



**\*EXCLUSIVE\* 3rd LABYRINTH AT ROCKY VALLEY?  
SPECIAL STONE FOUND ● BOWSENNING ●  
PATHWAYS ● FAIRY FAITH ● GRANNY BOSWELL  
\*plus\* *CORNWALL'S COLOURFUL SITES***

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# Meyn Mamvro

## STONES OF OUR MOTHERLAND

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

This Summer has seen some positive action around the protection and conservation of ancient sites in Cornwall, particularly West Penwith. The Cornish Ancient Sites Protection Network [CASPN] has been moving ahead on a number of fronts. The most important news is that it has secured Grants from the Lottery 'Awards for All and from 'Neighbourhood Renewal Community Chest' to appoint a Project Development Worker for a 6 month period. Raven LeFay, who is Secretary to CASPN, has taken up this post, and can now be contacted c/o Golowan Community Arts at The Barbican, Battery Road, Penzance TR18 4EF. She will normally be there 2 days a week (Mondays & Tuesdays) and at other times messages can be left on 01736-335322, or e-mail her at raven@golowan.com. Her brief will be to apply for funding for a permanent ASMO (Ancient Sites Management Officer) post, and to be a contact for any local groups or individuals who wish to offer help in the preservation of the ancient sites. She will also administer the FOCAS (Friends of Cornwall's Ancient Sites) scheme. This scheme was launched earlier this year, and for an annual fee of £5 (£3 unwaged) offers everyone the opportunity to support the voluntary work at the ancient sites. Among its specific aims are -

- to monitor the state of the sites and their appearance
- to respond to any circumstances that may affect them
- to try to educate people about the meaning of the sites
- to undertake practical work to improve access to them
- to work with the community to give people a sense of pride in the sites
- to co-ordinate voluntary work at the sites for improvements

To that end, Dave Munday has agreed to take on the voluntary rôle of Ancient Sites Management Co-ordinator, to liaise with volunteers who are willing to help do clearance work at the sites. There is usually a monthly 'clear-up' at a designated site and these are enjoyable and companionable events. Occasionally, they also produce startling results, as can be seen from Sarah Vivian's piece on p.5 about the discovery of a very distinctive stone at Boskednan Barrow in June this year. If anyone would like to volunteer for one of these clear-ups (which usually happen on a Sunday afternoon) please contact Dave on 01736-787230 or e-mail tarewaste@yahoo.co.uk

All this is excellent news for the sites and their preservation. CASPN is a partnership between agencies, landowners and alternative groups working together for the good of the sites, and such co-operation really now begins to show good results.



# news page

The Winter/Spring season of talks at the Acorn commenced on Thursday Jan 27th with **Pat Angove**, founder of the New Gaia Network, psychic, workshop facilitator, channeler and healer, who came to talk about “The Sacredness of Sacred Sites”. Pat posed the question ‘What makes a sacred site sacred?’ and showed that the answer had a lot to do with the interaction of the person with the site. She showed that it is this energy interface that dowsers can tap into, and sensitive people can pick up on at the sites. Many of these places seem to link together in lines across the land, which may be the traces of where people used to walk between the sites (and still do) or they may be associated with otherworld beings. This was an interesting and thought-provoking presentation, delivered with humour, discussion and discovery.

On February 17th **Marcus Mason** gave a spectacular presentation on “Eclipses, Planetary Grids and Soul Awakening”. Marcus is an astrologer, acupuncturist and earth energy researcher, and his holistic approach opened up doors of perception into the significance and effects of eclipses on the earth energies. He showed the astrological significance of the recent series of solar eclipses, and their impact on the earth’s energy grids and on human consciousness. The theme of his talk was no less than finding our true relationship to the spiritual divine, and how we are being given the opportunity to release all our shadow patterns. Accompanied by a beautiful sound and vision presentation with slides of the earth, planets, eclipses and ancient sites, this was a memorable evening.

On March 31st **Gloria Falconbridge** came to talk about “Celtic Totem Animals in Myth and Legend”. Gloria is a workshop facilitator and researcher, and drawing on her knowledge of Celtic texts and stories of encounters with animals in magical contexts, together with her own shamanic training, she weaved a rich tapestry of animal lore and connection. Her sources include the Mabinogi, the Irish mythic cycle, Pictish stories and early Arthurian legend, and from this she gave us an insight into the symbolic meaning of animals and birds, such as seals, stags, eagles, blackbirds & crows, salmon, hounds, swans, horses and others from the Celtic Otherworld. An inspiring talk

Finally, on April 28th **Andy Worthington**, an historian who specializes in looking at how people in the modern world relate to ancient sacred sites and the wider landscape, particularly through Paganism and political dissent, came down to Cornwall to talk about “Stonehenge and the Druids”, based on his book *Stonehenge, Celebration and Subversion*. His talk focused on the involvement of Druids with Stonehenge, from the revival of the 18th century through to the latest solstice celebrations. This ended what has been a varied and always interesting series of talks and presentations.

Beltane eve arrived with the 17th annual **Maypole Dance** on Carn Bosavern in St. Just. About 50 or so people came to enjoy the music, the dancing, the food, the company - and the new tent! There was a waterery sunset, and the evening finished with the traditional leaping over the bonfire.

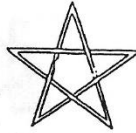


A week or so later it was the 17th annual **Three Wells Walk**, which was once again blessed with a fine day. About a couple of dozen walkers met outside Sancreed Church and made their way to Carn Euny Wells. This year we had a visitor from the greatest distance ever - Margaret who came from California, had seen the Walk advertised on the Internet and decided to make it the focal point of her journey to Britain! After lunch at Sancreed well, a slightly smaller group of 15 walked the longer second leg to Madron Baptistry Well, where all the waters from the three wells were mixed and a blessing given, before the final walk back by a different route to Sancreed. A day of much good companionship and laughter.

The Summer season of walks and site visits commencing on Sunday June 5th when local archaeologist **Paul Bonnington** led a walk around the Coastal Barrows and Settlements at Nanjulian between St. Just and Sennen. This was an on-site demonstration of the features written about by him in an article in MM57. Unfortunately, the day turned out to be a very poor one with rain and mist, with CEMG Committee members either sick, abroad or moving house! However, that did not deter a few stalwarts who went and were delighted with the rather exclusive information and knowledge they received from Paul about the barrows and the Courtyard House settlement.

A much better day was enjoyed for the next month's event on July 3rd, a walk to some Sacred Sites on Bodmin Moor led by **Cheryl Traffon**. A dozen or so members met at De Lank water works near St. Breward and went to several lesser-known sites in the area, including Leaze stone circle, King Arthur's Hall, King Arthur's Down circles, a fallen standing stone and the delightful settlements on Garrow Tor, finishing on the top of the Tor itself with its stunning views to other sacred hilltops on the Moor. Several discoveries were made, including the observation that people processing up the valley to Leaze circle would have seen Rough Tor only emerge into their view as they arrived at the circle itself. Some dowsing at the sites revealed several 'hot spots' at Leaze, and a tumulus not on the map was found nearby. Altogether a most interesting and lively day.

# Penwith Pagan Moot



by Sarah Vivian

The moot continues to thrive and attract new members, and we continue our busy Pagan lives of moots, rituals, planning meetings and Sacred Sites clearances! Kate is taking a break from writing this article, so I am writing this edition; there will be another different writer for the next issue.

The **Beltane** Ritual was in the field at Helen's Oratory, Cape Cornwall, with kind permission from the National Trust. We started with a purification led by Cassandra, then sat and made crowns of flowers and ribbons, with which we then Blessed each other with the joys of Springtime. An interlinking dance in a circle raised energy to send out into the world for healing. It was a beautiful ritual, but as many of us agreed, the weather and the scenery were so superb, we could have happily sat there staring at the view instead! Afterwards, as we were doing just that, there was a seal swimming around in Porth Ledden Cove, which Cassandra dubbed "The Seal of Approval" - groan!

Superb weather and scenery again for our **Summer Solstice** Ritual - this was on a patch of open land near the huge monument of Ballowall, on the cliffs near Carn Glouce. This Ritual celebrated the approach of the longest day and the height of the Sun God's power, the zenith of his light & magic. Ariel led the moot in a Fire Visualisation so powerful that one person's shoes became scorched on the soles! I then led a calling on Sun Power, and lit a fire in the cauldron from the fire of the sun, and we each fed the fire to symbolise feeding our inner fires of passion and purpose.

The Sacred Sites clearances are achieving good results - on 15th May we went to Boswens Menhir, and cleared so much gorse from around the Menhir that we revealed the remains of the original stone bank surrounding the flat raised area. Next was Boskednan Nine Maidens Barrow on June 12th, where we were able to pull thin "mats" of turf & vegetation off the sides of many stones, and revealed a great deal more of the circular barrow. Please see p.4 (opposite) for the description of a spectacular find. Then came a clear-up at Boscawen-Un Stone circle, where bracken & gorse are growing up very high - this was less successful as there was an unfortunate clash with other events and it was poorly attended. These sites clearances are open to all - "Many hands make light work", so please do come and help us keep our special places cared for.

The rituals are also open to all, everyone welcome, as are the monthly Moots which take place on the second Tuesday of each month at Chy Gwella, 53 Morrab Road Penzance. There are news, views, events, and organising dates for rituals, and we have a special topic for each session. For further details please see Noticeboard on back page.

## DISCOVERY OF A SPECIAL STONE

by Sarah Vivian

Clear-ups at Ancient Sites have happened sporadically over many years, but with initiatives proposed by the Cornish Ancient Sites Protection Network, these have turned these into regular events undertaken by the Penwith Moot. The Penwith Moot have now been doing clearance and maintenance work for several years, with any necessary guidance, or permissions obtained, by the Protection Network. All of these events have given valuable care to our beloved ancient places - and sometimes we are blessed to find something special!

On 12th June this year, a small group of us went to the Barrow at Boskednan Nine Maidens, which is on the high moors between Ding Dong and Carn Galver, to clear gorse and bracken. The weather was perfect, and large numbers of skylarks were singing above us all afternoon. The small Barrow was covered in wildflowers as well as gorse & bracken, and was looking beautiful, so we decided not to scythe it, but to carefully cut all the gorse out with loppers, and trim back the pathways. While we were doing this, we realised that some of the stones had thin "mats" of turf creeping up their sides which we were able to pull off quite easily. We then found other stones which were partially or completely covered with mats of turf, and it became increasingly exciting as we uncovered more and more of the circular Barrow. One of our guidelines from the Protection Network is that we can cut back to ground level, but not dig - because of avoiding disturbance to the archaeology - so we progressed with frequent discussions about how far we could go before it started to count as digging.

Mid way through this, I noticed a stone towards the end of the central dipped area, where presumably the main burial chamber was. This upright & rounded stone had been hidden by gorse, and with the gorse cut away I could see the tip showing as stone, with thin mats of turf and ivy creeping up the sides. First I pulled thin tendrils of ivy away - and saw something glinting, so I pulled at the turf, and it all came loose so much more easily than I was expecting, that all in one go I saw the most magnificent marking on the stone. In a stone which is otherwise completely plain brown granite, an inch and a half wide seam of blue-grey crystal (possibly tourmaline?) runs at an angle up one side, and down again at an angle, making an upturned ^ shape. The combination of the strong definite shape, and the contrast between the plain brown granite with the blue grey crystal, makes this one of the most distinctively marked stones I have ever seen anywhere. The position of the stone, at perhaps the head of the main burial, would have to have been deliberately chosen - so this stone's markings must have been of great significance to our ancestors.

*Colour photograph of stone on p.13*

It is interesting to wonder how many years have passed since this was last visible, and I am grateful to whatever Spirits look after the Barrow that they allowed us to find so much.



## !MM EXCLUSIVE! THIRD LABYRINTH AT ROCKY VALLEY?



A major new discovery has been made at the Rocky Valley labyrinth site that lies between Boscastle and Tintagel in North Cornwall (SX073 893). David Roberts recently visited the site and took some photos of the labyrinths. When he got home and put them on his computer, he thought he noticed something very faint in the area above the original two labyrinths. When he enhanced the area on his computer, he could just make out another labyrinth carving - in his words "faint but unmistakable". It certainly looks like the other two labyrinths but it is very badly weathered, which possibly means it is older than the other two, though the other two might have been re-cut over time, while the third one was forgotten. Both the two 'original' labyrinths are classic Cretan in style with 7-fold paths and a left-handed entrance. The third one also follows this pattern, with a 7-fold path and what looks as if it could be a left-hand entrance, though it is really too weathered to be certain. For colour pictures of the location of the third labyrinth and the other two ones please turn to p.13.

This is certainly a major discovery, and raises all sorts of interesting questions. If it is older than the other two, were they perhaps re-carved in imitation of it, maybe by the mill owner who lived there in the late 18th-early 19th Centuries? On the other hand if there were originally three, does that make an Irish connection more likely, as a triple spiral shape is found in many Celtic and even older contexts (such as the interior of Newgrange megalithic tomb in Ireland)? In MM24 ("Rocky Valley Mazes - the Irish connection") I argued that the most likely date for the carvings was in the early Christian period (formerly called 'the Dark Ages'), and not as early as the Bronze Age claimed for them on the plaque next to the carvings, nor as late as the 18th-19th century date claimed for them by both Jeff & Abegeal Saward<sup>1</sup>. My reasoning is that, across the Irish sea, near to Hollywood in the Wicklow hills, a labyrinth carving on the underside of a rock was discovered in 1908. This was a right-handed labyrinth carving, and both the Hollywood Stone and the Rocky Valley carvings were carved with a metal tool and are about the same size and shape. They are mirror images of each other.

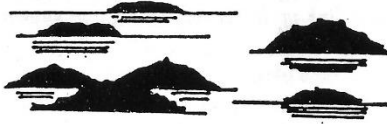
We know that there was frequent contact between Ireland and Cornwall at this period of the 6thC CE (often through Wales), and this is evidenced by early writings about the Celtic saints, and the inscribed stones found in north Cornwall that have an Irish link in the inscriptions and ogham notches (such as the stones in Lewannack churchyard). Charles Thomas suggests<sup>2</sup> that incomers may have come here from Ireland, landing at Tintagel, and if so, what more natural thing to do than make a carving in Rocky Valley as a thanksgiving/remembrance of their original homeland? The discovery of the third weathered labyrinth here makes this theory even more likely.

<sup>1</sup> "The Rocky Valley Labyrinths" - Abegaal Saward *Caerdroia* 32, 2001

<sup>2</sup> "And shall these mute stones speak" - Charles Thomas (*University of Wales* 1994) p.262-5



## VIEW FROM



## THE ISLANDS

*A new regular column*

*by Isles of Scilly resident*

*Tyto Alba*

## Chapel Down

The northern coasts of the Isles of Scilly have been shaped by successive ice ages. The southerly limit of the oldest of these has left a ragged line of stones, many of them flints scraped up from the bottom of the Irish Sea by an inexorable tide of ice. They still lie exposed on the open heathlands of Bryher, Tresco and St. Martin's. Pick up a random stone, incongruous upon the hoary native granite, and the underside may still be scored with grooves, gouged millions of years ago as the ice ploughed all before it. On Bryher, there are other signs of this great upheaval: wind-carved boulders lie upside down, torn from the cliffs, lifted aloft, and then discarded as the ice retreated.



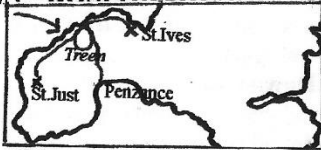
The heathland of Chapel Down on St. Martin's has not forgotten its history. It is still a mottled tundra land. Heather creeps along the ground, its branches wind and spume-gnarled. Plants and stones alike are rimed with hairy white lichens. In early summer, ancient field-boundaries are marked by yellow flowers of birdsfoot trefoils. The wind buffets, seagulls yawl, and a stone chat sounds like a striking flint, standing on some gaunt knob of stone.

The statue menhir is perhaps some thirty-five centuries old. Recovered from a field wall in the 1940s, he now stands in a puddle of grey granite, like a swimmer up to his chest in water, gazing out to sea. He is always moist under one armpit. Inscrutable, he watches the gannet's plunge far out to sea, the fulmar's glide, and close by, the dauntless, herculean straining of a dung beetle, wheeling his rabbit dropping towards the shelter of the ling. His gaze misses the mainland by a few degrees. It is as though he is awaiting some sail, or wave, or another tide of ice.

## PATHWAYS TO THE PAST

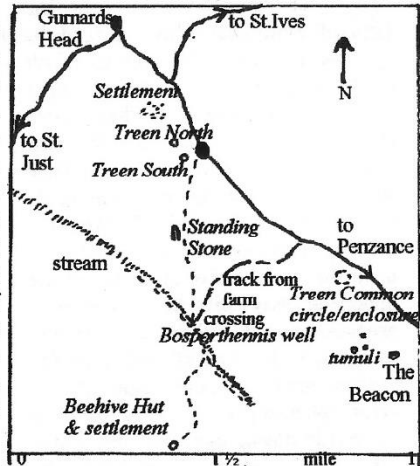
*A new feature that focuses on some paths that link up lesser-known ancient sites in the Cornish landscape.*

### TREEN - ROSPORTHENNIS



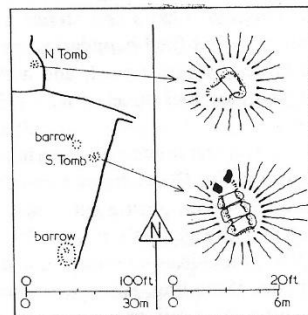
*Location of the area [left] & Direction of the walk [below]*

This walk of about 2-3 miles starts near Gurnards Head on the St. Just-St. Ives B3306 coastal road. Cars may be parked at Gurnards Head, or in the summer an open-top bus runs from Penzance-St. Just-St. Ives (alight at Gurnards Head). From Gurnards Head take the minor road that runs inland over the West Penwith Moors to Newmill and then on to Penzance. About 500 yds south of this road is a public footpath that starts from the west side of the road at SW4390 3725. This marks the beginning of the walk that will take in Entrance Graves, a standing stone, a well, a Beehive Hut and courtyard house settlement and an enigmatic stone ring/enclosure.



The path crosses a field, at the top end of which is a gate leading into the next field. However, before you reach this you will need to bear right to cross into the adjoining field to the west. As you enter this field turn sharp left, and about 200yds along next to the hedge is **Treen Common Entrance Grave (South)** [SW4384 3711].

This is the best-preserved of 4 barrow sites in this area, two of which are Entrance Graves and two others which may have been, though they are now too ruined to tell. Treen South has a fine mound 25ft across and 4½ft high, containing a chamber 13ft long and 3ft high & 4ft wide. The chamber entrance, which is defined by two low jambstones, is oriented NW, the direction of the midsummer solstice sunset. Recently cleared of gorse, the entrance is clear and this is a fine site to visit.



*Diagram & map by Craig Weatherhill*



*Treen Common (South) Entrance Grave*



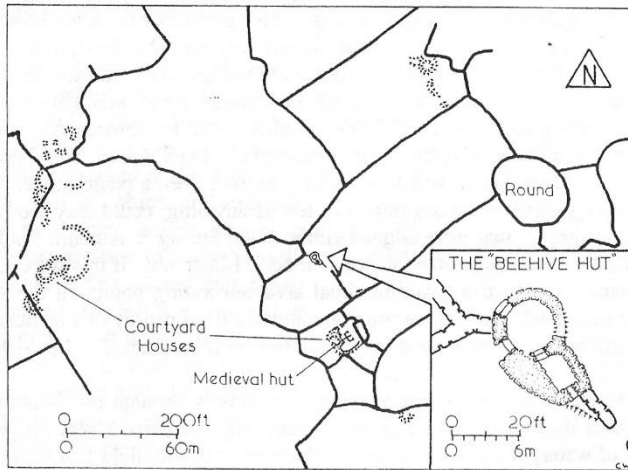
*Treen Common (North) Entrance Grave*

Further south along this field wall is another gorse-covered mound, which is all that remains of a barrow, that may too have originally been an entrance grave. Another barrow formerly stood a few yards to the NW of the Treen South grave in the same field but is now all but obliterated. The fourth tomb, **Treen Common Entrance Grave (North)** [SW4381 3715] lies in an adjoining field to the NW, but access is not easy. It entails either a clamber over some rocks and thick gorse that lie in the bank between the two fields, or a return to the field with the pathway running through, head back a few yards and climb the wall (which is quite high and difficult) into the field. The Treen North Grave is still recognisably an Entrance Grave, but has only a short passage, with much of it having been destroyed. What remains is 20ft in diameter and just 3½ft high. Its entrance is oriented SW, that of the midwinter solstice sunset, and directly opposite in the year to Treen South, which is unlikely to have been a coincidence. Although the two remaining barrows are too ruined to tell us anything, could they too perhaps have had entrance graves that were aligned either to the Spring & Autumn Equinoxes, or to the midsummer and midwinter solstice sunrises?. Either way, if this were so, then the 4 tombs would have been a beautiful ritual area celebrating points on the wheel of the year. The people who built these ritual monuments lived nearby in a settlement north of Treen North grave, the remains of their buildings now buried under the thick gorse.

However, it is now time to rejoin the pathway through the neighbouring field, and follow it over several stiles (well marked) until we enter a very rough furzy field with pits of water, and cows grazing. In the middle of this field is a standing stone or rubbing post about 4½ ft high at SW4386 3672, which appears to point to a notch in Carn Galva, a distinctive hill to the SW that broods over this area [*photograph on p.12*].

The path continues through this field and on to Bosporthennis [pronounced *Bosprenis*] Farm, though it is slightly easier to come off the path at this point and join the trackway that runs to the Farm. This trackway then runs through this old tumbledown Farm and crosses a stream. Here, along the south-east bank of the stream in overgrown and reedy ground lies **Bosporthennis Holy Well** [SW4390 3637]. In its time, this well was as famed as any in West Penwith, and children were brought here to be cured of skin diseases. It is now obscured and difficult to find, and in such a lonely spot it is hard to imagine throngs of people coming here for healing.

After crossing the stream the path continues along its south side. But after about 100 yds we need to turn off where another path to the right runs a few yards up to a gate and stile. Cross into a field and then head south-westwards over several fields until **Bosporthennis Beehive Hut** [SW4379 3596] comes into view. This is one of the remotest and least-visited sites in West Penwith.



[c] Craig Weatherhill

This Beehive Hut now appears to lie in the corner of a field, isolated on the flanks of Hannibals Carn. But it originally would have been centrally placed within an Iron Age settlement, and to the west and north of the Hut several fields away may be seen the remains of courtyard houses. The Hut itself is an unusual structure, consisting of a round, corbelled chamber 13ft across, connected to a rectangular room 11ft by 7ft by a low but massive doorway. It has been suggested that this rectangular room may be the remains of an above-ground fogou attached to the Hut, as the Beehive Hut itself is almost identical to the one at Carn Euny settlement that leads off the underground fogou there. This seems unlikely, but no one knows for sure what its original use may have been. The SW entrance to the Hut is modern, but inside the Hut, just to the right of that entrance there is what appears to be a recess, similar to the one in Carn Euny that may have been used as a shrine for offerings. It is not unusual to see a Corn Mother placed there nowadays, especially around Lammas time.

It is now time to retrace our footsteps back through the fields, over the stream and now follow the farm track that leads back to the road. On our right on the horizon we may see several standing stones silhouetted on the skyline, and we may now make a detour to visit the **Treen Common Stone Circle/Enclosure** [SW4446 3666].

This consists of an irregular elliptical ring of 14 standing and numerous fallen stones, with a diameter of 99-110ft. This makes it much bigger than the usual West Penwith stone circle, and it is not clear whether it is a Bronze Age circle, or maybe even henge, or Iron Age settlement enclosure.



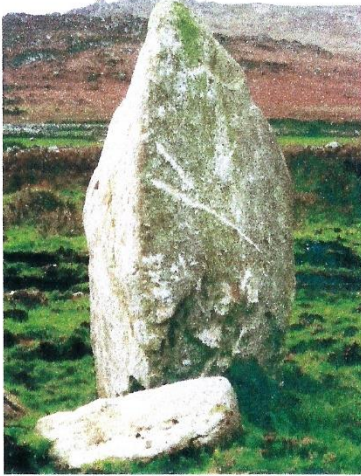
A midsummer solstice sunrise alignment from the site to a notch in Zennor Hill to the NE has been suggested, and several people have experienced altered states of consciousness here: Geraldine Charles saw 3 circles in a vision here [see MM52 p.19] and David Haynes saw accompanying stone rows. There are also 3 round barrows and the remains of a ring barrow to the south, on the top of the Hill called The Beacon. On this lonely moorland it is easy to get a sense of the ghosts of the past all around you.

But now we must return to the present. We walk down the slope of the Downs back to the road and, with wonderful views to the sea ahead, we arrive back at Gurnards Head, where a welcoming Inn with good food and drink awaits us, before we take our transport home.

*CEMG will be doing this walk on Sunday July 2nd 2006-all welcome Tel:01736-787612*

# CORNWALL'S COLOURFUL SITES

*The colour section this time features STANDING STONE SIGHTLINES*



*Stone near Bosporthennis points at notch in Carn Galva [see p.9]*



*Gatepost stone at end of Zemor Stone Row points to peak of hill*

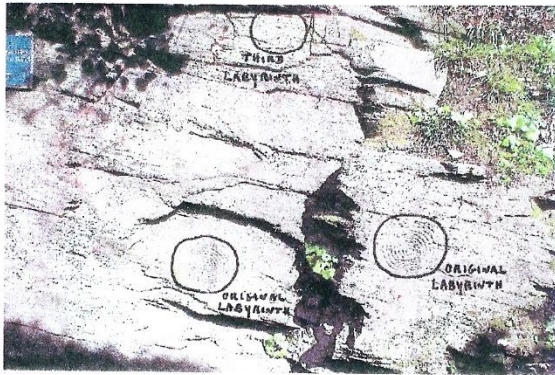


*Siblyback menhir on Bodmin Moor reflects shape of nearby hill*

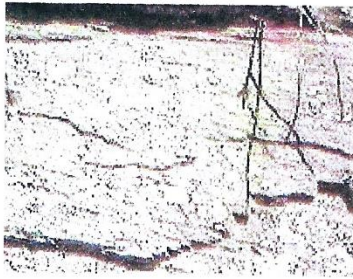


*Mên Scryfa standing stone points to notch in Carn Galva*

**The third labyrinth at Rocky Valley [see p.6]**



*Location of third labyrinth at Rocky Valley [c] David Roberts*



*Third labyrinth enlarged [c] DR*



*Original (right side) labyrinth*

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**The ^ shaped quartz seam at Boskednan Barrow [see p.7]**



*[c] Sarah Vivian*

## **MEDIEVAL MADNESS: THE ROLE OF THE SACRED WELL**

by **Sarah Head**

In medieval times, illness, especially mental illness, was thought to come from sources outside the body. Physical manifestations of such illnesses were seen to be the result of evil spirits, external possession or sensitivity to natural forces such as the full moon - hence the name 'lunatic' from *luna touché* = touched by the moon. If madness is thought to arise from the presence of "something evil within", then the common sense cure was to remove the evil spirit from the person.



In pre-Christian times, this could mean the local shaman walking between the worlds to both identify the spirit involved and discover the best means of getting it to leave. Such methods could include offering special food and drink, chanting, working on an etheric level to cut any cords binding the spirit to the living person or channelling positive energy to move the spirit on into the next world. It could be as simple as asking the spirit to move on or making the physical body too uncomfortable a place in which to stay. This might include purges, beatings or other violent means.

With the national establishment of the Christian church, the responsibility for casting out evil spirits fell to the local priest, who might use personal power, through Christ, to drive the spirit out, drawing on Biblical examples of Jesus casting out demons from those sent to him for healing. He might use the power of voice, rituals, sensing and/or sacred relics, depending on what he had to hand.

In Cornwall, some village priests had access to another tool, the sacred well, where the healing properties might include the ability to cure madness. The local term for this practice was known as boswenning. Nigel Pennick, in his book on Celtic saints, relates the term 'bowsenning' to the ceremony whereby pilgrims were immersed in the healing waters of identified sacred wells in order to receive the blessing of the Saint associated with the location. This was a voluntary activity and would be preceded by visiting the sanctified well on the evening before the Saint's day. The night would be spent in prayer and contemplation, presumably within the nearby chapel or sacristy associated with the well, rather than at the site of the well itself. Most sacred wells had chapels built by the side of them during the middle ages. This was part of the Catholic Church's attempts to control both the influence and veneration of holy sites.



The three Cornish wells associated with voluntary bowsenning by Pennick are Gulval, Nantswell (near Newquay) and Roche, though to this we may add Altarnun and St.Cleer. By the eighteenth century, when local clerics began to record sacred sites, only Roche, Altarnun and St.Cleer were associated with bowsenning. Gulval was noted by Borlase for its divinatory properties, and Our Lady of Nantswell in St.Colan's parish near St.Columb Major was used by local people to fortell their future.

### St. Gundred's

**Well** at Roche was said to ebb and flow with the tide, due, according to Carew in his "Survey of Cornwall" to water only being present in wet weather and drying up in fair weather. His measurements of the well as 12" deep and 6" wide makes it difficult to see how anyone could



be immersed in the waters! In fact, the well (also called Holywell) is several feet across and deep. Its association with bowsenning comes from Hope in 1893 who notes: "Maidens would repair on Holy Thursday to throw in pins and pebbles, and predict coming events by the sparkling of the bubbles that rise up. Lunatics were also immersed in it".

The practice of immersing people during a 'period of madness' in a bowsenning pool was a very different practice from that carried out by pilgrims seeking the Saint's blessing. Hope's description of what happened at Altarnun well, based on the writings of Carew and Borlase, carries a chilling account of events:

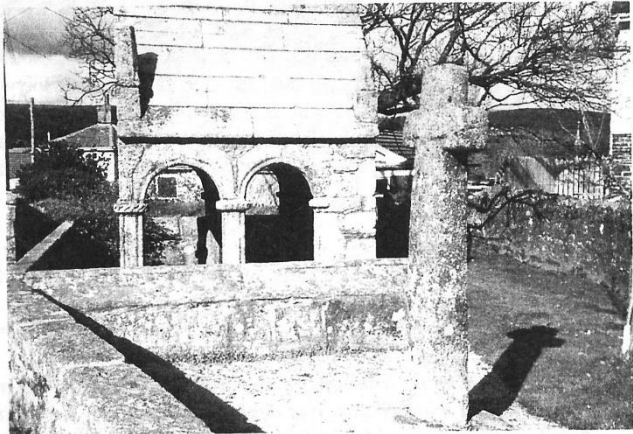
*"The water running from this sacred well was conducted to a small square enclosure closely walled in every side, and might be filled at any depth, as the case required. The frantic person was placed on the wall, with his back to the water; without being permitted to know what was going to be done, he was knocked backwards into the water by a violent blow to the chest, when he was tumbled about in a most unmerciful manner, until fatigue had subdued the rage which unmerited violence had occasioned. Reduced by ill-usage to a degree of weakness, which ignorance mistook for returning sanity, the patient was conveyed to church with much solemnity, where certain Masses were said for him. If after this treatment he recovered, St. Nun had all the praise; but in case he remained the same, the experiment was repeated so often as any hope of life or recovery was left".*

The Quiller-Couch sisters, following their father's footsteps around Cornwall's sacred wells, believed the bowsenning pool at **Altarnun** to be the remains of a Roman bath. Today, the pool is very muddy around the edges and it is difficult to see the source of the spring in the shade of the overhanging trees.



When I visited last summer, it was sad not to find any mention of the bowsenning pool in the church, nor of the key role the mediaeval priest would have played in organising and 'performing' the treatment.

The other sacred well clearly associated with bowsenning was **St.Cleer's** well, not far from Bodmin Moor. Hope says: *"The well of St.Cleer, the baptistry or chapel by which it was enclosed, and an ancient cross about 9 ft high, form a group by the roadside 100 yards eastward below the church. The water*



*flowing out of the well fills a pool or basin, supposed to have been used as a bowsenning pool for curing mad people".* Hope reports that the well was restored in 1864 as a memorial to the Rev. John Jope, who was vicar of St.Cleer for 67 years. St.Cleer is thought to have been dedicated to St.Clare, an Italian nun, born in 1200, who became abbess of a Benedictine nunnery and was the founder of the Order of Poor Clares. It would be interesting to know to which saint or deity the well was originally dedicated. In the 14th century Bishop Grandisson of Exeter tried to expunge any influence of the original Celtic Christians and took every opportunity to rename churches away from their original links with Celtic founders.

Although there are only three holy wells associated with bowsenning left in Cornwall today, it is clear that this was a widespread practice in a time which had little understanding and no effective cures for the conditions they saw as madness. We have no knowledge of how many people were drowned or left permanently disabled from being forcibly thrown into bitterly cold water, nor any statistics to show whether such a treatment was efficacious and how many sufferers were able thereafter to live a normal and productive life. We can only hope that somehow, the power of the sacred water helped to heal the suffering.

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## THE FAIRY FAITH IN A CELTIC COUNTRY

by David Sivier

To some people who study past ages, belief in witches, who worshipped the Devil and thus acquired strange powers, began in an earlier belief in doctors, who healed with powers they learned from the 'Good People'. Numbered amongst such doctors sixteen hundred years CE were the 'Donas de Fuera' – the Ladies from Outside. Such people believed they went to a great meal with the queen of the 'Good People'. The church, however, believed they worshipped the Devil. Slowly the tales changed under the questioning of the enemies of crimes of the church's faith, in which they thought they worshipped the Devil at a party. Faiths like the Donas de Fuera still live in Romania – the Calusari, who were made known in 'The X-Files'. Other groups of doctors with power over the natural live in Africa. It is believed they come down from an earlier faerie faith, which began in the Roman world.

Other nations also have fairy faiths like those. In Shetland, people who wanted power over the natural, got it from the 'trows', as the trolls were known. As in Italy, their opponents in the church argued against them, and people eventually believed the Church, so that the tales changed and told how people gave themselves to the Devil for power, instead of learning from the *trows*. In Somerset also in past ages lived people who healed with the powers of the Good People. One of these was Agnes Hancock, who fifteen hundred years CE, was accused in the Bishop's Court of healing people with the help of a spirit – a faerie. Other witches, who had powers learned from the fairies, were Joan Tyrrye from Taunton, and John Walshe from Netherberry in Dorset, a hundred years after Hancock. One hundred years after them, Isabel Gowdie in Scotland, and a nameless man from Yorkshire, also visited the Good People and learned from them the power to heal. Cornish people know the example of Anne Jeffries, who also got the power to heal after she travelled to fairyland with the small friends, which she found when she was nineteen. She was put in prison for this by Jan Tregearle, a villain in the stories.



Those who study the fairy witches believe they never went to fairyland, but their visits came from dreams they had when they were not asleep, in which they escaped this world and were repaid with power for their poor and hard lives. As is known from studying shamans today, such people were not foolish. British and Italian fairy witches perhaps were not opposed to the Christian faith. Some considered themselves in that faith. What they believed was that which remained from the old fairy faith. Then there were witches, who were believed to have powers from a contract with the Devil, or who worked evil with their power. Amongst these witches in the 19thC in Cornwall were Jenny Harris, Old Joan and Madge Figgey, who raised storms to destroy ships. Other witches lived in Treva, Trewa and the 'Gump' near Carn Kenidjack. The witches worshipped the Devil in the story in Cres Haf at Burnt Downs and at the Logan Stone in West Penwith. Amongst the witches in the story was the witch of Fraddam and her enemy, the wise man Pengerseck. Other wise men and women removed the witches' evil, like the Pellars, as they were known.

In other stories the faeries – the Good People, and also the Spriggans, Piskies and Buccas – visited St. Ives' market, danced on Tregarden Down and Trencrom Hill, held markets in St. Germoe, were seen at the 'Gump' near St. Just, at the 'towan' around Lelant church, under the cliffs at Land's End, and in the meadow at St. Levan. Amongst the people who visited their land was Cherry from Zennor and other women, who took care of babies for the faeries. It was believed that faeries stole people's babies, but the Good People also helped people – they worked for farmers, they showed tin miners where the best tin was, they took care of a woman who could not leave her bed. Although some people believed the faeries were the enemies of the Christian faith, they were seen putting their queen in her grave in Lelant church. Perhaps these faeries gave witches the power to heal. The fairy faith and the Christian faith, although sometimes opposed to each other, also sometimes lived together without upset.

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*This article is available in a Cornish translation: "An Fay Faerie yn Bro Keltiek". For a copy, please send a cheque/PO for £0.50 made payable to "Meyn Mamvro Publications".*



## “OLD AND A TROUBLE”

### NOTES ON THE LIFE OF GRANNY BOSWELL

by JASON SEMMENS

In his *Seven Cornish Witches* (1998), Kelvin Jones drew attention for the first time to the life and career of Ann Boswell, the nineteenth-century gypsy and itinerant pedlar, better known about the Helston district as ‘Granny Boswell’ and suspected for a witch.<sup>1</sup> While there has been interest over the years in Granny Boswell as a Helston ‘character’ there has been remarkably little hard information pertaining to her life available: this is due in part to the itinerant career she and her family enjoyed as pedlars and hawkers throughout their lives, as they only occasionally registered in official documents. Recent research however has uncovered hitherto unknown aspects of her life, and this article discusses the evidence for her career and background, and sets on record what might now be said about her.



In his account, Kelvin Jones made much of her as a ‘white witch’ or healer, yet the contemporary accounts suggest the opposite to be true. To the civic authorities at Helston she was a nuisance, as she ‘annoys people by begging but acts as a pedlar and has no certificate and so evades the law but no one cares to interfere with her.’ She was often met with abroad on the streets of Helston inebriated and incapable, and indeed in February 1902 she was ‘fined 2s. 6d. and 2s. 6d. costs for being helplessly drunk in Lady Street ... and for inability to pay was sent to Bodmin for seven days, without hard labour.’ She frequently strayed to nearby towns, yet as the parish guardians confirmed with weary resignation, she always managed to find her way back to Helston.<sup>2</sup> To the people of Helston she was an ambivalent presence in their midst whom many feared lest her fiery temper and sharp tongue might fall upon them. It appears that people were in the habit of giving her alms to ensure that her evil eye might not fall upon them, and she had a malevolent reputation for ill-wishing those who fell foul of her. At no time was this reputation more powerfully confirmed than in 1906 when Captain Taylor related this encounter with her:

*“It was in the 1906 election, when we were ferrying voters to the poll; I remember that the polished brass paraffin headlights were adorned with large blue bows. My father had reversed the car across the street outside our house, and was about to go forward in the other direction, when the local witch walked in front. She stood there, a ragged and grimy old hag, apparently fascinated by the shining and throbbing machine; and swaying slightly, as on election day she was more drunk than usual. My father, to make her move, first shouted, then roared the engine and tooted the horn. This nettled her, and she shrieked in her broad Cornish and with much foul language that the qualified wagon wasn’t going to get as far as the other end of the qualified street; she turned her back, and stalked off in fury. We started; before the car was half-way down the street there was a loud snap, and one of the one-inch steel tension-rods broke clean in two. A horse towed us home. It had long been said that Granny B[oswell] could ill-wish cattle and fowls, and she lived largely on the gifts of those who desired to ensure that her eye should be averted from theirs; but to be able to ill-wish a motor-car in public was a most startling confirmation of her art, and on the strength of that, I have no doubt, she was able to live in comparative luxury for the rest of her life.”<sup>3</sup>*

In fact Granny Boswell lived in comparative poverty in her last decade. For reasons unknown she was abandoned by her family and was forced to seek parish relief in the Union Workhouse on Meneage Street. She was recorded as an inmate on the 1901 census, though the workhouse overseers attempted to evict her in 1902, believing that they had no obligation to maintain her as she had no permanent address in the town. At a hearing of the Petty Sessions it was noted that ‘she had relations who could well maintain her but won’t do so,’ and indeed her husband Ephraim did not die until October 1904. Grudgingly she was returned to the tramps ward. Possibly her conduct in the workhouse was the real cause of their reluctance, as she ‘twice forced her way into the board room and had to be removed.’ Boswell spent the remainder of her life at the workhouse in what must have been appalling conditions. The overseers tried to discourage tramps by offering what a clerk described as a ‘starvation diet’ of ‘eight ounces of bread or six ounces of bread and a pint of gruel’ per day. The tramps were expected to break stone, though the clerk admitted ‘that half of the tramps ... were unable to perform the prescribed task. They were not all able bodied.’<sup>4</sup>

Granny Boswell died at the workhouse, of ‘senile decay,’ on 16 August 1909. Her daughter Agnes was in attendance.<sup>5</sup> Boswell’s remains were interred the following Sunday in the same grave as her husband, in the pretty wayside graveyard surrounding the Tregerest Methodist Chapel, a little outside Newbridge. Several hundreds of people attended the funeral, and a headstone was erected to mark the position of the grave:

In  
 LOVING MEMORY OF  
 EPHRAIM BOSWELL,  
 WHO  
 DIED 29<sup>TH</sup> OCT<sup>R</sup>, 1904  
 AGED 84 YEARS  
 WE HAVE TO MOURN THE LOSS OF ONE  
 WE DID OUR BEST TO SAVE,  
 BELOVED BY ALL, REGRETTEED GONE,  
 REMEMBERED IN THE GRAVE.  
*ALSO OF ANN BOSWELL, THE BELOVED WIFE OF THE ABOVE*  
 EPHRAIM BOSWELL  
 WHO DEPARTED THIS LIFE AUGUST 16<sup>TH</sup> 1909 AGED 96 YEARS.  
*ALSO OF HENRY BOSWELL, THEIR BELOVED YOUNGEST SON,*  
 WHO DIED AT ST. KEVERNE, 1891, AGED 21 YEARS,  
*ALSO OF UNITY BAILY, THEIR BELOVED DAUGHTER,*  
 WHO DIED AT PENZANCE, 1892, AGED 31 YEARS.  
*GONE BUT NOT FORGOTTEN.*



Granny Boswell's funeral.

Photographs of Granny Boswell and Granny Boswell's Funeral [c] Helston Folk Museum.

Jason Semmens is currently working on a book on Cornish Witchcraft which will be published in 2006.

#### Notes and References:

<sup>1</sup> Jones, Kelvin., *Seven Cornish Witches* (Penzance: Oakmagic Press, 1998) pp. 45 - 49; subsequently reprinted with alterations in Jones, Kelvin., *An Joan the Crone* (Penzance: Oakmagic Press, 1999) pp. 38 - 43.

<sup>2</sup> Anonymous., 'Helston Borough Petty Sessions.' *West Briton* (27 February 1902) p. 4.

<sup>3</sup> Unpublished manuscript of Captain Taylor, pp. 8, 9; courtesy of Janet Spargo of the Helston Folk Museum, to whom many thanks are tendered for her help with this article.

<sup>4</sup> Anonymous., 'Helston Board of Guardians' How Tramps are Treated.' *West Briton* (26 August 1909) p. 7.

<sup>5</sup> Per Death Certificate; see also Anonymous 'Notes from Helston and District.' *West Briton* (26 August 1909) p. 7.





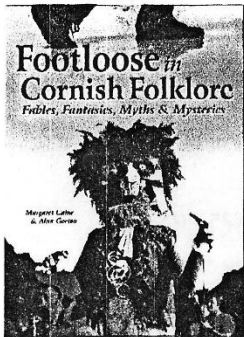
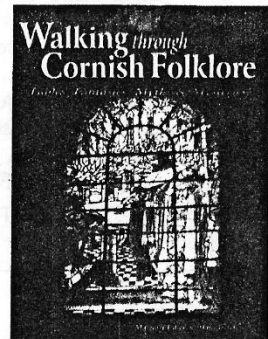
## BOOK REVIEW

**Walking through Cornish Folklore & Footloose in Cornish Folklore** by Margaret Caine & Alan Gorton.

Both books published 2005 by Cotswold Quality (Leisure) Ltd @ £3.99 each.

These are two excellent value-for-money booklets, of interest to anyone who loves Cornish folklore and would like to visit the places where much of it is set. Each booklet has over 80 pages and is crammed full of stories, walks, information and pictures (some in colour). The information is accurate, the interpretations sound and the walks practical and full of interest.

**Walking through Cornish Folklore** consists of 17 sections, covering all parts of Cornwall, from North Cornwall (Morwenstow, Boscastle, Tintagel, Slaughterbridge, St.Teath and Padstow), to Bodmin Moor & St.Breock, to the south and east of the county (Perranzabuloe, Ladock, Mevagissey, Luxulyan, Fowey, Polperro, Cotehele, Antony & St.Germans). Each area features the stories associated with the area followed by a circular walk that links together the places in the land where the stories are set. The stories are a cornucopia of Cornish legend, myth and folklore, encompassing King Arthur, Tristan & Iseult, saints, devils, piskies, fairies, smugglers, ancient sites and witchcraft.



**Footloose in Cornish Folklore** follows the same pattern but covers the west of the county, including St.Agnes (giants, ghosts), Portreath (giants, smugglers), Rosewarne (ghosts, giants & spriggans), St.Ives (ghosts, wrecks), Zennor (mermaid, witches, ghosts), St.Just (spirits, knockers, fairies, ghosts), Tregeseal (wreckers), Bosulow (stones, healing), Sennen (smugglers, spirits, magicians, Lyonesse), Porthgarra (ghosts, witches, giants, fairy cow), Boleigh (witches, spirits), Sancreed (fairies), Penzance (pirates, ghosts, giants), Germoe (magicians, smugglers) and Helston & Loe Pool (paganism, mermaids). The walks vary from 3 to 11 miles, so there is something here for everybody.

There is a sensitivity to Cornwall, a seriousness about the legends and a love of the land here in these booklets. They are much to be recommended and enjoyed.

## THE PIPERS TUNE

Henrietta Quinnell, current President of Cornwall Archaeological Society, and Nicholas Thomas, past-President, have stirred up something of a hornet's nest in the pages of *Current Archaeology* magazine. In Issue 197 they criticise some aspects of *Time Team's* approach to excavating ancient sites, and say that they "deplore the commonly held urge to excavate". They also argue against "excavation as an acceptable activity for amateurs". They are particularly antagonistic towards metal detecting, and their letter overall is an entrenched reaction to the involvement of non-professionals in the field of archaeological excavation. As such, it flies in the face of current archaeological trends in programmes such as *Time Team* that encourage a greater involvement and participation by the public in archaeology.

Their letter provoked 2 strongly-worded replies in *Current Archaeology* 198. Carol Kirby accuses them of "elitism", and says "There is little point in operating a 'closed shop' system if you want to keep the public and future generations of archaeologists interested". She adds: "I feel Ms. Quinnell and her colleagues are living in an exclusive world of academia."

The second letter, from well-known Roman historian Guy de la Bédoyere, is even more scathing. "It was good to see some archaeologists at least still have time to pour their energies into a moralizing zeal to weed out those who have consorted with the twin-demons: the media and detectorists." He sarcastically adds that they should set up "inquisitorial committees of self-appointed righteous archaeologists" but that "unfortunately that might leave archaeology without any archaeologists, except of course the Cornish Archaeological Society"!



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