

Dear Member



The fourtharch Old Boys Tankard Club NEWSLETTER

A Magical Adventure in the Darkest Depths of Cornwall August 2013

or

The Thirty-Nine [Strawberry] Stalks

[Apologies to the Thirty Nine Steps by John Buchan]

Featured Pub

The Sloop, St Ives [Not an official fourtharch annual]

The fourtharch outing to Cornwall and St Ives consisted of, Richard, Claire, William, Matt, Catherine, Emily, Uncle Mogi and your writer Great Uncle Paul.

Day 1 – The journey to Cornwall

I was to meet with agents Mogi, Richard, Claire, William, Matt, Catherine and Emily who had already established base camp at the John Fowler Holiday Village in the darkest depths of Cornwall. I took the train from Cardiff to St Erth changing at Bristol and then at Plymouth in case I was followed, leaving Plymouth the train would soon cross the Royal Albert Bridge, Brunel's engineering masterpiece linking Devon with Cornwall – visions of Robert Donat playing Richard Hannay hanging out of the train while crossing the Forth Bridge in the film version of the Thirty-Nine Steps came to mind. Would I also find myself hanging on for dear life as the train crossed a similarly famous old bridge – luckily I was not being followed and not being hunted by the police and the train crossed from Plymouth to Saltash without incident.

The rendezvous point was at St Erth railway station at 14.59 hundred hours and sure enough there were agents Richard and Mogi standing at the station entrance, Claire and William were waiting in the car. As we walked through the station car park Richard briefed me on a series of code words to be used during our operations "When we leave the car park don't mention the T.R.A.I.N" he instructed and we were to use similar coded language throughout the weekend including P.L.A.Y.G.R.O.U.N.D. and B.O.A.T.

Base camp as stated was in the John Fowler Holiday Village, a series of privately owned holiday cabins set in woodland all managed by the company. There was a central reception area, shop, bar and clubhouse with entertainment that had been embedded and not changed since the 1930s – the Germans would never find us here [did I just mention the Germans?]

The team had spent the week working on camouflage and had completely reversed our living quarters by putting all the bedrooms downstairs and living area and kitchen upstairs – thus confusing the enemy even if we invited them over for afternoon tea. I placed my equipment downstairs in my bedroom and was soon meeting with Matt, Catherine and Emily upstairs. Matt and Richard used our established coded language to tell us that they were off for an M.O.T and Mogi suggested that Richard leave him the keys to his car in case their mission failed – what a fine British team we have put together here. It was time for a quick debrief and just in case we were bugged we played Peppa Pig DVDs to drown out our discussions and to also force who ever might be listening around the bend.

While Catherine and Claire put Emily and William to bed for the night, Mogi decided to familiarise me with the rest of the park and we were soon sat down in the camp entertainments area with a pint each. The bar overlooked the large hall with stage and chairs set out ready for a weeks' worth of evening entertainment such as an extremely well unknown X-Factor contestant and Karaoke all for the enjoyment of the camp inmates – sorry, did I say inmates then, I meant – holidaymakers. I looked at Agent Mogi who had organised our cover at the camp with respect, however Mogi did warn that to protect our cover one of us may have to take one for the team, I was going to reluctantly suggest that this would be the ultimate sacrifice before he chipped in with “Yes, you may have to lose your trousers” [More later]

We returned to base to find that Richard and Matt had successfully carried out operation M.O.T. and that granny would be pleased, I assumed “granny” code word for Mr Big at the Cambridge end of operations [we work on a *need to know* basis]. It was Matt's turn to feed the troops to a hearty meal tonight, Claire and your writer took care of the washing up, next step was putting William to bed – task completed, however poor Catherine took a little longer getting Emily to sleep downstairs [formally upstairs] Meanwhile the rest of us discussed equality, feminism and sexism all inspired by the question – *is it still acceptable for a man to give up his seat on a bus for a lady to sit down?* As the only female in the bear pit, Claire held her own in the discussion and made some very carefully thought through points while Mogi quoted popular comedian Jimmy Carr “I'd rather see a pregnant woman standing on the bus than a fat girl sitting down crying”

With all children finally tucked up in bed Catherine returned upstairs from downstairs and asked if she could now take part in our debate that she had been listening into while getting Emily to sleep but we were now all gathered around the table to formulate operations.

We could not now use Peppa Pig DVDs to drown out our discussions as anyone listening might question why adults after a day of the same Peppa Pig stories would anyway in the world want to listen to more. Our solution was to work in mime and we planned our next move using playing cards, a Strawberry stork and used matchsticks. We all began with an equal amount of matchsticks apart from Catherine who substituted one of her matchsticks for the lucky strawberry stork – what a plucky girl I thought, we all need a little bit of luck on operations such as this. Proposals were then placed before the team by firstly taking all matchsticks away from your writer, Claire, Richard and Matt and placing them in Mogi's pile.

After almost coming to a conclusion, Catherine along with Richard, Matt and Claire then decided to retire for the evening, Catherine leaving her lucky Strawberry stork and remaining matchsticks with your writer. I then decided to make my own suggestions and took all matchsticks from Mogi's pile while still hanging on to the lucky Strawberry Stalk – I was later told that we were in fact playing Poker and that my win was all down to beginners luck, while I think it was down to Catherine's lucky Strawberry Stalk. Mogi insisted that we look at it all again in a few nights time.

Day 2 – Operation St Ives

It was the next day and first things first; Richard and Matt checked the beer brewing under the staircase in readiness for any emergency such as being holed up inside for a week – or maybe there was only enough for a day – anyway the beer was looking good. Time for breakfast and the job of feeding the troops this morning was down to the Mogmiester with sausage and bacon crumpets.

Our mission today was to get into St Ives for pasties and out again, we decided to take the C.A.R to the nearby railway station where we would then travel the rest of the route by T.R.A.I.N. The railway station is conveniently hidden away behind a small newly built housing estate so if we were followed the enemy would think we were visiting some old friends in the area and not transferring to the T.R.A.I.N.

We arrived at the station car park on time for the 10.21 and as everyone was getting themselves together I heard someone say “You are having ze change for za ticket machines” The combination of a foreign accent and the fact that the question was phrased as a statement, I suddenly realise we were parked right next to pair of *Germans!!!!*

My immediate reaction was not to panic and to stay cool in order to remain under cover but before I could stop Mogi he was already away with far too much information for the Hun.

“If you buy your train tickets first, making sure your papers are in order, you will then have change and be able to cross into Switzerland without any problems. I must say I had a similar issue parking at RAMSEY Island and HURST castle but at the end of extra time I was 4-2 up and I think you will find that the ball did cross the line”

I tried to shut agent Mogi down but he then continued to give the Germans the route to the ticket office “Just go by the car with the CHURCHILL insurance dog in the back and take the THIRD on your REICH”

So far as I am concerned Mogi might as well have given the Germans a map of England with directions to our base on the John Fowler Holiday Village, Agent Mogi was having the same problems undercover as he does with keeping a straight face after telling a joke. After mentioning the War 11 times, I think we got away with it and were at last all on the train to St Ives.

There was silence on the ten minute train ride from Lelant Saltings station as everyone enjoyed the view along the River Hayle to St Ives Bay finally arriving at the picture perfect town of St Ives itself. Is it any wonder artists and sculptures have flocked here for inspiration but most of all for the wonderful light and vibrant colours. I noticed that the cheeks on the men in our team were also looking rosy – but that could have been the thought of returning to the town later to visit the Sloop, the pub that was chosen for our very first 9/11 tour, unfortunately cancelled at the time.

We were soon making our way into St Ives along a path and down steps but always keeping a wonderfully enticing view of the town and harbour in view – St Ives is always busy in the summer months but especially today as it was Lifeboat Day 2013. As we walked around the main harbour wall with its restaurants, bars, gift shops, tea rooms and Cornish pasty kiosks we were approaching the Sloop and Claire pointed the pub out with the same excitement for your writer as she would do pointing out a toy store for young William [Do men ever grow up?]

We found a spot on the very busy beach and while everyone built sand castles I slipped away to take a look at the Tate St Ives that I found a little bit pretentious and filled with visitors who looked like they would run a mile from the artists whose works they were looking at. The gallery is only 20 years old but looks incredibly out of date already, I thought some of the best pieces of work were hanging in the cafes, pubs and art galleries around the town – art to view for free as I think it should be.

I made my way back to the beach to find everyone had disappeared – the lure of the Sloop was too much to resist and I found the whole team inside the pub with plenty of space to sit down to enjoy a pint and a bite to eat. Most people prefer to sit outside with a pint and who wouldn't with a wonderful view across the harbour and sometimes women's volleyball to enjoy – unfortunately a marquee had been set up for Lifeboat day so the women's volleyball was off – a great shame as I know that Agent Mogi very much wanted to show his support for women's sport.

I filled up with pasties for tonight's meal and then it was Catherine's choice for cream tea and scones, for some strange reason cream tea has the same effect on the girls as beer has on men and indeed Catherine and Claire proposed a similar 9/11 annual outing to visit favourite tea rooms around the country.

Meanwhile as we waited for our order, young William found a new game that I am going to call Postman Pete [there is already a Postman Pat] he had found the laminated menus and a slight gap in the two tables that had been put together for us to gather around and began posting the 4 menus through this gap, meanwhile Mogi collected the posted menus from under the table and placed them back on top of the table in William's out box.

As we left the tea room we split up into various groups to go exploring, something that the winding streets of St Ives demand you do for there was fudge to buy and interesting little shops hidden away around little corners to discover, Matt however knew exactly where he was going and that was to buy a Surfers hoody for young William with family name Meyer printed on the back.

There was a rescue helicopter now flying around in the bay all part of lifeboat day as we all eventually gathered back together again and were soon heading out of the St Ives on the T.R.A.I.N. The tide had now gone out exposing a vast river bed and a very graphic example of the power of the tides in this part of the world [should fool any German frogmen]

Operation St Ives had been a success, the pasties had been secured, transported and were now warming in the oven ready for our hungry team, meanwhile Emily danced around the room to her music and Richard and Matt got their papers in order and evening passes signed by their wives for an evening back in town at the Sloop.

Richard and Matt had discovered a good taxi business that turned up exactly on time to take us all back into St Ives, the driver was an encyclopaedia of local knowledge from the best pubs to visit in the town, the last pub to close and when the first big supermarket arrived in St Ives – not too long ago you might be surprised to learn. Richard thought our driver the most impressive ever as he dropped us off right outside the Sloop after winding through the crowds still mingling in the town watching the last of the Lifeboat day demonstrations.

We finally sat down in the Sloop St Ives as team fourtharch after the suggestion to visit the pub nearly 5 years ago – *pheww!*

After raising our glasses to this monumental achievement we now needed our newsletter group photograph that should have been a simple task but when we returned outside we found the whole world and his brother had moved with drinks in hand [normally illegal] onto the whole road area outside the pub to get into position to enjoy the live music coming from the Marquee [where the beach volley ball should have been – never mind Mogi, there is always women's football]

We were lucky to get our picture in front of the pub as the barmaid almost read our minds and came outside to move an emergency vehicle nearby and I quickly asked a passing local to snap us in situ.

It was time for a pub wander, first to the Lifeboat and to make sure we were not being followed we made our way in and out of a series of pubs in the back streets of St Ives finally ending it all in the Castle where like the Adam & Eve in Cheltenham we found ourselves at the end of an era. A group of locals seemed to be holding court in the pub, singing a series of traditional Cornish songs and sea shanties, we got chatting and before long Richard and Matt our two professional choristers were joining in and we were as predicted, running the pub by closing time. Our new found Cornish friends told us that the Castle was losing its landlord the next night and were worried that the new management would no longer allow singing in the pub – another pub at the end of an era. It isn't difficult to find a pub at the end of an era these days, eighteen pubs closed every week in the first half of the year according to figures released by C.A.M.R.A.

It was time to get more food at the late night take-away, we all then walked towards the taxi rank and our three diners sat on a nearby wall to enjoy the food and as I stood wondering where they put it all – suddenly I heard

“Your papers” or was it “You are having ze light for my zigarette” It was another question formed as a statement – yes it was another German. Matt and Richard began to reach for their papers and passes signed by the wives, I told them to put their papers away and immediately issued instructions “Mogi, Richard, Matt – do not give the German your names”

I asked a simple question “Are you a German?” Matt told me later that he feared I would blow our cover by going into the Basil Fawlty routine but I kept cover by not mentioning the war – or I don't think I did, but even if I did, I think I got away with it. I decided to obey the man's request and gave him a light for his zigarette while he continued to make statements framed as questions.

“There is another place here to drink in town”

“Are you stating that or asking us” I asked and not stated.

“I am asking zis you dumb Kopf” and finally the German actually asked a question as a question “Where are you from?”

I rather foolishly told him that 3 off us were from Wales except Matt who is from England

“Ah - Ein Englander” the German exclaimed and then he changed the subject completely and told us that he was very impressed with our food and that our country now has all the best chefs. Britain after the war – damn, did I mention the war, I cannot remember, but anyway, Britain after a significant event in the 1940s couldn’t even spell the word chef never mind have any, so yes I agreed with Jerry that eating out in the UK has become a much more enjoyable experience and that equally as ironic our comedians have become so bad that a German comedian is now one of the funniest in the UK.

The German seemed to find this interesting to which I questioned “So what about the French, what have they got now?”

“Nothing” was his reply as he clicked his heels and began walking down the hill, probably to swim out to a waiting U-boat in the harbour.



**The Sloop, St Ives Cornwall
Your Writer, Mogi, Gez, Richard & Matt**

Day 3 - Mount St Michael

It was the next day and the wonderful smell of bacon cooking was wafting around the chalet – unfortunately this was coming from next door [only joking Mogi]

It was a trip to St Michael's Mount today all bathed in glorious sunshine, Mogi hitched a ride with Richard and Claire and I went with Matt and Catherine, we were right at the very tip of Cornwall so it was only a 10 minute ride from the North coast to the South so to drag the journey out a little we all followed Richard around the Asda roundabout in Penzance 10 times putting poor Claire's head into such a spin that when it came to put her pin number in the cash machine at the supermarket cash machine – she had forgotten it.

Would we ever Mount St Michael today? An interesting play on words, similar to that used by Mogi during our trip to Bury St Edmunds – however Mogi did not ask when we were going to mount St Michael for the whole day – strange for him to miss a comedic opportunity like that.

We were soon parked up within the very efficiently run St Michaels Mount experience and making our way to the ferry slipway used during high tide, we would eventually return on the mid tide slipway that the ferry takes to a rock near the mainland and then a small causeway to the beach that joins onto the main causeway. At low tide the main causeway can be used to walk across completely free of charge.



Al & friend preferring the *free of charge* causeway to the Mount

Claire was feeling a little tired and needed a well-deserved sit down for 5 minutes while the first fleet of Matt, Catherine, Emily and your writer took the ferry across, when we were all eventually together on the Mount, Catherine offered to sit with Claire and the children in the gardens while all the men climbed up to the castle where upon reaching the top it was good to stand looking out to sea for some man talk.

I happened to notice Richard's shadow in the bright sun that was pointing due east, so I pointed out to sea in the opposite directions and stated "straight on to America" This opened a debate about where exactly the next land mass would be, Matt reckoned on Brazil then Mogi pointed in the opposite direction claimed that the first town you would come across would be Penzance – he was in fact pointing directly at Penzance that was perfectly visible in the distance [No jokes about Mount St Michael and a suspicious photographic knowledge of local towns - could this man be a Mogi look-a-like and a German spy?]

We then got onto much bigger stuff about the earth's land mass while Matt pointed out the cliff we were standing on and the sea crashing up onto the rocks below, this gave me the opportunity to relate a favourite piece of local Cornish folklore, the story of the Cornish Wreckers - wrecking was well known in Devon and Cornwall where the rocky coastline, and strong prevailing onshore winds helped wreck many merchant ships and warships. It is rumoured that ships were sometimes deliberately attracted: false lights on the shore were said to be used sometimes to lead ships into disaster then the cargo plundered by the locals. Mogi then told me that oh so clever Stephen Fry had said that this was all a load of rubbish [you didn't stop the winter Olympics in Russia did you Fry!]

We moved onwards and upwards through the house with its rabbit's warren like rooms and it has to be said quite a decent view out of every window or *vu* as they say in Norfolk. We returned to the ladies who were taking full advantage of the gardens and as we sat with the Castle behind us and William ran across the vast expanse of carefully manicured lawn wanting to be chased – it felt like a real Downton Abbey garden party moment. However was this the Downton Abbey garden party moment just before the First World War as Catherine announced that once back on the mainland we were to visit the P.L.A.Y.G.R.O.U.N.D, was this code for the beginning of our undercover operation? No, none of the above, as I was soon to discover that the code P.L.A.Y.G.R.O.U.N.D. stood for an actual playground that William and Emily thoroughly enjoyed – along with some bigger children.

Look out for Queen Victoria's footprint next time you visit the Mount, on the quayside as you go down the steps for the ferry back to the mainland.

We decided to swap passengers on the way back to camp to confuse the enemy so Mogi travelled with Matt and Catherine and I got in with Richard and Clare, as we drove off Richard noticed a much better light on the Mount and simply had to stop to take another picture.

There was more chasing to be done back at base as William ran up and down the entrance hallway and partly up the stairs before then chasing your writer and hitting me over the head with a large blue buoyancy aid.

To fool any spies looking in with high powered binoculars we decided to play poker for real tonight and while things were tidied up Mogi was busy striking more matches on the balcony for tonight's game – why so eager I wondered.

The children were in bed so let the game begin, poor Catherine and your writer lost our collection of matches [and strawberry stalk] very quickly while Claire hung on very well. Matt was a real opposition for Mogi but along with Richard, who had lent Catherine and your writer some extra matchsticks to stay in the game, we were all soon conquered by Mogi.

That's the answer – Mogi had not been doing his usual Bury-St-Edmunds and Mount St Michael comedy routines because he was saving all the energy he would need to keep that straight poker face for playing Poker.

Note: Glee and pride after winning may however be a problem for him but at least I now know that he is not a German spy.

The girls had had enough and along with the children were well tucked up in bed and fast asleep – someone suggested a last night pint in the holiday camp bar, it is amazing how quickly men can be motivated when there is beer to be found.

We walked up through the tree covered road towards the large roundabout with the camp shop on one side and the entertainment complex behind; we were soon climbing the steps up to the entrance next to the P.L.A.Y.G.R.O.U.N.D. or playground where William and Emily had played on the Wednesday evening before bed.

As we entered the clubhouse and neared the bar, always a warm and welcoming sight for any man, a young woman approached us carrying some sort of sock in her hands and suddenly asked [mainly your writer] if we had a set of false teeth. I thought I had pulled and this was the poor girl's best attempt at a chat up line, but no she was actually asking for false teeth as part of Friday night entertainment. After brushing this women away we got the beer in and were then able to see more of what was happening on stage where a Ted Bovis/Hi-di-Hi style camp comedian or in this case a young girl was about to make another request – this time a pair of men's trousers.

Mogi had warned me about this when I arrived, I was not ready to “take one” for the team and risk exposing my cover so I retreated to the smoking area outside. Upon returning to the bar the team told me that a fellow camper and Welshman had been the man to give up his trousers and had stood next to them to order more beer.

It was at this point I felt proud to be British to hear of a fellow Welshman standing at the bar ordering his beer without his trousers as part of good British holiday camp entertainment – a way of life the Germans tried to take away from us, a way of life we fought and are still fighting to keep – so come on Jerry if you're out there see if you can take our false teeth and trousers from us!

I later read and realised that the Germans had not returned for our trousers and false teeth but for a very different and completely innocent reason for nearly ½ million German tourists visit Britain every year now and in particular Cornwall all inspired by the writer Rosamunde Pilcher whose Cornwall based novels formed part of an 89-part television series in Germany.

Note: Suggest Pobol y Cwm not be screened in Germany any time soon.

Day 4 – The journey home

Saturday was changeover day and as I stood outside with a cigar while everyone packed up I noticed lots of people wearing official blue camp T-shirts arriving with vacuum cleaners and buckets full of cleaning agents to prepare the camp for the next week's inmates – sorry, holidaymakers. Richard and Matt were carefully loading up the beer while Claire and Catherine wondered why they had brought so much stuff all now gathered on the dining room table. I said my goodbyes as I was the first to leave for the train back to Cardiff, we had an idea to take William with us to see the T.R.A.I.N.S but unfortunately there was not really enough time as everyone had to clear the camp by 10am

Richard kindly dropped me off at St Erth station and as I waved farewell I reflected on a magical time spent in Cornwall with wonderful friends: - Matt the quiet unflappable Englishman, Catherine with her lucky Strawberry Stalk, Richard and Mogi teaming up for a photographic study of the area [results can be seen on the website] and Claire with Myrtle our head of house. Fondest memories are of the children of course, Emily in her pretty dress dancing to her music and William watching Peppa Pig with the same intense concentration of a grown man checking a big prize winning lottery ticket.

It began to rain as I stepped onto the train that would take me all the way to Taunton and along one of the most spectacular coastal railway lines in the world. It was good to finally sit down and relax after completing our mission in the darkest depths of Cornwall. Suddenly an announcement came over the carriage speaker from the guard, it was the usual safety and train time stuff followed by -

If you see anything at all suspicious, please inform a member of staff.

Or anyone suspicious, like a Greek paying his taxes for instance – looks like I am back in action, is there ever any rest for a busy secret agent?



Next Outing

Windsor November