KIT BARKER
CORNWALL 1947-1948
RECOLLECTIONS OF PAINTERS AND WRITERS

by

KATHRINE TALBOT

NUMBER TWO IN THE OCCASIONAL SERIES OF BOOK GALLERY MONOGRAPHS

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These are my own purely personal reminiscences. I have asked nobody to add their recollections or to verify mine. We none of us see events and our surroundings in the same way - how much more idiosyncratic does our view become when it has been matured and modified over so many years. I hope that this chronicle of a little more than eighteen months in West Penwith will contribute something to the annals of the time by the very specificity and subjectivity of its detail.

This account is dedicated to the memory of Kit Barker, David Haughton and Bryan Wynter.

Acknowledgements:

'The End of Cornwall' has not previously been published. Maurice Carpenter was born in 1913 and died in 1978.

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THE END OF CORNWALL

For Kit and Ilse, Noon Veor 1948

Morning is Cornwall, monochrome
Upon the moors. The cairns of lichened
Kings are closed forever. No
More kingdom. Here the dream shall end.

I have seen Venus walking on the water
Last night to make a pavement to the door
Of Zennor church. I heard the muffled laughter
Under the surf. I turned and heard no more.

But now the nave is echoing with a stone-
Cold song. The dolphin of the morning
Turns to the surface and I hear the groans
Of wrecks among the eternal combers borne.

The boy's voice fills the nave, his youth
Folded and cold as the sea. He has never wakened
In the dark arms of a girl, nor in the breath
Of Spanish islands felt the quickening.

The voice from the church crosses the cold Atlantic
Of my thought like a gull. There is no wave nor wind.
Yet out of the clear bowels a bubble breaks
And fear like a face appears at the sea's window.

I have seen a face in the birdless
Forest beneath the sea, and then a fin
White as a woman winked and disappeared.
Out of the empty workings like the cry of tin

A song, colder, more constant, than the one
Ringing like bars of steel from the Zennor choir.
They mingle and twine together like the twin
Tails of an Italian mermaid, rosy with desire.

Now the Atlantic is the mermaid's mirror,
A sheet of sun. The comb in the other hand
Huge as his lust. And now his gleaming terror
leaves iridescent tracks on the Zennor sand.

'Dark boy whose eyes are aisles,' I hear her singing,
'Lost king of Cornwall among forgotten cairns
You have touched the muffled bell-buoy of my heart,
and set it ringing
Forever in the caves where water burns.'

The song has ceased. I see the two appear
Walking the graveyard, terribly entwined.
No ripples now. The wide white sea is clear.
All Cornwall's kingdom has been undermined.

Morning in Cornwall, monochrome
Upon the moors. The cairns of lichened
Kings are closed forever. No
More a kingdom. Here the dream shall end.

Maurice Carpenter

KIT BARKER

CORNWALL 1947 - 1948

Recollections of Painters and Writers

Sometime in the spring of 1947 Bryan Wynter bought an old Ford van in London and asked a friend, BillMcKenzie, to drive it down to Zennor for him. Bryan had fairly recently begun to live at Carn Cottage, high above Zennor, overlooking the bay between Zennor and St.Ives. Bill, possibly because he was uncertain of the road or the dependability of the Ford, for the sake of company, or simply out of friendship, asked Kit to go down to Cornwall with him. I don't know how long they stayed with Bryan (the Carn had a living room and one tiny bedroom), but while they were there they saw an empty Sail Loft in Newlyn which was for rent for five shillings a week and decided to rent it and live in it.

Back in London, Bill and Kit found others who wanted to join them in Newlyn, and after a while they began to make their way there, probably Bill first on his motorbike with Graham Court who was also a painter. David Duff, one of the more permanent tenants, may also have gone down at that time. Kit was living at home and had no money for such a move. It was Monica Humble, the youngest of his three elder sisters who, later that summer, made it possible for him to go to Cornwall. Her husband Bill had just been in Paris on business, something almost unheard-of so soon after the war, and had brought her back some elegant French lingerie, rather different from our 'Utility' panties and bras. Monica sold this precious present and gave Kit the money.

The four tenants of the Sail Loft were joined by various friends for longer or shorter stays. David Archer was certainly there for a short time, also Kit's brother George and his girlfriend Cass. Michael Hamburger, whom Kit had known in the army, passed through. Some of the visitors brought a little cash, otherwise there was none. I don't know how the rent got paid. They all went down to the quay to fish, and the good-natured fishermen, coming in with their catch, gave them pilchards for bait which ended up in the frying pan. When a fish-lorry drove past him one night, Kit hung on to a tail sticking out at the back, and they had turbot for a night or two!

David Archer, always generous and at that time still affluent, was certainly the provider for a time, and must have been a loss when he left. Kit asked the fishermen for work, but there were no jobs. For a while there was a scheme for buying a derelict boat and going fishing, but this came to nothing. David Duff and Graham Court got the occasional cheque and food parcel from home.

In the meantime I had been staying in Mevagissey, to the east of Newlyn. A number of writers had made their home there. Among them was W.S.Graham and Nessie Dunsmuir who were living in a house belonging to Frank Baker (who was away for part of that summer and whom I knew from London). I made friends with them, and they found me lodgings in their street with a Miss Husband. Another writer, Louis Adeane, had a cottage a few miles inland in a little wooded valley. Still in his twenties, he was already a published poet and had a job as 'reader' for a publishing house. I was terribly impressed. Near him lived Derek Savage, his wife Connie and their children (I had met the Savage family in their Cambridge cottage in the war). Derek had been publishing poetry, especially in the U.S. literary magazines, since the '30s. He, like Louis, was a pacifist. They had been permanent residents for some time.

George Barker and Michael Asquith came to stay for a while as did the painter Keith Vaughan. David Archer, patron of impecunious poets, was there most of the summer. There was a young man called Michael White. The young American writer Mary Lee Settle and her poet husband Douglas Newton found lodgings and talked of staying.

Mevagissey was at that time an unspoilt fishing village with narrow streets and hardly any traffic. The road came down the valley from St.Austell, then went west towards Truro, but the streets above the harbour were too narrow for cars, running down the hillside with houses on one side, a wall on the other. When one wasn't doing anything else, one leaned over this wall watching the tide going in or out, boats being cleaned, 'toshers' being made ready for mackerelling. Fishermen stood talking by their boats in groups or sat sunning themselves on a bench on the quay, people walked on the double arms of the sea-wall. There were greedy seagulls waiting for tid-bits or swooping to pick up what was revealed as the harbour emptied at low tide.

There were two guest houses up on the other side of the harbour (I was told that it was called the 'money side' in contrast with the 'sunny side' where most of the fishermen lived), but there were scarcely any tourists, for the war was so recently over and petrol still rationed. At the hops in the village hall on Saturday nights one occasionally met someone from London or Birmingham, but the little harbour-side cafe served their crab sandwiches and Camp Coffee mostly to permanent residents and the day trippers from nearby Cornish towns.

The great talking-point in the village, everyone's boast, was the making of 'Johnny Frenchman,' a film shot in Mevagissey with an Anglo-French cast. Everybody had a story to tell of Francoise Rosay or the other stars, of the money they'd all made! It had been their **annus mirabilis** - French brandy had flowed in the pubs. 'Everybody' had had a part as an extra. Both the film's Cornish fishing village and its Breton

counterpart had been shot in Mevagissey, and I was told that, for the French scenes, a (cardboard?) pissoir had been erected in the square, hiding the war memorial.

We had a good time that cloudless summer, spending our days on the beach and evenings in the pub playing darts for pints. On Saturday nights we went dancing. The 'locals' kept themselves to themselves, but the fishermen were friendly; we were soon on christian name terms, and they would partner us at darts and buy one a beer. The wives never came to the pub, one only saw them with their husbands and children on Sundays on their way to and from chapel.

We had little money but we shared what we had. Nessie received ten shillings sickness benefit, Sydney (mostly called 'Jock' at that time) went long-lining with the fishermen whenever an extra hand was needed. The Mevagissey fishermen did not go fishing with nets but with lines to which hooks were attached every few feet. The lines were neatly curled in tubs, and on the way to the fishing grounds were baited with pieces of pilchard. Arrived at their destination, the lines were cast between marker-buoys, then, after an hour or two, hauled in with a catch of, mostly, whiting and dogfish, some cod and haddock, an occasional monkfish or John Dory, and a few crabs. Sometimes the hooks came up empty, sometimes every hook had a fish on it. It must have been hard work, pulling in the heavy lines in a strong swell, and heaving them on board where the fish struggled and flapped on the deck. By the time the boats returned to the harbour, the fish were sorted and ready to put into baskets.

Having learned of my parents' death in Hitler's camps, I had brought what I had saved over the years against their possible return (as well as a little money from the sale of my mother's jewellery), when, after trying to write a novel and short stories at night, I decided to come to Cornwall to write full-time. I allowed myself £3 a week (my room cost £1), and did not realise that I thus acquired a reputation as a young woman of means.

We pooled our rations, and I had most of my meals with Jock and Nessie. The fishermen, returning from their long-lining in the morning or late afternoon, often gave us fish, especially crabs and the despised (!) monkfish. We would buy a joint for Sunday and take it to the communal oven. I think it cost 3d to put it among the villagers' joints and pasties, and I loved to go and collect it in the tin, surrounded by lovely roast potatoes, and walk with it down the street. Even in 1947 this seemed an archaic, an almost heraldic thing to do.

Many of us were, I think, still recovering from the war years. I felt later that that summer made up for the carefree student days I'd never had, and gave me the holiday which, in war-time London, was no more than a rainy week a year, not enough to get over the strain of air-raids and anxiety. Though I had come down to Cornwall to write a novel, I left the typewriter unopened on top of the wardrobe. People were easy to get on with. We would set off for the beach east of Mevagissey every morning, walking down to it by a steep path. There we swam, dived from nearby rocks. I sometimes went for a walk with one or another of my new friends, going west through Portmellon and Gorran Haven where there were writers to visit, and on to St. Michael Caerhays, a magical place, then home climbing across the back of the Dodman. We talked endlessly of books, writing, painting and poetry. If we had problems, that was not apparent. I accepted everybody's way of life and made myself useful, typing some of Sydney's poems on the Bakers' kitchen table, cutting the men's hair, a skill I acquired on Mevagissey beach and continued to practise through my long married life. I admired the domesticity of Louis Adeane who had parted from his wife and led an exemplary bachelor existence in his lovely cottage. I took for granted Jock and Nessie's unsanctified union as well as the homosexual relationships around me, and David Archer's pursuit of the handsome young fishermen who played water-polo in the harbour in dashing leopard-patterned trunks.

Unsophisticated and possibly unobservant, I did not think at the time what a handsome group they made, Louis with his dark eyes and great tangle of black locks, Sydney taller, with red curly hair, his sharp eyes contrasting with his clown-cracking smile. Nessie was demurely beautiful, wore a skirt made from a paisley shawl. She joined in most when it came to the singing. George, looking like an Irish labourer in his cap in the pub, looked like a Greek god on the beach. Michael, another red-head, was tall and thin, but while Sydney was ruddy, Michael's skin was pale. Mary Lee appeared strong and handsome, (she'd been in the American army), determined beside her less substantial Den.

If you were a poet you lived - somehow. I was prepared to find poets dedicated to their art, licensed to be self-centred, penniless. About painters I knew nothing. When George spoke of his painter brother Kit, about to arrive in another part of Cornwall, I remember wondering what a painter lived on. I had met Yankel Adler, but he was older and established, his work seen in the galleries. George suggested I meet his brother once he was installed in the Sail Loft in Newlyn.

The painters and poets who lived in St.Ives, Newlyn and beyond had peopled many conversations among the Mevagissey Bohemians. Bryan Wynter and Susan Lethbridge had become familiar names. The older painters like Ben Nicholson were, of course, already famous. David Wright, coming from St.Ives one day, brought the latest gossip. I met him rising out of the harbour like some sea-creature, shaking the water out of his already grey hair.

While we swam from the beach most of the time, one could save the long walk and climb by having a dip in the harbour. This was not allowed on Sundays so as not to disturb the sensibilities of the chapel-goers.

Michael Asquith left, then George Barker, and some weeks later I had a postcard from Kit. Could he come over from Newlyn? I stood in the narrow lane leading down to the bus stop and watched the people walking up, wondering whether I would recognise him, wondering what we would say. In the end it was easy to pick him out. He was like George and yet not, had lighter hair, chestnut brown, and more of it both on top and, less acceptably, curling over his collar. His eyes were blue but not piercing like George's, and he wore horn-rimmed glasses. I did not notice that one was a glass eye, even though his brother had told me of the fencing accident that had cost him his eye. I think I considered a one-eyed painter too bizarre, and George was known to 'exaggerate.' Kit wore a brown corduroy jacket and corduroy trousers. He was quiet, but we were not shy with each other.

Miss Husband had a vacant room at the top of her house where he could stay. We went to the pub that evening, and Kit met the rest of the gang, some of whom he knew from London. While George had always referred to him as 'Kit,' I noticed that some of his London acquaintances called him 'Gordon.' This was his given name, but the family had always called him 'Kit,' and, though earlier paintings of his signed 'Gordon Barker' have now been found, he always signed himself Kit Barker from the Cornish days on.

He stayed for a few days, came back and forth for a while. When Frank and Kate Baker returned with their two little boys, Sydney and Nessie moved into a tiny cottage in the interstices of Mevagissey back streets. We spent a week or two energetically renovating the damp and derelict building. (Oh, the accumulations of old wallpaper!). Miss Husband had told me that I would have to move out in the 'season,' and the Bakers let me have a room in the next door cottage they had just bought. Kit joined me twice, and the two of us painted the woodwork of this new acquisition a satisfying vermilion.

By then it had become clear that the other inhabitants of the Sail Loft would be leaving, and Kit suggested I come over to Newlyn once he was on his own and we'd 'see how it went!' Kit wrote every day; I was anxious to move in, but there were many delays (David Duff, on the day he was due to leave, set his hair on fire while lighting the primus and had to recuperate), but finally the day came when I took the bus and train to Newlyn to join Kit.

The Sail Loft, up a steep lane just off the road that skirts the harbour, was a large and lofty place (we used to say you

Sail Loft.
Newlyn..
KB

could drive a bus round it) where sails were once stored and mended. Though you went straight in from the lane, it was the upper part of a former boathouse. Kit had stretched a few old sails between the uprights supporting the roof-beams, their canvas discoloured through the years, the cream turning grey, the terra-cotta salmon-pink. The building was flat-iron shaped, the roof coming to an intricate and not central point high up. When we looked after David and Lali's kitten for a few weeks, it climbed up the wooden posts at night and had a fine game running along the crossbeams, just beyond our reach.

There was a round table and a few kitchen chairs, one chair usually turned to Kit's Dulcitone. This charming little musical instrument, painted white with relief medallions, its keyboard two and a half octaves, and the keys sounding on tuning forks, was Kit's most precious possession. He played early tunes, Purcell, the Earl of Salisbury's Pavane, or some of the family folksongs. There was a chest with a primus on top, a single camp-bed. David Archer, I was told, had slept in a 'hammock' made of old fishing nets and had slowly oozed out of the bottom, but never quite fallen through. There was also McKenzie's BSA. When, in 1985, Kit made a series of drawings 'Recollections of Cornwall' some of which illustrate this text, the motorbike features in one of the Sail Loft. So does the 'carpet' Kit painted on the floor. It was handsome, in primary colours, round, vaguely Persian, perhaps eight feet in diameter. He always said that the postman was afraid to step into the loft, thinking the carpet was a pentagram.

On the side overlooking the harbour were two huge double doors which opened onto a yard about fifteen feet below. The doors were kept open most of the time while the autumn continued warm and sunny, and seagulls came in to scavenge. The view of Mounts Bay was magnificent. We weren't high up enough to watch the business of the harbour but could see the loading of large vessels at its western end towards Mousehole where there was a quarry. The harbour itself, when one went down to the quay, was always busy. Here there was a fishing fleet of long-liners, but there were also larger trawlers which went far afield and filled up with ice at Newlyn to keep their catch fresh. Some of them were French, and there were some pubs where French was the predominant language. One heard tales of fights and rivalries between the two nationalities, but also stories of brandy changing hands.

Though Newlyn was a town compared with Mevagissey, it was a very small one. There were a few shops, a Co-op, a cafe or two, the Sailor's Mission, pubs and fine houses on the 'Parade' running to Penzance, some with well-kept gardens and palms in front. Most of the town ran up the steep hill behind, but there were also still open fields there. When we walked to the pub at Paul, we crossed a stone stile and a field full of cows. From here you could see the bay with St.Michael's Mount in the middle, and in the background Marazion and the Second World War

McKenzies
B.S.A.
Newton.

battleship 'Warspite' on the rocks. For serious shopping and the cinema we walked the mile into Penzance.

After a week I returned to Mevagissey to collect my luggage and buy various necessities. I'd made friends with a junk dealer there, and he sold me a beautiful brass double bed and a fine chair and had them delivered to the Sail Loft.

But the BSA remained for a number of weeks. McKenzie (now living in an inland cottage) used to come in and work on it at all times of the day. It was in any case a pretty public place. When the postman delivered a parcel (the ex-residents and Kit's mother sometimes sent food), he would open the door from the lane and say good morning to us as we lay in bed. When the BSA was finally fixed, McKenzie started it up and roared out of the same door!

One of the most potent memories of those early Newlyn days is my first meeting with David Haughton and his Hungarian girlfriend Lali. It seems so strange now, but at that time it was a commonplace 'treat' to have tea, wherever one lived, in the local cinema's tearoom, usually painted pink and cream. Presumably we had walked into Penzance and were having tea before walking back. We had settled at a table, when Kit saw his friends. We went over, and Kit introduced me. I was stunned by Lali's beauty, her long black hair and fine oval face with very dark eyes. David, small and slight, with sharp features and short brown hair, looked intelligent and lively. Kit told me that he had studied at the Slade, and I was impressed. I am pretty sure the fact that Lali had also been a Slade student was never mentioned, and she did not tell us until much later that she did an occasional drawing. David and Lali lived in a cottage on the moors at Nancledra, more or less half-way between Penzance and St.Ives. We often went out to see them after this and sometimes stayed the night. There was a bus from Penzance followed by what seemed to me a very long walk through farm-land and over moors. I thought their cottage very romantic. There were few amenities. Water had to be fetched from a stream, there was a privy round the back, cooking was done on primus and paraffin stoves. At night an oil lamp lit the living room, and one went to bed with a candle. David always had several paintings going, so the living room was full of the paraphernalia of painting: canvases leaned against the walls, and a lovely smell of oil paint mixed with the cooking smells.

I was deeply impressed by David's work. He was at that time painting portraits of Lali, often against vivid strips of material, red and green, blue and yellow. His style was much influenced by Wyndham Lewis, but I didn't know that then. I admired the way his subtle distortion of her features changed her beauty without detracting from it. Later he painted the rows of cottages which became typical of his Cornish work, and there was also a period of paintings of brightly coloured farm

machinery, also greenhouses and cold frames with greenery and the splash of scarlet geraniums or tomatoes.

David was a hard worker. Apart from his paintings I particularly remember an offset drawings of Lali which he sold to a patron in London for what seemed a good sum. Kit told me that he had a tiny income from his mother. Lali went waitressing in St.Ives, taking that long walk followed by a bus journey several days a week. This was the accepted pattern for many painters at that time. Unless you had a sufficient private income or family help, the wife or girlfriend would go waitressing or find seasonal farm work.

Though there was neither heating nor water (let alone lavatory facilities) at the Sail Loft, we managed happily right through into November. As it got colder, we spent most evenings at the pub, the 'Fisherman's Rest,' the 'Tolcarne,' or the pub at Mousehole. We didn't know many people. The only Newlyn painter I remember Kit speaking of at the time was John Wells, but he was reclusive, and I did not meet him then.

When we walked back from Mousehole in the autumn dark, we would sing to help keep up a brisk pace. I had been familiar with communal singing in wartime. At Mevagissey I had been introduced to a different kind of singing. Nessie had a fine voice and sang Scottish and Hebridean songs. George sang Irish songs and the folksongs he had brought back from the U.S. He accompanied himself on an imaginary violin, favoured 'Careless Love,' 'Foggy Dew' (not yet made popular by Britten), and regretted Kit's absence when he sang 'The Royal Blackbird.' Kit too had a large repertoire, the finer voice of the two. Later he was to sing folksongs on WQXR in New York! I learned many of the 'family' songs then, especially loved 'She Walked Through The Fair' and 'The Snowy-Breasted Pearl.' Singing with a pint in your hand by the fire was part of everyday life.

By now I was working on my novel and Kit painted, often on pieces of wood picked up on the beach or in town.

When we had met in Mevagissey, I had wondered, of course, what Kit's painting was like. Brought up to Museum visits and an interest in art, I had gone to the London galleries in and just after the war and seen the paintings of Paul Nash and Piper, Sutherland, Tunnard, MacBryde and Colquhoun, Ayrton and Lucien Freud. I had bought postcards and the occasional Medici print. Kit, painfully shy (he found it difficult to go into shops), did not talk about painting, his own or other people's. Acquiring a few sheets of paper and a pencil, he made a few drawings in Mevagissey. They were of 'Amazons,' schematic 'jointed' female fighting figures. Since I had recently been involved with the Freudians, working for the West Sussex Child Guidance Service, I was more concerned with their content than their execution. When I got to the Sail Loft, there were no paintings for me to see. Kit had no money to buy paints or

Low Tide

canvas, there was no easel. If, naively, I thought that painters drew 'all the time,' this was a habit Kit only acquired later in life when he filled his many sketchbooks with drawings and watercolours of places he saw, of figures, 'versions' of favourite famous paintings or Japanese prints, flowers and fruit, small objects like feathers and shells, and recollections of the past, making drawings on the spot or in his studio until late into the evening.

I think we had known from the start that our tenancy of the Sail Loft was only temporary, and when November came we were told that we would have to move out. The Sail Loft was to be made into a pilchard cannery. We searched for a cottage to rent, but couldn't find anything. Bill McKenzie, David and Lali, and Bryan Wynter over in Zennor asked around. Finally somebody told us of an empty cottage on the moors above Zennor which might be available. It belonged to a farm and had been used by the Boy Scouts. We were told that the owners didn't really want to let it, but that it was worth trying. I don't know why I went to see it on my own. I took the bus to Zennor where I had never been, and walked up to Foage Farm. I well remember my interview with the farmer's wife. We sat in her parlour having a cup of tea. I was pretty desperate. She later accused me of crying (I don't think I did, but she may have been right) and of telling her that I was expecting a baby. That was certainly untrue - the constant fear of pregnancy, which was part of life for all of us at that time, would have prevented me from telling such a lie and 'tempting fate.' She took me to the cottage and agreed to rent it to us at £1 a month. It was called 'Noon Veor' which, I was told, means Evening Star.

We moved in during a dry spell shortly before Christmas. Someone with a van brought our bits of furniture to the top of the moors, from where we manhandled them to the cottage with the help of a farm boy. Exclaiming that the Dulcitone was surely a 'babby's coffin,' he almost dropped it when, jolted over the rutted ground, it began to play a few notes.

The cottage was long and low under a Cornish stone-slab roof with a chimney each end like two short ears. There was one room downstairs with an iron cooking range which doubled as open fire, a recess where we cooked on the primus and washed. Two windows and a door faced south over a T-shaped garden. Facing north and the view down to Zennor, there was a dark and windowless scullery, good for nothing but the paraffin can and boots. Upstairs also had one room, much smaller because of the pitch of the roof. Here stood the brass bed and a chest of drawers, what clothes we had were strung on a string across one corner. The room had no ceiling but went straight up into the roof. I had a fantasy that, should anyone try to take the cottage from us, I would cling to the roof beams. The privy was

near the north-facing front gate at the end of the front garden. We had a water-butt by the scullery door. The rain from the roof kept it full in winter and provided our water for cooking, washing and drinking, but the following summer we emptied its murky remains during a short drought and, deciding to take the opportunity to clean it, found rusty and faded toys and an ancient bar of yellow soap in the bottom. For a while we had to fetch water from the farm, carrying it ten minutes uphill over the moors.

Now we had left southern West Penwith for a northern aspect. From the gate we looked down the valley to Zennor church tower and a triangle of sea. On the hill to the right (blue with bluebells in the spring, purple with heather in summer and then tawny with bracken), twenty minutes walk across the moors, was Zennor carn and Bryan Wynter's Carn Cottage. More or less the same distance, but in the other direction, going south, was Nancledra and David and Lali's 'Croftpool.' It took us half an hour to walk up from Zennor and the bus. There was no path beyond the farm, and crossing the five intervening fields was a muddy and, with heavy shopping and paraffin, a weary haul. It was almost always wet, and before we got to our gate we had to cross a narrow gully which, though originally a path leading from east to west (possibly from Bodmin to Lands End, we were told), was more like a brook. Because of lack of money, our Wellington boots were second-hand and full of holes. We mended them with bicycle-tyre mending patches, but they never stuck for long, and our socks and feet were always soaking

We also carried some of our coal in small sacks when the farmer had no occasion to come up with the tractor. Almost as heavy as the cans of paraffin were the glass accumulators, batteries for the radio, which had to be charged at the garage. These were for ever running out, especially towards the end of the Shakespeare plays the BBC broadcast at that time.

Though we often saw David and Lali, went to their local and stayed the night with them, we now had Bryan Wynter as a neighbour too, the 'Tinner's Arms' in Zennor as our pub, and St.Ives within bus or even (long) walking distance. We saw a good deal of Bryan, and his paintings influenced Kit in the year we spent at Noon Veor. Bryan, like David, had been to the Slade but, older than David, indeed older than we were, he had been there earlier. He had had his first one-man exhibition at the Redfern Gallery in London that year and was already an accomplished painter with a variety of subjects, painting the Cornish landscape in oils, watercolours and gouaches as well as making wonderful drawings and watercolours of birds in cages and other animals. Kit told me that he had had a kinkajou (its habit of shitting from a great height had curtailed its residence at Carn Cottage). Now he had a hedgehog called Hodge in a box beside the fire.

We were friends, but I now feel that our relationship with the local painters and their partners was not a very close one. This was partly, I think, because I was so preoccupied with my own affairs, life with Kit, writing my novel, partly due to Kit's shyness and lack of self-confidence.

Though Kit said at the time that he was glad he had not gone to art college, and his self-taught freedom lent his work originality and freshness, I am sure he was conscious of his lack of status among so many painters who had been students at the great art schools. His schooling had been minimal due to illness, and there had been no money for college. In retrospect it seems possible that scholarships or other help could have been found. But in the family, higher education was never considered. It put the other painters, there was no doubt about it, into another category.

The years they had spent in the sixth form and in college, had been, for Kit, times of educating himself, reading in the libraries, and of a variety of occupations, living at home. For a while he and his friend Maurice Carpenter had had a pottery in Fulham. One of my plants stands in a bowl with their mark, a phoenix, on the bottom. Later they printed books on a small Adana hand-press under their imprint of 'The Phoenix Press.' The first had been a book of twelve poems by Maurice, then, in 1935, a book of medieval poems by Kit under his full given name, 'Albert Gordon Barker.' After that they printed a novel, an arduous job when typesetting by hand. Maurice was a passionate Communist and, I think, probably sacrificed his gift as a poet to a life committed to an idealism more and more difficult to sustain.

Once war started, Kit became an inspector at an aircraft factory, then joined the army and, in REME, was trained in tanks as an engineer. Later he moved to the Army Educational Corps. His time in the army had been acutely unhappy, and he seldom spoke of it. In our forty years of marriage, I never found out what had made him join (he had an Irish passport which could have exempted him), and why, since he had only one eye, they had taken him.

Even in his early days he never doubted his vocation as a painter, and by the time we met when he was 32, he had produced a small body of work, mainly surrealist, and shown and sold one or two paintings in a Bond Street Gallery. But he had been a slow developer, and his early circumstances, his illness, (he had been in bed for a year after diphtheria at twelve) and the loss of his eye in his later teens, had undermined his confidence. He had lived in the shadow of his famous brother, and his lack of self-assurance was a burden he only overcame when, in the United States and later in London, he became an exhibited, praised and financially successful painter.

In the meantime we bought the occasional tube of paint, he acquired surfaces to paint on, and Bryan, endlessly kind, occasionally 'lent' him the tail end of a tube. David, whom we considered affluent, was also sometimes on the scrounge. He came by Noon Veor one day and suggested he and Kit went to visit Bryan to see what they could do. David may have had some special colour he needed in mind. They left to stride across the moors.

Carn Cottage was said to be haunted. Alistair Crowley had visited it and perhaps held a seance. During the war, a young woman ill in bed while her husband was away, a friend sitting with her, had woken from a deep sleep and, it was said, seen a figure at the foot of her bed. She had given a cry and died. Kit, sensitive to supernatural phenomena, told me that when he had first visited Bryan, knowing nothing of the cottage's reputation, he had suddenly felt cold, and had had to go outside.

That day, after a brisk walk, Kit and David, arriving at Carn Cottage, heard voices inside.

'Good,' they said, 'Bryan and Sue are there.'

Inside, the voices were raised. Male and female. Not a good time to call. They nevertheless knocked, then knocked again. The dispute inside continued, but nobody came to the door. In the end they turned the handle and went into the cottage which was empty. Nor was there anyone in sight out of doors. The cottage on its high moor overlooked miles of empty countryside. They made themselves a cup of tea and left a note. Bryan, when we next met, said he was sorry. He'd been in St.Ives. Another time they should help themselves to a tube of paint, if a special colour was urgently needed.

On a later occasion, Kit and I walked back from St.Ives and, taking a short cut, went home by way of the Carn. There was a little quarry beside the road from St.Ives which was always referred to as 'the old Ford,' for the van Kit and Bill had driven down used to stand there. Now Bryan had a jeep which would climb right up to the cottage in two ruts. One of Bryan's 'party pieces' was to drive up to the Carn after an evening at the 'Tinners' and get out of the jeep half way up to have a pee, while the jeep chugged gently on to be rejoined eventually by its driver.

On this occasion Bryan was again away from home, but we had to get our breath back, and there was a standing invitation to make tea. We therefore lit the primus and settled down with a mug of tea. And while we were sitting there, admiring the painting on the easel and some of Bryan's new books, the painting on the wall opposite, a reproduction of Picasso's 'Absinthe Drinker' came off its nail and sailed over the bathtub full of water which had stood underneath, crashing down

Mousehole

in the middle of the room. I took it calmly, but Kit was not amused.

Though Sue spent a good deal of time at Carn Cottage, she had her own house in St.Ives as well as a thriving business, The Toy Trumpet. Here she made wooden toys which she sold to such grand places as Harrods. They were beautiful, the kind of toy one saw nowhere else so soon after the war. She had a lathe and had one or two people who worked for her. Towards the end of the summer, when our money ran out, she employed us to paint toys for her. We would collect a box of skittle soldiers, or the Sicillian carts lacking their flowers and cirlicues, barrows with (eventually) striped awnings, and paint them at Noon Veor. Since Kit was working on his own paintings, this was really **my** job, but I am hopelessly cack-handed and had often to ask for help as I laboriously put faces on the busbied soldiers or striped the barrow boys' awnings.

Sue was beautiful, red-haired, said to be formidable. I liked and admired her, she was always kind to us, and we appreciated her help. Now times were hard, we would buy half a pound of beef sausages, being unable to afford a pound, and I remember bursting into tears in the grocers because they had no quarter pound packets of cocoa, and I couldn't afford a half.

Earlier that year, visitors had begun to arrive at Noon Veor. Louis Adeane arrived from Mevagissey (in a fog at night), and Maurice Carpenter came down from London and spent a long week-end. David Wright came to stay. In his duffle bag he brought us a tinned ham his mother had sent him from Johannesburg - what a treat! He made the cottage seem very crowded with his height and the clumsiness which was a result of his deafness, but he was a most welcome guest, a warm and amusing man. He was twenty eight then, already grey-haired, had been at Oxford and was beginning to be known among the young poets, publishing in the 'little magazines.' He must have ben uncomfortable, his feet sticking out at the end of the camp bed in the living room. He stayed with us for a while, went back to London, and when he returned lived at Higher Tregerthen with David Lewis and Kit's nephew John Fairfax, finally sharing 'Cove Cottage' below Gurnards Head with John. He stayed on in Cornwall for a while after we had left.

I remember David writing poetry while he was staying with us. The light from the oil-lamp showed through the cracks between the planks of the bedroom floor as he sat below, thumping the table to establish the rhythm of the poem he was composing. Everybody liked him, he was much teased, being supposedly 'close,' reluctant to buy his round at the pub. He played up, cadging drinks and cigarettes, always broke. He was in fact generous within the means of his small income. No doubt he paid the Cove Cottage rent. Because he could not hear us speak, we mouthed our part of the conversation to make lip-reading easier. Some of the local inhabitants, I remember, started a rumour that we were dumb, David the only one who could speak (his immense laugh and sometimes 'rude' words could be heard all over the bus). Alternatively that we were all mad, possibly escaped from an asylum.

Walking across the fields from the Gurnards Head pub one evening, I was deep in conversation with David. He must have found the conversation interesting too, for every time I wanted to reply, he lit a match to illuminate my lips, so that he could see what I was saying. In the pub, if things got serious, philosophizing, or there was talk of poetry and literature, a piece of paper was brought out for the occasional difficult word. It was when the conversation jumped about that pencil and paper, sometimes the inside of a cigarette packet, were needed to bridge the gap to the next topic.

Friends from London brought us the latest Soho news. Family news came from Mumma, Kit's mother, whose chatty scrawled letters were always full of gossip. I went down to the farm every afternoon to collect milk in a pint tin can with a handle and a lid. One of the farm people filled it for me and handed me the mail which had been delivered by the postwoman who walked up with her satchel and long staff. Mumma's letters sometimes contained a ten shilling note which would help with the shopping or the rent, a tube of paint or the two or three shillings a week we spent at the pub.

Other members of the family wrote occasionally, George, who had received a Somerset Maugham travelling fellowship that spring and had gone to Collioure with Cass, sent postcards. Kit's nephew John Fairfax wrote that he was unhappy in London. Could he come down? He was writing poetry, wanted the freedom to be a poet. Kit wrote to say he was welcome. I think there were one or two false starts, but eventually he took to his bike and joined us. He was seventeen, a handsome and lively boy who soon fitted into the group. He was the youngest, and ever after known as 'Young John.' He too was teased, chiefly for being the only one of the Barker men who couldn't sing in tune, though always keen, 'The Cutty Wren' his special favourite.

The only girl who sang (Nessie was in Mevagissey) was Sue, encouraged by the men for her 'Mother She Is Having Trouble.' I remember a party at her house in St.Ives, a great affair with many people whom I don't now remember. Kit and I had little opportunity for joining the St.Ives painters or going to the St.Ives pubs.

We had met Peter and Sheila Lanyon and used sometimes to go to their house to have tea. They were always warm and welcoming and offered us a bath whenever we called, a great help. Kit talked painting with Peter. I remember that they had a copy of a 'Yellow Book' on their bookshelves which impressed me deeply. Anything to do with James and Conrad and their circle, with Ford Maddox Ford, was holy writ to me.

W. Prastle

Coast Guard Cottage.

We also met Sven Berlin, then chiefly a sculptor. He had a fine studio, a stone tower on 'The Island' in St.Ives, and he once let us spend a night there on our way to London while he was away.

We too had a party once at Noon Veor. We may have had a windfall, or there may have been some other reason. There were quite a lot of people, certainly David and Lali, David Wright and Young John, possibly John Heath-Stubbs whom I remember at the cottage on that or other occasions. He came down several times that year to join David Wright, and there was a joke about David and Heath-Stubbs crossing the dangerous streets in St.Ives. David unable to **hear,** Heath-Stubbs unable to **see** the traffic. Guido Morris, the printer, was there, probably also David Lewis with whom David Wright and Young John lived until they moved to Coastguard Cottage on a ledge of cliff below the Gurnards Head pub, a tiny place with a balcony overlooking the Atlantic Ocean. It was reached from above by a precipitous path skirting dangerous shafts.

What I remember best is our expedition to fetch beer for this party. David Haughton had suggested we order a small barrel at his pub, where the landlord would agree to such an arrangement. We took the camp bed and carried it over the moors, met David and, at the pub, collected the barrel which the landlord had tapped for us. We had brought a mug, and as we hauled our precious burden back across the top of Cornwall, we stopped every now and again to refresh ourselves. The barrel sat very neatly on the canvas of the bed, we marched, taking turns, one in front and one behind, as if the bed was a stretcher and the evening's refreshments a sick man or a corpse. After the party the barrel stood about for a few days before being returned. There was always a little left in the bottom, full of sediment; hops and malt, almost undrinkable - but beer!

Kit and I went to London for a few days in early June, and while there decided to get married. George and Cass came back from Collioure, there was a big and happy family wedding party at Kit's family home. The Cornish contingent was there too: David Wright was one of our witnesses. Young John was with us, also Maurice Carpenter and the Scottish painters, MacBryde and Colquhoun.

Soon after we had hitch-hiked back to Zennor, George and Cass came to join us. They stayed with us for some time before finding a cottage in Zennor Village: No.1 The Row. Add George o any number of people, and things began to fizz. He was timulating company, his brilliant talk always exciting, but he as never a comfortable guest, and since their visit coincided ith our running out of money, it was fairly fraught as far as was concerned, and I was glad when they moved into the illage.

Their cottage was at the end of a little row of houses not many steps from the Tinners Arms and close to the old church with its famous mermaid. There was no shop in Zennor, only a few, scattered houses, a rocky path that lead down to the wild sea. On the coast road leading up the hill to Eagle's Nest and eventually to St.Ives stood the little post office shack.

We saw a lot of them, of course, both in the evenings and in the daytime when George helped Kit to put a car on the road which Kit had bought with our £25 wedding present from his father. This turned into a saga and took five months, during which the car stood in a field full of cows below the cottage, and Kit and George worked on it a great deal of the time.

Cass often came up to Noon Veor with George. She was a beautiful girl in her early twenties. She looked like a young Lauren Bacall and dressed to match. I see her always in a tightly belted trench-coat with her long blond hair caught in a scarlet knitted cap, the end of which dangled half-way down her back. This was very unlike the rest of us who were wearing the clothes we had worn all through the war, 'fashion' being something for other people. She was very quiet, spoke little, and was encouraged by George to be 'moody.' She had been working for a film company. She was very kind to me, but I was in awe of her because of her beauty, and since she was so reserved and withdrawn, we did not become friends until later.

There were some fine days that summer. Walking across the moors was a pleasure then, and Lali sometimes came over to have a cup of tea. I remember sitting reading in the garden one afternoon, Kit was out, when a young man came round the house. This was Bruce Bernard, a London friend of Bryan's and Kit's whom I had not met before. He was probably just short of 20 then and had walked up from Zennor pulling up a brussels-sprout stalk as a stave, a handsome, round-faced young man who proved good company, if shy. He went to live on the other side of the peninsula and stayed there after we had left.

Since we moved to Noon Veor, Kit had been able to paint more. We had been working hard that spring - I finished my novel, began to write stories, sitting with my typewriter at the round table while Kit painted, his canvas (fertiliser bag) stretched on ancient stretchers which we had bought for a few pennies at junk shops in Penzance, propped on a wooden chair against the wall. Or he joined me at the table, drawing spidery elongated nudes, or skulls and shells in sepia ink with a fine nib, sometimes on tinted paper.

Kit had tried to interest London Galleries in his work when we were in Newlyn. Now the St.George's Gallery in Grosvenor Street accepted two paintings for their summer show, 'noticed' by H.M.Middleton in the Spectator of July 9th 1948. He exhibited some paintings in the Crypt in St.Ives in July-August with a group of West Penwith painters and sculptors and, in October, showed with Bryan Wynter at Downing's Bookshop in St.Ives.

It must have been a great occasion, a first two-man show. I remember the paintings but not the exhibition, not even the opening. Perhaps it was all too new to me, perhaps there was no 'Private View' or it was overshadowed by the difficulties of life. Bryan showed 19 pieces, Kit 12. Bryan's 'Birds disturbing the sleep of a town,' which was shown there priced 25 guineas, was exhibited at the Tate Gallery in the 'St.Ives 1939-64' exhibition in 1985. Like the 'Cow's Skull' paintings and the Cornish landscapes, it was very much a painting of the time.

Kit showed a fairly large oil 'Europa,' some gouaches, drawings and two wax etchings I still have: 'Head of a Poet' and 'Satyr and Nymph.' These engravings into layers of wax, revealing rubbed-in powder colour, were forerunners of a later series which were exhibited and much commented on in New York in 1951. Another wax etching, 'Hand Plough' appears to have been sold for 4 guineas. The 'Europa' was long and narrow, the figure of the woman stretched on - almost fused with - the back of the galloping bull. Of several bulls Kit painted at that time, David Wright still owns a small oil on a piece of wood.

The Noon Veor painting I remember best but which was never shown, was a 'Whistling Woman,' probably about 40 inches tall by 28, a three quarter figure painted on a sack stretched over the lid of a chest. The face was pink, the prominent mouth poised in a whistle to give it an almost snoutlike appearance. Though I had difficulties in not finding it 'ugly,' it was certainly arresting, and I think Kit felt that it was a step forward. A little later he painted a largish 'St.Michael's Mount,' the almost abstract island floating in a luminous pale blue, the triangles of sails echoed in the planes of the rocks and reflections. This painting was sold to a friend the following year but has never come to light. But another painting of the time 'Nancledra Pool,' obviously influenced by Bryan Wynter's 'bird' paintings, was shown in London in 1985, 'found' in a St.Ives collection.

That autumn the Cornish idyll began to fray at the edges. Not that I would have admitted it at the time. I felt deeply committed, especially to what was our first real home. But life was hard, and the lack of money or of any prospect was dispiriting, Looking back, we seemed to be always walking somewhere, not somewhere ten minutes away, but for miles and miles, and keeping the cottage supplied with paraffin and coal, keeping lamps cleaned and trimmed, filling stoves, washing, shopping, just ordinary everyday 'living' seemed to take all one's time and strength. Perhaps our energy was sapped by not enough, or not the right food.

Even at the best of times, that is before we were so short of money, our diet was probably rather poor. Many things were

Burning of the Brac
Noon Year.

still rationed or not available, and many foods we now take for granted were simply not known. Hardly anybody ate (or, indeed, sold) spaghetti, and I remember our delight when we could get some in Soho (as well as tomato-paste in small foil-wrapped cubes), on one of our visits to London. We ate bread, sometimes toasted on the open fire, and a lot of potatoes. Cooking on the primus stove was fairly restricted - the big, black old-fashioned coal cooking stove would sometimes boil a kettle, but the oven never got hot enough for a joint or something adventurous like toad-in-the-hole. At the Sail Loft Kit had improvised an oven by putting a biscuit tin on the primus and we had roasted the occasional piece of meat, but that was now beyond our reach. When we went on our weekly shopping expedition to Penzance, we bought fish, mostly fresh pilchards, also herrings which we fried coated in oats. Both were cheap but not much to my taste. I remember being always on the look-out for the then despised monkfish which we loved. We mostly ate sausages, cabbage and the perennial dried egg omelette. When I think of Noon Veor, I think of the packets of dried egg looking rather like today's fruit juice cartons, and the strange, smothering smell of the yellow powder.

As the months went by, money became scarcer. We pulled up the occasional cabbage in a field, found turnips on our way back from the town. Our relationship with the people at the farm became more strained as our rent and milk bills fell behind and finally remained unpaid. In the end I was always afraid that they would refuse to fill my milk-pail, and, having never owed money before, I hated my meetings with our landlady who would mention the rent. I was very conscious of the fact that the farmers too had a hard life, and that they thought us idlers, however hard we considered we worked. The fields on the moors were stony. All year we had seen the men of the farm trying to make them more workable by picking up stones and pulling out large rocks. The cows and horses were lean, grazing on the sparse grass. Not much else grew. When autumn came, the bracken on the moors was set alight, so that the ash would fertilise the ground for next year's fodder. We watched as one of the farmer's sons put the moors to the torch at dusk. He was obviously having a good time, jumping out of the way of the flames, running from clump to clump with his firebrand. When the heather and bracken had caught all round, we were isolated in the cottage. The fire illuminated the evening sky hanging low over the moors, flames jumped high, then died down and left a glow over the countryside. 'The Burning of the Bracken' was a theme Kit painted again and again through his life.

Kit tried various ways of rescuing our financial situation. He applied to the Artists Benevolent Fund, with Ben Nicholson as one of his sponsors, but in vain. We had a long form to fill in, but when it came to 'debts' we only had the two or three pounds we owed for our £1 a month rent, and perhaps a pound for milk. Nobody would sell us anything on tick (I once tried the butcher for half a pound of sausages), and one could not put one's beer or cigarettes on the slate at the Tinners Arms. It seemed the fund considered such lack of debt a disadvantage (others in St.Ives received grants), and it was thought that our living so far from any available work was the chief cause for our needy state.

And so it was. As the autumn advanced and it got colder, we began to plan a different future. Kit had always wanted to go to Mexico where he had acquaintances among the pre-war surrealists. We felt the need to get away, had been mewed up in England through the war. We could not go to Mexico without any money, but 'America' had surely always welcomed the adventurous poor, and we felt certain that we could make out there, that Kit, once he was able to paint without the constraints of lack of funds, would find his form and a place to exhibit and sell. We would shake off the shackles of post-war England, London and the family, and strike out on our own. A Jewish refugee organisation advanced us the money for our fares: it cost very little to cross the Atlantic by freighter. My relations in New York were willing to give us an affidavit which led to an immigration visa with a work permit.

The previous summer people from the London art world had come to visit the (some by now famous) West Penwith painters, had seen Kit's work in the Crypt and the Downing Bookshop show. They had visited Bryan Wynter and David Haughton on the moors and had been steered in the direction of Noon Veor by our friends. I remember Francis Watson of the British Council arriving, and how inadequate I felt to such a momentous occasion. It was overcast, possibly drizzling, the cottage and the moors did not look at their best, and whatever was said was not memorable. It was not as it would have been in a novel.

George Dix of the Durlacher Gallery in New York was another visitor, and he asked Kit to bring some of his work to London. He bought two drawings, and it was a happy surprise for us to find them on show at Durlacher Brothers on 57th Street in New York when we arrived there the following May (1949), with drawings by Minton and Colquhoun as well as Tchelitchew.

Since we had bought it that summer, our 1926 Rover had had a rough time in the field below the cottage. It had a fabric body, and the cows had taken a fancy to it. By December it might have been ready for the road, but it was stuck all over with large pieces of cloth, like plasters, where the cows' horns had slit the original fabric and pulled out the stuffing. It was nevertheless Kit and George's pride and joy - indeed we all had strong feelings about it! My living-dining-kitchen-working table had been used to assemble the crankshaft, we had all helped to cut down corks by the bushel to re-line the clutch. My saucepan had been used to boil the carburettor. I did not love that car. First time the engine 'sprang into life' in late autumn, it would only go in reverse. Something had been put in the wrong way round. Kit spent many hours lying in the wet grass under the car. Later we tried the occasional outing. It would go - for a while. There was a good deal of pushing. We often had to walk home.

But by mid-December the car was pronounced road-worthy, was taxed. We were ready to go. George and Cass felt their adventure in Cornwall had also come to an end, Young John was leaving with us. The farmer's wife agreed to take the brass bed and some other possessions in lieu of rent and milk money. So we set off early one mid-December morning: Kit and George in front, Cass, John and I in the back with, on our laps, Cass's cat and ours. Our possessions were in the boot and tied on top of it. Some of Kit's paintings were strapped against the sides. It took us 36 hours to reach London,shedding along the way cheques for petrol (some good, some doubtful), George's watch to pay for the final fill-up, the last 5s from my post office book. There was much pushing, much filling up of the leaky radiator, George was apprehended in Salisbury (where we got lost at 2 a.m. and asked a policeman the way) for driving with an out-of-date licence. We arrived to find our welcome-feast eaten the evening before, were offered kippers and champagne. The car never went again.

The day I arrived in Mevagissey in May 1947, the village was shrouded in mist. Among the houses, passing the war memorial and the 'Fountain' pub, one might have been anywhere. I went into a cafe and booked myself a room, then went up the first street I came to, houses on my left, white mist to my right. Where I could see cottage gardens, the spring flowers were in bloom after the hard, long winter. Everything was neat, white curtains at the windows, the heavy stone roofs shone with moisture. I climbed, and after a while there were no more houses, and I was enveloped in white nothingness. Finally I came to a bench and what was obviously a lookout point. I had hitch-hiked from Totnes that morning and was tired. I sat down and stared into that infinity of seamist. They call it 'the planet' in Mevagissey. After a while it became more and more luminous, hurting my eyes, then I could see transparent blueness - sea or sky. Slowly the mist dissolved and the view was revealed: the enormous sky and the sea, a huge bay, calm and blue and glittering, and below me the village and the arms of the sea walls embracing the double harbour. The fishing-fleet lay at anchor in the inner harbour, tiny people were at work on the quay. It was like a new world.

Above Zennor, Noon Veor was often enveloped in fog. I once came across the moors at sunset knee deep in pink mist. At night the cottage could be frighteningly isolated, worst when one was away from home and had to walk across the moors. When we spent the evening at Zennor ar at Bryan Wynter's cottage, swinging our lighted hurricane lamp on the way back, we left a tiny oil-lamp in our one small north-facing window to guide us home. We never walked from Nancledra in the dark: our cottage lay below the skyline, and we might easily not have struck the right line and been lost among the stone walls and mine shafts.

Though we only saw a small area of West Penwith - we never made it to Lands End - we loved the Cornish landscape and its sea. But we were young and unsure of ourselves, still starting out on our particular lives and art, and prone to the pains of youth and poverty and love, and often had 'terrible times together,' as W.S.Graham says in his poem, 'Lines on Roger Hilton's Watch.'

But when I wrote my first published novel at last in the States, it was set in Cornwall, of course: and when Kit began to paint in New York, he often chose 'Cornish' subjects: moors and harbours, fish, birds and boats. In later years he would sometimes, out of the blue, paint a Cornish landscape with a derelict engine house and broken chimney, and when he made his drawings and watercolours of Cornwall, he included a still-life of a skull and an oil-lamp as he remembered painting, with black lines around the objects (influenced by Rouault), at Noon Veor in 1948.

CORNWALL 1947

Peacocked in green above the scarlet skirt
she ran along the quay that hot September,
past fishing boats and the ammonia smell
of Newlyn's trawler fleet's ice factory,
permanent sun of post-war weather
on watery reflections, harbour swell
and silver shine of cobbles,
where Nonconformist fishermen repaired the ochre nets
and whistled after her bare legs.

Out of the drowning waters of the war
the painters climbed, their palettes dark with hope,
eyes on the jetsam of the sands,
animal skulls and bulbous oil-lamps on the table,
painting caged birds and seagulls and her face
subtly distorted against coloured bands,
ungainly men handling exotic fish
in primitively executed boats,
long-legged bellbuoys, harbour debris, floats.

Victorious derelicts of peace,
they fought the khaki nightmares of their past,
alive to the beginning of their own new time
amongst the cairns and ancient standing stones,
the tawny moors in sea-mist, enginehouse a finger
lifted in resolution like a sign.
They walked through Morvah, Gulval, Amalebra singing,
the poets out of tune with present aims,
the future an infinity of dreams.