

A SMUGGLERS' HIDING-PLACE AT ZENNOR

IN September 1961 there was found at Treveglos Farm, Zennor, an underground passage of great interest, almost certainly a hiding-place used by smugglers. By the kindness of the owner, Mr. William Nankervis, the writer was enabled to make a full investigation, assisted at times by Mr. A. Guthrie and Miss V. Russell.

The site is in a field about 250 yards east-south-east of Zennor Church, close to the north side of the road to St. Ives. The passage is about 13 feet long, running almost straight approximately east and west; the average width and height are 2 feet and 5 feet respectively. Its sides, ends and floor are composed of "rab" (yellowish granite subsoil). The eastern 8 feet of the passage are beneath a massive flat granite rock, obviously in its natural position, 11 feet long, over 6 feet wide and 18 inches thick; for 5 feet this rock forms the roof of the passage, but near the east end the roof dips below the level of the rock and is composed of rab. The western 4 feet of the passage are beneath two much smaller granite roofing slabs, obviously artificial, laid across from side to side at the level of the top of the rab and supported by several trig stones. The passage is entered from above through a gap between the rock and one of the slabs; two other stones form the sides of the entrance, which is of irregular shape and average dimensions 1 foot 4 inches east-west and 1 foot 9 inches north-south, large enough to admit a man without difficulty but not bulky objects. Grooves in the western end of the rock, above the entrance, strongly suggest the use of ropes or chains to haul goods in and out, but similar grooves elsewhere on the same end cannot have been so caused; they may have been made when the side-stones of the entrance were laid, or when the rock was struck by ploughs. The entrance was closed with a granite slab, and a similar one was found in the passage below, where it had evidently fallen.

The sequence of construction is obvious from comparison of the western part of the passage, with a carefully cut rectangular end beneath introduced roof-slabs, and the eastern part with its roughly hewn end and rab roof beneath a natural rock. The builders removed the topsoil west of the rock, dug out the western part of the passage, and tunnelled eastwards under the rock, afterwards placing the other stones in position and covering them with about a foot of topsoil and turf, of which only that above the entrance slab need be moved to gain access to the passage. The rock was partly covered with turf and looked no different from other rocks in the same field.

The passage is known to have been opened at intervals about 40 years ago, and was largely filled with topsoil containing fragments of

19th century and later pottery, suggesting deliberate infill rather than casual seepage; the whole passage was cleared out to the rab, but no objects of interest were found.

It is difficult to think of any possible use for this structure other than for storage of smuggled goods between the "run" and their disposal. The late Lt.-Col. F. C. Hirst in his notes on Zennor says that smuggling was a "regular industry" there until c. 1840, and mentions hiding-places of this type, though not this particular one. In 1881 Miss C. A. Borlase recorded in her journal (now in the Penzance Library) being told that her great-grandfather "Parson Will" — William Borlase, Vicar of Zennor 1768-1812 and a nephew of the Antiquary — had actively connived at smuggling, and in such circumstances it may not have mattered that the hiding-place was close to the road and in clear view from the churchtown. The field is shown as arable on the Tithe map of 1839, but may well have been rough uncultivated ground at the time when the hiding place was used, with vegetation thus partly concealing it from inquisitive gaze.

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