

**PISKIES & STANDING STONES, SPIRITS IN ROCKS ●
WINTER SOLSTICE AT CHÛN ● CASPN & LAN ●
NEW PREHISTORIC FINDS ● DOWSING ● NEWS
* ALL PHOTOS NOW IN FULL COLOUR ***

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STONES OF OUR MOTHERLAND

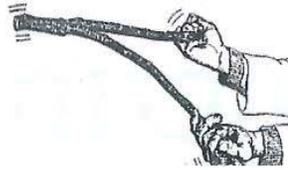
EARTH ENERGIES * ANCIENT STONES * SACRED SITES * PAGANISM * LEYPATHS
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The cows on Tregeseal Common have continued to excite controversy, with repeated occurrences of them rubbing against the stones of Tregeseal Circle and dislodging them. There have been a number of meetings there with interested parties to try and find a long-term solution, but *Save Penwith Moors* (SPM) group say that the only solution is to take them off the Common altogether. Although they say that they are not opposed to grazing per se, they claim that this breed of cattle (longhorns) are inappropriate at this site. After the latest incident, Craig Weatherhill of SPM commented: "This is the fourth incident of archaeological damage since this grazing regime was imposed two years ago. This situation of not only endangering but physically damaging the archaeology of Carnyorth Common cannot be allowed to continue". Nick Russell of English Heritage said that they were looking at making "more robust" repairs to the stones, but warned it may take some time, as 200 of Cornwall's scheduled monuments are at 'high risk of declining' with another 664 labelled 'medium risk'. A meeting was held at the circle at the beginning of August with all interested parties, including English Heritage, Natural England, the farmer Kenny Trembath, SPM, the Celtic League and CASPN. Some positive dialogue occurred, with everyone agreeing that the stones could not continue to be re-stabilised every time that one or more of them became loose. English Heritage undertook to make the loosest stones near the entrance of the circle more permanently stable, and also to place new upright stones on the Common away from the circle to encourage the cattle to rub against those. The farmer said that he was planning to burn off some selected areas of the moorland to encourage new growth which the cattle might find more attractive to graze, and to take the cattle off from the moor over winter and replace them with ponies, which have proved to be very successful in getting the vegetation low on Chapel Carn Brea. It will be interesting to see if all this helps to protect the site in future.

Meanwhile, one of the holed stones that stand not far away from the circle has fallen and broken in two. These holed stones were stood back upright by farmer Egbert Rowe in the early 1980s, when he concreted the two halves of the NW holed stone back together. This concrete has now crumbled, and English Heritage have agreed to remove the stone and repair it properly before re-placing it again on site. So hopefully, this iconic area of Tregeseal Common will once again have stone circle and holed stones in good repair.

Meyn Mamvro has received a request from a reader originally from Cornwall but now living in Ireland for a penfriend who loves the ancient sites and is willing to write to her. Please write to Rosemary White, Hendra Leam, Boyle, Co. Roscommon, Ireland.

DOWSING NEWS



Spring Equinox (March 20th) saw the **West Cornwall Dowsers** on a return visit to *Rosewall Hill*, first visited a year ago in April 2010 [see *MM73 p.2*]. This time they went to the eastern part of the hill, where a gatepost at SW4904 3920 dowsed with very strong energy, so much so that it knocked Bart sideways! [photo right]. Interestingly, although the men in the group were very wary of it, the women found it very attractive and clustered around the stone. Dowsing also revealed that it originally came from a dip in the ground a few feet away (at 4904 3918), where it was noticed that it would originally have stood on a visual alignment from a 'viewing platform' on the Hill above, through the church of St.Ia in St.Ives (which probably stands on a pre-Christian site) to Godrevey Island, and on to the holy hilltop of St.Agnes Beacon.



The Group then went on across the moor to a Bronze Age barrow with a well-preserved kerb surround at 4922 3918, and then to a distinctive tor on the horizon at 4950 3933, which originally had a logan stone. Here, CAS President Tony Blackman who was with the Group, identified a 'view frame' in the rocks [photo above] which looked through to the hill outside St.Ives that is now crowned with Knill's Monument. These view frames have been identified elsewhere, particularly on Bodmin Moor, by Roger Farnworth [see *MM 64 p.10-13*], so this one was a great addition to those. After lunch on the tor, the group made their way back to the viewing platform mentioned above, and discovered what appears to have been a boulder-lined processional way up the side of the hill to a spring and enclosure. A day of some fascinating discoveries, on a hill that is little-known and not much explored.



A week later and it was the turn of **Tamar Dowsers** to visit Bodmin Moor on a lovely Spring day. They met at the the Hurlers stone circle site to explore a stone and earth alignment running across *Craddock Moor*, identified by archaeologist David Hooley in a recent talk to the Group. The alignment links the Pipers standing stones on the edge of the Hurlers and then runs NW to a much-ruined stone circle on Craddock Moor, and a couple of enigmatic low embankments. In the other SE direction it goes to the apex of Caradon Hill, originally crowned by a barrow. At the Craddock Moor circle, the energy contained therein was still very evident, and the alignment was dowsable and visible to Caradon Hill.

The long low embankments were found, and dowsed as being at least 3000 years old, also deliberately placed to be in line with the Cardon Hill apex. The energy alignment ran straight down the middle of the two mounds, about 12 paces wide. Part of the way down the north-eastern bank was a hole that the dowsers found had originally contained a standing stone, and three energy lines still ran through it and spiralled around it. All this adds to the picture of the complex of prehistoric remains in this part of the Moor, and provided a fascinating and enjoyable afternoon's dowsing.

On April 10th the **West Cornwall Dowsers** met up on a beautiful sunny and warm day at Eagles Nest above Zennor, and made their way up to *Sperris Quoit*, previously visited in August 2010 [see *MM74 p.2*]. The tor above the site had a flat rock that Paul Bonnington had suggested was the original excarnation platform for bodies, the bones of which were subsequently placed inside the Quoit, and this was confirmed by the dowsers. They then followed the newly-cut path that ran through *Sperris Settlement*, and found the lovely energy spots previously identified there. There was a suggestion that this was the spiritual centre of the site. On to *Trendrine Hill* for lunch, where the entrance grave was dowsed, and an original entrance passage facing NW was suggested. The Trendrine Hill ley alignment leading back to Zennor Quoit could be clearly seen from here [see *MM61 p.20*]. Finally, on the way back, an unusual stone complex on the side of Sperris Hill dowsed as the remains of another *Quoit* [SW4697 3838], with traces of inhumations - *photo right*. If this is correct, then this makes three quoits in a triangular pattern, all in a small area, with Zennor Quoit intervisible from both Sperris Quoit and this one at Sperris Hill. The sequence of construction dowsed as being first Sperris, then Zennor, then Sperris Hill. An unexpected discovery that rounded off a lovely day.



May 1st was a rare bad-weather day, coming after several weeks of unbroken warm and sunny conditions. Nevertheless a group of stalwart **West Cornwall Dowsers** met up at the barrows on *Nanjulian Headland*. There are several barrows here, all with perspectives to Chapel Carn Brea and out to sea [see *MM57 p.14-20* & *MM65 p.8-11*], and all the barrows dowsed had very nice undisturbed energies about them. The locations of cist burials from some of the barrows were identified, before the heavy rain set in. Later in the month, the **Tamar Dowsers** took a trip to *Trelawney Barton Estate* between Pelynt and Looe. Local historian Carol Vivien gave an introduction to the site, and subsequent investigation revealed at least 5 main energy lines, located near to an artificial pond of some antiquity, and a burial area dating to the 2ndC CE, that needs further investigation. Finally, at the end of the month **West Cornwall Dowsers** went to the Cliff Castle of *Carn Les Boel* near Land's End, where the Michael & Mary lines enter/leave. There will be a full report on this and the rest of the summer activities in the next MM.

SPRING INTO SUMMER 2011

Weeks of good weather in early Spring meant that this year's events were all blessed with clear sunny days and dry conditions. As usual, the season started with the well-clear up and blessing of dollies at **Fenton Bebibell** on Good Friday, which this year was very late, being on April 22nd. Now in its 6th year since the revival of the custom, a group came together to clear the well, bless the earth and her creatures, and baptise the dolls in the waters. The local paper *The Cornishman* did a nice write-up.

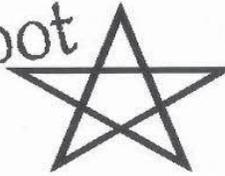


A week later and Beltane was upon us. This year saw the 23rd annual **Maypole Dance** in St. Just, which after 22 years had a change of venue and musicians, with new group Down2Earth (War an Dor). From Carn Bosavern it moved just down the hill to Bosavern Community Farm, who were able to offer a splendid field, complete with rubbing stone, a large area for the tent and dancing, and some really supportive help in putting it all together. Some renewed promotion and publicity brought about a splendid event, with over 60 adults and children enjoying the maypole dancing with a serpent dance around the site, followed by enthusiastic jumping over the Beltane fire.

The next day May 1st was very inclement with heavy and sporadic rain throughout the day, causing the **Penwith Pagan Moot Beltane** celebrations to be cancelled [see p.5]. However, the 4th **Penzance May Horns** event went ahead in the evening, with its wild discordant procession from Newlyn to Penzance. This year May 1st was on a Sunday, which meant that the **Padstow Obby Oss Day** took place the next day on Monday May 2nd. Fortunately the weather had much improved, and a great crowd turned out to watch the Osses and dance with them through the streets into the evening. The **Helston Furry Dance** also had a changed date because of the Sunday, and took place a day earlier than usual on Sat May 7th. As always, the Hal-an-Tow was the most spirited and pagan part of the day. Finally, Sunday May 8th brought the 23rd annual **Three Wells Walk**. A smaller group than usual did the 13 mile walk from Chapel Euny to Sancreed to Madron wells, but were rewarded with hedgerows of glorious flowers, and a lovely blessing for the summer at Madron Baptistry well, with the intermingling of the waters from the three wells.

Midsummer arrived with the usual **Old Cornwall Society bonfires** at various sites, and Penzance's **Golowan Festival**, more details of which can be found on p.23 of this MM

Penwith Pagan Moot



by **Eve Benney**

For our **Spring Equinox** ritual we met at the lovely Crean Mill, by kind invitation of Cassandra and Tia Latham-Jones. There could hardly have been a more beautiful place to celebrate the return of Spring than the Mill's beautiful gardens, warm and sheltered in the early spring sunshine. All around us in the gardens we could see the signs of life reborn from the death of winter cold. At Equinox, when day and night are of equal length, we see about us the balance that exists in all things: Winter gives way to Spring, death brings forth life, darkness gives way to light. All of us had decorated an egg, (some very artistic efforts!), as a symbol of our hopes for Spring and these were gathered up by the Maiden of Spring for Her blessing. The egg is an ancient symbol of new life, the fertility of the earth, and creation. For us it was our symbol of new hopes, new paths opening up, new joys blossoming, and we spent some time in quiet meditation in the gardens reflecting on these hopes. But Spring Equinox is a time of celebration, so in a less serious vein, the Hare of Spring joined us for a frolic and sent us off to seek the more traditional chocolatey kind of egg. In no time at all, normally sedate grown-ups were rushing all over the garden in keen competition with the children, (traditionally the Moot's champion egg hunters), to find those eggs. The golden Hare was found by Zennor, one of our younger members, so the Easter Egg Champion title remains with the children for another year! There were plenty to share around when we returned to end our ritual.

Although we have met for some very soggy rituals in the past, this **Beltane** the rain lashed down and thunder and lightning threatened, so our meeting at Boscawen-ün Stone Circle was cancelled. Given the downpours on the day, we looked forward instead to celebrating the fire festival of Midsummer solstice. **Midsummer** is the time for celebrating fertility and abundance in all things, and it is also a festival of fire, when the Sun is at the zenith, the height of its power. We met at Ballowal Barrow, at Carn Glooze near St Just, just before the Solstice, the longest day of the year. We called down the power of the Sun, all of us having first participated in creating our sacred space by decorating a shrine to the Sun, each of us bringing something that symbolised for us the glory, radiance or heat of the Sun. For the focus of our celebration of fire, we reflected on the dragon, or serpent, an ancient and most potent symbol of this power of fire. Fire is the element of dragons; fire is their realm, their breath, their gift. Dragons are the masters of fire, the lords of magical alchemy. Theirs is the power to burn away the dross, to refine and purify, to transmute base elements into precious. We went to seek this treasure, this power of the dragon, at the Barrow. There in the intricate serpent's coils of this most sacred place, we found our treasure, our serpent's egg. Passed through the cauldron's smoke, the dragon's breath, these became our talismans for the year ahead. Unlike Beltane, the sun shone warmly, and afterwards we enjoyed a picnic in true summer weather, the blue of the sky meeting the blue sea in Nature's perfect harmony.



C.A.S.P.N & LAN NEWS ROUND-UP

Cornish Ancient Sites Protection Network



Lesingey Round is a small Iron Age hill fort that lies to the north of the A3071 Penzance-St. Just road. Loved by locals for its beautiful views over Mounts Bay and its wooded interior, resplendent with bluebells in Spring, CASPN has been managing the site on behalf of the owner Neville Noye for a couple of years. Now, Neville has decided to give the site to CASPN permanently, which is an amazingly generous move. More details of future plans in forthcoming MMs



Pathways to the Past had its 5th year of walks and talks amongst the ancient sites of West Penwith on the weekend of May 28th-29th, and as usual attracted a good number of people. On Saturday there was an interesting guided walk with **Barry Reilly** to **Bartinney & Chapel Carn Brea – the hills of fire**, and in the afternoon archaeologist **David Giddings** led an informative ramble around Nine Maidens Common, entitled **Maidens, mines and moors**. In the evening archaeologist **Paul Bonnington** gave an illustrated talk to a full house at the Count House, Botallack on **The Tinnors Way**.

Sunday morning brought a talk by WCD's **Bart O'Farrell** on **Dowsing West Cornwall's ancient sites**, a fascinating review of energy and ley lines and discovered sites. In the afternoon **Paul Bonnington** led a walk along **The Tinnors Way** from Mulfra Hill to Bodrifty settlement, with 55 people enjoying the walk and Paul's ideas. Finally, in the evening the **Kernow Search and Recovery Group** (Roy Powell, Ian Larkin & Dave Edwards) came to North Inn to talk about their finds and discoveries in **Lost and Found**.

Make a note in your diary now for next year's weekend on May 26th-27th!

CORNISH ANCIENT SITES PROTECTION NETWORK [CASP.N]

CASP.N Address: Whitewaves, Boscaswell Village, Pendeen, Penzance, TR19 7EP

Web site: www.cornishancientsites.com **E-mail:** secretary@cornishancientsites.com

FRIENDS OF CORNWALL'S ANCIENT SITES [FOCAS]

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Sites Clear-Ups: Dave Munday 01736-787230 e-mail: dave@cornishancientsites.com

Report damage at sites: Tel: 01736-787186 or 01736-787522

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Sites Clear-Ups: Graham Folkherd 01326-241450 e-mail: info@cornishancientsites.com

RECENT PREHISTORIC FINDS



A rare gold Iron Age pendant, that was discovered on the Rame Peninsula in December 2008 by metal detectorist Craig Budding, is being bought by the Royal Cornwall Museum for display there. The centre-loop amulet, 34mm high & 10½mm wide, was estimated to date back to the 1st century CE. Anna Tyke, Finds Liaison Officer at the RCM commented: "These items are pretty rare. Bronze examples are far more common, but gold ones are rarely discovered. I might even suggest this is the first of its kind to be found in Cornwall".

Going back in time, a Bronze Age gold lunula was discovered in Cornwall in 1783, probably at Gwithian, and owned by John Price, a Cornish antiquarian who lived at Chywoone in Paul Parish. In 1838 it was purchased by the British Museum for 25 guineas, and remained there ever since, until it was loaned back to the Penlee Museum in Penzance, and displayed there earlier this year. It is one of 4 gold lunulae found in Cornwall (others were from St.Juliot nr. Boscastle and 2 from Harlyn Bay, nr. Newquay) Gold was beaten into a very thin sheet, and geometric designs inscribed for decoration. It is a beautiful delicate object, and the Director of Penlee House Alison Bevan said that she hoped it would one day find a permanent home in the Museum.



Meanwhile, another rare Bronze Age find was made this year at an excavation at Tremough Campus of the University in Cornwall. One of the student excavators Chris Verran, found an amazing total of 4 separate moulds in one day, all of them in perfect or good condition. The large number of moulds found in the one spot indicates that this was probably a Bronze Age worker's forge, that may have been part of a settlement of some kind.

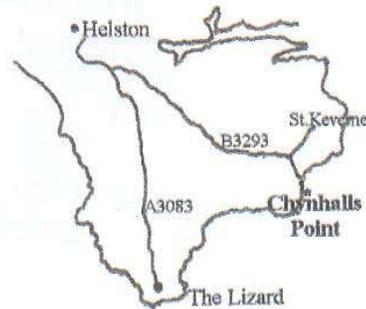
Finally, St. Michael's Mount was the location of a unique find of a Bronze Age hoard of 47 separate artefacts. The pieces, which include axe-heads, daggers, ingots, and a complete metal clasp, were discovered by a gardener Darren Little, who was clearing ivy from underneath rocks in the gardens of the Castle. Darren, a keen amateur archaeologist, quickly realised the significance of the find, which was verified by the British Museum as being 3000 years old. How the hoard came to be placed there remains something of a mystery, but this is the first real evidence that the site was being used, not only in the Iron Age, but back as far as the Bronze Age.



Axe-heads (left) & buckle (right)

UNCOVERING THE LIZARD

The Lizard peninsula in Cornwall (the most southerly point in Britain) is far less well known than its neighbour West Penwith. It does not have the spectacular stone circles, cromlechs, entrance graves & courtyard houses of West Penwith, but its megalithic charms are more subtle and elusive. In recent years, LAN (Lizard Ancient Sites Network) has been organising clear-ups at various sites on the Lizard, and has uncovered and revealed many fascinating places. This series visits some of these places and shows what has been found.



4: Chynhalls Point cliff castle [SW785 175]

Cliff Castles are dotted around the Cornish coastline wherever there is a rocky headland. Their purpose and function is still something of a mystery. Suggestions have included: places of retreat in times of danger, trading posts, or venues for important ceremonies. One of the most spectacular of these is Chynhalls Point on the cliff above the tiny fishing village of Coverack. Bounded on three sides by the sea, it has rocky slopes, and dramatic rock formations made from serpentine stone all over the site.



The Cliff Castle consists of two banks with an intermediate ditch, which cuts off a headland promontory of about 3.7 acres. The outer rampart, which is best preserved on the N side of the headland, is 1.1m (3.6ft) high, and the inner one is revetted with stone and rises to a height of 2.7m (8.7ft). LAN cleared much of this rampart in 2009. The original entrance was probably in the centre of the ramparts where a modern footpath now crosses. In 2010 LAN revisited the site and worked on blackthorn & gorse clearance on the eastern side of the promontory [photo right].



[c] Craig Weatherhill

Some years ago a carving of a 'serpent' shaped like a torc or horseshoe with a head at one end was discovered on one of the rocks here. It is completely undateable, but a serpent on a serpentine rockface on a cliff castle where snakes are known to live seems an apt symbol for this site!



THE TIDE ROCK – A LEGEND FROM GOONHILLY DOWNS

by Keith Rundle

On Goonhilly Downs, roughly one mile north-west from the fishing village of Coverack stands a large rock known to local people as The Tide Rock. Legend says that at high tide a small pool on the top of the rock fills with water, to diminish again as the tide goes out. Some 30 years ago my father took me to see the rock, now in later life I determined to find it once more. Enquiries to historians and others having proved fruitless, I set out to find the rock for myself. I remembered we had driven along the Helston to St Keverne road, B3293, finding the stone on the left along another minor road. After two false searches I closely examined a map, and my attention eventually focused on a small area along a minor road running roughly SW from the junction of the B3293 & the B3294 Coverack road, between the junction and Crousa Downs. Searching for a particular stone on Goonhilly Downs would take a lifetime, so I decided to seek local help, and in doing so struck gold, well, rock actually. Calling at a cottage along the road, the elderly lady who answered the door immediately recognised my description, commenting that the rock was known locally but then only to a few people. Furthermore, it was just up the road! Despite her years she kindly walked with me for half a mile back up the road to a small wooden gate set among dense growth and stunted trees. A short distance away along a path through the undergrowth was a large round rock. I had found The Tide Rock.



What is the strength of the legend? Well, unless prepared to stand equipped with tide times for 12 hours awaiting a complete tide cycle, it is impossible to say. Low tide at Coverack that day, 12 May 2010, was at 10.17, high tide was due at 16.13. The time of my visit to the Rock was 12.20, so the tide was roughly one third on the flow, 2 hours. The water on top of the stone did, roughly, equate to one third in depth from the bottom to a maximum indicated by a line of moss, being some 5 to 6 inches deep. Interestingly, perhaps inevitably, the water is fresh not saline.



The Tide Rock at SW771 194

What is the cause, if true? My theory is that there are many underground fissures in the underlying rock, from the coast to inland. These could, according to position, contain either salt or fresh water. Apparently each local cottage has a freshwater well. On the rock itself I could feel a tiny crevice at the bottom of the pool. The incoming tide could, moving along the many rock fissures, push fresh water back inland, creating a slow pressure surge. The Tide Rock could, by a freak of circumstance, be set just the right height and distance to allow water to rise up through the small crevice to fill the pool at roughly the same height daily, given that tide heights vary. Is this feasible or just another legend? Either way I have no wish to sit there for 12 hours, despite the tranquillity. I prefer to simply enjoy The Legend of The Tide Rock.

WINTER SOLSTICE 2010 AT CHÛN QUOIT

by Cheryl Traffon & Lana Jarvis

Winter Solstice 2010 on December 21st was a very magical occasion, with a total eclipse of the full moon coinciding with the solstice. It was the coming together of solar and lunar energy at a very powerful time of the year, and a rare event. Although lunar eclipses are relatively common, with often at least a couple in any one year, the coinciding of one with the winter solstice had last been seen in Britain over 450 years ago. In addition, the timing of this one meant that it happened at the very dawn of the Solstice, the longest night and shortest day of the year, a perfect blending of eclipsed full moon and sunrise energies. However, the timing did mean that it was only going to be visible for a short period of time at the setting of the moon from 7.40am, until the rising of the sun around 8.30am (where we live in West Penwith) would obscure the view.

Lana sometimes has to work night shifts and it so happened that on the night of the 20th/21st, she was working away from home in Helston. Neither of us got to see the whole eclipse from beginning to end, but between us we did see all the salient features! Cheryl got up at 6.30am to see the beginning of the eclipse, as the bright full moon began to be eaten into by the shadow of the earth, as it starting sinking towards the south-western horizon. After about 20 minutes, it disappeared into a bank of cloud from which it never emerged. Meanwhile however at Helston, Lana witnessed the full moon eclipse itself from about 7.40am as the moon turned a deep red, with just a silver sliver visible on the right *[photo right]*.



This was the prelude to the solstice day that rewarded us with not only the eclipsed full moon at the beginning, but with a perfect sunset at the end. The day was bright and sunny, with just a few clouds, and at about 3.30pm we saw the sun moving towards the south-western horizon, looking as if we might have a clear sunset. We jumped into the car and drove just up the road to the parking place at the base of hill that leads up to Chûn Quoit. It was at this site that Cheryl had first witnessed in 1988 the setting of the winter solstice sun into the distinctive notch on the natural rocky outcrop of Carn Kenidjack, and realised that the Quoit had probably been deliberately placed there by the megalithic builders to observe the phenomenon. The alignment was confirmed the following year in 1989, when once again it was observed and recorded, but although the Cornish Earth Mysteries Group made an annual pilgrimage to observe it for the next 19 years, never once was it seen, as conditions were always too overcast! On occasions it was seen by individuals a few days either side of the solstice, where it still 'worked', as the sun appears to be stationary at this time of the year for about a week ('solstice' means "sun stand still"). Sometimes we have been asked if this could just be a 'coincidence', but if you move 100 yards or so in any direction from the Quoit it does not work. We know that the megalithic builders were interested in sunrise and sunset alignments at their tombs (Newgrange in Ireland at the winter solstice being the most famous example) so this is no doubt deliberate.

Also, we have sometimes been asked if the movement of the earth in relationship to the sun has shifted since Neolithic times when Chûn Quoit was built? The answer is that it has, but only by about one sun's width. This might make a difference to this alignment, were it not for the fact that there are *two* notches in Carn Kenidjack next to each other. In Neolithic times the sun would have set into the left hand one, now it fortuitously sets into the right. A similar thing is apparent at Newgrange. When the site was built, light entered the light box of the tomb at sunrise. Now it still does so, but it happens 20 minutes after sunrise itself. Five thousand years may have elapsed since these sites, both Newgrange and Chûn Quoit, were built, but amazingly we can still see the megalithic magic at work. The only difference is that there is an annual lottery to see the Newgrange alignment, for which any individual stands a 1 in 25,000 chance of being successful, whereas at Chûn anyone can see it for free!

That was apparent when we got to the Quoit, for there were about a dozen people waiting there to view the sunset! We all stood quietly, watching the sun descend towards the notch, and when it got there, it seemed to hover for a long while over the notch, as if held in the sky by an invisible hand, before it slowly sank into the notch. It was an amazing sight, and all present were both thrilled and in awe. The experience touched our souls, and as we walked back down the hill we felt elated and full of the spirit of the winter solstice. The ground was full of ice-clad puddles, bathed in the winter sunshine, illustrating both the Crone and the Sun Goddess' power at this time.

Back home, we prepared ourselves for our Winter Solstice/Yule ritual, at the end of what had been a perfect day's moon and solstice experience.



The sun moves towards Carn Kenidjack



Hovering over the notch



Now setting into the notch



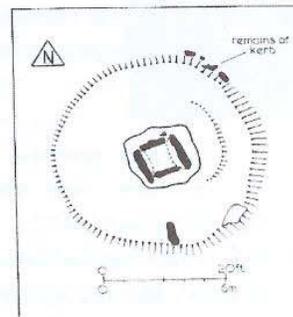
*IN-
SITE*

The centre-page feature that focusses on one or two particular sites each time in depth. As a follow-on from the article on p.10-11, this one looks at the monuments of -
CHÛN QUOIT & CASTLE

Chûn Quoit (pronounced *Choon*) lies on a high spot on the West Penwith moors [SW4023 3396] near to Pendeen. It can be seen clearly on the horizon from the B3318 road that runs from Portherras Cross at Pendeen to join the A3071 road to Penzance. The site can be reached from this B3318 road where there is a small car-parking area and a permissive path that climbs up to the hill. It can also be reached from Keigwin near Pendeen by a public footpath, and from Chûn Castle.



It is the only Quoit still almost perfectly preserved. The monument consists of a closed chamber of four slabs 1.5m (4ft) high which lean inwards and support a convex capstone 3.7m (12ft) square and up to 0.8m (2½ft) thick. It is surrounded by a low circular mound which is probably the remains of a former barrow, which however may not have completely covered the capstone. Part of the kerb remains on the NE side. There is also a cupmark on top of the capstone.



The midwinter solstice sun sets in a distinctive notch over Carn Kenidjack when viewed from the Quoit [see p.10-11]. A strong energy line has also been detected running from the hill top (Chûn Castle) through the Quoit and on to the notch in Carn Kenidjack. There is also a good visual alignment from Portherras Common entrance grave, through a possible standing stone now used as a gatepost (3980 3360) to the Quoit. Anomalous multi-coloured lights were observed running over the Quoit by archaeologist John Barnatt in 1979. Paul Devereux commented that the high radioactive count of the Quoit (123% higher than environment) may be related to this event.

[c] Craig Weatherhill



Sunburst at the Quoit

Chûn Quoit dates from the Neolithic period (3500-2500 BCE), one of the class of dolmens or cromlechs found throughout the western seaboard of Portugal, Spain, Brittany, Ireland and Wales. They were the earliest of any of the prehistoric monuments remaining in Cornwall, dating from the early Neolithic period (3500-2500 BCE), and were constructed by the early farmers who had recently settled and begun to plant crops and raise cattle. Each group of farmers occupied their own area or territory, and on high ground nearby would construct one of these dolmens. These sites were clearly non-utilitarian, and probably were designed as repositories for the bones of the dead, whose bodies may have been laid out on the capstones for the carrion birds to remove the flesh (a practice known as excarnation). Yet it would be a mistake to think of these monuments simply as 'burial chambers'. The bone evidence from sites in other places indicates that the disarticulated bones of a number of individuals may have been placed inside, and from time to time some bones were removed and were replaced by others. We may perhaps rather think of these sites as places where the tribe (or the shamans of the tribe) would go to consult with the spirits of their dead ancestors in trance journeys and altered states of consciousness.

A few hundred yards away from the Quoit on the hilltop above lie the remains of **Chûn Castle** [SW405 339], an Iron Age hill fort, built during the 3rd century BCE. Although only a few hundred yards separate the two sites, the Castle is at least 2000 years later in date. It can also be reached by a footpath coming from Trehyllis Farm below (take a road from opposite the Mên-an-Tol turning). Although it was robbed of stone in the 18thC, much of the Castle with its thick walls remains.



It is 85m (280ft) in diameter and consists of 2 concentric granite walls and ditches around an inner courtyard. The outer ditch was 6.1m (20ft) wide, and the outer wall now 2.1m (7ft) high, but may originally have been 3.0m (10ft) high. The inner wall (now mostly destroyed) was some 4.6m (15ft) to 6.7m (22ft) thick, and could originally have been some 6.1m (20ft) high. There were originally some Iron Age huts in the inner area, though no trace of these now remain. The site was re-occupied in about the sixth century CE, when 15 or 16 stone houses were built around the inner courtyard, and a furnace for smelting tin was made, just south of the well in the NW quadrant of the inner area. The entrance was also reshaped to make a staggered entry, which would have made attack difficult.

The Castle was obviously an important site in the Iron Age and early Christian periods, perhaps a meeting place for the local tribes or clans for barter, exchange, the sealing of bargains and 'marriages' and ceremonies. It was obviously also a busy place for the production and smelting of tin, which was then traded with other Celtic tribes in Britain, Ireland and on the Continent. An ancient trackway, The Tinnors Way, runs from here towards the Hayle estuary and St. Michael's Mount, so it was obviously in a key position.

FACES IN THE ROCKS - SPIRITS IN THE STONES

by Cheryl Straffon

It is generally acknowledged nowadays that to ancient peoples natural stones, rocks and tors were thought to contain the dwelling places of spirits, often spirits of the departed ancestors. In “Spirits of the Rocks”^[1] archaeologists Dick Cole & Andy M. Jones say: “People are likely to have regarded the landscape as being the creation of spirits, gods or ancestors, and it is likely that stories, myths and legends would have grown up around landscape features. Significant natural features may have been considered to be the homes of spirits, ancestors or gods, or gateways which acted as a means of communication with other worlds, or the place of creation”. They go on to argue that the shape of the eastern edge of Roche Rock itself, when approached from the north or south-east, has the appearance of a stone head, which, resembles an Easter Island statue. “This petrified face residing on its own island above the edge of what may have been a damp wooded carr is unlikely to have gone unnoticed by visitors to the Rock in prehistory and may well have been associated with myths and legends”.



Roche Rock (head on right of rock)

These ‘faces in the rocks’ can often be still perceived today, and if we notice them it is quite likely that ancient peoples, especially with their view of the natural world as a living being and/or the abode of spirits, would equally have done so. Because these ancient peoples left no written records, we do not know what names they ascribed to them, but we may perhaps infer that they were given the names of their Gods/Goddesses or even the names of their ancestors. We can see something of the same practice still at work today. Several natural rocky outcrops around the Cornish coast have been given the names of actual historical personages, usually from the 17th or 18th centuries, because of their supposed resemblances to those people. Examples include Dr. Johnson’s Head and Dr. Syntax’s Head from around Land’s End. Nearby at Sennen, a rock stack out to sea was named the Irish Lady from its anthropomorphic shape, and the legend that a woman from an Irish ship was shipwrecked there and subsequently died. Here we can see how the shape of the rock has either given rise to an associated legend, or else the legend has become attached to the natural rock. Either way, it is a good example of how rocks can take on stories and legends from a previous age, and how the rocks themselves eventually come to be thought as being places inhabited by the spirit of the person themselves. A similar process can be seen to have happened in other places. For example, in the west coast of Ireland, on the Bheara peninsula, there is a natural rock overlooking the sea known as the Cailleach Bheara stone. This was popularly supposed to be a petrified form of the Cailleach (the Hag or Crone of Celtic legend) herself, and even today fishermen place offerings at ‘her’ feet in the hope of a good sea harvest.

In Cornwall, there are many other similar legends of young women turned to stone for various misdemeanours, especially dancing on the Sabbath. The most-well known of these is the Merry Maidens stone circle near Lamorna, where the stones were considered to be the petrified maidens, and the two standing stones in the field nearby the Pipers who played at the wedding feast on the Sunday. Another standing stone, not far from Boscawen-ûn stone circle was called The Blind Fiddler in memory of a similar legend.



The dancing Merry Maidens

Some researchers have however gone further than this, suggesting that some standing stones themselves were either deliberately chosen, or deliberately shaped, by the megalithic people to resemble the human form, most notably the human head and face. The most well-known example of this is perhaps the West Kennet avenue of standing stones at Avebury, and some of the stones in the circle itself. Terence Meaden wrote about and extensively illustrated these 'simulacra' in his book *The secrets of the Avebury stones* [2], and more recently Paul Devereux has written about 'places with faces' in other cultures worldwide in his book *Sacred Geography* [3]. Both Meaden and Devereux suggest that these stones could be evidence of a 'dreamtime' era (similar to the Australian aboriginal one) in which objects were invested with mythic attributes, and the stones thought to carry a spirit form, known to the Aborigines as *arumba arunga* ('spirit doubles').

If this is the case with the Avebury stones, then we should expect to find similar examples in other stone age cultures elsewhere, including Cornwall. From time to time such stones have been observed and identified, and examples of 'stones with forms and faces' include Boswens menhir in West Penwith, Music Water menhir near St. Breock Downs, and Long Rock menhir on St. Marys, Isles of Scilly (suggested by archaeologist Paul Ashbee).



Boswens (face to right)



Music Water (face to left)



Long Rock (face to right)

Other sites with suggestive stones include Duloe stone circle near Liskeard, where the largest and most prominent stone is said to resemble a Crone or Cailleach shape. All the 8 stones in the circle are at cardinal points of the compass, N, NE, E, SE, S, SW, W & NW [see *MM75 p.12*] and there is some suggestion that each stone may represent a specific aspect of the Wheel of the Year, or that alternate stones represent 'male' and 'female' shapes, being alternatively either straight and upright or rounded.



Duloe circle - 'crone' stone on right

Another site with a dramatic 'face' stone is Bosiliack Barrow on the West Penwith moors. Here, one of the stones facing inwards at the back of the barrow has been seen to have a very 'ancient' face-like appearance, looking perhaps like a face of the ancestors. The barrow would originally have been covered with a mound, so the 'ancestor stone' would have been designed to be have been 'seen' only by the dead, or to be placed there to watch over the dead. Such stones are known about from other sites elsewhere.



Bosiliack barrow with 'ancestor' stone

However, it is not only stones that have 'human' faces that have been identified. There are also some stones that seem to have an animal shape. Prehistoric humans had a close relationship with animals: during the Paleolithic period, animals were hunted and their representations painted on cave walls in what some researchers have suggested were trance states. Also, as we know from the study of indigeneous peoples, it is probable that throughout the prehistoric period animals were still viewed as having a strong spirit presence that could interact with human society. One such 'animal rock' has been identified



'Animal' rock guarding barrow on Chapel Carn Brea

next to a Bronze Age barrow on Chapel Carn Brea, as if it is guarding the barrow and protecting the spirits of the dead within. Chapel Carn Brea was the most sacred hilltop in West Penwith, and all the barrows along the coast seem to be aligned to it [see *MM53 p.14-19*, *MM57 p.14-20* & *MM65 p12-13*]. On the hill itself, the barrow is located with a dramatic view across to neighbouring hilltops, and from it a narrow passage runs through the rocks, that may have been perceived and walked as a journey into the Other World.

Animals were thought to have spirits that interacted with human beings, and each animal had a particular meaning. At Danebury Hill Fort in Hampshire, for example, the earliest features found on the site were what may have been Bronze Age ritual pits, some of which contained dismembered dogs. In the Celtic Iron Age, and probably before, dogs were thought of as chthonic animals, who provided a safe passage to the Other World. Also found were remains of horses and ravens. Ravens were thought of as emissaries between the world of humans and that of the gods, and horses also had an Otherworldly aspect, as evidenced in the Welsh tale of Rhiannon, and some depictions of the horse Goddess Epona. The appearance of animals in rocks and stones would not just have been seen as interesting shapes, but would have carried a whole range of symbolic and spiritual meanings.

One such rock on the island of St. Agnes on the Isles of Scilly has been named Nag's Head from its supposed resemblance to a horse's head. Laurence Main noted that the site emanated "the most powerful energy of our whole trip" [see *MM68 p.5*]. On the neighbouring island of Gugh (joined to St. Agnes at low tide by a sandbar) there is another distinctively shaped rock, called Droptnose Point, which again resembles a human head and nose. From a cairn on the top of Kittern Hill, there is a strong visible (and dowsable) alignment to the Old Man of Gugh menhir and on to Droptnose Point [see *MM47 p.17*]. This may originally have been a 'via sacra' or ceremonial path running across the land for people (or spirits) to travel from one sacred site to another, and on to a spirit form petrified into a rock.

To ancient cultures, spirits of people and animals, Gods and Goddesses, and the ancestors themselves were everywhere, and especially so in the land and the rocks and stones that lay all around them.



Nag's Head on St. Agnes



(Above) alignment to Old Man & Droptnose Point & (right) Old Man



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PIXIES AND STANDING STONES: A CULT OF THE DEAD?

by **Brendan McMahon**

In the west, tracing the causation or aetiology of something has often been mistaken for understanding the thing itself, and this is one of several dubious assumptions upon which modern science is based. Darwin's *Origin of Species* is a symptom of this, not its cause. In the 19th century the new science of folklore was keen to prove its credentials, and so it constructed elaborate and sometimes highly speculative theories to explain the origins of folk belief and story.[1] Often these models contained a racist subtext, which labelled people from remote times and places as "savage" or "primitive". (As recently as 1986 Routledge & Kegan Paul published an anthology of Victorian folklore theory, entitled *Peasant Customs and Savage Myths* [2])

Accounts of pixie origins varied, though they were united by a common theme, according to Katherine Briggs: "In Cornwall (the fairies) seemed to be almost universally regarded as the spirits of the dead, of one kind or another. The knockers, who haunted the mines, were supposed to be the souls of the Jews deported there by the Romans for their part in the crucifixion. Pispigies or pixies were believed to be the souls of the prehistoric inhabitants of the land"[3]. The belief that fairies are the souls of the dead is also found in Ireland, the Isle of Man and elsewhere. As spirits of the dead, they occupy a liminal space, on the edge of human society, where the dead meet the living, and where belief can co-exist with disbelief.



"Fairies both are and are not. They are encountered on boundaries either in space between town and wilderness - or in time, at midday, at midnight, at the change of the year, or on the eve of a feast, or hallowe'en, or May Eve, in festive space marked out from normal life"[4].

The liminality of the pixies was also expressed in the moral domain. Though not infrequently helpful and benign (to the farmer whose corn they threshed in Hunt's story, for instance [5]), they were also capable of cruelty, such as the blinding of people who discovered their secrets, and especially the abduction of human babies in exchange for their own misshapen offspring, a practice which caused them to be widely feared. However, they were also known to be kind to children on occasions, as in the story of the lost child of St. Allen who was taken by "a beautiful lady to a beautiful palace with glass pillars", before being returned to his parents[6]. According to Deane and Shaw, the story "has been told since then in the district north of Truro" [7].

Footnotes are at the end of the article [p.21].

Of course, the loss of children was a very real threat at the time when these stories were being told and collected. Across the four decades 1861-1900 for instance, infant mortality rate CIMRI in Cornwall was the highest in the southwest at 150.0-149.9 per 1000, a rate only equalled by the grimmest Victorian cities; and while early childhood mortality rates (i.e. among children aged 1-4) did improve overall from 1861 (until interrupted by the great influenza pandemic of 1918-19), Cornwall's ECMR remained amongst the highest in the kingdom.[8] Whooping cough, measles and scarlet fever were the big killers in the 19thC, but deaths in infancy must always have been distressingly common, in Cornwall as elsewhere. The number of babies with congenital disorders was also recorded, and it is possible that the victims were thought to be fairy changelings. There are 2300 human genetic disorders known, not counting disorders caused by perinatal infection, with the result that nowadays about one baby in twenty is born with a congenital abnormality[9]. Such conditions were not understood before the 20th century, and even now the number of congenital disorders caused by unknown factors is easily the largest category of such diseases. It may be that it allowed parents to dissociate the loss, to split the loss object, (the 'bad' baby left by the fairies), and their own 'good' baby left in the other world, and to deny their own feelings of guilt and inadequacy.

Indeed, the stories not infrequently describe instances of parents neglecting their children, such as the tale of Betty Stoggs of Towednack Moor, who would go out and leave her baby alone with the cat. One day she returned home to find them both missing. Family and friends searched for them without success, and the next day Betty spied the cat and followed it into some furze bushes, where she found her baby, beautifully clean and wrapped in old-fashioned fabric, such as fairies love. Local people said that the fairies must have stolen the baby, intending to take it to their own place, but that it took them so long to clean it that they were caught by the light of dawn and forced to abandon it as they scurried off home.[10] This story reinforces the importance of parental supervision and the vulnerability of infants, and also reminds us of the traditional belief that pixies were a dying race which needed to steal human babies to survive.



This idea is sometimes linked to the theory that pixies represent the remnant of a small, ancient race which somehow lingered on in remote West Cornwall. This explanation does not seem to be traditional, and rests in part on confusion between the words 'pixie', 'pict', and 'pech', a kind of Highland fairy. It is nonsense, but interesting insofar as it does, like the other theories, associate pixies with the dead; as does indeed the whole folklore project. Folklore collectors in the 19th century were constantly lamenting the passing of the fairies and their stories.[11]

When Bottrell and Hunt compiled their great folklore collections in the 19th century, death was omnipotent in Cornwall, and not just among infants. Conditions in the mines were dreadful, and in 1847 it was estimated that one out of every five Gwennap miners died of or were disabled as a result of accident [12]. In the 'hungry forties' crops failed, food prices shot up, emigration increased and half-starved people rioted in St. Austell, Penzance and elsewhere [13]. Hunger, illness and emigration were inexorably linked, and "in the depressions of the 1840s, the 1860s, the 1870s and the 1890s, there was clearly little choice between leaving or starving" [14].

If the pixies represent the souls of the dead, their world is also a danger to the living. Visitors may find themselves unable to return home. When Alfred Noy stumbles into the fairy world, his dead sweetheart Grace warns him: "Embrace me not, nor touch flower nor fruit; for eating a tempting plum in this enchanted orchard was my undoing" [15]. To eat fairy food is to put oneself in their power forever in most cultures, and this is how Grace herself, who was supposed to be dead, came to be trapped in the other world.

No doubt pixie or pisgey stories have been told in Cornwall since time immemorial, though Jeremy Harte believes that the above story had been transmitted from Ireland in the recent past [16], and it may be that they do represent the vestiges of some remote cult of ancestor worship. But in the form we have them, they were told and collected in the 19th century, a traumatic time for a small nation which had just lost its language, was losing a high proportion of its population on the emigrant ships to South Africa, Australia, and the United States, and in which countless families had to cope with the personal disasters of infant mortality and bereavement. Perhaps the stories helped them to accommodate loss and change by embodying them in narrative. Confronting our worst fears in story form can help us master them, especially when they are shared in a communal setting, as were the original Cornish stories. In this sense, the West Cornwall communities made use of a well-established (perhaps ancient, pre-Christian) practice to serve a vital psychological need in a grim 19th century present. And Hunt and Bottrell recorded its passing. But perhaps not quite. Deane and Shaw collected a chilling little story dating from the 1950s:

"Some years earlier the landlady and a friend took their children for a picnic. They started off for home after the meal, but soon realised that one of the friend's little sons had left his jumper behind; the boy's mother returned to look for it, while the others patiently waited. The mother could not find the jumper, so rejoined the party, and they continued home-wards. As they descended into a valley they noticed a car run over a dark object lying in the lane; they reached the spot and were astonished to find that the object was the boy's jumper. Back at home they told the strange tale to the landlady's mother, who warned them that the site chosen for their picnic was a piskey ring, and that the subsequent incident was a sure sign of forthcoming death. The boy's mother worried that he, like the jumper, might be run over, kept him at home; a short time afterwards he broke an arm and contracted a blood disease from which he died" [17].

Whatever they may or may not have been, piskies were not the benevolent little fellows in pointy hats beloved by the tourist trade. The raw materials of a deathcult have always lain to hand in the Cornish countryside. On Bodmin Moor (near Minions) stand the Hurlers, an impressive stone circle erected in the Bronze Age, but said locally to represent the petrified figures of hunters, who were thus punished for playing the national game on a Sunday. More commonly, of course, it is dancers who are punished for breaking the Sabbath in this way as at the Trippet Stones near Blisland

[illustrated right], the Nine Maidens at Wen-



dron, and the Boskednan (Nine Maidens) stone circle.[18]. Cromlechs, like those at Lanyon, Mulfra, Pawton, Zennor and Trethevy, are the remains of prehistoric burial chambers, sometimes known as ‘Giants Graves’, and their capstones explained as the quoits which giants threw. Natural rock formations also had their legends: the rock at Pedn-men-du near Sennen is said to represent a deceased Irish lady who was shipwrecked there, and the famous “Hellstone” in the yard of the Angel Inn at Helston was said to bring death to women residing at the Inn [19]. Charles Thomas speculates: “To puny men, huge stones are something essentially other than themselves. A pillar may be the habitat of an ancestor whose spirit entered into the rock, as in certain cultures it could abide within a megalithic chambered tomb” [20].

Though few of the pixie stories that have survived are specifically located on the sites of standing stones, the two are strongly associated, partly because pixies tend to dwell in the remote moorland locations where stones have survived undisturbed, and partly because both embody the souls of the departed. Both in their different ways provide the narratives of death and loss which help us to confront and master our own fears.

All drawings by J.T.Blight (1835-1911)

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BOOK REVIEW

The Museum of Witchcraft: a magical history

Published by The Occult Art Company [£30 + p & p from
www.theoccultartcompany.co.uk]



This year marks the 60th anniversary of the founding of the Witchcraft Museum by Cecil Williamson in 1951, and the 50th anniversary of its move to Boscastle. Owned and run by Graham King since 1996, the Museum is celebrated by this book of reminiscences and anecdotes from a variety of contributors. The book is a high quality hardback, printed in full colour throughout, and lavishly illustrated with memorabilia from its early days and artefacts from the Museum. Contributors such as Adrian Bryn-Evans, Jo O'Cleirigh and Mike Howard write about the early days of the Museum and about Williamson and his relationship with Gerald Gardner; while others, such as Vivienne Shanley, Paul Broadhurst, Cassandra & Laetitia Latham-Jones and Gemma Gary talk about their involvement with the Museum under Graham, including the work that was undertaken after the Boscastle floods in 2004 to bring it back to life again. Although much of the book is celebratory, as befits an anniversary volume, nevertheless there are deeper cadences. Steve Patterson talks about how the Museum is not simply a quaint collection of outmoded folk belief or New Age paraphernalia, but a testament to these people who were executed for the crime of being a witch. And Rory Te'Tigo writes of the re-burying of the skeleton of Joan Wytte, and of his sadness at the way she was treated as an object of amusement and ridicule. All in all, a cornucopia of variegated impressions of the Museum, and a tribute to Graham King, who did so much to restore and revitalise the Museum, and who is now ready to pass it on to a new custodian and owner to care for its priceless treasures within.



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A TALE OF TWO OSSES

The story so far -

For many years Penzance's midsummer festival of Golowan was enlivened by the appearance of Penglaze, the Obby Oss, led by Teazer Cassandra Latham-Jones [see MM42 p.14-16]. However in 2008 the person carrying Penglaze decided to 'retire' taking his Oss with him. As a result of this, a co-operative was formed with Cassandra and others in order to create a reborn (mare) Oss, called Penglaz, who made several appearances at Golowan and Montol in 2008-2010, However, at the same time, the Golowan team set about creating their own replacement (stallion) Penglaze, who also made several appearances. For a couple of years there was an uneasy agreement to divide up the appearances between the two Osses [see MM68 p8-9], but this fell apart in December 2010 when the new Golowan Director Andy Hazelhurst banned the Latham-Jones Penglaz from all future festivals and distanced Golowan from any pagan associations or origins [see MM74 p.1]. This caused a great deal of controversy and bitterness amongst the local pagan community and others.

This year at Golowan -

The original Oss Penglaze was brought back from retirement and made 2 appearances - one at the Torchlight procession on St.John's Eve, and one after the Fireworks Display on the Friday night. Most pagans boycotted these events, but those who did go reported that, while the Oss was lively and frisky, the 'new' Teazer had no interaction with it, and the wild, edgy energy of old had gone. One correspondent said that "There was nothing sacred about it - it was a civic and boring affair". It appears that the form of the Oss and Teazer have been kept, but the real energy and meaning of it have been lost. This was Golowan's 21st anniversary, and a sad outcome of the Oss & Teazer's revival after all these years.

Penkevyll arises!

So what has happened to the Latham-Jones Oss? Well she has been reborn as Penkevyll (meaning 'horse's head'), and merged with a Border Morris tradition by Cassandra and Laetitia Latham-Jones. They formed a dance team called Boekka (Cornish for 'scarecrow') which perform dances with Penkevyll and her 2 Teazers (Cassandra & Laetitia), and also Guise Morris dances. New music for the team has been composed by Rhys Wynne Jones, who is also the rider of Penkevyll.



Penkevyll and team have made appearances at various events, both in Cornwall and also up-country, including the Witchcraft Museum's 60th Anniversary celebrations at Boscastle in May (where Penkevyll was pictured above). The team say that: "As an independent side we feel free to express that wild, anarchic part that seemed to disturb and unnerve certain members within local Festival committees". More details can be found on their web site www.boekka.co.uk.

20 YEARS AGO

Delving into the pages of MM from the past

In MM16 from Autumn/Winter 1991, we reported on the revival of Midsummer celebrations in Penzance with the newly-created Golowan Festival and Mazey Day. The reporting from the time makes fascinating reading:

“In the early stages of planning, there was some criticism that Mazey Day was an invention, but in fact it was soundly based on the celebrations which only died out in the early years of the 20th century. These celebrations included blazing tar-barrels, bonfires, and a serpent-like dance through the streets, all remnants of the old pagan midsummer solstice ritual. This dance, known as ‘thread the needle’, was revived, and it must have got close to the original feel of the day’s celebrations, as witness this letter to *The Cornishman* from one disturbed Penzance resident, Mrs Gillian Bailey: ‘I was appalled at the grotesque sight of the ‘monster’ serpent on sticks and the boom boom of the drum ... I can tell you we have not moved one inch from the Old Testament times. What has this country turned into? I think that someone should stand and denounce this paganism!’”.

The MM editorial went on to say: “There was an interesting (anonymous) reply to this in the following week’s paper that said ‘Why do those with so-called ‘Christian’ values feel the need to denounce a day of genuine celebration of summer and the fertility of the Earth? Mazey Day in Midsummer celebrates a time when life and light are abundant, and the serpent energies are at their peak. Pagans revere the sanctity of the Earth, its peoples and other life forms, with a love for, and kinship with nature. There are many paths to communion with the Divine - ours is a positive morality with each individual taking responsibility for their own actions and living in harmony with the outer world. So if a celebration such as Mazey Day is a step backwards to the old ways and values, then perhaps the world may become a better place’.”

The row over Mazey Day continued to rumble on for a few years. The following summer, another *Cornishman* reader David Reed wrote complaining that “like many Christian folk we were angry by the way this pagan festival was foisted onto everyone. We urge all Christians to boycott Penzance next Mazey Day and each successive one until this deplorable event is cancelled”. With the current row over Penglaze and denial of paganism, this furore from 20 years ago gives an apposite sense of *deja vu* and ‘plus ça change, plus ça même chose’.



An early Mazey Day with ‘pagan procession’ and Penglaze teased by Cassandra Latham

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