

DIARY 2021/22

February 28th – Monday

It looked a bit gloomy outside first thing but at least it was not raining at that point. It was just damp. I had not looked at any forecast and had no idea that the one I had looked at the day before had brought forward the day of heavy rain I had expected on Tuesday to today. It did not take long to find out.

The tide has been out over the last two days at the time of our morning walk, which has given us plenty of beach to wander about on. Yesterday, I had wondered what the material was hanging from the short slip and assumed that it was washed in on the big seas of late. Today, I noticed some more hanging from the flood lights and it looked like someone had draped very long scarves around various bits of the station. It is some sort of underlay from the station roof, much of which still rattles on the roof itself an unintended benefit of which is that it keeps the gulls off the roof. Perhaps I should get some for the polytunnel.

There was definitely no point in going to The Farm today as the rain would stop us from doing most of the things that we both had left to do. There was, however, plenty of point in going to the gymnasium for a blistering session, so I did. Before I went, I called our plumber but had to leave a message, which he did not respond to for the rest of the day, but I did get a call from the supplier I had chosen for the printer I mentioned yesterday.

There had been a minor hiccup on the usually smooth Internet buying process which needed to be resolved. While he was at it, however, he suggested that there was an alternative printer which had a lower cost per sheet price. I mentioned the fact that I had just spent three days researching the printer that I had selected but I told him that I would have a quick geek at the one he was on about and call him back.

In fairness to our caller, the alternative printer was very slightly cheaper per page on monochrome pages and significantly cheaper on colour pages. It was warhorse of a printer too and a company that has been around since the inception of computer printing. I have dealt with them in the past and they be regarded as the BMW of printers, not so much because of the prestige and build quality, which are nevertheless good, but because everything on it is extra. Duplex printing and scanning are available on the de-luxe model only and if you want wifi, it is an add on module. Despite that, it was not that much more expensive, would not need additional toner cartridges as they are higher capacity to start with and we would not have to change toners so often. It is coming tomorrow, we are told.

With our various administration tasks complete, I thought it high time that I actually did something constructive, like demolishing the remaining bits of shelving in the shop. There were only three sections left but they presented as much a challenge as the previous six sections put together. As we work further into the shop the further

underground we get and the more damp it becomes. This became clear when I started to try and undo the bolts on the plinths of each section. The closer to the end wall, the more rusty the bolts were. One saved me much trouble by being rusted out completely and another responded very well to a smart couple of taps with a hammer. Others I gave up on completely and had to bend the right angles together to flatten them and because of the rust, they were quite compliant.

The very pleasant man that I had contacted on Friday about taking the units away for scrap had already called during the morning asking if we were ready. I told him that I would call as soon as the work was done so he could come down when he was ready. I left a message for him after I finished and started clearing up the fallen plaster at the back of where the units were. In truth, I would have been better off using a shovel rather than a brush, there was so much of it.

True to his word, he was with us in his truck that did not look big enough a few minutes after my call. I helped him load up the truck that was roomier than it looked in the pouring rain. It had been tipping down since mid-morning and showed no signs of letting up anytime soon. It was a relief to get it out of the shop and, as I had moved it twice to get it into his truck, it was a relief that I would not have to move it again.

I felt that I had probably done enough for one day and retired upstairs to sort out the mountain of invoices that have accumulated in recent weeks. I was somewhat distracted during my sorting by the thumping great sea that had returned just when you thought it was safe to get back into the water. On Saturday, the raging had moderated to the degree that there was some perfect surf rolling across the bay in clean, long lines that attracted some of the local surfers out of retirement. Yesterday, the swell had increased dramatically and was breaking into white water right across the bay and today, the sea had clearly decided to really let its hair down. It was just too fascinating to watch, charging into the rocks below us, up the cliffs opposite and boiling over Cowloe and up against the Brisons. I did not get much in the way of invoicing done.

I was surprised that there were not many people around to come and have a geek at it, despite the half term being over and the rain, of course. Weather watchers do not bother much about a bit of rain. It was especially quiet as when I left the gymnasium this morning, so much so, I thought the The Cove had been evacuated due to some danger to which I had not been alerted. There was not a car to be seen anywhere along the road and no sign of life. Proper apocalyptic it was. I am not sure that I should be worried that I probably would not notice if there was a real one.

We shall enjoy the peace while we may.

February 27th – Sunday

I still had no idea if it was windy at the top of the hill but down in The Cove the sun was shining and it was entirely pleasant down on the Harbour beach. We were on our own down there, the bloody hound and I, but a little later, just as I was getting the truck to head off, there were several groups down there, some with dogs enjoying the early morning sun.

It was quite a sedate preamble to getting off to the range. I must at last have all my timings sorted out and enjoyed a leisurely cup of tea and purchased a new printer. It was a purchase that I had arrived at in the most circuitous way, and we did not actually need another printer at that.

I had bumped into one of our neighbours on my way back from the gymnasium and she reminded me that I was going to get her a bulk load of refuse sacks for her business. I had quite forgotten what with everything else going on and thought that I had better do it as soon as I got in lest I forget again. Because the company that we buy from have a minimum order value for free delivery, I wondered at what else we needed from them to make up the numbers. It is normally printer ink cartridges that very quickly make up the value, but we did that last time and we still had not used them. This had me thinking that we do not do much colour printing and it was not all that economic to have a colour printer and a laser printer for general printing. Why not have just the one laser printer, a colour one that would do both, save space and save having to buy toner and colour cartridges. Alright, dear reader, it is a fair cop, I just fancied having a colour printer, although the space saving would be useful.

Having made up my mind that we would have a colour laser printer was the easy part of the decision making. Deciding which one turned out to be a major task. I very quickly nailed it down to half a dozen and a bit more filtering whittled that down to two. The more reviews I read the more I flip flopped between them and then, while reading one review it recommended another printer I had not previously thought of. The reviews of this one were just as good as the others and in the end I had to be brutal about discounting it on the basis that I had less information on it than I did the others and had experience of the other two. It took a further day of internal wrangling to choose between the two left and in the end I set myself a deadline – leaving time to go to the range – to make a decision. So right or wrong, we have a printer coming. It was not until later in the day that I remembered that I still had not ordered the refuse sacks.

It was the first day at the range in a long time that we did not have rain or strong winds. There was a bit of breeze about but nothing to write home about, which was useful because there is not a post box for miles. It was an exceedingly pleasant day in pleasant company. I particularly enjoyed the afternoon because it was shooting with second world war era rifles, which I recall shooting as a boy as part of the cadet force. I now have my own, which has long been an ambition.

I might have mentioned before that it is quite a tiring day. We are at the range all day and active for most of it. There is much running around and resetting targets and

since, during the morning at least, there were record numbers of us, that was more running around than usual. I was most grateful that my second flask had turned up in the nick of time and I was able to fortify myself with full cups of tea rather than the rationing I have been used to. By the time we returned home I was quite worn out but still had the cleaning and putting away to do.

It was a happy day with a happy ending, too. One of the painters I had left a message with a few days ago, called back and will do our painting for us on a dry day during the week. Perhaps he knows I shoot things.

February 26th – Saturday

I was absolutely determined to get something done today and not spend too much time procrastinating, especially in the morning. I was successful to a degree, I think.

It was not the greatest of starts in the right direction. The bleddy hound did her bit and woke me up especially early but I managed to get her to go back to sleep again, so I could as well. As a consequence, I woke up about twenty minutes later than I might ordinarily have done.

Feeling a little guilty, I managed to get us out of the door and down to the beach without delay. It looked and felt like a splendid morning and heralded what I hoped would be a splendid day. The only problem with that was that I had intended to work inside today dismantling the shelving units, on a day when it would have been perfect to work up at The Farm. I was going to discuss it with the Missus, but she had gone back to sleep, so I remained with plan A.

I had anticipated some resistance from the painted in screwhead bolts on the shelving back plates. I left them for a minute while I took the last of the bolts off the plinths. This too was surprisingly easy, and I only had to cut one of them off. With those out of the way and the kick plates too, I could get close and personal with the bolts on the backplates. Once I had cleared the slots in the screw head they unscrewed very easily after the paint seal was broken. It was a methodical process but I was done with the first section in less than half an hour.

My problem now is being able to move all the sheets and shelves to the front of the shop, so I will have room to dismantle the last section. I had thought to take all the steel outside and drop it inside the compound that has been set up around the metal from the Lifeboat station roof that would get it out of the shop. Unfortunately, the steel fence panels have been bolted together. I could unbolt them, but I might just be able to slip everything under the gap at the bottom. It will only be there a few days, so I hope that is not being too cheeky.

That was not the only problem. I have no idea how long that shelving has been in place but if I had to guess judging on its construction, I would say at least thirty years. Behind it, running up from under the concrete shop floor is our mains water

pipe and the bottom six inches of it was severely corroded. Fixing it will not be easy as the road next to the shop slopes up and that pipe will be around five feet underground. I think that the easiest way around it will be to run another pipe from the meter to join the existing pipework near the ceiling in the shop.

Whatever work is required will mean finding a builder to do the digging and drilling through our two feet thick granite wall. Given the amount of effort we have expended finding a builder to do the front of the shop, I do not hold out much hope of having this work done before we open at the end of March. After the new shelving goes back, getting to the site of any join will be exceedingly difficult and if the shelving needs to be moved it will all have to be moved because it will be in one section all along the wall. The small gods of grumpy shopkeepers are having a proper laugh at my expense recently. I have left a message for our plumber to come and have a geek early next week.

The good weather was still nagging at the back of my mind all that time and, given that it was a good place to stop, went and had a chat with the Missus. She had planned to go around to Mother's with the petrol strimmer, which lives in the shed at The Farm so she offered to take me up and leave me there while she went off on her errand. It sounded good to me so off we toddled.

What I had not appreciated was that while the weather was all sweetness and light in The Cove, up at The Farm it was blowing in something fierce. It did not impede my work but it made it very uncomfortable and harder than it might otherwise have been. I wanted to press on with the posts for the compost shed, which is taking an inordinate amount of time, but I noticed yesterday that we seem to be short of wood. I was rather sure I had ordered 4x2 for the posts but there was none in the pile and when I checked the invoice later I realised that there must have been some communication issues because none had been charged for either.

It was not the end of the world, and I used the 6x2s instead, which had been earmarked for the rafters. This compost shed will be stronger than a brick built convenience. What did stop me was that I will need very specific heights on the front and back posts to ensure the correct angle for the pitch. Given that I do not know exactly how the hole borer will perform, I will not be able to cut the posts to size until I have tried them in the ground. It was too late to start on the holes, so I abandoned the compost shed again in favour of IBC preparation.

At least I made better headway here. The new one that sank after its plinth collapsed has been fixed and if I had the battery for the pump I could have emptied the primary in the chain ready to fix that too. As I did not have it, I went and washed out the one we had most recently that had quite a bit of earth in it. This will be installed near the barn and the plinth for that already waits. It was while I was doing that the Missus made a reappearance. She was about to dismount along with Mother and the bleddy hound but I stopped them. We were not far off going home time and there was little

else I could do. The IBC I was working on is pretty much flushed out and ready to be put in place. At last, some visible progress.

Mother came back home with us for pasties. It was a fitting end to a partially successful day, if you discount the water pipe discovery. I have already discounted it. I feel much better, now.

February 25th – Friday

The slipping away of the days seems to have gathered pace. I have found myself distilling what is left to be done and prioritising. Some things will just have to be left. I think that what is top is the compost shed, the new shelving in the shop and getting the IBCs in place. The latter is even more important now because at the last knockings of the day we discovered that there is a crack in the primary water butt in the chain linked to the barn. We had wondered why this was sometimes full and sometimes completely empty. It was just timing and if we used it after a shower it had not yet had time to drain out. But let us not get ahead of ourselves.

There was still enough sea to make the two swimmers in the Harbour this morning look quite precarious. They are both seasoned open water swimmers, so they will have known their limits but the swell was piling around the end of the Harbour wall with some force. They both came out while I was down on the beach with the bleddy hound, looking invigorated ... and cold.

I had expected it to be much colder out this morning, mainly because I caught some of the weather forecast last night and they said it was going to be. It was colder yesterday but much of that was due to the wind chill. There was no wind today or, at least, not very much. It was definitely colder in the gymnasium; I could hardly miss another day this week, so I forced myself to go. I was quite grateful for the blistering session, although I possibly questioned that later after shipping a further 25 boxes of stock up the hill.

I had to make myself available between twelve and one o'clock for the delivery but managed to get the Missus to The Farm before it arrived. Once again it was impossible to know what was in the shipment as the code number did not correspond to the one sent by the supplier of the larger of the expected deliveries. When it turned up it was everything that we had been waiting for all together and it would have been helpful to know that so that I could have had the trailer with me. As it was, I had to collect Mother on my way back to The Farm and managed to take two of the larger boxes and one of the smaller ones and still fit Mother in. It did not occur to me until later that I could have strapped one of them to the roof bars.

I hooked up the trailer, which always seems to take far too long, and put the tail bar back on, this time with cable ties so it would not fall off. It would be useful to be able to remove the hydraulic hose because there is nowhere to stow it. It almost certainly can be done but looking at the linkage, I suspect it is not meant to be done on a

regular basis. I strapped it up as well as I could. I am still not comfortable towing it on the truck, partly because it is designed to go on the tractor but mainly because it makes an awful clatter and you feel every lump and bang through the whole chassis of the truck.

While I waited for the delivery to turn up, I called the local scrap metal man. He is also a garden man and levelled the ground for the cabin for us – a useful fellow to know. I left a message asking if he would be interested in the shelving I was dismantling. Happily, he called back while I was at Mother's and told me that he would be delighted to pick it up and just to call him when it was ready and he would be straight down. This was a breath of fresh air.

You are already familiar with our builder woes with no one keeping us abreast of developments or not, dear reader, well, I am having the same problem with painters. We have asked several local workers, advertising their services in the local newsheet, if they would be interested in painting the black bits of the shop front. There is not much of it and the work could be done in a day. I have called three so far and left messages for someone to call me, and I have had no response. I did speak to the colleague of one who told me that the man would call back between six and nine o'clock that evening. Not a sausage. These people may well be very busy and unavailable to do our work, no problem, but it is surely the height of rudeness and completely unprofessional not to return the call and tell the potential customer that. I also get asked by customers quite often if I can recommend local workers. These are definitely off my go to list.

It was very hard to be upset and angry today. Up at The Farm, the beautiful weather was even more beautiful. It was warm, too, and I had to divest myself of my thick water and windproof trousers. I had also not put on my jacket since the morning. The couple of times that I had gone back to The Cove, there were visitors in abundance milling about at our end of the road taking advantage of the only business open at the time other than the OS. There, people were gathered outside enjoying the weather and the vista that came with it. I had driven through to the Harbour car park with the trailer because it was easier to turn around and it was very busy. There was hardly any parking on the street, so perhaps the message is slowly getting through. It was the first and only day of busyness this half term, so I did not feel too bad about not opening.

Once again we had reached the end of the day and not achieved very much. I speak for myself; the Missus had tidied up the barn, which made it much easier to unload the delivery and get the trailer into the barn. When I got back with the delivery, she and mother were sitting in the sun by the bonfire, poking it occasionally. Some life that. I just unloaded the trailer in the smoke. I did manage to screw two planks together to make one of the rear roof supports for the compost shed. The other, the front post, looks much longer than I imagined and I will have to revisit my measurements but in my hurry to bring up the delivery, I left my tool bag behind.

I spent the evening girding my loins so that I could set to with enthusiasm in the morning. Other people call it having a beer in front of the television.

February 24th – Thursday

Just when you think it is safe to go out without lead boots on that pesky wind comes back with a vengeance. It had a rest yesterday but came along with a double dose this morning.

When I stuck my head outside the door first thing, it was noticeable breezy but nothing especial, I thought. I was therefore completely unprepared for one rather robust and slightly vicious howling gale hiding at the corner of the Lifeboat station. It very nearly took me over and the bleddy hound decided that there were better things to do and turned around to go home. Luckily, I had her on a lead and we fought our way down to the little bit of beach that the tide had not yet got to. The sea was a raging mess again, lumping over the wall a good few hours before high water was due.

We were blown back up the slipway, which saved a bit of effort and ran back to the shelter of the flat. I stopped to lasso the wheelie bin that was making a bid for freedom only then realising just how cold my fingers were. That was some wind chill going on there and made me quite glad that we had not made plans to go to The Farm today.

I had a number of tasks and chores to do while sitting at my desk. Unfortunately, this can be infectious and I ended up still at my desk at midday. My game plan for the day was to make a start on dismantling the old shelving unit in the shop. I reckoned that I would have it done in a few hours which was still plenty of time before another fairly large delivery arrived from the Doing Parcels Dreadfully company. Ahead of starting, I telephoned the shelving company the new units were coming from just to make doubly sure all was well before I got rid of the old ones. I am not as daft as I look, dear reader. Well, not entirely.

I should have known that the dismantling would not be plain sailing, after all, this is me we are talking about. I knew that at some point, someone had glued a wood edging to the shelves, tarding them up and, to be fair it was quite effective. To save themselves time, they glued it across multiple shelves and I would have done the same but it meant sawing through it at the joins. That took no time at all with my clever oscillating multi-tool. What I then discovered was that each shelf was bolted to the next, thankfully only at the front of each shelf. This was fiddly and took time, although the nuts and screw bolt were in reasonable condition and unscrewed without much effort.

It was when I got to the plinth that the trouble started. The bottom shelf was bolted at the back and the adjoining one could not be released until the shelf next to it had been lifted as well. Then the wings that make up the plinth sides were bolted in too and the lower bolts were all rusty and some of them required some easing oil for encouragement to shift.

Having removed the first plinth it became clear that I would have to remove the back section as I went or risk the whole lot collapsing on me as I systematically removed the rest of the supporting plinths. This consists of two uprights and a back plate all neatly bolted together with screw head bolts that had been painted over. Each one will need the groove in the screw head channelled out so I can get a screwdriver in there.

I had just started that task when the delivery driver knocked on the door. I am not entirely sure which was more tedious, cleaning out the boltheads or dealing with the Doing Parcels Dreadfully company. This soon became apparent. Once again they had split the delivery but this time it had not been done 'officially' and the driver took ages fiddling with his bar code reader so he could sign off this part of the consignment. He told me that the other boxes, and he was not sure how many, which was no surprise because he told me he had eleven when he only had nine, would be in the second deliver expected in an hour.

I piled the boxes up on our newspaper box with a view to taking them up to The Farm. Since it was high time for a cup of tea, I decided I would set to with loading the boxes after that. I would only be ten minutes, after all.

I had only just sat down when a rather vicious squall decided that now was the time to barge through The Cove. I heard a bang as the sudden gust of wind scat the pile of boxes in all directions and all over our half of the road. Grabbing a coat, I hurried down to start moving them out of the road and into the shop when the hail started. It was heavy, too, and soaked the boxes instantly and me with them. It was the only squall of the day and in fact the only rain and perfectly timed for that ten minutes that the boxes were outside. Someone has it in for me.

These were the bigger boards that we had ordered and I could only get three in the truck at a time. I decided that doing three trips to The Farm was a bit much, so I loaded up the roof bars and strapped a further two boxes down. This worked rather better than I imagined now we have some proper ratchet straps. These have really come into their own this week.

It was while I was loading up that the Doing Parcels Dreadfully company sent a message telling me that they could not be bothered to deliver the remaining parcels today and they would come tomorrow, when we were expecting another large delivery. My expectations set, I was less than pleased when another driver turned up with one box shortly after I had locked up The Farm and put the truck away. I now have no idea if there is anything left to come or when that might be if there is.

When I got back in, I sent a note to our supplier to ask how many boxes they sent and now know that there are five more plus thirteen coming from another supplier. I set to planning to bring the trailer down tomorrow and how I might load everything at once. I then stopped myself from being so daft because all the boxes are being delivered by the Doing Parcels Dreadfully company, so that there was absolutely no point in planning anything until we see how or if they arrive. I had a cup of tea instead, which was far less stressful.

The temperature dropped dramatically into the evening, which is something we are unused to. In the background, the sea was still out there raging. As I drove down the hill earlier, great peaks of white water were breaking in front of the Brisons revealing a big swell still piling in. It is a moody beast, that ocean, and noisy too.

February 23rd – Wednesday

The bleddy hound, bless her, had me up at the earliest time yet, or would have had I not explained what was what to her and gone back to sleep. She let me have another twenty minutes which was good of her.

The wind appeared to have almost gone completely when we stepped outside the door, at least it was the calmest yet. We were slightly more speedy today because we did not meet her best pal until half way down Coastguard Row. We were all together for the briefest of spells before going our separate ways but it is always a good start to the day to meet them.

I had already decided that I did not need to attend the gymnasium this morning and did not change my mind when I got up. The purpose of attending the gymnasium is to keep fit for the various tasks I am demanding of my increasingly creaky body. If I have undertaken sufficient exercise through other means there is no point in torturing myself unnecessarily. Yes, it sounded a reasonable enough excuse to me too.

Instead of the gymnasium, I set my cap to heading into town to run an errand at the bank. As I was going, the Missus suggested that I collect the doings for our tea and that it was my turn to do it. I had a quick look at the Internet for ideas while I had my breakfast and came up with something that I could adapt for our tastes without making it too onerous to cook. It did not take long to write a list of the four items that we did not have in the cupboard – so it was not beans on toast, in case you were trying to guess, dear reader.

I met with a neighbour on the way out who asked if I still remembered how to get to town. I assured her that my satellite navigation system was working again since I had a new mobile telephone, so I had a high level of confidence.

I had quite forgotten that it was half term and that the roads were busier than normal. I also wondered if I might have problems parking in town but, of course, the majority

of visitors would be having their shopping delivered or going to Tesmorburys on the edge of town. I cannot recall if I have mentioned the benefits of visiting small independent shops before, dear reader. I cannot help but feel that our visitors are missing out because the service is more personal and the goods are often better value. Just for example, I had brought with me a few containers that I use for beans and pulses. The very good shop in Causeway Head that sells everything loose filled these up for me for a mere bagatelle. In Tesmorburys, I would have had to buy those small plastic packets at twice the price if not more for the same amount.

I realise that not everything can be acquired at the small independent shops and sometimes it is also more economic to go to Tesmorburys. It was a case in point today when I could not find a couple of items I required and ended up there. It is also difficult to avoid for fuel for the truck as I would have to go out of my way to find an independent petrol station.

I collected the bleddy hound on the way back and took her to The Farm for a run. I decided that a quick visit was in order to collect the tools and ratchet straps that I had left out. I also had an unrealistic hope that the concrete in the two flexible buckets might still be useable but, as I should have expected, we are the proud owners of two heavy, brutalist door stops. If I took them to the Tate Gallery, I would probably win a prize.

I lingered to give the bleddy hound a run and to water the seedlings in the greenhouse. I recalled that I had used two watering cans full last time so took two to the water butts to save time. As they filled, I saw something floating on the surface of one and gave it a poke, which I instantly regretted as it was a small mouse. I have no idea if I drowned it or it had already expired in the watering can before I got there. I do not recall if the watering can was upright or lying down when I picked it up, which would have resolved it one way or another.

I fished it out and gave it a decent funeral. It is common knowledge that mice funerals involve throwing the dead over a hedge, so I did that – ceremoniously, of course. A little frustrated that I did not know if I had been responsible for its demise or not, I just had to see if I could absolve my conscience. I found this – *“Exhibiting great endurance and flexibility, mice can swim and tread water for up to 3 days. When fully submerged, mice can also hold their breath for up to three minutes.”* Big thanks to Moxieservices.com for that. I will sleep more easily in my bed tonight. Crickey, 3 days. It must be all that treadwheel exercise they get.

After a week or two of procrastination I forced myself into action in the shop. The new shelves are coming next week so I have to empty and disassemble the old ones. It only took about twenty minutes to empty them, so I have no idea why I left it so long. I will dismantle them tomorrow if I can summon the enthusiasm but first I will check that the new ones are actually coming. There is a local lad who will take the scrap steel, which is handy, and I will have to contact him tomorrow as well.

I apologise, dear reader if you were forced to read today's Diary more slowly than usual. I have a new ergonomic keyboard that I am struggling to get used to and each line has been excruciatingly dragged from the unfamiliar key positions.

Tea was a winner, in case you were wondering, dear reader – chicken and chorizo pasta in a creamy sauce. I am in the good books momentarily.

February 22nd – Tuesday

I must have been some wicked somewhere along the way. Alright, I can think of a few instances but there is no reason I should be denied sleep just because the bleddy hound thinks it is time to get up. Still, once I am up, I am ready for the world even if it may not look like it.

A trip outside normally blows away any residue of cobweb that may have been lurking behind, so we did that. We immediately bumped into the bleddy hound's best pal and went on around the car park with them. It took a while because the pair of them dawdled but at least they made it around the whole circuit without splitting up this time.

On the way back, I ran into the scaffolders who had just arrived outside the Lifeboat station. Things seem to be happening very quickly, which is a bit galling when we have been waiting for 4 years for our roof to be done but I suspect the RNLI have more money and clout than me. I stopped and had a chat and they told me that today's work was putting up an inspection tower. One wag told me that he did not know why they needed an inspection tower because he could tell standing on the ground that it was broken. He did not use the word 'broken' but a technical term instead. I knew what he meant.

While I should really have been pulling my finger out and getting ready to head to The Farm, there were a few things that needed to be done at home first. Over the last months I have been rationing my tea supply while up at the range on a Sunday. I have a half litre flask that is clearly just a little too small. The Missus suggested that there is a bigger one in the cupboard but I reckoned that the tea would be cold by the time I got to the second half with the lid being open and closed several times. Two smaller ones seemed sensible. What would have been more sensible was to have sorted this out weeks ago, but it was one of those things I never got around to.

I am also going to have to cut out some time to make some rounds for my rifle as I will be using it next Sunday. I have got everything that I need but the machine that makes them needs to be clamped to the counter. The clamps that I have a just a little too narrow and longer reach ones would be helpful. Rather more pressing is the need for a bevel measure for installing the pitch roof on the compost bin shed that is under construction, so I bought one of those alongside the clamps.

It was last night that the Missus asked when I was going to do the concreting of the compost shed floor. You may recall, dear reader, that my efforts were scotched last time by taking the wrong sized trailer to the builders' merchant. The Missus had demurred a little when I asked to use her new shiny one and the lane and field are too slippery to have the merchant truck deliver. I was waiting for better weather. Pointing out that the use of her trailer was the sticking point greased the wheels of an agreement and as long as I returned it in the same condition I took it, all would be well. I was not overly confident regarding my side of the bargain but I had purchased a tarpaulin to protect the trailer as much as possible and I could always apologise if it got a bit concretey.

It was not the best start. We were late anyway, and I had to prepare the tail board including sticking on the new numberplate that I had been meaning to do since I bought it. The next problem was how to secure it as there were no points on the trailer on which to hang it. I settled for using some twine through the screw holes and attached that to the pins that hold the side flaps in place. Had I been a little more prepared I would have used more robust string but doubled up with the very thin twine.

I was around two hundred yards from the entrance to the builder's merchant when I started getting lights flashed at me and people pointing and waving. It took a moment to realise they were not people who recognised me or admirers of our newish, bright red tipper trailer. There was something amiss. The thin twine holding the tail board had snapped on both sides and it was running behind with one corner snapped off. I consoled myself noticing that the indicators at least were still working as I had my hazard warning lights on.

Arriving at the builders' merchant, I took time to secure the board more securely and hope for the best. I also deployed the tarpaulin and weighed it down temporarily with some tools from the back of the truck. My instructions were to reverse into the concrete loading bay but noticing that reversing the small trailer would be problematic, the very pleasant concrete man told me that he would use his tipper truck to load the trailer instead. I explained what I needed it for, and he went off to mix something appropriate.

Not knowing how long it would take, I removed the tools from the tarpaulin and spent the next twenty minutes running around the trailer trying to stop it blowing away. Happily, it behaved impeccably when the man arrived in his tipper and dumped the ton or so of concrete unceremoniously into the trailer bang in the middle of the tarpaulin. It had already made an effort to push open the side flaps on the trailer and I managed to reset the catches before any more weight pressed against them. I quickly deployed two ratchet straps diagonally across the trailer with the aim of stopping the tarpaulin flapping in the wind. It had not occurred to me, but the ratchet straps had the unintended benefit of holding the side flaps in place. This was just as well because on the journey back, the concrete settled evenly across the trailer bed and pressed its full weight against the sides.

I cannot say that the truck struggled with the weighty trailer on the journey home, but I certainly noticed it was there. I drove very carefully very mindful of the embarrassment of leaving 1.2 tons of concrete lying about on the highway. It brought to mind the time the Aged Parent dropped a couple of litres of white paint on the cobbles at the top of the picture postcard Gold Hill in Shaftsbury. I thought they might have to rename it. Even driving with the utmost care, I was very lucky to arrive at The Farm without damage because the hitch point of the trailer and truck was about six inches lower due to the weight and the trailer stand was scraping on the raised centre of the lane.

My game plan was to take the truck off the trailer and replace it with the tractor. It was going to be easier to reverse it up to the frame I had built for a start and also, the trailer could be tipped to extract the concrete. Ah, the best laid schemes of mice and men ...

I merrily wound down the trailer's stand onto a plank I put down to create a solid surface until I could wind no more. This is the point where the connecting bar lifts to allow me to remove the pin and drive away. That six inch dip could not be raised by the trailer stand winder and when I looked from a few feet away, the plank that I had used to rest it on was bowed crazily in the middle.

Momentarily toying with the idea of using the jack, I gave up and used the truck to reverse the trailer into position. I am definitely getting better at it but it still took a few attempts mainly because the access was very narrow.

Without the means of tipping the trailer the only way to get the concrete into the frame was to do it by hand. I fetched my trusty Cornish shovel and the Missus used a produce scoop and a flexible bucket. We set to.

It took a while and I do not think that I will be needing to go to the gymnasium tomorrow but we shifted the majority of the load between us. With the reinforcing bars in place we covered those over with some of the second half of the load. I had envisaged that we would be able to detach the truck half way through but we had nearly emptied it before I could use the stand to raise it high enough to get the pin out. When I did get the tractor in place and the tipper working, the entire tarpaulin slid gracefully off with the concrete in it. Oddly, it was exactly what I thought that would happen and had already planned, when I went through it in my head while lying in bed, to tie up the top end of the tarpaulin to stop that happening. What is even odder is that I had not actually forgotten about it, but I tipped the trailer anyway.

There was no harm done. We had tucked the fore end of the tarpaulin in front of the frame and the whole lot landed concrete first. We just had to peel back the tarpaulin and spread the pile of concrete around a bit. The Missus and I smoothed it out with a long board that I had kept for the purpose fully aware that time was not on our side.

I used the electric water pump to clean out the trailer, my boots and the shovel and quickly put the trailer away and locked away the tools. Mother was in the cabin and tea time was approaching so we finished up in a bit of a hurry. The Missus came out to inspect her trailer when I had finished and pointed out some bits that I had missed. I turned around to get the hose just in time to see the bleddy hound amble across the tarpaulin covered concrete that we had meticulously just levelled.

It was only after we got home that I remembered that we had left some tools out up there and two buckets of excess concrete that I had intended to put in the hole left by the middle post of my polytunnel wind protector. We will have two large door stops when we go up again. If we ever do this again, I will make sure we start earlier.

We were quite lucky with our timing. The evenings have been drawing out markedly in the last week or so and the mornings too, witnessed by the bleddy hound's increasingly early morning. The sun was still a way off setting when we left The Farm at gone five o'clock. At half past six, there was still enough light to see clearly across the bay. It was a salient reminder that spring is on the way and shop opening is pressing closer and we are running out of time.

February 21st – Monday

That wind had been howling all night or at least the parts of the night that I was awake for, the beginning and the end bit. It may have stopped in between, but I suspect not.

Whatever the case, it was blowing a mad hooley when we stepped out first thing into the salty rain that was not rain at all but the spray blowing down The Cove from the headland. Here, the waves were running up the cliff and exploding into huge spray fountains and running in rivulets down the cliffside. We looked out toward the west beyond Cowloe to a monster sea, raging in a continuous line of huge waves heading into the bay. It was quite disturbing and rather unexpected. I thought all that had gone away. Apparently not.

Since I had skipped gymnasium going on Friday to bear witness to a roof coming off, I was not going to be dissuaded today. I gathered my kit and headed off as soon as possible. I had felt quite cold earlier but I think it was the wind chill mainly because I have definitely had it colder in the hut with a tin roof – happily, it still has one. I managed a blistering session, which was most gratifying especially with the prospect of not doing a great deal later in the day.

I have some jobs to do in the shop, especially ahead of the new shelving arriving at the outset of March. I rather thought that I would get on with that because we had thought twice about going to The Farm with the wind still banging in quite robustly. All the indications were that it was going to be a bright, sunny and dry day, which was a bit of a shame to stay indoors for. All that went out of the window when we

telephoned the digger hire company to tell them they could have their digger back. We had expected it to be returned tomorrow or Wednesday, the same day of the week that we hired it, but the company told us that they would be there in the afternoon, just a few hours hence.

We scurried around getting ready for an immediate departure. We knew that the digger was a little on the muddy side and would need a quick wash down – that would probably take half an hour. We offered to drive it down the lane, it seemed fair since the delivery driver drove it up the lane to us. This alone would take twenty minutes at its sedate top speed of 3 miles per hour when it is not negotiating corners.

Actually, the drive down the lane was quite pleasant. I was wrapped up well against the breeze and avoided the dips and the pot holes. Up high, I could see over the hedges and had a vista we had never had before. At that pace I had time to look about and there was a surprising amount of flora and fauna about even this early in the year. A peacock butterfly joined me for a short while, flitting alongside of me before eventually resting in the hedge so that I could see what sort it was. I looked it up later, as it did not come with a label. I only had to wait a few minutes for the hire company to turn up and I left him to load it onto his trailer as I did not want him to see the tear in the corner of my eye and I left it behind.

We have been in contact with another group of builders to see if they would be any more responsive regarding sorting out our roof. They had already been once and today, out of the blue they turned up with someone else who would run with the major aspects of steel work. They are all local lads of about twelve, one of which we have seen grow up locally. So far, they have been more interested and responsive than all the other builders we have had in all together. Time will tell, obviously, but we have higher hopes this time around.

Enough about us, time for casting our news net a little wider for a change. From one of our trade news feeds I learn that a Devon hotelier has developed a new travel route for the South West along the lines of the North Coast 500 that the Missus and I travelled a few years back in Scotland. The new route is styled as the South West 660, and is comprised of 50 mile legs – and presumably a spare ten for emergency purposes - including sights to see and places to visit. It has been developed to encourage even more visitors to the area but particularly during the low season.

The wheels of the marketing machine have only just started to turn and the website is a work in progress. They clearly are not there to make new friends, stating that there are “*no towns*” west of St Ives and Penzance, which I am not altogether certain that St Just would necessarily agree with. Land’s End is singled out as well for its “*expensive car park ... alongside crowded fast food outlets and souvenir shops*”, which given that the marketing manager there complained about a joke in The Diary once that he had not even read, I suspect might draw a well-aimed written Exocet in its direction.

There has been much in the news recently – hidden beneath all the other stuff that has been in the news recently – about companies being “B Corp” certified. I had to look it up, but B Corp is a non profit organisation attempting to make all businesses a force for change in their communities and the planet. To be B Corp certified a company must prove its worthiness to exist on the planet, being nice to people, the environment and, erm, other things. I suspect it is probably easier for smaller companies to attain and looking at the list that is essentially true. They are mainly all trendy fashion and beauty product companies with a few exceptions such as vegan food producers and one sustainable beef company.

So, the reason I mention it – if dedicating a whole large paragraph to the thing is mentioning – is that a wine importer and seller in Truro has become the first such business in the UK to achieve B Corp certification and only the second globally. Well, it is east of Camborne where such things are very important, I am sure. Given that west of Penzance and St Ives is a wasteland of small hamlets of ne'er-do-wells awaiting the largesse of travellers seeking the revelations on the road less travelled, I doubt we'll see any B Corps here all of a sudden.

Mind, perhaps the Missus should be certified – in the nicest possible way – for cooking the remaining vegetables she was unable to cook last night because of the power cut and making them into a something for tea. Very tasty it was too.

February 20th – Sunday

The breeze had kicked in again as we took our stroll this morning. Despite that, the bleddy hound seemed happy enough to walk all the way around the block today. This might have something to do with her best pal who had come all the way across the car park to see her, which is the opposite way to which they normally go. That is true love for you. They split up again half way up towards Coastguard Row. Definitely modern true love.

It was probably just as well because time was pressing, and we would have dawdled else. Of course, it was range day as it is most Sundays off season and I go as often as I can, while I can. A couple of days ago the forecasters had suggested rain all day but come the day it was grey and overcast but only a hint of moisture in the air. The wind, however, was picking up all the time and I wondered how we might fair with our targets again.

Happily, the morning session was mostly using heavy, metal plates that mainly stayed on their stands. We had a couple of targets up but made sure they were in a sheltered spot. The afternoon proved a little more tricky as this was target only shooting and the one on the left, directly in line with the entrance split in half fairly quickly. We curtailed the session early because of the increasing wind and the darkening of the sky. The wind was banging in as we came to the end of the session. I hung about in the hope that someone else would collect the red flag which is at the

top of the quarry, fully exposed to the elements. It seems anyone else had better things to do, like going home, so it was down to me in the end.

The flag fought me every inch on the way down the pole and I had to tuck it up my jumper when I got it down to stop it pulling me over. I spent a few minutes making sure that the halyard was tied off tightly as the bottom pulley has come away from its fixing. As I turned to head back down the side of the quarry, the rain belted in. The gusts were probably approaching 70 miles per hour by this stage, so it was not the most comfortable I have been and was very glad to get down to the bottom, battered by unscathed.

When we had left in the morning there was a collection of contractor trucks littered along our stretch of the road. I had not realised but our friends to the rear had also suffered on Friday as their power line pole had come down. Although the cable was wrapped around a parked car, it was still operational but the team had come to right the pole, which was in a very awkward position. It took a while to get the plant into position and our friends lost their power from around the middle of the day.

Just as the team were finishing, they noticed another stretch of cable that was badly corroded. The team had informed our neighbour that the power would be off for a further hour or so while they fixed that too. That is when our power went off. The Missus was just finishing off the Sunday roast and the timing could have been better. We were short a couple of vegetables but what had been cooked was more than plenty as it usually is when the Missus is cooking. We ate our meal in fading light and toward the end by torchlight.

Fortunately, the room had not had a chance to get too cold when the power came on just over an hour later, as we were worried about Mother who had spent the day with us. We had been exceedingly lucky over the weekend as we are usually to top contenders for power outages in windy weather because most of our cables are above ground. We had got away light in some of the worse winds ever. The contractor team did a door to door later on, making sure everyone was up and running. I am quick to poke fun at the big corporates when they fail but, big praise where it is due, I am really quite impressed by Western Power Distribution, who provide and maintain the infrastructure here. Let us hope for some calm in the days to come.

February 19th – Saturday

My, my, what a lazy day I had. Yes, another and it was only a timely call from Mother than spurred me into action at all.

The breeze was much diminished when we stepped out this morning and we made it through to the Harbour car park without mishap. There was still enough wind there to push an empty barrel around and a visitor narrowly stopped it from heading down the

western slip. I helped him tuck it into a quiet corner. We did not venture around the whole block as the bleddy hound seemed rather keen to get back again.

Some contractors turned up halfway through the morning to put some proper fencing around the mused up steel in the corner. One of our boys left the digger there as well just to hold it in place as the winds are still forecast as strong for the next few days. I had not seen it last night but the last people to leave used the benches from the café and ourselves to form the cordon and the contractors very kindly put them back this morning.

Large parts of the day were rather wholesome with big cloudless skies or with high thin cloud that really only seemed to affect the colour of the sky. This brought in some visitors who, presumably, were denied a bit of a Cove fix yesterday – there were some that had more than their fair share, stuck in the Harbour car park much longer than they intended. I spoke with a lady this morning who owns one of the houses up behind us. She told me that she had been stopped by the police – “very pleasantly, but firmly” – from even walking down the road. She also said that she had been approached for an interview by local television but declined because she did not have her make-up on. I told her, no wonder the police would not let her through, we have standards you know. Fortunately, she laughed.

Mother called roughly in the middle of the day to tell me that her electricity had gone off again – not all of it, just the television and Internet. Previously, her ring main had tripped, and we had put it down to the toaster, which had been replaced. I just assumed a repeat performance and told her that I would come over without even asking any further detail.

If the call had not come, I think that I may well have remained sitting in the living room for the rest of the day. It was one of those days when everything seemed like too much effort. So, I was glad to have been spurred into action else I would have got to the end of the day and regretted it. I also wanted to go up to The Farm to inspect for damage that we could not see from the camera.

Mother’s predicament, when I got there, was not in the least clear. None of the switches had tripped, which was good news to a degree but the cause of her television going off was a mystery. She had been sitting doing her knitting with a radio channel on and the remote was the other side of the room. If the power generally had been interrupted for a few seconds that would have turned off the television but would have triggered her safety alarm. It is possible that perhaps she had inadvertently set a sleep timer on the television. Even if it has one, it seems unlikely. I left her with everything working but worried that I had been called out for no reason. I assured her that she had done me an immense favour by waking me from my indolence.

I circled back home via The Farm. There were a few items in places where we had not left them but otherwise we got away remarkably well given the strength of wind.

One post in the middle of my wind netting protecting the polytunnel had been rent from the ground but the others had held firm. Because it is still connected by the netting to the other posts, fixing the loose one will be a trial.

The only other issue was a broken polythene window in the greenhouse, surprisingly on the sheltered side. We could see that on the camera and I wondered if it has been blown out from inside because of a hole in the windward side. When I checked, the rest of the greenhouse was secure, so the broken window was a bit odd but at least more easily fixed than the post.

When I came to water the plants while I was there, I noticed that the end water butt had been upturned. This is the first in line and was surprising empty, which is odd since it is the first to fill and the last to be emptied. I am beginning to wonder if we have a blockage in the barn guttering, which will be a complete nightmare to resolve being so high up and close to the hedge. We shall keep an eye on it now it is back in place.

As I left The Cove, a huge truck was turning up. I had assumed it was there to remove the compressed roof but when I came back it had left a large container in the Lifeboat station forecourt. I am wondering if the game plan is that anyone turning up at the station has to break a bit off the roof and put it in the container. It will take a while but will be effective eventually. It is actually temporary accommodation, should it be needed because the station roof is no longer water tight.

I had been asked to attend the station later in the evening to test out the new arrangements. The management team had spent all day compiling a very swift contingency plan in retrospect. Power is still off in the building but there is now some emergency flood lighting on a low voltage feed to facilitate an evening launch. I took my head torch just in case, but it does appear that the temporary arrangements will work and most of us know where things are anyway. In an emergency we would easily manage, I am sure. We are, after all, a very bright-eyed, very excellent Shore Crew.

February 18th – Friday

Who would have thought that it was today that would live in infamy for at least a couple of days before people forgot about it.

I had been expecting to hear some howling in the eaves from early in the morning and at the outset there was one almighty gust come through. There were moments of quiet between the howling but that could have just been me sleeping. The bleddy hound did not seem to care very much – we think she is a bit deaf – and she got me up at the usual time.

She did care quite a bit when we got out into it; she was not in the least happy. I could not blame her at all since it was difficult for me to stand up in it and walk in a

straight line. I had checked the windspeed before we left and it was gusting at 75 miles per hour with a sustained 65 mile per hour wind. We detoured through the RNLI car park where the buildings and the walls give a bit of shelter and came back as we reached our end of Coastguard Row. The skies were bright with only fluffy white cloud about but the air was filled as if it were raining. This would be the sea lumping up against Pedn-men-du and the spray being carried down the road.

I had already made up my mind that I would not be venturing out again before the wind diminished, including a planned trip to the gymnasium - if it was still there - when a call from a neighbouring business came in. The doors to the Roundhouse had blown in at some point. The owner had arranged someone to put in a temporary fix but if I would not mind going to have a quick check, they would be grateful.

Leaving it until the bleddy hound had finished breakfast and I had a fortifying cup of tea, I tooted up with my full metal jacket Kevlar waterproof coat. Bizarrely, I suspected my gymnasium shorts were the best option of lower garment as they would not rattle so much in the wind, my legs being naturally aerodynamic, you understand. It actually did not make much difference I suspect because the wind had upped its game since I was last out, half an hour before. I could barely stand upright let alone move forward. I had to wait and move between gusts, which given the gusts were fairly close together made for very slow progress. Walking in a straight line was not possible at all and I was grateful when, having checked the door was indeed secure, I could move into the shelter of the Roundhouse.

Getting home was even more troublesome, being pushed from behind and trying to resist the urge to run with it. I was even more convinced that the gymnasium session was off for the day. Within the next twenty minutes that was confirmed by the roof skin of the Lifeboat station lifting up as one body, moving a little to the right and coming down again. I watched it unfold, as I spoke on the telephone to the Aged Parent, and land in a crumpled heap covering the road and draped over the railing to the beach below. Had the wind been in the northwest at the time, it would have landed on my lap.

All sorts of merriment ensued. I had been pretty sure that there was no one in the street at the time, as I was looking out. Both the Missus and I checked the camera recordings that are pointed out that way and confirmed that no one was squashed under the heap. As it had come down it had snapped the wooden pole that carried the streetlamp and electrical power for next door. I was corrected later because I had always thought that the roof was copper. It is not. It is stainless steel, which is probably also not so bad at conducting electricity and we feared that the whole structure and the railings all the way down to the chip shop might be live.

It took a little while for the authorities to mobilise. In the interim vehicles continued to squeeze by, which perhaps was not so bad. What alarmed me most was the number of pedestrians calmly ambling by the structure that was potentially live with high

voltage and flapping about in the breeze like a cotton sheet. It was probably around an hour later that the police closed the road and stopped people walking down.

If you ever asked the question, how many people does it take to clear up after a roof comes off, the answer is apparently a lot. Police came by in numbers to observe, obviously RNLI crew were about and eventually management, the contractors came by, at least a dozen of them, and stood about for hours, waiting for heaven knows what. Six hours after the event, there were around twenty five people standing around, some highly visible in yellow jackets and hard hats, others sheltering away in nooks and crannies. I have never seen such a busy scene of inaction in my life. I have to assume that there was an awful lot of risk assessing going on.

In the end some local entrepreneurs properly equipped took the plunge shortly before five o'clock, pushing the collection of metal to the side of the road with angry looking beasts of diggers and grabbers. An unassuming character with a disc cutter sliced through the railings as the light started to fail. It was difficult to see what the plan was and after seven hours of rattling metal in my ear 'ole, I had begun to lose interest to be brutally frank. I had fleetingly thought that they might just tip the lot over the edge, walk away whistling and muttering, 'what roof?'. In the end they neatly folded the whole roof into a pile about an eighth the area of the station roof and pushed it into the corner out of the way. I assume that they could not find a carpet to sweep it under.

All that very nearly did not happen. Shortly into the operation, the streetlight that the power company had assured the assembled crew had been turned off, leapt into a shower of sparks and fizzing as the digger knocked it. My uneducated guess is that although the power company had indeed turned off its supply, the cable that leads away from it goes to our neighbour's property which is powered by solar panels that would still have been very much live. To give the power company its due, they were here in record time to make it safe again and for the clean-up work to continue.

The Lifeboats remain off station at present while the situation is assessed but I should not imagine that is for long.

By evening time, the winds were starting to diminish to a regular breeze West Cornwall level. We had resolved to stay inside all day and had only come out to run the bleddy hound around in the mews behind us, using the back door. We were definitely not short of entertainment but from the shenanigans on the street and the raging sea in the bay. We are hoping for a quieter day tomorrow, we are quite worn out with the excitement.

February 17th – Thursday

The wind that has been with us for a fair few days was absent this morning. I suspect it is having a breather ahead of the main event tonight and into the next few days, as

far as I can tell. It was quite pleasant not to be knocked about first thing, but the Missus had not woken up yet.

The great plan was to be at The Farm early, so we made it around the middle of the day as usual. I dallied next door for a good half an hour while I took the door stop away from the sliding door so that it would open a bit wider. As is always the way, one screw came out with the minimum of effort while the other refused to budge, largely because it had no head left to it. I did try to cut one into it but my multitool metal blade had seen better days and I did not have a spare. Brute force won the day and I was able to be on my way to load the truck up with tools that I did not need up at The Farm.

It turned out not to be the most productive days, for me at least. The Missus and Mother ensconced themselves in the greenhouse and planted loads of things. I believe that they did all right. I was unsettled right from the start.

My main plan was to pump the water from one of the full IBCs into the new empty one that I had recently set up nice and straight and level on its own plinth made from pallets. Once the middle one was empty, I could move it out of the way and reset its pallet plinth so that it was level and put it back. I could then repeat the process, probably not in the same day, with the remaining, sloping IBC, the first in the chain. On paper it all looked extremely straight forward but on paper I had not allowed for a local waste disposal firm rolling into the field, lost.

The driver had cleverly followed his satellite navigation system that faithfully informed him that the holiday let he was servicing was in our field. You may have guessed, dear reader, that we do not have a holiday let in our field, mainly because not many people would be able to get to it and if they did they probably would not get back again. Our truck driver was about to demonstrate that very point.

We gave him directions to the place that he really wanted to be in and then informed him that he probably would not get out of the field without help. I felt that it would be worth a try and really to show him that I was not being jocular about his predicament. He tried and made a further six inches forward and four inches down with the drive wheels at the back. I fetched our much used strop and found a robust point to attach it to and reversed our truck into position. This approach was a complete failure but luckily, I had brought the tractor out to unload the earth containers the Missus had me load last thing yesterday.

There was much more success with the tractor, leaving the truck nicely aligned with the gate. There was every chance that he would make it back to the main road unaided but since I had the tractor in action I told him I would precede him down the lane just in case and would leave him at the turning he needed off the A30 a further fifty yards down the road from our lane. We discovered that he had little trouble navigating the lane and followed me to the turning where he promptly sped past

without going down it. I could hardly give chase in the tractor, so I turned around and went back to the field.

The Missus was already in the greenhouse when I got back, so I proceeded with my plan to pump the water from one IBC to another. I reasoned that although we had a battery powered pump, we could probably get away with syphoning it across using some water pipe we had around The Farm. I am sure in theory it would have worked just fine had I been able to summon up sufficient suction, so I fell back on the pump. With one fat and one thin battery available we were not sure if there was enough electricity to complete the job. There might have been but ...

I was not present when it happened but I suspect it made a pretty sharp crack. I now quite understand what Mr Shelley mean when he penned 'look upon my works, ye mighty, and despair' because my works that had taken some considerable time to come to fruition did not bear fruit quite as I had anticipated. Almost upon completion, the lower of my two pallets comprising the plinth, collapsed in one corner leaving the new IBC precariously perched at an angle far worse than the IBCs we were trying to fix.

There were only a few tens of litres left in the IBC we were trying to pump out, but I dared not continue lest the new IBC topple over. With what was left in it I was not able to move it out of the way completely, as had been the plan. I was able to tip it sufficiently so that we could get bricks under it and make it level that way. It is not ideal and if it does not fill up as we thought that it might before we can get up there again, I might well empty it completely and do the job properly.

Face with my dismal failure, I decided to divert my attention to the installation of IBCs to replace the three insufficiently large tubs being fed from the barn roof. I had already cleared the area for the first one and the work remained to prepare a base for the supporting pallet to sit on. This I did properly with concrete blocks and checking with a spirit level. This itself took quite a while and even now I am considering backfilling the blocks with hardcore so that they do not shift about.

Before we retired from The Farm we removed all the loose items we could find that might get blown about in the anticipated wind arriving during the night. I watched a bit of the evening news and it does appear that the media are doing their best to scare the bejesus out of everyone. The estimated windspeed is not unheard of for us, although the coincidence with spring tide is less than ideal. It is absolutely right to exercise extreme caution and to strongly warn about being anywhere near the edge of anything. Hatches are duly battened down.

February 16th – Wednesday

I wish that the bleddy hound would be consistent with her waking me up time. She was half an hour early again this morning. I will have to buy her a watch.

At least it was not raining when we went out, well, not much anyway. It was blowing still, largely from the west where it was yesterday and tugging at my short's trouser legs. The sea was pounding on the beach even as it headed to low water so we might well expect a big bash later on when it fills the bay. I do not think we are likely to get any respite much before the end of the weekend.

The weather was not going to stop me heading off to the gymnasium. There is a fly in the soup, however, and that is my earphones suddenly expired. They were working fine before my week off, then inexplicably, they simply did not work. I spent the entirety of yesterday late afternoon looking for a replacement as gymming without music is not to be recommended.

The broken earphones were very good other than the fact that they only lasted three years. They were wirelessly connected to my mobile telephone but had a wire between them, which made them accessible when they were not in my ears. I went looking for similar but things have moved on and all the development seems to have gone on the earbuds that have no wires at all. I shied away from these last time, fearful that they would drop out during a blistering session but it seems now, I have little choice. It took a while to research the best within the price range but I nailed it down to one that scored highly. I ordered them this morning. It is another feather in the cap of Star Trek creators who had Communications Officer Uhura wearing one back in the 1960s, although I am not sure that I saw her in the gymnasium with it in. I am looking forward to when they get the transporter working as I will start visiting abroad places again.

I headed to the gymnasium as early as I could because we had things to do today while the weather was still relatively clement. I concluded my blistering but silent session and hurried home for a spot of breakfast before heading out again and to The Farm.

There was more tractoring and digging to do today while we still have the digger. Another two loads of earth required for the first growing area and another two for the back of the polytunnel where I think that the beans will end up. I am not certain about any of that and will be back in the shop before any of that happens, I believe. The tractor required hooking up the trailer again at which I am becoming more proficient. I also noted that there was less hydraulic spillage out of the trailer hose, which either means I am getting better at disconnecting or there is a shortage of fluid in the system.

I discovered where the dipstick was, which was not where the video that I looked at showed it to be. At least I am assuming it was the dipstick for the hydraulic fluid but in any case it was very difficult to see a particularly clear liquid on a stainless steel stick. I think that it looks a bit low but I will check with our man at the garage after taking a photograph of the dipstick and where I think the filler cap is. I used the more reliable connection on the tractor today and it did not leak at all and worked admirably.

The weather was definitely not with us today. There was a bit of damp in the air initially but it was blowing a hooley up there. We were both sitting high up on open top machines buffeted by 60 miles per hour gusts. Not helping either was the ground, which is now quite wet and in the areas where we have scraped off the grass, the mud is cloying and very soft. At the back of the polytunnel particularly, the trailer was slipping sideways as I tried to reverse it into position and if I got too close to the hedge, the tractor followed suit. I have, however, developed a solution to the trailer not fully emptying when tipped – reverse at speed with the trailer tipped and stop suddenly. I am sure that is in the manual under things that should not be done, but it is effective but not overly helpful for maintaining a level platform in the mud. Luckily there was only two loads in each location, as any more would have made the ground impassable.

Of course, the small gods of farming could not let it be at just muddy ground and high winds. In our last half an hour up there, the mizzle became much heavier slapping stinging rain into our faces. If we were unhappy enough about the conditions, the bleddy hound made her disgust at being incarcerated in the truck again well known. I had to whisk her out in between my earth moving trips while the Missus added another load into the trailer and let her run around a bit. I think she was grateful when we eventually got home.

We made it back moments before a planned call I had arranged with the accountant. That was a call I could have done without and straight after that we had another builder turning up to look at the roof project we have had on the go for years. We might actually get it done one day but it is galling to note that if we had it done in the first year it would have been around two thirds the cost.

Still, there is always drinking heavily to forget. The trouble is I now find it difficult to remember what it was I was trying to forget.

February 15th – Tuesday

I castigated the bleddy hound again this morning for a too early start and then realised that she had actually given me a lie in of about twenty minutes. The trouble is that I have to move to see what the time is and if I move then I am fair game for waking up.

It had been enting down just prior to us going out and I had stopped to put on waterproofs which I then did not need. It was still a bit mizzly when we went out, but the lashing rain waited until we were safely back inside. I am usually able to lock the bin because the bin men have been through by the time we go out but they were later today. I got caught after they had been by a bit of a shower but I was not out for long. I would not have bothered but it has been a little busier this week with some early half-termers around in The Cove and I bin would be full in a few days else.

The Missus had suggested last night that she was still game to head up to The Farm today, despite the promised weather. I girded my loins accordingly in the morning but she changed her mind citing that she was concerned about Mother being up there in this weather. It was probably as well, even though the weather improved a bit in the afternoon it was still windy and not very pleasant. I stood myself down and went and did something else instead.

The something else I did was to go and measure the gift shelving in the shop. I had decided before Christmas that these units, probably the oldest in the shop, would be replaced this year. They have variously had coats of paint and shelf covers of sticky-back wallpaper in attempts to tart them up but this year I think they have gone beyond even the deepest cosmetic makeover. Some while ago I had looked at it and nailed the suppliers down to two, so I picked up the threads of this research and started from there.

All the shelving units are pretty similar, fitting together in the same way and are even standard sizes. There is a bit to know about how many end legs you need and subtle clearances difference but by and large choice is a matter of price and customer service. One supplier was based in the South West and the other in the midlands. The latter was cheaper by £250 so I called the South West supplier, which had given me a better feel as I browsed the website to see why they were more expensive and if they would do anything about it.

A very pleasant man answered the telephone, who is exactly the sort of person you need on the end of a telephone when an undecided customer rings up. He did not make any wild claims about the comparative quality of the build or any unrealistic offers about matching the price but I did like the cut of his jib, whatever that means, but at the end of the telephone call had decided that the South West company was probably a smart move. During the conversation our man had remarked that they used to buy from China but had made changes because of the extreme price of containers and shipping. Instead, they had decided a much better option was to purchase from Ukraine.

I did a bit of research in the afternoon regarding the tractor hydraulics but found nothing particular about whether disconnected pipes should leak out or not. I did establish where the filler cap was to top up the hydraulic fluid and also where the dip stick was on a similar tractor model. I do hope ours is the same. We will have to make an effort to get up there tomorrow as we will be sending back the digger soon and need to finish with it. We just chose the most inclement week to do it in.

The Missus combined a shopping trip with picking up Mother and I added a detour for her to pick up grease and a grease gun so that we could start maintaining all this new equipment and some of the old kit, too. I will have to check with the local mechanic up at the top what hydraulic fluid we need to be using and hopefully he will have some too.

I spent the rest of the day – there was not all that much left by then – sitting on my rear end. There was a fair amount of valuable effort put in but there was also quite a bit of idleness, too. I must try to learn to enjoy idleness again. Maybe next year.

At least occasionally we can enjoy the literal fruits of our labour. The Missus dug up some beetroot she had planted the season before last and had forgotten about it. I knew that she had prepared it because the kitchen is now purple but she served it up in some salad we enjoyed for our tea. It is not quite what you might call self-sufficiency but each journey and all that. Maybe next year.

February 14th – Monday

I never did find out if the sun reached into The Cove today because it was overcast in the morning and we were not there when it brightened in the afternoon. I did discover that it was still very breezy today and the belddy hound and I were nearly bowled over as we went around the corner of the Lifeboat station. We narrowly missed a shower as well, so that was lucky.

That was about the last bit of luck that the bleddy hound had today. She was whisked off to the veterinary doctor in the morning, which she hates with very good reason and was locked in the truck for most of the afternoon. Both were for her own good and comfort, but I doubt that she saw it that way.

For the first time in a week, I managed to get to the gymnasium. I really could not bunk off another session and the Missus taking the bleddy hound to town was the perfect reason to go as I would not be preventing any other work by doing so. I slipped into the routine very easily and had no trouble at all with completing a blistering session. I was even back ahead of the Missus and managed to get ready to go all but for a spot of breakfast and a cup of tea.

I thought that I had best not push it and demand a cup of tea when we arrived at The Farm, which tends to be the usual practice. We went straight to work mode and I headed in the direction of the barn to collect the tractor while the Missus went to drive the digger to her work area. I met her there because it can take a few minutes to connect up the tractor to the trailer. Reversing on to the trailer's hitch has to be inch perfect because the trailer is too heavy to move very far – just a few centimetres by being quite robust with it. Then the hydraulic hose needs to be connected.

There are three points I can push the hose into, and I am not entirely sure which one is correct. There is a single and a pair and I rather assumed that the pair were the for double acting hydraulic attachments, however, while trying to get the trailer working initially, our expert tried all the points. Up until to day I used one of the pair and the trailer tipping works perfectly well; the weight of the trailer compresses the fluid back to the tractor, so the hydraulics are single acting. Today, I decided to try the single point and while it worked it also leaked all over the place. I do not think that is because it was the wrong point to use but more because it is a leaky connector.

The other thing we have noticed is when the hose is disconnected again, the remaining fluid in the hose leaks all over the floor. I have no idea what the best practise is but to stop it leaking all over the floor of the barn, which it did the first time, I put a pot under the end of the hose. This too leaked on the floor but not as much as it did the first time. I will have to get some sand otherwise we will slip on the spills if we are not careful. There is also the problem of what to do with the collected spillage. It cannot go back into the reservoir as it will have bits in it, and I cannot throw it away. I will investigate.

We worked like Trojans, although I have no personal experience of this, I am just assuming they did a bit then stopped for cups of tea at regular intervals. Between us, we moved the remainder of the organic waste from behind the polytunnel to the area where it is to be buried. Most of it is earth anyway and as we moved it, I removed the larger bits of wood and brambles which we can burn when it is not quite so windy and anything else that should not have been there.

It was pretty hard going as I was constantly getting off and climbing back onto the tractor to remove the gate at the rear of the trailer and to sweep out the earth that got stuck. I also needed to jump down as I was reversing onto where I was going to tip it to make sure I was in the right location. I found that this was being quite energetic when I anticipated sitting down a lot for the afternoon. It also tested my creaking left knee not only by hoisting my somewhat less weighty than it used to be frame onto the tractor but also in some contortion trying to work the clutch sideways while twisted in my seat to see where I was reversing the trailer to. It did not help greatly that every fifteen minutes or so, the weather would throw a brief but heavy shower of rain at us. If anyone thinks that tractor driving is the soft option, think again.

It was on the way to five o'clock by the time we were packing up. The bleddy hound had been consigned to the truck for much of that time so that she would not get run over, scooped up with the digger or buried under a pile of soil. She had a break when we did, and we ran her around some of the field at the end but I cannot think that it was her best day ever. If we are up there again tomorrow, at least she will have Mother for company.

The sun was on the horizon as we headed back down to The Cove. In my view it is one of the best times of the day for light and picturesqueness and it was certainly working overtime today. The bay was a mess of stirred up sea, having been battered by strong winds all day and low pressure arriving from the west. The white of the foam all over the bay was lit up in sepia colours as it danced and spumed while racing across to the beach. Just the sort of evening for staying inside and watching it – except we had to make tea and cannot see from the kitchen.

*What is this life if, full of care,
We have no time to stand and stare.*

*No time to stand beneath the boughs
And stare as long as sheep or cows.*

*No time to see, when woods we pass,
Where squirrels hide their nuts in grass.*

*No time to see, in broad daylight,
Streams full of stars, like skies at night.*

*No time to turn at Beauty's glance,
And watch her feet, how they can dance.*

*No time to wait till her mouth can
Enrich that smile her eyes began.*

*A poor life this if, full of care,
We have no time to stand and stare.*

Mr WH Davies, good lad with a huge cheesecutter cap and a churchwarden pipe, bravely taking about standing on his one leg while staring. He called it Leisure, but presumably not in high winds.

February 13th – Sunday

It was a pretty bleak and miserable morning and the bleddy hound thought so too. She had tried unsuccessfully to rouse me even earlier this morning, so I had to have stern words. I was getting up early enough anyway for the range, thank you very much. When we did get out and down on the Harbour beach, she could hardly wait to get back again. It was blowing in hard from the south somewhere, so how it felt like it was coming from the west, I have no idea.

The weather played havoc with our games up at the range and we dismissed the idea of having paper targets for the morning session. We have a few laminated ones for such occasions but we have to use them sparingly as they are expensive and time-consuming to make – and then we shoot holes in them. Even in the afternoon, as the wind was diminishing, we could only use the smaller target back boards because the full length ones just ripped off their supporting pole. It was also wet for the duration of the morning and I discovered that the waterproof trews that I use for shooting had past their sell-by date and are letting in dampness at the knee.

Despite the weather, we had a whale of a time with the few that decided to turn up. I also discovered that I need a bit more practise with my Dirty Harry pistol as I was pants at it in the afternoon target shoot. It is odd because last time I used it I came pretty close to the top of the leader board. I definitely was not a lucky punk today.

Since there were not many attending for a wet and blown out day we finished quite early. The Missus came and collected me and I spent the next hour cleaning and putting away, which is always such a chore, probably because I was quite and blown out after a day in it. I shall keep an eye out for self-cleaning guns.

The weather was a good bit clearer in the afternoon but it did feel like the wind had come back again in some force. It might well have been because it had veered around to the west, so we were getting the full force of it. Fortunately, I only had to go out in it the once and the Missus did the late turn with the bleddy hound.

With Valentine's Day tomorrow we might expect the sun to creep back over the cliff for us down in The Cove. What excitement.

February 12th – Saturday

Well, I did it. It has taken some time between starting it and the finishing the bit I was able to do but at last I pulled my finger out and wired up the extension to the existing ring main. It was reasonably painless, too, other than tripping out the electric shower while the Missus was in it – oops. That was most unexpected especially as the ring main I was working on was turned off. Still, it is done now and the new sockets actually work. We just have to coax the electrician in to do the tricky bits.

The bleddy hound is getting a bit more previous in her waking me up. It is clearly because the mornings are getting lighter and there will come a time when I shall have to explain that to her. For now, it is not so bad and I am only getting up roughly half an hour earlier than I was a week ago.

It was a tad chilly when we went down to the beach but I fancy that it was not quite as cold as it was the last few days. I really have not been paying attention, so much so that I had no idea that it was going to rain today, which it did from the middle of the day onwards. It was not the reason for not heading to The Farm, that was to do with the Missus stabbing her finger with a pointy bit of chicken wire, but it was the catalyst that had me on my hands and knees later on joining wires together and crossing my fingers. I crossed my fingers afterwards because it is much easier joining wires together when they are uncrossed.

The Missus was due to head to the veterinary doctor today – not for her finger, although she probably stands a better chance of seeing the veterinary doctor than she does her normal one. No, the requirement was for some medicine for the bleddy hound's arthritis. Since both the Missus's index fingers are strapped up, she cut the other one, I went into town instead. Cleverly, I left it until it had actually started raining instead of going while it was still dry. It made all the difference while I was standing at the rather exposed petrol station filling up the truck.

It was when I came back that I set to with the wire cutters and a screwdriver, proving that even when handed a day off on a silver platter, I cannot have a day off.

Somehow it seems such a waste. I should be mindful that yesterday we crammed in an awful lot of work, despite the abandoned concreting, we moved a ton of earth and organic rubbish around the field and organised and executed a textbook Lifeboat recovery. In the middle of that I also sold Daisy, the Missus's vintage Fordson Dexta tractor. Do not fret, dear reader, the Missus did know about it.

Some while ago, having noticed that there were quite a few vintage tractors and the like up at our builders' merchant, I asked if they might be interested in the Fordson. It was just a casual chat and there was some interest at that time but I did not take it further because, at the time, I think we were waiting on it being fixed. Later, when it transpired that the tractor would need a rebuild, we decided to sell it as is but asked another party to try and find a buyer for us.

That was a year ago and our beleaguered mechanic who had the tractor parked up in his yard for a year, mentioned that it was getting in the way rather. It came back to mind while I was engaged in the conversation at the builders' merchant about the size of my trailer and broached the subject more formally with the owner. He said that his son was the person to talk to and he would relay the message. I took the call while in the seat of the current tractor that I refuse to call Poppy, made arrangements for it to be seen and an hour later, still in the tractor seat, took the call that clinched the deal.

So, perhaps I should not be too embarrassed by putting my feet up today, especially as the weather turned very mucky in the afternoon. It does not look too promising tomorrow, either, but I have waterproofs and perhaps I will face the day with renewed vigour.

February 11th – Friday

The Lifeboat launched into a much calmer sea under lovely blue skies at around half past seven this morning. We will not see our boat back again for a month or two. It seemed a little low in the water but I suspect that will be the sandwiches and care package that the Missus put together. If the worst happens they will probably come closer to shore and throw the heaviest crew member overboard and he can swim back.

On the subject of weight, I did some concrete calculations after I came back from the launch. With some hints and tips from the Internet, I concluded that we would need around ten bags of cement and possibly 34 bags of sand for the job. Given the weight restrictions on the truck that would probably mean five trips to the builders' merchant before I even started mixing concrete. I very quickly dismissed that idea and went back to thinking how we might transport sufficient wet concrete from there to here. After some more rapid calculations, I called for advice and to check my numbers.

I have said before that the boys and girl at the builders' merchant are a happy, reliable and most helpful bunch. They are much like a family and do not look down their professional builder noses at young dunces like me who pretend to know what they are doing. The smallest amount of concrete they will mix is 0.3 cubic metres which by kind chance is just slightly over the half ton weight limit we have on the small trailer. I had fleetingly considered taking the smart, freshly painted and much bigger tipping trailer – you know, dear reader, the Missus's trailer. Yes, me too, so I quickly dismissed that idea as well.

It would need two trips, but I would have exactly the right amount of concrete. The two trips were convenient as well because I will need to lay it half and half either side of a layer of reinforcing bars. All was set apart from having to run into town for some tacks for the tack gun that the Missus was using to attach the chicken wire to the anti-bunny fences. Surely that must be a contradiction in terms or just plain obtuse. The journey into town took more time than I had left to pick up the concrete in the morning, so I decided to wait until the afternoon when the concrete people were back from their dinner.

In the meanwhile, I hooked up the small trailer and spent some time on the shuttering box making sure that it was level except for a slight lean to the rear. At the appointed time I headed off to St Just and the builders' merchant to get there just at the right time. Quite fortuitously, I had parked across the entrance to the shop and by the time I got to the back of the shop where the counter is, I had quite an audience. They were all wearing one of those smiles that perhaps were the remnants of some snickering. It appears that they had been laughing at the size of my trailer and said that they had not expected one quite that small.

The long and the short of it, especially the short of it, was that the trailer was too small for the size of the bucket from whence the concrete would be poured. A proportion of my 0.3 cubic metres would end up on the floor. It was time to abandon my plan and either return with the big trailer – if I could persuade the Missus that I would keep it clean – or wait until we had a dry week and get the builders' merchant to deliver it. I explained about the trailer and the lady at the counter suggested that I line it with a tarpaulin and pour the concrete onto that. A capital idea, I felt, although the Missus was still dubious when I suggested it to her. Nevertheless, the opportunity to do any of it had passed for the day as there were Lifeboat matters pressing.

We still had time up at The Farm, however, to do some more earth moving. I hooked up the sparkly new trailer that is not to be used for concrete shifting and met the Missus at the dig site with the digger. Having been reasonably ginger with our loading on the first use, the Missus became more adventurous and loaded the trailer with about twice as much earth as we did before. When she was finished, I drove it over to the growing beds and tipped the trailer. This was not so successful, and several attempts later there was still about a third of the load still on the trailer that

had to be loosened by hand. It seems that the earth had compacted and wedged between the trailer sides.

The same problem occurred when we reloaded the trailer full of branches and other rubbish from the cleared hedge site. Again, it was a big load and again about half of it was left on the trailer after tipping it. I am sure we will get the hang of it and even if the contents needs shovelling out, it is better than how we were managing before.

Time caught up with us and we had to quickly pack away to be ready for the arrival of the relief Lifeboat back in The Cove. The boat had a very good run out and was about half an hour earlier leaving Salcombe than expected. I had a call early in the afternoon warning me that the boat was also making better progress than expected coming this way and would be back half an hour earlier than planned. I had arranged a crew to make ready the long slipway and agreed we would all meet at four o'clock.

We had not long finished setting up when the relief boat hove into view. There was quite a bit of movement at the foot of the slipway with a lively sea retreating with the tide. Happily, we have a bit of an idea how to handle such things but the take up of any slack on the recovery cable needs to be swift so that the boat is not washed off its recover position. Not that I wish to be too immodest but there is a higher level of skill required for such operations than might normally be required but we still executed what was clearly, to even the most casual observer, a textbook recovery up the long slipway.

The crew looked quite fresh faced after a nine hour voyage with not much of a break in between. They had not been short of food and had probably had sufficient to feed the relief crew who brought the boat halfway from Poole as well. There was, of course, some refuelling to be done and post operational checks and procedures to be carried out. Having completed our part of the necessary operations we dispersed for our next tour of duty. We are, after all, a very discreet, very excellent Shore Crew.

February 10th – Thursday

It was a cheerful enough looking day when I peeked through the window this morning. It was not until I got out in it that I realised that it was a good few degrees cooler than it was the day before. Happily, there was not a great deal of breeze to make it worse and the bleddy hound was pleased enough to be pottering around down on the beach.

I get most of my letter writing, paying of bills and other administrative things done in the morning. I am still battling with a problem that a customer brought up before Christmas that the payment system while trying to buy something from the online shop – it is the bit you circumnavigate on the way to the Diary, dear reader – only allows you to use Paypal, which is not much use if you do not have an account with that payment company. It seems to work fine on a pc but not if using a mobile device. There was a long pause from the support team since the middle of

December and last week the agent came back apologising because he had been off ill for a few days. I wondered what had happened to all the other intervening days but thought I better had not cause trouble since I still needed his help. I had a response yesterday from the specialist team, which I did not understand a word of. We await some simplified instructions that we can follow.

It was simple enough knowing what we would do next – a trip up to The Farm to continue our labours. There is so much to do that it is difficult to know what to do next. It is all important and all a priority. Today we decided that the Missus would continue making her anti-bunny fencing and I would construct the shutters and base filling for the compost shed floor.

It quickly became apparent that having placed my box frame on the ground I had levelled, it was not that level. I started to fill in the gaps using a spade until I realised that the ground was so not level that a digger was required to do the filling in. The digger was required again to go and fetch the hardcore, which we conveniently dropped the other side and other end of the polytunnel. Nevertheless, it was far better than having to fill a wheelbarrow and push it around even if it probably took a bit longer.

The grand plan was to get our favourite builders' merchant to deliver some wet concrete straight into place but the weather has not been kind these last days. The lane is a tad slippery and the tractor going up and down it the other day did not help at all. It is four wheel drive only up there at present and although the builders' merchant truck would get up there with a ton and a half of concrete on board, it probably would not get back again. I concluded that I would have to mix the concrete by hand and would look to collect the sand and concrete mix tomorrow.

We worked as long as we could at The Farm but we had been advised that the second part of yesterday's delivery – the one we had managed to postpone to a more convenient day – would be arriving at half past four o'clock. The Missus dropped me home to wait for the delivery and took Mother home. As if happened, the delivery came after she had returned. It was just two boxes, the balance of our order. Quite how the courier company could not work out that we wanted the whole delivery postponed – after all, they had picked it up as one collection – amazes me. It is truly deserved of the new name doing parcels dreadfully.

There was no Lifeboat training in the evening. The boat is going away for a refurbishment tomorrow and will not be back for several months. A small crew will take the boat to meet its replacement at Salcombe and bring it back home. Because the Missus believes that the crew will starve on such a lengthy journey, she set out to make sandwiches and tasty treats to last them the five months that she expects them to be away. I did not have the heart to tell her that it was five hours each way. She spent the evening cooking and preparing. I am sure that they will be delighted and may well need a bigger boat – or possibly bigger trousers.

February 9th – Wednesday

The lively waves in the Harbour again this morning did not put off our regular swimmer. She is only in for ten minutes or so, which I would say is enough for anyone at this time of the year, especially as she eschews the warmth of a wetsuit.

Nevertheless, it was not a bad day to be out and about, at least to start with. The skies may have been hanging with cloud but it was bright enough and more importantly, dry, as we had more field work to do today. Before that could happen, the Missus had to respond to Mother's emergency help button being activated. The alert was caused by her electricity going off. It was just the trip switch but the designers of the bungalow put the distribution box high up above one of the kitchen units and unreachable without a ladder. It seems an odd placement given that the building was designed to be for pensioners, or perhaps not on reflection. Anyway, the Missus went around to flick it back on again.

We were hot out of the traps when she returned – alright, we were luke-warm as I had a cup of tea to finish first. We had decided to take the trailer up to The Farm today but first we had to hook it up to the truck. This can be something of a trial but I am sure, with practise, it will become much easier. I was about to set forth to do just that when the Missus told me that she had already done it when she had arrived back from Mother. Piece of cake, apparently. Smart Alec.

Earlier in the morning I had a confirmation electronic mail from the courier company telling me that the delivery had been postponed, which was gratifying. A few minutes before we left for The Farm we had another message to say that a delivery was coming between two and three o'clock, exactly when my appointment was. The message was followed up shortly afterwards by a call from the driver whom I told delivery was not going to be possible so the 42 boxes he had on board would have to go back.

We left it at that but the driver called back, quite insistent. I told him that he was welcome to take it up to The Farm and detailed the turning, which he knew. I told him the state and width of the track and left it up to him whether he wanted to risk it or not. I was beginning to think that they should be renamed doing parcels dreadfully.

We got straight to work when we arrived at The Farm. At last we had all the elements and tools at our disposal to finish off moving the earth to the last of the growing areas. I drove the tractor with the trailer while the Missus did the digging. Had we had these tools at hand three weeks ago, all this work would be complete by now and we would have other things being done. Dismissing such regrets that we could do nothing about we got on with enjoying filling up the new trailer with dirt, driving it and reversing into position and tipping the earth exactly where we needed it. The first attempt delivered a bit of a lesson not to leave the back door on the trailer as this fell off with the weight of the earth and was promptly buried under a ton of it.

Happily, it did not take long to dig out and we carefully removed it before tipping on subsequent trips.

Having done our earth shifting well within the time we had, we decided to move the equipment around in the barn, now that we could get the tractor inside with the roll bar down. This would allow us to get both the trailer and the mower under cover for storage, certainly as a temporary measure until we could make some proper space in the barn for them.

I left for my appointment a little earlier than planned in the hope that I might be back before the courier driver arrived. There was a chance that even if he made it to The Farm he might need hauling out with the tractor and at the very least, I could lend a hand with the unloading of the 42 boxes. Imagine my surprise, then, when almost at my appointment in Penzance I had a telephone call from the Missus. She told me that she had received a call from some people we know at the entrance to the lane telling us that 42 boxes had been delivered to them. As you might imagine, I was incandescent with upsettedness and could even spell it. The driver had no sanction to drop the boxes there and had, effectively dumped them. Fortunately, the couple are lovely, but we might well have known them as untrustworthy sorts never to have boxes left with as far as the driver knew. I did call the driver, but he put the phone down on me.

I completed my appointment and hurried back to The Farm. I stopped with our friends at the head of the lane and collected as many boxes as I could get into the truck. When I got to The Farm I attached the small trailer and the Missus was already ready with the larger trailer attached to the tractor that she had only half an hour previously dropped into the barn.

There is a very funny film called Young Frankenstein with Gene Wilder and Marty Feldman. The Aged Parent took me when I was young and I recall us both weeping with laughter and rolling in the aisles. There is a line in it when the two are digging up a grave in the dark and wary of being caught. Marty Feldman comes out with "It could be worse; it could be raining." At which point there is a clap of thunder and it starts enting down. This scene popped into my head as we loaded a proportion of the 42 boxes onto our respective trailers and drove back down our muddy lane just as the rain started to fall.

The Missus arrived first and reversed up to the barn. I helped her unload and she made off for a second collection, leaving me to unload mine. The barn is at the bottom of a slight incline and when I got back into the truck and tried to head out, my wheels started slipping in the mud. The Missus had churned up enough of the slope with her manoeuvring to make traction a tad difficult for the truck. To make matters worse, I could not engage four wheel drive and it took me about ten minutes of trying various things before the lever went forward and I was able to drive out.

It was raining even harder for the second trip. Fortunately, the cardboard boxes are unlikely to spoil and the bodyboards inside will need to get used to it anyway. We convey our grateful thanks to who the courier company refer to as our neighbours. It was probably very helpful in the final analysis as we only had to transport the consignment half a mile rather than from down in The Cove.

After such an eventful afternoon, we were very happy to get back home. It is entirely likely that the bleddy hound was even more grateful having been incarcerated in the truck while we were earth moving and once again while we moved the boxes. When I had first arrived back at The Farm she had made a bee line to the truck so that she could get in. It was a desperate signal that she really would rather be back at home under her table. I am sure she will get over it.

Curry and beer night tonight. Life ain't all bad.

February 8th – Tuesday

It turned out to be another frustrating day, this time due to our favourite courier company which could not be bothered to pick up our delivery from the supplier yesterday. No one at the company thought to tell our contact there, else we would have known last night and planned our day differently.

The day started out very well, the weather looking reasonable and a bit of beach available for the bleddy hound to cavort about on, such as her cavorting is this these days. Her best pal was down there as well today and we both spent some time communicating with our opposite numbers, although I am not entirely sure what sitting on the sand and gazing about communicates but the dogs seemed to be doing well.

The Missus was keen to get going up at The Farm, although without the trailer up there the central plan had to be adapted so she could get on with other things. In the meanwhile, I would collect Mother from St Buryan and head into town, picking up our new numberplate for the trailer board on the way. I had a look online for spanner sets but it transpired we would be better off buying just the spanners we needed as there were no sets available encompassing all of them. When we arrived at the shop I discovered that I had not brought my credit card with me but having recently set up my new second hand mobile telephone to perform such tasks, I thought that I would give it a go. The last time I tried it was a complete and embarrassing disaster in a shop full of customers. This time, however, it was remarkably and scarily simple by just holding my telephone close to the card reader. It wobbled a bit and went 'ping' without me having to press any buttons. That is far too easy in my view. Why then do our customers spend about ten minutes in front of our card machine trying to get their phones to work?

Properly equipped, we headed back to The Farm to do whatever we could do while we waited for notification of when our delivery was due to come. By half past one

o'clock, well past the time we would normally be alerted, I called our supplier to ask them to chase the courier company. I had a call straight back from our contact at the supplier, apologising profusely that no one had told him until that moment that the courier had turned up last night, decided not to take our delivery and gone away again. It is not the first time we have had this issue with this courier company but normally it does not matter too much. The fact that we could have had the trailer at The Farm today and completed one of our major tasks made it exceedingly irritating.

We were told that it would be all resolved tomorrow but I had already made an appointment for tomorrow afternoon that would mean I would not be available for the delivery. I could have changed the appointment, but I reasoned that I should not be inconvenienced by the courier company's ineptitude and that they could work around a delivery the following day. It will mean taking the trailer back up to The Farm tomorrow and bringing it back down again at the end of the day, but I am sure we can cope.

I spent my afternoon digging at the spot where the compost shed should go – I checked – which involved digging an appropriate sized hole and then running around with the wheelbarrow to fill it up with some more sods from our never ending sod pile. This was a further six barrow loads, which I discovered was excellent exercise for both legs and upper body. I think, though, if I was doing it purely for exercise I might well have stopped at four, especially after all the weight training I had yesterday lifting the trailer and the hole boring tool parts.

While the Missus continued with her anti-bunny fence towards the south of the field, I also tried out the new spanners I had purchased earlier. I had been unsure about the size of spanner required for the nut that refused to move yesterday despite using a micrometer on it. The reading suggested I might use a 25 millimetre spanner so I bought one and a 26 millimetre spanner just in case. It was the latter, in the event and I was surprised at just how easily it dislodged the bolt. The work I did on it yesterday might have loosened it or the easing oil might have had time to seep into the nooks and crannies to do its job. I made a metal note to loosen it more frequently.

So, the day was not entirely wasted but it is frustrating that we cannot seem to make enough concrete progress to tick off any one job – although I suppose the tables are finished now and I did manage to pay some bills in the morning that I had quite forgotten by the afternoon. It was probably the trauma of it that made me forget. There is also work to do in the shop and the window of opportunity to do that is narrowing fast. There is nothing quite like living on the edge – provided you do not mind heights.

I soothed my furrowed brow by attending a Lifeboat operations team meeting after tea. We had missed a couple due to fear of the dreaded lurgi but we must have been feeling brave today. We discussed many things and had reports from all the important people. After we had run out of important people, I was asked about the

very excellent Shore Crew. Naturally, I reported that we were very excellent, thank you, and had carried out a few textbook recoveries, which seemed to satisfy everyone. It is easy to think that the Lifeboat station just runs by itself with some crew turning up for shouts every now and then. Without this team of dedicated individuals – and a Head Launcher – the boat would never leave the ground, er, so to speak. It is probably very secret so, dear reader, keep it under your hat.

February 7th – Monday

The bleddy hound was bright eyed and bushy tailed at first thing this morning, which was particularly irritating. She had roused me at three o'clock complaining of a sore stomach and the urgent need to go outside. I complied, of course, to discover all she wanted to do was eat a particular sort of weed that grows in abundance the year round at the edges of walls and so forth. I had to drag her away at the end because the munching becomes obsessive and I took her home for a few dinner biscuits, which she scoffed and went back to bed. She settled almost immediately, which lay the groundwork for my later irritation as it took me ages to go back to sleep after that.

The sea had also settled a good bit during the night but was still throwing a good bit of swell into the Harbour when we passed by. It was enough for two of our local cold water swimmers to take a dip and we watched for a moment or two as they were drawn out into the Harbour and brought back by the next wave. They seemed happy enough, so we moved on towards the car park.

On the way, we pass the large edifice of Tinker Taylor cottage, the thatch on the corner just before the Round House. The owners have been here over the weekend touching up the black paint that lines the first couple of feet up the wall. They also painted in white the large rock at the far corner which along with a metal structure above, protects the corner of the building from inadvertent collision by drivers who have not yet established the width of their vehicles. The principle is that drivers thump the rock rather than the corner of the building if they get too close. It was only painted yesterday during the day and has already got a big scrape along the side of it.

I was going to the gymnasium this morning but thought again when it was plain that our tipping trailer and attendant equipment would be delivered today. I needed to change the towing hitch on the back of the truck so that it could tow the trailer with its pin hitch and the Missus could attach the flail mower to the tractor. The original plan was to put everything in the trailer and unload when we got to The Farm. The fly in that particular ointment revealed itself when I checked the weight of the flail mower and discovered that it would be too heavy for the Missus and me to lift off by ourselves.

I discussed the logistics on the telephone with the very pleasant man who was going to be delivering the equipment. We will still put the hole boring machine on the trailer because, as he pointed out, we still have the digger and we can use that and a strop

to lift the hole boring machine off rather than manually lift it. I had obviously thought of this myself and wondered who it was would mention it first, honest guv.

First though, I had to fit the new pin and ball hitch to the back of the truck and before that needed to collect it from town. I already had some experience with nuts that have been in place for some time when I came to remove the lower lift arm stabiliser off the tractor. This time I did not have a five pound lump hammer about my person, so I thought that I had best give it a try before I left with the tools I had available to me. The primary problem was that I only had one 24 millimetre socket and the second and equally tricky problem was I needed a very long handle to produce enough torque to loosen the nut. I added some ideas of tools to my shopping list and struck forth.

Having exhausted all the builders' emporiums in the industrial estate, I resorted to the national motor parts and accessories store in the shopping estate just outside Penzance. It was not my ideal choice as it is expensive and can afford to be because I had not other option. I picked up the longest 24 millimetre spanner they had and a long arm wheel nut bar that I could put my 24 millimetre socket on. While the long arm provided probably sufficient torque, it was offset and in short order tore a hole in the side of the socket – and that was without going to the gymnasium. I clearly do not know my own strength.

I used a combination of techniques, using plentiful easing oil, heating up the nut with my new blow torch and thumping the spanner with the biggest hammer I had. It took a while but one of those things and quite possibly all of them inched around the nut one bit at a time. I managed to get a replacement socket from the Lifeboat mechanic who just happened to be passing. He is the most accommodating person and pleased to help in any situation. Once the nuts were loosened the rest of the process was straightforward and we are now the proud displayers of a pin ball hitch on the back of the truck, which is wizard, obviously.

I had just got back into the flat when the very pleasant man from the tractor company rang to say that he was on his way. We met him in the thickening mizzle at the back of the F&L where there is plenty of space to muck about. I had brought the truck and the Missus had brought the tractor and our friends had brought everything else on the back of a flat bed truck with ramps. Because the wheelbase of the trailer and truck were different, I had to reverse the tractor up the ramps so that the trailer could be attached and driven off.

The trailer contained the hole boring tool and was thus heavy. It took some while to get the tipping hydraulics to work and some heavy lifting to do so. We then attached the trailer to the truck while I reversed the tractor up the ramps again so that we could connect the flail mower to the three point hitch.

That had all taken a good hour to complete and time was pressing on. We decided that we could not leave the new kit out in the open and it would have to go into the

barn. Had we thought about this ahead of time – remember we had three weeks to think about it – we would have made some space in the barn accessible by driving straight in. As it was, the only space was to the left of the door and I spent a good half an hour trying to manoeuvre the trailer on the back of the truck into the corner. And failed.

It is very heavy and just trying to attach it to anything requires a good bit of effort. Getting it to move and swing just about finished us off. We were about to reverse the flail mower attachment into the barn when we remembered that we would need the trailer tomorrow to transport a particularly large deliver of bodyboards up to The Farm. It then took another half an hour to try and manoeuvre the truck into the barn to hook up the trailer and to manoeuvre it all back out again. It was not pretty.

It was beginning to get pretty gloomy by the time we managed to unhitch the flail mower into the barn. This was made more difficult by the fact that we could not dismantle the tractor roll bar. It was been so long in the upright position that one of the bolts had seized and no amount of thumping it with a crowbar and lump hammer would shift it. We also lacked a 21 millimetre spanner to assist with the procedure. In the end we had to drop the mower right by the barn door. We brought the trailer back down to The Cove as it will be needed tomorrow afternoon anyway, we if can summon the energy to reattach it to the truck.

By the time we wearily settled back in the comfort of the flat, not only were we completely exhausted but it did not feel that we had actually achieved anything all day. I know we had taken position of tools that will help tremendously on The Farm so we should take heart that it will save time in the future. We should look at the longer term view, perhaps. I will definitely sleep well as long as the bleddy hound does.

February 6th – Sunday

The weather is going from bad to worse. The sea was in a very upset state when I looked out of the window first thing this morning. It was throwing itself up cliffs and rocks and over the Harbour wall. In the Harbour itself, usually a quite sheltered spot, the sea was in turmoil and an unusually milky colour where it had been shaken up so much.

It was near high water when I took the bleddy hound out, so there was no way we were going anywhere near the beach. She is not daft and after one look, decided that heading in the direction of the car park was the thing to do today. She was less happy about the wind and the slight feel of rain in the air and got as far as the car park before leaving me and scurrying off in the direction of home. I cannot say that I blame her, that wind had stepped up a little more still from the day before and along with the sea state and the threat of rain the day did not seem terribly welcoming at all.

I made sure I was properly toggled up for my trip to the range today. It was a good move because although the firing point was sheltered from the main thrust of the wind, the entrance and another gap in the defences further down channelled the blow and was knocking our heavy steel plate targets off their perches. It was even more tricky for the clay shoot in the afternoon. We had to carefully position the two clay traps so that they fired across the wind to give us at least some chance of seeing the clays for more than a fleeting second. It worked quite well and presented the opportunity for some level of skill as the discs floated, raised and lowered once they had caught the wind. I cannot say that I did particularly well but I managed to hit a fair few as they danced about in the air.

During the morning we had some heavy bursts of rain blow through but these were nothing compared to the rain that came in the middle of the day and half way through the afternoon. We were all standing outside at one point when a lengthy squall blew in causing us all to scatter and run for cover. It really was quite intense for about ten minutes and stopped us in mid shoot. Luckily, the rain held off for the rest of the afternoon and by the time I took the bleddy hound out at half past five o'clock, there were blue skies stretched out about us.

It was the perfect day for a bit of beef stew and the Missus played a blinder. She used the skirt, stewing steak and a bit of rib from the cow we had from a local farmer. It had cooked for a few hours last night with the bones and she finished it off today. My word, it was some 'ansum and there is a bit left that Mother did not take home with her if you are interested. If I had a heart, it would be warming the cockles of it right now.

February 5th – Saturday

It appeared to be just as windy today as it was yesterday. We discovered later that it was even more windy than yesterday, but that does not deter hardy farming sorts. We just had to grin and bear it and pretend we were hardy farming sorts.

It was a trip around the unchanged block again this morning. The bleddy hound took her time today and had a little sniff at just about everything on the way around. Neither of us were in very much of a hurry, although I had agreed to pull my finger out as the Missus said she wanted to be up at The Farm earlier today. I did all my finger pulling when we got back home and we were ready to go at around half past ten, which is about as good as it gets.

The initial plan was for the Missus to light a bonfire. She had much success on Wednesday when we were doing the roof, making sure that the light breeze as it was then, was blowing in our direction. We spent our roofing time coughing and spluttering and my DIYman overalls still have the faint whiff of bonfire about them. We were only up there for five minutes before we admitted defeat in the teeth of a 40 miles per hour breeze from the southwest. This would very likely have taken the hedge with it had we been able to light one.

Instead, the Missus decided to get on with building the tables in the polytunnel. I had suggested that we glue the rubber feet on the legs as they were prone to fall off and would have been a constant irritation, so she spent half an hour doing that before she started. By the end of the day, all the tables had been made and the tabletops put in place. They all fit perfectly along the two central beds in the polytunnel and there was only an issue with one of them where the tabletop does not fit properly. It will not cause too much of a problem once the weight of the grow bags is sitting on top.

In the mean time I continued with my digging behind the IBCs (!), preparing the ground for the compost bin shed. It has taken a couple of days to get the ground raised enough that when the posts are in place they will be at a sufficient height above the IBCs to let the water from the gutter run into them. I had to import some bulk – in this case the sods from the L-shaped fruit tree planting zone – which I brought around by wheelbarrow. While the digger would have made light work of it, the machine is fearfully slow on the ground and it was just quicker to barrow it around by hand. Well, it was to start with, at least. By the time I was on my sixth barrow of heavy sods there may have been reason to believe the digger might have been quicker.

It has taken the best part of three days to get the ground up to a decent height and relatively level. It did not pay to dig too deep in the area to get more earth to the site as there are 'things' buried there that I would rather not unearth. I also did not want big holes in the area at the expense of one small area of higher ground, so the going was slow and measured. I carefully pegged out the area and strung some twine between them so that the Missus could see where the shed would be.

She did indeed see where the shed would be and asked why I had put it there. I looked quizzical and explained that the waste pipe from the roof needed to be in close proximity to the IBCs. In her mind's eye she had the rainwater pipe at the other end and the shed more behind the polytunnel rather than the IBCs. I shall look on the last three days as a practise session, so I should be expert when I come to move all that raised ground back four metres.

Once upon a time I would have been champing at the bit to get to an ale house so that I might watch the rugby in a suitably appropriate environment. Now, I was not even aware that it was on today until we met up with a neighbour who was on his way back to watch it. How the times have changed, or maybe it is just me that has. I did get to see the last twenty minutes, which was a nail biter and good enough reason to watch some more. We are, however, up against the clock a bit, so we shall be a bit more focused in the weeks to come. Gosh, that sounded like we might actually do that. I cannot wait to see what happens next.

February 4th – Friday

I had reports that the rain during the night was particularly heavy and had woken up some reporters who I heard from. It was more a case of 'what rain' as far as I was concerned, although I remember at one stage during the night a few sprinkles of rain dropping through the window above the bed onto my head. I had taken the precaution of not opening it too widely before I went to bed.

In any case, there was no sign of the rain when I went out with the bleddy hound at around the usual time of the morning. It did look like that there might be a shower or two about still, but nothing materialised while we went around the block. I had an idea that we might be chased off the beach this morning and so it was. It has been ages since we took the long way around for our morning stroll and I was rather expecting to see that there were a few changes to observe. That being the case, I looked everywhere for exciting signs of new things but there were none. Mind, it did help to keep my thoughts off the rather chilly breeze that was whistling around my knees.

There was an inkling deep in my soul that today would be an unplanned day of rest. The Missus had to go shopping and would pick up Mother on the way, that would use up an hour or two. I scurried off to the gymnasium as early as I could to make sure that I was not responsible for any tardiness. Given the temperature in the hut with a tin roof, there was definitely no dragging my feet today and I executed a rather blistering session in short order without missing any of my scheduled routine.

The Missus was a little animated when I came back but there seemed to be no urgency involved. It was not long before it was confirmed that we would do nothing at all today, certainly in terms of farming. It was probably a big opportunity for me to complete my bit of the wiring but the laziness in the air is infectious and I did nothing about it at all.

We had hoped, but were pretty convinced otherwise, that the tipping trailer would be delivered today. It is the second week of 'it will be ready by the end of the week' and was not. I could not get hold of our man until well into the afternoon who told me that the building of the flat packed trailer was much more complicated than usual. Of course it was, but he will call again tomorrow to tell me it will probably be ready at the end of next week.

It was not as if I was idle through the day. My pal from Lifeboat had given me his old mobile telephone to see if it would fix my location and route planning issues. He had provided me with the unlock code, which was the easy part of the whole operation, and told me how easy the man in the shop made 'cloning' his new telephone when he got one. All I can say is that I wished that I had a man in the shop available because it was not all that straightforward at all.

The 'clone' bit worked marvellously but all that did was transfer my contacts and calendar and a few settings. Everything else, music, data and applications needed to be address separately and manually. It took an age and required much looking up on

the Internet how to do things. It was an education and at times quite interesting but I could not help feeling that had I not had to do that then I could have been doing something more constructive – like doing the wiring, perhaps.

I became so wrapped up in the telephone that I completely forgot to take the bleddy hound out in the middle of the afternoon. It seemed even colder, perhaps because the wind seemed to have upped its game since this morning but I have noticed that I do not tend to notice it so much when wearing shorts. I should have worn my new, and now rather muddy, trousers. Nevertheless, it was a good looking day with blue bits and some sunshine with the sea doing a little bit of misbehaving, throwing itself up the cliffs opposite.

Hopefully, we will meet the next day with renewed vigour. I shall gird my loins, just in case.

February 3rd – Thursday

The bleddy hound let me have a lie in this morning after yesterday's early start. She does not have once ounce of empathy, so I conclude that it was because she wanted to. The breeze was back and it was a tad colder than yesterday and in fact when I went to get the truck to go up to The Farm, it seemed colder still. Imagine my joy, then, when I discovered that today was apparently warm and that a cold front would be charging in tonight.

Despite the plea from The Missus to get up to The Farm early, we just about made it before the middle of the day. Today, we picked up Mother from St Buryan and found the quiet little lane we use to get there was not so quiet today. The end nearest St Buryan was alive with two main forms of activity, both to do with farming. On the left of the road were a host of cars and vans parked as close in on the ditch as they could get. These were the daffodil pickers and we reckoned there were perhaps thirty in the team moving from field to field. On the other side were a myriad of various sorts of tractors, loaded up with various bits of kit for the planting of potatoes and covering them up afterwards with rolls of clingfilm. The tractors were also moving from field to field, which held us up for a while, which gave us plenty of time to try and find the road surface under a sea of mud.

The Missus will be planting her own potatoes up at The Farm just as soon as the anti-bunny measures are in place. We already have plenty of mud on the road outside our field gate, in fact it is made of mud.

Since we had been alerted that our tipping trailer and hole boring tools would be delivered 'real soon now', I wanted to press on with preparing the ground for the compost shed. Ideally, this would have had quite a low roof, one that I did not have to go too far up the ladder to but unfortunately, it needs to be high enough to feed rainwater into the IBC (surely I do not been to) in front of it. This issue is exacerbated by the fact that the designated area is already a good couple of feet lower than the

ground that the IBCs sit on. Actually, only half the IBCs sit on the higher ground, which is why they are sloping backwards. This will be fixed once we have the new one in place and we can pump water from the crooked ones to the newly installed non-crooked one.

To try and redress the balance, I thought it might be a good idea to shift some earth from nearby and dump it in the compost shed area to raise the level a bit. Having spent a couple of hours trying to achieve that, I am not overly sure that it has worked. There is a mound of earth where the lower level used to be but it really needs to cover a wider area and be compacted down. There is a positive and a negative to having the compost bins higher than the surrounding area. The positive is that we should be able to dig it out more comfortably but the negative is that we will have to reach up to fill it. The roof will also be a couple of extra feet higher than the ground on which any ladder will sit making doing the roof more scary to climb on and attach.

I still have time to reconsider the whole plan. Perhaps I can raise all the surrounding area to the height of the roof thus making fitting the roof a ground level operation. It is a work in progress and I will keep you abreast of changes, dear reader, as I am sure you are now captivated.

There was no Lifeboat launch on our training evening. The tides were not helpful and there is a bit of a storm blowing in. Instead, we congregated at the Inshore Lifeboat shed to learn about moving the Tooltrak without the engine running. The big bosses had issued a safety warning, as they do from time to time, regarding various vehicles being bogged down in soft sand and what to do about it. There have been occasional incidents where launch machines and Lifeguard vehicles have been stuck, so the advice is pertinent.

For the Tooltak tractor there is a specific set of instructions for releasing the tracks, which includes using a spanner to unlock the brakes and turning some taps to turn off the hydraulics. Only then can the vehicle be pushed or, probably more likely, towed by something big and butch. I found the most enlightening part of the whole event discovering that the Tooltrak has a combined tow ball hitch and pin hitch, just the thing I am after for the truck. I wonder if they will notice if I swapped them over.

February 2nd – Wednesday

True to our forecasters' words, the wind abated today, which was just as well because we had both awoken especially early for the occasion. There was no gymnasiuming and no preparation, just run the bleddy hound out to the beach and get her breakfast down her and head for The Farm.

Our pal was there already, ripping roof nails out with his nail bar, which was not some beauty emporium in the smart quarter of Penzance but an extra long crow bar extended with a length of scaffold pipe. This was definitely the tool for the job and

the nails were flying out. It also helped that our pal was able to ascend the ladder more than three rungs to gain some extra purchase as he levered them out. He said that the risk of placing the steel roof on top of the existing bitumen one is that it may sweat and encourage rust between the layers.

The old roof was removed in short order and set aside for me to wonder how to get rid of it. I suspect that some of it will make an excellent weed proof layer at the base of the compost shed but will need some sort of flat layer over it. With the perfectly good rafters exposed, we lifted the steel roof sheets into place to test the fit. We reckoned with just a little cajoling of the last one into place, we could get away with using just four of the five I purchased. This would give me a spare to use on the compost shed should I need it.

I was only able to assist by lifting the steel sheets onto the roof and screwing in the roof screws nearest the edge. Our pal did all the rest, bless him. It was not quite the seamless fit we hoped for on the last sheet that had to be bent and twisted to fit into the remaining space. It is also clear that not all the beams are square – which is not a surprise for any older building in the area. Builders may have had aspirations of it being 'zackt but settling for near 'nuff. After five hours we have a water tight roof, near 'nuff, that we will not have to revisit in a few years time like we did the previous one.

During our fight with the roof, the Missus had been deploying her anti-bunny fencing. I had spotted a geet pile of the frames up against the side of the cabin and she spent the morning stretching chicken wire across them. Even I was surprised that when she announced that she had used all the frames only two sides of the growing area had been covered. I think we are going to need a bigger fence to paraphrase an over-quoted shark movie.

It was only two o'clock by the time I sat in the cabin and had a bit of breakfast. Not much of the world operates on the same timing for morning meals as I do. Despite the early hour, the Missus was not keen on starting to build frames again and although I would not have minded rounding off the bit of pear tree planting zone I missed yesterday, we had been going longer than we usually do up there. Please bear in mind that we have other things to do as well, and we are usually late to the party instead of being early as we were today just in case you thought we might be being idle. We waited until we got home, then we were idle.

I did manage to cross a few tasks off my long outstanding task list, which was something. I called our potential builder earlier, or maybe it was yesterday but has yet to elicit a reply. I sometimes wonder if our rebuild of the front of the shop will ever come to pass or if there is a builder in the whole of West Cornwall who ever calls a client back. If that were not enough to torture myself with, the power point to my left as I sit keeps glaring at me. All I have to do is get on my hands and knees and connect my ring main extension wires to it but for some reason the job is still needs to be done.

Maybe tomorrow.

February 1st – Tuesday

Well, already through the first month of the year. Who would have thought. Disappointingly, it was not all that different from the last day of the previous month and I would not have even noticed had it not appeared in the bottom left of my screen.

That rather annoying wind was still with us but it seemed a little more robust than it did yesterday. It is supposed to abate tomorrow and I gave my pal a call to line him up for doing the roof tomorrow morning. I discussed with him leaving the old roof in place, but he told me that he had a nail bar. I could not immediately see the relevance, but I made a mental note just in case I needed a manicure at some point. We are going to start early doors tomorrow morning.

The Missus was super keen to start up at The Farm well before my breakfast. Who was I to stop her, so I dropped her up there and came back for my croust. Part of the deal was that I would collect Mother on my return, so at least one of us was getting a full day in. I was not particularly idle, either. There were a few calls to make and I chased up the delivery of our tipping trailer. I was told the whole consignment was delayed while they waited for a few bits for the hole boring tool, which was embarrassing because that was the bit that I wanted. The whole package will be with us at the end of the week, so we will keep the digger going for a while longer. Our man also told me that they had managed to fix our lower lift arm stabiliser and he would throw that in since we had to wait so long for the delivery.

I arrived at The Farm at around the middle of the day with Mother. The Missus was busy clearing yet another growing area, this time in front of the polytunnel. Apparently, this is where the fruit trees will go, at which I raised an eyebrow or two. There is a pretty good reason why there are not many trees in the Far West and those that are, generally tend to be in valleys. In the unlikely event that they grow up instead of along, they made also throw shadow on the polytunnel, which will not be helpful. I think that those problems are sufficiently far into the future not to worry too much about.

We swapped roles after I was settled because the Missus wanted to complete and install her fencing around the first growing area. Now February has arrived, some of the planting will commence and the Missus wants to be hot out of the blocks this year. We do not need any gluts of cucumbers at the end of October, thank you very much. I continued with stripping off the turf in the virtually marked out L shaped fruit tree area. By the end of the afternoon, I had become quite adept at the work and I would have been happy to carry on; the digger has a light on it, after all.

I did not hear my mobile telephone ring but the man at the sofa shop called while I was diggering to ask if we had made a decision yet on whether we wanted to continue with our sofa order. I had sent an email last night advising that we wished to continue, which he clearly had not received. It is a pain in the bottom that we can only send electronic mails to the store and not telephone. All calls are redirected through a call centre where they seem to have a rather persistent issue with having an unusually high number of calls all the time and while our call is important to them, all their agents are busy answering other calls. I sent another electronic mail.

In the early afternoon the weather closed in. By the time we finished, mizzle was smoking across the field from the northwest. It did not bother either of us unduly but the darkness was coming on and despite the light on the digger, we decided to call it a day. It was definitely a mucky evening with poor visibility across the village. Things were much better in The Cove but the sea was starting to act up with plenty of white water around the rocks and waves starting to splash over the Harbour wall.

Time for a cosy night in like normal people, whatever one of those looks like.