1		INTRODUCTION
3	*Chapter 1*	HOLIDAYS
11	*Chapter 2*	CORNWALL
19	*Chapter 3*	WILTSHIRE, KENT AND DEVON
29	*Chapter 4*	SOMERSET, HAMPSHIRE AND DERBYSHIRE
39	*Chapter 5*	DORSET, BUCKINGHAMSHIRE, NORTHUMBERLAND AND DURHAM, AND THE WEST COAST OF SCOTLAND
55	*Chapter 6*	OXON TO GLOUCESTERSHIRE
69	*Chapter 7*	THE WAR, MURRAY'S ARCHITECTURAL GUIDES AND SHROPSHIRE
85	*Chapter 8*	HEREFORDSHIRE, WORCESTERSHIRE, NORTHAMPTONSHIRE
91	*Chapter 9*	RUTLAND, SUFFOLK, ESSEX, LINCOLNSHIRE, STAFFORDSHIRE AND NOTTINGHAMSHIRE
111	*Chapter 10*	COMPONENTS OF THE SCENE
136		BIBLIOGRAPHY
138		INDEX

Plaster-work ceiling in the Long Gallery, Lanhydrock House, Cornwall, by A.F. Kersting, Cornwall, *1964, rear end-paper*

INTRODUCTION

The Shell County Guides were published for fifty years, from 1934 to1984, and in that time 35 counties were covered as well as the West Coast of Scotland and the Channel and South Coast Harbours. Many of the guides were re-written, which in total adds up to over 50 different editions; and most were revised, some several times. As well as new writing and textual revisions, the guides were regularly redesigned some three or four times: layouts and typefaces were modified; softcover bindings changed to hardback, or vice versa; or colour images were introduced, either as a frontispiece or on the cover. When the series finally ceased production there were two guides still on the stocks, Peter Burton's *Yorkshire* and David Lloyd's *Bedfordshire*. Some counties like Cheshire and West Sussex, almost all of Scotland and all of Northern Ireland had never had a guide. There are other books intimately related to the Shell Guides. In 1937 John Piper's Shell Guide *Oxon* excluded the city of Oxford because John Betjeman had published his own guide to that city, *An Oxford University Chest*. Just before the resumption of the Shell County Guide Series with the publication of *Shropshire* in 1951, John Betjeman and John Piper produced three Murray's Architectural Guides to the counties of Buckinghamshire, Berkshire and Lancashire, the first two written by Betjeman and Piper, the third by Peter Fleetwood-Hesketh. Stephen Bone's Shell Guide, *West Coast of Scotland: Skye to Oban,* was preceded by a guide written with his mother that was published in 1925 (winning a prize for its woodcut illustrations by Stephen Bone) and W.G. Hoskins' *Rutland* and *Leicestershire* were preceded by guides to Rutland and Leicestershire he'd written for Leicester City Authority Publicity Department, in 1948 and 1949. A version of his *Rutland* is still in print today, as is Peter Burton's *North Yorkshire* which remains a Shell Guide in all but name.

The Shell Guides are not only guides to 35 counties in a myriad of editions, issues and designs. More importantly, they are essays on the nature of a vast subject – 'the country', in most of its meanings, during a complex half century of change. They are the product of the reflections of many good authors and photographers, and their editors, John Betjeman and John Piper, whose work in other media is more documented despite the fact that the Shell Guides were their most complex works.

The problem is how to deal with this modest juggernaut. Luckily, others have written biographies of many of the protagonists and there are many histories of the period for context. Equally, there is no need for a detailed bibliophile history of the series as this too has been done, by Chris Mawson, and is freely available on the web. This book, then, is partly about the development of the Shell Guides into a new type of text where there is a narrative equivalence between word and image. From this point of view, the guides are a prototype of what we now call 'the media': they are a kind of static television and not really books at all. The other part of this book is an attempt to understand the vision of national identity in the Shell Guides – because despite, or because of, its limitation to rural and non-metropolitan southern Britain, the series is the largest essay on the relationship between our physical environment and British identity in the twentieth century.

CHAPTER 1

HOLIDAYS

THIS IS A BOOK ABOUT THE Shell County Guides which were published between 1934 and 1984. They were sponsored by the oil company Shell and were intended as guides for motorists. They weren't the first guides to British counties, nor the first motoring guides, nor even a complete guide to the counties; but they are, with Pevsner's Buildings of England series, the best guides to the counties of England and Wales (with a brief foray to Scotland's West coast).

Their unique quality comes from the combination of literature, antiquarianism, art and design with a devotion to expressing and revealing the pleasures of driving around counties by minor roads through smaller towns. Their vision was part *Under Milk Wood,* part local historical, part modernist, part conservationist; but underlying all these was a sense of holiday. These were holidays of a kind now lost in a rush to the sun by air: the Sunday drive, the weekend away, two weeks by the sea at Easter and the long drive.

The oldest and longest-published titles of the Shell Guides included *Cornwall*, *Devon* and *Dorset*, the archetypal holiday destinations of the twentieth-century English motorist who was predominantly middle class and perversely seeking that most English of vacations, the search for the unspoilt and untouristy. What these terms meant has more to do with what had happened to England in the early phases of mass tourism, which pre-dated motor tourism. This is best summed up in the contemporary idea that a traveller is not a tourist; a traveller is a seeker of the authentic place.

For many writers on Britain there was a golden age of an authentic country. This was the period when the British traveller roamed the Lake District and the Wye Valley, a romantic seeker of the sublime or the national character. This sort of experience is often contrasted with another category, the holiday – in particular the seaside holiday.

By the early twentieth century, the British seaside was a very well-developed tourist market. Because of the nature of mass travel before the car, these holidays were a very contained and artificial experience. Seaside towns developed as tourist destinations by offering ever-more contrived diversions from the core experience of the sea; but all of these were within walking distance of a destination arrived at by train. Seaside holiday destinations became satellites of the cities they served, no matter how distant; and as holidays became more democratic, seaside resorts tried to offer popular urban pleasures in their 'healthy' environment.

The original makers of holidays by the sea, the middle class, initially sought and developed newer, more exclusive, destinations; but here too there were often experiences which were no less inauthentic than the holiday entertainments of working-class tourists. Thus at Lynmouth in north Devon, a walk along the cliffs took on a more fashionably Swiss tone with the addition of Toggenburg goats to the land around the circular cliff-top promenade, which was reached via the funicular railway. Within the middle class there was a reaction to this kind of resort and it took two forms. One was the development of the idea of holidaying in a cottage. The other was the cycling or walking holiday. Both these types of middle-class holiday developed fast in the late nineteenth century and have complex motivations; but principle amongst these was the desire to find a more 'real', authentic experience of the source of middle-class identity – the solid values and history of the country – in places which were neither industrial nor metropolitan.

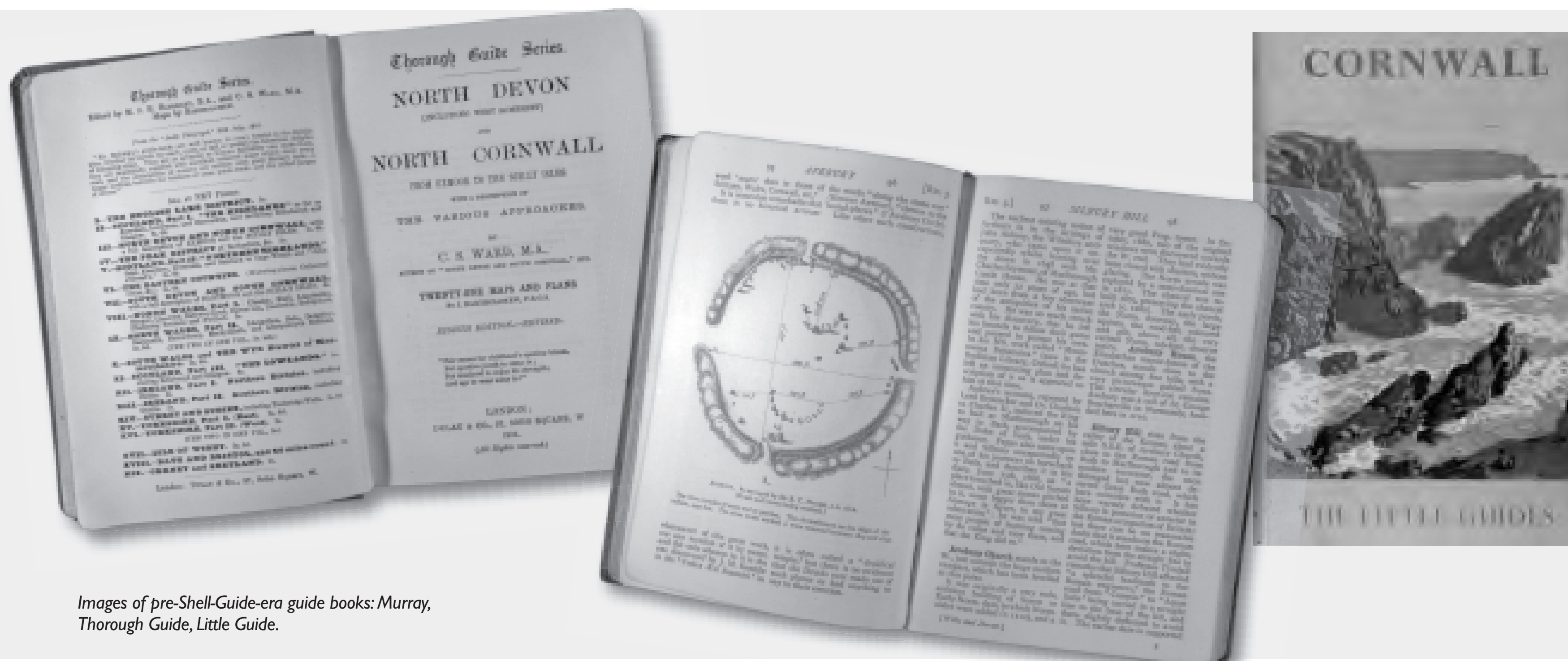
By the early twentieth century, the coastal districts of Cornwall and Devon were being developed piecemeal into areas rather than places of resort, packed with second homes, retirees and people seeking out sites of historical interest. Seaside resorts were for the many but the country beyond was for the few. Yet despite these developments and class differentiations, nowhere within the purview of tourism could be very far from a train station and a good road.

The railway spawned its own guidebooks based on those designed for the early-nineteenth-century boom in middle-class "travellers to the Continent": the Baedeker and Murray guides. These, though they developed before the train, embraced the railways as arteries of tourism. Railways offered the non-aristocratic travellers who were the main market for these guides a simple, predictable way of getting from A to B without having to hire horses, carriages and guides. In Britain, guidebooks emerged which were

© Estate of Stephen Bone. All Rights Reserved, DACS 2010

Stephen Bone's 'Girls in an Open Car', courtesy of Sylvester Bone

An open-top tourer rushing past red-brick Victorian suburbs toward a day out. Stephen Bone's image conveys the new freedom that increasingly cheap motor cars offered well-off contemporaries of John Betjeman in the late 1920s.



Images of pre-Shell-Guide-era guide books: Murray, Thorough Guide, Little Guide.

based on either the railway network or destinations served by the rail network, and these guides were produced either by railway companies, tourist towns or tour companies like Thomas Cook. The guidebooks to resorts offered a description of what could be achieved on foot within the resort, along with a limited number of nearby excursions to 'places of interest'. More interesting are guides like Baddeley and Ward's 'Thorough Guides' which gave accounts of extended excursions into the country from rail stations. These guides were for the very intrepid and might involve a 17-mile walk as a day's outing or hiring a fisherman at Padstow to row you around the headland before a longish walk back to Padstow across country. These 'Thorough Guides' were aimed at the adventurous middle class in search of the real country, just as hiring a cottage a gig ride from the station put you in the middle of the country with only 'locals' as neighbours.

It was not only the middle-class tourist who sought the authentic England or was concerned at its loss to urban development and tourism. From the 1850s, Tennyson's Arthurian poem cycle *Idylls of the King* turned a sleepy and inaccessible Cornish village into a tourist town by suggesting it was Arthur's birthplace. In the 1840s, Tintagel was called Trevena and was a neglected village of medieval houses. By the 1880s it had long been renamed Tintagel (after the headland on which the ruins of the castle stood) and the railway had arrived nearby – near enough to cause an exponential growth in tourism that led to the demolition of the old village to make way for new boarding houses, shops, pubs and hotels. One house was left, now known as the Old Post Office, and in 1903 it was saved for the nation by the new National Trust, a new part of The Establishment. The Old Post Office was almost the first National Trust property and its preservation was caused by an increasing anxiety that the forces of modernisation were destroying the deep tilth of historic Britain, considered so important to the national identity as a talisman of culture and stability. Before the preservation of the Old Post Office, the idea of Tintagel and King Arthur, with its linking of Ancient Britain and the Christian God, was considered an important part of the national identity in a way that the old village wasn't.

The preservation of the Old Post Office marked a point where national myths such as that of King Arthur came into conflict with a newer and more sophisticated set of ideas about national identity. These coalesced around the preservation of ancient structures as a way of holding onto a real, as opposed to mythic, national identity. Because objects that remain from the past are the tangible traces of that past, they are in a very literal way a part of the national identity, unlike the mythic Tintagel or King Arthur. The rise of this idea might have been expected to erode the authenticity of Tintagel in the

These guides were the precursors of the Shell Guides. Because they were based on pedestrian travel, they were packed with information on what could be achieved from various base points linked to the railway network. The essential problem facing their publishers was the combination of compactness with density of information, and this may be what led to similarities of format that amount almost to a convention: small size, snappy title and generic red cover, to make the range and type of the guide easily identifiable; plus an exhaustive description of its scope on the title page. Early Shell Guides emulated this latter feature in their ironic title pages; but by the later fifties they were simply described as "Shell Guides".

Arthurian myth. Yet what actually happened at Tintagel was not the substitution of this newer concept of national identity for an older mythic one but a simple and unquestioned creation of a compound concept in which real things and myths affirmed one another – which, after all, was the point of much archaeology in the nineteenth century. With the preservation of ancient monuments came the elision of the mythic, the ancient object, the authentic and the national identity. Tintagel as a site of national identity was actually enhanced by the preservation of ancient buildings; their authenticity shone on the myth of Arthur and vice versa, and this in turn made Tintagel a place of popular pilgrimage in an age of nationalism.

It was into this new world of middle-class aspiration and burgeoning anxiety about loss of the authentic that a young John Betjeman arrived with his father at about the time of the First World War. Betjeman's father had built an Arts and Crafts holiday house at Trebetherick, St Minver near Padstow and the family would travel by train from Paddington to Wadebridge and then to the house by horse and trap. By then Cornwall was a place known for its fishing villages through the work of the Newlyn artists and also as a place for bohemian artistic goings on. It was seen as a primitive, ancient place of myths and legends, of Arthur and Tristan but also witches and mysterious animals of the kind that inspired Conan Doyle's *The Hound of the Baskervilles*. It was a place of romantic and wicked locals, wreckers of ships and of course ghosts. To the city dweller it was also a country of warmth, early tomatoes, potatoes, daffodils and primroses. The Cornwall of Betjeman's youth was a place he could explore and as he did so, he developed his taste for old churches and chapels and also for the nineteenth-century Cornwall of tin mines, china clay, prosperous high streets and failed port schemes. All this is clear in his Shell Guide, *Cornwall*, of 1964.

It was a few years later that my mother and father transferred their Liverpudlian allegiances from North Wales and Portmeirion to a cottage in Boscastle rented from the National Trust. Later we moved on to Cadgwith on the Lizard and Cotehele on the Tamar. It was a long way to Cornwall and a fraught journey in the little cars and busy roads of the day, full of men like my father reliving the tensions of Betjeman's poem on the joys of the A30:

A man on his own in a car
Is revenging himself on his wife;
He opens the throttle and bubbles with dottle
and puffs at his pitiful life.

"She's losing her looks very fast,
She loses her temper all day;
That lorry won't let me get past,
This Mini is blocking my way.

"Why can't you step on it and shift her!
I can't go on crawling like this!
At breakfast she said that she wished I was dead –
Thank heavens we don't have to kiss.

"I'd like a nice blonde on my knee
And one who won't argue or nag.
Who dares to come hooting at *me*?
I only give way to a Jag.

"You're barmy or plastered, I'll pass you, you bastard –
I *will* overtake you. I *will*!"
As he clenches his pipe, his moment is ripe
And the corner's accepting its kill.

('Meditation on the A30', 1960)

In the late sixties and early seventies, Cornwall was very, very busy with holidaymakers – so busy in fact that new one-way systems and pedestrianisation schemes had to be developed for its old fishing villages crammed with shell shops, witch museums, tea rooms, bakeries and chippies. At that time there were more than a quarter of a million visitors to tiny village towns like Polperro and most of these came over the two-month duration of the spring and summer school holidays. Nowadays visitor numbers are more like 25,000 per year.

Mum and dad were typical middle-class tourists of the sixties and seventies, he a civil servant and she a housewife. They had done well at school and gone to university, moved south and set up home in south London. We lived in a typical modern town house surrounded by other young families. When we were young we had a Mini and then later a larger Austin 1100 estate designed, like the Mini, according to modern principles. We listened to pop music on the radio, ate off melamine. We had Scandinavian-type furniture and Beatles records. We children went to a modern mixed primary school. At Easter and for two weeks in the summer we would head west to a cottage in a small village or on its own. We sometimes stayed overnight at Shaftesbury on route and always drove past Stonehenge. Our holidays were a mixture of suitably un-touristy, though busy, beaches, and sightseeing sights that included ancient monuments, Arthurian places, stately homes and gardens, and craft shops – with a rare occurrence of fish and chips. We were taught to appreciate the real and to disdain the classic British seaside town as common. It was an age before irony.

What we children wanted were the shell shops, the ice creams, the beach shop for shrimping nets and, later, belly boards and endless hours on the beach. My parents on the other hand wanted craft shops, sub-tropical gardens, cream teas and, for my father, Dozmary Pool or a clapper bridge on Dartmoor, with an obligatory look at the prison. The beach for them mainly involved sitting on a blanket

'On the River Fowey', Edwin Smith, from Cornwall, *1964, p.32*

'King Harry Passage, River Fal', Judges' photographs, from Cornwall, *1964, p.54*

Cornwall was also full of pictures of mysterious and adventurous places, which was for me the essence of an ideal holiday. This may explain why I have always thought Edwin Smith's image of the River Fowey which is pregnant with possibilities of adventure was in fact the more romantic sounding Frenchman's Creek. The King Harry Ferry was full of promise to be exactly like crossing the Orinoco in a canoe.

Though I did not know it at the time the strangeness of these images represented the editors' own taste for the surreal as much as mine for the funny, odd and strange. The appeal of Betjeman and Piper's interest in the surreal was that it always retained a very accessible childlike quality often lacking in Surrealist art.

Roof figures St Ives Church, Studio St Ives Ltd., from Cornwall, *1964, p.52*

Crucifixion on Celtic type cross head, St Buryan, John Piper, from Cornwall, *1964, p.24*

Altarnun Font, John Piper, from Cornwall, *1964, p.11*

eating a picnic while we disappeared into the melee of kids on the sand and in the surf. Somewhere like Tintagel was problematic for my parents since the castle was impressive, as were its vertiginous cliffs and tiny beaches promising a glimpse of seals, but the shops in the village with their arrays of child-friendly knick-knacks, sweets and snacks represented a gauntlet that had to be run at every new tourist destination we visited.

But how did my father know about Dozmary Pool, the Cornish Alps or Wesley preaching at Altarnun, or indeed the attempts to develop Padstow as a mail port? For that matter, how did we find Polzeath beach or the King Harry Ferry? They were in the Shell Guide that I think we initially borrowed from the Kidbrook Library and later Mum bought for Dad. Betjeman's *Cornwall* operated at a number of levels that were a result of the way the writing, the pictures and the layout were designed to work together. Picking up and flicking through the Shell *Cornwall*, it was full of images that were mood essays making everything seem interesting, beautiful, dramatic or mysterious. There were enticing things for adults and children alike. Beyond beaches there was a slightly sinister Frenchman's Creek, and some funny, surreal religious figures photographed against a sea view at St Ives; but equally there were close ups of seal pups on a beach. Even to a child these were intriguing views. The guide's captions would tell you where in the gazetteer the written entry on the place could be found and letters and numbers indexed the location on a Bartholomew's map in the rear of the book. The image of the King Harry Ferry or the Helston Furry Dance would lead one to a thorough description of the thing, delivered with a light touch and an eye for anecdote and contextual observation. The entry for Polzeath which was illustrated and discussed in the introduction of the book was actually found under an entry for St Minver. This directed you not to the beach but to other interesting local features, a technique of mild misdirection that was designed to lead you deeper into the county.

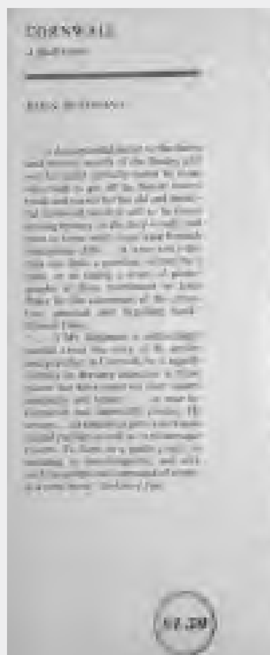
Betjeman's 1964[1] *Cornwall* clearly displays another of the guides' techniques, the very personal point of view of its entries. In the Cornwall guide it is clear that Betjeman is often recalling childhood experiences, young adult impressions and then the rather elegiac feelings of a man in middle age so that the book is by turns enthusiastic, impressionistic, train-spotterish and nostalgic for a past lost to the pressures of tourism. Nothing is more redolent of Betjeman's feelings than the early images of the book, the Atlantic waves of the cover, Edwin Smith's close up of lustrous wet pebbles, a child's view, and the juxtaposition of Stanhope Forbes' *The Lighthouse, Newlyn* (1893), painted not long before Betjeman's birth, and Osbert Lancaster's cartoon 'Evening Shadows, Polzeath' – opposite which Betjeman notes "showing all-electric Cornwall today". In the introduction, a photo of Polzeath, 1916, at which time Betjeman was eight, is contrasted to Polzeath in 1964, not long before I and my sisters went to the same beach shop. Strangely, it looks pretty much today as it did in 1964.

Polzeath in North Cornwall became a popular beach from the late nineteenth century onwards, after the railway reached first Wadebridge and then Padstow. It is still popular today, though busier than when Betjeman lamented its crowds in the early sixties. It is often represented as 'empty' – the ideal of the Cornwall holidaymaker – as seen here in a postcard card from 1980.

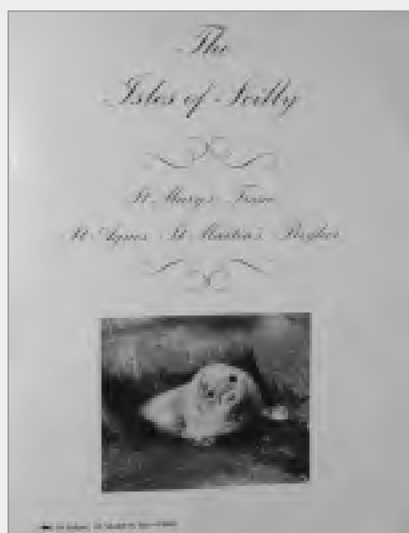
Repro of Postcard of Polzeath, Cornwall (1980), Colourmaster Int'l PAD 203

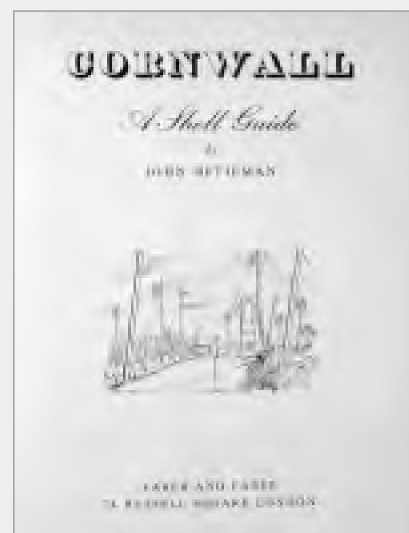
Two images of Polzeath, in 1916 and c.1960, from Cornwall*, 1964, p.8*

Cover of Cornwall, *1964*



Edwin Smith, endpapers of Cornwall





Far left: ***Seal, by James Gibson,*** **Cornwall*****, 1964, p.131***

Middle left: ***Frontispiece,*** **The Lighthouse, Newlyn** ***(1893) by Stanhope Forbes, © Manchester City Galleries***

Left: **Cornwall** ***title page with Osbert Lancaster cartoon***

Cornwall was the first Shell Guide I saw as a child. It drew me in because, in common with all the later Shell Guides, the initial images summed up the possibilities of the county and, interspersed with the more serious pictures, were always a few that were simply pleasurable – and they said beaches, boats and seals. Though Osbert Lancaster's cartoon had an adult meaning, I liked all the wires that the adults hated.

Betjeman's second *Cornwall*'s mix of history and description, memoir and review creates in the reader the sense that one is visiting a place that one already knows about, even down to a sense of the changes that have occurred – almost like a false memory. One effect of this is that after what is in reality a brief time (say a few weeks) of looking through the guide and visiting places described in it, one is left with a feeling that one knows Cornwall in a way that more narrowly descriptive guides like Pevsner's cannot create. This intimacy is something that the Shell Guides achieved in a format that allowed the reader to be shallow, to dip into the book rather than have to immerse themselves in a long narrative, of the form that highly personal guides usually adopt.

There was a good reason why Betjeman's *Cornwall* was so long in its vision and so personal. Not only did he re-present in his middle years his experiences as an Edwardian child, he also incorporated elements of his initial guide to Cornwall, written in the arch certainty of his late twenties as the first Shell Guide of the series, in 1933–4. The effect of this is that the 1964 *Cornwall* has elements in its writing of childish excitement, youthful irony and mature ambivalence, all lying just beneath the surface of the apparently self-denying pragmatics of a guidebook. Highly constructed yet compressed arguments are read onto the mute objects and locations that form the pretext of the guides' entries. This subversive combination of high subjectivity in the bland clothes of a guide is what characterises all of the best Shell County Guides, and it is this that made them such a powerful medium for the construction of a coherent ideology of national identity by reading highly constructed yet compressed arguments onto the mute objects and contexts that were the objects of entries in the guides.

Notes

1 The rewrite of the guide was originally proposed in 1955; Betjeman did not want to do it and so the gazetteer was offered to G. Grigson, who turned it down. It was then offered to J.H. Willmott of the *Cornish Guardian* and Betjeman urged him to revise it freely. Some time later in 1959 the text came in and Betjeman disliked it for its antiquarianism. A new draft from Willmott came in later in 1959; John Piper said in a letter to D. Bland at Faber that it was "dull, wordy and commonplace". Betjeman rewrote it in the end and didn't like the original design. It was finally published in 1964. John Piper later said, "It is by far the best of the lot". See Peterson, 2006.

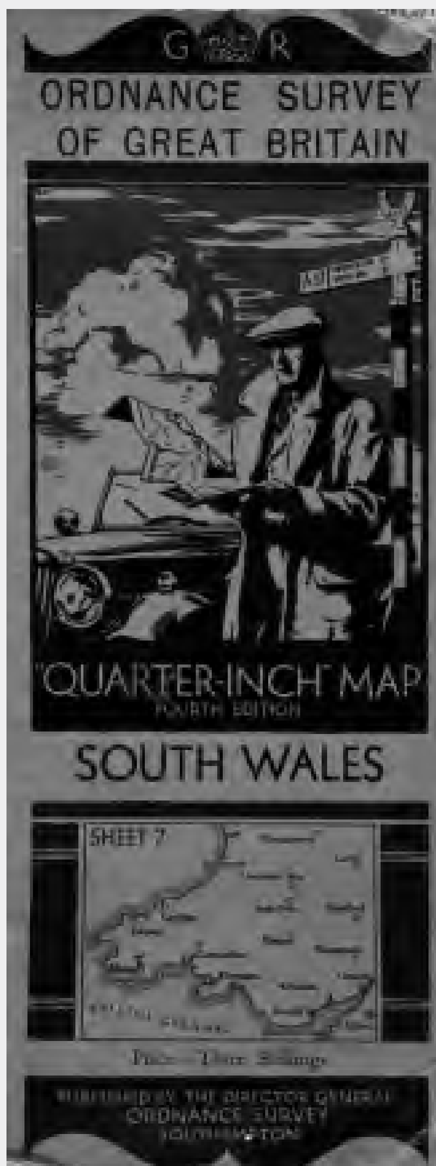
CHAPTER 2

CORNWALL

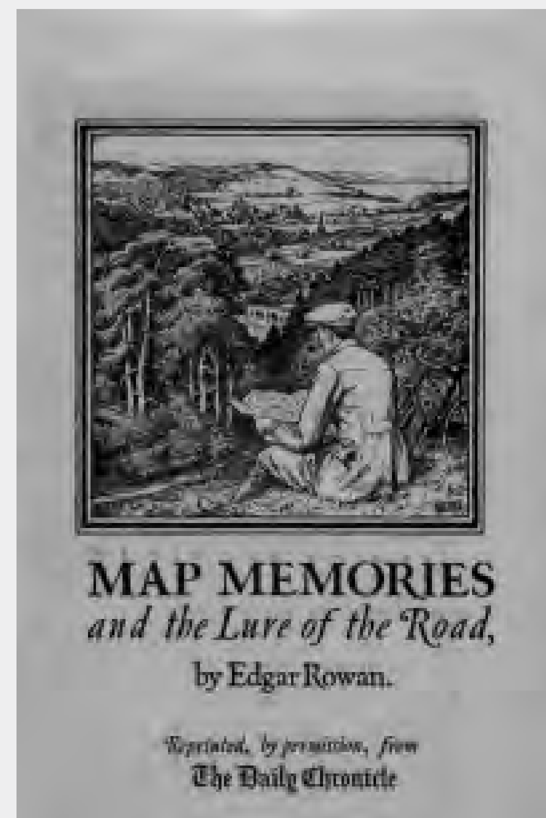
IT IS HARD NOW TO IMAGINE that in the early decades of the twentieth century roads were something that had been neglected for over fifty years. The last time there had been a period of road modernisation was in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries – notably Thomas Telford's London to Holyhead road, constructed to speed communications with Ireland, which survives as the A5 and the development of the macadam road by John Loudon McAdam, an effective and economical road surface and the precursor of the modern Tarmac road. After this, the development of the railways brought a neglect of roads, especially trunk roads, because rail was faster than any other form of transport. Earlier guidebooks to roads that listed the major routes to and fro across the realm gave way to Bradshaw's, while guides like Murray's used the railway as opposed to roads to create tourist itineraries across Britain. But with the invention of the motorcar the old cross-country road network became useful for more than local traffic once again. Early motor tourists were rich men with a motoring hobby. Gordon Russell describes in his autobiography *Designer's Trade* how his father's hotel, the Lygon Arms at Broadway, played host to Edward the Seventh and Henry Ford. Their cars were large, expensive and unreliable, a sport rather than a utility. The idea of the open road was also popular with the Chelsea bohemians of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries with as different characters as Augustus John and Alfred Munnings, Elizabeth von Arnim and (Dame) Laura Knight, not to mention D.H. Lawrence, all finding themselves part of a cult of the gypsy life. Into this growing culture of the road appeared Kenneth Grahame's Mr Toad[1] who, it is worth remembering, progressed from a faddish interest in bohemian caravanning to an obsession with motors and the open road. The manic glee of Toad's cry of "Poop poop!" as a fast car receded into the distance stood for the visceral love the car inspired in many, from the 1910s to the fifties.

In fact, the British love affair with cars developed quite quickly. In 1899, Lord Montagu's motorcar was banned from entering the precincts of Parliament but by 1933 there were two-million licensed motor vehicles on British roads, as well as 6,600 deaths in 1937 and 226,402 injuries.[2] Tarmacking of roads began in 1904, classification followed in 1909 and, in 1913, the numbering rather than naming of roads began, using the categories A, B and unclassified. In 1919, the Ministry of Transport was created. Petrol and car tax date back to 1909. Between 1928 and 1938 the number of vehicles on the road went from 1.5 million to 3 million. Between 1928 and 1935 traffic on the A13 went up 76 per cent and in the 1920s the construction of fast arterial roads (designed to have few gradients or curves) began, the A27 being opened in 1925.

Coincident to the numbering of roads was the belated recognition of cycle and motor tourists by the old rail-determined guidebooks, which began to include sections for first cyclists and then motorists. More important was the increasingly active



Ordnance Survey, Quarter Inch Map of South Wales, fourth edition, 1934, illustration by Ellis Martin



"Map memories and the Lure of the Road", publicity for O.S. Maps, Edgar Rowan, image Ellis Martin, after 1919

Charles Close revolutionised the maps of the Ordnance Survey after the First World War by using a new survey and new printing methods to produce a very accurate, informative and highly coloured map. This came at a time of increased map usage by the general public, largely due to an increased familiarity with map reading as a result of war service. As this publicity sheet for the 'One Inch' map notes: "In the Army we busied ourselves with 'map reading'. It was a useful thing to know, by examining a map of unknown country, whether you could see the point A from the point B, or whether your stealthy progress along a certain road would be overlooked by men with machine-guns at the edge of the wood that lay a thousand yards to the east." During the war, the O.S. produced over 30-million maps. Close also used advertising in the form of illustrations by Ellis Martin to market the maps to a new generation of leisure traveller, hikers, cyclists and early motor tourists that emerged after 1918.

marketing by the Ordnance Survey under Colonel Sir Charles Close. His newly surveyed, accurate and beautifully coloured one-inch-to-the-mile tourist maps had to compete with the increasingly popular half-inch coloured tourist maps created by another entrepreneurial cartographer, J.G. Bartholomew. In fact, in the twenties the Ordnance Survey started featuring wistful images by the artist Ellis Martin.[3] Ruggedly attired gentlemen of the Richard Hannay kind stood next to their cars and gazed out across rural scenes, whilst an equally manly copy suggested that the trusty maps which got you through "no man's land" would also get you across the Cotswolds.

By the late twenties, the state of both the roads and the tools of navigation required to make sense of them had been transformed – as were the vehicles and drivers. Although motoring remained an expensive hobby, cars were available in smaller and cheaper types. Moreover, large numbers of people had become familiar with motor vehicles and their operation in the First World War, and this created both a market of would-be drivers and agricultural engineers who could fix cars. Like Mr Toad, many of the new motorists were young pleasure seekers. The age of the caravan was gone and in its place was a cloud of dust.

Bearing all this in mind, it's not surprising that the idea of a new kind of guidebook for motorists would occur to someone. That it occurred to John Betjeman is not surprising either: in his time at Oxford, Betjeman took to touring the Oxfordshire countryside by car and actively considered writing guidebooks with his friend Frederick Etchells; moreover, he sent picky correspondence to the publishers Ward, Lock & Co suggesting improvements to their Red Guides.[4] However, in the late twenties, he was not interested in motor guides so much as writing about neglected eighteenth- and nineteenth-century buildings. What was it that made Betjeman come up with the idea of a new guidebook to the counties specifically for motorists?

By 1933, John Betjeman was a not very successful aspirant ex-Marlborough and Magdalen man with a taste for the rich and well connected. Since October 1930, he been working as an assistant editor at the *Architectural Review*,[5] a gentlemanly journal that was becoming much more provocative under the direction of Hubert de Cronin Hastings.[6] Surprisingly by 1933, given his later career, after only a few years at the *Architectural Review* Betjeman was complaining despairingly of the number of times he had to write the word 'architecture'.[7] Yet the genesis of the guides wasn't simply a desire to escape the *Architectural Review*; and it certainly wasn't, as some have said, the need to supplement his salary at the *A.R.* in order to marry Penelope Chetwode[8] – though he did want to do this and did need more money.[9] Betjeman's interest in the guidebook and its subject matter went much deeper. He had from his youth been a self-confessed "Church Crawler" – a visitor of ancient churches much like a train buff (which later he also became). He was also an amateur architectural historian who had become enthusiastic about the Regency and Victoriana with other fellow recherché aesthetes at Oxford and had, inter alia, developed a conservationist interest in ordinary Georgian and Victorian architecture at a time when these were generally held in no regard at all. Almost as a result of his long-term interest in the history of architecture he had also become a keen critic of guidebooks, as his letter of 1928 to the publishers Ward, Lock & Co about the writing of their guide to Leamington Spa shows.[10] Thus it is clear that Betjeman's interest in the subject matter and style of guidebooks was well-established by the time he joined the *Architectural Review*.[11] Here he met like-minded souls, but more importantly, he learned how to produce a magazine and picked up a knowledge of contemporary design and photography.

At Oxford Betjeman had got his first car, a Morris Cowley, and according to his daughter became an enthusiastic motorist[12] who toured around the Oxford and Home Counties countryside.

> Oxford May mornings! When the prunus bloomed
> We'd drive to Sunday lunch at Sezincote:
> First steps in learning how to be a guest,
> First wood-smoke-scented luxury of life
> In the large ambience of a country House.[13]

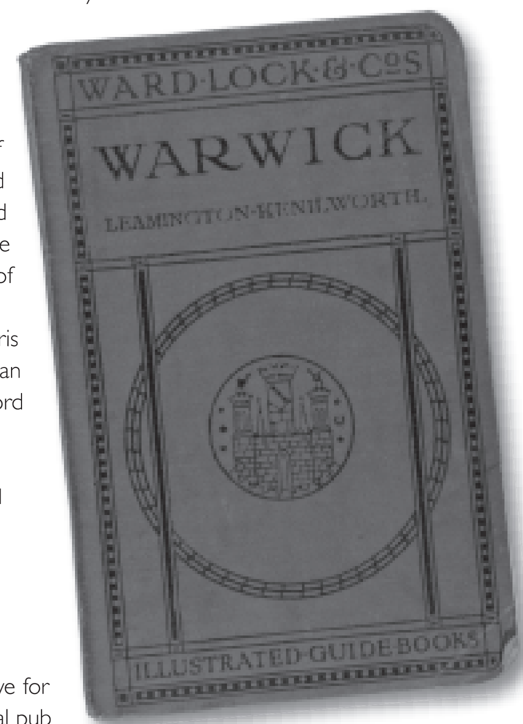
How else but by car would he have developed a love for Essex, where he spent his honeymoon in a small rural pub at Braxted?

> Like streams the little by-roads run
> Through oats and barley round a hill
> To where blue willows catch the sun
> By some white weather-boarded mill.
>
> …
>
> The deepest Essex few explore
> Where steepest thatch is sunk in flowers
> And out of elm and sycamore
> Rise flinty fifteenth-century towers.[14]

Betjeman was a man who was good at spotting new trends despite his own antiquarian leanings. He liked new stuff like motors, modern photography and design, and later the new media of radio and television. He was also good at storing up good ideas for a rainy day.

Moreover, Betjeman was living through a time when advertising

While a student at Oxford Betjeman wrote to the publishers of this guidebook to suggest improvements to their content and writing style, particularly the use of ill-considered adjectives in the description of Leamington.



A Pictorial and Descriptive Guide to Warwick, Royal Leamington Spa, Stratford Upon Avon, Coventry & The George Eliot Country, *14th edn, 'Red Guide', London: Ward, Lock and Co. Ltd, 1926*

was developing rapidly in new ways. By the early thirties, the motoring market was expanding fast and the Shell Oil Company and its competitors used billboard adverts to promote their products. Shell campaigns of the twenties operated in two ways. The first was simply to say that Shell petrol and oil were of high quality, sometimes using some Shell-fuelled sporting victory on land, sea or in the air as endorsement. Its other campaign was to suggest visiting some place in the country, usually a well-known spot or resort, using Shell products to get you there. But in 1929, a Shell employee, Jack Beddington, persuaded the company to let him revamp its advertising in order to reach out to the new motorists who were often young and wanted some kind of adventure. Beddington's idea was to use young artists to create modern art posters advertising the idea of using Shell petrol to drive to some off-the-beaten-track rural location that wasn't on the rail network. This campaign instantly changed Shell from a product into a lifestyle. Though the adverts Beddington created are well known, he is not. Beddington was a personable, dynamic, sociable and generous man who, after ten years working for Shell in Shanghai, was invalided back to Britain. In the following year, 1929, he became Publicity Manager and by 1932 he was Publicity Director and Assistant General Manager of Shell-Mex and BP Ltd. Later he became Director of the Films Division of the Ministry of Information. What was remarkable about Beddington was that, though he was powerful and successful, he was also genuinely enthusiastic about using young artists to draw in young people. Astutely, he had the foresight to put it about that he would pay young artists £50 for a poster design that could be used by Shell. Beddington instantly became a patron of the most promising young artists and he understood that these large adverts, appearing on the side of Shell delivery lorries and in other prominent places, were a fast-moving, fast-changing art gallery. They were an immediate hit and were so popular that the V&A gave them an exhibition, subsequently ordering multiple copies of the adverts that were framed and available for loan to schools on request.

Betjeman would have known about Beddington through his contacts at the *Architectural Review*. Beddington knew Lord Berners and Robert Byron and it was probably through them that Betjeman met him, just as he had met his future wife, Penelope Chetwode. He contacted Beddington and suggested that Shell might sponsor a series of guides to Britain that would be specifically aimed at the motoring 'bright young things', highly illustrated, shallow but informative and able to fit into a glove compartment. Beddington was supportive of the idea, which would be published by the Architectural Press that also published the *Architectural Review*. Beddington only wanted one dummy prepared and Betjeman unsurprisingly offered up a guide to Cornwall: his fee was £20. Later, after its preparation, Betjeman canvassed Beddington to help him turn the guides into a full-time job at Shell and thus get him away

'These Men Use Shell: Farmers', John Armstrong, 1939

Also a portrait of Jack Beddington, who was by all accounts very suave in real life.

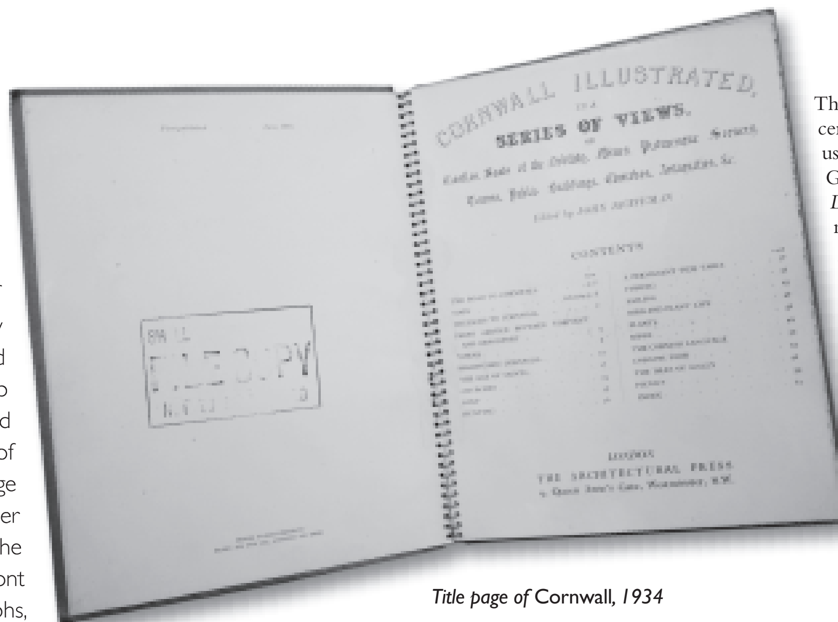
from the *Architectural Review*. Beddington did not think this a good idea initially, but Betjeman did later alter his working arrangements to spend three days per week on the guides, before the war stopped their production.

The dummy Betjeman produced was innovative, stepping outside the conventions of the guidebook as they had hitherto existed. This was in itself remarkable because at this time there was little evidence that Betjeman was gifted as a writer, let alone as a book designer and editor. Traditional guidebooks had been designed to be small and compendious which meant they were usually sized to fit a pocket, a size much smaller than a paperback, and printed in small serif type, for legibility, on bible paper, which was thin. They often ran to between 300 and 600 pages and so were bound in strong bible-type semi-hard covers. Most were red in colour or some other strong colour like blue (the Blue Guides) or green (Blackie's Guides). The strong cover colour made them easy to locate on trips. The content of guides varied greatly in quality and often suffered from being based on local legend or on ill-prepared local histories.

Betjeman loved these guides and used certain of their features ironically in his *Cornwall*, most obviously his pastiche of the very elaborate title pages of old Victorian guides with their steel engravings, elaborately chaotic type designs and inordinately long titles. In fact, this was not a pastiche at all but an exact copy of the top half of the title page of a guide to Cornwall published by Fisher

and son of London in 1831, about the time of the first Murray guide.[15] On the other hand, what Betjeman didn't like about existing guides was their stuffiness, their neglect of the historically everyday and unworthy, particularly Georgian and Victorian architecture – and their lack of pictures.

Betjeman's *Cornwall* was 63-pages long, printed on glossy paper that would take images well and over twice the size of a conventional guidebook. It was spiral bound using a new cheap system (Spirax) that enabled the book to be opened onto itself without breaking. Half of the book was taken up with black-and-white photographs and reproductions of old prints. Elsewhere the map of the region had photographs of local types photo-montaged onto it and there were whole-page reproductions of images and photographs on coloured paper (as was the style at the *Architectural Review* but which had the effect of conveying a vaguely late-Victorian décor feel). The front and rear covers were full-bleed black-and-white photographs, the front showing an old Cornish 'type', printed on shiny card and featuring reversed-out, sans-serif titles in a fashionable Gill or Gill-type font. It was called *Cornwall – Shell Guide*. In fact, the cover showed Betjeman's great talent for absorbing fashion in its use of Maurice Beck, who was an experienced and modish photographer for the *Architectural Review* but had also worked on Vogue and designed posters for London Transport.[16]


CORNWALL ILLUSTRATED,
IN A
SERIES OF VIEWS.
CONTENTS
LONDON
THE ARCHITECTURAL PRESS

Title page of Cornwall, *1934*

The faux nineteenth-century title page was also used in the early Shell Guides like *Wiltshire*, *Derbyshire* and *Kent* and modified for other guides like *Devon*. This device represents the fondness for Victorian ephemera that Betjeman had developed at Oxford.

Below left: The cover of *Cornwall* combined very modern style, sans-serif lettering, a full-bleed photo and spiral binding with a portrait of the Cornish 'type' that reveals a very metropolitan humour. Betjeman abandoned this them-and-us approach in his next guide for *Devon*.

Below right: Like the cover, this montage of map with local types reflected Betjeman's concern in the initial guides to be modern, witty and self-consciously shallow.

Front cover of Cornwall, *1934*

'The Road to Cornwall', Cornwall, *1934*

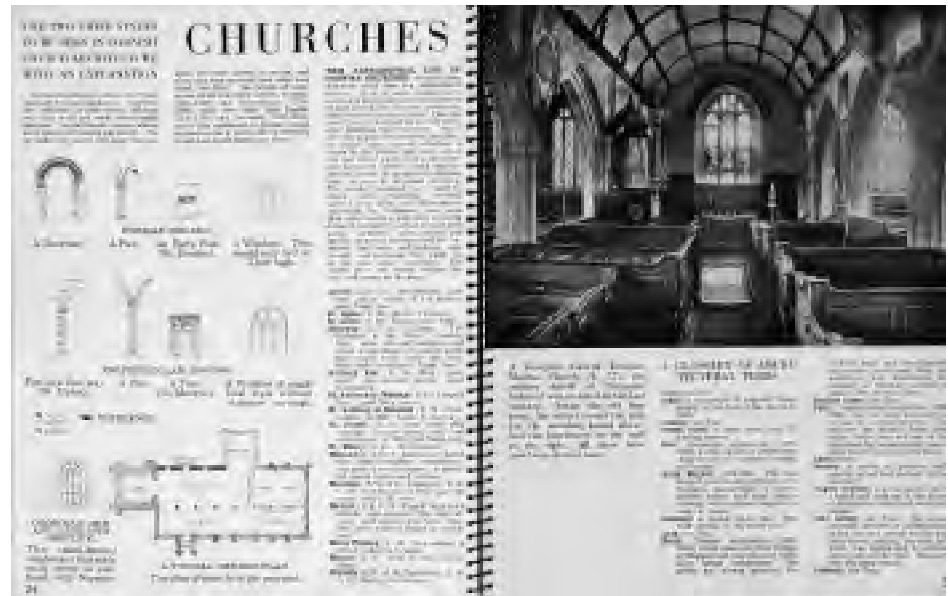
Cornwall was small and flexible enough to be rolled up like a half-size magazine. It was also relatively pricey at 2/6d and obviously wouldn't last. It was reassuringly expensive and fashionable. It sold well, going into a second edition by 1936. Being the first of the series and therefore a kind of manifesto, the inside cover was devoted to what kind of guide it would be – or rather, wouldn't be.

> There are two sorts of guide book, the antiquarian and the popular, and with a few notable exceptions most English guide books fall heavily into one or other of these classes. …This book about Cornwall does not try and compete with either type. It is more of an anthology. The pioneer service it performs is that it draws attention within its confined limits to the many buildings of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries that have architectural merit.[17]

He criticises the earlier antiquarian guides for their obsession with the ancient, and popular guides for their lack of concern with culture. He makes only two observations about his *Cornwall*: the first that it is unique in its interest in the architecture of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, which he knew was untrue in view of his own comments about Ward, Lock & Co's Leamington guide; and that it was an anthology, that is to say not unlike the popular guides he describes in the previous paragraph. Another thing he criticises in old guides is their devotion to church-crawling but, paradoxically, much of the guide is devoted to accounts of Cornish saints, Cornish crosses and detailed accounts of out-of-the-way churches.

In retrospect, *Cornwall* is not very good as a guide. Not so much an anthology as a serendipitous collection of topics from golf to saints, to fishing and sailing, and a lurid account of the Scilly Islands Ferry: "there are grisly tales of men who sailed seven times round the Horn, yet lost their appetite for the rolling deep after the apparently minor business of a trip to St Mary's."[18] *Cornwall* has very little space to describe places in Cornwall. In fact, where in the later guides the text is dominated by a gazetteer of places, in this guide there is no gazetteer, only a chapter listing towns and another listing churches. 'Towns' is seven-pages long and 'Churches' nine. The places in the 'Towns' section consist mainly of villages and the entries are bizarre in their relative lengths and what they describe. The entry for Boscastle is three times the length of that for Penzance, whose description is laughable for its lack of information:

> **Penzance.** Situation – Penzance is in a magnificent situation commanding an extensive view of Mount's Bay. There is excellent bathing and boating. While the country around is full of cliff scenery and prehistoric remains. Buildings – The finest building in Penzance is the market-house built in 1836 by William Harris of Bristol. Some of the lesser streets have good Georgian buildings, but the town has not the beauty of Falmouth, to which it bears a certain resemblance.


CHURCHES

Section on church architecture, Cornwall*, 1934*

Against his own declared aim, much of the first Shell Guide had strong echoes of the church-crawler 'antiquarian' guides Betjeman wished to challenge.

This could have been written by a character in an Evelyn Waugh novel. However, the entry for Wadebridge (which he liked) has some of the poetic compression that became the hallmark of later guides:

> **Wadebridge.** Situation – Wadebridge is on the River Camel. and [sic] as Arthur H. Norway has said in *Highways and Byways of Cornwall*, "when the tide is out it is almost as if the town had lost its soul". Up the Camel Valley there are pleasant journeys to Grogley Halt on the Southern Railway – a good place for blackberries – while the downs toward St Column, which are above the town, are full of prehistoric remains. Buildings – The chief beauty of Wadebridge is its mediaeval bridge of seventeen arches across the Camel. Along the river at Egloshayle – that is to say, the Northern bank – there are some delightful Georgian houses reminiscent of the architecture of the Isles of Scilly.

Though even this has a slight air of pastiche. Pastiche and funniness are in fact the guide's most obvious failing. In a smart urban way it mocks its subject, poking fun at everyone and everything from "artistic" orange-coloured curtains of second homers in Polperro to the "lumpen" appearance of the locals, notably in the caption to the image of a very Victorian lady: "Methodism is a great bulwark of Cornwall. This is a blind Primitive Methodist Woman preacher of a type that is fast dying out". The guide is very clearly aimed at the metropolitan visitor to Cornwall, with whom Betjeman seems at this time to have identified himself.

The strength of the guide lies in its serendipitous view and fascination with the local rather than well-established 'sights'. There is, for instance, a full-page image of a back alley in Polperro that is purely about the picturesqueness of the juxtaposition of stone walls. The wide range of subjects covered in the guide is experimental and many were gradually dropped from the guides; but in *Cornwall*, Betjeman was trying to appeal to what he supposed were the interests of his upper-middle-class audience. There are sections on hunting, fishing and sailing as well as prehistoric Cornwall, bird and plant life, and food. Some work: the section on fishing by Betjeman's father is something one could use today, whereas the hunting section is a gesture. But there were other elements to *Cornwall* that were very innovative and became a feature of the guides for many years. What remained throughout the series from 1934 right through to the late sixties was the use of abstracted images for the endpapers, in this case a close up of an open mussel shell on rippling sand. A feature that gradually slipped away were the references to Victorian imagery and book conventions, here best illustrated by the contents page with its grandiloquence and its many typefaces. Other regular

Sinking Ship, Cornwall, *1934*

Above: This double-spread image sits by his father's entries on fishing in Cornwall and represents the distinctly undergraduate humour of the early guides.

Left: A real innovation in the first Shell Guide was its use of the 'townscape' detail of an everyday back-street as a way of pushing Betjeman's agenda for the appreciation of the ordinary loveliness of English towns.

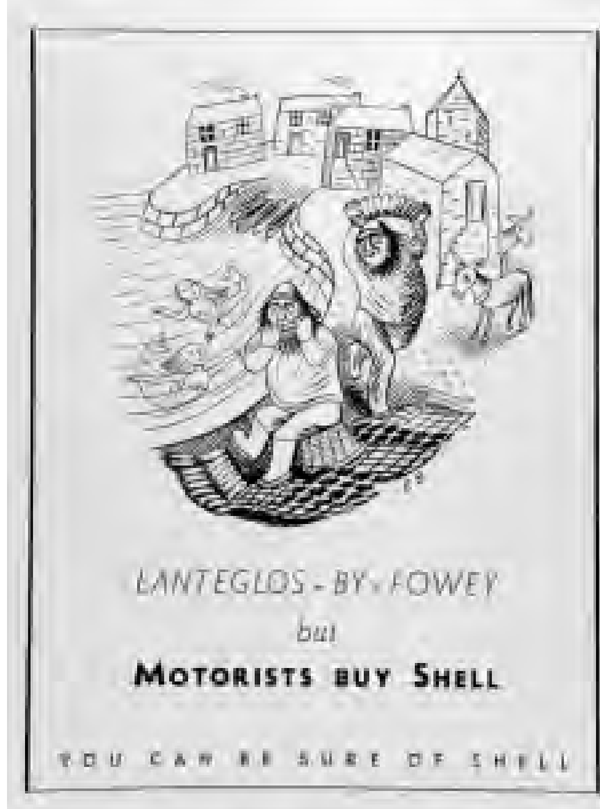
Below: The Shell Guides always used every inch of the available paper as a way of saying something. In particular, the endpapers of the early guides used designs in which an everyday item that typified some aspect of the county in question was repeated to form an almost abstract pattern. The 1964 *Cornwall* featured endpapers of pebbles on a beach.

Polperro back alley, Cornwall, *1934*

Endpapers of mussels, Cornwall, *1934*

features introduced were punning cartoons about Shell, here by Edward Bawden – "Lanteglos-by-Fowey but Motorists buy Shell" – and discursive footnotes in the text that appeared right until the last page of the last guide, *Nottinghamshire*, in 1984 which concludes with "a note on Nottinghamshire pronunciation".[19]

The guide must have been a success because Beddington offered Shell's support for more guides, and during the 1930s a total of 13 were produced under three publishers. *Cornwall*'s magazine styling, its visual modernity and its equally modish irreverence for its subject did their job of making a splash. One suspects that Betjeman understood that making a splash was more important than writing for posterity, for having secured the editorship and sponsorship of a series under the patronage of Shell and Beddington, Betjeman set about making better more serious guides almost straightaway.



Lanteglos-by-Fowey, Edward Bawden, Cornwall, *1934*

Combining Bawden's graphic style and a humorous punning by-line, these cartoons were a feature of the Shell Guides until 1939 and then again from the publication of *Herefordshire* in 1955 until John Piper dropped them on becoming editor in the late sixties.

Garden with sculpture bust, title page for section on the Scilly Isles, Cornwall, *1934*

Perhaps because of the generation of their editors and the period in which the Shell Guides first appeared, from the beginning the guides displayed an eye for the surreal image, such as this De Chirico-esque photograph. These were often included only because of their surrealism and, over the years, added subtle new expectations to Britain's sense of its own countryside.

Notes

1 Toad appeared in *The Wind in the Willows* in 1908, the same year as the first Ford *Model T* rolled off the production line in Detroit.
2 Marriot, l941
3 Hauser, 2008
4 About some inaccurate details in their guide to Leamington Spa.
5 Thanks to Maurice Bowra – see Hillier, 1988, p.348
6 Managing editor, 1927–1973, of the Architectural Press, *Architectural Review* and the *Architects' Journal*
7 See Hillier, 1988, p.274, quoting Betjeman's piece called 'Architecture' in the *London Mercury*, November 1933
8 Daughter of Field Marshall Philip Chetwode, Commander in Chief of the Army in India
9 By 1933/4 Betjeman was on £400 a year at the *A.R.* but this was both for editing it *and* creating Shell Guides. (See Lycett Green, 1994, p.124, letter from J.B. to Jack Beddington, 17 August 1933)
10 Quote from letter, see Lycett Green, 1994, pp.39–40
11 Betjeman began work at the *A.R.* in October 1930, a post he obtained through the influence of a friend of Maurice Bowra, Dean of Wadham College. Betjeman was a member of his circle both at Oxford and afterwards.
12 See Lycett Green, 1994, pp.19 and 21
13 Betjeman, *Summoned by Bells*, 1960 quoted in Lycett Green, 1994, p.21
14 Betjeman, 'Essex', *A Few Late Chrysanthemums*, 1954 quoted in Scarfe, 1968, p.8
15 Mentioned in Peterson, 2006, p.15
16 Maurice Beck worked on a lot of the thirties Shell Guides. He had been a fashionable 'society' photographer and knew Beddington from Shanghai. Later, when he had fallen on harder times, it was Beddington who gave him work for Shell. Beck brought stylish modern photographs to the new Shell Guides that rescued them from Betjeman's early ironic tendencies. See Artmonsky, 2006, p.30
17 *Cornwall*, 1934, p.6
18 *Cornwall*, 1934, p.56
19 *Nottinghamshire*, 1984, p.188