

# The Landmark Trust

## **THE FARMHOUSE, LOWER PORTHMEOR History Album**



**Researched and written by Charlotte Haslam, 1989**

**Revised and updated in 2026**

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## **BASIC DETAILS**

**Farm acquired by National Trust,  
buildings leased to Landmark Trust: 1987**

**Architect for restoration: Peter Bird of Caroe & Martin**

**Contractor: W. Lawry**

**Foreman: Greville Riggs**

**Restoration work completed: The Farmhouse Nov1989  
Captain's House 1995**

**Major upgrade works 2025-6**

**Porthmeor means great (meor) cove or landing place (porth).  
Sometimes Polmeor can mean great pool.**

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### **The 2024-6 works at Lower Porthmeor benefitted from a legacy from the late Mike Barnard. His widow Valerie wrote:**

‘We cherished all of our stays in over thirty Landmarks since 1992... You asked did we have a favourite Landmark, but they were all so uniquely different in their own ways that it would be quite difficult to choose. Certainly, they became a valued and constant part of our whole life together and have left me with enduring memories of happy times spent ‘Landmarking’ with Mike.... Due to us always wanting to experience as many different LT properties as we could, we only ever stayed at two of them twice, one of which was ‘The Captain’s House’, due to its stunning location at Zennor. It would feel good to know that Mike will have contributed directly to its upkeep for future Landmarkers to enjoy staying there as much as we did.’

**We are enormously grateful to Mike and Valerie.**



**General view of the Lower Porthmeor grouping. Captain's House and its adjacent cottage/barn is in the foreground, with The Farmhouse roof visible behind it. To the right are the four barns that supported the farmstead.**

## Summary - Lower Porthmeor: Captain's House, The Farmhouse & Arra Venton

You will no longer find a village called Porthmeor on a map and the name has passed instead to one of Cornwall's most famous surfing beaches, a few miles round the headland in St Ives. Lower Porthmeor, in its grouping and siting and the forces that shaped it, is representative of many other hamlets on this northern shelf of Penwith. It is also one of the most attractive of all the groups of buildings along this outstandingly scenic stretch of coastline.

Apart from the fact that it already existed, we know nothing for certain about the hamlet's appearance before 1600, at the earliest. The settlement would probably have been laid out in a similar way to today, but on a smaller scale, with only tiny yards and enclosures. The earliest houses would have differed little from the humble single storey building on the north of the site, with a single door and two tiny windows, and cow-houses and other agricultural buildings looking much the same alongside. Sometimes, the dwelling had a sleeping loft, sometimes they conformed to the 'long-house' pattern, the outer room acting as a byre for animals. Although humble, they were solid and well-insulated, providing warmth and shelter. As a building type they endured for over a thousand years, well into the 17th century.

It was not until then that the prosperity that had brought about the boom in vernacular house construction known as Great Rebuilding reached this westernmost peninsula, a century later than most other parts of the country. Then the older houses started to be rebuilt, with an additional storey, or new windows perhaps, and another room built on the end. As with their predecessors, few of these survive, having vanished when they themselves were upgraded, unless put to new use as a farm building, or kept on as the dwelling of a labourer or poor relation. A garden wall at Higher Porthmeor is in fact part of another such house, of quite a substantial kind. The Upper House – known since the 19<sup>th</sup> century as at Higher Porthmeor also bears witness to its 17th-century origin, with a lintel carved with the date 1682. No doubt other fragments have been reused in later buildings, such as window lintels, and dressed stone quoins.

None of the houses at Lower Porthmeor dates from before the end of the 18th century. Even then few houses in Penwith were built with two full storeys; the pattern remained that of a single storey with a now more spacious loft. So the Captain's House contains within its larger end a smaller and lower house, the roofline of which was found in the walls when plaster was stripped off in 1988. This could date from 1800 or even a bit before. However, the 1842 Tithe Map for Zennor, while listing a house and garden here, shows only what seems to be a smaller building again, hardly even a house. Perhaps this was because the bigger house was only then being built - such are the difficulties of dating, a range of fifty years either way is quite acceptable.

The Farmhouse almost certainly dates from soon after 1800, and is clearly marked on the 1842 Tithe Map. It also appears in the first edition of the 1' Ordnance Survey map, surveyed in 1805 (not published until 1813). The leap in terms of comfort from the earlier houses is immense.

The Farmhouse has been little altered over the years, but The Captain's House has gone through a number of different stages. First there was the small house already described. Then a building was added onto its lower end, blocking a window in the gable. This new building probably began life as a cow-house, because a drain runs out of it directly under one of the sides of the fireplace, which must therefore be a later addition to convert this end into a second dwelling. A house it certainly was in 1860 when Arthur Berryman (by family tradition known as Captain Arthur) was born there.

Soon afterwards, however, the upper end was enlarged, by adding a full second storey. The family then moved in there, and by the 1881 census the lower end may have become a cow-house or stable again, since an uninhabited house was recorded. Once Landmark took the site on, the barn was used at first for heating plant, by inserting a boiler room. In 2024-6, this was cleared and the barn was brought into the Landmark accommodation, as a large and airy kitchen and breakfast room. Captain's former kitchen now became the sitting room, and the former sitting room became a level access bedroom, with a new shower room created in the adjacent former housekeeper's store. At the same time, ground source heating was installed for all three Landmarks at Lower Porthmeor, to feed new heating and hot water systems in all three buildings.

The other farm buildings at Lower Porthmeor all date from 19th century. The long cow-house, running uphill from The Farmhouse, is marked on the 1842 Tithe Map. It already had a granary (locally called a barn or chall-barn) at the top end. On the upper floor of this the grain was stored, while cows lived below. Another cow-house, known as the Four-house for obvious numerical reasons, was added in the later 19th century by Robert Berryman, Captain Arthur's father. Robert Berryman also built the large barn immediately next to the Farmhouse, probably in about 1880. Its cambered lintels may, perhaps, have been reused from another building. It had a pig-house on its lower end, and there was another pig-house, now roofless, at the other side of the yard. In 2020-21, during the Covid-19 pandemic, major repairs to the barns were enabled by the Culture Recovery Fund.

Lower Porthmeor also has important literary associations. Author Virginia Woolf spent the summer of 1910 here, lodging with the Berryman family. Virginia Woolf had spent happy childhood holidays in St Ives with the rest of her family – her parents Leslie and Julia Stevens owned Talland House above Porthminster Beach. After Julia's death in 1895, Talland House was let out, but St Ives and Cornwall were always a place of recuperation for Virginia, who suffered recurrent bouts of depression and nervous exhaustion. It was to recover from one such that she came to stay at Lower Porthmeor, aged 28, in 1910. With Jean Thomas, her carer-

companion, she went for long walks over the moors. Virginia Woolf's later novels *The Voyage Out* (1915), *To the Lighthouse* (1927), *The Waves* (1937) and *Between the Acts* (1941) all draw directly from her memories of this part of Cornwall.

D. H. Lawrence lived at Zennor with his wife Frieda from 1915 to 1917, when Katherine Mansfield also joined the literary community he aspired to establish there.

As modern farming practices began to disrupt the ancient field patterns in the late-20<sup>th</sup> century, the National Trust decided that preservation of the Penwith area should be made a priority. In 1985 launched an appeal to buy land there under Enterprise Neptune. As a result, in 1987 the Landmark Trust took a lease in Lower Porthmeor with the object of saving the now empty and derelict buildings there. The Farmhouse and the Captain's House opened as Landmarks in 1990.

## **ARRA VENTON**

Across the road from The Captain's House and The Farmhouse is Arra Venton, a building of somewhat mixed parentage. It was once two buildings, a tiny Nonconformist chapel and a smithy, both as satisfying in their simple granite construction as the farmsteads. Early in the 20th century, a cottage was added to its smithy end. In 1952, these three buildings were combined in an eccentric if imaginative fashion into a single dwelling. Soon after, it was altered again, and treated and painted in such a way that it rather spoiled the elemental landscape of which it is a part and, felt our founder, spoilt the outlook from the farmstead across the road. When Arra Venton came on the market, he bought it to protect the grouping as whole (we would not be able to do so today) and restored it, to make it simple and unified again, looking out upon sea and wide moorland under the ever-changing west Cornish skies.

## Historical Background

There are few parts of the British Isles where archaeology is as visible as it is in Penwith. This is especially so in those parishes on its northern coast called the 'high countries': Zennor, Towednack and Morvah. Here much of the land is rough moor, among which successive early peoples chose to dwell. Amid such profusion of ancient culture it is easy to forget the population of more recent centuries whose main contribution, it seems, has been to leave all this archaeology intact for us today - to the extent of using the same fields and field walls. Throughout the millennium and a half since the end of the Iron Age, people have continued to live and farm here. They have developed a way of life that, although it has much in common with other remote and upland areas, is at the same time distinctive of this peninsula alone.

It is only in recent decades that the full complexity of this rich landscape has begun to be studied in detail and on a longer timescale, fuelled by growing interest in vernacular architecture, and post-medieval and industrial archaeology. All of this has been greatly encouraged by the National Trust, which has given this area special attention and, with the Cornwall Archaeological Unit, carried out a detailed survey of its holding at Bosigran, from pre-history to the present day.

Various difficulties are encountered in carrying out any such study. The poverty of the area is one - the buildings were always humble, and lacking in ornament, which makes them hard to date. The intractability of the material that was nearest to hand - moorstone granite - also contributed to the plainness of the buildings, coupled with the perishability of others, such as thatch. The final muddling factor is that whenever an increase in prosperity did allow a new building, it generally occupied the site, and consumed the materials, of its predecessor. Thus whenever earlier fragments do survive, they are often no longer in the right place.

On the other hand, those same characteristics caused the continuation of customs and practices long after they had been superseded in wealthier parts of the country, even on the south coast of Penwith. To some extent it is true to say that the Middle Ages lasted into the 17th, and even 18th century here. J. H. Matthews writing a *History of St. Ives, Lelant, Towednack and Zennor* in 1892, was able to say of the 'high countries' that they preserved 'much of the social aspect of former ages.'

So while almost no buildings can be dated to before the 16th or 17th centuries, it is possible to draw conclusions about their predecessors from the very few structures of this later period that do survive. One such survival, possibly 17<sup>th</sup>-century, stands at the top of the Lower Porthmeor settlement. Known as Grace's House, it was kept thatched well into the 20<sup>th</sup> century, and its bakehouse chimney was whitewashed. Another, more ruinous, is in the former Mill Farm in the valley below. Single storeyed, with tiny windows, these buildings resemble the black houses of Scotland. Although themselves post-medieval, they reflect a long tradition of similar humble dwellings, in which even the better-off members of local society would have lived throughout the Middle Ages. They also provide some link with those farmhouses of an even earlier period, the courtyard houses of Romano-British settlements like nearby Chysauster.

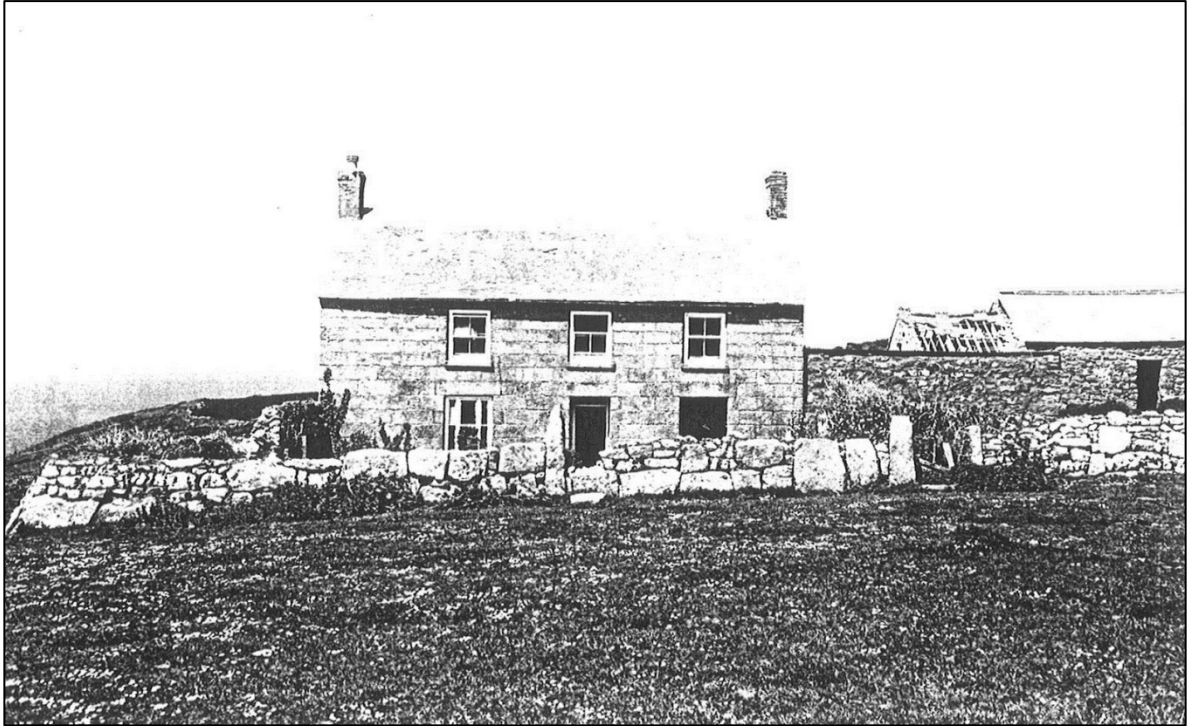
At what date the farmers from these settlements moved to the ones lower down and still occupied today is not known for certain. Not all early settlements were on high ground, two having been located among the fields on the coastal shelf at Bosigran for example. That associated with the fields of Porthmeor was higher up the hill in a field called Dinnis = Dynas, meaning a fortified place. It is likely that the move to the new, lower = site, close to two springs, and sheltered from the south and east, took place soon after the end of the Roman period. Certainly a settlement called Porthmur (with many variants in spelling) existed in the early 14th century.

In the new sites, as in the old, the houses were built close together in small hamlets, five or six together. This is a custom that lasted well into the 20<sup>th</sup> century

in Penwith, although since eroded by depopulation and the consolidation of farms. In very early times the impulse may have been security, but there must also have been an element of communal activity involved, especially of farming activities such as harvesting. Buildings sometimes seem to have had a communal use too; each house had its own garden and pig-house, but as time progressed it did not necessarily have its own complete set of barns, yards and cow-houses. Several houses could be grouped around a single farmyard complex.

Whether the hamlets represent the holding of a single farming family is not clear. In such a case the land would only be divided nominally, with separate dwellings for different generations, siblings or cousins, but a common living. This was an established pattern in other remote counties, known as the 'unit-system.' New houses were built close together but distinct from one another - a house for each household, rather than multiple occupation of a single building. The unit-system was a way of still following, but at the same time limiting, the economic defects of multiple inheritance, or gavelkind, banned by Elizabeth I. Certainly in 19<sup>th</sup>-century Penwith, many of the hamlets were occupied by different members of the same family. Porthmeor then was farmed by three brothers, who each owned a separate holding, but their descendants in the 1990s talked about it as though it was always one farm, with the men of each household sharing the work.

It was relatively rare in Penwith for the householder to own the land they worked, even in the 19th century. Most farms belonged to a larger estate under leasehold based on a number of lives. Sometimes the landlord lived in one of the manor houses of Penwith itself, such as Trenwith or Trevetho, but just as often through complicated transfers and descent they belonged to an estate whose owner lived far away. This might either be at the other end of Cornwall or in another part of the country altogether - the Paulet family-owned land in Penwith, although the majority of their estates were in Hampshire and Yorkshire. Very unusually for Penwith, Porthmeor was largely owned by its farmers, other parts belonging to the Lanhydrock estate.



**Above, the 'Inside House' (the Farmhouse) and below, the 'Outside House' (Captain's House) in 1987.**



## Lower Porthmeor – the buildings

Porthmeor, in its grouping and position and the forces that have shaped it, is physically representative of many other hamlets on this northern shelf of Penwith; and is among the most attractive of all the groups of buildings along a visually staggering stretch of coast.

Apart from the fact of its existence, we know nothing for certain about its appearance before 1600, at the earliest. The likelihood is that the settlement would have been laid out in a similar way to today, but on a much smaller scale, with tiny yards and enclosures. As has already been said the earliest houses would not have been so very different from the humble single storey building above Lower Porthmeor, with a single door and two tiny windows. The cow-houses and other agricultural buildings would have been like that next to it.

Houses excavated at Mawgan Porth near Newquay of the 8th or 9th century were found to have been of this kind, although there the walls were constructed in the same manner as the Cornish hedges - two skins of stone, with packed clay or earth between. Sometimes there would have been a sleeping loft, sometimes they may have conformed to the 'long-house' pattern, with the outer room acting as a byre. Again, examples have been recorded, at Lanyon in Morvah parish for instance.

We may struggle with the thought of living in such structures, and certainly, as soon as wealth permitted, they were improved on. But they were solid and well insulated, providing warmth as well as shelter, and there may have been ways of keeping them dry that we no longer know about in this age of damp-inducing concrete. As a building type, they endured for over a thousand years, through the Elizabethan period and well into the 17th century.

It was not until the 17<sup>th</sup> century that the prosperity that had brought about the Great Rebuilding a century earlier in other parts of the country reached this westernmost peninsula. Then the older houses started to be rebuilt and improved, with an additional storey, or new windows perhaps, or another room built on the end. As with their predecessors, few of these survive, having vanished when they themselves were rebuilt or upgraded, unless they were put to new use as a farm building, or kept on as the dwelling of a labourer or poor relation. A garden wall at Higher Porthmeor is in fact part of such a house, of quite a substantial kind. The Upper House at Higher Porthmeor also bears witness to a 17<sup>th</sup>-century origin, with a lintel carved with the date 1682. No doubt other fragments have been reused in later buildings, such as window lintels, and dressed stone quoins.

The other great improvement of the 17<sup>th</sup> century was the chimney. None of this date survives, as such, at Porthmeor, but a method of construction was developed which endured into the 20<sup>th</sup> century, with very little change apart from the disappearance after 1700 of a chamfered edge on the great stones of the fireplace surrounds. Each of the three houses at Lower Porthmeor has one of these huge projecting chimneypieces, and they occur in most of the other farms along the coast. Matthews in 1892 remarked of them: 'Here may still be commonly seen the immense open chimney, with dried furze and turf piled up on the earthen floor of the kitchen.'

None of the houses at Lower Porthmeor, then, dates from before about 1800. Even then few houses in Penwith were built with two full storeys; the pattern remained that of a single storey with a now rather more spacious loft. Thus The Captain's House – originally known as the Outside House - has gone through a number of different stages. First there was a small, single storey house, which could date from 1800 or even a bit before. Its roofline was found in the walls when plaster was stripped off in 1988. Next a building was added onto its lower end, blocking a window in the gable. It is thought that this new building began life as a cow-house, because a drain runs out of it directly under one of the sides of the fireplace, which

must therefore be a later addition, to convert this end into a house as well. The 1842 Tithe Map for Zennor lists a house and garden here, but only shows what seems to be a smaller building again, hardly even a house.

A house it certainly was in 1860 when Arthur Berryman (known to family tradition as Captain Arthur) was born there. Soon afterwards, however, the upper end was enlarged, with a full second storey added. The family moved in there, and the lower end became a cow-house or stable once again, being recorded as uninhabited in the 1881 census. It remained so until 2025 when it was refurbished to become part of the Landmark accommodation.

The Farmhouse (or 'Inside House') almost certainly does date from soon after 1800. Not only is it clearly marked on the 1842 Tithe Map, it also appears in the first edition of the 1' Ordnance Survey map, surveyed in 1805 although not published until 1813. It has been little altered over the years.



**Robert Berryman's barn and (on the right of the picture) Four-house, with a cart-house on the end of The Farmhouse, taken down in 1988**

The farm buildings of Lower Porthmeor all date from the 19<sup>th</sup>-century. The long cow-house, running uphill from The Farmhouse, is marked on the 1842 Tithe Map. It already had a granary (locally called a barn or chall-barn) at the top end. Grain was stored on its upper floor, while cows lived below. Another cow-house, known as the Four-house for obvious numerical reasons, was added in the later 19<sup>th</sup> century by Robert Berryman, Captain Arthur's father. Robert Berryman also built the rather grand, barn (i.e. granary) immediately next to The Farmhouse, probably in about 1880. Its cambered lintels may have been reused from another building. It had a pig-house on its lower end, and there was another pig-house, now roofless, at the other side of the yard.

## Owners of Porthmeor

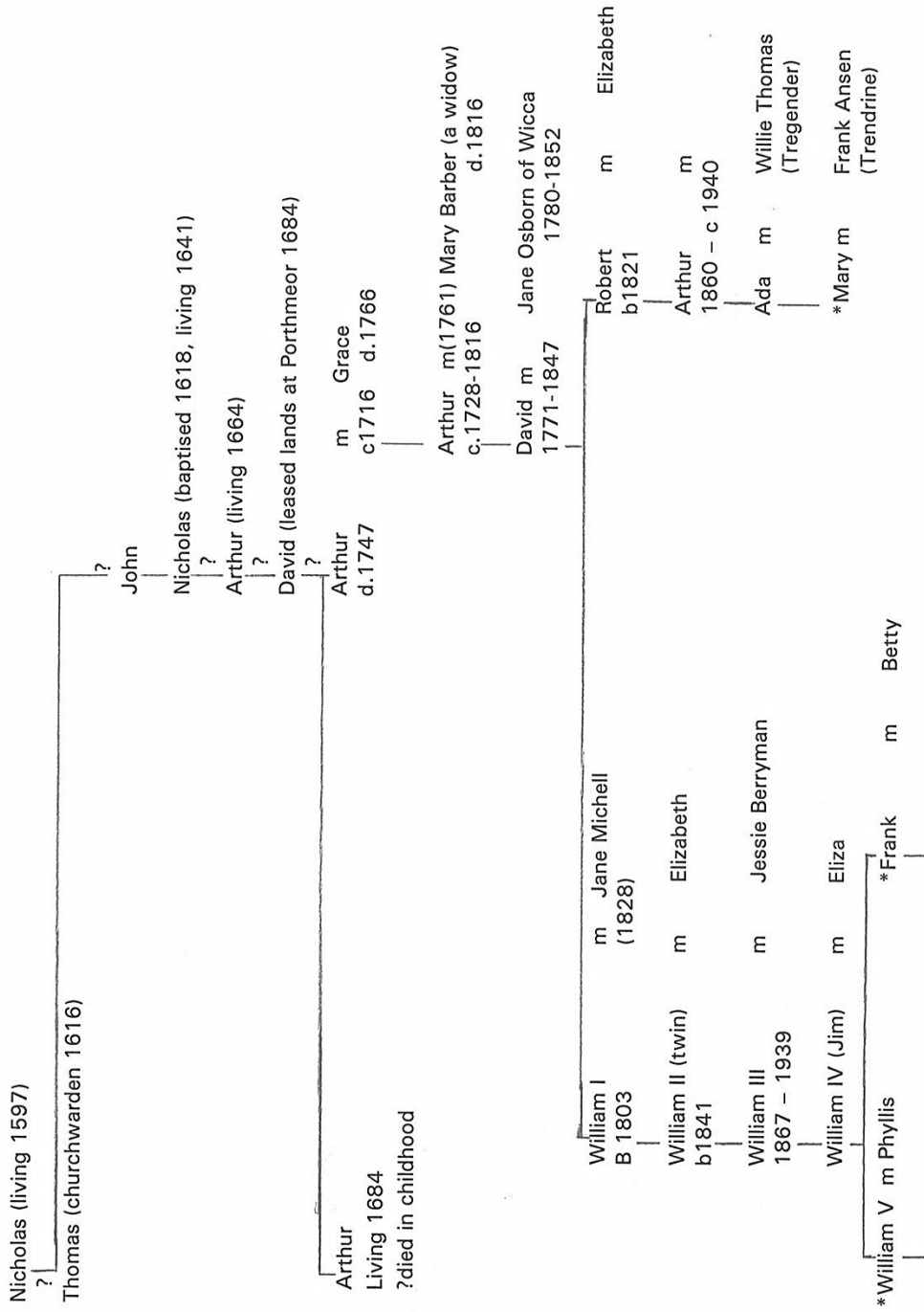
Porthmeor does not seem to have been part of the main Zennor manor of Trewey or Trethewy, held by the Killigrew family. In the early Middle Ages this part of Zennor parish belonged to the Manor of Binnerton, listed in the Domesday survey as being in royal hands. In the 16th century this passed to the St Aubyn family, who were based at Clowance, (now demolished), further east towards Redruth. In a late 18<sup>th</sup>-century rental of the manor, part of Porthmeor is still listed among its properties, but let in 1720 to the Earl of Radnor (of Lanhydrock), and in 1771 to his heir, George Hunt. The property held by the Earl is entered in the Lanhydrock Atlas of 1696.

Another part of Porthmeor was held from the manor of Treworlis in Breage (near Helston), which belonged to the Trelawney family, and it was from them that a lease was taken out by the Berryman family in 1684. The manor still owned part of the farm in the mid-18th century, and probably into the 19th. Another part again belonged to the Praed family, of Trevetha in Lelant.

The history of Porthmeor in the last two centuries, however, is very much that of the Berryman family, who still own and run the farm, and live at Higher Porthmeor. The date of 1682 carved on a lintel in the Upper House there is said to be the date at which they bought part of the farm, consistent with the further holdings they acquired by lease in 1684 as described above.

It is possible that they had already been there as tenants for 80 or 90 years before that. Subsidy Rolls (i.e. tax returns) of the 16th century list under Zennor a *Johes Porthmeor* (John) for 1509-23, and again (perhaps by now his son) in 1558. The value of his goods was then worth £6, putting him among the wealthier farmers in a range of £1 - £10. In 1571 he is worth £8, but in 1593, his inheritance has been divided between two sons, *Willms Porthmere* and *Ricus Porthmere* (William and Richard), each worth £3.

Early Berrymans, with simplified table of descent of Porthmeor family to present day



It was still common at this time for a family to take the name of their dwelling place as their surname, and to change it if they moved. Alternatively, they might take their father's name, and it would be from this stem that two widespread clans in the St Ives area, the Williams and the Stephens derived.

The Porthmere family may also, in fact, have been called Williams. The Subsidy Roll for 1557, instead of reading as it does in 1558:

*Johes Porthmeor valet in bonis £6*

*Thoms Michell valet in bonis £5*

reads:

*Johes Willm valet in bonis £6*

*Thoms Mychell valet in bonis £5*

The implication is that *Johes Porthmeor* and *Johes Willm* are one and the same. This might also explain the absence of anyone called Porthmeor from the otherwise very full Rolls of 1524 and 1545. There is at least one John Williams in each of these.

The Porthmeor family are strongly represented in the Muster Roll of 1569, which attempted to make a full list of all the fighting men in the country, and the weapons at their disposal. John Porthmeore is a parish constable for Zennor, with long bow, a sheaf of arrows (24), a short-brimmed helmet called a sallet, and a bill - a bill-hook blade mounted on a long shaft. William Porthmere has a bow and 12 arrows, an archer's leather and plated jacket, and a sallet. Another John Porthmere is both archer and billman, although he only has a bill, a jack (the leather and plated jacket) and a sallet.

In the Subsidy Roll of 1597, however, a new name appears: Nicus Beriman, assessed at £3 in goods. His place in the list, and the value of his goods, are identical to those formerly entered for William Porthmeor, so it seems

possible that he had taken on William's share of the Porthmeor farm. Richard Porthmeor is still listed, still assessed at £3, and his will was proved at Bodmin in 1601.

Another *Johes Porthmere* is listed in 1624/5, worth £3 and presumably Richard's son, but this is the last time that the name appears in the Subsidy Rolls, although five members of the family appear in the Protestation Return of 1642 (an oath of loyalty to the Protestant church, King and Parliament, that had to be signed by everyone over 18). Meanwhile, in 1641 two members of the Berriman family (Arthur and Nicholas) are listed in the Subsidy Roll, and were therefore of taxable status, owners of property. Both appear on the Protestation Return as well, Nicholas as a churchwarden; and Arthur appears again in the Subsidy Roll of 1664.

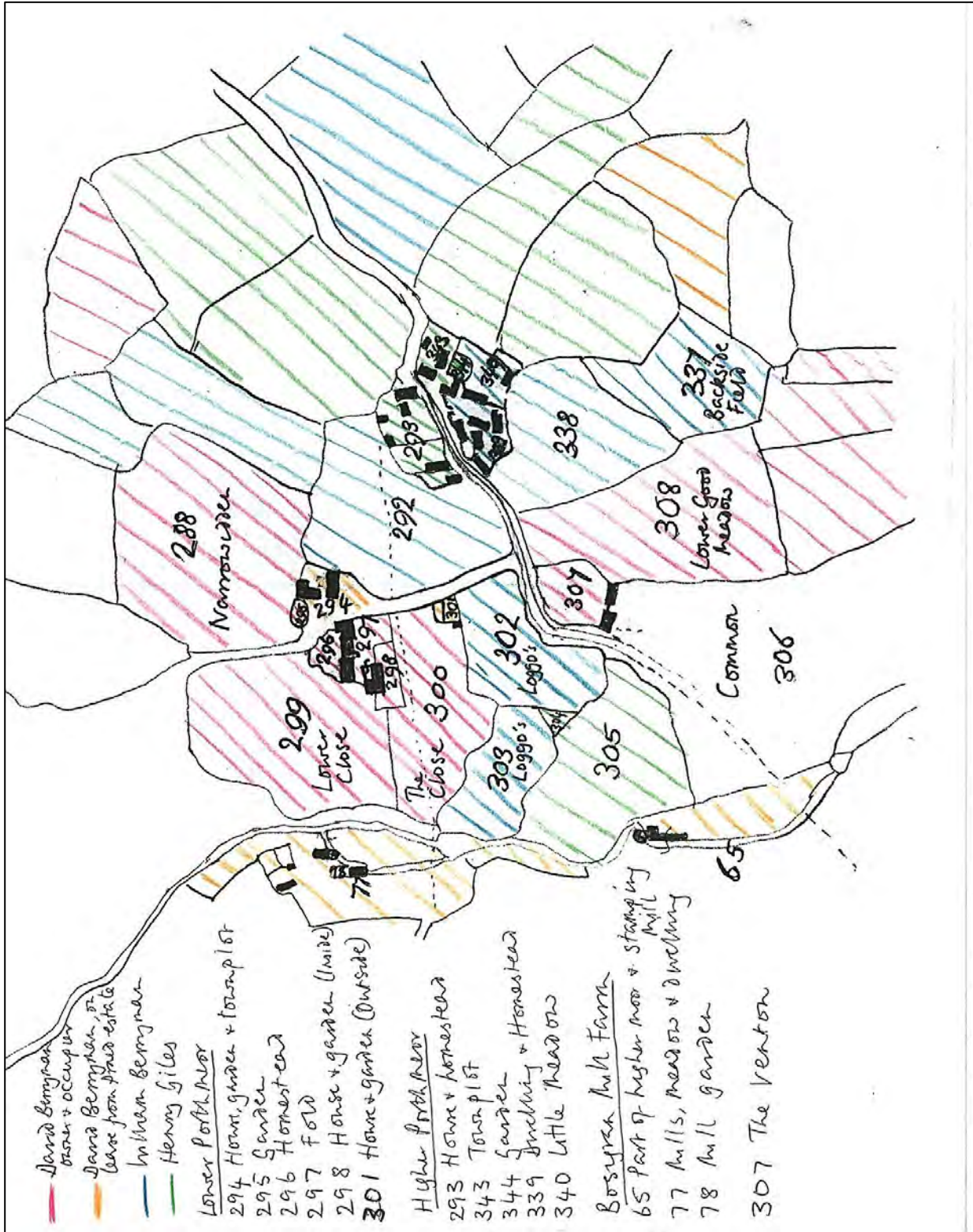
Whether these Berrimans were actually living at Porthmeor, or somewhere else within the parish, we don't know. Jean Nankervis, who has researched the history of the Berrymans of Zennor, chasing 500 members of the family through parish registers and many other sources, has found two main branches in the late 17th century. One was at Porthmeor, and another in Churchtown, Zennor. Later the family dispersed among many other farms in the parish - among them Boswednack, Bosporthennis and Chykembro, all close to Porthmeor. But the likelihood is that apart from Zennor itself (where Thomas Berriman was Churchwarden in 1616, and Nicholas, son of John Bereman was baptised in 1618) the family settled to begin with at Porthmeor, and by the 1680s was already well established there.

The lease from the Trelawneys in 1684, however, is the first positive link between family and property. For a consideration of £60 Jonathan Trelawney of Coldrenick, St German's (a junior branch of the family) leased for 99 years or 3 lives 'lands known as Porthmeor, in the parish of Zennor (part of the manor of Treworles).' The lessee was David Berryman of Zennor, yeoman, and the 3 lives were those of himself, his wife Grace, and his son Arthur.



This Arthur may have been the one from whom the present Porthmeor Berrymans descend, whose wife was also called Grace. Their first child was baptized in 1717 however, which even if he was very young in 1684 (leases often were based on the lives of small children) would still put him starting a family well into his thirties, a late age when most people married in their mid-twenties. There may have been a generation in between, or indeed there may have been more than one family of Berrymans at Porthmeor, then as later. Alternatively the Arthur of 1684 may have died as a child, and a younger brother, born in about 1690, have been given the same name. This certainly happened in Arthur and Grace's own family: of eleven children baptized between 1717 and 1737, six at least died in early childhood, including two Arthurs before the third who lived to raise his own family.

This last Arthur took on the family property at Porthmeor; and was succeeded in turn by his son David. And it is with David that the Lower Porthmeor we see today begins to take shape, because he was almost certainly the builder of the house now called The Farmhouse. With him, too, we arrive in the 19th century, the age of detailed maps, and census returns, and the beginnings of family memory. We can begin to build up a much fuller picture of the place and of the life lived there.



Porthmeor in 1842 from the Zennor Tithing Map, showing ownership of settlements and of fields around

## Porthmeor in 1840

The first 1' Ordnance Survey map for Cornwall, surveyed in 1805, only shows larger buildings, but it still gives a clear impression of the Porthmeor hamlet (which it calls Polmear) at that date. Most of the buildings are on the Higher Porthmeor side of the lane, with a smaller settlement at Lower Porthmeor, consisting of one house below the track, and two small buildings above it. This pattern is confirmed on Greenwood's map of the same scale of 1827, and much clarified in the Tithe Map of 1842. This last is also the first time that we actually have names attached to buildings and land.

David Berryman's house stands out clearly, with its garden (slightly larger than now), and associated buildings. A plot for a further house and garden is marked on the site of Captain's House, although there does not appear to be a house drawn on it. There is only a small building looking more like a pig-house, unless the first house here was much smaller than we imagine. A third house and garden, with its own 'townplot' or small yard, is shown above the track: Grace's house, still lived in. It may perhaps have been an unmarried daughter of David Berryman, called Grace, who was the last to live there, leaving it her name, as others have done to similar humble buildings.

Two further buildings are marked down the lane towards Bosigran, in a field called the Venton (meaning spring), the site of the present house called Arra Venton (and another Landmark let). The building nearest the lane was a Wesleyan chapel, and that next to it is said to have been a smithy. Certainly the 1841 census lists a blacksmith among the inhabitants of Lower Porthmeor.

All of these David Berryman owned, or held on lease, together with most of the fields running down to the stream, and north to the cliff. He also owned Bosporthennis, higher up the hill. At the time of the census in 1841 he was 70

years old, but still had six children living with him at home, of whom the youngest was 15. The farm of Higher Porthmeor, however, he had already handed on to his son William, who was living in the Lower House there with his wife and five children, and one servant, a girl of 15.

David Berryman was thus a substantial farmer in Penwith terms, when the average holding was little more than 12 acres. The 1841 census does not give acreages, and by 1851 David had died, but the land then farmed by his sons at Porthmeor alone amounted to 57 acres.

There are two as yet unanswered questions concerning David Berryman. The first is whether it was he who established the distinct settlement of Lower Porthmeor. The lane is likely to have wound its way around the hamlet since the Middle Ages, but before 1800 it would have been no more than a track, and would have had no divisive effect. It may have been those two 16<sup>th</sup>-century heirs, Richard and William Porthmeor, who established the two settlements; the name Lower Porthmeor was perhaps already attached to Grace's House when David Berryman built his new house near it. Alternatively Grace's House may simply have been an outlying part of Higher Porthmeor, and the lower farm settlement have been a completely new departure.

The need for an additional farmhouse may have arisen from the sale in 1769 of the Upper House at Higher Porthmeor and about 30 acres to the Giles family, who farmed there throughout the 19th century, and continued to own the land until it was sold to the National Trust in 1986. David Berryman's father Arthur lived until 1816, presumably at Higher Porthmeor; and David married in 1798, so would have been wanting to establish his own household soon afterwards - he had three sons by 1803. This, as we have seen, is roughly the date of The Farmhouse, and probably of the earliest part of the Captain's House, as well as the earlier farm buildings. The Farmhouse contains no traces of incorporating an earlier building (except possibly the wing at the back), so unless it stands on the site of one, it does

seem likely that the whole complex of yards and gardens might be contemporary with it. They are laid out on a much more generous scale than the earlier farms, which would indicate a later date.

In this light, it is interesting to look at the names used in the 19<sup>th</sup>-century census returns. The 1841 census, dating from David's lifetime, is the only one to call them Lower and Upper Porthmeor. In 1851 Lower Porthmeor is simply Porthmeor, while Higher Porthmeor is rather eccentrically called Little Porthmeor. Thereafter, until 1881 it is always just Porthmeor, with both hamlets returned as one. It is not inconceivable that a distinction that was important to an older generation, who had created it, was no longer remembered in their shared Berryman ownership, though admittedly today they are still referred to as Lower 'meor and Higher 'meor.

The other question concerning David Berryman is of course how he could afford to build such a handsome house, with its two full storeys, its fine ashlar front, and its quite grand decoration. As has already been remarked, the gulf between this and Grace's House, or whatever 18th-century predecessors there were at Higher Porthmeor, is enormous. Even a farmer on the scale of David Berryman would be hard put to raise the cash for this improvement from his agricultural returns alone. The answer must lie in the valley below Porthmeor, a hint of which is given in the Tithe Map of 1842. This shows that in addition to Porthmeor and Bosporthennis David Berryman held a lease on Mill Farm, Bosigran, on the other side of the Porthmeor stream. This is let to a member of the Eddy family of Bosigran in 1842, but just upstream from the mill itself (which had existed from the 17th century at least, and possibly before) there is marked a Stamping Mill.

Such works, where the ore extracted from tin mines was crushed and washed, are found on many streams in Cornwall. Usually they were attached, formally or informally, to a particular mine. The Bosigran Stamps would probably have worked ore from the Carn Galver Mine, or the Zennor and Morvah Tin Mines as they were then called, but possibly other mines as well. The date of these first

stamps is unknown, but the Cornwall Archaeological Unit in their Bosigran Survey for the National Trust suggest that the remains date from the 1810s, although they do not rule out their reuse from an earlier period. The Carn Galver Mine was flourishing by 1834, although for how long it had been working is not known; but other mines existed near Rosemergy during the 18th century, with stamps on the Porthmoina stream, and the Bosigran Stamps could have been connected with similar workings.

The main period of mining activity began in around 1780. Prosperity of a kind hitherto unknown in Cornwall was suddenly there in its midst. The population expanded, and anyone who could had a share in the industry. Whether the Berryman family had a connection with the stamps apart from leasing the land on which they stood, or whether they were involved in any other mining enterprise, is not known, but it is highly likely. There was a considerable overlap between mining and agriculture, in Cornwall as elsewhere, with the one supporting the other through bad times - Gilbert's *Parochial History of Cornwall* (1838), mentions the presence of tin lodes in Zennor 'tending to the great profit of the farmers and tanners' of the parish. Berryman family tradition certainly maintains a link with the later, much larger stamps in the valley, built on the site of the old grist mill in 1861 and worked as late as 1922. A window looking down the hill from Captain's House is said to have been inserted to allow a watch to be kept on it. It must have been from some such source as this that the money came for the new farmhouse that we now call Captain's House.

Porthmeor also provided homes for miners. In the 1841 census, two householders at Higher Porthmeor are recorded as tin miners. Another, John Newton, is entered as a blind man, and it may have been he who was injured in an accident at the Carn Galver mine in 1840, shortly before it closed. The *Penzance Gazette* recorded that 'a poor man' of this name was injured when a charge exploded in his face 'and melancholy to relate, blew both eyes out, and otherwise injured him.' However, the word 'blindman' has afterwards been crossed out, and it may be that this John

Newton was confused with another, the husband of Jane, a daughter of David Berryman.

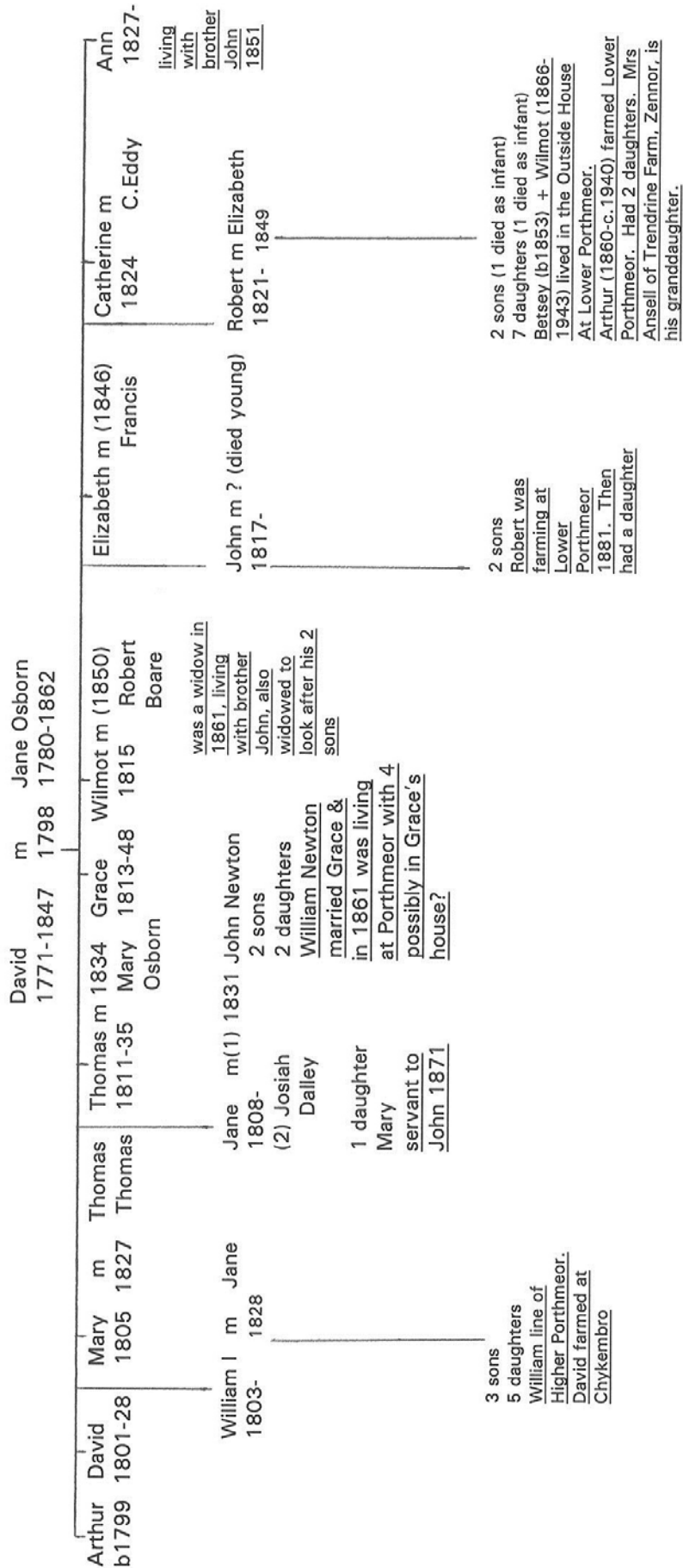
Jane (entered as a Dairywoman) and two daughters are listed in 1841, but her husband, to whom she was married in 1834, is not. Perhaps he had died of his wounds. Certainly by 1851 Jane had remarried, to Josiah Dalley, a tin preparer; while a son by her first marriage, William Newton, aged 19, is now a tin miner as well.

The five sets of 19<sup>th</sup>-century census returns become compulsive reading, as we see families grow up and change, and new generations take over. It is difficult to disentangle the different dwellings, since the lists are not consistent with each other, but the main households stand out clearly.

In 1841, there were three households in Lower Porthmeor: that of David Berryman himself, with his wife and six children; that of Jane Newton, (née Berryman) and two daughters, possibly living in Grace's House; and that of William Richards the Blacksmith, with his wife and two small sons. If he lived Arra Venton, this would confirm the suggestion that Captain's House was being built at this date.

At Higher Porthmeor there are five households: that of William Berryman; that of Joseph Giles, farmer (aged 25, unmarried, with a housekeeper); that of Thomas Hoskins, a tin miner (a wife and three sons); and Richard Grenfell, tin Miner, who from the names of his family was clearly an active Chapel man - his wife is Charity, while two daughters are called Charity and Mercy; and lastly that of John Newton, with a wife and one child. The total population of the hamlet is 40.

Porthmeor Berrymans in the 19<sup>th</sup> century



Compiled from Mrs Nankerris's family tree & Census returns

Ten years later things have changed slightly. David Berryman has died, and in his place at Lower Porthmeor is his son Robert, just married with a wife and one child, and a boy of 16 as servant. He was almost certainly living in the Outside (eventually Captain's) House and is farming 15 acres. His mother, and his brother John (also farming 15 acres) and three of his sisters are living in the Inside House (the Farmhouse). Jane and her new husband Josiah Dalley are still there, perhaps still in Grace's House; and William Richards is also still there, now with five sons.

At Higher Porthmeor the number of households has decreased, although one new house is recorded as being built - presumably by William Berryman (farming 27 acres), who now has eight children to house, as well as his mother-in-law. Joseph Giles has gone, to be replaced by Henry Giles, a man of 51 with a grown-up family (a daughter and two sons), who has moved here from Morvah, and has one maidservant living in. Thomas Hoskins is still there, but has become an agricultural labourer, no doubt because Carn Galver Mine closed down for eleven years. Two of his sons have become tin miners, however, while a third is a cordwainer. The Grenfells and the John Newtons have gone.

In 1861 the hamlet is returned as one, with no distinction between its two parts. However the Giles family, the William Berrymans, the Robert and John Berrymans are all still there. John Berryman is married and widowed, with his sister Wilmot living with him to care for his two children. After his household, one unoccupied house is entered, probably Grace's House. Robert Berryman's wife Elizabeth has just given birth to Arthur, who according to family tradition was born in the lower half of Captain's House, while the upper half was being enlarged. There has been trouble in the William Berryman household, with the birth of an illegitimate child to Mary, the eldest daughter, the father being one of the Giles family.

There are two interesting points about this census: for the first time some of the children are recorded as scholars; and the acreages of farmland have all slightly increased. Since it is unlikely that all four farms would have purchased more

land, this must be because formerly rough land was now being enclosed or brought under cultivation.

The 1871 and 1881 returns show the results of the end of the tin boom, and the beginning of the depression which led to a great fall in population. In 1871 there are still five households in the hamlet as a whole, four of which are Berrymans - William has handed on most of his farm to his son William II, now married with two sons. Ten years later the number has shrunk to four households with the death of the older William. Robert Berryman's is now the largest family, with five children living at home. Elizabeth, the older daughter, is a schoolmistress; Arthur is helping on the farm; and two of the younger children are draper's apprentices. They are living in the enlarged Outside/Captain's House, with its lower end listed as uninhabited. John's son, another Robert, has taken on his father's farm, and is presumably living in The Farmhouse - and it may indeed have been he rather than his uncle Robert who built the new barn and cow-house. The number of inhabitants has shrunk to 24.

## Farming the land

Whatever the tin mines may have contributed to the prosperity of the 19th century, the basis of the Berrymans' lives remained the land. The way in which this was farmed has largely been governed by the pattern of tiny fields, which was already well established by the Roman period. With small accommodations to later practices, such as the occasional medieval 'strip-field', and more recently the removal of walls to create larger fields, these are basically the same today. The crops within them may have changed in small ways, especially in the 18th and 19th centuries, but the methods of cultivation were still recognisably the same even after the Second World War. Wooden ploughs were used until the mid-19th century; the first tractor only arrived at Porthmeor in 1954. Since then, however, the old ways, and most of the old tools, have gone, and will soon be forgotten. William Berryman has been very kind in telling us his memories of the farm; Colonel Hirst in the 1930s recorded and collected many of the old tools and tales, but his Wayside Museum in Zennor closed in 2015.

The 1842 Tithe Map gives a detailed record of the names and uses of individual fields at that time, and of the different divisions of the farming hamlets. A study of the buildings helps to fill in the picture. So, from the presence everywhere of cow-houses, and of barn/granaries, we can see that the agriculture was a mixed one. The Tithe Map gives the impression that few fields were pasture for grazing, however; most are arable, with one or two meadows, for hay, and some rough fields or crofts for 'furze' (gorse), which was harvested for fuel. The Bosigran Survey, though, warns of accepting this too much at face value. The Tithe Assessors were keen to enter as many fields as possible as arable, since their value was greater. Many of the fields listed as such were only very occasionally cultivated; others were regularly put down to crops, but on a rotation system, under which 5 - 10 years of 'ley' or sown grass would follow on 2 - 3 years of cultivation. These ley fields would meanwhile have been grazed.



**The Lower Porthmeor cow houses and fold-yard, 1987**

Matthews certainly records in 1892 that most farms were pastoral, not agricultural. In addition to ley fields, the cattle would have grazed on areas of rough common, and in summer on marginal areas of moor and cliff. In winter they might graze on the stubble of the arable fields. For some of the winter the cattle were brought into the farm - William Berryman says that although it was possible to keep them out all winter, they never thrived on it. At Lower Porthmeor they lived in the long cow-house, and later in the Four-house and the ground floor of the Barn; and in the yard between Captain's House and the Farmhouse, which in 1842 is marked as the Fold.

In the late-19th century, there was a herd of about 30 cows between the three Berryman farms. Most of these were bullocks. In this century the balance at Porthmeor has tipped more towards dairy farming, first of all with a herd of Guernseys, then White Shorthorns, and finally in the last twenty years, Friesians. In 1990, the herd was about 100 cows and 70-80 bullocks.

A variety of crops was grown in what Matthews describes as 'the rich level land between the Zennor hills and the sea.' A form of oat called pillas was the main grain crop from medieval times until the early 20th century. In 1838, Gilbert says both corn and barley were grown in the 'very many fertile plots of ground' among the 'stones and rocks of great bigness' with which the parish was 'comparatively scattered all over.' Earlier there were pulses such as peas and beans, and vetches. Later turnips and potatoes were introduced but did not flourish. In this century vegetable crops became more common, such as broccoli, but more in lower parishes such as Lelant, where there were also orchards.

The threshing (locally thrashing) of the grain was an important occasion. Until the mid-19th century, this would have been done by hand, on a threshing floor. Possibly the flat area supported by an embankment at the top of the field below Lower Porthmeor, (called the Close, while the spring in it is known as the dicky) was once used for this purpose. Then came the age of the threshing machine. The first one, pulled by a traction engine, came from Lelant, and visited the farms in turn. At Porthmeor the threshing was always done at Lower Porthmeor, in the main yard beyond the farm buildings, called the Homestead, or in the Close field. The straw was then gathered into ricks, which stood on the platform at the top of the field.

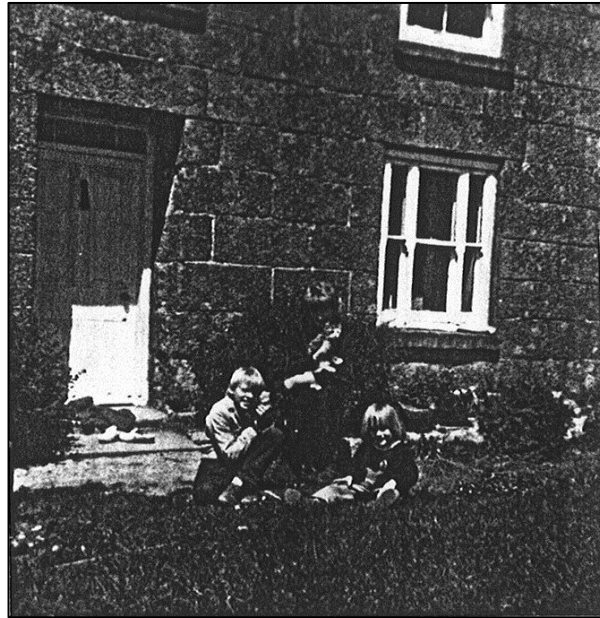
Hay was another important crop. This might be stacked in the Homestead, or in one of the meadows where it was cut. After cutting and drying it was first gathered (or 'saved') into stooks. Then on the following Saturday morning (never any other day whatever the weather) it was collected and built into ricks. It was important that the hay was not too green, or it might overheat and catch fire. William Berryman tells a story of how on one occasion when his father was still alive but housebound, a painter was sketching (something the farmers in this area have become very used to) one of the men building the rick. When it was finished he took it in to show to the old man, who looked at it and said 'If the rick is that colour it's going to catch fire.' Sure enough, soon afterwards, the man came running for a

bucket of water, reporting that smoke was coming from the centre of the rick. After the War the Berrymans acquired a stationary baler, and ricks became a thing of the past.

Every household had its pigs, and pig-houses are always to be found among the farm buildings. There are two at Lower Porthmeor, one below the Barn, and one on the other side of the Homestead. Both open onto the field, to allow the pigs to graze. The further one has its own swill kitchen, where the feed was prepared. The Tithe Map shows that each house also had a garden - in the case of Grace's House on a tiny scale. Here a few vegetables could be grown.

By at least 1900, horses were found on most farms. In earlier centuries the ploughs would have been pulled by draught oxen, but during the 19th century horses became more common. They were certainly a common sight at Porthmeor between the Wars, when William Berryman's father dealt in them. Sheep, however, were not a success, since they ate grass needed for the cattle in spring. A final crop for all these coastal farms would have been fish. Most coves used to have a boat or two pulled up on the shore until not so very long ago; and many a farmer would have had a share in a seine net, for catching pilchard.

By the beginning of the 20th century the main farms at Porthmeor had shrunk to two. The Giles moved to Hertfordshire, and their land was rented by the Berrymans. Higher Porthmeor belonged to William III (and has since been handed down through at least two more). At Lower Porthmeor there was only Arthur. He lived in The Farmhouse, and his sisters Betsy (the schoolteacher) and Wilmot lived in Captain's House. They used to have bed and breakfast visitors there in the 1930s, with an old tin tray for a sign, which was covered with some old flannel drawers when there was no room. Both Wilmot and Captain Arthur died during the Second World War. Lower Porthmeor was inherited by Arthur's two daughters, but in effect the Higher Porthmeor Berrymans took it on as well. A farm which had been worked by the men of three families was now being run by two.



**Berryman children outside The Farmhouse  
in the 1960s.**

William had moved up to near Liskeard in the 1950s, but he returned in 1964, and went to live in the Inside House at Lower Porthmeor. Although horses had by then been replaced by tractors for ploughing, William kept up the tradition, and was for many years Champion Ploughman for the West of England, and once All England Champion. Captain's House was let to the Keating family.

Both houses fell empty at about the same time in the mid 1970s, the William Berrymans moving over the road to Higher Porthmeor. The same was happening all along the coast - the population of Zennor had fallen from just over a thousand in 1841, to 200 after the War. Roofs could be seen falling in all along the coast, and inevitably in their struggle to keep going farmers were increasingly deciding to take down the ancient walls to create larger, more economic fields - the Iron Age field pattern around Chysauster has gone, for example. The National Trust decided that the area should be made a priority, and in 1985 launched an appeal to buy land there under Enterprise Neptune. It was particularly keen to acquire this in the northern parishes where, as always, change has come more slowly than elsewhere, and there was still time to preserve both archaeology and landscape. The hope to

preserve the farming practices upon which both of these depend was strengthened by the designation by the Government in 1987 of a large area of Penwith as an Environmentally Sensitive Area, where farmers were given an annual payment to support the continuation of traditional farming practices. This still left many groups of redundant buildings at threat from decay or insensitive development. Today, (2026) Penwith is designated a National Landscape (formerly AONB) and a Dark Sky Landscape. The moors are designated as a Site of Special Scientific Interest (SSSI) for their unique wildlife, geology, and cultural heritage.



In 1986, the National Trust bought the old Giles Farm at Higher Porthmeor and, the Upper House with 70 acres. In 1987, with help from Landmark, it bought the hamlet of Lower Porthmeor with 6 acres of land. The buildings were then leased to Landmark, which restored both houses. The Captain's (or Outside) House was initially rented back to the National Trust as a home for the Coastal Warden, and became a Landmark let in 1995. The National Trust now owns significant areas of

Penwith, both built sites of significance and large stretches of coastline, with covenants over much else. Bosigran is the NT's largest acquisition in the parish of Zennor, together with most of Rosemergy.

Shortly after we had taken on Lower Porthmeor, the house called Arra Venton came up for sale, and since in its form and colour it had become an eyesore on the hillside, we bought it, to bring it back to looking in keeping with its neighbours.

## Literary & artistic associations

In the early 20<sup>th</sup> century, and both sides of World War One, this part of Cornwall became a nexus for writers and artists, with strong associations with the eventual Bloomsbury set. Zennor at the heart of another such grouping.

The writer Virginia Woolf spent the summer of 1910 at Lower Porthmeor, lodging with the Berryman family, although in which of the two houses is uncertain. Virginia Woolf had spent happy childhood holidays in St Ives with the rest of her family – her parents Leslie and Julia Stephens owned Talland House above Porthminster Beach. After Julia's death in 1895, this house was let out, but St Ives and Cornwall were always a place of recuperation for Virginia, who suffered recurrent bouts of depression and nervous exhaustion. It was to recover from one such that she came to stay at Lower Porthmeor, aged 28 and not yet married, in 1910. With Jean Thomas, her carer-companion, she went for long walks over the moors, writing about them to her brother-in-law, Clive Bell. Her letters provide vivid vignettes of life here at the time:

We walked till 5 in the afternoon, through a perfect September day, along little paths in the turf, looking into the deep sea. We tried for tea at this old farmhouse, and were told we could sleep as well. As the one lodging at Zennor was filled 10 times over, virgins sleeping with matrons in one great feather bed, we were much relieved.

- Virginia Woolf, *The Collected Letters*, Vol. I, eds. Nigel Nicolson & Joanne Trautman (1985), Virginia Stephen to Clive Bell, 4 Sept 1910 no. 534.

...it seems likely that two large steamers are going to collide in three minutes. The pigs and the geese are making the farmer, a stout man, with a bad leg, hobble across the yard. From what Mrs Berryman says, the great dispute, which parts husband and wife, is whether the geese shall feed on the fields or the moor.... It appears that the geese, in taking flight from the tail of the wain, grazed three inches of skin off the smallest brat's leg. Mrs B., bringing in jam tarts, and apple pasty, and cream for tea, remarks that someone's always in trouble.'

- VS to CB, *ibid.*

We have been walking among the most remarkable moors, among barrows, British villages, stone maidens and beehive huts. If it weren't for the excitability of the geese, this would be the place I should like to live.

- VS to CB, *ibid.*

Virginia Woolf's later novels *The Voyage Out* (1915), *To the Lighthouse* (1927), *The Waves* (1937) and *Between the Acts* (1941) all draw directly from her memories of Cornwall. Cornwall 'remained in her memory as summer days of immaculate happiness. *To the Lighthouse* is bathed in the light of this happiness, and, whenever she returned to Cornwall, she recaptured some of it.' (Leonard Woolf, *Beginning Again*, 1964, p. 166).



**Vanessa and Virginia Stephens, playing cricket in Talland House, St Ives, c.1890.**

From *Charleston Magazine*, Spring/Summer 1999.

*Martin Gayford*

## STILL WINDING AND WONDERFUL: ZENNOR'S LITERARY AND ARTISTIC CONNECTIONS

'The corner of a corner of England is infinite and can never be exhausted'. A few years ago Patrick Wright took that observation by Hilaire Belloc as the epigraph of his book *The Village That Died For England*. That brilliant study took one place, Tyneham in Dorset, and investigated the ripples of ideology and social history and the writers, thinkers and cranks that eddied around it throughout the twentieth century. A similar work could be easily be written about Zennor, a tiny village on the coast of Cornwall a few miles past St Ives, and the surrounding area where an almost embarrassingly large number of major writers and artist have lived and stayed, Virginia Woolf and D.H. Lawrence among them. But there is one big difference between the two places.

Tyneham was brutally invaded by the modern age when it was requisitioned for tank training and artillery practice during the Second World War – and the grip of the army has never loosened. Zennor, on the other hand, is much the same as it was when Virginia Woolf first saw it as a child in the late nineteenth century. Little has been built, little has been altered. Tourism has intensified – the grey stone watermill is now a museum of rural history, with an adjacent car park. But every overwhelming feature of modern life is kept in check by the fact that there are no usable beaches nearby – or none that can be reached without a stiff walk, followed by an alarming scramble down a crumbling cliff-path.

The preservation of Zennor is undoubtedly a little artificial – it owes a great deal to the campaigning of Patrick Heron, the painter who lived in the big house at the top of the hill. If it had not been for his protests, the road from St Ives to Land's End would long ago have been straightened out and duel-carriageised, blasting through the headlands and zooming over the valleys on concrete stilts – in which case, it would have been goodbye to most of the peace and beauty of Zennor. But it is impossible not to applaud that artificial preservation, because this is an extraordinary place – so spectacular, it is hard to believe it's in England. (Of course, many would say it's not, it's in Cornwall, a different, Celtic place.)

The sea – in fact, the Atlantic ocean – shimmers and glitters, a constantly shifting range of blues, turquoises and greens (when it is not completely obscured by a sea-mist, that is). The fields are divided by ancient, perhaps Bronze Age, stone walls, forming an 'abstract calligraphic skein' as Patrick Heron put it, over the land. Everywhere on the moor and the fields – where farmers have not removed them in a vandalistic attempt to increase productivity – there are massive granite boulders. In some cases, these may be vestiges of prehistoric standing stones, circles and dolmens (such as the semi-collapsed but still surviving Zennor Quoit on the moor). This part of Cornwall is thickly scattered with the remains of pre-Roman settlement. It is

THE CHARLESTON MAGAZINE



National Portrait Gallery

*D.H. Lawrence, by Nickolas Muray, 1923.*

exhilaratingly beautiful, but also harsh. Often a wind blows as cold and sharp as a scythe, neatly slicing off the tops of the trees when they protrude over the wall of Patrick Heron's garden, as if they had been sculpted by the topiarist equivalent of a new-wave barber. The sea can be whipped up into towers and pinnacles of icy spray (or alternatively, according to John Betjeman, become covered with phosphorescence on a calm summer's night).

As you take that road, still winding and wonderful, from St Ives, you travel over a series of massive granite shoulders, the buttresses of the central upland of the West Penwith Peninsular. Above you on the left are the moors, punctuated occasionally by the tower of an abandoned tin mine. On your right, an area of farm land a few fields wide, then a further plunge down to the sea. Then just before you get to Zennor Church Town – as they say in Cornwall – sheltering in a valley, there are a few scattered buildings, not even a hamlet: a cottage on the moor, a house planted like a look-out post above the fields and sea, and a farm with a couple of attached cottages.

In those dwellings have lived, among others, two important painters and three world-famous writers. (Admittedly, one of the latter hated her stay.)

First to visit was Virginia Woolf. She would have walked there as a child on family holidays in St Ives (a regular destination of the Stephen family until 1894). 'Why do I always connect you with Zennor?' she wrote to Saxon Sydney-Turner in 1921. (Had they walked over from Carbis Bay in 1905?) She continued to feel the call of Cornwall. When walking in Regent's Park on Christmas Eve, 1909, she wrote to Vanessa Bell, 'it suddenly struck me how absurd it was to stay in London, with Cornwall going on all the time'. Acting on her words she caught a train to Lelant where she stayed alone for four days. The next year, her doctor advised complete rest at a nursing home in Twickenham to soothe her nervous condition. To complete the cure, the proprietor, Miss Jean Thomas, accompanied her on a walking tour of Cornwall, and they ended up staying with a Mrs Berryman on her farm near Zennor (as I ended up staying with a different Mrs Berryman 87 years later).

'Yesterday' she wrote to Clive Bell, 'we walked till five in the afternoon, through a perfect September day, along little paths in the turf, looking into deep sea.' (That is what one does at Zennor.) 'With regard to happiness – Walking about here, with Jean for a companion, I felt a great mastery over the world,' the natural effect of high places and clear air. 'If it weren't for the excitability of geese at night,' she concluded, 'this would be the place I would like to live in.' But despite the geese, she came back. Before that, however, D.H. Lawrence arrived.

At the end of 1915, he was in search of a refuge, from the First World War and modern civilisation. In November Scotland Yard, acting on a little-used obscenity law, impounded all copies of his novel, *The Rainbow*, understandably causing Lawrence to lose patience with England. For a while, he toyed with the idea of emigrating to Florida. This idea was linked in his mind with the scheme

STILL WINDING AND WONDERFUL: ZENNOR

of a utopian community of like-minded companions, which he called Rananim, and which he situated in various remote parts of the world as his fantasy shifted. It was an updated version of the city on a hill which the first puritan settlements in New England had hoped to establish.

December 11, 1915 however, was the deadline for war-service registration, and, though the tubercular Lawrence was unlikely to be called up, he found the prospect of the medical examination, naked and in public, profoundly unsettling. After queuing up for a while, he went home; having failed to register, obtaining a passport was an impossibility. The New Year found Lawrence and his wife Frieda staying at the Cornish house of the novelist, J.D. Beresford, and looking for a cottage of their own to rent – preferably a very cheap one, as they were very poor.

By February, the Lawrences had found Tregerthen, near Zennor. ‘When we came over the shoulder of the wild hill, above the sea,’ Lawrence wrote in suitably Biblical terms to Lady Ottoline Morrell, ‘I felt we were coming into the Promised Land. I know there will be a new heaven and a new earth take place now: we have triumphed. I feel like a Columbus who can see a shadowy America before him: only this isn’t merely territory, it is a new continent of the soul. We will all be happy yet, doing a new constructive work, sailing into a new epoch. Don’t let us be troubled.’

He commented, as any visitor to Zennor must, on the expanse of the ocean, and the changeability of the weather. ‘The snow falls and the sheep and lambs are disconsolate, the sea disappears. Then all is leaden and horrible. Then, in an hour, the snow is gone again, and the earth is so warm.’ To Katherine Mansfield and John Middleton Murry, comfortably and happily ensconced in the south of France, he wrote, encouraging them to transfer to Cornwall in April: ‘Primroses and violets are out, and the gorse is lovely. At Zennor, one sees infinite Atlantic, all peacock-mingled colours, and the gorse is sunshine itself, already. But this cold wind is deadly.’

The idea of the utopian community had



Adelphi Studios: Emery Walker Collection, National Portrait Gallery

*Katherine Mansfield*

clearly taken hold of Lawrence again, and this was to be the spot for it. Its inhabitants, apart from the Lawrences, were to be the Murrys, and perhaps Lawrence’s young friend, Peter Heseltine, better known later on as a composer, under the name Peter Warlock. Over the next few months, this plan collapsed in tragi-farcical disaster. But Lawrence stayed on for a year and a half, writing *Women in Love* at Tregerthen. Nor did he yet relinquish the ideal of Rananim.

It all started optimistically enough. At the beginning of March, the Lawrences were staying at the Tinner’s Arms, the low, stone inn beside the church. Based there, they discovered an ideal, tiny cottage at Higher Tregerthen, in the fields towards St Ives. Adjoining it was another, larger cottage, suitable for Mansfield and Murry. ‘It is only twelve strides from our house to yours: we can talk from the windows, and besides us, only the gorse, and the fields, and the lambs skipping and hopping like anything, and seagulls fighting with the ravens, and sometimes a fox, and a ship on the sea.’

Lawrence and Frieda set to and

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Photograph by Patrick Evans

*Eagles Nest from the garden*

decorated their cottage. 'I have made a dresser, which is painted royal blue, and the walls are painted pale pink. Here, doing one's own things, in this queer outlandish Celtic country, I feel fundamentally happy and free.' The effect, perhaps, with bright colours and, on the dresser, Victorian lustre-ware – some 'lovely purple-pink' pieces were bought in Penzance – plus Frieda's German pottery, would not have been unlike that of two other rural refuges for artistic drop-outs from the war in preparation about this time, Charleston, and Tidmarsh Mill, home of Dora Carrington and Lytton Strachey. Indeed, Carrington's ideas about interior decoration were probably not that far from those of her suitor and fellow-student, Mark Gertler, who was in turn a good friend of Lawrence's.

Later there was a garden, of which Lawrence was proud, until the lambs, about which he generally waxed lyrical, ate his produce, then the weather flattened it all. He continued an earlier interest in embroidery. 'I have just made a pouffe – a sort of floor

cushion, square and like a mound – and on the back, all around, I have stitched a green field, then house, barns, haystacks, animals, man and woman, all in bright-coloured stuffs – it all looks very jolly and bright.' Katherine Mansfield, when she arrived, commented caustically on Lawrence's needlework, but then she commented caustically on everything, including the epic landscape. ('It is not really a nice place. It is so full of huge stones'.) The trouble was that, while the bricks and mortar of the rural retreat, the setting and the remoteness, were all what Ranim required, Lawrence was extraordinarily ill-equipped for life with anyone else, his wife included.

'You may laugh as much as you like at this letter, darling, all about the COMMUNITY,' Mansfield wrote to S.S. Kotliansky, in May, only a month after the Murrays had arrived. 'It is rather funny. Frieda and I do not speak to each other at present. Lawrence is about one million miles away, although he lives next door. He and I still speak but his very

STILL WINDING AND WONDERFUL: ZENNOR



Photograph by Patrick Heon

*View from the kitchen window at Eagles Nest.*



Photograph Bob Berry

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*Bryan Frynter; Landscape With Hill Cultivation, Zen nor, Cornwall, gouache 1952.*

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voice is faint, like a voice coming over a telephone wire’.

‘I don’t know’, she went on, ‘which disgusts me worse – when they are very loving and playing with each other or when they are roaring at each other and he is pulling out Frieda’s hair and Frieda is running up and down the road and screaming for Jack (Murry) to save her...Lawrence isn’t healthy any more; he has gone a little bit out of his mind. If he is contradicted about anything he gets into a frenzy, quite beside himself and it goes on until he is so exhausted that he cannot stand and has to go to bed and stay there until he has recovered. And whatever your disagreement is about he says it is because you have gone wrong in your sex and belong to an obscene spirit.’

Naturally, Mansfield resented this. Another complicating factor was that Lawrence fell in love with Middleton Murry, who did not reciprocate this feeling, though they swore blood brotherhood. Finally Murry, with some embarrassment – as he avidly admired Lawrence’s writing and thought – made a declaration of a kind that utterly failed to satisfy. ‘I hate your love, I hate it,’ Lawrence responded, ‘you’re an obscene bug sucking my life away.’

The Murrys moved to another part of the coast, Lawrence explaining to his correspondents that the Murrys, unfortunately ‘do not like the country – it is too rocky and bleak for them’. The whole episode was transformed into literature, forming the kernel of *Women in Love* – the first draft of which was begun almost as soon as the Murrys arrived. Originally, Gerald was closer to Murry than he finally became, but in the published work Gudrun remained a recognisable portrait of Katherine Mansfield.

Lawrence transferred his – presumably platonic – affections first to a son of the farmer from whom they rented the cottage – whom he encouraged to set off for Rananim – then to Cecil Gray, a friend of Peter Heseltine’s who moved to a tinner’s cottage the following year. (Lawrence suddenly appeared at his door demanding to know ‘How long have you been

in love with me?’) Gray in turn had a brief affair with Frieda, who complained of Lawrence’s near impotence. No doubt such problems are normal in utopian communities and among artistic refugees; they were certainly not unknown at Charleston and Tidmarsh Mill.

Another, larger, cloud hung over Higher Tregerthen: the World War. ‘It is beautiful,’ Lawrence wrote just before Christmas, 1916, ‘wild and open: the big open space of the sky over the sea, blue and western-clear is my only consolation: though when I see the inflated sausage of an airship edging through the blue heavens, and the submarine destroyers nosing like swimming rats up the coast, I feel the universal sickness.’ There was, for one thing, the matter of Lawrence’s registration for war service. He had to report to Bodmin for a physical examination which he found intensely degrading – ‘the ignominy is horrible, the humiliation’. Later, in the ‘Nightmare’ section of *Kangaroo*, which contains a lightly fictionalised version of the Cornish period, Lawrence described how the other men jeered at ‘Somers’ – i.e. Lawrence’s – ‘delicate legs’.

He was declared exempt. But a second, blackly comic threat was developing. It was known locally that Frieda was German, and it was therefore concluded that she was a spy – a conclusion reinforced by her maintaining a subscription to the *Berliner Tageblatt*, corresponding with her von Richtoven relations *via* Switzerland, and the fact that the Red Baron was a member of her family. In the heated atmosphere of 1916 and 1917, it looked pretty conclusive to opinion in the neighbourhood. Lawrence was believed to be German too, impersonating an Englishman. Cecil Gray, who neglected to black out his cottage windows, was thought to be the leader of the ring.

A local vicar’s daughter was especially suspicious; but so were the authorities. A policeman often crouched beneath the Lawrence’s window, ear cocked for suspicious conversation. They were stopped and searched, Lawrence’s papers repeatedly checked, the

STILL WINDING AND WONDERFUL: ZENNOR

cottage ransacked. In August 1917, twelve armed men burst in, interrogated all three suspects and searched the cottage. In October, an army officer, the sergeant of the St Ives police and two detectives arrived, and the Lawrences were informed that they were to be expelled from Cornwall. The year before, just after they moved in, Lawrence had written to Bertrand Russell, that 'under the wild hills with their great grey boulders of granite, and above the big sea, it is beautiful enough and free enough. I think we can be obscure, and happy, like creatures in a cave'. That had proved to be a mistake.

But the Lawrences still had the tenancy of the cottage. For a while Virginia Woolf considered taking it up. In her diary for January, 1918, she reports 'We're in treaty with D.H. Lawrence for his house at Zennor. It's very distant and improbable at present though sufficiently tempting to make me think of that sea and those cliffs several times a day.' By March 1919, that had turned into a probability. 'We rather think, if we take them, of moving all our furniture and books down there from Asheham... Katherine [Mansfield, presumably by now recovered from her experience] says it's the most divine place in the world.'

In fact, as she reported to Janet Case in May, the Woolfs did take the cottages, for £15 a year. But not for long; in July they bought Monk's House, and Virginia Woolf wrote to Vanessa Bell that they would have to give up Tregerthen (though James and Alix Strachey would move in for August). Before that happened, she wrote the following month to her old friend Ka Cox, by then married to Mark Arnold-Forster: 'the brilliant, if wild, idea has come into my head, that we might arrange to share the three with you and Will.' (That is, the two cottages once occupied by the Lawrences plus the larger one in which the Murrays had stayed.) But this rerun of the Zennor community was not destined to happen.

Instead the Arnold-Forsters bought the big house above the cottages, Eagles Nest. There the Woolfs visited them in March, 1921. 'Ka and Will are the great people of the

neighbourhood', she wrote to Vanessa Bell. In that respect, and others, their position was a contrast to that of the Lawrences. Rather than a tiny cottage they had 'a large solid house, views from every window, water closets, bathrooms, studios, divine gardens, all scattered with Logan rocks' – that is, balanced so delicately that they move when touched. (In fact there is only one in the garden today.) However, large though Eagles Nest was, it was not warm. 'The cold! the cold!' Virginia Woolf wrote on another visit at Christmas 1926, to Vita Sackville-West: 'I sleep in stockings, vest, a pair of wool drawers (I had to buy in Penzance) a jacket. The bed gets cold on the right if one sleeps on the left.'

The following year, the Arnold-Forsters lent the house for five months to some friends of their's – a Yorkshire industrialist and Fabian named Tom Heron and his family. Heron had been in West Cornwall for a while, running a silk manufacturing firm owned by a friend. The landscape of the area made a tremendous impact on one of the Heron sons, the seven year old Patrick, who spent his eighth birthday at Eagles Nest. He drew the area, the garden, the sea, the rocks, 'all the time', as he remembered seventy years later. It was a shock when his father's friend suddenly wound up the silk factory, and the Herons moved to Welwyn Garden City.

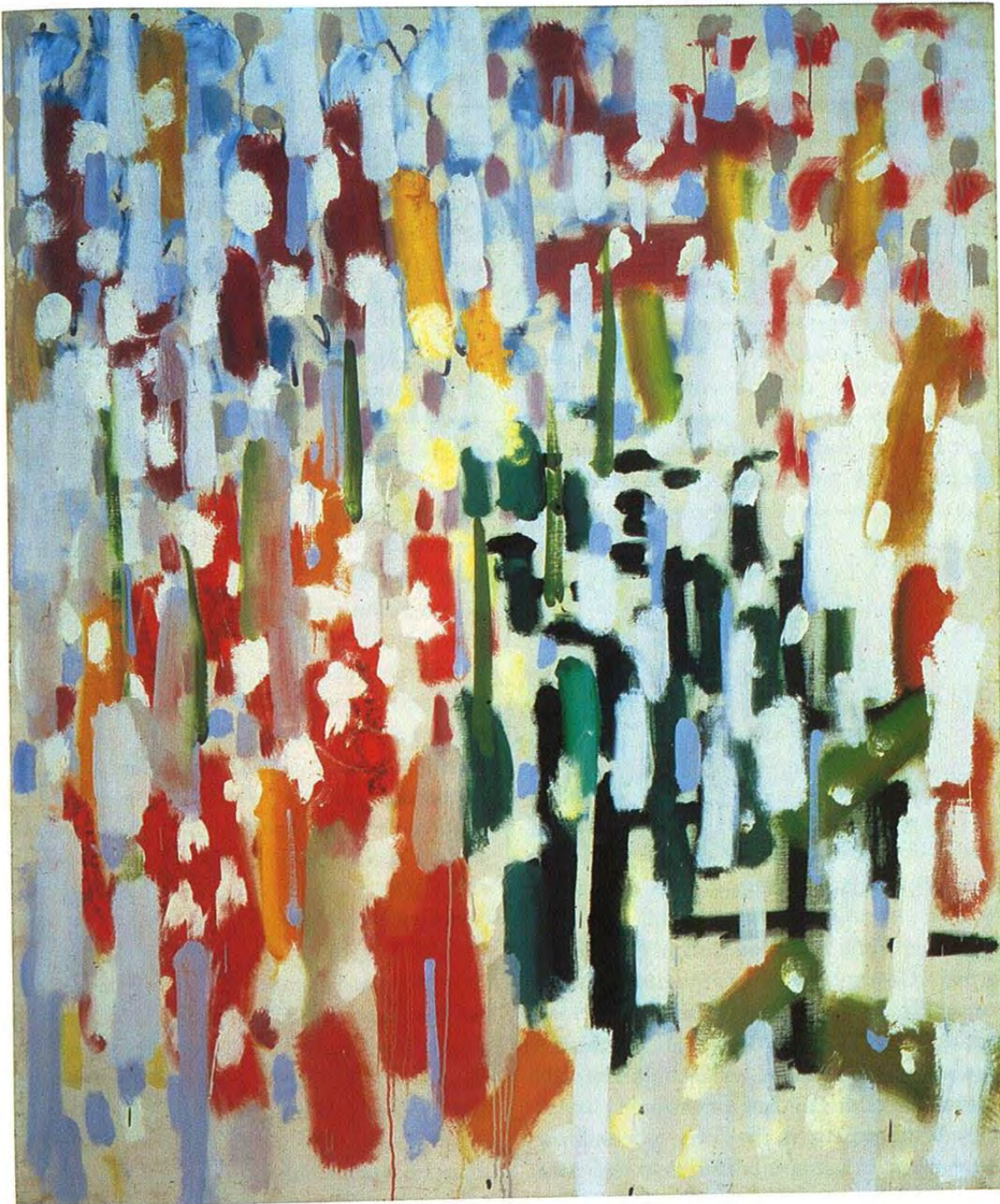
Patrick Heron never forgot Cornwall. He came back during the war, as a conscientious objector, to work at the Leach Pottery in St Ives. By that time, a group of modernist artists were assembling in the area, drawn by the remarkable landscape – Ben Nicholson, Barbara Hepworth, the constructivist Naum Gabo. After the war, Heron and his wife Delia regularly spent the summer in St Ives, but when they eventually moved to Cornwall permanently, it was not to St Ives but to Eagles Nest, which they bought in 1955 from Mark Arnold-Forster, son of Ka and Will.

And so Eagles Nest became an outpost of advanced abstract painting. Heron in fact 'went abstract' about the time of the move, and his painting echoed, though it did not represent, the garden and landscape around.



Private Collection. © Patrick Heron/DACS All rights reserved 1999

*Patrick Heron, Autumn Garden: 1956*



Tate Gallery. Purchased 1980. © Patrick Heron/DACS. All rights reserved 1999

*Patrick Heron, Azalea Garden: May 1956*

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Shortly after the move, in April, 1956 – like so many people, the Herons arrived in Cornwall in spring – Heron produced a couple of loose, ‘tachist’ abstractions he named ‘Camellia Garden’ and ‘Azalea Garden’, the camellias and azaleas being in flower at that time. Soon the Herons set about completing the work of the Arnold-Forsters in the garden. Delia, Heron later wrote, ‘was the tree-surgeon and gardener in chief; I was the hedge-clipper and tracer of paths (since everything was overgrown)’.

The result is horticulturally extraordinary – delicate and exotic plants coexisting with rugged granite masses that litter the site, and sheltered – just – from the savage winds and storms that destroyed



Bryan Wynter, Zennor, Cornwall

Lawrence’s little vegetable garden. Eagles Nest is, like Giverny, an artist’s garden that has seeped into that artist’s work; much of Heron’s work of the ’80s and ’90s, is explicitly, though abstractly, garden-based. And both art and garden reflect the landscape outside.

When staying in the house as a child, he remembered: ‘I first noticed that the gales shaped the trees and bushes at Eagles Nest into almost the identical stream-lined silhouettes that the rocks possessed. Certainly, what has always fascinated me is the closeness of the relationship between the rhythmic shapes of the garden and those of the wild Zennor landscape surrounding it. The calligraphy of the Bronze Age walls of the tiny fields 250 feet below the house is reflected in the garden as are the silhouettes and profiles of the

rocks, seen against the sky that litter the moorland crests. All the garden’s shapes seem to be a formal restatement in microcosm of the utterly informal patterns of this Celtic coastal landscape.’

Within, the Herons transformed the sombre Edwardian interiors of Eagles Nest into brilliantly white, modernist ones in the style of Barbara Hepworth’s studio, and Kettle’s Yard in Cambridge (a style very different from the early modernist colourfulness of the Lawrences and Charleston, a style that ultimately derives from Piet Mondrian, one modernist who turned down the suggestion that he move to Cornwall). In a distant way, some of this echoes the attempts of the Lawrences to create a cell of modernist life on this exposed coast. The artists of St Ives only constituted a community to a limited extent – or at least, like most real communities, it was riven by furious disagreements. But Nicholson and Hepworth would come to Eagles Nest, and the painter Bryan Wynter came to live as Heron’s closest neighbour at Carn Cottage, about as much above Eagles Nest on the moor as Higher Tregetherthen is below. One year Francis Bacon, during an incongruous spell in Cornwall, came to Christmas lunch – as Virginia Woolf had decades before – and insisted on setting light to the pudding.

Most visitors were drawn to Zennor by the landscape. What Patrick Heron had to say about it is not unlike the conclusions of Virginia Woolf in 1921: ‘The truth is we can’t do anything but watch the sea – especially as the seals may bob up, first looking like logs, then like naked old men, with tridents for tails. I’m not sure though that the beauty of the country isn’t in its granite hills and walls, and houses, and not its sea... Of course it’s very pleasant to come upon the sea spread out at the bottom, blue, with purple stains on it, and here a sailing ship, there a red steamer. But last night walking through Zennor the granite was – amazing, is the only thing to say I suppose, half transparent, with the green hill behind it, and the granite road curving up and up.’

## Restoration of the buildings – 1988-95

Note: the major upgrade in the 2020s has meant a significant reorganisation of the rooms in Captain's House, but this earlier account is left intact as written here, for the historical record.

When Landmark took on Lower Porthmeor, both houses were derelict, and the farm buildings were also in a poor state, after severe gales a few years before. Slate roofs had been replaced with corrugated iron or tin, sections of which had blown off. Squatters had been living in The Farmhouse, decorating its walls with mystical drawings.

Work began with the roofs. These had traditional Cornish scantle slates - small slates in courses of diminishing size set in a bed of lime mortar; and they have been renewed in the same manner, with slates from the Delabole quarry, near Camelford in North Cornwall. The roof structure of The Farmhouse had to be completely renewed too.

The walls of **The Farmhouse** needed some repair, especially in the north-west wing, where the core was very loose, and the brick chimney needed rebuilding. Otherwise, all that was needed was complete repointing, all done with lime mortar. Time will reveal how effective this is at keeping the building dry - one of the properties of lime is that it draws the moisture out of the wall and allows it to evaporate, rather than trapping it as concrete does. Houses pointed entirely with lime, before the cement age began in the mid-19th century, were thus probably much drier than we imagine.<sup>1</sup>

The upstairs windows, and those on the staircase and in the kitchen were repaired, but that in the sitting room had vanished, so a new one had to be made. The front door frame was repaired, but the door itself is new. The back door into the yard

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<sup>1</sup> See the following section on the works done in the 2020s for the latest chapter on this.

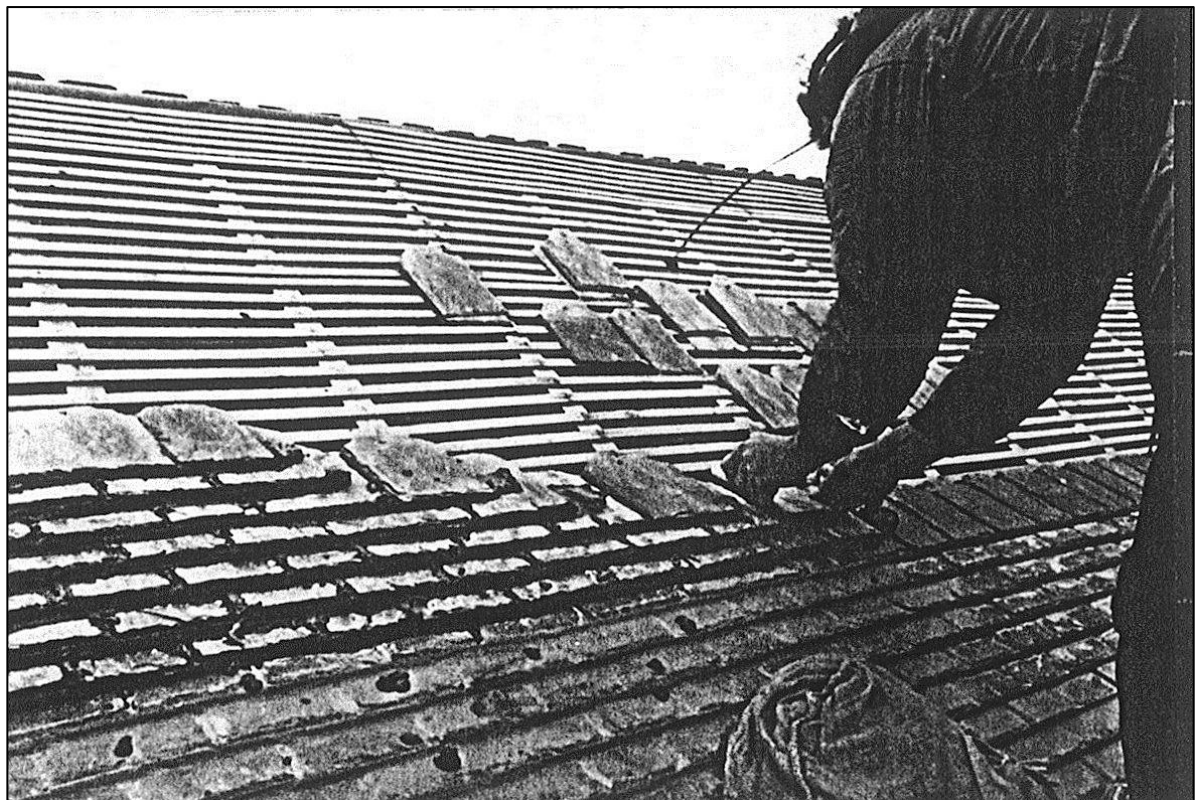
had been blocked up, but the frame was still there. Another door led from the kitchen into the dairy/ bakehouse; in order to make room for cupboards, we decided to block this one, and unblock the other. The back door itself is new, as are the windows in the dairy, storeroom above, and shed. Except in the dairy, these copy what was there before.

The ceiling joists in the kitchen were repaired, and their ends strengthened. The floorboards throughout the house are mostly new, although whenever possible the old ones were retained. The granite floor in the hall is original, but that in the kitchen is new, replacing concrete.

The great granite fireplace in the kitchen was slightly tamed with a new wooden surround. The sitting room fireplace is entirely new, replacing a modern stone one. The stairs were repaired, but new balusters had to be made, the old ones having been burned for firewood by squatters.

When we first took on Porthmeor, the bedroom upstairs still had its pretty fireplace, but this later disappeared. An exact copy was made from photographs. The room never had a cornice, but it had the little dado rail, which has been renewed. The bathroom partition is as it was when we came - this room was formerly a bedroom.

The repair of **Captain's House** has had to be equally thorough, and since the masonry of the walls was of a less high quality, quite a lot of grouting and filling had to be done, as well as repointing. It was decided to leave the lower end as the half-house, half-stable that it had become, with new windows to make the front more presentable, but the interior left as a shell. The projecting fireplace was noted as very good.



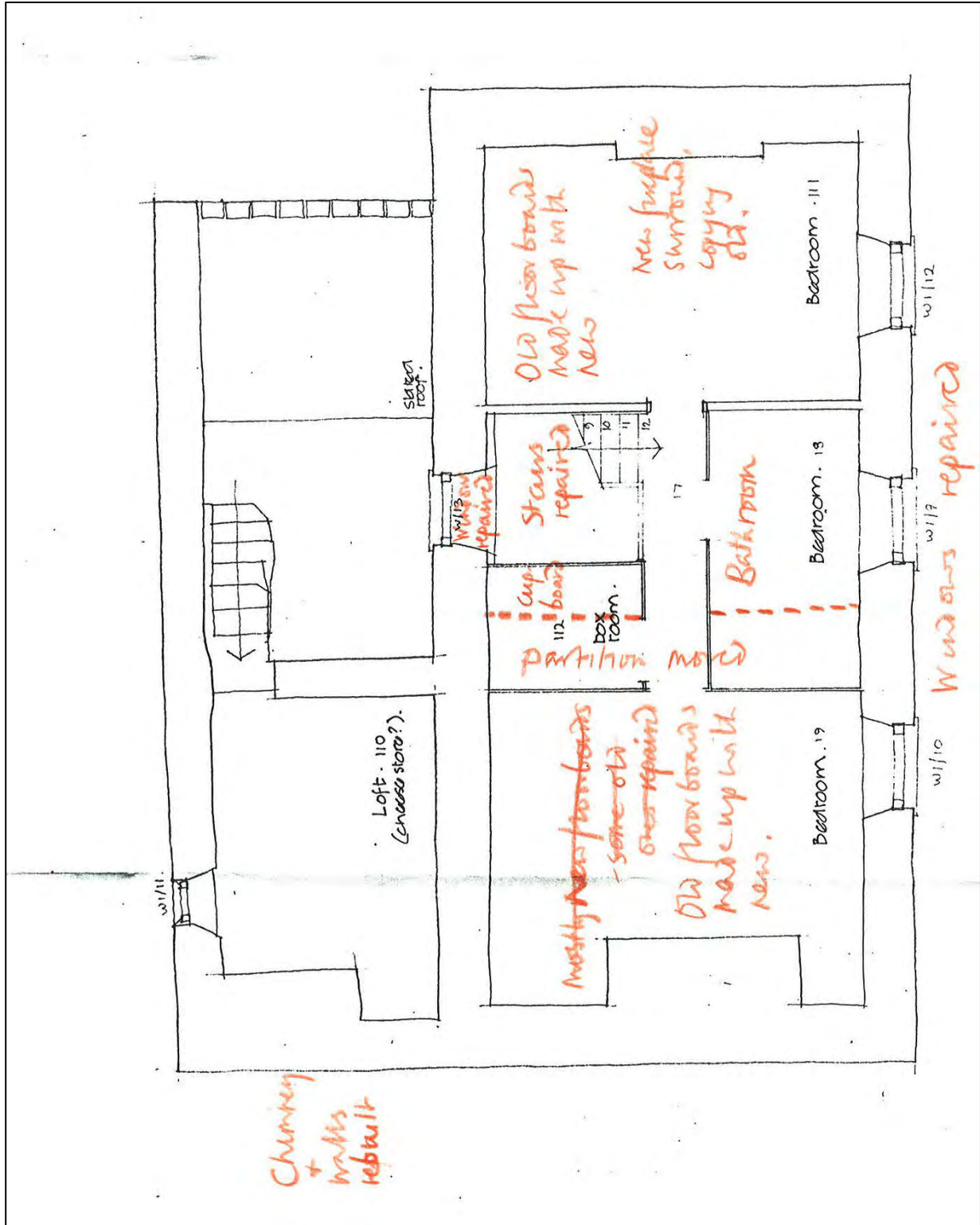
**Scantle slate roofing – small slates set in lime mortar**



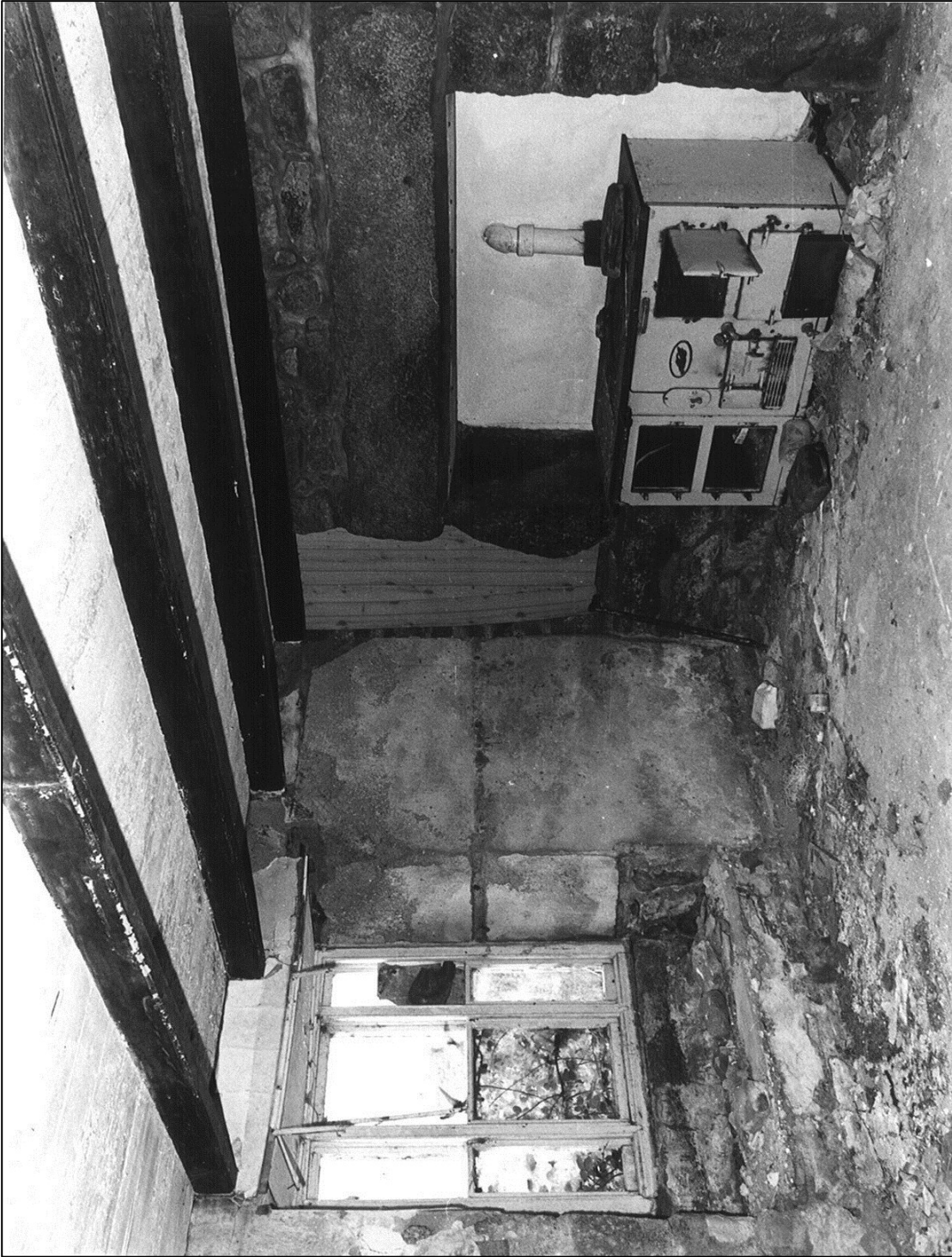
**The dairy (or bakehouse?) needed some rebuilding. The ground floor window had been enlarged, with a modern frame; but has now been made smaller again**

The barn has been given a new roof and doors, but otherwise the farm buildings were simply made sound and left as they were. A crumbling carthouse (and the machinery that had solidified inside it) was removed from the end of The Farmhouse. Grace's House and the building next to it are not part of our property, and still belong to the Berrymans. The walls and enclosures that divide the settlement and give some shelter from the terrific winds, are as important as the buildings themselves, and give the farm much of its character as an extension of the geological landscape. Their repair and maintenance is an ongoing exercise. Where buildings have become derelict, such as the pig-house, no attempt will be made to reverse this, although the effects of time will not be given free reign in future. This extraordinary and beautiful place is still part of the serviceable architecture of Penwith, and must not be encouraged to become a just another layer in its archaeology.





The Farmhouse, first floor – notes of the 1990s work



**The Farmhouse: the window was repaired; the ceiling joists strengthened.**



**The Farmhouse: the great stone fireplace lintel is characteristic of many Penwith houses; this one has now been tamed with a wooden surround. The door into the dairy (more recently scullery)**



**The Farmhouse: the door into the yard had been blocked but its frame was still intact. All that was needed was a new door. The wooden partition dates from the building of the house c. 1800. The floor once made up of old mill-stones, on top of which concrete had been laid.**



**A swallow nested in the kitchen in 1988**



**The Farmhouse: the hall and staircase in 1988.**



**The Farmhouse: the sitting room in 1988, and as it was before the 2025 refurbishment.**



**The Farmhouse east bedroom, in the 1980s and after restoration. Mr and Mrs David Berryman attained a level of comfort in their new house undreamed of by their forebears, and probably even their parents.**



**The west bedroom. Squatters had been living in the house and left behind their rather superior graffiti. Below, as it was before the 2025 refurbishment.**



**Captain's House in the 1980s**



Captain's House before conversion of the barn end



**The kitchen and sitting room at Captain's House, as configured 1990-2024.**

## Major upgrade and refurbishment, 2020-25

At the start of the Covid-19 pandemic, Landmark's nationwide repair and maintenance programme was frozen due to the first national lockdown, with consequent uncertainty about when contracts could be agreed or specialist builders and craftspeople work onsite. The spring closure of Landmarks for holiday bookings dealt a devastating blow to our finances and directly impacted Landmark's maintenance budget, which is solely funded by those holiday bookings. However, grants from the DCMS Culture Recovery Fund (CRF) scheme meant that a group of 15 critical projects at 17 Landmarks across England were able to go ahead in 2020-21 – one of which was planned maintenance work on the three linked barns at the Lower Porthmeor lower site, which urgently needed stabilisation, repair and reroofing.

We removed failing cement sheet roofing and undertook masonry repairs, installing new timber rafters and purlins in the traditional style. The barns were reroofed with a traditional Cornish scantle slate covering, wet-laid using lime mortar and local Delabole roofing slates. Principle contractor Paul Carter, of Paul Carter Construction and Renovation Services Ltd of Treen, brought expert knowledge of the distinct West Penwith vernacular architecture.

That done, we were keen to keep the momentum going on other plans for the three properties. More than 30 years after the Lower Porthmeor Landmarks welcomed their first guests, the time had come to revisit them. All three were still heated by night storage heaters, and we were keen to update and improve their heating systems and hot water systems by introducing renewable energy in the form of a shared ground source heat pump system (GSHP) to serve a wet radiator system, and a new three-phase supply to permit eventual electric vehicle charging. We also wanted to provide at least one of the houses with an easily accessible ground floor twin bedroom and shower room, now in Captain's House.



**Work underway at Captain's House, summer 2025.**



**The kitchen in The Farmhouse became the site office during the 2024-5 works. Here, Landmark Surveyor Graham Watts (left) hosts a SPAB Scholars' visit in July 2025.**

Later, in the mid-2020s, considerable preparation was needed before these works could begin: RTP Surveyors were appointed to take the project forward for planning consents, building control and tendering. A feasibility study and mining searches were carried out for all three properties by GED King Plans. An ecology survey was undertaken by Sam Sith and thermal performance was assessed by Diane Hubbard.

Landmark's Surveyor for the Southwest, Graham Watts, acted as project manager. Discussions were held with the National Trust and the neighbouring landowner, on whose land we needed to drill GSH boreholes, to run the new electricity cables and to place a new transformer to service.

All the routes and locations had to be agreed in detail and then implemented by the electricity board. Some of these negotiations would prove protracted, but with almost everything in place, works finally began on the buildings themselves in January 2025.

We had originally hoped to use a single GSH system for all three properties, but it proved too far for water to circulate effectively between them, so a separate system and water storage had to be provided for Arra Venton. The site is rich in archaeology (with remains from the Bronze and Iron Ages and the Romano-British period), so there was an archaeological watching brief during the installation of GSH boreholes and the digging of drainage (nothing of significance was found). We expected the boreholes to be very hard to drill in such a landscape, but in fact the drilling turned out to be relatively straightforward, thanks to the amount of mining in the area.



**The Farmhouse during the 2024-5 works, with just some of the ducting and groundworks required for the new ground source heating installation.**



**The first-floor chimney breast on the problematic west gable in the Farmhouse. The porous granite of the walls was allowing water penetration; the roof space above was poorly ventilated.**

The radiators and hot water at Lower Porthmeor are therefore now largely run on its own renewable ground source energy system. New BT lines installed in all three properties allow for wifi and remote monitoring of heating. All this obviously required significant trenching and groundworks, the scars of which were soon to fade back into the landscape.

Overall, we were on site at Lower Porthmeor for some two years in the end, chiefly due to the exacting negotiations (and consequent delays) with the National Trust, adjacent landowners and the electricity board over the placement of electrical cables and equipment and boreholes, and to further frustrating delays in the delivery of the necessary equipment. The 2025/6 winter proved especially blustery. There was still more disruption in the final stages of the project due to named Storms Gorette and Ingrid battering the headland, as we experience extreme weather events with increasing frequency.

### The Farmhouse

At the Farmhouse, it was time to address ongoing concerns about persistent water penetration on the west gable, which gets most of the weather and the low grade 'pig granite' of which it is constructed is (perhaps surprisingly) permeable through tiny fissures. Internally, the building was well draughtproofed but not breathing well, with no airflow through the roof space. Condensation was therefore a problem. To ameliorate the water ingress, the gable wall was repointed. The chimneys were taken down and carefully re-built to their original appearance, so that their weather detailing could be improved by installing a lead tray throughout the stack.



**The Farmhouse first-floor west chimney breast under repair with insulation ready to receive lime plaster (below).**



When the internal coating of the wall was removed, a cementitious plaster was found, with 25mm of rigid insulation, on top of which was an expanded metal lath and more cementitious render / plaster, all of uncertain date. After careful consultation, and given the unavoidable fact that the granite construction of the end wall allowed rainwater ingress, the approach taken was to reinforce the existing impermeable barrier and to increase thermal performance by insulating, so reducing the possibility of interstitial condensation. A tanking render was therefore applied to the existing cementitious render, then an insulated lime plaster called Super-therm , and finally a finish coat of fine lime plaster.

Otherwise, various minor joinery repairs were made. The installation of the new heating system and its pipework was disruptive, and full redecoration was required.

### Captain's House

At Captain's House, more significant works were carried out, turning it from a four-bed to a six-bed Landmark.

First came repairs to the roof. As mentioned above, Captain's House has a wet-laid, scantle roof, a Cornish traditional roofing method I and considered part of the region's heritage. A scantle roof uses small, thick, random-width slates laid to a triple lap gauge, rather than the standard double lap. The slates are fixed to the battens with oak pegs or copper nails and bedded in a lime mortar, ensuring better weather protection and high wind resistance, as well as blending effortlessly into their landscape. The salvaged slates were sorted on site according to length and then laid on the roof with the largest first, diminishing to the smallest at the ridge. The west gable and chimneys of Captain's were also repointed, making sure that the lime mortar did not dry too quickly in the summer days.



**Repairs underway to the chimneys and scantle roof of Captain's House, and the repointed west wall of the barn end.**



**Breaking through from Captain's House to the barn cottage and the creation of the new interconnecting doorway.**

To re-cap briefly on the evolution of Captain's, the so-called barn adjacent to the main house probably began life as a cowhouse, as a drain runs out of it directly under one of the sides of the fireplace. The chimney flue must therefore be a later addition, added when it was converted into a dwelling in its own right, in which Arthur Berryman (known by family tradition as Captain Arthur) was born in 1860. Soon afterwards, the upper end cottage was enlarged by a full second storey and this became the main house. The family moved in here, and by the 1881 census, the lower end was recorded as uninhabited, eventually reverting to use as a barn or cowshed.

This was still the case when Landmark took the site on in 1988. Thereafter, we kept the barn weathertight and maintained, presenting externally as if still a cottage but in reality a gutted space roughly boarded up as a plant room, and this felt a waste. So we removed its internal boiler room and oil tank, and have brought it into use as a single large space, a new kitchen and dining area with underfloor heating. The former kitchen has become a more spacious sitting room, and the former sitting room (very compact for this use) is now a double bedroom, with an adjacent shower room created in the former housekeeper's store.

Bringing the barn back into use was not quite as straightforward as first envisaged. First, there was listed building consent to be obtained for an empty building to be made into accommodation. The planning authorities initially thought it was literally a barn, whereas in fact, it was a cottage that had slipped out of use. An archaeological watching brief was also required for all the associated groundworks, but nothing of significance was found.

Creating a new door opening into the new kitchen required some unexpected structural stitching work, as the gable end between Captain's and the barn was found to be two skins of granite filled with earth. The contractor made light work of creating the opening itself, by wielding a large stone-cutting chainsaw.



**Captain's Barn in 1988, revealing its many adaptations for agricultural use. These openings were subsequently blocked. *National Trust Vernacular Survey 1988.***



**Reopening the window in 2025.**

Small areas of the corbeling on the magnificent stone chimney required rebuilding, and the flue was repointed and top off with a slate capping. Once the underfloor heating elements were in, a new concrete floor was laid, replacing that laid in 1990, with Mexican slates laid on top. This may seem a surprising choice, but it was what Landmark had laid in 1990 and matches those elsewhere in the building. Sadly, Cornish Delabole slates are now more than ten times the cost of imports. As ground levels had risen outside, meaning the new kitchen is partly below ground level, particular care was taken to ensure good ventilation.

The window to left of rear door into the new kitchen was unblocked, as shown in an historic photo (there have inevitably been many ad hoc adjustments to the fabric over the years – although perhaps unsurprisingly, there were never first floor windows on the barn cottage to the seaward side as first built).

The barn's external structure was still sound but we didn't want to risk any destabilisation and so a new internal timber frame was inserted from which to 'hang' the ceiling, thus ensuring minimum intervention, reversibility and better drainage through a drain wall system between the granite walls and timber linings to capture and drain away any condensation. The walls and ceiling were then insulated and plastered, and tongue and groove panelling was fixed to the walls. The kitchen units were designed and made by our furnishings team at Honeybourne.

In the main house, the fire safety separation had been identified as less than today's standards require, and sound deadening was also needed between the new sitting room and the bedroom above. This ceiling was therefore underlined with an insulated lining and plasterboard.

New radiators were installed to go with the renewable heating system, involving all the inevitable disruption of new pipework, and Captain's was redecorated throughout.



**Once the barn had been cleared of its inserted boiler room, the massive cottage chimney breast was repointed and the walls lined out. An internal frame then was created to hang the ceiling from and to attach T&G panelling and insulation.**



**Work underway to transform Captain's former kitchen into a sitting room, including sound deadening to the joists; and the new pipework in the sitting room at The Farmhouse.**



## Geology and Biology

Penwith is as rich in geological and biological terms as it is in archaeology, and detailed books have been written on both subjects. The National Trust has also carried out a Biological Survey of Bosigran, of a similarly high standard to their Archaeological Survey. In briefest summary therefore:

### **Geology**

In most people's minds Penwith equals granite, the Land's End massif being the final mainland outcrop of this rock, aged and weathered into characteristic carns and rock castles. Along the north coast, however, there are outcrops of the slaty country or surface rock through which the granite dome thrust, and which in the process was metamorphosed to form a hard greenstone, known locally as killas. Gurnard's Head and the cliffs between it and Porthmeor Cove are of this finer rock, and in the Cove itself there occurs the point at which granite and country rock meet, where the most dramatic effects of contact metamorphosis' can be seen. The granite itself is enriched with (metamorphic) quartzes and crystals, such as tourmaline and mica.

### **Biology**

The chief characteristics are the variety of habitats, and the lack of man's interference with them. The heathlands of the inland hills, and of the coastal headlands; the areas of gorse and scrub; the grasslands (improved and unimproved); the cliff lands; and the valleys cut by streams, with areas of marsh and willow-scrub, and steep uncultivated banks: all these support a rich life of flora and fauna. A walk down to the cove in May produces breathtaking sheets of bluebells (where presumably there was once tree cover); late primroses, cowslips and sea-pinks all growing in the same turf; and many, much rarer treasures. Later in the year the field walls stand in a ruff of foxgloves - and so on throughout the year. The richness is continued in birds, with colonies of sea birds, common and uncommon, and of inland species, of moor and heath as well as farmland and garden; migratory species, and the occasional windblown visitor.

## Cornish Hedges

West Penwith is renowned for its so-called 'Cornish hedges'. These are an ancient form of field boundary characteristic of the southwest peninsular. Looking much like shaggy dry stone walls, the hedges are formed by building two slightly tapering sides of large stones excavated from the landscape, and packing the cavity between them with sub-soil. Smaller interlocking rocks are used to build the hedge high until it reaches its level, when it is finished with neater rows of square stones called 'edgers'. A topping of turf is then sliced from the ground and anchored to the top with sticks, soon growing down into the crevices to become part of the 'hedge'.

The hedge is slightly wider at bottom than at the top, and forms a very stable and durable structure, often standing for hundreds of years or more. Bushes such as gorse may grow on the top, helping to act as a windbreak, and it is the role of the vegetation that gives the hedge its name as a rich flora develops time, supporting a semi-natural wildlife habitat. Examples abound around Lower Porthmeor. A wonderful labyrinth of different styles of Cornish hedges has been constructed in recent years as a work of landscape art at Kerdroya, just off the A30 near St Neots.



**Different styles of Cornish hedging at Kerdroya.**