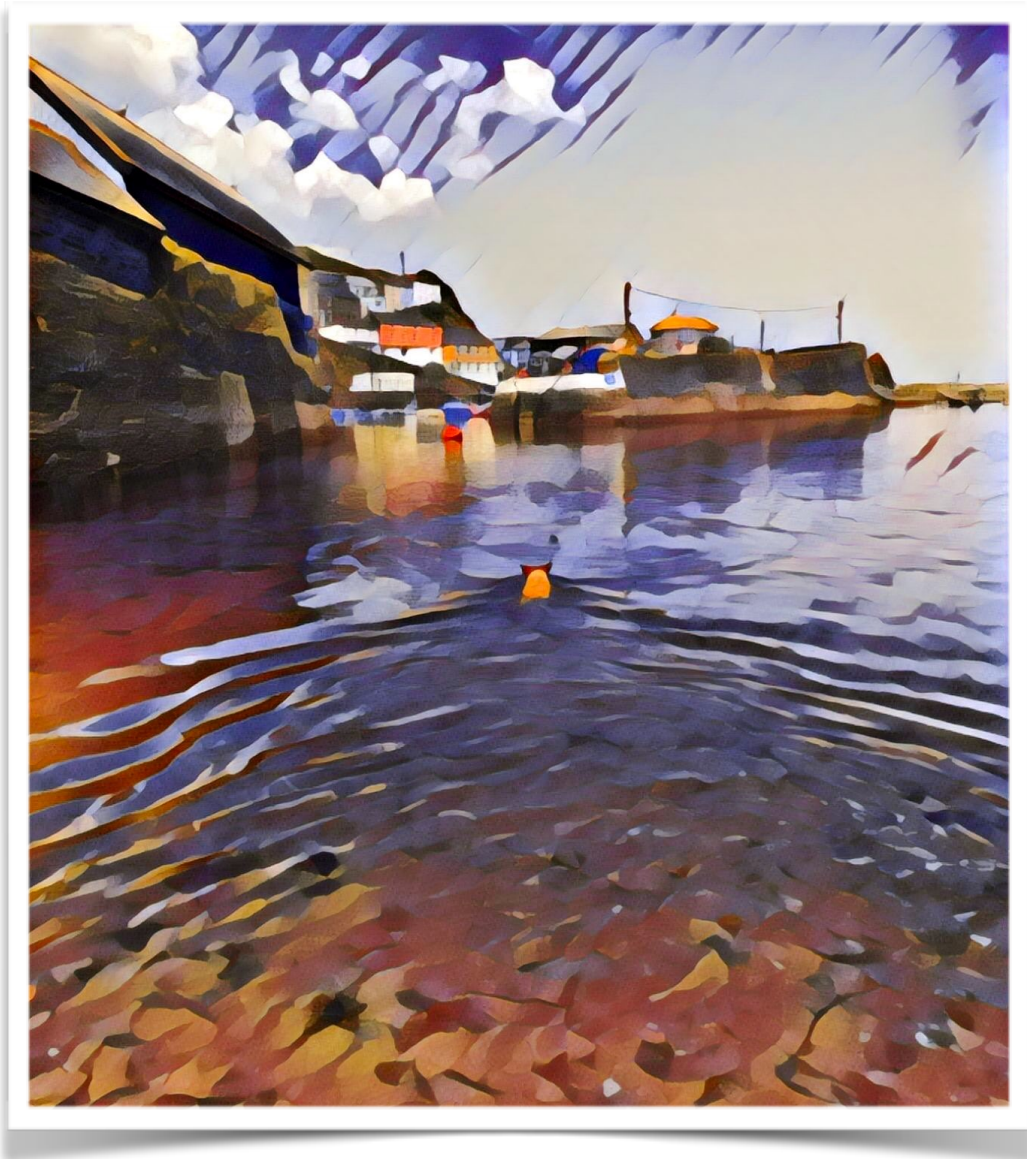


## *Chapter 6: Timmy, the Snowflake, and Mysterious Mariners in Mevagissey*

To many nowadays, Mevagissey is a quaint Cornish village harbour: a holiday destination. That's how Simon first discovered it as a small boy, enjoying his first ever ice cream, being carried around the harbour by his mum and dad. But it's a working harbour too, home to a small fishing fleet even today. And it was home, too, for Simon for thirteen years until 2015. He lived on Polkirt Hill, high above Sandy Beach in the outer harbour, right next to the old copper mine Wheal Kendall. For past generations, Mevagissey was home to a thriving pilchard industry, the buildings of which still line the old quay today, turned into pubs, restaurants, and souvenir shops. Further back in time, it's also been home to well organised smuggling operations, rum and furtive dealings. But what you may not realise, is that Mevagissey was once a tiny commercial port and, alongside nearby Charlestown, featured significantly in Simon's family history.



Timmy learning to swim from Sandy Beach in Mevagissey Outer Harbour one balmy May morning

In the mid-nineteenth century John Dunbavand, Master Mariner, was Captain of the Julia, whilst his son Thomas had also gained the rank of Master Mariner by the age of 25, when he married his sweetheart, Elizabeth Miller, in Warrington in 1869. The Dunbavands all started young by crewing schooners out of Runcorn and Weston Point docks on the Mersey to gain their sea legs, working their way up to become Master Mariners: highly respected sea captains, plying their trade from their home port to Spain, and to Newfoundland. But more often than not, plying their trade to Cornwall, often to Mevagissey.

Among the many ships was the handsome topsail schooner Snowflake, built in Runcorn and launched in 1890. She was 88 ft in length, and registered at 109 tons: tiny by today's standards, even for coastal shipping. Her regular voyage was to take china clay from Charlestown to Runcorn (and thence to the potteries of Stoke-on-trent, where Simon's Great Aunt Ada ran a pub), returning to Cornwall with coal to Mevagissey from the collieries of St. Helens. By the 1940s this voyage had become impossible, and she was sadly broken up. The Snowflake had become a regular visitor to Mevagissey harbour by 1892, managing to squeeze right in to the inner harbour at high tide, where she was able to dry her sails, and on a spring low tide, drying out her bottom entirely.



Snowflake tied up alongside at high tide in Mevagissey Inner Harbour, 1892

So the schooners of Runcorn and Weston Point docks worked all around the British Isles, including Scotland and reaching as far as Newfoundland, crewed by up to eight men. In 1920, the fourteen-year-old cook and cabin boy Joe Broady boarded the Weston Lass, later sailing onboard Snowflake herself. Weston Lass also sailed regularly from Weston Point to Mevagissey with consignments of coal, anchoring towards the mouth of the Mersey waiting for a fair wind, and putting into Milford Haven in Wales in bad weather. The Snowflake indeed made it to St. John's Newfoundland with Broady, delivering a cargo of salt from Weston Point, but she struggled: heading from New Brighton at the mouth of the Mersey to Holyhead the seas were treacherous, and it took a whole week just to reach Cork for repairs and provisions. The transatlantic journey took three weeks, fortunately in fairer conditions.





Polkirt Hill, Wheal Kendall's copper mine adit, and the choppy waters of Mevagissey Harbour

The return cargo was salted herrings bound for La Coruña, proceeding to Bilbao for copper to return to Runcorn. But on the night of 6 May 1934, Snowflake got into real trouble off Holyhead harbour, losing her sails in the storm, dragging her anchor, and flying the distress signal. She was heavily laden with a cargo of coal, bound for Mevagissey, and heavily rolling. The Holyhead lifeboat put out and rescued the crew of just four, leaving the schooner to ride out the storm. Miraculously, she did ride it out, and the crew returned to her the following day to bring her safe into port. Whenever Snowflake arrived in Mevagissey, the local Cornishmen were grateful to unload the cargo of coal. And the maidens were grateful to see the crew again. Walking around Mevagissey, Timmy wonders if there are some distant relatives hidden amongst the locals. Maybe one member of the crew didn't return to Cheshire at all, but stayed right here in this tiny paradise. In the industrial revolution, which would *you* rather have called home?



Seagulls and Snowflake towards the end of her working life, Mevagissey, 1932

The bank of Philip Ball & Son was founded in Mevagissey in 1807, and was able to issue its very own one pound bank notes, which proudly proclaimed on them 'Mevagissey Bank'. Balls became bankrupt in 1824, taking down with it the newly formed Wheal Kendall copper mine, and causing widespread hardship to all the people of Mevagissey. Yet the Ball family repaid its debt to the village: Philip's son Timothy became the local doctor and nursed Mevagissey through the cholera epidemic of 1849. Wheal Kendall didn't begin any commercial mining operations, but the drainage adit to the mine shafts had been created, and to this day a bridge carries the narrow road of Polkirt Hill over the mouth of the adit where it discharged into the outer harbour. Above this very spot stands the house Simon had built in 2002. But at the Fountain Inn, the oldest pub in the village, where landlord Billy Moore would regale customers with tales of days gone by, Timmy senses the atmosphere of Balls Bank right next door. Were it not for the bankruptcy and the Victorian cholera, then the copper mine would have made Polkirt Hill too unstable for building, and maybe things would have turned out differently. Licking the slate floors of the Fountain, perhaps Timmy senses the spirits of old Mevagissey. Or perhaps the slice of pan-fried sea bream—landed yesterday, plated up just a few hours ago with samphire and Café de Paris butter and inadvertently tumbled onto the slates—*may* have caught his attention...

Timmy still visits Mevagissey twice a year, in May and October, sniffing the salt air and strolling around 'Hitler's Walk'. Enforcing the village's harbour fees with a strictness and zeal during the 1930s, Councillor Wright Harris recorded the movements of the fishing fleet from a lookout on the 'money' side of the village, overlooking the watchtower and harbourmaster's office on the 'sunny' side. The pretty gardens quickly became known as 'Hitler's Walk'. But what became of the councillor? Does his spirit still strut around Polkirt Hill at night, keeping his beady eyes firmly focussed on the still waters of the harbour below? And when Timmy walks the trail up to the Lost Gardens of Heligan, clearly visible just a few miles inland from Polkirt Hill, does he sense the souls of the gardeners who optimistically downed tools in the potting shed, leaving the fields of Heligan to join the fight on the fields of Flanders, never to return?



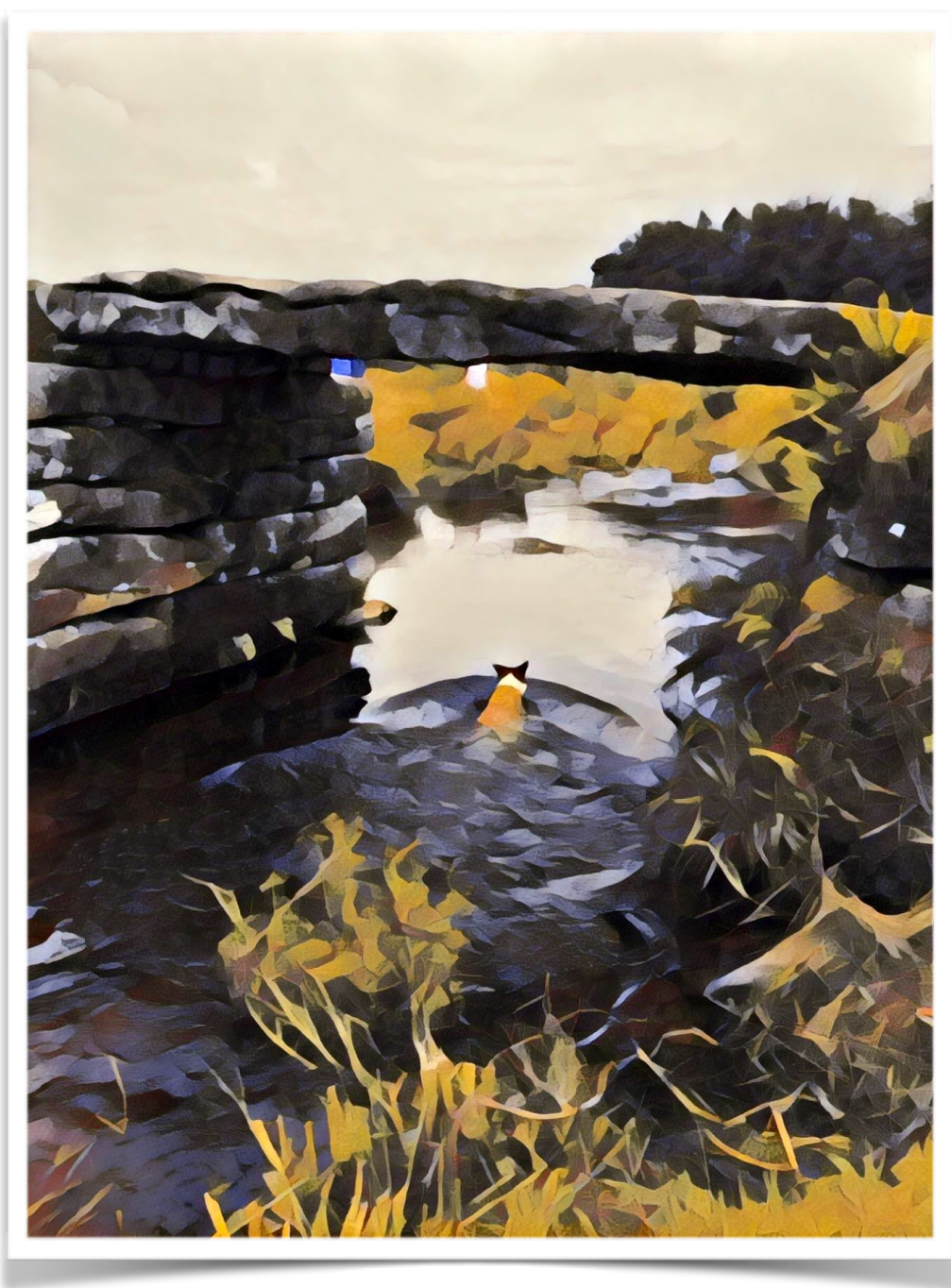
Timmy enjoys some respite along 'Hitler's Walk' on Polkirt Hill, Mevagissey



## *Conclusion*

Here endeth the first volume of 'Timmy's tales: Timmy the Super Sleuth. If you'd like to put your footsteps into Timmy's pawprints, then when it's safe to do so, consider a visit to the following pubs:

5 woofs: Ilchester Arms, Abbotsbury; Blue Ball Inn, Countisbury  
4 woofs: Ring of Bells, North Bovey; the Fountain, Mevagissey  
3 woofs: Blisland Inn, Blisland; the Staghunters, Brendon  
2 woofs: the Warren House Inn, Dartmoor; The Cleave, Lustleigh  
1 woof: Jamaica Inn, Bodmin Moor; Rockford Inn, Rockford  
0 woofs: Kestor Inn, Manaton



Timmy takes a dip at Postbridge: Bye for now!