

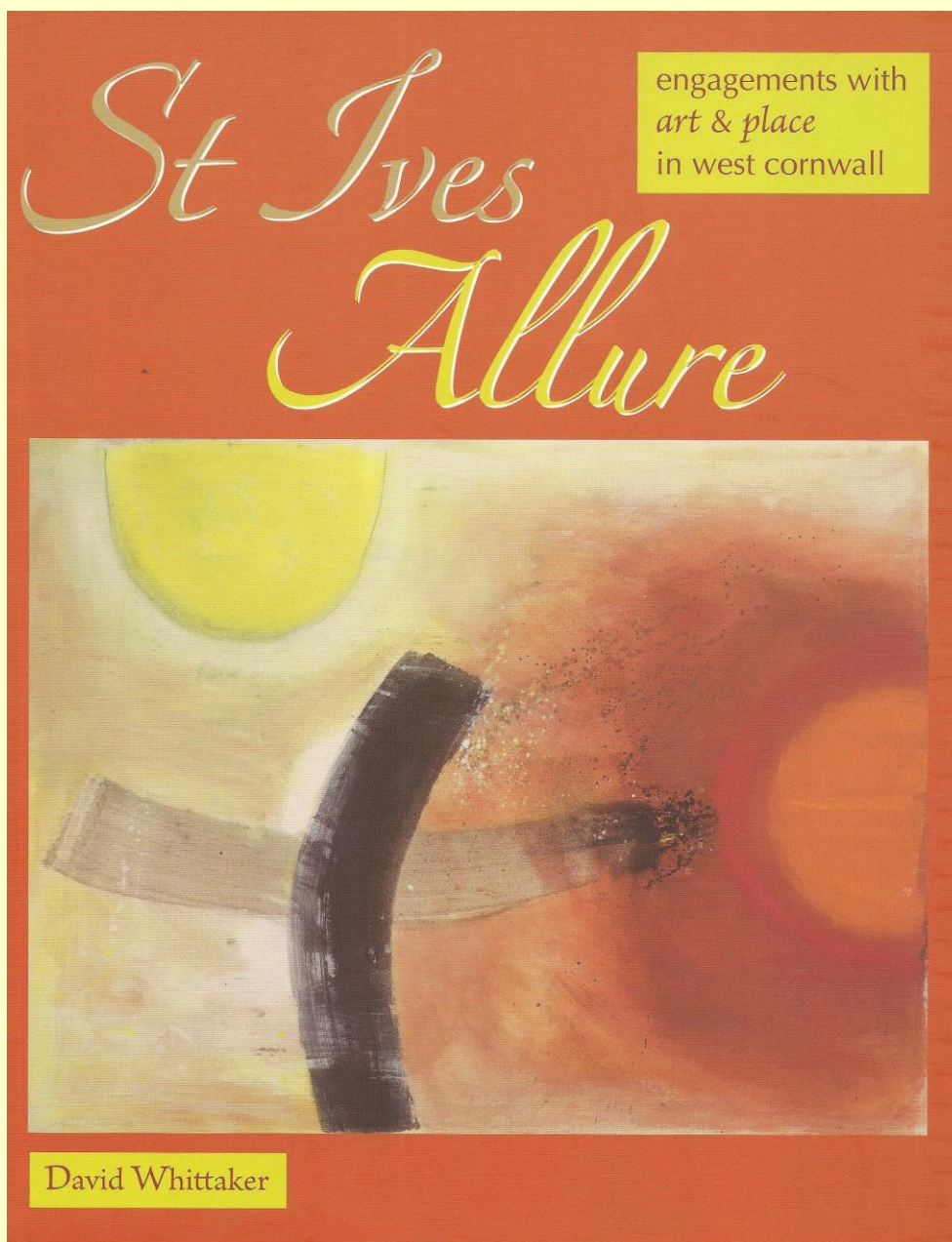
St Ives Allure

(Engagements with art and place in West Cornwall)

David Whittaker

Wavestone Press

ISBN 9780954519490



David Whittaker's book, 'St Ives Allure' is a collection of portraits. He draws from his personal friendships to offer insightful and well-rounded impressions of the people who inhabited the names that personify the arguably over-written, over-analysed artistic colony of post-War St Ives. His choice of subject is, in the best parts of the book, of lesser known but important characters – none more so than Dr Roger Slack.

Dr Slack ministered to the health needs of artists, their spouses and children as well as to the general community of St Ives from 1947 to 1984 – pretty much the lifespan of the St Ives art uprising. He, his wife Janet and their three children lived just opposite Leach's pottery. Whittaker says: *'Rarely, if ever, in the annals of medical history can there have been a physician with such an illustrious clientele of artistic patients'* – everybody from Christian Scientist, Ben Nicholson, to the reclusive Bryan Wynter, Sven Berlin, W S Graham and Peter Lanyon. Dr Slack recorded interviews, took photographs and amassed an archival collection which is now one of the foundations of the St Ives Archive Study Centre.

The Slack essay is an important one – he is well known but, until now, not written about. Whittaker does not feign academic insight but rather offers a personal account of the man he knew. He gives us the person, and points the way, via that archive, to the possibility of a much bigger work - hopefully!

The other essay which commands attention is that about the Lamorna Trio: Marlow Moss, Ithell Colquhoun and John Tunnard. These three highly distinctive characters lived on the other coast but the essay does not feel out of place although their various practices differed significantly from mainstream St Ives – but the connections, influences and resonances flowed around the peninsular, not confining themselves to St Ives – and Whittaker, by including these three, and also an essay about Newlyn Gallery curator, Michael Canney, emphasises this point – before concluding his personal Who's Who with a photo-essay that looks closely into the whole Penwith landscape.

David Whittaker writes fluently and cogently. His style is easy and his intelligence is both critically astute and humanly warm. His account of taking tea with Wilhemina Barnes Graham presents a woman who, for many, seemed remote and aloof, as a very warm and generous person, singular in her self-possession but outward going.

St Ives Allure is not a study, or a text book or even a glossy 'icon' book – it is a very readable, fulfillingly revealing, gentlemanly and rewarding book that fleshes out many characters, introduces a few lesser-known but important ones, and repays the attention you give it by sharing portraits of intensely creative and distinctive people who, as he knew them, were also human, good friends and generously loquacious companions – having, like the artists he admires, looked intensely at the St Ives colony for many years, David Whittaker succeeds in introducing us and leaving a series of lasting impressions, a verbal exhibition – no mean feat.

Bert Biscoe
bertbiscoe@btinternet.com
01872 242293
9th November 2018