

# The Preservation of Ancient Monuments in Cornwall

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Cornwall is probably richer in prehistoric monuments than any district of the same size in Great Britain, or perhaps even in the world. From the by no means exhaustive lists in the Victoria County History and from a schedule made in 1913 by a Committee of the Cornwall County Council for the Preservation of Ancient Monuments the following very imperfect statistics have been collected:

Earthworks, whether cliff-castles, hill-forts, single or double earthworks, or other sorts, 207.

Stone circles, 14.

Menhirion or Long-stones, 21. There must be many more, broken or unrecognised.

Quoits or Cromlechs, 8. This is probably very much an understatement.

"Allees Couvertes " or underground structures, 11

Huts and Hut Circles or collections of them, 16. Several of these have been noted since.

There are also some hundreds of barrows or tumuli of various shapes, sizes and ages, which have not yet been recorded in any complete lists. As authentic history begins rather late in Cornwall, we may also count as quasi-prehistoric the following

Roman Milestones, 4

Holy Wells, with or without chapels or other structures, 83.

Christian Inscribed Stones, 43.

Ruined Chapels, 15.

Stone Crosses, about 400.

Thus it will be seen that including barrows, which may be estimated at least at 400, there are over 1200 prehistoric or quasi-prehistoric monuments of various sorts in Cornwall. Any of these may be in danger of destruction. Land in Cornwall, as elsewhere, is frequently changing hands, great estates are being broken up and in many cases farms are being sold to those who formerly held them as tenants—all possibly good things from an economic point of view, but involving very great risk to antiquities. There is also danger connected with the widening and improvement of roads. Wayside crosses, ancient bridges and other objects may suffer from the ignorance or carelessness of those concerned in such operations, and there may easily be cases of objects, such as stone gate posts, which have

been originally crosses or even Roman milestones, being broken up before their former use and archaeological value had been recognised. It is only fair to say that the County road authorities really do recognise the danger and have no wish to destroy or damage things of archaeological interest; but they naturally do not claim to be antiquaries and do not always know such things when they see them.

In 1913 an Act of Parliament was passed under the rather unfortunate title of the "Ancient Monuments Consolidation and Amendment Act"—to "consolidate" an ancient monument is all right, as in the case of the fallen trilithon at Stonehenge, but to "amend" one would be rash. What was meant, of course, was the consolidation and amendment of the rather ineffective Acts of 1882, 1900 and 1910 on the same subject, but the title was one of those things which might have been better expressed: This Act gives very great powers to the Ancient Monuments Department of H.M. Office of Works, acting under the advice of a very strong and representative Ancient Monuments Board, to schedule for protection any objects of sufficient historic, architectural, traditional, artistic or archaeological interest to be worth preserving. When this is done, not even the owner can destroy or injure such an object, and heavy penalties are incurred by an offence against the regulations. This very drastic Act is no tyrannical interference with private property. It only compels ignorant and ill-conditioned owners to do what all decent and intelligent owners have always done.

The Act was in abeyance during the Great War, and though a beginning has been made and about 30 important objects in Cornwall have been scheduled, it is necessary to use tact and "moral persuasion" before resorting to compulsion, or more harm than good may be done. So the scheduling must needs be done gradually. There has been an attempt to divide the whole of Cornwall into districts, and set "correspondents" of the Ancient Monuments Department in charge of them, but that system has not yet been perfected, and where the archaeological objects are so many, the district would have to be very small, so that any one correspondent could keep an eye on them all.

The Old Cornwall Societies have a great opportunity of making themselves useful in this matter. It would be a good ideal for each Society to take informal charge of the ancient monuments in its district, make lists of them, inspect them periodically, and report on them to the Federation of Old Cornwall Societies, and in case of any danger of destruction or damage write direct to the Ancient Monument Department, H.M. Office of Works, Storey's Gate, Westminster, S.W. 1. Let no one fear being considered interfering or called that dreadful thing, a "local busy-body." There are conditions under which it is quite right to be a busybody, and there is no doubt that the Office of Works will welcome interference of this sort. Each Old Cornwall Society should do work of this sort in the way that best suits the local conditions and the positions of the members. The details do not matter as long as the work is done, but it may be allowable to make the rather obvious suggestion that each Society should map out its sphere of influence into small districts and get a member to undertake to look after the ancient monuments in each. Tact in dealing with owners and

occupiers is needed. There is no use in "putting up their backs." But owners and occupiers are generally reasonable enough, and most of the harm that has been done in the past has been done out of honest ignorance. It is for the Old Cornwall Societies to dispel that ignorance. Incidentally also hitherto unsuspected objects may be discovered. Within the last few years two of the four existing Roman milestones in Cornwall, one at Tintagel and one at Breage, were discovered as gate-posts through the accident of their coming under the eyes of intelligent observers, who were nevertheless not trained antiquaries, and several crosses have been found in similar circumstances. These can hardly be the only ones, and the "chasse aux milliaires" might be quite good sport "whene'er we take our walks abroad" and a variant might be the "chasse aux croix."