September – October – mis Gwyngala - mis Hedra 2025 481

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NEW ZEALAND CORNISH ASSOCIATION
Est. 1962
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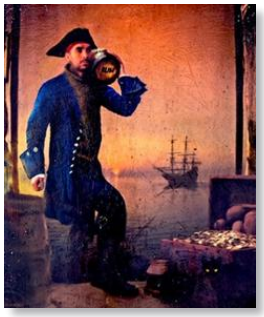
# NEWSLETTER
Lyther-nowodhow

Kowethas Kernewek Mordir Nowydh

## Smuggling



Cornwall's rugged coastline, with its hidden coves, towering cliffs, and proximity to continental Europe, has made it a natural haven for smuggling across the centuries. In the 18th and early 19th centuries, smuggling was common. The wars that Britain was fighting were costing the country a lot of money. This had to be raised by taxation, particularly on imported goods such as wine, spirits and tobacco. Owners of small, fast boats could evade the high taxes if they could dodge customs officials enforcing their collection.

Given the euphemistic title of "free traders", the image of smugglers has been glamourised by folklore. They have been painted as brave community heroes risking life and limb to provide the poor with a few pleasures in otherwise miserable lives. It was a time when few local people thought that smuggling was a crime so the free traders were sometimes aided by entire villages including the local clergy. They moved contraband such as brandy, gin, tobacco, tea, and silk. Smuggling was a lucrative alternative to legitimate trade. Coves such as Prussia Cove and villages like Polperro and Cawsand became infamous hubs, with well-worn night-time routes for moving goods inland.

One such character was John Carter, also known as the King of Prussia Cove. He was a mixture of hard-working fisherman, honest merchant and out and out rogue. John and his brother, Harry, owned two large vessels - a 19-gun cutter of 160 tons, and a 20-gun lugger, each with a crew of around thirty men. The vessels were equipped with at least one smaller boat for inshore work. They were good seamen with an encyclopaedic knowledge of the Cornish and the French coasts. The two were arrested and imprisoned in St Malo for a year.

Ironically (you might say inconsistently), the Carters were confirmed Methodists and forbade swearing on their ship They were credited with holding quayside Sunday services for their crews. By 1807 John just disappeared from the cove. Harry retired to a farm nearby and went on to full time preaching.

The reality was often violent. Smugglers armed themselves against revenue officers and collisions at sea were not uncommon. If they were caught, the crew of smuggling ships faced jail as did their accomplices on shore. Their boats were confiscated and auctioned. To ensure that they were not bought back by their former owners, the ship hulls were sawn into three pieces and sold as broken-up vessels along with all the cables, anchors, tackle and furniture.

It would be easy to believe that smuggling is a bygone part of Cornwall's charming history. Unfortunately that is not the case and smugglers continue to exploit Cornwall's physical geography, weather patterns, and community knowledge. The local press regularly reports on seizures of contraband and court cases but one incident along the Cornish coast hit international headlines recently.

The lawbreakers now use technology in their illegal trade which these days is generally viewed more starkly, with awareness of its links to violence, exploitation, and addiction. Ocean-going cargo ships now deposit large water-tight bales of drugs into the sea, fitted with GPS tracking devices to enable them to be located and taken ashore by small coastal boats.

One of these collection runs was intercepted by UK Border Force last September. A rigid-hulled inflatable boat was spotted picking up bales of cocaine 28 miles off the Cornish coast. They were pursued by Border Force for about half an hour at high speed in a dramatic chase fit for a James Bond movie. Two men were arrested when they ran the boat aground on Gwynver Beach near Sennen in Penwith and tried

to escape on foot. Two land-based accomplices were also caught and the men were charged with tryng to import over £18 million worth of drugs. Prison sentences of 17 years or more were handed down at Truro Crown court at the end of July.

## Port Gaverne

Port Gaverne is a small hamlet on the north coast of Cornwall that was once a busy port. Lime-rich sand was harvested there and processed in lime kilns for use as fertiliser. The port was used to transport the lime and slate from the nearby Delabole quarry as well as being home to a fishing fleet. The advent of better roads and railways caused the gradual decline of the port. The beach is now maintained by the National Trust.

The hamlet is now mainly tourist accommodation and has fallen foul of high house prices as a result. In 2008 the affordability of houses in the Endellion parish (of which Port Gaverne is part) was 48.6 times more than the average income. At that time the ratio in all of England was 15.4. In NZ it was 5.2. The 2024 ratio in Cornwall was 8.8 and in NZ it was 14.6.

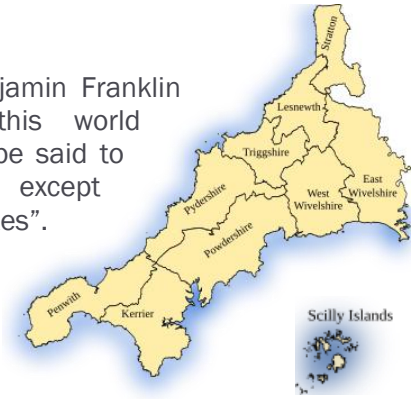
At the last meeting in Christchurch, long term member, Les Mitchell, told this fascinating story of his childhood in Port Gaverne.

During the second world war the sea between Ireland and Britain was swarming with mines. Word got out that one had come to visit their little bay. It bobbed around the rocks dangerously before it almost washed up onto the beach, rolling around in the swell. The local policeman accompanied by the coast guard came down the hill watched by the locals. Before anyone else did anything about it a man named Joe Honey came down with two ropes which he wrapped around the mine (being careful not to detonate it). He went to fetch a 3rd rope and securely fastened it to the rocks. When the tide went down the mine lay on the beach. The next morning on his way to school Les made a detour to the beach. The navy was disposing of the mine and the policeman was shooing the children off to school. There was no recognition for Joe from anyone of importance for his quick thinking and bravery. Les hopes in time that he will be recognised as a legend.

The story is corroborated by the owners of a cute cottage, The Pink Cottage, in Port Gaverne offering self-catering tourist accommodation. Anthony (Hank) Marnan was evacuated to the Pink Cottage during the war and loved the place so much, he eventually bought it. (He must be rich to afford a house in that area!) The history of the cottage on its website confirms that Joe Honey, a lobster and crab fisherman then aged in his 70s, acted quickly to secure the mine. They describe it as "A massive sea mine, designed to sink a battleship or aircraft carrier."

Tank traps, large pyramids of solid concrete, were also deployed on the beach during the war to prevent enemy invasion. Anthony also claims that near the end of the war a second mine was washed onto the rocks at the base of a cliff near where he was walking with his mother and brother. They were deafened when the mine exploded and left "a huge bite" out of the cliff that is still visible and showered the family with earth.

## Taxes




In 1789 Benjamin Franklin wrote "In this world nothing can be said to be certain except death and taxes". Taxation had been used in various forms long before Mr Franklin wrote the US Constitution. In medieval Cornwall, around the time of the Doomsday survey, the country was divided into administrative districts called 'hundreds'. The number of hundreds changed over the years, ending up at nine on the mainland plus the Scilly Isles as shown on the map. They were used to collect a range of taxes and levies. The system was in place from around 925 A.D. until 1894 when they were replaced by local government districts. The whole of Cornwall is now governed by Cornwall Council.

Taxes from Cornwall, which was still treated as a separate territory, were fed through to the British kingdom. In 1496 Henry VII needed funds to continue his war against the Scots. He over-ruled the long-standing freedoms awarded to Cornwall (such as its Stannary Parliament that governed the mining industry) and demanded increased taxes. The Cornish resented the imposition and launched a rebellion in 1497. Michael Joseph and Thomas Flamank led an armed expedition to London. They were defeated in the Battle of Blackheath and Cornish people continued to pay their taxes to the British monarch.

Jump forward to the modern day and Cornwall is enjoying an element of revenge. On 1 April this year Cornwall Council imposed a 100% premium on the council tax (effectively doubling the tax) paid on second/holiday homes that are

not occupied year-round. Houses that are rented as holiday accommodation are subject to business rates of council tax. The move, which was permitted by the British parliament's 'Levelling Up and Regeneration Act' was intended to dissuade wealthy up-country types from inflating Cornish house prices only to spend just a few weeks each year staying in Cornwall and supporting the local economy.

It has, like many things, not suited all Cornish residents. Cornwall Live has recently reported on one case where a homeowner in Golant on the picturesque River Fowey is attempting to sell her property. She bought the house for £240,000 in 2013 and first listed it for sale for £400,000 last August. It still hasn't sold despite the price dropping by £100,000. She blames the need to revise her expectations on the combination of the double council rates and a higher rate of stamp duty for second homes imposed by the HM Revenue & Customs. To me, it still seems that she would get a fairly good deal, even at the lower price, and that the taxation is having the desired effect of making houses more affordable for locals.


## Women in Cornwall

Historically and traditionally woman have performed domestic roles in society. In Cornwall that might have meant baking pasties, knitting fishermen's guernseys and the full range of household chores. But they had paid work too, especially until they married, as bal maidens at tin and copper mines, packing pilchards at ports and as domestic servants.

The following is a list of women (in no particular order) who are either Cornish or have had a significant influence on Cornwall and Cornish culture. There is a long list in Wikipedia so I have made a selection based on the names I recognised or if their achievements jumped out at me. There is a strong bias towards soft, artistic pursuits although there are some exceptions.

Gents, your turn will come in future newsletters.

- Dolly Pentreath – the supposed last native speaker of the Cornish language. See the last newsletter.
- Daphne Du Maurier – author of best-selling novels such as Jamaica Inn, Frenchmen's Creek and Rebecca based in Cornwall.
- Rosamunde Pilcher – author of many novels located in Cornwall that have stimulated tourism to TV filming locations especially from Germany where her stories have resonated.

- Margaret (Rita) Lidgey – the only female captain of a Cornish tin mine, Wheal Magdalen in Ponsanooth during WW1
- Barbara Hepworth – world renowned sculptor and artist who worked for many years in her studio in St Ives
- Rowena Cade – creator, builder and founder of Minack Theatre, Porthcurno.
- Helen Glover – Olympic gold medallist rower.
- Ann Glanville – 19th century ferrywoman across the Tamar and world champion rower.
- Emily Hobhouse – pacifist and activist against the deprived conditions in British concentration camps in South Africa during the second Boer War.
- Moura Lympany – celebrated concert pianist.
- Brenda Wooton – poet and singer.
- Fanny Moody – operatic singer nick-named 'The Cornish Nightingale'.
- Maria Branwell – mother of the Brontë sisters.

- Mary Bryant (neé Broad) – convicted of highway robbery, deported to Australia, escaped by sea to Timor, recaptured, returned to England, pardoned and died in Cornwall.
- Virginia Woolf – lived in Cornwall and gained inspiration for many of her novels, most notably 'To the Lighthouse'.
- Jenny Rowe – retired chief executive of the Supreme Court of the United Kingdom
- Selina Cooper – human rights activist, Suffragette and anti-fascism campaigner.
- Stella Turk (neé Treharne) – born on the Isles of Scilly, lived in NZ for a while, returned to Cornwall to work as a zoologist specialising in marine life.

- Robyn Davies - many times national surfing champion.

## Last ingot of tin


Early in August the last ingot of tin smelted in Cornwall was sold at auction raising fund for Children's Hospice South West. The tin was mined at South Crofty, the last operating mine in Pool that closed in 1998, and was smelted at Wheal Jane.

The auction, held in Penzance, included the 12.5 kg ingot bearing two hot marks - the traditional lamb and flag mark and one specifying the source of the metal. It was accompanied by a framed certificate of authenticity and a jar of South Crofty high grade concentrate, an intermediate stage of purification.

The successful bid at the auction was £6,400. The Wheal Jane Group, which is developing a 'environmentally pioneering earth science cluster' in a business park on United Downs then donated funds to double the bid. The auctioneers added their buyer's premium raising £14,144 in total for the charity.

## Meetings

12 members met in Christchurch on 9 August -a funny old winters day - and welcomed a new member, Michael, whose relatives came from St Ewe. He later told the meeting about his great, great grandmother Elizabeth who immigrated to NZ in 1863. Heather Gladstone's two musical contributions this time were The Cornish Smugglers Song and Lamorna.

Les Mitchell told the WWII story on page 2 and Don Hillier described the Norman church at Altarnun. Mentioned in the Doomsday Book, the original church was built in the 12th century, replaced by the current one in the 15th century that was built from unquarried stone from Bodmin Moor. It is very ornate inside - the pew ends are beautifully carved. Heather shared that, as a result of detail in the carvings, Cornish bagpipes were able to be replicated.

The meeting heard about plague stones at Zennor and Mousehole. Stones were hollowed out into bowls and filled with vinegar so that people could donate coins to people affected by the plague without passing on germs.

Celia King reported on the drug smuggling and boat chase mentioned earlier. Heather reminisced about Christmases past with a 'show and tell' of treasured memories of her childhood Christmas presents.

There were 15 members online for our first Zoom meeting on 21 August. The time flew by but there was an opportunity for us to introduce ourselves and for president, Judy, to give a presentation on Hayle and its Towans, a long stretch of golden sand that is off the tourist track.

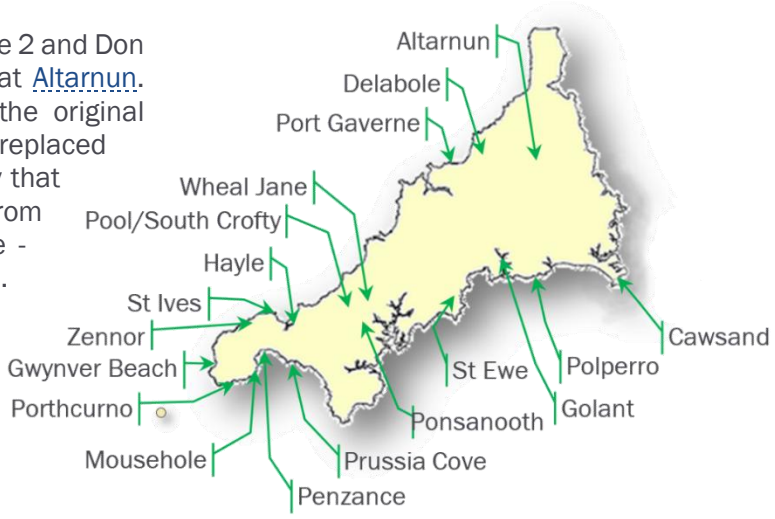
The next meeting will be on the evening of Wednesday, 19 November. We will keep to the time limit of 40 minutes but, to make better use of the available time, there will be a 'waiting room' for people to log into until the meeting starts. The agenda will include a presentation about pasties humour from Edward Rowe (Kernow King) and music.

I will send an email invitation to members on my email list a week before the meeting but here are the details:

| | |
|---|---|
| Date: | Wednesday 29 November 2025 |
| Time: | 7:20 pm |
| Link: | zoom |
| Meeting ID: | 863 9473 8272 |
| Passcode: | 2knCV1 |

## Places mentioned in this newsletter

Lots of places got a mention this time!




That's it for this newsletter my 'ansomes. See 'ee again dreckly!

Nick