# Sunrise on the Sea

by
*James R Warren*

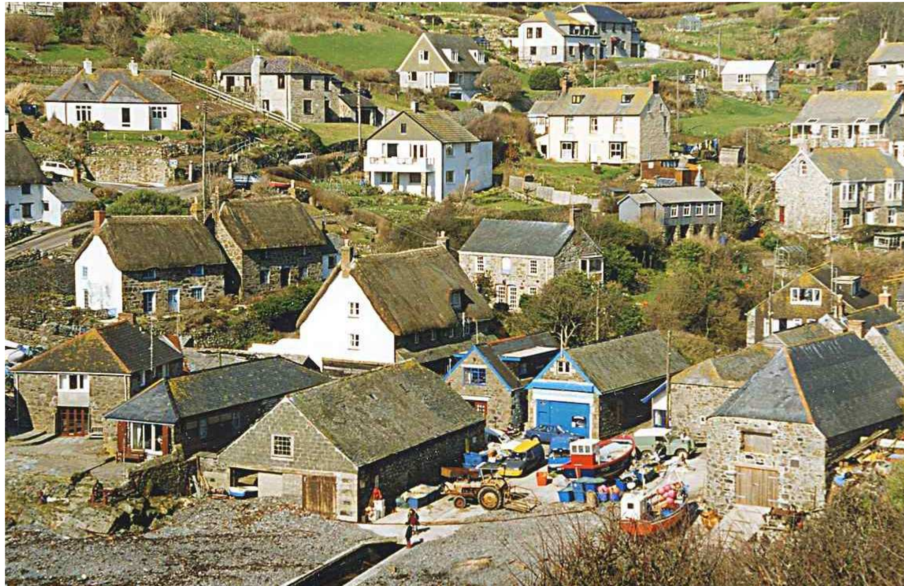
They say that the tip of Cornwall subsided submarinely and was inundated extinguishing a fortunate country forever. I write of a land on the coasts of Cornwall that is just as lost as fabled Lyonnesse.

In that vanished time I discovered some strange things in a world that is gone for good; and for ill.

*Louvain*

My Father was a sailor. He joined The World's largest navy. But his work concerned its flyers and their need to know the weather. In the spring of 1961 he was drafted to Culdrose, an airfield guarding the wide Western gate of The Channel. He settled my Mother and I in a rented flat, the lower floor of Louvain, a large house overlooking the sea.

Louvain nestled in a verdant sheltered valley where a sequestered village huddled around two rocky coves. A narrow loop of tarmac dived and threaded between the pink and whitewashed cottages where fisherfolk slept beneath slate or thatch. The men of Cadgwith used the larger Northern cove for their dozen open boats that they used for setting and retrieving crab and lobster pots. The former were circular wickerwork affairs somewhat like an old-fashioned inkwell: The lobster creels were lath and string contraptions, half cylindrical and tunnel-like. The fishermen caught fish on lines, too, but dogfish were despised and hanged ignominiously from the eaves of the tar-stained pilchard sheds about the little harbor. The fishermen sat their boats up the cobble beach upon greased wooden rollers down which they launched them seaward with the help of the beach slope. When it came to retrieving them, brute exertion was assisted by an ancient oil-engine that winched a steel hawser.

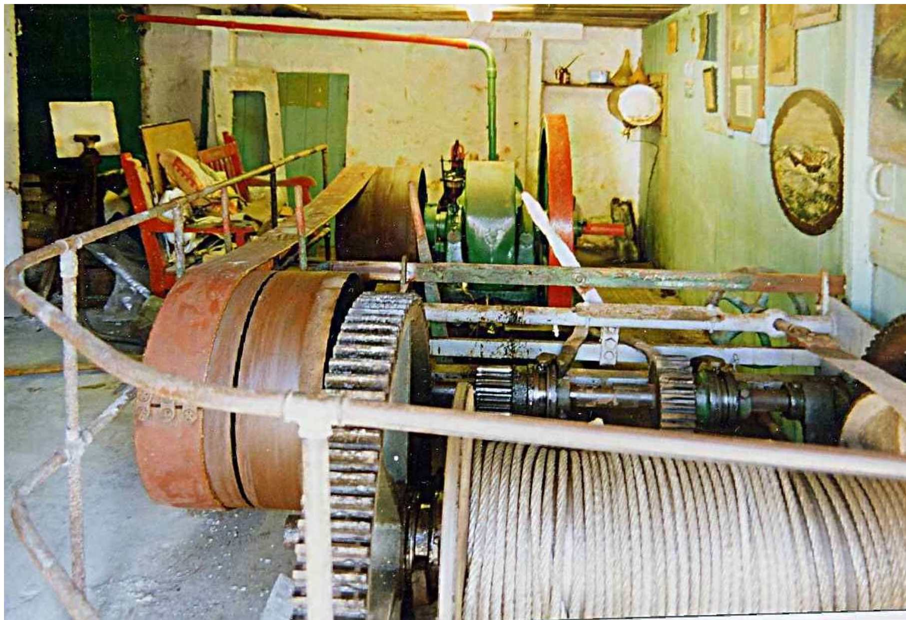


*A View of Cadgwith*

A black stone hut with a yellow chimney pot perched like a jealous blackbird cock atop the Northern promontory. We called it "The Coastguard Hut" but it was a redundant huer's hut where a hundred years before a watchman would scan the turquoise sea for the writhing pods of silver pilchard which visited these waters and alert the boatmen below with a timely cry. Near the hut were cliff-top benches where Father said the locals could sit and "meditate": The first time I heard that word. For a few brief years Cadgwith was the greatest pilchard port in the World, as the cluster of decaying sheds and factories behind the coves testified. A spinster inhabited part of one, the fine roof of which had slipped down the slope into the smaller South cove slate by slate. As a boy I fashioned these slates into little disks using beach cobbles and tried to skim them across the heaving sea, though other lads were much better at that than I.

The whole North cove stank of oil, tar and decomposing fish. Behind the beach a long wooden balk called The Stick formed an extempore bench where the old men would gather and gossip. Chief of these was the portly Rumbo who would draw on his pipe and expound unintelligibly in tones as thick as clotted cream. I would pass these men on my way to school each morning as they sat in seal-like sloth before the sunrise on the sea. To a nine-year-old they seemed uniformly ancient and bewhiskered, languidly puffing pipes and dressed alike in oil-soaked blue sweaters and sea-boots. They did not repair to the hotel just behind them, even in inclement weather, for Cornishmen were Methodists and Methodists were teetotal. Beside The Stick was a lifeboat shed where a spotless blue craft was prepared behind blood-red doors. The men would grasp ropes and manhandle it down the greased rollers into the waiting sea. One day Mother told me that a BBC film crew were capturing the last launch of the Cadgwith lifeboat. I rushed to the cove and stood viewing the ritual as I have viewed myself viewing the strangely archaic scene many times since. But the boat was not for show and brave men would have scrambled it without hesitation in any needful storm. The mechanism of the old oil-engine also interested curious boys, who would be regarded with gruff suspicion by the duty winchman as he loitered puffing his pipe in the kerosene-laden air of his alcove. Years later I would

photograph the contraption and nine years later still detect an ornately-worded sign prohibitive of his deadly pleasure propping without notice the rear wall of the winch chamber: Well within the era of Health and Safety. I can hear now the heavy metronomic click of its spring-loaded injector as it idled out of clutch, for it seemed to idle ten times longer than it drew. As the valvegear clattered the cast-iron flywheel grated and grunted as it hunted on its bearings below the muffled chug above. The pilchard store where the engine had been installed had an old tar-soaked wooden door to seaward in which some vandal had carved the year "1815". Other, manual, winches of fibrous iron were planted in the living rock about the cove, gently rotting and rusting in the salt air.



*The Oil Engine and its Winch*

The beach of this cove consisted of slightly smaller stones than the larger cobbles and boulders that characterised the smaller inlet to the South. This was separated from the fishing cove by a tiny peninsular with a wasp-waist isthmus. This little cape was called The Todden and bore an empty gun emplacement and an iron railing at some precarious steps that led seaward. Before the War, Mr Jane was the confidant of artists, and his fishing forebears had lived on The Todden in Victoria’s time, and been photographed before their door. The beach stones were almost all of red serpentine, a very beautiful and easily workable ancient rock, grayish-red if dry but scarlet shot with black veins if wet or polished. Mr Jane had his lapidary workshop atop The Todden and turned little lighthouses rum barrels and ashtrays to sell to visitors. The serpentine stone was, however, very different in bulk where it formed massive riven black cliffs encrusted with vibrant patches of yellow lichen. Just down the slope Mr Tripp’s arty though unpretentious café occupied the upper storey of an old pilchard shed, almost inaccessible up a very steep set of wooden stairs leading from the road.

It is difficult to capture in words the humic, almost subtropical, nature of the soil and vegetation in a climate that was lush without being sultry. One day I skipped over the boulders in the South cove and clambered up a steep slope by

clawing my fingers into soft but firm loam beneath a forest of dwarf elms. Flowers and vegetables of diverse kinds grew luxuriantly and the little valley swooned with wild garlic in its season. Slow worms slithered shyly through the undergrowth but were easily caught and very docile in a childish palm. They were like neat and lustrous silver pencils with lovely pinhead black eyes and delicate mouths. The double helices of their tiny scales looked like a jeweler's engine-turning, intensifying their argentine appearance.

A path ran along the valley between walls and verdure beside our garden, and on the other side of this path a corrugated iron Anglican mission church was built upon concrete piles driven precariously into the loam-smothered slope. The Established foundation was precarious in more than one sense for whilst Cadgwith had no other place of worship the surrounding villages sported large non-conforming chapels of granite ashlar. The open undercroft of this little church was crowded with old Bakelite radios amongst which a child crawled fascinated. As if not sufficiently secret and sequestered the tin church was painted dark green to match the jungle and its tiny bronze bell hung like an apology above the door where my Father could ping it with air-rifle slugs fired from the garden. Sometimes I would steal through the door and blow a few notes on the treadle-pumped harmonium for the only time that we saw the church in use was when my Mother and I sung carols there at Christmas.

I heard children speak of playing on the "wreck" which I thought must be one of the derelict ships which notoriously littered this coast. It then became clear that they meant "the recreation ground" behind the neighboring agricultural village of Ruan Minor, half-a-mile up the hill. One day I went there and sat on a mowing machine as I ate in the sunshine. Later I had to use a bench as a tractor came and dragged the mower around the flat field. An old man with a hideously deformed mouth and face haunted the few streets. His terrible speech impediment was aggravated by a thick Cornish accent and adults avoided him. The children had some derisory nick-name for him which I have fortunately forgotten, but alas I never knew his real appellation. The children taunted him which I thought was cruel because he was a man alone and it could be me who was that disfigured. One day he came up to me when I was alone on the "rec" and began to address me. I stayed and listened with straining and embarrassed fascination as he painfully explained how he had won his injuries in the trenches of The Somme.

Walking home from school I took a short cut through the fields past the still leafless copse where a colony of rooks croaked their raucous cries as I descended to the hotel in the fishing cove. A placard on its wall said "Cadgwith Cove Inn: Devenish". Now as then, orthography was not my strength and may explain my confused cogitations. “Devenish” struck me as very odd because even I, a stranger and a mere child, knew that I was in deepest Cornwall, at least seventy miles from the Tamar, from England, and from anywhere conceivably Devonish.

I soon formed a friendship with the postmaster's eldest son David who lived opposite Louvain. His father encouraged him to attend chapel and Sunday school. On one occasion I accompanied David to Ruan Minor, where the nearest Methodist chapel lay. During prayers some sportsman in the back row folded a piece of card and catapulted it at a stained glass window. It interrupted the reverential interlude with such a detonative report I was surprised the window was not broken, but more alarming was the abrupt look of anger and affront which transfigured the minister's visage as he jerked his eyes to the window: And then resumed the liturgy with his former equanimity!

A lot of these red or yellow cards were about because The Grade-Ruan Horticultural Society had just held its summer fête at St Ruan, a charming hamlet reached by the path along the valley floor. The vicarage ( for Ruan Minor Anglican church ) was virtually the only habitation in St Ruan and the Society used these cards for labeling award-winning produce. Since some hundreds of cards were printed the organisers of '61 were obviously very optimistic: Over-optimistic it would seem since most fell into boyish hands and I retain a few to this day.

But it was a lovely fête with many interesting side-shows. The sun dappled the lawn through the thick broad leaves as people milled about in quiet confusion. I won a bar of soap and a red gingham face-flannel at something but could never follow the bendy wire without completing the bell-circuit.

In a deserted farmstead near the Lizard road at Predannock the doors were open. My Parents and I entered the pristine kitchen as the family had left it and found their enormous black gilt-edged bible profusely illustrated and lying in the window where the setting sun could light it. Outside, old GWR passenger stock formed outbuildings complete with morocco seats. Maps of the rail routes remained printing-house mint behind glass panels above the doors. The railways had been nationalised but the mainline and Falmouth were still serviced by steam whilst a DMU traveled to Helston some eleven miles North of Cadgwith. Helston was the nearest real shopping town. Its splendid granite thoroughfare, Coinagehall Street, had a severe Georgian Doric coinage hall which had a museum in the basement, and two deep and rapid rivulets ran permanently down each gutter: Rapid in the hydraulic as well as the ordinary sense for their liquid surfaces were frozen into lattices of standing ripples. One day we went to see the Furry Dancers process through the town as a brass band accompanied them with the world-famous ditty. More specialised purchases like toys or books were available in Falmouth. There were only two quotidian shops in Cadgwith; Mr Drew's post office where you could get soap, detergent and canned goods as well as stamps; and a little green-shuttered cupboard of a fish shop built into a wall beside the lifeboat station. The cupboard opened to sell fresh fish, whatever was landed whenever it arrived. The little cupboard has been a seasonal film-and-tat shop for many years now.

David, his elder sister Mildred and I walked daily the half-mile to Ruan Minor Junior and Infants School. It was a bit too far to return home for lunch so after the first few days I stayed for school lunches. Four buxom ladies prepared these on site and they were infallibly superb. The main course was frequently a toasted shepherd's pie but invariably involved potato in some form; whichever retains my approval. I was even less keen on greens then than now and the veg lady would always meet my refusal with the same expression of matronly disapprobation. The sweet course, too, was predictable, and predictably delicious. Either chocolate or yellow canary sponge with custard and golden syrup. I forget what we got to drink but for sure it was not beer, for Ruan Minor was "dry". If we were still peckish, however, we could buy a bone-shaped Mackintosh’s Golden Cup or sugar shrimps at the post office in front of the school, or sugar cigarettes at the café beside the playground.

I had derisively contradicted a boy who told me that cricket balls were made of glass so the following lunchtime Maunder strode into the dining hall and threw one at the wall making a sound like a rifle crack, for he was never one to understate a point. Capable of avuncularity, the village dominie was more memorable for baroque tantrums. We sat quiet as mice at tiny square desks in a Gothic-arched

Victorian hall of rough serpentine, but occasional naughtiness or obtuseness would obtrude. Mr Maunder would thereupon cuff the culprit sharply across the head and shout at him. We children would usually take this in good part, shutting up and getting our heads down. On one occasion, however, some little colleague had infracted with the master's back turned and I got the blame. Mr Maunder delivered his usual rebuke and I burst into tears. That night I told my Mother what had happened and she strode off up the hill to take issue with the schoolmaster. I do not know whether he apologised: I hardly think so, but he did admit he had made an error. How did he know: Because Jimmy had never before cried when struck!

There are things I saw and noted as a boy which I have only understood as a man. Maunder sported a thick and bushy mustache stained yellow as his fingertips. I could not account for these strange xanthic stains though it was obvious enough that as soon as the man finished one cigarette he would light another. The vast schoolroom had a big black stove set within a wad-rubbed railing. Somehow, Mr Maunder could sit atop this heater as he sensually dragged and expounded with a smile. Perhaps when I was two-and-a-half or three I taught myself to read. I was a solitary child of intelligent parents and books were ever to hand. But by the age of nine I could barely write. The porcelain inkwells on each desk were filled with a coarse blue fluid constituted from water and powder that dried to a bronzy sheen. We applied this liquid to exercise books using horrible brass-plated iron nibs which scratched and scored the paper like repichnial insects. Each of the exercise books was emblazoned with what looked like a crow standing above six white circles whose iconography was wasted upon me, as a swag below displayed the enigmatic legend: "One and All".

Maunder took me in hand and sacrificed his playtimes and mine to teaching me a slightly florid but legible script. The fact that I retaught myself to write five years later in the interests of speed and clarity does not diminish the benefit he gave me or the idealism and dedication he showed, resented by a boy then, respected by a man now. A lasting change he conferred is my facility with decimal fractions, trivial you may think but one of the cornerstones of my lifelong fascination with scientific things which first burgeoned in Cornwall. Mr Maunder had two excellent sons who attended his school. I once surprised the elder bathing naked from a rock ledge on The Todden, where he told me to depart with a vigor which belied shyness. The younger was a little softer and less remote, a potential playmate.

The sea pervaded everything at Cadgwith. Its body washed up to the road and The Stick but its spirit submerged the whole nation. Once the sun decided to take the day off and my Parents and I had a gray walk along the Loe Bar towards the cross which marks the graves of those who perished when the warship *Anson* drove ashore in a landward gale in December 1807. ( It was not obligatory to bury shipwrecked dead in consecrated ground until June 1808 ). Many sailing ships were embayed before lee shores to founder on that coast and even in the age of steam many ships were washed onto the cobble berm which blocks the outlet of the Loe ria, assuming they avoided the cliffs on either side. As I walked over the bar I found a length of copper pressure tubing of the kind which communicated steam to a Bourdon gage and I boyishly took it home and polished it. Further South we inspected the concrete footings of Marconi's transatlantic radio mast at Polurian. When I lay in bed in daylight I could gaze through the french window and watch the great Queens, the France and the United States pass in slow and stately silence up and down the sea. All

the children at school were the sons or daughters of fishermen, coastguards or sailors, except for odd exceptions like David or Mildred.

Mr Maunder kept large stocks of both wicker and raffia, the former of a caliber suited to childish hands, because crabpot making was a major curricular discipline! Britain's armed fleet was still a world force, and its Merchant Navy was by far the largest in the World. Both fleets were shadowed by enormous reserves typified by the immense BP tankers anchored in the Fal, dwarfing the little King Harry Ferry which plied beneath them.

A grandly-named organisation would advertise on an ornate green notice-board by Cadgwith Post Office. Once a week they projected feature films in the makeshift cinema of Ruan Minor village hall. One of these was memorably in color: A religious film about a Brazilian worker. Except for the football pools, bingo or any other variety of off-course betting was illegal and unmethodist for wherever working men hazarded their lives rather than their wages, whether in mines or on the sea, abstemious non-conformism flourished. And Cornishmen were either fishers or miners.

One dark and misty night David Mildred and I walked down the hill from the village hall picture-show in Ruan Minor. As we looked up at the sky great sectors of white light swept *through* the cloud above, shone from the Lizard light about four miles away. It was then the brightest light on Earth. When my Grandmother visited from Sussex she took me to see the lantern in daylight. The keeper rehearsed the light's statistics as the immense prism of faceted glass idled slowly floating upon its "bath of mercury", a feature of the mechanism which made a lasting impression upon Nan. Below us extensive shops of heavy diesels awaited the twilight or a fog which would summon forth the niagaras of electricity or compressed air needed to work the lamp or the horns or both. Just this side of the Trinity House installations the bright white cube of Lloyd's Signal Station graced the cliffs. Though already redundant this functioned to wire the London underwriters as soon as an insured ship safely hove past; or to raise the alarm should any run upon The Lizard.

I seemed to be the only child in the class whose wickerwork was found persistently defective and Maunder would invariably de-weave it with a gimlet and make me do it again, so that I started several things and completed nothing.

Our lounge faced the cove-framed sea and caught the full luster of the morning calm. The kitchen, however, faced the valley flanks and sat dankly behind its small sash window. On the Northern wall a large black range burnt coal to heat both house and water and I often melted chocolate in eggcups on its top.

There was no refrigerator. There was thick lead gloss paint on the walls and this spread in three colors: Mocha, avocado green and cream. But strangely, when you opened a tin of paint it was invariably of some gayer hue.

Hangings were notified days before the event in radio comment and gossip. Mother and Father always tuned to The Home Service at breakfast time. At ten to eight some homiletic anecdote was delivered, often in an irritating manner. On hanging days even a child knew that the priest was talking out the final few minutes of a man's life. At five minutes to eight a perfunctory inland forecast would be followed by the weird incantation of the shipping weather. And then silence. And then the inexorable and unstoppable Greenwich pips. In those days all were of the same staccato duration, each as final as the next. Then the redundant announcement and you knew a life had been snuffed out on purpose. But that was not true. The victim still

had six minutes to live in the agony of his broken spine, his gasping screams of anguish stifled by a rope.

Several Edwardian villas with hipped roofs and glazed verandahs dotted the Cornish landscape, often sheltered by Scots or *Araucaria* pines and commanding prime sea views. Tony Witham and his bearded father were other Naval tenants who lived in one of these on the hill between Cadgwith and Ruan Minor, whilst our albino friend Eric shared with his invalid father a similar property within the village.

A lane up the opposite hillside ran towards Lizard Town through a little suburbia of pre-war retirement homes. In one of these small bungalows Jeremy lived with his parents and we sailed with some difficulty an electrically-driven plastic model of the liner "Orestes" on a small shallow and muddy garden pond. On another occasion a group of us children went to visit the farmyard where this lane reached the fields. The farmer brought in the cows to milk and showed us how to sit on tripod stools and skillfully squeeze the teats to draw milk, which we did. The smell and ordure of cows was everywhere and the creamy frothing milk which we gathered in his riveted galvanised iron bucket did not look attractive. We had, however, a complementary drink thereof.

On two or three occasions David showed me a paperback book about Japanese torture camps in World War Two. This was luridly illustrated with photographs of Chinese spies who had been tied to stakes and blinded. An enormous dial-cluttered radio of gray sheet tin sat next to Maunder's throne. One day he switched it on to regale us with a very disturbing story about a group of nuns who had arranged with some people they had befriended to substitute for the latter in some "gas chambers". It was clear form the context that these "gas chambers" were lethal. Other than that I understood nothing of the why when or where. When the broadcast ended the teacher dispassionately switched off the machine, and offering no interpretations or explanations told us to resume our tasks. I became aware that, whatever the particulars, beyond the shores of our happy village lay worlds of unspeakable evil.

The cliffs were topped by well-used revenue beats which were not yet consolidated into the continuous amenity path of today. The path from Cadgwith to The Lizard via The Devil's Frying Pan and Landewednack was superb. A mile South of Cadgwith a black wood and glass shed called Studio Golvah lay a little back from the path before a splendid seascape. Rumor had it that it was the haunt of beatniks who sometimes roamed its secret precincts nude. One day I stole up to the window and peered in. The window sills were littered with bird skulls and other *objets trouvés* but alas there were no naked ladies.

In several respects I was a bad influence on the other children. On the way up the lush little valley to St Ruan a nameless river tumbled over a concrete weir by Ledra Mill. The mill itself was a ruin from which iron-bound rotting shafts protruded streamward amidst the foliage. David's dad, Mr Drew the postmaster, had a large stock of "Fab", a withdrawn brand of detergent in eight-ounce cartons. One day David and I stole as much as we could carry, lugged it to the weirhead and consigned it to the waters.

During the season, Cadgwith had the rudiments of a tourist industry which is now much more developed.

The only participatory game I have ever enjoyed was a cricket match with David and my Grandparents on the field behind the post office. The field is now a tourists' car park but in those days there were no double yellow lines or pay lots. One

hot summer's day the visitors trusted their hand-brakes to hold them as they parked bumper-to-bumper along the steep narrow lane to the cove. David and I procured a bike wheel and set it rolling down the hill. It soon outran us and veering into a shiny car stripped a stripe along the offside. The motorist, who was just returning to his vehicle, was not very pleased and shouted at us very chasteningly.

By the Ruan Minor entrance to the village an old girl set out her stall of embossed leather knickknacks all marked "Cadgwith" but doubtless made in Walsall. She never attended this display, relying upon visitors to knock her door for service. One afternoon, on the way from school I persuaded some village children to thieve an item each and I myself stole a miniature dictionary sporting an embossed fishing boat. By some means I have never ascertained ( for those days were nearly telephone-free ) intelligence had preceded us home, and Father said I must either return or purchase the little book. Either solution implied a shamefaced interview with the old lady. I paid her the half-crown and kept the book as she dismissed me with a smile. I did not really want the silly souvenir and felt foolish. And half-a-crown was a lot of money. Mildred was very upset when she learned of my wickedness, and took me to task asking if I was "broke".

On another occasion I stole nothing but got the blame anyway. Three biscuits remained in the bottom of the barrel. Father was looking forward to them after his return from the air base but arrived to an empty jar. He then spanked me angrily and I resented my Mother's insouciance during this episode as I assumed that if I was the only child she must be the real furtive biscuit-eater. Many years later I realised that the biscuits may well have been consumed by a visitor.

On November 5th the Cadgwith children ( we did not have "kids" in those days: They existed only in America ) walked up the hill to the Ruan Minor "rec" for the semi-organised firework display. I suppose I enjoyed it but I rose at the crack of dawn the next day for the best part of the exercise. When I got to the dew-strewn field I picked up all the spent carcasses I could find and hauled them down home where I delighted in their smell color and variety.

A few weeks later it was Christmas and I went to my bed with its wonderful view of the cove and the winter sea suffering a delicious expectation. When I awoke I had a bumper harvest of books and presents from my Mum and Dad and my many absent relatives. Besides nuts and candy there was a die-cast Luger pistol which was equipped to take caps on a roll and which seemed much more European and sophisticated than my ornate silver cowboy revolver. There was complete with tripod a battery-powered Japanese maxim gun which rattled and flashed when you pressed the thumb lever. Someone sent a Bloodhound air-to-ground missile complete with its launching cradle, but the *pièce-de-résistance* was a magnificent white ballistic missile with a rubber warhead which could be armed with a cap. It came complete upon a high-quality die-cast transporter with rubber wheels, perspex windows and a worm-gear mechanism which tiny fingers could crank to elevate the weapon to its launch pad which latter had fully-functional screw-jacks. For good measure, the fourth element of the set was a beautiful military lorry with a removable metal cover.

One day my Dad took me to Culdrose Air Station to see the aircraft. It seemed very quiet. I had the pleasure, for a nine-year-old, of sitting in the cockpits of Sea Vixens, Buccaneers and Vampires as well as the perspex bubble of a small Bell helicopter. I also inspected the Wessex and Whirlwind machines but the most interesting aircraft was the Fairey Gannet. It looked far too heavy to fly with its great bulbous radar wen and its contrarotating six-bladed propellers. I had physically to

climb the fuselage to reach the cockpit above. Suitable staggered toe-holds were built into the aluminum skin. So as not to spoil the aerodynamic characteristics of the surface, spring-loaded metal flaps covered the holes from the inside. These made a very satisfying clatter as I kicked them in. The seat was high off the ground and surrounded by arcane dials, levers and rather heavy-looking brass selector switches, which could be shifted with the fingertips.

Cadgwith seemed to be full of aging widows and spinsters some prosperous and others not, for the sea and war and war at sea and war with the sea had left many with absent men. In a little roadside bungalow beside Louvain lived Cath Mitchell a kindly spinster with two cats. The elder cat was seventeen years old, gray and deciduous, and would calmly doze as she was stroked. Her younger sister, otherwise similar, was very nervous and flighty. The elder cat died and the younger had kittens in a cupboard, which Cath proudly opened to show me the litter. One day Cath boiled some hoppers on her stove and cheerfully deposited some struggling crabs in the seething water. I thought this was very cruel and said so but Cath continued smiling. When I left Cadgwith Cath gave me a bar of chocolate and a superb model lighthouse in white-veined green serpentine for her father was a serpentine-turner, and he had made it.

Although the Cadgwith serpentine was red, various shades of green were commoner and white not unknown. There had been a Victorian fashion for green serpentine interior moldings and the green form was abundant at Poltesco, a deserted boulder-strewn cove two miles North of Cadgwith. Here, beside a bamboo-skirted stream the ruins of an old turning-mill tumbled beside their wheel-pit. One day my Mother, I and another child bathed in the sea from this cove in whose larger boulders I discerned what appeared to be short streaks of lustrous copper similar to a much larger vein I had found in the living rock of The Devil's Frying Pan, a collapsed cave immediately South of Cadgwith. My Dad's local OS map marked a place called Wheal Unity at Mullion about five miles away. I knew that "Wheal" prefixed the names of Cornish mines but this was the sole example on the Lizard Peninsular. Nearly thirty years later, on a visit to The Camborne School of Mines Museum I saw a large raft of native copper won at Wheal Unity, a unique metalliferous mine on the Lizard serpentine. Before this, however, the Manchester tutors told me that a certain Coverack serpentine quarry yielded native copper and in 1974 a fellow undergraduate proudly showed me the dendrite he won there.

My Father used to drive my Mother and I on day trips in his Austin A35 van, popular then because purchase tax was remitted on commercial vehicles as long as they had no rear side windows. One day he drove us to the forlorn wastes of the Gwennap mining country. Cornwall is one of the few places where tin is found and the metal was mined with copper continuously from The Bronze Age until 1997. South Crofty was still a going concern but the rest of the Camborne area was a desert of grassless waste tips, ivy-clad engine houses, smoke-stained parapets and forests of peculiar stone and brick staged chimneys. Coal and steam had been used for all purposes: Pumping, hoisting, calcining, crushing, buddling and the generation of electricity and compressed air. The earliest telephones were used for communication and whereas all recoverable scrap had been salvaged telephonic disjecta littered the ground. The Great Western Railways admonitory cast-iron notices also failed to pay recovery and clung like officious limpets to railside brickwork. The scene had the desolated romance of a ghost town or Ostia Antiqua and my fascination with old mines was kindled.

In those days people saw this as neither industrial archeology nor environmental blight. It was just abandoned wasteland.

On another occasion my Father showed us a streaming works built in a leveled basin. Mazes of creosoted-planking launders fed water to slim overshot wheels which languidly cranked the shafts of rocking cradles for the sifting of residual tin ore from the dust of deep-mined spoil. All this functioned without apparent pilotage or maintenance.

My Grandparents sent me a chemistry set and a microscope. One of the suggested experiments involved connecting two test tubes with glass tubing and piercing the side of the lower tube to permit gas escape. The upper tube was then filled with coal ( not provided ) and roasted using the spirit lamp. Coal tar gathered in the lower tube and eventually my Father succeeded in lighting the tiny gas stream with a match. On another occasion I dissolved copper sulfate in a watch glass and electrolysed it with the little carbon rods provided, one of which became plated with pink copper. Copper was also precipitated when gramophone needles were placed in copper sulfate solution. The microscope was equipped with a gimbal-mounted mirror but domestic Swan lamps were too weak and distant to shine through the optics. So one sunny afternoon I took the instrument into the garden, sat it on a chair and studied the copper sulfate and cobalt chloride crystals on slides. At thirty times magnification the rugged topography of the little rocks was a revelation, as was the play of blue or pink light on fractures and on faces. Perhaps more revealing were droplets of garden pond water which seemed to be alive with languid or frenetic animalcules.

These were the most formative toys I had but I never wanted for books or playthings as a child. My Parents had less income than many people, but they marshaled their money wisely and I was an only son. Even then there seemed to be a contrast with the lifestyle of my friends David and Mildred across the path. The postmaster's large house was also on a slope and the Drews seemed to suffer a dank and troglodytic existence in the semi-basement of their home. Their quarters were noisy and chaotic. The television was always playing and always tuned to Westward whose annoying "Golden Hind" ident seemed to recur with distressing frequency. Somehow three-year-old James seemed to command much more attention than his modest scale merited and poor Mrs Drew seemed never to rest. By contrast Louvain was an island of serenity. When my Father's dad got a new television my Father brought his old Bush set to Cornwall and I sometimes watched "Tonight" but telewatching was not encouraged in his household.

My own Mum and Dad did not merely show me old mines. One sleepy summer Sunday we drove to the hamlet of Ruan Major about three miles from Cadgwith. It was a deserted village whose roofless church had walls of marble scrollwork and a floor scattered with roof-tiles and guano. Amidst the tall broad-leaved trees which whispered in the breeze was Erisey, a large medieval stone manor-house, part of a working farm. The lady of the house gave us tea and cakes before a flaming fire in the great hall, sparsely furnished and floored with flags. Erisey was not far from the surviving Grade Church which was isolated among fields. On another evening Father took me there and a gentle priest showed us to the dusty belfry where I sat on a window ledge whilst the priest demonstrated the tone of the great bronze bells by pinging them with his fingernails. Grade Church did not have electricity and was lit by kerosene lamps. Half-a-mile from Grade, St Ruan's Well rested beneath a stone kiosk beside the Cadgwith road. The Cornish had wished to build the church by the well, but every night The Devil moved their stones and timbers to the Grade site.

Eventually the local people gave up and fell in with Satan's suggestion. They also told me that the large serpentine footstones of the styles were pierced with holes in order that pixies could take refuge from human feet.

But Cornwall is full of unlikely holes. One day I walked alone past a tiny building and heard furtive tittering within. I crept up to the letter-box and gingerly opened it to peer in. Inside Strowger selectors leapt and pirouetted chattering to themselves. As I said, Cadgwith was almost telephone-free but there must have been enough call activity on the Ruan code to work this tiny exchange. On another day my Mother took me to Mullion where a different hole was inspected by a calm and matronly woman in a very clean and modern surgery with venetian blinds, the first I had seen. She introduced me to another innovation, her high-speed drill which she said was like "a little jet engine" and so it seemed. This was the last occasion on which I underwent surgery without anesthetic, and yet unlike subsequent occasions over the years it was quite painless. The Dolor-Ogo is another hole. One afternoon, when the sea was calm, my Parents prevailed upon a young man of the village to take us there in his dingy. As the four of us boarded the gunwales declined to within six inches of the sea and the owner started his outboard. After a few minutes he motored into the great cave and turned off his engine. We sat rocking on wavelets as sun-dapples coruscated across the roof through the chilly twilight inside the living rock. In the remote interior the sea lapped and gurgled ominously. After some time contemplating the green sea beneath us we asked to return and the young man drew on the starter cord. Nothing happened. After a few more attempts the motor drew us to the open sunlit sea and expired for want of fuel. More frantic elbow-work as I sat watching with excited amusement. Eventually the little engine sputtered back to life and we returned to the fishing cove, where only the lifeboat boasted such things as life-jackets or radios. Real men used neither and women were too proud to ask.

It was on a sunlit day in 1962 that Mother and I sat atop the cliffs of Landewednack as a great crowd assembled above the new Lizard-Cadgwith Lifeboat Station and sung "Almighty Father, Strong to Save", one of the most moving experiences of my life as a thousand mostly female voices swelled and lulled their supplication with a restrained passion which echoed and mirrored the latent and awful power of the gentle sea lapping below. If the sun had not shone I should have wept. Presently the blond profile of Philip Battenberg, Prince Consort of England, said something inaudible into a microphone on a black ledge in the distance, and the big new lifeboat dived into a great white cone of spray and roared seaward. No longer would burly Cadgwith men skid out their craft on stinking logs.

The happiest year of my life was ending. You probably think that Cornwall is a wet and windy promontory, romantic but inclement and merciless to the mariner. The Greeks and Romans certainly thought so. And yet when I was nine every day was sunny and calm, born in cool purity and dying in balm. I discovered that there was friendship that there was thought and there was feeling, that places had a magic and that progress was possible in a land which had a past.

For me the idyll broke and the world we knew has vanished forever. But the urge to seek to find and to know which kindled in that dawn of reflection persists unquenched.

*Original Essay SUNRISE0 WordPerfect Document dated 17 June 1999.*
*This revision 24 November 2005 including photographs taken on the morning of 5 April 1996.*

## Photographic Notes

*Louvain* ( LOUV961s.jpg )

The Mitchell brothers, siblings of Cath, owned Louvain. George, the elder and coxswain of the lifeboat rented the upper storey to summer holidaymakers. Robert owned the ground floor and hired it to The Royal Navy. My bedroom was the small room between the bay windows. In 1961-62 it had a full-height french window.

Ruan Minor is on the plateau, behind the four-house terrace on the right-hand skyline.

On the left of the picture the staggered terrace behind the bushes was Coastguard cottages.

*A View of Cadgwith* ( CADG962As.jpg )

Louvain is the seemingly-skewed six-windowed house with dormers at top-right center. The Mission Church is the stilted green tin shed immediately below.

The gabled Lifeboat House behind the middle of the cove is finished in blue, with big blue doors ( 1996 ). The winch is accommodated in the pilchard shed with a hipped black roof at bottom right. The "1815" door to seaward has been replaced with the strap-hinged double doors.

*The Oil Engine and its Winch* ( CADG964us.jpg )

Note the way in which the walls of this alcove are decorated with Victorian sepia portrait photographs, naive paintings by Cornish Primitives ( possibly worth thousands ) and other local memorabilia. The framed "Smoking Strictly Prohibited" notice lent against the bottom of the rear wall in April 1996.

At that date the engine was use-ready and its cable taut to the water's edge.