

MARAZION Memories

NEWSLETTER

Heritage Lottery Fund



Marazion Memories is a reminiscence project covering the parishes of Perranuthnoc, Ludgvan, Marazion, St. Hilary. Co-ordinator - John Pollard.

A REMINISCENCE PROJECT PROMOTED BY MARAZION AND DISTRICT FORUM, FUNDED BY HERITAGE LOTTERY



The project has been pleased to record a number of people who have lived on St. Michael's Mount. Their stories bear witness to what a special upbringing those who grew up there enjoyed and provide many comparisons with life on the mainland. We are keen to meet other Island residents prepared to share their memories.

Jane Howells and Sheila Berriman were delighted to have the opportunity to record **Lord St. Levan** at his home in Penzance. His Lordship was happy to share his memories of the Mount and the recording reflects his great love and affection for the Castle, the Island and the people associated with it. He reminisced about the changing times, his early memories of spending school holidays at the Rookery and sailing each day on his uncle's (the then Lord St. Levan) fishing yacht. He reminisced about wartime and although he was away fighting he could describe the defences of the Mount, which was felt to be vulnerable to a German Landing party. Allegedly Von Ribbentrop, Hitler's Foreign Minister, had his eye on the Castle as a home should Germany win the war. Lord St. Levan's uncle died in 1940 and his parents lived there until they retired in 1976 when he and his late wife moved in. Our tape contains stories of the history of the Castle, describes some special visitors and provides an insight into the St. Aubyn family history. He also told the story of Queen Victoria's unexpected visit. The family was not at home and she was shown around by the housekeeper – but Prince Albert did play the famous Chapel organ!

We are grateful to Mrs. Isabel Thomas for providing the photographs of the Red Cross



Marazion Memories has been privileged to record **Mr. Frank O'Donnell** who was brought up on the Mount. Although his later childhood and working life was spent away from West Cornwall he has returned to live in the area. We print the following reminiscences from his memoirs and are grateful for his co-operation:

'St Michael's Mount, in the twenties and thirties was a unique, and for children, almost enchanted Island. Not for us the fear of traffic or anything associated with human beings, we children knew everyone on the island and they knew to whom we belonged. There were of course the natural hazards of living on an island, the sea itself, stormy weather, climbing the cliffs and trees; but if the truth be told all of those activities and dangers only served to make the mount a true paradise for a group of young children. Perhaps the most outstanding event of the year was the annual concert party. Everyone on the island had a part to play and each and everyone joined in with wholehearted enthusiasm. Preparations were set in motion several weeks beforehand with the carpenters and boat builders erecting a stage at one end of the upstairs boathouse and many other arrangements which we children knew nothing of, being attended to. The seating arrangements were, to say the very least rather primitive, even for Lord and Lady St. Levan and whoever happened to be their house guests at that time.'

We are indebted to Mrs Gill Joyce of Newlyn, another of our contributors brought up on the Mount. Gill's father was Mr. Stanley Ager, the Castle butler from 1947 until his retirement in the 1970's. Gill lived on the Mount from the age of 11 until going to college, she later married on the Mount, as did her daughter.



Left: Mrs & Mrs Ager, daughter Gill and their grandchildren. Gill wrote: 'To grow up on an island off the coast of Cornwall must surely be a unique and memorable experience. When that island is the Jewell in the crown of Mounts Bay – St Michaels Mount, the experience of childhood is indeed privileged.'

Gill continues: It was to this enchanting and yet bewildering location that the Ager family came in July 1947. Following his new appointment as butler to the third Lord St. Levan, Stanley Ager with his wife Barbara and two daughters took up residence in Boscagel, formally the island laundry, newly converted into the Butler's flat with the island café on the ground floor. The lives of all residents are literally ruled by time and tide. Certain phrases became part of our thinking – spring tides, dead tides, high tide, low tide, causeway open or closed, walking or boating- Chapel rock, Gwelva, Top Tieb, confusing to a mainlander but fundamental for an islander. For me the move was a total shift. I had been born and reared in the beautiful border county of Berwickshire on a large country estate where my father was butler to the Laird. We were several hours away from the coast and on infrequent visits I remember dreading the bitterly cold water of the North Sea! I recall clearly being totally overawed by the beauty and reality of an island crowned with a castle and surrounded by sparkling blue water which until then I had only seen on a postcard. I learned to swim, to row a boat, to sail, to fish to climb perilous heights on forbidden cliffs, to explore nooks and crannies and to live out many childhood fantasies all over the Island. The environment became more of a challenge for an ambitious teenager involved in local concerts in Marazion Church Hall, many after school events in Penzance Girls' Grammar School and of course a social life for an emerging young adult.

Home Front Recall Project – Pathway to the Past- Marazion School – Sept-Dec 2005

This was an exciting project directed by Alessandra Ausenda and a team of 'experts'. Alessandra and Mary Oliver provided input as artists, Anna Murphy, drama and story telling, Francesca Ausenda was the photographer and John Pollard contributed in terms of reminiscence. An 'ideas market' sparked the pupils imaginations, volunteers came and talked with the children about their memories of the 2nd World War and there was a tea party. Pupils then interpreted and expressed the information they had gained in a number of ways, some of those who attend the Senior Citizens Lunch Club at the school recorded their own memories and Francesca worked with a group of teenagers to produce a short film entitled "Now and Then". The final event was an open evening when a series of exhibits displayed the work of the project including the children's workbooks where they recorded the whole experience. It was great watching the children and adults working together. We all learned a lot and as the photos below show – we had fun!!

