The Landmark Trust

ARRA VENTON

LOWER PORTHMEOR

History Album

Researched and written by Charlotte Haslam, 1989

Re-presented in 2015

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ARRA VENTON
BASIC DETAILS

Chapel built **1839**

Old cottage and smithy present **1841**

Old cottage rebuilt, with new cottage on site of smithy
1911-12

Chapel closed **1939**

Three buildings remodelled as Arra Venton
1955-6

Architects: Geoffrey Bazeley & Barary

Acquired by Landmark Trust **1988**

Restoration architects: Caroe & Partners

Builders: Phoenix Restoration with St. Cuthbert's Builders

Work completed **1991**

Porthmeor = great (meor) cove or landing place (port).
Sometimes Polmeor = great pool.

Arra Venton = well or spring (Venton) field (arra or eru)

Contents

Arra Venton

Summary - Lower Porthmeor

Porthmeor is a hamlet consisting of two farms, Higher and Lower Porthmeor. The name itself has passed 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 have gone into its continuation, is representative of many other hamlets on this northern shelf of Penwith, and is also among the most attractive of all the groups of buildings along this visually staggering stretch of coast.

Apart from the fact of its existence, we know nothing for certain about the hamlet's 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. The earliest houses would have been little different from the humble single storey building on the north of the site, 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 a bit like 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 for animals.

We shudder with discomfort at the thought of living in such structures today, and certainly, as soon as wealth permitted, they were improved on. Yet they were solid and well-insulated, providing warmth as well as 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 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 rebuilt, 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 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.

The other great improvement by the 17th century was the chimney. None of this date survive, as such, at Porthmeor, but a method of construction was

developed which endured into the 20th century, with very little change apart from the disappearance after 1700 of a chamfered edge on the great stones of the fireplace surrounds. Both the Captain's House and The Farmhouse across the road have 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 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 rather more spacious loft. So the nearest Landmark the road – now known as 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 Tithe Apportionment Map for Zennor of 1842, although it lists a house and garden here, only shows what seems to be a smaller building again, hardly even a house. The National Trust's Vernacular Buildings Surveyors have suggested that this was because the house was only then being built - and such are the difficulties of dating, a range of fifty years either way is quite acceptable.

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 John Smith, spoilt the outlook from the farmsteads across the road. So when it 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 Cornish skies.

Lower Porthmeor also has an important literary connection, since author Virginia Woolf passed the summer of 1910 here, lodging with the Berryman family (it is unclear in which house). 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, this house was let out, but St Ives and Cornwall were always a place of recuperation for Woolf, 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 Cornwall.

Arra Venton

For an ordinary house, Arra Venton has a surprisingly eventful past; as it stands today it is a creation partly of 1839, partly of 1911-12, again of 1955-6, and finally of 1990-91. Its curious roofline reflects the fact that it incorporates three different and earlier buildings: a cottage, a smithy and a Wesleyan Methodist chapel.

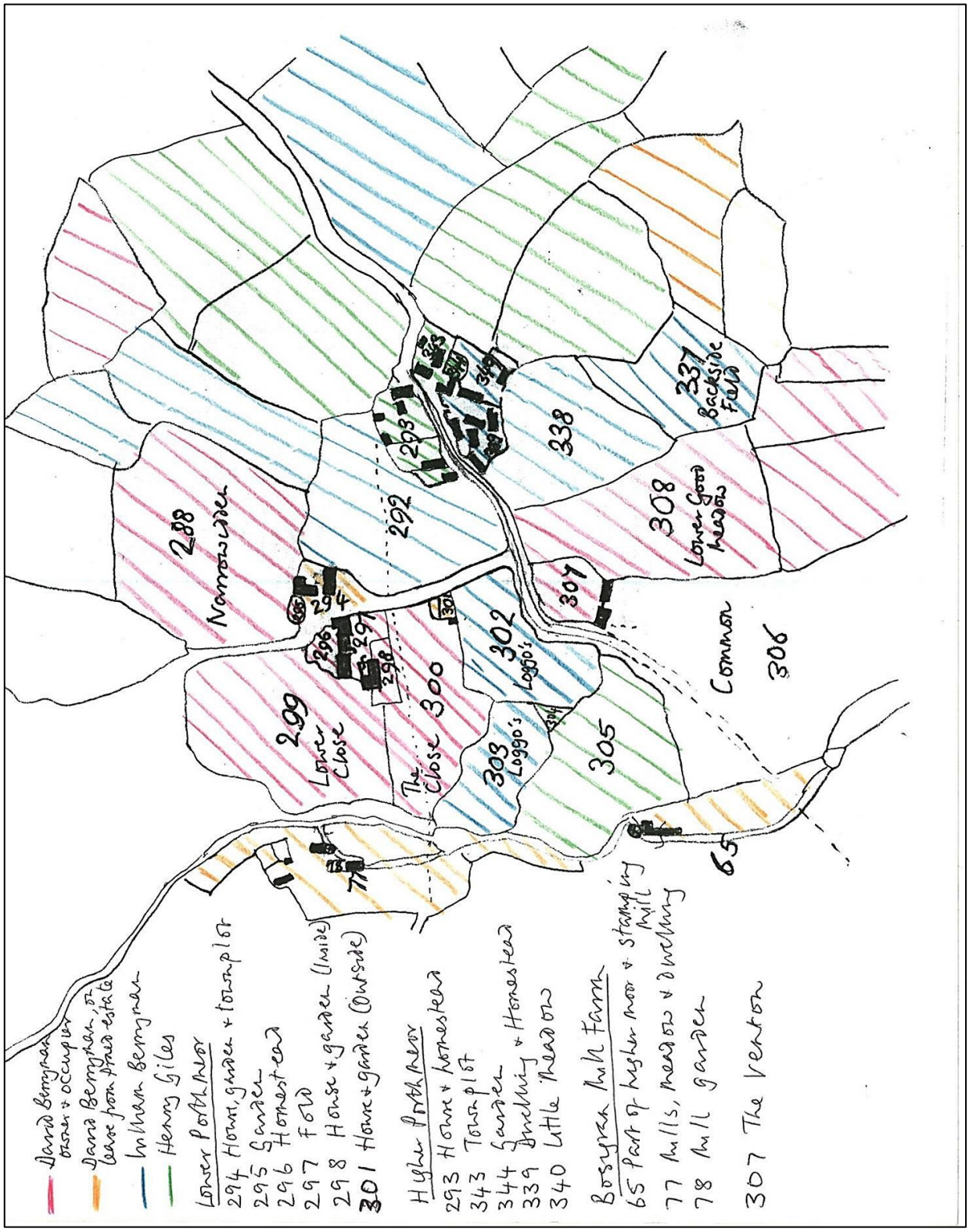
The chapel

The chapel is the best documented of these earlier buildings. In July, 1839, a plot of land thirty feet by twenty, part of a field called Narrow Venton, was bought from David Berryman, Gentleman, the owner of Lower Porthmeor, for five shillings. A chapel was 'intended to be built thereon.' A deed of settlement was drawn up according to a Model Chapel Deed devised in 1832 by the Methodists, a copy of which was duly lodged with the title deeds.

The property was vested in the Superintendent Preacher of the St Ives Circuit of the Wesleyan Methodist Church; and also in a group of nine Trustees, all from the Parish of Zennor. Two of these, William and Richard Blight, were Mine Agents, probably connected with Carn Galver Mine; four more were yeomen, two were miners and one was a carpenter. They were thus typical of what have been called the 'chapel' classes. Non-conformism did not on the whole attract the gentry of the wealthier farmers, such as the Berrymans of Porthmeor, who remained 'church' but drew its support from the new population of miners and the old population of the rural poor.

One of the trustees, a miner called John Newton, may have been the husband of Jane Berryman, daughter of David Berryman who married a man of that name in 1834. It may also have been he to whom a tragic, but not untypical accident occurred in 1840, shortly before the Carn Galver Mine closed. The Penzance

Gazette recorded that a ‘poor man’ named John Newton was injured when a charge blew out in his face ‘and melancholy to relate, blew both eyes out, and



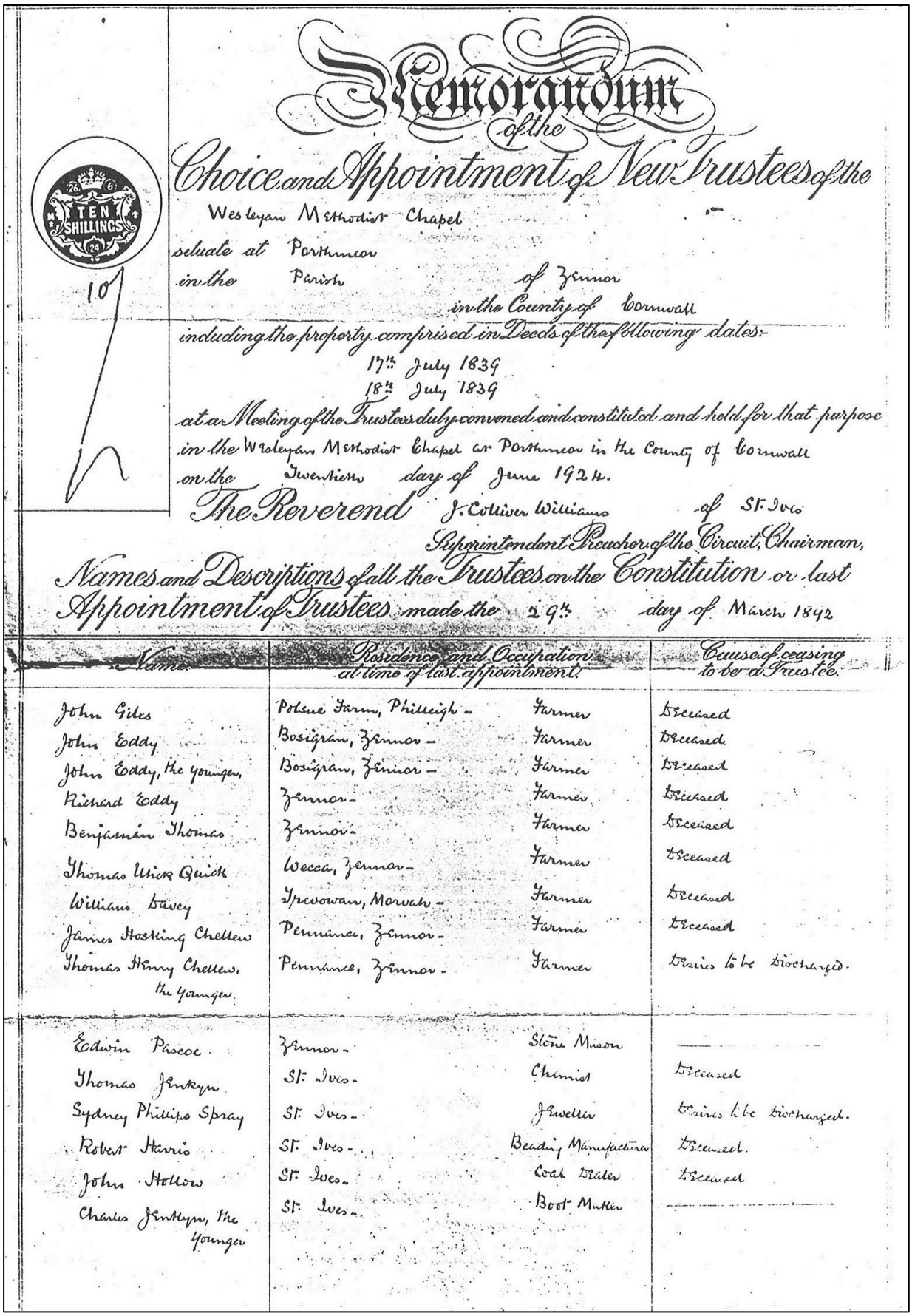
Porthmeor in 1842 from the Zennor Tithe Map, showing ownership of settlements and of fields around

otherwise injured him.' He was dead by the time of the Census of 1841, leaving his widow and small son still living at Porthmeor.

The Trustees got on quickly with building their new chapel. The Ecclesiastical Census of 1851 records that it was put up in 1839, as a separate building used exclusively for worship; that only an afternoon service was held there and that the congregation numbered 52. The chapel is clearly drawn in too, on the Tithe Map for Zennor of 1842.

The building is typical of a rural chapel, with the appearance of a slightly grander than usual agricultural building, constructed of the most readily available, and therefore cheapest, local materials. Its floor level was originally some two feet lower than it is now, with a door at the east end, visible in the wall next to the present front door to the cottage. The pulpit was at the opposite end, lit from behind by the gable window. The two side windows (both in the sheltered, leeward wall) were, as usual, aimed to be just too high to tempt the seated worshippers to look out. In 1936, the eight benches on which they sat were still in the chapel.

In 1873, a new group of Trustees was appointed, all but two of the original nine 'having departed this life.' One of these, the carpenter, wished to retire, because he was then working at a mine in Northumberland. It looks rather as though the new body of Trustees, consisting of fourteen men and headed by William Grenfell, the one survivor from 1839, must have included most of the male members of the congregation. They came from farther afield – two from Morvah and one from St Ives – and the range of occupations has grown to include several farmers, as well as miners, a tin dresser, two mine engine drivers and a printer. None of the Berrymans were among them, but John Giles, then farming part of Higher Porthmeor, was 'chapel' as were the Eddys of neighbouring Bosigran.



Memorandum of the Choice and Appointment of New Trustees of the

Wesleyan Methodist Chapel

situate at Porthmeor

in the Parish of Zennor

in the County of Cornwall

including the property comprised in Deeds of the following dates:-

17th July 1839

18th July 1839

at a Meeting of the Trustees duly convened and constituted and held for that purpose in the Wesleyan Methodist Chapel at Porthmeor in the County of Cornwall on the Twentieth day of June 1924.

The Reverend J. Colliver Williams of St. Ives

Superintendent Preacher of the Circuit, Chairman,

Names and Descriptions of all the Trustees on the Constitution or last Appointment of Trustees made the 29th day of March 1842

Name.	Residence and Occupation at time of last appointment.		Cause of ceasing to be a Trustee.
John Giles	Polsue Farm, Philleigh -	Farmer	Deceased
John Eddy	Bosigran, Zennor -	Farmer	Deceased
John Eddy, the younger,	Bosigran, Zennor -	Farmer	Deceased
Richard Eddy	Zennor -	Farmer	Deceased
Benjamin Thomas	Zennor -	Farmer	Deceased
Thomas Wick Quick	Wecca, Zennor -	Farmer	Deceased
William Davey	Ireswoman, Morvah -	Farmer	Deceased
James Hosking Chellew	Pennance, Zennor -	Farmer	Deceased
Thomas Henry Chellew, the Younger	Pennance, Zennor -	Farmer	Desires to be discharged.
Edwin Pascoe	Zennor -	Stone Mason	———
Thomas Jenkyn	St. Ives -	Chemist	Deceased
Sydney Phillips Spray	St. Ives -	Jeweller	Desires to be discharged.
Robert Harris	St. Ives -	Reading Manufacturer	Deceased.
John Hollow	St. Ives -	Coal Dealer	Deceased
Charles Jenkyn, the Younger	St. Ives -	Boot Maker	———

Record of the appointment of new trustees, 1924.

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Names and Descriptions of all the Trustees in whom the said Chapel and premises now become legally vested.

First. Old continuing Trustees:-

Name	Present Residence and Occupation.	
Edwin Pascoe	Green, Gurnard's Head, Zennor -	Farmer
Charles Rorkyn	St. Ives -	Retired Br. Master

Second. New Trustees now chosen and appointed.

Name.	Residence and Occupation.	
Matthew Osborne	Bosporthennis, New Mill, Penzance -	Farmer
Stephen Celenso Beckerleg	St. Ives -	Retired Civil Servant
Samuel Henry Stevens	St. Ives -	Secretary
William John Pascoe	Green, Gurnard's Head, Zennor -	Farmer
Thomas Warren	Higher Kerrow, New Mill -	Farmer
James Osborne	Mill Downs, New Mill -	Farmer
David Berriman -	Chyklembo, Zennor -	Farmer

Dated this 20th day of June 1924

Signed sealed and delivered by the said J. Collivet Williams as Chairman of the said Meeting at and in the presence of the said Meeting on the day and year aforesaid in the presence of } J. Collivet Williams - Chairman of the said Meeting.

Witness: [illegible] Pascoe, Gurnards Head Zennor Farmer's Wife

Witness: [illegible] Thomas Gurnards Head Zennor House Keeper

Chapel congregations were perhaps at their height at this period. There were two other chapels in the parish of Zennor alone, providing 430 seats in all. The next time new Trustees were appointed in 1894, the end of the mining boom in West Cornwall is clearly reflected. Five Trustees continued from 1873, all of them farmers, one of whom had previously been described as a miner. Of the ten new Trustees, four are farmers, and the remaining six consist of a stone mason, a chemist, a watchmaker, a beading manufacturer, a coal dealer and a boot maker, the last five all of St Ives. It rather looks as though the congregation from Zennor had shrunk to such an extent that elders from St Ives had to be brought in, although this cannot have been their main place of worship.

Services were still held however. *The Cornish Methodist Church Record* of 1894 records of Porthmeor:

> There is all the difference between an ordinary day and a festival day in this place. Ordinarily the famed lantern of the ancient ascetic would hardly reveal a specimen of the genus homa, but on festival days in the neighbourhood of the plain sanctuary they may be seen in crowds. The Rev T. Richards was the preacher in the afternoon, giving plain directions on how to increase the crops. He was accompanied by the Rev J. Whitton (New Connexion) who spoke at the evening meeting. There was the tea of course, and such a tea, those who want to learn how to entertain friends should visit Porthmeor at its next Harvest Festival. The meeting at night was especially impressive. May the seed sown be found after many days.

Kelly's *Directory* of 1919 lists the chapel as still active, along with one in Churchtown, Zennor. Nine Trustees were appointed in 1924; six farmers (Including a Berryman, of Chykembro) a retired bootmaker, a retired civil servant and a Secretary. Twelve years later, in 1936, services had ceased altogether. The chapel was let on an annual tenancy to the West Cornwall Field (Archaeological) Club. The club's President, Lt. Col. F.C. Hirst, had excavated the Porthmeor Iron Age settlement in the earlier 1930s. He also filled many notebooks with records and observations of the vanishing life and customs of Penwith, preserving many of its artefacts in the Wayside Museum in Zennor, of which he was the founder.

Then in 1940, the chapel was sold by the remaining four Trustees to Mrs Frances Fentiman, owner of the adjoining cottage. Permission for the sale had been given a year earlier by the Methodist Conference, exactly a century after it was built, and it was subject to certain restrictive covenants; the building was not to be used for the manufacture or sale or supply or distribution of intoxicating liquors or as a theatre or dancing hall or music hall.

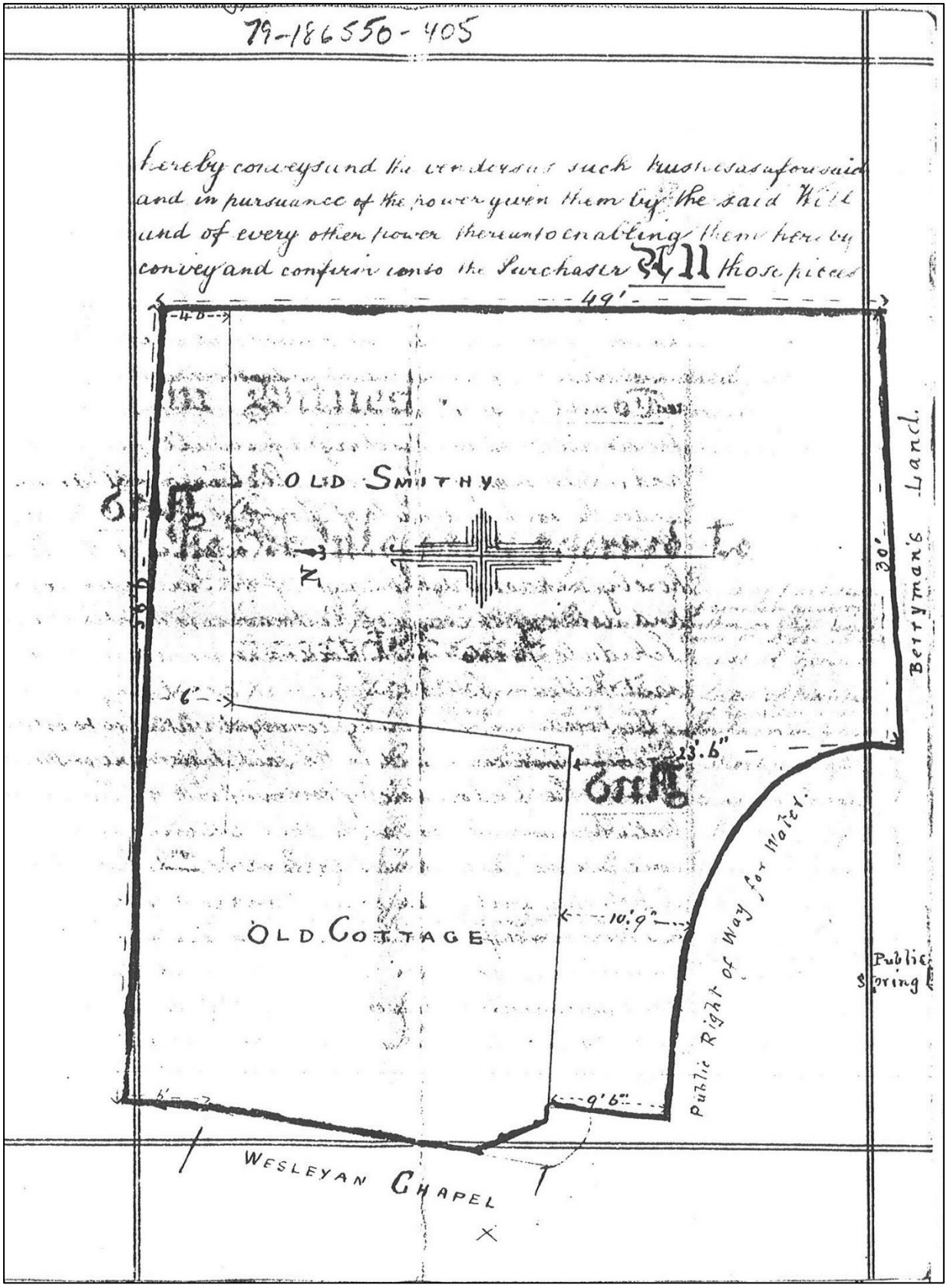
The other buildings

The Tithe Map of 1842 clearly shows another building slightly to the east of the new chapel, on David Berryman's land. According to the rough plan on a conveyance of 1911, this consisted of a cottage whose end wall appears in fact to have been shared with that of the chapel; while at its other, east, end, there was a smithy. The curious way in which the cottage and chapel abut would suggest that the two were either built at the same time or, more probably, that the cottage was built slightly after the chapel, taking advantage of its end wall to reduce its own building cost, but leaving a small space to give access to the chapel doorway. If the cottage did come first, it was not by very long; no building is shown in this position on Greenwood's map of Cornwall of 1827, although the scale is too small to be absolutely sure.

A natural assumption would be that the cottage was built for the preacher, or for a chapel caretaker. No mention of it is made in any of the chapel documents, however, so this seems unlikely. With its smithy, it seems indeed, to have been built for a particular tenant, and the census returns of 1841 and 1851 tell us who this was. Listed among the inhabitants of Porthmeor is William Richards, blacksmith, with his wife and, in 1851, five young sons.

In 1861 he has gone, however, and no new blacksmith replaces him. It is difficult to tell whether a new family moved into the cottage because the houses of the

hamlet are recorded in a different order in each census, and it is the households that can be followed, not the individual buildings. Certainly where you would



From Conveyance of 1911: Berryman to Facer

expect another household to be listed, the entry records one uninhabited house. In 1871, the households in Porthmeor as a whole had shrunk to five, from eight in 1841. Possibly the original cottage was never again inhabited. By 1911 it had fallen into ruin, a victim of the fall in population in Penwith in the last decades of the 19th century. According to the late William Berryman of Higher Porthmeor, his father remembered the smithy being used as a cow shelter.

There was, however soon to be another cottage on the same site, built up partly on the walls of its predecessor. This new building reflected a new pattern in the occupation of Penwith, with the arrival of educated and creative people from other parts of the country who fell in love with it and came there to live (often to paint) or spend their holidays. In 1911, the ruin was bought from Arthur Berryman and his sister Elizabeth, grandchildren of David Berryman, by Professor Thomas Facer. He was Professor of Music at Birmingham University and according to his granddaughter, Mrs Lainchbury, it was his wife's idea to rebuild the cottage, and it was she who made all the arrangements.

The plans were drawn up by an architect friend – the building permit was granted to a William Facer, so perhaps he was a cousin – and put into effect by a local builder. They had clearly decided to rebuild the original cottage to look almost exactly as before from the outside and with the same curious relationship to the chapel which was, of course, still in use for worship. Then, where the smithy had been, a new, two storey cottage was built. According to Mrs Lainchbury, the somewhat curious way in which the two buildings relate, with their different floor levels, was because the architect never actually visited the site, and just relied on measurements given him by Mrs Facer, or the builder.

Inside, the old cottage provided a single, large living room (today's kitchen, with a small kitchen partitioned off in what is now the porch. In the new cottage there was one bedroom on the ground floor with the stairs where they are now,

leading to two more bedrooms. At the far, east, end of the ground floor (half of the existing bedroom) was a workshop and store, with its own outside door.

The Facers spent many happy summers at Carn Galva Cottage, as they named it. When Professor Facer retired, they lived there permanently for some years, during which time the professor formed a male voice choir in the district. Mrs Lainchbury still had the silver cigarette case they presented to him when he returned to the Midlands in old age. After the Thomas Facers' died, the cottage was taken on in the 1920s by their daughter, Mrs Frances Fentiman. Her family in turn spent all their holidays there.

Carn Galva Cottage in about 1930.

Mrs Lainchbury remembered the old Berryman sisters, Betsy, Catherine and Wilmot, who did bed and breakfast in the Outside House, the nearer of the two farmhouses of Lower Porthmeor, which became home to the National Trust's coastal warden; their brother, always known as Captain Arthur, lived in the Inside House, now the Landmark. He was the last of the Lower Porthmeor Berrymans. In Higher Porthmeor was his cousin, William Berryman, whose son, Frank succeeded him.

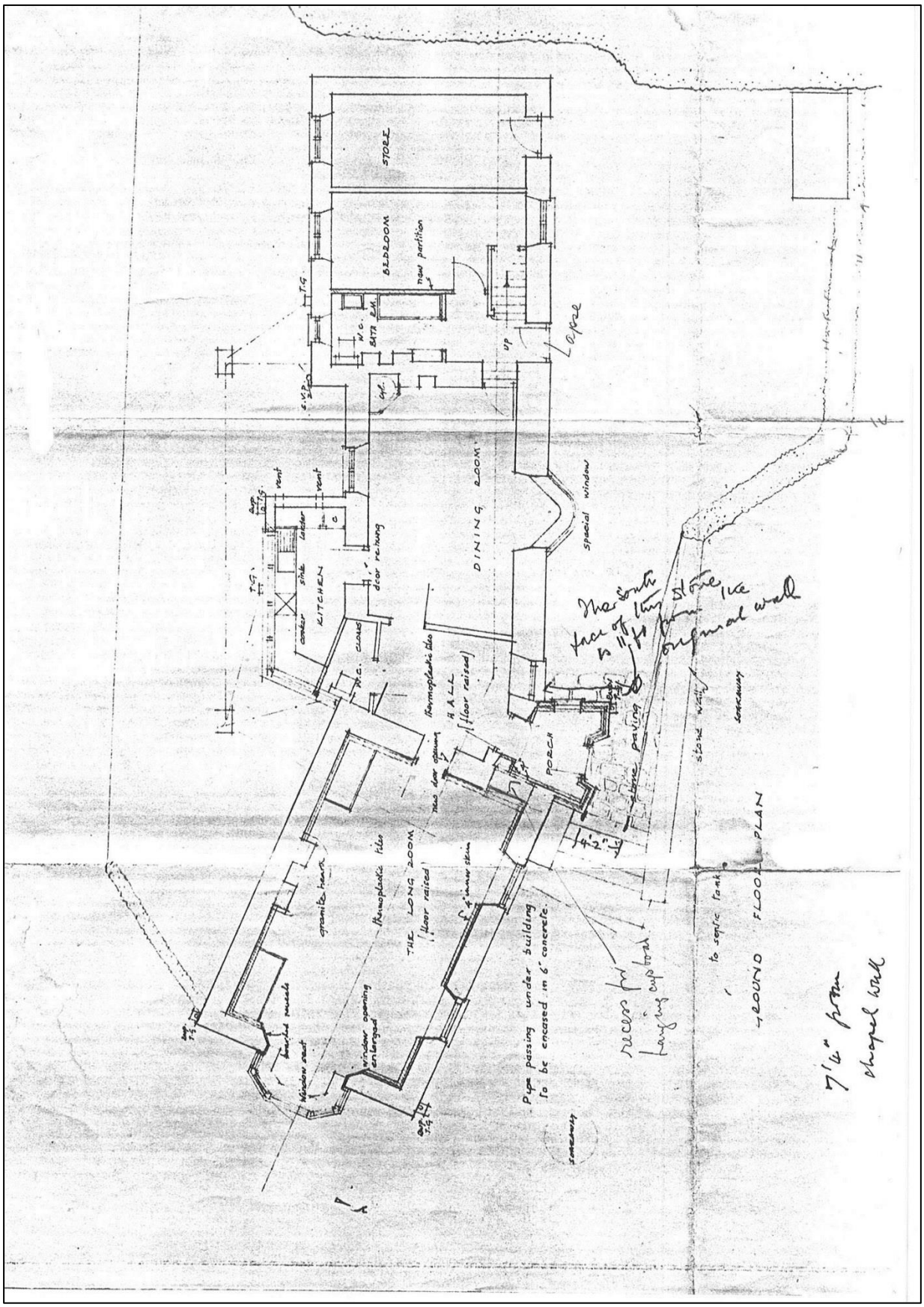
Although the Fentimans bought the chapel from the remaining Trustees in 1940, they never incorporated it into the cottage. This was left to the next owner, who bought both chapel and cottage from Mrs Fentiman in 1954. This was D W Thomas (or more precisely, his wife V W Thomas, in trust for their daughter, Elizabeth) a solicitor from Camborne who was also one of the prime movers, and donors, in the National Trust's early efforts to preserve the coastline, serving as first Chairman of their Cornwall Coast Advisory Committee. One of his sons, Nicholas Thomas, has since given coast at Rosemergy (beyond Bosigran) to the National Trust in his memory, as well as restoring the homestead there. His other son, Professor Charles Thomas, became a notable archaeologist and Cornish scholar.

Carn Galva Cottage in about 1950, taken by Mrs Fentiman's daughter, Mrs Lainchbury.

This photograph showed the original window in the chapel gable, before it was replaced by a bay window in 1955-

Mr and Mrs Fentiman, with their daughter, Mrs Lainchbury, outside Carn Galva Cottage in about 1950.

The big living room in the old cottage, c. 1950.



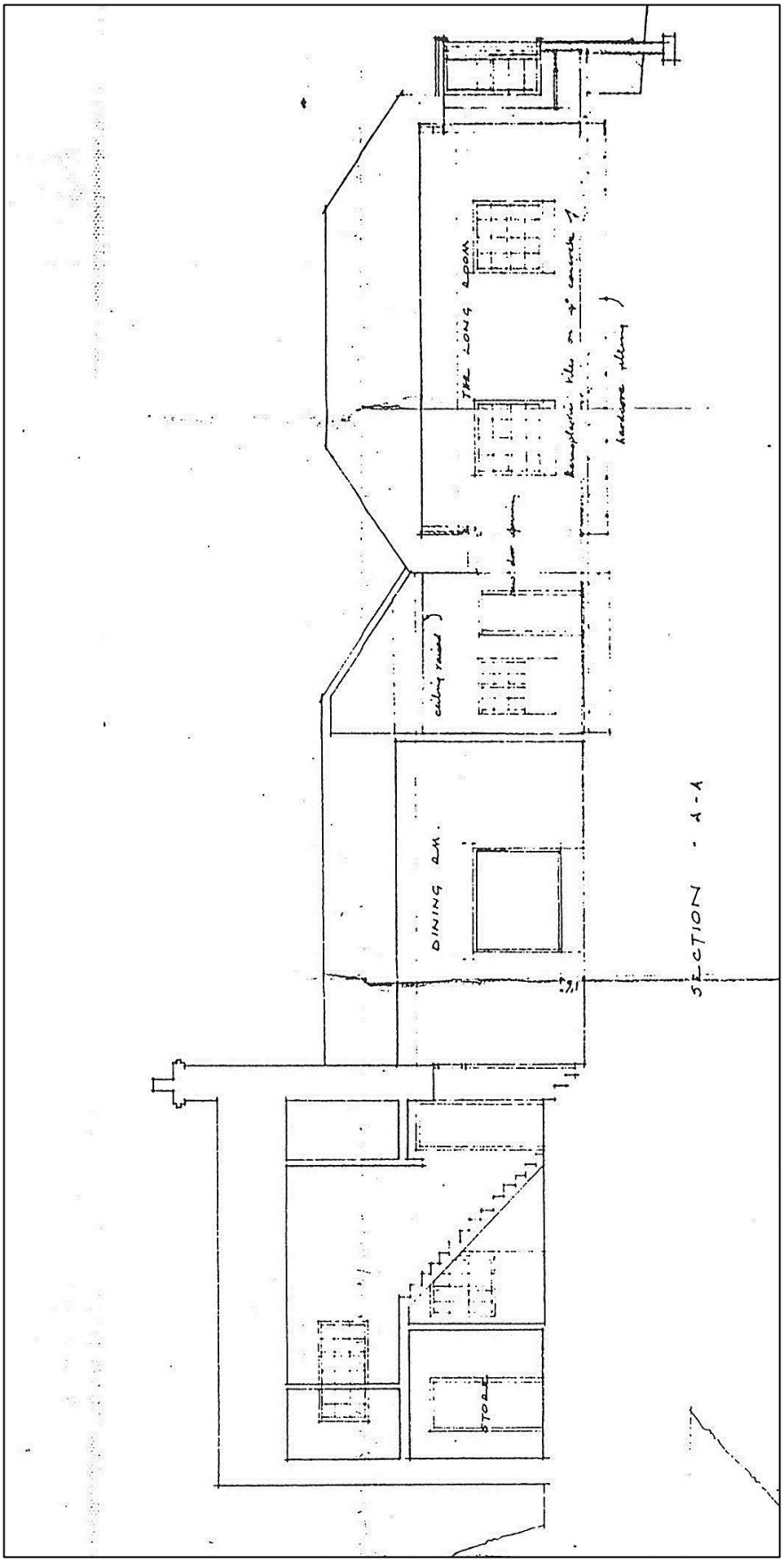
Arra Venton as remodelled in 1955-6 for D.W. Thomas by G. Bazely & Barbary..

D W Thomas employed the Penzance architects, Geoffrey Bazely & Barbary, to remodel the house. A new central door was made into the chapel, and its floor was raised to make it level with the old cottage. A new bay window was added to the west end, looking out to sea. The walls were lined with an inner skin for insulation and protection against rain driving through the rubble stone of the walls. A fireplace was made, with a granite fender formed out of an arch from Clowance, the demolished house of the St Aubyns near Camborne.

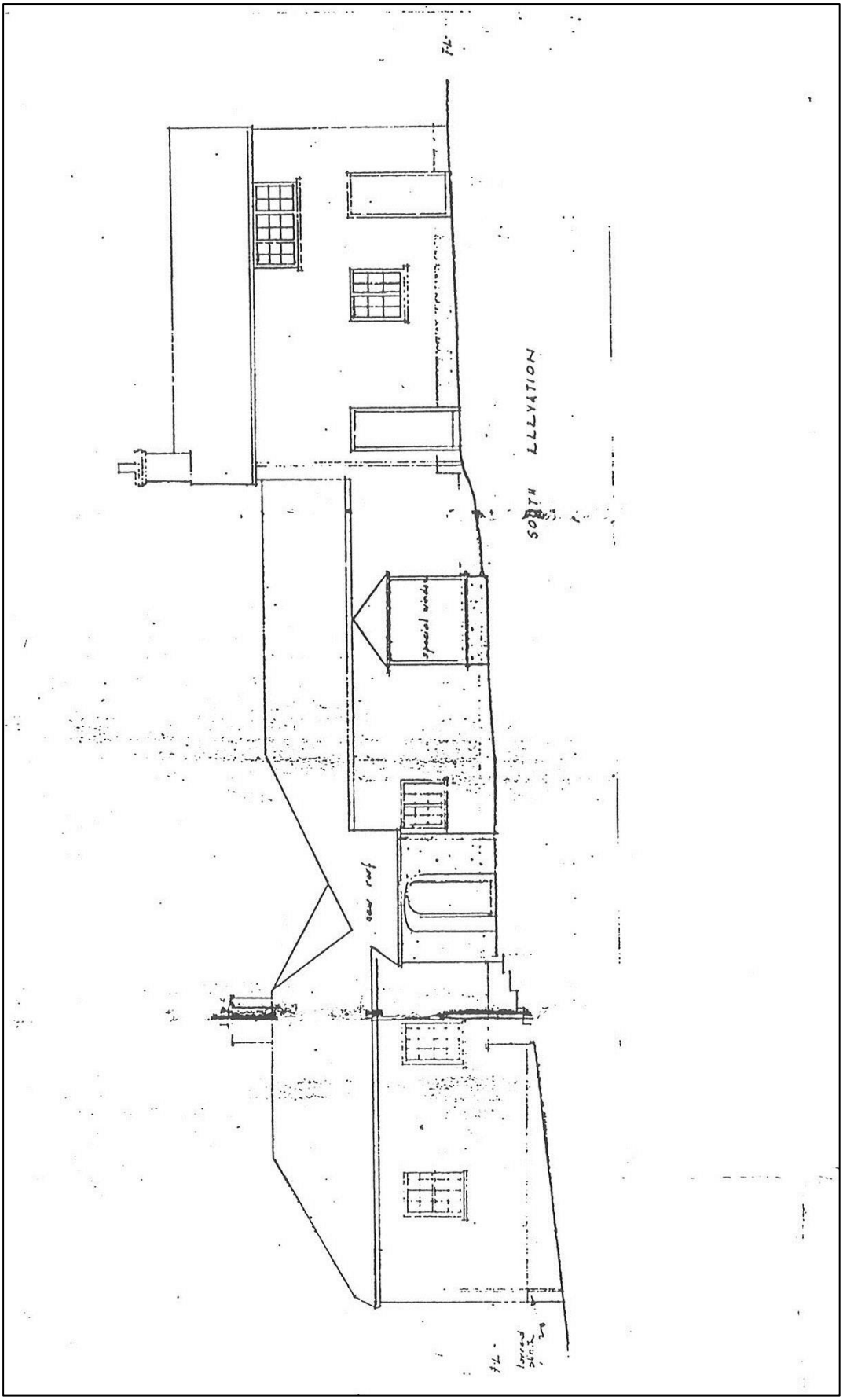
The porch was enlarged, with a new curved slate roof; and on the other side a new lean-to kitchen was added. The most notable addition was perhaps the bow window in the dining room, or old cottage, described on the plans as 'special.' Mr Thomas chanced on the single curved sheet of glass in a Falmouth glassworks, after the shop that had commissioned it had failed to collect it. A table was later made specially to fit within the bow by Robin Nance.

If the finished result was still odd, the remodelling itself was imaginative, and very typical of its date. It came in for praise at the time for its blend of traditional materials with more modern design, to create a comfortable and interesting house.

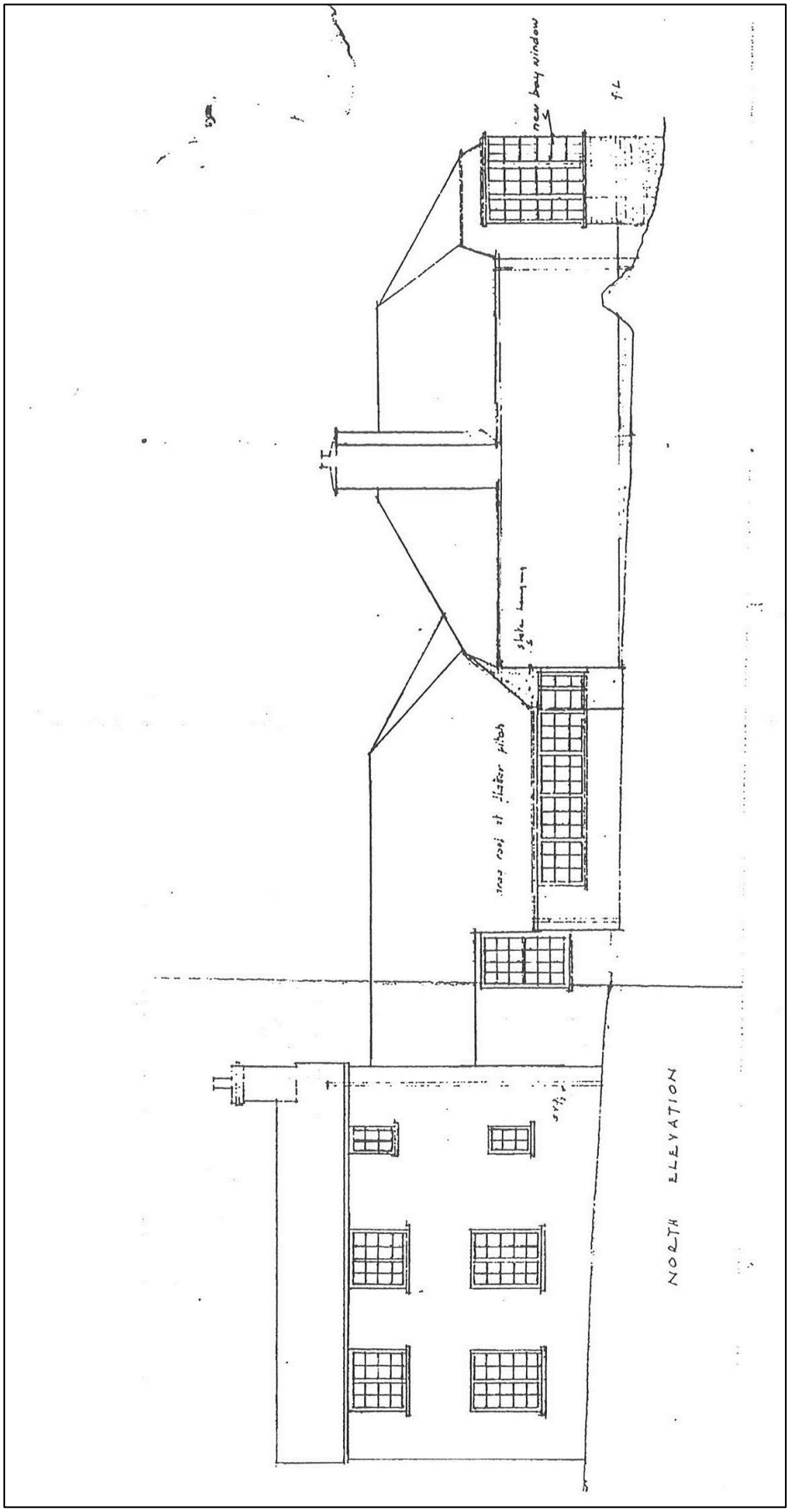
The Thomas's renamed the house Arra Venton, which according to Bannister's *Glossary of Cornish Names* (1871) means spring, or well, field. The name of the field given in the deeds, Narrow Venton, may be a corruption of this. In the Tithe Map of 1842 the field is simply called The Venton. The well, or Venton, itself, with its granite cover, is probably the oldest structure here. The public right of way to draw water from it was carefully drawn in on the 1911 conveyance and re-affirmed during the building work 1955-6, although by then no one had actually drawn their daily supply there for years. The land to the south of the house, running up to Carn Galver, had originally been moor, held in common like much of the cliff land, but it was divided up between different farms in 1880, this particular plot falling to Lower Porthmeor, like the Venton Field.



G. Bazeley & Barbary: 1955, Proposals for Arra Venton.



G. Bazeley & Barbary: 1955, Proposals for Arra Venton.



G. Bazeley & Barbary: 1955, Proposals for Arra Venton.

Arra Venton in 1957 after D.W. Thomas's remodelling.

Donald and Viva Thomas, leaning on the new door of their cottage on completion of the conversion in 1957.

For most of the time that it was owned by the Thomases, Arra Venton was let to tenants, until it was sold in 1971. Arra Venton then changed hands a number of times, and a number of further alterations were made inside and out, the worst of which was to paint it brilliant snowcem white, so that it became visible for miles. When it came on the market again in 1988, just after the acquisition with the National Trust of Lower Porthmeor, Landmark felt that it would be doing a public service – and a service to those in its other houses at Lower Porthmeor – by buying it as well, and then demonstrating how such a building can be persuaded to get on rather better with its neighbours.

Arra Venton lighting up the Penwith landscape c.1980.

Arra Venton in 1988.

The Suppressing of Arra Venton

Work did not actually begin at Arra Venton until 1990, all energies before then being concentrated on the repair of the houses at Lower Porthmeor. The architects, Caroe and Partners, were to be the same; and in 1990, the foreman who had overseen the other work at Lower Porthmeor, Greville Riggs, set up with a joiner, Mike Challoner, as Phoenix Restoration; they were taken on to do the building work at Arra Venton, with the help from St Cuthberts Builders from Somerset on the outside works.

In addition to the white paint, the chief fault of the house was that it simply had too much glass for a stoney landscape. If the number and size of the windows was reduced, it would glare much less at its surroundings. There was also a basic problem in the, admittedly original, junction between the roofs of chapel and cottage. A number of different repairs here showed that there was always a problem of leaking in the valley between the two. On visual grounds, as well, we felt that it was time for them to be separated. The 1955 porch and kitchen would be removed, the old cottage would have a new end gable wall and a much lower passage linking it to the chapel instead.

The roofs of chapel and old cottage were both in very poor condition and would need completely reslating, and repair to the actual structure. The new cottage also needed reslating, although the structure itself was sound. Before the work of stripping the roofs could begin, the tremendous gales of January 1990 did much of this work for us, tearing out great holes. After extensive repairs to rafters, and the replacement of the chapel wallplate, new, small Delabole slates were relaid, using the traditional Cornish technique of scantle slating, in which the slates are bedded in lime mortar, rather than nailed, which gives them extra strength against the wind.

Inside the chapel.

The long and laborious job of sand-blasting off the snowcem paint was carried out at the same time; and then that of repointing the whole house with lime mortar, which allows the walls to breath and dry out after rain, so protecting the whole building from damp. Three window openings in the north wall of the new cottage were blocked at the same time, leaving one on the first floor and two on the ground. A door at the foot of the stairs in the south wall was turned into a window. The original second doorway in the south wall, leading into the store, had been made into a window when the store was made into a bedroom, and this was now reopened, and given a new stable door.

Under some protest from the architect, the glass bow window in the old cottage, which is so characteristic of the 1950s conversion, was retained. The bay window on the end of the chapel was removed, however since it leaked, and also contributed to the over-prominence of the house. Instead, we planned to put back the sort of window which we thought would have been there when it was still a chapel. Fortunately Mrs Lainchbury, Mrs Fentiman's daughter, provided photographs at just the right moment to show that we were on the right lines. Strictly, it should be set slightly higher in the wall so that, with the lower floor, it came above the minister's head. Since we were not reverting to the lower floor level – and indeed were not restoring the building as a chapel – we felt that it looked better if all the windows were at the same height.

Inside the chapel, a fibreboard ceiling had been inserted beneath the original one, and this was removed to reveal the old boarding above. There was originally a boarded dado as well; we decided now to line the room entirely, as an extra defence against the weather. On the floor, new boards were laid, instead of the existing Spanish clay tiles. New sash windows were fitted in the existing south openings where fixed windows had recently been inserted; and the sills, which had been raised a few inches, put back at their correct level.

Roof damage after gales in January, 1990.

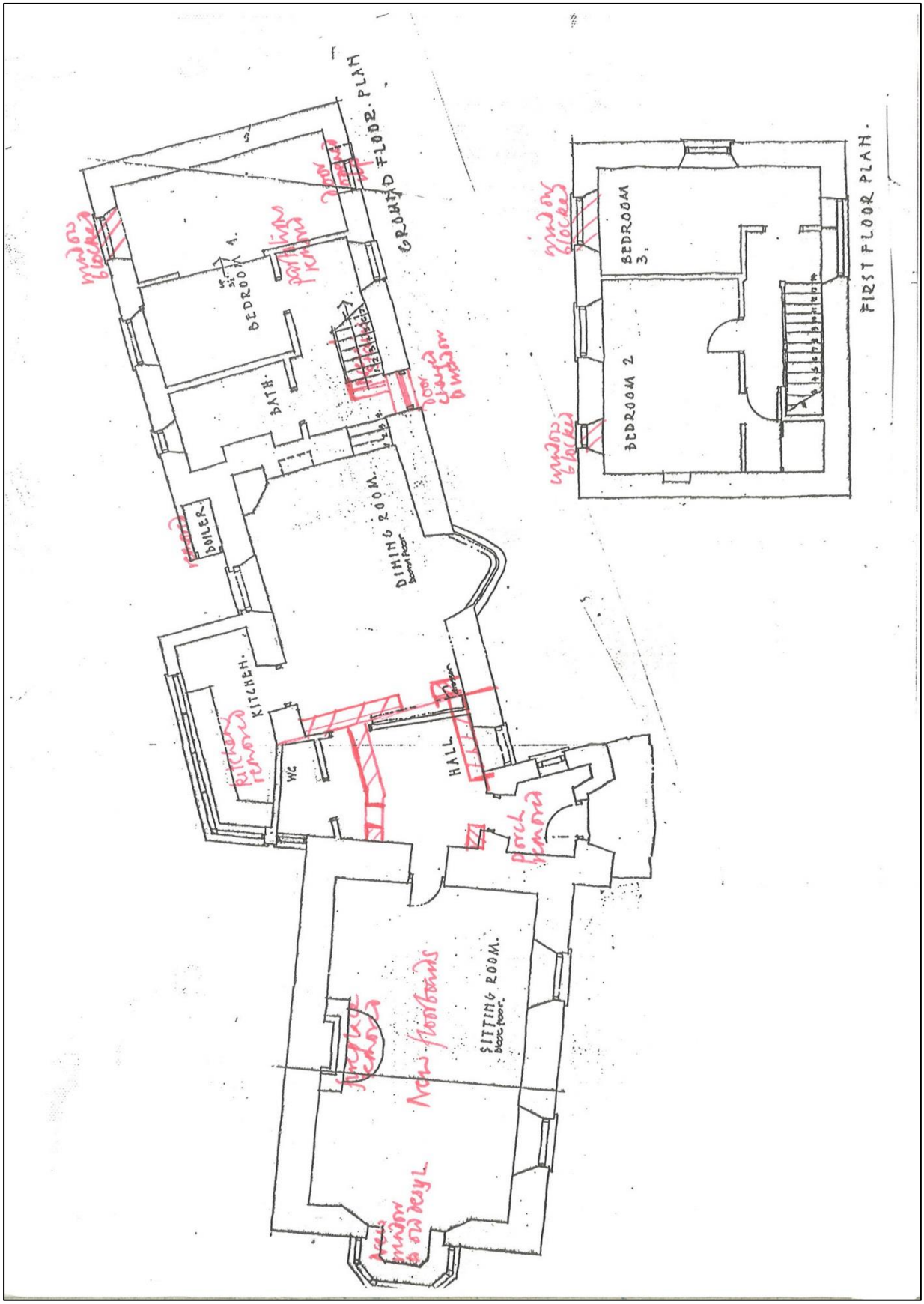
Rebuilding the chimney of the new cottage.

In the old cottage, the boarded ceiling was retained, with new boards replacing those that had gone rotten. The walls had recently been stripped of plaster and pointed up in cement in a very ugly way. This we replaced with lime mortar, and then the walls were simply limewashed – partly because of what turned out to be mistaken information that this had once been the smithy and a simple finish therefore seemed appropriate. However the humble cottage which in fact stood in this position is unlikely to have had anything more than an annual coat of whitewash on the walls, so we are not far wrong either way.

The new partitions on the ground floor of the new cottage were copied from the old boarded ones upstairs. Some of the first floor joists had rotten ends, and had to have steel bearers fixed to them. A newish open-tread staircase was replaced with a traditional, and less steep, cottage stair.

Outside the house, a new Cornish hedge was built by Mr K Trembath along the boundary of the property, between it and the field and also along the road, providing a buffer against the passing summer traffic. This gain served to tie it in better with its surroundings.

Arra Venton is not the kind of building that Landmark would normally feel the need to rescue, but the project has definitely been proved worthwhile, if only to show how much can be achieved by minor surgery and a sensitive use of materials. The difference between the simple, agreeable house that we saw to completion in the summer of 1991 and the flashy, self-important character that had disappeared behind scaffolding eighteen months earlier was almost startling. All in all, Arra Venton has emerged as a new, and better-behaved building, which we are glad to own and to share with all.



Arra Venton in 1988, showing alterations made by Landmark.

Wesleyan Methodism in Zennor

Wesleyan Methodism, to which the Porthmeor chapel belonged, had long roots in Zennor. These went back nearly one hundred years before the chapel itself was built in 1839, in the very same year that the Wesleyan Methodists celebrated their Centenary.

Methodism began as an Evangelical movement within the Church of England, aiming to provide religion where there seemed to be none, in poor rural areas where parish priests were few and far between, and industrial areas where the established church could not hope to answer the needs of a rising population. Its leader was the Rev John Wesley, with his brother, the Rev. Charles, and other lay preachers who established Methodist Societies, and meeting houses, in London and Bristol in 1738-39.

The Wesleys visited Cornwall for the first time in 1743. Redruth was to become the Methodist heartland in the county (a Revival there in 1814 brought 5000 new converts in a single year), but a Society was established in St Ives and soon numbered 120 members, and on the same visit Wesley preached to 200-300 at Zennor. Elsewhere, the Wesleys had been greeted with hostility and mob violence, organised by the resident Anglican minsters. In Zennor, however, John Wesley recorded in his diary that he 'found much good will in them, but no life.' Clearly, they were not yet ready for Salvation.

He was back the following year, to discover that the mob had burned down the meeting house in St Ives to celebrate a naval victory over the Fench, believing the Methodists to be in league with the Jacobites. The same rumours had reached Zennor, where he found there had been a 'shaking' among the brethren 'occasioned by the confident assertion of some that they had seen Mr Wesley a week or two ago with the Pretender in France.' His preaching gave renewed confidence and he left happy that he had 'settled the infant Society.'

While in Zennor he had lodged at Rosemergy. The farmer's wife, Alice Daniel, had prepared for him 'a little chamber, and set for him there a bed and a table, a stool and a candlestick.' This has ever since been called Mr Wesley's room, and for many years some of the furniture and an inkstand were preserved there. He visited the Daniels again in 1766.

Wesley visited Zennor in each of the two following years. In 1745 he 'found some life, even at Zennor', while in 1746, he felt that the Society was genuinely becoming established in the area. He preached near the churchyard at Zennor, before church service began 'and surely was it never more wanted.'

For fifty years, until his death in 1791, John Wesley toured the country, holding meetings in fields and market places, preaching to all who would listen, setting up societies, attracting new members. He did not reach West Cornwall every year, but he seldom let more than two years go by without appearing among them. In 1775 he noted that 'the people in general here (excepting the rich) seem almost persuaded to be Christians', and on his 27th and last visit, in 1789, he wrote 'surely forty years labour has not been in vain here.'

Wesley remained a firm member of the Church of England throughout his life, although during the 1780s, his followers persuaded him to form the scattered Methodist Societies into a legally established body. He saw himself bringing true Christianity to those who had previously known only an incomplete version, if not downright heathenism. It was only after his death that Methodist preachers came to be ordained, and then to administer the sacraments to their own members. Even then, curing their period of fastest growth (their numbers doubled from 100,000 to 200,000 between 1796-1815), they somehow avoided the taint of being Dissenters, and it was partly due to this that they drew such strong support from the middle classes.

They were not without their own rifts and divisions. A number of breakaway societies formed, such as the New Connexion in 1796 and the Primitive Methodists and Bible Christians around 1810. These never commanded the membership of the Wesleyans, whose membership in 1839 numbered nearly half a million in Britain and America.

In Cornwall, like the industrial North, Methodism never failed to find support after its initial introduction by the Wesleys, unlike rural counties such as Devon where it gained little foothold until the 19th century and then mostly in its Bible Christian form. The skilled industrial population was far too numerous to fit into the old parish churches and if they did, they did not always find there a form of worship to which they could happily respond. It is not surprising that they welcomed the enthusiastic and informal meetings of Wesley's society, usually arranged out of working hours, and where miner was genuinely on equal terms with mine captain in the eyes of God.

J H Matthews, writing his *History of St Ives, Lelant, Towdnack and Zennor* in 1892, might be over harsh on the moral and religious conduct of earlier times (and over-optimistic about that which followed), but he was echoing a generally felt view when he stated that:

> it would be impossible to overrate the results of Wesley's preaching in Cornwall, the inhabitants of which, from a careless people whose only religion was a curious mixture of the remains of Catholicism with yet more ancient vestiges of Celtic paganism, became a sober, Bible-reading folk, only less strongly Protestant and matter-of-fact than their Welsh cousins, who received Calvinsim from Whitefield at the same date.

Historical Background

There are few parts of the British Isles where Archaeology is so visible to the layman 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 the last decade that the full complexity of this rich landscape has begun to be studied in detail and on a longer timescale, fuelled by new interest in the fields of vernacular architecture, and industrial and post-medieval 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, has carried out a detailed survey of its holding at Bosigran, from pre-history to the present day.

There are some enormous difficulties to be 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 plain-ness of the buildings, coupled with the perishability of others such as thatch. Both of these in turn contributed to the final muddling factor - 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 17th-century, stands at the top of the Lower Porthmeor settlement. Known as Grace's House, it was until recently kept thatched, and its bakehouse chimney whitewashed. Another, more ruinous, is in the former Mill Farm in the valley below. Of a single storey, 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 Chysauster.

At what date the farmers from these settlements moved to the ones 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 is higher up the hill in a field called Dinnis = Dynas, a fortified place (which gave Lt Col F.C. Hirst the clue to look for it). It is likely that the move to the new 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 (the variants on its name are inevitably many) existed in the early 14th century.

In the new sites, as in the old, the houses were still built close together in hamlets, as many as five or six together. This is a custom that has lasted to within living memory in Penwith, although eroded in this century by depopulation and the consolidation of farms. In very early times the impulse may have been partly security, but there must also have been an element of sharing in it, especially of farming activities, such as harvesting. In recent centuries 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 another remote westerly county, Merioneth in North Wales, where among the gentry of the early 17th century a pattern grew up that has been labelled 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.

It has been suggested that 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 Queen Elizabeth 1. It is easy to imagine something of the same happening in Penwith. Certainly in the 19th century 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 today talk about it as though it was always one farm, with the men of each household sharing the work. The pattern can be seen again on many farms now, as the farmer's son sets up his own self-contained home.

On the other hand it was comparatively rare in Penwith, unlike Wales, for the occupant also to be the owner of the land, even in the 19th century. Most farms belonged to a larger estate, and were held by leases based on 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. Part of Porthmeor, which exceptionally was largely owned by its farmers, at one time belonged to the Lanhydrock estate - as in a sense it does again today, Lanhydrock being the National Trust Regional Headquarters.

Early house and shippon (cattle shed) at the top of Lower Porthmeor, known as Grace's House. The enclosure in the foreground was a garden.

Lower Porthmeor–the buildings

Porthmeor, in its grouping and siting and the forces that have gone into its continuation, is representative of many other hamlets on this northern shelf of Penwith; and is besides 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.

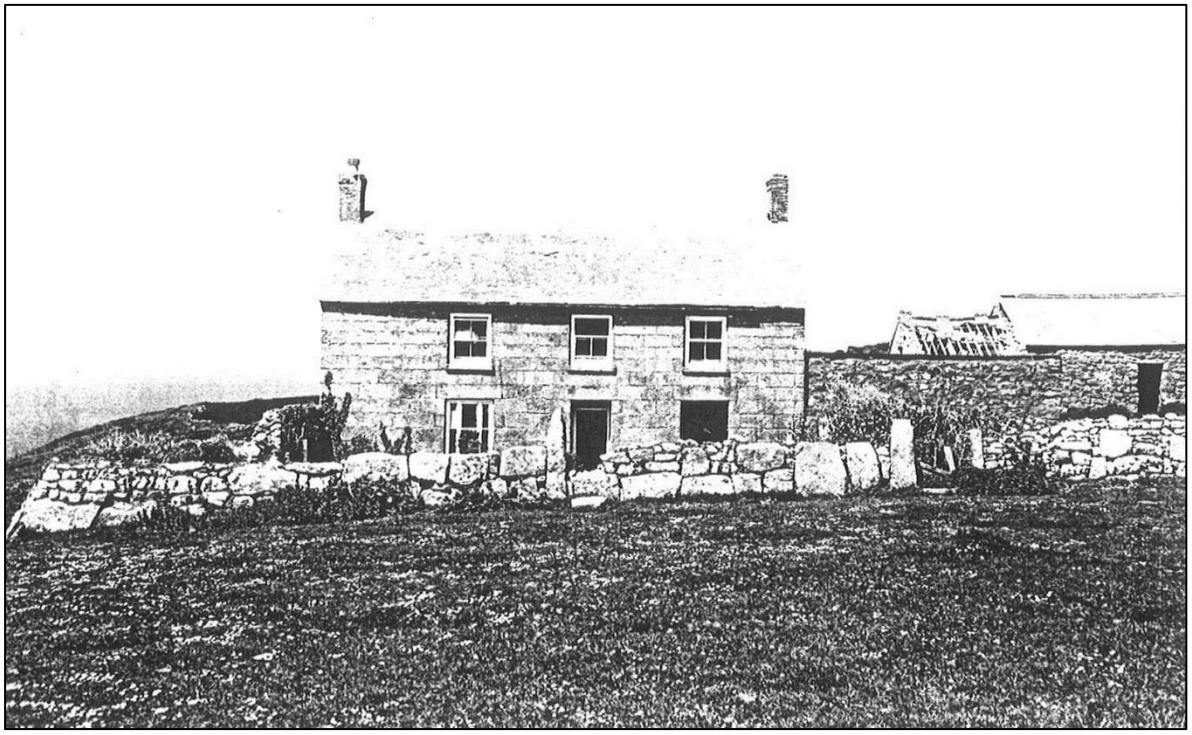
We shudder with discomfort at the thought of living in such structures, and certainly, as soon as wealth permitted, they were improved on. But they were solid and well insulated, providing warmth as well as shelter, and there may have been ways of keeping them dry that we no longer know about in this age of damp-inducing concrete. And 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 then 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, 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 rebuilt, unless put to new use as a farm building, or kept on as the dwelling of a labourer or poor relation. There was at Bosigran, in a very ruinous condition, one house that dated from this transitional period, with a single mullioned window, but this was pulled down a few years ago. And a garden wall at Higher Porthmeor is in fact part of another such house, of quite a substantial kind. The Upper House at Higher Porthmeor also bears witness to a 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.

The other great improvement of the 17th century was the chimney. None of this date survives, as such, at Porthmeor, but a method of construction was developed which endured into the 20th 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 (not counting Grace's house) 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 these 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 rather more spacious loft. So the house nearest the road - known as the Outside 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 Tithe Apportionment Map for Zennor of 1842,



Above, the Inside House (1987) and below, the Outside House

although it lists a House and Garden here, only shows what seems to be a smaller building again, hardly even a house. The National Trust's Vernacular Buildings Surveyors have suggested that this was because the house was only then being built - and such are the difficulties of dating, a range of fifty years either way is quite acceptable.

The house that almost certainly does date from soon after 1800 is the Inside House, now the Landmark. This is most clearly marked on the Tithe Map of 1842. It also appears in the first edition of the 1' Ordnance Survey map, surveyed in 1805 although not published until 1813. The leap in terms of civilisation from the earlier houses to this is so immense, that the reasons for it will be looked at in more detail later on.

The Inside House has been little altered, but its companion, the Outside 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. It is thought that the 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. 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 again, and has remained so. This had happened by the time of the 1881 census, when an uninhabited house was recorded.

The farm buildings of Lower Porthmeor are all 19th century. The long cow-house, running uphill from the Inside House, 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

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

19th century by Robert Berryman, Captain Arthur's father. Robert Berryman also built the very charming, and rather grand, barn (i.e. granary) immediately next to the Inside House, 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.

Owners of Porthmeor

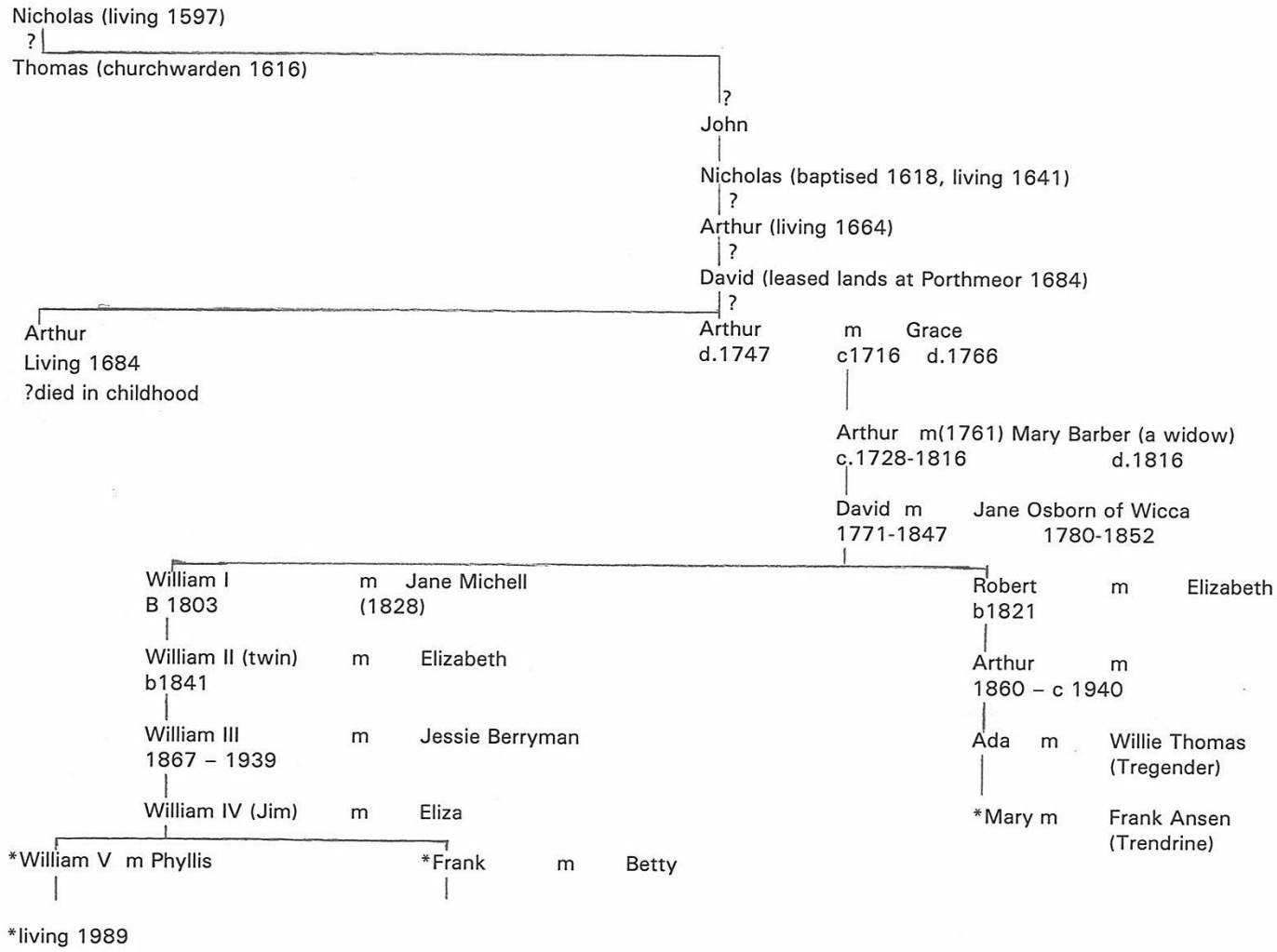
Porthmeor does not seem to have been part of the main Zennor manor of Trewey or Trethewy, held by the Killigrew family. In the early Middle Ages this part of Zennor parish belonged to the Manor of Binnerton, listed in the Domesday survey as being in Royal hands. In the 16th century this passed to the St Aubyn family, who were based at Clowance, (now demolished), further east towards Redruth. In a late 18th 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, and as described above they acquired more on lease in 1684.

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 œ6, 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 being 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 Porthmeare 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 or possessions. 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.

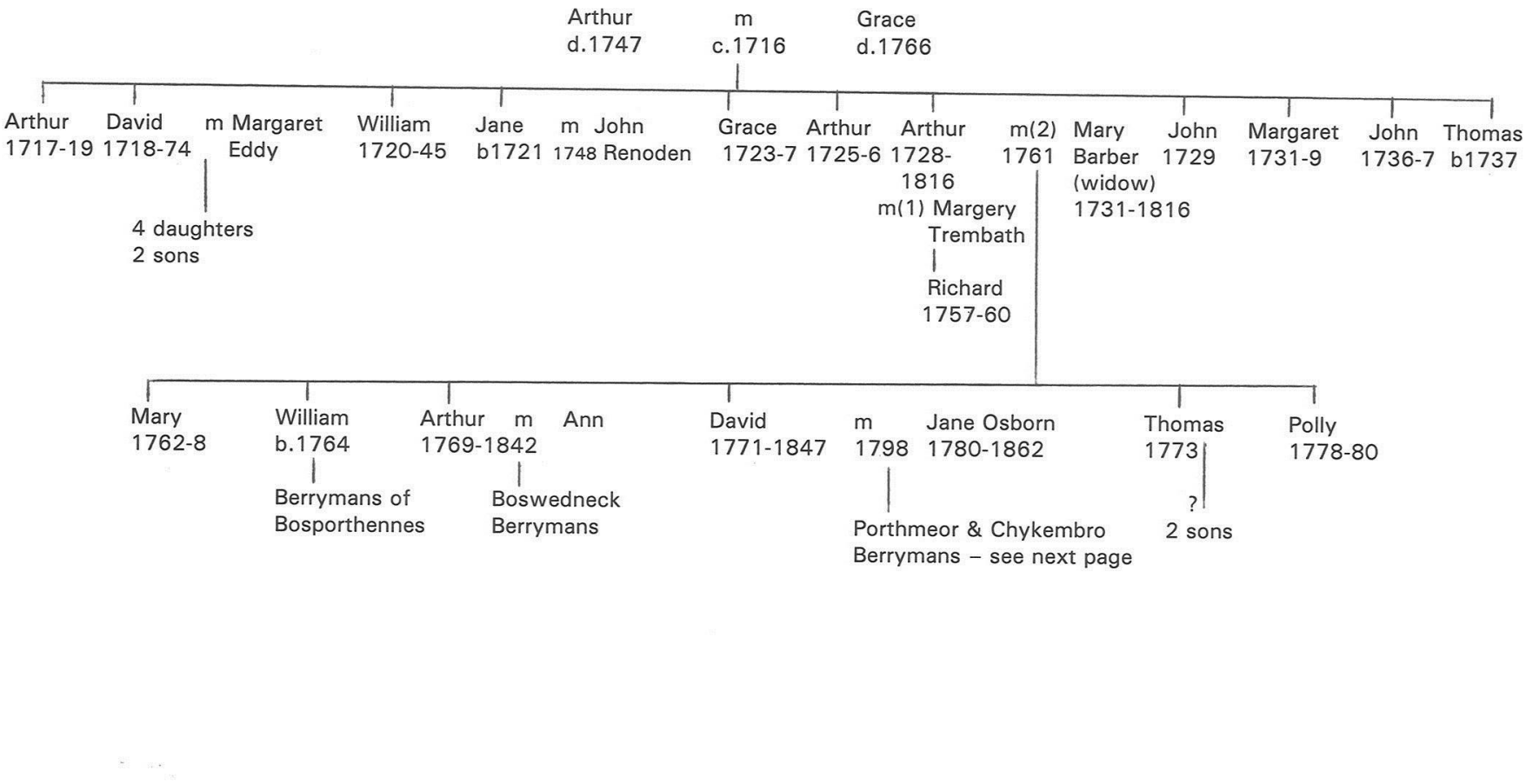
The lease from the Trelawneys in 1684, however, is the first positive link between family and property. For a consideration of œ60 Jonathan Trelawney of Coldrenick, St German's (a junior branch of the family) leased for 99 years or 3 lives ‘lands known as Porthmeor, in the parish of Zennor (part of the 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, with 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 new Farmhouse in which you are now staying. 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 Berrymans in the Eighteenth Century



Compiled from Mrs Nankerns's family tree

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 the Outside House, although as already described 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 other's have done to similar humble buildings. There is a Tom's house at Higher Porthmeor for example.

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. 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 16th- 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 has 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'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 Inside House, and probably of the earliest part of the Outside House, as well as the earlier farm buildings. The Inside House 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 19th 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 (the last census available) 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, briefly, as Lower 'meor and Higher 'meor.

The other question concerning David Berryman is of course how he could afford to build such a grand 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, 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.

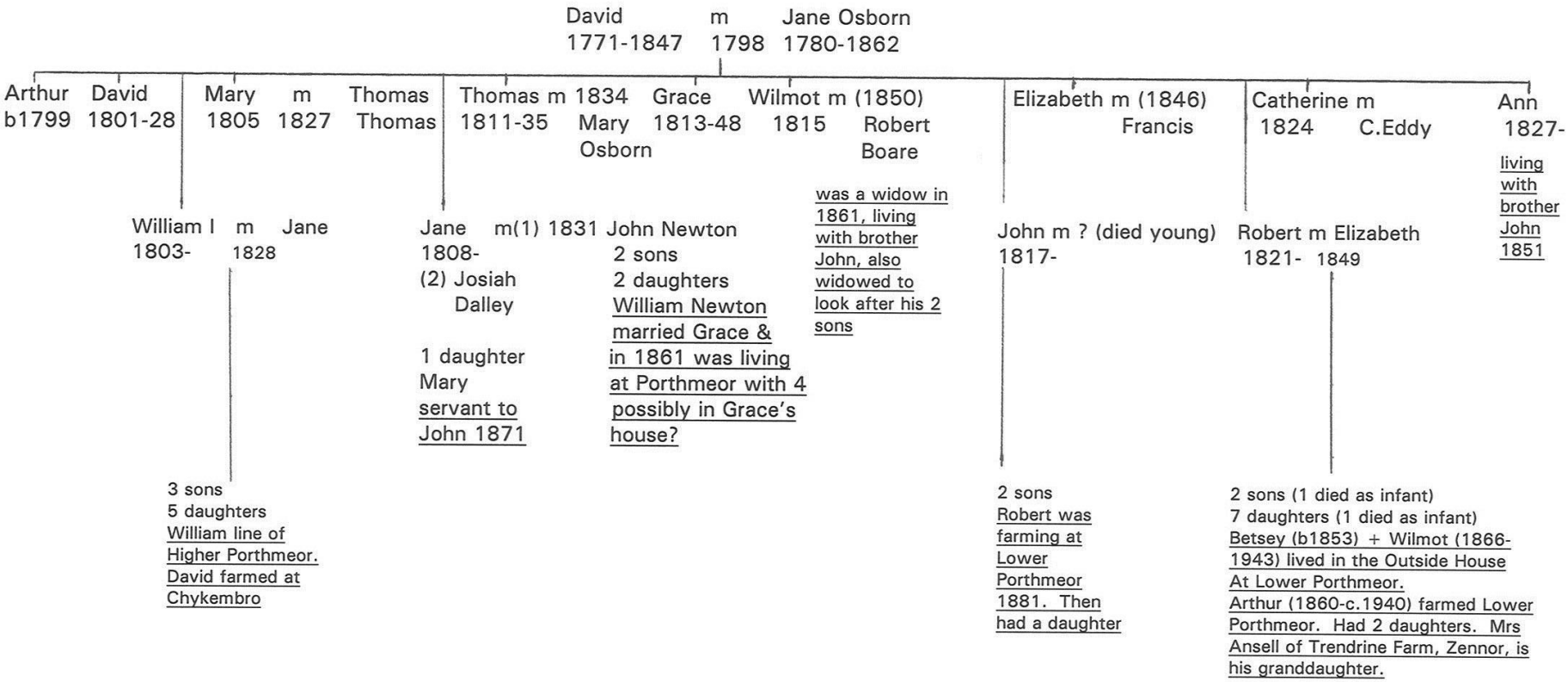
The main period of mining activity began in around 1780. Prosperity of a kind hitherto unknown in Cornwall was suddenly there in its midst. The population expanded, and anyone who could had a share in the industry. Whether the Berryman family had a connection with the stamps apart from leasing the land 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 in Wales, 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 tinners’ 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 the Outside 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 for the new farmhouse came.

Porthmeor also provided homes for miners. In 1841 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 Gazetter 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, and it may be that 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.

Porthmeor Berrymans in the 19th century



Compiled from Mrs Nankerris's family tree & Census returns

The later Nineteenth century – more Berryman's

The five sets of 19th century census returns soon 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 are 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 at Venton, this would confirm the suggestion that the Outside 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, 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.

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 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. 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 the Outside 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 shows 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 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 House, with the lower part listed as uninhabited. John's son, another Robert, has taken on his father's farm, and is presumably living in the Inside House - 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 in another generation will be forgotten. Colonel Hirst in the 1930s recorded and collected many of them, and a visit to his Wayside Museum in Zennor is essential. William Berryman has also been very kind in telling us his memories of the farm.

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.

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 would be 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 would have lived in the long cow-house, and later in the Four-house and the ground floor of the Barn; and in the yard between the Outside and Inside Houses 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 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. The herd now is 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. Gilbert in 1838 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 'comparitively 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 had 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. The older houses also have a 'townplace' or 'townplot', a small yard off which such buildings as the bakehouse or the dairy would open. There were several of these at Bosigran, but at Porthmeor they only occur with Grace's House and the Upper House at Higher Porthmeor.

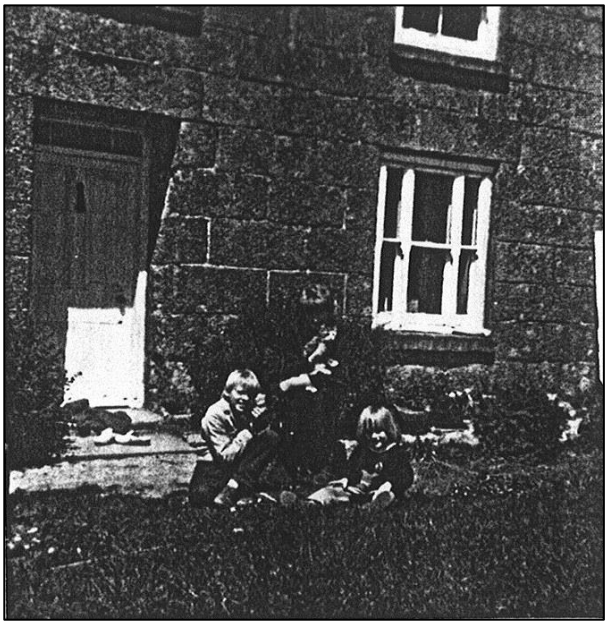
Another animal that would be found on most farms, by 1900 at least, would be the horse. In earlier centuries the ploughs would have been pulled by draught oxen, but during the 19th century horses became more common. They were certainly a common sight at Porthmeor between the Wars, when William Berryman's 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.

Up to the present day

At the beginning of this 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 main Farmhouse, or Inside House, and his sisters Betsy (the schoolteacher) and Wilmot lived in the Outside House. They used to have bed and breakfast visitors there in the '30s, 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 eventually being run by two.

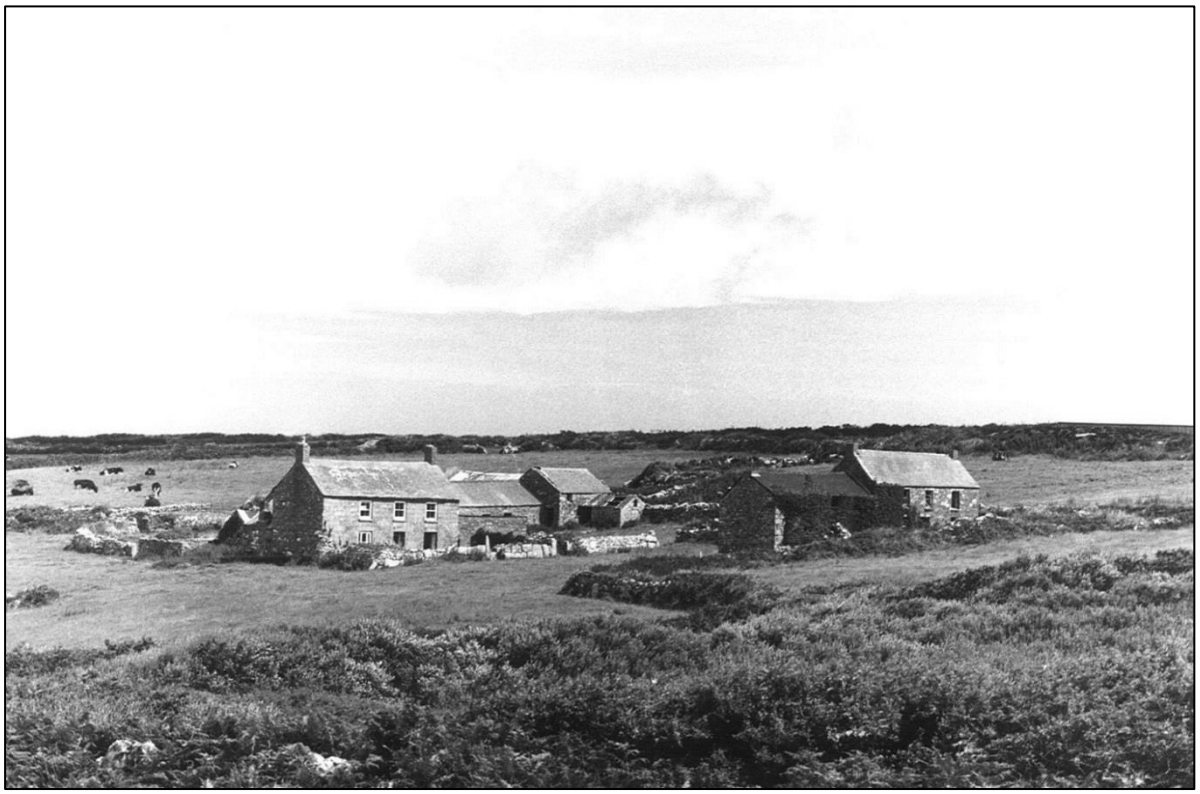


Berryman children outside the Inside House
in the 1960s.

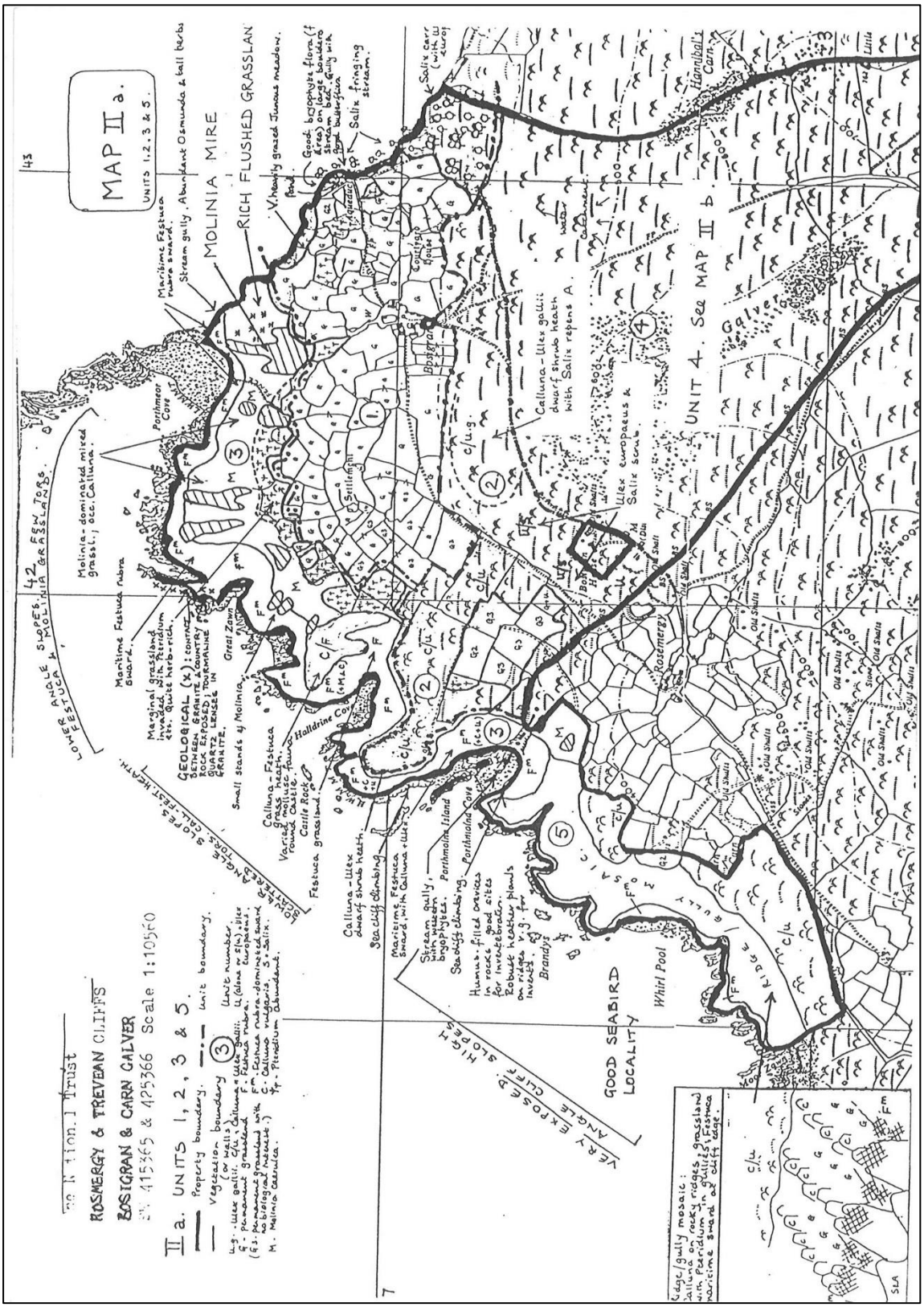
William had moved up to near Liskeard in the 1950s, but he returned in 1964, and went to live in the Inside House at Lower Porthmeor. Although horses had by then been replaced by tractors for ploughing, William kept up the tradition, and was for many years Champion Ploughman for the West of England, and once All England Champion. The Outside 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 are 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, and the Trust has since attempted to have part of the coastal strip designated as a Rural Conservation Area. It has also sought to acquire, and restore in a traditional way, buildings as well as land.

So far Bosigran has been the Trust's largest acquisition in the parish of Zennor, together with most of Rosemergy, long stretches of cliff land, and covenants over much else. At Higher Porthmeor in 1986 it bought the old Giles farm, the Upper House with 70 acres; and then in 1987, with help from Landmark, the



hamlet of Lower Porthmeor with 6 acres of land. The buildings were leased to Landmark, which has now restored both houses. The Outside House, once rented back to the National Trust as a home for the Coastal Warden, has been a Landmark since 1995 and is now known as the Captain's House.



Map from National Trust's Biological Survey, showing flora and fauna of property adjoining

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 slatey country or surface rock through which the granite dome thrust, and which in the process was metamorphised 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.

Some pitfalls to be encountered in Archaeological investigation

(from Charles Henderson's Notebooks in the library of the Royal Institution of Cornwall, Vol 11, 1914-17

Bosportennis Huts and Cromlech

> 'The capstone of the monument lies on the ground and is remarkable since it is perfecly circular with a diameter of 5 feet and an even thickness of 6 inches. Mr Borlase in *Naenia Cornubiae* gives an amusing account of the excitement of the local antiquaries on its discovery: Many were the theories put forward until cruel disillusionment came in the shape of an old man who declared that his uncle, a miller at Porthmeor, when in search of a stone for his mill-stone, found the capstone, and thinking it would be suitable, he set to work to make it suitable. When the work was completed, however, he found the stone would not serve his purpose and so he left it there. This story and Mr Borlase's assertion that he himself saw the fragments knocked must be accepted as the truth.'

Acknowledgements

Thanks especially to Mr and Mrs William Berryman for the recent history of Lower Porthmeor, and of their family, and for the loan of Mrs Nankervis's family tree.
Thanks also to the National Trust for the loan of their Surveys, Archaeological and Biological, and of Vernacular Buildings. Nicholas Johnson of the Cornwall Archaeology Unit kindly read through this account, and made helpful corrections on archaeological matters. Eric Berry clarified ideas on the development of Penwith buildings, especially the earlier ones.Peter Bird filled in the detail of the restoration work. .Most of the 'before' photographs were taken by Bill Newby.
Except for published books acknowledged in the text, most of the material for these notes came from manuscript sources, held by the library of the Royal Institution of Cornwall and the County Record Office, both in Truro; the Redruth Local Studies Library has copies of the 19th century census returns on microfilm, and many books on local history and topography.

If the stones could speak . . .

Times, 10th July 2004

At first sight, they are anything but exceptional. But these humble Cornish walls may be the world's oldest functioning artefacts. **Sean Thomas** explains

I am standing on a little lane in Penwith, west Cornwall. In front of me is a steep moorland valley that leads down to the sea. All around is a classic west Cornish landscape of small green fields and meandering stone walls. At first glance it seems unexceptional, if beautiful. Yet there are historians who think this valley, and those near by, are unique and uniquely precious. The reason is those humble stone walls, which experts believe may be the oldest human artefacts "still in use" anywhere in the world.

This startling claim was first made by the land-use historian Oliver Rackham in his *The History of the Countryside*. "In the Land's End peninsula," he writes, "there is one of the most impressively ancient farmland landscapes in Europe. The farmland is of tiny irregular pastures separated by great banks, each formed of a row of 'grounders' — huge granite boulders — topped off with lesser boulders and earth."

After discussing how the banks "zigzag and deviate" in order to incorporate the boulders, Rackham concludes: "The banks . . . are contemporary with the field . . . and can be roughly dated by the Bronze Age objects buried inside. These banks, indeed, are among the world's oldest human artefacts still in use."

If it was one lonely historian making this claim, it could possibly be ignored. But Rackham's thesis has been adopted by people in power: the Countryside Agency reiterates the "oldest walls" claim in its latest policy documents for Penwith; the agricultural ministry Defra has done likewise — and also devised a plan for preserving the walls. These developments make the "walls of Penwith" a rural issue as much as an academic debate. Should the walls prove to be as precious as some suggest, woe betide any Penwith farmer who wants to enlarge his fields.

The present state of the Great Walls Debate sees lines drawn between the poetic and the pragmatic wings of British academe. The attitude of the pragmatists is typified by the remarks of Charles Thomas, an expert in Cornish studies. He regards Rackham's claims as excitable hyperbole and asks: "Is such a hypothesis actually testable?"

The more poetic side of the debate is voiced by the Cornwall county archaeologist Peter Rose: "There may be other places that could make similar claims. But what is indubitably true is that the Penwith walls have not been altered in any way since Bronze Age farmers built them. In fact, the whole rural landscape in that area is a unique survival from prehistory."

Everybody, at least, agrees the walls are ancient. But how ancient? The Penwith peninsula is one of the most historically resonant places in the British Isles. Traces of settlement have been detected from the early Stone Age, circa 7,000BC. Flint factories were in operation near Penzance around 2,500BC. By about 2,000BC, new waves of immigrants were streaming for tin on the upland moors; they were also hedging in their livestock to protect them from the bitter Atlantic winds — a task made easier by the many enormous moorstones, which they were able to incorporate within their walls. It's these same boulder-rich walls that we see today.

Four thousand years is a pretty impressive age. But does it make the walls the "oldest human artefacts still in use"? Not necessarily. Archaeologists point to rival claims. In Izmir, west Turkey, for instance, there is a single-slab stone arch bridge over the River Meles, which is meant to be the "oldest bridge on the globe". Yet the best guess is that it dates to about 850BC, some time after the oldest walls at Penwith.

Another claimant to the crown is a network of irrigation ditches in Iraq. Mesopotamian irrigation probably dates back to the 6th millennium BC — much older than the Penwith walls. This sounds promising, but experts still think it unlikely that any of the original Iraqi ditches could have survived so many years of use.

Adrian Thomas farms longhorn cattle in the little green valley of Nanquidno, near St Just. He has no doubt as to the value of the walls. "We are encouraged to protect them under the Environmentally Sensitive Area scheme, but most farmers would protect them anyway. OK, the walls are uncommercial — many of the fields are very small: two turns of a tractor and you're done. But we still need the walls."

As proof, he cites a Lincolnshire farmer who bought a farm near Sennen a few years back. This man tore down the walls, and you can still see the result: the fields are bleak and exposed, the topsoil ravaged by winter gales. So it seems the walls are not just archaeological oddities — they are ecological necessities.

Nevertheless, the ultimate case remains unproven. We may have to wait for carbon dating — and a very big argument — to find out if the "oldest artefacts" thesis is correct. And even then it may come down to intuition — a sense of place. The best way to find out is to visit Zennor — this is where the walls are apparently at their most authentic and impressive. I am walking down the little valley that leads from the churchyard to the sea. In the distance I can hear the wild Atlantic; behind me a songbird is trilling. It feels, clichés notwithstanding, timeless.

But could the reality match the romance? Cheryl Straffon, a writer and historian from west Cornwall, says: "What Defra and Rackham are saying is very bold, and your first instinct as a historian is to reject it. Because there are plenty of artefacts much older than the Penwith walls: pyramids, stone circles, and so on. However, one cannot be sure any of these are still in use, in the way that the Penwith walls are still utilised by Cornish farmers. We would need to get one of the walls scientifically dated to clinch the argument."

KATARINA BOUER

"THE WHOLE RURAL LANDSCAPE IN THAT AREA IS A UNIQUE SURVIVAL FROM PREHISTORY"

Martin Gayford

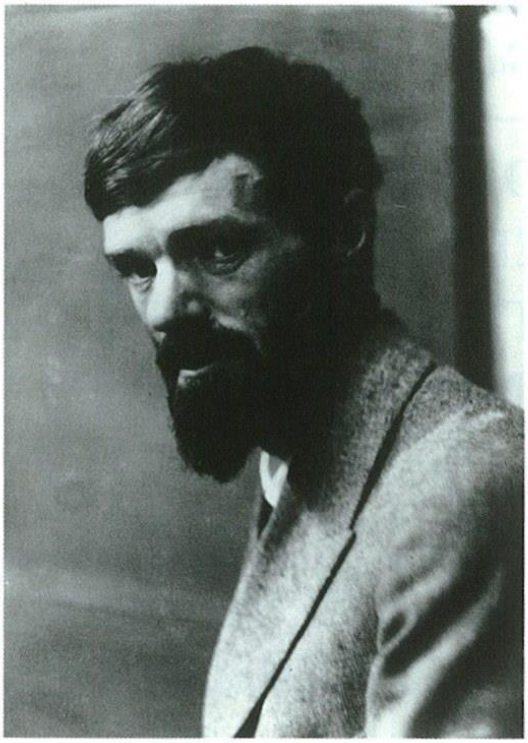
STILL WINDING AND WONDERFUL: ZENNOR'S LITERARY AND ARTISTIC CONNECTIONS

'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



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

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

Photograph by Patrick Heron

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 Rananim 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. Koteliansky, in May, only a month after the Murrys 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 Heron

View from the kitchen window at Eagles Nest.

Photograph Bob Berry

Bryan Wynter, Landscape With Hill Cultivation, Zennor, Cornwall, *gouache 1952.*

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

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 Murrys 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.

Patrick Heron, Autumn Garden: 1956

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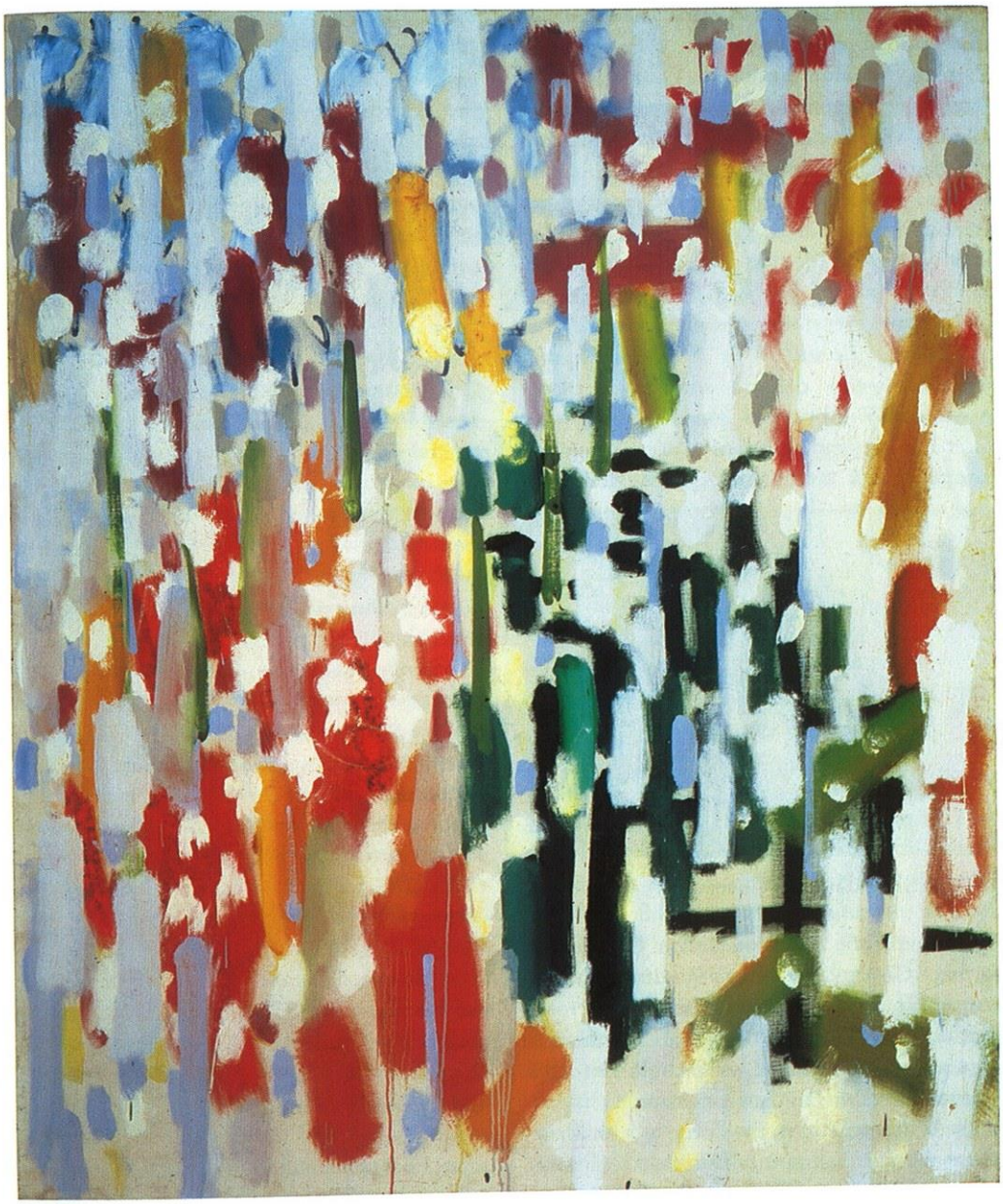

Patrick Heron, Azalea Garden: May 1956

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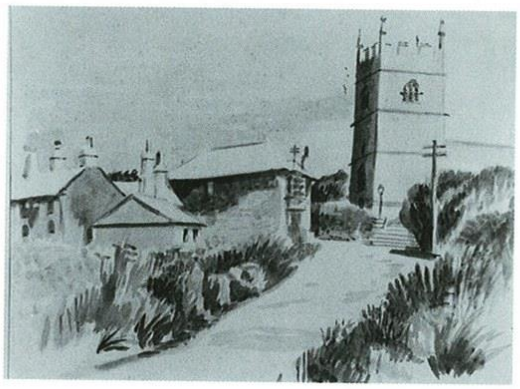
Shortly after the move, in April, 1956 – like so many people, the Herons arrived in Cornwall in spring – Heron produced a couple of loose, 'tachist' abstractions he named 'Camellia Garden' and 'Azalea Garden', the camellias and azaleas being in flower at that time. Soon the Herons set about completing 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 Tregerthen 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.'