

Craig Weatherhill: Memoirs

Craig Weatherhill is a writer, archaeologist, folklorist and Cornish language expert. He lives in West Cornwall.

Upbringing

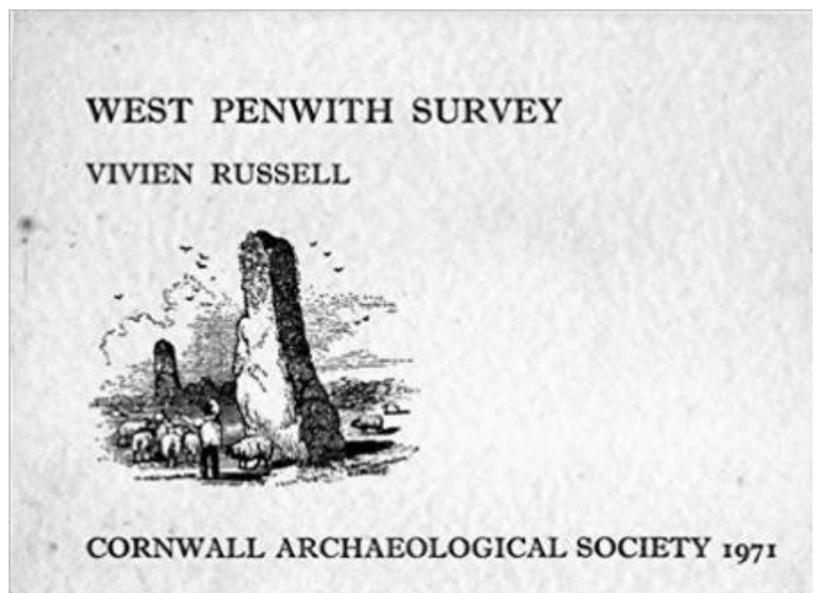
To my eternal regret, I wasn't born in Cornwall. With my parents' Royal Navy careers, I could easily have been born in Trinidad or Malta, but it was nowhere so exotic in the end! I do, though, have firm Cornish ancestry. One ancestor lies in St Levan churchyard, and there's even a legend about his grave. He spelt the name 'Wetherel' but family records show that the spelling's been all over the place over the years.

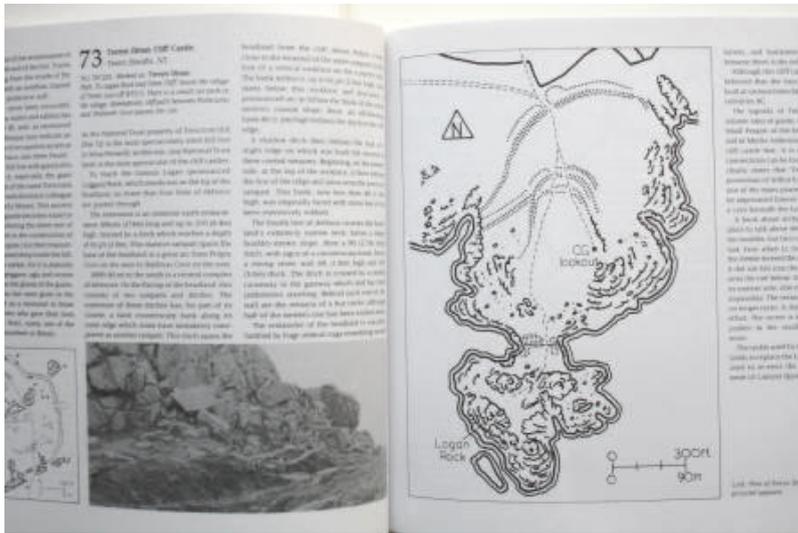
My entire conscious recollection is of being brought up in Cornwall, specifically, St Just; and very much shaped by my surroundings. At the age of 8, an old St Just lady gave me a first edition of Hunt's book of legends, written c.1880, and it fascinated me. I

realised that many of the stories were set within a few short miles of where I lived, so I set out to find the locations. In the late 50's, life was very different and rather safer. Parents didn't worry if offspring of an adventurous nature vanished for a few hours, and it was far safer to do so. It taught me much. I was entrusted - at weekends when Dad was on watch at the coastguard lookout on Cape Cornwall - with going to the village, buying two hot pasties, then trudging all the way (2 miles) down to the Cape in all weathers. I did that in a Force 11 one Saturday, trying to keep the pasties warm under my jacket, because they were Dad's lunch and mine. Afterwards, back home, Mother and I were shocked when an item came on TV news that the Cape Cornwall Coast Guard lookout, 145 feet up, had had its windows stove in by the sea! Dad was down there, but luckily he was completely unhurt.

As I explored the moors and cliffs, I kept coming across circles of upright stones, big mounds with stone chambers in them, etc., and didn't know what they were. So I asked my teachers. They knew nothing, either, but I was determined to find out and spent hours in local libraries and, of course, all was revealed. So, that's how and when it all started, and I never, ever, stopped! I found that the archaeology and the legends were interlinked and, later, that language and place-names were all part of the same story, too. The more I learn, the more I realise there's still a lot more to learn, and, of course, that's the fascination that keeps the interest going.

I joined the RAF in 1972 with the intention of becoming a cartographer. Only three weeks in, I took a hell of a fall and broke my back in two places, luckily low down (more or less where my belt is), so the nerves of the spinal column were never jeopardized. To this day 4 inches of silver-steel hold it all together. I had two pastimes I loved more than almost anything - horses and goalkeeping - and the surgeons told me I'd never do either ever again. Hell, I was only 23 and I was not having that! I only gave up riding last year because of



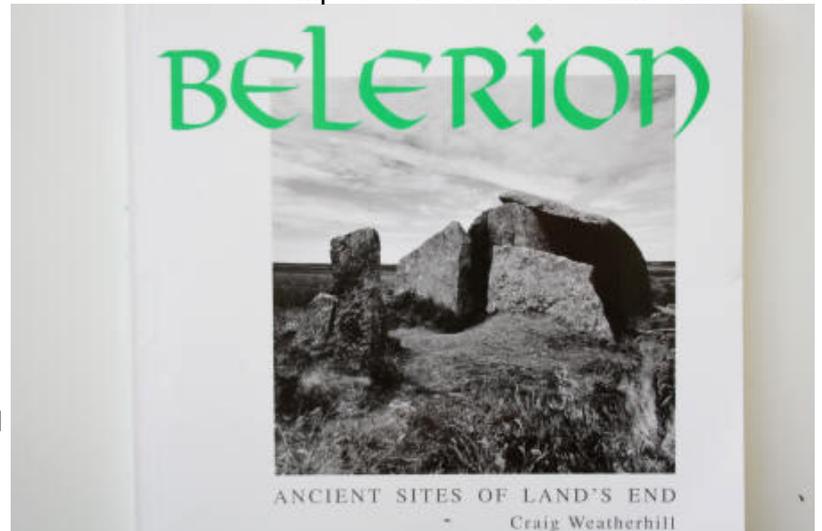


Vivien's original survey included many field-names, so I recognised their importance and relevance to archaeology and Peter, of course, was fluent in Cornish and had written 'Cornish for Beginners', so my interest in the language really began there (although there was always a fascination with the names I encountered way back in childhood.) After 'Belerion' came out, and because of all the survey work I'd also done, Peter nominated me for Bardship so, in 1981, I became Bard 'Delynyer Hendhyscans' of the Cornish Gorsedh (the Bardic name means 'draughtsman of archaeology'.)

"The Lyonesse Stone" (1991) was my first attempt at a novel and I'll admit that Alan

Garner's "Weirdstone of Brisingamen" and "Moon of Gomrath" (read originally as a teenager) inspired it. If he could do that around a single Cheshire legend, what could I do with the wealth of legend that we have? That, eventually, became a trilogy.

The only other novel I've written was a completely different challenge and, frankly, a cheeky one. I'm a massive Jules Verne fan and I'd thought that his "20,000 Leagues under the Seas" and its sequel "The Mysterious Island" were crying out for a third book, especially if I could retrieve the passages purged from English language translations by the Victorians for largely political reasons, sizeable omissions that were left out for years and years. I found them and the new novel "Nautilus" (2009) was born - the biggest thing I ever wrote: 135,000 words! It's the present day. Nemo's long dead but...his boat isn't. But there are a lot of strange incidents and characters that link Nemo's past with present events. Great fun, and it's had good reviews from Verne fans!



With luck, one more from me should come out later this year: an early history of the Cornish people, to be called "The Promontory People" (more or less what Kernow/Cornovii mean).

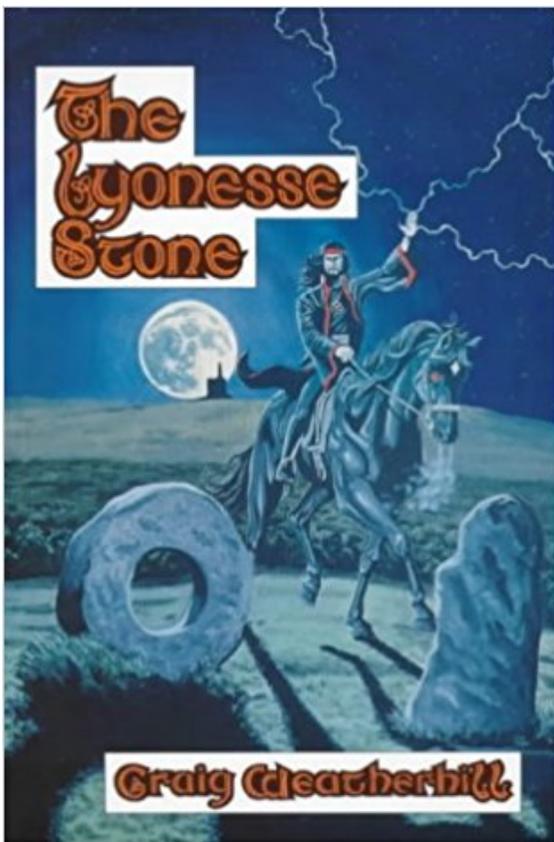
Paganism and alternative archaeology

I should make it clear that I'm pretty open-minded and willing to look at all arguments before I decide what's worth going on with, and what isn't. Having said that, there is a fair dose of the cynic in me, too.

Ithell Colquhoun's book 'The Living Stones' was inspiring. Like many, I'd also read Alfred Watkin's "The Old Straight Track" (Alan Garner's novels put me onto that) so, of course I was very interested in John Michell's "The Old Stones of Land's End" and the concept of ley-lines. I still think that much of what he wrote holds water.

As the New Age developed, people started to appear from all over the place, some of whom were utter fakes, but others were not. Dowzers are a good example of that. Donovan Wilkins and Hamish Miller (both, sadly no longer with us) were proven skilled at their craft. Don even made a living from finding suitable spots for borehole wells from dowzing. Some other dowzers are very dubious. So, you do not dismiss alternative theories, not by a long chalk, but you do question who's making the claims and what their ability (or lack of) actually is.

Of course, mainstream archaeologists were very po-faced about the whole thing to start with, but one of the first to say: "Hold on, this person's got something here", was no less than Aubrey Burl, and there were few more respected archaeo-logists than him. I only met him the once and found him very likeable. Another was



Prof. Charles Thomas who was actually a paid-up member of the Fortean Group! Charles could be a prickly old bugger, but his dry wit was both instant and quite remarkable.

When excavations at Tintagel in the late 90s turned up that bit of slate with 6th century names scratched into them (replica below right), Charles was the first to say that his heart sank when he read ARTOGNOV, because he knew what would happen. Sure enough, 'English' Heritage suppressed all release of the news until the start of the high summer season (wallets through turnstiles!), then went for it: "PROOF OF ARTHUR AT TINTAGEL!" all over every major newspaper in the land! Blatant profiteering and, of course, historical bunkum. Charles publicly shot them down in flames with the unforgettable remark that : "The name Artognou is as closely related to Arthur as Gerald is to Geronimo!". That had me in stitches.

I never met John Michell, but Paul Devereux became a friend. He and Charla were living in Penzance at the time. I'd read some of his work, and he'd read mine, and we collaborated on a book that Sigma Press had asked him to write. He rang me up and said: "I don't know why me, as I know damn-all about Cornish legends, so can you write it and I'll add a couple of chapters on earth mysteries?" So that's what we did, and it went out in our joint names. Paul has come up with some quite astonishing stuff over the years and I like the way that he does

his work scientifically. I liked Paul, and was sorry when he and Charla moved on elsewhere.

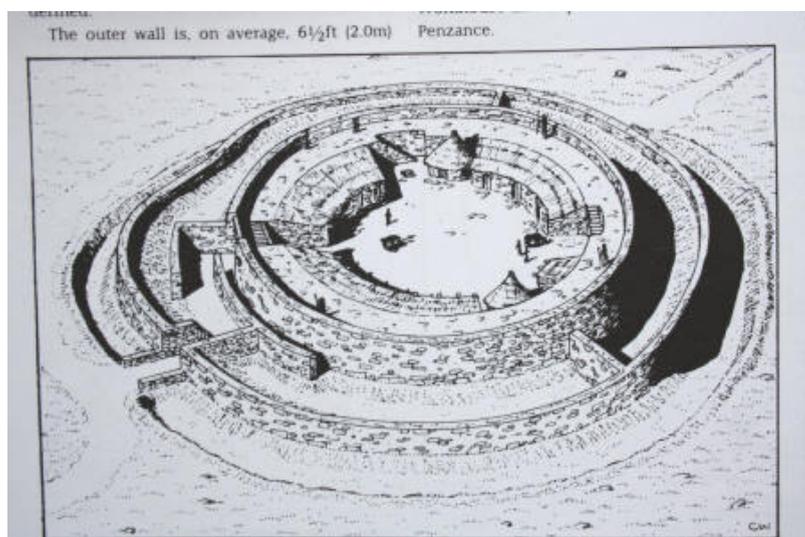
Most of the local pagans are lovely people. Rory TeTigo is a talented man, and as for Cheryl Traffon, I love her to pieces. She's kept Meyn Mamvro going for years now, and it's a nice inclusive mix of serious research and esoterica. Cassandra Latham, the Witch of St Buryan, is someone else that I've a whole lot of time for. I'm actually an atheist, having been turned off the whole idea of religion by its senior practitioners who seem more interested in running a power-crazy dictatorship, with their God coming a very poor second. Nonetheless, I've been invited to two or three pagan rituals and hand-fastings, and have been very struck by the peace, beauty and atmosphere of the proceedings. Andy Norfolk is another who knows his stuff.

So, archaeologists in general are far more questioning and far less rigid than they used to be. I'm in frequent contact with Barry Cunliffe, a truly lovely and unassuming man. Now when you bear in mind that I never went to university (perhaps a poor choice on my part, but then I preferred to earn and learn my trade in the field, rather than attend a university course that probably wouldn't even mention Cornish archaeology), and have no letters after my name, Barry treats me as an absolute equal, which is quite wonderful. He'll be using my 1987 detailed survey of Chun Castle when he raises enough finds for his planned dig there. He had an advance team take some random GPS readings (not available to me in 1987) to check its accuracy and it WAS accurate! Which amazed me, as I did the whole thing single-handed with two tapes and an optical square! It took me a fortnight!



During the days under the Dept of the Environment, there was little problem with the overseers of heritage, except in the late 70's and early 80's when widespread archaeological destruction went ahead without penalty. 'English' Heritage (I'll call them EH) took over in 1984, and there were problems from the start.

Moorland intake was going on on Truthwall Common, where a whole Bronze Age field system was at risk. Further investigation found remains of the settlement, which completed an entire surviving Bronze Age landscape that also included the stone circles, holed stones, chamber cairns and barrows. EH decided to "blanket-schedule" the entire landscape, then only went and tipped off the landowner a few months in advance. Of course, the first thing he did was bulldoze everything within the area he'd chosen to intake, and that included the settlement. EH was warned beforehand about the landowner's total disregard for archaeology. Then we had the Chun Castle (drawing below by CW) affair where I suggested that all the tumble caused by 19th century stone-robbing be carefully replaced on the inner wall, exposing as much of its original vertical facing as possible - in short, giving some dignity back to the site. EH wouldn't even entertain



the notion. "Can only be done in accordance with the earliest photographic record!" So I asked them about Box Brownies among the Roman legionaries that allowed reconstruction (by EH) of an entire rampart at The Lunt Roman fort, Coventry, gates, fighting towers, palisades, the lot! Bang! Down phone at the London end!

Next came the infamous Cadbury's Creme Egg Hunt that resulted in over 2 dozen Cornish sites being badly damaged. EH wouldn't lift a finger. It took Prof Charles Thomas to visit the Cadbury Chairman direct to put a stop to it. This is all the very first year of EH's existence. Back to Chun, I pointed out that heavy heather growth was

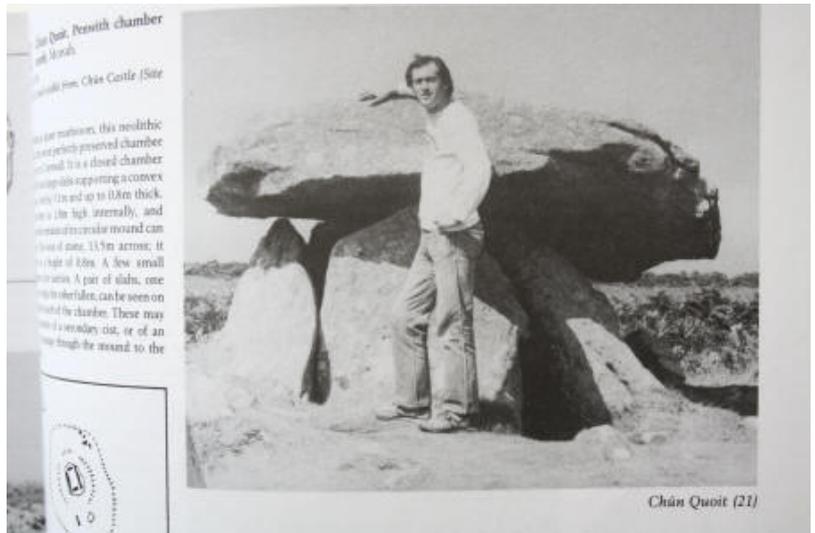
causing a section of the outer wall to bow. "No, it isn't," said a voice 300 miles up the road. (In the end I spent a few days carefully removing that growth and its roots. The wall settled back and has been stable ever since. I never told EH!).

There was whole list of these examples of utter indifference towards Cornish heritage by EH, and I grew well tired of their arrogance and lack of concern. In 1988, I joined Penwith District Council as Conservation Officer, and the first thing I did was to write to EH, under the Council's authority, to include a good many unprotected ancient sites in the Schedule. They wrote back and assured me that a new Scheduling programme was under way and due for completion within 5 years. 5 years came and went. Nothing. I wrote again. "Still in progress, very soon now!" 10 years went by, by which time I'd left Penwith, then another 10. Nothing.

Then I found a report by a CAU staff member to the Cornwall AONB board, dated 2008. This stated that, when the Environmentally Sensitive Area scheme in West Penwith started in 1987, EH decided that the ESA scheme was sufficient protection, and decided not to carry out any more Scheduling in Penwith. But that was BEFORE my first letter! EH serially lied to me, and through me, to the Council! Only an Emergency Scheduling has ever been carried out in the district from 1987 to now, 30 years(!), and all those unprotected sites, like several courtyard houses and Bosphorthennis Quoit, remain legally unprotected.

During my Conservation Officer tenure, came the Chysauster fogou debacle. One capstone had become unstable. EH said it would cost £80,000 (then £110,000) to repair it. Labour costs, they claimed. I said it would cost nothing - we had a 300-strong Cornwall Archaeological Society, including good archaeologists and people skilled in traditional granite construction. One block and tackle, and we'd have a nice, stable fogou again. "We don't want them," said the voice in London. "We want people who know what they're talking about!" "OK, so if you guys know what you're talking about, what does 'fogou' mean?" I asked. Bang, Down phone at the London end again! The fogou was craftily filled in one weekend, a month or two later.

So, as you can now see, EH and I have heartily despised each other for over 30 years! I crossed swords with them again recently over the "Disneyfication" of Tintagel, but nearly had cardiac arrest last year when they actually consulted me over proposals for Chysauster! (Which are actually very good, barring one item I'm trying to persuade them to drop), but most had been formulated by staff at the Cornwall Archaeological Unit. Relationships between me and the CAU have always been fine.



Archaeology and conservation

When the Cornwall Heritage Trust started up, I think they bought Sancreed Beacon as their first acquisition, then invited me onboard. I served on their Council for a few years, during which time we acquired Castle-an-Dinas, St Columb. Of course, in 1987 I moved back to West Penwith, from where the CHT evening meetings in Wadebridge were just too much of a long haul after a day's work, so I came off the Council. I remained a CHT member and still am.

Through Charles Thomas, and when still living in Falmouth and working in Truro, I met Nick Johnson and Peter Sheppard, who'd started the 'Cornwall Committee for Rescue Archaeology' with Charles at the helm. Basically the CCRA was two men in a top-floor cupboard on Strangways Terrace, Truro. They were funded by the Councils and various other sources, but didn't know if they'd still be in existence in the following year. By that time I was doing a regular weekly radio spot on Radio Cornwall, on Chris Blount's breakfast show. I'd drop in, do it live, then trot off to start the day at the office. Those 5 minute spots would talk about archaeology, legends, place-names, etc., but I started using them in an attempt to shame the old Cornwall Council into taking on the CCRA full-time, as it was ridiculous it being the only regional authority which didn't have an archaeological section, when considering our huge wealth in archaeology. The upshot of that was that it worked! Obviously I wasn't the only one pushing for this, so our combined efforts paved the way for the permanent Cornwall Archaeological Unit. Each survey that I did was copied to the CCRA and CAU, so those now had a positive outlet. By about 1990, my surveys petered off as the CAU were now doing the job professionally, so I could devote more time to other related things I was already well involved with, like place-name study. I'm on the current Bilingual Signage and Place-Names Panel of the Cornish Language Partnership, which started up in 2008, and was also Chairman of AganTavas, the Cornish language society, for 3 years. I'm an Honorary Life Member of that now.

Recent developments

I'm now on the Board of the Penwith Landscape Partnership, which has secured £4 million Heritage Lottery funding, and am involved with at least 3 of its projects, in which my place-name, language, and archaeological experience can be put to practical use. One project is to restore the ancient Tinner's Way route, which is featured in 'Belierion', but neglected and largely forgotten for decades. Former Grand Bard Hugh Miners and I had traced its entire route and found that it was still largely intact, and there's no better way to see the moors and all they contain, so from c.1980, I've been pushing hard for its restoration, recognition and promotion, to no avail.

The old Cornwall Council ignored every approach, then went off and invented a totally fictitious "St Michael's Way" which even appears on the OS maps (and is nowhere near as spectacular and atmospheric a route as the Tinner's Way)! My aim is to get it formally upgraded to Bridleway throughout, and have it designated as a National Trail, much like the famous Ridgeway in Berkshire-Wiltshire, which is of similar age although much longer. But, under this Project it WILL happen! At last! There's nothing like sheer bloody-minded persistence for results, if you're prepared to be patient!



When the time comes for me to turn my toes up, and I'm asked, "What did you do with your life, Craig?", it'd be a lie if I said: "Not a lot". Putting these screeds together for artcornwall.org has made me realise how much it actually totals. Now I'm wondering: "How the hell did you fit that lot in?" It never made me any money - even with the books I more or less broke even - but that was never the aim. In many fields, the work hadn't been done, needed to be done, so I did it and I'm still doing it.

There have been disappointments along the way. I'd spent 4 years (1978-82) concentrating on surveying all the known courtyard house sites. Col. Hirst had called for that work to be done way back in the 1930s, and no one had done it. So I did, only for Prof, Malcolm Todd of Exeter University (who, thankfully I never met in person), to scornfully dismiss the copy of the completed report I'd given to the CAU, saying: "Who do these amateurs think they are, stepping on our ground?" When Nick Johnson told me, I was furious, and asked him to tell Todd that academics like him hadn't bothered to get off their arses and do it in the 40 years since Hirst flagged it up, so if they won't, this "amateur" will. Imagine my reaction when Todd then produced a book...with one of my courtyard house settlement drawings in it, totally unacknowledged! There's a word for people like that, but it's more Anglo-Saxon than Cornish!

Since I acquired the Mellotron (keyboard), I've actually played it on three records. One for Matthew Clarke's band "Skwardya"

in Redruth, a song called "Gras the Nev" (a rock balled in Cornish); and two for Bard and Cornish-American Jim Wearne in Chicago: "Song in the Wind" (his tribute to the Moody Blues - so it just HAD to have a mellotron!), and "The Boys of Penlee" (to which I actually write the lyrics). Again, not for money, just for fun. She now has a friend called Roland (a Roland synthesiser), but I've yet to learn all its complex bells and whistles.

For me, healthwise, things have rather changed. I can't walk far without gasping and that means I can no longer visit the sites and monuments that have inspired me for so many years. Just as bad, I've had to give up 50-odd years of riding but managed to coincide that decision with the retirement of the horse I was riding - Shogun the giant (17.3hh), one of the very finest horses I've ever known. Beautiful to ride, and a joy to work with. The big, gentle guy has no idea what bad temper is! I wish he'd actually been mine (he wasn't). So a lot of work, still local heritage work, is done right here, and when I need a rest and a change, I have the mellotron and synthesiser to drive myself mad with! And a house crammed with 3,000 books!

Oh, yes. I was married once. By far the biggest mistake I ever made, so that lasted only three years and I never contemplated it ever again. No kind involved (I have none at all). I live the life of a hermit now! And I like it.

Finally, which of all Cornwall's tens of thousands of sites and monuments is my own favourite? No contest. It's the wonderful courtyard house village of Bosullow Trehylls, NE of Chun Castle. I've spent hours in there, relaxing in one or other of its rooms, just soaking up the sheer peace of the place. I think it's Ian Cooke's favourite, too (he of "Journey to the Stones", who lived at the Men-an-Tol Studio until recently). Ian and I formed "Save Penwith Moors" in an attempt to curb the worst excesses of the London-based quangos on our precious moors! To a fair measure of success, too. We've re-registered 500ha of them as Common Land in the last 5 years or so, which spiked Natural "England's" guns more than just a bit, and stopped them from fencing them all in! Ian and I have been friends for decades, and we're equally passionate about the Penwith cliffs and moors.