

DIARY 2024

November 30th – Saturday

The day did not look like it held great promise at the outset, but it was a sight better looking than the day before. It brightened up considerably in the afternoon and there were even bits of blue breaking out amidst the sullen cloud.

It was Christmas tree day, and the Missus was up early and keen to get a march on the day. We started with the memory tree; we were unlikely to forget it as it is a big brute. There is normally much fuss about the best angle it should be set at, and several turns are required before the perfect view is achieved. Today, I erected the tree into its bucket and it rested on its stump, perfectly straight and reached immediate acceptance from our artistic director. We tied it in place to the railings with twine at which point, I retired.

The Missus has her own mind about how a tree is decorated and interfering in the process one does at enormous risk to one's personal safety. This one's personal safety is somewhat jealously protected, and I gracefully disappeared from the scene. Just before I went, I deployed our long extension so that the Missus had somewhere to plug in her lights.

ABH had been staring out at us through the window during this episode. She hates to be parted from the Missus for a moment and it is torture for her to be able to see the Missus while being unable to reach her. She is getting a little better at it, but not much. She instinctively knows that one of us is about to come up the stairs even before we ourselves do, it seems. Therefore, she was waiting for me when I opened the door.

It was about time for second run of the day, so I took her down to the Harbour beach of which there was plenty. The weed was a bit thinner today and we were able to range a bit further than we did yesterday. We were not long off going when a young dalmatian turned up and this one was eager to play, He was duly let off the lead by his owner and the two had a right good time for a while. It is one of the rare moments that ABH waits for each time another dog comes into view. Today we had a double whammy when, shortly after the dalmatian left, a neighbour from up the hill arrived with his two jack russells.

Walking ABH was about the only thing I had to do today other than make my dinner for the range tomorrow. Taking a day off is a foreign concept to me and I must admit I was a bit stumped. I took a little zizz in the middle of the morning that wasted three quarters of an hour and ran an errand up to The Farm for the two Christmas decoration suitcases wherein were the timers for the tree and decoration lights.

Our lighting man we have pinched from Mousehole lights – it was more that he turned up last year and offered his services – arrived shortly after the memory tree

was erected. He spent most of the rest of the day erecting the string of lights hanging off the scaffold poles. When I came back from The Farm the lights were ablaze, all the way from the Lifeboat station to past the bus turning point. They looked spectacular in the daylight and even better as the night came on.

Clearly, the memory tree had taken a little longer than planned. The Missus was also distracted by a hiccup in the Christmas party plan that she spent some time trying to sort out. This left the other tree lying on the deck as the end of the day approached. I would not be around tomorrow to help set it up, so we quickly erected it as dusk came on and we left the Missus to the decorating tomorrow.

Through the afternoon, it was clear that the swell in the bay was building. By the end of the afternoon, we had some flogging over the Harbour wall and white water breaking up the cliffs opposite. It was a deep rolling swell, the waves not breaking until they hit the shore. It looked likely they would build a little more by tomorrow. I noted earlier that the rock field that seemed to have been covered over last week had reappeared again. I do not think this spring tide is likely to do very much than make it worse still. Ah, it was good for a day or two.

Farewell, November. Boy, are we just racing towards the end of the year.

November 29th – Friday

Phew, what a scorcher – shame it came with a guts of rain for most of the day.

I am not sure that I had expected so much rain. Fortunately, it waited until I had returned from the gymnasium and taken ABH around for the second time in the morning. We returned to the Harbour beach now that there is some to enjoy. For the earlier part of the week, there had been a huge mound of oar weed piled up at the bottom of the slipway. The tractor had done most of the piling to let the fishing punt out, the only one keen enough to go out. I am surprised that our oppo managed to get the Inshore down there yesterday with that in the way.

Today, with spring tides mounting, the big pile had been broken up and the whole beach was strewn with it, albeit in thinner piles. To get from one side of the beach to the other, or indeed from top to bottom, it requires some fancy footwork avoiding the slippery patches all over. ABH makes nimble work of it as she is pretty sure-footed on most terrain types. I had to be content to watch her leap from boulder to boulder on the other side of the Lifeboat slipways as she worked her way up to the sea wall a few days ago. Today, she leapt up on the Harbour wall and down the other side. I had to leave her to it and hope for the best.

Having worked my way through the morning chores, donned my DIYman overalls and girded my loins to commence some proper work, it started raining. I added workman's full metal jacket waterproofs to my ensemble, which are thicker and warmer than my ordinary waterproofs. On a day where the temperature ended up in

the mid teens, this was not the ideal combination. It kept me dry and did not mind getting snagged or dirty but under all the layers, I slowly did an impression of a prepared Christmas turkey on Christmas morning.

One of the first things that needed to be done was to bring down the metal fences that we hang things off. The fences are remains of the safety fencing that was brought in to cordon off the Lifeboat station roof when it decided to slide gracefully to the street. No one has since laid claim to the fencing, and it has proven quite useful now and again. The panels are not terribly heavy but are awkward to handle with one person wielding them. When I looked around, I was the only person there, so I carried them down by myself. By the end of the day, they were cabled tied to the railings across the road.

My other job of the day was to make up the extension cables that will power the lights. It had not occurred to me at the time but the plugs and sockets we had purchased were cheap. I did hesitate at the time, but time was pressing as I recall. I think if anyone says in future that it is only a plug, they are gravely mistaken. The internal fittings were poorly made, screws were made of soft metal and care had to be taken not to strip threads of foul the ends. The work consequently took far longer than it should have but at least each extension appears to work. Yes, I tested them.

The other regret I had was not being in at the outset when specifications were made and measurements, erm, guessed. Looking where the fence panels now are and where the trees will be positioned, the sockets may not line up properly. There again, tomorrow, when we hope it to be dryer and I have recovered some energy, I may be pleasantly surprised.

We had already had one surprise during the morning. A while ago, I had ordered a metal fender to place on the rear corner of our building to protect the corner of the roof that is around a meter and a bit off the height of the road at the top of the slope to the mews behind us. Previously, that corner has suffered the occasional impact from turning vehicles or Tesmorbuys vans reversing up the slope. I had already decided that we would need something on that corner to prevent any reoccurrence when the new roof had been completed and the boys had reminded me of it shortly before they left.

The thatched cottage, Tinker Taylor, that sits on the road around to the Harbour car park has a metal structure just below the thatch that saves camper vans and other high vehicles from scating off the edge of the thatch. They also have a bleddy geet granite rock at ground level that is neither here nor there in this recounting. The metal structure has been there years and appears to do the job. It once had to defend against a double decker bus and is still there, so it does work. It seemed sensible to recourse to our favourite fabricator to do something similar for us.

It had been a while since I asked him and quite recently considered giving him a nudge. He is a busy boy, so I thought better of it, which is just as well. I missed a

telephone call this morning as I was eating breakfast and the next thing I was aware of was the Missus telling me that someone was drilling outside the bedroom. There is nothing quite going to grab your attention like someone drilling into the side of your house, so, having already guessed who it was, I went around to investigate.

Our boy is a good lad. We may have to wait a bit for him, and you could not call him cheap, but what he does is exemplary and worth every penny. We now have a sturdy fender attached under the roof corner. I suggest any vehicle coming into contact with it will, without doubt, come off worst.

We did not get as far as the trees today. Each year we seem to pick worse weather to do them in and tomorrow might be slightly better. Most of the power is finished, although we might have an issue with the tree atop the fuel store which can be sorted later. We will start earlier tomorrow and hope to have it complete by the end of the day.

I was happy to not that the rain at last abated by the time I took ABH around after tea. There was still damp in the air, but the most notable thing was how warm it was still. I still wore a rain jacket to keep out the damp but otherwise I was overdressed in just a layer or two. Any more of this and I will have to resurrect my summer togs.

November 28th – Thursday

A new Inshore Lifeboat arrived late last night on the back of a lorry. It was expected but I am not sure that I expected it quite so late. The boat stayed on the back of the lorry in the RNLI car park overnight and volunteers were asked to attend to give the new craft a run out early on in the morning.

I was just about to volunteer my services to drive the Tooltrak when I neighbour beat me to it. It was a close run thing because I had waited as long as I had dared and was just about to give in when his message came through. It was probably just as well because ABH afforded me a bit of a lie in this morning, and I had only just come back after our first run when I met the driver commencing to unload the boat on the way back.

It had started out as a half decent morning, but the cloud cover increased during the morning and when I stepped down to the shop on an errand, it was drizzling a bit when I came out again. There was no proper rain around but as the day drew on it came to mizzle and a proper miserable afternoon set in.

The mizzle did not stop us from setting forth, first to The Farm where we picked up some wood and some tools. The aim of the wood was to drive it into the top of the scaffold poles so that there was an insulated layer to hang the lights from. From there we went to pick up Mother and then onto Penzance where we were to purchase the trees.

She went alone to collect them last year as she could drive all by herself. This year, I came to provide the chauffeuring, and Mother came to provide moral support. The Missus wore her official RNLI events management jersey because last time she elicited a discount on the purchase. This year, probably because I was wearing my replacement overalls that inexplicably have RNLI embroidered across the breast, we got the larger memory tree for free. I think it was largely because the tree was slightly sub-standard but no one will remember that, surely.

We had purposefully set out on our venture early, or at least had intended to. As usual it did not quite work out like that, and it was gone three o'clock before we arrived back in The Cove. The very kind man who is looking after the string of lights to be strung along the poles, was there when we returned, planning and making sure all was in order. He will look after everything to do with those lights and the poles, so we will not have to thump bits of timber into the ends after all.

I had thought to make up the cables after we returned but made a cup of tea and had a bit of a zizz instead. Why do things today when they can easily be put off until tomorrow when I shall be required to assist with hoisting the trees. It will add a little time pressure to the work but at least there might be a chance that it will not be raining.

While I was making up cables, the Missus was supposed to be putting lights onto the small plastic tree that will go on the Lifeboat station fuel store roof. She cancelled that because she was not going to put it up with the crew's help in the mizzle but by the time I went over for training, it had stopped. We shall have to attract some volunteer help from anyone standing still long enough later in the week.

I had thought that a launch had been organised but instead it was shore based training. The very excellent Shore Crew ran the new ILB out with the new Tooltrak so that the radio could be tested as it gave problems earlier. The Tooltrak is new also and it is much improved. The few of us there all had a go, and the drive is much more positive and the engine much smoother. Our next one will come after the 2030 moratorium on diesel engines and will therefore be electric. I shall be happily retired from service by then but will make time to watch how the volunteer is chosen to be the first to drive it into the sea.

When we had finished playing with Lifeboats, those of us at a loose end helped the Missus set up the Christmas lights in the Lifeboat station window. I retired to look after ABH who spent her time running from window to door waiting on the Missus coming back. We will replace that bit of carpet in due course.

November 27th – Wednesday

On first impressions, it was a very pleasant day. Most days would have been pleasant compared to yesterday in terms of both the weather and the content. I

would say that it was tad colder than the day before and this was aided and abetted by a sharp northeasterly breeze that appeared to hold down the temperature.

I launched myself into the day with a normal run around with ABH, which was perhaps a little longer than our normal first foray into the day. That usually happens when we are able to visit the beach first thing, and I am not insistent on an immediate return as I might be when the shop is open. I missed my gymnasium sessions either side of the weekend for one reason or another, so I was keen not to miss today's. I was feeling quite chipper after such an extended rest and managed a proper blistering session, although my rowing time could have been better. I put this down solely to 'Have Yourself a Merry Little Christmas' playing on my earphones. It was hiding under 'Various Artists, Track 6' which is just downright sneaky and put me right off my stroke.

Oddly, or perhaps not so oddly after a change from standing all day long, my dickie knee is hardly dickie at all. I felt quite the charlatan when a very pleasant lady from the NHS telephoned me about my path to having a false knee installed. I had indicated that I might like to attend a hospital in Shepton Mallet because their waiting times were shorter than everyone else's according to a website we were directed to by someone I now cannot remember who. The very pleasant lady told me she worked for the scheduling or assignment team – I cannot remember that, either – but really had only the local four or five hospitals in her remit.

I very carefully explained that I could not care which hospital I went to provided that a) they did lots of knee operations and therefore had some demonstrable expertise in the procedure and b) had a waiting list that would have me on the operating table at the outset of November next year. She was most understanding, which was quite a delight, and told me that although she could get me a consultation in Shepton as early as next week, Plymouth was not far behind with an appointment in early January. Further, the waiting after that would be five to seven months and that dovetailed nicely with my requirements – as well as being a sight more convenient. It is now booked.

On my return from the gymnasium, I repaired to the kitchen to cook the hog's pudding I had bought in St Just, whenever it was I went, for my breakfast. While that was sizzling away, I prepared the shin beef that I had bought in Penzance yesterday – I could remember shopping in Penzance yesterday – and the other first ingredients of tonight's tea. Congratulating myself on my organisational skills, I rewarded myself by sitting down and eating my hog's pudding and very toothsome it was too.

I do like to look through the trade news occasionally while I am at a loose end and eating breakfast was about as loose as ends get these days. One hot topic and coming our way 'real soon now' is DRS, Deposit Return Scheme, which is returning recyclable drinks containers to the shop where you purchased it or a shop that is close at hand at the time you finish it.

It is clearly a monster of a thing to implement because Scotland started on this path several years ago and have not yet got there. One of the stumbling blocks there, was the inclusion or exclusion of glass containers. It was eventually excluded because of all manner of things such as shopkeepers cutting themselves on broken glass or getting hernias because of the weight involved. Other weighty matters weighed in such as would smaller shops be excluded, how would the waste be collected, and a list of other items longer than everybody's arms joined together.

No one has yet mooted how much the deposit would be, but I can see that it will be just another thing that pushes up the price of your fizzy drink. For one thing there will be administrative costs, particularly for the small retailer – this grumpy shopkeeper, for example – who will either have to keep a huge stock of, say, 10 pence pieces or pay a transaction fee if it is done via a refund on a credit card. That and spending hours on the telephone trying to get some intransigent collection firm, probably Basho, to collect the full bags of plastic containers clogging up my shop.

Most recently, Wales has jumped into the fray, or rather jumped out of it because they are very keen to include glass while everyone else wants to exclude it. In England the system is supposedly set to start at the end of 2025. It really is an oil drum of eels – which is much bigger than a can of worms. I suspect we will see man land on Mars first.

Where this thread started, before the awful preamble I have led you through, dear reader, was that I read in the trade press while eating my hog's pudding, that a small group of big drinks and recycling related companies have urged the government to consider digital DRS. This perplexed me somewhat, so I read more deeply into the article. What they were advocating was that a consumer could reclaim their deposit by reading a barcode on the bottle with their smart mobile telephone before recycling the bottle at home – or indeed before they chucked it over the nearest hedge, which I guess might be a small sardine in the pavlova. However, anything that reduces the number of bottles brought to my door is very welcome indeed, thank you very much.

There, everything you ever wanted to know about DRS but were afraid to ask. You heard it here first, folks.

Sorry, I digress. Now, where was I. Oh, yes, eating some of Mr Old's very excellent hog's pudding for breakfast. Well, I finished that and was very cognisant of the fact that I had ordered two four-gang extensions from a supplier in town and needed to go and collect them. I had also put my mind to other parts of the system that would deliver power to the Christmas tree lights that the Missus would be installing by the end of the weekend. Rather awkwardly, the system would need a string of extensions plugged together as I could see no other way of delivering the required sockets over such a length of space. The saving grace is that none of the fairy lights that will hang off the sockets will be pulling much power. The only other risk might be fire, which is a very remote possibility, but since it is across the road, it would probably result in one spectacular but brief, harmless conflagration.

What I was trying to arrive at, dear reader, was that I had to drive into town again merely to purchase the items that I had, erm, itemised. It is very much against the ethos of trying not to use as much diesel by maximising the efficiency of each shopping trip. We shall put it down to, 'must try harder'.

With tea cooking – it takes several hours, bubbling away – and time pressing as well as it being a perfectly pleasant day – I think I may have said that, but it was such a long time ago I felt it worth a reprise – I decided to take ABH up the hill.

It was indeed exceedingly pleasant. We passed by, at a respectable distance, a couple with their dogs sitting on the Neolithic cairn of Carn-mên-ellas. It had not struck me before, but it is a vantage point from which you can see all the way from Cape Cornwall to Land's End and with the clarity of the air today, it was spectacular. The sun was on its way to setting and providing a glorious ending to the day, which we missed, and the light was almost showing Land's End and Longships in silhouette. We are fortunate to bear witness to such things.

The walk is not hugely strenuous, but it suits when time or the weather is not altogether with us. Today it was all about time, so quite how I managed to fit in another length Diary, is quite beyond me.

Finally, and I do promise, dear reader that this is the final paragraph, honest guv, we wish our lady neighbour from the United States of America a very Happy Thanksgiving Day – or it will be by the time you read this.

November 26th – Tuesday

Gosh, dear reader, I cannot wait to tell you what a fun day today was. First let deal with the weather because as any good author will tell you, it is always worth making the reader wait for the exciting bits. It probably works for rubbish authors too, but I am sure you will let me know.

The wind had completely gone, or so it seemed and therefore would have been a great day to put out the posters we did yesterday. There was also blue sky and a bit of brightness, but it seemed a little cooler today, although it was not. This led to quite a pleasant walk out first thing and another halfway through the morning. On both occasions we met up with Django, a smooth coated retriever and Newfoundland cross who regularly attends the shop when he is here. He pointedly ignored the shouty little monster that I had with me and hid behind his master's legs.

We had a call first thing from our solar man to tell us that the long-awaited replacement switch had arrived, and he was on his way to us. Naturally, I was out with ABH when he got here but the Missus let him in. She had gone down to the shop midway through the morning to prepare the tree that will sit atop the fuel store over by the Lifeboat station along with the 'dead Fred' dressed up as Santy.

Our solar man did not take long to identify the switch as the only culprit in the fault on the domestic side of our system. Once identified, it did not take long to replace it, and he was gone inside an hour after arriving. We now have a fully functioning system, and we can turn one heater on – if it is sunny outside.

That out of the way left the field open for the main event of the day: shopping. Ordinarily, I would wave the Missus off at the door and welcome her home three or four hours later. My contribution being to heave the overflowing shopping bags up the stairs into the flat. Today, however, because of her disability, I was commanded to chauffeur her and Mother from shop to shop. ABH had to come with us, obviously, so my additional duty was to entertain her in the confines of the truck and take her for a walk around a suitable car park as required.

I will not go into detail, mainly because I do not want to relive the experience in my mind. Suffice to say, we visited two Tesmorburys, a homeware superstore, a pet superstore, our electrical wholesaler, which was down to me, and two independent shops in town. As we left town three hours later, I remembered just in time we did not have one critical item for the beef and chorizo chilli I decided to make for tomorrow. We returned to the Tesmorburys we had started with where I found the 69 pence item remarkably quickly.

I would have headed to one of the manned checkout lines, but the three out of eight open had long queues. So too did the line of automated checkouts but that queue seemed to be moving more quickly. It was not until I was quite far advanced in the line that I noticed the sign that told me that the machines were payment card only. I think had I been on my own I would have switched to one of the manned checkouts and suffered the long wait. The sheer idiocy of having to use my credit card to pay for a 69 pence item irked me greatly.

It had already started raining a little while before, but as we left town it was getting dark as well. The rain continued thereafter and during our after tea walk when it had upped its game by increasing in intensity and recruiting an blustery east wind to maximise its awfulness. It was still pelting down when I took Mother home and again when I came back. It epitomised the grim dreadfulness of my day and rounded it off nicely.

I suppose as some sort of sop to my sensitivity, it stopped for our last walk around the block. How very decent of it.

November 25th – Monday

I do apologise for the tardiness of the appearance of The Diary this morning. I had to scurry off to an appointment in St Just. A very pleasant lady was waiting to measure the blood pressure in my ankles. I am always game for a bit of an adventure but at least it had some purpose to it and that was to see if the pressure in my ankles

matched the pressure in my arm. A difference would indicate a blockage somewhere in between and the bets were on that it would be around my dickie knee.

I am very pleased to report that it was a perfect match and that everything is hunky dory. The very pleasant lady also noted that my pulse rate was exceedingly low, which, she pointed out could be a good thing unless it came with symptoms, in which case it might be a bad thing. I am very glad that was cleared up because it would not do to worry about it.

If you subscribe to the theory that your heart beats a finite number of times then stops, which all of a sudden, I do, it means that I will probably live to 120. My new knee will still be going strong long after that, obviously.

While I was in the fine metropolis of St Just that sports two excellent butchers, I decided to purchase some shin beef that I use in my beef and chorizo chilli. Sadly, neither butcher had any, so I consoled myself with some of Mr Old's very fine hog's pudding that I will have for breakfast one day this week. I was also able to procure some hooks so that I might progress the hanger in the boudoir. I left St Just brimming with joie de vivre after a morning of predominantly happy outcomes.

It was the sort of morning that would bring joy and happiness anyway. There was plenty of blue sky, sunshine and only the occasional shower all wrapped up in a blustery and playful wind. I had worn little boys' trousers on my jaunt to negate the awkwardness of having to remove grown-up's trousers at the doctor's. Thus attired, I did not find it in the least chilly around my nether regions, in fact, I felt somewhat liberated and at ease with the world.

Sadly, the blue skies only lasted the morning, and we were overcome by cloudiness for the rest of the day. It did not bring the same inner mounting flame of peace and calm that the morning had fostered in our hearts. The flame went out and the shattered fragments of peace, love and understanding were blown away by the punchy wind blowing through The Cove. Still, we cannot have it all.

It made it the ideal time to finish off the hanger in the boudoir. Having found bigger and more robust hooks at the local independent hardware store in St Just, I had all I needed to complete the job. This was done in a flurry of bradawling, power driving and screwing in that had the batten and the hooks protruding from it up in no time at all. I filled the countersunk holes with filler. A little later on, I sanded down the dry filler, painted over the top and put up the hanging bar suspended from chains hanging off the hooks. The clothes are now duly suspended from hangers of their own and I wait with eager anticipation for either satisfying silence or the fearful crash of failure.

The day of the carols in the Cove concert draws very close now and the Missus felt it time to advertise this to the world. Well, she had already advertised it to the world via the wonder of the Internet but The Cove being a little isolated from such things, she

felt it necessary to put up flyers wherever they may stick along the promenade. Since her hand is not yet mended and the putting up of flyers requires some two-handed dexterity, I was asked along to provide assistance. We took ABH along for show.

One common theme that I have noticed through the three such events, this is the third, is that the wind has done its utmost to disrupt proceedings. This year appears no different and although the wind was in the southwest and considerably less robust than previous days, it was still enough to make the putting up of flyers difficult. Add to this the staple gun that has seen better days, wood benches apparently made of staple proof wood and railing posts too broad for the cable ties we had brought, we had a bit of a time of it.

On the bright side, despite fumbling and striving with each poster attachment, we still made the end of the street more quickly than we would have done taking ABH with nothing else to do.

The Missus wanted to stop off at the OS to make arrangements for a buffet after the concert. St Buryan Male Voice Choir will be putting in an attendance this year, extending the event well into the evening. I demurred on the offer of a pint; we still have not won the lottery. Instead, I had a very pleasant conversation with our temporary neighbour from America who tells me she had joined the craft club at the Community Centre. She is better informed than I because I did not know there was one, but she seems to have fitted in well. It is also testament to her fortitude that she walked up and down the hill to be there, although some of the fortitude on her return was courtesy of the bar at the OS.

We must look to acquiring some Christmas trees later in the week. It will put us ahead of the start of December in putting up decorations, but not by much and we are constrained by the time it will take to do so and the date of the concert. I cannot help but think my time to do things for the next week will not be my own.

November 24th – Sunday

It rained for the entire length of the day, which was not very pleasant of it. It certainly did not encourage ABH to stay out very long during any of the fewer walks that we did today. Happily, it did not stop us shooting our rifles at the range but did mean that the course of fire had to adapt, and we shot at fewer targets than we might otherwise have done because they get soggy and fall off before we get a chance to put holes in them.

I had only planned to attend for half the day as the afternoon session was for a discipline that I do not indulge in. Therefore, I drove myself up and was the first one there. When the boss man arrived a little later, he told me that the A30 was shut from the last roundabout, and they had been diverted. I learnt later that the road was flooded at the Newlyn crossroads and that a car had broken down there.

Up at the range, there were several pools of standing water right in front of the firing point. I had anticipated this and worn wellies instead of my usual walking boots – clever boy that I am. Two of us spent a little time trying to clear the gully that leads down the hill but despite getting the water flowing, the pool was still there by the time we finished the morning session some four hours later. Our efforts were not entirely wasted, it was just taking a long time to drain out.

All the shooting was done from the firing point, but we still needed to run out to reset the targets – using laminated sheets - and the metal plates after each shooter. The rain was thankfully moderate during the morning, but it was incessant. We should also be thankful that the wind had dropped off a little.

We never really did get the winds we were told to expect, topping out at just short of 60 miles per hour on the weather stations visible to us here. Gwennap Head, fearful of its reputation as windiest place in the universe, turned off its monitor so no one could see just how unwindy it was there. The other reader, in contrast, rubbed salt into the wounds by reporting 79 miles per hour at Portland Bill.

While the was still coming in from the south, it felt proper breezy at certain points in The Cove when I managed to persuade ABH around the block in the afternoon. I had to check the Land's End weather station when I came back because, for all the world, it felt like it was coming in from the northwest.

The rain eventually stopped at around six o'clock and our afternoon run around the block was mercifully dry – from above at least. There was a river running down from Mayon Cliff as there usually is after a bit of rain. This will continue for a few days. This is rather frustrating as I have been waiting to see if the waterboard's works outside a property at the end of the Harbour car park have been successful.

There has been damp running away from clearly previous attempts at stopping what might be a water leak there. It has been going on for almost as long as I can remember. I even reported it once. I spoke with the property owner about it on a couple of occasions and he was just as clueless about the source. Several times it has been purportedly fixed, but the damp patch has always persisted. One theory is that there is a spring there.

I had a good look in the hole when it was open this time and the water pipe is fearfully close to the surface. Even if it has been fixed this time – and we will not know until the rain and the runoff dries up – I cannot imagine it will outlast more than a few vehicle movements over that area.

Just when we thought it was all over ...

I drove Mother home again after bringing ABH back from her walk. I slipped into full metal jacket waterproof before we left as I had noticed some rogue rain clouds hanging about on the rain radar. We were lucky that we missed them. I was driving

away from St Buryan when the heaviest shower of the day blew through. I could see no more than a few tens of yards for a while until it passed. It was all gone by the time I got home.

Since today has been all about rain, we best have a rain poem. I could not find one so here are some lyrics by Uriah Heep – the band, not the Dickens character.

They did another song called Sweet The Rain but when I looked it up, it was called Sweet Lorraine, so I did not use that one.

Rain

*It's raining outside but that's not unusual
But the way that I'm feeling is becoming usual.
I guess you could say,
The clouds are moving away,
Away from your days
And into mine*

*Now it's raining inside and that's kind of a shame,
And it's getting to me, a happy man,
And why should you want to
Waste all my time.
The world is yours,
But I am mine*

*Rain, rain, rain, in my tears,
Measuring carefully my years.
Shame, shame, shame, in my mind.
See what you've done to my life.*

November 23rd – Saturday

I suspect that the wind must have been rather more around our way than the records suggest last night. When we came down first thing, the bin was hanging off its ties and the lid to the newspaper box was up. The only reason that would be is the wind came in from the west or northwest. I have to guess that it must have been a local bit of freakery, because all the weather stations had the wind in the south all night.

Putting a clip of some sort on the newspaper box was a task outstanding since the failure of the last clip I used. I think that may have been at the end of spring and forgotten about for the whole summer. It was most likely because I could not think of anything to use as a clip. I still could not think of anything to use as a clip even now, so I put a twist of computer communications cable in the hole that will do until I think of something better – sometime after the twist of cable fails at a guess.

I had suspected that the weather was a bit iffy when it was still dark at seven o'clock. I had checked the forecast last night, though heaven knows why, and it has suggested no rain until the middle of the morning. Given there was rain on the windows and on the street, that forecast was a tad misleading. Happily, when we stepped out, it was just stopping and while it was a little breezy, it was hardly more than we are used to most breezy days. It was actually much brighter than it looked and the headtorch I brought with me was superfluous. The other thing that was most notable was that the breeze was warm.

ABH went back to bed when we got home that allowed me to get on with breakfast and a few morning chores. It was not until after I took her out the second time that I got downstairs to put a second coat of paint on the batten destined for the boudoir ceiling. I still cannot find the third hook, which will be annoying if it is not located before I need it on Monday. I also had problems attaching the metal end to the pole that will stop things falling off the end. There was no way to attach it other than gluing it, which did not seem a robust option at all and turned out not to be when I tried to glue it. In the end I screwed it in which was only slightly more robust than gluing it but at least it is held in place. I do not think it will need to stand up to any punishment because it will not.

Come the time for our afternoon walk out, I had fully expected the rain to ease at the very least because the forecast told me it would. It took a few minutes to get kitted up with full metal jacket waterproofs – just in case you understand. By the time I did that and had our customary full scale play war trying to get the harness on her, it looked a little bleaker outside than it had when I started. I paid not real attention, expecting any minute that the rain might clear but when I opened the door, the rain was smoking through The Cove. With a nod to the rain radar, I thought that the rain might ease at any moment and after waiting under ABH's expectant eye, I decided we would give it a go.

This time it was me who decided that enough was enough. I am sure ABH would have come with me around the circuit, but it would not have been at all pleasurable, so I cut our losses and headed for home. It was even less pleasant heading in the other direction as the wind was in our faces. It was for this reason that we did not go up the cliff and put our heads above the parapet so to speak. Actually, that is nonsense. We did not go up the hill because the wind was thumping in somewhere in the high fifties and we are not stupid – sorry – not that stupid.

Earlier, I had dashed off to St Just. The Missus told me yesterday that I was cooking a beef casserole for Sunday tea and that we would need vegetables. It is like being caught in a nightmare version of that cooking programme in a tent. There is one thing I detest more than shopping and that is shopping on a Saturday when the shops are at their busiest. Given that I had no choice, I grumbled about it instead that made me feel much better. It also made me feel a little better that I could go to St Just and not Tesmorburys that would have made me even grumpier, if that were possible.

There is a very good greengrocer in St Just. In fact, there are some very good independent shops in St Just and makes it well worth a visit rather than heading into town. The shopping list I was furnished with could be satisfied with just a visit to the greengrocer shop and I was very lucky to find a parking space in the square. This was especially lucky because the weather had deteriorated anyway and up in St Just it was several times worse than in The Cove.

I do like visiting the greengrocer shop despite my misgivings about shopping on a Saturday. The lady behind the counter is a friendly soul and we can have a bit of a good hearted chat, which we normally do. Rather than being crowded out, there was just me and one other customer – good for me, not so much for them, I suppose. As well as all the vegetables I needed, all without plastic wrapping and many, no doubt from local farms, they do all manner of other food goods, again, many from local sources. Some local home producers also sell things through the shop and one of those things was a lardy cake.

Lardy cake is a sort of bread made with lard instead of butter along with fruit and sugar. Straight from the oven, it is a comestible delight though probably not the thing for someone on a low fat or low cholesterol diet. I do not rightly remember the last time I had lardy cake, but it awakens memories of childhood holidays with grandparents in Somerset. For that reason, and because I rarely see it anywhere these days, I rather assumed it was a Somerset delicacy. The Internet tells me it was probably Westcountry but not to look too deeply, much like the origin of the pasty (sorry, MS) or the proper way to have a cream tea (jam first, obviously).

I looked at it on the counter with longing. I shared my thoughts with the lady behind the counter who said that she too remembered it from childhood but in Hampshire, so the Somerset thing may be just me. She too extolled its virtues, but on this occasion I demurred. I will arrive at a time quite soon when it has eaten like a worm through my brain, and I have to return to buy one. It will be on that day that they do not have one, of course.

I returned from my failed walk with ABH to see the Missus preparing some of the vegetables I had purchased. Some preparation was beyond her one-handed chopping, and I took the turnip (swede if you are reading this from England) – in Cornwall everything grown above ground is a broccoli and everything underground a turnip, roughly speaking – and later the parsnips (parsnips are parsnips) as they are much harder to do single handed.

I found myself remaining in the kitchen preparing sandwiches for tomorrow's dinner at the range and by the time I had done all that, I was in dire need of a sit down. When the shop reopens and customers ask how my holiday went, I will be very pleased to tell them – through gritted teeth - of all the countless hours of recumbent relaxation I have enjoyed.

The Missus felt capable of putting together the various elements that I had helped prepare for tea, so that was handy. That just left the washing up and the taking around a reluctant ABH. We could hardly blame her as I too was not exactly leaping at the idea of going around some more. My waterproofs were still dripping from the first time and even full metal waterproofs have their limits to how much water they can repel.

We must hope for better tomorrow, which at least shows a cessation of the howling wind. I think it is just whining in the eaves tomorrow.

November 22nd – Friday

I was really late out of the starting gate today; I must have worn myself out yesterday. I even spurned my morning exercises, because I could not be fagged and I also missed out on a gymnasium visit because our solar man was turning up. Am I turning into a couch potato, I must ask myself, then I could not be bothered to do that either.

It was hardly making up for my laziness, but I did a slightly longer than normal walk out with the little girl in the morning. We were late going so there was a sliver of beach to patrol and then we walked around the block. When we went down again later on, we had a bit of a dust up with an injured shag. I think that it was also young but took umbrage at being chased out of its place of shelter by an inquisitive ABH. She chases birds as a matter of course, even when they have taken to the wing, so she was quite surprised this one did not also fly off. The bird made the best it could to get away with ABH barking at it and following on and me shouting at ABH to leave it alone. There was a Mexican stand-off with the bird squawking quite scarily and ABH looking bemused and my chance to get her back on the lead again. The bird hopped off to the sea but on sea or on land, I doubt that it would be with us long.

It was still cold first thing but warmed considerably during the day. The wind dropped ten miles per hour in gusts to around 20 miles per hour also and went around a bit more to the west. Earlier in the day, cloud came in dark and brooding and I expected some rain that never came. The afternoon saw continued cloud cover but at a high level and it brightened considerably for most of the afternoon.

I ran out to collect Mother halfway through the day and we actually had heating on. There must be a hole in our insulation because by the end of the day the outside temperature had risen five degrees on the morning.

It was the sort of day that I could have been bone idle and bitterly regretted it by the time it came around to bedtime. There was some major effort involved, but I managed to shift myself to start work on the clothes pole in my boudoir. I removed the last hook, the one that had actually found solid wood in the ceiling, and measured up where the drill holes in the batten would go. It will have to work with just two anchor points, I had hoped for three, because of the spacing in the joists.

Apparently, the standard is 16 inches apart but like everything else in this building ours are different at 24 inches. Thankfully the batten with cover them up but there are more test holes in the ceiling than a Swiss cheese.

I slunk off downstairs to drill the holes and put a first coat of paint on the batten. I reasoned it was easier to paint before I installed it. I will fill the countersunk screw holes when it is installed and dab some paint on the filler afterwards. Timely completion of the project will rely on me finding the will to put a second coat of paint on tomorrow and finding the third hook which has mysteriously disappeared. Installation will have to wait until Monday as I am shooting on Sunday even if the weather is pants.

We had been hearing warnings all day about the arrival of Storm Bert and the utter devastation of planet Earth that it was expected to bring. I am beginning to believe that the Meteorological Office has hired an ex-Sun newspaper headline writer to write its weather announcements because they are all extreme. After the last storm, the one beginning with A, which was also supposed to wipe life off the planet, but settled with knocking a few trees over in Scotland, I am somewhat sceptical. One day, we will have a really bad storm, and they will not have words scary enough to warn us.

Since the weather will be poor come what may tomorrow, I decided that it was a good idea to take ABH out for another stank. You could not countenance the battle of will it took to get my body to drag my kit on to go out. Once we were on the way, I was fine, and I even managed the utter frustration occasioned by a small hound who can drag out such a short walk into a marathon. If we managed two steps forward to every six back to sniff something that was missed on the first pass, we were lucky.

We eventually made it around the same walk that we did yesterday, because frankly, it is easy to do and is quite sheltered. It also provides a variety of scenery along the routine that makes it a bit more interesting for both of us. I was a little overdressed since the wind had abated and the temperature increased, but I was a layer down in expectation and finished the walk not overly over-heated. ABH even found a pal to play with. Well, the other dog was not exactly onside, but did not appear to mind being followed while it chased a ball.

I had hoped for a little zizz after we returned but a short stank like that merely whet's ABH's appetite for even more playtime. I therefore found myself on the floor playing tug the teddy for the next half an hour before she decided to go and bother 'nanny' instead. I am not exactly sure what the purpose is, but she will bother me to lie on the floor with her, then fine a chew to chomp on. It seems all she wants is someone to be down there with her. No amount of persuading will convince her that chewing her chew sitting on my lap while I am more comfortably in a chair is no different. Apparently, it is.

My escape involved going to cut up potatoes for the making of chips. I ragged the Missus with a series of irritating questions such as what length she wanted them, fat or thin, preboiled or fried, crinkly or straight. I managed to get quite a few in before she threw something at me.

Friday is fish night, of course, and I can cook fish. Mother and the Missus had 'pretend' fish. The Missus insists on these little frozen patties of nameless, reconstituted fish of dubious origin because they do not taste like fish. The Missus hates fish. Through the wonder of magic and good fortune, I managed to get everything ready all at the same time, even twice cooking the chips to perfection. I have never cooked chips before because I do not eat them, well, very rarely when there is little choice of carbs. It is remarkably easy. It is just the clearing up that is a pain in the bottom. I have no idea what you are supposed to do with waste oil in the new green scheme of things. The much maligned council website is of no help. We use old coffee jars, which is probably not the best thing, but it is the only solution we could think of.

I would normally walk ABH around the block while the Missus takes Mother home but as she cannot currently drive, I had to do both. This required a major discussion about whether I should walk ABH first or take Mother home. Walking ABH won in the end. It is the sort of momentous decision making grumpy shopkeepers are faced with when winter comes to The Cove. It is as well we are made of sterner stuff.

November 21st – Thursday

An utterly despicable morning if ever there was one. A northeasterly breeze of around 50 miles per hour laced with very cold rain and a wind chilled temperature of around -1 degrees. Some of the rain I felt splashing on my face again as I lay in bed and I definitely felt all of the chill that went with it. Getting out of a nice warm bed was a challenge to say the least and I was not even being encouraged by ABH. I think it must have been the cold rain on my face that did it.

I managed to get all my exercises in before ABH decided it was time to get up. She was not overly enthused about stepping outside and I really could not blame her; neither was I. It was when we managed to summon the courage that we discovered the rain was coming in sideways from somewhere in the east. ABH raced up into the relative shelter of the RNLi car park and back servicing just the bare minimum of her needs in record time before racing back again.

We sheltered for the rest of the morning watching the rain skim off the window and listening to the wind howl in the eaves. The sound alone was enough to make you cold, although the actual cold did its fair share as well. I put a picture of a fire in the middle of the sitting room and huddled around it. If it gets any colder, I may be forced to put some heating on.

It was therefore something of a relief when, at around the middle of the day, the cloud cleared away and the sun came out. I had rather hoped that the Meteorological Office's forecast was not over-optimistic about the clearance, although the weather did clear a little later than planned. Given that we had spent most of the entire day yesterday couped up, I thought it fair to take ABH for a bit of a stank.

We did not venture far. It was pretty cold out and most of the first half was under the shadow of Carn Olva. It was not until we got to The Valley that we found some sunlight to bask in and by then it was most welcome, thank you very much. I was in full metal jacket waterproofs mainly to keep the wind out and they did a pretty good job of that, for which I was also thankful. What we were not overly keen on were four or five large dogs, off the lead coming the other way.

They were not the sort of dogs to be wary of generally, and I am sure they were perfectly friendly else, but in a group, they were intimidating and especially as two of them peeled off barking loudly and crushing in on ABH who understandably was scared witless. I picked her up when I could, and she immediately climbed onto my shoulders. There was no harm done, but for a while after she would not lead but held back on my heels as we walked on.

The rest of our trip was uneventful. The beach was perfectly pleasant in the sun and deserted for a while. Most noticeable was the sand that had been dragged down from near the dunes and pulled over the big field of rocks. There is still a remnant at the near end of the beach but most of it has gone and the beach levelled out.

I noticed on the way out that there was a large line of oar weed rolled up against the rocks at the top of the beach and running across the bottom of the OS slipway. I poked my head over the parapet of The Beach car park – from a distance as there is a fair drop the other side – and determined that there was enough weed there to discourage someone, say with a dickie knee, from attempting to get over it. I made a mental note and when we returned along the beach later, we exited up the slipway under The Beach complex.

Conversely, on the Harbour beach more sand has piled in at the top of the beach and under the slipways. There is some weed there but not as much and it is spaghetti weed, rather than oar weed, so called because it is on a western beach.

It was not the longest of walks, but it blew out some cobwebs and was better than staying at home. I also felt much warmer in the flat when I returned that would have had much to do with the Missus turning on the living room heater, I am sure. I would be more comfortable still if the solar panel for the flat were operational. Our man cancelled his visit this morning because a part he was waiting for had not arrived. On discussion, we both felt that the most likely component at fault would be the little switch that diverts the power from shop to flat. I knew we should have had a Frankenstein's laboratory type lever switch. Not much could go wrong with that.

I prepared tea for us both and we still seem to be alright even now. We had it early because we were both expecting to attend an early Lifeboat meeting. The Missus was going across to garner funds from the crew for the forthcoming Christmas party. The last two years there have been sufficient funds in the collection pot to at least subsidise the crew's meals but this year as well as the shop suffering a downturn in business, the crew fund has as well. There is enough to cover some drinks, but the crew must pay full price for their meals.

There was a training launch planned for both boats at seven o'clock. This was in doubt early when a forecast suggested an uncomfortable increase in the swell in the bay. As the time approached, this never materialised, and the launch went ahead a couple of hours before high water.

I ceded control to our trainee head launcher for the night. He had been trainee for the best part of a year. It does not take that long to acquire the necessary skills and our man is not slow on the uptake, it just takes a phenomenal amount of time to get someone here at the same time as our man to pass him out.

The launches went ahead without issue, and, given the approaching tide, we set up for short slip recovery. Some of our crew had been delayed through work, so we had plenty of willing hands by the time the boat was due back in. While the Missus stayed in the station along with a very well behaved ABH for the duration, I took her down to the beach for a run while we waited, ABH, that is, the Missus did not need a run. There was some light down there from the slipway floodlights, which was as well because I did not have a head torch with me. It was only a brief run, and I returned with plenty of time to assess the sea state on the slip ahead of the boat coming back.

I have long been a critic of the 'fishing rod' equipment we use to transfer the span to the boat. The span connects the boat to the main cable to haul it up the slipway and the crew pick up a line off the 'fishing rod' to pull the span aboard. On a pushing tide with an active swell, this puts the very excellent Shore Crew at risk when they deploy the 'fishing rod' and even more so when they go and retrieve it because the tide is that much further in. It is why we use our most dispensable member. If there is more than one, they play cards for it.

After much lobbying by me, we have the option in poor weather to revert to the heaving line thrown from the boat thrown to a crew person on the slipway. I would favour this option as the standard method all the time but have so far been out-voted. Tonight, myself and a few experienced crew looked at the possibility and the best way of dealing with it, especially as we might have had to make that decision tonight. I will advocate for giving our plans a few trials over the next few high water recoveries to see what becomes of them.

After all the theory, it was time to carry out the 'fishing rod' procedures as the boat came back to the station. The Inshore boat had been recovered earlier and we had a full compliment and more of crew to help with the big boat. All went swimmingly until

one of the Boat Crew let the line that they pick up off the 'fishing rod' dangle too close to the propellers and it got caught up as they attached the span.

It is not something that was noticed straight away as it does not impede the progress of the procedure. It was only when the boat was coming up the slipway that we saw it and quickly assessed the situation and what was required to remedy it. It was not stopping our progress, so I recommended that we complete the recovery and remove the line when the boat was safely secured on the tipping cradle. We executed what was clearly a textbook recovery up the short slip with item fouling boat's propeller.

As expected, we were able to safely remove the line from the propeller and found that the line was wound very tight but ultimately undamaged. We are, after all, a very calm in a crisis, very excellent Shore Crew.

November 20th – Wednesday

The clear skies from the previous evening persisted into today, which was good of them. The days have been a brae bit dour so far this week, so it was hearting to see some brightness. The clouds of all sorts slowly crept in during the day, but we had some sunshine right until the end.

At least it meant not getting wet for the first walks of the day with ABH. The first was just a cursory look around the block and on the second we made it to the beach that had sea on it earlier on. We did not tarry there long. She makes up her own mind where she wants to go, and she took me up the western slip and around the block.

It had seemed a little less cold but there again the wind had gone away, and I had just finished a blistering session at the gymnasium. Everything had been meticulously planned to make sure we could leave to make sure we got the Missus to the hospital on time. This included a pit stop at Smokey Joe's café – think old style transport café build around a converted Portakabin with huge portions of breakfast and pie and chips on the menu, along with big mugs of tea and coffee. All that is missing is a fat chef with a rollup hanging from the corner of his mouth.

Smokey Joe's café is famous in Cornwall, at least, and is hugely popular. It was so hugely popular today that there was no room at the inn. Ordinarily, we might have waited but time was getting a little tight, so we had to make do with a take-away sandwich, which was very good but disappointing nonetheless. ABH did not seem to mind; she still got a bit of sausage and a bit of bacon, so she was happy.

The opening of the rebuilt stretch of A30 was much heralded and celebrated by the much maligned council and indeed the contractors who were only several months off target completion. It feels like we might have travelled the new stretch once, but I rather think my befuddled mind is confused with a speeded up film someone made of driving down it. It looks very well done and will make an awkward stretch of road

much more comfortable to travel. Given that it has been open for some months, it was disappointing to see that the new roundabout signage is still the temporary yellow A-frame tucked among the bushes at the side of the road. It is like buying a new car and discovering that they tied the hubcaps on with gaffer tape and cable ties.

Worse still, after a year or two of traffic misery on the A30 there is traffic misery on the A390 leading into Truro. It is the building of the controversial Langarth Garden Village, which is a nice way of saying, housing estate on what was once green and pleasant land. The much maligned council has decided on the full green option with no car parking spaces and plenty of cycle lanes because the people who will live there can cycle into Truro where they will work. The people who live there and work in, say, Penryn, Falmouth or Redruth are going to be very fit and largely late for work – or just late when they try to cycle the busy main roads to those destinations.

Having negotiated all the traffic and traffic restrictions into Truro, we arrive at the hospital with just a few minutes to spare. The appointment was at the Duchy private hospital next to the poor people's hospital. Not that we were paying, by some financial jiggery pokery, the NHS pay for poor people to go to the rich people's hospital, although obviously, they must do much forelock tugging and the like when they are there and leave their dirty work boots outside the door. They must also desist from spitting on the floor, I believe.

The previous evening, the Missus asked what I intended to do while she was being sliced and diced. It took me a moment to realise that for an indeterminate amount of time, ABH and I would have to amuse ourselves. Since heading into Truro city filled me with dread and the fact there is very little parking now, I looked for alternatives that we both might enjoy. The obvious solution was a park or somewhere we could walk. I had a look at a good old fashion map on the good new fashioned computer and discovered Kea Park not far to the south of where we would be.

The road to it looked direct enough but come the time, I keyed the location into the satellite navigation system and was very glad that I had. There is a single lane to the park, but it is broken in a couple of places where a left or right turn must be made to stay on it. This would not have been obvious on the ground and being led on the circuitous route was essential.

There was some roadside parking maybe three vehicles, which was explained when I looked it up. The park is an area of woodland, think Hundred Acre Wood but smaller, like three and a half acre wood. The reviewer said that it was very quiet, which did not surprise me at all given the journey to it. I half expected to see the bones of previous visitors at the side of the road who were lost trying to find it.

I elected to run the perimeter of the area, which I had calculated would probably use up a reasonable amount of time particularly given ABH's proclivity to sniff everything in sight. I had, however, misjudged her desire to get back to the location she had last

seen the Missus, and we raced around the circuit with hardly a sniff anywhere. It would have been impassible in many places due to the mud but thankfully most of the mire was covered in a layer of birch leaves. This helped but made it slippery in places but at least we made it back to the truck not coated in mud up to our ankles.

We used the satellite navigation system to get back to the main road again. I probably could have managed but the road was narrow and twisting and required concentration to avoid the oncoming traffic. For narrow and twisting back road that crossed the railway twice, once under, once over, it was busier than I might have imagined. It is probably a local's rat run but to where I could not imagine.

ABH and I spent the remainder of the time waiting in the truck. The Missus was only gone three hours for half hour procedure, but it seemed much longer. The sun was dipping to 'in your eyes' territory when we eventually left with Nelson in the back describing in gruesome detail blood and the gore.

If I thought that the traffic coming in was bad, we hit the road going back at rush hour, which in Cornwall starts at around half past three o'clock for some reason. Since living in the Far West, I am most unused to such inconvenience, although even now Penzance can get a bit clogged in the same time area. I used to quite like driving but found now that I could happily do without it, especially driving at night or in poor weather – or at night in poor weather, even worse.

Given the hour, we stopped at a Tesmorburys to purchase some ready meals for when we returned. It is food, but not as we know it. It also let me off the hook for the first night of being responsible for feeding us. Mother may well laugh but I shall be cooking for her too on Friday. I will practise a bit tomorrow night but given we have a Lifeboat, it will be early and quick – ham sandwich, then.

November 19th – Tuesday

It looked grey and bleak through the living room windows when I eventually surfaced to look through them. ABH decided to get up halfway through my exercise routine this morning and shortly after that we discovered just how bleak the day actually was.

The wind had gone around to the west but still felt like it was coming in from the northwest and still raging in the mid 40s miles per hour. ABH thought so too and took a swerve before we got to the top of the Lifeboat slip and went up instead through the Lifeboat car park which is a more sheltered route. There was still rain in the air, but we had to wait until the middle of the morning for it to kick in fully. We probably did not have the heavy downpour we got caught in yesterday, but we decided to go out in what happened to be the heaviest that we had today.

The Missus is headlong into preparing for the Carols in the Cove concert on 5th December, which in truth is not very far off. Part of that is putting up the trees and

the decorations across the road and the decorations, or at least the ones she has not purchased yet this year, are in the barn. In fact, if we purchase more decorations, which we most assuredly will this year, we will need a bigger barn. The added complication to it all is the Missus is having a major operation tomorrow. Alright, it is a very serious operation to me because she will not be able to cook for a couple of weeks, otherwise, it is a very minor operation. Whatever it is, it will put one arm out of commission for an indeterminate amount of time. I have in blinding clarity seen the future in which I will quite literally become her left hand man – leaving her right to clip me around the ear 'ole when I get it wrong.

So, it became imperative that the decorations were loaded into the back of the truck and brought down to the shop today. From tomorrow for a while, she would have to rely on me picking out the correct decorations, which of course I would not, and end up making multiple trips to The Farm until I got it right. We did not get too wet doing it as the rain was starting to peter out, but it was breezy up on The Farm and not very pleasant.

After unloading, there was not a great deal of time left before I had to dash off again to meet an appointment I had with my false ear man, the one who does not listen. I had rehearsed how I would handle our next meeting. I needed to be able to lead him to the conclusion that there was indeed a fault in both the false ears that would be undeniable. It was undeniable last time, but I will ill-prepared for his intransigence.

I set off early because the strimmer's shredder blade that I had ordered from a local independent company was with their branch in Long Rock and I wanted to collect it. I also had a couple of minor items in mind to pick up for some niggling projects about the flat that had been outstanding for slightly longer than forever. These only came to the forefront of my mind as I was passing the shops that stocked those items. Hopefully, if I put my mind to it, I can put these minor jobs to bed and sleep peacefully at night – apart from thinking of all the other minor jobs that I had temporarily forgotten about.

Everything went swimmingly at the optician – the type that looks after ears. I launched into my carefully prepared script and had our man agree that logic showed it was highly unlikely that the tubes that feed the sound into my ear or indeed the manner in which I put them on was at fault. I briefly reminded him that he suggested that my brain had tuned the false ears out but that was so far fetched, I did not dwell on it. I did not bother with having him agree that his programming was very unlikely to be wrong either but concluded with the outcome that the only thing left was a fault in the units themselves.

Before he had time to respond to any of that I suggested that it would be worthwhile trying an alternative pair of false ears of the same make tuned to the same programme and using the same tubes and seeing how they performed. He really did not have anywhere to go other than try another pair and, having programmed them, I told him that they worked perfectly. Even then, rather than take my word, he insisted

we retry the old ones again, which, of course, did not work but again, it was only my word. Eventually, after holding the spare and existing units to his ears he admitted that there seemed to be 'some difference' and he would send them off to be checked. Hopefully, wherever they go to be checked there will be rather more precise scrutiny than holding it near a sceptical ear.

It was something of a pyrrhic victory. It means another lengthy wait for them to return from repair and then another lengthy wait for another appointment for him to hand them over and another lengthy wait to see if they fail again. Tales from the Internet tell me the make and model now used by the NHS are cheaper and inferior to their previous models and are prone to failure. Buy cheap, buy twice.

I pushed forward with my boudoir ceiling hanger when I returned. I discovered that despite the Missus' best efforts and using our builder's stud finder tool, she had missed two out of three rafters when screwing in the hooks. I had better luck with a bradawl but there again I did not have to worry about putting surplus holes in the ceiling as they will be covered over with the batten.

I ran out of time with that and will have no time tomorrow either. The Missus had her very important meeting at the Lifeboat station to discuss all things Carols in the Cove related just after tea. This left me to take Mother home with ABH riding shotgun. A rogue shower had just passed through, but we avoided getting wet but as we approached St Buryan we were deluged with a heavy shower of hail. It was heavy enough to leave a snow-like covering on the road. Fortunately, it has stopped by the time we got there but was slippery underfoot as I took Mother to her door.

The Missus' very important meetings do run on a bit, and she eventually got home just ahead of bedtime. We lost our tropical temperatures in lumps during the day and ended in low single figures. The rain and the cloud, however, seem to have left us for the time being as I noticed Jupiter shining brightly in the east surrounded by a host of stars when we returned from St Buryan. Woolly jumper time tomorrow, I would venture.

November 18th – Monday

It had rained during the night. I had early morning rain splash on my face to wake me up which made a change from ABH jumping on my face. I seem to think that I had slept particularly well, shooting always wears me out, but makes it ten times harder to get up.

ABH appeared to be suffering the same malaise, and I was able to get through my exercises without interruption. We were therefore late getting down to the Harbour, although we are not tied at all to any specific schedule, which was noted by the same swimmers and their dog that we had met a day or two earlier. The dog is an ardent swimmer and is regularly seen in quieter waters out as far as the outer channel markers.

Today, however, the sea had at last shown some muscle. I was nearly flushed upon when I ventured near the Harbour wall and down near the tide line. There has been no flushing over the Harbour wall in weeks. High pressure is sinking away to the south and we have a moderate low pressure system out to the northwest, laced with weather fronts which would have accounted for the earlier rain and the rain that looked to fall on us at any minute.

At last, the little pool at the foot of the steps leading up to the Harbour wall has filled in. It was created around the spring tide before last and for some reason irked me being there. I had no intention of climbing up on the wall, so it was a most irrational irritation, and I had looked each time we went down to see if it had gone. I had lost hope this tide too, but it must have filled in on the last high water last night. Quite a bit of sand had been piled up in that corner but, it seems, at the expense of the sand under the Lifeboat slipways where the rocks are once again exposed.

I ran ABH down there again after I returned from today's blistering session at the gymnasium with all the good intentions of taking her on a bit of a stank down to the big beach and the trail up to The Valley in the early part of the afternoon. I also wanted to sand down the length of batten I had brought back from our wood store at The Farm. The hanger, suspended from the ceiling in my boudoir, had collapsed during the search for some shoes last week. It lost one hook several weeks before that and it was only a matter of time before the next one fell out.

The grand plan is to attach a batten to the ceiling and the bigger threaded hooks into that. The problem is always finding the rafters, but the batten arrangement should have a better chance of success as the loads will be spread wider. I had hoped to get the first coat of paint on today as well, but that was not to be.

Mindful of the tides and the fact that the rock field and the lake below it now makes traversing the beach at the tide line impossible in normal clothes, I decided to step out before two o'clock. The aim was to head up to the Valley on the Coast Path and back across the top of the beach. It was raining a bit when I came out of the shop having finished my sanding. It was not so heavy as to stop us walking out but by the time I was ready to go, and ABH and I had gone through the increasing normal ritual of her playing hard to get before we go out, the rain had upped it game. We stepped out into a downpour and before we got to the end of the street, my shorts were soaked through as were my walking socks. ABH was not faring much better even in her raincoat, and it was she that made the decision that going back was the correct direction, not going forward.

Going back, we were head onto the wind which flattened my wet shorts against my leg, which was most uncomfortable and somewhat cold. That wind had been increasing since the morning where it started in the 30 miles per hour region. By the time we went out, it was in the high 30s and by evening time, more than 40 miles per hour and piling in from the northwest or thereabouts.

For our subsequent walks out, I made sure I was in full metal jacket waterproofs. I had not worn these for some time and although I restricted the number of layers I wore underneath, it felt like I was wearing a suit of armour. I should point out, dear reader, that I have never actually worn a suit of armour as I am not that old nor am I an historian who might have worn one for research purposes. I do, however, have a very active imagination – as you might have noticed, dear reader – and therefore imagined in quite some detail what it might have felt like. Very much, indeed, like wearing modern, full metal jacket waterproofs, I would say. There, I am glad we have settled that.

The rain was never again quite so heavy as it was when I elected to go for our walk. This either demonstrates some exceedingly poor decision making on my part or the small gods of grumpy shopkeepers really do hate me even when the shop is closed. ABH, while happy to dive into a placid sea for a cold dip even in the dead of winter, does not do rain very well. She used to tolerate it moderately well, but as time has gone on, she has clearly changed her mind but, happily, will sit while we use a hair dryer on her without complaint.

Thankfully, for our last walk out, the rain had degenerated into lighter drizzle but the wind being more insistent drove us to rapidly skirt the top of the Harbour into the more sheltered environs of Stone Chair Lane. Here, though, the preponderance of telephone and electric wires overhead make a fearful howling and moaning in a strong wind. It did not seem to bother ABH too much but had me looking about for ghouls on every corner. I was very grateful to be going home where it is only the Missus there to scare me.

November 17th – Sunday

I was a little pressed this morning. I got up with what I thought was sufficient time to do everything before going up to the range, but I had not reckoned on computer error. Of all files to lose, it was The Diary that turned out to be at fault.

The file is copied into the ether as I type it each day. Not only is that a handy backup should things go wrong, but I can also access it from other computers anywhere. Except this morning, I could not. It took a while to nail it down but the copy that is held on my computer, accessible locally in the event of a network failure, had somehow become corrupt and was hanging any application that tried to open it.

My morning mission to bring The Diary to you and the other reader, dear reader, was in grave peril, so I thought to try and access it from my laptop computer that is normally in the shop. I had not taken it back since I had ventured away from home, so it was still handily upstairs. Thankfully, the online version was accessible which meant that I could edit yesterday's draft while trying to fix the error on the desktop computer. I should possibly have tried to do one then the other, but it was so much fun doing them both at the same time, I continued.

Having established that the local copy of The Diary folder was corrupt, I changed its name. I had to disconnect from the Internet to do this as the folder would have been in use otherwise and not allowed me to do it. I then copied the online version of the folder to a thumb drive on the laptop, switched the thumb drive to the desktop computer and copied the good folder into where the corrupt one was. It was a likely solution and happily it worked else I would have been even later that I was.

As it was, there were half a dozen cars already at the range when we arrived. We were only half an hour late, but some friends told me everyone else had arrived early for a change. They had mostly finished setting up the range for the courses of fire, which left me with not much to do. I did make up for it later when it came to patching targets and setting up plates and falling children that had been knocked down.

It was a thoroughly enjoyable day, and for the most part we had blue skies and sunshine. We were sheltered from the breeze that was in the northwest and the temperature, that we had been told to expect would be very much colder than of late, was only a little bit colder than of late. In fact, for most of the day I had felt quite overdressed but into the afternoon, the temperature started to drop away quite sharply, or at least it felt like it did.

We also had some showers blow through that most of us felt had not been forecast. At the range, we had a couple of moderately heavy showers, but the Missus reported that she and ABH had been soaked through after venturing to the beach at just the wrong time. As we left the range, closing on four o'clock, we looked down on a huge lump of rain moving to the southwest. While it was mostly cloudy all over with some brightness out to the west, the cloud was higher and less threatening, so the rain cloud stood out starkly. I was glad I was a couple of miles away and a few hundred feet higher.

There seemed to be the threat of rain in the air when I took ABH out shortly after tea. We had just missed a further shower before we went, and they appeared to be quite sparse, and we got away with it. She was in a hurry to get back, it seemed, and we did no tarrying on the circuit save to stop and chat with a neighbour at the end. The tail end of the last supermoon of the year was just visible now and again through the broken cloud. Supermoons seem to be two a penny these days – I certainly do not remember such things as a child, and I am sure that I would have done – and I am sure this one had a name too if I could be fagged on looking it up. Alright, having typed that I just had to look it up: beaver moon, for heaven's sake. Now I wish that I had not.

For all you beavers out there, beavering away, we wish you happy moontide but I fancy you probably could not give a monkeys – and I doubt they care less, too.

November 16th – Saturday

We are on groundhog day as far as the weather is concerned. Another overcast day in prospect, dry this time, with hardly a breeze and the sea as placid as an indoor boating lake. The temperature seems to be holding on, although I did feel a little colder this morning in the flat but that might just have been me.

I was late up again and ABH was not too bothered about it. I think she may have been cold because she was keen to get under the covers which she did, causing me to get out of bed altogether. If I had laid there any longer, it would have been laziness and there were things to do, although not necessarily urgent.

The Missus had arranged to meet her pal up at the top in the middle of the morning, leaving me with ABH. I was just finishing off breakfast when she left which coincided with the arrival of ex-Head Launcher and his dog. On seeing this ABH made it clear that she wanted to go over and meet and would give me no peace until she had. I was intending to take her down to the wide expanse of big beach anyway but almost certainly would have procrastinated. The circumstances were a timely impetus to get off my behind and get going.

ABH was perfectly happy to wait with ex-Head Launcher's dog while we chatted, which we did for about half an hour. The sitting around suggested that perhaps I should have worn a hat but after we got going it would have been superfluous. We covered much of the beach at the tide line, choosing first to walk west until we came to the rocks and then retracing our steps until we were heading north up the beach.

There were not too many other people about. We could have completed the whole journey without meeting anyone had we chosen to. Instead, we followed our noses with a vague notion to walk north along the tide line until we got past the big field of rocks, then head back hugging the dunes at the top of the sandy ridge. There was certainly no way to cut off the corner as right in the middle of the field of rocks and leading down to the sea there is a huge lake.

It was emptying at the rate of a mountain stream through a narrow channel down at the tide line. I watched as a fellow walker waded across the lake entreating his dog to swim after him. Only waders or a swimsuit would have been appropriate for such a crossing, so I was left to cross the swiftly running channel which I did as near to the lake as I could where it was shallower. We then headed east up the beach and across the field of rocks nearly at the end where the rocks were fewer and smaller.

We met a few dogs on the circuit, but ABH had been happy to rocket around in circles all by herself. Let us face it, if she wanted a bit of a chase, doing it herself is usually her only option. It was a particularly pleasant little stank, mostly on the level and took us most of an hour to complete.

We were still home ahead of the Missus. Clearly, an hour march across the beach and back is hardly any exercise at all and as soon as we were home ABH brought

me one of her toys for a game of tug. I expect I used to be like that. Darned that I remember it that way.

We had intended to go up to The Farm yesterday so that the Missus could sort out the Christmas decorations, but life got in the way. I was correct in the assumption that we would be doing that today instead and we left almost as soon as the Missus arrived back from her pal. I did not think I would get to try out the strimmer but once the Missus got settled in the barn, ABH was happy to go off and explore thankfully keeping clear of me as I strimmed across the front of the cabin and the approach to the wrecked polytunnel.

I had a good look at the damaged structure today. It will take some effort to put the frame right and I think we might need to replace one of the poles that is bent. We had taken the decision that we would not be able to afford to fix it this year but getting the frame repaired should not cost much and will stop it becoming damaged further. Instead, we will convert each of the raised beds into mini polytunnels using some water pipe we have as hoops to run across the top and we have some plastic to fix across them. The priority though, is still clearing the field with tractor and strimmer and we have ordered a shredder blade for the brambles and thick stalks of the things I do not know the name of. We are definitely on the way, although I suspect Carols in The Cove will take priority over the next few weeks.

We headed home at around half past three with some of the decorations that the Missus wanted to sort through as well as some of the lights that she wanted to test. We are still waiting for the RNLI to arrange some outside power on the Lifeboat station and are a bit stuck until that is done as we do not know what socket types they will install. We have a man on call who is expert in such things, he had helped with the Mousehole lights for years.

He seems very keen to help us and suggested that we install poles along the front from the Lifeboat station that the lights he was supplying could be strung from. An enterprising soul on the station team managed to twist the arm of a local scaffolding firm to let us have some gash poles for the job. I told our man when he turned up to make some measurements the other day. He rejoined with a wry comment that steel scaffold poles would not have been his first choice to string 240 volt lights from in a rough weather environment. His said, that we would probably manage with a good length of insulated tape.

It gets gloomy then dark pretty quickly now and before we knew it night was upon us. There was not much left of the afternoon in any case, and it seemed that we had temporarily broken ABH as all she wanted to do was sleep. I took her out after tea but when it came to the last run around it was raining, which was most unexpected.

We are still waiting for this cold snap to arrive, so perhaps the rain was a prelude. I will now fret over what to wear tomorrow at the range and will probably take some alternatives, as if I did not have enough weight already. What a dilemma.

November 15th – Friday

Near 2,000 words yesterday. My apologies. I will try and be more succinct.

We woke to a day that had much the same stamp as yesterday with its lumbering cloud and gloominess. There was much less of the rain, but we did have some as I crossed the moors when I ventured into Penzance later in the day.

It was a thoroughly lazy day, as far as such a thing exists when you have an ABH in the family. When she insists, you comply because she will persist with insisting until you do. I used to be able to get away with my morning exercises because I was up a good hour before she could be bothered. Now I am getting used to being later, I am regularly jumped upon. If I am face down, it is a weight I have to bear and if I am on my back, she is on my chest with her tongue up my nose.

Thankfully, she does not come with me to the gymnasium else there would be little point in going. As it was, I managed a passably blistering session, not quite reaching target on the rowing but fully compliant in all the other disciplines without a hint of complaint from the dickie knee. I am beginning to wonder whether I made the right decision in having it replaced with a china one. I wonder too if I will be dishwasher safe.

As usual, I followed up my gymnasium session with a charge down to the Harbour beach with ABH. Occasionally, she will climb up on the Harbour wall and disappear down the other side. My dickie knee may be less dickie but my issues with heights are still as sharp as ever. While the little girl is up on the wall I get vertigo by proxy, which she probably knows. I went up the western slip to see if I could see what she was up to from the top of the sea wall. By the time I got up there, she was down at the bottom of the western slip wondering where I was until two other dogs turned up, then she did not care.

Having hauled her home, had some breakfast and waited for the Missus to return home with Mother, I was ready to go out again. I had a call at the gymnasium from our strimmer man who told me that the strimmer was ready for collection. One of the issues with it, he told me, was that the European Union's rules restricted the fuel mix to reduce emissions. As a consequence, the machine did not generally run very well. There was a governor on the fuel mix control which with some ingenuity and something heavy could be broken off to allow the fuel mix to be a little richer. Obviously, that would be a very bad and naughty thing to do and, of course, he did not do that, not once, not at all, honest guv.

ABH has some small chew sticks that she has after her morning walk, or rather she did have until she finished them off yesterday morning. I meant to get some

yesterday and this morning after our walk she was all at sea not having them. Since I was heading into town anyway to have the front tyres replaced, I said that I would go to Tesmorburys to get her some more. Since I was going to Tesmorburys, the Missus said, could I also get ... and produced list and provided instructions on how it should be read and where the things on it might be found in the Tesmorburys store. Since most of what was on the list were standard fresh foodstuffs, I went to the very good independent shop that does the same food better and either at the same price or less and did not need the ancillary instructions. There were a couple of items that I could not acquire at the independent shop, which included ABH's treats, so I went on to Tesmorburys to finish off.

The people at the Newlyn Tyre Company are exceedingly good at what they do, to my unprofessional eye. It was a stroke of luck that I managed to get seen almost straight away. The previous times I have been they have been busy, but they seem to be able to juggle priorities very well and I have never had to wait all that long. They are also very reasonable and the bill after the tyres were replaced was not as big and scary as I had expected. It was still big and scary, though.

It seems that the remaining time I have in a day after doing whatever it is that has needed to be done, is taken up by either walking or playing with ABH. I was hardly in the door when she started on me, first a big welcome followed by being followed around as I sought to make a cup of tea. Half an hour sitting down was punctuated by being launched at as I sat at my desk. She does not seem to understand 'I'll be with you shortly'. I withstood about fifteen minutes of pester power before I was compelled to take her down the road for a walk.

Being too late for a proper stank, we had to be satisfied with a run down to The Beach car park and back. It had become so gloomy as we walked that the lights in the houses were coming on. I had noted when we came down the hill on Wednesday just how few properties had lights on. We are an empty Cove, for sure – unless our visitors are being very frugal with their use of electricity - and I will check just how much longer the café intends to continue as it would be nice to have one last breakfast before they do.

With Mother in attendance, we had the heaters on for the first time this year. It was not immediately clear just how much more efficient they are now we have insulation. I have never really paid that much attention because, like vehicle fuel, you either need it or you do not, and you pay the price whatever it is. The solar panels will help too, so we will not be able to make direct comparisons to previous years. We must therefore assume that the combination of insulation and solar panels are making heating the flat a super efficient operation or the whole enterprise has been a waste of effort.

I think we will be more in need of the heating by the tail end of the weekend as a cold snap is predicted with snow further north. When I took ABH out for both her last walks of the day, I found it incredibly mild. It was also very quiet as the sea continues

to play dead at all states of the tide. Any more of that and we will have to put surfers in zoos as there will not be any left in the wild.

I will leave you today, dear reader, with that discomfiting thought.

November 14th – Thursday

Today was not half the day its predecessors were. In the old days we had acres of blue sky and sunshine, now look it. I must give the day its due, it was considerably warmer than it was yesterday, I will say that for it but by and large, days today are not what they used to be.

We had a pleasant enough run down to the Harbour first thing, before the day got really rough. Maybe I just did not have my eyes and senses open at that hour, which was a better hour than the hour we got out yesterday morning. That was a little early for my off-season burgeoning laziness.

I did not hang about long after that and gathered my clobber to head up to The Farm as there was a tractor to try and start. I took with me our miniature battery pack that has started so many other people's vehicles, it was about time it started one of ours. My clobber includes a very good pair of waterproof labourers' trousers. I do hope that the labourer does not miss them too much. They are more for winter wear but are essential on the tractor whose seat is usually wet. Fully kitted up, I set out.

The tractor had been sitting idle far too long. The Missus went and started it in the summer after our neighbour told us that it would not. It needs to warm up before the key is turned otherwise it does not start, which we think was the problem in this case. She tried it again yesterday and the battery was flat hence me taking our miniature battery pack with me that worked marvellously after a bit of effort.

The dashboard cowl, the steering wheel and the steering column were covered in bird excrement. There was even a bird nest under the bonnet when I raised it to get to the battery. It put me in mind of a child's illustrated book depicting a farmyard scene with a decayed tractor and Roney Robin living the high life in its rusting frame. Alright, perhaps I read different illustrated books to normal children. Our tractor could do with a good brush up and at the very least a covering of light oil to stop the bodywork rusting further.

I cleaned off what was needed with a mind to move the tractor out into the light which would make it easier to recover the battery pack. I had let the engine warm a bit first and the sluggish oil in the engine circulate some, and noticed that according to the electronic gauge, the tractor was desperately lacking fuel. I thought that I would see to that first before I moved it. I deemed that it was safe to shut down the engine and if the worst happened, there was still power in the battery pack for another couple of starts.

We have spare fuel in the shed which should not have suffered from the storage time, and I picked one of the lighter barrels and the fuel filter funnel. I did not bother to look, the gauge had told me it was empty, so it was something of a surprise when the funnel did not immediately empty, and diesel poured down the side of the tractor. I removed the funnel and let the remainder of the fuel back into the barrel. Looking in the filler tube, it was full to the brim. The gauge had lied, which will be a bit awkward the next time it really is running low.

Satisfied that I was not about to immediately run out of diesel, I returned to the original plan of moving the tractor out of the shed. It started immediately, which was quite satisfying, and I lifted the flail mower off the deck and selected a gear. There is a forward/reverse selector on the steering column that the driver lifts and either pushes forward for forward motion or back for reverse motion. That is what a university education does for a design engineer. The trouble was that the lever lifted but would go neither forward nor back.

I immediately assumed that it had seized from lack of use, a theory that was supported by the cobwebs and signs of corrosion around the base of the lever. I mistakenly believed that my tools were down in the shop else I would have tried to remove the steering column cover to see the state of the mechanism. Instead, I reached for the long empty easing oil can behind the driver's seat, which was not very useful because it was empty – long ago. Happily, in the toolshed with the door that still does not open smoothly, I found some white grease and some 3-in-1 oil both of which I applied liberally to the affected area.

After some time and much cajoling, I managed to shift the lever using only as much force as I dared. I repeated the action several times until I was sure it would move relatively freely without undue effort that might damage the workings. Only then did I restart the engine and move the tractor out into the light.

I had used up valuable mowing time with my efforts to get to the stage where I could actually use the tractor for the purpose I had intended. There was lots of mental note taking to remind us to put a cover over the cab area and to lag all the operable parts in oil and/or grease if we intended not to use it for a while.

It was relatively easy to mow the areas where I had strimmed a couple of days ago but when I moved out into the field, I had to constantly adjust the engine speed and the height of the mower to stop it snagging and catching on the thicker tufts. I concentrated on the areas we would need to use most but had to go out in the wider field to turn the machine around and align with the next strip. I had to remind myself to turn off the mower if I wanted to go into reverse as it makes some horrendous noises if you try to change direction without doing so.

A couple of times I spotted a fleeing field mouse (at a guess) as I dispossessed them of their comfortable habitat. I do hope that they managed to pack a suitcase before the flails struck. Had I been more in tune with nature's ways, and in compliance with

the law of the land, I would have issued a Section 21 eviction notice eight weeks in advance. I just hope none of these fieldmice know good lawyers else I will be in a fix. I had hoped to spend an hour up at The Farm mowing but since I had wasted half of it trying to get to the point where I could mow, I gave up when I thought that I had made sufficient headway. One thing is for certain, mowing the field will take at least one whole day and it will have to be done multiple times and some of it will have to be attacked by strimmer with a brush cutter attached to get shot of some of the thicker and heavier plants.

I headed for home for a welcome breakfast, and it was only when I got there that I remembered that I had left the tractor key on the seat. I was not particularly worried about thieves, but I harboured a probably irrational concern about a magpie swopping down and carrying it off. Nevertheless, breakfast took priority, and I resolved to collect it later when I took off on my next venture.

There was some uncertainty about what would happen in the afternoon. The Missus had initially thought to sort out the Christmas decorations that we had cleared the way for a couple of days ago. When she thought better of it, I decided that I would get rid of a few errands that were required to be done in town. The idea was led by the telephone call from the optician – the one for eyes – who had informed me that my reading spectacles were ready for collection – no charge, thank you very much.

I dropped Mother's Chinese meal from the previous evening off to her at St Buryan via collecting the tractor key from The Farm. My errands complete in town and having collected my spectacles, I headed back via the new vehicle tyres shop in Stable Hobba at the edge of town.

It was me who noticed that the nearside front tyre was terribly worn and out and our friendly garage who confirmed it. They had said to have the tracking checked as the tyre was unevenly worn on the outside. When I asked at the tyre shop, the very pleasant man told me the uneven wear was more likely to be a preponderance of roundabout usage at slow speed. The theory being that the very heavy engine in the truck turns the nearside tyre under on right hand bends. It seems logical because the left tyre is still good for a few miles yet.

I do not like replacing single tyres and have order a new pair for the front to be fitted tomorrow afternoon. They will look at the tracking, just in case.

All the while during my sojourn it was trying very hard to rain properly. It succeeded on a few occasions which reminded me that I should replace the windscreen wipers. I dropped off at the windscreen wipers shop just outside town as at least you can park outside that one. The choice of windscreen wipers is broad and of every length and type. Since you generally purchase them in pairs, they mainly sell them singly, although there was one pair I could have purchased of the type I needed.

To aid the decision of which type or length is required for your vehicle, there is a computer screen to use. Key in the registration, so that the company can find out who bought what and shower them with advertising, and as a bonus, it shows the choice of wipers for your vehicle. I had the choice of at least ten, or five pairs plus the one pair sold as a pair all at different prices. There is no indication of quality, and I would have done my due diligence before I set off had I intended to purchase the wipers in advance.

It was just as I made the decision on the mid-range price that I noticed, in small print at the bottom of each unit, a lower price which did not include fitting. I did not notice how much at the time else I would have included a dry remark at the till, but I purchased without the fitting. It is not that hard to fit them and certainly not worth the £6 each blade that the company wanted to charge. For that price I would have expected to be brought a couple of libations on a silver tray while I lounged on a recliner being fed grapes by nubile virgins. Mind, this was Penzance, so that may have been a bit of a stretch.

There was still rain in the air when I returned but I had made up my mind to take ABH for a bit of a stank since she had been cooped up all day. The tide was in, so it was up the cliff or nothing for a walk. We did the short stank along the Coast Path to the first turn and back along the cycle path. The flecks of occasional rain in the air were hardly noticeable and we were back to moderate temperatures today, which is confusing. If we are going to be cold, let us be cold or vice versa. Not one day this and the next day that. It throws my wardrobe into confusion.

The sea was every bit as calm as it was the last time we walked up the cliff but a good bit darker today. Those heavy clouds were with us all day and mighty black in some parts. I was quite surprised the rain was not heavier. It was a very pleasant stank during which we only met a couple of people; it really is quiet in The Cove and the surrounds.

There was no Lifeboat launch in the evening, just a meeting that was mercifully brief. It allowed me time to take ABH around again and be plagued all evening by her wanting to play. I made a mental note to walk much further next time as the short walk we did earlier merely warmed her up a bit, clearly.

November 13th – Wednesday

It was a beautifully sunny morning and the trip down to the beach first thing, however brief, was refreshing in the sharp coldness that had developed through our clear night. I was fearful of heading to the gymnasium. No, let me be more precise. I was fearful of stepping into the hut with a tin roof in the certain knowledge that it would be colder inside than it was out.

I did not delay my departure, for we were under the clock today. My fears, though, were unfounded and, for once, it seemed warmer inside that it was out. It was not

like I had walked into a sauna, mind, and I started my routines quickly and warmed up in no time. Later in the winter, I will be wearing a fleece until halfway through my 5,000 metres row and I decided not to think about that.

Since I returned from Sherborne, my dickie knee has been remarkably not dickie at all – well, hardly. I must conclude it is the amount of walking, which is missing when the shop is open. I am not sure how I might counter that when we come around to shop opening again. Perhaps I could install a ramp on two of the aisles with steps at the back end. A couple of circuits a day should help tremendously. Not only would this help me, but we would have the fittest shoppers this side of Camborne. The only problem I can foresee is that we would need to limbo at the top of the ramp because the ceiling is quite low.

In summary, I had a very successful time at the gymnasium, which might fall into the category of a blistering session. My time on the rowing machine needs some work, but at present, under the circumstances, I am happy that I can get through it all without compromising too much.

I used to wear a suit to work and had a couple or possibly three. I now only have the one suit that I wear at two occasions, the welcome one being weddings. I do not get invited to many weddings these days and that was true of today.

We drove back with the sun low in the western sky and in my eyes, which was awkward. ABH had been billeted with Mother for the afternoon and we detoured to pick her up. Mother said she had been good as gold all day – she does love her ‘nanny’ – but we had clearly overstayed our absence from her and in the last hour she had become distress. We had been nearly five hours apart and it was the first time we had left her for any serious length of time, so she had not fared too badly.

We decided that we would collect a Chinese meal from St Just rather than have the Missus rustle something up. By this time, the setting sun had set fire to the sky, nearly all of it from horizon to the gathering darkness looming up from the east. It was quite spectacular. Out to the southwest, Venus stood out as a single point of white light amongst the deepening red. The waxing gibbous moon had already risen in daylight and was getting brighter by the moment as it crossed the morphing colours across the sky. We had that set out in front of us as we drove down from the heights of St Just and the last of Penwith Moors, gazing down on a minute Longships reef sitting in a blood red sea.

If you wanted a glorious and memorable farewell, you could not have had a better one than that.

November 12th – Tuesday

The weather fell in with our plans very nicely, which must have been a first or at least a welcome coincidence not seen in a very long while. It was just a shame that our plans did not fall in with our plans, which perhaps should have been expected.

I had not earmarked a specific time to be up other than early, but I am that normally anyway, so I left it up to ABH and she elected for shortly before seven o'clock. She then promptly went back to curling up on the bed – she did not even make any pretence at getting out of it – and let me do other things than take her out. I knew that whatever I started would be interrupted so I started my morning exercises with no expectation of finishing them in the same session. Sure enough, she got me at the end of my press-ups.

We had a quick run down to the Harbour beach of which there was plenty enough for a run about. The fishing fleet had decided not to venture out today despite the sea being reasonably calm. Perhaps it was the chill that had descended upon us during the night, down to single figures, albeit reasonably high ones. If the Meteorological Office is to be believed, which I am dubious about doing, the rest of the country suffered temperatures much lower.

We returned and ABH went back to bed again leaving me to finish my exercises. I had a cup of tea and then made ready for a run up to The Farm. The game plan had been that I would get the strimmer out and, assuming I could start it, would do the strimming around the toolshed door, the barn door and the incinerator and the bits in between. That was the plan.

The strimmer has been notoriously hard to start even from new. With use it had got worse and since we had not used it for around 18 months, I imagined it would be worse still. Added to that I had heard that unleaded fuel degrades over time, and we had quite a bit mixed as 2-stoke fuel. That which was already in the strimmer would be suspect, too.

I started off with high hopes. I took the fact that I had actually managed to get into the tool shed as a good sign. The grass was so built up in front of it that I had to rip clumps of it out with my bare hands to prise it open. It would have been sensible to use the strimmer outside the door first but since the strimmer is in the toolshed, that would have been difficult.

At first, it would not respond at all to my ministrations with the pull cord. I looked around to make sure nobody was watching and read the instructions. I had much more success and it actually ran for a few seconds before conking out. This was the most that I could get from it and after three or four semi successful attempts, it would give up and play dead no matter what I tried. Leaving it for a minute or two allowed me to get a bit more life out of it next time I tried but, really, it was becoming futile.

I had been up there an hour when I decided to throw it into the back of the truck and on the way home, stop into the garage at the top for some help and/or some advice.

Our friend was not there when I arrived, so I asked his oppo who told me our friend hated the bleddy things, which did not enthuse me with optimism. I waited around for a bit and was just about to give in and come back later when he arrived. It was worth the wait because not only did he know someone who could help and arranged a meeting for the evening, but he told me of a premix fuel we could buy that had a five year shelf life. For the use we have of the machine – although that would be different this year – that would be ideal.

I went back home for a spot of breakfast and while I ate that, the Missus returned from her appointment down the road and made ready to pick up Mother for the second part of our planned day. This was to return to The Farm to clear the waste cardboard from the barn so that the Missus could get at the Christmas decorations. My earlier effort was to make sure that the incinerator could be used, and we could easily move between the barn and the incinerator with the cardboard. Since I had failed miserably at that, we would need to clear it by hand.

Once we had Mother settled in the cabin, cleaning out the cobwebs that had accumulated over the year it had been sitting unoccupied – by us at least – I decided to have another crack at the strimmer. It was to no avail but the Missus who has had more experience at it than me, offered to have a go. After several semi successful tries, she managed to get it to run on for a bit. A few more tries and with my help on the throttle, it started running properly. It shows that even inanimate objects bend to the Missus' iron will eventually and resistance is futile.

I managed to clear the bits I wanted to clear but knocked the end off the strimming cord, which is a wire and not at all easy to do, but I was asking much of it. It meant stopping the machine while I fixed it and, of course, I could not start it again afterwards. So, the Missus stepped in again and got it running. Despite running it for a further twenty minutes we decided that it was still a good idea to leave it with our recommended repair man to have look at.

The Missus and I fell into a team effort to clear the cardboard from the barn. There was rather a lot of it and Mother asked why it could not have been disposed of using our waste collection service. It was a very good question and one that I was not going to ask the Missus. She was very happy burning it and giving the glaciers waiting in the wings a head start – or whatever befalls us from burning too much cardboard – and I was very happy not to upset any apple carts.

I did have to upset a few other things to get the large boxes out of the barn, but we should expect some collateral damage from such projects. This would include my energy levels which were rapidly being exhausted having been at this farm game since early o'clock in the morning.

We got down to the last third and will destroy the rest of the know world another day unless I can convince the Missus to have it collected. We would have carried on to the end but for the fact I had to meet a man about the strimmer at six o'clock and go

to a Lifeboat Operations Team meeting at seven o'clock. Somewhere before that we would need tea, and I would need a small zizz if I were to make it through until the end of the day and especially the Operations Team meeting.

It seemed sensible to take Mother along to meet the strimmer man as I could drop her home on my way back. It would save the Missus going out later. So it was, Mother and I headed out to the small industrial estate just to the north of St Just. It is nestled in a valley on the moor and in pitch darkness. Our man had thought to leave the roller door open on his unit with the light on to give us a clue, which was most helpful. What was most unexpected and gave us both a start was the big 'oss waiting patiently inside the unit. It took a moment for us both to realise that it was an exceedingly life-like model and alongside it the frame of another. It seemed rude to ask about it or what this very pleasant gentleman did for a living other than service strimmers. He had come out especially to allow me to drop the strimmer off, which was most kind of him and he even thanked me for being prompt. He hopes to have the strimmer ready again by Friday.

I have come to the conclusion that I no longer like driving in the dark. I am not overly enamoured by driving any great distance – further than the top of the hill - in the daylight, either but the darkness really gets my goat. Our new dashcam is very bright and I constantly confused it for lights in the rear view mirror. I made a mental note to read the instructions to see if the display could be dimmed or turned off at night which I will remember the next time I am driving at night.

Having made it home, it was time to head across the road for an overly long meeting. When I came back, I was briefly greeted by ABH who immediately went back to her place on the chair by the window. She is constantly roaming and exploring when she is at The Farm and the few hours we had spent up there must have thoroughly worn her out. I had to use wiles to get her up to go out for our last walk as there was no way else she was getting up from where she was. It is clear that if I want any rest in the evenings, we are going to have to spend every day at The Farm.

November 11th – Monday

Just another normal, shop closed day in The Cove. Up moderately late, coax ABH out for the first run of the day down on the Harbour beach and head back for a cup of tea.

Initially, we had the day that the forecasters said we would have all day yesterday. There was a cap of low cloud reaching its misty fingers down into The Cove and not quite getting there. The houses up on Mayon Cliff were wreathed in smokiness and visibility across the bay was severely limited. We were still, however, hanging onto a bit of warmth but it was to slip away from us before the end of the day.

I was late doing my morning warm up routine and had to entertain Mother while I did my five minutes plank. Alright, I am ten seconds off the target, but will get there soon

but, I would wager, not if ABH does not desist from climbing on my back halfway through. She switched to climbing on my chest when I flipped over for leg exercises and sit ups, as she tried to extoll the virtues upon me of her rather smelly crispy, smoked cod skin chews. I cannot say that they are to be recommended.

We have forty packs of butter in our freezer down in the shop to see us through until Christmas. We do eat a lot of it because Mr Trewithen's farm does make exceeding good butter. Alright, we will probably not get all forty before Christmas and we will get through even fewer if the person who uses the last one in the flat does not get one out of the freezer to replace it. I had prepared a sumptuous, if not luxury breakfast using the last of the crayfish – the remainder of the squid will have to be wasted unfortunately, but there was not much of it – retrieved a lump of Prima Bakeries very edible low GI seeded loaf and reached into the fridge for the butter that was not there. Disappointment is hardly the word. I had to drive up to the shop at the top and buy a packet before I could tuck into my meal.

I think that I largely wasted most of the rest of the day, which I suppose is acceptable since it was the first such day since the shop closed. I did pursue the insurance issues we have been having because someone from the company called but did not leave a message, which was irritating. I was much placated when I spoke with a lady at the company who had been very helpful in the past. She told me that the company had amalgamated with two other branches that had previously been run autonomously and that the administration was being done out of Truro, which explained much. It is east of Camborne, you know. I find it hard to be annoyed with someone who is entirely pleasant and efficient and anyway, I had made my point.

The other thing that I took up with was the failure of our solar system. The system switched to the flat ceased to function while I was away. Completely dead. I switched it back to the shop again and in the sunshine of the day, we generated more power than I think Hinckley C will this decade. We certainly generated much more than we used but will not get a penny for it as I have not yet completed the form. I will get to that but thought we would fix the fault first. They looked at it remotely while I switched it back to the flat and took photographs of the many switches and dials. They will send the chap back who designed it when he is next free, which is a problem with having a bespoke and complex installation. We will be royally stuffed if our man ever leaves the company.

All that led to a rather hurried walk down to the Harbour beach with ABH and an attendance at the Lifeboat station for a training launch and for a family to cast a benefactor's ashes on the waters over by Longships Lighthouse. We launched shortly after four o'clock with a basic crew on board and the family. On shore, we were rather better off with level headed trainees who had some experience under their lifejackets.

The weather had rapidly improved since the early morning's low cloud and we had some blue skies and sunshine. Not that it did much for the temperature that fell

rapidly during the day. By nighttime we were into single figures for the first time in a while, so we were still relatively warm on the slipway, although it did not feel like it. We were blessed with a magnificent sunset, too. The ladies who returned with the boat said that they had imagined the event before they went but with the visual accompaniment, they were blown away. They were not the only ones. It was quite stunning.

The boat returned to the bay a little later than advertised, which meant that the cable was a little short and the crew at the back of the boat had to haul it down. Had the boat been on time, it would have been the right length, but the tide was falling quite rapidly. I was quite proud of thinking of that so quickly when asked later. Nevertheless, it was a textbook short cable recovery up the long slipway and the boat was tucked away in no time. We did not wash down as the boat had to remain dry for tomorrow when a broken rail will be fixed on the port side.

The family very kindly donated some money to the station and suggested that we purchase a coffee machine with it. I apologised on behalf of the station that they had clearly been offered a sub-standard cup before the launch that had clearly precipitated the kind offer. I hope they did not mind some levity brought to the solemn occasion. We are after all, a very jovial, very excellent Shore Crew.

November 10th – Sunday

We were all late up this morning. ABH had been up just to check if 'nanny' was still here and promptly went back to bed again. I eventually coaxed her out at gone seven o'clock and we had a bit of a runaround on the beach, which would be the last I saw of her until I came back from shooting.

I had awoken in the small hours wondering where the kettle was. I went on to wonder if my Thermos flasks were still under the sink and would I be able to find all the bits that make them whole. I reflected that on the whole it was probably not worth getting up at that moment to satisfy myself that they all could be found relatively easily. That, of course, meant lying in bed and continuing to wonder if I would find everything and then going through, in my head, each cupboard in the kitchen trying to remember what was in each.

When the moment came, I found the kettle in the second cupboard I looked in and one flask and one stopper. I was missing one flask, one stopper and two cups which I had to empty the remaining items in the cupboard to turn out. I found the flask but despite emptying the entire cupboard there was no sign of the other stopper or the two mugs. Instead, I found two flasks belonging to the Missus, in leather cases, of course. They were bigger than mine, of course, but I was not sure they were twice the size and if I were to take just the one, I had better check, which I did, and it was.

I had remembered to get everything else ready the night before but had entirely forgotten the flasks. Had I recalled, the Missus would have found them in a trice with

a smug look on her face and admonishment that I should look properly. I maintain that it is easier for her to find things because she is the one that put them away. Things I put away, I can generally find quite easily – unless they have been moved, for which see point one.

Shifting everything to the truck, I had quite forgotten just how heavy everything is. Today there were three guns, a rifle and two pistols and three types of ammunition, which is even heavier. I am sure that ammunition must have been invented by the senior officer classes for the foot soldiers to use. A foot soldier carrying enough ammunition to make a difference could not possibly run away from the enemy, at least not until he has used up most of it. It was probably too late to run away then.

Happily, I only have to carry my guns and ammunition and sandwich as far as the firing point, which is far enough. I have used most of the ammunition by the time I get to go back to the truck, which is just as well because I am quite worn out by then. Because I got to drive up to the range today, Mother still being with us on her holidays and not needing to be collected, I was first one there. I have a set of keys that permits me access to most areas and allows me to set up before our head honcho gets there. I am sure we are all mindful of how much he and his missus do for the club, so it is nice to be able to help directly in return.

We had a most enjoyable day shooting many holes in targets and, later, small metal plates and falling children. I realise to the uninitiated that the latter may sound a tad concerning. I hasten to point out that these are not real falling children or indeed even pretend ones. The name derives from the fact that we have 'falling men', human shaped, but around half size – we could not lift a full size plate, the half size are heavy enough, thank you - steel plates that collapse when successfully shot. The 'falling children' are simply smaller versions of the same and it is easier than saying, 'small falling men', although I am sure there was dark humour involved at some point as well. I am sorry to disappoint, but there are no falling women. We found that they often refused to fall down when shot, 'as a matter of principle', or were too busy to be playing silly men's games. Just for clarity, we do have lady members of the club, although, I grant, it is mainly men.

During the summer, the shooting extends later in the day, but we have to close up early in the winter because we start to lose the light. Consequently, we start packing up at around four o'clock, especially after a practical session where there are far more targets, plates and obstacles to put away.

I did not look at the time, but I think I was home by half past four o'clock or certainly before five o'clock. The Missus was down on the Harbour beach when I arrived, so after I had unloaded – and regained my breath – I went to stand at the top of the Harbour to see where they were. ABH looked up but did not immediately recognise me or did not want to run off from the Missus, possibly. When called, she belted up the slipway to allow me to make a fuss of her before bounding back down again. When she got there three larger dogs bounded down from the western slip, which

was her cue to go and bound with them, even if they completely ignored her. If we harboured any secret hope that it might wear her down a bit, we were sorely mistaken as she was just as exuberant when we got home and through the evening as ever.

Despite being told that the whole day would be shrouded in mist, there was none in The Cove when I left nor during the day. It was mainly cloudy, but there were sunny breaks and even up on the range, where there was some mist initially, we had a mainly fine day. One small cloud mist rolled through the old quarry in the middle of the day – it is very atmospheric in the mist up there, think Hound of the Baskervilles or Old London Town – but was there and gone. It was mild, too, which is unusual for my winter days at the range and on occasion, even though I had dressed down, I felt somewhat over-dressed.

The rain made no reappearance in the evening as it had done the previous two nights, and our final walks around The Cove were pleasantly mild and in the dry. I am sure that I will sleep well as I had quite forgotten quite how tiring a full day up at the range is.

November 9th – Saturday

We have not been to the top of the hill on the Coast Path for about a year. Alright, it is probably less than that but my, how it has grown. It seemed a very long way to the top even though my dickie knee is behaving itself remarkably well. It is easy to forget the gloriousness of the view from there and in the clarity of air we had today, it was especially grand.

The day had started off a little grey with damp hanging in the air. I think that it has drizzled at the very least for most of the night and only in the morning started to clear. It has seemed awfully dark at near seven o'clock when ABH deemed that it was time to get up. She had initially spurned my offer for a walk, waiting until I had got dressed up to go out before doing so. Naturally, she waited until I had got undressed again before changing her mind. How she is still alive, defies reason.

It was pretty gloomy down there, but I probably did not strictly need the headtorch I had taken down with me. The tide was pressing in quiet quickly and ABH decided to dart under the slipways. There was no particular danger of being cut off, but she is a determined little minx and could decide to venture off after some sniff or other where I could not reach her for an hour. I did need my headtorch under the slipways, so it was not wasted.

It was mid morning by the time it started clearing up. Had it remained grey, I might not have bothered with a stank up the hill, but the glimmer of brightness put me in the mood to try out my dickie knee up Mayon Cliff on the rough. I had already taken the little girl out for a second time in the late morning and knew that it would definitely be little boy trousers again and as light a top half as possible. I had some more

fussing to do for the insurance company and reasoned that I could go out having resolved that. I sent them a strongly worded letter – I told them I thought that their “administrative processes lacked robustness”, which was fun, I thought. I had discovered that the last proposal for homeowners’ insurance had already been paid a month ago and had a receipt to prove it. I felt that my robustness comment was fair under the circumstances.

I was quite exhausted after that, which led to a little light zizzing. I do enjoy and afternoon zizz, or anytime, really, but enjoy it much better when it is not interrupted by an eager and irritating ABH. I managed to placate her, which awarded me a further fifteen minutes before it was clear that we would need that belt up the hill.

I had polished my walking boots when I returned from our walk yesterday. It made for much better at walking today, obviously, and I fare bounded up the steps at the start of the Coast Path. Yesterday, we had taken half an hour to get to the end of the road on our walk as there are plentiful places to sniff at along the way and ABH sniffed at them all, at least once and some of them twice.

Today, we had much the same experience once we had gone past the new gate at the bottom of the cliff. The ’osses are back on the moors and so too is the electric fence. I am uncertain what the level of current running through it, sufficient to deter an ’oss, would do to a diminutive hound and I am keen not to find out. I am super careful when we are near it to keep her away. The same applies to the exit we use onto the cycle path where the risk is even greater. The problem on that stretch where I carry her, is that my parlous balance might topple me over onto it. Perhaps she is safer on the ground.

If you are familiar with the route, dear reader, you will understand that we did not venture very far today. The turning off the path is a few hundred yards along the Coast Path and leads onto the cycle path where we headed left and down Maria’s Lane. Stone Chair Lane, where we turned off next, has recently been surfaced with tarmac. The boys did a particularly good job of it but stopped outside our neighbour’s place up the hill. I have it from an informed source that the much maligned council’s ownership of the lane stops at that point, so they ignored the lower section which would still be terribly pot holed had it not been for some community minded path menders and some left over tarmac. They did not fill them all but did several and a bit around the drain cover up the first part of Coastguard Row.

Passing the gate of our neighbour up the hill, reminded me that I had set aside some saffron cake for them. I had thought about taking it with me on the walk but not for very long – it would have been tiresome lumping it around however pleasant a gesture it would have been. I was going to leave it again but since I was already in walking gear and my dickie leg was behaving, I decided to run it up after dropping off ABH.

One of the tempting factors other than meeting our neighbour – alright, the only tempting factor, was that I would get to try out the chair lift. Given that I would be unlikely ever to go to Switzerland or Australia where they are plentiful and used to give their skiers a quick route to the pistes, it would be only chance to try one. I set off in eager anticipation with cake under my arm.

The son, who did most of the building work, him being a builder and all, had built a little shelter to keep the seat dry at the bottom of the run. I thought that it might be deemed rude not to ask but then considered that seeking apology was far easier than asking, especially as to ask I would need to walk up the steep steps. How hard could it be, I thought.

Very, as it turned out. I very quickly found the power switch and two buttons, helpfully labelled 'UP' and 'DOWN' and given that the seat was already down even I could work out which button to press. The difficulty arose when I noticed that the switch was more than even the longest arm's length from the seat. I considered that there must be another button on the chair itself but if there was, it was very well hidden. The next option was to use a long stick to press the button with, but the only stick was very robust and far too short anyway. The last remaining option to press the button and then make a dash for the seat before it got going. I had been told that it was monumentally slow, so it was a favourable possibility but there again, so was missing the seat as I threw myself on it and being crushed by its inexorable grind to the top. The thought of the mess it would make that our neighbour up the hill would have to clear up, deterred me – along with an unwillingness on my part to meet an early demise.

I walked up the steps under the gloom of defeat only to discover my knock went unanswered. Stuck for where to leave my gift where it would be undisturbed by the small robin that had only just stopped laughing at me, I stuffed it in the saddlebag that hung under the seat of the electric chair. I sent a message later to explain where it was. I will seek instructions next time.

We passed a pleasant and quiet afternoon. I took ABH out again before tea and did not think I would have to later as she was out for the count. She changed her mind about that shortly after I thought it and we took a spin around the block in the dark as usual. It was raining again, just lightly, when we went out for the last run, but we had enjoyed a good day of it by then.

Shooting again tomorrow, where I can vent my frustrations on some inanimate objects. I am very much looking forward to it.

November 8th – Friday

I think I may be being followed. The day before yesterday, neighbours from The Cove found me in Sherborne. Today, a chap who was waiting at Sherborne station not far from me, passed me in The Cove this morning apparently walking his dog. It

was him without a shadow of a doubt. Whoever is behind this stalking should be mindful not to use such distinctive people to do it. Our man was a good few inches taller than me, slight build and a recognisable quilt jacket. They should not think that the innocent accessory of a dog would confuse me.

Our man was passing by the shop as I came down with ABH after visiting the gymnasium. I missed the Wednesday session as I was away deep and feared that my knee may have slipped back to its old ways. It was actually better than it had been for a couple of weeks, and I suspect that it was the power walks up the hill in Sherborne that kept it spry and lively. It was a good gymnasium visit too, nearly back to old form on the rowing machine and completing all the tasks in the circuit in one blistering session.

ABH and I did not tarry long on the beach. I had already decided that I would take her on a bit of a stank in the afternoon as it was such a cracking day. The sea was calm again as it had been last night and probably most of the week. It has not yet stopped being mild, even during last night's easterly blow, the underlying temperature was still up. With the heavy cloud we have had for a few days breaking up a bit, it was quite sunny in places. Ideal for a walk out, and the only thing delaying us was the tide taking a while to drop away.

We had been left with a couple of gala pies when then shop closed. Their use by date was set to expire over the weekend, so I thought that I would have one today and having the other the next day would not be too much of a hardship especially if I had the second with a different condiment. So fixed in my mind was it that I was quite looking forward to it and went downstairs to the shop fridge where I had left them. Strangely, the cupboard was bare. When I enquired of the Missus, she told me that she had placed them in the freezer along with everything else - everything else that I could possibly use as an alternative to gala pie for breakfast. The only thing that was available was eggs, like the scrambled variety that I had consumed for breakfast on the last two days – now three.

There were a number of chores waiting for me when I came back. One of them was to pay the much maligned council the licence fee for our premises licence. I am reasonably certain that I could ignore it and no one would notice. I missed it one year and no one batted an eyelid. I get no reminder or demand for the payment, but I know that it is still due each year. I could not quite remember how much it was and tried to look it up but was led a merry dance trying to find it and gave up. By then I remember what I had paid last year and sent off the payment but like last year, I did not bother with a remittance advice on the basis if they could not be fagged to send a demand or reminder, why should I bother to send a remittance advice. I am able to prove I paid, and that should be enough if it comes to it, but I am sure it never will. It was only after I had finished with it that I discovered it has gone up ten pounds. Quite how it has increased ten pounds is beyond me. They do nothing for it, there are no costs of administration because they no one does anything. Ah well, there is always next year to make amends.

The other item on the agenda was a conundrum from our accountant. Because the Revenue want to change my business financial year to something inconvenient, the first few weeks of trading fall in the previous accounting year now. I had submitted one sales figure that did not correspond to what had gone into the bank, and could I please look at it, so I did. It did not take long to discover that the sales had occurred in the previous financial year but the settlements into the banks account had occurred in the next. Thankfully, I have an accountant who will sort out what happens with that, I suspect the sales and settlements will be recorded for the previous year.

I had also inadvertently totalled up on my spreadsheet sales for the first day of April. I had dragged my cursor one cell too far. That was reasonably easy to identify but it would have been better to identify it when it happened.

The last thing was the business insurance. The company had waited until the last moment to send me the proposal giving me no time at all to review it and because of the exorbitant cost, it definitely needed reviewing. Despite having had one of their employees help me sort out the mess, the other half of the company continues to send me threatening demands for payment. I had three letters from them waiting for me and they had all arrive together. One was the revised proposal for me to review, another was a summary of what had changed, and the third was a demand for late payment of the revised proposal.

To make matters worse, another letter arrived today which was a proposal for the householders' insurance which was due on 2nd of November. It had been sent on 31st October by second class post. It is a shame it is Friday – or maybe a blessing – as I will have to wait to send a strongly worded letter explaining the error of their ways.

A good stank with ABH was required to blow the cobwebs out. I had waited a bit for the tide to recede, but it was still a good way in when I noticed that we had already gone past two o'clock in the afternoon. I decided that we could wait no longer and sought out my walking boots. I had noted last year that I would have been far better off wearing my little boys' trousers for these walks and did so on this occasion.

Disappointingly, however, we had lost the good weather. Gradually, since the morning, the cloud had thickened and by the time we came to leave there was a bit of a breeze kicking up and there were flecks of rain in the air. This solved the problem of what to wear on top, although I still kept it light as the temperature was still holding. The decline in the weather made no difference to my lower wear; it was still best to wear shorts.

I thought to keep it simple for our first run of the off-season and we took the Coast Path out to The Valley and headed down to the beach from there. I discovered last year that ABH is not overly enamoured with the big beach as there is little to sniff on

the sand and I have mentioned before that she does not do ball fetching. Taking the Coast Path at least gives her a more interesting journey for half the walk.

The second half of the walk was of more interest to me. From our vantage point over the beach that rock field that I spoke of is clear, but we cannot see the relief. As we walked back from just the other side of The Valley and across the stream, there is a massive shelf at the back of the beach. The rock field is fairly flat at the bottom of a steep escarpment that runs half the length of the beach. It is high enough to obscure the view of surfers coming away from the sea as they walk towards it. It is quite a feature. The other most notable thing is the accumulation of sand at the southerly end of the beach close to the OS slipway. There is more sand here than I have seen in years, and we have to walk down a slope to the beginning of the slipway whereas it has always been either on the flat or an upward incline.

I had left ABH off the lead as we headed down to the beach so that she could run about a bit, which she duly did. She had eyed up three border collies as we hit the beach but thankfully thought better of it. I told her we were bound to me at least one dog she could play chase with, even if the other dog was not an active participant in the game. Sadly, she was treated with some contempt when she made approaches to a few dogs still on leads with their owners. She can be a bit persistent, for sure, and makes a lot of noise but stands off doing so but it does not look threatening but was certainly treated like it. It is a problem that she will not immediately come to heel. We will have to work on that. She did find her unwitting playmate, a cocker spaniel chasing a ball, so ABH was happy chasing the cocker as it chased its ball. So, that was something.

The highlight of the evening was tea. While I was away, the Missus convinced our two most prolific fishermen to drop her some squid. She had asked before, but I think they were clearing pots that day. As a bonus, she ended up with a crawfish or crayfish if you prefer. They are one up from lobster in the rank of luxury, decadence and expense in the world of seafood and contain far more and sweeter meat. We indulged mightily, Mother the Missus and me, and were royally stuffed by the end of it.

The rain came down more heavily as the day went on and our subsequent walks were necessarily shorter and dimmer. The late afternoon walk on the Harbour beach was in twilight and the wet. The after tea walk, in darkness and even wetter and I will not even mention the last walk of the night, which she did not want to go out on at all. Mind, neither did I but the Missus convinced both of us in the end. I wondered later, if it were such a good idea, why she did not go instead.

November 7th – Thursday

I had a bit of a race in the morning centred around saying farewell to the Aged Parent at the top of the hill at an agreeable time in the morning and making the train departure at the bottom of the hill. Getting up earlier would give me no advantage, other than being able to amble up the hill and I had already decided that power

walking up there was far better for my dickie knee than slouching up it. I therefore share an amiable breakfast with the Village Elder and Chum, well, we shared the time that we had it. We are not so comfortable together that we share each other's food.

Since the agreed time to meet the Aged Parent left time a little tight, I thought that arriving a few minutes earlier would do not harm and did so. It was pitifully short farewell but if you are parting, no amount of delay with affect the outcome, just merely prolong it. I was then on my way back down the hill soon enough to meet Village Elder and Chum as they left the hotel.

I made it to the station with plenty of time to spare. I do not like arriving at a station almost on time as there is room for fate to intervene and make you late. It made not the slightest difference anyway as the train was late. It then became later with the information display telling us that it was on time and at the previous station. By the time it was fifteen minutes late, it became someone irritating to look at a sign that was patently lying.

As luck would have it, one of my fellow delayed passengers told me that his son was on the delayed train and he worked for the railways. The son had enquired from his colleague who had informed him that a train had broken down further down the line and up trains were being diverted around it using the down line. Eventually the train arrived just ahead of the crossings that precede the platform and stopped. My friend informed me that as well as the broken train, there was now a signal failure, and they had to close the crossing gates manually.

We were at least fifty minutes late leaving Sherborne and any hope of making my connection at Exeter was dashed. I looked at the time of the next train and reasoned that I would just about make that train – barring any further delay. That might be a delay such as the train being terminated at Honiton, several stations out from Exeter and my connection. Other than an apology, we were given no further information on the train other than the train was terminating there.

An announcement was made when we got off the train but with the noise of the still running train and my lack of false ears, I could not hear it. I asked at the ticket office which I managed to get to ahead of all the other people who could not hear the announcement – who knew so many others had false ears that did not work. I was told to wait half an hour when the next train was due to take us all on the remainder of the journey.

What should have been obvious, however, was that the reason that the previous train was delayed had not been resolved. They had told us that the issue would prevail until at least two o'clock, so it should have come as no surprise that the next train that we had been advised to wait for was also some twenty minutes late arriving.

Without pandering to the common convention of cutting long stories short, especially when there are valuable column inches to fill and if you have a good story, you may as well beat it to death, I shall continue. We arrived at Exeter for a connection of some sort, more than an hour out from my original connection. I could have taken a slightly earlier train and changed at Plymouth because I had taken the trouble to look it up. No one had ventured to suggest that was an option and had I not looked it up, there was no indication that I could do so. I concluded that changing at Plymouth was going to be an utter fag and I had spent enough time waiting on platforms. Instead, I elected to take the next direct train despite the fact that it would stop at every station and halt along the way. After all, I had a book to finish, and I was on the last furlong.

Time passed and the Missus was waiting for me when the train eventually arrived at Penzance on the way up the clock to five o'clock. Since I had plenty of time to think about such things on the journey, it seemed like a very good plan to drop my broken spectacles in at the optician – the one that looks after eyes – which is around the corner from the station. It brought the first good news of the day which was that my spectacles are probably covered by a warranty. They are probably not warrantied against being sat on but since no one asked, I did not volunteer the reason why they were broken. I will wait to find out.

I had not long arrived back home to be riotously welcomed by ABH - the Missus and Mother were moderately amused that I had arrived home – than I was going out again to launch the Lifeboat.

Some happy soul had reasoned that since it was a training night it was probably a good idea to get the boat wet. I elected to take a back seat during the whole operation and assisted in minor ways. Six hours of travelling, albeit mainly sat on my behind, can weary a fellow, you know.

The boat launched out into the darkness of the bay at around half past six o'clock in arrangement with the tides. It would return around eight o'clock near high water. In the meantime, I went back to the flat and dragged ABH out for a post-teatime walk around the block. I was grateful that I had slipped on a mid layer and my Lifeboat jacket because a robust easterly had started up at some point before I had arrived home and was bringing quite a chill with it.

I got back to the station with plenty of time to wait for the boat to return. I had spent the rest of the day waiting, so one more time made not a lot of difference. At around quarter past eight we brought the boat up the short slip in what was clearly a textbook recovery and followed it up with a wash down. We were so numerous that all the job that needed to be done were carried out with so very little effort it hardly seemed worthwhile. With nothing better to do after securing the boat on the cradle, I went up on the gantry to direct refuelling operations with some of the new recruits to our team. We were all done in pretty short order and back home by quarter to nine o'clock. We are, after all, a very Smithonian*, very excellent Shore Crew.

*Adam Smith, division of labour.

November 6th – Wednesday

The Diary terminated in a bit of fluster yesterday. I could not possibly tell you, dear reader, that it was actually this morning as that would ruin one of The Diaries greatest mysteries. I shall endeavour to do better today but I have to tell you, the odds are stacked against me.

I am very particular about my scrambled eggs. They have to be only just done and with plenty of butter. If I am feeling indulgent, I will also add half a tub of clotted cream. So, it was with some trepidation that I chose the scrambled eggs on toast over the breakfast ciabatta with optional local smoked bacon, egg or sausage. Well done to the chef; it was a work of brilliance and was hot too, where normally it is halfway to cold when it arrives on the table.

Time was not on my side, and it seeming fitting, to scrambled also to get on my way up the hill to arrive at the Aged Parent's door at the time that I said I would. Because of my haste, I did not pay too much attention to the group of four people standing in the way just outside the hotel's outer door. I was about to circumnavigate the crowd when one of them stepped into my path. It was Chum.

It has been some years since The Diary mentioned the Village Elder and Chum, a partnership with whom your grumpy shopkeeper fraternised and drank immoderately at the F&L. They live a stone's throw – if you are throwing from up the hill downwards – from Cove Road at the bottom. It was therefore something of a surprise, to put it mildly, to find that they were not only in the same town, a long way east of Camborne, at the same time as me but also staying in the same Hotel and then in the adjoining room. Chum is an artist and had heard that Sherborne has a growing art scene which she thought worth a visit. I had to dash away, but we arranged to meet later to have tea together.

The Aged Parent has a break from seeing me in the middle of the day. There is clearly a limit to the amount of exposure a normal person can endure in my company and thus I was sent forth to amuse myself while they had dinner and a bit of a zizz.

Normally, in the evening, I manage at best a couple of pages of a book I am trying to read before ABH requires my attention on the floor to play tug or play fight with her. It makes for very slow reading progress. On the journey here, with no interruptions, I made far better progress into the novel I am currently reading. I suspect that I might finish it entirely on the journey home. Therefore, I thought to take another book back with me as the journey without would be exceedingly tedious.

I paid a visit to the Laurel and Hardy Newspaper Company's sister organisation that runs a stationery and bookshop in many towns. Here, I found a suitable book, but it

has been quite a few years since I had paid full price for one and I balked. I remembered seeing a charity shop a little further down and resolved to look in there first. If they did not have one, I would drop into the other shop on the way back up the hill. The only problem with that is that I would then have to carry it all the way up the hill and back again without forgetting it and leaving it there. I guess that is the price I pay for being a cheapskate.

We, the Aged Parent and I, passed a pleasurable time speaking of this and that for a few hours. The time sped by quickly and we were still chatting when their tea arrived. It was my signal to make a hasty exit and also meet at the arranged time with the Village Elder and Chum.

I made it back with just enough time to drop my book off and hobble down the stairs where they were already waiting. I had extolled the virtue of the Digby Tap and we made our way there to become reacquainted and to cover several years of absence. It was not that remarkable that we fell in with one another as if the intervening years were just minutes. Eventually we decided that eating might be a good idea but were disappointed that the Italian restaurant that we repaired to was unable to accommodate us. We went back to the Indian restaurant that I dined at yesterday, instead.

The meal was quite incidental and a mere necessary inconvenience to a conversation that ranged and twisted through many avenues I could not possibly recount them all. In short, we all had a thoroughly enjoyable time of it. Once, we might have continued into the night, but time ravages the best of us, and it seemed utterly appropriate to end before the night advanced too much. What an utterly splendid evening.

November 5th – Tuesday

On the first day that our solar panels were switched to the flat, the weather closed in. We came face to face with a bay full of mizzle as I opened the door to the flat to step out first thing. I had checked the weather for my later destination of Sherborne, east of Camborne, at it too was set to have two days of mizzle, the duration of my stay. It would make a difference from the hacking rain that I usually enjoyed, at least the last two years of my going there.

It was getting lighter as we stepped out and no headtorch was required. If we had any intention of heading to the beach, the tide scotched it straight away. We headed around the short block and had a sniff amongst the newly wet grass.

I was not in any particular hurry as I had got up early enough not to worry about the time too much. That is always a mistake as time then creeps up on you and before you know it you only have five minutes before it is time to leave. That almost happened but at least I had filled in the intervening time with packing, so when the time did creep up on me, I was mainly ready.

I shall not bore you with the journey. It was uneventful and completely unremarkable unless you count the trains leaving and arriving on time as remarkable, which it may be. Since I only use them once a year, I would not really know. What I will bore you with is the disaster that occurred when I stood in my room and called the Missus to tell her I had arrived safe and relatively well. We had been cutoff on our first attempt and as I waited for her to call back, I took a look around the room, leaving my reading glasses on the bed. I was standing by the window when she called again and as I answered, I sat down on the bed. I had thought my spectacles to be quite resilient, but I clearly landed on them at just the right angle to snap the frame.

Not much can happen without my reading glasses. Menus are indecipherable, messages cannot be read, wrong buttons can be pressed, and Diaries cannot be written.

Only seconds after I had finished talking to the Missus, the Aged Parent called, asking where I was. I told him my position was desperate and he pointed me at a locally recommended optician. Without knowing where this optician was, I struck up the hill in the direction of the Aged Parent's abode. Only when it appeared that I was running out of shops did I ask for directions and then I picked a person who did not know. There was another independent optician close by, so I went in there, avoiding the only other optician which was in the same chain as my false ear shop.

The very pleasant lady at the desk told that the frame could not be fixed without being sent away. The weld where the frame tightening screw and failed, and it would need rewelding. She suggested the most expedient remedy would be a new frame but, though they stocked my brand, they did not have that model in stock. I asked for directions to the other optician and discovered that it was down the bottom of the hill and past the hotel. A short way down in that direction, a thought struck me, and I returned to the very pleasant lady I had just spoken with. I asked roughly how much a new frame might be and rather wished I had not. I decided that I would have to wait until I got home to see if they could be fixed.

The downside of that decision was that I did not have spectacles and therefore no menu reading, messages missed, wrong buttons pressed and no Diary. In our little shop we sell reading glasses for less than five pounds. Surely a pair of those would do in the interim. The only place I could think of looking was the national chemist chain that was nearly next door to the optician. The store did indeed sell reading glasses, the cheapest being ten pounds which people were readily purchasing because there were not many left.

My next problem was choosing the pair of correct strength. I know from our own stock there is a number printed on the packaging denoting the strength. I had assumed I would need a relatively high number but not having a pair of spectacles to wear, I could not read the numbers. I proceeded to try various pairs out until I found ones that might suit but even then they were not ideal. I headed to the pay desk.

It was very quiet in the high street, probably a combination of the time of day and a sign of the times; there were no more than a couple of dozen people all told. Half of these were at the chemist's checkout, queuing. I waited a short while but when the next customer in the queue clearly asked a non-standard question of the assistant and she disappeared off to ask for help, I gave up. I would try again on my return to the hotel.

I related my tale of woe to the Aged Parent, and it appears that he had kept all the previous pairs of spectacles he has ever had since childhood and had a selection from which I might choose a temporary pair. Unfortunately, most of them were bifocal with the top bit being for long sight. I might have got used to this over time but initially it seemed it might prove problematic. One pair were pretty close to my own prescription and would do very nicely for the time being, luckily. This is what we children rely upon from our Aged Parent.

I try not to rely upon the Aged Parent for anything other than temporary spectacles and made my own arrangements for my evening repast. First, I paid a visit to the very admirable Digby Tap at the bottom of town. It is one of the last remaining properly public houses and stalwartly refuses to change. The last time I was in town I was told that they did meals as well and were pretty good at those too. I resolved to eat there in the evening and after a couple of beers, I asked at the counter if I might see the menu.

This, it turned out, was the wrong question to ask. I perused the menu at my table for a few minutes. It was quite an extensive menu for a small venue, and I was pleasantly surprised by the wide scope. I selected a dish and returned to the bar to order it. The bar lady looked surprised and informed me that she was sorry for the confusion, but they only did food at dinner time and not in the evening. Crestfallen, I had another pint.

Since teatime was pressing on, I thought to cut my losses and return to the hotel for a burger and chips or some other simple arrangement. Having arrived back, the joint was jumping, as they say, with a small three piece band set up by the door. There did not appear to be any tables free, but I asked at the bar anyway if they could accommodate me. There was apparently no room at the inn as this was a private party. I asked if they could recommend somewhere else and the bar lady pointed to three establishments that I had passed on the way and had already dismissed.

On the previous occasions of my stay I have looked at the Indian restaurant squeezed between a posh Italian place and a very downmarket alehouse. I had not eaten there for one reason or another and it was also empty, which appeared to be another reason to ignore it. However, there were a couple of Asian ladies dining there, which appeared to commend it, so I gave it a try. Wow. They provided me with a chef's special, one of two on the menu, and it was exceedingly palatable. I shall add it to my list of options for next time.

Having assumed that I would have little to report in today's Diary, I now find that I am pressed for time. I must hurry on, dear reader.

November 4th – Monday

Did I forget to mention that The Diary would be later arriving on your screens in the morning. I do apologise.

I did actually manage to get an extra hour in bed this morning before ABH decided that I had quite long enough to indulge myself in the closing of the shop. I thought that I had better rouse myself, largely because of the milk that needed to go out. I had plenty of time but still thought to take ABH around the block first and then return to the shop. It was all I could do to stop myself from putting out the shop display so ingrained is the routine.

Disappointingly, the newspapers were still there and uncollected. I left doing anything about it until I had come back from the gymnasium, just in case I had missed that they were running late. They were not, but I was still buzzing from my blistering session at the gymnasium, so I did not care too much. The blistering sessions are still not as blistering as I would like. I have to keep telling myself I have a dickie knee and pushing it too much, too quickly may not be helpful and a man must know his limitations. Still, I have to try as that is the point.

I had to gently persuade ABH to come out to play when I got back. She is usually keen, but it was a good couple of hours earlier than she is used to and once she has settled back into bed again, she is notorious to get out again unless she wants to. After I had got her down there, we had a lovely time on the beach with the tide halfway down. Spring tides have been gradually pushing higher up the beach and have dumped a good bit of sand just ahead of the denuded corner up by the western slip. It has already filled in the area underneath the top of the Lifeboat slipways. A couple of tides ago it was just rocks in that corner. It does not look like it has been of much use to the big beach though.

When I got back, I thought that I had better sort out the milk and the newspaper situation. I left a message on the milk company's answering machine and, although I did not see anyone arrive, the next time I looked it was gone. The Laurel and Hardy Newspaper Company were a whole different gourde of iron filings. You never see any more those drawing games you could get that used iron filings and a magnet. Anyway, the only way of resolving the matter of the newspapers was to call the outsourced helpdesk, which are of no help at all. In fact, the only thing they do is type a message that I could do myself without having to make a telephone call first.

I called the helpline and spoke to a very pleasant man who asked for the customer number that I had just keyed into the telephone. That gets my dander up before I have even got to the problem and my usual response when asked is, 'what, the

number I have just keyed into your telephone system?'. I suppose that it could be to check that I keyed it in correctly but then again, why not ask me twice, which would be quicker. He then asked for the name of the company, The Old Boathouse, and then the first line of the address, The Old Boathouse. No, he said, the first line of the address. Yes, I said, The Old Boathouse. This could have gone on, but he wisely changed tack and asked where the company was. Yes, I know that it is childish and that I should not be unnecessarily irked by such a thing as being asked for our customer number by a computer followed by the unsuspecting agent who answered the telephone. I do not care. So there [FX: grumpy shopkeeper stamps foot].

I was made to wait while the beleaguered agent typed a message to the depot. He duly gave me a reference number for me to keep and cherish. Sadly, I do not feel the slightest confidence that my plight was recorded satisfactorily or that anything will happen other than having to do the whole thing all over again tomorrow. It does not help in the least that I had a message waiting for me in my inbox related to the call I made to suspend the recycling collection. It was an automated response, which made it even worse, that stated the usual, it was taking longer than expected, blah, blah ... they wanted to make sure they had assimilated all the facts, blah, blah ... otherwise we have done better all about your request.

I did solve the problem about the message I had from the other day sporting a reference number I did not recognise. It seems that every time I reply to a message the agency has sent me, it raises a new ticket. In a decent helpdesk system, replies would be tacked onto the end of the call log on the original ticket so there was an easy to follow call history. I thought at first that this was a really pants helpdesk system because it would generate work exponentially for the agents. It then struck me that those wily Asians at the outsourced call handling agency probably have a contract with the Laurel and Hardy Newspaper Company based on ticket numbers closed. I cannot think of another reason you would have a helpdesk system that did that. It does not help me very much, though. I have more open tickets than the Waterloo Station sales office.

I took the opportunity of not having anything else to do today to scoot into the big city. It was a quick functional trip to get the shorter tubes for my false ears so that at least they did not hurt if I decided to wear them as a fashion accessory. There is no reason why else I would wear them, as they do not work for the purposes of hearing other people speak. Since I could not get through on the telephone, I decided to call in on the opposition, the alternative provider that the NHS has contracted out to. They told me that it would be three years before I could jump ship, on the anniversary of my first assessment. We will have to see about that.

In the meanwhile, I booked another appointment with the man who does not listen in the hope that I can convince him that my false ears do not work. It is my conclusion that there is a technical problem with the units that I have. Trying out an alternative pair would prove the point, and I will press him on that matter when I go for the next appointment at the end of the month.

It also took some threatening behaviour to get the staff to replace the long tubes with short tubes and the heads replaced with the small ones that I found to be comfortable and effective when the units were working properly. I was told I could change the tubes but not the earpieces as the audiologist would need to approve that. After a stern look (read into that what you may, dear reader) she decided that the small ends were allowable because they were on my record and promptly supplied me with medium ones that were not. Another stern look ensued. I do not understand why everything has to be so difficult. I am not asking for anything unreasonable.

The cafe next door provided us with bacon rolls this morning which came with a naughty brownie. This is a type of chocolate cake rather than a diminutive female person wearing a brown uniform and a woggle. Ordinarily, I would eschew such naughtiness, but we had some clotted cream to get rid of. It seemed like the best solution would be to eat it with a brownie – the chocolate cake, for the avoidance of confusion – and swallow, so to speak, my self-declared avoidance of such things. I shall not make such sacrifices commonplace, but I did find it rather toothsome.

The day continues with various small trips out with ABH. We had missed the perfect opportunity of some low water adventure on the big beach. With the tide approaching, we made do with the Harbour beach and when it got dark, a few spins around the block. The Missus had made it clear that she would brook no ABH interruption of her activities clearing out and reorganising the freezers downstairs. As usual, she ploughed through it in her own particular way and when I looked in an hour or so later, it was nearly all done.

I went down at last knockings to empty the bins and turn off the empty freezers. After that the shop is running on its winter consumption of electricity which is around a tenth of the normal operational requirements. We received the bill for the last month, the first month where the solar panel were working all the way through. It was clearly not going to be the most efficient or effective month for them when the sun, when it was visible at all, was not at an optimum angle. But we used 31 percent less energy. Now, that will include less energy heating pasties (sorry, MS) and the fridges and freezers using less because the ambient temperature had dropped but it was significant enough.

Once I had turned off what we could in the shop, I switched the solar panels to the flat, so we will see how that progresses.

I am away deep for a few days – beyond Camborne even – to visit the Aged Parent. I do not like to give them too much advanced notice lest they run away before I get there. I am off by train in the morning, and I am sure that there will be much waving of hankies, tearful goodbyes and such. The Missus will be gone shopping by then, so I will tell her about it later.

November 3rd – Sunday

We were out in the dark again this morning as the little girl was up a bit earlier. It suited me because I had needed to get some wrongly delivered milk back in our outside box before the milkman arrived. We, ABH and I that is, the milkman does not usually walk around with us, did our normal, in darkness, short route around the block. For some reason, she was particularly interested in a patch of grass that we routinely visit. What was different about it this morning, I will never know but she spent ages sniffing every blade of grass.

We arrived back at the shop to do the morning chores – well, I did the morning chores while ABH just watched – and to fetch the returning milk from the fridge. Luckily, I checked the box first only to discover that we had missed the milkman. He had been long before ABH and I came down. He is never that early usually but clearly made today an exception. He left a note that he would pick it up tomorrow morning at a later time than this morning. Nevertheless, it is still a begger because I will have to get up early on our first day of closing to put the milk out. I might have put it out the night before, but it is still so mild the overnight temperature is at least seven degrees higher than the safe temperature to keep milk.

We had a Traffic Enforcement Officer breeze through The Cove shortly before half past nine o'clock in the morning. That is twice within the period of a week at the start of one of the quietest times of the year. I think the much maligned council are taking health and safety very seriously and taking into account their employee's mental health. By deploying the Traffic Enforcement Officers when they are least likely to have to ticket an inappropriately parked vehicle, they can avoid the anxiety over confrontational issues. I heard later that he got a van parked on the corner by the OS, which not only has double yellow lines but an advisory 'keep clear' line. It is a daft and dangerous place to park at the best of times as it obscures the view coming around the corner. Good man, then, and was early enough not to get into a fight about it.

Talking of confrontation, I elected to have a hot breakfast this morning. I do not bother during the summer as it would be cold by the time I am even a quarter way through it no matter how early I start. Customers interrupting my repast is to be expected. In quieter times, if I start my breakfasts early, I generally get away with it. I have noticed, however, that if I choose to have a hot breakfast, I can guarantee at least two or three visits. Consequently, I do not often have hot breakfasts and when I do, they are usually cold.

It certainly was not cold again today. That mild spell continues, and I could easily have gone to the end of the shop opening in shorts and flip flops. Radio Pasty got its way and it was thoroughly grey today with thicker and darker cloud than yesterday. There was even a little damping drizzle in the middle of the day for a while and again at the end. It did not seem to bother people overly as it was hardly noticeable and at the brief busiest times of the day, people were still milling about through it.

The sea state that had been trying to settle all week, achieved its ambition today; the bay was flat as a dish. There was a bit of a shore break out on Gwenver but too far away to see if it was any good for surfing or not. Surfing on the main beach at anything other than low water or out the back has taken on a whole new world of jeopardy. That field of boulders and rocks I mentioned a few days ago has just grown and grown. It has expanded towards the OS end and become much broader. There is also a gully leading up to it in the middle of the beach so if you wish to walk to the far end of the beach, you now have to go close to the dunes or get wet feet even at low water.

I had plenty of time to observe such things as we were desperately quiet. Even so, I still felt a pang of guilt for the several new arrivals who looked very disappointed when they discovered we were closing at the end of the day. We had done quite a job of running down the perishable goods and my visiting in-laws, going back home tomorrow, cleared out a good deal of what was left when they took Mother home. I had promised next door the remains of our whole milk which I thought we would have a fair supply left over. The semi-skimmed, I had got near enough spot on. At the last knockings, the OS came and cleared out the full milk. I asked the lady who picked it up if the OS would have to close now that its main supplier was closing for the season. I was not sure if that received an amused smile or a look of derision, but I decided not to ask.

Speaking of derision, for all those who have royally scoffed at the idea of displaying windbreaks and fishing nets and summer goods outside the shop in the heart of winter: the last sale of the season was a windbreak and two tiddler nets. I rest my case.

Then, all of a sudden, that was it.

November 2nd – Saturday

I had listened to Radio Pasty's gloomy take on the forecast for the weekend, so I was not at all surprised when the sun broken through in the middle of the day and a big blue sky started to emerge. There was a bit of breeze from the east keeping the temperature down, but you could put up with that when it looked so glorious. It turned out that we were the only spot in the country to see the sun today.

I was a tad late rising. As I reported yesterday, I am transitioning prematurely. It was of no matter as I dispense with my exercise routine at the weekend and get up far too early for the off-season anyway. It resulted in being able to take ABH down to the Harbour beach in daylight and to meet the two lady swimmers as they emerged from the cold, they said, water. I told them that the sea temperature would still be near its warmest at this time of year and was probably like stepping into a warm bath.

Our ladies looked dubious when I told them that, so for fun, I decided to see if there was some historical data on the Internet related to The Cove's water temperature. Of course there was, right alongside how many grains of sand there were and the length of the longest and shortest oar weed strands. I had always assumed that the sea would be at its warmest at the end of summer, maybe August time. Looking at the data over four years, that was not a bad assessment with July and August being about the same and by September, one or two degrees are dropped. By this month it is down around four degrees from the warmest. This year, even though July and August were below the average, this November is above the average at 14.4 degrees Celsius – although, I will concede, not quite the warm bath I suggested.

Having settled these momentous matters, I opened the shop to a viciously quiet morning. Ex-Head Launcher came down for a chat while he waited for his bacon roll from next door, which obviously brought a few people in. Our neighbour from up the hill came down for her last weekly shop and had us both in stitches. I shall miss her visits quite grievously and more grievously still, will have to make house visits which means slogging up the hill to the foot of her stairlift.

The frivolity over, we started seeing a few customers, but business did not really take off until just before the middle of the afternoon. The burst of busyness was short lived, lasting no more than an hour. We had already disappointed the few people who came to us for newspapers in the morning because they were late arriving. It was time in the afternoon for our customers to disappoint us.

The Laurel and Hardy Newspaper Company posed a conundrum with their late delivery of the newspapers by shorting us two copies of the Daily Mail. We have to report claims before a cutoff time else we lose the claim entirely. The newspapers were delivered after the cutoff time today, so I could not claim the loss through the website. I also could not call the helpline, because it was closed on Saturday after the cutoff time. I resorted to sending a message using the facility on the website that ordinarily generates an automatic reply with a reference number. I received no such reply.

I had considered waiting until tomorrow and falsely claiming against a newspaper of similar value to the two missing newspapers. This, I considered, might be risky because looking up that reference number on the spurious message I received yesterday, I found a message related to newspaper deliveries at the end of last year. I had quite forgotten the company failed to send us newspapers on our last day citing that they could not possibly close us on a Sunday – despite having done so for the previous 18 years – otherwise we would have newspapers on Monday. The logic of the excuse eludes me to this day. I now do not know whether we will get newspapers tomorrow or not.

Actually, having just written that I do remember that the message I had was a complete fabrication. Our last resort contact put her hands up a few days later to say she had entered the wrong date and closed us down a day early. Providing she has

not done the same again, we should, indeed, have newspapers tomorrow and I have been worrying unnecessarily.

We had sporadic customer visits during the rest of the afternoon. Most people were aware that we would be closing at the end of the season, even if they did not know the specific date until we discussed it. There were only two visitors who were not aware of it and are now. One lady had moved into The Cove on a long term basis and will be with us during the winter. I did feel some regret that we would not have the opportunity to provide her with a grumpy shopkeeper experience as it would have been entirely convenient for her, especially as she will rely on the scant bus service to get around. I gave her as much information as I could think of at the time and our contact details if she needed anything else while she was here, and we were closed.

The rest of the day was uneventful with just the infrequent comings and goings of visitors. I checked the perishable stocks and found that we were not doing too badly in running them down. I suspect that we will run out of milk before the day's end but, while I agonised over that for a bit, ordering more would risk being left with far too much, so I demurred.

Our walk around the block with ABH after tea was entirely pleasant. We had felt a bit easterly or northeasterly draught over the last few days but even its cooling influence has not made the days cold; it is still particularly mild. That extended into the evening, although a jacket was necessary, I was not exactly pulling the collar up against the chill.

Gosh, just one day left.

November 1st – Friday

I think that it was Radio Pasty's forecaster who said that it would be a bit colder today and they were not wrong, at least about the temperature first thing. To my mind it was only marginal, and I had taken ABH down to the beach and not really thought much about it. Only when I was standing in front of the shop chatting with a neighbour did I feel it a little bit, but I had dispensed with my jacket at that stage.

Sadly, we did not see much – spelt any – sunshine during the day and suffered full cloud cover. The cloud cannot have been all that thick because it was still bright and it was dry, which is always a bonus. It was a little cooler during the day, down three degrees according to the Land's End weather station, but I do not think that people were overly bothered especially as there was hardly a breath of breeze and that it was the last day for many.

There is always an exception to the rule as I discovered when I entered the gymnasium. The air in there was down three degrees on the three degrees it was down outside. It did not matter too much as I was soon very grateful for the extra cooling. I am still not fully up to tip top performance, but I was at least able to do the full gamut of exercises that I am used to and successfully achieved a blistering session.

Many people have asked how my left knee managed to become dickie. Alright no one has, but just in case they were going to, I will explain anyway. I would love to say that it was from playing some manly sport like rugby or doing something heroic like charging down a ravine to rescue Lassie from a well but sadly it was not. It was ice skating. My partner, Jane, was devastated. She had such plans of fame and stardom, of entering the Olympics together, and that sort of thing, but it was not to be. I hear she took up with some other fellow but obviously it would have been a major disappointment after me. I have no idea what happened to them. As a parting gesture I gave her one of my mixed tapes, as you did back then, a few tunes by Debussy, Dukas and Ravel as I recall.

That is all behind me now and I was comfortable enough to take ABH down to the Harbour beach for the second time in a few hours. The tide was well out this time and there was a long expanse of beach to explore. We were joined by a family. The mother and daughter went sea glass hunting with the father and son kicked a football between them. This caught the attention of the little girl who ran up the beach for a closer look. She proceeded to chase the ball to and fro, and when she reached the next kicker, she stood aside in expectation of the next kick. This was excellent value for the next ten minutes before she found some seaweed and ran off for a chew.

She went back for another go at chase but this time, if the ball was running slowly enough, she would stop it and look at the next kicker in expectation even if it was well short of the kicker. She really has not grasped the concept of bringing the ball back in the tradition of throw and fetch. She will happily chase after a thrown ball, get it and then wait for the thrower to come to her, or just wander off with the ball. It is most frustrating and the chief reason we do not take a ball to the beach with us. I did not think that the man and boy were that bothered by ABH, but I put her back on her lead after a while and we left them to it.

At the top of the slip, she immediately knew that Mother was here somehow. She ignored a couple of passing dogs, which is unheard of, and went straight to the shop to be all over Mother like a rash. Even the Missus came out second best. She does love her 'nanny'.

I cannot rightly say the same for the Laurel and Hardy Newspaper Company, although their recycling service has been most acceptable. That is mainly because I have not had to have too much contact with the company, just put out a bag of cardboard now and again. Unfortunately, I needed to call them today to terminate, or at least suspend, the service until next year because they were unable to take notice

in advance. I spoke to a very pleasant lady who works for a call handling agency contracted by the Laurel and Hardy Newspaper Company. She made me wait on the telephone while she sent a message to terminate the service. Quite why I cannot send a message to terminate the service and cut out the middle, erm, lady I do not know, but anyway, she told me it was all done. We shall see.

A short while later, I received a message from the Laurel and Hardy Newspaper Company, using the same reference that the very pleasant lady had given me, telling me how sorry they were that I had to raise a complaint. Perhaps she had pressed the wrong button or somehow got the wrong end of the stick, although I was very plain. I wrote back making it clear that I had not raised a complaint, just a request to cease the service. Heaven knows what will happen now.

To add to the utter confusion, I had another message from the Laurel and Hardy Newspaper Company, using a different reference. It preceded the 'complaints' message, so cannot have been to do with that request. It told me the customer experience team were taking a little longer than expected with my case number while they assessed all the information available to them. I have not the slightest idea what this refers to and there is no way of finding out. Hopefully, it will be something to keep me entertained during the long winter nights.

There was not much entertainment in the shop for long periods during the middle of the day. We had a small flood of going homers while I was out at the gymnasium but after that business went a bit flat. I was about to mentally align myself with the new normal when another flood of people came, mostly demanding pasties (sorry, MS). I had quite missed the fact that it was national have a cheese pasty day today and had lost the opportunity to increase our supply of them to meet the sudden demand. We did start selling traditional pasties later, but I am now in fear of running out of cheese ones before the weekend is out.

The rest of the afternoon was fairly upbeat. I am afraid I have rather lost focus now and just let what happens run over me. I think I may be going through my transition to closed grumpy shopkeeper prematurely, like a confused werewolf going feral at half moon. I am sure it will be alright as I only have two days to go, and I am sure no one will really notice. Do not be alarmed, dear reader, I will look nothing like a werewolf – I have no hair to start with.

Obtusely, I had spent some of the quiet time of the day topping up our grocery shelves. I reasoned if we had the stock, it may as well be out rather than in the store room. It does mean that the Missus will have more to move when she comes to clean the shelves before we open again. I wish I had thought of that sooner now – and probably, so does she.

Our man at the Lifeboat station told me that the Traffic Enforcement Officer – Traffic Warden to you and me – had been around this morning. I thought that they might be extinct because that is the first time since before the summer. It makes absolute

sense, of course, because with less cars around now he will be finished more quickly and available to do more areas with less traffic. Anyway, he struck gold this morning as some of the RNLI shop ladies had parked on the street when they found no room in the RNLI car park for their big end of season meeting this morning. Whoops.

I had to drag ABH around the block after tea. She was most reticent about moving any further than the corner of the Lifeboat station for some reason. She then spent ages sniffing large areas of the Harbour car park and I had to pull her away from there before it became obsessive. I will never know what that was all about unless I am reincarnated as a dog – or werewolf.