

DIARY 2024

April 30th – Tuesday

Oh, what a joyous surprise: still bleddy raining when I stepped out of the door first thing. It was first thing, as well. ABH decided half past five was a decent and proper time to get me out of bed. I was pleasantly surprised that there was a glimmer of light in the sky. It made me feel so much better about the time.

So delighted was I that I almost forgot about unlocking our bin and bringing down the remaining corporation bin from the mews behind us. I made it with seconds to spare. I am relishing every one of these weekly collections as they are the last that we will have when the new regime kicks in. I think it may be too late to ask the builders to build an extension so that we have room to put the seven receptacles we will have to deal with.

With the rain hacking down and not a customer in view there was at least some good news. Our builder tells me that after more than two weeks waiting, the scaffolders will be here at early doors tomorrow morning to start the reconfiguration. He did not say how much that will cost, which I am looking at as a good thing at the moment. I would have hated to spend the rest of the day in a cold sweat.

For a change, I spent the entire day gainfully employed doing something or other. For the first half of the day, I played with barcodes especially concentrating on the surf jewellery that the Missus finds it hard to remember. I am not surprised as there are five different prices and none of them are marked because the price labels fall off. I was about to embark on the overstock from the store room and top up the stand at the same time when the cash and carry delivery turned up. That kept me busy for the rest of the day especially when the frozen order turned up halfway through.

I mentioned that the alternative cash and carry we have been using for the last two orders cancelled our direct debit, forcing us to use a credit card. This was all very well but what we order is not necessarily what turns up on the doorstep as they have occasional out of stock items. Between the last order and this we are owed about £180 and since it is likely we will not be using them for a while, I want the credit paid rather than sitting on our account.

The accounts department seem very reticent about returning calls, always assuming that the message I leave at the reception desk gets through. It is very likely that it does because last time, on the third occasion of speaking with the same individual at the reception desk, he sounded irritated and put me through rather than taking a fourth message. It happened again today, and I was still waiting for the return call when they all went home at four o'clock. I think I have the accounts direct number on one of the messages I was sent by them a week ago, so I may try that tomorrow morning and catch them out.

As promised by Radio Pasty, the day dried up in the afternoon. As if by magic The Cove came alive with a handful of visitors. It would have been nice if they spread themselves out a bit but they nearly all came in a bunch. These people were largely passing through, dressed for the trail as one particular group of ladies would have said – although they could have been Canadian who may not use that term. I need to be careful as I cannot readily determine the difference by the accent.

More of the peripatetic visitors we had were from closer to home, namely Germany and Netherlands. I can tell the difference between those accents, which is helpful sometimes. It came as a surprise that they were still buying postcards and stamps to go with them given the new price of the stamp. One German explained to me a few days ago that the international stamps coming from there to here used to be far more expensive than ours to there. He said that now the balance is pretty even, so I judge that although it seems expensive to us, it probably just meets expectations to them.

As the weather changed a bit today, I checked grandfather's barometer today, and noticed that it had not moved since I put it on the shelf. I thought that it might be broken, and it put me in mind of a song the Aged Parent used to sing about the grandfather clock, it 'stopped short, never to go again when the old man died'. It then occurred to me that it might not have changed because the air pressure was the same as the day before, which, when I checked, it was. I also looked at the synoptic charts and it does not look like we can expect much of a change for a few days hence. Never mind, it was worth it just to remember the Aged Parent dulcet tones.

April 29th – Monday

I had to remind myself that it was supposed to be raining today and to reset my expectations accordingly. Otherwise, I might have been expected an atrocious day of trade rather than a truly not-worth-getting-out-of-bed-could-not-get-much-worse-day of trade.

The rain took a while to develop into something it would not mind putting its name to. After an initial few bursts here and there it settled into a pattern of being not too sure whether it should be hard, soft or stopped completely. It pretty much went on all day like that.

For the first time in a week, I managed to slip down to the gymnasium. It was raining pretty hard when the Missus came down to let me go but by the time I had my gymnasium sweatshirt on, it had almost stopped. Despite having stopped both gymnasium going and my morning exercise session at home, I felt pretty chipper by the end of my blistering session. I was nowhere near a record or for that matter my benchmark time on the rowing machine, but it was good enough.

While I am at the gymnasium and particularly while I am rowing the 5,000 metres, I am able to transport myself to lands and times far away while music soothes my aching soul through my ear pods. It is usually that way but today Melissa Etheridge

decided to sing 'come on let it rain', which was not useful at all and just as I left Traffic started up with Rainmaker. I know that no one listens to Traffic anymore, but it was still raining when I stepped out.

My post-gymnasium run around the block with ABH was severely limited. She had the Missus up during the night for a change, having slept through the night for a whole week. She had me up the previous night, so she must be getting better. I would imagine that she is climbing the walls in her head, unable to get out and run around, but she is clearly still uncomfortable as getting her from her bed can be rather traumatic for all of us when she has made up her mind she is not getting up even when she has to.

I had some time during the morning to pursue my new pet project. Do not worry, dear reader, I will not entertain you with too much further detail. I added a few more sample products to see if all the combinations of things could be accommodated, such as our fantastic, how do we do it for the price, bulk buy discounts. Of course, I had to sit down for a while after reminding myself what profit shaving deals they really are. I had to stop again when the Missus turned up to let me go to the gymnasium and did not have much of an opportunity in the afternoon. There is plenty of barcode recording left to do, but it can be done piecemeal.

The rain that was supposed to leave us in the early afternoon, left in the late afternoon instead, clearly having not heard of overstaying your welcome. In that time I had seen possibly two or three customers, who had been brave enough to come out or had not had homes to go to. I have pretty much given up on the forecast, but I have a new weapon at my disposal that may fill the gap.

When I last saw the Aged Parent, he bestowed me with my grandfather's barometer and the thermometer he used in the chicken house. I had sent it ahead of me in the post and it has remained in its packaging since November during all our moving about and building work.

Having recently been uncovered, I took them out of the package with a view to possibly having them at The Farm, since that is where they came from. I am unlikely to head that way for a while so, rather than put them on a shelf upstairs or in the store room, I put it out in the shop for the time being where they have been for a couple of days. Grandfather was a small holder for a time and sometime miner and milkman before that. He also worked in a Detroit car factory where he invented Soul music, but that is another story. I do not know if that makes him an optimist, but his barometer has been reading between Fair and Very Dry, which is probably less accurate even than the radio forecast. Perhaps he knew that one day I would be gazing upon it and the very dry simply refers to his sense of humour. He was Cornish, after all.

If so, he would have had a proper laugh at me just before bedtime when I took ABH for a spin. Assuming that the rain had long gone I set forth completely unprepared for

the thin, soak you by looking at it, rain that silently drenched us. As types of rain go, that was about the weirdest rain that I had been out in, heavy but light at the same time. We live in strange times.

April 28th – Sunday

I did a grand job of annoying myself almost first thing this morning. It really set me up for the day.

It was a lovely morning, too, the sun was shining from a sky dotted with fluffy white clouds. If I were to be fussy, I might have thought even better of it if it were not accompanied by a light breeze from the northwest making it a tad more chilly than I would have liked.

The view out of the windows at the front of the shop had been on my mind for some time. Not only was there a film of builder's muck on the outside, sealed in by a good dose of salt from winds and rains of the last seven months but the inside was filthy, too. The sanding dust from the Missus efforts on the front of the counter clung to the dirt on the window and lay deeply in spots I missed the first time I tried to clean it up.

I dropped down to the shop early so that I could hose down the outside before putting out the display. This would have been a little easier had the builders not got cement on the hose gun and effectively stuck it in the open position so that I soaked my trouser leg not expecting it to spring into action when I opened the tap. I suppose they could have cemented the gun shut, which would have been worse. They have also knackered the hose so that it drips all down your sleeve as you hold the gun and drips onto your shoes. Having surmounted these unexpected irregularities, the action of hosing down the windows was not particularly effective anyway. What they need is a good scrub with soap and water.

Inside, the first electric sliding door in The Cove and the other window are open to access and easy to clean. The one in front of the counter has those document holders like you see in estate agents' windows. They do a marvellous job of keeping the advertising in the window tidy but do make it difficult to clean. There are four columns hung from a threaded button screwed into the upper frame. The top of each wire has a cover that screws onto the threaded button, tightening the cable and straightening the frames as it does. The first three came down easily and the window behind each now clean as is the bottom window frame that was difficult to reach before.

There is always one of a series of anything that is a problem, and it was the last on my right nearest the door. The threaded button on the final wire decided to unscrew from the window frame rather than the cover from the threaded button. I did not realise what was happening until it was too late. Now, the cover turns everything in unison apart from the screw which now would neither go up nor down. I managed to get the screw to go back in a little further by using some longnose pliers, but it still

leaves the wire on one side slack and the document holders crooked. Luckily, it is on the extreme right of my field of vision otherwise it would be a constant source of irritation instead of just an annoyance for the remainder of the day.

At least I have a clearer view out of the window, other than the streaks left by the hosing down. Those I can live with because washing the windows properly will have to wait for another day. A pretty fine view it was too, the clarity across the bay crystal clear and usually associated with rain coming. The swell had almost completely disappeared and any movement on the water was led by the increasing breeze from the northwest. Ordinary surfing gave way to windsurfing with one exponent out there for most of the morning whizzing about.

As discussed last week, we seem to be busier on Saturdays and it was very true of this week as well. I had already done the grocery order and the pasty (sorry, MS) order for Monday did not take very long at all. At least it appears that pasty use over the weekend is consistent but I must be wary as we should surely be getting busier from the start of May. As we know, idle hands make room for the devil's work, so I decided to do some of that instead – well, it was something to do.

A while ago, I fleetingly considered one of those clever tills that knows which item is being sold by scanning its barcode. One of the advantages of this this is enhanced inventory control and the person behind the till knowing what price things are. I pretty much know the price of all our products (and the value of none, perhaps) by being generally there every day. This is fine until the Missus takes over who is not there quite so often and frequently has to look up the price as the item comes to the counter.

As time progresses, we also might want to consider a part time helper to give me a break now and again. That is currently impossible with many things in the shop not priced. You may think that the simple answer is to price everything in the shop. First, I am far too lazy to do so. Secondly, many items are not conducive to accepting price tags such as the surf jewellery where the tags just fall off, items where the labels make a mess when you try to take them off or are simply too small or numerous.

Most of the items in the shop, however, these days come with barcodes and the most obvious solution is to be able to read the barcode and discover the price. For this we must have a backend database with every item listed against the barcode reference and a frontend device that can read the barcode and match it against the database reference.

At this stage, dear reader, you may have established just how tedious the day had become and just how mind-numbingly bored I was. I do apologise for inflicting this upon you, but it will be over soon, I promise.

So, to cut a long story a little less long, we already have all our stock items listed. I invested in an application which is similar to a spreadsheet but has many more bells

and whistles. It was while I was looking at mobile telephone apps that might read barcodes that I discovered that one of the bells and whistles was the ability to read barcodes and insert the reference against the stock item. All that was required was to visit every item in the shop and read the barcode on it. Of course, it was a little more involved than that and the backend needed a bit of work to make it work seamlessly. The sharp end is a bit clunky, but will work once it is set up but that needs to be done once for each session. We have a spare mobile telephone that we might be able to set up permanently and just use that instead of our own.

There is some work yet to be done to make the process easy to use, but all the parts are in place. Since it was so quiet, I went around the shop collecting barcodes and, of course this is when it started to get busy. I decided that it was time to stop for the day when I started to get irritated when customers came in and interrupting me and I had to have a quick conversation with myself about the order of importance of things.

Still, I now have a project to distract me from the boredom of our quiet times, which will, of course, now evaporate and leave me with no time at all. Maybe I will pick it up again at the end of the season.

ABH seems to be improving day by day but her little romper suit to stop her licking her wounds is annoying her a bit. She only has a few days left of wearing it and in the meanwhile we are all set to suffer. She will now come out for short walks without seeking out the nearest soft spot to lie on. One day soon we will all have a normal life back again, there will be bluebirds on the wing and a grumpy shopkeeper will sleep in his own little bed again – oh, I feel a song coming on.

April 27th – Saturday

It had rained pretty heavily in the night, which is very alright by me, thank you very much. What is not so alright with me is a forecast for heavy rain during the day when there was none. It puts people off and I would rather have the support of our national weather forecasters than have them conspiring against me. I had several people through the morning expressing surprise that they were not getting wet. Others would have stayed at home and not ventured in this direction with their bulging wallets.

Never mind, I had plenty to occupy me when we first opened. I had called in a delivery of Furniss biscuits as the display was looking a little thin. There was a bit of fudge and some of Freda's rather excellent peanut butter to price and put out as well. I managed to string that out for about half an hour which brought me nicely to breakfast time.

I had already decided that I would progress to doing our cash and carry order today, largely to give me something to do. The only thing wrong with that is I will now not have it to do tomorrow. The obvious thing would have been to leave it a week until our original company got its act together. Of course, there is still the possibility that

they might not, and I would have delayed our order by a week for nothing. Leaving a week would also interfere with my careful planning. I had worked out that provided this order lasted three weeks like the last one did, the next order would fall just ahead of half term, which is ideal. There again, I might just have over-thought the whole thing as it should get busier during next month and we might have to do the order sooner anyway.

Since I had already listed some of the items I knew to be short, I decided to press ahead with our friends in Exeter. It takes a while longer at this time of year as we have to be careful about what we spend, and we do not want excess stock sitting around when the money could be better used elsewhere. It will also do no good on a shelf if there is no one there to buy it. We are therefore very frugal.

The sea appeared to calm during the day but that may just have been the effect of low water coming on. One of our fishermen told me that it had been quite lively in the morning over at Brisons but it had been good enough for him to launch. By low water in the middle of the day, the swell was barely noticeable in the middle of the bay. However, there was enough of a break close in to give the surfers a bit of fun.

It does not happen very often but when it does, it can be quite irritating. If we are sent items in the mail that do not carry the correct postage, we are handed a form by the postie which sets out the address on the item and a fee to pay. The irritating or more accurately, frustrating thing about it is the lack of further information, so we have no idea of what the item may be. The last time I paid the penalty I ended up with a bit of useless advertising and kicked myself for falling for it. Since then, I have contained my inquisitiveness and spurned any suggestion of paying. The item is returned to sender after eighteen days.

Today, we had two such forms delivered and both of them held a penalty charge of £2.50. The last item was just £1 and so I was doubly intrigued as to what these items might look like – but not so intrigued as to shell out a fiver to find out. Instead, I consulted the Royal Mail website to examine their table of charges. The £2.50 charge is only levied in one circumstance and that is the two letters or large letters were sent using stamps that were not barcoded. Ouch. There is only one crime more heinous and that is no stamp at all which will cost the recipient, if they are daft enough to shell out, a fiver.

What bemuses me most, although it is an assumption, is that the sender gets away Scot free even though the item has gone through the mail system twice, almost there and back. I think a more appropriate method of resolving this is to deliver the form to the sender and let them pay if they still want it delivered. After all, they know what it is and are in a better position to judge whether it is worthwhile. The Royal Mail then do not have to go to the expense of returning it. I am, of course, talking about a body that will sell me international stamps but refuse to send 'Air Mail' stickers to go with them, so there is no hope that they might do something sensible.

We saw a few more customers today over the poor showing from yesterday and from the timing and what they were buying, these were arrivals rather than departures. We are seeing some proper grocery shops, which is encouraging and which I catered for in the latest order. We will have to wait a while before I start indulging in some juicy experimental products – if I can find space to crowbar them in. I am constantly listening to our customer 'have you gots' and add the more popular to my mental list. I have an aversion to doing so for the 'you don't haves' even if they are jolly good ideas. I should overcome my prejudice, but I struggle.

There had been a few minor showers in the latter part of the day to make the forecasters happy, but nothing really of note. It had remained cold as the breeze, such as it was remained somewhere north of us. We are warned it will ramp up over the next few days but head around more to the southwest. What joy.

April 26th – Friday

The rain that we were promised for yesterday afternoon arrived this morning just in time for the delivery of our white goods. I had to make a swift call to our builder to get him to remove the scaffold poles that would have made the ingress and, erm, outgress of the units impossible. They have been taken out before and the scaffolding is still there. I conclude, therefore, that they are belt and braces, superfluous to requirement or we have been very lucky.

I also feel very lucky that my sore throat disappeared. Very oddly, it was there for the first half of my sandwich last night which made it exceptionally difficult to eat. When I came to eat the second half, it had gone completely. I had expected that it would slowly ease and waking up one morning with it gone would have been much less surprising. Well, I never did.

It is usual for bands of rain to pass in one direction or another and be done with us in reasonably short order. This band of rain, part of an occluded front, seemed pinned to Land's End and slowly rotated on its axis bringing us rain for most of the morning and into the afternoon, on and off, without ever going very far. I do not mind having new rain every now and then but having the same rain over and over was a bit much. I am sure I was not alone in this thinking because our customers stayed away in ones and twos. (I know you were expecting 'droves' there, as is customary, but there really are no droves of customers about at the moment and I feel such details are important.)

The delivery van arrived in the middle of the morning when it was still raining. One of the two-man team seemed unhappy in his work and complained vociferously about our steps and the size of the large fridge. It strikes me that if you disliked delivering things, being a delivery van person was most likely the wrong job to have. Perhaps their personal circumstances are such that they cannot choose a different profession, so I should not be so harsh. Most of the deliveries we get have drivers

that take some pleasure in it, even if that is seeing just how hard difficult and inconvenient they can make it for the customer.

We now have the full set of appliances in the kitchen that we started with, and all is well with the world. We had to wait a few hours for the refrigerant in the fridge and freezer to settle before we could set them up for use, but the dishwasher was a different story altogether. The Missus set to with that as soon as the delivery men were out of the door. Straight away she discovered that the waste pipe did not fit through the hole drilled for it in the side of the unit. This was not a surprise because it had some weird device attached to the hose. We may never know what that is for, but it did not look like it could or should be removed. The Missus went at the hole with a small sanding tool and the next I heard the first collection of cups was in it.

The rain eventually cleared in the early afternoon and some brightness ensued. The street was dry inside an hour, and you would never know that it had rained at all. The only evidence really of a change in the general weather was that the sea state. Waves were dashing over the Harbour wall at high water and lumbering waves starting rolling in on the beach – or that may well have been rolling waves lumbering into the bay. Whichever it was, it brought surfers out in numbers as they had been starved of anything decent for the last ten days. The waves were easily overhead and proper tubes were forming.

After the rain, we saw a few customers and the café next door had people sitting outside. The customers we had were hardly going to keep us in socks and carrots for very long, but it was good to see them, nonetheless. One gentleman who purchased a few essentials carefully crafted his enquiry about Tesmorburys by asking where he might do some more comprehensive shopping. I admired his sensitivity but told him if he wished to find some better value produce, particularly for fresh food, he could probably do no better than visit the plethora of local independent shops in both Penzance and St Just.

Sadly, he did not look as though he was paying me the slightest notice even though I was in earnest. Cornwall and the wider Westcountry has placed food at the heart of its persona and continues to be fated worldwide for its innovation and quality. I cannot understand why anyone would want to come here and live off homogeneous and often highly processed products you can get anywhere. I will continue to bang the drum at my customers in the hope that one day the message will take root.

Moving on from admonishment to thanks, my gratitude is due to the other reader, TL. He brings my attention to the Moulin Rouge where, on the same day I was explaining in some detail how I was adding sails to the stems of my windmills, theirs were falling off. They also lost the MOU off the signage, which was lucky. The loss of other letters would have been so much worse, even if appropriate. I telephoned the management as soon as I heard. I would not like them to think that the Diary's comments were in any way deliberate. The Diary is, after all, a highly respected

(alright, maybe not highly ... or possibly respected) international publication and would not wish to upset the entente cordial.

The Missus coming into the shop in the early afternoon to forage for the last of our winter fish, reminded me that I had not placed our order for fish. I keep getting asked, too, which is unforgivable. I think that I may quite literally have missed the boat because we are now in spring tides and the netters tend to fish the neaps. I have left it with our very good supplier in Penzance to get the timing right and since we are not busy, I have offered the Missus to go and collect.

Now you know what we had for tea and since we had more than I certainly needed – I do not speak for Mother, of course – what I have had for breakfast as well. It was a regular visitor who underlined that he knows every facet of my life reading The Diary for a bit. It is a notion I have previously considered, especially in these modern times, that someone could quite easily steal my identity. I think that I came to the conclusion that it would have to be a very desperate thief who would wish to emulate the persona of a grumpy shopkeeper. If the time comes, if whoever it is could let me know and perhaps we could arrange a fair exchange.

April 25th – Thursday

ABH had been sleeping on the couch with the Missus since her operation. It must be very comfortable because they were still snoozing when I headed down to open the shop. They did get up in time to head off for the check up at the veterinary doctor's but they were gone for ages.

I took the precaution of putting on my woolly pulley before I went downstairs today and discovered it had been the right thing to do. There did not seem to be much in the way of breeze, but others made comment about the temperature, so it was not just me. It remained bright but cloudy for half the day before some inclemency joined us later in the afternoon. Frankly, I do not think that the weather has much to do with the lack of customers, although it is probably better that it is not raining. In the middle of the day there was the grand total of a dozen people on the beach. If that is all the main attraction can pull in, we are in deep trouble.

Just to add to the misery, it seems I have acquired a head cold. I have been nursing a sore throat, the only symptom, since Sunday, which has been uncomfortable. Now, it has expanded to include proper cold things. I had the dreaded lurgi around this time last year, but I really cannot recall the last time I had a cold or influenza. I think that standing by the open first electric sliding door in The Cove helps and I have long since made up my mind that the screen is staying. I think that getting a cold once in four or five years with the number of people we see is pretty good going. It does not, however, make me feel any better and because it hurts to swallow, I cannot even console myself with a drop of malt whisky at the end of the day.

I will, no doubt be awash with sympathetic cards and messages of good cheer, So I urge you, dear reader, to refrain from adding to them as we have nowhere to put them at present. There, I knew that you would understand.

Ordinarily, I would have taken to my bed, but I have heard the Government's call and rallied to the cause; I will not be part of 'sick note Britain'. Struggling on bravely, I set about unpacking the delivery we had in the afternoon that now bolsters our stock of preserves, marmalades. I suggested that before I ordered it that it was one of the few items in the shop that was selling well. Naturally, since I placed the order, we have sold very little of it. Never mind, I have a fresh stock of mustard to dig into for my breakfasts.

Flushed with such success, I opened one of the boxes from yesterday's delivery or it might have been the day before. I selected one that might generate some intellectual stimulus and a physical challenge: putting stems on children's windmills. The first issue to overcome was the order of packing. The windmill heads were at the top of the box, tightly crammed in and interlaced. The stems were hidden at the bottom. This was a particularly delicate operation that took more than a few seconds to execute. Even then, I had not extracted all the stems, but I reasoned once I had fitted the ones I did have, diving in to extract the next few would be an easier task with fewer heads to delve through.

It then struck me that the heads were different colours and so too were the stems. The stems were relatively easy to colour identify but the heads, being speckled, looked like something out of an Ishihara colour blindness test – which I am not very good at. There were seven different coloured stems, but the numbers were not evenly distributed and I could only speculate that there were fewer different colour heads, although there might have been.

I sat and considered this situation for a while and came to the conclusion that the target audience, very small children, would probably not formulate a compelling enough argument that would convince anyone that a particular head was paired incorrectly with its stem. I could, of course, be wrong but, on balance, weighing the risk against the time that might be consumed in developing and researching colour combinations, I felt it safe to randomly fit stem to head and hope for the best. The only cumquat in that particular trouser press was if the adult were choosing for the child. I would hope, however, that no adult was forcing a child down a pink and white stripe when it was obvious that there were a blue and yellow stripe child, even if the head was pink.

What I had not hitherto considered was that the stand, constructed from a block of floral foam long since degraded and covered in birthday wrapping paper was built for shorter windmills. The stems slotted into the provided holes but immediately fell over flat. I hoped that as more were added, the front – or back – ones would support the rank in front, but it was a in vain. I filled the block, but some are slanted forward and some backward. It does not look very tidy and will bear some modification.

After all that stem fitting and cogitation, I was some weary, I do not mind admitting, dear reader. There were other boxes to open and deal with, but I felt a good rest was not only deserved but necessary under the circumstances.

It was probably just as well that I had kept something in reserve because someone had thought it a jolly wheeze to organise a Lifeboat training session for both boats. Tonight, we had dignitaries from Falmouth Coastguard to put onboard. Last week a contingent from the station visited Falmouth Coastguard on an experience tour of the facility. This was the reciprocal leg of the informal arrangement, and it was good to put faces to the names which are familiar to me from their daily reports on Radio Pasty.

The launch was called early to fit in with the tides but resulted in a poor turnout and consequently only the big boat was launched. I was fortunate enough to secure a post in the warmth of the winch room for the evening, I then spent an hour and a half just inside the doors at the top of the slipway, chatting while we waited for the boat to return.

The forecast had told us to expect rain all of the later part of the afternoon and into the night. It turned cloudy in the afternoon but there was scant evidence of the wet stuff until we were standing at the top of the slipway at gone eight o'clock. We could see a light shower, more mizzle really, clouding our view of Cape Cornwall a little and felt a spec or two on a couple of occasions. Whatever was driving the alleged rain was not affecting the sea state and it was relatively calm for the exercise. One of the Coastguard team remarked that she was glad it was no worse than that and it had confirmed her belief that land based employment was the correct choice.

The boat slipped back into the bay going on for half past eight o'clock and it was brought up the short slipway in what was clearly a textbook recovery. In fact, one of our visitors later said that it was an unexpectedly smooth operation. It was not unexpected for us, of course for we are, after all, a very smooth, very excellent Shore Crew.

April 24th – Wednesday

The water pipe feeding the washing machine fell off the wall quite a while ago. It has sat gingerly behind the washing machine, undisturbed for some time because fixing it was too difficult. We could either fret that the loose pipe would crack further back where it was pivoting inaccessibly behind one of the units or we could ignore it and be hopeful. For the last several years, we have chosen the latter, largely because it has been forgotten – until now.

I was brutally reminded of its parlous state when I pulled out the washing machine to move it ahead of the carpet man's arrival. It occurred to me that a temporary fix might be appropriate just in case our man inadvertently moved or bashed it in the

execution of his work. A piece of wood, not quite the right size and a couple of cable ties to secure it to the waste pipe that runs below it, did the trick but was definitely not a longer term solution.

In my new role as custodian of the first empty, no customer shop in The Cove, I had plenty of time during the morning to invent that longer term solution. Where I was a tad constrained was that I had access to a limited number of tools and resources to complete the job. It was rather like one of those team building courses where the group are asked to cross a river with only a matchbox, tin of sardines and pair of short trousers. I did not have the luxury of such things but a childhood of watching Blue Peter gave me a distinct advantage.

There was no sticky-backed plastic involved but three blocks of wood, held together with cable ties formed the core of the solution. This supports the water pipe by sitting on the waste pipe below it and held in place with two additional cable ties. It is not perfect, but the pipe is more firmly held in place than it was and roughly in the right location.

Having scored a success in the preparation for putting back the washing machine it was only right and proper that the dishwasher fell on its bottom. The Missus pushed it back into position later in the day and duly connected it to the water supply and the waste system. All the appropriate lights came on for its new inaugural run, but it decided to sit there and do nothing at all. I consulted with our washing machine repair man who knows about these things. Having explained the problem his considered opinion was that it needs to be replaced. At least I have a deal with the white goods supply company that gives us free delivery and taking away. I purchased it with the fridge and freezer as it was cheaper than getting the much maligned council to do it. This roof is getting more expensive by the day.

After poking our new cash and carry company in Exeter again today, they eventually responded regarding my cancelled direct debit query. Since we had not placed an order for more than a year, they felt that we probably did not need it, which is fair enough I suppose. I recall that I had to jump through some considerably hoops to apply the last time and was not much looking forward to doing it again. Doing it by credit card, however, is a greater pain because of the values involved.

They sent me the appropriate forms and I went to the trouble of filling them out, getting our signatures witnessed – in twenty years it is the only supplier credit agreement that we have had to do this for – and photocopying our passport photographs. I had just completed the final task and was about to send everything back when a man from our other cash and carry, the branch that had all the goods but would not deliver, came into the shop.

He told me that he had been despatched hither by one of the bigger wigs above branch level to come and have a chat. He seemed to be carrying some sort of twig, which one of the doves in the scaffolding had dropped. He explained that he had

been tasked with making us an offer we could not refuse in the hope that it would bring us back into the fold. Either the letter I sent as a parting shot or the not inconsiderable revenue we were taking with us had spurred some senior manager into action. Our man offered delivery from the depot that did not deliver.

I wondered momentarily whether I might ask for delivery with a harem of maidens fanning me with palms and feeding me grapes as I lounged on a settle but decided not to push it. I did however suggest that one of the key elements of the Hayle delivery was its time, early in the morning before the day got busy. He told me he could do that, but it would be on a Saturday, which suits us just fine as it is a change over day.

He needs to go back and settle the details with his boss, but he seemed confident that there would be no problem. It does leave us with a bit of embarrassment having barged our way back in with the other cash and carry after spurning them for a year. I will hold back with the direct debit application. We shall see if there is any face saving advantage to placing a couple of orders a year with them but it is probably unlikely. I did make it clear to our new man that I would be exceedingly less than pleased if we found they were to withdraw the service a year down the line.

All those shenanigans left me no time at all to open the boxes of the order I had placed with our beachware supplier yesterday which arrived in the middle of the day. There was nothing there of great excitement, although we have a best selling turtle made out of small shells back again. Such a simple thing and it sold out of its socks.

I would like to commend the fellow who turned up for a lengthy browse while having a video conversation with a friend on his smart mobile telephone. It provided some much needed entertainment for me and a couple who were in the shop at the same time. Sadly, though, unless he comes back again, we are unlikely to find out why Suzie (her name changed on the remote possibility that she is innocent) said what she said. Our visitor professed ignorance of her motives while the friend suggested that there was some intent to cause upset. Well, if we knew Suzie like they knew Suzie, we might have an opinion of our own.

I should worry about such things. While I concerned myself with soap opera level happenings in the shop the Missus was ramping up the clearing away upstairs. After the great dishwasher disaster, she had moved on to the tumble dryer that I had to go up and help with. When I left, she womanhandled the washing machine from the bedroom to the kitchen and reinstalled it. Unlike the dishwasher, it responded to its operational test and washed a load of clothes without getting the floor wet, which is always a bonus. She had also replaced all the kick boards after sanding down the ones that seemed a bit tight. I think DIYman might be out of a job, although Batman did have Catwoman as a sort of sequel and they did not work together much, either.

The dishwasher, however, was the greatest disappointment. Not only is it now added to the long list of appliances being replaced but it was also the one I was looking

forward most to having operational again. There is no two ways about it, once you have enjoyed life with a dishwasher there is no going back to the old ways. Even if I were bamboozled into thinking that hands that do dishes could be as soft as the rear end of a baby rabbit, which I doubt has any truth in it at all, there is still the scolding hot water to contend with – if done properly.

I await with trepidation being able to use our slimline unit once it has been replaced on Friday. The slimline version is perfect for just two people or three if we include Mother. It does need some careful, ordered packing at times but not an overwhelming challenge. At the house, there was a full size model that I had become accustomed to filling without any brain engagement at all. I fear it may have spoilt me.

ABH is still very tender and feeling sorry for herself after her operation. Either that or she is playing us like cheap violins, although I probably identify more as a battered banjo – I was going to say ukelele but I cannot spell that. She goes back for a checkup tomorrow, but in truth, I think she is recovering just fine and the flat has not felt so calm and ordered in nearly a year.

The sun gave us up halfway through the day. It had been cold throughout and even colder in the evening. I shall stick with the adage about holding onto my clouts until the end of May, just as soon as I work out what one is.

April 23rd – Tuesday

Our run of dry weather was spoilt by a shower of rain just at the time our pasty man (sorry, MS) turned up. He was quite shocked by it as he told me that it was not in the forecast, though which one he looked at he did not say. By the middle of the day, the sun was out in parts, but it was much colder than the last couple of days. A breeze had picked up during the night from the north. That would have done it, for sure.

I would have scurried upstairs for my jumper, but the carpet man had arrived earlier and commandeered the kitchen and the immediate surrounds for his work. I was not about to stop him, having waited so long, so remaining cold would have to be order of the day.

With all the excitement of yesterday, it was going to be difficult to top it today. I gave it my best shot by inputting more than 100 invoices into the accounting system. I had prepared the ground yesterday by putting them in date order – I know, how I managed to squeeze that into my action-packed day is hard to countenance. That took most of the morning and I still had the cash invoices and building invoices to do after that. It is as well that I had the invoicing to do as the cold, even mixed with a bit of sunshine, did not encourage too much in the way of customer visits through the day.

I had a call from one of our more enlightened suppliers which likes to tell us when a delivery is coming out. It was only one box, a remnant of a previous order that was late coming. I considered that it might be an idea to add a few other items if there was anything that I needed sooner rather than later. It was not something that I could answer immediately, so I said I would call back.

For this particular supplier, we usually make a long call off list at the start of the year and erode it as we need the stock. This preserves the prices but commits us to the stock we set out at the start of the year. Last year, quite by chance, I forgot to send the list I had diligently compiled. This worked out in our favour because the trade we were expecting never materialised, as we save ourselves having to purchase stock we did not need. This year, I decided that I would do the same but keep the list as a guide of what we would want if it got busy. When I came to look at the list, I discovered that I had not even compiled it, so was at a complete loss as what we might add to the delivery.

Since I had nothing better to do, I set about making a list of items that we may want to purchase and discovered that there were indeed one of two items that we could add to the delivery. Not only would this adorn our shelves making them look a little less bleak, but it would give me something to do when they arrived. I just managed to get back to the company before they closed the deal on the one box.

I cannot say that things got any more exciting than that. I can usually conjure something out of very little, but it is a challenge conjuring something out of begger all. It was by far the quietest day that we have had since we opened. There was not even so much as a complaining customer or a person on the street slipping on a banana skin.

Any more of this and I will hang up my digital pen.

April 22nd – Monday

We have now had several days in a row with bits of sunshine in them and no rain. I am getting a little concerned that we may be looking at a drought.

There were some grocery deliveries this morning to keep me occupied. It probably shows that at least some things are going out of the door in sales, although I have had to throw away a few rotten tomatoes and mushrooms. There were also a few cases of pop and I know I have not thrown out any cans of drink recently.

The Missus went off early doors with ABH and came back without her. Today was her day at the dog doctor and we would wait for the call to go and pick her up later in the day. It was a strange a curious experience not being bowled over by an excited ball of fur every time I went up to the flat during the day. The Missus managed to take up the lino on the kitchen floor without interruption as well.

Our carpet man called late last week to tell us that the lino was expected to arrive today and that he would come to fit it tomorrow. He called in the middle of the morning to confirm that the lino had arrived, and I told him that I would make arrangements to come and collect it when we knew ABH was ready to be released. The veterinary doctor and the carpet man are neighbours, which was highly convenient.

We had sunshine today and no breeze, which would have annoyed the Highly Professional Craftsperson who had been looking to take his boat out over the weekend. The forecast for both days showed wind at least twelve knots short of what it actually was. Had he gone out, he may not have exactly been in trouble, but it would have been exceedingly uncomfortable. Today would have been ideal.

As we move toward spring tides again, there is more of the big beach available during the main part of the day. This made loads of room for the three people who wanted to walk across it. I am sure they were grateful. The Lifeguards had placed the flags in the middle of the beach which ensured they did not have to step foot on the sand for about three hours.

Everything was under perfect control until the early part of the afternoon. It would have been remarkable for it not to be under control as there was begger all to do. It was at around half past one o'clock that the Missus, who had taken the opportunity of some on her own time to go sea glass hunting on the Harbour beach, to come running back. ABH was to be released at half past two o'clock and because of the lino situation, it was down to me to pick her up.

I arranged with carpet man to meet him shortly before the allotted collection time and between us we managed to squeeze the lino into the truck without any need to try and use the ratchet straps, which of course was a huge disappointment after diligently practising for a month. That done I went next door to pick up the woozy little girl, not long out of her general anaesthetised state. Before I was allowed to collect her, a nurse instructed me on how things should go when we got home. I was told that she could only have her pain killers after eating, which she does randomly, she was not allowed to leap up or down on chairs and she could only out for functional activities. When she had finished, I asked if there were any more impossible tasks that we had to complete and got a wry smile for my trouble.

I drove home carefully but ABH was still pretty spaced out and I doubt if she knew where she was at all. The Missus helped me to unload the lino and then retired to keep vigil and to stop her jumping up or down, which she would have done had she not been restrained constantly. We have three days of this, which will be interesting.

Before I left, our wine order had been delivered but I had not had the chance to unpack it, price it and put it away. I had quite forgotten about it and was further distracted by noticing that our postcard fudge boxes and rock had been delivered. It kept me occupied for the rest of the afternoon and generated another couple of

boxes of cardboard to fill the store room with. It is difficult to comprehend just how exciting a grumpy shopkeeper's day can be.

But hold, that was not the pinnacle of the day's activities. The Missus had been busy in the kitchen through the day removing the kick plates from the units and cutting out the old lino. We had to clear various boxes from the hall and the areas where I man wanted to unroll the lino and lastly shift the washing machine, which is always a delight after twelve hours shopkeeping. We had to do it in shifts as one of us had to monitor the poorly ABH.

We had a slow leak in the drainage pipe behind the units a while back. The huge stain that it created across the kitchen floor is still evident. Unfortunately, it also rotten some of the thin ply used under the lino and this needed to be replaced. Most of my tools are at The Farm but luckily, I had brought the multitool down a while back so that the Missus could use the sander on it. It has a decent enough cutting tool for thin things and I used it to tidy up the broken old board. Even more luckily, for which I will pay dearly later, no doubt, there was a gash bit of ply of the right thickness under some wood that the builders had left behind. It did not take long at all to repair the gap, although I could have done a better job with more time, I am sure.

We are hoping that after the end of tomorrow, this will be the last major disruption in the flat, barring the delivery of the new fridge and freezer, and we will be able to get on putting everything back together again.

Gosh, I thought that The Diary was in trouble then and I would not have any excitement to report.

April 21st – Sunday

It was another fine looking day when I got up. We had half a day of that before it was snatched away by a covering of cloud, although that came and went at first before deciding to stay. It was mighty cold again on our side of the street and I took the precaution of layering up before I came down today – and was still cold.

Once again, there was not much doing today, probably less than yesterday. Once upon a time, Sundays were the busier of the two weekend days but certainly through last year, even in the main season, Saturday has taken over the mantel. That is not to say that today did not have its moments, it was just that they were not as good moments as yesterday. On the bright side, it seems that I ordered just about the correct number of pasties (sorry, MS) for the day.

One of the outstanding tasks remaining in phase one of the build is to install the CCTV cameras on the front of the building. I have asked numerous times for an idea of the length of the computer cable required for each. I know where the cable starts and roughly where it ends but I have no idea where the cable will run. There is also

the issue that they will need to pass through the window reveal and I wanted to avoid the need for a bigger hole than necessary.

I know what will happen. I will get a demand for the cable giving me no time to order it, I will not be able to get one exactly the right length and even if I did, it will come with a big plug on the end that will require a big hole. Because the moment of install is creeping a little closer now, I decided to head the problem off at the pass and apply a bit of thought to it. Ideally, we could use a cable with no end on it and fit it after it has gone through the reveal. Fitting the end requires a special tool, it is not something I have done before but the communications teams that I have worked with were doing this as a matter of course, so I looked it up on the Internet.

The tool set required was not a lot of money. The process did not look complicated, and the cable is much cheaper than buying ready made fly leads. I also have a need to have several shorter cables in the living room attached to various things, so the use would not be limited to just two cables. The kit arrived today but I will have to wait a while more for the cable. In the meanwhile, however, I thought that I could use an old cable and cut the ends off to practise on.

The process itself is incredibly straightforward. There are however frustrations, particularly if you happen to be colour blind. There are four pairs of wires, each pair has a solid colour and a striped colour. The pairs are brown, orange, blue and green. I knew that I would have a problem with the brown and green, which are at opposite ends of the line, helpfully. The blue and the orange should be distinguishable by shade alone, which they were. I did not think that mixing up the green and brown would be a problem as long as I made the same mistake on both ends. So, armed with my cable and kit, I gave it a go.

I should start with the positive. I have a working cable what I made all by myself. How it did not end up over the sea wall is quite another matter. As I keep remarking, it is a simple process. Untwist the pairs, line them up in order, slip them into the cable end the right way around, and crimp them with the crimping tool. The frustrating and time consuming element of that short list is the bit between lining them up in order and slipping them into the cable end such that they emerge in the same order.

The number of times one colour would leapfrog over its neighbour in the cable end was more than I wished to count. It is a very fiddly operation and requires a bit of patience that I do not have. Having said that, I only wasted four cable ends before getting it right. I am sure that with a bit of practise, it will work quite smoothly, the only thing is that it unlikely that I will be doing it that often to attain that level of familiarity with it. At least I do know that I can do it and when I spoke with the Highly Professional Craftsperson, he also knows how to do it, so come the time, I will hand the kit over to him for the camera cables.

While on the subject of frustration, the Missus send me a message from her bed this morning while I laboured in the shop – no, that probably was not at all necessary but they are the facts, nonetheless. She suggested that since it was Sunday that I should go and get my shotgun and practise some shooting. It was not the range that she had in mind, either, but the collared doves that have taken to roosting in the scaffolding all around the front of the flat and especially outside the open bedroom window. They are very vocal but at least it is not a sharp or piercing sound – well, in my view, anyway.

The collared doves seem to have a better reputation than pigeons and are a little kinder on the eye. I caught one as it hovered in front of the front door just outside the window, almost upright with wings flapping. I might have had an award winning photograph had I set up my camera and waited for five hours with my finger on the shutter release for the exact moment. I do not think that I am that dedicated, dear reader, and you will just have to imagine the image in your imaginations. You must be good at that after thirteen years of Diary reading.

April 20th – Saturday

We are being spoiled rotten. Daylight at both ends of the day and the daylight we had this morning was full of sunshine. It was also bitter cold again which was not too bad when I was speed walking up behind ABH on our morning saunter but a tad more of a trial standing inactive behind the counter. It might have been alright but for a cold southeasterly breeze that had found a way to bend its way through the open first electric sliding door in The Cove.

It took until late in the morning for The Cove to come alive with enough people to make opening worthwhile. I had spent the time before that fending off requests for newspapers. Obviously, the more requests I get, the more concerning it is whether I made the right decision about holding off being supplied. I think, on balance, I am so far correct in my assumptions and that it only the weekend that there might be sufficient sales to be profitable. I know that it is feasible to get deliveries just at weekends, so I will make enquiries during the week to see what the costs will be.

Talking of deliveries, the parcel post service brought another tin of paint today. They managed to deliver it without spilling a drop. I have shared this with the Missus and suggested anytime she needs more paint, I will give the Royal Mail a call and ask if they can bring it from the shop for her. When I say I suggested this, I meant that perhaps I would one day mention it in passing or maybe leave an anonymous note somewhere.

Just when you thought that the busyness that we had seen at the end of the morning would signal and busy afternoon, it all went quiet again. We had to wait another hour for another spurt of action followed by another lull. At least I had to bay to look out upon in its glorious bright blue edged with the yellow-beige of the beaches and the grey of rock. There was not much of a swell and certainly nothing to tempt any

serious surfer into the water, but the surf schools still gave it a go. A windsurfer of some sort ventured out in the morning for a while and in the middle of the afternoon there was a stand-up paddleboarder and a rib doing some angling out by Aire Point. Everyone else had thought better of it.

I ventured forth with ABH in the evening before tea and braved it without a jacket. On the sunny side of the street, it was reasonably temperate and I did not miss my jacket at all. The Harbour beach was packed with local families, there are only two local families but the numbers are legion and when you add friends as well there were about thirty people down there. With pets as well thrown into the melee, it was carnage down there, so we avoided it.

I also went out again last thing. I was surprised to see the last vestiges of light in the northwestern sky in deep purples and mauves. They were highlighted on the horizon by a single pinpoint of light, a crabber plying its trade, deck light blazing. I could have fooled myself it was a summer night if the hypothermia of the day was not still wearing off.

April 19th – Friday

There was a bitter chill in the air first thing this morning that had me reaching for extra layers early on. The blue skies and still air of yesterday were already a distant memory. I do not know where the wind was coming from this morning, but it was doing the temperature no favours at all.

There was a bit more ritual throwing things away again this morning. It comes to something when the milk has to go as it has a fortnight life on it when it arrives. If we cannot shift a little bit of milk inside two weeks, it is pretty poor show.

I scurried off to the gymnasium as soon as I could. An hour of rowing and throwing weights around in a blistering session had me warm long enough to enjoy quite a comfortable frolic on the Harbour beach straight afterwards. She managed a run about all by herself and we hurried back to the quiet of the shop.

By the time I came back downstairs again, the chill was setting in once more. The cloud cover remained thick, although it was a better colour grey than we have been used to. It provided some encouragement. We had to wait until the middle of the afternoon for the promised breaking up of the cloud and a little blue sky. By that time, it was a little too late to expect any warmth from it and we did not get any.

It was a thoroughly tedious day with nothing at all to commend it. After a couple of deliveries in the morning, there was not even anything to price and put out. I am not sure how I busied myself, but I must have been doing something because the time passed without me noticing it.

One thing that I did notice was after hours of quiet solitude, I picked up the telephone to make quite an involved call and customer sprang from around corners and in cars suddenly appearing to park in front of the shop. It was the busiest that we had been all day and lasted precisely the amount of time it took to make my call, which thankfully was more waiting than talking. If you do not believe in the small and malicious gods of grumpy shopkeepers now, you never will.

The time passing unnoticed may have had much to do with having to look after ABH in the shop while the Missus went on an extended shopping trip. I do not think that it started out as an extended trip but she, unlike me, did not remember about the traffic lights on the bypass and got stuck in the traffic on the way back. She also had some traffic grief in Tesmorburys, where she likes to shop. With a trolley full of goods that would probably have been value in the independent shops in town, she sought out someone who might collect on their selectively inflated prices. Unlike the small, independent shops in town, Tesmorburys prefers that you do not interact with their staff and use the automated till instead. This is probably why the Missus had to spend an inordinate amount of time waiting for one of the two available tellers on a busy Friday afternoon.

After all that, she was therefore not overly delighted when the pot of paint she had purchased dropped out of the truck when she parked opposite the shop. She was even less pleased when the lid popped open and deposited the paint in the gutter. It could, of course have been much worse and the paint could have spilled in any number of less convenient places to mop up. The episode put me in mind of the Aged Parent in a similar but much more public mishap. I might have related this tale before and if I have, hard luck – can you not see I am struggling to fill column space today. Here it is again.

He had purchased, as I recall it, a larger tin of paint than the Missus had but similarly white in colour, from a small independent shop in the town of Shaftesbury in Dorsetshire. We were waiting at a rendezvous at the top of the famous and iconic Gold Hill when, inexplicably, the tin fell from his hand and cracked open on the world renowned cobbles. There was no remedy available at the time and I do remember the Aged Parent in a cloud of embarrassment – shortly before we all made off in a hurry.

The breeze had diminished by the time I took ABH out again after tea. The setting sun was at such an angle that it was impossible to see down the street to the west. There did seem to be a little warmth in it then, which was just a tad late to be of any use. It was, however, a pleasant walk around the big block after a bit of a cavort on the empty Harbour beach. The lighter evenings are truly established now and a bit of sunshine to go with them is most appreciated. There were a fair few people parked up gazing at the view. Let us hope that they can turn up during the day tomorrow.

April 18th – Thursday

It was a glorious morning. The wind had almost dropped out completely and the sea was relatively smooth. There appeared to be some surfable waves out on Gwenver had there been anyone around to surf them.

I had one customer until later in the morning, a friend and neighbour, who I am sure only turns up out of charity. He arrived shortly after my ritual throwing out of a few saffron cakes and several loaves of bread that had lapsed out of date. Had there been a few fishes as well I might have hung onto them just in case someone could have made something of them. Now that the weather has improved, I need to see about ordering in some fish as we have nothing at all in the freezer.

By the middle of the day and the early afternoon, custom had picked up a bit with some actual customs buyer actual things. Much of it was centred around drinks and snacks but there was the occasional gift purchase and rather more pasties (sorry, MS) than I was comfortable with. Once again, I have to make a projection for pasty sales over the next three days and once again, we had a surge of pasty buying after the deadline for ordering them. It is most disconcerting.

The main event and highlight of the day was the arrival of the new wheelie bins and food waste containers. This should bring the receptacles for fortnightly waste collections to seven for a full complement. We are and have always been missing the box in which, erm, something goes but I cannot remember what. I think that I would have the same problem for some of the other five, although the general waste bin is fairly obvious. I am sure that if we had a building with a sufficiently large outhouse, it would all come together after a month or two. Since we live in a small flat with no outside space, it will be difficult to say the least and I am sure we are not alone in this. I could almost guarantee that the master brain that thought up this complex arrangement has more than one outhouse and a massive garden and had no concept of people living without.

The truck, piled high with wheelie bins and food waste containers, parked outside the shop as a base from which to distribute the containers to the households on their list. We had a grandstand view of the careful way the two operatives threw the plastic bins off the back of the truck, stopping afterwards to reattach wheels that had flown off under the violent onslaught.

The two operatives proceeded to distribute the bins to the various households that they had on their list, studiously avoiding us. I would have left it but one of them came into the shop for a pasty and ice cream, so I asked why we had been omitted from the delivery. I was told it was because we were a shop, which I understood, so I explained it was the community charge paying flat above I was asking about. He promised to come back when they had finished down the road. Apparently, we were frowned upon because we had a commercial bin outside. The fact that it sat next to our domestic bin held no sway at all. The bin then duly arrived but without the food waste bins.

I should have kept my big mouth shut because we now have to find a place to stash these receptacles for three months before the new disservice kicks in. I will also have to make a mental note to try and find the four recycling bags we put to one side 20 years ago.

It was when I went around to the mews behind us to find a place for our wheelie bin that I noticed that all the properties had been delivered of a set of bins. Only two of the properties there pay council tax and the council had been to some trouble to point out to the others that they needed to contract privately for their waste collection. Out of a sample of eleven properties in the immediate vicinity of which seven are holiday lets, only two correctly got their community charged for bins.

Given that the much maligned council increased our community charge by five percent this year again and constantly whinges about having no money, it is galling to witness such profligate waste. I am also told the much maligned council also outsourced the bin delivery to a London company. Perhaps we do not have people in Cornwall with the skills to delivery bins. It is not hard to comprehend that it is easier and quicker to drop bins to every property than try and find community charge paying properties from a list, but it is lazy and wasteful. I can think of no other reason for it other than utter incompetence.

The glorious morning continued into a glorious afternoon and brought an unexpected bonus of a few more visitors into The Cove. At one memorable point in the afternoon, we actually had a queue at the counter. It might have been said that I slowed down service to make it a bit longer than it needed to be, but I would dispute that, obviously.

The upsurge in customer interactions brought with it familiar questions and problems raised. One lady had inadvertently got off the bus here instead of Land's End. I still do not understand, when the Land's End Coaster is clearly a tourist service, why it does not announce destinations when it approaches a stop. If the driver is not keen to do it, some automated arrangement is not beyond the wit of the bus company, surely.

A small party arriving at our door from the direction of the Harbour car park were seeking succour after a long journey from somewhere – and not just the Harbour car park, I assumed. One of the party remarked on the 'Sennen Cove Café' that he had seen above our neighbour's window. For one of the ladies there that might have been an ambiguous clue because she felt it necessary to ask where she might get a cup of tea. It has taken years of study and practise to reply that indeed the aforementioned Sennen Cove Café might be a good place to enquire without the slightest trace of irony in my voice.

It took a friend and neighbour – I know it may be hard to believe, but I do have more than one, although the friend bit may not necessarily be reciprocal – to commence a conversation regarding the use of a drone in The Cove during the afternoon. It had

come a little too close to his property for his liking and he wished to remonstrate with the operator. Some way into the conversation, the mention of birds of prey came up which reminded me of something I had omitted to mention when discussing the electricity board's refurbishment of its infrastructure a week or two ago.

At the back of one of the properties along Coastguard Row is a pole that has rather more connections on it than the average in the area. Atop that pole is the effigy of a bird of prey, presumably to ward off pigeons or whatever animals are warded off by effigies of birds of prey. I stand to be corrected on this because I have not been around there with binoculars, but that is what it certainly looks like. Why that particular pole, I have no idea. Perhaps some expert has decreed that was the optimum position for it. I must assume that it was the electric company that put it there as opposed to some local wag otherwise it is likely that there would be a charcoal encrusted effigy of a local wag alongside it.

To save my bored bacon in the quiet of the later afternoon, the stationery order I placed a couple of days ago arrived. For some reason, I have to request an invoice after the order has been completed, which is unlike most companies that send one as a matter of course. It makes pricing the articles in the order more cumbersome as I have to look up each one on the website, rather than on a list. It is either that or leave the items in the boxes until the invoice arrives. Nevertheless, it gave me something to do between customers.

It being such a pleasant day it would have been wholly churlish not to have a Lifeboat exercise at the end of it. So, we had one. Both boats were in the play leaving the station at around quarter past seven o'clock in the daylight and on a falling tide. Neap tides meant that the Tootrak had plenty of room to launch the Inshore boat without too much drama and the lack of any decent swell helped tremendously.

The boats were out for an hour or so, although the Inshore boat came back for a crew change halfway through. We sat and discussed many important matters while watching the sun set behind a bubbling line of cloud on the horizon. I had found myself facing the west while we chatted and although not exactly staring at the sun, had spots before my eyes in failing light when the boat eventually hove into view.

It had turned chilly very quickly and was even colder down at the end of the long slip where we executed what was clearly a textbook recovery in calm waters at approaching low water on a neap tide. It did not take long for us to wash down the boat while another team recovered the Inshore boat and put that away. We were all done by nine o'clock. We are, after all, a very timely, very excellent Shore Crew.

April 17th – Wednesday

I appreciate the sunshine, I really do but will no one rid me of the turbulent, incessant bleddy wind.

The seabirds seemed to love it. It was like a gull convention today. They had been gathering since I noticed a large group sheltering in the lee of Pedn-men-du and since then larger groups had been seen on the south end of the big beach and along the rocks under the promenade. Today, as I went down to open the shop a whole host were airborne high up in the glare of the sun sitting over the top of the hill. Later, as I took ABH around the block, a similar number were dodging the currents above the Harbour car park, although that might have had something to do with the entire loaf someone had broken up and strewn across the parking spaces near the sea wall. They did not seem that interested in it though.

I started the day with four layers and a hat today. Yesterday, I had been daft enough to think that once the shop was open and I was predominantly inside, it would be sufficient. We are not exactly blown away behind the counter but there is enough breeze swirling around inside to get you from behind.

It might have been better had I got to the gymnasium today but decided that getting the truck on top of gymnasium and giving ABH a run would be a bit much and I would not have been back behind the counter until the early afternoon. As it happened, the Missus took an inordinate amount of time to come down to the shop to let me go and I was not back until early afternoon anyway. That will teach me to try and be the nice guy.

Looking at the bill for changing two cam belts that came with the truck I should have left it there. Just for added discomfort, I had to go and fuel up after I collected it. Not that it affected me greatly, but a set of temporary lights on the bypass had a queue of traffic in the westerly direction all the way from Eastern Green at the outskirts of Penzance all the way to the Madron roundabout which is roughly in line with the middle of town. I made a mental note to drive back along the sea front and amazed myself by actually remembering to do so.

Such smart Alecness does not go unrewarded, and I picked up a foreign coach driving at 20 miles per hour all the way from rejoining the A30 back to the turn off to The Cove. I almost did not make it back for tomorrow's pasty order (sorry, MS).

We are exceedingly cautious about buying anything when there is so little custom about but when the custom that is about is buying postcard boxes of fudge, local preserves and fridge magnets, it seems sensible to at least have some. Last year we muddled through the doldrums at this time of year by having enough stock in hand. This year we are not so lucky. I took an unreasonable amount of time selecting minimal amounts to see us through and I am still looking for the original file of a picture I want on a magnet. I could not find it anywhere on the computer or storage drives.

Whilst I have been without our main computer, I have had to improvise on where things have been kept. Where once everything was in a couple of folders, carefully

labelled, it is now in other carefully labelled folders that did not include the archive files that I could not get hold of. Trying to reorganise after I got the computer back, I have somehow lost a couple of important folders. They should be on a backup somewhere and when I have time – in the right place - I will look.

Toward the end of the afternoon even the sunshine deserted us and the hat that I had discarded after coming back from town, went back on again. I managed to generate a little bit of heat by running up and down our steps trying to get the new computer screen to work. It is not so much the screen that is not working but the output from the computer. It was working just fine when it was set up in the bedroom when we were at the house but since it has been moved back the two crucial ports decided not to work.

I spent about half an hour on it but concluded it was probably a hardware failure. The longer term solution will be to replace the graphics card but in the meanwhile I have ordered an adapter cable to run from the one remaining screen output that the computer has and that I know is working.

It is a long time since I did any circuit board replacing in computers, so I am hoping that it will be a simple slot out and slot in. Hopefully, getting the right card will not be a problem as the computer is relatively new. It is a problem that I could do without but using one of the old screens, at least the computer is still operational. If nothing else, it helped to pass the time on a particularly quiet and tedious afternoon.

ABH probably had less of a tedious afternoon than she normally endures at present. The Missus took her to the veterinary doctors for her pre-operation check. She is going again on Monday to have a somewhat delicate procedure carried out. It will ensure that we will not have to keep her under lock and key twice a year and happily never have to drown her puppies. It will also mean that forever more she will probably hold a grudge against the veterinary doctor, us or both – she is Cornish, after all.

April 16th – Tuesday

The wind was still howling around the eaves and the scaffolding when I got up and took ABH around briefly. Radio Pasty suggested that the winds were lighter than yesterday, but I begged to differ; at half past six o'clock they still seemed pretty robust to the pair of us. There was a bit of rain, too, but this confined itself to falling while I was driving the truck to the garage to have our two cam belts replaced.

I headed into town on a whim, actually it was on the small loan car that we had been given. I made the assumption that I would need to put fuel in it but for once it had about half a tank, which was handy. I needed to purchase a card for a neighbour whose birthday it was and rather hoped that someone would take it up the hill and her steep drive for me to deliver it. I was not so lucky. Perhaps her outside stairlift

will be in place by next year and as long as it starts at the bottom of Stone Chair Lane, I will be laughing.

Also laughing, I am sure, were the guys who turned up to do some minor tweaks to the Lifeboat aerial pole. The traffic management truck had turned up before I had headed off with the truck which was before we opened. The two boys in that sat around until the cherry picker and its operator turned up and it waited until another van turned up with the person doing the minor tweaks.

All present and correct, the two boys in the first truck leapt into action, putting barriers around the cherry picker and two signs on each approach. They then retired to their truck. After some wait, which was probably a dynamic assessment window, the cherry picker operator lifted the aerial man up the pole where he conducted what cannot have been more than an hour's work. I think he went up twice for good effect and to maximise the usefulness of the cherry picker rental.

By early afternoon, the traffic management guys had been here for five hours. Their last job was to collect the street signs and the barriers and load them back on their truck. The cherry picker left and shortly after that the traffic management truck sped off ignoring the twenty being plenty in both forward and reverse gears. The poor lambs must have been exhausted and were keen to get home.

Mind, I cannot say that I put much effort into the day, either, although I was not getting paid for my idleness. Having said that, we were a little busier than we were yesterday and actually sold a sensible number of pasties (sorry, MS). There was a problem with that in that I did not order any for tomorrow. I had my eye on the deadline and felt comfortable that I had plenty of time before it. When it came to it, however, customers and telephone calls intervened, and I missed it. I am not sure that I am overly concerned because we have frozen pasties to turn to for emergencies.

Because life is frustrating enough, I decided to add to it by starting a chat session with our mobile telephone supplier. Both the Missus and I have placed an order for a SIM to put in Mother's old mobile telephone so that she can make emergency contact if her power goes out. The order the Missus put in was cancelled because her credit rating was poor, which is odd since she had a mortgage and a business loan neither of which are in default. I tried my luck and today I discovered that my order was also cancelled but no one at the company could tell me why or indeed wanted to provide even a modicum of assistance.

I spent a whole hour on the chat session, providing my details several times to various agents as I was passed around and going through security checks three times. At the end, it was apparent that the company did not have anyone who could help with the problem because it was 'online' and looks after itself and the same deal was not available from the sales team.

It was a very irritating hour. One highlight was that I was told if I did not respond within 8 – 10 minutes they would terminate the session. Having waited a similar amount of time for the agent to respond, I cut and pasted the notice back to her, which did not go down well. Near the end, I was merrily typing my closing argument – unlike me, it took no more than a minute – and I was interrupted by the agent asking if I was still there. I did not resist the urge to point out that I had waited far longer for her to respond. We parted on even terms, I felt.

I will look elsewhere for a SIM only contract for Mother and hope for better service.

In the midst of all that, I calmed my fevered brow by putting out the sweet bag order that had arrived in the early part of the afternoon. As sweet orders go, it was not one of the biggest and I just about finished it off before it was time to wrap up the shop for the day.

At twenty-five minutes past five o'clock, our man at the garage called to tell me the truck was ready to collect. I asked him what time he closed, and he told me half past five o'clock. I know that the little car they gave us was nippy, but I suggested that even then I would be pressed to get to the garage before they closed. I will pick it up tomorrow.

Upstairs, we advanced our getting the flat back in order by five boxes that we managed to shift into the loft. It is progress, in a sort of hare and tortoise sort of way.

April 15th – Monday

Our weekend summer came to a sudden end sometime during the night and we woke up to an icy blast coming from the northwest. The wind does not have to be especially robust from that direction to seem like it is. It was bitter cold all day with a cold breeze swirling in the shop.

It did nothing to encourage visitors to The Cove and any with some sense would have headed for the shelter of the south coast and presumably they did. Even the seabirds took shelter behind the headland, all huddled together out of the wind. The seas abandoned its lately discovered decorum and white topped waves came streaming into the bay, losing their form and collapsing into fields of white foam all along the beach. If that were not enough, a heavy band of rain ran across us in the earlier part of the morning but thankfully before I headed for the gymnasium.

There was not a soul on the street as I headed down the road and not a soul on the street when I came back. A blistering session was utterly necessary today just to ward off the onset of hypothermia. I stuck my nose into the empty café next door and told them in case they were wondering that the news had just broken that there had been a zombie apocalypse and that we were the only survivors. Looking up and down The Cove and across the beach, it could very possibly have been true –

alright, maybe not but certain some other apocalyptic disaster. In true British form – except he is Irish – he offered me a free sausage bap, just in case.

Demurring on the sausage bap – I had just come away from a blistering session after all – I swapped footwear for something more appropriate and took ABH down to the Harbour for a run. It was thankfully devoid of Great Danes, but the breeze was not overly comfortable for either of us. Even on a diminished tide, waves that might otherwise have been flogging over the wall, took flight on the wind as soon as they reached the parapet and flung themselves across the Harbour.

We did not last long down there and made our way around the block. For a place where there was no one to be seen, the car park was remarkably busy. All the cars were empty bar one where a couple sat resolutely in the shelter of their car watching the waves bounce over Cowloe. Where everyone else was is anyone's guess but most likely braving the walk to Land's End. At least the wind was in the right direction to not be blown off the cliff.

The Missus continued her solo effort at clearing out the garage. I have no idea where she might have put it all and I did not venture upstairs to find out until later in the day. It was already pretty tight up there and now the boxes have spilled out into the hall. It was a sterling effort because the garage is now empty, and we are finished with our temporary accommodation in all its guises. It is a particular set of skills she has, which involves some single mindedness that I am glad was not directed at me. She also managed to make enough room to open the access to the loft so that some of the boxes, at least, can be shipped up there out of the way.

I can hardly say that I did my fair share today unless we really do also serve who only stand and wait. If so, there was an awful lot of standing and a great deal of waiting because if we saw a dozen customers, I was probably seeing double.

Closing the shop for the day could not come soon enough. We were going to put some of the boxes into the loft, but the Missus had not got around to arranging which ones. This proved to be something of an error of judgement. We had tea instead. Sometime in the small hours there was an almighty crash that, after waiting to make sure that it was not a real apocalypse, we got up to investigate.

One of the lower plastic boxes in a pile had a sudden and catastrophic structural failure leading to the boxes above it toppling into the hallway. In true domino style, these knocked over another pile strategically placed for maximum effect if knocked with sufficient force from the appropriate direction. Not only did the broken box, one that contained multiple small items, of course, spill its contents abroad, but the subsequent boxes in the chain reaction, containing larger and heavier items, lodge themselves in the bathroom doorway. If nothing else it is cast iron proof that the small gods of grumpy shopkeepers do not sleep.

April 14th – Sunday

One of the things that has been irritating and getting worse day by day is the broken wheel on the windbreak stand. It is the same wheel that broke before and I bought four new ones to replace it – they come in packs of four. I reasoned that it was sensible to keep them because it was clear that the wheels fitting on the heavy carriage are probably not as robust as they should be. Upgrading them will be a major job because the bespoke stand will be difficult to modify for bigger wheels. In the meanwhile, it is not too onerous to replace like with like.

The actual replacement took only a matter of minutes after I had found a suitable book and couple of pieces of wood to jack the wheel off the ground. The thing that took longer than any of it was finding where I had put the spare wheels for safe keeping. I had looked in all the usual drawers and only as a matter of chance on the very brink of giving up for the day, I found them in a desk alcove in the store room office.

It was obviously the day for things going astray or awry. Having set up my computer in its proper place, I have discovered that the main screen refuses to work the way it did before we moved it. I have tried various things, but it has me flummoxed. I can set it up on its own and it does work then, but not in tandem with the second screen.

I have found it some help when comparing items and spreadsheets and so on to have both to look at the same time. Admittedly, I do not use two screens very often and in reviewing the situation, I concluded that I probably could get away with not having the second screen. This became very pertinent when I started looking for a replacement for the main screen. Apart from it not working like it used to, it also has a line down the middle of the screen where the LEDs have died. It is rather annoying. Consequently, I spent a silly amount of time researching and selecting a replacement screen and because I had decided to have just one, I thought I had better have a big one that I could still view two spreadsheets on at the same time.

Changing the windbreak stand wheel and selecting a new screen kept me busy for several hours. This was very handy because customers coming into the shop did not. Those that had over the last week had highlighted that we were missing two key products from our shelves both of which are dog related. We have been frequently asked for dog poo bags and the second most popular item was dog ball launchers. You might surmise from this that we have a preponderance of dog owners visiting at this time of year, which would be a very astute observation. That being the case I asked the Missus to head to The Farm on the way back from collecting Mother.

I was still considering computer monitors when she called to tell me that she could not get into the barn. The last time I was up there the padlock was misbehaving but after a bit of jiggling and good old fashioned lumping it with something heavy, it was brought to heel. I had roundly emptied a tin of easing oil into it and thought no more about it having successfully locked it again when I left. It seems that the easing oil did not do as much good as I had hoped and when she eventually came back to the

shop it was with the errant padlock in her hand with a broken key in it. At least she had been able to get into the barn and collect the bags and ball launchers.

I immediately diverted my attention from computer monitors to padlocks and bought a new stainless steel one with a lock cover that should last at least a year. I followed this success with ordering the new monitor. It was not quite the one I wanted but I did not think that I could justify £600 on a screen I predominantly used only five months of the year.

I managed to eke out that excitement through to the early afternoon. We had a few customers through the door and a few notable sales. The most notable would have been pretty mundane had it not chimed in resonance with something that we noted last week while doing our shopping from the new cash and carry. I had made comment on the fact that the new supplier did not have an ordinary case of baked beans on offer. All we could get were single small tins or normal sized tins in packs of four. I had queried who would be buying multiple packs of beans if only on holiday for a short time. So, it brought a wry smile to my face today when a family turned up and purchased four cans of beans. The family was not that big, either – they clearly just like beans.

It was quite telling how quiet the day was because we enjoyed some of the best weather we have had for a while. Half the sky was blue with around fifty percent high level cloud, then out to the east the cloud became more consistent across the whole sky. It led to a mainly bright day and if that was not going to invite an increase in visitors, nothing was because they were not here. The sea state was probably as calm as it had been for weeks which did not offer much hope for the few surfers out there trying their luck and, once again, there were not huge number of the wide expanse of beach doing anything else, either.

As I was bringing in the outside display near the end of the shop day, I noticed that the other front wheel on the windbreak stand was also broken. This one does not seem to touch the ground as heavily as the one on the other side for some reason. Either the stand is not level, which I doubt, or the route I chose to pull it in and out is uneven and favours the other wheel, which is more likely. In any case, it needed fixing, so I repeated the process from the morning which neatly bookended the day. I will have to buy another four wheels – after seeing if there are more robust ones of the same size – because with only one left, I will need two and at the busiest and most inconvenient time possible.

Since there was some time before tea was ready, I ran ABH out and down to the Harbour beach that was occupied by just a few people in the chill of the early evening. There was plenty of light and it was still quite bright, a pleasant enough evening for a bit of a run. We were there just two minutes when ABH was distracted by some approaching party from the top of the slipway. Before I could look, we were overtaken by a huge black Great Dane that left ABH with a 'what the bleddy 'eck is that' look on her face and uncharacteristically quiet. When she worked out that it had

no designs on eating her, well not immediately, she tried some tentative barking and a couple of steps toward it. This resulted in running away quickly when the Dane took a step toward her. It provided some great David and Goliath entertainment for the gathered party on the beach. The Great Dane decided that ABH was worth no attention at all and left quite soon after arriving while ABH made the best of recovering her pride.

While I was busy being bored in the shop, the Missus was busy moving things from the mews garage that we had been allowed to continue to use. The flat is even more full of stuff than it was before, which I did not think possible. Most of the boxes are for the loft, except we cannot get into the loft until the kitchen floor is done and that requires at least the washing machine to come out of the kitchen for which there is no room outside the kitchen. There is a hole in my bucket, I fear.

April 13th – Saturday

The sunshine from yesterday was just a big tease, it seems. It was not bad today, at least it was not raining, and although a little cooler than yesterday, it was bright in places, and we did not have a gale of wind. Compared with what was being thrown at us over the last two weeks, this was a good day.

It was a shame, then, that everyone had left either last night or in the early morning; a few of our bread sales went short because we could not supply before eight o'clock in the morning. If we thought that it had been quiet during the poor weather days of the week running up to this point, we were deluding ourselves. Today was the way of things to come for the next few weeks.

So, with lots of time on my hands to do all those jobs I could not do because we had been too busy, I sat around, scratched my behind and did none of them. Well, it would be no good doing all those jobs and finding that I had nothing to do tomorrow. These matters need to be carefully considered.

I was not entirely idle during the day, just mostly. I managed to prepare the bus timetable for its change tomorrow and updated the website so that all the timetables are available for download all at once. I will switch the displayed version tomorrow when we slip into 'low season'.

Although I am supposed to be practising restraint, there were a couple of things that needed to be ordered. We had missed out ordering frozen food because of the freezer breakdown and had just purchased ice creams as the lower volume would be more manageable. I probably should have ordered these earlier, but had most of the basics and it sort of went out of mind. There were gaps, however and things like frozen pizzas were missing for which we apologise to those Easter visitors who wanted on. The order also had the benefit of not being terribly time sensitive.

Also fitting that category of needed now were the pickles and preserves from our local maker of such things. This required a bit more effort than the frozen food which I can largely do from memory and knowing what we had left. I surprised by myself and my dormant enthusiasm by actually getting off my scratched behind to dig out the overstock from the store room and put it out on the shelf. This order is being done mainly for the Cornish grain mustard that they do, which is running dangerously low. Sadly, I am my own best customer for it and it gets used up quite rapidly on my shop bound breakfasts.

At around four o'clock in the afternoon, the sun made a desperate bid to come out. Up until that point, the mist had been thickening through the day with the occasional bright period now and again. We might have been better off than some; a lady who had travelled in from Gwithian told me the mist was much thicker there.

The sea state was also much improved on previous days. It was calm enough for the fishing boats to go out although there was still enough surf even at low water to tempt a few boarders out. This is just as well since low water commands most of the usable portion of the day this week. The expanse of beach that was dotted with people yesterday was largely empty today and even when the sun sort of came out there did not seem to be much temptation to fill it.

I cruised through the remainder of the day with hardly a customer to entertain me. Instead, I looked at fridges because ours in the flat is in a parlous state and the freezer that sits underneath it is so old that it runs on coal. Having said that, of course, it is still perfectly serviceable and will probably continue so longer than we will have need for it. However, as the old adage goes, new lino, new fridge and freezer. No. I had never heard of it either, but the Missus swears her granny used to say it.

The Missus was looking at a small double door freezer and had set her heart on one until mean old me pointed out the depth would prevent us from getting into the kitchen. I then foolishly suggested that I probably no longer needed a dedicated beer fridge and the gap could be used for something else. This prompted a rare moment of sublime agreement after the Missus said that we could have a tall separate fridge where the double fronted one would have gone and a separate freezer where the beer fridge was. Research continues to find suitable items for each gap.

That, thankfully, brought us neatly around to shop closing after a particularly quiet change over day. I shall have to find other things to occupy me if I am to survive the next several weeks with my sanity intact.

April 12th – Friday

At last, a sunny day with no conditions. Well, none that were obvious at the time, although I am sure we will pay dearly for such luxury at some point in the near future: hosepipe ban by June?

I busied myself first thing for the arrival of the window people. I moved our very heavy colour laser printer from the window sill – we have very big window sills – then the carpet man's gear from under the windows that were to be replaced with clear glass. It was not a huge amount of effort and I wanted to ensure that they had a clear run at everything since we had waited so long.

I was moderately surprised when the window man – singular – turned up. I did look around for the rest of the team, but he assured me that he was definitely on his own. It did not take long to establish why he was on his own and that was his expectations for the job and our own were broadly dissimilar. We required, and had communicated to the surveyor, that the porch was to be dismantled and new windows put in their place, effectively reconstructing the porch with the exception of the lid. His notes described fitting two windows into an empty space.

He was also unaware that we had asked that the old window frames be taken away. It was not an official service, but it had been offered when we asked, so we accepted. Lastly, the replacement clear windows were too heavy for one person to lift up the stairs, so he called in reinforcements to take away the old window frames and to help heave the new windows up the steps. I think all was well after that, but I rather left him to his own devices deciding to check later.

The fitting of the launders did not go well, either. Not long after starting, the boys came down to tell me that the existing launders were of two different profiles and would not fit together. If memory serves, they were done at different times to try and stop the geet floods we were getting on the corners, much of it to do with the size of the launders and the long run to the downpipe. They worked well for years but apparently the join was lagged with silicone filler, which they did not want to do again.

At least this time they think that we will get away with standard size launders. We will have an additional downpipe on the corner by the drive up to the mews. My only concern with that was the Tesmorbury vans reversing up there and scattig it down. We also discussed options for the back corner that the vans have previously knocked seven bells out of. I think we may have one of the geet granite blocks left, which should at least wreak some revenge if not solve the problem.

The sunshine of the day really got into its stride by the middle of the day and the early afternoon. Even our shady side of the street was starting to warm up nicely, or it might just have been that I was sitting too close to the pasty warmer (sorry, MS). That had seen some action during the first part of the day when pasty sales took an unexpected turn for the better. I had based my order on the sales from the previous week, which were poor to say the least. I was near enough cleaned out of cheese pasties in the morning. I have some frozen traditional pasties that I can fall back on but once the cheese have gone, they are gone. I might be in trouble come the weekend.

The return of the sun had a dramatic effect on the beach, which when I looked on in the afternoon was dotted with people. For the first time this year there were people camped along the high water line and bathers rather than all surfers were cavorting in the shallow surf. The sea was much better behaved, better even than last night. It was lowish water when I looked and there was plenty of time for it to get leary again.

We started to lose the sunshine in the afternoon or rather the mist returned from yesterday and played a part in blotting it out. The temperature also dropped quite considerably, which we understand to be a feature of the coming days. It had me reaching for my fleece that I had discarded in the middle of the afternoon; a fleeting glimpse of what we could have had.

The boys had returned to put a roof back on the porch after the window man had gone. I understood it to be a temporary job, but it looks pretty sturdy to me and probably more robust than the roof we had before that had started leaking like a colander not long before the work started. They tell me that we will probably end up with fibreglass but, frankly, as long as it works, I do not care very much.

It had been quite a busy day, which made me wonder where all the people had been all week. I imagine it was the final fling before the majority gone home over the weekend. My expectation is that we will then enter the desolation of the in between world between holidays and the more consistent good weather starting, which is probably the middle of May. I must gird my loins and resist the urge to buy lots of grocery stock that we will end up throwing away. I must also resist the urge to buy lots of gift stock that we will not sell until the end of May.

Since that was a lot of resisting all at the same time, I thought I might capitulate to desire and have a beer. Seemed fair to me.

April 11th – Thursday

Well, it was not exactly raining this morning, not as such but the street was wet and so was everything that was outside. The air was so thick with damp that you could get wet just by walking through it and on top of that, you could not see a thing, either.

I spoke with one of the fishermen who had come down to the Harbour to see if they could put to sea once the tide had receded a little. They wanted to assess the sea state but found that particularly difficult when they could not actually see the sea. It was pretty obvious at high water because the waves were crashing over the Harbour wall and the waves that you could see just before the wall were heavy with swell and choppy too.

There was very little in the way of outstanding jobs in the shop to carry out. There were a few things to put out on shelves and I had to do the guess for the number of pasties (sorry, MS) for the weekend. So, with a little spare time I thought that I had

better finalise the stock values for each department and send them off to the accountant. The up-market spreadsheet system that I use has had a column at the end of each item that totals the stock value. All I have to do is key in the numbers of each item and read the total for the stock value column. I have not yet worked out how to make it produce a combined report for all the departments but doing it manually is not that onerous.

It was only after I had completed it that I remembered I had not counted the hooded sweatshirts. Now that is an onerous task and I had been putting it off since Christmas when we did everything else. I used the excuse that the shop and store room were full of things from the flat but after making space for the grocery order earlier in the week, I no longer had that as an excuse. It took about an hour and I also restocked the shop hangers so that we had a full complement on display. We had sold a few over Easter, but I did not think that would matter too much.

While I was labouring with my counting, the boys were finishing the painting in the living room and putting on the remaining ridge tiles. It was explained to me what a complex process the latter was. There were about four layers of things that went on, breathable layers, insulation and plastic strips before the ridge tiles themselves were fitted. There was cementing, mitring and screwing down but by the end of the day, they announced it was complete and offered that I go up for a 'topping out' ceremony. Sadly, I discovered how busy I was somewhere between the first and second step of the ladder and had to demure.

The launders will go on tomorrow and next week the scaffolding will be reconfigured so that the boys can get to the front wall of the building as well as all the way to the back for phase two of the work.

The Missus, fed up with clambering over the bed that was hard up against the wall on her side, broke out the new bed that had sat boxed up in the shop for a week. The mattress for our usual bed is squeezed in behind the headboard and I am rather hoping that it does not sag in the night and land on top of us. The configuration means that the door does not open more than a quarter way and we have to squeeze through the gap.

I put such thoughts aside because some clever fellow had deemed the conditions in the bay sufficiently calm to launch the Lifeboat on training. I had a quick scout around the very excellent Shore Crew to see if anyone could remember exactly what we had to do. Between us, we cobbled together enough of an idea to get the boat sliding down the long slipway at the appropriate time and with a crew on board. One of our esteemed number peeled off to launch the Inshore boat into the less than welcoming waters. All we had to do now was work out how to bring both boats back again.

Before we all took to our duties, we took a minute to remember a man whose name was practically synonymous with the Lifeboat winch. He shuffled off too soon earlier

in the day. He was one of the first to make me feel welcome at the station and having been there for many years was held in high regard. Out of respect and remembrance, I took the winch operations tonight.

The boat launched at around seven o'clock and promptly disappeared from view into the low cloud that had been hanging around all day. It was much thinner than it had been earlier, at least it was thin enough for the Lifeboat to see its way back to the station again around an hour or so later. There was some fun and games watching the Inshore recovered not that long after high water in a very disturbed bay with waves still lumping over the Harbour wall. It was good experience for both Tooltrak driver and boat helmsman to get the boat back on the trailer that was being dragged side to side by the fickle current.

The big boat returned shortly after. There was a bit of lump down on the short slip but the boys managed to get the 'fishing rod' in place without too much wellie wetting. From my eerie in the winch room, I would venture that it was a textbook recovery in somewhat difficult conditions and in a smooth and efficient operation the boat was washed and made ready for the next launch by nine o'clock. We are, after all, a very timely, very excellent Shore Crew.

April 10th – Wednesday

We had more rain this morning. It was heavy at times, as well. Still, the ground probably needed it after all that dryness yesterday. We should also be mindful that the reservoirs need filling up, after all, we only had our hosepipe ban rescinded at the end of August last year. The water board's website tells me that total storage is at 99.2 percent, it was 80 percent this time last year and only 85 percent at the beginning of this year. If it keeps raining at this rate, we will have to start drinking a lot more otherwise the reservoirs will spill some. Beer is around eight parts water, so that sounds like a good place to start.

It was still raining when I headed to the gymnasium. Miraculously, there is still no flooding on the floor and the bulge in the ceiling is no bigger. It must be a very selective leak. Today, I managed to beat my benchmark time on the rowing machine, so clearly what I wear has no bearing on the result at all – unless having wet shorts spurred me along.

The passing rain left behind a legacy of mizzle but at least it was temperate mizzle. I felt reasonably comfortable down on the expanse of Harbour beach with ABH after my blistering session. We had a bit of a run around but when she settled to munch her way through a length of seaweed, I felt it was time up and we headed back to the shop.

Early in the morning, I had called up our new waste collection company. I had asked for the cardboard collection to be rescheduled for today and called to check that it had been. At first, the very pleasant lady – certainly more pleasant than the not so

pleasant man I had spoken with last week – told me that the cardboard collection was not scheduled. Then she found a note on the file explaining that we had missed last week due to the change of day – which the not so pleasant man had told me had not happened – but was still not clear if we were being collected today or not. I explained that I was unhappy about leaving the cardboard out just in case because if I had to pull in back in again, it would be so much papier mache. She asked me to wait while she contacted the depot, which I did, and when she came back I was told that the manager would send me a message either way regarding the collection.

He did not but, as ever, a clearer picture is available from the man on the ground doing the work. It was the same driver that we had when we were contracted to the company he used to work for before it was taken over by the company we are now contracted to. I do hope that you are keeping up, dear reader, as I only type at this rate and no slower, else my fingers do not keep pace with my thoughts. I explained the whole situation with the waste and the cardboard, which came as no surprise to he, a seasoned waste collector. He told me to put our cardboard out whenever we had some and he would collect it anyway. It works for me, and it probably works for the company too as I am paying for the service, just not necessarily when they think they are providing it. It costs me a pasty (sorry, MS) and the occasion can of pop.

Despite the stunning weather - the mist cleared a bit so that we could vaguely see the other side of the bay – we were not overrun with customers. I did not take it personally and amused myself with the remnants of the new cash and carry order. I had tackled most of it the day before but there was still quite a bit left. There were a few items that I did not remember ordering and I surmised that there were a few things left in our 'basket' from the last time we attempted an order last spring. I had noticed this omission but thought that I had cleared the old basket before I started. Clearly not. There is also the possibility of 'key bounce', inadvertently hitting the add key twice.

While I was at the gymnasium and working through our delivery, two of the boys arrived to carry on with the painting of the living room. This was less than straight forward as we have placed furniture around the periphery of the room. There were heavy things in places that they needed to get to so that they could reach the window sills and the window surrounds. Every time I went up there, they seemed to be managing very well. Back again tomorrow to finish off, I hope.

Dovetailing with that, I spoke with our window people today who tell me they are coming on Friday to replace the obscure windows that should not be and to fit the new windows for the porch. When they have done that, the builders can finish off the porch and we will be almost finished indoors. Then I can put my computer back.

It is on that computer that all my messages come in. I can receive them on my smart mobile telephone but it is a pain in the rear trying to keep track of and print invoices from it. I think that I have a gap in the invoices I have started printing from the mobile telephone and when I still had use of the computer. I cannot resolve this until the

computer is set up again. Even then it will take a while. Given the time it has been off I estimate that there will be around 500 messages I need to wade through, the vast majority will be rubbish and deleted but each one needs to be selected individually. I can barely wait.

Because the furniture had all been moved around in the living room, we had to find a place to perch to eat our tea in the evening. We have moved from relative comfort to living in utter disarray again. Yes, we can hardly wait until the inside is finished – except then there is the back third of the roof to do. Oh sweet joy.

April 9th – Tuesday

The wind was still howling and the sea angry when I headed out with ABH early this morning. The Harbour was full of spring high tide swirling water, white in the main and disturbed some more as waves came crashing over the wall. The pair of us were fair battered about as we passed the head of the slipway and turned up the kinder end of Stone Chair Lane.

It was cold, too. I lasted the first hour in the shop before being forced to the first electric sliding door on automatic. When that was still not good enough, I went upstairs and slipped into something a little warmer. I had never really stopped to think about it before, but I suppose that standing behind the counter in thick jumper hat and gloves is not a great look. It probably evokes thoughts of street market traders with fingerless gloves. I was a cut above that; my gloves had fingers.

Had I been a street trader I probably would have been even colder as there was no action in The Cove to keep me warm. We were quiet throughout the whole morning and having completed all the tasks I could think of doing, I ended up scratching my behind waiting on the next delivery. Thankfully, I did not have to wait long and the smaller of today's deliveries arrived first. The lack of business allowed me to clear it all before the next, much bigger one arrived.

The Missus had started her painting lark early this morning. She had clearly come to a natural break because she left ABH with me while she went off to collect Mother. The little girl has become increasingly nervous of travelling anywhere with the Missus – now, there is no place for misogynistic comments about lady drivers, especially when they have access to all those heavy and sharp things in the kitchen. We think that it stems from when the Missus drove through a big puddle and the resultant dowsing of the truck scared the pants off her.

I had tried having ABH down with me earlier in the day, but she was shaking in her boots after the briefest of time. I was not sure whether she was cold from the wind still streaming in through the now open first electric sliding door in The Cove or the constant rattling of the sleeves on the scaffolding was getting to her. It was certainly

getting to me as it was making one almighty racket and at a frequency that my false ears were amplifying nicely. Just as an aside, the crackling of our pasty bags (sorry, MS) does much the same and when I am serving pasties, I can hear nothing else.

Anyway, as luck would have it, the big cash and carry order arrived shortly after the Missus got back and had taken ABH off for a walk. We were also lucky that it was the same driver as we had two years ago and who is very amenable to helping unload the cages. Where we were not so lucky was that the lorry's arrival sparked a sudden rush of customers, the most that we had all day before or after. Now, dear reader, you cannot convince me that this was pure coincidence and not the small gods of grumpy shopkeepers at work.

Custom picked up generally in the latter part of the day. This, too, was no surprise because I was gainfully employed in trying to clear the order before tomorrow's waste and cardboard collections. The sales would not set our world alight, but it was better than not having them at all.

With the upturn in business comes the risk of those customers leaving something behind. Today there were sunglasses and a hat. Youngsters have arrived on skateboards and on several occasions have left without them but odder than that are people arriving with walking sticks in hand and leaving without them. Perhaps we are the Lourdes of the Far West. Today, however, I am not sure that anyone could top the last family of the day. They left behind a pram complete with baby inside. I am very glad I caught them before they disappeared from view. They did seem particularly embarrassed, but I am not entirely convinced that it was not deliberate. I rail at litter being left but I draw the line at babies – they make too much noise when you try and put them in the bin.

Ordinarily, it would not be noteworthy at all, but these are strange times. It did not rain here today, not at all, not one drop. I did not see any birds carrying twigs, so I am not all that hopeful, so we will take that as a little win.

April 8th – Monday

I thought that it made for a pleasant change having our rain in the morning instead of the back end of the day. That was until I discovered that we had it at the back end of the day as well.

It had largely stopped by the time I headed to the gymnasium for my blistering session. I now have my key and my kit back so all was well with the world and strangely, I missed my target time by a mile. My other shorts are thicker and afford additional comfort during my 5,000 metres row. Perhaps that is it.

I have long since stopped worrying about the state of the floor in the hut with a tin roof. Despite all the rain, it remains only damp on the floor, which is quite a miracle, although there is an ominous bulge in the hardboard panel that has been used to

cover where the ceiling collapsed some while ago. I open both windows in the hope that the breeze might do some good at drying the place out. It had dried everything else out in The Cove.

By the time I came back, the day had transformed into a much more pleasant condition. It was much brighter and any breeze, now coming in from the southeast, was almost unfelt in our part of The Cove – as if that was to last. I ran ABH down to the Harbour beach, now sporting its spring tide credentials by being almost empty of sea. The little girl had a grand time chasing around other dogs that wanted nothing to do with her or did but were on leads. I had to pull her away in the end because time was pressing, which is really not fair at all. She has put up with sitting about upstairs while the Missus paints or moves things about, which can be no fun at all for a young pup who wants to play all the time. No wonder she has us up at night; it is revenge.

I was very mindful that we have a big grocery order arriving tomorrow and that the store room floor had been used as an extension of our household storage space during the ongoing works. There is, at the back of the store room, a set of shelves that has acted as the dumping ground for many things over the years. It has had an occasional clear out now and again but had not enjoyed such a luxury for some time. I knew roughly what was there and most of it would need to be thrown away. Really, only the spare slatwall hangers could be kept and they take up very little space.

Finishing a very late breakfast, I set to on the task, which did not take quite as long as I might have imagined. It helps, of course, having a skip across the road, which made life much easier than trying to bag up the various bigger objects that needed throwing away. It would have been helpful if the waste cardboard had been collected last week as we have quite a bit now. We will have even more by Wednesday. It is piled up at the end of the store room which now means I will have to clear the delivery before the cardboard is scheduled to be picked up on Wednesday else I will never reach it.

The breeze did not bother us at all during the day. It was in evidence across the bay as the hefty waves running in during the afternoon were peeling back in capes of spray. There was a small army of surfers out there during the sweet spot of the flood. It must have been reasonable at low water as well because our German friend from further up the hill only goes out in kinder but serviceable conditions. Just before he left, our boy who had been on the roof all day, told me that the wind was going around to the northwest early in the night and ramping up to 70 miles per hour.

It being bin day tomorrow I was quite happy that our bin would survive the night. Our clearing out upstairs has generated extra and heavy waste this week and our bin is full. The bin that I bring down from the Mews, however, had only the one sack in it, so I kindly filled the void with some more bags of ours. It was not quite the selfless act of neighbourly good will. The additional bags would not fit into our bin, so would have gone into theirs in any case.

I took ABH out after tea when the wind was just starting to kick in. The showers that had initially come with it had just gone and we headed around the block unscathed. The wind speed had ramped up to around 40 miles per hour at this stage but because it was in the northwest, it felt much more ferocious. As it picked up, it brought the sea state into an angry looking mess and the ordered rolling waves from earlier were now a disorganised boiled pot, flecked with white tops.

By the time we went to bed, the noise of it alone was scary enough. For us – and probably our neighbours, too – it was added to by the flapping of the remaining sheets on the scaffolding. The scaffolding itself had already proven its stability during the previous ten storms of the season, so we had no concerns there. We had to close our bedroom window because the rain that had returned when it turned to night, was lashing onto the new worktop windowsill.

ABH was none too keen in stepping out last thing, so the Missus let her out the back where it was relatively sheltered. We would discover in the morning if the new roof, finished today apart from the ridge tiles, was still there.

April 7th – Sunday

The day did not look quite as alluring as yesterday and the wind that was still with us was making an awful racket in the sheets that remain on the scaffolding. Our insulation and double glazing work very well in muffling the sound while we are indoors. On the positive side, the day remained largely dry until the end, although with low grey cloud and mist, it did look like it might rain at any moment.

It was not long into the day when I decided that I had better throw myself into the grocery order from the alternative cash and carry at Exeter. There were bound to be products that we had been used to getting that we would have to find alternatives for. I also wanted to mark as 'favourite' all the products that we would normally purchase to make it easier next time. This necessarily made the ordering process this time much longer than it would otherwise have been.

The process begins with a stomp around the food and drinks aisle looking for things that are missing that cannot be replaced from the store room. Of course, that does mean stomping around the store room as well for each item I find missing. The Missus is a bit more organised and will write a list to fill the shelves first and makes one trip of it. The result is the same – I hope.

There were numerous compromises that we and our customers will just have to get used to. The prices are largely similar to our usual cash and carry, so no one should be upset when the new products appear on the shelves. There were, though, a few anomalies that we will have to work around, the most obvious of which was the absence of single, standard cans of baked beans. We could buy half size cans, which we discounted, or buy them in packs of four, but I suspect that even the most hardened baked beans eater would struggle with a pack that size on, say, a week's

holiday. Happily, our local food service provider does them at a reasonable price, so we are covered.

It took most of the day, on and off, before I got to the end of my list. I talked over some of the issues with the Missus after she came back from collecting Mother and doing a spot of shopping. In all, the ordering process was not too painful, and we did not have to make many changes or omissions. In fact, the choice of product was wider than we have had in years from the competitor, which was quite refreshing. The only downside is we now have to expect an afternoon delivery – alright now, but far less than alright in the height of summer. I also need to have a chat with them because our direct debit seems to have disappeared and I had to pay by credit card, which does not help either of us very much.

On a far brighter note, I have fixed the LED tube lights back into our new dairy fridge and they work. These were responsible for shorting it out last year – could it have been the year before. Anyway, the tube lights that had flooded with water from the poorly designed fridge sat in the way in the store room for an excessive period of time.

Having discovered what the problem was, I put some thought into arranging a fix that was not forthcoming from the maintenance people I pay a fortune to each year. The problem being that the water ran down from the hole that the cable pokes out from and enters the light fitting at the top, where the contact points are. The delay in putting in the fix was that I was waiting on finding a small tube of silicon sealant as I did not want to buy and waste one of those large tubes that require a special tool to use. Finding no such thing and fed up with the tubes getting in the way, I used some blu tack to fill the holes. I had already slipped the finger of a rubber surgical glove over the connector and clipped it on with a cable tie. When I fitted the tubes back into place, I pulled the end of the tightly fitting rubber glove over the connection hopefully rendering it waterproof. I know, utter genius.

The lights have been shining like a beacon for a few days now. I have high hopes that the fix is near enough permanent, probably until the rubber withers.

Under the glaring light it was more obvious that we were running out of bacon from a very good butcher up at St Just. Having stepped out on the road of restocking, I discovered that our wines were running low and that I needed to order some bread from the milkman. It all happened in a bit of a rush at the end of the day and might just have been psychological. The Missus had told me that as soon as I arrived upstairs we would be shifting the heavy sideboard from our bedroom to the living room where it belonged. It is not just heavy; it is heavy and awkward not allowing you to move your legs very much. Still, it is done now and will only have to be shifted when the electrician comes to install the heaters and the Highly Professional Craftsperson comes to finish the painting, which means we cannot put things in it yet. Otherwise, it is where it is permanently.

The whole operation, and the consumption of our tea, was watched over by two collared doves who had taken shelter on one of the scaffold poles outside the window. The netting that is there is only to stop larger bits of building dropping on the general public's head, so it is quite easy for nature to come and go. The two birds are a more permanent fixture around here and breed under the Lifeboat station roof. I have no idea whether these are the original pair or some of the paired off children as they have been around for years.

They share their abode – well, it is big enough – with various groups of pigeon, which we have seen nesting on occasion under the slipway by the station doors. Despite the infrequent launching of the Lifeboat, it is probably seen as a safe environment to live and breed as we are, after all, a very nature-loving, very excellent Shore Crew. The station is also regularly guarded, especially in rough weather, by a large seal that patrols along the southern edge of the bay. It is a playful seal and often lounges with its triangular looking head poking out of the water, wondering just how many of the people looking on think he is a great white shark.

April 6th – Saturday

Sunshine! I told myself it was not real and felt much better about it after that. I will have to watch what they put in my tea though.

Leaving the sunshine aside, today was all about the ferocious wind that we had been warned of. I have no idea when it was supposed to have peaked, but by halfway through the day Land's End was averaging just short of 40 miles per hour from a southerly wind. Gwennap Head, windiest place in the universe could only manage a paltry 63 miles per hour gust, hardly enough to straighten their windsock. Oddly, Gwennap Head was registering a southwesterly, which was probably more accurate.

It was enough, however, for me to deter several young people from purchasing kites. I do not like turning away sales, but it saves the embarrassment of explaining to parents later why their small child suddenly migrated to St Just. The children's kite that we have would be ripped to shreds in the conditions we had today. The more robust stunt kite might survive a little longer, but it has an advisory of Force six to seven and we were in Force eight to nine territory today.

Along with our new improved weather, we had another increase in business from a new and improved visitor contingent. We were busy from quite early on and remained so for much of the day. There was a revival of pasty selling (sorry, MS) that concerned me a little, but the flow calmed down from the middle of the afternoon, so we may yet be in the clear. More of a surprise was selling a few bathing costumes, the sort for children who wished to cavort in the water. The sea state was a bit fierce, so I believe that they had found some rockpools to splash around in.

Unlike yesterday, the sea was bouncing up the cliffs opposite a couple of hours before high water. Waves were launching over the Harbour wall covering from one end to the other and having a rare old time over Cowloe. There were about half a dozen surfers out in the big waves who reckoned it was good enough to surf, although the Lifeguards did not agree and had red flagged the beach. Not that there was very much room left for the red flag. Despite it still being neap tides, the tidal push has the waves almost up against the dunes and the waves were running amok on the rocks there.

It was busy but not summer busy, so I had plenty of time between customers to work my way through a delivery that turned up late yesterday afternoon. Initially, I thought that it was our small sweet bags but it turned out to be gifts and novelties for our gift aisle. I had been careful not to place too big an order and most of it fitting out on the shelves with no need to find storage space for the overstock. We now have gift shelves that look a little more respectable but there is still more to come once I get my act together and I am sure we are on the right side of the coming quiet period.

At some stage during the middle of the afternoon and when I was not paying attention, the sun went off. It was replaced by grey low cloud and mist and eventually, yes, more rain. It was a bit of a disappointment to say the least but probably confirmed that I was indeed imagining things this morning.

By closing time, the mist had gone and the rain dissipated. Someone had obviously taken Kathleen home again.

*I'll Take You Home Again, Kathleen
Across the ocean wild and wide
To where your heart has ever been
Since first you were my Bonnie bride.
The roses all have left your cheek.
I've watched them fade away and die
Your voice is sad when e'er you speak
And tears bedim your loving eyes.*

*Oh! I will take you back, Kathleen
To where your heart will feel no pain
And when the fields are fresh and green
I'll take you to your home again!*

April 5th – Friday

The morning was cold, grey and damp. I could hardly contain myself having such rare, good weather first thing in the morning. It was even better than that as it turned out. We had a few hours of warmer, slightly less grey and misty and dry following on.

The unexpected heatwave – we use the term advisedly, or perhaps even with a hint of irony – brought a veritable upsurge in customers and an equal demand for pasties (sorry, MS) that I had not anticipated. I am now hoping that the promised cataclysmic

weather for the weekend that I also had not accounted for actually lives up to the hyperbole and produces a corresponding downturn in pasty consumption, else I will run out by Sunday.

In truth, the weather is unlikely to be as bad as forecast nor is the forecast really that bad. The lady on Radio Pasty was talking of winds reaching 50 to 60 miles per hour in the Far West, which is but a mere breeze in these parts. The BBC has also admitted that its forecasts accentuate the poor weather over the good. A friend and neighbour who reads newspapers and takes note of things happening east of Camborne sent me the clipping. I have been saying this for years. Just remember, dear read, you read it here first, The Sennen Cove Diary with its finger on the pulse of the nation – well, our little bit of it anyway.

It was good to see some European visitors among the crowds. It was not quite so good when they bought postcards as we were unable to service them with the appropriate stamps. I had been aware of the impending price increase on April 2nd and had sold the last International stamp a couple of days before. I think that was the first time that we have not been left with any. The euphoria must have gone to my head because I forgot to purchase replacements of the new value until today. I did have a look to see if I could buy them in advance but the sneaky fellows at the Post Office had shut down the website the day before.

Before I continue, we are quite used to the price of a first class stamp being increased by a percentage well ahead of inflation and it is the third such increase in twelve months. However, I had thought that the increase on the second class stamp was limited such that even we poor grumpy shopkeepers can afford to send letters. I was quite in awe that the price increased by over ten percent this year. It seems that the gloves are off.

The Royal Mail shop website shut down was clearly an assumption. When I logged in today to purchase the stamps, the website was still showing a message saying it was not working and gave a telephone number to call instead. The telephone number was incorrect, so I dialled again using the correct number. Unfortunately, I had chosen a bad time to call because all their operators were busy on other calls as they were experiencing an unusually high number of calls.

In the fifteen minutes while I was waiting for a team that was “trying its very best to help” me, I looked at the options I *could* get to on the website. I thought that I had better have my account number to hand and that looking at ‘My Account’ setting might be a good place. It was not. Thinking that perhaps looking at ‘Order History’ might be a better bet I discovered that it took me to a page of ‘Business Services’ instead.

All of this was just passing time because when the very pleasant lady answered the telephone eventually, she told me all that I needed to do was to go to the website and order the stamps I wanted. It may have helped had she actually listened to

anything that I had to say but I guess that may have not worked with the script she was reading from. I was advised to try another browser, which I did but found that it did not remember my password like the other browser did and neither did I.

Since I could not login, immediately at least, the very pleasant lady told me that it was because I was not registered. I assured her that I was the last time I purchased stamps to which she suggested that my registration probably 'dropped off the system'. Given that that its closely associated company has previous issues with computer systems, that might have been believable, except on this occasion it seemed unlikely, particularly given I had logged in not half an hour earlier. I was told to re-register, which I knew would not work because I was already registered but since the very pleasant lady was clearly not to be argued with, or indeed communicate with in any other manner, I did not bother.

Having established that they might have previous browser issues, I tried again on the alternative browser having found out what my password was. It all worked marvellously, which was a happy outcome because I did not fancy another fifteen minutes waiting to talk with someone who did not want to listen to me.

Our visitor surge dropped off a little in the afternoon, suggesting that it was the leaving contingent buying things for the journey home and going home presents. The lull gave me the opportunity to have a look at the sea where the swell had been building all afternoon. It was dancing a merry jig over Cowloe and thumping over the wall at near high water. Big waves were running into Gwenver but there did not look to be too much leaping up the cliffs opposite, so perhaps the swell direction was wrong for that sort of thing. It went well with the insistent rain that started at around four o'clock and continued into the evening.

I took ABH down to the Harbour beach after tea because it is now still light at that time. She takes delight in all manner of games played with the oar weed down there, including eating it. Someone advised that it was poisonous for dogs but the bleddy hound used to have a much now and again as well and she lived to fifteen years old. We do not let ABH have an abundance of it and so far, there seems no harm. The only trouble I had was tearing her away and had to walk to the top of the western slip before she broke away from her chomping and followed me.

I then conducted a lengthy search for a visitor's Bramley computer ear buds. The visitor who had stayed at our old residence in the Mews behind had telephoned to say that this son had lost his ear buds and the clever little things were still pinging as being in the mews. I did a fingertip search of the area and even had a look around the house since the key had been left with us. I also knocked on the doors of the three occupied properties butting onto the mews and there still was no report of them being found.

Calling back, I asked the father if the buds could be made to make a sound, which I believe that they can, so that I could locate them if I was close by. It did cross my

mind that I might not be able to hear the tone as I was not wearing my false ears. We did try that but to no avail and then the son, in the background, announced that they had 'moved' and were pinging at the OS down the road. Whether they had actually moved or the initial information was incorrect, I have no idea and I guess I will not hear the outcome either. I do hope that it was just that the finder had taken them there to be lodged until reclaimed as they are expensive devices – I know because the Missus has some.

After all that excitement, under a glowering and darkening sky, I was all set for bed. Grumpy Shopkeepers cannot take too much excitement all in the same day.

April 4th – Thursday

There were a few bits of brightness around during the morning just to tease us but they were soon replaced by the order of the day, which was more grey misery, mizzle and awfulness. Into the afternoon it went downhill from there. I was tempted to put 'the end' after that but I would not wish to short-change you dear reader, as I do enough of that in the shop.

Our carpet man arrived to finish off the hallway and to do the steps. He did the hallway but not steps because they were wet. He suggested coming back next week but the reason that the steps and entrance are wet is because we bring it in on our shoes. It is likely to be wet next week, too, so we need to put a rug or mat down in the interim. I am sure it would be very boring if life was simple, and things just went as planned.

The Missus ran off to our cash and carry to collect the top up items that we would need to see us through to next week. I checked that they had them before she went and needed to cross off two items because they had been delisted. I wrote a general letter to the company for the local manager to share if he wanted to, setting out the reasons why we will be taking our not inconsiderable spend away this year. Apparently, we are one of the top five spending customers at the branch, but it clearly held no sway with the powers that be. It seems a very odd strategy.

In her absence, I looked after ABH. Last year she was beginning to get the hang of sitting on her throne by the door, meeting and greeting especially when she knew that the Missus had gone away. So far it has been a bit of a shaky start, but the Missus has been upstairs. Today, I had hoped for better, but she spent most of the time in the doorway tripping people up and shouting at other dogs that passed by and very little time on her throne at all. We shall have to persevere and hope that she improves.

We slipped into a very tedious afternoon as the rain came down with renewed vigour. Fortunately, I had a couple of parcels delivered that I could break the monotony opening, pricing and putting out on the shelves. I hurried through it because the cardboard that was due to be taken away was still outside uncollected.

After a while I decided to give the waste collection company a poke and I was told that the truck had come yesterday. I queried why the date had been changed without notice, as the previous collection had been on a Thursday, and was told unapologetically that it was Wednesday on our account and so there. I was getting nowhere with the agent I spoke with, so I sent a message to the account manager to make sure we were not charged and arranged a collection for the following week.

The day dragged on until closing time whereupon I ran ABH down to the beach. There was a family there again but apart from making her introduction to each one, she went off and did her own thing. The small boy in the group had a remote controlled truck that had been at rest for the first ten minutes we were there as he threw stones into the sea. ABH had ignored it at first but when it started up spinning and running across the beach, she was delighted by it and found it an excellent game. It entertained her constantly for about fifteen minutes and I had to pull her away because it was teatime. I can see that we will have to purchase one – just for her, obviously, as I have no interest at all in such things.

I had to leave half a pasty behind to make Lifeboat training on time where we did not launch the boat again due to the weather. Instead, we played with the winch. I should have gone over during the day when the power was off so that I could make sure that the winch started when it was off. For a simple diesel engine, it has some very complex wiring, we discovered, for batteries and chargers of which it has at least two. I am not entirely sure what we concluded from delving into its inner works but it passed some time before we went home. We are, after all, a very perplexed, very excellent Shore Crew.

April 3rd – Wednesday

A customer brought to my attention as I served her family that I should have a security tag on our packets of Werther's sweets. I had not heard the news story and she told me that supermarkets had found that the sweet was being targeted by thieves. I told her that I did not think we had to worry as being a small independent shop our prices were much more reasonable than the supermarkets.

Today had been heralded by Radio Pasty earlier in the week as the best day this week. Obviously, I invested all my hopes and dreams on today, planning all manner of outside activities such as al fresco pasty selling (sorry, MS). Imagine then my utter devastation on being informed this morning by the same weather forecaster that today would be ruined with heavy showers in the afternoon. Of course, as days went this week they did not have to try very hard to be the best.

Despite a good dose of sunshine during the morning it did not deliver us hordes of happy shoppers. Perhaps they were all just too stunned by the sudden good weather or just too ashamed after being told off for littering. I do apologise, dear reader,

because I very rarely leave the page on a sour note. I will make amends or at least an effort in that direction.

In the doldrums of the morning, I made an effort to input my remaining invoices into our accounting system. I am now mightily confused because I am guessing that the invoices I get during this month are required to be in the system to input into the financial year end that has now moved to the end of March. At the same time, these invoices now feed into quarter one of the new VAT year, so I do not know where to file them. I would say that the Government had achieved its aim of Making Tax Difficult and perhaps even over-achieved.

I was grateful when the Missus came down to relieve me and interrupted the process. I made a swift exit to the gymnasium using the key from the keysafe. When I went up into the flat later in the day, I noticed that the Missus had uncovered my proper gymnasium kit, so I will have my own key back on Friday. Perhaps I should keep on with the temporary kit because for the second session running, I managed to better my average on the rowing machine, which seldom happens in the second blistering session of the week. I did not even have to come back and lie down for a while.

There was a bit of a flutter of busyness when I returned to the shop, but it was short-lived and for the rest of the day I had to be content with random visits. Today was definitely not a day for eating pasties, it seems, and was probably just as well because I missed the deadline for reordering. It did however jolt me into remembering that I needed to produce a list for the Missus so that I could send her on a mercy dash to the Hayle cash and carry. The cheffing boys at the OS relieve us of prodigious quantities of canned beer during the week - I can only assume they use it in the cooking – and we were close to running out. There are a few other items that we could do with replenishing as well.

We have come to the conclusion that the Hayle cash and carry is a lost cause and the Redruth store being collection only, if a non-starter. Therefore, we will have to go back to the competition at Exeter, which is a monumental pain in the rear, but we must adapt not only to the inconvenient delivery schedule but also the differences in products available to us. Since we did not use the alternative last year, our access to their system had been revoked, so I had to call to get them to let us in again.

The whole process had me looking around our shelves to see what had gone missing since the weekend and to refill the shelves where I could from the store room. There was quite a bit missing – some of it we had not been able to fill in the first place and consequently there was still quite a bit missing when I had finished. It was a bit early to be making the cash and carry list, but I have the list for the Missus provided I can entice her away from working her way through the flat on her mission.

She was up there at it all day again, working her way through the kitchen. The decorating bit is done so she was cleaning cupboards and the items that were going

back into them. Now that our skip has been replaced with an empty one – or was – I expect we can use some of the space for the myriad bits of kitchen kit that has not been used for years. Cast about on the floor I noticed an ice cream maker that probably made ice cream once in its history with us and a pasta (sorry, oh, never mind) machine that I do not think has ever been used. I seem to recall that it was a wedding present and had therefore been sitting using up cupboard space for 26 years in case the people who gave it to us turn up one day and demand evidence of its continued good keeping.

With a bit of a gale in the southwest all day, I had some breeze swirling into the shop on occasion and keeping the temperature down. Outside in the sunshine I understand it was reasonably temperate but since I only went out once with ABH on my return from the gymnasium, I would not know. The wind had made the sea a bit choppy and there was a bit of swell today that kept the surfers happy in the last knockings of the day.

The electricity board had arrived early again. I am not sure they did any installing today, but they did an awful lot of preparation and there were coils of cable and fittings alongside some of the new poles to the west of us. The Lifeboat station is switched off tomorrow so I may assume those marked poles will be installed at the same time. I just hope they press the right button at the power station to turn off the correct circuit. Candles are another thing our cash and carry have stopped doing.

April 2nd – Tuesday

Yesterday's really was a glorious morning; the Diary does not do April Fool jokes because of the time lag in publication. We were back to normal this morning with rain moving about an hour after we had opened and staying with us into the afternoon. It produced a trading day that would not have sustained a nineteenth century street urchin.

We had a slew of deliveries first thing that were all probably superfluous but at least gave me something to do. I also remembered, probably a little too late, to order some of the small tubs of Moomaid of Zennor ice cream that are so popular, and these turned up in the middle of the day. The last of the orders that should have been done before the weekend were the popti savoury biscuits. These fill the shelf above the bread and cake display that has been looking very bleak without them. We still await their delivery.

One thing that I was not expecting today was the arrival of the spare room double bed. For some reason I had it in my head that it was a divan, and I was wondering where we were going to put it. There is nowhere upstairs, although conceivably we could have placed it under the two mattresses we are sleeping on at the moment and sleep with our noses pressed against the ceiling. Since it is actually a bed not a divan, the boxes fitted in the shop in front of where our newspapers would have

been. There had to be some advantage to not doing newspapers other than not going broke.

The rain was a big feature of most of the day. It was helped into our world by an easterly and southeasterly wind that increased as the day progressed. The rain, also increasing in intensity from time to time, could be seen coming on sideways. Visitors returning from Penzance and the south coast had reported that it was much worse there, which makes a change from reporting that the sun was splitting the hedges.

The poor weather did produce some sales of our rain ponchos, in abundance, in fact. One party announced that they were heading for the Minack and a matinee show there. They had called ahead and were told that there were high hopes of the heavy rain finishing at two o'clock. I looked at the rain radar and told them that there was indeed a high probability of the rain ending at two o'clock but unfortunately would start again at five minutes later. I looked again in a bit more detail and the geet lump of rain on top of us was moving northwest at some speed – how does that work with a southeasterly gale kicking in. It looks like I have some competition at Minack for predicting the weather as, on the stroke of two o'clock, the rain stopped.

It left us with low cloud and mizzle for the rest of the day and there was a bit of a cold draft leaking into the shop. It was a huge improvement on the easterly from two days ago and I am ever grateful for small mercies. It even tried to brighten up on occasion, which showed off the sea sitting placidly in the bay. The sea state had been pretty calm for the last two days which looks unlikely to change much before the end of the week.

We have already discussed the difficulty that we have with retail food stock from the local cash and carry but it seems our troubles are not yet over. A couple of years ago, we started stocking some local beer from Penzance. I was cautious at first because it was quite expensive being artisan and from a small brewery. My fears were quickly allayed when it starting flying off the shelf quicker than I could restock it. Despite a price increase last year, it sold just as well. I sent a message to the brewery today to ask for new stock for the season. I had a reply very quickly telling me that they had stopped production while they moved premises and built a bigger brewery. I am distraught.

I have had a brief cast around for replacements and while there are a few artisan brewers in Cornwall, getting the beer delivered will be problematic as they are further afield. There is a brewery in St Ives, but we already stock their products and, again, we are limited by the supply chain as they do not deliver themselves. I shall make enquiries tomorrow and see how far we get.

Even the deliveries we are getting seem to be beset with problems. The box from the company supplying the wooden hangers we ordered arrived today. It was addressed correctly and inside was a picking note that showed the correct items and two boxes of windproof ashtrays. Someone was clearly distracted between looking at the

picking note and putting items in the box. We will have to wait another couple of days for the hangers to turn up while the ash trays are getting picked up tomorrow.

I have ranted on before about litter being squeezed into the locked gap of our domestic bin that has to sit on the pavement – especially now that the bin men are forbidden to empty bins from convenient, informal collection points. The commercial bin is also locked but gets the same treatment as the public bin, being 20 metres away, is far too distant. Just before we left the house, I was asked to remove the decorative wood crates that sat outside two of the properties there. One I broken down and put in the skip but the other I left across the street waiting for the skip to be emptied first. The crate has no bottom, and this would have been obvious to anyone looking into it as they deposited the first of a series of disposable coffee cups, food containers and other litter.

It was clearly not a bin but being 20 metres from the public waste bin made it far too distant to drag and empty coffee cup and because one person had used it, other felt it justified to do the same. I have come to the conclusion that people in general public mode suddenly become total bleddy eejits incapable of stringing coherent thoughts together. I fear for the new Harbour toilets that were clean and shiny when I surveyed them last Thursday evening ahead of the official opening. They will be treated with the same disdain as the street, the beach and pathways. Whatever happened to us to arrive here.

April 1st – Monday

Oh, what a glorious morning. We shall leave it there, shall we. To be fair, it stayed bright and reasonably warm through most of the day before coming in wet and grim after about five o'clock. The 'warm' is most likely a result of it not blowing cold from anywhere today.

Right from the off the sun was shining and there must have been a bird chirping somewhere in The Cove, I am sure of it. Of course, it was not quite from the off because it was still largely dark when I got up due to that pesky clock changing lark. It eluded me until the Missus mentioned it, probably because it was Easter, which is a bit of a sneaky thing to do.

As usual we were deathly quiet for most of the early part of the morning. It allowed me to do some bottling up and to clear some of the new wetsuits that had rested in the store room since I brought them down from The Farm last Wednesday. I had left them be because I was waiting on the wooden hangers. It only struck me today that the majority of the suits were children's ones, and we use hangers we already have for those. I had been tripping over them for the best part of a week unnecessarily.

I was utterly determined to get to the gymnasium this morning. I had not been for more than a week partly because we were busy and more latterly because I could not find my kit. I had a proper look for it last night but it must be buried deep. I had

seen it last week, but the Missus had moved things since then – I would hesitate to suggest that it had been done deliberately so she did not have to cover me in the shop, but it is a consideration.

Giving up on finding my regular kit, I looked for alternatives and found a couple of tops that would suffice. I already had a suitable pair of shorts and my plimsols were on top of the pile, for which I was very grateful. It was not until the morning that I remembered my key to the gymnasium was in the shorts pocket that I could not find. I thought that I could remember the number for the keysafe, which it worked out that I could, and proceeded to conduct a blistering session.

I felt much encouraged that I could still walk back from the gymnasium and found a small errant hound waiting for me. I kept her waiting while I changed plimsols to shoes. At least I was able to do so without being run circles around and leapt upon. We took an amble around the big block avoiding the beach - the temerity of it; there were people down there hogging it. The car park was about half full and there were plenty of people milling about, many on their way up Mayon Cliff for the walk to Land's End. We did not tarry too much and the back nine along Coastguard Row was quiet allowing us home without event.

I was at the gymnasium for about an hour. By the time I came back the tables opposite the café were all full and the street was buzzing. It is quite uncanny how quickly we can go from deathly quiet to buzzing metropolis. It did not necessarily translate to busy in the shop, however, although with the weather on our side it was not a wholly disappointing day.

Along with the crowds come spills and mishaps. In the space of an hour, we had a credit card handed in, found on the street, a mobile telephone left behind and an enquiry about lost VW keys somewhere between us and the other end of the big beach. While I did not hold out much hope for the losers of the keys, I was very pleased when a young lad came in to enquire about the lost mobile telephone. His obvious relief and gratitude gladdened the heart.

As I traversed the shop aisles later in the day, it was quite obvious that we had indeed been relatively busy. There were gaps where there were not gaps before, some of which I was able to fill with overstock from the store room. Some will require the Missus to trek out to Hayle – hopefully not to the bigger store in Redruth – to pick up a few bits later in the week.

I cannot see her being at all happy about that because she is very focussed on getting the flat in order, which is a very tall order indeed. Today, the second day of it, she spent in the kitchen chained to a paintbrush as she painted the colour into the walls. It appears to be a different shade of the same colour as everywhere else but has a different name. I am sure it is very lovely.

I think that this means that tomorrow she will be working on getting our kitchen back where it was before, although we cannot yet put back the appliances as the lino man – the same as carpet man, but lino – will be putting new lino down. After that we might actually have three rooms that look relatively straight, a bit like normal people. It might stop raining for a bit, too. That would be nice.