



Smuggling Memories

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A gentleman living at Fourlanes well remembered having been told of the route taken by the smugglers after landing their cargo at Gwithian. Apparently each rider would have a spare horse. Two kegs of spirits could be slung on each side of the pack-saddle on the led horse, and two kegs in front of the rider. By night they would pass up the bottoms from Gwithian to Tuckingmill, thence on by Treskillard and Gryllis to Forest. From here, probably by this time considerably reduced in numbers, they passed on to Nine Maidens, Polhigey Moor, and Hernis Farm in Stythians. Mr. W. T. Martin was told by an old man near Polmarth, not a great way from Polhigey Moor, that when hard-pressed by unwanted inquirers, the smugglers would hide their kegs beneath the waters of the stream.

Sometimes it would appear that a wagon, with wheels muffled to deaden the sound, was used. An old lady who, about sixty years ago, used to visit a friend near Illogan, was on several occasions nearly frightened to death by the appearance of a ghostly chariot without wheels at a crossroads between Illogan Church-town and Broad Lane, probably at what is now Paynter's Lane End. She discovered later that it was the smugglers' wagon, the wheels of which were muffled to reduce the sound to a minimum; but the sudden appearance of a wagon which made no sound, dashing at full speed through the lanes, was enough to give the impression to a superstitious person of a chariot without wheels. It is possible that the smugglers tried to increase the suggestion of the supernatural, as I was told that the men in the "chariot" were "dressed all funny." A gentleman then resident in Four Lanes made several trips across the Channel in the pursuit of this profitable trade. Sometimes it was necessary to resort to such stratagems as hiding liquor in coffins, or other unlikely hiding-places, to escape the vigilance of the preventive men, but often underground hiding-places were specially excavated. Some time ago such a smuggler's bolt was discovered by the subsidence of a garden wall in Stithian's Row, Four Lanes. Although reports were published in the Press (e.g., The Cornubian) at the time, I can gather no record of what was found; if any reader has any information or newspaper-cuttings regarding this I should be glad if he would communicate them.

At Carn Brea village, near Redruth Churchtown, there is a row of whitewashed cottages. Although most of these are fairly modern i.e. 1920's, one of them (I believe the third in the row) is apparently much older. When some alterations were being carried out, a large space was discovered in one of its walls, the only apparent outlet being a small window in the back of the house. It could not have been part of the old open fireplace, as the open grate was in the wall opposite: the thickness of the wall had often been commented upon before. Local opinion conjectured that it was a forgotten smuggling store-place.

Many of the farms of Wendron and the district around possess caves cut in the marl or pot-granite. These usually consist of a tunnel, extending in one case for fifty feet, with branches on either side. These branches are not usually more than ten or twelve feet in length, but one that branched from the main tunnel at Mount Wise, near Carn Menellis, took sixty cartloads of material to fill the gap it left after it had collapsed beneath the weight of a steam' tractor. There are, or were, examples of these caves at Mount Wise, Filtrick, Gregwartha, Hendra, North Penhalurick, and a farm near Penhalvean. Although the prominent positions of some of these forbid the view that they were excavated for smuggling, it is more than probable that they were occasionally used as hiding-places by smugglers. It is likely that they were first made, however, for a purpose similar to that which they served until recently, that of storing roots, etc. They were so used for potatoes, many sacks of which were heaped inside, the entrance being then filled in with earth, thus protecting them from frost in the severest winter. The entrances of some have an extremely ancient look and there is a remote possibility that some such may be of early date, as similar tunnels are sometimes connected with undoubtedly ancient Logos or passage-chambers. My reason for mentioning them at such length is to record the purpose to which they were recently put, before this, too, is forgotten and "lost in the mists of antiquity."