

# The Emperor's Gold

by Robert Wilton

*'written in and inspired by Port Isaac'*



"The idea for the Comptrollerate-General series of novels came to me, like a bit of driftwood or weed or just the tide hurrying towards my toes, when I was standing on Port Isaac beach watching the water. We were spending more time here, and I knew I needed a writing project that would occupy the long train journeys. We were renting St Samson's, in Dolphin Street, for the winter - we hadn't yet found a permanent home here - and I wrote the first words of the book, the introduction describing the phenomenon of a mysterious organisation active behind the scenes in every crisis of British history for four centuries, sitting up in bed in St Samson's one Sunday morning.

Late one evening, a week or two later, I walked up the cliff path beyond the Old School House, just to stand for a few minutes and enjoy the wind and the silence. As I was looking down at the mouth of Port Isaac harbour, at the black sea hurling itself against the blacker rocks, at the eerie white frenzy of the foam, the image of a shipwreck came to my mind, strong and vivid. That, I knew, had to be the start of the book. The opening scenes, of the wreck, of the man who came out of the sea, and of the vast power of Napoleon's army waiting across the Channel to destroy Britain, were written at the kitchen table in Dolphin Street. In my mind, the little fishing village of the novel - the wind wailing in the tiles and the rain gusting through the alleys, and the local parson carrying the body from the sea through the mist - is the Port Isaac through which I would walk home on those winter nights.

With a few exceptions - many train journeys, the odd Balkan bus, a chilly room in Kosovo and a beautiful village high in the Albanian mountains - the rest of *The Emperor's Gold* was written in the little home of our own that we eventually found here in Port Isaac. The hero, Tom Roscarrock - you'll find the name here and there in these parts - is Cornish, and my affection for the character of this place - not just further from the rest of Britain, but somehow different - is in him and the rugged individuality that makes him so effective. When bits of the plot were proving troublesome, I would roam back and forth on the hills to the west of Port Isaac wrestling with them; when I wanted fresh ideas or a clearer head, I would walk out along the cliff path to the east. Too often, when I was supposed to be writing, I would stand and watch the sea."

**'Sensational... great, intelligent, fun'**

*Time Out*

**'Literary gold... superbly satisfying...beautifully written, wonderfully clever'**

*The Daily Telegraph*

"Down in the little fishing village, where the storm wind whined and whooped through the roof-slates and threw blasts of spray down the narrow streets, the Parson looked out into the darkness of the bay, leaning into the gusts with his arm thrown up against the violence of wind and water. As clergyman, he muttered a prayer to an indifferent God to bring his parishioners through the maelstrom. As local magistrate he frowned at the thought of tomorrow's damage, of the disputes over fallen chimneys and scattered lobster-baskets, of the scuffling over debris deposited on the beach once the storm blew itself out and the sea receded. And as a man, widowed, exiled and forgotten in this mean extremity of the world, he wondered about the terrifying and lonely deaths of the men on the schooner, far out along the cliffs and surrounded by brutal, vengeful nature in fullest flood.

But miraculously, out of the fatal desert of the sea, out of the inhuman carnage of the dying ship, out of the clutch of the waves there came a man..."

'A sparkling gem of a novel; not only a gripping espionage thriller that has the extra thrill of being grounded in genuine history, but a beautiful, lyrical novel alive with the sheer joy of language. **Literate, intelligent, utterly captivating.** Not since Hilary Mantel's "Wolf Hall" has a novel been so drenched in a sense of time and place - and this has a plot that blows all comers out of the water.' *M. C. Scott, President of the Historical Writers' Association*

