

DIARY 2024

September 30th – Monday

The wind decided to be fair and share its omnipotence with us on the north coast today. I think it might have been a little over-zealous yesterday in the south because it was only a half-hearted attempt to cow us, and it was all over by dinner time.

The day remained grey and a bit damp and the sea very wind blown with the tide never really leaving the beach before the next high tide. There were a few minor bits of wet in the air purporting to be rain, but it was insubstantial and carried away on the breeze. I have no idea what the forecast said today would bring but I suspect that even a fair forecast would have struggled to bring many to The Cove.

I am very glad that we do not have a comfortable chair or a back office in the shop else I would have fallen asleep in it. I was lucky enough to have the solar people back, unannounced, during the morning to check a few things on the install and the correct a problem with the monitoring on the flat. That kept me awake and they were here all morning. I also had a call from our bank which has decided to allot us a relationship manager, after seven months of not having – or missing – one.

He wanted to book a 'meeting' with me over the telephone and wondered when the best time would be. I told him the best time would be when I did not have any customers about to walk in and ask if they could pay me money. He asked when that would be, as he wanted to ask me some questions so that me might elicit an understanding of our business. I told him that one of the facets of our business, shopkeeping, was that once we opened in the morning, customers were pretty much at liberty to enter at any time they liked thus making it impossible to say when the best time to take a telephone call. I was hoping that this was at least one important question answered.

I was, however, sharply aware that it would be prudent to keep my relationship manager sweet on the off chance that I might need something one day. It was this that prompted me to give him a time that hopefully would allow me some opportunity to give him as little information as possible and still keep him happy. I have a week's stay of execution.

You have to be pretty monumentally bored to go and clean a fridge, but I am afraid to report that it actually got that bad by the middle of the afternoon, I was pretty monumentally bored. It was not as if the fridge did not need a good clean. It is our pasty fridge (sorry, MS) and collects crumbs for a living, mostly in nearly inaccessible places. Had I been in the least interested, I might have questions why there were nearly inaccessible places in a fridge you would need to clean occasionally. It took longer than I thought, too, especially as – how you could not guess – it prompted the highest frequency of customer visits we had enjoyed all day.

One of those customers informed me that the jellyfish are back, which I already knew. They seem to come and go with particular tides, wind directions and currents. I do have the time but not the inclination or access to the data required – and certainly not the expertise – to make a study of such things and thereby possibly have a chance at predicting their arrival and departure, should they be present at all. Since I had done not so I found myself completely at a loss when the same customer asked what time the jellyfish would be gone. I could have been frivolous and unhelpful and told him, ‘about ten past three on Wednesday, if they wish to catch the bus’, but that would have been rude. Instead, I told him that to answer such a question I would need to have made a lengthy study of the tides, wind directions and currents that lead to their appearance and departure and while I had the time to do so, sadly, I did not have the data or expertise for such a venture. He seemed happy with my reasoned response but clearly, it did not answer his question.

Once thing I could have told him was that the swell had returned to the bay. It was not much use to a surfer because it was racing into the bay backed by enough wind to flatten the waves. Later in the tide, as we approach the next springs, it was pounding on the sand and crashing in on the rocks all along the cliffs opposite.

There was some warmth to the evening that must have been lost in the day due to the breeze. The afternoon had turned out bright and sunny and we had seen a few more people moving about. By the time I took ABH out in the evening, the sky to the east was darkening quickly but out to the west, the horizon was a pink and orange lit by the set sun and hung around almost until after we got home. How lovely.

September 29th – Sunday

The rain, such as it was, a bit showery with mizzle between and occasional heavy bits, did not arrive until late in the morning. The wind, however, was something of a different prospect, blowing in from the south to start with. When it reached the southeast at the end of the morning, it was time to switch on the first electric sliding door in The Cove as it was blowing its chilly airs straight at me across the counter. I understand that on the top of the hill and on the south coast, they had it much worse.

Our reference weather stations are on the north coast but were registering gusts of around 50 miles per hour. Gwennap Head, windiest place in the universe, was reading gusts of two miles per hour. I think they may have a problem with their industrial strength anemometer unless it goes around to zero when it reaches 99.

ABH and I had managed to get to the beach ahead of the weather first thing. The weed was still in attendance but did not seem as mountainous as it had in the gloom of last night. She wandered under the slips, and I had the chance to have a look at the new sand that had piled up since the last time I looked. Someone mentioned that there was quite a bit on the big beach under The Beach car park and at the bottom of the OS slip since those big spring tides. That would make it the first time this year there has been sand down there.

There was a bit more preparation to do in the shop this morning. The soft drinks fridge needed a few items topping up, but frankly, today, I could have done that at anytime and not inconvenienced anyone. After the rain started, The Cove died a death and we only saw a few customers and they were mainly the people staying here. It gave me nearly a whole day for finding something else to do with myself.

The much maligned council and the bus service they contract conveniently filled the gap with their new bus timetable. I had expected that we would simply switch to the 'Low Season' timetable, but the bus company has introduced a completely new one.

I will start with the positive, that there are more buses running than the Low Season timetable. Hoorah. Then there is the rest of it. Oh dear. It is an odd offering and one that presumably makes sense to someone but calling it a regular bus service would be the last name that came to mind. There are two early buses for the school run 40 minutes apart, a wait of two hours for the next then another 30 minutes later. I had to check that twice to make sure I was not mistaken. The only difference between the two services is that one misses out Land's End for some reason.

There are a couple more randomly timed services then a three hour wait for the next one. If we were in Spain, perhaps, I might have guessed that it was for a siesta. Perhaps First Kernow's data shows that no one ever takes a bus in the first half of the afternoon out of The Cove. One thing is for certain, they will not now.

The most obvious difference is the cessation of the service to St Ives and therefore there will be no link between The Cove or the village and St Just. Arguably, there is justification for a service because of the medical centre in St Just. We went through this last time and the bus company laid on a separate service after some much maligned council pressure. It may be that the data shows that no one used the service and therefore, it is unnecessary. I might argue that if the service had been run from Land's End rather than The Cove, it might have attracted more use. I have dropped the matter in the hands of the parish council and our much maligned council councillor's laps for them to deal with.

Since trying to understand and distil the information from the new timetable into something for ordinary folk to understand at a glance took me three hours, I did begger all else in the afternoon. I decided not to look at the solar panel output, reasoning that two disappointments in the same afternoon may be a little too much to bear. I did a quick look about the shelves to see if it was worthwhile doing a farm shop cash and carry order, but it was not. This also counted as a disappointment because I forgot to order my tomato juice last time and will run out. I love a virgin Mary in the evening.

The rain continued into the evening in varying versions of heaviness. I stirred myself to take the little girl around and despite the swirling light rain, it was not in the least cold. The breeze shifted direction just slightly during the afternoon and long longer

blasted at me, but I left the first electric sliding door in The Cove closed as I had bus timetables all over the counter and did not want to risk them going everywhere. It was still somewhere in the east in the evening and did not bother our stroll in the gathering gloom. Neither of us were inclined to hang around much outside but apart from our raincoats that were dripping, we were relatively unscathed when we got back.

I may reconsider my position on grown-up trousers tomorrow but surely just one more day will not hurt and we will be in October wondering where the year just went.

September 28th – Saturday

Today the forecasters had the weather just right. We were told of clear skies from overnight and bit of a sunny day and we got exactly that. In the sunshine, it was lovely and warm even if it was a bit cool in the shade. There was a barely noticeable breeze from the northwest and the sea had returned to calm again after being rattled by the wind for a couple of day. There was no appreciable surf and hardly any appreciable surfers trying to find any. Surprisingly, there were a few, quite a few, people camped out along the rocks at the high water line soaking up the sunshine.

At this time of year we do not expect very much, not even from our sunniest of days but it was far better than having a howling northerly. Yesterday, I had kept the first electric sliding door in The Cove on automatic. At first, it was because the squally showers were being squirted into the shop; I could see rain drops hitting the water in the dog bowls under ABH's throne. Later, it was because it was a brae bit chilly, and my fleece was not helping very much. I reasoned that in the absence of very many customers, having the door shut for long periods of time would not make an awful lot of difference.

Today, the fleece came off early. I had cause to walk up to the back of the building in the early afternoon and it was very comfortably warm up there in the direct sunlight. It was also doing our solar panels no harm at all and over the last three days they have increased their output each day. I am still a little suspicious of the data displayed by the mobile app, but the online data looks a bit more believable. Today we edged a little closer to our optimum, which is with total sunshine on a summer's day, fifty percent in any 24 hour period. Today, we managed 30 percent. The optimum might unachievable, but we had very good results from today. I do not know if all day sunshine in summer would be more productive as all day sunshine now. We will not really know until next year.

What prompted me to go up the back in the first place was the arrival of the recycling box for our bottles. This time I had stipulated in my application to the much maligned council that it be delivered to the shop since they claimed they had delivered last time and patently had not. It was bigger than I imagined, and I was also sure that it came with a lid, which ours did not. I think we have been done but never mind.

The Missus and I had already discussed moving the bags to the back of the flat where we could get at them by opening the back door. After Thursday night's blow when the bags did their best to shift themselves up to the back, it seems like an even better idea. I will have to shift them a bit further come collection day but that is only once a fortnight – if I get the days right. I am also hoping that the open glass container does not look too attractive to would be recyclers staying in the Mews. We decided against moving the food waste container as it is a little less accessible to critters where it is.

We had a young lad arrive at the shop quite late in the day clutching an empty bottle of beer. He asked where he might recycle it and I explained the much maligned council's forward thinking strategy on recycling: that he should take it home with him. Asked if he would like a bag with his 16 cans of beer he was looking to purchase, he demurred because it was plastic. I asked him if he would like to pay with cash or plastic, but I think the joke was missed.

I might have mentioned before, in fact I am sure I have, that many of the small children, especially locally when buying small amounts of sweets think nothing of asking for a plastic bag to take them away. I thought that such things would be part of early education and therefore reflex for the next generations. I find it very sad that it is not.

I may not have noticed too much at the time, but we had a good business day. The scores on the doors when I did the till were enough to almost bring a smile to a grumpy shopkeeper's face. At this time of the year, we are weather led or, as I reinforce from time to time, weather forecast led. The world and half his entourage of followers told me during the day that the weather for tomorrow is awful and therefore, regardless of what actually happens, our customer will go and find something else to do.

The weather was still pleasant enough to take ABH down to the weed strewn beach after tea. It was very gloomy and on several occasions I had to use my head torch to see where she was. She does not care about being by my side and when a family group came down clearly searching for something they lost earlier, she ran off to the far side of the beach to meet them. I picked up two gleaming eyes in the torch light, else I would have lost track of her altogether. At least she had a bit of a run.

It certainly wore me out. I was definitely finished for the day when we got back.

September 27th – Friday

I must have awoken a couple of times in the night and all I could hear was the wind howling. At some point in the night, it had gone full northerly with no protection at all to us along the sea front. I had not appreciated that there was still the occasional shower thrown in for good measure until the morning, when I got up at the usual time.

The first job was to check on the Lifeboat and I quickly discovered that it was an hour out of Newlyn. That made it a seven hour tow during the night in not quite the most pleasant conditions. The big question of the morning was, would those same conditions allow us to safely recover the boat, and it was a case of waiting until daylight to have a proper look at the bottom of the long slipway as we headed to towards low water.

In the meanwhile, I decided to get through as much of the morning routine as I could because I knew once the recovery had been signalled, I would be caught up with that instead. I was hampered in my endeavour by the failure of some key aspects of our computer network. The Missus had complained the previous night that she could not get connected, which proved difficult to isolate because I was having no trouble at all. I guessed that it had something to do with catching her in the act of 'tidying up' the router, switch and its attendant mass of cables on and around my desk. I did not see it at the time, but some of the cables had been bent and stretched in this tidying up and now were not working at all. It took me a precious half an hour to get it operational again but even then, some of the cables – including the crucial cable to the network downstairs – need further attention.

By the time I had resolved the problems I had the call telling me that the boat would be returning from Newlyn and had, in fact, already left. I quickly mustered a crew of four, all experienced members of the team, and we went about setting up the long slip. I calculated that I had enough time to run back to the shop and organise the fridge ahead of the pasty delivery (sorry, MS), which I did, getting back to the station just as the boat was coming around the headland.

While the wind was banging in at fifty miles per hour making it quite uncomfortable standing exposed on the slipway, there was no serious swell, just wind chop, which was a relief. I had elected to be front man down on the bottom of the slipway, catching the heaving line thrown from the boat. I reasoned that the Boat Crew should not have too much trouble with it today as the wind was behind them. We were indeed lucky today and by careful arranging of my receiving stance, managed to catch the entire coiled rope with my face which I had only seconds before placed in the way.

It is such meticulous attention to detail that contributes to the sort of textbook recovery we accomplished today up the long slip. We finished off by bringing the boat straight into the station for refuelling on the level on the cradle before washing down later. I left the crew contending with these procedures while I dashed off to the shop to heat some pasties for the crew. There, I was waylaid by the pasty man who arrived just at the crucial moment and by the time I got back with the hot pasties and our own packed away in the fridge, the briefing was over. We are, after all, a very precisely timed, very excellent Shore Crew.

The Missus had stepped in before I got back. It was only shortly after opening time and I think that she had seen the pasty man and me still in my yellows on the newly reinstalled cameras, so they have some use after all. She had got ahead of the posse on some of the deliveries that had followed on from the pasties and when I came back, I finished off the milk while she priced the greengrocery.

I also picked up the pieces from our outside display that had been blown over and scattered across the pavement. Earlier, I had retied the wheelie bin that had managed to escape the first tying up and this time did a better job of it. I was just about to send the Missus away when she said that I may as well go into town now rather than later. I had planned, this morning, to go to the gymnasium and after that, go into town and see the optician about my false ears. It will not be very long that future children learn at school that opticians are people that look after ears, except those that go to posh schools and still do Latin and classics, who will know better.

First though, I had to relearn how to drive. It was not the driving bit that was so hard but the remembering where the windscreen wipers stalk was and how it worked. I needed it too as the shower that I ran into two thirds of the way to Penzance was of biblical intensity. It was still doing bits of that when I came back having only managed to elicit an appointment with the ear man and the understanding of the person at the counter that I was not lying when I said that they were not working.

I avoided the showers when I was walking about town. It was disappointing to note that many of the shop units in Wharfside that were empty when I last visited in Spring, were still empty. Perhaps I should take encouragement that there was one new food outlet and an electric bicycle shop with an electric rikshaw outside showing off. While it was still relatively early in the morning, the streets were emptier than I might have imagined. Perhaps if they rebuilt Penzance a bit smaller with all the excellent independent shops in a big square, it would do much better.

Or turn most of the empty shops into accommodation and provide an instant customer base for all the viable shops in the centre.

I picked up Mother on the way back. We detoured back to the main road because one of our delivery drivers in the morning told me that the back road to St Buryan was blocked by a fallen tree and cable. There were no signs at the entrance when I went by on my way into town, but it was easy not to risk it and go the other way. The other way was flooded with big puddles of lying water in many places. It is quite low lying across most of the route but the stretch that usually is underwater even if it is not raining was completely clear. Someone must have been doing some handy work there.

There was not much going on in The Cove when we got back which was much the same as when I left and much the same for the rest of the day, in case you were wondering. The punchy wind and short sharp showers were not conducive to attracting a wealth of visitors unless they had a covert delight at being beaten across

the face with a wet haddock. Clearly, some were, but we would certainly not hold that against them. Many were those that we were seeing the last of and gathering going home presents. I remember selling a lot of going home presents and made a mental note to check if we needed to order some more biscuits and fudge. There were precious few groceries being bought.

I had placed an order for our surf jewellery a couple of days ago and the package arrived today. I had ordered just enough to fill our homemade stand, which will suffice from now until the end of half term. I am trying very hard to keep our spend under control for the last five weeks of our opening and have a target in mind that needs to be in the account at the end of it to see us through the winter. The surf jewellery, however, is essential.

I also ordered our winter butter from the milkman. It is at an exceptional price until the weekend when, I am told – at the risk of starting a countrywide panic buying frenzy – that the price of wholesale milk and cream hits an all time high. We at the smaller end of the supply chain have less room to absorb increases, so it will take a while for the big boys to be affected but, I am told that they too will feel the pinch enough to have to pass it onto customers in the end too. I am so glad that The Diary is able to bring you all the latest industry news alongside other uplifting stories of the day. Our pleasure.

Our after tea walks are now almost certain to be in darkness, now. ABH was keen to go down to the beach when I took her out and, through the gloom, I saw that there was another dog running about down there. Without decent light, I decided it would be better not to risk a meeting that might not go well, so we walked around the block with me feeling guilty that I had refused the little girl some fun. I did not dwell on it for too long and she did not seem to hold it against me – she is Cornish, so a grudge can last a lifetime – and we completed the rest of the walk without incident.

The temperature, especially with a sharp northerly, was noticeably cooler than of late. Walks have been with fleece and rain jacket, mainly against the wind. We are trying hard to remember if the living room is now warmer than it would have been before the work. It is still comfortable in a t-shirt but, I fear, little boys' trousers are nearing the end of their usefulness in the shop. I will keep you apprised, dear reader, as I know how important such matters are to you, it being a marker of a major turning point in the season.

September 26th – Thursday

The wind was howling in the eaves at some point during the night and in the small hours of the morning there was a terrific downpour which thankfully did not come through the skylight. It was still raining a little in the morning when I took ABH around the block but by opening time in the shop, it had largely stopped.

The boys turned up just as it stopped raining to finish off the final bits of build work. These were the ancillaries, the CCTV and the VHF aerial for the scanners for which I had spent time finding all the right connectors. I had similar difficulties with the comms cables for the cameras and had bought a kit for putting the ends on. In the end I had spoken with a very knowledgeable and most helpful supplier who had put me right on a few things. Unfortunately, one end of the cables needed to be threaded through a small hole in the window post, which meant adding the end on afterwards.

The cameras were up and running and the boys cleaned up and gone by half past one o'clock. The only proper struggle they had was with the grommets on the junction boxes that did not fit. Quite why junction boxes are not supplied with them as a matter of course, or the holes or the grommets standardised, we can only guess. In the end the Highly Professional Craftsperson used some neoprene to stop major splashes and drips from going into the box. The time I had spent yesterday configuring the camera paid off because they worked as soon as they were connected and we were able to test them. The cameras that are now one on top of the other were labelled east and west to make accessing the right one easier. I will now have to rename them – after I work out whether east or west is top or bottom

And that was it. They went up so that they could say tearful goodbyes to the Missus. I will save my tears for the arrival of the last bills. It seemed a rather pathetic end to such a long running project. There were no fireworks or champagne corks hitting the ceiling, just a wave and some tail lights heading up the hill.

It took a while for the wind to come around to the northwest and when it did, the temperature dropped like a stone. The gusts were around 30 miles per hour, and I could feel them swirling in the shop. I had started the day bravely in a shirt but by the middle of the day capitulated and went and got my fleece.

These were not exactly ideal conditions to promote busyness in the shop and throughout the morning there were a scant few walking about, wrapped up in thick coats and woolly hats. We saw better business in the afternoon but 'better' was very much a marginal term; the whole day was pretty bleak. The flat sea in the bay eventually became more animated after a week or so of lying flat. With a blustery onshore wind it was not much help to our surfers but two competent kite surfers took to the waves in the middle of the day, shooting around the inshore waters at some rate of knots.

Later in the afternoon, the rain made an unwelcome return in the form of quite a nasty little squall that smoked through The Cove sideways. If the street had not already been cleared, that would have done it in seconds. There was no coming back from that and we spent the rest of the afternoon in the doldrums.

The wind was really starting to pick up when I went across to our Lifeboat training meeting in the evening. Our wheelie bin had gone over in the night last night and

needed tying down for the first time since spring. Now the wind was in the northwest, it was starting to become a nuisance.

There was no launch planned as the wind alone would have made life difficult. The sea state was definitely rough and would not have helped either. Instead, we all became film starts by practicing a scramble with our pagers going off. Over the last few months we have had a local photographer and film enthusiast making a mini documentary that can be shown on the television in the viewing gallery. He had drone footage, launch pictures, recovery film and all sorts ready to put together and this was the last missing bit, he told us. We can hardly wait for the premier.

If our filmographer had stayed around for a while he could have filmed it for real. I was woken from my slumber at ten minutes to eleven o'clock to attend a Lifeboat shout. Two men in a yacht had found themselves north of Pendeen somewhere, they were not exactly sure where they were, either, and the Coastguard thought it a good idea to go and get them.

A small team launched the boat into the pitch black and a less than welcoming sea, accompanied by strong northwesterlies. The original position given was a bit closer to us but a second position given after launch would have put it squarely in the hands of St Ives Lifeboat. Given that the new casualty position was around an hour away, we closed the doors and packed in for the night. The balance of probability had it being a lengthy tow back to Newlyn.

September 25th – Wednesday

At least it had stopped raining for a bit when I took ABH out for a run first thing. We were just seeing some of the first light in The Cove through particularly thick cloud cover. We might have gone out earlier, else. She ducked under the slipways when we arrived on the beach, just for a change, and I lost sight of her. I had brought my head torch, just in case, and needed it to find her in the gloom. At least we avoided the dead fish – the tope are actually smoothhounds but just as dead, I was told – and the tractor that decided to launch one of the fishing boats as soon as we arrived.

There was no rushing about this morning. Our commercial bin collection changed times last week and completely confused me. I assumed that the change was permanent and it would again collect before I got downstairs, so I loaded the bin last night and put out our cardboard recycling. Well, I had to do something to make up for getting the domestic collection wrong earlier in the week. There was a bit of greengrocery to sort out, a few pasties (sorry, MS) and some milk and none of that took very long. It allowed me to cruise gently into morning and wait for the Missus to come and relieve me so that I could go to the gymnasium.

The rain that had returned shortly after ABH and I had got back from the beach, eased considerably by the time I headed down the road, which was good of it. I had missed Monday's session due to the solar man and was keen to do some catch up

today. I have to admit that it was a struggle today as my dickie left knee is being very dickie of late. It took some effort to beat it into submission but once done I managed quite the blistering session I was looking forward to. It was a very long crawl back along the pavement to the shop, however.

Our second trip to the beach being in daylight allowed me to see all the dead fish and crabs that ABH was rolling on. The day had taken a turn into rip gribbler territory with blue skies allowing the full force of the available sun to light up the beach. Most apparent, other than dead fish, was huge collection of gull footprints littering the sand. They must have had an impromptu seagull disco, stomping up and down or maybe just one gull happed upon one of the alleged missing bags of cocaine. What was most noticeable, however, was the clarity of the water, absolutely crystal clear.

Out on the sea wall below the Harbour car park, the scaffolders were back erecting another Isles of Scilly ferry terminal/lithium mining project edifice. I had noticed after they went last time they had left a fence unit lying against the sea wall halfway down. I thought that it had been discarded at first, but from the bottom of the long slipway we could see that it was covering a hole in the wall. They must be back to fix that, I assume.

We concluded our walk around the block and after a bit of rain, ABH likes to sniff every blade of grass and inch of ground. It is probably very absorbing for a small hound but a tad tedious for a grumpy shopkeeper keen to get cleaned up and back behind the counter.

I was there soon enough, and we enjoyed some dry weather levels of customer visits, for which we are very grateful. This was fairly sporadic throughout the afternoon until the café next door closed. Then, of the few people who came past, I was asked frequently if we did hot drinks. We have briefly considered having some sort coffee machine for the periods that the others are not open but very rapidly dismissed the idea when we think about the mess and the constant tripping upstairs for water. I send them down to the OS where you probably have to book three weeks in advance. (You almost certainly do not but booking in an ordinary ale house to have a meal is still beyond me.)

I was left with ABH in the hot seat while the Missus whisked Mother off to see Lord of the Riverdance leg stomping extravaganza at Hall for Cornwall in Truro. It is very clever, I am sure, but I cannot imagine anything so awful as watching a bunch of very fit youngsters clomp around the stage to loud diddly music. It is why I did not get invited – other than the Missus not wishing to be seen in public with a grumpy shopkeeper. I will find out in the morning if they enjoyed themselves, which I doubt they did not, as I would be away in the land of screaming nightmares long before she got home.

There was a huge clump of rain heading our way, so rather than wait until after tea to take ABH around, I took her after I shut up shop. The added advantage is that it was

also light and, once again, I was able to identify, mainly, what sort of dead and smelly animal she was rolling in. Fed up with that and being chased off by the tide, we headed around the block and across the largely empty car park.

I had to take her around again just before I retired by which time it was raining. It was not the heaviest rain we have seen. That and the brevity of our walk thankfully meant not too much towelling dry after we got home as I had forgotten to put her coat on before we went. It was not long after we came back that the breeze kicked up from the southwest and rattled the blind on the bedroom window. It was too warm still to think about closing it and I gambled on not getting wet from the slightly open skylight above the bed. I do not think I would have noticed, anyway.

September 24th – Tuesday

It was a much better start to the day. It was grey and soulless, instead of being grey, soulless and wet. We waited until we had a modicum of light to guide us and ABH and I headed down to the Harbour beach for a bit of a run. We found some more dead crabs for ABH to roll around on and there were two tope and a dogfish in various places littered about – I looked up the difference. A neighbour told me they had been turned out by a fishing boat as I believe the rules demand and I guess there would have been a good reason why they were not dropped further out.

They were not the only things in or near the water today. Just like the Jaws film franchise, the jellyfish are back, this time nastier and stingier than ever. Apparently, the regular Harbour swimmers knew about it yesterday and I caught up with it this morning by the same neighbour who told me about the fish. I will have to talk to her more often; she gets out more than I do, er, she just gets out. It was not fifteen minutes later that the first victim we had seen, another neighbour a stone's throw from the first, came to the shop for succour and sympathy. We sold him some reasonably priced succour – we are not a charity, you know – but we were clean out of sympathy. If you are going to participate in extreme sports, such as swimming in the sea, you must expect a certain amount of risk. If the small gods of grumpy shopkeepers had intended us to swim in the sea, they would never have given us heated swimming pools.

Still, it turned out to be a smashing day to be nursing jellyfish stings. The sun broke through in the late morning and transformed The Cove into a bustling resort once again. It is astounding how a little bit of sunshine can make such a difference. We were busy in the shop from almost the moment the sun started shining and all the way through the afternoon until it got a little grey again.

Our solar man turned up early and laboured long and hard through the day. He is definitely no shirker. When he left shortly before half past three o'clock we had a working system, our 16 solar panels generating electricity for the shop just shortly before the sun disappears behind the top of the cliff for the winter. We were busy in the shop at the time so I did not get to have the grand tour of all the installed kit, but

he showed me photographs and explained functions. He then showed me the switch that had taken two years to come to reality. It was a tiny rotary switch sitting between two monitors. I told him that was no good at all and it needed to be one of those big levers you see in Frankenstein movies. I am mortified that they could not find something better.

I cannot yet even see what it is doing, and I must wait for the people at the office to do whatever they have to do to get us set up on the inverter company portal. When I am, we shall be able to see how much electricity we are generating and how much we are using. It is frustrating after such a long wait that we will have to wait some more before finding out just how successful or how effective the investment is.

The sea was flat calm again today. The Lifeguards were clearly leaving it up to the water users whether they risked the jellyfish and were not proscribing by red flagging the beach. There were very few out on it, even on paddle boards and I guess that they had some protection from stings head to foot in neoprene. Despite the good weather there were not that many people out on the beach, either. Just a few walkers strolling here and there.

All the connectors and the cable for the VHF aerial project arrived in the middle of the day. I tried the connectors all in the right places and they all fitted perfectly, which was a major relief. The package also came with appropriate junction boxes for the cameras. I sent a message to the boys to tell them that they now had a green light to come back and they will come Thursday because I was told that the forecast had it as wet tomorrow.

After a bit of sunshine and pleasantness, it rained today, too. The clouds started building in the later afternoon and the streets drained and emptied of visitors. We are starting to see an increase in our foreign visitors again or they are just more noticeable with fewer of our own, perhaps. They are just as confused as our native visitors and perhaps more so regarding the frayed and tattered bus service and I have found myself offering more information about that than anything else. It is most helpful having the real time view of their positions via a website tracking them. It is not without issues: there are satellite blackspots where the bus disappears and then suddenly reappears and given the twisting nature of our roads, some seem to be going in the other direction as they go around a tight bend.

One customer asked if the buses run on time, and I was forced to say that the ones that arrive when they are supposed to do. Some though are either late or not coming at all and you never know which it is. I give my best at providing as accurate an answer as the information available to me allows. Sometimes that is just not enough. One customer told me he was expecting the 14:10 to Penzance, which confused me until I realised he was looking at the Low Season timetable. I tried to put him right and he listened, but you could tell he did not believe a word I was saying. I must have a dishonest face or, maybe, the bus times are just so fantastical that they are beyond belief.

It was proper raining when I took ABH out after tea. We both wore our raincoats and both came back with wet lower halves. I took some time towelling her dry when we came home but there was no one to do the same for me as the Missus was still out taking Mother back home. Such is my lot.

Finally, I should take a moment to congratulate the Aged Parent on their wedding anniversary. I usually send a card to remind them but I missed the post then I missed calling in the evening – what an errant offspring I am. No wonder they disowned me and left me in a basket in some reeds or was it a gooseberry bush – I was too young to recall. I also do not remember the year of the wedding, as despite what they say about me, I was not there, but I suspect that it will be close to 70 years. Crikey.

Note for the Aged Parent paternal: if you have forgotten, do not scroll down after, 'such is my lot' when you show Aged Parent maternal and you might just get away with it.

September 23rd – Monday

It was a damp grey and mizzly morning, which was not what we had signed up for. I had to wear a rain jacket when I took ABH down to the Harbour. There was just enough sand to make it worthwhile but one of the fishing boats was being pulled in, so we had to be a bit careful, and I kept her on the lead. We did not tarry too long.

I had once again found myself pressed for time this morning, which rather confirmed my fears about resetting my getting up time. I have no idea what delayed me but ABH has previous as a thief of time, but I am not sure it was all her this morning. I was just finishing loading the last of the recycling into the bags when the pasty man (sorry, MS) turned up. It marked the start of a frenetic morning, which was daft when there were so few customers about.

There was some cutting down to size of the large boxes that the small Velux blinds had come in, but it was worth it to get rid of them. I also gathered together the glass jars and bottles we had collected, which, in truth, was not very many. I tried to remind myself to reorder the proper black box for the glass as using one of our baskets is not ideal. I was just congratulating myself that I had it all done on time when the general waste lorry turned up. I had my weeks mixed up.

In my defence, we have clearly become so good at recycling that we had filled our recycling sacks and had hardly any general waste to dispose of. This gave me the impression that since the sacks were full, it must be recycling week. If it is this hard now to remember which week is what, I will be proper stuffed when we are on our holidays. Happily, the bin men were good enough to pick up our bags on the way back through from doing the houses beyond us.

I had barely finished breakfast when the solar man turned up. I had thought that he was arriving with a team, but he said that they had been diverted elsewhere. He had already set aside two days and I had no doubt that he would have it all done by then. He exudes confidence and quietly works away getting things done. There was hardly any fuss bringing the cables through the store room wall and before I knew it, he had installed the inverter in there. This was most disappointing as I had imagined something with flashing lights and a bit stylish. Instead, we have an anonymous grey junction box with an aerial on top of it. I think I shall be asking for a discount.

The rain cleared up in the middle of the morning after a last gasp bit of heavy drizzle. Again, it was at odds with the forecast, but I am not going through all that again. The mist sort of came and went then came again but it was hazy all day. It was not bad walking weather or just for a stroll around but clearly I was the only one who thought so. The beach was empty all day and there were few waves to attract surfers and it appears that either dog walkers have learnt to read, there was a warden spotted for the first time ever or they were not interested in taking to the beach either. The dog control order comes to an end at the end of September, so those who have respected the restrictions have not long to wait.

The Missus left for town in the middle of the morning and was away for some time. There were errands to run and our quarter end paperwork needed to be dropped at the accountants. ABH was very well behaved in her absence but still has a bark at passing dogs. She was getting a little restless towards to end but it was three hours and she is only 18 months old, so she is doing well in the hot seat. I guess that there are not so many small children absently poking her in the eye to concern her, so we will see how she is at half term.

Solar man went at around four o'clock with still quite a bit to do, he told me. He fully expects to be able to commission the system and our, possibly unique, switch to direct power either to the shop or the flat. I had expected there to be a procedure to follow, such as isolating the array first before throwing the switch or raising a kite on a wire in a thunderstorm, and I discussed that with our man. He told me that was another stipulation of the National Grid people that there was no procedure, however simple, because it would allow room for error, which is very fair comment. The system will consist of just one switch to direct the flow. I am really quite impressed with the work these guys have put in.

The last couple of hours of shopkeeping were mind-numbingly tedious. Of course, that made little difference to me since my mind is numb already, but the time did drag so. It was not like there was a great deal to do to fill the void, either as the shelves are mainly full and the store room is mainly empty of things to fill them with anyway. I did manage to order another black box for our glass and asked that it be delivered to the shop this time so that the much maligned council cannot say that it has been delivered or that no one was at home – unless they try and deliver it in the middle of the night.

The last couple of hours of shopkeeping might have been a little less of a fag had the rain not returned to give us another soaking. The first I saw of it was one of our regular visitor couples coming into the shop dripping; I had no idea it has started until then. The rain kept up in varying intensities of wet until past closing and into the evening. It was an outlying scattering of the main rain system that was currently deluging up country from the Midlands to the Westcountry and causing major flooding, I learned from the news. We are therefore very grateful that we have not been more badly affected.

I was not affected at all either time I took ABH out after tea and last thing. It was wet, sure enough and the air still had a damp feel to it but there was just enough light and just enough sand to cavort on the beach for a while. There were also just enough crabs, reasonably large for the girl to roll on and one unidentifiable half fish in the surf for her to try and get. There was also a juvenile dog fish or tope being washed in and out but that was far too fresh to interest her. Quite what killed them off or if they were discards from one of the boats – unlikely – will forever remain a mystery.

I thought it best, unless we wanted a fishy ABH all night in bed, to whisk her around the block where we met no one in an empty car park and walked past many dark holiday let windows. A bit bleak, for sure.

September 22nd – Sunday

Here we go again, so let us get this out of the way first. The online weather forecast had us in the clutches of rain all day long. Outside, the sky did not look that hopeful but there again, it did not look that bad, either. A quick geek at the rain radar suggested that we would largely get away with it, as the bulk of the rain was heading up just east of us. Right or wrong, the forecast alone would keep people away.

An early couple out for a bit of a stank asked if it would rain today. I told them what the Meteorological Office had forecast and also that, to me, the rain appeared to be going east of us. We spoke briefly about yesterday's weather, and I told them that it was probably the end of the world and we had all passed into Vallhalla. Then I reflected that had that been so, it was still bleddy raining.

Casting such matters aside, I found myself at a bit of a loose end shortly after the shop opened. I am still getting up at busy period time in the morning and could probably laze in a bit longer now we are a little quieter. It is hard to break the habit, for one thing, and the other is I am a bit afeared that I would find myself rushing about for things. So it was I found myself in the shop with plenty of time to do the papers, clean the pasty warmer (sorry, MS), clear the water and toilet tissue from the back of the store room to the store room floor, top up the fridge magnets that had almost run out completely and fill up the sunglasses stand. I also threw a few drinks in the soft drinks fridge and the beer fridge for good measure and was still finished with time before opening.

Predictably, there was little doing in The Cove during the bulk of the morning, which was aided and abetted by some light rain now and again. When the rain stopped, we were left with a good deal of low cloud sitting atop the cliffs but not bothering us too much down below. It appeared to me quite mild and humid, although most people appeared to be wrapped up, mainly fearing a return of the wet, I think. We saw a bit more action in the middle of the day and into the early afternoon but it was very small beer indeed and made me fancy one to ease the hurt.

In my boredom, I decided that I had might as well look at the coaxial connections between the aerial, the two-way splitter and the two scanners that we wished to connect. I had not taken in very much on Thursday because it was a terrible day to get through let alone understand technical details. When I looked at it afresh, it was much clearer – sort of. There are many different types of coaxial connector, it seems and in our array of kit we have three of them. One of the bags of connectors I bought are BNC which would perfectly fit one of the scanners except that the cable from the aerial is going to the splitter first. The other scanner has an SMA connector and needs an adapter as I could not find a coaxial cable direct SMA connector. The two-way splitter has F-type connectors so will also need an adapter, although the other bag of connectors I bought might well be useful.

I managed to find an adapter for the second scanner, which will definitely be required. My existing bag of connectors will do for the second scanner, so I do not have to be concerned with that, which leaves connection to the two-way splitter. Here, I have a choice of buying three adapters so that the bag of connectors can be used or, all supposing that can be made to work, use the second bag of connectors and not need the adaptors. That sounds favourite except the connectors are too big for the cable.

The problem with the first solution is that once the adaptors and the connectors are in place, the whole package is so long there is not a junction box big enough for it other than the gigantic ones that will look obtrusive on the outside wall. I have one thing to check, which will have to wait until tomorrow when the company is open and then I will go ahead with our order, which includes both options. If the worst comes to it, the two-way splitter will have to be housed indoors and the cable fed back outside again.

That was just about as exciting as the day got. We saw a few more people around in the late afternoon when they realised they had been hoodwinked about the rain and returned from wherever they had been. We sold the pasties that I had been waiting to sell all day, which was a relief and a fair few fridge magnets alongside. I even managed to top up the postcards in between customers and discovered that we could probably do with some reordering. I think I might wait to see what a 22 percent increase in the price of first class stamps does to sales first, though.

I have come to the conclusion over the last couple of days that I must live my days with my head in a virtual bucket. Yesterday, I missed all the forked lightning strikes

although they were happening in the bay outside the shop window. Today, I had a queue of customers asking if I had seen the dolphins, which I had not.

Someone mentioned them a few days ago but I was sceptical because we had not seen dolphins here for some years. I suggested that they may have been tuna, which we have seen in abundance. With the numbers of people reporting the sightings, there was no doubt, especially as they had come right into the bay at one point. It seems somewhat grotesque to point it out but the first appearance of dolphins in the bay coincides with the sewage release yesterday as did the arrival of a big shoal of bait fish I mentioned yesterday. I think I will just leave that there.

It is not my best segue into the next subject, but the Missus had been keen to try Trevedra Farm's roast dinners. Campers there can enjoy a sit down meal and they also do take-aways which today included their own lamb. It was well presented, plenty of it, and properly cooked and very much top rate and also the last time they were doing it for this season, I believe. None of us would say anything against it but we would all have preferred one that the Missus had cooked. It is why we do not go out to eat; we can get as good if not better at home.

There was plenty of wet in the air when I took ABH around the block after tea. We could still not get onto the Harbour beach because it was not there when we passed by at seven o'clock. It was also coming on to dusk but perfectly temperate and little in the way of breeze. The mist still hung mysteriously above us, clinging to the cliffs and swirling around the softly lit houses. Even in poor weather, The Cove manages to shine through somehow.

September 21st – Saturday

You may not ever get to read this, dear reader, if the prophesy is true that is. Well, I have to admit that it was my own little bit of propheting – although the other sort would have been preferable, if highly unlikely today. It was sparked off very quickly by a small, distant peel of thunder which made me look out across the bay. From quite a bright start, the sky had been darkening from the south and a few spots of rain fell just before the shop opened.

It all gave me cause to have a geek at the rain radar, which, in retrospect, was probably ill-advised for a man with my moderately sensitive disposition. To the east of us, currently laying waste to Truro, east of Camborne, was quite the largest and most intense blot of rain I think I have ever seen on the application's screen. At its core were colours representing rainfall ranging from 75 to 120 millimetres per hour, which, for comparative terms, is roughly apocalyptic or, to put it another way, the end of the world as we knew it.

Before the terminal night fell upon us, I hailed one of our newer fishermen on his way to the Harbour. I asked if he intended to go out and he responded that he would if one of the more experienced fishermen was going. I suggested that heading out on a

large expanse of flat water with a big metal pole sticking up from the back of the punt may not be the wisest of plans. After a brief pause to enjoy a timely bit of rumbling thunder, he agreed. This was before I had come to the conclusion the end of the world was nigh and going to sea in a mobile lightning conductor would not make the slightest difference to the outcome of his existence, although the length of it might shorter.

When the terminal night arrived, the shop was busy with young people who had ventured out without any form of waterproof protection. I rued that we had exhausted our supply of rain ponchos a week or two previously but reasoned that I would not be able to enjoy the proceeds anyway. With that in mind, I switched on the outside lights without a care, knowing I would never have to pay for the electricity they were gobbling up. I even closed the first electric sliding door in The Cove wondering if I had yet enjoyed full benefit from the investment.

We had at least managed to carry the meagre cash and carry delivery into the shop without getting wet. I had made a start on clearing it to shelves and storage but decided that it would be a waste of time to continue. Instead, I thought that I would eat my pseudo salad niçoise tiger roll that I had hurriedly constructed while waiting for the cash and carry delivery to arrive. It seemed a shame to waste it and churlish to go out on an empty stomach.

The end of the world seemed to go on a bit longer than I was anticipating. The skies did eventually brighten, and the rain went away leaving quite a bright and sometimes sunny day. It had left me with a bit of a problem, however. On the face of it, trying out the prophet business appeared to be an ill-fated venture and one that I should really avoid it as an alternate career choice. On the other hand, I might have been right. The brightness, the bay, the beach and the shop may be what the post end of world looks like, and I am in either Heaven, erm, or the other place. It is worrying therefore, first that I am still able to worry in the afterlife, but more important still that if it is the latter of the two alternatives it rather means that I spent the last twenty years of my earthly existence voluntarily doing the same thing as my eternity of punishment. How very disappointing.

It seemed futile to resist going back to clearing the order that had arrived. Even after the end of the world, the solar man would still be turning up on Monday. The blessing was that there was considerably less of it than in all the other previous orders in the year. It still took me until the middle of the afternoon to clear it and I will move everything from the back of the store room tomorrow. I did not wish to over-exert myself in one day. We will look to having our last order three weeks from now, which will give us time to run through some of the stock. It will also rely on the cash and carry being able to find a driver for that week since we seem to be stuck in a two weekly cycle at present.

Unsurprisingly, we had to wait until the rain cleared out and the skies brightened before we saw very many customers. Even then it was far from busy, folk having made other arrangements for the day, I would suppose.

It was a shame because the bay looked magnificent in the brighter afternoon. The remaining rain clouds skirted us to the north while the skies brightened from the south. It produced some deep and brooding colours in the water and across the cliffs to the north of us. As the dark clouds shipped out, they were replaced by thinner, high level cloud and a good deal of haze but a good natured day, nonetheless.

The beach looked splendid too as the last big tide of this moon revealed more of it including the sandbar and banks that had been there all season. It was also probably the last time the link between the big beach and Gwenver would be quite so wide; for the last couple of days you could march an army across in line abreast. What you could not do today was swim or surf as the Lifeguards had red flagged the beach. I have no idea why, as it was as flat as a dish at high water and only gently disturbed by waves at low water. I made a mental note to make enquiries later as it was a bit of a mystery.

I had to wait until late in the afternoon before a lady came in and unrequested told me that the beach was red flagged due to pollution. She had read it on a sign helpfully displayed by the Lifeguards, presumably. Whether the water quality had actually been tested and found to be sub standard or whether it was a Combined Sewage Overflow (CSO) alert that triggered the closure I am not sure. It would not surprise me that it was the latter in this risk averse world but I know that the water quality of our bay is tested regularly, it being an Award Beach or whatever they call it.

I did check online and The Cove had suffered a CSO event today. It did rain heavily for a while, but the real heavy stuff was in short bursts and the rest really was not that unremarkable. It is disappointing that we do not have a sewage system, not that long installed, that cannot cope with a bit of heavy rain now and again. I think that the closure is unlikely to last very long, which is a blessing because, for those that like that sort of thing, I am sure that the water looked most inviting today.

Business petered out into the late afternoon, the only thing to occupy me being water quality investigations. It would have been the ideal opportunity to work out what bits we needed for our VHF aerial system had the shop that we needed to talk to been open.

The Missus had no problem occupying her time as the blinds for the Velux windows arrived yesterday and she spent some of the afternoon and evening installing them. It is very exciting as we have never had blinds before. It also means that the probability of ABH giving me a lie in into daylight hours after we close has increased dramatically, as we can keep the light out of the bedroom longer. Well, I can live in hope – unless I was right about the end of the world.

September 20th – Friday

Well, the morning certainly looked alright and it was just lovely when I took ABH down to the Harbour beach after I came back from the gymnasium. That was shortly before the middle of the day. It all went a bit downhill after that and the Meteorological Office issued a weather warning for Thunderstorms. I had not particularly noted the humidity, but it was unusually warm stepping out of the Lifeboat station last night after finishing and it had been warm all through the morning too. I suppose the mist might have been a bit of an indicator had I been really thinking about it, but I really was not.

Instead, I was thinking a little bit about clearing the store room for the cash and carry delivery which would mean moving the geet pile of mainly water and toilet tissue on the middle of the floor left over from the last one, to the back of the store room. My mind then moved on to Monday when I would have to have cleared the delivery and moved all the stuff from the back onto the floor again because the solar people were coming. There is nothing better than almost pointlessly moving things from one place to the other and back again. Although, I suppose that it is not pointless, just a pain in the bottom.

There were some usual deliveries to take care of in the morning and a few customers needing some last minute going home presents. It was the last of the busyness that we had for the rest of the day. I had been grateful for the late afternoon peak this last week has provided but it was clear that the late afternoon peakers had gone home. Instead, we had a Lifeboat shout.

Pagers went off at twenty past three o'clock and the big boat was in the water not long after. We had clearly worn out the very excellent Shore Crew with yesterday's launch and recovery because only one of them turned up for the launch. It was enough to send the boat on its way and, perhaps luckily, the boat would be gone for some time.

The Lifeboat was called to assist a yacht with total power failure that had been drifting for two days. The two crew on board were only able communicate with a handheld radio and had found help with a rather grand three masted sailing ship that was able to relay a call for help. The Lifeboat arrived some 45 minutes later and took the yacht in tow to Newlyn, which I estimated later to take around two hours.

In the meanwhile, we closed up the station and I headed back to the shop to watch the dust settle on the shelves. We would prefer a bit of dust to the leak that we seemed to have had recently. It is not certain, but it may have come from the kitchen where the dishwasher connection leaked for a while until the Missus tracked it down. It dripped mainly on some tins and jars, which were recoverable, but it still would have been better without it. It was only a small leak into the shop so I will check again in a few days and hope that it was the fixed old leak.

The boat's return was confirmed later in the afternoon, and I alternated between organising a recovery crew and making sure everything in the shop was done so that I could close on time. I try not to place any orders for the morning of the cash and carry delivery but our leaving visitors had effectively dismantled the biscuit and fudge shelf for going home presents. The small cans of Cornish made classic and pink lemonade and ginger beer have been a huge success this year and particularly so during today, it seemed. I had to order two cases of them to our tomorrow order.

There was no five minutes to closing rush or late arrivals, so I was able to close on time. It gave me the opportunity to see the family eating their fish and chips opposite dump the remains in the Lifeboat station's wheelie bin. It has a big sign on the front and top saying, "NO RUBBISH", which I thought plain enough. I saw that they had tried our bins a little earlier, the ones with a sign pointing at the public bin 20 metres away. Our family had clearly felt that the fifteen metres to the Lifeboat bin was far enough. I should be grateful that they did not leave it on top of my bin that someone had done earlier in the week as well as an ice cream tub today. The thought processes rushing through these people's minds is a matter of great wonder to me.

My own thought processes turned to Lifeboat recovery and soon after tea, I decamped to the Lifeboat station to join the motley crew that had already gathered to help. We are seeing more of the Boat Crew now willingly volunteer to join the very excellent Shore Crew in their endeavours. I put it down to the allure of our glittering reputation and the tales of derring do. If we wore jackets with buttons, we would be going around with the top one undone.

After my inner turmoil during yesterday's recovery, I decided to take a back seat in the evening for the sake of my sanity and operated the winch out of everyone's way. Once again, we set up for the short slip at near the top of the still huge tide. The boat return sometime after eight o'clock. Even in the darkness of the Harbour, it was very clear to me from my vantage point that we executed a textbook recovery up the short slip, and the winching was, of course, flawless. A wash down and refuel later and we were all done and ready for quick feet up and bed, and ready for the next one. We are, after all, a very relentless, very excellent Shore Crew.

September 19th – Thursday

The Cove is the sort of place that people come back to time and again. We know of generations of families that still arrive today when their grandparents or great grandparents first came many years ago and brought children with them, who in turn brought their own children. We have been here sufficiently long to see some of these generational changes, which we try not to notice too much.

So, when a young man enters the shop with his fiancé and you confirm his question that, yes, we had been here a few years, I knew exactly what was coming. Therefore, I was able to stop him mid flow before he revelled in telling me just how

young he was when he first came to the shop and how exciting it was to know that I was still the same shopkeeper 'all those years later'. I suggested that should his forthcoming marriage be blessed with children he might like to go on holiday to Scotland.

Yesterday morning there was hardly a breath of wind when I took ABH out first thing, which was odd since it had been breezy the day before and set to continue. I should not have questioned it too much because by the time I got down to the shop, the easterly breeze had started up again. This morning, we had the easterly right from the outset, and it was blowing in my face the day long. At least this saved me some electricity because if it was not there, I would have put the fan on; it was quite warm today despite the breeze.

With everything else going on this week, I was sorely pressed today to meet the deadline for our cash and carry order. It was always going to be a difficult one, too, this close to the end of the season as we do not want to be left with anything that will go out of date before we open again. That as a goal is unachievable, but we can do our best. So, not only did we need to order much less than we usually do, we also needed to order enough to meet a minimum order and the two successfully worked against each other as I strived to complete it.

Nearing four o'clock I was just five pounds short having exhausted all the options I could think of. I cannot recall what it was that eventually tipped us over the line but it left very little time to add the tobacco that we have to do last as it does not count towards the minimum order. We probably have one order left before we close but I suspect that we will need to go to Redruth to collect, as we are very unlikely to meet a minimum order on that one.

While all that was going on, the boys were doing the last few bits to call the building work, over. The very last items were to install the CCTV cameras and a VHF aerial to hopefully make listening to marine traffic a little clearer. We had always intended to put a camera on each corner of the building similar to how they were before the work started. I had purchased some appropriate cable months ago thinking that it would be run during the construction phase. It was deemed better to do it afterwards but the cable, which had to be replaceable having needed to do so in the previous installation, needed to be surface mounted in places. The only cable that suited our needs just so happened to be pink, or purple or possibly mauve. Whatever colour it was, it earned the cable the Missus' exclusion from being run inside and therefore required a rethink about where and how we placed the cables.

We came to some conclusion, thanks to some inspired thinking by the Highly Professional Craftsperson, that both cameras could occupy the same post and thus provide for a shorter and more convenient cable run, outside. Along with the cable, I had also previously purchased large junction boxes to accommodate the cable connections. The first problem with these was that there was no waterproof grommet that came with them, which while not immediately essential would need to be retro

fitted to maintain its waterproof integrity. The second problem was a little more terminal. The boxes had a hinged lid and would not open once installed below the camera. I will have to purchase different boxes but at least it gives me the opportunity to get white ones to match the post on which they will sit.

After this momentous failure, they moved on to installing the VHF aerial. This also proved problematic, first because we could not find the additional cable that had been bought some eight months before. We will only find that after I have purchased a replacement length. Instead, the boys made do with what came with the aerial only to discover that the connections we had did not fit the scanner upstairs. Only later did we discover that the scanner downstairs had a different connection and might have been made to fit. We also need a compatible splitter so that one cable feed can go both upstairs and downstairs and the one I have is incompatible with all the connections. I will call the supplier of such things and see if we can establish a shopping list of all the right bits.

While it would have been nice to have the cameras and the VHF aerial all finished and working, they can wait for another day. As the Highly Professional Craftsperson said, at least we have a plan and once the bits are in place, they can come back another day and finish it off. It was, nevertheless, excruciatingly frustrating.

All through those shenanigans, we had a reasonably steady flow of customers. It followed the later afternoon peak in business that the rest of the week had shown. Today, however, it was quite fraught trying to consult with the boys, complete the cash and carry order and serve customers all at the same time. By the end of the day my equilibrium was quite out of balance and not only had I reached the end of my very frayed tether, it had long gone out of reach and was now beyond sight.

There was very little time to consume a tea that I would have preferred to spend more time on before I had to head over to the Lifeboat station for a training launch. I still have not discovered the purpose, but a film crew were going on board and our resident crewman who serves as station photographer, was doing some filming from shore. This left us a little short handed and meant that I had to resume my Head Launcher mantel when I had hoped this evening to take a bit of a back seat.

There was much scurrying around and busyness as the film crew got on board. Our Inshore launch party had a tricky time of it with the huge tide, near full, left only the slope of the slipway to launch from. We had a softer time of it with the big boat. Before the Inshore launch party came back, we were a bit short on numbers which led me to be distracted with doing rather than directing which held things up a bit.

Even an hour later when the boats arrived back in the bay, the tide was still swamping the Harbour slipway and on the Lifeboat short slip, the water was up past the rollers. The Tooltrak for the Inshore boat was near afloat when it recovered the Inshore boat and made a very tricky turn in the waves to get back up the slipway.

When the big boat came in, it had to hold position on engine thrust rather than 'stick' on the static keelway of the toe of the slip. This required some smart winch work to make sure the take-up was as quick as possible so that the boat did not go out of position. From where I was on the long slip overlooking the operation it was clear, despite the size of the tide and the operational challenges we faced, that we executed a textbook recovery up the short slip in less than favourable tidal conditions. We are, after all, a very adaptable, very excellent Shore Crew.

On balance, I was very grateful that day was over and that someone invented malt whisky.

September 18th – Wednesday

I had to take ABH out in the darkness of the morning today. She rather insisted upon it. Gadzooks, the flies. They are attracted to the allure of my head torch which is in exactly the wrong place if I wanted to avoid the beggars being in my face. I noticed much the same when I took her out last night, especially in close proximity to the greenery up Coastguard Row. They were much worse out on the Lifeboat slipway where I presume the rotting weed attracts them and they did not even need a torch to be clouded all around me.

The morning when it did arrive, I am sure it does not mind me saying, did not seem to hold the same promise as it did the day before. It came good in the afternoon, but we had to make do with a bit of haze and thin cloud during the first part of the day. There were a few waves today, too, which there were not yesterday and most of the good surfing is to be had at lower parts of the tide. Otherwise it is just too big to be of any use.

It is not always so, but if we are to have a quiet day during the week, it is usually a Wednesday. My guess is that our visitors gave up on the morning and decided to find other things to do. They would have missed a decent afternoon and a glorious later part of the day when you would not have got a toe on the beach let alone a foot or a beach shelter.

The tides are some of the biggest of the year. They played havoc with the rescue yesterday and prevented the yacht crew getting in their Liferaft. There is a big moon to go with them, too, and it was quite spectacular on the rise last night when I took ABH for a spin last thing. It seemed slightly smaller tonight but every bit as bright, but it was a bit higher in the sky than the previous night since we were a little later.

The whole of the afternoon had been knocked sideways by the arrival of our large fish order. This is the order I placed last week when the tides were kinder and had to place again at the beginning of the week. I never get any notice, it just arrives. At least this time the invoice came in about half an hour before the fish did which allowed me to set up the store room to vacuum pack and price delivery when it did come.

If I am really pressed, the Missus comes down to serve at the counter while I process the fish. Since it came early enough, shortly before three o'clock, and the Missus was in town, I ploughed on and served the customers myself in between. This is awkward at times because I have one fishy glove that probably is not best smeared on a fridge magnet or the bag a pasty (sorry, MS) goes in. I do not like wasting gloves, so I try and remove it without turning it inside out, which takes time. Sometimes, of course, it is inevitable and on this occasion I went through half a dozen single gloves.

That might be slightly misleading, suggesting that I had to serve many customers during the fish packing, which I did not. As I mentioned earlier, it was a very quiet day, despite the good weather. We were once again busier in the later afternoon, which seems to be the pattern and also because I had a fish order to process. The combination of serving and being distracted on other matters, like ordering bread, had me finishing my fish packing almost at closing time.

Along with a five minutes after closing rush – just for something different – and the usual packing up of newspapers and doing the ordering I was a good half an hour behind getting upstairs for my tea. This in turn meant half an hour later taking ABH out and while that usually does not matter to her very much, the evening gloom was setting in and she was not much minded to have a run around the block after exploring the small amount of recently vacated beach.

There is always tomorrow – we hope.

September 17th – Tuesday

The skies were clear from the very start of the day today. It made for a very pretty morning with the thin strands of cloud on the horizon out to the east heralding a warning of the sun about to rise.

ABH and I were down on the Harbour beach with one eye on it and the other on a couple of bobbing heads in the water taking an early morning swim. She went down to greet them when they came out then followed them all the way up the beach. It is a good job we are getting to know them.

The morning shop preparations are become less intense now that there are fewer and less regular deliveries. This morning included topping up the drinks fridge that I had not done for a few days and the newspapers and magazines that are always there now. I am still fine tuning the newspaper numbers, especially the weekend ones to make the effort of sending back unsolds a little less strenuous by making sure there are fewer of them.

Our builders turned up in fewer numbers today. They tell me they aim to be completely finished by the end of tomorrow. Yesterday, I arranged for a man in a van

to come on Wednesday afternoon to take away the last few weeks' worth of broken tiles and waste wood. It is a good enough marker of the end of the project as any other, I suppose. After ten months or so of large and small achievements, the petering out ending does not really feel like a momentous, bottle of champagne against the side of the building moment. The boys have been professional throughout and, as we already knew them, a bit of a family feel to the whole arrangement with ribbing and jollity through most of it.

Despite the good weather that was probably better if not as good as anything we had during the proper part of summer, we were very quiet during the morning. It was not that much busier through the rest of the day either but substantially better than it would have been had the weather been poor. In the quietness of the morning, I pottered around the shop topping up this and that and generally being a bit useful. Although the day did not seem to warrant it, I ordered in some additional logs. I think that we will need them sooner or later. What we will need sooner is some pasty bags (sorry, MS) so I ordered some of those although with the general slowing down of pasty eating had me ordering two days of pasties together to avoid any embarrassment of failing to make a minimum order for one day. That was nothing beside the embarrassment of having pasties and nothing to put them in.

Just as I was about to embark upon some other minor venture, my Lifeboat pager went off. I knew I was marking time for some reason or other. The details that emerged later showed that a 60 feet yacht had lodged itself on the Runnelstone, a big lump of submerged rock identified on the surface by a ruddy great admiralty buoy that has flashing lights and a big bell and a big sign saying keep outside – easy to miss, I am sure. It was proper stuck and having taken the crew off for safety, it was a case of waiting for the tide to see if it floated or sank. Or, indeed, caught fire from the lithium batteries on board.

Happily, it did the first of those a good couple of hours later and because it was so large our boat had to wait for the same fishing boat from Newlyn to come and tow it back there that had come to take the rib off Gwenver. This incurred much time waiting around and later, when the yacht was afloat, more time towing it slowly around waiting for the fishing boat to arrive. That happened at around half past three o'clock just to the correct side of the 20 feet tall buoy marking the Runnelstone.

The yacht was part of the annual Normandy Channel race that I have mentioned before that had hundreds of yachts of various sizes leaving Caen on 15th September. This one clearly decided to cut the corner at Land's End with disastrous result.

During all this waiting time, I had returned to the shop. The two other members of the crew, due to all the uncertainties involved, very kindly waited around the station. As the eventual plan began to take shape and to stave off boredom, the two loose crew set up the short slip, gauging that by the time the boat came back, we would be well on the way to high water. This only left me to arrive when I could see that the Lifeboat was on its way back to station.

When the time came, it was typical that it should arrive when the day had taken a turn for a spot of busyness we had last seen at the height of the summer. Alongside that, the bread order needed to be done before I left, and the Missus needed to be called to come and relieve me. I made it onto the slipway just as the boat was coming on to the moorings at which point they would be asking for me.

The boys had done a good job of setting everything up and it only remained for me to execute what was clearly a textbook recovery up the short slip as the large tide pressed in. The boat had brought back one of the yacht crew who did not fancy staying on a boat with a hole in the bottom all the way to Newlyn, and who could blame him. We brought the boat straight into the station so that the casualty could get his feet on dry land as soon as possible. We are, after all, a very supportive, very excellent Shore Crew.

It was still moderately busy when I returned to the shop, but the street emptied soon afterwards. On the whole, it was not a busy day at all and had only ramped up for an hour or so in the later afternoon. It is a particularly odd profile of business and I can only assume it is trippers touring about and reaching here last in the day. It is not a complaint, simply an observation. Perhaps if we can find another band of trippers who start the day here, we might have a full day of business. We grumpy shopkeepers live in hope.

Our mystery boat stayed overnight and was still with us in the late afternoon. It is not quite as exciting but on balance it is most likely to be doing things with the international cables. There was a survey boat running up and down the cables earlier in the year, so perhaps we might assume this one is acting on the information gleaned from that visit.

Our evening walk was not quite as exciting as the previous day. Most of the sunsetting had already happened and the crowd there to watch it had begun to drift away. We were lucky to have a little bit of beach to run about on but no one to run about on it with, so we walked around the block instead. Dusk was coming on quickly as there were few clouds out west to reflect the last light of the sun and by the time we reached the end of Coastguard Row, the streetlights were coming on. If we need a mark of the day's end, that would do nicely, thank you.

September 16th – Monday

The good weather from last night extended into this morning. Even the famed Meteorological Office celebrated the low hanging cloud clinging to the cliffs by putting little sunshine symbols on their website. It was however a very mild morning with hardly a breath of wind from anywhere, but it was humid too, hence all the mist.

It took a while for skies to clear and we were closing on the middle of the day when the first of the blue appeared above us. The slow start also had a startling effect on

the crowds of people we had enjoyed through the weekend: they were nowhere in sight. A few had turned up to take in the view of the mist breaking up on the cliffs and to sit and have a coffee or a bit of breakfast from the café next door but trade, such as it was, did not kick in until early afternoon.

We were aware that the ice cream kiosk has been closed mostly over the last couple of weeks. I believe they opened for a few hours later in the afternoon yesterday but disappointed would-be customers default to our humble offering otherwise. Today, despite the general lack of business, we had an unusually high number of ice cream sales from the middle of the day. One lady told me that we were the only ice cream purveyor in The Cove, although she did not detail where else she had tried. We do not usually carry much stock since most people prefer a local ice cream cornet and apart from the little tubs of Moomaid ice cream from Zennor, we only have the commercial brands. I think we may run short if the demand continues.

The building boys turned up again this morning, a little unexpectedly. They had arrived last Thursday and were surprised to see the scaffolding still in place as they had been told it would be removed by the time they got here. There was only limited work they could do with it still in place, so they embarked on that. I was told that the scaffolders would be arriving the next day, but the builders would not be back until Monday.

Wind forward to today and our builders arrived to note that the scaffolding was still in place. There was work that could be achieved with it in place, so once again they carried on regardless. Shortly into the afternoon, the scaffolders lorry pulled up with the head honcho himself in charge and nine months, three weeks and half an hour later, it was gone. I was worried that it had been there so long that our old building had come to rely upon it to stay upright. There was a bit of breath holding when the last bit came down, but we seem to be alright at the moment. We are hoping against a high wind.

To celebrate, I took myself off to the medical centre in St Just. They had been gentling nudging me to remember that I should have had my birthday bloods done before the season commenced but I was a brae bit busy at the time. I would have gone last week but I needed someone to check my ear 'oles and I was told that the nurse that week had not been trained in holding a torch and looking in ears, so I had to choose this week instead.

I rue the cutbacks in the NHS that mean that I no longer get a cup of tea and a biscuit having had my whole arm drained of blood, but I put as brave a face on it as I could. As always, the nurse wanted to check my blood pressure before she commenced the blood letting. This was fine, other than my blood pressure is always elevated in such places. What I judged to be very underhand, however, was that while I was trying hard to have calm and pleasant thoughts, and without any pretence at subtly, the nurse pulled out the huge needle and various accoutrements that went with it right in front of me. It completely turned my state of zen

contemplation into a moment of near apoplexy that I am surprised did not send the machine screaming for help.

On the plus side, when the nurse checked my ear 'oles she found them the epitome of cleanliness. Through a process of elimination, I have determined that this almost certain means that there is something amiss with my false ears, as I can discern no difference at all between wearing and not wearing them. Unfortunately, I do not know what happens next because by the time I had finished doing everything else, it was too late to telephone the optician – that also does ears, in case you think I was calling the wrong shop.

Before I left, we were joined in the bay by a working boat. Looking it up on the ship finder application, we discovered it to be a port tender, and it arrived with a tender behind of its own. I am reasonably sure that it had been used by Falmouth Divers before and surmised that it might have had something to do with the events on Friday. I met more knowledgeable friend later who told me that it was in the wrong place for that, so we are still completely bemused as to why it is there.

Also bemused was a customer who came in search of a bit of a snack and initially did not fancy a pasty. He asked if we had sandwiches, which I thought we probably did not since we had sold quite a few over the weekend. I looked down to the fridge and there was one left. He returned quite smartly and told me he did not fancy vegan sausage and, really, I could not blame him. Even if you were vegan, why would you want anything that pretended to be a traditional meat item. He settled for a pasty. As I handed it over to him, I told him, deadpan, that it was one of our award winning Cornish pasties made with vegan skirt steak. The look on his face was utterly priceless until I assured him it the skirt steak came from Cornwall and had been nowhere near Vega.

For some light relief, I took ABH down to the Harbou beach for a run after tea. I had not seen that the two dogs that has voiced their displeasure at her were up on the Harbour wall. ABH noticed as soon as we were loose and down on the beach and was keen to play. When the owner brought them down to the sand they chased and ran about much more politely than before, which was excellent sport. ABH, clearly a little warm after her exertions, took herself off for a swim at the end.

With a clear sky and a setting sun that I missed while ABH was playing, we had quite the perfect end to a day that had started out a little on the tricky side.

September 15th – Sunday

Not quite the clear blue sky that we enjoyed yesterday morning, but as mornings go, this was a crisp and clear one with just enough chill in the air to make it feel fresh as a new born daisy.

It remained grey but bright for the rest of the morning, despite what the forecasters were saying about it. It was also dry and warm and did not seem to put off the sudden wealth of people we had in the street from the middle of the morning. They started arriving in numbers shortly after my pager went off calling for the Inshore Lifeboat to go and have a look at a lifejacket discovered at the bottom of the cliffs under Land's End hotel.

As is the case with such things, a search was ordered to make sure that the owner of the lifejacket had not parted company with it and was still out there. More likely is that it was a spare carelessly allowed to wash off a boat in rough seas but the search happens nonetheless. There was some speculation that it may have come from Friday's shenanigans but that was dismissed when the description did not match.

Initially, the Inshore boat was tasked but the only helm available was the duty mechanic on the big boat, so they had to take the big boat instead. This was fortuitous as it would have had to launch anyway for the search. I had taken a step back and let our training head launcher run the show. The boat was gone for some time which allowed time for another seasoned head launcher to arrive so that I could go back to the shop and leave them to it.

The boat arrived back with the tide pushing in, relieved of their duties in the supposition that the lifejacket was inadvertent jetsam. Our man practising his head launchership had set up the slipway almost as soon as the boat left as we had expected a swifter return than we actually had. However, the preparation was still effective a little later than planned and, from where I was behind the counter, it certainly looked like a textbook recovery up the long slip.

If it had not been, our man would have had a second chance to prove himself as the boat was tasked to launch again to another found lifejacket. This one was quickly identified as being to do with the events on Friday and the boat returned for yet another textbook recovery up the long slip. We are, after all, a very consistent, very excellent Shore Crew.

We had been moderately busy in the shop throughout the period that the Lifeboat was out, and it continued for a good bit after that as well. It certainly kept me occupied and prevented me from following through on my plans before we opened to restock the sunglasses display. I was also very late with our farm shop cash and carry order. I was putting it off rather than not being able to do it as I determined that it would be borderline if we could form a minimum order or not and also whether we needed one at all. In short, it would be more difficult than usual and would require some effort. It did not seem like a day to be making an effort. I capitulated in the end but the endeavour fair near finished me off. In truth, I should have gone for a lay down but, the life of a grumpy shopkeeper is a brutal one and I had to continue until the end of the day.

The was not even the Missus to give me succour. She had once again gone off to the Minack chasing donations to the RNLI but this time she included the matinee performance as well. She had made my tea before she went, which was good of her, and had taken ABH for the main part of the day. I had her back again in the late afternoon and she largely behaved herself in the shop hot seat by the first electric sliding door in The Cove. Given that she had spent most of the day inactively sitting by one of us while we worked, she did exceedingly well for a small pup.

I took her around the block after tea and down to the Harbour beach. We had to wait until the two dogs she had met yesterday had gone. While there was no actual carnage the last time, the other dogs were not impressed with her presence, and it was no problem to wait a few minutes until they were gone. It did mean that there was no letting off of steam like there would have been with a playmate present and I once again wondered if there was something I could take down for her to chase – she will not go after a ball.

At the closing hour in the shop a customer had casually mentioned that it looked like it would rain very soon. I could not disagree as it did look a bit bleak out to the west. However, it had not been that long that our friend and neighbour from just up the hill had categorically stated that the weather was looking good for the next week. Clearly, the forecasters that he had that from would not make such claims had there been the slightest risk that they might have been wrong. I dismissed our lady's concerns with a dismissive wave of my hand and did my best to look aloof to such wild and alarmist claims.

My rain jacket did a marvellous job of keeping out the soggy good weather we were having when I took ABH out for her last run. It was coming in quite heavily by that stage and the Missus had earlier told me the good weather was hacking it down at Minack. I blessed our good fortune that at least it was not going to rain anytime soon.

September 14th – Saturday

The day announced its intentions right from the off: to be better than yesterday and, on balance, I think it probably achieved it.

With near total blue skies, very little breeze and an increasing temperature, we were busy from the start of the day. The tables opposite were full even before the café opened and saw a regular exchange of bottoms as the day progressed. Despite a swell unblemished bay, there were enough gentle waves at the shore line to provide for the surf schools to take a few punters in for a splash. Not even the paddleboards came out until later in the day.

For the last few years we have had use of a very good plumber, one who turned up when he said he would and would generally make every effort to attend a call no matter how busy he was. We were a mite trepidatious when we learnt that he was retiring but he gave us a number of someone he knew when we last asked for his

services. The new man is just as diligent it appears and turned up today to fix our leaking cistern and the bathroom sink pop-up plug that has been stuck for a while, which has made cleaning it more of a chore than previously. We will guard him jealously as such plumbers are a scarce resource.

Today's biggest surprise was to see the rib that had landed at Gwenver beach still in place in the morning. I had seen lights flash over there when I took ABH out last thing and expected to see a rib shaped hole where the rib was last seen. Clearly, someone in authority did not want to risk a second night and sent a fishing vessel around to tow it back to Newlyn. One of the Lifeguards paddled out on a rescue board to pick up the rope and attach it to the rib. I last saw the fishing vessel making extremely slow progress out of the bay with the rib close in behind it. I can understand why they did not use a local boat. It is a long way to Newlyn and it might have got lost.

We had enjoyed some busyness through the day but by the middle of the afternoon, it had slowed to a trickle. There were a few arrivals of people we have known for years, and it was good to see them and have a chat. It was also good to see many new faces too, but I suspect that many today were trippers here on the bus, at least some of them. I spoke with a bus driver a couple of days ago and he told me that they are very short of drivers, the main reason for missing buses on our route. They are having problems recruiting as apparently no one wants to be a bus driver. I know that they are suing for more money, but he thinks that is more fear of work than fear of wages.

The Missus disappeared off in the afternoon to visit a food festival at Penlee Park in Penzance. She had promised me some exciting food for tea but reneged when she discovered that it was extremely busy and the queues for each stand far too long. It was something of a disappointment because she was going out again in the evening and the lack of success meant a ready meal for me after we closed.

The last fling of the Minack season is a week dedicated to 'Festival of the Sea' celebrating the RNLI's 200th anniversary. The local fund raisers had been invited to come and shake buckets at the events and this weekend it culminated in the Cornish Proms and our turn to do the shaking. The Missus volunteered to lend a hand and promptly disappeared again in the late afternoon leaving me with ABH. I am starting to feel like a bucket widower.

I consoled myself by looking down at the beach under the softening light of the evening sunshine. The tide was rapidly closing off the beach while a few paddlers paddled and walkers roamed across what was left. The light lit up the cliffs picking out each rock and deepening the contrast between them and the grass clinging to the slopes. It has a very comforting feel about it, like seeing an old remembered friend you can look fondly upon.

ABH sulks a bit when the Missus is not there but shortly after tea, she was starting to get a bit restless. I took her down to the Harbour beach just as the sun was making a big fuss about setting for a bit of a run. Happily, sort of, there was another dog on the loose down on the sand, so I let her off in the hope that there would be a little sport between them. The other dog was waiting for the mistress who was collecting a second dog from the Harbour wall and was therefore distracted. When all of them were on the sand, there was a bit of running about but the other dogs really were not keen to have ABH join in and told her so. ABH, being somewhat impervious to such complaint kept on running with them until I managed to tempt her away for a final walk around the big block.

At the top of the western slip, we met up with a couple of long time visitors and tarried for a chat. Coming from a place called Scotland, which is north of Camborne, they are grandparents to L&L, which is how we first met but sadly the girls have not been down for some time. They were small girls when last we met, now small ladies. I am told that we have been asked after, once or a dozen times while they have been here, so it is wise that we say hello. Hello.

September 13th – Friday

This morning, the breeze dropped down to under ten miles per hour and went around to the southeast. I find this incredibly unfair. Why can the people on the south coast not have an irritatingly robust and persistent wind for a week. Mind, if they did, I would still be getting it in the face behind the counter.

There were some pretty, high level clouds in the east just before the sun peeked out over Escalls cliff, showing off fiery reds and, erm, other colours. ABH had dragged me around the block after visiting the beach. I could not let her off the lead for a run about because the tractor was milling about. We had stopped to meet a couple of lady swimmers who we had met earlier in the week but at least this time they could go in. I think ABH thought that she deserved some recompense for not being able to run around, so she led me up the western slip and around the block.

It was still quite chilly at that time in the morning. There was no cloud to keep in the warmth, that was not there anyway, from escaping. The compensation was the clarity of the air, the view out across the smooth surface of the bay and the fishing fleet at work on it and, of course, the eastern sky. The little girl took her time going around but we were not in any particular rush, and we had plenty of time to set up the outside display when we got back. There was precious little stocking up to do and most of the preparation centred around the delivery of the weekend's pasties (sorry, MS).

The promise of the morning followed through into the day providing a gibbleresque day of sunshine and warmth. The only thing missing from the scene was a wave or two. The bay was flat as a dish - paddleboards only.

On the scene, however, and increasing throughout the day were customers in all manner of sizes and shapes. They came and bought things in some abundance, for which we were very grateful. So grateful was I that I left as soon as I could to celebrate with a blistering session at the gymnasium. Despite enjoying a blistering session on Wednesday, I managed to just about get back on track again today with times much like I had been used to before the summer.

As is usual, I ran ABH down to the Harbour beach again after I returned. It must have been our lucky day because once again we arrived just as a tractor was dragging a boat up the beach, so the girl had to stay on her leash. Again, we ended our post-gymnasium walk by going around the block and taking our time in doing so. She was luckier later when we went down again in the afternoon. One of the neighbours from up the back had their two large hounds down on the beach and one of them was kind enough to give her a run around.

At this time of year, taking our time is easier to do and has less impact on the business. Today, however, taking my time got kicked into the long grass by quick succession of deliveries. I should have seen the writing on the wall when I decided that I could risk a bacon roll from next door. It arrived with a continuous line of customers making eating it hot mission impossible and eating it at all, a tough challenge.

I had placed an order for our local preserves but as they never send an acknowledgement, I had no idea if it had been received let alone know when it was coming. It arrived by surprise, all five large boxes of it, in the early afternoon. I methodically worked my way through it. The shelf was just about empty, so it was a simple case of putting out as much as possible, so that as little as possible went into the store room. While I was employed in this venture I had a call from the driver of a big lorry bringing a pallet of windbreaks and spades to our door.

Our man was just at the end of the road and wanted a brief reminder of where we were. I was able to clearly identify where we were by the number of cars parked across the road from the shop. I told him he would have to block the road while he dropped off the pallet, which should not inconvenience the road users for very long and it did not. Those that were held up were very patient and no horns were blown in the process like they had been earlier in the morning and of which I was blissfully unaware. Someone had blown an alpine horn in the Harbour car park in the morning in an act of random, acoustic violence. Do not ask, dear reader. I have no idea.

I had abandoned the preserves while I attended to the delivery of the pallet the content of which now towered outside the shop window nearest the counter. In turn, I thought it best to abandon that while I finished the preserves. It was while I was doing that, the wine delivery arrived. It was still there, untouched, when I finished for the day, too.

Just as I completed dealing with the preserves and was about to tackle the pallet delivery, the Missus arrived to run the shop while I dealt with it. A towering block of goods it may have been but since it consisted only of windbreaks and spades, it was remarkably straightforward to deal with. I had to empty the truck of the excess shampoo and the clothes rack I had taken from the back of the store room as neither had yet found their way to The Farm. I let those to one side while I packed the delivery and, at the end, discovered that every inch of truck space had been consumed and the bit I had taken out would have to wait for my return.

Since we are trying hard to save the Missus using her crook arm, I took the load up to The Farm and secreted it away in the tight spaces we have left in the barn and store shed. It did not take very long as the space used for the items previous had not been reused when they were emptied, thankfully. We will have a major job to clear up the barn after the shop closes. The store shed is in reasonable order with only wetsuits needing some attention.

When I returned, the Missus had the radio scanner on. A rib the chef next door had pointed out near Gwenver appeared to be the centre of attention. It was not immediately clear what had transpired but an expensive looking black rib sat on Gwenver beach while a police helicopter circled overhead. Later, social media was alive with speculation that it was drugs or illegal immigrant connected, which would have explained the earlier appearance of the fisheries protection vessel, also used by Border Force just outside the bay.

Later still, one of our Lifeguard/Lifeboat team posted on our message board some footage of two black ribs in high speed chase across the bay ending on Gwenver beach. Characters from the chased rib disembarked and ran away followed in hot pursuit by characters from the second rib. It is a sad reflection on society that the baddies no longer wear black so that the goodies in white can be easily distinguished. We will have to wait for the facts to emerge and all else is speculation.

In the meanwhile, there is a rather handsome black rib with a very big outboard engine sitting on Gwenver beach. We do wonder if it will still be there in the morning. This is Cornwall, after all.

September 12th – Thursday

It was a better looking morning than we had seen for a while if you discount the heavy shower of rain we had shortly before I got up in the morning. The breeze was still there, and the chill had deepened but the breeze was certainly less than the same time yesterday and there were bits of blue sky to appreciate.

Many people came out to appreciate it during the morning and by the middle of the day we had all but run out of pasties (sorry, MS). The small gods of grumpy shopkeepers have ways of bringing a person down to earth with a large bump after

outrageous claims of perfecting pasty ordering, say. I implemented our contingency plan, which is to bake some of our frozen stock to boost the numbers. They were halfway through cooking when a squall blew in from the northwest. It initially blew a number of people into the shop for shelter about half of whom felt guilty enough to be compelled to make a token purchase. After that, the street emptied and my emergency pasties went begging. I would have had precisely the right number again otherwise. I clearly should have more confidence in my own ordering abilities and not allow myself to be tricked so.

It was not the only punishment of the day. The first card transaction of the day failed to go through, the machine issuing an error that suggested our network was at fault. I went through the usual remedies that had worked in similar circumstances in the past with no positive result. I had already begun to suspect the machine itself and when I connected to next door's network and it still did not work, it confirmed that it was not us.

When I came call the company to report the fault, I referred to the note I had pinned to the side of the pasty warmer that has our account number on it. Unfortunately, it had been there so long that part of the number had rubbed off. It would be necessary to have it when I called, so I looked up on the company service portal on the Internet to see if I could find reference to it there. I could not, but some smart service agent had put up a notice that trouble was afoot. Whatever it was must have been big because the service was out for most of the day and for all their customers. Happily, we have a contingency machine that charges more but allows up still to take card payments. It seems the provider's problem was pretty widespread as the Eden Project postponed its sale of Inside Track concert membership until Monday.

It took a while after the squall for a few customers to wander back into our end of The Cove. It was nowhere on the scale of busyness we had enjoyed during the morning, which was a bitter blow. The bay was worthy of a visit based on the view of the water with its hundreds of white horses galloping in on the beach. It was, however, clearly not worthy of a bit of a surf. As the tide dropped out in the afternoon there were a few novices in the shallows with instructors and just two further out being knocked sideways by quickly successive waves with a bit of pushy breeze behind them.

Nothing quite says the season is over than the much maligned council coming around to take away public bins. I buttonholed the fellow doing the collecting with a cheery, 'ere, what's your game, sunshine', to which he replied that now that the season is over, the three additional bins that were supplied along Cove Road were being taken back until the next busy time. It did cross my mind, the part that is left of it, that I might enquire whether that would be the half term at the end of October when it would certainly be of more use where it was than languishing, dormant at their depot. It then occurred to me that I would probably be wasting my breath, which is far too precious as the years go on, so I did not bother.

It is a tacit admission that the new small bins provided are too small to be useful. It strikes me that it would probably be more cost effective to have left our larger bins in situ all year rather than swap smaller ones in and out twice a year. What do I know.

Well, what I do know is that there was a Lifeboat exercise planned for the evening. Due to the tides, we had to launch early at six o'clock, which suited me just fine. Unfortunately, it does not suit the majority of the crew who might find themselves in remote locations because of their jobs and we struggled for Boat Crew initially. I reasoned that business has dropped off in the later afternoon and just for once I could probably get away with closing fifteen minutes earlier so that I could make the briefing, which I duly did.

The northwesterly had been increasing all afternoon and for the first time since the spring, jackets were required on the slipway. We had just the right amount of numbers on shore and had the slipway prepared for recovery shortly after we waved the boat off. I retired for some tea and returned a little ahead of the boat heading back.

The sun was setting spectacularly through the clumps of cloud above the horizon when we gathered at the top of the slip. I missed all the best bits because myself and an oppo headed down to the bottom of the slipway to meet the boat. The tide was on the push and there was a fair amount of rise and fall along the keelway on the slip. The choppy waters were no more than the tail end of the bigger waves we had seen earlier in the week and there was little ground sea to be a problem.

Consequently, we executed what was almost certainly a textbook recovery up the long slip at around half past seven o'clock in the dimming light of the day. It was clearly darker up on the boat because they elected to use their green lamp to signal their readiness whereas down on the slipway we used our green flag. We are, after all, a very obtuse, very excellent Shore Crew.

Because of the early launch, there was still time for a bit of relaxing when I got home before an insistent ABH insisted I take her out for her last spin. It was definitely chilly in what we hoped was the last of the irritating northwesterly. The Missus decided to stay up late to see the Northern Lights which did not materialise. I was long gone by then and did not care.

September 11th – Wednesday

ABH was not that keen to come out this morning and I had to wait until I was almost ready to come down and start on the shop. At least it meant a run around the beach in proper daylight but it was curtailed because time was pressing. Needless to say, we were blown about the place by that persistent northwesterly.

As we headed down the slipway, I noticed an adult Herring gull with two juveniles standing about near the waterline. I tried to impress on the girl before I let her off the

leash about the strong bond between mother and offspring. I warned that the mother would fight beak and, erm, beak to the bitter end to protect her young. Duly briefed I let ABH off the lead and she promptly went bounding down the slipway to chase away the pesky birds. As predicted, the mother gull took an aggressive stance and promptly beggered off, leaving the two young ones to fend for themselves. Ah, nature in the raw*.

Several people had told me that the forecast for today had been marked down as dreadful. At the last minute the forecast had changed to day long sunshine. It was not that either – well it was for a bit - but it was dry if windy and the temperature was not exactly Arctic, although a couple of degrees cooler than yesterday.

The sea state was much more agreeable today and, I have heard, jellyfish free. Later on, when I was taking ABH down on the beach after returning from the gymnasium, a lady went in for a swim. She came out unscathed, so unless she was a man of steel, and she certainly did not look like a man of any sort, although it is getting harder to tell these days and not that I was looking honest guv, it seems the rumours were true.

Phew! Moving on, I managed a full session at the gymnasium, too. I did not break any records but kept inside my guide times albeit at the top end. It was not all that difficult, either but there again I did miss out on Monday's session thanks to the man from the solar company. It made me fleetingly think that maybe two sessions a week are enough but that is heading in entirely the wrong direction and I dismissed it immediately.

Also heading in the wrong direction has been our sales of cigarettes. All year we have seen a major reduction in sales, which from a shopkeeper point of view, is most advantageous. We make next to no profit on cigarettes, and they represent a huge amount of capital tied up, which could be used for more profitable ventures; I would probably make more betting on horses. On the other hand, single use vapes have increased in favour tremendously and the margin on those is obscene. I was late to the party on these but this year they have taken off.

Things remained stable for the whole year up until the last two weeks in August. In just two weeks we sold out of cigarettes while our vapes languished a long way back in second place. We ran out of nearly all our cigarettes which resulted in an unwelcome inflated spend for our last cash and carry order. As a result, I stayed my hand on buying further vapes, which, as it turned out was hugely fortuitous.

Reading the only free trade magazine sent through with the newspapers I discovered some dire warnings regarding the illegality of single use vapes from 1st April next year. I was aware of discussion around the product but somehow had missed the enacting of the legislation. I have taken drastic steps to reduce our exposure and have discounted purchases of two together. I know, discount. It cut me to the quick. I have not been right since.

We had been quite busy all day, in a comparative sense, which was most gratifying after yesterday. I had been concerned that we would have insufficient pasties (sorry, MS) today having elected to run for two days without an order. I must tell you, dear reader, it was a close run thing but we closed the day with one pasty left. Of course, the outcome was never in any doubt, and I mentioned the risk only to introduce some edge of the seat excitement and jeopardy to the Diary's sometimes conservative pages. My precision pasty ordering is now the stuff of legend.

Sadly, the last few hours of the day did not match up with the edgy drama I introduced to the earlier part of the day. By half past four o'clock the street was mainly empty, and I made do with a few stamp sales and the occasional chocolate bar. The days of beer fridge shelves being cleared in last minute frenzies are definitely over and I really should be considering not waking up quite so early in the morning. I just cannot break myself of the habit.

The drop in temperature also had its effect. I felt quite chilled towards the end of the day for the first time and encouraged the passing notion that I might dispense with my little boys' trousers early this year. There is a small flamingo in the custard in that regard in that the big boys' working trousers I ordered will not be here for a week and then may not fit. The working trousers I have, while giving excellent service for a few years, are terribly thin.

I spent a week researching one that might be a tad thicker and eventually ordered a pair from an online supplier. The process is fraught because sizes are never what you think they might be but the lack of appropriate shops nearby, even if I could get to them, made buying online the only way. What surprised me most was the impossibly long lead time. I can only assume that they are made of the hair of an albino Tibetan yak, which are almost impossible to find at this time of year, and transported by camel train to maintain the authenticity of the essential oils in the weave or some such. They were less than thirty quid, too. Absolute bargain, so I was happy to wait – or was until the cold snap hit.

I am hoping for slow customers tomorrow who do not cause too much draught as they move about in the shop. Spare a thought for a grumpy shopkeeper's knees, would you.

*unlike a couple of days ago, I decided to write the footnote at the same time as the reference so that I did not forget. First, no gulls were hurt in the writing of this Diary, although possibly slightly alarmed. Secondly, the previous reference for 1812 thesis was water, loo paper – Waterloo paper. Oh, never mind.

September 10th – Tuesday

The day started out a lot better than it ended up. Even by the middle of the day it was looking grey and feeling cold. Once again, it looked like we missed the bulk of

the rain, although it was not very heavy, that cut across the middle of the duchy all east of us.

The sea was in some turmoil early with the tide high. It was rough and sizeable waves were pushing in with a good bit of northwesterly wind behind them and did not look all that inviting. Even at low water, it looked pretty disorderly and the whole of the beach front was just a mess of white water. It was good enough to allow some swimmers into the shallows but only one or two sufferers thought it good enough to try the waves further out.

Our man from that end said that most of the jellyfish have moved off now and up the north coast to St Agnes and Newquay. We wish them well in their new home.

I had not ordered much the previous evening and therefore had little to do in the shop in the morning. I have not done any soft drinks bottling up in the last couple of days as not much has shifted. I was also keen to avoid bringing more into the store room while matey from the solar company was working in there. Things are not moving fast enough to keep topping them up and I leave it now until a line of product is starting to look a little thin just to make the endeavour worthwhile.

One line of products looking very thin to the point of us not having any is the spades. Another is the windbreaks, although we would have enough of those to see us through until the end of the season. The common factor between the two is that they come from the same supplier and if we are to place an order, best do it for everything. I had not quite anticipated running out so close to the end of the season, but they are somewhat essential for a shop in our location and not having them would be a bit of an embarrassment – along with all the other embarrassments.

The rain did not hold off forever for us at the western tip. A wave of mizzle blew through and cleared the street. It improved for an hour or more despite the Meteorological Office's insistence that it was raining in a mediocre way all afternoon. I spent the last couple of hours almost on my own which gave me plenty of time to finalise the order for spades and windbreaks. It is quite a substantial order and will arrive on a pallet. Just when we thought we had finished with all our heavy lifting for the season.

I really am going to have to find a project to occupy me that I can carry out in the shop between customers. It is only going to get quieter now in the run down to half term and our eventual closing for the season. It was terminally tedious just the few hours in the late afternoon today, so I will have to rack my pitiful excuse for brains before they cease from lack of use. Something physical would be best, although I might find myself not being fagged to do whatever it was. I did have a think by wondering around the shop floor for inspiration and all I came up with was the gaps in the stock, particularly the greetings cards and surf jewellery – again – both of which cost money. I will need to do something about both of those but I still need to

find something cheaper to do. Suggestions on a postcard, please, because at least it would give me something to do reading them.

I was called to our regular Operations Team meeting across the road at the Lifeboat station tonight. It had stopped raining by then and was trying hard to stop mizzling too. It achieved both by the time the meeting was finished. I am convinced even more that my false ears are not working because I heard very little of what was discussed at the meeting, although that could equally be because I was not listening. I am having my ears checked at the doctor's on Monday, which will be a welcome distraction while they empty my arm of blood. I will know more then, if I am still conscious.

By the time I took ABH out for her last spin, the mizzle had cleared up completely. Despite a bit of breeze from the northwest that was still hanging on, it was comfortably temperate. Just a shame it could not have been there earlier.

September 9th – Monday

Just when you thought it was safe to go back into the water ...

ABH and I met up with a couple of keen cold water swimmers on the Harbour beach. They were looking tentatively at the rather stormy looking waves crashing in front of their feet but were distracted by the arrival of ABH who went over to say hello. I caught up a few moments later and discovered that it was the jellyfish soup that was putting them off. One lady said that she had been stung a few days earlier and was not keen to repeat the experience.

On further enquiry, the lady was convinced it was a compass jelly fish that got her as it was brown. I repeated what I had read from the MSC, and we looked around at some of the jellyfish being washed in. We did not see any compass jellyfish but there were some moon jellyfish and a few of what we presumed to be the mauve stinger, being as they were mauve – I was told. We made an assumption about the stinging part.

The lady told me that, on reflection, they probably would not swim today.

I think that they would have struggled to swim very far against the very robust northwesterly that had found its feet during the night. It brought a deep chill with it that had me wondering about the advisability of continuing to wear shorts. Some warmth seeped into the day a little later as the sunshine took hold, but it was never going to get the better of that wind that refused to let up.

It took a while for our visitors to consider stepping out to brave the world. To begin with, we were very slow right up to the point when I needed to order pasties (sorry, MS) for the following day. Estimating what we might sell today I struggled to put a minimum order together for tomorrow. The only way I could resolve it was to place

an order for the next two days and miss out tomorrow, which is what I did. Cue the world, her boyfriend, his great uncle Gertrude, the family cat and its adopted gerbils all turning up over the next few hours demanding pasties, cheese pasties and sausage rolls to beat the band. We are now in a position that we do have too many pasties for tomorrow but not enough for the day after. There is not enough slack for a minimum order and we are in the same position that we started in but a day later. I really should not tinker with nature like that.

Our solar man turned up as promised this morning. I had expected him to cast an eye around the place and perhaps install the back board for the inverter in the store room. Instead, he was here the whole day drilling holes in walls to accommodate the cable runs and generally making good all the groundwork for the full install a little later. If for nothing else, his visit was immensely valuable for discerning that he could tap into the shop's supply upstairs and that the only disruption downstairs would be the installation of the inverter and its feed cables into the store room. The shop would not need to be disturbed at all. The only toenail in the bechamel sauce would be that the Missus would have to give up a small part of her book cupboard to accommodate the switch gear upstairs. A small price to pay – unless you are the Missus. She will need to be told, preferably when I am somewhere else and even more preferably, by someone else.

Starting somewhere near the end of the morning, business took off. We were busy throughout most of the rest of the afternoon and were, as I noted, cleared out of pasties. Everything went from groceries as expected to gifts, hooded sweatshirts and t-shirts and several of our expensive Dunoon mugs. It was a day that met my expectations for where we are in the year but given the weather forecasts - regardless of the actual weather – we will be poorly served for the rest of the week. It still amazes, and to some degree, irritates, that each week I am being told that next week is looking good. Our pasty man had the decency to tell me that a cold snap was coming and, at the time, it seemed like it had already arrived. I had already noticed that a cold front was due to sweep down from the north during tomorrow, so that was probably spot on.

The last hour of opening was pretty quiet. We sold mainly logs and kindling that fortunately our supplier had been good enough to deliver on the same day that I had ordered. Otherwise, most people had dashed for the warmth of their billets and I could probably not blame them. ABH and I took a stroll out after tea and the wind and the chill, while refreshing after a day in the shop, were not the best for wandering about in at length and with little purpose. Even those walking to a destination I doubt were overly delighted by it.

Definitely, time to call it a day.

September 8th – Sunday

I think that dusk enjoyed itself so much last night that it decided to come back and have another go this morning. I am not sure that I recall such a dark and dour morning in the early days of September before and is representative of the weather in general this year.

It seems that we were lucky despite the grim start. Rain descended from the north and piled through the Duchy from mid Cornwall to the border and beyond. We endured some mist and dampness, but it warmed up from the chill we had in the morning and was largely only slightly breezy and rain free.

My main focus of the day was to clear the remainder of the cash and carry order and then clear the back end of the store room. The surveyor from the solar company is arriving tomorrow morning and I am informed that he will also be doing some pre-installation work. I had been mindful of not loading too much into the space ever since we agree that the inverter was going to go there. This paid off to a degree because most of what was there were larger discrete units like cases of water and toilet tissue and very little in the way of small bits and pieces.

Through careful diligence and also by not having much left to do, alright, it was mainly not having much left to do, I managed to finish off by the middle of the afternoon. I am hoping it is sufficient for what our man wants to do but it should not take too long to empty the shelves that sit alongside the rear wall. It has meant, however, that the carefully cleared floor of the store room is piled high with cases of water and toilet tissue. It might well be used on a game show to represent a thesis written about a famous 1812 battle, perhaps*.

For the last several days I have been hearing reports of number of jellyfish gathering on the big beach. I saw one down on the Harbour beach, but it had been otherwise unaffected. It has become an increasing issue and led yesterday to the beach being closed off by the Lifeguards. The predominant species is thought to be Pelagia Noctiluca or mauve stinger, because they give a nasty sting. I have no idea what colour they are. One of the Lifeguards told me about them and said that a sting he had received a few days earlier was still making his hand numb. The Marine Conservation Society, where I had the information from, is aware and suggests the invasion is due to persistent south westerly currents bring them from warmer waters.

I spoke with a local lad toward the end of the day after he finished his shift in the café next door. He told me that the Harbour beach was now full of them, too. ABH had not long come back and seemed unaffected, and the Missus never said anything. Perhaps they did not notice them and ABH is immune. I doubt it and I shall be very careful if we head down there in the next few mornings.

Those small gods of grumpy shopkeepers must be rolling around on their marble floors, laughing their bleddy heads off. Poor weather, fewer visitors, bus strikes – and buses not running, much maligned council bin removal and now bleddy jellyfish

– oh, and poor weather. Never kick a man when he is down; he might get up again, although it is not looking all that likely just at the moment.

I usually have my ear to the ground to be able to hear the distant rumbling of most things heading our way that may affect our business. However, it was a customer who alerted me to a forthcoming increase in the price of postage stamps. I quickly looked up on the Internet and the price of first class stamps is set to rise by a whopping 22 percent to £1.65 from its current £1.35 at the beginning of October. The price of international stamps will increase to £2.80 from £2.50, a price that already raises a few eyebrows amongst our foreign visitors.

I was already poised to order some second class stamps, which are not going up but I added some first class to cushion the blow a bit. I had been about to buy quite a pile of international stamps, too, but was glad that I checked first. I ordered one sheet and will probably run out but better than then being left with them as they have the price marked on them whereas the first and second do not.

The problem with postage is only likely to get worse. Several times this year I have reminded people that reel at the price of a stamp, the cost of the 'last mile'. It is the bit that none of the competitors want to do for ordinary mail and the most expensive bit. The postie cannot easily be replaced by automation, like much else in the process. It seems that the vicious cycle is set to continue: fewer people post letters as the price rises and the price rises because fewer people post letters.

Our day was not the most inspiring, neither the weather nor the business we had despite both probably being better than that east of Camborne. There was not much ordering to do at the end of the day, although quite pleasingly, fresh fruit and vegetables are selling well. I have yet to stabilise the milk volumes but that really is not so much of an issue and I am beginning to get to grips with pasty sales (sorry, MS). Logs are the new best seller as the evenings become chilly and I must remember to order some more.

I took ABH down to the Harbour beach in the evening, on the lead to begin with. There was no evidence of jellyfish on the sand, but we had arrived just short of high water so none had the opportunity to be stranded. We wandered around the block after that, blown around by an increasing northerly breeze and yes, it is getting chilly either end of the day.

September 7th – Saturday

We had a call yesterday from one of the organisers of the Sennen village community fun day telling us that it would not be such a fun day in the weather they had been told to expect and had therefore postponed it. We had purchased some fizzy pop to donate for the event that would have been picked up tomorrow. We shall now hang on to it until the rearrangement.

The weather forecast subsequently changed. It still looked a bit mucky for tomorrow but not as bad as first advertised, which did not surprise me at all. Instead, it appeared that we would get a gush of rain from the middle of the afternoon today when previously the whole day would be clear. Up until that point we had enjoyed a fairly benign morning of bland alrightness and hardly any customers. Since we had hardly any customers when the weather was dry and reasonably inviting, I had no great expectations for the later afternoon in the rain and was not disappointed.

One thing that did disappoint me was the first customer of the day wanting to return a loaf of bread. It was one of our plastic loaves, so full of preservatives that they would outlast the pyramids if not consumed first. The lady had bought it yesterday with its best before date due to expire at the end of the day. She wanted to change it because the best before date was now today and it would clearly become putrid and inedible by midnight.

I tried hard to explain the difference between 'best before' and 'sell by' and that by eating the bread even a few days hence would not lay her out in bed with food poisoning. I suggested that the difference in taste and flavour from three days previous would, in all likelihood, be completely undetectable. She was unconvinced and asked again to change it to which I agreed should she cover the cost of the new loaf – which incidentally had the same best before date. I do not think I have won a repeat customer, somehow.

Our big cash and carry delivery arrived a little later than I anticipated but since the order was smaller than during the summer and the start of the shop day almost inevitably slow, there was no problem with it. As usual, I moved half the delivery and the delivery driver the heavy half. I was thankful that they sent a big strapping lad who could carry two cases of water at a time. Having seen that, I let him take all the heavy stuff rather than show myself up by trying to compete. I made a mental note to blister a bit more in my blistering sessions at the gymnasium.

At the close of last weekend I was very aware that our customer numbers would drop dramatically. Being a very forward looking smart Alec, I dropped the volumes of newspapers across the board in anticipation. Having seen out the week with the new numbers, it seems that I am not quite as clever as I thought I was, which should not have surprised me since it had been a regular feature of my life thus far. What I failed to comprehend that while there was indeed a drop in the overall numbers of customers, the ratio of Daily Mail readers saw a marked increase. I recognised my mistake during the week but through various distractions I failed to make the appropriate amendments to our order and thus I was today embarrassed by running out of Daily Mails again but much earlier than the rest of the week. I will say in my defence, the other titles were perfectly arranged, it was just the Mail. It is done now but will take until Tuesday before being in force – if, of course, the Laurel and Hardy Newspaper Company do not change it themselves in the meanwhile.

Our rain arrived around four o'clock. Looking at the rain radar, it had come close several times from around two o'clock but had parted at just the right moment to let us be. When it did arrive, it was reasonably heavy and pretty much killed off trade for the evening. It was not too upsetting as we had squeezed what was possible out of a particularly poor business day. There had been some sort of event down on the beach that a neighbour and I thought might have been the annual end of season surfing shindig they have down there, but were not sure. That too would have pulled people in that direction rather than ours.

I decided it was not worth taking ABH around after tea as it was still raining heavily. I took her around last thing, and it was still raining but not so heavily as earlier. It looked set in for the night, so it was best to shut it out for the night and retire.

September 6th – Friday

Those people at the Meteorological Office are naughty tinkers. They had us on with three days of weather warnings to frighten the pants off us then, ho, ho, ho, it was all a jolly jape. Sure enough, the good folk in the Cotswolds got a bit damp for a while but there again you cannot expect to live in picture postcard villages and not have a bit of bad luck. No, we basked in sunshine today, and when it was not proper sunshine, it was bright enough and positively warm through the light northeasterly breeze.

Along with our improved weather came improved numbers of customers. There were not so many that I could not squeeze in clearing the store room bit by bit and the remainder of the stationery order left from yesterday. The wine I ordered in a bit of a hurry yesterday morning, hoping to catch the delivery that day, came today. It was very good of them because I had clearly missed the orders for that day, so they made a special trip with no fuss at all.

I cannot say that for all our customers, however. There seems to be a bit of anguish over the expectation of receipts. Those few people who want them, seem to be affronted when they are not automatically forthcoming. Most complainers use the term, 'do I get a receipt?' to which I politely enquire whether they want one or couch it as, 'if you ask for one, you do'. The fact of the matter is that hardly anyone wants a receipt, and it seems pointless producing one if the customer is simply going to ask me to put it in the bin. So, when I was told today that, 'it seems that receipts are a thing of the past', I explained to the customer the hard facts about it. I suggested that if he wanted a receipt he should politely request one and we would be more than happy to provide it and that there was no need for oblique comments. If he expected it automatically, he would, more often than not, be sorely disappointed. It seems that asking, 'can I have a receipt, please' is a thing of the past.

While not fighting with unruly customers, I set to on clearing some shelves in the store room. It seemed safe now to get the stock out onto the shop shelves where there is less of a chance now of them selling and therefore we would not have the

fag of having to order more. This is not such a problem with the perishable goods that if left long enough, go out of date and can be thrown away. I managed to sustain this proper work for a couple of hours until it became tedious, and I had to stop for the good of my health. I left clearing the last few items on the floor until later when I could panic and have to do it all in a rush.

I had been looking forward to spending some time setting up my new, previously used, smart mobile telephone but the good people at Doing Parcels Dreadfully decided that they would not deliver it today. They did not say when they would deliver it, so I shall have to remain on tenterhooks until then. The case for it also did not arrive as expected, which was a relief because it would just have rubbed my nose in the telephone's absence.

Clearly, this was not the most pressing problem when the Missus could not find her lamb stock cubes. When I went up for a cup of tea in the middle of the afternoon, I was pressed into searching a high cupboard for them. They were not there, and I did not have time to stop and search other high cupboards. The Missus concluded that she would need her folding stool so that she could continue to search by herself.

When we had the new porch built, we asked specifically that one window be large enough to climb in and out of so that we might more easily access the flat roof, where the Missus some years ago laid plastic turf. Do not believe the traditionalists who tell you that it is not remotely like the real thing; we have weeds growing all over the roof. Anyway, I digress. To access the outside, we need to use the folding stool. Three guesses where the folding stool is.

The afternoon saw some broadly better weather than the morning. The warmth had really settled in, and it was generally brighter too. There was hardly a ripple in the bay which concentrated an army of hopeful surfers on the tip of the large sandbank that strikes out from the beach car park end. There, an occasional wave broke the monotony of the wait and allowed a gentle roll in on a board if you were lucky enough to be in the right place.

Up at the top of the beach was a small line of windbreaks and tents. It was a pretty pleasant day to be lazing on the beach, if you like that sort of thing and well done to those who did not put too much store in a forecast that was patently wrong yesterday. How much it affected our trade today is debatable, but it would have put some people off, no doubt.

We had a little bit of a rush in the later part of the afternoon but too soon to be a five minute to closing rush. The ice cream kiosk was closed again today, so we had a stream of refugees come ice cream time. I spoke with our neighbour later in the day and it seems, like us, they are juggling priorities with other businesses and family. Not everyone is content to swap a local scoop ice cream with a national brand lolly, but we sold quite a few ice creams, nevertheless.

At this time of year there are fewer people that we know turning up. It is always good to see them, of course, because they are part of the fabric of life here in The Cove. Earlier in the year, we had our friends from The North and today, after a longer absence, we had our friends from so far north of Camborne you would have to stand on a chair to see it. They arrive later in the year, at least two years apart, because obviously it takes longer to get here. They are hoping to get back home by Christmas.

What with meeting people and last minute shoppers, I found myself sorely pressed to close the shop on time. I also had not done the newspapers and remembered just in time. Having usually only time to criticise the Laurel and Hardy Newspaper Company, I have to say that the recycling collections have been worth every penny I have not paid for them – the first six weeks were free. Even if I had, it was a mere bagatelle against having to cope with excess cardboard piled up in the store room. The acid test will be stopping the service and restarting it next year when I anticipate a gruesome battle of wills.

The tides are still restraining our use of the beach in the mornings and the evenings. Walking around the block is just not the same as being able to range on the beach and there still is no one to play with. Even when there is, with bigger dogs she usually blots her copy book by leaping at them and barking instead of being polite. She seemed quite keen to rush home this evening and completely missed the cat sticking its tongue out at her from the wall above. She met face to face with it once, which resulted in a shocked 30 second stand off before the cat came to its senses and made a quick exit. I am not sure ABH knows what it is or what to do with it. Ah, the innocence of youth. She will soon learn about age and cynicism.

September 5th – Thursday

My forecast appeared to be entirely accurate, and I even did it yesterday rather waiting for today. The wind had gone around to the northeast and plagued me all morning. It was not a particularly cold wind, just colder than it would have been if it had not been blowing at all or coming from somewhere in the south. When it started coming in laced with a bit of rain, as it did during the morning, I decided the sensible thing to do was to give up and close the first electric sliding door in The Cove. It dropped out some in the afternoon and probably went a little further to the east and was not half so keen, allowing me to set the first electric sliding door in The Cove back to open again.

Despite the dire weather forecast for today – go build an ark if you can afford the timber – we were quite upbeat for the morning. I had taken fright and put a rain jacket on for the morning walk with ABH. It was not until I got out that I realised that the little lumps of rain on the rain radar were going the other way and had already missed us. Oddly, I do not recall it being that breezy, but perhaps I am just used to it now. It was later in the morning that everyone else took fright and disappeared for the day – probably to St Ives; it always rains in St Ives.

I had not had very much time in the last day or two for distractions, but I was aware that my smart mobile telephone was showing signs of last leggedness. It was a hand-me-down from a Lifeboat chum who very kindly donated an old one of his. That was a few years ago, I think. I did manage to identify that new smart mobile telephones worth having were an awful lot of money and in a year when things are a little tight, that was not helpful.

Today, given that we ended up being extremely quiet and I was left with not a great deal to do, I looked a bit closer. There were a couple of telephones at the lower end of the market with a just about affordable price, but they did not exactly have rave reviews. I was painfully aware of the age old saying that grumpy shopkeepers at the tail end of rubbish years have to be grateful for the smart mobile telephones they can afford, but I was keen to explore a bit further.

There are so many different types and models even within a single manufacturer's range that I decided to look at one supplier's website for more information. It was as I was scanning down the list of telephones they supply, which was legion, that I noticed the inclusion of 'certified refurbished' telephones at half the cost of the originals. Most were a couple of years old, but provided I could make telephone calls, take photographs and it would run the programs that I use to order and pay for things, I was not particularly bothered. Bingo. It arrives tomorrow.

The promised rain appeared in the afternoon, although it did not appear to be as heavy as advertised. It did look like a good pasting was following north of the Thames from London and ended up somewhere in South Wales. Quite what they had done to deserve that we can only guess at.

The rain did not stop trade completely and we had visitors come and go, wrapped up for the weather. One visitor that I thought would have been better prepared was a walker, sporting all the kit from decent walking boots to expensive and bulging backpack. He came in for one of our plastic kagouls, already wearing a flimsy cheap affair. You might imagine that a good set of waterproofs were de rigueur for such people. Another was a man planning to jog from Land's End to John O'Groats. He told me he had postponed his start because of the weather. The run might take him a while if he is only going to do it when the sun is shining, especially this year.

Ordinarily, it would have been an afternoon of boredom and scrabbling around for things to occupy me. Although there was a bit of that, I managed to top up the fridge magnets the lack of which was irritating me, we also had two deliveries in the afternoon. They came together in the same van, the first being the postcard fudge boxes that I had let run down to nearly nothing and the other was the stationery order in rather more boxes than I was anticipating. The stationery order was not going anywhere, so I dealt with the postcard fudge boxes and filled the shop shelves to completion and found space on the reserved shelves for them in the store room.

The reason for their being more cases than expected for the stationery order soon became apparent. There were 18 cases of shampoo. I suspect a key bounce that I did not notice but the company has a charge for restocking, plus the cost of sending them back would be preventative. Fortunately, there is no sell by date on such products as I think we will have them for a very long time. I do think that using it myself will help much, either. I took out what we might reasonably use before the end of the year in the shop, and packed the rest up for The Farm.

The rain was refusing to let up through to the end of the shop day and I dragged in the display items to let them drip dry on the shop floor. Later, I headed for the Lifeboat station for a meeting. Given that we launched yesterday, there was no planned launch in the evening, so we discussed training instead. There is a new regime and training system in place that has some major glitches. They will be ironed out in time but, meanwhile, we were instructed how to work the system to get around them.

We were in the station long enough for the rain, that had reached crescendo as I came across, to ease off again. When I took ABH around for her last run out just after nine o'clock, the rain had ceased completely. The tail end of it was coming through the channel north of us. The Meteorological Office promised more for tomorrow from mid-morning but a customer told me that the forecast she had seen was for a good day. I am glad we have that clear, then.

September 4th – Wednesday

There was a fair breeze blowing through The Cove from the very outset of the day. It brought a bit of a chill if you were standing in the wrong place, but the ambient temperature seemed still reasonable. The wind stayed with us for the rest of the day, all of it from the northwest, but at least it dropped down a little later in the day and in the sunshine it was very warm.

At least the forecast had little sunshines all over it when I had a geek for someone a little later. No one looks at the wind, so we had a wealth of visitors arrive and tell us how windy it was. We sold a few windbreaks on the strength of it. Occasionally, we are asked questions about the windbreaks such as how wide they are and how tall they are – erm, how tall does it look. Also, will my family fit in it and will it fit in my car. Today's question was even more vague, which one should we choose? At times like that I fall back on the rule of thumb that if you are sitting on the sand, the short one is right and if you are in a deckchair, the taller one is more appropriate. I do not mention that it would also depend on how many people it is to cover. Why complicate matters.

We had made a quiet start, but it did not take long for some busyness to make itself apparent. There were a few people milling about when the Missus came down to let

me go to the gymnasium and more still when I came back an hour later. ABH and I were unable to get down to the beach earlier in the morning on the grounds that it was dark and quite possibly, if I could see it in the dark, the tide was in. We would also have been caught up with the tractors moving about, so we were better off going around the block. I made amends by taking her down to the beach on my return from the gymnasium when we had plenty of room to run about and play. Sadly, she only really gets animated when there is another dog around to play with and we are nothing more than second best.

When I returned to the shop, we were busy. I do love September days because they are generally a bit busier than my expectations. It is not always the case, and each day is strongly weather led. It was therefore much of a disappointment when a lady, late in the day, asked about the storm being threatened for tomorrow. Since I do not look at the forecast, I had no idea. I also had no idea that today was equally yellow flagged, apparently a neighbour revealed later on. Once again, we are being told of cataclysmic rain, which I firmly believe will be no more than a few showers here and there, for us at least. They also made no mention of the wind that looks like being quite severe from the northeast. I might have to make use of the first electric sliding door in The Cove for a couple of days – if it has not ceased up through lack of use.

The RNLI grand raffle still continues to reverberate around the vicinity. I think the Missus has finished her thank you letters and the number of people collecting prizes has diminished. There are, however, two big pictures to send out at the discretion of the winners. Today, while I was about my blistering session at the gymnasium, the Missus wrapped up the prints with the plan to take them up to the post office to get a quote on how much it might cost to send. The information would be provided to the winners to see if they wished to shell out to have their prizes sent to them.

The wrapping had been done and the Missus was about to head off to get the truck when a Cornwall glazier's van stopped outside the shop. It stopped for quite a while before the Missus could get there. It was a right pane in the glass, which sounded so much better in my head.

I had, momentarily, thought to cancel my trip to the gymnasium because a couple of hours after I got back, I was off to the Lifeboat station to wait on an exercise. The Royal Marines, here on their annual two weeks Mountain Leaders Course had suggested a joint exercise with the Lifeboat. They would have a casualty at the bottom of the cliff somewhere convenient and we would go and assist with a casualty care team and the Inshore boat to take them off. The casualty would be transferred to the big boat and all would be over by five o'clock.

We gathered at three o'clock but did not launch until forty minutes later while the Marines made themselves ready and called in their emergency. We were aware that the burgeoning swell around the cliffs may make a proper transfer unsafe for a practise and used a 'dead Fred' to simulate the casualty. It is not the done thing to half drown a perfectly healthy Marine just to see how we do it, apparently.

The boat was gone a little more than an hour after a successful exercise. In the meantime we had made ready in the boathouse and were suitably arranged when the boat steamed back into the bay. In fact, I was suitably arranged in the shop and had to hurry over to meet the rest of the crew. Our head launcher in training took the reins today and from where I was standing he conducted what was clearly a textbook recovery up the short slip with a pronounced swell of a couple of metres swirling about. The boat was washed down and put away without issue. We are, after all, a very efficient, very excellent Shore Crew.

Having hurried to the station, I hurried back again in time to shutdown the shop for the day. It has gone quiet by that time but we still had a five minute to closing rush, just to keep things real. I had also had to hurry the cash and carry order. I still had not properly completed it by close of play and the Missus keyed it in after I had shut my eyes for the night. It will need to be tied up and finished off tomorrow morning.

Phew, what a helter skelter of a day that was, even without a whole heap of customers.

September 3rd – Tuesday

Perhaps I should not lambast the Laurel and Hardy Newspaper Company quite so much. I waited until almost ten o'clock for our newspapers today. He told me the van had broken down – which would not have surprised me – but I knew I was just being punished. It missed its mark because no one came and asked for a newspaper until after they had been.

I was not the only one being punished and the Laurel and Hardy Newspaper Company not the only punisher. The First Bus Company were doing admirably themselves at upsetting a few customers. As usual this year, they are tardy at sending someone around to change the timetable at the bus stop. Why they cannot ask the bus driver to do it, is beyond me, probably because it is not his job and would require a change of job description and more money. They are already striking for more. I would see that as an opportunity.

Not only were there lines of people waiting for buses that would not arrive at the time advertised, the problem was exacerbated by various buses being dropped out. The biggest issue with that is that no one is quite sure if it is just late or not coming at all. From the comfort of my home I am able to see where buses are in real time, provided they have a satellite signal. Strangely, that service is not available on the First Bus app and anyway, you would need a signal on your mobile telephone which would not necessarily be available everywhere on the route. I am going to have to write to them at the end of the season to explain the errors of their various ways this year – for all the good it will do. Ah yes, it will make me feel better.

The weather was a marked improvement on yesterday. It seesawed between sunny and bright and cloudy and was warm enough. It had started out with a bit of a wind and the sea state was such that it kept the fleet in the Harbour until a bit later in the day. The wind dropped out a bit later and we enjoyed a day that we could at least be proud of.

It was gone the middle of the day before we started to see any action. It suddenly came together with the arrival of a German tour bus and its passengers, mainly ladies. The tour buses normally drop off here and the passengers head off to Land's End without so much as a guten tag. Today, they poured into the shop for ice creams having established that the ice cream kiosk next door was closed. It reminded me that I should have placed an ice cream order earlier in the day and that I should do it before we closed unless we wanted to completely run out.

It was a day for treats. Yesterday, I had delivered to the café next door some near liquid bananas that our greengrocer company thought that I might not notice before selling them to our customers. They embarrassedly credited all of them and I took them next door to see if they could use them rather than throwing them away. Wind forward to today and the governor next door brought around some banana bread laced with walnuts. I am fond of neither product, but the fellow is a master chef and I thought it churlish not to try some at least. I was very pleasantly surprised because the flavour of neither was obvious in the eating. I was even more pleasantly surprised when I added butter to each slice and consumed rather more than was good for me.

The story does not end there, either. As with us all, the sudden end of busyness catches us all out in some way or other. For the café, it was bread which they suddenly found themselves with an abundance of that they had no use for. The Missus took it off their hands and made bread pudding which she returned after slicing off a tithe for ourselves. I now have banana bread and bread pudding to weigh me down when I stopped eating cake a few years ago. I have slipped a bit in that regard, but I suspect much of what I now have will have to be binned.

Our day turned out to be much busier than I anticipated. The charge was led by the German ladies and coincided with our farm shop cash and carry delivery. I was expecting to help the driver carry it in, but I was immediately distracted and he had to do much of it by himself. I found time to get most of it out of the shelves during the course of the afternoon. The drinks that came with it will wait until tomorrow, which will make a change since I have not had to do the bottling up since the weekend.

It crossed my mind that I could reset my alarm for a later time, but I am nervous that I might be pressed, although I probably would not be. ABH gets me up around that time anyway, but not always. I will change it by and by when I discover I am in the shop with nothing to do of a morning. It came close on Monday when I found I had time to sweep the floor. No wonder the beach is lacking sand here and there; it was all in the shop.

Perhaps I can use some of the time to clear the back of the store room. I have been communicating with the solar people and we have a surveyor arriving on Monday. I had suggested they have another look as things have changed a bit since they last looked. I had a reply that said the surveyor would also like to get ahead of the posse on the installation and do some of the preparatory work while he was here.

I was all for it, but it means having the back of the store room cleared two days after the cash and carry delivery. It will be a small order but even then, getting the back of the store clear with a pile of stock in the way will also be a tall order. I will direct the Missus to help but must make sure she does not do any of the heavy lifting which will be like asking the tide not to come in.

Talking of which, there was only a sliver of sand for us down on the Harbour beach in the evening for our walk, ABH and me. She insisted on going down anyway and since the sea state was not dangerously vigorous, I let her loose. She discovered that there was not enough sand down there to play on – told you so – and we continued our walk around the block.

We met a family at the top of the western slip looking at the rough seas flogging over the Harbour walls. ABH wanted to see what they were looking at, so I lifted her up and I fell into conversation with them who were regular visitors but ones I did not know that well. During the season and often outside it, we often meet people, either local or visitor and our walks are extended accordingly, which is great unless we are in a hurry, and I am far too polite to end the conversation prematurely. I try to make sure I am not in a hurry.

I was definitely in a hurry to get to bed when I got home; my eyes were closing. Perhaps I should set my alarm a little later, after all.

September 2nd – Monday

A better demonstration of the suddenness of the end of the holiday season, you could not have had. Today, it was like turning off switch. The weather did not help, and the weather forecast still less. There was a fair bit of rain in the mist this morning and once that had cleared out, the mist largely remained. At one point it looked like it was lifting and the sunshine taking over, but it was short lived.

At least the recycling truck made it past the bus turning point and we had our recycling collected that we carefully compiled into its appropriate bags and our food waste disposed of. Our neighbour up the hill, whose family had been down all week, had left theirs out for collection too. They asked if I could go and scoop up the empty bags and glass bin as they would be gone before the collection, and I agreed that I would do it when I took ABH around.

They had left it halfway down Stone Chair Lane, quite against the much maligned council rules that it should be left at the boundary of their property. I sense a dichotomy between the much maligned council desk jockeys and the boys on the ground. If that recycling had been left at the boundary of their property, no way in a year of recycling collections would it have been collected. As it happens, all the other recycling had gone but the bottles remained. It is unclear why they were left. Some boxes and bags next to it had been left but that had a much maligned naughty sticker on it, renouncing it as 'mixed'. I left the bottles there and suggested our neighbour book a missed collection to see what would happen.

On the topic of waste mismanagement, the new posh public waste bins are becoming a matter of concern. It is rather the lazy waste collecting than the bins themselves. Behind the posh exterior to these units is a shabby recycled wheelie bin that does not precisely fit the space inside. This allows litter to fall between the rim of the wheelie bin and the exterior frame and collect at the bottom. The waste collectors are perfectly aware of this residue and are equally happy to leave it where it is. There is, no doubt, an issue with bending over to pick it up and without the correct picker equipment, they are powerless to act. I presume similar rules prevent them from picking up a telephone and calling a bloke (applies equally to male or female blokes) trained in the use of the appropriate picker equipment. It looks like I will have to do it myself – pick up the telephone, that is. I have an appropriate picker, but my union card is not up to date and there would be hellup.

I am sure that it will come as no surprise to you, dear reader, that despite the long list of outstanding tasks I delivered the other day, today I did none of them. In fact, dear reader, I did begger all. After finishing the morning chores and deliveries, the day emerged as a de factor day off with the exception of serving the few customers we had. I did go off to the gymnasium where I conducted the first full – almost, I knocked 1,000 metres off my row – blistering session in six weeks and, boy, did it feel like it.

The guilt got to me eventually as well as the boredom and I completed an order for our stationery supplier. They are a bit more than just stationery and supply some toiletries we cannot get from the normal cash and carry. As it turned out, I could not get them from this supplier either as they were out of stock – again. It was mainly the toiletries that drove the order but to make minimum order value I had to spread the net wider. Having discovered that the toiletries were absent I had a make a bigger order of the other things, which was not in the least helpful.

Earlier in the day I had the foresight to reduce the number of newspapers we would have delivered commensurate with the drop in customers wanting them. I cannot drop them too much because having a surplus ensures that at least some of them will be dry on wet days. I had postulated that the Laurel and Hardy Newspaper Company worked in the open air but having consulted with the driver, it is the vans that are the problem. Apparently, more than one of them leak. I had always thought it was the driver's own vehicle, but it seems the Laurel and Hardy Newspaper

Company keep a fleet of aging, decrepit and leaking vans for their drivers to use. The organisation defies comment.

I delivered the last bundle of invoices to the Missus for sorting, keying and filing in the afternoon and she spent the evening sorting them. In truth, I will have the time to do it myself, but having just started her off, I would hate to break the momentum. The pile is as big if not bigger than the last lot and represents only the August invoices, probably around 200 of them. I will do the newspaper tickets tomorrow as penance.

ABH was sleeping the last few times I went upstairs from the shop. I knew what was coming and spent the entire evening being plagued by a bored hound wanting to play and being naughty when I thought that I could get away with reading my book for five minutes. I took her down to the Harbour beach and around the block for a change of scene but that only took half an hour. We could part way exhaust the bleddy hound with a tennis ball and a ball launcher and she would chase it continuously until I was worn out. ABH does not chase a ball, or anything other than other dogs, which are not that easy to find especially now everyone has gone home. I will walk her ragged come winter.

The day ended far better than it began and, after all, we had avoided the big rain and thunderstorms that run up the country the day before. We hope for better in the week, but I think we have a bit of sea and wind to come first.

September 1st – Sunday

Ah, the paradox of the end of busy season. I now have plenty of time to keep the shelves topped up with gifts and goods for the hordes of shoppers who are no longer here – should I find the inclination to do so.

Yes, the bubble definitely burst yesterday with a mass exodus. The weather first thing was not all that encouraging and was not likely to change things much. ABH and I got a little damp as we did a small circuit as there was a mizzle in the air. We avoided the beach because it was dark, and it looked like a small group of kayakers were heading down to launch which would have spooked the little girl. She was already growling with intent as we watched their head torches descend the western slip.

By the time the shop opened, the damp bit had stopped being damp but there was plenty of mist left and that hung around all day, although it got brighter now and again and it was perfectly warm, if you did not mind a bit of humidity with it.

The camps at the top of the beach were a sparse, a well dispersed arrangement of a few tents and windbreaks. The windbreaks were probably superfluous given the very slight draught from the southeast. They were about as effective as the surfboards quite a few unrealistically hopeful surfers took into the water and whose only utility

was to prevent the owner sinking below the surface having floated in the same spot in a dead calm sea for an hour.

I did find some enthusiasm first thing. I had all the sweet boxes emptied by half past nine and the display full. Before that I had filled the drinks fridges and done the newspapers. A man on fire you might say. An hour later there was not even an ember left glowing and I coasted all the way until things picked up a little near the middle of the day. I forced myself to order some malt whisky as my stock upstairs has nearly expired. I was not in the mood to be adventurous and stuck with the ones I had ordered before, which are exceedingly palatable and some of them only cost an arm to the elbow and lower leg. I thought to purchase them now as the next ones will have to be made from nettles distilled at The Farm.

The mist thickened in the latter part of the afternoon and the damp returned for a short while. As is often the case, the sun as it dipped lower shone through from under the cloud as it neared the horizon and cheered the place up no end. It did not particularly encourage an influx of excited customers and we stuttered along until it was closing time with the occasional grocery shopper. Later, when I took ABH out after tea, we had blue skies above us as the mist retreated up the valleys all along the cliffs opposite.

It would be wrong of me to say that I regained my enthusiasm for shelf filling toward the end of the day because it was the abject boredom that spurred me on to do it. Nevertheless, the outcome was much the same but with less enjoyment and personal fulfilment, but it did pass the time adequately until I ran out of stock or at least the stock I needed. For some reason, whenever we purchase additional volumes of an item that has flown out in the previous period, it is always something else that we do not have in abundance that flies out in the ensuing period. It is something that grumpy shopkeepers just come to terms with because there is no solution to it.

I am going to have to find pet projects to take up now that we have no customers. Ones that I can do while in the shop and preferably ones that do not coat very much. The first will have to be clearing the back of the store room ahead of the solar inverter installation but that will have to wait until after the cash and carry delivery next weekend. Another will be to tidy the toy shelves at the back of the shop but I will have to wear my brave trousers to even walk down that aisle because there will be carnage, I am sure.

One local lady disappeared down while shopping a few days ago. She was gone for ages – it happens, so I was not concerned. When she emerged, she had very kindly put things back on hangers and shelves that had moved around the shop. I ended up with a bikini top on the counter for which there were no apparent bottoms. That also happens. It is the way of things and best not thought about. A grumpy shopkeeper must protect and maintain his equilibrium or give in to madness. I will not venture which applies to me.