

Small Pilgrim Places 14: St Corentyn, Cury and St Winwaloe, Gunwalloe

I started this pilgrimage walk, my fourteenth journey around Small Pilgrim Places, on a Cornish headland with a view across a sandy bar and a quiet creek towards Porthleven to the north, the Lizard peninsula a few miles to the south. The path took me past several fields of cabbages, ready for picking, and then down towards the sea through banks of gorse and bracken attracting bees, moths and butterflies, and grassland bleached almost white by the summer sun.

I followed the South West Coastal Path, stopping for a coffee at an old pub in Halzephron, where timbers are said to have come from the wrecks of Spanish and Portuguese galleons whose treasures were hidden by local smugglers at the inn. The coast path took me around the cliffs and past small coves, occasionally diverting inland where recent landslips continued to erode the coastline. I ate my picnic under the welcome shadow of the imposing Marconi monument, an obelisk marking the location, as the inscription reads, "from which were transmitted the first signals ever conveyed across the Atlantic by wireless telegraphy."

From there I headed inland through Mullion and on northwards across rolling hills and valleys, past high hedges of bramble and blackthorn, where blackberries and sloes were just beginning to ripen in the relentless heat. My destination was the small village of Cury, whose name derives from the patron saint of the church, St Corentyn. He was a 5th century bishop in Brittany, which has many historic and linguistic connections with Cornwall.

In the churchyard stands a tall, weathered Celtic cross facing towards the coast, and carrying a thriving coat of lichen. I entered the church just in time for tea and cake, prepared by a group of parishioners who meet there regularly for prayer in the Celtic tradition. For this we gathered in the



A scene from the Emmaus Road, St Corentyn's

Lady Chapel where the east window, appropriately enough, depicts Christ with the travellers on the Emmaus Road (parishioners here, I was told, regularly welcome pilgrims and visitors). It was a great pleasure to pray there with the priest, Fr Shane, and several villagers, including Churchwarden Priscilla, who led the prayers.



A characterful label stop on the exterior wall of St Corentyn's Church

I met up with most of the group later that evening for a pub supper – an unexpected gesture of hospitality for this pilgrim, which extended even to providing me with lodgings that night at what was once the vicarage, now a very comfortable B&B. I had the chance, too, to learn something from these local people about Cornish history and politics.

The following morning Priscilla saw me off as I headed over some parched golf links towards the coast and the Church of St Winwaloe (another Breton saint) standing right next to the sandy beach at Church Cove, Gunwalloe - so close that, standing in the porch, I could hear the waves lazily breaking on the shore. A slate sign above the door in the porch, welcomes the visitor to “The Church of the Storms” – a reminder of its exposed location.

To one side is a detached bell tower, possibly the oldest feature of the current building, dating back to the 15th century. Inside, the north and south doors carry painted panels showing some of the twelve Apostles. These were once part of a full set of Apostles on a rood screen that stretched across the chancel and the north and south chapels. It's thought that money from a local 16th century shipwreck could have funded the original panels.

The church now sits in a popular cove near a well-used footpath, with visitors frequently popping in – many, no doubt, inspired by the TV series Poldark. Church Cove was the location for the night-time shipwrecking scenes, and it was at St Winwaloe's Church that Poldark married Demelza.



Path to the south porch, St Winwaloe's



St Winwaloe's Church stands next to the beach at Church Cove

Ali Green