

St. Nicholas Chapel,

The Island, St. Ives

ST. NICHOLAS is not only the patron saint of children, but also of sailors and it is natural to assume that the latter is the reason for the dedication of this little chapel, standing as it does on the top of the Island, surrounded on three sides by the sea in this town where our ancestors have for centuries derived their livelihood from the sea. Unfortunately we do not know when it was built, but we do know that it has withstood patching and alterations since the latter half of the 15th Century – or even earlier. Indeed, one would assume that our Cornish ancestors duly worshiped in St. Nicholas' Chapel before the Church of St. Ives was erected in 1434.

The town authorities have always been responsible for its upkeep. In the Borough Records for 1592 we find “paid to John Kalamey for mending Saint Nicholas Chappell, 1s. 4d.” and in 1538 a traveller to Cornwall is recorded as saying, “There is now at the point of Pendinas a chapel of St. Nicholas and a pharos for lighte for shippes sailing by night in these quarters.” Not only has this chapel served as a place of worship but it became transformed into a look-out for revenue officers in the 18th Century and eventually passed into the hands of the War Office who used it as a store until 1904 when the Department began to pull it down, amid local outcry. Fortunately, the desecration was arrested and in 1911 Sir Edward Hain (the St. Ives ship owner) restored the building to commemorate the Coronation of King George V.

The chapel was restored again in 1971 through the generosity of Mr J F Holman with the co-operation of the then Borough Council. Local artists have contributed to the work and Archimandrite Barnabas of St. Elias Monastery, Willand, Nr. Cullompton in Devon gave the Icon of St. Nicholas. The local churches have agreed to share responsibility for the spiritual care of the chapel so that on the “highest point” we shall see a visible reminder both of that unity which we seek and that which we already have.

(The historical details in this brief summary are from J H Matthews “A History of St Ives” published in 1892 and “The History of St. Ives” by Cyril Noall)