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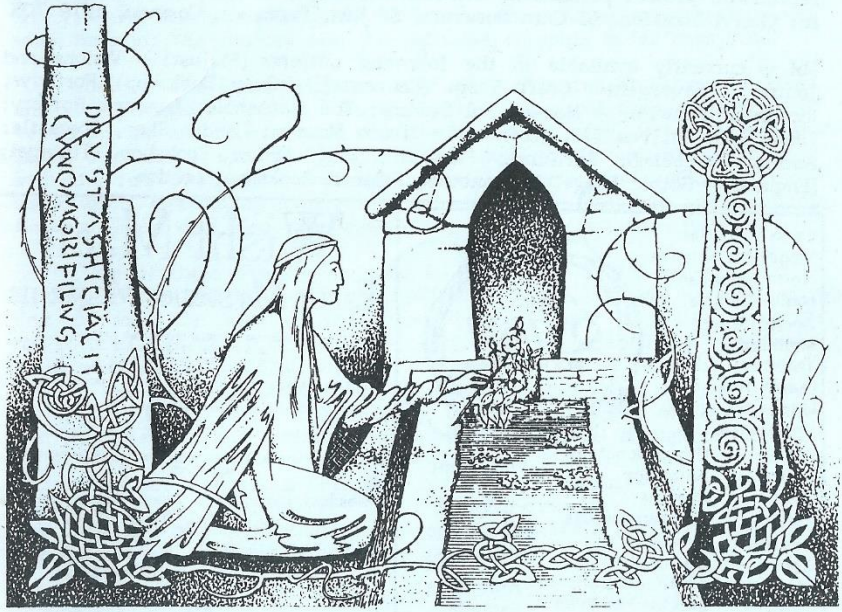
ancient stones and sacred sites in cornwall



THE TRISTAN STONE - Craig Weatherhill
MÊN-AN-TOL • LIZARD DREAMERS • FOGOUS
EARTH MYSTERIES • PAGAN CORNWALL •

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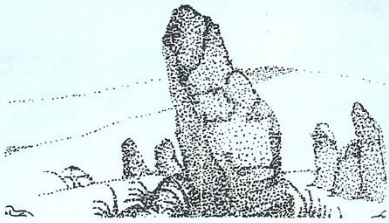
FIRST ISSUE OUT WINTER 1993



Meyn Mamvro

Stones of our Motherland

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

The Summer started with the 5th annual Maypole Dance at Carn Bosavern in St.Just. This year Radio Cornwall sent one of its reporters to comment on the celebrations, and she broadcast a very nice piece on it, saying: "Men and women who share the belief that people should live as close to nature as possible came together this weekend to welcome the Summer. The feast of Beltane or Mayday is one of the most ancient and sacred of the Celtic festivals, rich in history and symbolism." Music by the local group was played, and extracts of on-the-spot interviews with your editor, Caeia March and Craig Weatherhill broadcast, Craig summing it up well when he said: "As you can see, the Celtic pagan spirit is far from dead".

Beltane and Summer Solstice were also celebrated at Harmony Pottery, and at Lughnasad a Goddess Tour of England, Wales and Cornwall brought 30 women to see and connect with the sites of Rocky Valley and West Penwith. There was also a special celebration for the festival, coinciding this year with the full moon, which included chanting, drumming and walking a landscape maze, and making a beautiful earth mother out of corn and hedgerow flowers. There were also many open visits to the ancient sites [see p.2].

One of those sites well visited in the summer is the Men-an-Tol. The clearing of the land around it [see MM20 p.1] by the Cornwall Archaeological Unit to show the area of the supposed stone circle continues to excite controversy. Ian Cooke of the Men-an-Tol Studio has taken the opportunity to provide a book wherein visitor's comments on the site can be recorded, and he told MM that 90% of the people who visited the site were opposed to what had been done. The CAU say they are surprised at the reaction, and that they did not consider the matter controversial enough to have put it to public debate and consultaton beforehand. On p.4-5 we look at the archaeological implications of the new theory about the stones, but meanwhile if any readers have visited the site since the cut-back and have any views one way or another, please either drop MM a line and/or write to the Archaeological Unit at Old County Hall, Truro.

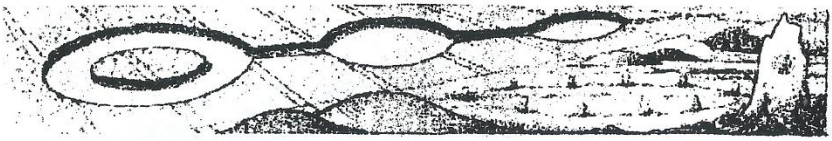
This summer has for your editor been largely concerned with getting my book "Pagan Cornwall - Land of the Goddess" ready for the printers. Since the magazine started 7 years ago, MM has grown to become a (one-woman!) small publisher, with two very successful Earth Mysteries Guide Books to the Ancient Sites in Cornwall to its credit [see p.9]. Now, the book I started researching 5 years ago and writing 1½ years ago has finally reached fruition. I would like to think that it is very different than other books on Cornwall, and that those of you who have appreciated and supported the magazine over the years will find much to enjoy also in the book.

cornish earth mysteries group news page

Summer outdoor activities were generally blessed with some lovely weather. On May 2nd the 5th annual **Three Wells Walk** attracted over 20 people, who visited Chapel Euny, Sancreed & Madron wells in a 12 mile walk. On June 6th a smaller band followed the **Zennor Churchway Walk** for about 10 miles from St Ives to Pendeen [see MM21 p24] on a very hot day. July 4th brought a very interesting **Imaging Session** at Boscawen-un stone circle. Here 11 people medidated at the circle and then compared images afterwards Many images were found in common, including particularly eyes (6), lines and grids (5), golden-yellow colours (6), and cow/bull horns (3). These were not particularly obvious or predictable images, and it was felt that there was scope for further research here. On August 8th 10 people drove to **Bodmin Moor** to look at some of the sites in Cheryl Straffon's new guide to the Moor, including The Hurlers, Rillaton Barrow, Stowe's Hill & Craddock Moor stone circle. This is a area rich in alignments and landscape patterns, and many interesting observations were made. Finally on September 5th, the **Men-an-Tol** [see p.4-5] provided the venue for an on-site investigation day.

Further information about the 1993 Autumn/Winter series of talks from Andy Norfolk, The Cottage, Launders Hill, Crowan, Camborne.0209-831519

THE CORNISH CROP CIRCLE GROUP



The May 22nd visit to Rough Tor was cancelled due to bad weather, but on June 27th a few members met on **Kit Hill.** There were no crop-circle formations in the area, so they investigated sites on Cadsonbury Hill (mapping a weblike complex of energies) Tokenbury Hill, Dupath Well, Trethevey Quoit, St Cleer Well, The Hurlers and Dozmary Pool. On July 18th there was a visit to **Tintagel** to look at Glebe Cliff church and the maze carvings of Rocky Valley. Finally, on August 22nd **Boscawen-un stone circle** provided a very special and magical site for dowsing investigation.

Further information about the 1993 Autumn/Winter meetings and talks from Barbara Davies, Old Stables, Lescrow, Fowey. (0726-833465).

NEWS

MERRY MAIDENS CHIPPED OFF The Merry Maidens stone circle in West Penwith was this Summer desecrated by a man who chipped off a piece of one of the stones, and was seen by a witness who reported the matter. Local TV and radio interviewed County Archaeologist Nick Johnson, who commented that the sites "are being loved to death by people who cannot resist owning a piece of history", and Meyn Mamvro editor Cheryl Straffon who said that "the principle of free open access to the sites is under threat from such actions. Those of us who love and revere them are horrified by such destruction."

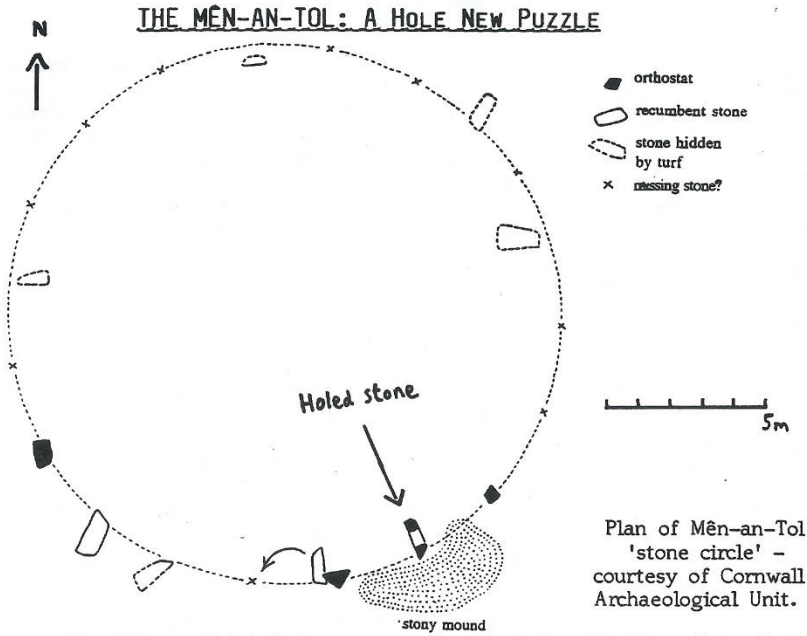
BALLOWALL BARROW TO BE ENTRUSTED English Heritage have now revealed details of some of the sites that they are actively planning to lease out to other bodies [see MM20]. In Cornwall this includes Balowall Barrow (Carn Gluze) which the National Trust will now take over. Craig Weatherhill commented that this was a welcome move, but that there were still fears over some of the other sites: "These monuments are our property, we deserve to have a say in the matter".

CELTIC CROSS NOT AT PIECE! Following on from the attempt to steal Nun Careg cross near the Merry Maidens [see MM21], another cross at Piece near Redruth was targeted one night in early June. A local schoolteacher came across a group of youths trying to steal the cross at 3.30am with the aid of a lorry and a small crane, but managed to dissuade them from proceeding It is believed that these thefts are part of an illicit export trade.

CURSE OF ERASMUS IS WELL REMOVED! Phillack Well near Hayle, which was profaned over 250 years ago when the High Sherriff of Cornwall Erasmus Pascoe washed his mangey dogs in it, has been restored by the Hayle Old Cornwall Society. Ever since the dog dip in 1720, the family was "cursed": Erasmus died "a dreadful death" 3 years later, and his son died the same year of smallpox. The family fortune was dissipated and the line died out in 1744. Now the restored well, which is a hole in the ground in a field opposite Phillack Church, may be used again - but not by local dogs!

BRONZE/IRON AGE SETTLEMENTS REBORN Two independent projects are under way in Cornwall to reconstruct settlements from the Bronze and Iron Ages. On Bodmin Moor 3 hut circles with thatched roofs are being built on Trewortha Farm, overlooking the remains of original 4000 year old hut circles and burial chambers. Farmer Graham Lawrence hopes the finished site will be a residential study centre to be used by large numbers of school-children. And at Chacewater near Truro, Jacqui Wood, owner of Saveock Mill, has started a mock Iron Age village, including roundhouses and a weaving shed. Visitors to the centre can see Celtic ploughing and cultivation.

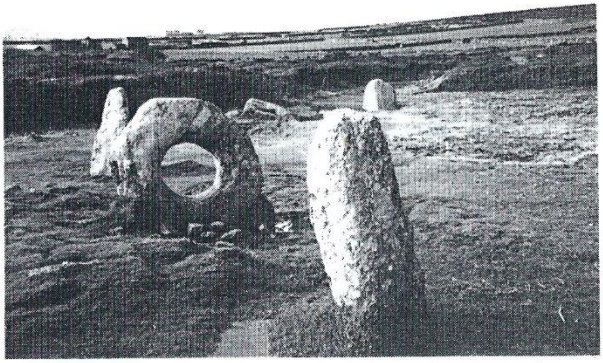
Meanwhile, schoolchildren from the Cormoran cluster of primary schools in West Cornwall shared a week at Chysauster ancient village near Newmill, where they carried out a wide range of activities, including Celtic music-making, flint knapping and crafts, such as weaving, spinning and wood turning. They dressed in Celtic costume made by themselves, and ate authentic food by milking goats, gathering wild salads and making bread. One of the buildings in the complex was re-roofed by the schools and their advisors to give it a feel of authenticity.



Plan of Mên-an-Tol 'stone circle' - courtesy of Cornwall Archaeological Unit.

The Mên-an-Tol holed stone on the West Penwith Moors has always been a source of intrigue and interest. It is an unusual site: although free-standing holed stones are known from other places (for example, the stones of Tregeseal on the nearby Penwith Moors, and the holed stones near the Merry Maidens stone circle) there are few of this size and shape, it being some 3½ft high with a hole of 1½ft diameter, large enough for the average person to crawl through. On either side is an upright of about 4ft high, with another fallen stone nearby. Traditionally, it has been interpreted either as a unique monument, or else the remains of a chambered tomb. Both interpretations have problems: the fine line symmetry of the stones suggests deliberate positioning, but a plan of the stones by Dr. Borlase in 1754 shows a different triangular arrangement. However the central holed stone could have been since moved, leaving the two uprights in the same position.

The second suggestion, that the holed stone was originally the entrance of a tomb, has some credence. Such stones are known elsewhere in the world, although significantly perhaps not in Cornwall. The nearest we come to it are the circular cramped porthole entrances to the chambers of some Cotswold tombs such as Rodmarton and Avening in Gloucestershire. However there are similar arrangements at some other sites in Cornwall, notably the small apeture at the bottom right of the portal entrance of Trethevey Quoit near St.Cleer, which may have been related to the open rectangle above Newgrange entrance lintel in Ireland. All these structures may have been a method of allowing the sun's rays to enter the tomb and/or to allow the spirits of the dead to escape the tomb, although the Mên-an-Tol hole seems rather large for this purpose.



As long ago as 1877 C.W.Dymond published a plan of the site, which included particulars of six surrounding stones which he believed had not been recorded before. These were nearly equidistant from the Mên-an-Tol, making a circle about 96ft (sic) in diameter.

Recently (see MM14 & 20), the Cornwall Archaeological Unit have reiterated this idea and suggested that the monument was originally part of a stone circle about 55ft in diameter consisting of 19 or 20 stones, of which traces of 11 are still visible. In a piece of good Earth Mysteries research, the CAU comment: "If the complex at the Mên-an-Tol was indeed a stone circle, then it would seem likely that the holed stone originally stood at right angles to its present orientation - i.e in line with the circle. Perhaps it was a 'special' stone - a focus for rituals or for observing distant features from the circle. If at a tangent to the circle, observations through the hole would have been to the NNW or SSE. At this orientation no obvious astronomical events or landscape features suggest themselves to the writer, but others may be aware of something significant."

However, this stone circle interpretation raises some difficulties. The spacing of the stones in the circle is not regular, even between existing uprights. And no other stone circle in the country is known to have such a holed stone as part of its structure, although one of the stones in the Mackrie Moor 5 circle on Arran has a small perforation. The closest parallels are the former Ring Stone that stood outside the Avebury circles, and the former holed Stone of Odin on Orkney that stood between 2 stone circles. The Stone of Odin was used for the purpose of sealing bargains and betrothals, which again may hint at a ritual origin for holed stones: certainly the Mên-an-Tol was known as a healing and divining stone, and a similar legend is attached to the Tolvern holed stone near Gweek. Aubrey Burl suggests that these holed stones may originally have been porthole entrances of Neolithic chambered tombs from whence came the intricate association of death, burial and life-giving ceremonies.

So we have returned "full circle" to the burial chamber. How can that relate to the idea of a stone circle? There is a possible explanation which draws all these threads together. The circle of stones at the Mên-an-Tol, if circle it was, may not have been a "stone circle" as such, but rather the cairn circle of a burial chamber, a practice known from other places, notably Bryn Celli Ddu on Angelsey, Newgrange in Ireland, and perhaps Mackrie Moor 5 on Arran. The holed stone could have been the entrance to that tumulus, or the capstone of it, and the large uprights the flankers. There are in fact remains of a cairn, lying to the periphery of the circle. Therefore the Mên-an-Tol may have been both stone/cairn circle <u>and</u> burial chamber.

THE TRISTAN STONE - THE MYSTERY OF THE MISSING LINE

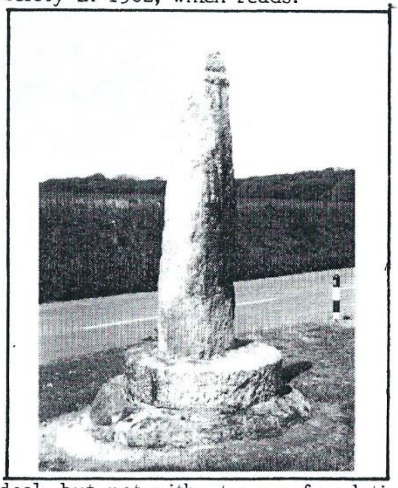
by Craig Weatherhill

The famous Tristan Stone, mounted on a two-stage granite pedestal, stands on a roadside verge a mile outside Fowey. Beside it is a plaque provided by the Fowey Old Cornwall Society in 1962, which reads:

THE TRISTAN STONE
This stone, erected nearby about 550 AD, has on its north side a raised T, an early form of the Christian cross. On its south side, in 6th century letters, is inscribed:

CIRVSTANS HIC IACIT
CVNOWORI FILIVS

Translated, this reads "Tristan here lies, of Cunomorus the son". Cunomorus was Marcus Cunomorus of the medieval Life of St Sampson and King Mark of Cornwall in the love story of Tristan and Iseult.

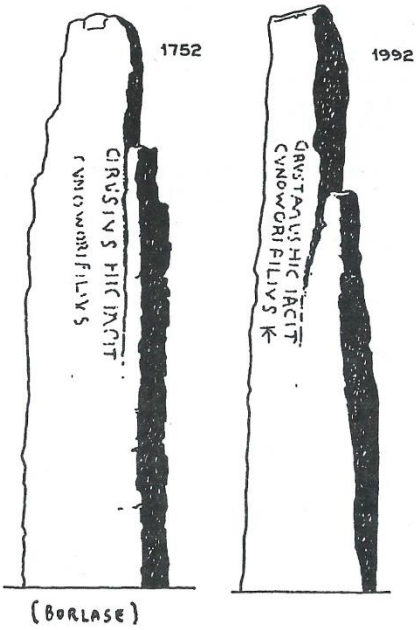


This plaque presumes a great deal, but not without some foundation. The inscription is well worn and difficult to dechipher, but the earliest drawing of it, by Dr William Borlase in 1754, interprets it as CIRVSIVS HIC IACIT CUNOWORI FILIVS. Macalister (1945-49) read the first name as CIRVSINIVS. It is now generally agreed that both readings were mistaken. The initial CI is in fact a laterally inverted D; the second I is most certainly a T, while the next letters form a contracted symbol to be read - AN or ANV. The first name is therefore DRVSTANS or DRUSTANVS, a British name adapted by medieval French writers such as Béroul to TRISTAN, in order to equate with the french 'triste', meaning 'sad, sorrowful'. The name DRUSTANS has been wrongly claimed as being of exclusively Pictish origins. Certainly variants of it were found in the Pictish regions of Dark Age Scotland, but, as Oliver Padel points out in "The Cornish Origins of the Tristan Stories", the earliest known example of it is on this Cornish stone.

THe W of CVNOWORVS is an inverted M (there was no W in the Latin alphabet). CUNOMORUS, the British "Cuno-moros" = sea-hound, is a well-attested name of the period. In later Cornish, it became Kenvor, and occurs in at least five place-names, for example Tregenver (Kenvor's settlement) at Falmouth, and Crenver (Kenvor's fort) near Crowan. While they may have been named after five men called Kenvor, it is equally possible that they were named from a single important man with wide-ranging landholdings. The word CUNO-S, literally "hound", implies a leader and seems to have been given almost exclusively to the names of such men: CUNOVAL ("powerful hound") of the Mên Scryfa, and the CUNOBELINOS ("hound of the sun god Belenos") who faced Julius Caesar, to name two British examples. It also appears in the name of the Irish hero Cuchulainn ("hound of Culainn").

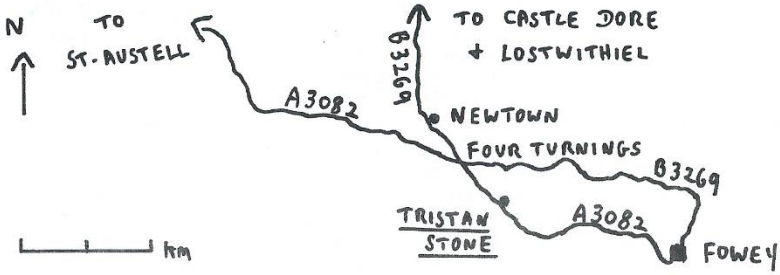
CUNOMORUS also appears in genealogies of the Kings of Dumnonia in the form CYNVAWR. He appears to have ruled during the first half of the 6th century, a date consistent with the style of lettering used in the inscription on the stone. The 9th century Breton monk Wrmonoc, in his "Life of St Paul Aurelian" tells of St Paul's meeting in Cornwall with "Marcus, whom men call by another name, Quonomorius", implying that he held authority not only in British Dumnonia, but in Brittany, settled from the mid 5th century by Dumnonian Britons. Gregory of Tours, writing at the end of the 6th century, mentions a Breton Count' of about 50 years earlier, named Chonomor, and Breton legend blackens his character as Commorus, the Breton Bluebeard, and also refers to him as Marc'h. If the CUNOMORUS of the Tristan stone is indeed this man, then the inscription can be excitingly interpreted as "Tristan here lies, son of King Mark."

The excitement doesn't stop here. Two hundred years before the stone was drawn by Dr Borlase, it was seen and mentioned by John Leland, the self-styled King's Antiquary to Henry VIII, in his "Itinerary" compiled between 1534 and 1543: "Castledour belongs to the Earl of Sarisbury. A mile off is a broken crosse, thus inscribed - CONOMOR ET FILIVS / CVM DOMINA CLUSILLA". It seems that Leland didn't see the first line of the inscription, which was well worn even in Borlase's day and perhaps only legible in certain lights, but saw a third line which had either vanished or become too worn to read by the 1750s.



Borlase's drawings of other Cornish inscribed stones demonstrate a remarkable accuracy and it would be fair to assume that his depiction of the Tristan stone was equally good. However, he shows a distinct bulge on the left side of the stone which gives enough room for a third line, whereas today there is no such room, and no such bulge - in fact, this side of the stone is now slightly concave in profile.

Borlase is hardly likely to have been wrong. On the right side of the stone, he showed a small projecting boss at the head of a vertical split to be level with the beginning of the inscription; that is, about 8 inches higher than it is today. It would seem that a piece has broken off here since his day, while another piece, weakened along a similarly vertical plane, has also split away on the left side of the stone.



The Tristan Stone has suffered a series of moves. According to Borlase, it had been moved from the Four Turnings crossroads about 12 years before he saw it lying in a ditch at Newtown, 200 or 300 yards to the north-west. The 1813 Ordnance Survey map shows the "Ancient Inscribed Stone" at Newtown, and J.T.Blight also saw it there, by which time it had been set upright. Sometime after that, the stone was returned to the Four Turnings, close to its original site, where it stood until 1971 when road-widening necessitated its final move to the present site. (There is no evidence to support an oft-quoted claim that it once stood close to Castle Dore; it seems never to have been less than 1½ miles from the hill fort). It is therefore more than likely that the stone was damaged during at least one of its moves. If a large sliver containing that enigmatic third line did split off, it may have done so during its erection at Newtown, or when it was moved back to the Four Turnings. This valuable piece of the stone may still be lying somewhere within that short distance, awaiting rediscovery. It may have been built into a hedge or, the worst scenario, it might have been broken up and used as hardcore under the road.

John Leland is likely to have misread some of the inscription he saw; for example, his CVNOMOR ET FILIVS is, in reality, CVNOWORI FILIVS, and the clearest part of the entire wording. It is perfectly possible for the CL of CLVSILLA to have been a debased O, in which case the name would have been OUSILLA, an acceptable Latinisation of the British female name AD-SILTIA = "she who must be gazed upon", a direct equivalent of the Greek name Miranda, and which would have become in Old Cornish "Eselt". This name appears in a place name near St Keverne, recorded in 967, "hryt eselt" = 'Eselt's ford'. So, as DRUSTANS was to become Tristan in medieval romances, so Eselt was to be horribly changed by French poets to Iseult/ Isoude, and by the Germans to Isolde.

Could it be that the inscription actually tells us that "Tristan here lies, son of King Mark, with the Lady Eselt?" If it doesn't confirm the authenticity of the world's greatest love tragedy, then it would at least confirm the historical existence of its principal characters and the close relationship between them. Clearly Padel is too hasty in dismissing Leland's reading of the inscription as "simply wrong". Leland did not connect the names CONOMOR and CLVSILLA with Mark and Eselt, or with the great legend. In my view, he recorded what he honestly saw and had no reason to act otherwise.

It is certain that the people whose names were carved into the stone were early Celtic Christians, for this type of memorial is exclusive to that faith. As if to reinforce this, an early Tau cross, a simple T shape, is carved into the top of the rear face of the stone. Borlase shows the remains of two mortices at the very top, one above the Tau cross, the other above the inscribed face. These might have held a later and more conventional cross-head which would clarify Leland's description of the stone as a "broken crosse". Such long-lasting memorials seem to have been reserved for nobility and were set up either in early churchyards or beside important trackways. The Tristan Stone (also known as The Longstone and The Cunomorus Stone) stands near the southern end of perhaps the most significant post-Roman trans-peninsular routes: The Saint's Way, serving wayfarers, priests and traders, travelling between Ireland or Wales and Brittany.

The Tristan Stone is one of the largest and most impressive of these memorials, and a good two feet taller than the seven feet so often quoted. It is also of granite, which doesn't naturally occur within three miles of its site. To merit the effort it must have taken to transport the stone to its site, the people it commemorates can only have been of exceptional importance. Perhaps we shall never know what really happened in their lives, or the true circumstances of their deaths, but the majesty of the great stone raised over the bodies of Tristan and Eselt will preserve their magic forever.

Article [c] Craig Weatherhill
More on Iseult on next page.

THE EARTH MYSTERIES GUIDE TO

BODMIN MOOR AND NORTH CORNWALL
including TINTAGEL

REVIEWED BY BOB TRUBSHAW IN "MERCIAN MYSTERIES" No.16 (August 1993)

"A fact-filled compendium of lore on stone circles, standing stones, inscribed stones and ancient crosses - not forgetting the Stowe Hill complex of sites, and, above all, Tintagel and associated Arthurian lore. Covering an area rich and deservedly famous for its prehistoric remains, not only are six-figure grid references given for each of the many entries, but a great deal of information on possible astronomical sightings and alignments (checked out by Andy Norfolk's computer software). How could all this be contained in a mere 48 pages? Well, those who have seen the previous volume on West Penwith will know it can be done, and very effectively.

Bringing together 'orthodox' archaeological data with more 'fringe' perceptions, this is a very valuable source of information to anyone who may ever travel to this still-magical landscape. Whilst most of the facts have appeared in earlier issues of Meyn Mamvro magazine, it is most helpful to have them brought together. I look forward to a day when every area of our country has a guide of this style and quality. Recommended to anyone who may ever visit these parts."

£2.95 (post free) from Meyn Mamvro, 51 Carn Bosavern, St.Just, Penzance, Cornwall TR19 7QX.

ISEULT - A PAGAN GODDESS?

by Cheryl Straffon

The story of Tristan and Iseult, written down in 1160 from much earlier sources, is a tale of pagan magic, love and betrayal. Iseult the Fair was daughter of Iseult, Queen of Ireland, and is brought back to Cornwall as bride for King Mark by Tristan, a Celtic prince and nephew of Mark, whom she has healed. On the way Tristan and Iseult drink a magic love potion intended for Mark and fall deeply in love. She escapes Mark's court with Tristan but later returns to Mark when the potion fades. However their love continues even after Tristan leaves Cornwall for Brittany, where he marries another Iseult - of the White Hands. Eventually he is mortally wounded in battle and dies, having been tricked into believing Iseult the Fair will not come to him with her healing potions. When she does arrive and learns of this she herself dies of despair. The two loves are brought back to Cornwall and buried side by side in graves from where a hazel and a honeysuckle plant grow forever entwined.

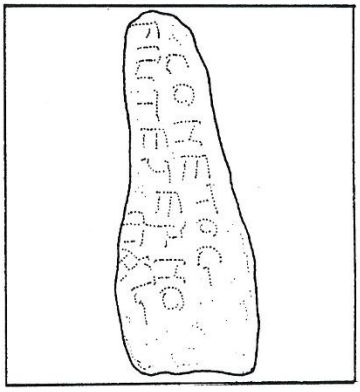
Iseult is a Goddess figure: a powerful and independent woman in her own right who will not be constrained by the conventions of an arranged marriage. She is the daughter of a Queen, indicating a matrilinear descent in her background, and both Mark and Tristan's position is dependent on the power of her love. She is able to control people and events, as for example when she tricks Mark by getting Tristan, disguised as a beggar, to carry her across the Perilous Ford (which parallels the strategems used by Rhiannon in the Mabinogian), and she is also a natural healer. It is therefore possible that in earlier versions of the tale she was the Goddess of the Land, to whom the King or Prince had to be wedded to gain his power. The significance of Tristan marrying another Iseult when her love is no longer available to him should also not be overlooked in this context. The two Iseults are two aspects - and with Queen Iseult there are three - of the same archetypal figure, the Sovereignity of the Land herself.

Iseult the Fair also has parallels with other independent and rebellious woman against the constraints of patriarchal society, such as the flower-bride Blodeuwedd from the Mabinogian, Blathnait from the Irish myths, Grainna from the Irish cycle of Finn, and Gwenhwyfar (Guinevere) from Welsh and British legend. Caeia March has also suggested [in an article in MM23] that Iseult may be a combination of, on the one hand, a local vegetation goddess whose name has been lost, and on the other hand a Cornish variant of Bridgit/Bride, who may have been known through long years of sea trading with Ireland. Bride may have been brought from Ireland specifically by Irish pottery makers who came to settle in Dumnonia in the 6th and 7th centuries. In the Welsh Triads Tristan is also a powerful swineherd, indicating his link to the Underworld; and his rivalry with Mark over the hand of Iseult places him in the ancient context of the theme of the fight of the Summer and Winter kings over the hand of the Spring maiden, a theme deeply rooted in the British and Celtic mysteries. The legend is full of many such echoes of a time when Iseult was not merely a "fair princess", but a powerful and central Goddess figure in her own right.

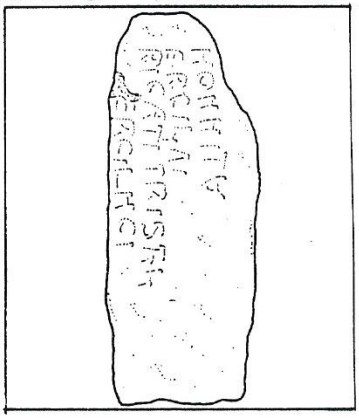
Extract from "Pagan Cornwall - Land of the Goddess" by Cheryl Straffon (Meyn Mamvro Publications, 1993). Further details on p.22.

INSCRIBED STONES OF MID-CORNWALL

CUBERT (SW7861 5776) Cubert lies near Perranporth on the north coast, and built into the west wall of the church tower is a stone inscribed CONETOCI FILI TEGERNOMALI (Conetocus, son of Tegernomalus), possibly dating to the 7th century.



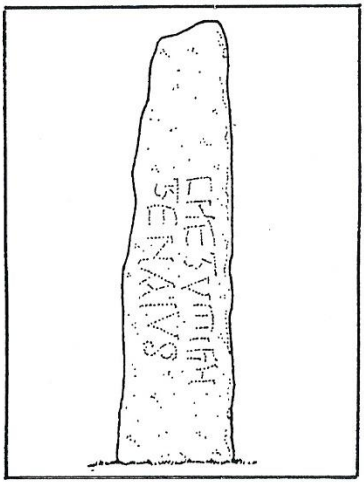
CUBY (SW9275 4527) Cuby lies at Tregony near Truro, and built into the SW corner of the church is a stone inscribed NONNITA ERCILINI RIGATI ... TRIS FILI ERCILINI (Nonnita, Ercilinus, Rigatus ... the three children of Ercilinus). It dates from the 5th - 7th centuries C.E.



ST CLEMENT (SW8509 4386) In St Clement churchyard (near Truro) there is a cross cut at the top of a 6th century inscribed stone which reads IGNIOC ... VITALI FILI TORRICI (Ignioc ... Vitalus son of Torricus). The second part of the inscription was also repeated in ogam script but this has now largely broken away.

MENHEER FARM, NINNIS (SW7199 2486) Near St Day (Redruth) is this farm with a Roman milestone dedicated to "The Emporor, Caesar, Antonius Gordianus, pious, fortunate." Dated to 238-244 CE, it is one of several in the county: another lies at Breage near Helston (West Cornwall).

MAWGAN CROSS (SW7071 2486) In the centre of a small village near Gweek (north of the Lizard) is a headless cross-shaft inscribed with the words CNEGUMI FILI GENAIVS (Cnegumus, son of Genaius). The lettering is a late form, possibly as late as the 10thC.



Cornwall's mysterious places

This new Meyn Mamvro series looks at special places within the Cornish landscape that pay closer attention. Original research reveals new information about some sites that can not be found in the usual run of guidebooks and articles. The first contribution starts most aptly right in the centre of Cornwall as the Omphalos itself is discovered.

CORNWALL'S SACRED CENTRE

The idea of the Omphalos (literally "navel") as the sacred centre of the "world", or a particular area, has occured to many different cultures in different places. To the Ancient Greeks it was the Omphalos itself at Delphi, site of the oracle of Apollo; to the ancient Babylonians it was at Eridu, the head of the Persian Gulf; and to the Muslims it was (and is) in Mecca, called the Ka'bah, a black meteoric stone that originally represented the Goddess Al'Lat, although it is now called under patriarchy the Hand of Allah.[1]

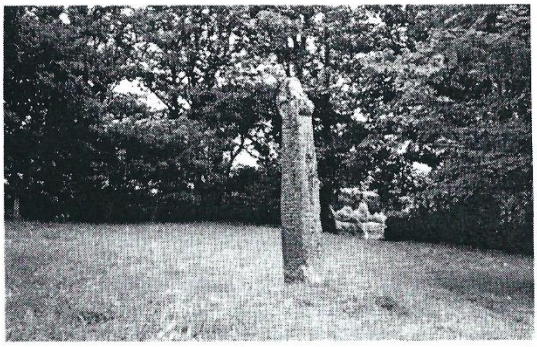
For England there are several candidates. In the tale of "Llud and Llevelys" from The Mabinogian, the mythical King Llud was instructed to measure the length and breadth of the land to find the exact centre, where there would be a pool with two dragons fighting. This he did, and found it was in Oxford. Other possibilities are High Cross (on the Leicestershire and Warwickshire border), Royston (formerly on the Hertfordshire and Cambridgeshire border); Dunstable in Bedfordshire; Lichfield in Staffordshire; Croft Hill in Leicestershire; and Meriden in Warwickshire.[2]

Every Celtic land also had its own centre: in Ireland it was the holy hill of Tara, a sacred place for thousands of years; in the Scottish Hebrides it was Iona, another religious centre with a continuing spiritual tradition; in Wales it may have been the Prescelly mountains, one in particular known to be a hill of sacred visions; and on the Isle of Man it was Keeil Abban where the earliest Tynwald site was located, a spot that stood right in the centre of a line between the most northerly and southerly points of the island crossed by the east-west axis.[3]

The site of all these omphalos were often marked with a special pole or sacred tree, the "axis mundi" of the world, which later became the Maypole, or by some special stone. These stones, such as the stones in the churchyard on Tara hill, came to convey great significance: the Adamman's Stone at Tara has a small figure carved on it which may be a representation of a Cernumnos figure or a fertility Sheila-na-gig figure. They marked these places of great spiritual energy where the Mundane World and the Otherworld met, symbolic centres of the spiritual heart of the Land.

[1] For more details see "The Black Stone: Omphalos of the Goddess" Bob Trubshaw [Mercian Mysteries 14 - address in Exchange Listings].
[2] See "The Quest for the Omphalos" - Bob Trubshaw [Heart of Albion Press, 1991]. [3] See Letter from John Michell in Mercian Mysteries 13.

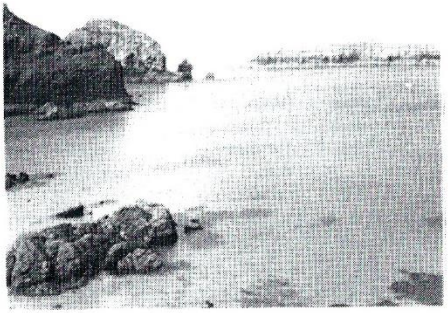
So did Cornwall, itself a Celtic land, ever have an Omphalos? Indeed it did, and the cross marking the centre of the Land still exists today. It can be found in the village of Lanivet near Bodmin. The name Lanivet is very interesting in itself: it means the church-site (Lan) at the pagan sacred place (Neved), a clear indication that the site had pre-Christian significance. It later became a Christian holy site, as many pagan places did, with Celtic crosses in the churchyard and an inscribed stone in the church. It was especially marked as being the half-way spot on the Saints Way, the route of pilgrims across Cornwall from Padstow on the north coast (13½ miles away) to Fowey on the south (also 13½ miles away). This gives us the mid-spot on the north-south axis, and shows that the Saints Way was only building on an earlier pagan migratory route. On the east-west axis, it is about 50 miles from Land's End and 40 miles from the Tamar, and is clearly the symbolic centre of the land: a note on the Church door proudly proclaims it as "the geographical centre of Cornwall."



The cross marking that centre stands behind the village church in a cleared grassy area. It has the most decorated shaft of any wheel cross in Cornwall, which includes a very curious figure with a tail, clearly not a religious icon unless it is supposed to represent the devil! If so, it could be an indication that the stone was a pagan symbol before becoming Christianised. Other indications of Lanivet's pre-Christian significance can be found in the date of the Feast Day, which takes place on the Sunday after the last Thursday in April - clearly the old Pagan Celtic May festival of Beltane. Cornwall's omphalos is indeed a very interesting sacred centre. [CS]

Dream Weavers of the Lizard

by ROBIN ELLIS



If you go and stand on the cliffs near Lizard Point on some lazy summers afternoon, look towards Kynance Cove, and you are sometimes lucky enough to see a marvellous sight. When the sun is at a certain angle it strikes the cliffs, glancing off the green serpentine rock dazzling like quartz. Its appearance is like a gigantic multi-faced snake-skin stretched tight along the cliffs - and it seems to radiate an awesome power, ancient and strange: "THE SERPENT OF THE ROCKS."

That the green serpentine stone of The Lizard contains a mystery has always been known, and it gradually dawns on the sensitive visitor that this whole part of The Lizard is special on some way, dedicated to something, set apart even. Anyone who thinks this way is not alone in their fancies. History and legend show that they are in the company of a long line of their ancestors. Even the name, Lizard, could derive from "Lisarth", meaning 'Holy Place'. Or it could have an even stranger derivation!

Lady Clara Vyvyan knew The Lizard intimately, with perception and passion! In her excellent book "My Cornwall" (Bossiney, 1973) she wrote of The Lizard as having a sense of "something more", behind, or beyond, or beneath things visible or tangible. She felt that there was something uniquely magical in certain aspects and qualities of The Lizard which was difficult to put into words. An atmosphere of enchantment, concerned with streams and their secret undergrowth, and the coastal track that leads along high cliffs and down into valleys,with birds & wild flowers & moorland space!

Clara spent many days in glorious long-lost summers of the 1920s on The Lizard, and later in her book she tried to explain what its atmosphere of magic meant to her. More recently a modern mystic said something similar "It's like a living Presence at a focus of Power! Its aura is all around us now, and yet what we feel is only a fraction of what it contains. Yet its strong magic! People who stay here for too long go a bit fey, become a boit 'pixilated'. Dreaming dreams, and seeing visions! This Lizard Place-magic is so potent!"

It may well be enough just to stay on the 'potent' parts of The Lizard in order to "Dream dreams and see visions". But there are mantric invocations which can help. Or so say the eerie Shamanic Lizard Cult "The Kachinas, The Keepers of The Ancient Dream". One such powerful 'Dragon Spell' is an invocation to the dark Serpent Goddess, which the Kachinas believe to be the mistress of the hidden secrets of The Lizard. It requires a rock-pool, or 'rock-chalice' to carry it out properly. One within a sea-cave inside the earth is best of all. If you find one with an S mark on the rim, or overlooking the bowl, it will be especially powerful, as it is already dedicated to the Serpent Goddess! The intention is to communicate with this entity, by seeing pictures, either in the pool, or in your mind. This can supposedly be achieved by intoning aloud the following invocation. It can be repeated as often as you like, until you feel contact has been established.

TO SUMMON THE SERPENT OF THE LIZARD

Treasures that no mind can comprehend,
That no man can harm.
Dream on with tripled powers.
Shining One, your strength is in the stars.
Great is the Moon Glow,
And the Moons' Powers!

Keepers of the Ancient Dream,
Come, Dream in here with us.
If I cry, CAR-AW, CAR-AW!
Show thy self!
If I cry, CAR-AW, CAR-AW!
Take it to Yourself!

From the Ancient Dreaming,
The Wise Goddess speaks!

[Meditate for awhile]

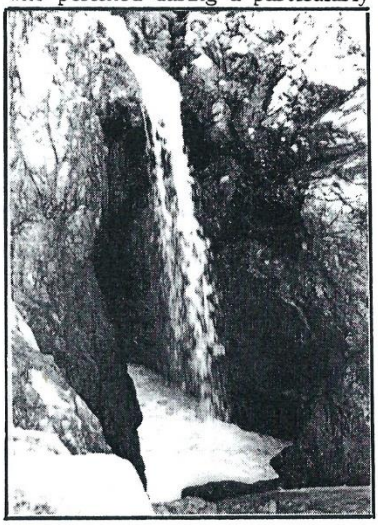
Oh, Mother of Light and Dark.
You who know mercy.
May your moon visions be with us,
As with our ancestors of Horrendous Powers.
Take us now to the Threshold,
Of the Otherworld.
But do not leave us there!

[Meditate]

The great secrecy with which the Lizard pellar cult operate is understandable, as they wish to carry on with their projects without outside interference. However there is no reason why other people should not try their invocations when on The Lizard to see what results they get! Unlike the more open Pagan Movement of West Penwith, The Lizard is a remote hidden place where individuals and small groups of two or three people gather in secret to study its mysteries -and there is plenty of mystery to explore!

What are we to make of the claim, for example, that parts of The Lizard are honeycombed with secret tunnels? Certainly there ARE tunnels on The Lizard, usually natural passages linking one bay to another on the seashore. Often these tunnels are the only way into certain bays, thus giving uniquely private access to particular coves. Also there are undoubtedly smugglers tunnels running inland from the coast, many of which are well known (such as the extensive network of tunnels around St.Keverne) while others no doubt wait to be discovered. But what are we to make of the claim that there are other tunnels, not generally known about, of great length and vast antiquity? Certainly, if the existence of a tunnel system dating back to the Neolithic, or pre-Neolithic, was to be proved, it would be of enormous interest to archaeologists, but it would leave open a lot of vexing questions, such as who constructed them, and for what purpose, and to where do they lead? The Lizard is not unique in this regard as there are claims for another, more localised tunnel system on the north coast.

Another mystery of The Lizard can be found in the various mysterious pathways radiating out from Lizard Village. They follow curiously sinuous snake-like curves across the landscape, each one uncompromising in the direction that it takes. One runs due south, wild between two fields towards the coast. A deep cut full of primitive nature, with no interference from the tamed field on either side. Eventually it enters a scared grove of trees, an unusual sight on the West Lizard coast, under which lies the bodies of a great many people who perished during a particularly horrifying shipwreck.



After which the path disappears into a hole on the ground - a hole which on closer inspection reveals itself to be a secret narrow path, leading downwards at a steep angle, concealed within the cliff, until it becomes stone steps leading down to yet another mysterious cove and cave!

Another path runs westwards towards Kynance Cove, and so uncompromising is its route that it runs part of the way along a wall, rather than risk deviating a foot or two to run along the side of it. This path takes you to a special place, sometimes known as The Warren. It is a strange, concealed, secret location of wild undergrowth which towers up above your head blotting out the sun. A hidden place which conceals many secrets - including a lovely little waterfall! It comes as no surprise then when certain Geomancers claim that these pathways, and others like them, are following ancient serpentine energy lines across the landscape. An energy immensely older than the ley-line system, and of immemorial antiquity! It says something about the people of The Lizard that these paths have been preserved, in one form or another, throughout the millenia. It is logical to assume that if these paths radiate from Lizard Village, then a long time ago, where the village is now, there would have been a Sacred Shrine of some kind, a Shrine of immense mystical significance from which the village would derive its name: Lizard=Lisarth=Holy Place.

Yet another mystery is the Lizard Pellar cult itself! It seems to be a Paradox wrapped up within an Enigma. Even its name "The Kachina, The Keepers of the Ancient Dream" is not something that people understand. Though only a small movement of around fifteen or sixteen people, split into 'affinity groups' of around three each, their influence is immense and deeply relevant to The Lizard energies!

That people see visions and experience altered states of consciousness while on special parts of The Lizard cannot be sriously doubted - there is too much evidence. But why they should is a great mystery, perhaps one of the greatest we have. According to The Lizard Pellar, who have studied the matter deeply, it is some unknown force within the ground which is the source of the mystery. It emits an energy-field, the "Snake-Breath", through the various kinds of openings in the earth, which can interact with people and profoundly affect them. The more sensitive they are, the more they are affected! These energy-fields change frequency, vibration, and intensity, as they pulse out of the ground. Our minds react to these as mystical experiences, which are created from our own understandings of mythology and spiritual divinities. These become impregnated in the Aura, or Energy-Field above the ground in that area, and form Archetypes and Icons which are triggered into Being by the minds of people sympathetically disposed to react to them. These Place-Memories then become a vehicle for this unknown force to influence people, both consciously and unconsciously.

The Kachinas are studying this awesome power in a effort to understand its purpose, and are utilizing the Aura to heal and achieve very high states of consciousness! They claim regular communication with Dolphins and Whales, and to be able to consciously create Thought-forms within the Energy-Matrix, though they are unable to sustain their existence beyond the Energy-Field. The Kachinas aim is to accelerate their evolution using the Aura of The Lizard to stimulate parts of the mind at present unknown to us! One curious aspect of this power is its ability to apparently benignly possess people through their growing obsession with the Snake-Breath. Which suggests that it values the freedom to exist for a time on the surface of the earth, and to utilize the human mind to think with. Also it appently greatly dislikes the short-wave radiations, and other waves of a similar nature, emitted by the radar towers and tele-communication equipment on, and near, The Lizard. It is alleged to have the ability to be able to use human beings as a focus, to disrupt the smooth functioning of these instillations, as well as for other, more obscure, purposes!

What mysteries lie in the deep dark places of the Earth who can say? But at least we can now say what these ancient tunnels are for. They lead the Pilgrim to where the Earth-Spirit dwells within the Earth. The Temple Caves of the Dark Mother, inaccessible before man and nature, both directed by the same power, has tunnelled into them. Whether on The Lizard, or on the north coast, these same forces are still active!

Article (c) Robin Ellis. Artwork [heading] (c) Andy Norfolk. [text] (c) Geraldine Andrew. Photograph of Ogo-dour waterfall and cave on The Lizard by Jenny Croxford (an artist living and working on The Lizard).

Penny Harris

A TRIBUTE

Cornwall lost one of its most special women when Penny Harris died in July this year. Penny was an original and most gifted artist, whose work was highly appreciated and whose spiritual centre was strongly rooted in her love for the natural world. She lived and worked at St.Agnes and some of her work has appeared in previous Meyn Mamvros, including Spirits at Sacred Sites (MM4 p16), St.Ambrew's Well (MM5 p21), The Green Man (MM6 p17), the Yule Wheel (MM10 p17), Eostre's Egg (MM10 p18) & the Corn Maiden (MM10 p20 & below).

Penny came from a long artistic family. Her mother, Olive Frances Friend, was a well-known artist who painted in the pre-Raphaelite style, and Penny was taught by her and at Exeter College of Art. For most of her artistic life, she worked with the intricate and difficult medium of painting (by reverse) on glass, and her works were beautiful compositions of light and colour. They are superbly detailed, and repay closer and closer study as their hidden meanings become gently and subtlely revealed. She once said to me that she did not know where the images came from, but seemed to take on a life of their own. Many of us believed that they came direct to her from the Earth Mother herself, and that she had the ability to capture all the fecundity and exhuberance of the spirit of the Earth and her creatures. She kept working as long as she could until her illness became too much for her, and some of her last work is full of powerful archetypal Goddess images.

Penny was a lovely woman, warm, kind and caring. I saw her about a fortnight before her death, and we sat under a shady tree in her garden and talked of the joyful things in our lives. One of her last projects was to illustrate a book of fine poems by Clare Persephone Marfell-Harris, called "The Web of Enchantment". This was produced by Penny's husband Philip Harris, who has also made some of her prints available for sale. Copies of the book (£5 + £1 p&p) or details of the prints may be obtained from P.O Box 1, St Agnes, Cornwall TR5 0YR.

Cheryl Straffon

BOOK REVIEWS

"CELT AND SAXON - THE STRUGGLE FOR BRITAIN AD 410-937" - Peter Berresford-Ellis (Constable 1993, £17.95).
"THE CELTS - THE CONSTRUCTION OF A MYTH" - Malcolm Chapman (Macmillan 1992, £45).

Peter Berresford-Ellis is a Cornish historian of some repute, and his analysis of the period of Dark-Age Britain reflects this. It is a learned scholarly work, containing essential historical material brought together from many sources in a readily accessible way. But it is his approach to the matter that is most interesting. He very much sees the Saxon take-over of England, and the subsequent expulsion of the Celts to Cornwall, Wales, Ireland and Scotland, as not the relatively peaceful integration of two peoples that some historians have claimed, but rather a deliberate policy of agression, supression and dispossession. Amongst a wealth of detail he evidences the slaughter by the Saxons of a thousand Celtic monks; the lack of Celtic words and place-names in English (Anglo-Saxon); the dissolving (by Athelstan) of Celtic Cornish centres of scholarship, and the banning of Celtic forms of worship. However this policy of "annihilation" was a conquest never completely achieved, resulting in a further thousand years of conflict and uneasy relations between Celt and Saxon, the legacy of which still remains today. He believes that the Celts were always linguistically, culturally and temperamentally different and distinct from the invading Anglo-Saxon English and that even within the western kingdom of Dumnonia Cornwall was a separate country until the 8th century. Therefore, what we have today is not "Britain" which is a myth, but in reality "England" and the Celtic remnants. This is a thought-provoking and challenging book, and its views and findings must be taken on board by anyone interested in the period and the ultimate fate of the Celtic peoples who were once the original inhabitants of these islands.

Malcolm Chapman also deals with some of the same issues, but has a different perspective on them. Chapman's point is that when talking about "the Celts", we are not really talking about an unbroken lineage, but that the Celts of the Iron Age, the "Celts" of early medieval Europe, and the "Celts" of the modern day are not a simple continuum of culture, race or language. What links them is rather a symbolic opposition between a central defining power and its fringes - England and "the other". There is important material here on who were the Celts and what happened to their language. Chapman questions the whole notion of a Celtic identity, which puts him at odds with Berresford-Ellis, and asks "how Celtic are the Cornish.?" Studies of physical anthropology (and blood samples) have shown the answer to be "no more Celtic than anyone else", but a people's sense of identity is not only expressed through racial characteristics. He scores an own goal by questioning how many ordinary people go to the Midsummer Bonfire celebrations in Cornwall - in fact the answer from my own knowledge is "quite a lot". The Cornish are very proud of their traditions and history, as are most "Celtic" peoples. But both writers would probably agree that the "Celts" are 'other': Chapman would say 'because they have been defined (or defined themselves) as such at different times'; Berresford-Ellis would say 'because they have been marginalised by the English'. Taken together, both books make some thoughtful and cogent arguments in a difficult area.

"TINTAGEL – ARTHUR AND ARCHAEOLOGY" – Charles Thomas (English Heritage/ Batsford 1993. £14.99)

Charles Thomas' new book on Tintagel is commendably cautious in its interpretation of this legendary place. He says that the book should be taken only as an "interim report", and that the purpose of it is not to offer final answers to all the mysteries. Nevertheless, his enthusiasm for the place shines through the unfolding story of the Island, the castle and the churchyard over many centuries. In this process he makes a number of valuable points: that Tintagel Island was quite unsuitable for all-year occupation; that there is no independently attested connection in early Cornish folklore locating Arthur at Tintagel; that the old interpretation of it as a Celtic monastry (by, one has to say, an eminent archaeologist of his time) is erroneous; that "King Arthur's Footprint" in the rock may well have been a prehistoric sacred site for inaugeration ceremonies; but that there is a peculiar absence of Otherworld legends attached to Tintagel, a place where one would justifiably expect to find them. There is thus a rebuttal of any "historical" Arthurian associations with the place, but nevertheless a tolerant view taken of other approaches: "It would be a grey world if ever the Thought Police outlawed all but academically-approved writings", a sentiment with which MM can readily concur. The book is excellently-well illustrated with photographs (some coloured), maps and diagrams, and represents the most up-to-date summary of Cornwall's most famous site. (CS)

Drawing (above) is by Andy Norfolk from the Tintagel section of "The Earth Mysteries Guide to Bodmin Moor and North Cornwall including Tintagel" [Meyn Mamvro Publications - £2.95 post free from MM address]

PAGAN CORNWALL land of the Goddess

CHERYL STRAFFON

From the waters of the river Tamar, named after a goddess Tamara, to the Isles of Scilly, named perhaps after a goddess Silina, Cornwall has been, and in many ways still is, a land apart from the rest of England. As a child, I used to look from my bedroom window across the Tamar herself into Devon; and as an adult I have looked from my bedroom window across to the Isles of Scilly. From one end of Cornwall to another I have journeyed, always aware of the special separate quality of the land. For each individual person there will be different reasons why Cornwall is so special and different, but for me it is because I can feel the ancient ways and the sacred land still alive in a way I feel nowhere else. Those ancient ways and that sacred land have taken me to the heart of the mystery known as The Goddess, a spiritual essence who was once revered, loved and acknowledged in this land, and whose ways lingered on here perhaps later than many other places.

Many books have been written on ancient Cornwall, but for me they have generally lacked the insight that the land and its peoples was, and in many ways still is, the children of the life-giving and sustaining force of the universe, known to our Paleolithic, Neolithic, Bronze Age and Celtic ancestors as The Goddess. This book then is my small attempt to reclaim her again, to find her rightful place in the land that is hers. In the process many interesting nuggets from the past have emerged, some already known but not linked together before, others perhaps forgotten or their significance overlooked. But always it was the awareness of her presence in my country and in my heart that led me on, and will, I hope, lead others on to find her again in the pages of this book and in Cornwall herself.

The book has one major premise - that there was a continuity of tradition that was often altered, modified or transformed, but nevertheless had a consistent thread from the earliest times up until the present day. This premise may not be accepted by some researchers, but nevertheless much of the new archaeological and mythological study has shown that this is a reasonable and sustainable premise upon which to work. The pace of change was much slower for our predecessors, and many hundreds if not thousands of years would pass without any major alteration in the rhythms of life. Therefore, although some of the suggestions in this book are tentative and speculative, nevertheless they are all founded on a matrix of material research and evidence, material that is taken from current research in archaeology, mythology, folklore, legend, and earth mysteries.

"Pagan Cornwall: Land of the Goddess" includes material on The Ancient Goddess; Sites of the Goddess; the Spirit of Sacred Earth; the Goddess of Healing and Divination (wells); the Isles of the Goddess (Scillies); The Goddess of the Land (Celtic Cornwall); The Wheel of the Year; Witches and Wise-Women; and The Goddess today. It is published now at £7.50 [£8 by post] - order form enclosed or write direct to Meyn Mamvro.

mother and sun
THE CORNISH FOGOU

IAN McNEIL COOKE

I began a manuscript for a work on Cornish Iron Age souterrains (known locally as fogous) over a decade ago following a visit during the early 1970's to Carn Euny. Although I had read many arachaeological reports and discussions on these unusual 'tunnel-caves', it was not until after I had actually been inside a fogou that I began to question the proposed functions of storage or refuge so often suggested as the reason behind their construction. I found it impossible to reconcile these opinions with the architecture and aura of the sites and decided to try to find out if anything could be discovered which might shed some light on their original use - a use which I suspected had a great deal to do with the pagan religion of West Cornwall prior to the Roman invasion of Britain.

I read everything I could lay my hands on in public libraries and made repeated visits to the remains of all existing sites. The first odd fact to emerge was that nine out of eleven fogous for which detailed plans exist have the northern arm of the long curved passage orientated towards the north-east around 55^0-65^0. I thought it likely that there may be some connection with the rising sun at Beltane or the summer solstice, and went to Carn Euny before dawn one morning in the middle of June 1985 to test out this idea. The sun appeared over high ground to the north-east exactly in line with the axis of the eastern portion of the long passage, and visits to other sites have since confirmed that this is no mere chance phenomena but an integral feature of fogou design.

Studies of early Celtic literature and art-forms, as well as a reading of Greek and Roman mythology, reinforces this connection between sun and cave (both natural and 'megalithic'), and there is an almost universal belief that the sun is born out of the underworld. More recently I accidentally stumbled across a further potentially vital clue to the reason behind fogou construction as ritual centres. The alignment of passages to the sun is mirrored by the directions taken by local subterranean mineral lodes of tin and copper which are detectable by dowsing; in addition the chronology of fogou building also coincides with the apparently prolific trade in tin between West Cornwall and the Celtic, Greek and Roman civilisations of continental Europe. (Tin was a very rare metal essential to the making of bronze used by these cultures).

For my book I have provided as full a collection of unbiased factual information as possible, as well as many biased opinions and interpretations of function - my own included! Dr. Patricia Christie, Director of Excavations at Carn Euny 1964-72 has commented: "I have much enjoyed reading it and am enormously impressed by the thoroughness of your research, and the excellent case you make out for ritual function, which I certainly go along with". "Mother and Sun: The Cornish Fogou" contains the most comprehensive collection of fogou material ever assembled and made available to the public It is published in Dec 93 at £38 inc - order form enclosed or contact MM.

The Pipers Tune

Coincident with Ian Cooke's new book on Cornish Fogous (see previous page) is the current (1992) volume of "Cornish Archaeology 31" which contains an article by Rachel Maclean which considers alternative explanations for the function of the fogou. She dismisses the theory of storage as being unlikely: very few products could have been successfuly stored in the damp interiors. However, she also doubts possible ritual use: the carving of the 'deity' at Boleigh is felt to be only subjective, as it is no longer visible. The possible unroofed condition of the corbelled chamber at Carn Euny, which the excavator Patricia Christie felt could be evidence of a ritual nature, is questioned: Maclean says it may have been roofed with perishable materials. And the discovery of some cremated bone in the construction trench at Carn Euny is, Maclean feels, more likely to be evidence for a foundation offering than a sustained ritual function. Her belief is that their most likely use was as places of refuge, there being some evidence of this in souterrains in Ireland and Britain. With Ian Cooke's new book taking a noticeably different view than this, the fogou function seems to be in the spotlight once again.

"Cornish Archaeology 31" also has an article by Adam Sharpe which makes a few speculations about cliff castles, such as Treryn Dinas and Gurnards Head. He considers alternative explanations of their use, and feels that they would have been impracticable as places of defence, refuge or trading, because of the rocky terrain. Instead he suggests that they are similar to inland sites such as Carn Brea, Helman Tor, Roughtor or Stowe's Pound, and that all these sites were central places that acted as "cultural, administrative and religious centres, important focii in the landscape reaffirming local identity and group affiliation". Or to put it another way, ritual or ceremonial centres! This idea has also been put forward in an article on the relationship between cliff castles and stone circles by John Stedman in the next "Meyn Mamvro"

Finally, the idea of the alignment of ancient sites/leys as spirit paths, which has been talked about so much recently (see The Pipers Tune MM20 & MM21) is partly questioned by John Michell in the latest edition of 'Northern Earth 55' where he writes of the alignments of old stones in West Penwith: "Neither in Cornwall nor elsewhere have I found legends of old tracks or spirit paths along these (type of) alignments." The debate continues!

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ISSN: 0966-5897