



THE WILKIE COLLINS SOCIETY

CORNWALL THEN AND NOW PART 2

by

Andrew Gasson

**Wilkie Collins Society
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CORNWALL THEN AND NOW

In 1851, Wilkie Collins published *Rambles beyond Railways: or notes in Cornwall taken a-foot*, a description of his walking tour of Cornwall the previous year. The book included twelve lithographs by his travelling companion, the young artist Henry Brandling.

In the Introduction, Collins wrote “On considering where we should go, as pedestrians anxious to walk where fewest strangers had walked before, we found ourselves fairly limited to a choice between Cornwall and Kamchatka - we were patriotic, and selected the former.” The complete tour took a route along the south coast of Cornwall to Land’s End, returning along the northern coast with visits to some inland sites.

On recent visits to Cornwall, I have been attempting to reproduce photographically these twelve scenes as they now appear compared with the early 1850s. The images have been converted to black and white and toned to match the original lithographs. Part 1 followed Collins’s route and included six pairs of illustrations. Here in Part 2 are the remaining six also following the progress of the travellers, starting on the south coast at Looe in the east of Cornwall and finishing in the north. Quotations are mainly from *Rambles Beyond Railways* where Collins’s spelling of place names is notably inconsistent.

The original 19th century editions of *Rambles Beyond Railways* have long been out of print. There were two 20th century editions, neither of which included Brandling’s lithographs. Plans are now afoot to publish a new, unabridged edition. This will feature both sets of the twelve illustrations as well as a modern commentary based on local knowledge.

Finally, I hope this article shows that the artist’s perspective is very often impossible to reproduce photographically. If you doubt ‘the camera never lies’, then consider that artists can be even more ‘economical with the truth’.

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Looe

Looe was and still is a “fishing town on the south coast of Cornwall.” Collins anticipated “a little sea-shore paradise” and stayed at the Ship which can still be found. The mediaeval bridge which Brandling drew dated back to 1436. It was 384 feet long and consisted of fifteen arches but was replaced in 1853, three years after Collins’s visit. Looe is no longer a paradise but a very busy place in season although small fishing and pleasure boats do still abound.



Loo Pool (Loe Bar)

The Loo-Pool (Collins's spelling), despite the similarity in name is nowhere near the fishing village but about 60 miles further west, a short distance from Helston and close to Porthleven on Mount's Bay. It consists of Cornwall's largest natural freshwater lake (the Loe) separated from the sea by the sand and shingle bank of Loe Bar. Brandling's viewpoint is taken from the eastern side at the south of the lake. There is no sign of either Brandling's tree or the headland cottage. Long gone, if they ever existed, although Photoshop could no doubt resurrect them. The Loe, according to Tennyson and legend, is possibly the lake into which Excalibur was cast.



Lamorna Cove

Lamorna Cove is situated beyond St Michael's Mount on the western side of Mount's Bay about four miles from Penzance. The view today, with its quay and cottages, is completely different from Collins's time. The centre-piece obelisk of Brandling's illustration was either pure artistic licence or subsequently removed. Lamorna became the site of extensive granite quarrying between 1849 (the year before Collins's visit) and 1911. Possibly the obelisk was part of the granite sent to London for the 1851 Great Exhibition or that used to form the Thames Embankment.



The Logan Rock

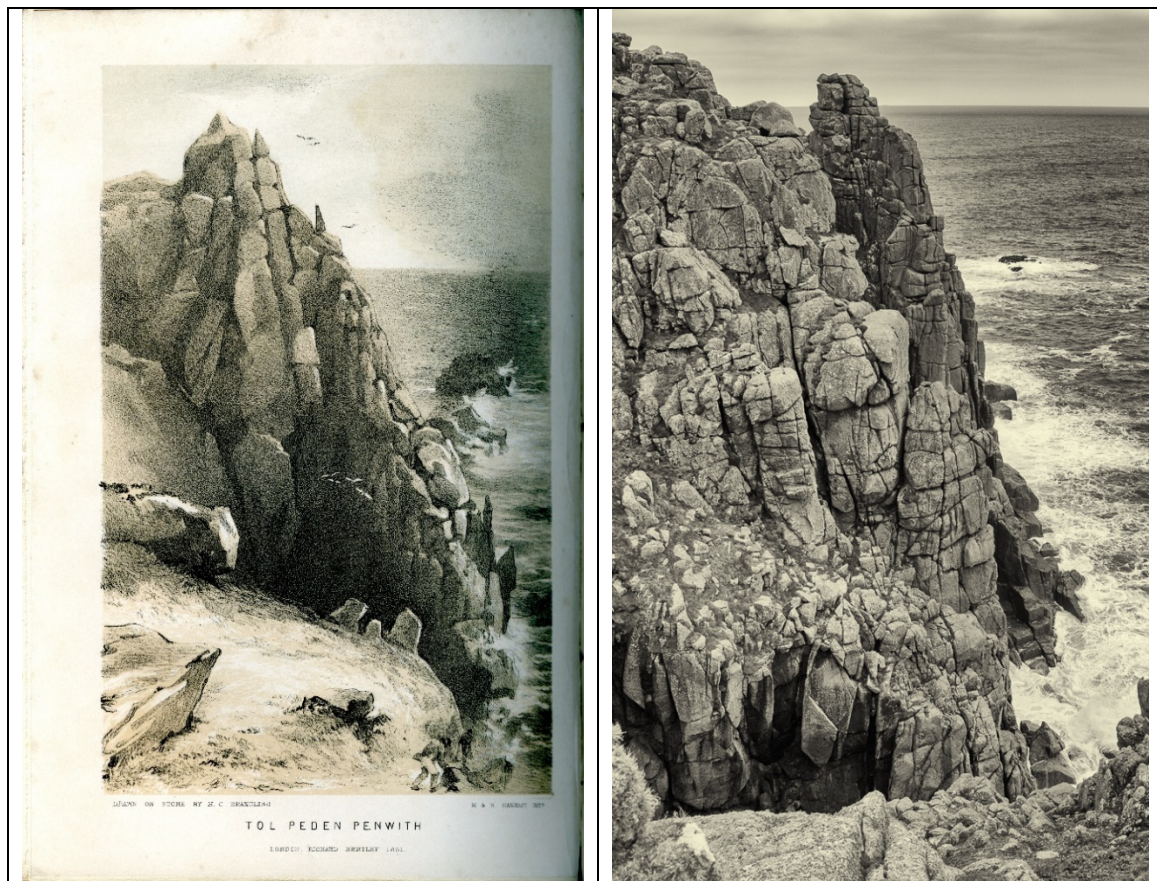
The term logan signifies a pivoted rock as a result of natural erosion. **The Logan Rock** is situated on the coast near the village of Treen about five miles from Lamorna. “This far-famed rock rises on the top of a bold promontory of granite, jutting far out in to the sea [...] When you reach the Loggan-Stone, after some little climbing up perilous-looking places, you see a solid, irregular mass of granite, which is computed to weigh eighty-five tons, resting by its centre only, on a flat broad rock.”



The photograph shows not only how the rock is pivoted but also how Brandling has used considerable artistic licence to draw the rock at this particular angle with a largely imaginary view of the coastline. There is certainly no room for leisurely bystanders, Victorian or otherwise. The rock was alleged to move on its fulcrum with a minimum of force until, in 1824, naval lieutenant Hugh Goldsmith decided to defy Druid legends and toppled it from its pivot. He was obliged to replace it in its original position - at a cost of £130 8s 6d - but “the rock is not to be moved now, either so easily or so much, as it could once be moved.”

Tol-Peden-Penwith

Mid-way between the Logan Rock and Land’s End lies “the desolate pile of rocks and caverns which form the towering promontory, called Tol-Peden-Penwith, or, The Holed Headland on the Left.” The latter may refer to “a black, yawning hole that slanted nearly straight downwards, like a tunnel, to unknown and unfathomable depths below” which is located a short walk to the west of the headland and is the likely spot where Manion meets his doom in Collins’s novel *Basil*, published in 1852.



Lanherne

About 50 miles north-east of Land's End lies the village of St Mawgan, close to Newquay. Here is found the Carmelite convent of Lanherne, given to the nuns as a refuge from overseas persecution. "The strictness of their order is preserved with a severity of discipline which is probably without parallel anywhere else in Europe." Now as then, the nuns never leave the convent and are never seen. Once again, the artist has the advantage over the photographer for even with an extreme wide-angle lens it is only just possible to include the adjacent church as well as the convent.

