

THE ATTLEE FAMILY CAME TO PERRANWELL

Sometime around 1860 John Jewell built two substantial houses in the parish, one was called Leory Croft, later Woodlands and now Tregaskis and the other was Coosevean. John Jewell was a mining engineer from Redruth, who managed an iron foundry at what was then called Basset's Wharf, later Visicks, located where the present main road crosses the Carnon valley. In 1849 a Captain Tregaskis had built another wharf nearby, roughly where the present car salesroom is located. The Carnon and Kennal rivers were navigable for small ships at that time.

Leory Croft was built on rising ground on the edge of the mudflats, where the Kennal and Mellingey streams meet. It is reached through lovely beechwoods and the house is flanked by a venerable Wellingtonia [a type of Redwood] and a large Monkey Puzzle. It feels strangely isolated, although only a stone's throw from the main road and has fine views down the Carnon valley to the Roseland.

In 1920 Tom Attlee moved into the house with his family and lived there until his death 40 years later. Tom was the elder brother of Prime Minister Clem and the brothers were very close as shown by an extensive correspondence. By 1914 Tom had built up a reputation as a respected architect, lecturing widely on architecture and architectural history. Both brothers were ardent supporters of the incipient Labour party, but whilst Clem served with distinction at Gallipoli, The Middle East and Flanders, Tom was a convinced pacifist, arrested as a conscientious objector, court marshalled and sent to Wormwood Scrubs prison. He was released in 1919 and reunited with his wife Kathleen and their two children. As a disgraced pacifist he had little prospect of employment and eked out a living with a small bequest from his parents.

During his sojourn in prison it is thought that he made an acquaintance with a fellow pacifist, who was a member of the Visick family, then the owners of the Basset Foundry. This may have been the catalyst for his move to Leory Croft, which then in common with most local houses had no electricity or mains water. He and his wife made ends meet by tutoring local children and some writing, whilst he became a popular lecturer for the WEA. Rather to his surprise his neighbours, mostly ex- military, did not hold his pacifist views and imprisonment against him and they became good friends.

In 1929 Clem was a member of Ramsey Macdonald's Labour cabinet and in 1931 he came down to Cornwall to stay with his brother to support the well known Cornish historian A.L.Rowse, who was standing as the Labour candidate for the Falmouth and Penryn constituency. His bid was unsuccessful, but he tried again in 1935 and again Clem, now the leader of the Labour party, came down to Cornwall to speak at the hustings. Rowse was not elected and he gave up politics for academic and literary studies.

Tom threw himself into local activities such as the Devoran Amateur Dramatic Society, the WEA, church and educational groups. He was a good friend of Winston Graham and John Betjeman and after the second world war used his architectural knowledge as an advisor to the Historic Churches Trust, which was entrusted with war damage repairs to churches.

By the 1950's life was slowly improving at Leory Croft with a tiny bathroom, a limited water supply, candles and flickering gas jets giving way to a modest extension, mains electricity and the telephone. His wife Kathleen always insisted on her daily bathe in the creek, but in later years opted for a bath tub fixed at the bottom of the garden, which filled with sea water at high tide. She never learnt to cook, leaving Tom to do this and also the housekeeping. She devoted all her time to her children and working with the Red Cross.

During his brother's tenure as Prime Minister from 1945 – 1950 Tom and Kathleen visited him at Chequers and at No 10 and Clem came down to Cornwall for short breaks to get away from it all in what was to him rather primitive conditions. Tom died in 1960 and his wife five years later. Some parishioners may remember them and comments would be welcome. A simple wooden lectern in memory of Tom was given to Truro cathedral.

For much information I am indebted to a biography of Tom Attlee called "With a quiet conscience" written by a cousin Peggy Attlee.

Chris Burton. January 2012.