

DIARY 2024

March 1st – Friday

March, does that make this spring? I have no idea. If it is, it was not the most auspicious start. The sun was shining between the big, white fluffy clouds and all that was required to enjoy it was a big pair of heavy boots to stop you being blown away in the vicious breeze.

At various points in the night, I could hear the wind howling in the eaves. I am not sure that we can hear much of the rattling of the scaffolding sheets from our room, but we could be assured they were making their usual din in a westerly topping 60 miles per hour at times.

It was still having a go when I headed for the gymnasium. The sea had joined in the party and was raging out in the bay and throwing itself up the cliffs and over-topping Pedn-men-du. It looked its Sunday best with the sun shining down and highlighting all that churning white water. The contrast against the blue of the sea is stark, almost as much as the seabirds that darted across the dark skies out to the west. If that was rain, I did not get to see any of it, well, not at the times I was out in the morning.

Naturally as night follows day, ABH needs a run around after I returned from my blistering session. We avoided the beach because there was not much of it and what there was kept being washed over by the occasional wave that was pushier than the others. We hacked across the car park, empty but for the work vans by the toilets and a couple of fishermen about their maintenance. We paused on the patch of grass at the end of the car park and let ourselves be slapped around by the wind and refreshed with the spray from airborne waves. Of course, the big, spectacular waves that hit Pedn-men-du with a big explosion of white water waited until we were around the corner and could only see the tops.

I had only momentarily dropped in on the workforce after the gymnasium and it was a hive of industry in there with builders and window installers working in harmonious concert. I checked that the builder was happy with the notion of building the porch, which had been left out on a limb a bit and still needs windows ordered for it, and then left them to it.

Since there appeared to be not a great deal happening in the house, I drove off to get Mother at around the middle of the day. I needed to go into town for some junction boxes and some trunking to keep the fibre protected when the communications company comes next week to move it back to the living room. This will prove a little premature as there is, as yet, no power in there and we will have to run an extension cable. The timing was a best guess and probably could have benefited being a week later. I shall make a note for next time, ahem.

While we were out, I had a message from the Missus requesting fish for tea. We have some still left in the freezer, but I was to get plaice for Mother for a change. I had it in mind that Mother preferred it filleted but, of course, Mother prefers it whole. On top of this, I was also unable to get the squid that the Missus wanted – the Missus hates fish; seafood is different, apparently. They did have some St Ives Smokehouse mackerel, which I found I had sufficient funds for – lucky me. It is not a good look arriving home with all the things that I wanted and none of the ones Mother and the Missus wanted. It was almost like I had done it on purpose. I made a note for next time.

The weather had worsened during the day, as if the high winds were not enough. The showers became more frequent and heavier and a good deal more wintry. (Mr Microsoft wants me to use the word wintrier. It is a proper word but looks like I made it up.) We were hailed upon in the truck outside the electrical contractor's and again outside our favourite Penzance fish supplier.

I had it in mind to take ABH down to the beach again in the afternoon after we came back. I left it while I had a cup of tea and she settled after the excitement of Mother arriving, then booted up and headed out. I knew some showers were on the way but hoped that they were quickly through. The first hit us when we were no more than halfway down the street and precipitated an immediate about turn as the hail came in swift and heavy, with a squally wind behind it. ABH was not to be convinced otherwise and we ran for the comfort of the warm and dry living room in the house with only brief forays out after that.

The Missus went down to the flat in the last knockings of the working day. I had told her that the windows had been finished including the insulation to fill the gaps. The reason we went with the company that we had is they were very professional when they installed the first electric sliding door in The Cove and were this time too. Our big picture window at the front had shrunk a bit but we have French windows either side of it which will be useful in the summer as it can get very warm in the flat. I thought that it all looked marvellous, even if the window frames look a little more chunky – aw, go on then, chunkier - than the previous lot.

The Missus returned looking glum. Her main complaint was that the west facing window at the front corner is frosted when it should be plain. I have no idea how that came about. The other comment was that the French windows are not. They are double openers. There is a different, I am told but she was happy to let that be. The frosted windows were indefensible and had to be changed.

The original plans for the windows were drawn up last year. If they were drawn up last week, I probably would still struggle to remember what was agreed. Last year, not a hope. I certainly did not remember agreeing to frosting glass above my desk nor is there any reference in the quotation, thank heavens. I can vaguely remember researching French windows and I have an inkling that they were thought to be

prone to draft issues. I do not remember specifically choosing double openers but it seems to be academic, so I shall not worry too much.

Of course, at the crucial time of trying to call the window company surveyor an hour before close of play on a Friday, the Internet in the house packed up. I restarted it as we now have a key to the router, which is next door, but it came back with insufficient bandwidth for me to make or receive calls. At the same time I had to run ABH out around the block in weather that was wintrier than we had in winter was getting wintrier by the minute.

When I got back, I just had time to decamp to the flat and make my call from there. I left the frosted glass issue with our man who will sort it out. We have yet to determine if there was any evidence that I had missed it in the documentation, but I have been through the most recent three times and only found measurements. They are a reputable bunch, and I am sure we will work out a satisfactory outcome.

The boys had also cleaned up inside the flat in readiness for the inside finishing stages. How exciting.

March 2nd – Saturday

What an industrious pair we were today. It is the first proper work we have done since we broke up for the holidays back in November. Although that is not entirely true, it certainly seemed like it.

Some of it, the painting of the cladding timbers, nearly did not happen. I had been waiting most of the week for some sensible weather which did not include wind or rain. When I looked at the weather this morning – and listened to it too – I was disappointed to say the least. I was of a mind to start anyway but having looked at the forecast, it did appear that the rain at least would be clearing out in the late morning. The wind was something else.

When I took ABH around in the morning, there was still a fair amount of bluster from the northwest or thereabouts. It was not particularly robust in relation to the windspeeds we had been seeing of late, but the direction was not helpful. When I went down to the shop to stick a damp finger in the air, it showed no signs of letting up, although the ground was drying up nicely. I decided that I would go ahead with painting regardless.

Not to be left out, the Missus came down to start cleaning and clearing up the shop. This is a mammoth undertaking now that everything is covered in wood dust from the sanding. This is part of the reason we are not starting at three o'clock the day before we are due to open like we usually do. ABH accompanied us and had to make do with being bored and ignored.

Before we started, I took her down to the Harbour beach. I spotted a small puppy already down there and decided that, whether or not it was keen, it was going to be candidate number one for playing with ABH. Luckily, it was a four month old cockerpool that was keen and able for a run around and some rough and tumble. The two appeared almost ideally matched and left us owners to have a chat about this and that while keeping a light eye on the dogs. The couple are here all week and staying in the thatch opposite the Lifeboat station. Hopefully, we will see them some more.

Exercise over, ABH was cooped up in the shop for the next three hours while the Missus cleaned and I painted. First though, I cleared all the timber from the temporary concrete supports that I dismantled the other day. I then pulled out some of the timber cladding planks. I thought to do a few and then come back for more but ABH was still in exploration mode and was getting under my feet. It was easier to take all ten planks out and prop them up against the scaffolding.

Placing them against the scaffolding was easier. It was also easier for the wind to pick them off and throw them on the ground, so I had to prop them up a bit more securely. The next problem was the wind howling up the tunnel beside the shop where I had decided to do the painting. I reasoned that I could not do them indoors as I would have nowhere to put them to dry, also I did not want black paint everywhere inside.

That was good reasoning because I got black paint everywhere outside instead. The paint was flying off the brush even before I removed it from the tin. After ten minutes of the road getting flecked in black paint, I collected some cardboard from the shop. I could have done with a bigger piece but any larger than the one I had would have had it flapping around in the wind. I also had to contend with the sheets on the scaffolding that flapped into my face and strove to knock the planks off the pole they were leant against.

Having beaten the wind long enough to complete a plank, I then thought to find somewhere it leave it while the paint dried. There is a kerb that runs up the length of the shop and this seemed the best of a poor set of choices. The kerb was wide enough in places for two planks but in others only one. I also rested two planks horizontally under the concrete block ballast at the bottom of the scaffolding and the last two against the side of the café next door. I left an unpainted hand hold on each plank so that I could move it into position and paint it afterwards. It was a very messy business.

I left the eight planks lined up on the driveway and the two under the scaffolding to dry. I had imagined that they would have to stay there whatever the weather until they were dry, probably overnight. Clearly, it was not ideal especially as the wind refused to diminish and the drying planks would almost certainly be flecked with sand and grit. Hopefully, when I come to do the second coat the weather will be kinder.

Not only was the wind blowing but the temperature had dropped and further assisted by wind chill. Even with four layers including DIYman overalls and my faithful work rain jacket on top, I was feeling it. The Missus, who was less wrapped up in the shop also suffered largely because she had taken off her hooded sweatshirt for ABH who was also shivering.

I ran her down to the beach again after I had finished to try and warm her up a bit. Before we had started our work, I had noticed two pre-school aged children down there with mother, building sandcastles. When ABH and I stepped out three hours later, they were still there. The children, immune to such things as cold and lashing rain, had a whale of a time. I felt for mother who had stayed there sat at the end of the western slip all that time.

Just before tea I had passed by our planks and noted that most were almost dry. This played on my mind as did the forecast for overnight rain and some while after tea and after it got dark, I went down and moved the planks into the shop. They were still tacky here and there and we may have a few black tram lines on the floor this season. We try and make some changes to the shop each year. This year it will be our floor mounted modern art installation.

March 3rd – Sunday

There was a patch of brightness in the morning sky, which was clearly deceiving as it all turned to pants after that. Albeit pants with bright patches here and there.

I had made the awful decision to cease shooting now. In a shortening timescale we have an increasing amount to do, and I ended up not doing any of them with the day in hand I had created.

In truth, I was not entirely idle, although I was not overly enthused to do very much. The frequent showers and the invading cold were enough to put most people off doing anything. I did, however, manage to get some administration done and to sort out some of the alarm cables that disappear into the floor of the living room. That might have been a bit strong. I looked at them for a bit and concluded it was best to leave them until I could get the floor up.

At some point toward the middle of the day I went over to collect Mother from St Buryan. I had to go via The Farm to clear out the wood that I had put in the truck from the shop. It has been a while since we have been up there. Normally, we would have spent nearly every day there doing something but this year we have been utterly distracted by the building works to the exclusion of all else. Little has changed up there and I was grateful to see that the holes in the back end of the polytunnel have not worsened any. I had hoped that we could implement a more permanent fix

with the sheets from the scaffolding but since they are still in use, that will have to wait.

If I had any outdoor plans at all after collecting Mother, they were scuppered by the arrival of the rain. It looked black and menacing to the north as I drove into St Buryan and shortly after getting Mother into the truck, it became menacing. Big lumps of rains splashing on the windscreen that soon became continuous sheets. This followed us all the way home before easing off as we unloaded Mother and parked the truck. Naturally, it started again shortly after getting down to the beach with ABH for a run out. This became a much shorter walk than I intended when ABH decided to vote with her paws on the choice of staying out in the rain or going home.

One thing I had been meaning to do was to write to the electricity board. We had been aware since last year that it had intended to renew the infrastructure in The Cove when I met one of the surveyors. He had told me that it would happen during March and I had explained then about business in The Cove and Easter. I had thought then that a commercial entity such as the electricity board would be a little more business oriented than the much maligned council and would avoid disruption at our peak times.

It was therefore something of a surprise when we had our letter explaining that the electricity board intended to cut our supply on Thursday 27th March, right at the outset of the Easter break. Though no further outage for us was planned, it asked that parking be avoided in some key areas all over The Cove during the following week. If the work had been planned for just one week earlier, the disruption to business would have been minimised rather than maximised and, in fact, we probably would hardly have noticed.

For all the good that it would do, I resolved to write to the electricity board and because they would almost certainly ignore me, copied in the local MP for effect. I had no doubt that the electricity would still go off on Thursday. We and the surrounding businesses would have to close their doors for the day but hopefully someone somewhere would be woken up to the fact that it could have been planned better.

The rain had cleared out during the afternoon and between the grey and the insistent cold, there were actually some bright spells. One of those was when ABH and I visited the beach in the latter half of the afternoon after she had her hair cut. Mother insisted that I put her coat on lest she catch a chill and I did as well for the same reason – but before I was told. The sun was dipping under the clouds in the west by that time and affording a modicum of warmth – or it could just have been my imagination. We stayed out as long as we dared and came back the long way around as it was a good as it had got all day, and it seemed a shame to waste it.

Having been lifted by our bright good fortune Mother grounded us again by saying she had heard the weather for the coming week was poor as well. It is going to be

tricky fitting in a second coat of paint on the planks and I stand no chance of doing the big ones for the front. At least two of those are yet to be purchased, replacements for originals that had rotted through. We have a couple of busy weeks ahead.

March 4th – Monday

As rain filled, grey and chilly days go, this one was definitely rain filled, grey and chilly. Even describing it now fills me with a dourness I reserve for days that have few if any redeeming features. It was not until well into the afternoon that it became even vaguely the sort of day you would take home to meet your mother.

It did not quite stop me from going to the gymnasium, but I was fortunate enough to pick a five minute window in the deluge to run down the road in. I was not so lucky coming back.

I had managed quite the proper blistering session today despite the day's efforts to leach the enthusiasm out of everything. It fed my theory that my shooting day was more wearying than I had thought. Not that it will stop me doing it, but I should be aware, at least, not to expect too much from my crumbling frame the following day. I knew that I was in for a soaking on the way home because it became very dark in the hut with a tin roof for a while. It brightened a tad before I opened the door, and I thought I might have got away with it, but I was wrong. I got very damp damp going home but I suspect had I left five minutes earlier, it would have been much worse.

As I have become accustomed to doing, I stopped in to see the boys on the way back home. They were all in attendance today and there was sawing, planing, hammering and sawing – there was a lot of sawing – and all manner of manly work going on. Not at all suggesting that ladies cannot do the work, of course they can and just as well as men but with smaller saws and things. It is just like needlework is womanly work, which men can do just as well as women, probably – with bigger needles. Gosh, I could have been in trouble there.

Anyway, I digress. Now, where was I? Ah yes, the work going on in the flat that could have been done by men or women or people like that. I have ceased to ask where they are in the schedule. Apparently, schedule is not a nice word, but things are moving on in the right direction at a quite pleasing rate. It was encouraging that I was given the green light to call out carpet man to get him in to see about how we might refit the carpets that there taken up.

We had expected the arrival of the alarm company to run their cables, but they called in the middle of the morning to tell me that they could no longer get here. The installation of the alarm cables will be down to the boys as they need to be done before the plasterboard goes on. Also, with that in mind we had a conversation about the data cables for the cameras. I had mentioned before the need to run these

cables in conduit or trunking so that they could be replaced. This seemed to be problematic, and no immediate solution came up in the conversation. I left it with them.

No solution was offered by the electricity board, either, when I heard back from their technician but there again, I did not expect one. What I did expect and what I got was a load of excuses about how necessary the work was and how they were so busy they could not fit it in anywhere else other than one of the busiest times of the business year. I was also told that we, specifically, did not get as much advanced notice as our neighbours because when they called to put a letter through the door, the shop was "a building site". Oddly, other people have managed to put flyers through our door and left packages in the box at the front of the building site.

My decision to copy our local MP on the letter seemed to pay off. First, I doubt that I would have had such a speedy and polite response otherwise and, secondly, I had a call from his office offering support. I had a very sensible discussion with the very pleasant minion who called. We both understood that it was too late to do very much and in the end we agreed a stern letter from the Minister would serve to demonstrate the folly of upsetting grumpy shopkeepers at the outset of their season. That is all sorted, then, except we will still have to close for a day just before the Easter holiday kicks off.

Flushed with such success, I decided to run the little girl down to the big beach for a bit of a celebratory stank – after a little zizz, of course. We had arrived at the sunny spells part of the day but just in case such good fortune went to our heads, it came with a gale of southwesterly wind. In truth, it was not that windy, but we were slightly more exposed to it out on the Coast Path and the beach when we got there.

It was the same circuit that we had done all last week and serves as an abridged version of the around The Cove walk that we do when the tide is being unkind. There were not that many people around on the beach, which came as no surprise at all. One of them, however, was a neighbouring shopkeeper with her small spaniel that I know from visits to the shop. She and ABH immediately took to each other and sprinted around us like little rockets. It was the second time today that she had found friends to play with. We had met a couple of dogs on the Harbour beach half an hour before we were rained off in the middle of the day. I have little expectation that the double whammy will lead to a slight less exuberant ABH in the evening.

If we thought that the sky had rained enough today, it came back with a final heavy shower just before it started to get dark. We were left alone after that and it would be useful to have some dry in the rest of the week so that I can finish the painting. Even so, I may not have time tomorrow because it is an action packed day in prospect. I shall try and keep up.

March 5th – Tuesday

St Piran's Day: a day full of saffron buns and pasties and we had neither and not a one. There was plenty of it on Radio Pasty, as you might imagine, and I only heard that because I was taking the truck to the garage to have its annual test and service. I was given the keys to a small Citroën motor car and told that it was running on fumes – as usual, I thought. It is a small price to pay for having a loan vehicle while some people in overalls who you know and trust give your vehicle an overhaul. Also as usual, I forgot which side the filler cap was and had to make an assumption about the fuel type too.

We may not have had a saffron bun today but there was a current bun in the sky for most of the day. It was most apparent as I was driving up the hill where it was in my eyes making driving and keeping to the road a bit of a lottery. I had the same treatment on the way home in the late afternoon, too but at least everything was working then. The truck will have to go back to have its cam belt changed. It is quite an expensive procedure but better than have it snap on you. Just to make it even more expensive our truck has two. Quite fortuitously, I have booked it in on the same day that our electricity goes off, so I will not have to worry about being absent from the shop.

I dropped into see the boys when I arrived back home. Work continues in putting even more insulation onto the ceiling followed by some plasterboard. There were no burning questions today, just an acknowledgement that we were all ready for the communications company man to arrive. Knowing that I would be busy in the morning with the truck, I arranged the service for the afternoon which could have been anything from one o'clock until six o'clock.

With the sun still shining and the prospect of rain slim, according to several forecasts, I decided to get ahead with the sanding and second coat of paint on our side panels for the shop. I almost reconsidered after I took ABH out ahead of starting. Out to the west was a glowering sky which seemed to be at odds with the several forecasts I had seen. We did indeed have a bit of a shower, but it was short-lived and the rest of the day was sunny again.

It made a change sanding and painting without a wind howling through the scaffolding tunnel. I had almost finished the sanding when the communications company turned up. We elected to keep the main line from the pole where it was and simply run a line from the grey wall box to the new – which was the old – termination point. Had I foreseen this would be the sensible solution, we could have had a longer line installed and done it ourselves and saving a few quid.

As it was, the engineer earned his keep but making no fuss about having to climb out of the kitchen window to access the grey box amongst all the scaffolding. His mate, the fellow who did the change last time, turned up to lend a hand and it was all done in half an hour. What jolly good chaps they were.

Not long after this I had cause to use the public bin on the corner of the Lifeboat station. I noted that the bin had been changed to a different one that did not have a hole in the top. To use it, the lid must be lifted. That would have been inconvenient but better than not having one at all, which, in effect was what was there because the delivery people had not unlocked it. I made the assumption that this was an omission and fetched my key from the shop. I do hope that was not part of the much maligned council economy drive – having bins there but unused so that they could save money on not emptying them.

After the communications men had gone, indeed, while they were still there, I commenced the painting of our wood panels. The ones I had placed under the scaffolding had suffered rather more than the others, so I resolved not to use that space again. One of the boys had also tidied up the drive and had removed all the battens I had used to rest the drying panels on. I had to root through the skip to find some more and I also took the precaution of finding some plastic bags that I could place between the painted planks and next door's light coloured wall. Being as frugal with space as I could be, I managed to fit all ten finished planks along the drive and under the scaffolding.

Depending on which forecast you look at, the planks will be fine there overnight. Either that or they will be a little damp. I had already decided that I was not going to move them, so I guess it did not matter which forecast was right.

At some point during my busy schedule, some in-laws arrived sporting their new hound. The dog's name is Abby, which is a genteel and feminine name. I could not help but think that Arnie or Tyson would be more appropriate but since she is a girl, perhaps something like Amazon or Brunhilda. The dog is built like an outside lavatory made of bricks. The head alone was half the size of ABH. Nevertheless, the hound was a sweet and gentle thing, although probably not best to keep her in a room with your best china as she is young and playful.

ABH did not take kindly to this intrusion. While out, she had not taken umbrage at any other dog that has approached to gain her attention. She made an exception in Abby's case and sought sanctuary with Mother or the Missus when she was not snapping at our guest. All Bella wanted to do was play with her new friend and her new friend was having none of it. One thing is for sure, the in-laws will be fireproof walking dark streets at night in any neighbourhood.

The Missus had held the fort keeping ABH from savaging Abby for the duration of the visit. She passed me on her way to run ABH on the Harbour beach as I finished off the painting. I went down to join her after I finished.

I had scarcely noticed that the sea was in full flight again after a couple of days of rest. The bay was filled with big charging waves and looked spectacular under the bright blue sky and unadulterated sunshine. We are in neap tides and the sea does

not move very far up and down the beach with each cycle. However, even after three hours of going out, it was still trying to push us off the beach.

Tomorrow will be slightly more relaxed, but we must press on with clearing up the shop. I must also think about orders for the new season which have been furthest from my mind so far. It will not be so much a change of focus more just adding something else to the list of things to do. St Piran arrived in Cornwall on a millstone but at least he did not have one around his neck.

March 6th – Wednesday

On the bright side, the sea had calmed to a more reasonable swell providing a decent bit of surf on the main beach by the look of it. The price we had to pay for such a thing was another day where the rain interrupted play at the most crucial times.

One of those was not when I headed to the gymnasium, for which I was grateful. It even stayed off while I ran ABH down to the Harbour beach. At least this time, the same number of hours off high water as yesterday, the waves were not trying to push us off. It probably would not have mattered much if they were because ABH was not particularly interested in the beach in the morning.

I was not particularly interested in very much because a certain little girl had me up in the middle of the night for an hour. Heaven knows what she was up to but she had me out of bed twice in quick succession and the second time because she fancied a midnight – or three o'clock – snack, bless her cotton socks.

I had every intention of heading down to the shop to do a little more cleaning up but somehow that went out of the window. The Missus announced a shopping trip in the late morning, and I decided that a short zizz before I started work was a cracking good idea – except it was not. I woke because ABH had quite enough of sitting around doing nothing and I thought that a run up the hill would do us both the world of good. It was then that we discovered it was raining and had to wait until it was gone away.

It did not occur to me that it would be a difficult dress day. I geared up in wet weather gear and a couple of layers and headed out. We got as far as the steps up Mayon Cliff before the sun came out and it was instantly warm. There was no way that I would make it to Land's End without melting away, so I decided that we would cut through at the first opportunity and come back. That turned on its head as soon as we crested the top because there was a cooling southeasterly blowing across the moor, which made it much more comfortable. Also, the sun slipped behind some cloud.

The recent rain was still cascading down the steps at Mayon Cliff in small waterfalls over each little drop. It entertained ABH all the way up and thankfully washed her paws that she managed to foul up in a muddy ditch earlier on. There were also a couple of muddy puddles that could not be avoided on the path but happily the small streams later washed our paws and boots clean.

We had made probably a bit more than two thirds of the journey to Land's End when the sun broke through again. I had already warmed up despite the relaxed pace, so the appearance of the sun really was not that welcome. We reached a branch in the track, which was odd as there are no trees for miles. I will not say it was a fork in the track, but it allowed us to cut across to the cycle path prematurely. We embraced the opportunity to shortcut. By the time we reached the end of the path, my coat and hooded sweatshirt flying in the breeze, I was as damp as I might have been if it was raining.

The Missus had returned when we got home, so I threw her the little girl to dry out and shed my layers as quickly as I could. What had started out as a waterproofs and leggings walk had very quickly developed into a shorts and light jacket walk. Gosh, what an uncomfortable mistake to make.

What with sanding and painting yesterday, a blistering session this morning and a good stank in the afternoon, I was pretty much worn out. Despite the discomfort, it was good to get out in the fresh air with the girl as the opportunities for such things are fading fast.

I had recovered sufficiently to take ABH out, as we generally do, before tea. There was plenty of beach to run down to and her cockerpoo pal from Tinker Taylor had just arrived too. The owner and I had a pleasant chat while being entertained by two hooligan puppies chasing each other and rolling around playfully. It crossed my mind again that in retrospect ABH would have been happier with a permanent pal. I think that now it would be very difficult finding the right pal as after nine months of having her this is the closest we have been to a perfect match.

I soon disabused myself of the notion when we tried to walk them up the slipway. It took ten minutes as they would not stop playing. I then thought of the walk to Land's End with two of them and very quickly realised how unfunny that would be after the first 100 yards. I had not even got as far as what having two of them on the throne at the door of the shop would look like when we were busy with customers in the summer.

We had stood for half an hour on the beach in the warmth of the end of a slightly sunny day. While chatted and watched the hounds, the sky very quickly darkened which nudged us into leaving. I have no idea if it rained again because we were back home by then. It was not when I went out again after tea, which I was very happy about. Someone needs to invent clothes to cope with such weather, cold and wet

one moment and warm and sunny the next or I am not going out again until the weather breaks.

March 7th – Thursday

Well, it definitely was not grey and mizzly this morning. Sunshine was pouring through the living room window, when I eventually opened the curtains. It poured through the front door too when I opened it, aided by a 40 miles per hour easterly wind.

The wind was the main feature of the day, although the sunshine made a good presence all the way through as well. If it was not for the wind, the sea would not have looked half so spectacular as it did, especially near to high water. There was a ground sea which was not pronounced at low water. The white water against the cliffs opposite gave it away and as the waves broke, the spray peeled back against the easterly wind. As the tide increased, this became more apparent and over at Gwenver, large capes of spray followed each wave in.

There is something most peculiar about the bay in an easterly breeze. The sea has the appearance of moving rapidly to the west, which just looks so wrong.

ABH and I had managed to get onto the beach in the late morning. Sadly, her pal was not there but she found a bit of fish bone to roll on and throw around. I had taken her in a break from shop cleaning and in DIYman overalls with a hooded sweatshirt underneath, I was adequately warm in the direct sunshine even though we were fair knocked about by the breeze.

It took some will power to get started this morning, but I was getting fed up with the state of the shop, which drove me on. I went down with the handheld vacuum cleaner and used a paintbrush to flick the sanding dust into it. Later, I turned the vacuum cleaner on and that worked much better. It was pleasingly effective for the deeper piles of dust and a smaller paintbrush worked marvellously on the crevices of things like the till. I had started with moving the painted planks to the back of the building and placed them against the back wall either side of the door. The master plan was to use the dust sheets that the Missus had used but in the wind they were about as much use as they had been in the shop when the Missus did the sanding. I will go back and secure them a little better when the wind dies down.

Having not really got started in the shop in the morning, I went back to it after I had taken ABH down to the beach. While it was perfectly pleasant on the beach in the sun, it was bleddy cold in the shop with the wind howling outside and causing an occasional draft through the door. I wanted to keep the door open so that I could

step outside to clean off the more mobile items so that I was not just recycling the dust.

I also found that the vacuum cleaner that I had brought down from the house had run out of power on my return and I had to use the one in the shop. It is just as effective but is smaller and does not last as long. I rationed its use, but it was the cold that got to me before the battery ran out and besides, it was time again to run ABH around. Mind, I had managed to clean the counter top and everything on it, which was quite a feat given the amount that was on it and I had cleared the floor earlier as well. Perhaps I should have carried on a bit but quite frankly, I was pooped.

I dropped in to see the boys a couple of times today. They were getting ahead with the plaster skimming of the ceiling, which is a skill to be wondered at. Ordinarily, they would have set up stands across the floor so that the ceiling could be reached in single sweeps from one side to the other. With access to the flat not the easiest, the builder elected to use stilts, that I had not heard of in relation to building use. Intrigued, I went up again in the afternoon to watch. Plastering is a particular skill on its own. Plastering while stilt walking, golly gosh.

Since I had retired early from proper work I sat down and cleared the latest pile of invoices. We seem to have at least one a day from the builder's merchant but sometimes they include two or three in the same file. When I print them off for Making Tax Difficult, my clever printer prints them two sided and two or three times I have missed the one on the reverse side. All the invoices get checked against the statement at the end of the period, so I pick them up then. If I have already keyed in the facing one, I need to reprint the one on the reverse and insert it out of order in the file. I have tried to be more vigilant, but I am still missing the occasional one.

The Missus has already started cleaning the rooms in the house that we do not use and preparing for our decamp. She spent much of the day upstairs cleaning and ironing while I was in the shop cleaning. This, I suspect, will ramp up as the days go on.

I still found time to head to the Lifeboat station for training in the evening. No launch was planned because of the howling wind that had not let up and the sea conditions. The meeting was poorly attended because of this but we still found useful things to do. The Boat Crew disappeared into the bowels of the boat to do some mechanics and the very excellent Shore Crew took off with the Tooltrak to practise the emergency recovery procedure.

This involves releasing the brakes of the machine and shutting off the hydraulics so that it can be towed by the Harbour tractor out of wherever it is. The supposition is that the failure occurred in the water at launch or recovery time. If it failed anywhere else, it could probably be left until it was fixed. It was far too cold to be practising in water, so we practised in the Harbour car park where it was far too cold as well. I checked later and for those few hours that we were out, the temperature dropped

two degrees before increasing again and nine o'clock just as we finished. We were all very glad to get back into the warm of the station before heading home.

I curled up with one of my malt whiskeys when I got back. It had not been the most energetic of days, but I was utterly spent. Let us do it all again tomorrow.

March 8th – Friday

I had already counted out the gymnasium this morning. After yesterday I do not think I would have had the strength to walk that far against the vicious easterly that was still blowing up the street. The rain, that seems to be the de facto alternative weather to windy, was not scheduled to take over until much later. Unlike yesterday, there was no bright sunshine to take the edge off the wind chill, although it did seem a little warmer today.

In truth, the reason that I avoided the gymnasium this morning was because I probably did not have the time. I had to trek into town for some coaxial connectors for the VHF aerial we are installing, so that we had them rather than having to panic when the boys came to do the job. Since I appear to have run out of things for breakfast, I also detoured over to St Just to pick up food supplies knowing that I could get some Paul's Bread there and my choice of decent butchers. We had also run out of logs, which having now bought some will guarantee that the temperature will improve for the remainder of our time in the house.

The grand tour of West Penwith went without issue. I even picked up a few fixings for the boys that they were running out of while I was in Penzance. The wind was making itself felt and seen across the moors and when I stopped into the builder's merchant just outside St Just, I was given a proper beating as I headed to the door. It seemed to be just as windy in St Just town, but it did not stop a horde of shoppers milling about. I must usually pick a naturally quiet time but today there was no other word for it but bustling. I had to wait outside the grocer shop because I could not get in the door and the butcher was just as packed.

Originally, I had intended to pick up Mother on the way back, but the plans were changed before I left the house. She has had scaffolding up all week waiting for the installation of solar panels and the team arrived today. I was out long enough for the installers to finish, and I had the call while in St Just that she was ready to come away.

When I arrived at St Buryan. I saw that the installers had done four or five properties during the morning. The housing association must have had a windfall from somewhere because the much maligned council has been claiming poverty for some time, so it cannot have come from them. Wherever it came from, it will save Mother quite a few pounds. Judging from the number of panels it is likely to cover all her

meagre daytime usage, although she will pay for anything during the night and during darker days; the windfall did not stretch to the installation of a battery.

St Just was not the only place that was busy. When we got back, the mews was crammed with vehicles. One of the properties has had work people there almost as long as the boys have been doing our building. Heaven knows what they are doing in there, but they could have rebuilt the place by now. What with various other services going on, it seems The Cove is waking up to the new season.

I had not rushed while I was out but had not expected to be quite so long and it was gone midday when we got back. I took ABH out straight away. There was not much beach to play on and the tide was pushing in. From the top of the hill the bay had looked a little more orderly than it had been yesterday. From the level of the beach, it was clear that the swell was still pretty heavy allowing the little girl to play chicken with the waves as they rushed up the sand.

There was no getting on the beach later and we had to be satisfied with a walk around the big block. I might have to make the effort to go a bit farther tomorrow despite still having the shop to clear.

Talking of which, I spent a little more time down there after running ABH around. The carpet man caught us off guard and he had already been in and measured up. It had been our intention to use the same carpet for the living room, but the shape and size of the room had changed a bit and the edges of the old carpet were in a poor state. It seems we had no choice but to replace it, which is an unplanned expense but necessary, it seems. We chose a replacement then and there from the samples he had with him.

We had a group discussion with the builder and the carpet man and came to the agreement that he would come and install the new carpet and the other work in a fortnight. That is the deadline week for moving in; the week before the shop opens. We will have our major grocery delivery that week too and all manner of shop-like work will be going on. The workload will be heavy and the timing excruciatingly tight. After that, the Missus will be on her own for moving out of the house into the flat, which is less than ideal. I am sure the boys will help with the big stuff but it will detract them from other work – also not ideal.

I gave up cleaning the shop in the later part of the afternoon and retired back to the house. I was grateful that the Missus had started the fire because, once again, it was very cold in the shop and with the wind not letting up, I was frozen to the bone. I was also grateful that the promised rain did not materialise until long after we had gone to bed. We did have some luck, then. Perhaps I should have purchased a lottery ticket.

March 9th – Saturday

The weather in the morning was largely passable. There was still some breeze about rattling the sheets on the scaffolding, but it was much diminished. It must be going to rain, then, and it did.

We did have some respite during the main part of the day when it was merely grey and unwelcoming. I must say that I had not thought much beyond the morning when I intended to head down to the shop again. The trouble was that I procrastinated and by the time I was ready to go down there, the Missus was ready to go shopping.

I had, in the interim, taken ABH down to the beach for a bit of a run. It was very quiet out as anyone who had come visiting was almost certainly packing up to go home or had already done so. There was also some rain in the air that would put off most casual walkers who really did not need to be out. There was nothing particularly exciting to see in the bay either, as the sea had calmed to an almost benign state. We did not tarry too long because ABH was clearly not finding it ever so exciting, and I returned with every intention of heading to the shop.

Two things thwarted my endeavour. The first was that I had left the handheld vacuum cleaner down there overnight and it ran out of battery almost immediately after I started using it. The other was a small irritating ABH who, after exploring as much of the shop as she could get to, decided that launching herself at me so that I could not do anything was a good way to get me to stop and give her some attention. I did try and ignore her some more but that did not work very well, so I gave it up as a bad job and will get back to it tomorrow.

I had managed to clear one of the shelves and throw away a pile of paperwork that had been there for a few years unused. I also resolved the puzzle of why there was a set of drawers sitting on the middle of the floor behind the counter. It had been there a while. The Missus had put the contents of the pasty warmer on it, the racks and such, which disguised it, and it was not immediately apparent what it was. Having removed them and identified the drawer unit, I then wondered where it came from as I could not for the life of me remember.

It took me a moment or two, or probably longer since I had given it a passing thought the previous times I was there, to realise that there was more woodwork under the back shelf where the pasty warmer sits than I was used to. I had removed the woodwork frame that had sat on top of the shelf, but it had not occurred to me that there was more under the shelf as well. Of course there was, as otherwise the upper frame would only be supported by the shelf. Once I had removed it there was an obvious gap the size of the drawer unit. All is now resolved.

I went back to the house and succumbed in my defeat to a small zizz. ABH brooked only a short interval before she made it clear that she had been lazing about in bed all morning with the Missus and was having no more of it. Perhaps I would not mind awfully taking her out for a bit of a stank up the hill, maybe.

By this time, I had registered that with the wind gone we were going to get rain, obviously. The forecast had it that I should immediately dash out and buy sufficient timber for a boat to contain every living thing of all flesh, mainly my own and that of a small ABH. Since the message arrived from the Meteorological Office and not any higher authority, I duly ignored it and settled to venture forth in some full metal jacket waterproofs, just in case they were even vaguely right.

I was right to be sceptical. There was hardly any rain at all to begin with. We had a few spots on the way up to the lookout and a few more as we cut across the moor. I had not planned a very long excursion; it was late enough in the afternoon as it was. We did have a little bit more sustained rain as we started along Maria's Lane, but it was hardly a deluge. There was some heavier rain on and off during the rest of the afternoon and into the evening, but we were not going out again, at least no further than around the block.

Yesterday, I had a message from one of our suppliers asking if we were intending to make a purchase with them before Easter. These messages can sometimes irritate, because if I had intended to place an order I would have done so. Alternatively, they can be the nudge I need to place an order that I intended to do but had forgotten, so the reminder is very welcome. I know, I cannot have it both ways.

In this case it was one of the suppliers that we had done well with last year and were currently out of their stock. I would have done an order earlier, but I have been holding off due to the fact that we are really in no position to take in deliveries. I had also put it on the too difficult pile and trying hard to ignore it. With just a few weeks left before opening and realising that we will need at least some stock to sell, I thought I better step to it.

My intentions were pure, I promise. I even got as far as writing a list of the items that I wanted but no further before being distracted by something else. I will convert the list to an order tomorrow. Honest, guv.

On Friday, I had tried to recall the carpet man because we had forgotten to mention the hallway. I called from the flat and had terrible trouble maintaining a signal and I suspect a problem with the Internet. After I had finished running around today, I called back into the flat to check what the problem was.

The problem was that the boys had unplugged everything. The power to the equipment now that it is back in its original position, runs across the doorway and is obviously in their way. We will have to compromise on a solution because we need to still run the business while the boys are working. Hopefully, the power in the living room will be back on in the next week or so and will resolve the issue.

The end – of phase one, at least – is nigh. It is so nigh that I can almost taste it. Yum, yum.

March 10th – Sunday

Happy Mother's Day to all those mothers out there. I am sure that you will be doted upon, showered with loveliness and waited upon hand and foot. I would view with deep suspicion any offspring out there who claimed that they forgot, somehow eluding the six weeks of advance advertising and social media frenzy about the contrived celebration. Naturally, I would have showered my own Aged Parent in blissful sentiment had she not blocked me on social media and turned off her telephone. It is almost as if she knew I would try and contact her today.

Perhaps I should have tried to 'reach out' instead. It is a phrase that seems to have garnered popularity among suppliers, and many would be suppliers of ours use those very words to try and entice me to peruse their wares. I may be obtuse, alright, I am obtuse, but the second those words are uttered my concentration waivers. I can think of nothing else other than its meaninglessness, its etymology and then I wonder whether they might say things like 'I know where you're coming from', which is unlikely because I have ceased to engage. It is daft really because it is only a couple of words, but it does so ruin a perfectly good day.

This day was not too shabby, at least to start with, given the forecast we were shown. It may or may not have rained a bit in the night. I was not entirely sure, but the road was wet, so it may well have done. That did not stop it looking brighter in the morning than darker in the scale of greys we have been getting used to. It was much warmer as well, the wind having almost completely gone away. The bay looked a tad more sedate than it had done at any time over the last few weeks but there was still a bit of swell underlying the smooth surface and at high tide was flushing over the Harbour wall.

All that made very little difference to my day as I had promised myself that I would double down and get some cleaning in the shop done. My objective was to finish off the till area so that we could start on the rest of the shop. I almost finished it as well but was scuppered by a couple of insurmountable problems I had not anticipated.

I had left the pasty warmer until near the end because it meant going into the flat to wash up the shelves and get some water in a bucket to run a wet cloth over the warmer unit itself. The floor would need mopping but that will be left until we can do the entire shop in one go at the end of cleaning everything else. It was when I got into the flat that I discovered that I could not fill the sink because the plug was missing and there was no washing up liquid to be found. Sure enough, I could have gone back to the shop for the washing up liquid but without a plug, it would have been pointless. It will not take very long to do, so can easily be left until later, which is probably what I have been saying about cleaning the shop.

I had to do the cleaning in two halves. Today may have been Mother's Day but in truth it was really ABH's day. She had her first play date in the late morning after I had commenced my cleaning. I had arranged with the young cockerpoo's owner that

we should meet on the Harbour beach and let the girls run wild. I was there slightly ahead of our arranged time but was met by another fellow in yellow wellies walking purposefully towards me from the western slip. Unlike the last time I met one of his crew, this chap was very polite and not at all overly excited. He pointed to the seal pup up in the corner of the slipway, next to the western slip and asked if I could keep ABH away.

ABH was not that bothered. In fact, I do not think that she knew it was there at all and I let her wander about on the opposite side of the beach as we waited for her pal. While the two of them would probably ignore the seal and run around concentrating on each other, it was a bit of a risk and pretty much cancelled the arrangement. I met with the cockerpoo, Twiglet's, owner and we agreed to meet up later.

I would have had to break from my labours anyway to run ABH out, so the only difference it made was I was able to get back to work more quickly than I otherwise would have been able to. It was then that I discovered the problem with washing up but concentrated on cleaning everything else. I also did a fair amount of throwing away. There are things there that we have not used for years, and I took no prisoners on my brutal sweep through the shelves. I have no doubt that in our first week of opening I will be looking for things knowing I had seen them somewhere before then remembering exactly where they were. It was a shame that I had to stop but ABH's second appointment time had arrived, and I had to scurry down to the Harbour beach again.

We had great success the second time around. The two of them did not stop running about and play fighting for three quarters of an hour. At the end of it, they did look like they were slowing down but I am sure only a brief rest would have seen them at it again. It is as well that Twiglet's owner is a good conversationist otherwise we would have looked a bit daft standing in silence while the dogs played. We did not make a further arrangement, but I am sure we will meet again before they depart.

In between my two cleaning sessions, Mother arrived with her entourage of in laws to celebrate the day of some importance. Later, I discovered that while the Missus may not have killed the fatted calf, she had certainly cooked it. Perhaps we should have decanted to Mother's and cooked it on her solar panels. It was a sizable bit of beef because the Missus does not do small, and we will be eating beef for some time to come.

It had started to rain a bit just before we had our tea in the lateness of the afternoon. By the time I took ABH around after tea, it was raining a bit more heavily and I toggged up in full metal jacket waterproofs and made sure ABH had her raincoat on as well. The rain was not so heavy that it dissuaded her from going out and, indeed, she took a very sedate trot around the big block taking her time poking her head in here and there. I concluded that her run around with Twiglet had taken its toll and she was quite exhausted by it. Unusually, she went straight up to bed after the

Missus had taken her out last thing where normally she will launch herself at me when she comes back. Twiglet is here for another week, so we hope to see her again. It made me wonder if there is a playmate rental service we can call upon. Gosh, that would be useful.

March 11th – Monday

I strongly suspect that it is the end of the world as we know it; it was not windy today and neither did it rain.

There were some very suspect, dark and threatening clouds about at various times during the day, just so we were not alarmed too much, perhaps. Other than that, there were bits of blue sky poking out between quite a bit of white fluffy cloud. It was exceedingly temperate for the time of year and just a light breeze from somewhere in the west. The sea was the best behaved that it has been for quite some time, and with an abundance of colour in the hedgerows you might be forgiven for thinking that some of spring had arrived.

With such seasonal goodness in the air and good weather to frolic in, there was only one thing to do: go and buy some paint. I had dropped by to see the boys on the way to the gymnasium in the morning to see what their expectations were for this week. I was pleasantly surprised when they told me that they anticipated having got around to painting the living room by Friday, which dovetailed nicely with our expectations that the carpet would be installed the following Monday. Of course, that does not mean that is what is going to happen, but it was good enough for the Missus to tell me that we were heading into town to buy the paint for job.

I did not allow myself to become too excited by the revelation and undertook what might be described as a perfectly normal blistering session. I had managed to get through most of it when the Missus called to say that the carpet man had arrived. I had made the assumption that he could measure the hall by himself, which is why I had gone to the gymnasium. It turned out that he could measure the hall by himself, but it was just as well that we met because there were a few outstanding questions that needed to be resolved. Even better news was that he expected to turn up on Saturday to start the underlay and gripper installation to get ahead of the posse for Monday.

With that bit of business concluded, I returned to the house for the obligatory running of ABH down to the beach before making myself ready for a journey into town. It is quite easy to regret that there was no Twiglet down there for her to play with but to watch her, it seemed it did not matter much. She is perfectly capable of running around in circles as if being chased and using the deep grooves in the sand made by one of the fishing boats as a racetrack. We spent a good half an hour down there exploring and running ourselves ragged – well, one of us did.

Now that I have mentioned it, I should explain that all but one of the fishing punts had been removed from the slipway and pulled into the Harbour car park. Part of this is to avoid extra large waves from the winter storms causing them damage and partly to put them in proximity of the tractor shed for maintenance. Today, one of the boats that had undergone quite a bit of work, was pulled down the western slip and hauled up onto the main slipway. Hopefully it is a sign that fishing weather is expected in the near future.

We were under instructions for various types of paint for the living room. The Missus has also chosen some colours for the double bedroom and the kitchen which she intends to do herself. I was party to the decision process on what colours to choose for each of the rooms. There is one, for the living room, called 'cobbled cove' and 'coastal breeze' for the bedroom and in the kitchen, 'peppermint rock'. They all sound very jolly and I am sure will suite each of the rooms that they have been assigned to even if they do all look vaguely similar. I am very glad I was asked for my opinion, though.

We are very lucky to have a commercial paint shop on the outskirts of town. It must be very popular as it has been there for years and still going strong. The paint is mixed on the premises, which presumably is why the choice is so wide as demonstrated by a huge rotating display on one side of the shop. The Missus suggested that we just confirm that the colours we had chosen from the catalogue looked the same on the display. It is just as well that we did because she said that the 'cobbled cove' did not look as yellow as she had hoped and chose 'battered corn' instead that was identical. There were other changes too, because they were too light or too dark or too green or brown. We must have very similar views because I agreed with each one.

Having decided on the final colours, we had to wait while the very pleasant and clever man that served us mixed up the paints to make the colours she, I mean, we had chosen. It took a while too and the Missus took various pots out as each became ready until I was left with just two and the bill. It might have been the paint fumes, of course, but I found my eyes watering a tad.

That all done we arrived home a little late to start anything in the shop. It was not a great time either to be taking ABH for a stank, particularly on the big beach as the tide was pushing in. I had taken a look on the way down the hill on our return and it did look then that there was just about enough time to whizz the little girl along the Coast Path to The Valley and back across the beach.

We procrastinated a little while we unloaded the paint, and the Missus went off to see a pal at the top of the hill for the afternoon. Noticing the time pressing on, I booted up and took the risk that a coat for either of us was probably unnecessary, which it was, and we headed out.

The tide was at a rather more advanced stage than I had thought but in my estimation, with limited swell and heading towards neap tides, we would probably get away with it if we hurried along. Of course, hurrying along was the fatal flaw in the whole, carefully planned endeavour. ABH does not do hurrying along. We did not even get across The Beach car park without having to stop and look at other dogs and people. Unfortunately, there were quite a lot of dogs and people. There had been quite a crowd on the beach when we came down the hill and as they were now leaving, they were being replaced by some surfer type people changing into wetsuits.

Along the Coast Path, there was much more to stop and have a sniff at and when the path opened out a bit, there was plenty to stop and look at in the direction of the beach. I do not know what ABH was looking at but I was keeping a careful eye on the advancing tide, which at the northern end of the beach did not look too threatening. I could not see the southern end of the beach, which is narrower, and where the pinch point would be first.

We kept to the top part of the beach as we walked back. There is far less to sniff at and explore along the beach, which is the whole point of going out on the Coast Path first, and we made good progress. We chickened out at the path that leads up to the Beach Surf Bar and went through the car park rather than over the reef. From above it looked like we would have found an easy path through but the waves were very close to lapping at the bottom of the OS slipway, so it was as well that we did not chance it.

The Missus was out until the end of the afternoon. She does not see her pal too often outside the season, so they would have had much to gossip about, I am sure. I did not ask. In her absence, I had taken a call from our carpet man who had called with the quote for the carpet and the work. We will have to wait to do the kitchen floor as the vinyl we had chosen was no longer available, so the quote did not include it. It must have been the fumes from the new carpet I was imagining because I found my eyes watering a tad.

The temperature from the day was dropping sharply away when I took ABH out after tea. We went around the small block and a little way up Coastguard Row. Earlier in the day, we had seen the huge trucks of the electricity board arrive sporting chunky poles. They had been there all day, but I could not see where they had installed them until I wondered at the crunching underfoot of churned up gravel. Mind, the pole in Coastguard Row is the only new one I spotted, and they must have done a few more. I think that they must have changed the type of tree they are using because the new poles alongside the old ones are substantially thicker and, in many cases, taller. California is probably missing a few Giant Redwoods I would say.

March 12th – Tuesday

There is clearly a price to pay for having a day of sunshine, no wind and no rain. It was windy and rainy today – well, it certainly started out that way.

The rain had mainly come overnight and left us grey and mizzly for much of the rest of the day. It was moderately brighter in the later afternoon but the wind, although diminishing, was with us all day.

The electricity company paid a visit to the mews early on in the morning and there was no mistake about their visit or what they had done. I will give them their due that they are veritable experts at putting big poles into very tight spaces. The boys had to move their cars but ours, parked alongside, stayed where it was. I heard the commotion but was a tad distracted in the house and only saw that they had been a while after they had gone. The much taller pole sat alongside the old one in the corner next to the wooden chalet that sits between the mews and the RNLI car park. The evidence of their visit was all over the road in clods of thick mud. It will be difficult to prove, but they also bent the wheel on our wheelie bin. This is irritating because we have just heard that it will be replaced in July. I hope it lasts out that long.

No sooner than I had brushed my teeth and had a quick lick behind my ear 'oles, I departed for the shop and to crack on with cleaning the shelves. I had made sure to take ABH for a run before I started so that I would not need to break for a while and spoil my cadence. Armed with a paint brush for dusting and a bucket of water for washing down shelves after dusting them, I set to with vigour. About an hour later, I was joined by the Missus who started on the other side of the shop.

There are several jobs encompassed in the general title of shopkeeper that are a mite tedious, such as opening curtains at the start of the day, placing orders, unwrapping cartons, refilling shelves, bottling up, sweeping the floor, serving customers and closing curtains at the end of the day amongst several others. None, of these, however, compare even slightly with the grim drudgery of dusting individual bars of chocolate, sweets and chewing gum packets with a small paintbrush. It appears that the sweet shelf took the brunt of the sanding the Missus undertook, and all the wrappers were covered in a thick layer. This took me the lion's share of the time I spent in the shop today.

I had to stop after that to take ABH for a run, mainly because it was time to and also to avoid the onset of repetitive strain injury from dusting sweet packets. On both runs out today there had been plenty of Harbour beach to play on. The harbour tractor had been down there clearing the beach of large rocks ahead of pushing boats out. They must have found some because there were a few deep holes scattered about the beach. There were also ridges and tracks that ABH delighted in jumping over and running up and down as well as scooting around in wide circles. I am guessing that she was compensating for being holed up in the shop all day with very little entertainment and being largely ignored by the pair of us.

We laboured into the afternoon. There are going to have to be words with the neighbours upstairs. The racket they were making all day was just entirely unreasonable. They also worked into the evening, which was good of them, trying to get everything ready for the decorating that now has to happen before the end of Friday. The carpet goes in starting on Saturday provided we can find a way of getting the big roll into the flat in the first place. It might be possible to get it onto the scaffolding at the side and through the side window. Otherwise, it will be trying to squeeze it through the back door where the bends are at less of an acute angle. Friday evening will be interesting.

We will also have to work through the great pile of detritus that the cleaning of the shop floor has thrown up. Amongst the furniture we put down there was a great pile of things from the window seat and various cupboards we could not think where else to put. Much of it are things that you would like to keep but cannot imagine that you might ever use but are loathed to throw away. We will have to gird our loins and divert them to the Household Waste Recycling Centre where they can be tipped.

The Missus had a fair distance still to go with her shelf cleaning. I did not have quite so much but I am also having to sort through each item for its sell by date. This is a tad time consuming because I have to put my spectacles on to read the date in most cases. It is the usual suspects each year: light mayonnaise, condiments such as horseradish sauce, flour and crisps. This year we avoided throwing out the tomato soup. Oddly, the other soups such as oxtail and chicken on the same brand have much longer dates. If I could be bothered, I would try and find out why. Another usual product missing is the large bottle of pop, which we give away. It seems I managed the stock down to a minimum this year.

Regardless, it is always a disappointment throwing out anything as it seems such a waste. Some can be diverted to the Lifeboat crew as they will largely eat anything, but the majority will end in the bin. We did try asking the homeless shelter in town once long ago, but they refused to take anything even past its best before date, which seemed churlish since it is still legal to sell it, let alone consume it.

We retired late in the afternoon quite exhausted from our efforts. I recovered quite well from having to stand on a ladder to clean top shelves, too. By the time I attended our Lifeboat operations meeting in the evening, I was running at full efficiency again. I shall, no doubt, be fit to do it all again tomorrow. I can hardly wait.

March 13th – Wednesday

It is usually me that remembers it and well ahead of the date itself rather than the Missus. It is probably out of fear. I would have been into town several weeks ago and ordered a bouquet and one for the birthday as well that follows a month behind. Today I forgot the wedding anniversary and it was the Missus who mentioned it first.

I am pretty much in the clear because, as I said, it is normally the Missus that forgets. She would probably not have liked the bouquet anyway because we are in a strange house and there is nowhere to put them; all our vases are in storage. I am reasonably certain that I would have remembered if we were in the flat but, of late, I am distracted. She does not buy anything for me; she does not like to rub my nose in it.

Once again today, I headed for the shop early on. I had sacrificed another gymnasium session and rearranged my morning to be ready for the refrigeration engineer's arrival. It was therefore most irritating but understandable that it was cancelled because the engineer had called in sick. I decided not to waste the advantage of time and went down to the shop to start my half of the shop.

Unfortunately, cleaning shelves and throwing away out of date items does not make for very good Diary writing and probably even less for Diary reading. There again, I have never let such details get in the way of publishing a page full of tedious drivel and I do wonder, dear reader, why you are still here at all – all supposing you are, of course.

Happily, for we Diarists, although probably not for the hapless soul, there is always some hapless soul ready to step into the breach to save the day. On this occasion there were two hapless souls who managed to get themselves cut off by the tide over at Pednevounder. They were extremely fortunate that they had just enough mobile telephone signal to contact the Coastguard who pressed a button to summon the Lifeboat. It also summoned the Coastguard Cliff Rescue Team and the Coastguard helicopter.

So thin was the information that none of the services had very much of an idea what the situation was. The Cliff Rescue team had the best idea because they got there first and clearly, they were not telling. All that we knew was that less than half an hour after the boat was called out and launched into the briny, it was stood down and probably before it even got to Pednevounder.

The day had started out grey and unwholesome. It became brighter as the day continued and warm, did I mention warm? Today, despite a bit of a breeze, I could have been in shorts and t-shirt and still have been comfortable. In fact, while scrubbing, washing down and moving things from one shelf to another, I was getting particularly hot under the collar. I resolved this by taking off the collar and even then, I was still warm.

On the first occasion I had taken ABH down to the beach I had needed my coat on, mainly due to that breeze. I had assumed I would need it again the second time, early in the afternoon, but that time I was severely overdressed. I had removed the offending layer but had still been in my DIYman overall when the balloon went up. We had been exceedingly thin on the ground for the launch which necessitated me

running around shifting doors and being in two places at the same time. After the launch, another layer had to go.

We were still thin on the ground when we understood that the boat was returning. Thankfully, four Boat Crew who had arrived late to the party were happy to throw their lot in with us and help out with recovery. The sea state that had been dickie to start with had worsened since the boat had gone out and threatened something of a difficult recovery.

One of the Boat Crew is particularly versed in the intricacies of boat recovery. I took her with me to the bottom of the long slip to catch the heaving line thrown by the Boat Crew on the boat. She was ahead of me on the slipway steps, and I told her to venture down as far as she felt comfortable. I promised that I would be behind her all the way but did not specify any particular distance of behind. I always find it best not to be specific in such circumstances. Nevertheless, despite the Boat Crew being unable to throw a heaving line at two standing still people with any accuracy, my oppo caught the line on the third throw and we latched up the span so that it could be hauled aboard.

The swell that I reported to the boat as running around ten feet up the tow of the slipway was running more than twenty feet up the tow when the boat arrived. We were in such a high-risk environment that at one stage we actually got our Wellington boots wet, although we recovered well. It is testament to the rigorous training that we all undertake that even under such challenging conditions we executed what looked to me like a textbook recovery under challenging conditions.

Having hooked up the boat, we made our way back up the slipway to the relative safety of the boathouse. I even remembered to look behind me when I got to the top to make sure my oppo had come too – our motto being ‘never leave a man behind unless they are so far down the slip it would be too much of a fag to get them’. With the able assistance of the other members of the Boat Crew, we had the boat tucked up and ready for the next launch in no time at all. We are, after all, a very inclusive, very excellent Shore Crew.

I returned to the shop but had no stomach to continue my efforts in cleaning. I had almost finished anyway and only required replacing some of the beachware items on their shelves after cleaning them. This will take no more than five minutes in the morning, although I do have to empty buckets and fix a light fitting that had come adrift from the ceiling. It is a continual problem that the ceiling has few anchor points and without knowing where underlying battens might be, screwing anything into the ceiling is a bit of a lottery.

Just before I had been called away on service, the Missus had broken ranks after finishing her half of the shop before me. She went off to wash down the commercial mats that we use in front of the first electric sliding door in The Cove and behind the counter. Normally, she would have brought the pressure washer down from the

Farm, but time is pressing. She was still doing this when I returned, so I left her with it while I took ABH back to the house.

Yesterday, we had ABH for most the afternoon in the shop. She refuses to settle but can hardly be blamed in such a mess and with so much going on. As a result, she was completely knackered by the time we finished and slept through the remaining part of the afternoon. She was even less animated later in the evening. It was gone half past four o'clock when I took her back home. She had been tethered up watching the Missus wash the mats and, given that she cannot stay away from running water, had become wet and consequently chilled. The Missus stayed out for a further hour, which gave ABH time to have a rest.

After a late tea, the evening was gone in a trice. As an anniversary treat, I took ABH out for her last run. We were blessed with some clear sky in the west yesterday evening and a view of a perfect crescent moon attended by a bright Jupiter. The sky was a little thick with cloud tonight but with a bit more of a waxing crescent, the moon was still visible. There was no sign of Jupiter, however, which was so close to the moon it appeared to be hidden. It was also very quiet out so late in the evening apart from the roaring of the sea. That will not last long now, I am sure.

March 14th – Thursday

Today was our wedding anniversary part two; we had the church blessing today. I remembered this one.

Not that it made very much difference to the day. The in-laws were coming around for tea before their departure on Friday and the Missus needed to go shopping. She left me with ABH who was once again delighted to have to come down to the shop with me.

It did not take me long to put the last bits back on the shelf, but I went and had a look at the light unit hanging by its cord from the ceiling. I had reasoned that a couple of wall plugs might do the trick but even then, there is nothing for them to bind on. What was really required was some plasterboard fixings, which I have somewhere. Every now and again I come upon a small packet of them and think to put them away somewhere safe. The place is very safe indeed because I have no idea where it is. I even asked the boys if they had a couple, but they did not have one between them. I will have to trip into town or the builders' merchant up at St Just tomorrow.

I have not been able to use my computer for a couple of days because the boys have had the Internet feed switched off. The power cable runs across the doorway and is a bit of a trip hazard for them. I found that it was on again this morning, so I took advantage and printed off all the invoices that had accumulated since the last time I printed some off – it was some pile.

There was also some confusion about our waste collection. I had asked that we had a general waste and a cardboard collection. When I telephoned to arrange our general waste collection, I was told that there was no contract for the cardboard. I spent some time today sorting out the issue. I do not think we are in the same league as Basho's incompetence, at least I do hope not. We should get our first collection next week in any case and I have filled the bin already.

I was rushing around a bit during the morning trying to tie up these loose ends in a timely manner. We had experienced a bit of Lifeboating yesterday and were keen for more. Always happy to oblige, our Coxswain organised a couple of training launches for today since we have not had once for some time. An additional reason for the two launches was to give some Tamar class Lifeboat experience to a lady Coxswain from Penlee Lifeboat station.

The Institution has to comply with worktime directives and consequently we need sufficient Coxswains to cover 365 full days each year. In The Cove, we have been planning for this for some time and have five Coxswains which nearly covers all the available hours. Some Lifeboat stations are not so lucky, and the Institution has thought to train some roving Coxswains to cover absences and gaps in service provision. The lady Coxswain from Penlee is one of the first 'Coxswain, Afloat Mechanic' roles to make that happen. She has already gained confidence with the Severn Class Lifeboat and now needs to see how the Tamar works and especially how slipway stations differ from pontoon launches.

Quite a surprising number of us gathered for the first launch given that it was the middle of the working day. Some people had to slip away quickly afterwards to get back to work like our Isles of Scilly aeroplane pilot who attended while waiting for the mist to clear. We were slightly better off on the shore side than I had at first thought with an additional two crew, which permitted us to launch the Inshore boat concurrently with the big boat.

On the shore, we too are making sure we have adequate cover, although we are not affected by the working time regulations – Head Launchers, for example can keep going until they drop provided we have a backup person ready to take his place. To this end we have nominated an appropriate person to train up to step over my expired carcass and take the reins when my expired carcass can no longer do the job. Today, I let him loose with launching and recovery and to make sure that I carried no influence with the process, put myself in the winch room out of harm's way. This, of course, had absolutely nothing to do with the fact that it was a tad chilly in the breeze and it had rained earlier and there was still a bit of damp in the air.

It is a testament to the rigorous training that I mentioned yesterday, that the boy done good, as some people sometimes say, apparently. The launch was meticulously executed and an hour or so later the boat was brought back up the long slip in what looked remarkably like a textbook recovery.

The Inshore launch and recovery, with very little sea in the Harbour to launch into, was equally well executed. The Inshore crew had asked if we could recover them from the big beach, so after we had concluded our launch and set up for recovery, we sauntered down the road to look at the OS slipway. Even as we approached, it was clear that this was not going to be possible. We went down anyway and discovered it was worse still with large boulders on the slipway itself. There was not only a deep shelf to drop down onto the beach from but also the sand around the drop off point was littered with sizable rocks. There was no way the Tooktrak and trailer would get down there, although in a lifesaving emergency, we might have given it a go.

When I returned home after tying up the administration of recording our attendance, I had some more work to do in the shop and on the computer. Eventually, I made it back to the house to discover that ABH had not been out since the morning, and it would be a good plan to take her then.

We had been excluded from the Harbour beach in the morning because the tractor was working down there. One of the fishing boats was launching to drop lobster pots out ahead of the new season and was making multiple trips of it. When I passed the beach after the launch, it was empty and prime for a little girl to chase around on. She was not overly enthusiastic, so it was a delight for both of us when Twiglet came charging down the slipway to meet her. ABH has been sniffing at the door each time we pass, so she must be missing her pal. They made up for lost time and spent a good half an hour chasing and play fighting all over the beach. Sadly, it the last day we shall see them this time around. The next time they are here, Twiglet will be much bigger than ABH and the partnership may not work quite so well but it has been immense fun while they have been here.

As if one launch was not enough training for one day, we scheduled another in for the evening. This would permit our lady from Penlee to see the difference between long slipway and short slipway recoveries. We gathered in the evening a little earlier than a normal training night. Many of the same people were there that were there in the middle of the day but there were also quite a few others who could not make it earlier. Our Isles of Scilly aeroplane pilot came back again and had not been required to fly.

The day had started out grey, damp and breezy. There was a fair amount of low cloud that had disrupted flights to the Islands all day. Halfway through the morning there was a heavy belt of rain come through but all we got later was mizzle. It did not make for a particularly inspiring day all told, which was probably ideal that we had some Lifeboat activity to take our minds off it. By the evening, the breeze had freshened, there was more damp in the air and the sea state had livened up.

The Inshore boat launched again in the evening. With high tide arriving in the middle of operations, the Tooltrak driver had to pick his spot further across on the slipway to make for a safe launch. Even then, the Inshore boat had some fun and games

getting back onto the trailer. They had used the sea state to train some less experienced crew on landing the boat and they are now rather more experienced than they were when they started.

On the shore we had plentiful numbers to staff both launches adequately. Unfortunately, our regular winchman was present which meant that I had to venture forth into the wild outside. I let another of my colleagues take the reins this time and I took the role of a regular crew member. We stood by while the lady Coxswain took some turns on reversing the boat onto the slipway. At our station there is no requirement to practise parallel parking, which clearly would have been including otherwise. The very excellent Shore Crew, all male men to a man, watched in silence because that is the sort of grown-up chaps we are.

All done, the boat came in a final time and was hauled up the short slip in what was clearly another textbook recovery. We washed down and put the boat away for another time, finishing at around nine o'clock, which is only just ahead of my bedtime. We are, after all, a very consistent, very excellent Shore Crew.

March 15th – Friday

Happily, not one of our wedding anniversaries today, so I did not have to remember anything.

It was just as well because ABH had me up at four o'clock, probably the trauma of her pal deserting her today. By the time it was time to get up, I had a hard time remembering anything at all, although one of the things that I did recall was that it was a mite inclement earlier in the morning and not a great deal better later. I had not paid too much attention to the forecast for the day, but I did see a fair amount of brightness and sunny spells at the one I looked at during breakfast. If there was a sunny spell, I must have missed it.

Largely, we were rained upon. It was the drizzly sort of rain backed by a vigorous breeze from the west, so every time it thickened, we could see it smoking through The Cove. I was just heading to the shop to fix the light fitting when I was headed off at the pass by ABH, who thought it best I take her for a run first. We headed for the beach, but it clearly was not the same without Twiglet. There was some fun chasing bits of dry seaweed being blown about in the breeze but otherwise there was little of interest. We ended up heading around the block, instead.

On the way back we bumped into one of our longer term second home owners at the corner of Coastguard Row. She has lived there on and off longer than some first home owners and certainly much longer than us. Every time she comes down, she spends a lot of time tending to her garden that clearly needs much attention after lengthy absences and this is where I saw her. She had left a message for me to contact her, so it was a happy coincidence that we met up.

The lady has two long-haired dachshunds one of which was so keen on ABH that she almost attached herself to her face. Whichever way the little girl moved the dachshund moved with her. It could have been much worse, but I had to pick ABH up in the end as she was getting somewhat perturbed by the attention, which had developed into close quarters stalking. I was offered coffee and a visit inside that I have never seen and would really like to. Unfortunately, my boots and ABH's paws were muddy, and it would not have done to blot our copy books or their carpet.

Eventually, I managed to get to the shop where I was still short some fixings for the light. One of the boys had suggested I remove the plasterboard fixing from a television bracket that was no longer required in the kitchen. We had put a small television there and never used it. It must have seemed like a good idea at the time. The boys had already removed the bracket, so I unscrewed two of the fittings and took them downstairs. They did the job on the light fitting that is now back in place, but we will still have to be careful not to knock it because even the plasterboard fittings were only just viable.

In the meanwhile, the electrician turned up to fit all the sockets in the living room. I brought the lights that we had purchased some time ago down from storage in the garage we are borrowing. I suspect that we will need dark glasses when they are on as they are very bright. I had tried to suggest we use the 'warm white' colour frequency but was overruled to have 'cool white' instead that will appear even brighter. The boys also took delight in tell me how awful they would look but, in my experience, the Missus is irritatingly, usually right. When we checked later they did not look too bad at all.

We are unlikely to be able to get the lights off the ceiling as the paint there was still wet. In fact, one of the boys was still painting the ceiling when I delivered the light units. I am sure it will be fine, and I am told I should not be so concerned with such minutiae.

One thing that was definitely not minute was the carpet. One of the very excellent Shore Crew is connected with the man who is a good mate of our carpet fitter. I was told that the mate would be doing the delivering but could not do it until the evening. It struck me then that I could probably collect the carpet during the day, and we would have some burley lads [almost] willing to help move them into the flat. We had anticipated some difficulty taking the carpets in and the more helping hands available the better.

As chance would have it, the carpet fitter called in the morning to say that the carpet had been delivered and his mate would bring it over between seven and eight o'clock. I offered my alternative, which was deemed a very good idea. Had I realised how heavy and cumbersome the carpets were, I might have thought twice. No, I definitely would not have thought once about it.

We arrange to meet after he had returned from getting the underlay which turned out to be late in the afternoon. The timing was somewhat fraught because Doing Parcels Dreadfully had inexplicably split a two box delivery and I had to wait for the second one to be delivered. I had already paid a visit to The Farm with a truck load of things from the shop that better belonged there. While doing that I discovered just how carpet transporting unfriendly the weather was. There was thick mist up top laced with variable heavy mizzle requiring a coat when the air temperature was in record highs. It was most uncomfortable but about to get much worse.

I arrived in Penzance with really just enough time to load up and return before the boys would be closing in on going home time. Three rolls of carpet lifted onto the truck without issue but the last, the five meter length, was very heavy. Our carpet fitter comes highly recommended because he is very experienced which has come through many years of carpet fitting. He is now retired and does just a few jobs. He is therefore not in the bloom of youth with muscles like tug boats. While I attend the gymnasium three times a week – only one this week – I too am not exactly Mister Universe.

We dragged the last roll of carpet out of his front door, me on the front half. The centre roll had been removed so that it would be more flexible when we came to move it into the flat. This just made it more difficult to lift. When our man casually instructed me to hoist it onto my shoulders my immediate thought was that I had forgotten a spoon to balance on my nose at the same time while playing a cheerful tune on a penny whistle.

Quite unbelievably, not only did I not believe it, but my creaking frame was somewhat surprised as well, I managed to hoist my end onto my shoulder. Between us, although mainly me, we managed to manhandle it onto the roof rack. However, because it had the centre roll removed, the front section hung in front of the windscreen. It needed to be lifted on top of the other three rolls so that it could be supported. Surprising myself again, I fashioned a hoist using the ratchet straps that I had brought with me and pulled the front end to the top. I could get under the rear end to push that on top.

With a bit of practise, most things become easier to do. I have found this not to be the case with deploying ratchet straps, which I constantly struggle with. It therefore came as no surprise that having fitted three ten meter lengths to various places over the length of the carpet rolls and ensure their tightness, by the end of the man's drive I was out of the truck and doing them again because they had all settled and loosened.

I spent the entire journey home in the grip of fear that I would see one of the carpets in my reverse view mirrors on the road behind me after rounding a corner or going up a hill. Had the big one come off, there was no way I would get it back on again by myself. I stopped halfway home to check the straps which proved unnecessary and

then spent half an hour outside our back door – the first chosen route into the flat – trying to loosen the ratchets.

We tried getting the carpet in through the back that offers what we imagined to be the straightest route, but it was not going to happen as the back section was still unmovable in the back doorway when we tried to turn the first bend. By pushing and shoving and being none too polite with it, we managed to get everything through the front door.

The arrangement was for the carpet man to come tomorrow to put down the underlay but in consultation with the boys who were still painting and plastering, it was thought best to put it off until Monday. It will put us a day behind, but everyone would be tripping over each other had he turned up tomorrow.

I was very grateful to be able to put my rear end in a chair after all that and I was quite surprised that I made it as far as the top of the slope. I also had to broach the news that the carpet man had mistakenly provided new carpet for the spare double bedroom when we had intended to reuse the existing one. It is a job done now, so we will have a room sized bit of carpet spare of one sort or another. I am trying very hard not to be concerned with the minutiae, but I am being sorely tested.

March 16th – Saturday

Did I say, 'sorely tested'? The Highly Professional Craftsperson sent me a message soon after he arrived at the flat this morning. We have a leak under the water pressure heater tank in the airing cupboard and the floor is wet through. Make that 'injuriously tested'.

I went and had a look. We have had this before when the connections deteriorate. It is just a very small drip but must have been going on for a while because the wet has extended beyond the door into the hall. We have turned off the heater and the boys very kindly offered to drain the tank. I called our very helpful plumber who said he will come around on Monday. I suspect it will require a new tank like it did last time.

We had been up again in the middle of the night with ABH. We will have to drug her before bed tonight just to get some sleep ourselves. The weather had improved in the last tenth of the day yesterday into something reasonably pleasant. It was still reasonably pleasant in the middle of the night but when I went to the flat this morning, we were back to grey, grisly and mizzly again. It would be good to think that it is just getting out of the way so that Easter is all sunshine and warmth. I also expected the shop to have been made ready overnight by a team of enthusiastic fairies, but it was not.

The morning just got worse as it went on until I could wait no more and decided to head to the shop to start the grocery order. We are open in just a week's time, which

is hard to comprehend having been shut for such a long time and our work still going on. We cannot wait for the flat to be finished and have to assume that it will all come together just in the nick of time. It means taking in the deliveries with the furniture still in the shop and working around it.

It also transpired that the Missus was ready in her DIYwoman dungarees to go down to the flat to start painting the double bedroom. She had elected to paint that and the kitchen and will still be doing so when we open, I think. It was important to get the double bedroom done ahead of the carpet – the original carpet – being refitted. I was going to mention that she could not possibly paint the bedroom in her dungarees because they are blue, and all painters wear white. It just is not right nor is it proper but in the name of avoiding a clip around the ear 'ole, I will turn a blind eye on this occasion.

The Missus was at the painting for the rest of the day and into the evening and part of the night. I took ABH into the shop and finished the stock order in around a couple of hours after ABH had stopped annoying me and settled down in the window seat. It may seem an inordinate amount of time to take writing down an order, and it was. I also restocked the shelves with anything we had in the store room and sorted through the store room for more out of date stock. There is plenty more to do in the shop, but we are really hamstrung until we can clear out the furniture. It will be a last minute rush, which in truth is normally what happens when we are opening the shop for the new season.

When we are in full swing, the ordering does not take very long. By that time, we know what is low or is missing almost before we write the list. After four months of doing other things there are some gaps on the shelves that I have no idea what occupied them before. I will have to go through our entire stock list to see if I can identify the missing items. I have also just remembered that I forgot to take a note of what tobacco we need. Frankly, I am not that fussed about it. We do not make any profit on sales of tobacco, and it ties up thousands of pounds of cash. The margins are incredibly slim despite inflating the price a little to make it worthwhile. It seems that we do not inflate it as much as some of the multiples and fascia stores, so I am unapologetic about doing so. I am often shocked when customers from big cities tell me how 'cheap' our tobacco products are.

Two and a half hours of stock juggling was enough for any sane person, so I decided to have a break back at the house. I checked in with the Missus who was knee deep in skirting boards and white paint, so I left her to it. She was in her element with the boys all around her giving her encouragement. They generally give me abuse.

I must confess, I dropped into a deep zizz after having a cup of tea. ABH woke me up by jumping off my lap with a loud bark to shout at someone who had the temerity to walk past outside. I had already decided that I should take her for a longer walk. We have not much time left to enjoy such things, she had not had one for a few days

and there was a break in the weather. This probably sounded better than it was. The mizzle had stopped for a bit, but it was still grey and grisly.

What it also was, was incredibly warm and it did not take much of a decision to shed a layer. I would have not bothered with my rain jacket either but for the fact that the forecast suggested that the rain was coming back again but was not sure when. I gave it a trial run by driving up to the shop at the top to get some more butter and milk before we set off and established that even having a hat was a mistake.

I left the groceries and my hat in the box at the front of the shop and headed towards the beach. I had decided to utilise our soft option which is to walk up the Coast Path to The Valley and back across the beach. It is the soft option because it is short of hills to climb but still represents a reasonable effort in stepping out, more so than walking along the beach and back.

Despite being a little over-warm it was still an enjoyable little stank. There seemed to be a good few people around today enjoying the brief break between awful weathers. We did not meet anyone to play with on the way back, although it did not stop ABH haranguing an ancient looking King Charles spaniel, which was a bit embarrassing. You might think that noticing such things would be inherent but clearly not, unless ABH is just plain desperate for anyone to play with her.

I was very keen to shed the layers I had on when we got back. There was plenty of damp in the air and ABH had taken herself into some deep rockpools so needed the use of the hair drier. I let my own hair dry naturally, which happened soon after walking through the door. We settled in to wait for the Missus to return. We had a long wait.

With little else left to do, I decided to place the order for our main cash and carry order. When I logged into our account, I was dismayed to see that they had changed the system and I could not quite work out how to add the items to our trolley. It took a few minutes to realise that we had been locked out of the online ordering function. This led me to the next level up from dismay, whatever that is but it was certainly mixed with frustration and irritation because there was nothing I could do about it until Monday morning, when I will be up to my eyes with the carpet man.

I thought to compile a list of a spreadsheet, listing the catalogue number, description and quantity. Having listed around 40 items I concluded two things: I was going to run out of patience before I ran out of list and that fifty percent of what we wanted to order was not there anymore.

For some time, the Hayle cash and carry has been more and more weighted towards catering than retail. In the four months since we have been closed it seems that they have removed most of our regular retail stock. Things like toilet paper, cooking oil, condiments and tins of soup are all missing. If we get our ordering facility resolved

on Monday morning, I am not sure there will be enough there to order to bring us up to minimum spend for delivery, which is £1,000.

One plan would be to order as much as we could from Hayle to be delivered – all supposing we make the minimum order – and drive to the Redruth depot which has the other things we need. It is unlikely that I would get everything on our list in the truck for one trip and I do not want to do two. Longer term we are going to have to switch ordering to Redruth full time, but I seem to recall that there is some issue with the way they deliver that may give us a problem. I think we still have an account with the other cash and carry in Exeter but frankly, that has its own problems, and we are pretty much stuffed for other alternatives.

I do not know what the next level up from ‘injuriously tested’ is but I feel that it has already been surpassed.

March 17th – Sunday

It was not ABH who had me up at silly hours of the morning, it was the merry tones of my Lifeboat pager calling me to arms.

A lone yachtsman heading this way from somewhere else decided that he would like a bit of company to conclude his journey and request a Lifeboat tow him back. He was about 30 miles off, somewhere north of the Islands, which is a fair old stank to get to and even longer towing back. The boat was gone for seven hours and even then had not reached Newlyn; we handed off to Penlee Lifeboat just northwest of The Cove.

Much as we would have liked to hang around, after launching the boat into some very inclement weather, we felt it appropriate to head home and go back to bed. Well, someone had to do it. Normally, we have a reasonable idea of what will transpire and how long it would take. On this occasion it was very much a case that it would take a long time and the boat would probably be back around breakfast time, maybe.

I did check at around five o'clock and our boat was making very slow progress, around four knots, and was way off still. I awoke again just before what I might consider to be my normal getting up time and, lo and behold, it was just about the right time to head across to the Lifeboat station to make preparations.

The members of the very excellent Shore Crew attending on this occasion were all local, apart from one who had spent the night, so we gathered very quickly. As we opened the doors on a grey, grisly and mizzly morning – the weather during the night had been much, much worse – it became apparent that we were in transition between long slipway recovery and short slipway recovery on a pushing tide. It was down to me to decide the slipway, which involved guessing how long the Lifeboat

would be and how much the tide would have advanced in that time. I went for the short slip.

The weather was closing in just as we were finishing setting up and the boat emerged from a thickening blanket of mist just beyond Cowloe. It was rather earlier than I had anticipated, and we might very well have recovered it on the long slipway. We were a couple of steps short of my desired minimum level on the short slipway but that marker is very much a risk averse measure. I adjudged that we were still good for the short slipway, just, and that it was probably the right decision because the swell had suddenly picked up. We would have been very uncomfortable on the long slipway.

We called the boat in, and executed what looked to me very much like a textbook recovery up the short slip and I am sure that anyone else watching at half past seven o'clock on a Sunday morning would say the same. On reflection, it would have been much more appropriate to have our trainee Head Launcher command the recovery due to the fact I was getting wet in the heavy mizzle. I shall be more attentive to the weather conditions next time I am handing out duties and pick up the winchman's job.

The Boat Crew had been very rapidly dismissed, sent home to their beds. We remained to refuel the boat with the senior Boat Crew left in attendance. We are, after all, a very dedicated, very excellent Shore Crew – at least in the daylight hours.

The Missus was out of the blocks early on after I returned to the house to carry on her painting duties. She had to give two of the walls that had not long been plastered additional time to dry before painting them. This left still a lot of work to do in what is essentially quite a small room. I had hoped that she would not be working long into the evening again as she was quite worn out last night when she returned and besides, there was tea to cook. More seriously – before I am lynched by my thumbs for such talk – had we planned the painting lark better, I would have made arrangements for tea. Something she could cook a bit more quickly. Oops.

ABH and I hung out for a while after the Missus went, as pals do, until I had a call from Mother on a strange telephone number requesting some assistance. Her power had gone out and was at a loss how to get it back on again. Had her consumer panel been installed in more sensible location I have no doubt that she could have resolved it herself. In fact, I am surprised but grateful that she did not get her step ladder out to reach the box that sits high up on the kitchen wall. I was not aware that she had given up her mobile telephone because she rarely used it, and despite not being used, it was leaching money. She therefore had to borrow a neighbour's telephone to call me.

I went over immediately to resolve the issue. It did cross my mind that her new solar panels had been so surprised by the appearance of the sun that they had tripped her circuitry. I found that the neighbour had switched everything off including the solar

panels but had stopped short of resetting the RCD switches for some reason. With those switched back on, everything worked just fine. I restarted the solar system – which sounds almost Herculean – and was surprised to see it generate a none too shabby three kilowatt hours at its peaks.

Mother told me that the power had gone off while she was using the toaster, so I checked that before I went. We will have to find a pay-as-you-go mobile telephone for her, one that allows you to keep your credit permanently, so she can have a telephone for such emergencies.

After a pretty awful night and morning, the sun broke through and shone all about. I looked to see if there was a sting in the tail, but there was not. We had blue skies and warmth the day long after the rain disappeared, so I stayed indoors and had a lengthy zizz. We did take to the beach a couple of times during the day and spent some time there milling about. With my furry friend by my side there was little that I could do that needed to be done in the shop, such as mopping the floor. I resigned myself to being lazy for a day.

Although not very physical, I did finish off one of the orders that needed to be done today. It is for the more up-market items that we sell and the big packets of crisps and some of the vegetarian and vegan options that I thoughtfully provide to our more particular customers. They, at least, will be happy if we cannot get anything from our rather strangely focused cash and carry company.

Despite starting early, the Missus worked long into the night and ABH and I were in bed when she eventually came home. I suspect that we have a week of this as we try and squeeze all the moving back into a short a timescale as possible. There will still be work going on around us but most of the interior has been completed. I think we will have to gird our loins like they have never been girded before and invent some hours from somewhere, too.

March 18th – Monday

I was up early again today. I reasoned that there was a lot to get out of the way before I went down to the flat to meet the carpet man. I had also been roused an hour earlier by ABH and could not really settle again.

The most important thing I wanted to do was to have a chat with the manager of the local cash and carry at Hayle. I had planned the conversation around getting him to agree to send us a delivery even though it did not meet their minimum spend. I have never understood, and I broached it with the manager when we spoke, why they have both a minimum spend for delivery and a charge. Surely, if they are recouping the cost of the delivery through the charge, and it would be difficult to see how they were not, why have a minimum spend.

Anyway, the conversation went reasonably as planned. He was reticent about the delivery if it came under minimum spend until I slipped into the conversation, as reasonably as I could, that it would only be below the minimum because they had removed half the retail stock. I fully understood that there was no point in having a pop at the manager. He was most sympathetic and broadly agreed with our arguments. Apparently, if we want retail stock delivered, we must expect it from their hub in Exeter and then it will be unceremoniously dropped outside our door on a pallet with no assistance to bring it in. Sounds very much like the Tesmorburys owned cash and carry no longer want our business. I left him with our predicament, and he will come and visit next week to let us know what arrangements he has been able to make.

By the time I had finished with the manager, the carpet man had arrived and had already started work. The first thing that he noticed was that the thin plywood that the boys had put down was not entirely complete. There was a large gap over by the window and he recommended some be placed on the top step and he was looking to me to resolve the issue. There were several problems with that: the boys had diverted their attention to matters outside; they had used the last of the plywood; and even if I could find some, my tools were up at The Farm.

The lack of plywood meant a trip into Penzance and since the only size I could get was eight feet by four feet, I would also need to take the jigsaw with me so I could get it in the truck – or practise my ratchet strapping again. The jigsaw was with my other tools up at The Farm, so I went there first. While I was there, I had a scout around in the barn for some gash plywood, which I did not find and then a sheet of something similar caught my eye in the wood store – which is a fine place to look for wood – and there were several sheets left over from the Missus' effort with the Lifeboat Christmas message.

It was thicker than the other ply that had been used, so I took a few sheets to show our carpet man to see if they would be suitable, which they were. It took a while to manufacture the right sizes mainly because the bits of gash ply had no square sides to start from. There was also no single sheet big enough for the larger gap and although I thought that I had enough separate sheets, I did not have enough to complete the job. It was back up to The Farm for some more.

I do not think that it delayed our man too much. He was able to crack on with the spare double bedroom. When he left, the carpet for bot rooms was in place and was being left to settle. He will come back tomorrow to finish those and also, hopefully complete the steps and the hall.

Just as the carpet man left for the day, the plumber turned up. I had already cleared out the airing cupboard enough to gain access to the water pressure tank using what little space we had left in the single bedroom, which was already scant. He decided, as we thought, that the unit needed to be replaced but to do that even more needed to come out of the small room. We now cannot get past the threshold of the single

bedroom, the corridor is full of the living room window seat and various bits of small furniture and the bathroom is full of the kitchen things and clothes from the spare double bedroom. We are moving back into this in a couple of days' time, apparently.

Our very good plumber then announced that given a change in rules, he can no longer fit water tanks bigger than fifteen litres. Ours is 30 litres. We need a plumber who had the relevant certification. Fortunately for us, our plumber is very, very good and knew just the man and would call him tomorrow to smooth the transition. I still need to call him myself to agree who buys the unit, clear the store room for the cash and carry deliveries – there are two tomorrow – get to Redruth to purchase the balance of our order from the cash and carry there, get it all out on the shelves, clear the corridor upstairs so our man can carpet it, move our furniture upstairs to clear the shop, mop the shop floor and rearrange the shop furniture, clear and defrost the ice cream freezer, order the ice creams that we lost in the big freezer crash in January or whenever it was, make sure the scaffolding from the front is cleared so the outside display can go there, place the orders for soft drinks, bread, milk and pasties (sorry, MS), move the mattress from the house to the flat so that we have something to sleep on and calculate all the new shop prices because they will have changed since we closed. Thank heaven's we have three days to do it in, else I would be really worried.

The Missus made off in the afternoon to take a friend to a show up in Truro. It was no something that I am interested in, so I was happy to remain behind to look after ABH who goes into a fit of depression when the Missus leaves. I am not sure that it helped that we had to visit the Lifeboat station at short notice. The boat is being taken off service and moved around to Newlyn where it can be worked on and more conveniently tested while the engineers work to resolve some issues. ABH sat very patiently in the crew room while we launched the boat and closed up the station.

We managed to get out a couple of times for a walk around the big block and a visit or two to the beach. After the rain overnight, we were left with a predominantly grey day and, in the afternoon, the temperature dropped markedly. It had earlier risen markedly to a very unseasonable twelve or thirteen degrees, so it was only going back to something a bit more normal for the time of year. We also had a few drops of drizzle in the air at one stage and a bit of breeze developing but did not amount to much.

I went to bed a little later than normal, but ABH held vigil for the Missus to come back. I will need to be up with the lark in the morning as I suspect I have a full day in prospect.

March 19th – Tuesday

So, I thought, working in the shop all day bring in cartons and packets, then putting stock out on the shelf. Why would I need DIYman overalls. I had worked in them yesterday and found myself overly warm by the middle of the day, so it was sensible to do without today. Of course, it was. What a fool.

I was indeed up with the lark, cracked four minutes of plank during my morning exercises and got ready for delivery number one. The Hayle cash and carry from which we had around half of what we needed very kindly sent a message to tell me that they were on their way. We had initially thought that the delivery could be placed on the shop floor but given the furniture is still on the shop floor, there was very little space. I felt it best to clear the store room as normal and place the deliveries in there, hence the early start.

The brushing up was just about finished when the van pulled up outside for what was very likely the last time. Whoever we continue with, the deliveries are more likely to be in the afternoon, which is highly inconvenient as it will arrive when we are at our busiest. The driver and his mate along with a little help from me managed to clear the van in short order leaving me with the job of unpacking, pricing and shelving it.

The Missus can usually knock the entire order out in half a day but she does not usually have a small hound to contend with, a carpet fitter requiring assistance, builders asking questions and a refrigeration engineer turning up in the middle of it.

In fairness, I was a long way into the delivery when the Missus decided to head off to Redruth to collect the second half of it. The farm shop type goods had already arrived by that time, coming just as I finished a swift breakfast. I had thought that she would be going to Redruth tomorrow, so I had not expected to be dog sitting as well. ABH had not even been for her morning walk, so I broke away from my work to take her around.

I was still quite pleased at this stage that I had not worn my DIYman overalls. It was still reasonably temperate as we headed for the small amount of beach that the tide allowed. I seem to recall that there was a bit of brightness, but a thick mist was forming and bringing with it a bit of a chill. The sea state was also very disturbed, although I did not pay much attention to it in the bay. It was hard to ignore it flogging over the Harbour wall, though, even with small neap tides as they are at present.

As the weather changes and the mist took hold, it was not long before I was regretting not wearing my DIYman overalls for the warmth they provide. Later, I regretted not wearing them for the protection they gave from getting my clothes lagged in builders dust. Our carpet man had advanced from the double bedroom and the living room where he had done a fine job and moved to the hall. Here the carpet and underlay kicked up the fine dust and detritus that the building work had deposited there. The damp carpet, as a result of the water heater leak, simply ensured that the accumulate dust on my top and trousers would not brush off easily as I dragged them all down to the skip.

I had the freezer engineer with me for most of the day as he battled with replacing the compressor on our relatively new unit. He had parked outside, which was probably as well given the numerous trips he made for various bits of strange looking equipment. He was one of our regular visiting engineers, so between bits of work we talked about the building work and ABH, who had taken his fancy having a dog himself. Because the door was open for much of the time, I had to tie her up to her bed and praise where it is due, she behaved very well. I had thought to give her a decent walk later in the day but there was no time and the rain – yes, bleddy rain again – had moved in and did not stop.

Another reason why it takes me so long to process the deliveries, especially for the first one of the season, is I need to check all the prices. Up until last year, or was it the year before, most of the prices remained static. Last year, not only had they changed over our closed period, but they changed again during the year, some of them more than once. This year there are quite a few products that have remained static, which can only be a good sign.

I had a chance to look at the prices from our dodgy drinks supplier and noted that some of those had increased unreasonably. Some of that may have been the tax change on alcohol, but not to the degree that some of them changed. I checked with our local cash and carry supplier, the one that started last year, and their prices were still the same and in two examples, five pounds cheaper per case of twelve drinks. When I advised our new representative for the dodgy drinks supplier she asked if I could provide invoices of their competitor's pricing. I responded with a curt message telling her we will not jump through hoops to prove the point, just buy from the cheaper supplier.

With the short exceptions of taking ABH around the block and a couple of visits to the flat, I was in the shop all day working through the deliveries. I had averted a couple of issues with carpeting – he cannot do the bit where the water heater leaked – and working out where to put the frontage timber. With the freezer man gone, I could focus entirely on clearing the order. It does not do to feel too chipper about such things with the small gods of grumpy shopkeepers keenly watching over everything you do.

When things are going well, they are just as likely to jog your hand while you slice open a case of pop with your very sharp knife. There is a reason why they call it 'pop' and that is after the sound it makes when your very sharp knife nicks one of the bottles and it explodes lemonade in all directions. Naturally, in one of those directions is one grumpy shopkeeper's trouser leg and shoe. I should feel gratitude that my trouser leg prevented the sticky juice from entering my shoe. I spent an unnecessary ten minutes cleaning up the mess.

Just as I was nearing the end of the task, the Missus arrived with the second half of the order from Redruth. We unloaded it in the rain and shipped it into the store room.

The Missus decided later to go down in the evening after taking Mother home and clearing it so that we could start afresh tomorrow. It was the third late evening in a row that ABH's equilibrium was turned upside down by her extended absence. She was inconsolable, traumatised and probably not even Betty Ford could save her – until the Missus arrived again near nine o'clock and made everything better again. I am still waiting for someone to do that to me.

March 20th – Wednesday

It was a day that was forecasted to be grey and mizzly, which is probably why it turned out to be dry and bright and a much lighter shade of grey than anticipated. I am sure that our scaffolders were most grateful.

Last week we were told that the scaffolders would be here any day now and this was the day and now. There was no mistaking the merry sound of shackles hitting the buckets that they carry around and poles being lined up together echoing around the mews. When I stepped out to go to the gymnasium as early as I could manage, there were the building boys, the scaffolders including the boss man and the carpet man all gainfully engaged in their respective roles.

I was absolutely determined to get to the gymnasium this morning as it had been over a week since I was last there. I missed it and my body was crying out to throw a few weights around and get on another 5,000 metre row. Unsurprisingly, I managed a record breaking blistering session and will try to get there again on Friday, although that seems unlikely.

Some of the sheeting from the scaffolding was lying discarded in the mews when I returned. I sized it up and reckoned that it would probably do very nicely for patching up the polytunnel and fixing the windows on the greenhouse. I was asked if it was in the way by one of the scaffolders, keen to please, and he was quite delighted when I said I wanted to take it away. It would get dumped otherwise, although probably not in the household waste recycling centre. I put it on top of our outside box until I could put it in the truck and when I went to get it in the evening, some tidy soul had thrown it away.

After the obligatory taking out of ABH for a run on the beach, I dropped down to the shop to recheck my lists for ordering of soft drinks and beers from our dodgy drinks company and the far less dodgy local food service supplier in St Ives. We had discovered earlier that we have been shut out of yet another supplier website through lack of use. We fixed this quite quickly, but it was good to see neither the dodgy drinks company nor the food service supplier had any such issues. I will make a note to check next year a couple of weeks ahead that I will promptly forget just after writing it.

It was difficult fitting ourselves around the scaffolders and the builders to get down to the shop and the flat to do things. The Missus found plenty to do in the house, cleaning up my 'dressing room' ahead of moving out. It is or was the single room in the house that was used for nothing else, so I adopted it as my dressing room. I have never had a dedicated room for dressing before and it felt most decadent. I also did my morning exercises in there, which was very convenient. Having now been cleaned, I am banned from the room. I am distraught.

In order that I might distract myself, I felt it a good idea to decamp to the Lifeboat station and do a bit of Lifeboat recovery. As luck would have it, a group of happy Boat Crew departed The Cove earlier in the day to fetch our Lifeboat back from Newlyn where some of its technical woes have been resolved. We were told that the boat would appear in the bay keen to be recovered at around one o'clock in the afternoon. It was all we needed to know in order to gather a small but perfectly formed crew of our own to set up to receive the boat on the short slipway.

At the duly appointed time, the Lifeboat rounded Pedn-men-du and headed for the moorings just offshore. We had excelled ourselves in setting up without fuss and in short order and had fallen to convivial conversation while we waited. As usual when the boat arrives, a swell kicked up at the bottom of the slipway just where I was heading to fix in our 'fishing rod' that the Boat Crew pick up the heaving line from. As we were short in numbers, I drew the short straw to go down. It was a high-risk operation and one freak wave nearly wet one of my wellies. I was lucky to get away with it.

Despite still reeling from the shock, before you knew it, we had conducted what was clearly a textbook recovery up the short slip. There was some washing down at the top of the slip since the boat had been moored on a pontoon exposed to the sea spray and the flight of seagulls. That done, some refuelling – we had only done that days before, where had they been – and the boat was settled and ready for service. We are, after all, a very efficient, very excellent Shore Crew.

By the time I got back, the Missus was keen to get started in the flat. Our carpet man had got as far as he could given our leaky problem and had left. This meant that we had full access to the flat without upsetting anyone. The Missus had reported a problem with our upright vacuum cleaner but by the time I caught up with her, she must have fixed it because she was vacuuming any available carpet she could find. There was a fair amount of waste from the carpeting left in the flat. Our carpet man had clearly identified what was good and bad and I spend a little time clearing out the bad while the Missus piled the good up in a corner.

With a frozen order now on its way for tomorrow morning sometime, I went downstairs to turn on our remaining freezers. I had switched on our big chest freezer yesterday because I thought that we would move the contents of the ice cream freezer into that while we defrosted it. That only left the freezer that had just had its new compressor and the much older freezer we use for chips and packet frozen

food. As I plugged that in, the electrical breaker that sits just behind it popped out. I tried it again in case it was an anomaly, but it was not, and the unit clearly needed some engineering attention not a month after it was serviced. The small gods of grumpy shopkeepers had clearly upped their game since yesterday as this was a little more serious than a trouser leg full of lemonade.

We are hoping that the freezer can be mended before the weekend. It will be needed to decant one of the other freezers into so that we can defrost the ice cream freezer in the shop. I am wondering how many more marbles can be thrown under our feet as we struggle towards the finishing line.

Moving back into the flat was looking a little more achievable by the end of the day. The Missus had reconstructed our dining room table and I had taken the chairs for it up from the shop. The spare bedroom is now empty, and we can place our new mattress on the floor to sleep on. The bathroom needs cleaning and we do not have command of the kitchen but otherwise, we are tickety boo.

It had been a fine day for struggling through as well. There was plenty of blue sky with high level cloud and hardly any breeze at all. The sea state that had been raucous the day before had mellowed a bit but was still leaking over the wall when we were down there at high water. There were patches of thin mist here and there about The Cove that left a bit of a chill in the air but generally, it was warm and very humid. I was down to a t-shirt while moving things around for the shop in the afternoon.

It was the sort of weather for opening the shop. I am rather hoping that the forecast for the coming week is not accurate as that looks like exactly the sort of weather for not opening the shop. It is also not the sort of weather for putting tiles on a roof now that the top is down. Oh, joy.

March 21st – Thursday

The day started as the last one left off with some bright sunshine and warmth in the morning. And that was the last we saw of it.

It was always going to be a busy day. We have two days left until the shop opens and there is plenty left to do. I arranged for three deliveries which normally arrive mid-morning, so I thought that I was relatively safe having a bit of early breakfast and get down to the shop afterwards. The builder came knocking before I finished and told me that they were having to run off to an emergency job somewhere else but would be back tomorrow. Also, before I finished, one of the boys came up to tell me that there was a delivery awaiting my attention. I was a bit taken aback and even more so when he told me that they had already taken one in. They had also taken the furniture from the shop up to the flat, which was a huge relief.

After taking in the frozen delivery, I returned to the house to finish the cup of tea that I had poured but more so to fill up my mop bucket with hot water. We give the shop floor its annual mopping just before opening, whether it needs it or not. It probably needed it more this year than any other because of the sanding dust the Missus kicked up when she worked on the shop counter front.

All the moveable shop furniture is bunched up on the far side of the shop. Clearly, it needs to be moved into its normal position but also needs to be moved out of the way so that I can mop where it will eventually go. Now that the flat furniture has been moved upstairs, we have space to move things around. It seemed sensible to me to mop all the areas that I could get to first, then move the furniture around and mop where it had been. There is, of course, a drying period first before any moving can be done.

In order not to waste any time, I decided to clear the soft drinks and beers that had been delivered. I was halfway through this when the bigger order of soft drinks arrived, and it therefore took some time – call it the rest of the day – to restock the shelves. I had finished by the time we decided to give up and have some tea, but I had been diverted in the meanwhile.

The boys have somehow managed to break the toilet seat in the flat. They have promised to fix it, but I needed to buy a new one first. It had been a fraught process getting the one we were using because the first one was rubbish and now, so it transpired, so too was the replacement. Even by spending a few more pounds there is no guarantee that another new one is going to be any better and I cannot seem to get any guidance or recommendations. I took a ridiculously long look at several websites, none of which inspired much confidence and eventually found something that might be alright but there again, it might be complete rubbish once more – just more expensive rubbish. Whatever the case, it is unlikely that it will be installed before we move in and therefore it will be a question of balance, which was a great album by the Moody Blues.

I do wonder where The Diary is going when I am reduced to write about toilets seats.

On the journey to finding a toilet seat on the Internet, one company recommended that its seats were available at one of the builders' merchants in Penzance. Since I had to run an errand in town anyway, I stopped what I was doing and headed out thinking that I could get the toilet seat on my way back. If I was going as far as Penzance, I may as well go to the Household Waste Recycling Centre to dump an old CCTV camera and the shop laptop that objected to not being used for four months and refused to boot when I tried it yesterday. I wish now that I had taken the old toilet seat, too. I shall stop writing about toilet seats now.

I returned home with a replacement blind for the bathroom and no toilet seat – darn it. Since I had the truck outside the shop, I decided that it would be a good time to load up the scaffolding sheets that I had found tucked under the still hanging sheets

in front of the shop. There was also a roll of carpet that we will not use in the living room. It had taken two of the boys to get it up there. The Missus and I were struggling to get it out again when a neighbour suddenly appeared on the steps and lent a hand. By sheer luck, it came down on top of the truck where I was able to practise my ratchet strapping again. It went very well until I hit the track leading to The Farm which is very bumpy, and I almost lost it. More practise is clearly required.

I resumed in the shop when I got back and finished off the soft drinks. During this process I noticed some best before dates had expired that I had failed to notice before. It was mostly orange juice and fizzy orange juice that is now down the drain. The soft drinks I consider as unfortunate casualties of business, the beer that I found however, brought me to my knees in great distress. I will have a word with our Lifeboat Coxswain and suggest that I advertise it as free for collection at the next event he wants a good attendance for.

ABH had been in the flat for some while, so after running her around one time I went back to the house to see if she needed food, which she did not. The post had arrived in my absence and amongst the advertising was a letter from the much maligned council. The staff in their environmental department are clearly bored while waiting to enforce the second phase of their new waste collection regime. The letter told us that they had people out looking at where we place of waste bins ready for collection. These hawk-eyed spotters had noticed that in some places people put their bins in informal collection groups, which was not allowed, and they were having no more of it. Bins had to be placed at the boundary of your property and the highway or they will be left unemptied.

I wondered whether the officious committee that decided this had stopped to consult the waste collectors or indeed had looked at properties outside the walking distance from the office in the big city that they looked at. Certainly, in The Cove there are several properties that do not adjoin the highway or are off lanes that are not navigable by the waste collection trucks. The properties of Stone Chair Lane and Coastguard Row both place their bins in groups at the edge of where the truck can get to purely for the convenience of the collectors. It might be a concerted effort by the much maligned council to make their bin collection operatives more healthy but I cannot see it going down well. I also cannot see any bin collection operative running halfway up Stone Chair Lane to collect a bin left at the boundary of someone's property, let alone taking it back again. I shall watch with keen interest what happens next Tuesday – if anyone had taken any notice of the letter, that is.

I shall have to be up early doors tomorrow. The water heater plumber is coming first thing to fit the new one probably at the same time as the pasty man (sorry, MS) arrives. All supposing I have sufficient time between rearranging the shop furniture and carrying our things, including the mattress and a sofa, from the house to the flat, I might pen a few words expressing how delightful the experience was in tomorrow's exciting edition of The Diary.

March 22nd – Friday

Well, this might be a short page, which is fairly ironic because what we managed to fit into today was legion. I just have not found the time to write about it.

It was not the most auspicious start to a monumental day, and I initially thought that the small gods of grumpy shopkeepers had got fed up with throwing marbles under our feet and progressed to the full pulling of the rug. We had a couple of large items to move from the house to the flat, including the mattress and, of course, it was raining.

We entreated the building boys to remove some of the scaffolding that impeded the route up the steps at the front and bless them, they fell in to lend a hand, with the two seater couch at least. The new mattress is one of those memory foam ones and was considerably lighter than our own bed's mattress. We knew this because we moved our own mattress to the spare bedroom to go underneath the new one that we carried over from the house.

I had already been up for several hours by this time. Our Friday delivery of pasties (sorry, MS) is usually an early one, so I made it down to the shop just after half past seven o'clock, just to be sure. He was late, of course, and the plumber beat him to it. The plumber had told us that he would be fitting the new water heater by the end of the week, and he was true to his word. He was a very pleasant chap, which was encouraging as we will need to replace our existing very good plumber when he retires shortly.

It was not long before the builders arrived – or had they arrived already, it is very confusing - and I helped them move the concrete blocks from the other side of the shop frontage. They had been left behind as I imagine the blocks from the first side weighed too much for their lorry to be added to. They also removed several of the scaffolding poles so that we can get our outside display out when we open tomorrow. They went further and swept the frontage up to make it look semi respectable. It was a shame that the inside did not at that moment.

I had started rearranging the shop furniture and mopping the floor while I was waiting on the pasty man (sorry, MS) and the plumber. There was a lot to do and because not everything is on castors. We have crowbarred in various additional shelving and racks that make moving the things that are on castors a lot more difficult to move than they were. It is inevitably a slow process but with the subtle marks I have made on the floor that determine where everything goes, it was straightforward.

By the end of the morning, the water heater was working, and the shop furniture was in the right place. The floor had been mopped, in some places more than once, the remaining dairy fridge cleaned and the things that are not supposed to be on the shop floor, removed. What was even more welcome was a splash of sunshine that replaced the bleak and damp morning. You could hardly say it was warm. A rather

smart northwesterly had developed, but it was a decent day for walking a disturbed ABH around the block a few times during the day.

It is probably the greatest regret of the transition to shop opening that the little girl will no longer get her walks around The Cove and over to Land's End. She probably would not even if the shop did not intervene as we would be very cautious of the risk of adders on the paths, especially as she likes to stick her head in any hole she sees. I would dearly have loved to take her on one last stank, but we really have been too busy, which is pitiful really.

The living room had become a dumping ground of the furniture from the shop and was fast becoming full. It made sense to start putting the furniture in its proper place, which mean starting with reconstructing the electric sofas. This took an inordinate amount of time as I 'lost' one of the connections and could not get one of the recliners to work properly. Between the builder, the Missus and myself, we managed to connect it all properly and heave it into place.

I was distracted onto another project and the Missus did the second sofa with rather less drama. I cannot remember precisely what else was involved but there was a lot of going to and fro the house for bits that we suddenly remembered that we needed. We were still doing that into the evening and by night we were still finding things that we had forgotten that would have to wait until tomorrow.

One of my distractions was that we could not find the till. I thought that we had left it in the shop and indeed we had. I eventually uncovered it in one of the stock drawers, which I only found because I had looked everywhere else. I ran it until the last minute to place the dairy and bread orders because I had so much else on. I will find out tomorrow if I have forgotten anything in those orders or complete orders themselves.

I had forgotten all about the butcher's order that should have gone in with a bit more notice. This worked out well because the second freezer engineer of the week announced that we needed a new compressor fan for the freezer that blew up on Wednesday when I plugged it in. The order for the spare part is in, but we are a freezer down and having the butcher's order would have meant nowhere to put it. We might be still struggling next week because Easter may intervene in our getting it fixed. We shall cross fingers and toes.

At the end of the day, that recliner that we fixed looked exceedingly attractive and felt even better when I got onto it. Oddly, I had to drag myself to bed as I did not want to get up. I can look forward to a rest tomorrow when I scratch my behind all day behind the deserted shop counter.

March 23rd – Saturday

I think it pays to make a big splash when we open the shop for the first day of the new season. We could not make much more of a splash than opening on a day of howling westerlies and lashing rain. Despite the temperature soaring, ahem, in the afternoon to ten degrees, it was no match for a wind chill that had me fetching a thick jumper to put on top of my other three layers.

The wind had whipped the sea into some frenzy making white top waves chase rapidly across the bay. It looked a bit more alluring into the afternoon when the sun came out. It was in the afternoon, too, that a few more people decided to brave the elements, encouraged by the cessation of the heavy showers we had earlier. People even came into the shop and bought things. We do love it when a plan comes together.

The lack of custom in the morning allowed me to deal with the deliveries that we had. The milk had been late, although our man does step up the pace when we all get a little busier and since he works six days a week, I really cannot blame him for taking advantage when it is quiet. Because they were the first deliveries of the season, they were all maximum volumes of all the ranges we have. Not only does that take time to put out I also have to be more thorough about checking the prices and updating our master record for each.

Not that I expected a sudden rush, but I have made available the local baker's products on our website. The advantage is mainly ours, but customers can be assured we will have what they want. It is expensive and we do not want to have a big stock that we throw away, so if we can order on demand, it is most helpful. Because I am hip, with it and in the groove, I have added a QR code to our order sheet. This allows people to point their smart mobile telephone camera at it and be magically transported to the appropriate page on our website. Even grumpy shopkeepers can push the envelope and be at the leading edge of technology sometimes as well as using daft catchphrases.

The technology may be streaking ahead but it seems my memory is falling behind. When I was in proper work, we would have something called a quality manual that listed all the tasks and processes in a particular group. If I had been smart enough to have one for the shop, I would not have neglected to add mushrooms and red peppers to our grocery order. Logs and kindling would have been ordered at the appropriate lead time before opening and the wetsuits that I did remember to order – mainly because it was before any building work started – would have been labelled and on the shelf. I have an inkling that we are short of spades, too, which I would have identified because my quality manual would have had a 'start of season checklist'. I think the main reason why we do not have a quality manual for the shop as I did when I had a real job is that despite their undoubted usefulness, they were a monumental pain in the backside.

In the later afternoon, the showers returned, one of them particularly heavy. I had just scooted upstairs to make a cup of tea. I can normally do that in under a couple

of minutes leaving the tea bag in and returning to serve the happy throng. Unfortunately, I mis-timed it and had to wait until the vicious squall had passed.

When I eventually got back to the shop there was a small group of bedraggled passers-by lurking just inside the first electric sliding door in The Cove. They looked a little sheepish when I appeared, and it transpired that shelter was all they craved rather than to bolster our sales for the day. As the rain passed, I bade them well as they went on their way as we are nothing without our humanity. I made a mental note to lock the door next time.

The rain and business tailed off toward closing time at the outset of the evening. I had filled some of the time by doing my administrative work inputting invoices into the accounting system. I am keeping separate the building work invoices as I am still not sure how much of the VAT I can claim back. The sudden surge in value of our claim will no doubt trigger an alarm in the revenue's computer system, so I could expect an inspection shortly thereafter. I suspect it would be prudent to put aside some of the repayment just in case they get shirty about what I have claimed.

By six o'clock, our closing time, I was frozen to the bone. Our soaring temperature had plummeted in the afternoon, and I did not need the Land's End weather station to tell me that. With no heating in the flat and a gaping hole around the porch, I was unlikely to get any warmer after we closed. Just to make it interesting, the wind had veered to the northwest and straight at us. The log burner that I had been so wary of initially at the house seemed a very attractive proposition as I shut the first electric sliding door in The Cove. If we have the same tomorrow, I am minded to keep it closed during the day despite its propensity to repel customers.

In truth, it was not that bad in the flat. The Missus had our small smart fan heater going which works very efficiently and took the edge off the chill. A simple hot meal – we are not in a position to cook complicated hot meals yet – fed my inner glow until bedtime, which reminds me.

The whole moving in has been very much like camping out in our own home but there is one positive from it all. The sleeping arrangement with our normal bed mattress on the floor and the spare bed mattress on top was most comfortable. In fact, rather more comfortable than our normal bed. I do not think the Missus will bear such an arrangement permanently, however, so I shall enjoy it while I may.

Having once dragged the propriety of The Diary into the gutter with talk of toilet seats, with the damage already done I may as well repeat the misdemeanour. We are currently managing without a toilet seat and, as you might imagine, there is a certain lack of basic comfort in that. I have calculated that the enforced curtailment of unnecessarily lengthy operations has improved efficiency in the household and will save approximately 7.6 days over the period of a year. I have therefore cancelled the order for the new seat.

March 24th – Sunday

It was a much kinder day than yesterday, that was for sure. The wind had died down sometime during the early morning and had backed towards the west. The air was still cold, and I found myself heading upstairs halfway through the morning for another layer. The hat stayed on all day. Mercifully, too, there was no rain until much later in the day.

As is usual off season and to some degree in season, it took a while for things to busy up. I do not think it is anything to do with not having newspapers and much to do with people being on holiday and not wanting to get up too early in the morning. We had a few enquiries about why there were no newspapers today and probably, on a Sunday, it might have been worthwhile. Unfortunately, I can get delivered just at weekends but it is a disproportionately higher cost than getting the whole week and I am not keen to line the Laurel and Hardy Newspaper Company pockets for a few Sunday papers.

We had a better run on pasties (sorry, MS) today, which was heartening. We have to meet a minimum order for delivery, which makes it awkward if we only need a few. While I was working on the reorder of pasties, I also compiled the orders for some of the fresh food that I had missed on the first round of ordering. A couple of the items were highlighted by a customer who had asked for them and when I went around the shop, there were several others I had missed, too.

We broke our morning up by attending in shifts the 90th birthday party of a neighbour. In the past she has been pretty good at hiding her age by telling different people different truths. She had told me that she was 80 a couple of years ago only to discover at the café that they had celebrated her 80th the previous year. Like Mother, you would never guess given the level of activity she gets up to. There was a surprise morning party with a host of family members in attendance, many of whom had arrived discretely without her knowing. It was a well deserved shindig.

The Missus resumed her attack on the clearing and cleaning of the house when she got back from picking up Mother. We are struggling to find places to put things without making it difficult moving things about to bring the flat back into order. There is much interior work to do in the flat still and it makes no sense to put things in places where they will have to be moved to finish the work. The plan had been that the flat would be finished before we moved back from the house. Now we have to compromise and find solutions.

It is not helpful that I am stuck in the shop and although yesterday had enough quiet spaces for me to do some things, today was busy when some bags and boxes needed to be shifted. I managed to get there late in the afternoon to clear the latest full load that the Missus left outside the back door. At least the activity warmed me up a tad and encouraged me to take my hat off for the rest of the afternoon in the shop. It started to rain shortly after that, so I got there just in time.

The rain would have caught me by surprise because I had not looked at a forecast since yesterday. I was alerted to its arrival by the Highly Professional Craftsperson turning up with his brother to check the watertightness of our roof, especially the bit where it meets the adjoining bit of roof. While they were here they also plugged a bit more of the gap around where the porch meets the new windows, which should make it a bit warmer inside.

With trade dwindling in the later afternoon, I decided to have a look around the shop to see what else we were missing. I was a little aghast at the emptiness of the shelves, so, call me crazy if you will, but I thought I would spend a little time pulling some stock out of the store room to fill some of the gaps.

After a while of doing that, it was clear that we could do with a few more things to put out, so I looked again at some of the gift orders I had contemplated at the trade show I went to. I thought then that the offering was not very inspiring, and I thought the same again when browsed the brochures again. Perhaps I just need some fresh eyes to look over them as they all look very much the same as last year and the year before that. I am pretty sure we have a gift type delivery arriving next week but have not heard anything concrete yet. I might give the company a call on Monday to make sure.

The Missus does like a bit of a challenge. When I went upstairs on one occasion, she was preparing vegetables for tonight's tea. For the last couple of nights we have pulled things from the freezer because of the state of the flat's kitchen. Mother was not here on those occasions, though. I think only the Missus would have even thought about preparing a roast dinner in these circumstances, let alone delivering on it. Tonight, we had a proper roast dinner with proper washing up afterwards – done manually in a sink. We are brave, are we not.

March 25th – Monday

This was the red letter day when our new spare bed was due to arrive and then did not. The delivery driver could not find us, apparently and then refused to answer our calls when we tried to respond to the message. The Missus did manage to speak with the driver later who complained that he had just been given our name and The Cove as an address. Why he was moaning to us about it and not the company that gave it to him, I have no idea. That is another night in our double mattress bed which, secretly, I am quite pleased about.

It was also supposed to be a day deluged by heavy rain continuing on from last night and running right the way through the day. This will probably explain why it was not raining when I took ABH out in the morning, continued not raining when I put the shop display out the front and still was not raining on each other occasion I stuck my head out of the door. That is not to say that it did not rain at all. The street was damp

and sometimes a bit wet, so it did rain a bit here and there, it just was not as advertised – again - and not particularly heavy.

It was enough to put off our builder who did not fancy the risk of being rained off halfway through tiling to roof. I imagine it put off a few customers, as well. Now that the overhead covering had gone, work outside work is at the mercy of the weather. I did question whether it was prudent to remove it before it was finished but was told it would be fine.

In truth, the outside work is of no real consequence to us in terms of its timing. It is the finishing off the inside that is stopping us from putting everything back to rights. We cannot move desks and cabinets back to their proper place when work still needs to be done behind them. The builder must have heard me thinking because the Highly Professional Craftsman turned up at eight o'clock to start with the final bits of finishing in the living room. I spoke to him about our wall heaters too but apparently, they agreed with the electrician that it is down to him, they just did not bother to tell me.

Essentially, all that needed to be done was cladding the steel posts that sit between the windows. They will need to be painted but I think that can be done with the furniture in place. The only problem now is that while we waited for the Highly Professional Craftsperson to finish, we have placed bags and boxes in every conceivable space around the flat and now cannot get to the furniture to move it back. Oh calamity.

The Missus, once again, spent the day up at the house packing and cleaning. At various intervals during that time, I abandoned the shop and run up to move a few bags or boxes down to add to the pile in the flat. It is fast resembling one of those horror homes that are sometimes featured on television programmes where hoarders can barely move, their properties are so packed with detritus. The Missus will no doubt get to grips with it after she has finished with the house.

It still has not registered with me properly that Easter looms large at the end of the week. It is probably the distractions and the lack of customer activity that is leading me astray. Every now and again the reality of it leaps up and bites me on the nose such as when a customer asked for logs, it being inclement and cold and likely to remain so for a while. Luckily, we had a couple of bags left over from last year, but we would need more going into the Easter weekend.

I had made enquiries at the fuel merchant we had used while we had access to the wood burner, and they were around the same price as our existing supplier but could deliver more often. As luck would have it, they were delivering tomorrow so I made arrangements for enough to see us through the weekend when there will almost certainly be a heatwave now.

The rain tried a bit harder in the afternoon and was a bit more persistent, but it never really got into its stride. It had cleared out before I shut the shop and left behind a mizzly and grey evening to appreciate. There was certainly not enough of it to stop me making several more trips up to the house to collect bags and boxes. I went up again after tea just to turn out the light and bring back what I could. There are a couple of bags and some loose items to bring down and that is it. What I might have regarded as an insurmountable task, the Missus had concluded in a weekend and a bit.

There will not be much doing tomorrow in that regard as it is Mother's birthday – a biblical lifespan plus a silver anniversary - and other things will be happening. Happy Birthday, Mother.

March 26th – Tuesday

In the house, I was regularly waking up at around half past six to seven o'clock in the morning. Now that we are ensconced in the flat and I need to wake up at half past six o'clock, I am completely reliant on my alarm waking me up. If it was not enough to have the small gods of grumpy shopkeepers playing silly beggars, now my metabolism wants to join in.

After yesterday's rain, and some places were far worse off than we according to Radio Pasty, we were rewarded with a day of sunshine. So sunny was it that a workperson engaged on a project working in the sunshine came and purchased some sun lotion. On our shady side of the street, the temperature was still in the woolly hat and extra layer category. It would appear that not only is the grass greener on the other side but the sky is brighter and the air warmer.

The Missus pointed out that there was work going on over at the Lifeboat station. The steps up to the crew entrance that have been there for 130 years give or take are getting handrails to ensure that we do not fall off them on the way to launch the boat. While it is possible that we of the very excellent Shore Crew have a slightly higher average age than that of the Boat Crew, we also have had more practise at climbing steps and are therefore, logically, better at it. We must conclude then that the handrails have been installed for the benefit of the Boat Crew and are nothing to do with us.

Other than our own, it was not the only work going on in The Cove. The electricity board has commenced its renewal of the infrastructure by starting at The Beach end. I am sure I knew this but had forgotten but was reminded by the continual line of people asking for change so that they could pay for parking as the machines were not taking payment cards. On reflection, it must just have been the payment card technology that was not operating as the machines themselves would still need power to issue tickets for cash. I am sure that there would have been some arrangement in place for a temporary supply.

Due to our outage tomorrow, I have been carefully planning orders for the following day. It is likely that our telephone use will be restricted, and we will definitely not be able to make Internet orders. I am pretty sure that we have avoided any deliveries tomorrow that require refrigeration and will make sure that we have anything out of the freezers that we may need during the day.

Talking of freezers, we were very lucky to have our freezer repair man arrive in the afternoon with the spare part to make our broken freezer work again. As soon as it was available to use, I was able to decant the contents of the ice cream freezer, where we had put everything over the winter, to the other two available units in the shop and the upright in the store room. The ice cream freezer is now defrosting. Had we had the opportunity to do that before we opened, I would not have spent the majority of the day turning away ice cream sales. This was especially galling because we did have ice creams in some abundance. They are sitting in the store room chest freezer still in their boxes. It was tempting to try and sell them, but I know that all the requests would have been for ice creams in the boxes at the bottom of the freezer.

Whether it was the effort of shifting frozen things from freezer to freezer or whether the warmth of the day had finally crept across the street it is hard to say but I was able to shed a layer and my hat in the middle of the afternoon. It coincided with what seemed to be the last flurry of major customer activity of the day. We had been quite busy for most of it, which was hugely welcome and most unexpected. So unexpected was it that the café next door cleared us out of milk, which at least will not go off in the fridge when it is turned off tomorrow.

Our man from our main cash and carry turned up as promised in the early afternoon. He is at least making an effort. He tells me that he voiced his opinion to his bosses at his review and, if he is to be believed, some of them too were concerned about the removal of retail goods from the shelves. He had printed off a list of the things that we had purchased over the last year and highlighted all the items that were no longer available. Some of these he had managed to acquire again and some others he is seeking a solution for. I reviewed the list after he had gone, and it did not seem complete with some key products not listed at all. I think we may be stuck with ordering from their competitors at Exeter, which will be a pain in the bottom.

The sea had been in a benign state all day, as far as I recall. It certainly looked almost placid at low water when I last gave it a proper look when a child asked about fishing off the Harbour wall. When I looked again, well into the afternoon, the swell had picked up and was throwing big waves across Cowloe, along the beach and up against the cliffs opposite. There was quite a bit of white water in the Harbour as the waves thumped quite gracefully over the wall. I could not see a small child there, so that was alright.

I would love to have included a paragraph or two on Mother's big day, the wild party, digging champagne corks out of the new ceiling, dancing into the night and dealing with the noise complaints from the neighbours. Sadly, this Diarist must cut short his reporting else the wide readership – I use the term broadly and advisedly – would be bitterly disappointed – also broadly and advisedly - by the void left in their lives by the failure of today's entry to appear on their screens in the morning. This would merely compound the awfulness of discovering that their will not be a Diary entry the following day because I will be unable to write it. On the plus side, you will have had two Diary's in a day.

Adieu and farewell, for now.

March 28th – Wednesday

I had best start with what I did on my holidays, since I apparently had one yesterday. I have to say that it did not feel much like a holiday as there was far too much working involved and the weather was, how shall we say, inclement.

Although the boys get here at around eight o'clock and we have to be relatively respectable to receive them, I thought that I might take advantage and have a bit of a lie in. ABH had other ideas and got me out of bed fifteen minutes before I would normally have got up. It was probably as well because we had to have everything done, including having a cup of tea, before the electricity went off at half past eight o'clock.

Fortunately, the Missus did not need any electricity to finish off cleaning the house and was finished that shortly before the middle of the day. I had to hang about in the flat with ABH because there was a delivery scheduled for today and with all the electricity board trucks in the street, we would have to unload pretty sharpish. As it happens, they arrived when I was halfway to town in the middle of the day.

I had not planned to go into town at all today. In fact, it threw my carefully planned schedule of work into disarray. Our accountants had sent a message the previous afternoon explaining that they needed the VAT submission as soon as possible. This rather flew in the face of their previous explanation that due to Making Tax Difficult (MTD), the Government's flagship programme for making it so much harder for small business to operate, we would have to move our accounting quarters to coincide with the April start date. It was my error completely and shows how little I know about the world of accountancy and why I have to employ accountants at great expense to do it all for me. I was confusing 'the accounts' with 'the VAT', which are two separate things. I know that now. While His Majesty's Revenue and Customs (accounts) want my accounts to follow the defined tax year, His Majesty's Revenue and Customs (VAT) want the old quarters to stay as they are. They are really making great strides in Making Tax Difficult, and I commend them for their efforts.

The upshot of this revelation was that I had to dash into town to drop off the invoices that I had fortunately brought up to date, well at least as far as the VAT was concerned. The accounts need a little more input before they are ready for the end of March.

As I explained, the delivery we were expecting had arrived by the time I got back. It was not a large delivery but needed to be sorted with some of it staying in the shop and the rest going up to the store at The Farm. Since the heavy, squally showers that had been blowing through all day seemed to have dissipated, I thought to take ABH up with me. We would just need to contend with the gusting wind blowing in from the south somewhere, which, up at The Farm, would be fully in our faces.

I wrapped up against the elements before we went and was quite comfortable after having been cold and damp all day. ABH did not care and cavorted across the whole field for all the time we were up there. Not only did I have stock to drop off, I also had a list of stock to bring down with me. The battery in the store room needed to be swapped as well so that it would last the summer season. In consequence, we were there for a good hour and the little girl ran her socks off.

She is a year old now and reasonably sensible most of the time. Therefore, I was not overly concerned when I lost sight of her for a while now and again. I close the gate. If it is open, she wanders out into the lane, which is not good as other traffic uses it occasionally. When the gate is closed, even though she could easily walk underneath it, for some reason she does not. When it came the time to go, she was most reluctant to get back into the truck. There was much running away and eventual kicking and screaming but I calmed down after I caught her.

Fast forward to the current day but not before passing a cold and wet night. The rain was lashing down outside first thing. We could hear it clashing with the remaining sheets and cascading down the windows as we have no launders to stop it. I was very grateful that ABH decided not to get up so early this morning and by the time we went out, it had just stopped for a while.

The rain persisted through all of the morning and some of the afternoon aided and abetted by a howling southerly gale that even in the shelter of Mayon cliff could give you a good pasting if you went around the wrong corner unprepared.

I went down to the shop early because I wanted to clean the ice cream freezer, having taken the opportunity of our closed day yesterday to defrost it. Once it is manoeuvred out of the shop doorway, which is the difficult bit, it empties of meltwater quite efficiently on the slope. Another fifteen minutes later and it was clean and ready to start up. I left it to get down to operating temperature rather longer than I needed to as I was distracted with other work. It was not until someone asked for ice creams that I remembered that I was supposed to check it and fill it up. We now have a clean and filled ice cream freezer.

There was still a good deal of stock that had either been delivered or I had brought down from The Farm that needed pricing and putting out. I had done some of it in the latter part of the day yesterday. I set to with this until I was distracted by customers or order deadlines. By the end of the day, I had still not finished it but it is a work in progress and is not urgent that it gets done immediately.

The sea was a thing to wander at. In the morning it was grey bleak and very angry and in the afternoon, it was blue and white and very angry but far more alluring to look at. It was well into the afternoon before visitors came to do just that. It is the top of the spring tides, and the fisher boys were there in the morning to haul their boats up to the top of the slipway out of harm's way.

It was not exactly the ideal day to prove that our boat is indeed an All Weather Lifeboat but our pagers went off in the middle of the afternoon nevertheless. We had been tasked to standby off Nanjizal for a lady on the cliffs down there. It was probably not the best of uses of the Lifeboat in such conditions as we would never have got it back into the station. In the end it was discovered that the lady was lost and confused and being foreign a communications misunderstanding had occurred. She was easily put right by the Cliff Team who turned up to guide her in the right direction. The alarmingly good turnout for the shout was stood down half an hour after we arrived.

Business had picked up some in the afternoon along with the better weather. It does not look overly welcoming for the next few days but probably a little better than the last few. The sea state is set to calm down a bit, that will help with any of our visitors determined to make the best of a bit of beach activity. My loins are duly girded.

March 29th – Thursday

I have spurned my appearances at the gymnasium for the whole week because we have had far too much to do. I had intended to go this morning, but the Missus expressed a desire to get on with sorting out the flat, so I demurred. It was partially that and not being able to find my gymnasium kit. It is one of many things that are somewhere in bags strewn about the flat.

We were much better off for weather today. The wind that had stayed in the south was diminished, after an initial show of strength, and because of that we hardly felt it at all in The Cove. The showers were scattered throughout the morning, but we also had sunshine throughout the day instead of just half of it. It made it a much more appealing day for our visitors to be out and about in and they made the most of it.

It was gratifying to note that there was a bit of shopping going on, too. We sold a respectable number of pasties (sorry, MS) but I suspect that we will fall short of the 80 pasty weekend that I had anticipated. There was also a pasty mystery. I had quite forgotten that I had ordered two vegetable pasties, by special request, and they went

in with the others mixed up in the fridge. I picked one of them out by accident, which reminded me that I had ordered them, but I could not find the other. Since I had only sold one at that point, it had to be somewhere in the shop, and I was pretty certain it was not the one I sold. After a while of looking, I began to doubt myself and had to ask the people I sold the pasty to whether I had made an error. They sent back a photograph that proved I had not. I found it in the end, but I had to empty nearly every pasty from the fridge.

Eventually, I came to the end of the boxes I had brought down from the store and a couple more that had arrived in the post. We have some new ceramic coasters that I thought that we would try out and I ordered in a load more of the very clever glass design gift cards that were very successful last year. I put those out yesterday and already we have sold a few.

We also took a grocery delivery order. A senior neighbour who lives in a property with a very steep garden to the front door, has eventually thrown in the towel about getting up and down her steps. Even I find it a struggle. She has an anarchic and twisted sense of humour that I appreciate, and we often have bizarre and surreal conversations when she visits, such as discussing the extensive impact of the monarch deciding to change his pronoun. Therefore, I was very pleased to hear that she was having a chairlift installed. I told her it was about time because I was fed up and worn out getting up her steps. I dropped the order around in the latter part of the morning and joking aside, I will be very grateful when the lift is installed. It half killed me getting to her door.

I was not minded to look at across the bay too often today as I was distracted seeking customers out. I know that the sea was much better behaved than it had been over the last few days, but it is still a bit disturbed and it is a very large spring tide. The restarting of the Lifeguard service passed me by rather, although I was aware that it was happening. They did it very stealthily in The Cove. When I remembered near the end of the day, I could see the flag flying above their renovated decking. It did look a bit like they were isolated by the tide with the waves lapping at the walls of their redoubt.

I am not sure that they had very much work to do today and probably spent their time admiring the woodwork. It was hardly a beach day, just a few dog walkers and the more robust outdoor type. There must have been some surfers in the water at some point, I really did not notice. It was not the best of surf, but there were waves which I am sure ticked the box for some of them.

Given the weather it is entirely possible that I wasted my time bringing down a few wetsuits from a recent order from The Farm. I also belatedly ordered some wooden hangers from a catering supplier. We had spent a fair bit on steel ones for the purpose only to discover that they pushed the shoulders of the heavier suits out of shape. I had initially steered away from the wooden ones because of the metal hook which tends to rust here after a while, along with everything else. The steel hangers

are not wasted as they are good for the hooded sweatshirts. It is where to put them all when the stocks are low that is the real problem.

It was heartening to see the obligatory five minutes to closing rush again. I missed it all these months. I had a telephone call from a strange international number earlier which I duly ignored. The caller left a message. A couple of Americans from America were visiting our fair land and wanted to shop at our very emporium and asked if we would still be open when they arrived. I tried to call back, aware that the call would be bounced to the USA and back but my telephone service would not let me. I sent them a text message instead which prompted my mobile telephone service provider to send me a text message telling me that it was very expensive to do so and it had already cost me one pound.

The couple, from Springdale, St George in Utah, were exceeding pleasant and spent a small fortune. They told me that they were keen to avoid Tesmorburys and I told them how astute they were. I told them of the wonders of small independent shops and pointed them at St Just and Causeway Head in Penzance. They will be here all week and I look forward to their next visit.

It was as well such excitement came at the end of the day because it quite tired me out. It will take a week or two to settle into the routine and for me creaking body to accept it will be upright for many hours of the day for the next seven months. I must find my gymnasium kit as I will definitely be going on Monday.

March 30th – Friday

I am beginning to think that it would be worth taking a loss on newspaper sales to free me of the burden of repeating why we are not stocking them. I have been fair inundated with enquiries over the last couple of days. Of course, it is busy Easter time and in a couple of weeks we will be very quiet again. It crossed my mind that next year I might be able to encourage the Laurel and Hardy Newspaper Company to send papers for two weeks and then stop them again. It would be a high risk venture because it normally takes them two weeks before they get it right.

Later in the day, a regular visitor suggested that I sell newspapers during the off season with a surcharge, carefully explained on a notice that no one would read. At least newspapers would be available and people could make up their own minds if they wanted to pay extra or not. It would still be a problem, however, if people decided not to as I would still be paying for delivery even if I sent everything back.

Radio Pasty gave a bit of a confusing weather forecast this morning. I think it might have been a new forecaster because she told us that if we were on the Islands we would certainly get more rain but on the mainland we would be exempt. I was not sure where this left us because normally we are lumped in together: the Isles of

Scilly and the Far West of Cornwall. I did not have long to wait as we were beset with showers for the first half of the day. At least we had some sunshine between the showers in the morning. The afternoon turned horribly grey before the rain came back again in geet lumps.

After the traditional morning hiatus, our visitors came to the streets in larger numbers than yesterday. It was heartening to see some of our new stock items going out of the door and even better when they were being paid for. I was worried yesterday about having too many pasties (sorry, MS) but by the end of the day I was worried about having too few. We did reasonably well on food sales but once again I ordered far too many bread rolls. I really must learn to rein in my urge to order them because they never sell as well as I think they will.

The Missus, fed up with trying to paint skirting boards with a small hound on her back decided that it was my turn to be lumbered. ABH needs to familiarise herself with being the shop dog again. She was doing up to three hours last year on her throne in the shop doorway and will need to do so again. She is better off if she knows that the Missus has gone off somewhere. Today she was fully aware that she was just upstairs and acted accordingly.

We managed an hour most of which she was outside looking at the steps up to the flat. I managed to get her to sit on her bed for some of it but when we started getting busy with customers, she was out again getting under people's feet. Despite that it was not too traumatic for either of us until three dogs arrived all at once and pretence of restraint and order went out of the window. I hauled her back behind the counter and stood on her lead while I tried serving customers at the same time. That went well enough until I needed to move about to serve pasties, which was interesting while trying to keep one foot on the lead at the same time.

I had to maintain this charade for the next fifteen minutes because it was the busiest we had been all day – of course – and everyone wanted pasties so that they could watch me contort myself between the counter, the till and the pasty warmer. I took ABH upstairs after the last customer left and admitted defeat this time.

We had a very muted five minutes to closing rush and no surprise given the weather that had been heading our way. I had the good sense to bring the outside display in early, which saved me and it a soaking when the rain arrived just before closing time.

Despite its slide into awfulness at the back end of the day, the weather had shown some minor improvements. The sea state had developed such that one of the brave lads of the fishing fleet could get out and service some pots. The waves had not gone altogether and were much cleaner in the bay which allowed for a number of surfers to go and have a bit more fun. We had been busy enough during the day, about the same as the day before it turned out, which was not rip-roaring but better than a kick in the rear.

The same person who had suggested the newspaper surcharge also reminded me that the bus timetables were changing tomorrow. As luck would have it, the lady who refreshes the local interest advertising leaflets also dropped in a new bus timetable. I quickly reviewed it, then slowly reviewed it and then took a long time to puzzle at it.

The creative team, probably consisting bus company and much maligned council staff, have excelled themselves this year. We have ended up with mid-season times, high-season times, low-season times and winter times. Easter holiday is mid-season and lasts for two weeks before it goes back to low-season – which I would have thought was probably mid-season, but what do I know – it then goes back to mid-season sometime in May before hitting high-season for the summer holidays. Even then there are school day, school holiday and college day additions to each season.

The timetables have always been difficult to understand but I have always prided myself on being able to unpick them and run off our Cove summary in under an hour. Word seems to have filtered back to the contriving team and they have set me a real challenge this year. Quite how the average visitor is supposed to unravel it in two minutes after arriving at a bus stop is beyond me.

Whatever the case, there will be more buses roving around this year than ever before, so credit where it is due to the bus company and the much maligned council. Roughly, there will be a bus every hour and a half. Knowing what time and in which direction will be the fun part. It will definitely be an improvement on Friday. A customer asked about buses on Good Friday and, unsure, I consulted the live bus 'app' that shows where buses are at that moment. From the St Ives/Penzance parallel (like the 47th parallel but north to south and not so snappy) there was one bus in the whole of the network.

Happy Easter everyone.

March 31st – Saturday

We have had the breeze come from every other direction, so I suppose it was bound to go easterly at some point. It was not so much duty that kept me at my post behind the counter today as being frozen to the spot.

It was quiet enough in the morning, so I dedicated some considerable time and effort into completing the bus timetables for the three levels of service. There were some interesting anomalies where buses would have the same first one or two buses of the day across service levels but then have the third starting a few minutes earlier or later than its counterpart. For example, the third bus out of The Cove on the mid-season timetable leaves at midday and arrives at 13:30. In the low-season, the same bus leaves at 12:10 and arrived in Penzance a minute earlier than its mid-season counterpart at 13:29. Someone has far too much time on their hands if they can make individual timetables like that.

Very possibly the greyness of the day and the biting easterly took its toll of business as we were nowhere near as busy as yesterday. It did not seem to affect a host of people taking to the big beach for a walk in the afternoon, perhaps walking off big Sunday roasts. There were hardly any waves, particularly at low water but it did not stop a few surfers from going out and bobbing about joining the dive boat out on the mooring also bobbing about.

The divers had been here at Easter time last year doing the same dive on Beaumaris. They were a mixed group of youngsters and keen on a few pasties (sorry, MS) halfway through the day. One of them came back later in the day for another pasty and told me that there were twenty of them in the party all from Liverpool scuba diving club. They are here for the week in various sites taking each day and weather to decide where.

The downturn in trade saved me from embarrassingly running out of pasties and we ended the day by having just a few more than enough. Where I did mess up was in not ordering any milk for today. I had completely forgotten to place the order last night and we duly ran out in the middle of the afternoon. I must try harder.

Just to rub our noses in it at the end of a poor day, the rain came back in again. This time it was too early for me to have got the outside display in. I had also omitted to bring down a rain jacket but fortunately, the rain had eased by the time I needed to get out there.

It is probably best that this particular Easter Sunday is swept under the rug and never spoken of again. I just hope we do not keep tripping over the rug.