

Dodman from watch house

PATHWAYS & QUARRIES

People experience this stretch of the coast largely by tramping along the South West Coast Path, a long-distance route way originally used by Excise Men observing and moving quickly to interrupt smuggling activity.

Here and there along the cliffs we encounter former quarries, surviving as irregular cuttings, usually hard to penetrate now, being so overgrown. Most would have yielded stone for local building and hedging, but it is possible that some quarries produced limestone used in the kilns at the two Porthollands and at Porthluney. Quarries generally lie beyond the valuable farmland and are on steep slopes where cuttings driven in on the level could most efficiently work into the target rock. It is also possible that coastal quarries were conveniently placed in relation to harbours and hards from which stone could have been exported. Dating of the quarries is uncertain. As they are industrial it is tempting to see them as fairly modern, but some of Cornwall's earliest building stone quarries are along such cliff sides.

Farming was also linked to the coast through the carting to the land of sea sand and seaweed to sweeten and manure the soil, and, of course, through the use of the little ports of Portholland and Porthluney as places from which to send produce around to the larger coastal or estuary towns of Truro, Falmouth and Mevagissey.

It is not known to what extent other resources along this coast were exploited, but elsewhere in Cornwall shellfish were harvested from the intertidal zone, eggs and squabs (fledglings) from the nests of sea-birds and samphire (a fleshy umbelliferous plant used for pickles and to flavour fish dishes) and mussels from rocky outcrops. All were, at various times, important for local economies and the methods employed to reach and take them were often risky.

MILITARY

Most military activity along this coast has been defensive, concerned with responding to invasion threats, and has consequently been focussed on the beaches, and on beacon fires on headlands. Occasionally you will hear the booms of Naval guns practicing on the Dodman naval firing range in the Channel. Similar exercises would have been heard off this coast during the Second World War.

DIRECTIONS TO CAERHAYS ESTATE



From Truro: first turning right off the A390 after Grampond (signposted to Tregony and St Mawes) then follow signposts to Caerhays.

From St Mawes & King Harry Ferry: take right turning from A3078 (signposted to Veryan) and next turning left signposted to Caerhays.

From St Austell: first turning after the end of Sticker by-pass (signposted to Tregony - B3287) turn right at first junction and then follow signposts to Caerhays.

From Mevagissey: head for Gorran Churchtown and look for signpost to Caerhays at Gorran High Lanes.

ADMISSION

Gardens

Adults £5.50
Children under 16 £2.50
Children under 5 free

House (conducted tour only)

Adults £5.50
Children under 16 £2.50
Children under 5 free

Gardens & House

Adults £9.50
Children under 16 £3.50
Children under 5 free

OPENING DATES

Gardens Open

18th February to 1st June
10.00am - 5.00pm
7 days a week
(Last entry 4.00pm)

House Open

10th March to 30th May
12.00am - 4.00pm
Monday to Friday
(inc bank holidays)

Reservations recommended

CAERHAYS CASTLE & GARDENS

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CAERHAYS CASTLE
ST AUSTELL CORNWALL

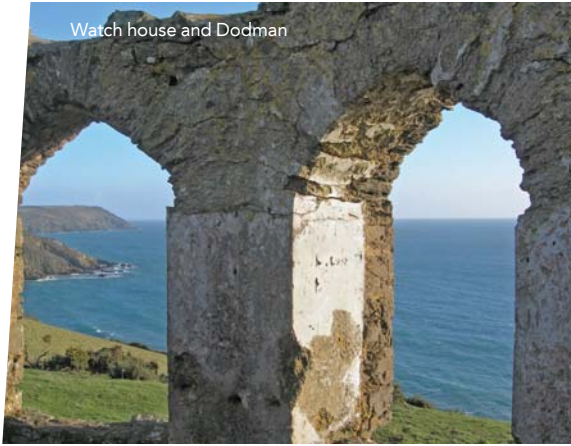
THE COAST



CAERHAYS
ESTATE



Supported by the Cornwall Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty – Sustainable Development Fund'



Watch house and Dodman

Now one of the quietest stretches of Cornwall's coast. Coaches cannot reach between Portloe and Portholland, and the policies of the Caerhays estate itself are instrumental in keeping it all relatively unspoilt.

This quietness is, however, perceived from the points of view of the land and the present. Seen from the sea, we appreciate that Caerhays is fairly centrally placed on Cornwall's busy south coast, and viewed from as recently as the early modern period, we find that this was a typically busy stretch in terms of fishing, coasting, smuggling and wrecking. We see hints of this in the remains of former infrastructures.



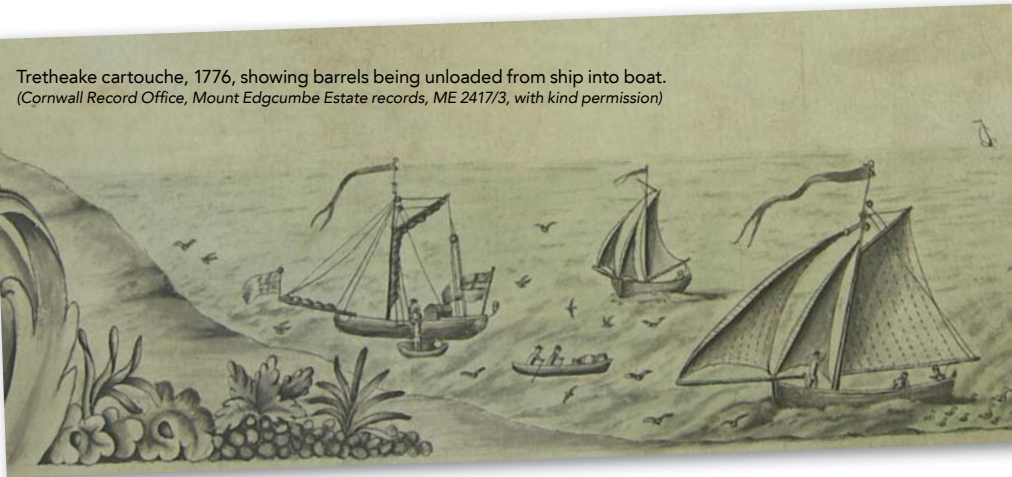
Watch house

provided with comfortable, if cramped, quarters, warmed by a fire. At times of war, particularly with France, the objects of attention would have been obvious, even if sightings of enemy vessels might have been rare.

At other times the watchers would have been concerned with the safety of those at work on the sea: those serving in the Royal and merchant navies, fishermen, and foreigners. Sadly, a number of ships and boats have been wrecked along this stretch of coast. Perhaps most dramatic were the events of 5th and 6th December 1830.

WATCHING FOR DANGER

The arched window openings of the Watch House on the crest of the slope above Porthluney are not just fine frames for looking along today's coast. Their early nineteenth century Gothick form also takes us back to a time when it was sufficiently important to monitor this coast for there to have been a person on permanent watch,



Tretheake cartouche, 1776, showing barrels being unloaded from ship into boat. (Cornwall Record Office, Mount Edgcombe Estate records, ME 2417/3, with kind permission)

A hurricane drove no less than three foreign ships onto the shore at East Portholland. Danish, Russian and French sailors, in mortal danger, stranded hundreds of yards from safety in wooden vessels that were being pulled apart by enormous seas, were rescued by the remarkable bravery of five young fishermen. 'Stripped to their drawers', they grabbed a boat washed off the Russian

of the lads who had risked their lives to save the terrified sailors, and they set to their task of stealing whatever they could lay their hands on. They were eventually dispersed when the revenue cruiser the Adder was called up, came to, and fired shots over them.

More recently, in 1961, the Allegriety hit the cliffs near Greeb Point and was then driven on to the rocky

'Stripped to their drawers', they grabbed a boat washed off the Russian ship

ship and used it to row out and get a line onto one of the three ships, enabling ten men from the Russian ship and seven from the French to reach solid land. The Danes also managed to get to safety. As so often the case, and not just in those distant days, 'country people', now known as wreckers, heard of the loot to be had, which included wine on the French schooner. On the following day they descended on Portholland, no doubt passing the homes

foreshore below the Watch House. It was scrapped here, material being brought ashore by wire rope.

SMUGGLING

At certain times, especially in the later 18th and early 19th centuries, an eye would also have been kept open for those who would subvert the law and undermine the country's taxed economy: smugglers. Tradition has it that all elements of local society were involved in the

'trade'. Gates of the Caerhays estate were allegedly left open at appropriate times, although this may not have been needed if the tunnel that was supposed to run from Caerhays Castle down to Porthluney actually existed. A drawing on the cartouche of a late eighteenth century estate atlas of neighbouring

Tretheake manor actually shows men unloading barrels from a ship into a waiting boat in a bay not unlike those on this coast. Most of the little coves where such boats could be hurried ashore have zigzagging paths protected by banks: covered ways with shallow, widely spaced steps ideal for lugging heavy loads on moonlit nights. Catchole to the west of Portholland is a good example.

Top: Coast path and Dodman

Bottom: Apples harvested from former cliff orchards

FOOD FROM CLIFFS AND SHORE

Falling away from the farmland to the sea, the coastal fringe is now entirely neglected, largely overgrown with furzy, bracken, thorny and brambly scrub and patches of woodland, dominated by sycamores and willows. It is now difficult to appreciate that until the turn of the 20th century, and even later, this land was part of the coastal farms' resource. Much of the cliff would have been useful rough grazing, divided into separate holdings by stock-proof boundaries which, though redundant and overgrown can still be seen. Some parts were even enclosed as part of a farm's fields and traces of former hedges survive, as on the cliff-tops above West Portholland. Others were orchards, again with enclosing hedges, and here there are a few survivals of apple trees. Varieties include Sweet Larks, Primrose, Mannington Permain, Adam's Permain and Costard, fruits used for dessert, jamming and pickling.

