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meyn mamvro

ANCIENT STONES & SACRED SITES OF WEST PENWITH.

STANDING STONES • CELTIC CROSSES
LEGENDS OF CORNWALL & BRITTANY •
LEYS & EARTH MYSTERIES • PAGANISM

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Regular readers will note a slight change of appearance of the magazine. New cover design by Barry Follett-Millard of Penzance, and drawing by Su French, plus clearer type coming from a change of typesetter (Angove Office Services of St Just) and printer (Bondestat Printers of E.Sussex) will we hope meet with approval while helping us to keep our costs down. Thanks also to all of you who renew your subscriptions so promptly.

VISIONS+JOURNEYS

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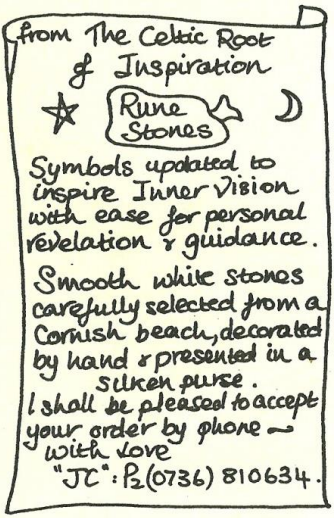


Meyn Mamvro

EARTH ENERGIES • ANCIENT STONES • SACRED SITES • PAGANISM • LEYPATHS
CORNISH PRE-HISTORY & CULTURE • MEGALITHIC MYSTERIES • LEGENDS & FOLKLORE

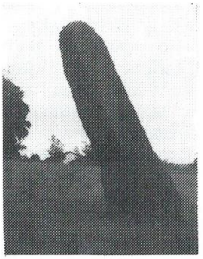
West Penwith has seen some lovely visitors this last summer who have come to share our very special landscape with us. The London Earth Mysteries group led by Rob Stevenson, and Rob Wilson from Northern Earth Mysteries came for Beltane and the Obby Oss, and the Rainbow Camp people and other sundry pilgrims for the Summer Solstice which was celebrated widely down here - nearly every hilltop and ancient site seemed to be buzzing with spiritual energy. The American Indian Dreamweavers came to do a course at CAER, and a number of Meyn Mamvro readers, including Michael de Styrcea (editor of RILKO) came to visit us. Paul and Charla Devereux of the Ley Hunter came down to do research for their new book, which involved geiger-monitoring and magnetic anomoly work at some of Penwith's ancient sites. The results will be published in the book, but suffice to say that the geiger monitoring of the Merry Maidens confirmed Meyn Mamvro's research (see No.6 p7) that there are lower radiation readings inside the circle than background. Wells and fogous provided the expected high count inside, with the exception of Halligye - interestingly this fogou is unlike most, not cut out of a wall or bank but constructed on the natural surface of the ground, which might possibly make a difference to the radiation readings. Subsequently to this visit, Meyn Mamvro has been doing some ultrasound work at dawn at some of the Quoits for the Dragon Project.

Leaving Summer behind and moving down into the dark days of Winter, an interesting controversy has reared its head locally about Halloween/Samhain. Methodists in Cornwall have launched an outspoken attack against Hallow'een, claiming that it is rooted in devil worship and witchcraft, and various ministers at the synod in Falmouth condemned it as "sinister" and "an evil influence". Two excellent replies to this were published in the 'West Briton' newspaper, one from Cornish wizard Tony 'Doc' Shields, who has a new book planned to be published this Winter called 'Monstrum!', and the other from MM reader John Negus. Doc Shields pointed out that the Methodist ministers seem remarkably ignorant about the meaning of Hallow'een: "It is in fact the pagan Celtic New Year's Eve taken over and re-named by the Christians, like so many old pagan feast days (including Beltane, May Day, celebrated with so much enthusiasm in Padstow)". John's letter is an ironical delight and is worth reprinting in full: "I must concur with the intentions expressed by the various ministers. Christianity should indeed be purged of its pagan associations. However, I do not feel that the revered ladies and gentlemen are being diligent enough in their efforts. I believe that the other obviously pagan festivals should also be removed from the Christian calendar, such as the rebirth of the winter sun, which is still being celebrated as Christmas, or that other great heresy, Easter, with its sacred eggs and blessed bunnies, a fertility festival which is still called after Eostre, the pagan goddess of spring. The list of hidden heresies seems endless! Indeed, if all of the pagan aspects were removed from Christianity there would be precious little left! So push on, good Methodists all, in your self-destructive campaigning, and leave paganism to the pagans. See you at the midsummer bonfires perhaps?"

INTO ALIGNMENT

Several of the features in MM6 provoked some interesting responses. Aubrey Burl has drawn attention to a reference in Lukis & Borlase, Prehistoric Stone Monuments – Cornwall 1 (1885) about Boscawen-un centre stone in which they say: "Dr Stukeley's supposition (in the C18th) was that it originally stood upright, and that somebody digging by it to find treasure disturbed it." The contradictory supposition is that the central pillar is purposely aligned to face the midsummer solstice sunrise. Indeed Ian Cooke in his book "Journey to the Stones" claims that there are 2 axe-heads carved on the stone visible only at that time. There are similarities elsewhere: in Wales the angular stone of the 3 Harold's Stones menhirs seems to be pointing towards the midwinter sunrise. Meanwhile Barry Heafield's comments in MM6 about centre stones and circles being about power energies rather than alignments provoked the following response from John E. Palmer: "The practice of geometric design and orientation is now known to be very ancient indeed, even predating the Megalithic era, which people carried these traditions to its culmination and apotheosis. Moreover, it ought to be obvious by now that the Ancients drew no dividing line between either the spiritual, the poetic, the magical, or between science and art, which concepts were experienced as one. The eminent studies of Professor A. Thom, amongst others, have allowed us to discover some important characteristics of British stone circles. There is no reason to neglect the study of alignments at ancient sites, or any other subtle characteristics which have been built into megalithic monuments (simulacra for example). Alignment was obviously of considerable importance to the Ancients, as has been amply proven at many sites."

Boscawen-un



Harold Stone

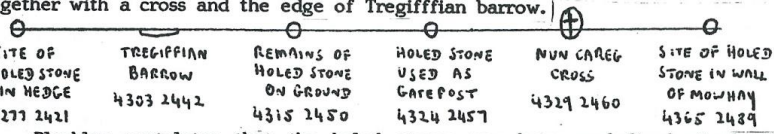
John also comments on the Boswens stone being free of snow while all around the land was covered (see MM5 p24). In MM6 Colin McIntosh suggested that it was because the water surround would be unlikely to freeze and thus dissolve the snow as it lands. He cited the Merrivale stone rows on Dartmoor as an example, but John wonders about the viability of this, mentioning that he visited them when winter had barely set in and found the largest standing stone there standing in a frozen pool of water. As he says – "the mystery deepens!"

Another comment in MM6 (& Introduction on p1 of this issue) about lower geiger readings inside stone circles provoked an interesting response from Peter Middleton who, having used a group of electron accelerators wonders if stone circles can be compared to synchrotons (particle accelerators) found today in nuclear physics. He says: "The piezo electrical effect of quartz is well known. Touching stones raises the internal pressure and gives off minute charges of electrical potential difference (P.D). (This is presumnably the cause of the tingles and electric shocks sometimes received by people off granite stones in circles – see for example Hamish Miller's comment in MM5 p6. Ed.) Imagine thousands of people tuned in pushing and relaxing, raising an ever-increasing PD, and by being physically joined together in a circle, a pulsating wave of power moving around the circle!" Back to circles as power centres!

.....at the Merry Maidens

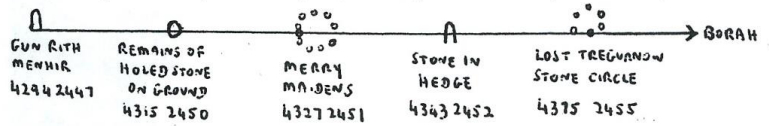
There has been interesting feedback on the ley lines of the Merry Maidens area featured in MM6 p4-7. Several readers have pointed out that Ley No.4 given, Merry Maidens - Boleigh fogou first given by Lockyer in 1910 does not in fact go through the fogou. (Lockyer perhaps confused the position of the fogou). B.S. McMillan points out that it could not be the May Day sunrise line - in fact Ley No.6 (Boskenna Gate cross - Merry Maidens) fits that line. He also suggests that the Merry Maidens area map shows a number of kinks in the lanes of the kind Watkins suggested indicate the passage of a ley, particularly the offset in the lane to Tregurnow. He adds that he has found very many such kinks along the May Day lines on all the maps he has examined (see MM3 p6). "If you draw the line through Tregiffian Barrow and the circle you will see it touches the main road at two points where the road changes direction."

These alignments at the Merry Maidens area were originally examined in an article by Alan Bleakley in 'The Ley Hunter 93'. He makes mention of 2 other stone circles originally in the area (Boleigh at 4314 2445 referred to by Lockyer in 1909 mentioned in the article in MM6, and Tregurnow at 4375 2455 referred to by Halliwell in 1861 to the east of the Merry Maidens) which together with the holed stones would have given a triple circle/holed stone site very similar to Tregeseal. (There is however some doubt as to the veracity of the other Boleigh circle and the 3rd Tregeseal circle as evidenced by crop marks on aerial photographs - see MM6 p6 & MM5 p2). As for the Merry Maidens holed stones he points out an interesting 'dead straight alignment' between 4 of them over a distance of only 1300 yards, together with a cross and the edge of Tregifffian barrow.



Bleakley postulates that the holed stones may have symbolised ritual rebirth and threads together "a picture of ceremony utilising the alignment of holed stones, sited specifically to utilise earth energy in harmony with bodily energy. The holed stones may have linked a chain or 'snake' of people holding hands, taking up the 'charge' of the stones and passing it one to the other. The important links may have been made by 'sensitives' or children who would actually link hands through the holes of the stones, maybe utilising the energy generated for visionary or healing purposes, for divination or an act of sympathetic magic."

Bleakley also mentions the Gûn Rith line suggested by Lockyer as giving an observation of the Pleiades stars whose setting would have warned of the May Day sunrise (MM6 p7 Ley 3) and adds in some points -



He picks up Lockyer's idea that this was a 'via sacra' from Gûn Rith to the Merry Maidens, and interestingly enough Michael de Styrecea has recently observed that Gûn Rith points precisely to the eastern gap in the Merry Maidens circle along this line. Bleakley points out that 'Goon Rith' is Cornish for 'Red Downs', perhaps a reference to the setting sun in the west, and the line splits the circle into two crescents, one to the north and one to the south like two moons "as if the waxing and waning moons are pincering the (pivotal) 'king' stone in the circle." The alignment finishes at Borah, place-name in Cornish for "place of the witch"!

Summer Solstice with the cows of Boskednan

(1) A veggie's viewpoint – Michael Woolf

We climbed the hill ahead of dawn, processing to the beat of a deep drum. Our pace quickened with the drum as the solstice stones came into view. The neglected Nine Maidens of Boskednan warmed to our presence, and soon after our arrival we stood silently in meditation. This was a meaningful time for me and many thoughts danced before the dawn.

I later heard that during this meditation members of the group had been distracted by some curious cows that had followed our procession and entered the circle shortly after us. I was not aware of them as an intrusion at the time. The only distraction being those among us who felt the need to shoo them away.

We were gathered to celebrate the Summer Solstice, when the earth was at her most joyous and creative, under the longest gaze of the sun. We were worshipping her in all her creativity. We could feel her presence through all her creatures, from tree sap to our own pulses.

It was strange then that some should find the cows a threat or distraction, yet welcome three strangers later in the ceremony. All should be welcome, cows presenting less threat than humans. They are a far more placid breed and certainly more attuned to Mother Earth.

The first conscious stirrings of my own love for Earth came at the age of nine when I felt that I could no longer eat meat. I found myself at variance with my family and their religious beliefs, and with most of my friends. But I saw no way that I could live in harmony with nature while destroying any part of it when alternatives were available. Vegetarianism may not have been the ultimate answer but it went some way to easing my conscience. I would no longer put an animal through panic, indignity and slaughter to satisfy my own gastronomic whims. I would try to eat in accordance with the foods offered from Earth when they were ready to be given by her. Foods such as nuts, fruits and grain which, though alive, are not of the same conscious level as us, and therefore unlikely to be subjected to the same tortures. I am not impressed by the tragedies of concentration camps or gas chambers whilst aware that every town still herds our earth-sisters into abbatoirs so that we may gorge ourselves on their fear-filled flesh. They have blood as we do, they love as we do, they share our earth and visit the stones with us!

Perhaps the uneasiness felt by some in the cows presence might reflect the stirring of conscience. I should certainly have been vastly distracted had I been sharing a ritual with someone I was about to murder.

Paganism is a way back to nurturing this magical and off-maligned planet. We try to help her in many ways. I would like to make a plea to fellow pagans not to eat those who share our earth and our dreams but to eat and dream in green harmony.

Sacred Cows & Sacred Sword!

(2) A pagan perspective – Cheryl Straffon

Like Mike I was at the Nine Maidens ritual and like him I found it a very meaningful time. I remember the cows when they first arrived – in fact I went over to talk to them, telling them they were welcome to share our ritual but we would rather they didn't disrupt everything – a request they basically adhered to! I was not aware of them being shooed away during the meditation, being in a state of meditative reflection, but I don't think it would have made much difference as they came and went as they pleased! We are at one with the infinite cows and all that!

But Mike, a sincere and committed vegetarian, does raise other points in his article that relate to paganism. Does being a pagan and loving the Earth and all her creatures imply that one must be vegetarian? Many present-day pagans would say so, but our pagan ancestors certainly didn't think so. Indeed for them, the reverse was true – the hunting and killing of animals was part of the most mystical and awe-inspiring side of the pagan way. Many of the old gods – gods that are still acknowledged today – were hunters and eaters of meat. Herne the Hunter is one, Odin leading his wild hunt another. King Arthur himself in the earliest Welsh triads was a hunter-king. To our pagan ancestors, the beasts they hunted were sacred, and often took on the attributes of Gods themselves and vice-versa: for example the antlered Celtic god Cernumnos is intimately linked with the deer who was hunted and formed the staple diet of the hunter. From this comes the idea both of sympathetic magic (the hunter taking on the attributes of the hunted) and the shape-shifting (man becoming the animal or bird he is hunting). To kill and eat an animal was not an act of barbarism but an act of sacredness. As Walter Kurkert puts it: "In the experience of killing one perceives the sacredness of life; it is nourished and perpetuated by death. This paradox is embodied, acted out and generalised in the ritual." (Homo Necans).

Part of the problem is of course that nowadays the killing and eating of animals is no longer a sacred ritual act, but one devoid of all meaning except greed and exploitation (the gods of C20th). But to a pagan all life is sacred – the nuts fruit and grain no less than the cows. Personally I do not agree that fruits of the earth are any the less worthy of respect than cows, or that there is any more or less justification for eating them. All creatures and plants in the Goddess' universe feed on each other, and all, except mankind, take just enough of what is needed for the species to survive. The same spirit is in all of us – wo/men, cows and plants. The fault lies not with the act of eating other creatures but of exploiting all of Mother Earth and her creatures as if their whole purpose was to serve mankind.

At the ritual we were actually celebrating the fruition of the bounties of Mother Earth, while at the same time being aware of the coming lean months. At times like these pagans have always sacrificed and eaten other creatures in order the ensure the fertility of the earth's cycle. "Ritual death was a common practice of salvation and god-seeking" (Bob Stewart) and the cooking and eating of creatures in the magical cauldron of Kerridwen, the ancient Celtic mother-goddess, has a mystical and life-preserving function. Plants, animals and other life-forms were all intimately interconnected and passed into the earth at death, eventually being reborn afresh. This is fundamental to an understanding of the pagan way, and we cut ourselves off from our roots at our peril. So if we had been really true to our faith we should actually have sacrificed one of those cows (there being no goats or virgins handy!) at which point doubtless Mike would have made his excuses and left! I am not seriously suggesting that as pagans nowadays we should do this, but we should remember where our faith comes from and its purpose and meaning.

(3) A final Comment! – Pat Angove : As another member of the group, I remember the cows only being shooed away because they begun to show bit too much interest in Mike's guitar, our flowered offerings, and our food. The food and flowers we could have shared, but Mike's guitar?

Vandalism at the Land's End

BY JOHN E. PALMER

John E. Palmer is a leading artist in the Netherlands who also has a great love for the ancient sites and their sacredness. He has written for a number of Earth Mysteries and other magazines on the sites of Britain and the continent, and is very concerned at the threat to megaliths in his own and other countries. He is a contributor and regular correspondent of Meyn Mamvro, and here presents a detailed look at the state of the stones in West Penwith.

One night, nineteen years ago, having hiked down to Cornwall from London, I reached the peninsula at Falmouth; it was stormy and ferocious waves crashed with tremendous force against the sheer cliff on which I was standing. From Land's End I looked out into the dark, into nothingness. White foam spurted high up against the rocks, spraying me with salt water. It seemed to me that this was the end of the known world, of the Island, but also a beginning.

In ancient times, Britain was known as the Island of the Mighty, it is named as such in the Welsh Mabinogion, - where King-priests had built vast stone circles which certainly would have greatly impressed early travellers and traders. The earliest known, marked astronomical observations at Stonehenge took place at 8.100 B.C. at the end of the last Ice age. Through the cyclical, and manifold transformations of the Great Goddess, known to have been revered in Old Europe for over 30,000 years, life appeared out of death. The sparkling clear waters of rivers winding through the landscape, welling to the surface from sacred springs, are Her bloodstreams.

The ancient lines of power, conveying telluric forces across the fair face of the Earth were marked by standing stones, mounds and stone chambers, sited in close relationship to recurrent, important celestial events appearing at the rugged horizon.

Indeed, the later Latin church, having inherited the ideals of Roman imperialism, deemed it most imperative to take over so many pagan high places, destroying the old Celtic church in the process, surmounting these with their own stone built structures at conjunctions of the ancient lines of serpent-dragon power, thereby effectively investing and consolidating their total authority over the land and its people. And so it was too, at the Land's End.

Our prehistoric ancestors had most viable reasons for the erection of standing stones, each a living sculpture, – and from their careful choice of materials we can indeed deduce that they intended their constructions to last forever; as such, they also built with a view towards the future. Their klnowledge is subtly written, marked in encoded form across the landscape.

Ancient, Way-Side Shrines and sacred places should be approached with due respect. I have never understood people who vandalise and even utterly destroy ancient sites and harmless, mute standing stones, and to find that such senseless destruction of our beloved heritage is still continuing is to my mind, deepy grieving. In the past, the megaliths and circular mounds were believed to be the residences of nature spirits and fairies, which for a considerable time had ensured their preservation, and calamity befell those who tampered with them. When the first amateur archaeologists moved in, this belief was soon dispelled, which gave way for the search for burial treasures, and aggravated by a total lack of respect, large scale destruction resulted.

William Borlase (1696-1772) had drawn up an interesting plan in 1754 of a site near St. Just, which consisted of intersecting stone circles, that have sadly disappeared. I visited a related design that was dug up from beneath a thick layer of turf, called Stein A Cleit, on the Isle of Lewis. Perhaps one day the lost site of the St. Just circles may be discovered by seeking cropmarks on aerial photographs, and by dowsing the area. Already in Borlase's day people had lost their respect for the ancient sites, and in a letter of 1766 he complained;

"At Carn Brea the mason are now stripping and ransacking the obelisks, pilfering the circles, demolishing the tribunals without mercy or distinction." As elsewhere, the stones were used to construct fieldwalls and farmsheds with, and Chûn Castle and Castle-an-Dinas, posing an easy quarry, were similarly pilfered.

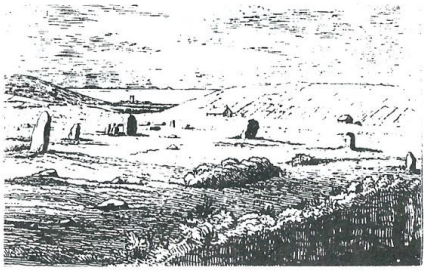
Thus the civic authorities robbed great amounts of stone from Chûn Castle to build Madron Workhouse and to pave some of the streets in Penzance. Kerris Round was demolished in 1840 for the construction of Penzance breakwater, although there was sufficient stone to be had elsewhere. The capstone of Bosporthennis Quoit was hacked to an oval shape by a miller who had intended to turn it into a quern.

A later member of that same family, vicar William Copeland Borlase, made detailed notes and drawing of many ancient sites around the 1870's and whilst he criticised excavation by others, he saw no bones in doing so himself, in sharp contrast to the artist John T. Blight, who had confined himself with singular respect to registration and illustration. Thus whilst Borlase, one of the arch-fathers of modern archaeology, robbed dolmenic chambers and Quoits of their contents, as at Carn Euny and Pendeen Fogou and Carn Gluze Barrow, which was afterwards rebuilt, and Pridden Menhir which has been leaning over since he visited it with a spade, he also succeeded in saving Zennor Quoit from destruction in 1861. Upon learning that the farmer wanted to turn it into a cattle shed, for which purpose some holes had already been drilled into the stones, Borlase halted breakage work by paying the farmer five shillings. How many would go to such lengths today? (Trevethy Quoit on Bodmin Moor befell a similar fate; the drilled holes in the inwards fallen slab prove that much).

PRIDDEN STONE.

Ballowall Barrow is also a Victorian reconstruction, notes Ian Cooke in his "Journey to the Stones" (1987). During the Victorian period mining works had been restarted in Cornwall and farmers, eager to cultivate wastelands, demolished ancient sites of which the viable sanctity was no longer recognised. Some made a pastime of treasure seeking; the Druid artist and initiate, William Stukeley, (1687-1765) believed this to be the cause for the leaning, at a precarious angle, of the Centre Stone of Boscawen-Un-Stone Circle, in which view he was probably right.

For many centuries the ancient stones had been protected by an aura of magic, and it was considered most unwise to disregard the Spirit of Place. In the early 19th C, - J.T. Blight recorded that "a clown of the neighbourhood", seeking a crock of gold had dug a deep pit around the Mên Scryfa Inscribed Stone, which caused its fall. The engraved lettering "Rialobrani Cunovali Fili", (Royal Raven son of the Glorious Leader) proves it to be Royal, tribal Stone. Though later re-erected, - with the word 'Fili' below ground, - the foolish digger suffered ill luck, as also the farmer who was so bold to dig into West Lanyon Quoit Burial Mound.



The destroyed Tregeseal stone circle

Only four Stone Circles remain in the Land's End, though there were many more. Boslow Circle, on Boswens Common, was destroyed before 1842, the "Devil's Lane" Circle Enclosure was destroyed after 1876, Boleigh Circle still existing in 1861 was probably destroyed soon afterwards, and the Beacon Cromlech at Sancreed disappeared in about 1840. The Tregeseal Circle II was destroyed in 1905 and competely in 1961, the Trevorian Circle near St. Buryan was still traceable in 1914 but was totally erased by the year 1927.

Originally, there were about 50 Fogous in the Land's End; Trevean Round, an above-ground Fogou was demolished in 1913. Lescudjack Castle Hill Fort in Penzance was razed to the ground when a modern housing estate was built on the site. During World War II a military radar observation post was installed in the 4000 year old Chapel Carn Brea Cairn, which was destroyed in the process.

Straightforward protests against vandalism were few and far between, although the graveness of the problem was foremost recognised by the eminent archeo-astronomer, Sir Norman J. Lockyer (1836-1920) and to the results of his research concerning stone avenues and alignments in both Dartmoor and Cornwall he added with understanding sarcasm: "The disastrous carelessness of the government in the matter of our national antiquities is, I am locally informed admirably imitated by the Devonshire County and other lesser councils, and, indeed, by anybody who has a road to mend or a wall to build." His words are still actual today.

"Once again we would wish to stress how important it is that all traces of early knowledge should be most carefully studied before they disappear forever. In Cornwall for instance, it is heartrending to find stones marking alignments are still being removed and used for other far less important purposes." Thus wrote the late Prof. Mary Williams in the foreword to "Britain, a Study in Patterns". (Rilko, 1971).

A few years after investigating an alignment from Boscawen-Un stone circle, John Michell found to his dismay that some standing stones belonging to it had disappeared, which led him to voice a similar complaint in his "Megalithomania" (1982); "Even in western Cornwall, one of the most deeply situated archaeological areas of Britain, it is only the more famous monuments that are safe from anyone's whim to destroy them."

It has been obvious for some time now that isolated complaints about the ongoing destruction is not going to be of much help in safeguarding our megalithic heritage; overall protection can only be achieved through renewal of respect and widening legal powers through the amendment of the Ancient Monuments Act.

The scheduling of ALL megalithic monuments however, has to my knowledge so far only been proposed by the enlightened editress of **MEYN MAMVRO**, Cheryl Straffon, (see MEYN MAMVRO issue 4, 1987, page 24) and the legal protection of ALL megalithic monuments by the present writer. (Vandalism at the Megalithic Monuments, 1984, published in Rilko Newsletters (1987-88).

The archaeologists, who by their profession claim to be interested in pre-historic monuments, generally appear not even to have attempted to safeguard these, and their common attitude towards the sacred is reflected in the story of how Prof. Charles Thomas, ex-president of the Cornwall archaeological society, tried one day to get as many people as possible to mount the capstone of Chûn Quoit.

When the archaeologists did note a cup-marked stone at Tregiffian Barrow, (Cornwall) they carted it off to Truro museum, putting a replica in its place. What sacrilege! Similarly, other decorated stones, for which copies have been substituted in place, were moved to museums all over Britain, from the carved stone at Bryn Celli Ddu in Cymru to the very tip of Orkney Mainland, where the carved Pictish Symbol Stone from Brough of Birsay was moved to Edinburgh. Archaeologists will claim that these stones are thus protected from the inclements of weather and from vandalism. But there have been no instances recorded of vandalism at such stones, and if detoriation by weather is seen to be serious, such stones can now easily be treated with water-repellent compounds.

The idea that the stones are safe in museums is surely a folly, for there they can be endangered by fire, earthquakes, storms and other natural calamities, which most modern buildings have not been designed to withstand. These stones have been standing at their original, and safe sites for around 3,000 years, and how long do the curators of museums think their buildings are going to last? These priceless stones are much safer in the living landscape.

Most farmers simply detest stones on their land and ploughing around them is considered a nuisance and a bother; the reasons for destroying valuable ancient monuments have never ranged very deep at the Land's End. It is appalling to find that destruction is relentlessly proceeding to this very day, with standing stones being particularly at risk. From a recent survey, it appears that there are now 71 Standing Stones known in Cornwall (though there may still remain stones yet to be discovered) only 12 of which are 'listed', (but which offers these no viable legal protection) and 59 Standing Stones which are at present still unscheduled.

Cheryl Straffon of Meyn Mamvro informs me that an astounding 45 destroyed examples have been documented! Thus the Tremayne Farm Menhir II was destroyed in about 1900, and its neighbour, Trewern Menhir II, was destroyed in 1958. The Trevear Standing Stone, near Sennen, was uprooted in 1972. Furthermore, a number of stones belonging to alignments centred on Boscawen-Un Stone Circle have disappeared, including two important Outliers which vanished early in 1980. The Chapel Carn Brea Menhir was broken up by the farmer in 1985, though it was a scheduled site. Scheduling does not engender effective, legal protection and thus means basically nothing. The disappearance of so many beautiful Standing Stones does imply a grave loss to the cultural inheritance of the nation; being sorry always comes too late! May shame rest upon the heads of these barbarians and vandals. It also means that further investigation from many angles and research of the vast patterns that were set out across the landscape by the ancient, wise sages will in the near future, in particular areas be exceedingly difficult, if not impossible. For each small facet adds to the understanding of the greater whole.

Chapel Carn Brea - now destroyed

To the above must be added the wanton removal (neatly called "clearance") during the last few years of a Bronze Age settlement at Tregeseal Common, and the fields system at Chysauster, both of which were partially destroyed by the landowners. All these ancient sites, and many more besides, are gone forever.

The late Prof. Alexander Thom, who investigated the geometric characteristics, closely related to astronomical alignments at stone circles in the British Isles and menhirs in Brittanty, believed that the ancient builders were proud of their achievements and that no stone ought to be removed. And so can we too, beyond any doubt, be proud of our most ancient inheritance, which may justly be regarded as having formed the primal cornerstone of western culture.

Sadly, British law has not been kept up with these insights and as it stands at present, it leaves a great part of our common inheritance vindicated in the hands to too many of those who, being unconscious of the quartzite realities of human self integrity, – with total disregard for irreplaceable and unique sites are allowed to destroy these, and often coveted parts of our beloved landscape along with it, in which the ancient standing stones form such marked features.

The quite insufficient legal protection awarded to Megalithic monuments is all too often simply accepted by helpless references to the Ancient Monuments Act. In the words of the archaeologist Leslie Alcock, in his "By South Cadbury is that Camelot...." (1972); "However important a monument might seem, it belongs not to the nation, but to the person on whose land it stands; and he has almost absolute power over it... even when a site is nominally protected as a 'scheduled monument' under the Ancient Monuments Act, the landowner may obliterate it by ploughing, afforestation, quarrying, building, or in any other way he wishes – provided he gives three months notice to the Department of the Environment. So much for the national heritage!"

Most of these responsibilities have been given over to the newly installed "English Heritage", who, together with the archaeological bodies would do well to combine efforts to seek at Parliament, for a small but important amendment in the Ancient Monuments Act; safeguarding ALL megaliths.

Both the Inspectorate of Monuments and English Heritage have had, on several occasions, – pointed out to them important and irreplaceable monuments that were immediately endangered: they have done absolutely nothing.

Even when legal protection of ancient monuments is finally achieved, there still remain those people who will try to negate the letter of the law. Thus although the long dolmens in the province of Drenthe, Netherlands, have been protected by the Ancient Monuments Act of 1961, these are still being vandalised, ironically by the archaeological committee installed by the State to safeguard these structures. The National Ombudsman of the Netherlands has already recognised the validity and importance of my complaint, but since he is not taking action, I will proceed with my protest to the Minister of Culture. This also goes to show that the care of ancient monuments ought not entirely to be given into the hands of the archaeoglogical profession, whose idioms are seen to be rather limited. The destruction of the true characteristics of the ancient mounds of the Boyne Valley in Eire by archaeologists is a case in point.

If all and every Megalithic monument was again respected, Britain would be so much richer. It is surely ironical that standing stones erected for viable reasons by early agricultural communities who lived in harmony with their natural environment, are still being totally irresponsibly vandalised and destroyed by the agriculturalists and others of today, whose needs they also meant to serve.

It is vital to reinstate the lost respect, and to recognise the common basic characteristics of ancient ceremonial sites as being essentially sacred places, which may indeed still function as true Way-Side Shrines today, marking the qualitative points of ancient knowledge in both time and space.

After all, Stone is what this Earth is made of.

Article © John E. Palmer

Guide to West Penwith Standing Stones

The following 'Top 30' sites are the principal standing stones still remaining in W. Penwith. Others that have been incorporated into hedges or are badly mutilated or are of doubtful provenance (eg possible rubbing posts) are also mentioned where relevant, but destroyed sites are not generally included. The sites are listed in geographical clusters radiating out from Penzance (from SW to NE) to make visiting easier, and photographs of some of the lesser-known sites are included.

B3315 ROAD (PENZANCE-NEWLYN-LAMORNA)

1. **SHEFFIELD** (4585 2752) Pictured here. Discovered by Michell in 1984 after the publication of 'Old Stones'. Stone stands in hedge, is about 8ft tall, 8ft wide at base tapering to flat summit. Aligns with NE Piper, Merry Maidens circle and Boscawen-Ros field stone.

Sheffield

2. **THE PIPERS** (NE 4354 2482/SW 4350 2474) The 2 tallest menhirs in Cornwall, the NE at 15ft and the SW in the next field at 13½ft. Excavated by Borlase in 1871 - no finds. The NE stone (pictured in MM6 p4) is now leaning. The 2 stones if aligned point to the edge of Merry Maidens circle. There may originally have been a third Piper (see article in MM6 p5).

3. **GÛN RITH** (4294 2448) Stands in hedge to W of Merry Maidens. Excavated by Borlase in 1871 - found a 'pebble'. There is an alignment between this stone, the circle and a stone in the hedge at 4343 2452 (see MM7 p3). Pictured in MM6 p4.

4. **BOSCAWEN-ROS STONES** (Field 4281 2394/Hedge 4278 2393) Two stones knocked down earlier this century; only the eastern one re-erected in field. Two Michell leys run from each stone (see MM6 p5 & 7 for photo & details). There is the stump of what may be a 3rd stone in a nearby field (4260 2371). Photo in MM6 p5.

5. **TREVERVEN** (4082 2399) Pictured here. Stands in field near some daffodil woods. Footpath (now obscured) runs beside it from the road. Excavated in 1922 - no finds.

Treverven

SOUTH OF B3315 (PENZANCE-LAMORNA)

6. **SWINGATE** Three stones can be seen at 4570 2517, 4582 2524 & 4614 2522. The first one is the largest, a 6ft triangular pointed stone, listed by Michell who said there was a former neighbour to it. The other 2 are possibly rubbing posts.

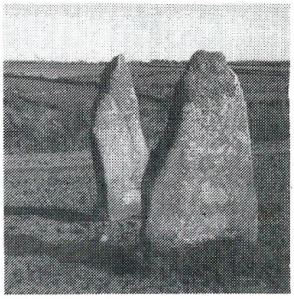
7a. **CASTALLACK** (4540 2545) Noted by Michell on a Boscawen-un ley, the stone is remarkable for its line of cup-marks, 7 in one line with 2 underneath. There is also a cupped stone in the wall of nearby Castallack Roundago (4482 2541). Pictured in MM4 p5. Further down the road and up a green lane can be found:

7b. **CASTALLACK CARN** (4474 2537) a 6ft tall menhir now almost completely overgrown by ivy and flowers. On one of Michell's leys. There were other possible former stones nearby at 4550 2513 & 4494 2540.

NORTH OF B3315 (PENZANCE–LAMORNA) & SOUTH OF B3283 (PENZANCE–ST BURYAN)

8. DRIFT STONES (4371 2831) Pictured here. Formerly known as The Sisters, this pair are in a field beside the road – one 7½ft, the other 9ft tall some 18ft apart. Borlase in 1871 found a pit had been dug betweeen them though out of line. Helen Woodley claimed (MM4 p7) that the 2 stones align precisely with the horizon. Michell has some leys going through them and also lists another pair of stones about a mile away at Faughan (4522 2822) though these are probably the entrance stones of a roundago.

9. TRESVANNACK PILLAR (4418 2788) Pictured here. The 3rd tallest standing stone, being some 11½ft high. An 1840 dig found 2 urns, now in Penlee museum. Several Michell leys run through it, and other neighbouring stones are visible from it. A second fallen stone originally at 4426 2793 has recently been re-discovered by a MM reader at 4425 2813 (see MM3 p24).

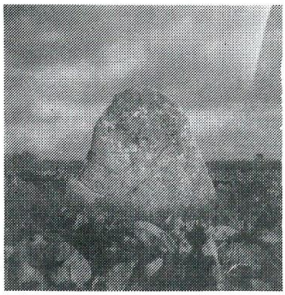


Drift Stones

10. KERRIS (4439 2743) Pictured here. A triangular stone, excavated by Borlase who found only pebble & flint. On 2 of Michell's leys. Nearby is another roundago with 2 entrance stones in a wall behind a house (4450 2720), on one of the same leys.

11. CHEYNHAL (4507 2751) Re-erected early C19th. Some 8ft tall, it is on one of Michell's leys. There were also 2 other stones formerly in the next field, one of which stood on another ley.

Tresvannack



Kerris

12. TOLDAVAS (4266 2671) A large erected boulder found by Michell exploring Lockyer's Samhain sunrise line from Boscawen-un circle past Trelew longstone.

13. REDHOUSE, PAUL STONES. These stones were recorded on the 1906 6" OS map and listed by Michell at 4480 2663 & 4476 2658, the former being on several alignments. They stand in neighbouring fields, but are dissimilar in appearance : the former is a thin slab, the latter having more of the appearance of a menhir, it being nearly 6ft tall.

NORTH OF B3283 (PENZANCE–ST BURYAN) & SOUTH OF A30 (PENZANCE–LANDS END)

14. TRELEW (4217 2693) A 10ft menhir excavated by Borlase in 1872 who found a pit had been dug some 3ft away containing pieces of wood, flint, clay and bone. On several Michell leys and illustrated in MM2 p8.

15. CHYANGWENS (4186 2709) Stone in hedge on one of Michell's leys. Despite some doubts expressed about its provenance, Michell points out that it is the only stone in the hedge that so stands out. A more detailed examination of it by Michell himself will apppear in the next MM (No.8).

16. PRIDDEN (4165 2661) Now leaning at an angle, originally upright when excavated by Borlase in 1871 who found only a few splinters of human bone and ashes. See p7 of this MM for Borlase's original sketch and current photo. No alignments found by Michell but MM reader D.J. Harvey found another stone in the hedge nearby which may have led to the vanished stone circle at 4169 2659 (see MM6 p24). Trelew longstone is visible on the horizon from Pridden.

Trevorgans

17. TREVORGANS (4047 2614) Pictured here, being hugged! Stands in a field just outside St Buryan. Michell (in 'Old Stones') has 2 leys running through it, and a further one discovered later from the stone through Toldavas to Sheffield stone.

18. BOSCAWEN-UN STONES At 4149 2761 is an 8½ft high stone in a field near the circle, with another long prostrate stone built into the hedge behind (see picture in MM4 p5 bottom). At 4174 2770 in the land leading to the farm is a triangular stone in the hedge (picture in MM4 p5) with another on the opposite side of the lane, giving 2 pairs of double stones. The triangular stone points to the Summer Solstice from the Circle. There were also formerly 2 stones at 4041 2721 & 4031 2719 forming an alignment from the Circle, noted by Michell in 1974 but since destroyed (see article on pp6-10 in this MM).

NORTH OF A30 (PENZANCE-LANDS END) to SOUTH OF A3077 (PENZANCE-ST JUST)

19. BLIND FIDDLER (4252 2818). The 4th tallest standing stone, nearly 11ft high. It consists of a long thin slab of granite studded with quartz. Excavations in early C19th produced some fragments of bones and ashes. On one of Michell's alignments. Pictured in MM4 p3 in an article suggesting a visual midsummer solstice alignment to a notch on horizon.

* **CHAPEL CARN BREA** A listed stone formerly at 3814 2799 on several of Michell's leys was broken up by the farmer in 1972. See original photo on p9 of this MM. Michell also noted a stone in the fence to the N of Chapel Carn Brea at 3867 2847. There is another large stone on the opposite side of the road leading from Chapel Carn Brea to Lands End airport.

20. SENNEN (3546 2557) Pictured here. Overlooking the sea towards Lands End, this stone stands in the hedge but is on several of Michell's leys and many computer-discovered trines (3 aligned sites). There was formerly another stone at Trevear Sennen at 3685 2598 through which Michell found 2 leys, but has been uprooted and lies in the hedge.

21. TREMAYNE (4298 3136) Pictured here. One remaining of an original pair, the other destroyed around 1900. Borlase dug between them in 1752 and found a pit similar to Drift but no burial.

Sennen

Tremayne

NORTH OF A3077 (PENZANCE–ST JUST) to WEST OF B3312 (PENZANCE–MORVAH)

22. TREWERN (4320 3208) Pictured here. Just over the A3077 there is one remaining of another pair, paralleling the Tremayne stone(s). The second Trewern stone at 4319 3194 was destroyed c1958. The stones stood near Trewern Round which also has 2 entrance stones (only one of which is now in situ) like Castallack and Kerris previously mentioned.

Trewern

23. BOSWENS (4001 3290) On the open Penwith moorland, this 8½ft stone is visible from Tregeseal Circle as a notch on the horizon (see picture in MM1 p12) and on a ley running to West Lanyon Quoit & Mulfra settlement (see MM2 p7) as well as a couple of others including a summer solstice sunrise to Men-an-Tol and Nine Maidens (Boskednan) circle. Chûn Castle and Chûn Quoit are both visible from the site. The stone was originally surrounded by a low cairn.

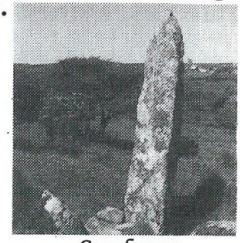
* At **PENDEEN** a recently (re?)erected standing stone which may be ancient is on Carn Eanes at 3860 3380 (see MM1 p24/2 p24/3 p24). At **KERROW FARM** on the foot of Chûn Downs a stone is in the hedge at 4145 3425. And at **MORVAH** two standing stones were formerly there, both of which have been destroyed. Higher Trevowhan (4089 3513) was pulled down in 1958, and Lower Trevowhan (4034 3567) is recorded as a name, but possibly refers to the Giants Grave, a ruined cromlech near the spot.

EAST OF B3312 (PENZANCE–MORVAH) to WEST OF B3311 (PENZANCE–ST IVES)

24. WATCH CROFT (4209 3567) Excavated by Borlase in 1863 – no finds. Stands just over the brow of the hill and may be aligned to a notch in Carn Gulva at Beltane/ Lughnasad sunrise.

25. MEN SCRYFA (4268 3529) A 6ft tall menhir near the Men-an-Tol. The stone is probably Bronze Age with a C5th–C6th Latinised Cornish inscription, commemorating a local leader (Royal Raven). A feature on the stone with photos will appear on MM9 or 10. Nearby is the Nine Maidens stone circle with the stump remaining of an outlier at 4339 3516 which relates to midsummer sunset.

26. CARFURY (4400 3400) Pictured here. A lovely setting for this 10ft stone hidden over the top of the road to Ding Dong mine, covered in bluebells in Spring. An excavation in 1958 found no remains. Many leys go through the stone.



Carfury

27. BOSWARTHEN (4428 3301) A boulder stone on the 2½" OS map near to Madron Well.

28. TRY (4597 3498) a 9ft menhir standing on a farm at the bottom of Mulfra Hill. Excavated in 1958 & 1962, a stone cist with a large capstone was found buried near the foot of the stone, containing a beaker, pottery and bones.

29. PORTHMEOR (4325 3726) Pictured here. Stands in a field overlooking the sea near a settlement. Excavated by Borlase in 1879 – no finds.

Porthmeor

30. KERROW (4524 3733) A 6½ft menhir excavated in 1935 – 2 urns discovered.

* Two stones are SE of St Ives: **BEERSHEEBA** (5251 3714), a 10ft stone standing near Trencrom Hill, and **GIEW MINE** (5022 3714), a 6ft stone with views to St Michael's Mount. These and other standing stones will be featured more fully in the next MM (No. 8).

Celtic Crosses
a Pagan Origin

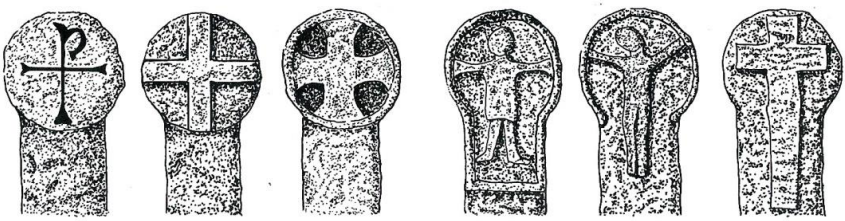
BY SU FRENCH

Su French is a past contributor to Meyn Mamvro: the Spirit of W. Penwith in No.4 and a Guide to the Crosses in No.6. Here she develops the theme of Celtic crosses and takes a most interesting look at their origin and symbolism.

The cross is now almost always associated with the symbol of Christianity, but for thousands of years, the cross in its various forms has been one of the most significant symbols known to man and the symbolism behind the cross is far more ancient than the cross itself.

The circle, or disc, is a representation in many religions of the sun, the giver of life, and most cults throughout the world have some sort of symbol which depicts a cross within a circle. There have been many prototypes of this symbol. The Egyptian Ankh was a cross with a circle forming its top limb, a sign representing the renewal of life, male and female polarity, regeneration. The Maoris used the cross as a sign of the Moon Goddess, while to the Maya the Tau cross represented the tree of life. The Buddhists have a wheel with a cross as its axis, the wheel of the Law. Crosses have been found on archaeological remains of the Chaldeans, and in Troy. The Druids, priests of the Celtic religion, were said to have made the most beautiful tree in their sacred oak groves into the form of a Tau cross. The Tau was a symbol of God amongst the Druids, as well as the Jews, and this made it an acceptable symbol to the Christian Church.

Following the Celtic religion from which our Cornish stone crosses originated, the sign of an equi-armed cross within a circle, is a very powerful symbol, used to direct the consciousness inwards. It is a representation of the spirit in perfect balance. In ancient Europe it represented the seasons, the year being shown as a wheel. It depicts the daily cycle of dawn, noon, dusk and night, as well as the elemental qualities of Air, Fire, Water and Earth. The circle-cross is used in all forms of Pagan and magic ritual.



Christianity was first introduced into Britain by the Romans, but was slow to be accepted in Cornwall. It was not until the Fifth Century that the converted Irish, the Celtic 'Saints', began to arrive from Ireland and Wales to settle the North coast of West Cornwall. These men and women established themselves as part of the community, and when they died they were buried in the ancient Lans, the pagan burial grounds, and often crosses were erected to mark the grave. These were the beginnings of the churchyards and a large number of Cornish parishes as we now know them, began in this way.[1]

Many of the old stone crosses are said to date back to the 5th and 6th centuries, the time when the Christian clerics were bringing their new religion to the heathen population of Cornwall. In central Europe the use of the equi-armed cross was forbidden by the early Christian priests as being a Pagan symbol, and it was not until the Quinsext Council of Constantinople in AD 683 was it decreed that the Agnus Dei - the symbol of a lamb which had represented Christ until that time, should be replaced by a Christ figure, which we see on some of the oldest crosses.[2] The earliest form of Christian cross known is that of the Chi-Rho, which is thought to come from the Greek word for fish, indicating that Christ was a 'fisher of men'. It is easy to see how this sign was corrupted into the Latin cross we associate with Christianity today. There are examples of Chi-Rho crosses at Phillack Church (SW 56523840) and on the St Just Selus stone (SW 37133143).

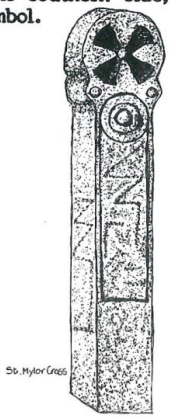
The most common form of stone cross found in Cornwall is the wheelhead cross, the round head on a shaft, suggested by the Dexter brothers[3] to be a relic of the Pagan custom of Sun worship. It is true to say that the sun was often shown as a disc with a centre spot, as it is in the Astrological symbol of the Sun today. The wheel was also a Druidic symbol, representing the power and vigour of the sun. Christianity in Cornwall was evolved in a Pagan environment, and the religion of the Celtic Druids was based upon a reverence of nature and the forces of the elements. They had long taught the worship of the Sun, and Earth and the stones. In its growth, the new religion absorbed much Paganism, and if at all possible, folk-lore and folk custom were given a Christian explanation. The ancient festivals were made into Christian Feasts, and the Old Gods were also brought into the Church and given the name of Christian saints. It is easy to imagine how the people were won over by this new religion, and accepted it readily.

To begin with, the old stones which had been worshipped for countless generations by the Celtic people were often carved with a simple cross to convert them to Christian use, and perhaps to exorcise their Pagan associations. The oldest 'crosses' seem to be often no more than a slab of stone. There are some which, as the Dexters point out, can only be called monoliths, such as the Connor Downs cross now to be found in Camborne Churchyard (SW 64534003). The history of this stone is interesting, known as the Camborne Monolith, it seems to have been converted to a Christian cross as late as the 11th or 12th century. It has a small head and relatively enormous cone-like shaft, which the Dexters liken to the figure of an ankh. It is believed to have once been a boundary stone, named as 'Meane Catloar' or Maen Carduan', as far back as 1343.[3]

MERTHER UNY

There are other monoliths which look and feel much older than the Christian religion they represent. One ancient stone can be seen in an old lan, an oval, and probably pre-Christian burial ground at Merther Uny in Wendron Parish (SW 70342932). It was best described by Ithell Colquhoun who likened this and a few similar crosses to human figures with a "round head, joined to the shaft by a sort of neck, and which seem to stare at one from a face formed from a central boss and four apertures - it's features."[4] The Dexters suggest that this monolith is Pagan, a symbolical representation of the Earth Mother (Uni), watching over Her sleeping children. There are similar stones in St. Uny churchyard, Lelant (SW 54813769), and Roche Churchyard (SW 98795977). The cross at Roche has some very interesting incised designs on its shaft, including on its southern side, a sword, which is claimed to be a Pagan symbol.

The Dexter brothers link this cross with the Egyptian Goddess Neith, or Net, mother of the Sun. They also put forward the theory that in the days of the Cornish tin trade with the Eastern countries, The Goddesses of those cultures were introduced into Cornwall, Neith being one, along with Uni, an Etruscan Goddess and Tinia, (Lantinny - St. Anthony). These foreign Goddesses, are to be found in the metalliferous areas of Cornwall.[3] The cross in Mylor Churchyard (SW 82033523) is also said to be a pre-Christian monolith. Suggested by legend to mark the grave of St. Mylor, this cross, now buried seven feet in the ground, is 17ft 6ins tall, and the tallest of the Cornish crosses. This cross has carvings in the form of concentric circles of spirals on the shaft, and is said to be a symbol of Sun-worship. Two small crossheads found at Budock churchyard (SW 78613238) are claimed by the Church booklet to be 3000 years old, and to have been Christiansed in the 5th or 6th centuries.


St. Mylor Cross

BOSCREEGE

There is another cross, at Boscreege, (SW 59043023) in Germoe Parish, a dwarf amongst the Cornish crosses, which seems to be little known, and has a spiral on both sides of the head.[3] This lovely little cross could not be described as a Christian monument, the spiral being very much a Pagan symbol, considered to be connected with Sun worship. There are right and left-handed spirals of this kind to be found carved on stones at Newgrange. Built into a garden wall, this cross seems to be the only one of its kind to be found in Cornwall.

So from these beginnings the crosses were developed. The most primitive example of the cross depicted on a round head is the equal armed, or Greek cross, which are most numerous in West Cornwall. The later version of this cross, sometimes called a Maltese cross, is an equi-armed cross with the ends of the limbs expanded. In the 7th Century the figure of Christ began to appear. There are two types of Christ figure. The earliest form depicts the figure upright and alive, usually wearing a tunic. On the much later crosses of the 12th Century onwards, Christ seems to have been accepted as being dead, arms raised and head bent, sometimes on a crucifix. There are many examples of this type to be found in Penwith.

TRENBATH

The designs on the Cornish crosses are many and varied, and we can see the progress of design through the centuries. However, there are some crosses which are more curious in their ornament, for example, the Trembath cross in Madron Parish (SW 44902915). This stone has for its decoration on head and shaft, an interesting selection of double axes. This was a symbol of several ancient religions, including those of the Mycenaean culture, and in Greece and elsewhere it became a symbol of the Sun God as well as the God of Thunder, the Hammer of Thor in Scandanavian countries. We can only speculate on how the double axe found its way onto a presumably Christian stone in Cornwall, and Dr. Dexter's theory is that it was brought here by metal traders from the Eastern Mediterranean, before the new religion became widespread. This type of symbol can also be seen on a rough stone slab which has been built into a bench in the porch of Towednack Church (SW 48702807), as well as the shaft of Trenethick Cross in Wendron parish (SW 66842910). This is also called the Patriarchal Cross a development of the axe cult, and a device found in ancient Crete and Cyprus.

Another curious and interesting ornament can be traced on Penzance Market Cross, now in Penlee Park (SW 47053004), and also on the decorated shaft of a cross in the ancient Churchyard of Lanivet (SX 03956423). This is the human figure which seems to have a tail. The Dexter brothers go into great detail about how it used to be thought that Englishmen, Cornishmen, Dorset and Kent men in particular had tails when they were born. There are references to Englishmen with tails as far back as the literature of the C12th.

Two more crosses which are worth attention stand at Trevales, in Stithians Parish. The first, (Trevalis No.1)[5] (SW 74073614) has a figure on its head which appears to be standing on a small heart. This figure is recognised by A.G. Langdon as being female in appearance, and the whole shaft of the cross has a curved and feminine look. The other cross at Trevales (Trevalis No.2) (SW 74443582) also has a figure on its head, but this one stands above a circle-cross and is very much more masculine looking. Remembering that the cross within a circle represents in the Old Religion the symbol of life and fertility, and that these two crosses definitely have a masculine and feminine feel, the Dexters may not be far wrong in their view that this pair of stones could have been erected as phallic emblems symbolic of fertility, and that these also have been Christianised.

Through the years the ornament of the crosses has remained sculptured on enduring stone. Many have now been lost, used for agricultural and other purposes, or deliberately mutilated by the Puritans, whilst some have been built into the fabric of the churches which sprang up in the 13th and 14th Centuries. Those we have left will repay a great deal of study, for there may be more to their history than the Church would have us believe.

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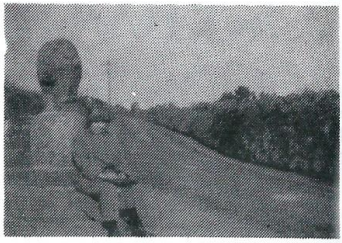
FEEDBACK on CROSSES



The feature on West Penwith crosses in the last MM (No.6) provoked some interesting feedback. Reader Mrs Ellis of Sennen was particularly interested in the information on the Boskenna Cross now at 4258 5426, close to the left hand hedge on the B3315 road from Penzance (Newlyn) to Lands End at the junction of the minor road to St Buryan about 1 mile past the Merry Maidens. In Langdon's 'Old Cornish Crosses' (1896) he says that in 1869 the cross was found built into "the hedge" and then erected on a triangular piece of grass in the middle of the roads. This is the spot where Mrs Ellis remembers it. She encloses a picture (reproduced above) showing her mother sitting at the cross, taken about 1921. The road on her right is the St Buryan road and she is facing the continuation of it towards the Merry Maidens. Since then the road has been turned into a junction and the cross moved (back?) into the hedge. Langdon does say that the cross probably originally stood in the centre of the roads, but does not say on what evidence he bases this statement.

Another reader has told us about the Penzance market cross in Penlee Park. Apparently it was moved in the 1920s from Morrab Gardens and before that from Greenmarket in 1829. But even before that it was (originally?) at the bottom of Causewayhead in the wall where the Midland bank now is. Much travelled crosses!

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Cornwall & Brittany lands linked in legends

BY CHERYL STRAFFON

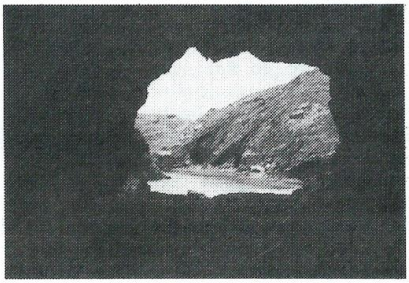
A previous article (in MM No.5) took a look at the links between the kinds of ancient sites in Cornwall and her neighbour Brittany and concluded that early peoples from about 3500 BC crossed over from Brittany and continued the tradition of megalithic building in Cornwall. These links continued throughout the Bronze Age and into the Iron Age. For example, a gold sheet lunula found at Harlyn Bay near Padstow in 1864, now in Truro Museum, is identical to one of 3 found at Kerivoa, Côtes-du-Nord Brittany, and similar to another from St Poton, also in the Côtes-du-Nord. It has been shown that all 3 lunulae were made by the same craftsmen using the same tools, proving that there was a direct link between Brittany and Cornwall around 2000 BC.

Moving forward into the Celtic period, there are fascinating hints of the closeness between the two lands in language and legend. Nora Chadwick[1] observes: "The fact that the Breton language is related more closely to Cornish suggests that the majority of the immigrants came from Cornwall, and it has been observed that relations between Cornwall and Armorica (Brittany) continued much later and more intensively than between Wales and Armorica, and communications between Cornwall and Brittany were constant at least till the C16th." The name of the ancient kingdom of Dumnonia (SW England) can also be found in Northern Brittany today as Damnonia, and Cornwall (Kernow) can also be found in SW Brittany as Cornouaille (Kernev).

Several of the early Celtic saints and rulers are shared by both countries. Samson (who founded the settlement of Dol in Brittany) was a Welshman who embarked from Cornwall in 521 AD. Also, Cunomorus, who ruled in Brittany around 540 AD, was said to have governed in Cornwall as well as Brittany. Peter Berresford-Ellis[2] suggests that he may have been the same man as Marcus Cunomorus (King Mark) of Cornwall. In the medieval romance Tristan and Iseult, set in and around Brittany and Cornwall, Tristan is the son of Blancheflor, the sister of King Mark of Cornwall (or King Marc'h of Cornovaille in the Breton version). He comes incognito to Mark's courts in Cornwall from Brittany (there is still an Ile Tristan off Douarnenez) in Brittany and eventually brings Iseult there from Ireland as a bride for Mark but becomes her lover himself. He is banished to Brittany where he marries another Iseult, and returns in disguise to Cornwall. Further adventures follow in Brittany and in Cornwall. Tristan's death is commemorated by a 7ft monolith that stands near Castle Dore (Fowey), the inscription of which translated reads - 'Tristan lies here, the son of Cunomorus.' If Cunomorus, or Cynvawr to give him his Celtic name, was both a C6th ruler in Brittany as well as Dumnonia, and was in addition also King Mark of Cornwall, it would certainly help to explain the close links between the 2 countries.

There are other close connections between the worlds of Brittany and Cornwall in the Arthurian legends. According to Geoffrey of Monmouth's 'History of the Kings of Britain' (c1135) Arthur (begat at Tintagel castle) defeats the Saxons with his chief allies the Bretons, and marries Guenhuvara (Guinevere) daughter of a Cornish nobleman. He goes to Mont St Michel where he disposes of the giant who had killed the niece of Hoel, leader of Brittany. Legend also has him battling with a dragon on the sands of the village of St-Michel-en-Grève in Brittany. When he returns to Britain he fights his final battle in Cornwall against the usurper Modred and is taken to the mysterious Avalon for his wounds to heal, and from where both Brittany and Cornwall had hopes of his return. Another legend has him buried on the Ile Daval in Brittany. Other figures from the Arthurian court also have adventures in Brittany especially in and around the ancient Forest of Brocéliande, "whose ruler was Arthur and whose spiritual lord was Merlin."[3] Merlin's castle (where he was imprisoned by the enchantress Viviane) lies below the lake of the Château de Comper, from which Lancelot took the name Lancelot du Lac. Nearby at the Pont du Secret Queen Guinevere confessed her love to Sir Lancelot, and deep in the forest there is a fountain at Barenton (a centre of Druidic teaching) where Merlin, being there treated by the Druids, was bewitched in a spell by Viviane – the fountain is called 'Perron de Merlin' (Merlin's Threshold). Merlin of course is still remembered in Cornwall at Merlin's Cave under Tintagel Castle, and Merlin's Rock off Mousehole where a prophecy of his came true.

By the C12th then "some sort of legend about Arthur was current among popular story-tellers of Wales, Cornwall and Brittany – in fact among all the Celtic races descended from the Britons of Arthur's day."[4] It seems then that it must have been the Bretons, travelling widely at this time, who transmitted the tales further into European romances. Although there is no written trace of Breton versions of the legends, it seems likely that the Bretons must, like other Celtic peoples, have had their bards whose aural stories would have attracted the writers and poets of the newly developed French language, and who tranformed them into the medieval Arthurian romances.

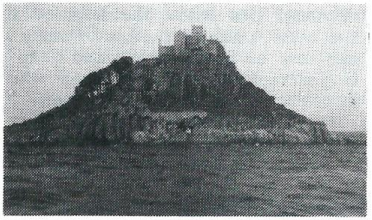


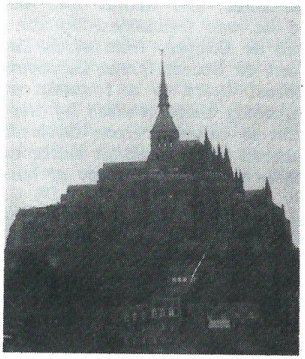
Merlin's Cave

Another similar legend that the 2 countries share is that of a lost land, drowned by flood – in Cornwall, Lyonnesse lying between Lands End and the Isles of Scilly, and in Brittany, Ys off the bay of Douarnenez in Finistére. From both lands only one person escaped: from Lyonnesse is was one of the Trevilian family on a white horse; from Ys it was the king Gradlon on his horse Morvarc'h. Ys was drowned because Dahud, daughter of the King was tempted by her lover the Devil to let the floodgates be opened. When Gradlon escaped on his horse with his daughter up behind he was instructed by God to throw her into the torrent, which he did. She then because a Siren, luring sailors to death upon the rocks, a legend not dissimilar to the one at Mermaids Rock near Lamorna Cove (coincidently not far from Merlin's Rock already mentioned) where young men are supposed to have swum, lured by the singing of the mermaid, never to return.

Fishermen have supposedly sometimes glimpsed Ys below a calm sea, just as Sennen fishermen claimed to sometimes hear the bells from the 140 Lyonnesse churches beneath the waves and find the remains of houses washed up in their nets (Carew, 1698).

There is a similar closeness in legend between St Michael's Mount in Cornwall and Mont St Michel off the coast of Brittany (now Normandy). For centuries the legend has persisted that St Michael appeared to Cornish fishermen on the Mount in 495 and gave it its name. Precisely the same legend appertains to Mont St Michel where St Michael appeared to St Aubert in 710. Even the reputed origins of both mounts are virtually identical. The Cornish peoples called St Michael's Mount CARREK LOSYNCOS (The Grey Rock in the Wood) and the remains of old trees are still to be seen in the sands of Mounts Bay, photographed as recently as February 1974. Recent scientific analysis has indicated that trees were growing there about 1800 BC and presumably were subsequently drowned by the rising sea level (see article in next MM for more details). The same fate is supposed to have happened to Mont-St-Michel where the forest of Scissy was covered by the sea, leaving a large sandy bay from which protruded the rocky island of the Mont.





Another island off Brittany, the Ile de Seine, which lies off the Ponte du Raz, the Breton equivalent of Lands End, has similar legends to those associated with the Scilly Isles off Cornwall. The Scillies were supposed to be the islands where prehistoric man took his dead for burial, legends given some credence by the wealth of burial chambers there. Similarly, according to Loeb, a C6th Byzantine writer, the Ile de Seine was where the corpses of Druids were taken for burial. The bay to the north of the Pointe du Raz is still called Baie des Tréspassés (Bay of the Dead). The islanders - only converted from paganism in the C17th - are still very much aware of the thin dividing line between the living and the dead - "The air is full of the presence of the departed: they rise out of the sea; they are visible among the rocks and on the shore; they are heard whispering behind the stone walls that divide the fields."[5] The islanders continued to follow the pagan belief in the material aspect of life after death, and on some of the older tombs there are holes carved out for libations of milk and wine. The island itself was once inhabited by nine Druid Sorceresses who had supernatural powers including raising storms at sea by their incantations, changing into animals, curing incurable diseases, and foretelling the future. Even in recent times it was believed that certain women there had 'le don de vouer' (power of communicating with the Evil One) and on dark nights they have been seen by the fishermen embarking on mysterious boats (bag-sorcèrs) in order to take part in the groac'hed or witches sabbat. This recalls many of the stories told by Bottrell (1870) and Hunt (1871) about the witches of St Levan and Zennor in West Penwith.

All these rites may be vestiges of the old Celtic pagan religion and together with all the other close correspondences between the two countries, show that Cornwall and Brittany have probably shared a continuity of cultural and spiritual identity from some thousands of years.

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Spirit of West Penwith & Brittany

by Alexandra Lobban

Reading the article on Brittany, Penwith's French Connection in MM, No.5 made me think about the many other connections we share with our French neighbours. Being in the fortunate position of having a French Mother whose family comes from Brittany, I've been able to spend many happy hours observing it's ancient sites and people.

Living in Cornwall I have also passed among the ancient stones that our ancestors have left here in our keeping. I have walked across the rugged moors and by the coast, learnt the history and met the people. In both lands there lies the same 'Spirit' and same soul, the wind tells the same story, the stones and sites share the same foundations.

In France it is said that the true essence of Brittany lies in it's tip and it can also be said that Cornwall's ancient Heritage also lies in its tip, 'Penwith'. It is in these places when we stand high on a hill overlooking wild and desolate moors or the restless sea, our backs resting on an ancient stone that we feel that something, an 'Echo' of the past, a thrill of belonging, of being wanted.

It may be bold for me to say, that deep inside, the Cornish and the Breton people are very proud of their heritage. Those who live in Penwith, usually are there because of a calling, they themselves sometimes do not always understand. When you travel along the little rural roads looking for some sacred site, you need only stop at an old house or farm and ask it's occupants, they will lead you in the right direction.

In Brittany this is even more so. Never ask your way to one of Brittany's ancient sites without being prepared to spend sometime, even a few hours, with a total stranger whilst they tell you of their sacred sites, history, myth and superstitions. Tell them that you are from Cornwall, then you are a friend for life and out comes the best red wine and cheese. It makes little difference whether the only French vocabulary you possess is yes, no and thankyou they will carry on speaking to you for hours in the traditional French manner.

The old French of Brittany consider Cornwall a very close relative to them. And it is true that we share many similarities with them not only in the physical relationship of land and ancient sites but also of belief, superstitions and folklore.

The Breton land is filled with the legends of King Arthur and Merlin and of the lost lands of Lyonnesse and Ys. Sacred wells are held in great esteem. The Breton people are a very proud race, proud of their heritage. We too must remain proud of our land, our stones, and our relationship to them.

The symbol that can be seen all over Brittany is the three fold spiral. A symbol which is part of the Celtic national ancestry, a symbol of eternal life, and of the ancient power which courses through the land and through some of the sacred sites. Within it's spirals lies the true meaning of our relationship to all of these things. Dwell on it's pattern and remember.

An engraving by Ian Cooke of the goat island of Gavrinis in Brittany and the Earth Mother is on the back page.

The Piper's Tune

A new stone has been discovered by John Michell (pictured above) while he was down in West Penwith recently. A very tall (about 12ft) and chunky stone, it is acting as a gatepost in a field near Cripplesease at 50273610, not far from Trencrom Hill. There are several other largish stones around the area, but none as prominent as this one, and its large size would of course be unnecessary for a simple gatepost. There are several mines nearby and it is conceivable the stone may have come from one of these, but less than a mile away there is another listed standing stone, Giew Mine at SW 20223714, a "substantial moorstone block 6½ft high, one face sub-triangular 2ft wide, the other tapering up from 2ft 9in quite weathered." (Guthrie - "A possible unrecorded standing stone and barrow at Towednack", Cornish Archaeology 16, 1977). This too is near some mine workings but Guthrie says it has nothing to do with the mine workings and has weathered as it stands. This brings up the eternal dilemma facing stone hunters in W. Penwith - how does one know if a stone is ancient or not? Guthrie states with confidence that it appears to have no relation to the mine workings, but a careful examination of the stone shows a hole drilled into the middle of one side of it. Even if it were not originally part of a mine building it looks suspiciously as if it has been adapted for use.

Some stones in W. Penwith are undoubtedly ancient, and the centre page feature in this MM gives the best of them, but others are more dubious. If free-standing they could simply be rubbing posts, as in Swingate 2 & 3 or the several stones near to West Lanyon Quoit: but equally they could also be megaliths, as in Porthmeor which doubles as both menhir and rubbing post. And if in the hedge there is really little way of knowing unless excavation has been done, or they are on one of Michell's leys (providing you accept the leys of course!) John himself discusses this with

regard to Chyangwens stone in an article in the next Meyn Mamvro.

I have "discovered" several prominent stones in hedges myself - for example one near Zennor at 45283845 and one on the St Buryan-Lamorna Pottery road at 43752583, but in the absence of other corrobatory evidence it is impossible to say with any certainty whether they are ancient or not. The Sites & Monuments Register held by the Cornwall Archaeological Unit lists some 55 menhirs in W. Penwith of which about 25 are either doubtful or else destroyed so there is no means of ascertaining their status. Of the rest only about half have been excavated, mainly before this century. So, a lesson here for stone hunters in W. Penwith perhaps - by all means look for and find megaliths in the landscape, but unless there is some evidence of deliberate placing by ancient man they can as easily be 'modern' quarried stones or natural rocks as ancient megaliths.

Finally, an ancient stone that has been identified. The broken stone from St Just vicarage garden, pictured in MM6, has now been visited by Peter Herring from the Cornwall Archaeological Unit and is thought to be the remains of a saddle-quern, an iron-age implement for grinding corn. At some later date it must have been inscribed, but the meaning of the lettering is still unknown. Any ideas? (CS)

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