

# PAF NEWS

A bi-monthly newsletter for the Friends of the Polperro Arts Foundation

## Wave watching, by Lisa Woollett

*They say that climate change will bring more frequent extreme weather events, including the kinds of awesome storms that we saw back in February 2014. Frighteningly violent as they can be, storms offer wave-watchers the chance to capture some truly beautiful images as Lisa has done so often. Here is an extract from her book *Sea Journal* which describes one of those storms as it struck Polperro seven years ago, together with some background for some of her best-loved wave photographs.*



**Wave shadow:** I took this photograph at Porthcurno in west Cornwall. The bay is known for its white sand - mainly quartz and crushed shells - which means the sea retains its turquoise colours when rough. It was used on the cover of my second book *Sea Journal*, and (on the wise advice of local designer Chris Halls) was flipped to face the opposite direction. It would then, he said, lead the reader on into the book. Other crucial advice came from Polperro Arts Foundation's Sue Lord: check both versions in a mirror. Where it was clear that the flipped version worked better, not least as it echoed the S in *Sea*.

“On a stormy morning I drop the children at school and walk down the steep hill into Polperro. Still sheltered in the narrow streets of empty holiday cottages, I see no one, hear only the wind whistling through rigging over the roar of the sea. I start to hurry. It is close to high tide and the inner harbour is sleek and brown, impossibly full, pushing a strandline right up into the streets. In the outer harbour the sea heaves beneath a floating island of driftwood and debris, and another wavewatcher's bench.

I head out through the Warren and up on the cliff path to see Peak Rock. I am not the only one. Half the village seems to be out here - dog walkers, fishermen, the owners of the closed cafes and flooded shops, artists, a few parents I've just seen outside school - anyone who doesn't have to be at work. They stand along the path in twos and threes or alone, mostly in silence, facing the sea and the outcrop of rock that protects the harbour.



**Bluegrey wave:** This one was taken from a rock on my local beach at Lansallos, and was the first or second frame of perhaps 200 similar but much poorer shots. The light changed almost as soon as I'd taken it, but I stayed on taking photographs from the same spot for another hour or two, chasing something that had already gone. With so much wind and salt spray in the air. I was unable to check what I had – and left feeling sure I'd missed it.

'Fifty years I've been here,' the man next to me says. 'And I've never seen it like this.' The swell is coming in from the west and Peak Rock is taking the full force of the waves. They explode against it, sending spume right over the top so it falls like fireworks. The rock is maybe the height of a six-storey building but is dwarfed by the waves. I lose all sense of scale. When some waves hit there is a low whistle from the path, a collective intake of breath. Then a lull as the wave crosses the mouth of the harbour. When it slams into the cliff beneath us there is a deep boom and spray is flung up into the sloping gardens; we feel it through the soles of our shoes. On the far side of the harbour the rebounding waves lash the windows of a cottage, but they hold.

The old stone fish stores on the harbour wall are not so lucky – the roof of one has already collapsed (a fortnight and two more storms later and three have gone). It is a similar story all around the south west, and for a month both local and national newspapers are full of pictures of storm-damaged seafronts and people taking risks to watch waves.



**Glass wave:** I took this photograph at Porthbeor on the south Cornwall coast and it was entirely unexpected. Unusually, I was photographing my children (jumping off a rock), when the waves behind them began rebounding off the cliff and colliding beautifully with the next oncoming wave. I saw a couple of sculptural collisions, yelled at the kids to get out of the way, and took a handful of photographs. When I first saw this one in the viewfinder, I suspected it was too cleanly perfect for anyone to believe it wasn't altered.

An hour later the tide has turned and fewer waves break over the rock. People begin to drift away. I stay on, waiting for the light, and a particular moment after the waves break, when wind catches the spray and carries it in sheets towards the cliff. 'You should have seen it earlier,' a woman says, to a newly-arrived couple watching in awe."

*Coincidentally the storms that Lisa describes led the National Trust to partly rebuild Polperro's net loft where Sea Journal was launched in 2016. The book and her photographs are available in the PAF gallery and you will find much more information at her website: [www.photographsofthesea.com](http://www.photographsofthesea.com).*

## Polperro's art history - the 1880s

### *More notes from David Tovey's book, Polperro – Cornwall's Forgotten Art Centre (2021)*

"To stick by his boat and stand by his cargo, fight fair and die game, was all the larnin' a Polperro lad needed; and if that tachin' didn't make a man of un, nothin' to be larnt out of books would."

This imaginary but wonderfully evocative quote was used by the novelist Louisa Parr to characterise the people of Polperro, or at least some of them, in her novel 'Adam and Eve' published in 1880. From other sources we know of the parlous state of education in the village prior to the opening of the village school - now our own village hall - in 1879. And yet ironically the success of 'Adam and Eve' brought increased awareness of the village and a new level of sophistication from its visitors, including growing numbers of artists. Hence the title of the fourth chapter of David Tovey's book, 'Into the Limelight - the 1880s'.



Frederick Short, Polperro, 1888

During this decade several notable artists worked in the village and exhibited widely from the west country to Glasgow, with some important works that were shown at London's Royal Academy. David weaves the history of art into the more general history of the village, such as the establishment of the Teglio family's fish export business and their processing factory beside the harbour which begins to appear in a number of pictures from this period. Similarly Frederick Short's 'Polperro' (1888) shows the state of the harbour at that time, as yet without a fish market bordering the inner harbour.

Henry (Harry) Williams spent enough time living locally that unlike those who came only for a season, he was referred to as being 'of Polperro'. His works shown in galleries in Plymouth and Penzance, where he eventually lived, were well appreciated by critics for showing "splendid colour harmony" and

demonstrating "an unmistakable style of colouring." His 'Summer Evening, East Cornwall', which shows the inner quay as it was at the time, appeared on the auction market as recently as 2019.



Harry Williams, Summer Evening, East Cornwall

Several of the works of the 1880s show local characters more prominently than previously including James Waite's 'Polperro' (1883), Thomas Gotch's 'News from the Beach' (1884),

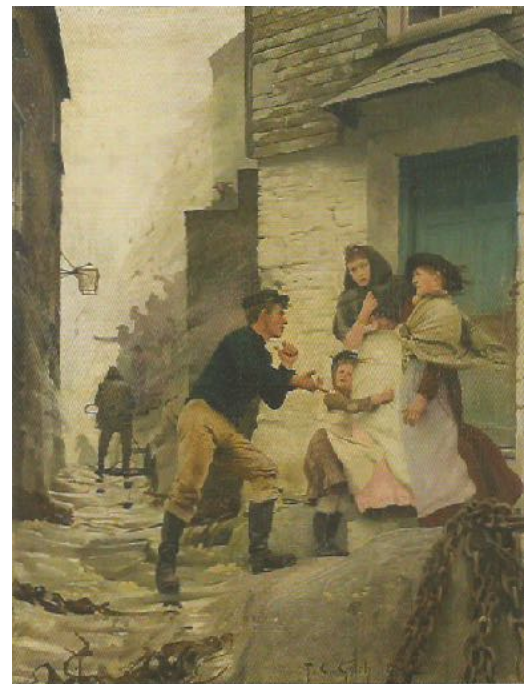


James Waite, Polperro

Henry Rheam's work and several pieces by Charles Boutwood and Herbert Butler, both of whom married local girls, settled in the village and still have descendants living locally today. We saw Butler's massive 230 cm wide 'Youth and Age' in issue number 5 of our newsletter (December 2020). Many of these people are depicted clearly enough that they would have been recognisable at the time. In the 1891 census one resident, Alice Puckey, listed 'artists' model' as her occupation.

We cannot leave the 1880s without mentioning William Mouat Loudan's 'Fish Sale' (1888), another very large work which shows several local people quite clearly. David describes it as a painting of Polperro which "made a bigger impact at the Royal Academy than any painting of the village had done before." This is an old friend of our PAF newsletter; see issue 6 (January 2021) in particular. Its restoration is now complete, it will be a focal point for the exhibition which David is arranging at the Falmouth Art Gallery next Spring and, who knows, perhaps one day we will find a way to hang the original at least briefly in the village once again.

*David Tovey's two-volume, 600-page work can be purchased from his website <[www.stivesart.info/art-in-polperro](http://www.stivesart.info/art-in-polperro)>. Copies are also available in the village at the Post Office and in our own PAF gallery at the village hall.*



Thomas Gotch, News from the Beach (1884)



Charles Boutwood, The Young Fishermen



Henry Rheam, On the Lookout (1890)

## About the Foundation

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The Foundation was set up in 2001 to support and promote local established and aspiring artists and to increase awareness of locally-produced art and the long history of art in Polperro. After 19 years at the Chapel Rock gallery in Foresters Hall overlooking the inner harbour, in 2020 the PAF moved to its present site in the Polperro village hall next door to the Crumplehorn Inn.

### *Our Team*

Currently we have eight exhibiting members all of whom live and work locally: **Barbara Ellis**, artist; **Sandy Horton**, glass; **Paul Lightfoot**, photographer, writer, newsletter editor; **Sue Lord**, artist; **Charles Summers**, artist and fan-maker; **Babs Taylor**, artist; **Tracy Watts**, graphic designer and illustrator; and **Lisa Woollett**, author and photographer. **Jennie Hale** is our guest artist and **Jacky Humby** is our secretary.

### *What we offer*

- We **exhibit** an extensive, evolving collection of local art works in our gallery in the Polperro village hall.
- We arrange and host occasional **events** for the benefit of local residents and visitors.
- We circulate this free **newsletter** six times each year; email us to suggest others who might like a copy.
- At these links you will find freely-available examples of our work as [screen-savers](#), [desktop wallpaper](#) and in other formats to bring a taste of Polperro and its art to your home computers, tablets and phones.

### *Support us*

Please let us know if you would like to join us as an artist, Friend or volunteer.

### *Contact us*

Our gallery is open daily, normally from 11am until 5pm. Alternatively please contact us by email <[polperroarts@gmail.com](mailto:polperroarts@gmail.com)> or through our website: <[www.polperroarts.org](http://www.polperroarts.org)>

