

MY PILGRIMAGE

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We spoke about pilgrimage and the place that is special to us. We were asked to show and tell.

For me and then, after Angie and I became one, us, travelling home from wherever we were was our pilgrimage. We would often spend hours on trains, planes and automobiles taking us to Bodmin or the various places Angie's parents lived. We truly loved our experiences living away, but always coming home to the people we left was special. Catching up with family, eating together and sharing old and new memories was memorable in itself.

There's a place on the A30 just before Launceston where the road dips and at the bottom just as the dual carriageway rises is the sign I've been waiting for. In black on a white background with the Cornish Coat of Arms - a tin miner and a fisherman stand alongside a shield with fifteen roundels or Bezants in a triangle, above the shield a Cornish Chough and below the words in a scroll pronounce "One and All". The sign says Welcome to Cornwall. In the top left someone has placed a car sticker of the Cornish Flag with the Cornish name for the County "Kernow".

This would be my first object. A simple sign but to me for years it said welcome home, welcome back to the place where you are from, where your brothers are and where your family goes back generations – where you are safe and where you will find comfort and the love of friends and family.

Strange, because Bodmin is not the most beautiful part of Cornwall. It is next to the windswept moor that shares its name and there is not a golden beach, fishing harbour, tin mine or stunning cliff in sight. But pilgrimage is about people more than place. And here the people are my people, and the buildings and the landscape my old haunts growing up. The derelict barracks, the council estates and the imposing Beacon monument that overlooks it are the places that I grew up in and feel connected to.

And then as I grew older and met Angie, we continued to travel, had our children and settled down next to Cornwall. We made our home so that our children could feel that connection to people and place that can only be gained from growing up in a place and immersing yourself in the community. Ivybridge in Devon is also close to the moor and shares Cornwall's dramatic coast line, and there's a place on that coast close to our house which is our special space.

A quiet rocky cove with a sandy beach that almost disappears when the tide comes in. It's quiet because it is off the beaten track but you have to go down a track to get there. A steep farmer's track rutted with decades of tractors brushing against the bramble hedges that divide his fields. You walk down this anonymous track for 100 yards and it brings you to a fence line. Over the fence a field descends sharply to the cliff edge; beyond is the deep blue sea. You

remember that moment when you were young, sitting on the back seat of the car looking out the front window and you would go over a hill and all of a sudden: excited calls of “I can see the sea, I can see the sea!”? That’s that moment as you reach the end of the farmers track. It opens up in front of you and you thank the Lord that you live in such a beautiful place – to see a pale blue sky over a deep blue sea all the way to that point on the horizon where there is just a line of the earth curving away, and the two blues meet.

Here we turn right and walk down a steep vehicle wide path with sea views on the left and gorse and green on the right. On the track, grass and small flowers fight to get a grip before the next tractor comes by. We often stop to see a bird sitting on the fence ahead or admire a hairy caterpillar struggling up on the paths edge or to look at butterflies fluttering around on the wind.

Struggling under the weight of our beach bags and trying not to strain our knees, we continue down and down until, at the edge of another field, there is a gate leading into a dark natural tunnel of windswept trees and hedge. It’s about 30 yards long and is dark and slippery and opens up to a hooded entrance to the cove itself. You step out and there you are on the edge of the rocky cove, our cove. We have been here often. Laying our big Teneriffe blanket on the beach, we will settle in for a stay. Lying in the sun on our secluded beach together as family is our special place. Here we don wet suits and snorkels and daintily or clumsily walk out over sea covered rocks to deeper water, laughing as each gets used to the cold or stumbles and cries out. We will explore the inlets and channels between the rocks looking through our masks to see waving sea weed and shoals of small silver fish going about their day.

We will get to a rock outcrop where the water is deep enough for the children to jump off and after they have dived and somersaulted enough we will clamber back over the shell covered rocks to our Teneriffe blanket to dry off, eat and drink and share what we just saw or did. So this is our special place – our local pilgrimage. My object from here would be a small pebble – just one smooth cream coloured pebble millions of years old that may have one day been part of the rocks around us.



This piece was written after a virtual session with the British Museum team, exploring material culture related to pilgrimages.