

CORNWALL

A pictorial guide to favourite coastal places

Sketchbook

Jim Watson



Thatched Cottage, Sennen Cove



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The Old Watch House, Polperro

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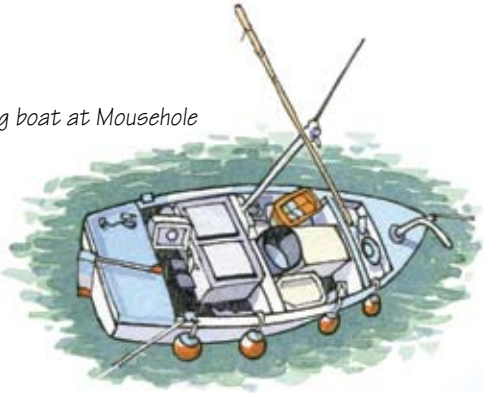
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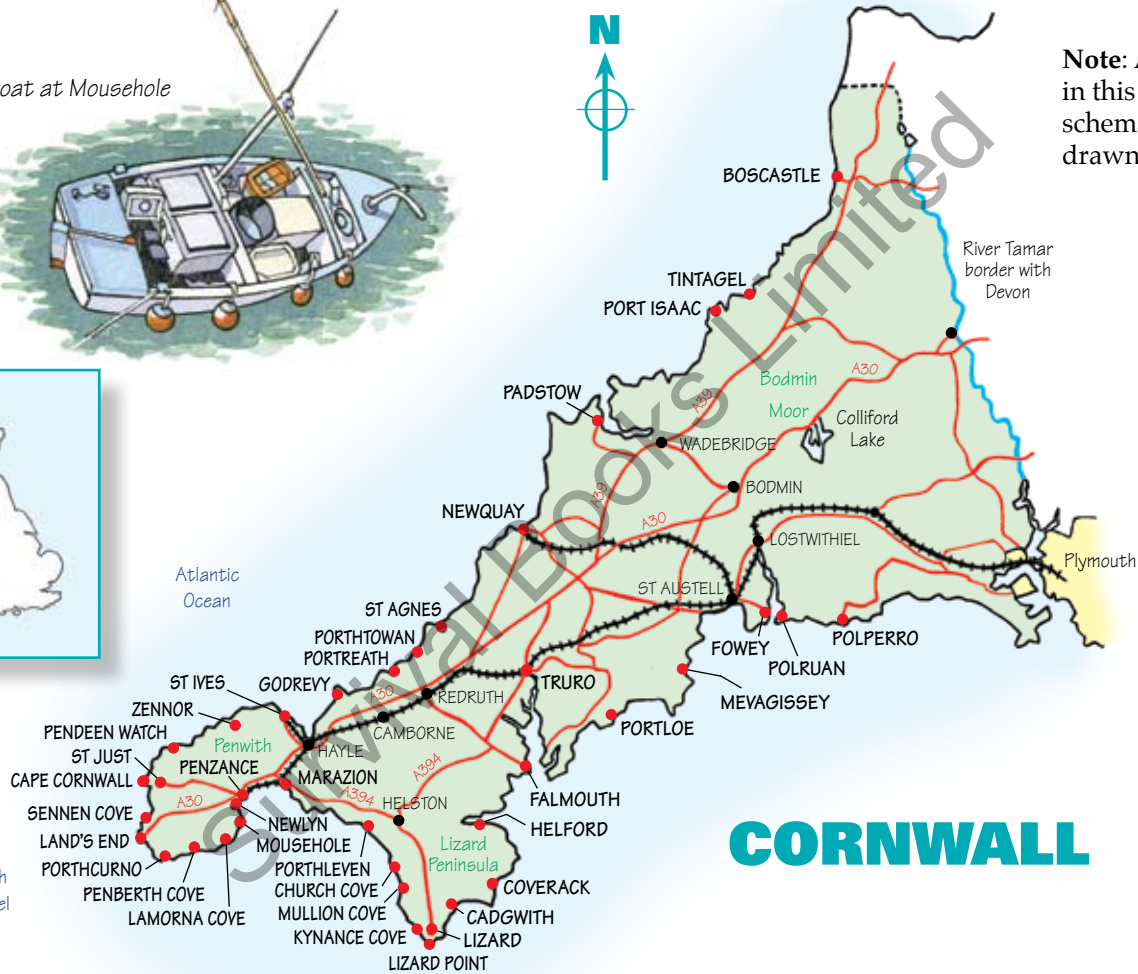
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*Approaching Zennor on the
B3306 St Ives to St Just road*

Fishing boat at Mousehole



Note: All maps in this book are schematic and not drawn to scale.



CORNWALL

INTRODUCTION

For me, Cornwall has it all: beauty, drama, serenity and inspiration. There's also a timeless, unchanging quality that has sustained me for the more than 40 years I've been enjoying its cliffs, beaches and villages.

Cornwall makes up the western tip of a long arm of land thrusting into the Atlantic Ocean, as though it wants to escape from the rest of England. Indeed, it's separated from Devon – and England – for most of its length by the River Tamar, with only a seven-mile stretch of land keeping it from breaking free. This separateness also extends to the Cornish culture, which has retained its Celtic heritage and is rich in myth and legend, a place of standing stones, Gothic tales and smuggling sagas.

There are plenty of places inland that are worth visiting but it's the fabulous coastline that most of us flock to. Cornwall has the longest and most diverse coastline in Britain. Depending on how it's measured, headland to headland or water's edge, it stretches 300 or just over 1,000 miles. At its broadest, the county is only around 45 miles wide, so you're never more than 25 miles from the sea. It has over 300 beaches and 12 separate Areas of Outstanding Natural Beauty.

This book will guide you to a plethora of favourite places, a journey beginning at Boscastle in the northwest, rounding Land's End and ending at Polperro in the

southeast. It shows you how to get there – with detailed maps – where you can park and what to look out for. There are also some easy walks. The South West Coast Path follows the entire Cornish coastline, so if you join at any point you're guaranteed a well-maintained and waymarked route with fabulous views.

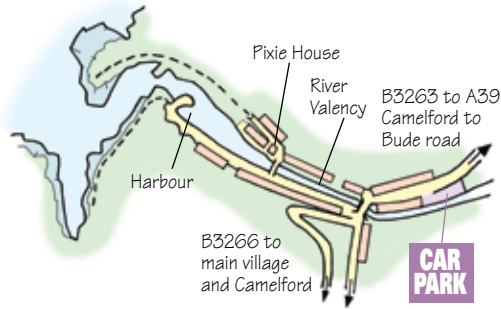
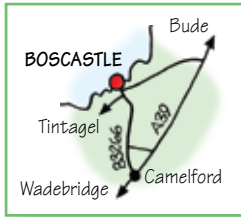
This book is a celebration, but I also hope it informs and entertains. Producing it has been a pleasure, a journey of discovery and most of all, a labour of love. These are some of my favourite places – anywhere. I hope they give you as much pleasure as they always give me.

Jim Webster

Rugby, 2015



*Splendid isolation –
a seaside home at
Coverack*



The main village of Boscastle sits grandly up the hillside, leaving the harbour at the bottom to conduct the business of tourism with avid vigour.

It was once a significant port, the only one for 20 miles, as well as a fishing harbour. The fishing boats struggle on but Boscastle is now given over almost entirely to its visitors.

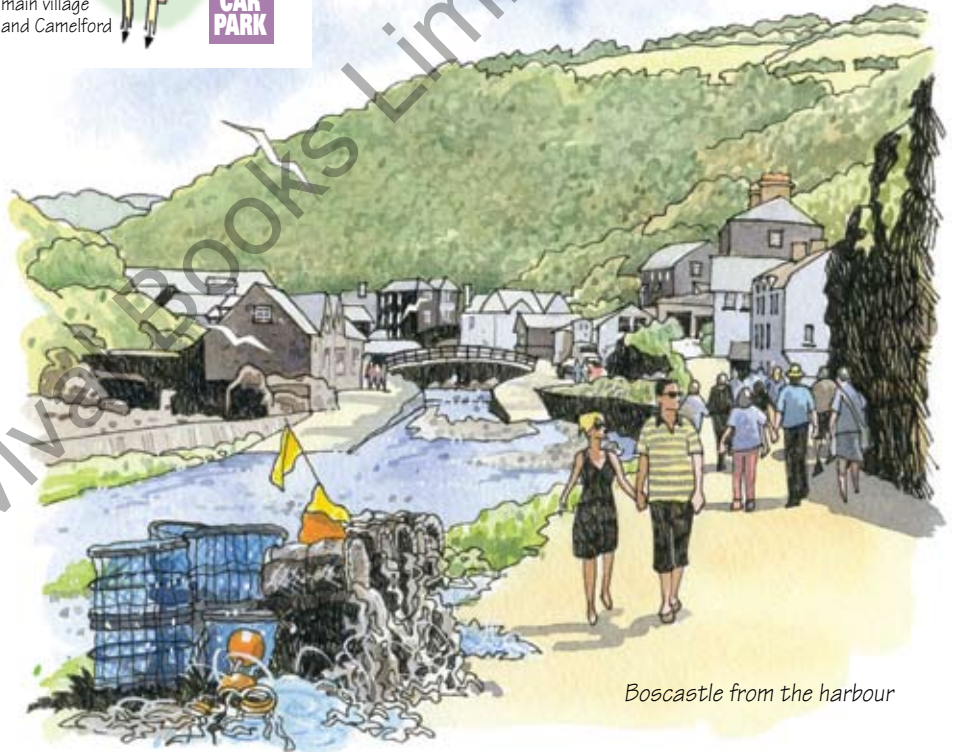
BOSCASTLE

The 300 year-old Pixie House (the Harbour Light), famous for its crooked roof, was reputedly the most photographed building in Boscastle.

However, in 2004 it took the full brunt of the floods and was completely destroyed. Within two years it was returned to its former glory, rebuilt with every nook and cranny carefully recreated.



The rebuilt Pixie House



Boscastle from the harbour

On August 16, 2004, torrential rain pounded Boscastle for eight hours, increasing river levels by 7ft (2m) in a single hour. The River Valency burst its banks, sending 440 million gallons of water cascading down the main street at up to 40 miles an hour, uprooting trees, washing away boulders and, ultimately, buildings.

The torrent picked up vehicles in the car park and a surreal procession of small cars and camper vans was captured on camera, and witnessed on television around the world. Some 75 cars, 5 caravans, 6 buildings and several boats were washed into the sea; approximately 100 homes and businesses were destroyed; trees were uprooted and debris scattered over a large area. In an operation lasting from mid-afternoon until 2.30am, a fleet of 7 helicopters rescued around 150 people clinging to trees and the roofs of buildings and cars. Remarkably, no major injuries or loss of life occurred.

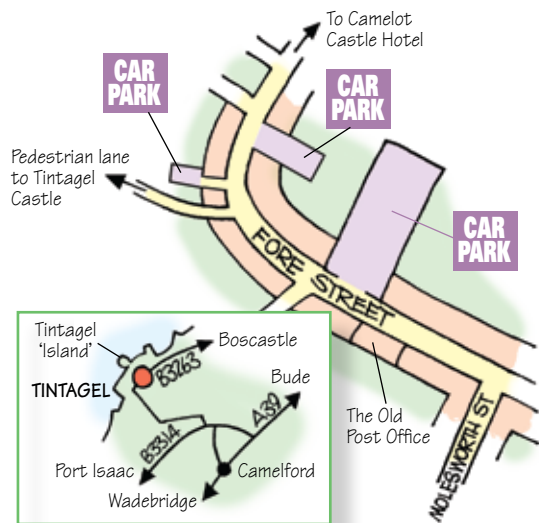
With commendable urgency, the people of Boscastle set about rebuilding their community. Within a couple years businesses were up and running again and there's few signs these days of the devastation. Cynics might say the rebuilding has turned a tourist set piece into even more of a stage set, but the tourists who flock to the undeniably picturesque harbour don't seem to mind too much.



The harbour exit to the sea



The harbour



The Old Post Office

TINTAGEL

Unusually for Cornish tourist centres (at least in this book) this one straddles a hilltop rather than being snuggled down in a cove with its feet in the sea. Tintagel is a long straggly village with no obvious reason for being there except as an adjunct to a castle, a function it continues to perform admirably to this day.

The modern-day village was known as 'Trevena' until the Post Office established 'Tintagel' in the mid-19th century. Before then 'Tintagel' had been the name of the headland and the parish.

Appropriately, the village's premier attraction is the 'Old Post Office', which dates from the 14th century. The charismatic, grey-stone manor house, which became a post office during the 19th century, is now Grade I listed and owned by the National Trust. It attracts more than 45,000 visitors a year and is handily positioned just across the road from an expansive car and coach park.



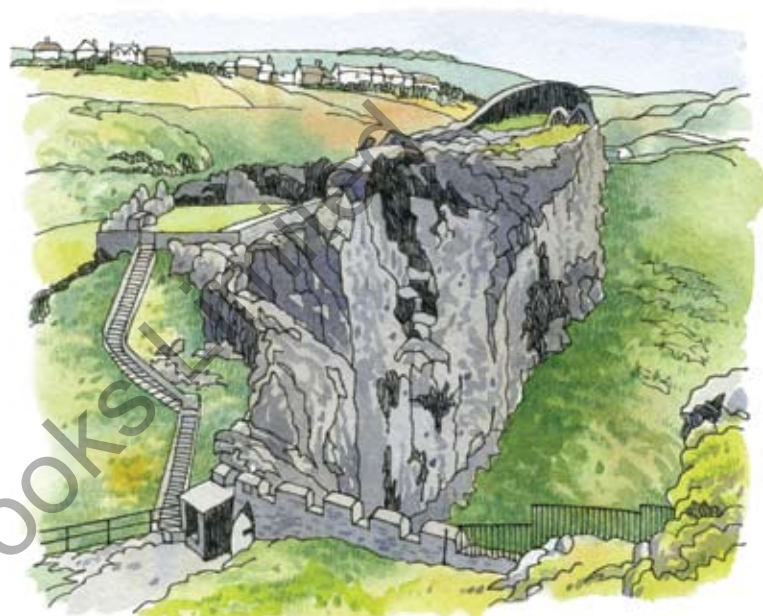
Fore Street and the lane to the castle, with an inevitably-named bookshop

A half-mile west of the village, Tintagel Island is connected to the mainland by a narrow neck of land facing the full force of the Atlantic. A place of settlement, mystery and extreme weather since Roman times, it was always well qualified to take on the mantle of the Arthurian myth.

The legend began in the 12th century when Geoffrey of Monmouth published his mythical history of Britain, describing Tintagel as the place of Arthur's conception. During the 13th century, Richard, Earl of Cornwall, was so inspired by the tale that he built a castle on the 'island' peninsula in a deliberate old-fashioned style to make it look more ancient. This eventually fell into ruin and is largely what we see today.

The castle features in the doomed romance of Tristan and Isolde, the inspiration for Wagner's epic opera. Victorians flocked here after the Arthurian connection was revitalised in poetry by Alfred, Lord Tennyson and others.

The ruins are breathtaking. Steep stone steps, stout walls and rugged windswept cliff edges encircle the great hall, where Richard, Earl of Cornwall, once feasted. The views are sensational and when sea mist suddenly swirls around the ramparts on a sunny day, myth and magic become a powerful possibility.



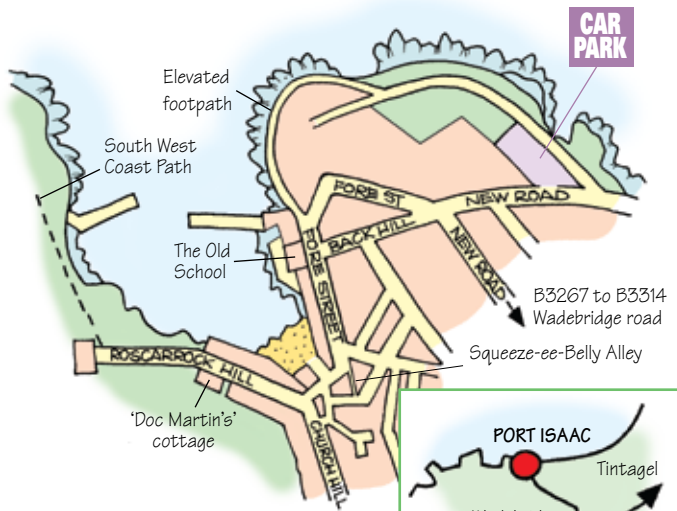
The ruins of the upper mainland courtyards



The rugged coastline from the castle

Camelot Castle Hotel

Tintagel village



PORT ISAAC



The Platt



Fore Street

For many years visitors knew Port Isaac as 'the place you park on the beach'. These days that facility seems to come and go but as the narrow twisting streets of the village are no place for modern vehicles, the large car park at the top of the hill is the best option. The footpath around the cliff top is a superb viewpoint, and the stroll down Fore Street through an avenue of picturesque cottages and interesting shops is a delight.

The Platt, a small square and stoney beach at the bottom of the hill, is usually a chaotic scene of fishing paraphernalia, squawking seagulls, lounging tourists, bendy buildings and a welcoming old pub with it's doors flung open. The perfect Cornish holiday scene. It can be sunny too!



Squeeze-ee-Belly Alley measures just nineteen and a half inches wide, officially the narrowest of such alley-ways, certified by the Guinness Book of Records

Port Isaac has been a fishing village since the 14th century. The pier was constructed during the reign of Henry VIII. The village's central area dates from the 18th and 19th centuries, from a time when its prosperity was tied to local coastal freight and fishing. The port handled cargoes such as coal, timber, salt, pottery, stone and Delabole slate from nearby quarries, which were conveyed down its narrow streets. With the construction of the North Cornwall Railway in 1895 and a station – Port Isaac Road – built three miles from the village, transport trade in the tiny port was effectively killed off and Port Isaac became dependent mainly on fishing. Fishermen still work from the Platt, landing a daily catch of fish, crab and lobsters. Port Isaac Road station closed in 1966.

Port Isaac's narrow, winding streets are lined with old white-washed cottages and traditional granite, slate-fronted Cornish houses, many of which are listed as of architectural or historic importance. It's a wonderful place to explore, just picking a street at random and seeing where it takes you.



A hidden-away corner



Church Hill

Houses in Fore Street



The Gullery Home of the mischievous seagull children's books written and illustrated by Jon Cleave. Jon is also a member of the Fisherman's Friends folk singing group but his day job is working in the shop. You can't miss him. He's the one with the bald head and twirly moustache like a comic circus strongman



The Old School Now an hotel but still features as a school in the ITV series Doc Martin

Fore Street

Church Hill

Walkway from the car park



Port Isaac is home to the *Fisherman's Friends*, a group of sea shanty singers who perform on summer Friday evenings on the Platt outside the pub. If wet, in the pub. In 2010 they signed an album deal for £1 million with Universal. The group is made up of ten local men who live in the village and grew up together. It includes fishermen, farmers and shopkeepers. One is in his seventies. As *Port Isaac's Fisherman's Friends* they have performed all over the UK, including the Royal Albert Hall, and have appeared on the popular television quiz show *Eggheads*.

The village is a popular venue for film and TV shoots. Films include *Saving Grace* and *Nightmare Man* - where Port Isaac was depicted as the Hebrides. The TV series *Foldark* was filmed here and more recently it became Port Wenn for ITV's *Doc Martin* starring Martin Clunes as the irascible GP.

Port Isaac is always a pleasure to visit and the demands of tourism don't seem to have overwhelmed its community spirit. Long may it continue.

The Golden Lion A splendid old pub with a dark smuggling history. Great place for a banter, a crab sandwich and a pint



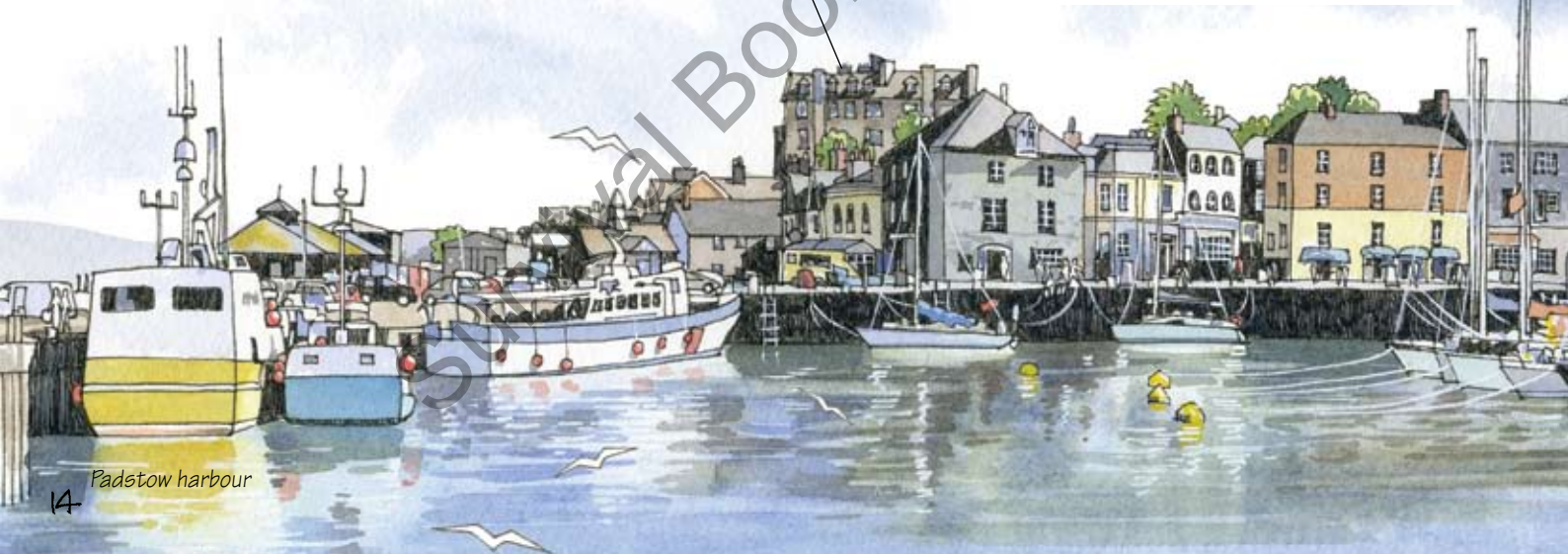
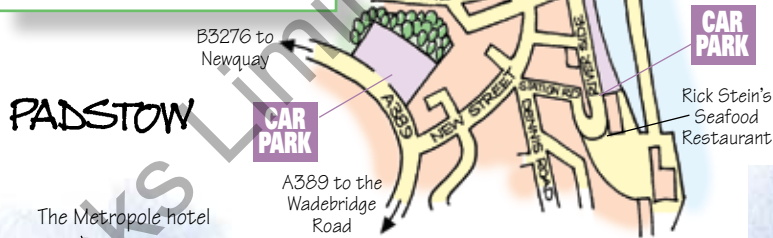
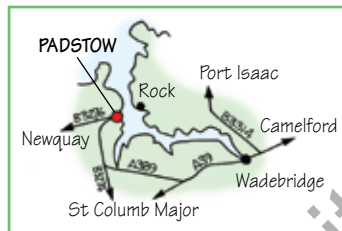
The Platt

Port Isaac from Roscarrock Hill

The Camel estuary cuts deeply into the north Cornwall coastline, so to cross from one side to the other requires a road trip of around 15 miles via Wadebridge. Consequently there have been ferries across the Camel for centuries. The current service carries foot passengers between Padstow and Rock daily.

Traditionally a fishing port, Padstow is now a popular tourist destination. Although some of its former fishing fleet remains, it's mainly a yachting haven on a dramatic coastline with few easily navigable harbours.

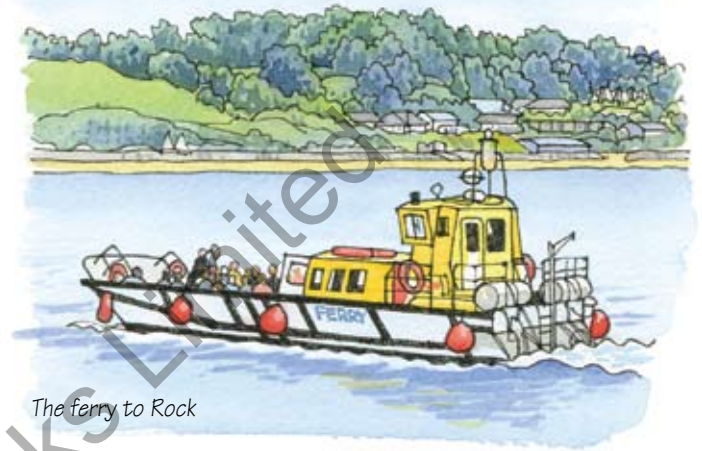
The celebrity chef and restaurateur, Rick Stein, has had a considerable influence on Padstow. He now has four eateries in the town and tourists travel from far away to eat at his restaurant and cafés.



Padstow harbour



*Rick Stein's Seafood
Restaurant, Riverside*



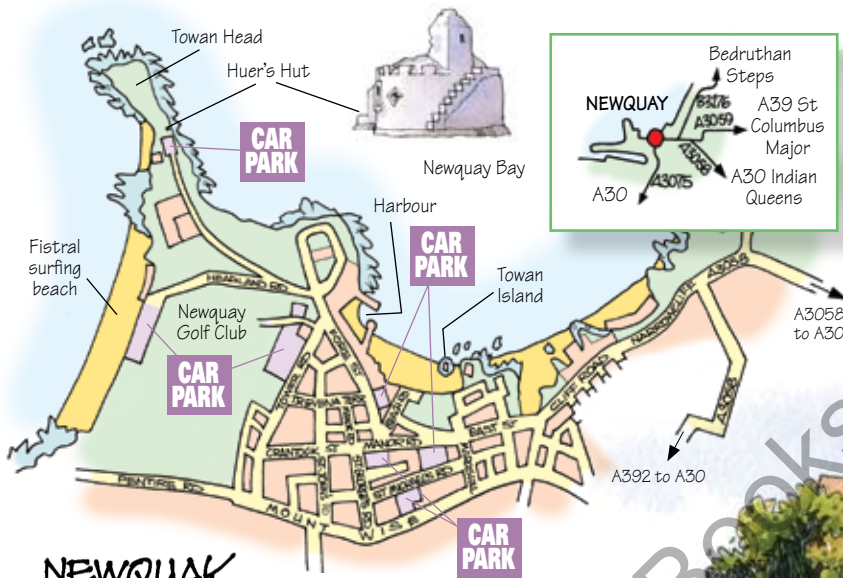
The ferry to Rock



Padstow has been attracting visitors for a long time. More than 4,000 years ago, even before the building of the Pyramids, it's thought that travellers used the Fowey and Camel Valleys on their journeys from Brittany to Ireland. By using this route, known as 'The Saints Way', the tortuous sea passage around Land's End could be avoided.

The arrival of the railway in 1899 promoted Padstow to a major holiday destination. Until 1964, it was served by the Atlantic Coast Express – a direct train service from London – but the station closed in 1967. The old railway line is now the Camel Trail, a picturesque foot and cycle path along the river. One of the railway mileposts is now embedded outside the Shipwright's Arms public house on the Harbour Front

Padstow enjoys a mild and benign climate and a more sheltered position than other Cornish resorts. Sloping down to the harbour, where many fine medieval buildings survive, the town is a wonderful jumble of crooked streets and multifarious little shops, which have developed organically over the years without hindrance by the heavy hand of town planners.



Fistral Beach is capable of producing powerful, hollow waves and holding a good sized swell. International surfing competitions have been held here for more than 20 years. Newquay is also home to the reef known as the Cribbar. Breaking at up to 20ft (6m), it attracts surfers from all over the world to ride its massive swell.

Towan Island A landmark granite rock with a restored house from the 1930s perched on top which can only be reached via a 70ft (21m) high, 100ft (30m) long footbridge, believed to be the only privately owned example in the UK. In 2010 the house was offered for sale with a price tag of £1.25 million

NEWQUAY

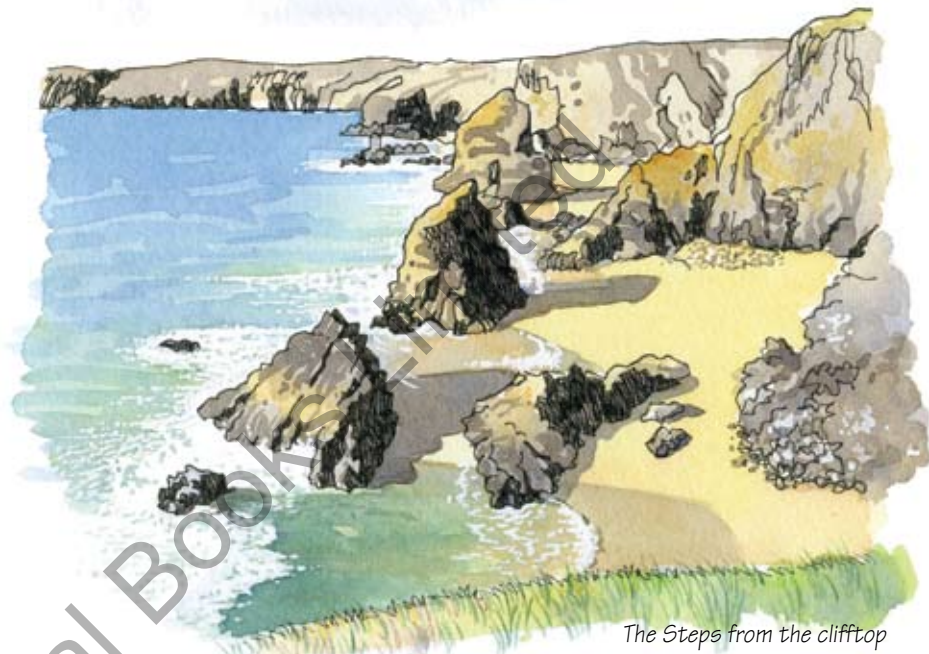
With its fabulous coastline and nine long and accessible sandy beaches, Newquay has been a major tourist destination for over a century.

Around 22,000 people live in the town, but the population rockets to more than 100,000 in summer, largely due to its position as the surf capital of the UK. Surf stores, board manufacturers and hire shops abound, with the accompanying chillout bars, traditional pubs, beachside cafés and nightclubs. A night out in Newquay is unlikely to be quiet.



Towan Island & beach

For a quieter time head for Towan Head, a breezy, open peninsula with good walks and sea views. An ancient stone hut on the Head once housed a huer who alerted the town's fishermen of approaching pilchard shoals with cries of 'Hewva, Hewva!' ('Here they are!'). With the harbour almost a mile away he must have been a remarkable shouter.



The Steps from the clifftop

BEDRUTHAN STEPS

Six miles northeast of Newquay the cliffs at Bedruthan have been systematically eroded, leaving a series of volcanic rock stacks which rise majestically from Bedruthan Beach, forming a spectacular series of columns stretching across the bay.

There's ample parking in a National Trust car park and a precipitous series of steps have been cut into the rock down to the beach. The descent should not be attempted lightly but it's hugely satisfying to walk amongst the towers and witness the power of the sea close up. The beach is beautiful white sand and it's easy to linger too long with the tide coming in and the steep climb back up the cliff to accomplish. Take care!

ST AGNES

A large, sprawling but attractive, village built on a hillside, St Agnes boasts a remarkable range of shops including grocers, butchers, greengrocers, a pharmacy, newsagent, post office, and even a bank! A stroll along Vicarage Road to the church is like stepping back in time. There are also craft shops, galleries and workshops.

St Agnes parish church consecrated in 1851 and built on the site of earlier buildings dating back to the early 1300s

Bank House Grade II listed built early 19th century



St Agnes parish church & Bank House



The village is well-known for its high quality tin which has been mined here for hundreds of years. St Agnes tin is still in production today at Blue Hills, the only remaining tin streaming works in Cornwall. The remains of engine houses can be seen today around the cliffs of St Agnes and the village.

A mining trail begins at the famous Wheal Coates tin mine on the cliffs near Chapel Porth. Full details – and much more – at the St Agnes Museum (yes there's even a museum here! Free entry too!).

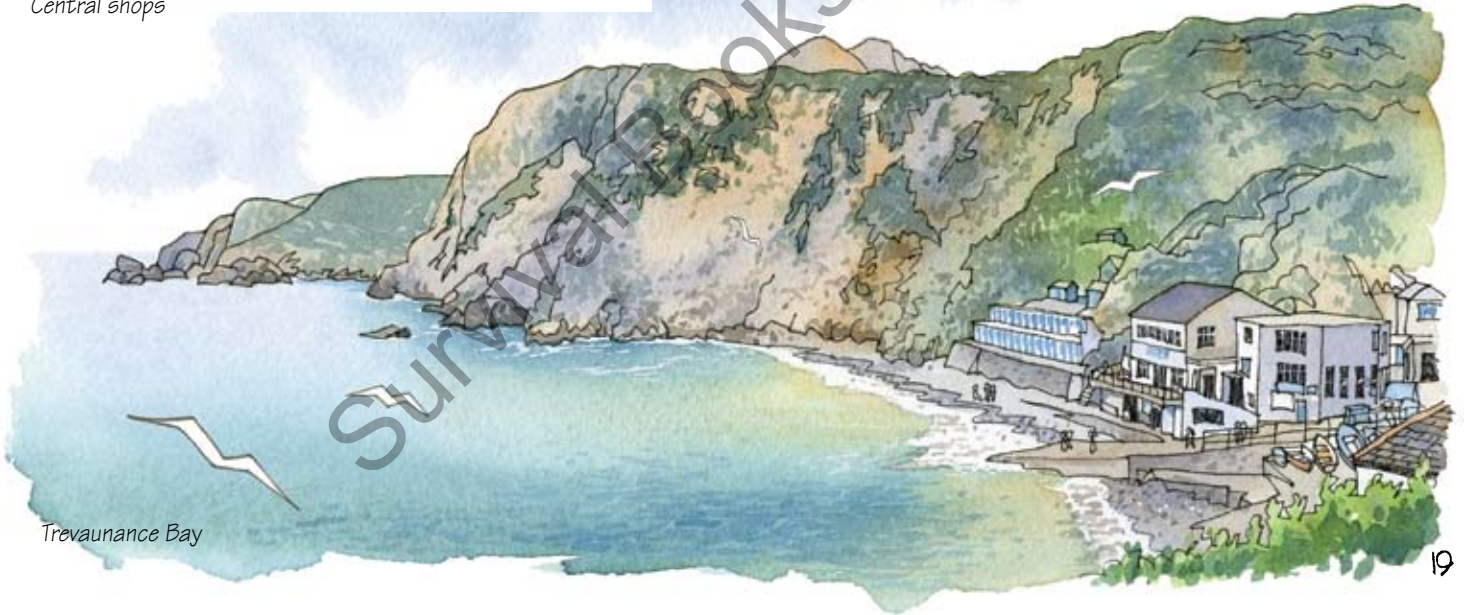


Central shops

Trevaunance Bay is a half mile away from the village along a pleasant wooded minor road, Quay Road. There's a car park at the end and all the seaside facilities you'd expect.

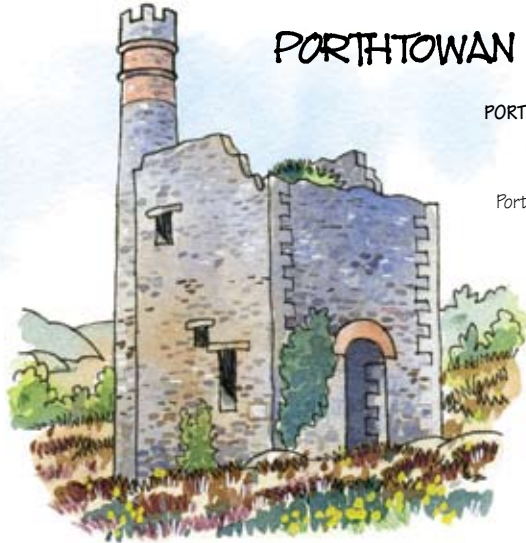
The scene is impressive, nature in the raw. A restless sea rattles a stoney beach beneath cliffs pitted and crumbling from centuries of Atlantic storms and stained by mineral deposits. Heaps of mining waste are piled across the skyline while seagulls soar in endless flight.

There have been repeated attempts to build a harbour here. The Tonkin family was most successful in 1710, their pier surviving for over a century. A new one was built but that too was soon washed away. Trevaunance Bay remains pierless. Nature always wins.



Trevaunance Bay

PORHTOWAN



The popular resort of Porthtowan lies along a narrow combe leading to a broad shore where golden sands and rolling Atlantic rollers are a delight for surfers. Now a virtual holiday complex, the village was once a hugely prosperous copper mining centre. Wheal Towan, which overlooked the village, was said to yield its owner, Ralph Allen Daniell of Trelissick, a fortune of 'a guinea a minute' night and day.

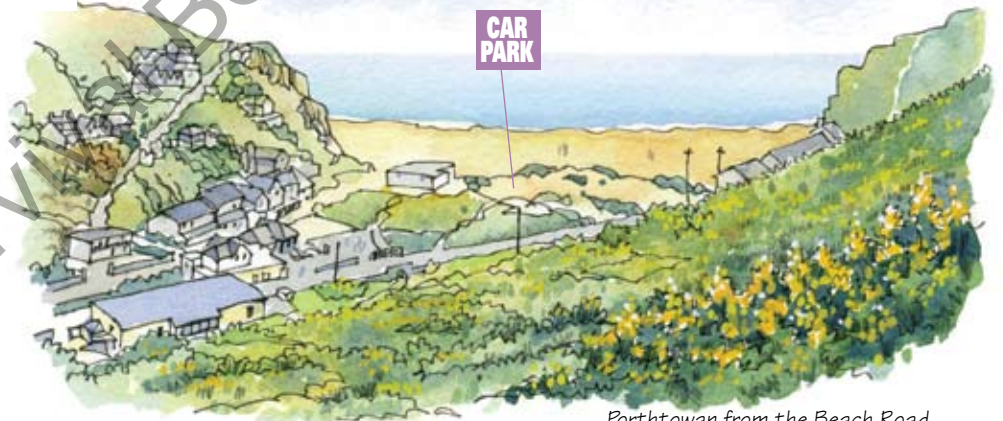
When the decline set in towards the end of the 19th century there was a mass exodus to mining camps in California, where miners from Porthtowan outnumbered the rest. They took their homespun standards with them – no work on Sundays, put on your best clothes and attend chapel.

Porthtowan hit the national headlines in February 2010 when a 56ft (17m) long Fin whale, thought to have been hit by a ship, was washed up on the beach.

Ruined engine house near Porthtowan

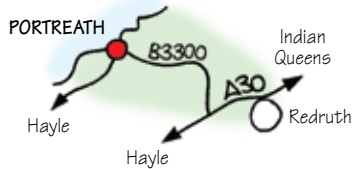
A ride between the brown, stoney hills inland from Porthtowan is a rather surreal experience after the green fields and golden sands along the coast. The valley once reverberated with all the clamour of the 19th-century mining industry, but is now silent and still.

With carefree scenes of modern holiday makers not far away, it's a good place to reflect on the hard lives that miners and their families endured in less fortunate times.



Porthtowan from the Beach Road

PORTREATH

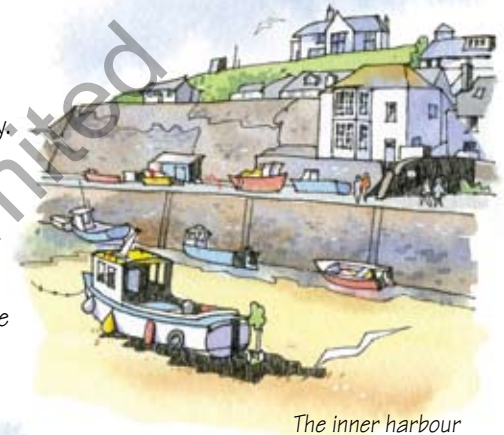


Like neighbouring Porthtowan, Portreath is now a thriving holiday village. It was also once an industrial hot spot. But at Portreath it was much, much more so!

In 1760, mining and industry magnate, Lord de Dunstanville, set out to transform the quiet little fishing village into a viable port with docks and a railway. A three foot (one metre) gauge tramway to Scorrier was in operation by 1812 and a branchline with a 1 in 7

incline down to the harbour was laid to join the Hayle railway. The harbour was expanded in 1800, 1824 and 1846. Copper was transported from mines in the Chacewater area using horse drawn wagons and shipped to Swansea for smelting, while coal and timber were brought in for use in the mines. Modern boats still find the narrow harbour entrance difficult to negotiate so it must have been really hairy with a large sailing ship carrying more than 100 tons of ore.

The railways and tramways associated with the mineral trade have now been turned into an excellent long distance cycleway and footpath, extending 15 miles from Portreath to Devoran on the south coast.



The inner harbour

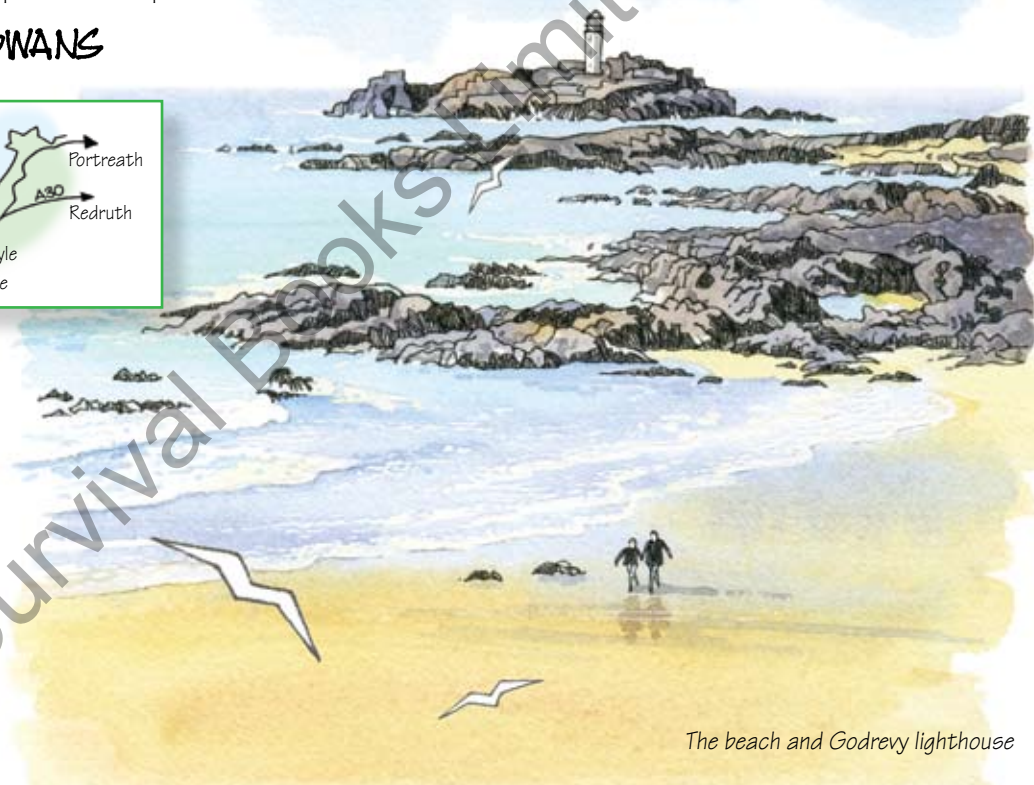
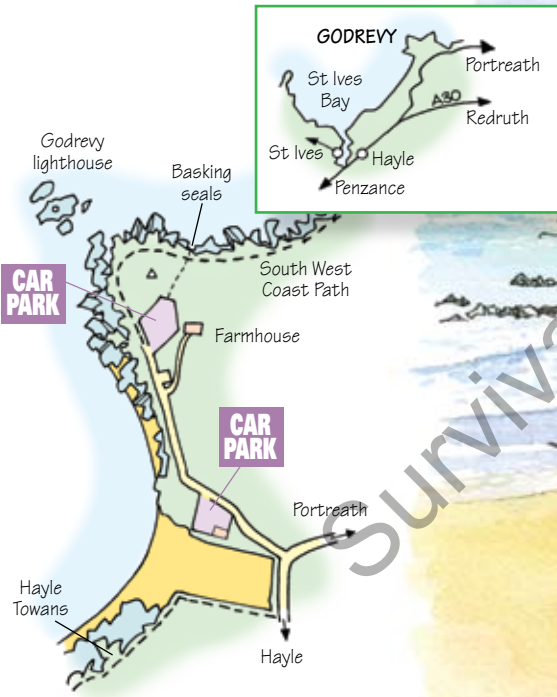
Portreath from Trega Hill



Godrevy Head is a rocky, one-mile square promontory, facing north into the Atlantic, largely owned and managed by the National Trust. It has some of the best coastal heathland in Cornwall, with many species of plant, animal and insect life, and is a renowned habitat for seabirds. Grey seals populate one of the coves. Godrevy is a wonderful place to walk, picnic and

explore the rock formations and pools when the tide is out. Godrevy Island lies approx three hundred yards off the Head. Seaward of Godrevy Island lies a submerged reef known as The Stones. Godrevy lighthouse was built to warn shipping of the dangerous reef.

GODREVY & HAYLE TOWANS



The beach and Godrevy lighthouse



Godrevy Lighthouse

The lighthouse was built on Godrevy Island in 1858–1859, a white octagonal tower, 86ft (26m) high, made of rubble-stone and mortar. Originally, the light was continuously manned by three men, but in 1934 it was automated. The light flashes white/red every 10 seconds and can be seen from around 12 miles away, with a red sector only being visible in the arc of danger from the reef.

Three miles of golden sands, cosy dunes that give respite against the fresh Atlantic winds and a view of a lighthouse with a famous literary connection. Little wonder then, that when Hayle Towans was put up for sale at auction a few years ago it sparked a fierce bidding war across the world. The plot, covering 76 acres, eventually sold for £80,000 to an unnamed woman with Cornish connections. She's not allowed to develop it, dig it up or stop other people using it. Her desire appears to be simply to own a little piece of paradise and keep it that way. How wonderful is that?

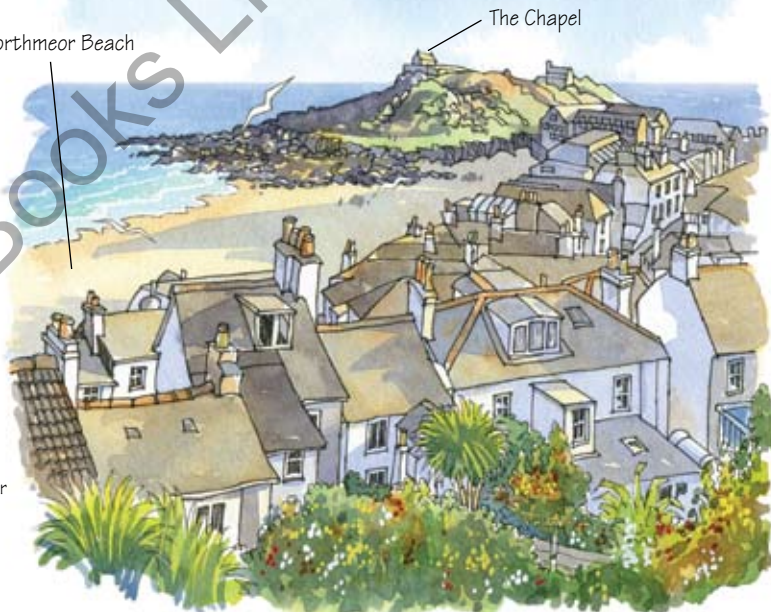
The beach, across the bay from St Ives, is a favourite among surfers, walkers and those who like to lounge on the sand or in the dunes. It also attracts attention from literary pilgrims. The lighthouse that sits so attractively on rocky Godrevy Island is widely believed to have been the inspiration for Virginia Woolf's 1927 novel, *To the Lighthouse*. As a child, Woolf and her family took holidays in St Ives.

The Towans

ST IVES



Most people's favourite Cornish coastal town, St Ives enjoys a sublime setting almost surrounded by a viridian sea at the southern end of the magnificent sweep of bay around to Godrevy. It's a much-loved, craggy and salt-encrusted, barnacle of a town with granite steps, artist studios and a maze of breezy, sand-blown, back lanes that echo to the boom of surf on Porthmeor Beach. The harbour takes centre stage; a sheltered sun trap by day and a lamp-lit boulevard for strollers on their way to the many restaurants and pubs in the evening.



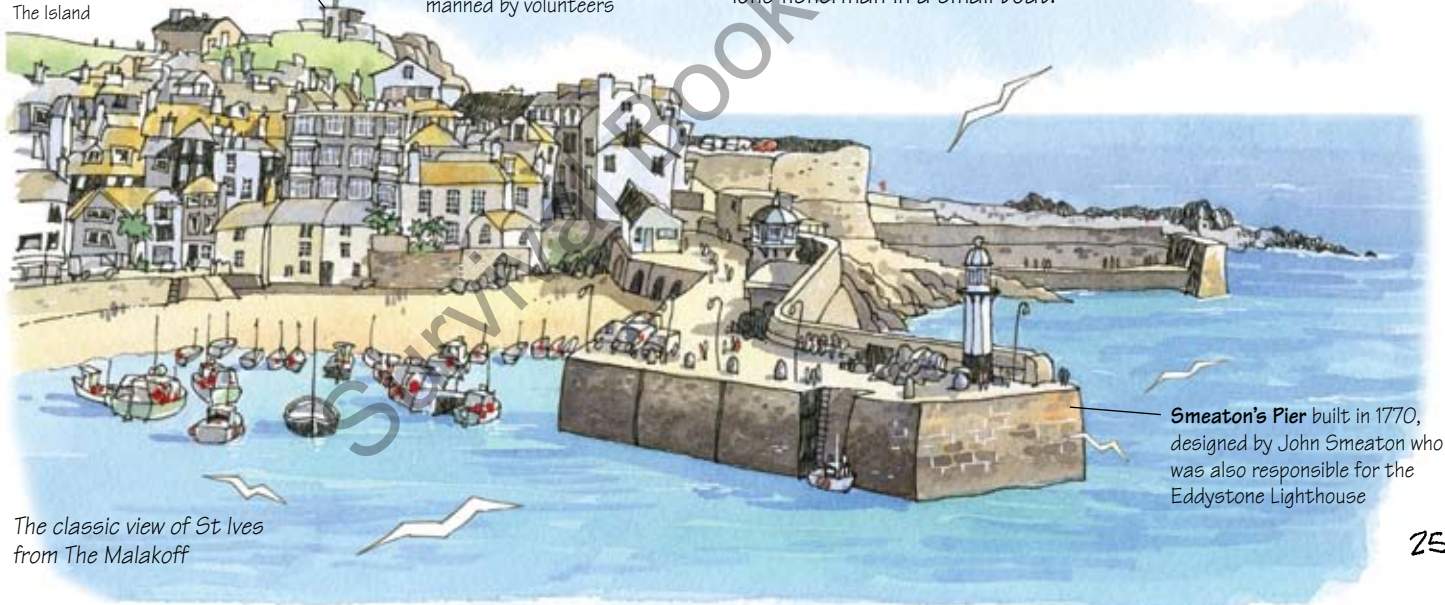
The view from the Tate Gallery across the rooftops to the Island

During the 1800s, St Ives was a hugely prosperous fishing town. The pilchard (sardine) industry was especially profitable with around 300 seine boats netting millions of fish. At one time 800 men and boys were employed with 400 boats.

In 1834 there was possibly the largest catch ever, when 30 million pilchards were caught in one net in one hour. The pilchards were salted and pressed into barrels along the seashore and exported mainly to Italy, where they were the preferred dish to eat on Fridays.

Coastwatch station Originally an abandoned Coastguard station but reopened in 1994 by the National Coastwatch Institution (NCI), a charity manned by volunteers

The Island



The classic view of St Ives from The Malakoff

The arrival of the railway in 1877 began the change from an industrial town to a tourist destination. GWR was known as 'God's Wonderful Railway'.

Attracted by the bohemian lifestyle – and the bright light – avant-garde artists flocked to St Ives and each year hired a whole train carriage to take their paintings to be exhibited in London. For a few dazzling years the remote little town was as artistically famous as Paris or New York.

Bolstered by the arrival of Tate St Ives, the contemporary art scene continues to flourish, but the local fishing industry is greatly diminished. Recently, single line fishing for mackerel has become popular, and more cost effective, as it's conducted by a lone fisherman in a small boat.

Smeaton's Pier built in 1770, designed by John Smeaton who was also responsible for the Eddystone Lighthouse