

## ***The spy who is staying out in the cold!***

I've been to spy on the Tintagel Bridge. It is a beautiful thing, as are most bridges. Their beauty derives from the demands of their function – to span otherwise impassable voids and torrents as lightly, robustly and efficiently as possible.

The question for Tintagel is not whether this is a good bridge, but whether it is a good thing to have a bridge at Tintagel. Impassability has protected the archaeology, geology, flora and mystery of the island, leaving us with a rich, holistic and compelling heritage which it is our duty to conserve, understand if we can, and to hand on, as good stewards, to future generations. What we should be handing on is not simply the material relics and rocks, but also the fundamental principle of conservation – to understand by protecting. It is a principle which has guided our forebears, and so it should guide us.



Tintagel is not simply a Scheduled Ancient Monument. It is also a Site of Special Scientific Interest (SSSI), and an Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty (AONB). There is a balance to be struck between nature and man in how we manage this place, and that balance should shape the way in which decisions about it are made by its various stewards.

My beef about Tintagel is that the governance by the various designation regulators is entirely inadequate. This inadequacy flows from financial expediency and an ideologically founded model driving the management of Scheduled Ancient Monuments. There are now holes in the law which should protect Tintagel (and many other precious places, including Stonehenge).

A place like Tintagel, where several protections jointly protect the whole, should be governed by a 'regulatory council' – a management 'board' comprised of each of the regulatory bodies, created for each site. Decisions, like that to construct a bridge, or to locate a commercially beneficial but fantastical 'statue', or to carve comic-book faces in bedrock, should be taken together by all regulators, each advocating for those elements which it is charged to protect, and each able to encourage or veto according to the best interests of those elements, and of the whole site.

The Tintagel – Clovelly SSSI cites two elements for protection – flora and geology. Whilst the archaeology tells us one story, the geology narrates the formation of the land, a bigger tale by far! At Tintagel this latter story is dramatically portrayed. The SSSI forbids 'quarrying or drilling'. Natural England does not appear to have played any part in deciding whether a bridge should be pursued, and yet the dowls which anchor the statue, the ground bolts (of some 10m length) which now emboss the rock at either end of the bridge, the excavations to form supporting platforms, and the chips of the sculptor's art down on the beach, all represent acts of 'quarrying and drilling'.

Natural England, like its fellow agency, the AONB Partnership, were not partners in the managerial decision-making affecting Tintagel; they were merely 'consultees' in the Planning process – consultations which were summarily ignored as arguments were made in the Planning Committee about supporting shops in the village high street! This is simply not good enough. The relevant laws are inadequate.

My recent espionage has produced one profound conclusion. It is that the bridge is very successful. The knight is as big a photo-opportunity as the signpost at Land's End. The outcome of the bridge is that the numbers now crowding on to Tintagel Island to selfie the fantasy-knight have outstripped its reasonable capacity – it is very full of falling feet, and every tread is compressing, eroding and affecting the internationally significant archaeology – much of which still remains to be investigated and understood.

The English Heritage CIC business plan transformed Tintagel from a destination for people who appreciate both great landscape and the careful conservation of historical and natural heritages, into a camera-clicking 'attraction'. Visitors, faced with a challenge of steep steps and difficult conditions, used to opt to not venture on to the island, Now the bridge, inserting a significant structure into the landscape, gets them there. Having quarried and drilled, it will be eroding those very things which make Tintagel what it is – an archaeological conundrum. What's good for the bank balance is high risk for the 'asset'.

What price is Cornwall, or Britain, or historians and archaeologists, to pay for such commercial exploitation? Should we compromise the principles by which we protect and appreciate the mysteries and histories of our heritages to baldly make money – what is the real lasting cost? To invoke Disney at this point is a cliché, but the question grows more insistent!

Having looked, I conclude that the law must be changed so that multi-designated sites such as Tintagel are properly governed. All regulators of protective designations must be equal, and each have the right to veto developments such as road tunnels or bridges, disneyfying interventions, all risks to the sustainable integrity of the whole place, to its beauty, its narrative, its science and its spirituality.

Secondly, with this bridge in place (until an Atlantic gale sooner or later lets rip), what measures are there to protect the archaeology of Tintagel Island? How are the visible and ugly imposition of ground bolts in the rock, the dowls and the carvings, to be mitigated? Who is measuring the impacts of overcrowding, trudging, scraping, pollution and exploitation? Is there an independent monitor who has some form of controlling sanction or constraint? Historic England knows nothing of geology or landscape – it does heritage! So how will it include and respect its equal SSSI and AONB partners in assessing, controlling and repairing?

Tintagel was very busy on the day of our visit. The visitor centre next to the Cornwall Council car park in the town was closed (only open at weekends....in August!!). It is £0.50p to use a public toilet. I don't mind paying to pee (£0.20p in Boscastle), but I don't see why my bladder should pay-off the Cornish National Debt. Further down the street we discovered an oasis of Cornish calm – a smiling welcome, a modestly priced dish of tea (with complementary Ginger Nuts) in china cups, with doilies, preserves and second-hand paperbacks on modest sale – and most important of all, a free pee in a clean toilet where the flushes worked – thank God and King Arthur for Trevena-Tintagel WI.

The contrast between a helpful, industrious and kind reception at the WI and the crude exploitation of the island left two questions in my mind – which version of Cornwall do we wish to hand on to our descendants? The answer, I suspect, lies in the genuineness (or otherwise) of our smile. Are we prepared to stand and fight for the integrity of the product which Kernow is rapidly being exploited into? It's beginning to feel like a 'Wild West Show'!

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