, it made progress tricky to say the least particularly for a chap encumbered with a dickie knee and errant hound tugging at her lead.

Given our tardy departure, we cut across to the cycle path at the first exit and made our way back. It is still a decent stank for a little girl with short legs, especially one who was clearly feeling a bit weary to start with. After the dirty weather of most of the day, the late afternoon clear sky made it a refreshing and pleasant walk.

It was definitely a coup de grâce for ABH who refused, point blank, an after tea walk around the block and still needed some cajoling when I wanted to take her out last thing too. Suggesting that she would now have a good night's sleep without disturbing us is just pure fantasy, so I will keep my trap shut and fingers crossed.

December 19<sup>th</sup> – Thursday

Well, I was not expecting that. Not surprising, really, when I do not look at the forecast often but even then, the wind that ramped up sometime during the night, is normally hyped and trumpeted across the media in bold print to try and scare us all. It was hard to miss after ABH woke me a couple of times during the night. It was less howling in the eaves as moaning in the wires above us.

I had a look at the weather stations when I got up to see what the scores on the doors were. Land's End is now broken and Gwennap Head, windiest place in the universe, is still not recording windspeed. That only left St Ives and to be fair it was in

the firing line for a brisk northwesterly draught. When ABH and I stepped out I think we could concur that it was at least 50 miles per hour whipping across the Harbour car park to slap us around the face a few times. It was funnelling down Coastguard Row and felt a bit more severe, especially when it introduced some sharp and pointy rain that stung my legs and cheeks (on my face). If anything was to inject a little vigour into our morning, that was a pretty good shot.

The windspeed appeared to be sustained well into the afternoon. I noticed also that the temperature had dropped like a stone last night. The windchill reading at St Ives said it was three degrees but out on the beach later in the morning, it felt a lot colder. The weed is still there at the lower reaches of the beach but clearing at the top half. It was still not a beach to run around on, although ABH had a bit of a chase with a large Weimaraner who was taking no notice of her. We did not stay for long. As soon as ABH decided to mooch about a bit I whisked her off around the block just to keep moving.

I almost missed the deadline for pasties (sorry, MS) before we went out. I needed to place the order for the Christmas shoot up at the range this weekend. There was not enough for a delivery, so I ordered in some frozen pasties for next week. I suspect that sales will be a bit hit and miss, and I might have to supplement or replace volumes. When we came back, I headed down to the shop again to put some of the drinks away in the chiller. I am sure if I had planned the opening I could have done everything in a day, but there was no real harm in doing it piecemeal. While I was down there, I also made a list of all the other things we would need from local suppliers which I will order in for Friday, so I am not pressed on Monday morning. The dairy will be the only thing I have to worry about then.

So pleased was I with such an advanced state of planning, I decided that a small zizz was in order before I took ABH on a stank. The Missus had gone shopping, so the little girl was quiet for a while. She does like to curl up on a lap when we get to zizz time, but I had elected to sit in my chair in front of the computer. This will be why, just as I was dozing off, she reminded me of her predilection by jumping at me repeatedly. I had to relocate and start again.

It must have been this that made me only wake half an hour after the time I had thought to set out. It was not a huge issue but did mean missing a cup of tea. I think that might have been useful on a day when the wind was still banging in from the northwest bringing its chill with it. Nevertheless, it was a grand stank up the back of the beach to The Valley and down onto the beach from there. We were warned of showers in the afternoon, but they did not materialise.

We met a few other dogs on the way back down the beach but there was not much fun to be had with them. She studiously avoided a back half of a juvenile seal rotting on the beach below the tide line. It was clearly mobile and did not smell at all but did not exactly make for a visual feast with stormy wind-blown seas as the backdrop. We also met a neighbour from up the hill who was much more pleasing on the eye, and



we spoke about shop opening. This was much less pleasing as she was surprised that we were not opening at the weekend because she had heard that everyone would be arriving on Friday. It is too late to change but I can now fret about it all the way until Monday when we will open.

She also casually threw in that she had heard another storm was on the way, this time sporting 80 miles per hour winds. When I got home, I had a look at the synoptic chart for the coming few days. There was no storm mentioned but the northwesterlies were set to run and run with a couple of days respite when they bent a little to the west. Sunday looks particularly raucous and likely to blow the pasties out of our hands up at the range if we are not careful.

The wind seemed to moderate later in the evening. Mother had arrived back for a surprise visit, coming back with the Missus after her shopping trip. They went home while I took ABH around the block. There was still a bit of wind to knock us about a bit and the rain that was expected midway through the afternoon eventually arrived. There was nothing much to it and I was wearing waterproofs, so it mattered not a jot anyway – to me at least. ABH did not seem that bothered by it either, although we did not discuss it.

She was a bit more animated during the evening, so I entertained her while the Missus belatedly made out Christmas cards. I will spend the morning sticking on stamps to meet the deadline. Either that or I will post them in drawer, after all, it is the thought that counts.

On that score, thank you to all of you who have sent cards to us at the shop and thank you too for not putting on a return address. That was most thoughtful of you. Rest assured, we wish you as many reciprocal good tidings as you sent us.

December 18<sup>th</sup> – Wednesday

What a rotten day. We started out gloomy and a bit damp and ended up gloomy, wet and mizzly with some heavy rain thrown in from time to time. Its only saving grace was that it was relatively mild for the time of year.

Once again it was slightly colder in the gymnasium than outside but given that we were in double figures all day, it did not matter too much. I had no excuse for my dismal performance today however hard I tried to think of one. I consoled myself that my ultra slow pulse did rise to the occasion for a while, I panted some and broke into a bit of a sweat, which was mainly to do with thinking about the bill for the cash and carry that will become due on Christmas Eve. Happy bleddy Christmas.

As usual I took ABH down to the beach after I came back. Just before, I managed to squeeze in sending a few Christmas cards on the last day second class postage was likely to arrive roughly on time. If you find that Christmas has come and gone and the Christmas card you were expecting from a grumpy shopkeeper has not arrived, give

it a couple of weeks. It still will not arrive because in all likelihood I did not send one but at least you will have had a couple of weeks of excited expectation.

The Harbour beach was almost completely covered with oar weed ranging from a few inches to a few feet deep. It does not make a great deal of difference to ABH, it just slows her down a bit. However, she was at first distracted by a group of cold water swimmers gathered at the bottom of the wharf for a group photograph, which she duly photo-bombed. She has no shame. Incidentally, my clever word processor suggests that “cold water swimmer” should be “cold-water swimmers”. I would say that both were probably true.

Clearly, there was no galivanting on the beach. I had to carefully pick my way around the thin bits or the patches of sand while ABH waded through some of the deep stuff. Actually, to a small, short-legged hound, it was all deep stuff. There was not much fun to be had, especially when she started eating the seaweed. I could see that running and running, so I decided on a walk around the block – again. We did the same a little later, too as I saw no future in venturing further in the rain. It would have been useful to take her on a proper stank because she was full of beans last night. I concluded that would be no fun for either of us, so we shall just have to suffer the cabin fevered mutt again tonight.

I was mindful that time presses on and there was a small cash and carry delivery that needed to be dispersed to the shelves down in the shop. As soon as we returned from our second walk, I left the girl in the company of the Missus and headed down the shop.

It took most of the rest of the afternoon as there was still quite a bit of decorations detritus scattered about the shop floor. As I was about to go down, the Missus handed me a bag of even more. Each year, the Missus buys more decorations of one sort or another and at the end of the season, they are taken down and carted up to The Farm. What I have noticed is that nothing is ever thrown away. Surely some of it will never get used again unless the Missus is working towards a decorations magnum opus that will see The Cove from Carn Olva to Pedn-men-du covered in tinsel and fairy lights. I have suggested that we might want to review the decoration situation at the end of the season before I have to consider a larger barn – brave ain't I?

ABH surprisingly slept right through the evening. The Missus occupied herself completing the end of quarter invoices that I will have to run into town tomorrow and I read to the end of my book. ABH was still sleeping when it came to bedtime, and I had to disturb her to take her out for a last walk. Disturbing the girl if she is sleeping requires nerves of steel as she kicks and screams and spits fire. The same is true of ABH, so I carefully tempted her out with the promise of beef, which mercifully worked. It also had stopped raining. Must be my lucky day.

December 17<sup>th</sup> – Tuesday

ABH did not want to get up at all this morning, which was a bit of an irritation because I was in a bit of a hurry. She popped out of the bedroom long enough to have me kitted up to go out and when I was ready, promptly went back to bed again. She is a properly little comedian.

I left her to it, completed the morning chores and finished my tea, which I would not otherwise have done, and got ready to go on my big adventure. Happily, she decided to make an appearance just at the right moment and I took her around the block in a bit of a hurry.

As you may recall, dear reader, I had booked my slot at the Household Waste Recycling Centre where they would brook no delay and also booked a collection at the cash and carry where they probably could not care less what time I arrived, as long as I did. First, though, I had to go up to The Farm to pick up the additional bits that we wanted to tip and then go via St Buryan to pick up Mother who loves a good trip to a tip. Sorry, I would have used Household Waste Recycling Centre, but I could not give up 'trip to a tip', now could I. We had left plenty of time and despite a bit of traffic we were on track to be fifteen minutes early at the Household Waste Recycling Centre gate.

I wondered if we might be made to wait on the equivalent of the naughty step. It crossed my mind that the much maligned council had built a special spot where recalcitrant tippers were made to wait. It would be a place where parents would point fingers to show small children what naughty people looked like, rotten fruit could be thrown and they would be made to feel suitably feeble and hopefully, penitent.

As it happened, the very bored looking person standing by the gate checking off registration plates on a tablet computer and clipping the tickets of those people, like us, in borderline commercial looking vehicles, waved us through without a thought. In fact, he asked that I hurry up putting away my clipped ticket as there was another tipper waiting behind me. We did not have very much to tip and were very quick. We would have had slightly more had I remembered to bring my bulky but malfunctioning electric blanket. I could have kicked myself as I will now have to find somewhere for it until the next time I forget it.

We advanced to the A30 again and headed towards Pool where the cash and carry is, slightly east of Camborne. Last time I came this way, my playful satellite navigation system thought it a jolly wheeze to send me through the narrow and winding streets of Camborne instead of off at the next junction. I suspect a case of Karma or what we might call natural justice. This time around, I made sure that I had looked at a good old-fashioned map, albeit on a not so old-fashioned computer screen, to make sure that I knew where I was going. I take it that fate had not quite yet finished with me because an incident further up the A30 closed the road and we were forced to detour through Camborne once again along with all the other east bound traffic.

The cash and carry had everything ready for us by the time we got there. The rain, did I not mention that it had started raining, rather kindly held off until I had loaded the truck. There was not a great deal to load, just a few cases of beer and other essentials and we were on our way. We were able to return on the main road, which was something of a relief; I am not sure I could cope with having my nose rubbed into Camborne twice in the same journey.

I also could not cope with unloading the truck into the shop without first having a reviving cup of tea. Before I did that, I had to take ABH around the block for a run and since it was still raining a bit, had to slip into some waterproof gear. It was only then that I was able to put up my feet for a few minutes and have the cup of tea I would have had after my breakfast had I not been so pressed for time.

Eventually, I stirred myself enough to go downstairs to unload the truck which did not take very long. I left it piled up in the store room to be dispersed probably tomorrow if I could stir myself again two days in a row. Instead, I unpacked one of the boxes of hessian tote bags that I rescued from the barn. I had suggested that these be put in airtight boxes against the damp up there, but this had been left for one reason or another. When I collected them shortly after we closed, they were starting to smell a little fausty, so I got there just in time. What I had not considered was their attractiveness to mice and as I decanted them into the container, I had to throw out eight bags that had been chewed. The other box is not broken, so should be mouse free.

I returned to doing very little while the Missus, who started to rearrange the living room decorations when I went downstairs, continued. She wanted the lights around the room's edges to line the pelmet – which runs horizontally around the room where the steel girders run. It looks very effective, if very blue, and thankfully does not flash, which would eventually bring on madness.

When it came to the corner of the room where I was sitting, I decided it might be politic to run ABH around and to get out of harms way. Rather cleverly, we managed to choose the exact time the rain came in with utter vengeance but only after we had set out. I knew it was coming, perhaps not with that ferocity, and was wearing full metal jacket waterproofs. ABH was not and was very unhappy about that and she made it very clear by not only refusing to go any further but dragging me back in the direction of home.

Happily, the heavy rain did not rematerialise but it remained mizzly for the rest of the evening, sometimes quite heavily. Even the last bastion of brightness of the day, emptying the Memory Tree cash box was a disappointment; it was empty. We shall hold out for better tomorrow.

December 16<sup>th</sup> – Monday

It would be really good if we could manage time a lot more flexibly. For example, I could have done with some more hours today in which to get things done. Obviously, time, like money, cannot be imagined out of nothing – unless you are a government - it must come from somewhere. I would simply move it from a day when I had far too much of the stuff. Of course, there would be a danger of over-borrowing and not putting back, so only very careful people should be allowed to do it.

I was even out of bed reasonably early, to my credit. Sadly, I have been very good since the shop closed at frittering away such advantages by allowing myself to be distracted. Consequently, having completed my morning chores and taken ABH for a spin down on the Harbour beach, I was late in getting myself to the gymnasium.

I was probably later coming back, too, because a day at the range does wear me out a bit. My time on the rowing machine was not one to be admired, although I did finish the whole 5,000 metres and not too far out of time that it was an embarrassment. Perhaps I should publish my fastest and slowest acceptable times in The Diary. If I was too shy to admit what time I achieved, you would know how embarrassing it actually was, dear reader. On reflection, I will keep my times to myself in case they are embarrassing to start with.

The long and the short of all that was I was late for everything else. I was late going downstairs to check what the toilet roll situation was and consequently I was late finishing the cash and carry order. There were some dependencies involved as to when I could book the collection. First, I needed to see when our vintner was open so that I could collect a wine order. This would impact on when I was able to book a slot at the Household Waste Recycling Centre, which in turn would restrict when I could book my cash and carry collection time.

The vintner is usually quite good at responding quickly and it soon became apparent that we would need to rely on a delivery from them as the only time they were available for a collection was early each morning. We agreed that they would deliver, so that was one complication out of the way. I went ahead and booked the Household Waste Recycling Centre slot after making sure that there was some flexibility with collection times at the cash and carry, which there was. Everything is booked for tomorrow and if I thought I was short of time today, tomorrow will be even worse.

As explained yesterday, I have nearly run out of ammunition for my .22 guns. There is another .22 shoot this weekend and therefore I needed to replenish my supplies. Being no time like the present, I thought that I would get the task out of the way as there will be deliveries later on in the week, I would have to be present for. The journey out to Helston is probably the least pleasant journey in Cornwall thanks to the multiple speed restrictions of different types along the way. One minute you are travelling at 60 miles per hour, then 30 miles per hour for a while, up to 40 and back down to 30 and returning to 60 miles per hour for an impossibly short distance before being sent back to 30 miles per hour again. Several of the villages have reactive

speed signs and these are of different types, just to keep it interesting. One even records your number plate and shows it to you on a subsequent sign 50 meters down the road, in an effort to emulate an average speed camera.

There are three really annoying ones that are inexplicably placed too close to the point where 60 miles per hour becomes 30. The sign reacts way too early to the advancing vehicle even while it is legitimately in the faster speed zone. It lends an air of injustice to the system and makes the driver bitterly resentful driving through the village. Alright, maybe just the one resentful driver, then.

Other than the irritation and resentment, the journey was without issue. I bought my ammunition and returned home only just remembering in time to buy a big can of spray oil. I bought one of these soon after joining the club and acquiring my own guns. That was nine years ago. It is either particularly economic oil or I do not use enough.

It was near four o'clock by the time I got back. This did not leave much time to take ABH for a stank up the hill before we were benighted. The beach out of bounds because of the current timing of the tide, which might have been a better option. I quickly unloaded the truck and put it away and climbed into my walking gear. I spent five minutes looking for my jacket before I left it in the truck, so we had to collect it on the way.

There is no such thing as a quick walk with ABH, so I elected to do the shortened version of the Mayon Cliff walk which is cutting back to the cycle path at the first exit. It is still a reasonable walk, quite possibly a little longer than a mile but there is less up hill and down dale and less rock and mud jumping. It was getting gloomy before we went but we were not hampered at all by the lack of light as it hardly changed at all during the walk. The Christmas lights were on as we descended Stone Chair Lane, which is pleasant under foot now that the tarmac is down.

The Missus made a start on the last big invoice inputting session of this financial year. She did not get very far as something had changed in the system that made us suspect something was wrong. We have spent time setting up the system so that each supplier's page comes up with a template so that the various categories that we have to split them into, such as tobacco and confectionery, are already there on the page. When we looked after tea, they had all gone. This is another thing I will need to sort out tomorrow in a day that was already looking pretty impossible.

If I could just borrow a few hours from the next day, I could stop worrying.

December 15<sup>th</sup> – Sunday

I do not think any of us would have chosen today to stand out on a West Cornwall hillside and knock over metal plates and put holes in paper targets with a .22 calibre

gun. We were there, nonetheless, twelve of us which is somewhere short of a usual .22 day. Others clearly had more sense.

It was just about light enough to let ABH loose on the Harbour beach amongst the weed a little way into the morning. There were now a few geet piles of weed around the bottom of the western slip all about four feet high. Conveniently, they had left a passage between them that you can walk through without going around. We did not hang about this morning because although I was early getting up, ABH was very late.

At that time the weather seemed reasonable in The Cove. I did note a cloud or two of mizzle floating through at the far side of the bay and the ground on our side was wet, so we must have had some of it here earlier. It was clearer as we drove up the hill that the mist was thicker towards the moors but it was distinctly patchy, with some areas completely clear. As we might expect, Carn Grean, on which the range sits, was shrouded in mist as was the airport but the land between was clear.

We spent the day being swept with clouds of mizzle that came and went at irregular intervals. The wet bits were quite wet, but the breeze was very slight, which was some advantage. The ambient temperature was a little higher than it had been the previous week, and it was largely dry to start with, so I shed my waterproof coat for my shooting jacket. As the day went on the frequent getting damp between the dry patches meant the cold was seeping through and by the end of the day, I was quite chilly despite the running around. We fewer shooters, we tend to move around a bit more.

Nevertheless, it was a most enjoyable day out. During December, the normal course of monthly shooting is abandoned because of the disruption of Christmas to the schedule. The range planner therefore has resorted to much more .22 shooting than normal. My ammunition reserves were already quite low and with another use of .22 calibre for the Christmas fun shoot, I will have to go and buy some more before next week.

We finished a little earlier than usual. It was still mizzly when we drove home, perhaps a little more widespread than when we left in the morning. It was when the Missus noticed that the low fuel light had illuminated on the dashboard. This usually flashes at first depending on the vehicle's attitude – usually belligerent and uncaring – but after a while goes solid when the amount of fuel left in the tank is low irrespective of the gradient of the surface it is on. Since it was now a solid light, I surmised it had been short of fuel for a while. The Missus had gone shopping a couple of days ago at Tesmorbury's where fuel can be purchased. She did buy quite a lot when she was there so perhaps there was no room left in the truck to squeeze the fuel in.

There is a reasonably ancient computer in our less than modern truck that shows the range available given the average fuel use that it has calculated. This suggested that

we had 50 miles of driving in the average sort of way before we ran out. The Missus was happy to believe this and recommended that we refuel tomorrow. I have worked with computers for 45 years and have learnt not to trust the beggers, so I let her off at home and travelled into town to refuel before the Missus took Mother home later.

During the journey, the onboard computer went from showing 50 miles of available driving to 40 miles in the blink of an eye, which was not comforting at all. I noted that having fill the truck to capacity at the petrol station, we had seven litres of fuel left. Using what little arithmetic mental agility I have left I calculated that perhaps the 40 miles of range that the computer eventually settled upon was probably reasonably accurate and if anything was understated. I still do not think that I would rely upon it but there again I would probably refuel the truck when I see it has arrived at quarter full. I am uncomfortable living on the edge.

The misty mizzle continued all the way through to the end of the day. I had ventured out after tea while the Missus took Mother home and again at last knockings and got wet both times. This does not lend much hope for getting things done at The Farm but for now, all activity is focused on the shop opening again.

December 14<sup>th</sup> – Saturday

All change on the weather front. We have lost our high pressure to the south and consequently the chilly east winds. Instead, we have chilly west winds bringing some wet with it.

After I had been out with the little girl first thing, I had to check the Land's End weather station. I had heard that along with the westerlies, the temperature would increase. According to Land's End it had, by a couple of degrees. My knees need to tell my brain that because it was fair freezing down on the beach this morning.

I had to have a little snigger after all that tractor work clearing the weed to the edges. The beach this morning was strewn with the stuff when we went down to the Harbour. In fact, it was worse than before and there is a geet pile of it at the bottom of the western slip that the tractor would need to clear before it could get down. There were no boats going out today. The heavy ground sea we had yesterday had vanished by the wind had introduced some serious chop to the bay and out beyond.

The rain, such as it was, came later in the day. There were a few light showers, and we missed them all. I had taken ABH out for a second time in the later morning to cavort on the beach, picking our way across the weed on the lighter densities – well, I was, ABH was charging around regardless, sinking up to her belly at times. Later in the piece, she found a mainly deflated balloon that gave her some immense pleasure and entertainment as she chased it with the wind.

It was that sort of day when nothing much was to be done and nothing much happened. Having mainly arranged she shop sufficiently that we could open again, I



had to prepare the list of things I would need to collect from the cash and carry. The list is not extensive, but there are items that we might consider as essential to have on the shelf, such as tinned tomatoes. It will be essentials only, as we are only open for a week and want to maximise returns for as little outlay as we can manage.

We do not pander to the season, so there will be no mini Christmas cakes or mince pies – although in the past we have provided mince pies and even mulled wine as complementary to visitors. Santy's playing hardball this Christmas and there will be no such largesse – unless the Missus gets to hear about it. No, this year customers will be lucky to get a free Ho, Ho, Ho and a Christmas smile from this grumpy shopkeeper.

Having finished the shopping list in the shop and discovered a few more shelves and items affected by our sink leak earlier in the year, I took ABH out again. Luckily, it had not long stopped raining and it was, perhaps, not quite as chilly as it was earlier. We walked down to the The Beach car park for a change of scenery and met one of the Very Excellent Shore Crew moving into a newly vacated property down there. His small van was chock full of furniture, and I told him but for having ABH in tow and the fact that I had to shampoo the goldfish later I would have lent a hand. I told him that I was, of course, joking and if he needed a hand to drop me a message and I would send the Missus down straightaway.

The rest of the afternoon and into the evening descended even further into apathy. The Missus had spent some hours in the kitchen after she had dropped Mother home blanching vegetables, cooking a heap of mushrooms – I did not question why – and preparing tea. For my part, I placed the order on the cash and carry website and will pick it up next week, along with taking some items to the Household Waste Recycling Centre and picking up some wine from our supplier who is also out that way. Given that I have to book a time at the Household Waste Recycling Centre, I will have to go there first as it will be impossible to meet the time window else.

I did not take ABH for an extended walk today and she played up for the entire afternoon. Whether there was any cause and effect there I cannot say. She will not get one tomorrow, either, as I will be shooting, so perhaps I might determine better then. I am quite weary when I return from shooting, so I do hope it was a once off.

December 13<sup>th</sup> – Friday

Two late mornings in a row was a bit too much to hope for, it seems. I was up a little ahead of what might have been thought as the usual time and in the pitch dark of a chilly late autumnal morning. She promptly went back to bed again, the little minx.

We did arrive on the Harbour beach in the half light but I still needed to use my head torch to see into the corners. There was a fair amount of weed about despite the bigger tides which we had to pick our way through. We did not tarry long on this occasion.

The Missus had an appointment to have her nails clipped. I thought that meant taking ABH but clearly, I did not hear right. She came back having had a French polish, but I am not altogether sure that was it either but anyway, she left the dog behind. Since Mother was here to look after ABH, I took myself off to the gymnasium where there was no mistaking that I enjoyed a blistering session. It was highly necessary too, as inside the hut with a tin roof it was colder than the outside for the first time this end of the year.

It has become routine that I take ABH out as soon as I return. She is usually waiting for me and gives me no quarter until I have changed out of my plimsols. With high water some way off, there was plenty of beach to cavort on. Since our first visit the Harbour tractor had been at work clearing the weed from the launch route of the fishing punts. That man has far too much time on his hands as every inch of the beach had tractor tyre marks on it and all the weed was either lined up against the Harbour wall or in a big pile by the Lifeboat slipways. The beach itself looked like remarkably like a facsimile of The Somme. The tide will do as it wills when it returns in the afternoon but I cannot help but think the work was an exercise in futility.

Despite the carnage, we had a splendid time. A neighbour and regular to the beach had his two Jack Russells with him. We were joined shortly after by a couple of visitors and their two dogs of around the same stamp and mayhem ensued for a short while. Thankfully, they all got along reasonably well and there was much running about and chasing, which is just the ticket for ABH who had erstwhile just been chewing on a stick of seaweed.

I returned to a very naughty breakfast. It was a bit spur of the moment, but I fried some bacon in butter and fried some bread in the resulting juice and had a fried bacon sandwich. My bloods results, which I can look up on the NHS app now, tell me that my cholesterol level allows such naughtiness from time to time, but I am rather afraid my blistering session at the gymnasium was utterly wasted.

It might have been out of guilt but I rather suspect that it was more because I enjoyed it so much last time, I took ABH up the cliff in the middle of the afternoon. It took most of the time taken on the whole journey to get to the turn off halfway to Land's End. ABH sniffed and ran back down the path constantly and we struggled to make headway. We were not in any hurry, which was as well, because the trip took us an age. I say it as if I cared, which I did not. We descended into the valley of deathly quiet and it stayed that way almost until the end of the cycle path. It seems that Whitesand Bay is a very noisy place at present.

Even as we passed the Harbour on our way out, the swell was sending big waves over the Harbour wall. It was rather sudden and caught me by surprise. Earlier, when we were on the beach, I was slowly aware of a great roaring in my ear 'oles. It was the sort of background noise that you become suddenly aware of when you stop concentrating on other things and it made me look up to see where it was coming

from. Over on the other side of the bay, big waves were rushing in on Gwenver, tossing plumes of spray into the air and leaping up on Aire Point. The big beach at the time seemed relatively unscathed by such activity.

When we advanced slowly up Mayon Cliff on our walk later, the large swell in the bay was a bit more evident. It was the sort of swell that seemed almost invisible in the bay but at the margins was unmistakable. White water dashing up the cliffs at Aire Point and big waves curling in slow motion over Cowloe. Two punts were out at sea, and I suspect they would have had a bit of a time of it coming back to the Harbour, which they did while we were out.

I had expected waves to be leaping up on Longships lighthouse, but it seemed quite calm in Gamper Bay. The only evidence of any violence was the occasional wave leaping into the air fifty feet at Dr Syntax Head. It was odd to see the swell isolated like that and I am sure I could study for years and still not understand it.

There was much activity in the flat when I returned. Mother and the Missus were preparing the Christmas vegetables that the Coldstream Guards will be enjoying with us come the day. There was a huge pot of them sitting waiting to be blanched and frozen in readiness. I am sure it saves much time and effort on the day itself but fair near wrenched my back carrying the pot into the kitchen.

The other preparation than ensued afterwards was the Missus getting ready for the Lifeboat station Christmas party. She had invested some of our funds in flowers for each of the lady attendees – the boys were getting beer – and was busy splitting them into bouquets. There was also the pre-payments for the dinner that needed refunding. We had to change venue at the last minute to the OS that was £10 cheaper than at Land's End and all the money had to be returned to various crew and couples. Lastly, there was the getting ready of the Missus to be done.

The Missus went on ahead to pay for the food and make sure everything was as it should be. It only takes a few minutes for me to make myself beautiful, of course, so I took ABH around the block before I followed the Missus down. Naturally, the day being dry throughout, a line of showers arrived just at the time we ventured out.

We took over the restaurant and filled it to capacity. It was a wholly enjoyable evening but sadly the funds for beer ran out after just one round. Every so often the OS has the grand plan that it wants to embrace the local community and see the Lifeboat crew attending more regularly. Crew are offered a discount. I had thought that this offer was still running, but there was no evidence of it on the night. Drinks at the venue are more expensive than in the big city, so it is little wonder our not inconsiderable kitty expired so quickly.

Nevertheless, the event was carried off very well. The staff did a marvellous job of feeding us and delivery drinks to the tables. Space was tight and it would have been mayhem if everyone went to the bar to get their own. The hot and cold buffet we

were offered turned out to be just hot and both with meat. The staff did well to accommodate vegetarian requests on the night, but it would have been better to know in advance. Those were the only two criticisms on a night that was well organised, especially at short notice, and well executed by the OS.

I retired relatively early to relieve Mother of her duties looking after ABH and to relieve ABH, too. It had stopped raining after the shower blew through and it was a relatively pleasant night to have a last run out. As I came back down the road, the Christmas lights at the Lifeboat end looked spectacular. The Missus stayed until the end of proceedings to make sure everyone went home, and we went to bed well past my bedtime. I shall not be worth a button in the morning.

December 12<sup>th</sup> – Thursday

It seemed to have been raining at some point during the night and there was still damp in the air. It was no colder than yesterday but the wet in the air seemed to make it so and it hung around all day.

We were that late this morning getting out that it was full daylight when we went. I had left it as late as I could and still I found ABH slacking behind me. With the shop not open it does not matter very much and I let her lead, erm, from behind. If she is comfortable going out later, she is welcome.

There was no pressing need to do very much during the morning. One thing I needed to do was to check the bottom of the slipway ahead of the planned training launch today. The tide was out so it was the only opportunity I had today. Whoever is down there tonight – and it will not be me - will be on the rocks as we head into spring tides. The grating seemed to be free of slippery weed, which was helpful, but it will be pitch dark down there later and head torches will be required.

I also needed to take the things that were in the way in the shop up to The Farm. I did not feel there was a need to rush until I remembered that the Missus needed to go shopping. It was only really when I was taking ABH around for the second time of the day that I remembered, otherwise I would have just taken her up to The Farm with me.

Fate had clearly stepped in because just at the end of Coastguard Row, I hopped upon our neighbour from up the hill. She had plans to drive herself up to the shop up in the village because Tesmorburys had let her down. I told her that they always disappoint me too and, as luck would have it, I was heading that way and that I would take her. She replied that it did not seem very lucky to her. So, I explained that we should avoid having octogenarians on the road at all costs, and I was doing my bit for humanity.

It was not until she was safely locked into the truck that I explained we would have to go to The Farm as well. I told her to view it as an outing and that she would get to

enjoy it, eventually, and one day look back on it as a jolly jape. She took an aged in the shop at the top, which I suspect was revenge. Actually, I thought that she may have asked if they had a back door and a number of a taxi to take her home. She must have found some nerve – or they did not have a back door - because she came out and let me lock her in the truck again.

Our barn owl put in an appearance for her when we arrived at The Farm. I explained what we had been trying to do up there before the building work got in the way last year. We will have to pull our socks up after Christmas as there is a lot of work to do. I think our neighbour enjoyed the outing, but I may still have a call from Age Concern later and might have to leave the country for one without an extradition treaty.

The Missus left for shopping almost as soon as I got back. I cannot remember what time that was exactly, but it was near dark when she got back with Mother in tow. Mother is staying with us for a couple of nights as she will be looking after ABH on Friday night while the Missus and I head to the Lifeboat station Christmas party, which will obviously be a wizard prang.

I helped with hauling up the not inconsiderable haul of shopping. I was informed that it was all the vegetables for Christmas, so I asked which regiment she had also invited because I thought that it was just going to be the three of us this year. There were also even more Christmas decorations and bags of flowers, so I am hoping it is a wedding. I did not ask about the flowers lest it be for my sending off party.

One of our glorious leaders across the road had called for an early meet ahead of launching at quarter to seven o'clock this evening. Both boats launched off into the night with the aid of the very few of us on shore. It is getting to be the time when many have other commitments and some whose work picks up again at this time of year. We then set about preparing the long slipway for a recovery later in the evening.

I took my leave after everything was settled and ran ABH around the block. The cloud was quite broken, and the moon was waxing gibbous and giving off quite a bit of light. It was cold and my breath in the moisture laden air lit up in the headtorch beam and obscure my vision on occasion. I walked the rest of the circuit without breathing so I could see where I was going.

I returned to the station for a chat with the boss man. We are trying to be very diligent with the new training system and I noted that on my last trip out driving the Tooltrak, my head launcher role was not noted on the computer system. Since we are usually tight on numbers, some of us will undertake dual roles, like head launching for the Inshore launch and recovery while also driving the Tooltrak. Also, we regard the head launcher role here as superfluous. It would mean someone standing around in an orange tin hat, scratching his behind, but it is mandated, so we have to have someone qualified nominated in the role. We had a similar issue with the big boat as I had to cover a trainee winch operator and the trainee head

launcher, as the nominal person in charge of both roles. It sounds complicated and it is. Hopefully, common sense will eventually prevail, and the system will adapt to reality instead of the other way around.

As it turned out, I was in the right place for tonight's operation. I was in the eyrie of the warm and comfortable winchroom, which had nothing to do with it being warm and comfortable while it was very cold and dark at the bottom of the slipway, honest gov, and everything to do with being able to view the whole operation at once. On this occasion it paid off as I was able to quickly untangle a tricky issue with the main cable before it became a problem. I could also clearly see, through the gloom at the end of the slip in the boat's powerful deck lights, that it was a textbook recovery with tricky cable issue up the long slipway with a skeleton crew. We are, after all, a very adaptive, very thin, very excellent Shore Crew.

December 11<sup>th</sup> – Wednesday

It was a little less gloomy today, although I did not know that until well after I had taken ABH for a run for the first time this morning. It was not that we were particularly early, but I would have said that the sun was particularly late in arriving. I found myself on the Harbour beach with the tractor down on the waterline, trying to make sure ABH did not end up under it. I keep her on the lead when the tractor is in action, but she does like to dash about and forgets sometimes she is on the lead. I had my headtorch on as well in the gloom so that the tractor knew we were there.

The temperature had not improved much on yesterday, in fact I think we had lost another degree. The breeze was about the same as yesterday and I felt it particularly on my way to the gymnasium. Once again, though, it seemed a little less cold in the hut with a tin roof for which I was very grateful.

I am also grateful that my dickie knee is no longer as dickie as it was when we closed at the end of the season. It is clear that the constant standing up is a problem and if I lived a normal life, I could probably get away with another couple of years before needing to do anything drastic about it. As I live a strange and complicated life that somehow evolved along with acquiring a shop and a farm, I must assume the all clear on the dickie knee front is simply temporary and I should proceed as planned.

Having moaned vociferously over the last two days about failing to get my finger out on the shop preparation front as if it were someone else's fault entirely, I got my finger out on the shop preparation front today. Admittedly, it was into the afternoon after I had concluded my blistering session at the gymnasium, eaten a less than hearty breakfast after failing to notice that I did not have enough left-over chicken left over for a hearty breakfast and procrastinated as long as seemed decent. Alright, I probably pushed the envelope a little on the decency front, but at least I got going in the end.

Strangely, although the floorspace is exactly the same, with the ice cream freezer now in the middle of the shop, there is insufficient space to fit everything in. We also have a plethora of boxes, mainly stuffed into the store room, containing decorations that we would not ordinarily have. We also have two large boxes of canvas carrier bags that I rescued from The Farm.

They were taken up there on the understanding that they would be transferred fairly pronto into somewhat airtight containers to keep the damp getting at them. When the shop closed and I eventually had time to get to The Farm, the canvas bags were still in their cardboard boxes and starting to smell a little fausty. I brought them down to the shop when I collected the decorations and was assured that this time suitable boxes would be found. They are still in their cardboard boxes but having pressed the Missus, one container has been set aside. I think we will need to purchase a couple of those silicon damp protector bags you occasionally find in products susceptible to damp but super-sized ones and the containers alone will not be sufficient to protect them.

I will need to get up to The Farm tomorrow as there is quite a collection of goodies to go up there to get them out of the way. Hopefully I will be able to find a second container and lids for both of them. I will then have to remember to acquire the silicon bags to put in them. I feel an Internet search coming on.

I had already spent some time nosing through the many pages of the Internet for prices of timber and roofing. After a couple of three o'clock in the morning deep thoughts on the subject, I have concluded that repairing the polytunnel at The Farm would be an expensive waste of time. The winds that rip across one of the highest points in the village are unlikely to go away. What we need is an expensive building instead.

Actually, I thought initially that it would be less expensive than a replacement polytunnel until I saw the price of the roofing sheets. The idea would be to erect a wood frame on fencing posts. It would need rafters on which to attach the roofing sheets but the back of it could be entirely timber as could half of the sides. It would serve to let enough light in and keep it sufficiently hot. We could use the door from the polytunnel which are still in reasonable nick.

It is a lot of work but even short of funds, I reckoned we could get most of the frame up before the new season starts given fair weather for a bit. The roofing would need to wait until next winter, unless we could find a supplier daft enough to deliver them up there at the end of the season. Otherwise, they will need to be strapped to the roof rack on the truck and gingerly driven up there. Anyway, a new hair-brained scheme, erm, project is born.

Putting such nonsense aside, it was time to drag ABH out for another run. We really only have a choice of two walks and variations on those, so today it was the beach walk. By the time we went, it was not quite as bright as it had been. As usual,

though, by the time we got to the second half, the sun was starting to sink and was breaking through the thickened cloud. It was chilly, for sure, but the breeze was not much to talk about and above all, it was dry.

ABH seemed to dash through the Coast Path bit as if it had all been sniffed before just a couple of days ago, which of course it had. She had tarried a bit at the outset but soon got into her stride. The one bit that she rushes is the bit that I find most tricky and that is the short descent to the bridge across the stream in the Valley. It is narrow and twisting and I have to watch my step. She obviously knows and does it because she thinks it funny, no doubt.

She had a right good time on the beach even if there was no one to play with. There were only a couple of other people there and they were well ahead of us. There was lots of running around in circles and racing down to the water line on the wet, virgin sand. The tide was coming in, so it must have been very quiet down there today. She found some fishermen's discarded bait which she delighted in rolling over until I kicked her behind then we stood and watched the multi-coloured sky for a bit with the waves crashing on the beach. It reminded me a bit of Hollywood movies at the start or end when the hero is walking along the sand at Malibu with the waves rolling in behind. Alright, maybe that is just me, then.

It became increasingly weedy towards the OS slipway. I had not checked on the way out, but the weed had encroached on the bottom of the slipway and we had to walk through it this time. Before we got there, ABH stopped to sniff at something we had just walked by. It was a fairly fresh dead seal, either an older juvenile or young adult. I called it in when we got home and the very pleasant lady at the Cornwall Wildlife Trust who look after such things asked me if it was obvious where it was. I was about to say that it was but given that I had nearly tripped over it and it was only ABH who drew my attention to it, I reconsidered. She noted it was getting dark soon, and the tide was coming in and told me someone would be out tomorrow for it.

When we got back home, we helped the Missus restore the hanging labels to the Memory Tree. The last lot had blown away during Saturday night's blow and it was only today that I fashioned a more wind proof replacement box for them. Later she put up some more decorations, this time in the flat, so we could revel in the Christmas spirit from the relative comfort of our front room without having to go across the road to do our revelling. ABH helped by chewing the ends off the Christmas tree branches the Missus had collected. We clearly have had enough of Christmas trees after the two across the road.

Obviously, I shall be dressing as Santy and giving away presents to small children when the shop opens just before Christmas.

Wait. Sorry, that was another Hollywood film I was remembering. Will I 'eck as like.

December 10<sup>th</sup> – Tuesday



It could easily have been another day of doing very little. Alright, it was another day of doing very little not helped by a grey sky and a bitter easterly breeze that threatened to freeze the hairs off my knees.

I even got up late and ABH was not helping at all; I had to do it all by myself. That first walk down to the Harbour beach was a real slap around the face and woke me up nicely. ABH once again was interested in whatever was the other side of the slipways. The wind was from that direction so I concluded that there must be something in the air. This was confirmed when she took off under the slipways to have an investigate.

I followed as best I could, but she set off across the rocks like a little mountain goat and left me standing. Calling her has little effect when she has the bit between her teeth, although she is getting better at recall. I stood there a while until I heard her bark a few times. There was nothing much I could do, so I waited for her to come back which she did when I shouted a little louder. It might have been that, or she just might have been coming back anyway. There was something there but even having looked from the railings on the way back home, I could not see anything.

After breakfast – a long time after breakfast – I went down to the shop to sort out a few more things to make the shop a little more ready for opening. If I do a little bit each day, it will be open two weeks after Christmas. I will have to up my game but at the moment it is still possible to put off until tomorrow that which could have been done today.

It was not really part of the work required but I had eventually cleared the box upstairs that was the content of my desk before the work commenced last year. I was brutal and threw away most of it on the basis that if I had not needed it in a year, it was unlikely to be worth keeping. I still need to clear my current desktop to finish the job properly, but that will have to wait until I am inspired or frightfully bored again. In the meanwhile, I had a pile of things that will need to go to the tip, sorry, household waste recycling centre where they will be tipped.

One of those things was a laptop computer that required sanitisation before it left us to rid it of any personal information. I used to take out the hard drive and drill holes through it, which is very effective, but this laptop had a solid state drive, a computer chip. I looked inside the previous laptop I disposed of and could not identify the right chip, or at least could not get to it. I disabled the computer as best I could, but it meant plastic shards flying everywhere. This time around I simply reset the computer via the option in settings and will hope for the best. The data can still be resurrected but you would have to be pretty determined.

Mother arrived with the Missus just as I was finishing off the very little I had done in the shop. It was my signal to go upstairs and do even less for an hour before it was time to take ABH out again. Dark and gloomy it might have been but with the wind

slowly dropping to a slight breeze, albeit a very cold one, it was probably just right for a stank up the cliff. I had not realised just how late I had left it but there was more than enough time before light started to fail even allowing for ABH's propensity to walk double the distance of any given journey. All things being equal and given that we were not in Pennsylvania, I decided that the extended, cutdown walk to Land's End was just the ticket.

I suppose in all honesty, well maybe some honesty ... alright, hardly any honesty at all, I wanted to see what the National Trust team had done to fix the two Coast Path faults I had reported last week. The first is not very far into the walk at Castle Zawn. Here the path was a muddy quagmire completely impassable and necessitated the detour on the de facto path above it. The team had hacked a new channel along the side of the Path lined with rocks on one side and carved a deeper channel across the Path itself leading down into the zawn. They had done something similar to the Path further up where there was a deep pool last week. It was a bit disappointing. The fix will last a little while I am sure but will have cost next to nothing to implement – perhaps a couple of hour's unskilled labour. It had taken two years at least for that to happen for the Castle Zawn bit. Done a little sooner it would have saved the heathland above the path being torn up.

On the approach to the bottom of the hanging valley, I stopped because I was aware of something but was not sure what it was. It took a moment for me to realise that it was the utter silence of the place. There was no longer the rush of the breeze; no waves splashing on any rocks; not a bird singing or any animal moving about; not a blade of grass rustling in the heather. I know I am deaf, but not that bad. I just stopped and listened to it for a minute or two and was worth every second of it.

We met no one on the Coast Path and only one person on the cycle path on the way back. I had set out wearing several layers and little boy trousers to let the air at my legs and was perfectly comfortable after the initial chill wore off. If I had been able to get into my stride, I may have found that I was over-dressed but there was absolutely no hope of that with ABH in tow.

You may have questioned, dear reader, how it was so quiet when I had a nosy little ABH spinning around my ankles. I may not have explained before, but we are in possession of the only ninja dog alive. She moves silently on any surface – except when she is barking, which is rare – and very often at home she can arrive at my feet completely unnoticed. Quite frequently, when I am doing my exercises on the living room floor, the only notification of her arrival is a slight breeze as she wafts her bushy tail past me. Down in the valley of Castle Zawn, she made no noise at all.

We returned home completely refreshed and to a room that felt like a sauna. The heating in our newly insulated front room is more effective, for sure, especially without the draughts through the hardly existent wall we used to have. I suspect it will be impossible to tell just how much less energy we use because of the addition of the solar panels unless I can be bothered to do the arithmetic.

We all drifted into doing some more nothing during the afternoon. I could make up some tales of derring do to fill The Diary pages but even that is a bit of a struggle. It is one of the things in The Cove that during the off season, especially when the weather is dour, not much goes on. I will endeavour to pull my finger out tomorrow – or possibly the day after, maybe.

December 9<sup>th</sup> – Monday

The morning was a morning that inspired nothing at all. The temperature had dropped like a brick at five o'clock in the morning, which is an odd time for it to drop. We had no rain, which was handy and ABH and I made it to the Harbour beach for the first time in a while.

She seemed interested in something under the slipways, but I never did get to find out what. It might have been the devastation caused by the rough seas over the weekend. The sand had been scoured out from under the slipways leaving the rocks exposed. That which had not been scoured out had been blown up onto the wharf, the slipway and the road. I am finding random bits of weed, too, in the oddest of places as we walk around our end of The Cove.

I managed to get to the gymnasium today. I had ducked out of the latter sessions of last week in deference to our visit from the in-laws. I am sure that they would not have minded me going but it seemed better not to. Given the rest that I had I was not surprised that my blistering session was back on form again. It helped that it was not as cold as I expected in the hut with a tin roof but much of the cold today was from wind chill.

After I had come back and settled, everything took the greatest effort to complete. It was not the lack of energy, but the lack of will that was holding me back. Perhaps I should just have accepted that it was one of those days but there were things that needed to be shifted forward, even by just a little bit.

The shop is due to be open again in two weeks and it certainly is not ready for that. I asserted myself to make the greatest effort at starting things off. I moved the newspaper box outside and put the lightweight gazebo back in its cover. Exhausted after those gigantic efforts, I went upstairs to sit down for a while.

Earlier, I had made the effort to contact the much maligned council regarding my missed food waste collection. I know, I know, I should be careful because I have to stand behind the counter in a couple of weeks and should not wear myself out too quickly before then. Casting caution to the wind in that regard, I filled out their online form which asked, very roughly, was it my fault it was not collected. Was I sure I had put it out before seven o'clock; had it been in the usual place; did I use the right container; had the collection actually taken place yet or was I being a little premature; had I perhaps just dreamt that it had not been collected.

I explained – as far as I could on the online form – that the highly trained operatives had indeed breezed through The Cove, had collected all my other recycling but elected to ignore the food waste that was sitting on top of the bin that the recycling was next to. The automated response told me that the contractor would be investigating my case, examining the lorry's CCTV in minute detail and if my story held water, they would send someone along to collect it drecky. As I had placed my report before midday, I should expect someone to collect my missing collection by six o'clock – should I not be lying through my teeth.

The much maligned council's contractor duly arrived a few hours later and dumped my carefully collected and separated food waste into a general waste truck. I may as well have put it in the street bin opposite and at least have saved the carbon of them sending out a truck.

With the wind abating to a degree and the likelihood of rain slim, I decided that it would be a good plan to take ABH for a run. The beach was looking good, although I had left it a little late in the tide, so I elected to walk up the Coast Path at the back of the beach, up through The Valley and back along the beach again. The route was largely unaffected by the recent strong winds but some of the sand had been shifted about in some of the more exposed parts of the Coast Path. The beach below looked resplendent in the softening light of the sinking sun and was nicely framed by the marram grass waving about on the dunes.

I sank into piles of soft sand as we came down from the path and onto the beach. There appeared to be few changes other than some sand blown up the back and the stream coming out from The Valley had forked halfway to the sea. There was a photoshoot in progress as we crossed the stream. I did not recognise the model but there again it could have been the most famous current Vogue model, and I still would not have recognised her – not in her clothes anyway, ahem. They seemed to be semi-professional at least, because there was an assistant photographer with a portable light. There were no make-up artists or the like, so I am guessing this was not top dollar.

Years ago, I had an office on the ground floor of an office block in London that looked out on a large sculpture. It was used one day for a photoshoot with a very alluring young lady in hardly anything at all as the subject. The windows were tinted so they outside could not see in. I tried very hard to ignore proceedings but word travels fast and very soon my office was packed full of young men with their noses pressed against the glass. Obviously, being the decorous chap that I was, I averted my gaze – several times.

Anyway, I digress. Now, where was I. Ah yes, the shape of things on the big beach. Nothing much had changed after the storm and the high seas. There is still the large field of boulders and a shelf of sand at the back of the beach which is what we returned on. Some sand had gone from the bottom of the OS slipway where a big

pile of weed lurked just off the end of it. The tops of the wood posts have been revealed again. These, I am more convinced of than ever, were guides for the launching of the Lifeboat when it was housed in the building that is now the Old Boathouse Stores. They probably also helped keep the channel clear of debris to a certain extent.

ABH was just as keen as I was to get back home and out of the weather. It was not unpleasant, but I think we have all had enough wind for a while. Our subsequent walks, the one after tea and last thing were closer to home but still exposed to the chilly northeast draught. I must try and be a bit more enthusiastic tomorrow or time will catch us out.

December 8<sup>th</sup> – Sunday

I made exactly the wrong decision about leaving the Memory Tree labels out last night. When I looked over in the morning, the table was on its side and the labels were all gone. They represented several hours of work that the Missus and Mother put in, stringing bits of old Lifeboat kit to plywood shapes with fishing line. There are spares, but really not the point. The box and table had been fine the night before in similar windspeeds. I think what upset it was that the cable ties holding the security fence to the railings broke and nudged the weights off the table.

There was not much I could do other than add more cable ties and this time tie down the table too. I left a note for the Missus and headed off to the range. I could not even do that before washing down the truck windows that were thick with layers of salt. It is everywhere and my hands were slick with it after handling the table and the fence.

The wind rather inconveniently went around to the north within an hour of me arriving at the range. It was blowing directly into the firing point all the time we were there, and the temperature was dropping as the day went on. I normally wear a shooting jacket that has big pockets to keep my spare magazines in, but it meant taking off my outer layer, which was the windproof one. I managed without it.

There was a fair number of attendees as .22 rifle shooting is quite popular. The guns are cheaper and readily available as is the ammunition. The bigger calibres require a bit more cash and most people who have them reload their own ammunition which cuts the price in half but is quite a bit of work. We adapted the course of fire to use heavy targets and those that would not get blown over in the wind. Despite the impediments it was a successful morning of shooting.

It preceded the AGM, which is a condition of the club's rules. The secretary had issued a notice telling members that they need not attend if they did not want to. There would be no voting on matters that required a majority such as increase of fees, so only committee members needed to be there. The whole meeting only took

half an hour and since no shooting had been arranged for the afternoon, I came home.

There had been some spots of rain that did not amount to very much when we were up at the range. As I headed home via Mother's so that I could turn on her heating ahead of her return home, the showers became a little more serious. There was a long line of them piling in from the north but at least the wind had start to soften a little. The one advantage of the rain was that it was doing a grand job of clearing away the salt from the windows – and I noted from seeing the salt on one of our skylights, from the solar panels as well.

I took ABH a couple of time during the later afternoon and evening. The wind was still being insufferable even if it was dropping out a little. We avoided the beach and settled for a couple of turns around the block instead. Happily, it had dried out with the line of rain having moved to the west leaving our windows clear to see through again.

Having been lured into a false sense of security, I was not expecting the heavy showers that unkindly fell at the exact time we were due to head out on our last walk. The windows were clean; what did we need more rain for. I tooled up in full metal jacket waterproofs but found that we had inexplicably found a momentary gap in the rain. It just started to come back as we headed up the steps. I fancy that it is some kind of revenge over my unkind comments about forecasters. Perhaps I should be more careful.

December 7<sup>th</sup> – Saturday

It sounded worse than it was overnight. Alright, it was pretty bad too. The wind recorded at Land's End did not quite reach 70 miles per hour. St Ives had it worse with winds just over 80 miles per hour during the morning. The sea, however, was putting on a decent show with a bay full of white water and large waves charging in. Spray was smoking over Pedn-men-du but I do not think that the waves were crashing high enough for any spectacular pictures this time around.

The in-laws made a break for home late in the morning, which was my signal to go and investigate the power problem over at the Lifeboat station. As I suspected, the Lifeboat station breaker had tripped suggesting a problem with the lights man's board. Hopefully, it was just a bit of rain blown into the works and it will be alright from now on.

Although the wind was decreasing bit by bit, it was still pretty strong but with nothing in its way it battered us with impunity. The scene here had brought quite a few storm watchers in to have a geek, and we had traffic heading to the Harbour car park from early in the morning all through the day. ABH was not ever so keen to go exploring, so we kept our trips out to purely functional runs. I think that also she was very worn out from her constant efforts to terrorise the in-law's dog. There was nothing

particularly vicious about it but if she wants a playmate, she will have to learn to be a bit kinder. By the end of the visit, however, they were both getting along reasonably well. At least she got her own bone toy out of it, which she has been nursing ever since.

After the in-laws left it became a de facto day of doing nothing. Even ABH joined in and slept from later morning until the middle of the afternoon. After a brief walk around the block, she went back to sleep again. It is very tiring entertaining visiting hounds it appears.

I took her out on the long walk around the block. I had intended to head to the beach that was safe again after the tide had gone out. Previously, it was a boiling mass and at high water, the Harbour wall disappeared under the onslaught of continuous thumping waves. All the weed had gone and the wind had pretty much instantaneously dried out the sand. As a consequence, the loose sand was being blown around. We had it full in the face as we came around the corner of the Lifeboat station, so it was going to be much worse further down on the beach. We hurried past the top of the slipway and onto the Harbour car park.

The car park had around a dozen cars parked up with some of the visitors enjoying a robust battering from the northwesterly wind while many watched from the comfort of their cars. Even at low water, the spray was smoking off the footings of Pedn-men-du and there were flecks of sea in the air every way you turned. It was a little more sheltered at the back of the car park as we turned up the hill towards Coastguard Row. Here, we were blown along with no real control over the pace we walked at. There was no tarrying at any part of the walk and clearly there was not much to sniff at or what there was could wait for another day.

I had to come back out again after delivering ABH back to her cot. Our big 660 litre commercial bin had decided to take itself for a wander along with our domestic bin that was strapped to it to keep it from doing the same. There used to be an anchor point on the wall at the back of where the commercial bin stands which I have only just remembered. It should not really need it but obviously the wheel brake is no longer working.

We very much battened down hatches and stayed in for the rest of the day. ABH really had worn herself out and did not come alive again until after tea when I gave her a brief run out. It really is uncomfortable and very wearing stepping out into winds push 70 miles per hour again. It was no surprise our foray was brief. We did it again last thing and that was no less brief than the former.

The decorations had stood up well to the onslaught, the trees leaning and sagging a bit against their stays. The tray of labels used to hang messages on the Memory Tree had fallen out of the shelter it normally sits in, so I replaced it when I went to empty the box. I was going to bring it in but thought better of it and placed a big fence weight against the front of it instead.

The lights had all worked again tonight but were swaying alarmingly in the wind. All we can see from our flat windows is the faint glow of them across the street. The windows are all completely frosted with several layers of salt. There will be a grand hosing down when the wind has gone but all that salt will be eating away at any metal work it can find no matter how well protected.

The wind is set to continue all day tomorrow as well, which will make shooting interesting.

December 6<sup>th</sup> – Friday

While there may not have been any signs that Carols in the Cove had actually happened last night – other than a good return on the investments by way of donations, thank you very much – when I opened the first electric sliding door in The Cove this morning, it was a different matter.

I had slowly worked up to that moment. I have previous experience of packing things back into bags that they easily come out of. I had absolutely no doubt that the gazebo would be one of those things that would prove a veritable nightmare trying to squeeze back into the bag. It clearly required the four legs to be mashed together at the base with no gaps between them. At the same time, the canvas that serves as the gazebo roof must be tucked in between those legs such that the top also squeezes together without any gaps.

Forty minutes later, having stripped down to my t-shirt – I did keep my trousers on – I managed to sit on the top of the horizontal structure to close the last foot of zip on each side. It only remained for me to load it, the canvas holdall of sides and the eight heavy weights into the back of the truck, take them up to the Inshore boathouse and unload them all again. I was going to go back and pack the lightweight gazebo but when I arrived back at the shop, I discovered that I really could not be fagged to do it.

I decided to go back upstairs and find a comfortable seat to take my weight. Going into the store room to turn off the light, I noticed a robin sitting on a shelf having a geek at me. It had come into the shop earlier to laugh at me while I tried to fit the gazebo into the bag. I had politely asked it to leave, and it did after asserting that it was leaving because it wanted to rather than because I had asked it to. This time around, it was having none of it, presumably finding the store room far too warm and comfortable – or had seen the forecast for tomorrow morning.

The trouble with evicting robins is that you actually have to see them go out to be certain they have left. I positioned myself behind the shop counter, turned off the store room light and settled in for the long haul. Alright, the long haul was not all that long before I became bored waiting and went into the store room with a stick. There was no sign of the robin but, as explained, I had not seen it leave. Having battered



the boxes along the top shelves and convinced myself it was a robin free zone, I turned off the light again and sallied forth to check the rest of the shop.

Sure enough, there was robin on the shoe rack. Fortunately, I was able to get behind it and give some gentle encouragement to urge it to the front of the shop. After manoeuvring a few times to remain behind it without making it panic, it eventually made it to the doorway only to be waiting on the outside bin when I stepped out to lock the shop. I assume it was there to make some pointed remark, in the manner that we all do when the subject of our ire is either out of earshot or is sure not to understand what we say. I am sure that it felt much better for it.

I was determinedly idle for the rest of the day other than having a stank down the road to collect all the Carols in the Cove posters and banners. It probably would not have happened except I had to make a dash to the shop at the top on an errand. I took scissors and a knife with me on a whim and had the job done in half an hour. When I got back, I thought it best to secure our outside newspaper bin just in case, but the second anchor point for it had disappeared. It resulted in me dragging the bin inside for the night.

It is a bit of a dilemma created by a national agency that we should be able to trust for accurate information. The news stated that the Meteorological Office had issued a 'rare red alert' for wind, citing that 90 miles per hour winds were expected. When I looked in the middle of the afternoon, the red alert was for coastal Wales and North Devon, but the wind speed predictions were lower than ours in Cornwall. Ours had been reduced from the morning by ten miles per hour and could well be something entirely different by bedtime. It is an utter shambles, spreading fear and alarm one minute and less than six hours later, saying they were only joking.

The wind did start to increase in the later afternoon. We started to hear things clatter about with unsecured bins wandering about. At that stage, the wind was still in the southwest but has ramped up to 50 miles per hour already. It would not go to the northwest in The Cove until later in the night but it was still quite blustery when we took the hounds out later on. ABH was less than pleased even after trying to find a close by, sheltered spot. It was too noisy there and we ended up going around the short block anyway.

Not long into the evening, the Christmas lights went out. They are all on the same board that our lights man supplied, so that was the first suspect. All the breakers on that were on, so it was the breaker in the station that had tripped indicating that the fault was on our lights man's board. Since the wind was swirling in around the Lifeboat station yard, there is a strong likelihood that it was water ingress that caused the issue. I will reset the Lifeboat station breaker in the morning and see where we are from there.

With nothing further to do other than listen to the wind howling in the eaves, we retired for the night with the hope that we would not have two Christmas trees pinned

by the wind to the front of the shop in the morning. Keep your head down, dear reader.

December 5<sup>th</sup> – Thursday

At least the rain had gone by the time we got out in the morning. There was still some damp in the air and some mist making it an entirely grey and uninteresting sort of day in prospect. We were grateful that the continuing wind, still in high spirits, had not yet come around to the west. Little did we know that we were just being lulled into a false sense of security.

According to the Land's End weather station the temperature had held to the mid teens all night but has suddenly dipped a couple of degrees from seven o'clock for a few hours. I found that intriguing. It had happened for a longer period at St Ives, but oddly not at Gwennap Head, windiest place in the universe, that is still not recording the wind speed. It certainly felt mild enough when we, brother-in-law and I took out our respective hounds first thing.

The in-laws were keen to take a trip out to St Just. They were in search of a bone shaped toy that ABH had commandeered from their hound. The two get on relatively well but ABH has discovered she can terrorise the older and bigger dog without retribution and therefore does so. Central to this appears to be the toy. I watched with great interest some canine one-upmanship this morning.

ABH had previously nicked the item and secreted it in the bedroom by the back door and had subsequently curled up on the bed. I went in to get dressed in the morning (my boudoir having been requisitioned) and was followed in by the other dog. So quiet was he that I would swear that he came in on tiptoes, snatched the toy and just as quietly, left. Moments later, ABH stuck her head up, suspected something was afoot and went to the edge of the bed to look at where she had left the toy. The look of perplexed horror on her face – robbed, robbed, me jewels all gorn. I am still laughing at it now.

Such merriment can only last so long. Breakfast came and went and time arrived to do something. On this occasion, doing something meant helping the Lifeboat boys put Santy on the roof of the fuel store alongside his tree. This started us off and next it was fetching the RNLI supplied big and robust gazebo with instruction to erect it across the road. The Missus had previously explained that during the summer, she had put this very item up all by herself. Thus the gauntlet was cast down, so I had no alternative but to struggle manfully for half an hour attempting to get it somewhere in the approximation of slightly erected. I failed miserably. In my defence, m'lud, I would wager the Missus put it up in something rather less than an increasing Force Seven gale.

The Missus came out to help and hot on her heels was brother-in-law. Just to add a little interest to the proceedings, the damp in the air turned wet and it started to rain

roughly sideways. Between us we wrestled with the beast into a vaguely upright shape and then, when we had the top secured – we nearly lost it over the railings at one point – we lifted up to completion. We were advised by the director of operations that the heavy rubber feet would stop it from blowing away and it would not need tying to the railings. They did not and it did. I used my best cub scout knots to secure the side nearest the railing but the feet nearest the road had nothing to be secured to. I pulled one of the benches across and used that as an anchor on one corner, but I rather suspect it will be in the way later on.

The good news was that the rain was due to stop by the time the concert starts, according to the slightly venerable Meteorological Office and would not return. The bad news was that the slightly venerable Meteorological Office was also predicting the wind go to Storm Force 10 and go to the northwest that would afford us no shelter at all – but at least it would be dry.

For the next few hours, I kept an eye on the gazebo from our flat's window. While the frame itself seemed to be holding up well despite being shaken by some very vicious gusts, the sides were not fairing so well, particularly to the windward side. I went down again and used some more twine to tie what I could of the panel to the railings and another bench. It was still rattling but with weights on the bottom and tied to the bench and railings, it would not fly off anywhere.

The rain did abate, which was good of it but the wind, despite still being in the southwest, was increasingly becoming a problem. It was highly unlikely that the smaller, lighter gazebo that we intended to set up alongside the bigger one, would be of much use. At least it would not be raining.

There was a slow increase in activity as the afternoon came to a close and evening drew on. Our lights man turned up to install his remaining electrics and to set up the sound system for the night under cover of the gazebo. The shop was converted into a temporary café and a big pot of mulled wine was set on to warm. A hot water urn is borrowed from the church and by and by the organist arrived, whose choir it is that would be singing.

We were still beavering away not an hour away from the start of the event when the rain started. Yes, the rain that the Meteorological Office had somehow inexplicably missed. I looked at the rain radar and there was a two county length band of very heavy rain sweeping south. We took shelter under the gazebo and stood there like three little pigs who had chosen to make their last stand in the straw house. The ensuing combination of wind (fortunately, still in the southwest) and rain was biblical. The rain sheeted sideways down the road and the gazebo rocked alarmingly while our jolly man on his sound system played, Unchained Melody – When you walk through a storm – and other happy tunes.

We all surreptitiously glanced at the Missus whose child Carols in the Cove is and then at each other knowingly. It was too late to cancel the event, but the weather

could not have been worse. Happily, the rain swept through quickly and by the time the boys turned up to turn our worried pause into a scene of frantic activity, the rain had stopped.

Blind optimism and a fine positive attitude saw the lighter gazebo set up outside the station door in the shelter of the boathouse courtyard. Power was shifted and lights provided in the new venue and our lights and sound man adapted his arrangements to ensure the sound system worked too. Then people started to arrive.

The evening went off splendidly. The wind came around to the west and announced its arrival with a mighty squall but waited for the interval to do so. There were enough people to make a crowd and this year nearly everyone joined in with the singing bringing the whole event back from the brink of oblivion as if nothing had happened. There was some fun brining the gazebo down again in the teeth of a Force 10 gale, now fully in the west but with a man on each corner and another cutting the ties, it came down without disappearing over Carn Olva.

It took half an hour to deconstruct the event, bring the Lifeboat in off the slipway where it sat lit up during the proceedings and begger off down to OS. I looked around after everyone had gone and there was no sign that it ever happened at all. I do have a lively imagination; perhaps I had imagined it all.

December 4<sup>th</sup> – Wednesday

Back to grey again today. After a few days of rather accommodating weather, it fell apart a bit today. There was some light drizzle later in the day but damp in the air for most of it. The ensemble came with a power of wind from the south, forecast to be in the west for Carols in the Cove.

The morning seemed to disappear quite quicky. I think I did a few things, but I am not entirely sure what they were, but I doubt very much that they advanced civilisation or world peace. One of them put to rights Mother's telephone billing. Her latest bill showed a debit in the account which was unlikely to be resolved without action. The problem would indeed get worse as her monthly payment did not amount to the quarterly standing charge. The company, however, stated that the monthly payment did not need to change when patently it did. I resolved to have a little chat, but Mother needed to be present to tell them it was alright to speak with me.

At first, we were met by an automated service. It gave us the option to increase the monthly payments but by far more than was necessary. The only reason Mother needs a telephone service at all is for her emergency care line; she uses the Internet or, in an emergency, her pay as you go mobile telephone. There was no option to talk to a real person, so I simply did not select an option and, lo and behold, I was put through. Surprisingly, I was not told that all their operatives were busy on other calls and that my call was important, I got to speak to person straight away.

So quick was it that I thought that I might have been speaking with an AI computer. This was very quickly rebuffed when I told the very pleasant lady that Mother and I were both deaf and if she could speak up and clearly, we would both appreciate it. I have stated this once or twice in calls and it is remarkable how the speaker at the other end makes an effort to speak more clearly. We still had trouble understanding because the very pleasant lady had a bit of an accent and the content of what she was saying made little sense as well. Apparently, she could not just change the monthly payment, she would also have to change the billing cycle. We could either pay monthly and be billed monthly or pay quarterly and be billed quarterly. I explained that currently we were paying monthly and being billed quarterly and that seemed very feasible because they were doing it. I discovered that could continue it unchanged but if we wanted to change it, the billing cycle or charging cycle would have to change.

I had an appointment with our accountant and the Missus needed to go shopping for more supplies for Carols in the Cove. Time was pressing, so I told the very pleasant lady that provided the cost was the same in each case, she could do what she thought best. Told to make the choice ourselves I elected to go with the monthly cycle. I really do not understand why things need to be made so complicated.

Happily, the meeting with the accountant was not complicated. We had survived another accounting year, the 2023/2024 year, in good order, which we already knew since we were almost at the end of the 2024/2025 accounting year. We poured over the figures, discussing why some things were more expensive than the year before. This is actually more difficult to assess than it seems because the summer just gone is the one forefront of the mind and we were trying to discuss things that had happened the previous year. Why for example had our telephone and fax usage increased significantly – it was probably down to changing websites, but I could not remember if that was this year or the year before. Our electricity usage had decreased. I am darned it I can imagine what we did the year before last to make that happen.

He had delivered the statement in a very upbeat fashion and at the end told me that our tax bill was not quite as bad as I thought it might be. I had pushed back my chair, as I thought we had finished when he brought up the matter of his fees. It included the preamble that the tax was lower and how oh so complicated it all was and how much time and work went into putting the accounts together. This was swiftly followed by the coup de grâce - a nice little increase in the fee for doing it all.

There was not much to say in response to this as the fees are the fees and everything is more expensive. I cannot manage without them and their fees have never been extortionate. It does not do, however, to roll over without a fight, so I reminded him that several years ago they were supposed to do the annual accounts alongside the VAT so that they would first, be more timely and secondly, the cost would be spread across the year and therefore be less of an impact especially at a

time of the year when we could least afford it. We agreed that we would change how we were billed, so maybe my last stand did some good after all.

Since there were several things that were required for Carols in the Cove, I brought the Missus and Mother with me on the journey. I dropped them off at the Tesmorburys store down on the sea front, which is on the way. Having finished at the accountant, I returned to pick them up. They had been waiting outside for about ten minutes as there is nowhere inside to sit down. Mother looked like Nanook of the North but at least she was not too cold from waiting.

We went on from there to acquire a couple of timers for the Christmas lights. So far, the Missus had been going out to manually turn them on and off. She will need to continue to do so for the lanterns because our man has not returned with the part he is waiting for to make them timed as well. We also sought a corkscrew as the in-laws had brought what looked like a rather good bottle of red wine with them. I thought they had they had brought a decent bottle, but it was obviously an old one going cheap as it had one of those old-fashioned corks in the top. After looking in Tesmorburys and a homeware shop, we could not find one. We had run out of them in the shop too, but the Missus managed to find one in our customer resources box that we used to open bottles of wine customers purchased if they did not have one of their own.

The weather was closing in by the time we got home. The wind was still not so much of an issue for us but it had started to rain a bit. This increased into the evening.

I spent some time in the shop clearing away the detritus from the Christmas decorating, moving everything into the store room. The area will be used for providing tea, coffee and hot chocolate to the masses when they arrive for Carols in the Cove tomorrow. I am sure there will be much more to do in there, but I did as much as I could while being undirected by the events' director of doing things.

Deep into the night, the Missus discovered that the timers she had installed earlier in the evening might need some attention. The station display came on at midnight instead of going off and we are yet to discover when the tree lights went off. It is a mere stickleback in the mayonnaise, however. When I descended the hill in darkness after a brief visit to the shop at the top, the Lifeboat end of The Cove looked glorious. It was helped along by our neighbour next to the café who had excelled again this year with the decorations adorning his property. We will be having coach trip visits next year, for sure.

December 3<sup>rd</sup> – Tuesday

It was definitely several degrees colder this morning thanks to our clear skies last night. I felt its sharpness as we headed to the beach first thing, and it was still about the same when I took ABH again just before I headed off to collect Mother. There was a good bit of cloud about which must have arrived sometime before dawn as it

was still quite dark when I got up. Despite that the air was perfectly clear and it had the makings of another pleasant day. Plenty of time still for it to muck up by Carols in the Cove day.

I managed a bit of laziness in the morning and then set to with repairing the toilet seat. It is a completely rubbish set up for such an expensive seat and I have no doubt that it will all loosen up and need doing again before long. I suspect that the screws that hold the fixings onto the seat will need some thread locking glue next time. I just did not have any to hand when I did them this morning.

Still, I cannot be having all the fun, so I went off to collect Mother. I was under instruction to take some chicken out of our freezer and would have done so had there been some there. I told the Missus that we would have to buy some and that I would collect Mother first and take her on such a wild adventure, too.

St Just was the obvious place to look but I thought to try the local shop in St Buryan first, but they only had Tesmorburys packs, which they get from their local cash and carry. There is a farm shop just outside St Buryan and it is on the way to St Just. We looked there once when it first opened and found the gift food goods a little pricey. They have a fresh meat counter and there is no doubt that it is top quality gear. I would have got the chicken there, but they did not have any. We ended up in St Just and acquired our chicken from the very excellent Mr Olds on Chapel Street, so called because there is a butcher shop there.

When we arrived home, the in-laws had beaten us to it. They had not long arrived by the look of it and Mother and I piled in upstairs to meet everyone. I went to put the chicken in the fridge only to notice that there was some already there. I enquired about this. The in-laws had brought it to make tea with.

We sat about and chatted for a while watching ABH and the in-law's dog vie for top place. It was clearly a struggle that would persist for the whole visit and would not be resolved. Happily, it did not go to fisticuffs, just simmering resentment with a diplomatic overcoat.

I had thought to take ABH only for an abbreviated walk since it looked like she had been quite active for a while already. It seemed to be such a pleasant day that I thought better of it and decided to take her for a stank up the hill. We might have gone to the big beach again, but we had lost the tide by the time I came to go. So, I booted up and we took the high road up the cliff.

Ordinarily, I would have taken the short cut to the cycle path and done the normal circuit. With blue skies starting to arrive from the north and the temperature not quite as keen as it had been earlier, I elected to continue up the path and turn at the second cut through. I had not thought so at the time, but I was halfway into the journey when the temperature exceeded my clothing expectations, and I wished that

I had a couple of layers fewer. Fortunately, I had stuck with my little boys' trousers and the cool air circulating from below helped tremendously.

The path is a very well used one and very likely one of the busiest stretches of the South West Coast Path. It therefore takes quite a bit of abuse that leads, in places, to excessive wear and tear. One such place is at the top of Castle Zawn where the path descends to into the hanging valley. At the bottom is a very muddy part that remains muddy except for more extended dry periods. It has been like that long enough for multiple boots to have carved a detour about it which itself is now quite boggy in places.

Further on, just beyond the two streams that bisect the Path, there is a deep pool of standing water on the path. It is at the edge of a bog and circumvention is from tuft to tuft across the mire. This, I think is relatively new, but the other one has persisted for years without attention. For such a busy part of the path I would have thought that the National Trust would have been right on it since it probably only needs a quick fix to relieve the issue. I cannot believe that the organisation is unaware of it but will drop them a note in any case.

Remarkably ABH arrived home with paws just a little darker than the rest of her coat and hardly dirty at all. I can only imagine that she is so light and nimble-footed that she does not sink into the mud. Perhaps her coat is self-cleaning too.

The Missus was out fine tuning the decorations when we got back. I rather suspect that it was major improvement rather than fine-tuning as she was out there until teatime when I had to drag her kicking and screaming back to the flat to join the rest of us. Sister-in-law had been complicit in the action for a while but had withdrawn at a sensible time to make our very toothsome tea for us.

There will be much running about and doing tomorrow as it is the last day for running about and doing before the main event. Without a list of things to run about and do, we are at a loss. We will just watch the Missus run about and do and hope to catch up later.

December 2<sup>nd</sup> – Monday

The pleasant freshness of the morning hit us square in the face this morning as we came around the corner of the Lifeboat station. It was not the strongest of breezes, a mere 30 miles per hour or so, but it was in our quarter, or near it, blowing in from westnorthwest. There was no shelter from it on the beach and despite the spring tides touching every square inch of the beach, there was enough dry sand for it to be blasting about. Not that ABH paid a blind bit of notice, but I could feel it pricking my legs, so she must have been affected.

Having carried out the morning chores, including filing the shop's latest electricity bill that was somewhat higher than I had expected, I headed for the gymnasium. I was



feeling particularly chipper this morning for some reason and blistered rather more than the previous blistering session. Perhaps it is because we are in a new month, and I am getting into the swing of being on holiday.

Surprisingly, I was still keen for more when I returned and quickly changed out of my plimsols so that I could take ABH down to the Harbour beach again. I had just seen someone else head down there with a dog and rather hoped that it would give ABH a chance to run about a bit. Sadly, it was not the sort of dog that she might play with fully, but she did get to run about for a bit. The sand is still piled up at the back of the beach, more than I have seen in some time and the weed has largely been taken out on the big tides. We finished off with a small hike around the block to round off.

I was then thoroughly lazy for the remainder of the morning, not that there was much left, and some of the afternoon when I amused myself by watching the Missus do some ironing. Then there was much cleaning and clearing ahead of a visit by various foreign heads of state. My apologies, apparently it is just a visit by the in-laws and Mother. I was confused by the level of deep cleaning going on.

There are a few chores that have been hanging about waiting for the right impetus. One of those was hanging the skylight blind in my boudoir which has been converted for the period of the visit to Mother's bedroom. I have no idea where I am supposed to do my boudoiring now. I shall have to improvise.

Anyway, I digress. Now where was I. Ah, yes, the hanging of the blind, which I must clarify is not some sort of pogrom but the installation of a window covering. For a venerable company such as the one where we purchased the window, I had imagined that the installation of one of their blinds would have been a must simpler proposition. The only simple bit was pushing in the pod that contained the blind material on a spring loaded roller. There were pre-installed lugs for that. My question has to be, if they can do pre-installation for the pod, why not the rest of it.

Instead, I had to screw two little plastic fittings to the bottom of the frame, then two side rails. The problem with the side rails and the fact that the window was above the bed meant that I could not see where the screw holes were. Also, the right side rail needed to be screwed in left handed.

The Missus told me afterwards that she had no problem with the two she had installed. I wondered if the one I did, which was a roller blind, was significantly different to the venetian blinds she had installed. I do hope so because it was the excuse I used for taking so long about it.

One of the other tasks is to correct the installation of the toilet seat. Yes, that is still a problem five months later. The first replacement, the rubber pads fell off. The second, the rubber pads fell off and the metal fixing snapped. The third, a more expensive seat and one with more traditional fixings, has rubbish traditional fixings

that move eventually and the screws holding the seat to the fixings come loose. Because the window took so long, I will have to look at this tomorrow.

Somewhere amongst all that I managed to take ABH for a stank along to the big beach. We did the usual walk along the Coast Path to The Valley and back along the beach. It was a cracking day for such an adventure. The sky was blue with scudding white clouds crossing it. We had one shower during the day, carefully timed for when I went down to the gymnasium. Without any rain, the sharp breeze was not so much a problem as a welcome bit of freshness in the air.

There were few other people wondering about and we had what remained of the big beach largely to ourselves. It was sad to see that the big rock field is back to being just as big as it was before. Much of the sand that had been ramped up at the back of the beach has been eroded leaving big shelves along stretches of the beach so that the rock field is more or less on a level with the rest of the beach now. The big lumps of weed that inhibited access to the OS slipway has gone and we were able to go back up that way and home.

The cleaning and making of beds followed us into the evening during which we somehow managed to crowbar in having some tea. I must remember to put beer in the fridge which will probably be my only contribution to the preparation. I had best not mess that up.

December 1<sup>st</sup> – Sunday

It was a shabby looking day, looking like it was keen to rain at any moment. Indeed, up at the range it was mizzle smoking through from time to time, though it never got any heavier than a light drizzle. Later in the day we even had some blue skies, but it was damp throughout but not uncomfortably so.

If I ever give up shooting, shotgun day will come first. I rather think that it will give me up before I give it up due only to the weight I carry up there. It is slightly better coming back as I have emptied my flasks of tea and fired a considerable weight of lead into the air or into the ground around the floor of the range. There are still two shotguns and the remaining cartridges to bring back and I am quite weary from all the running around.

It is one of the busiest days and takes some concentration to get everyone moving through the three courses of fire. Two are conducted simultaneously and pass reasonably quickly but the third is one person after another and this takes a while. If we are not the person shooting, we are running around the range when the shooting stops to put steel plates back up and reset the falling men. Yes, for shotgun day, we progress from falling children to falling men.

While I was lifting heavy metal, the Missus was stringing fairy lights and tinsel. Each year she excels over the year before and this year is no different. There is more

acreage of lights than ever before, and these are strung about a quarter the length of the lanterns strung high above them. One very keen local lady telephoned while I was at the range to ask about writing a ticket for the memory tree. I am not sure what she may have made of the rapid fire of multiple shotguns in the background, but I assured her that the tickets would probably be available from this evening just as soon as I had shot all the baddies – and indeed they were – the tickets available, that is, not that they were baddies – oh, and I did not shoot anyone – yet.

There were far fewer people for the spot of clay pigeon shooting in the afternoon. We are now using 'natural clay' clay pigeons as, would you not know it, the old ones were bad for the environment. Since we are now, or soon will be, in the middle of a Site of Special Scientific Interest (SSSI), the Bartinney Downs, we have to be a bit careful.

Bartinney has its own page on the Cornwall Wildlife Trust website. From this we learn that ground nesting birds such as the skylark and meadow pipit are there in the summer and in winter, woodcock and snipe ground feed. Dogs, therefore, should be kept under 'effective control' while visiting. However, the cattle that graze there can stomp all over the pipits between April and December with impunity – when they are not being rained upon by lead pellets from our cartridges.

There has been some discussion about the use of lead pellets in shotgun cartridges and I think that they are banned in some wetland areas. No one yet has come up with a properly viable alternative to lead and no one has seen fit to ask the wildlife what they would prefer to be shot with. It is a conundrum that is set to run and run.

I called up the Missus to come and collect me just before we all fell in to clear up the clay gear. Clearly, that is a bit of a spoiler for those readers who were blissfully unaware that the Missus had regained the ability to drive herself about. The view from the top was spectacular as we drove down with the sun on its way to setting, the sparkling sea and Longships lighthouse and reef in the distance overshadowed by some dark cloud dropping its load of rain into the ocean. If you want an idea of what that looked like, the Cornwall Wildlife Trust has a picture of something very similar on the Bartinney page on its website.

The Missus had been labouring most of the day on the lights across the road. She finished just as the last light of the day was replaced with darkness, thus revealing, in stunning glory, the fruits of her efforts. She has truly exceeded the work of last year and the work our new lighting friend has produced has upped the game significantly. Having access to mains power has made all the difference as well. In previous years we have relied on batteries topped up by solar power or recharged during the day and the whole system was ineffective. Tonight, the lights shone brightly right until they were turned off.

It still feels a little early for Christmas lights, but at least we did not light them up halfway through bloody September. That reminds me, I need to order the Easter eggs.