

## Looking back, looking out

**K**ellan Head Look Out was first-established by HM Coastguard in the late 1800s and was in use until the mid 1970s. Situated on top of a 245ft cliff, it was manned by Port Isaac Coastguards when there were gale force winds or foggy conditions. The facilities were minimal – a telescope, a pair of binoculars, a bearing board, a telephone, a manual fog horn, an oil heater and a chart light operated from a 6volt car battery. The stone building had a water butt which provided the water for cleaning the salt from the windows.

Watch keeping was based on the six-hour watch routine; 0600-1200, 1200-1800, 1800-2400, 0000-6000. Up until 1965, the Coastguards used to walk from Port Isaac to Kellan Head, allowing themselves one and a half hours each way. The route taken was the inland path to Port Quin (Postman's Walk). On occasion the Coastguards have had to crawl across the open ground near the foot of Kellan Head as it was impossible to stand against the storm. The path from the Pine Awn stile up to the Roscarrock field was often overgrown and the Coastguards used to cut it back to make their walk easier. One time, while working on the path, Station Officer Bill Pink and Coastguard Aubrey Tucker heard a man shouting for help after he had fallen into a deep hole in the valley. It was lucky for

him that they Coastguards were passing by on that day.

In the late 1940s, the Royal Navy placed a target buoy for aircraft to bomb in the middle of Port Quin Bay and installed two look-outs for the plotting staff – one at Carnweather Point and the other one 20ft below the Kellan Head Look Out. When the Royal Navy ceased using the range in the mid 1950s, HM Coastguard took over the Kellan Head one as it was a better structure. The one at Carnweather Point remained unused until the National Trust demolished it in 1975.

In 1958, Auxiliary Coastguard Atkins was on watch at Kellan Head and due to a medical condition became unconscious and knocked over the oil heater. The whole building was gutted by fire and Mr Atkins lost his life. The old Look Out was quickly refurbished and was in use until the mid 1970s. In 1985 the building was pulled down and the site cleared.

I joined the Coastguard Service in 1963, serving until 1987, and spent very many hours on duty at Kellan Head. Fortunately, I was able to drive to Port Quin and only had to walk from the cottages to the Head. Even so, it was a hard 15-minute climb, especially in the dark. When I started watch keeping the rate of pay was 3/6d an hour (17½p).

*From our Man in Fuerteventura,  
David Castle*