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ALFRED WALLIS (NEW REVISED EDITION)

ARTIST AND MARINER

Robert Jones

The life of the Cornish primitive artist, Alfred Wallis (1855-1942), remains a constant source of fascination to the growing number of people with an interest in those artists of Cornwall who comprised the Newlyn and St Ives School. Seaman, fisherman and later dealer in secondhand goods and scrap, it was not until Wallis was well into his seventies and eighties that painting became a compulsion which was to last until the end of his life. Yet though much has been written about his influence on British art, little has been done to directly examine the sources of the images themselves in order to draw out the character and inspiration of the man behind them.



It could be said that the author, Robert Jones, who was himself once a fisherman, and who has become a respected contemporary artist, was driven as much as inspired to write this book about his fellow artist and mariner, Alfred Wallis. It is their shared experiences that imbue this book and take the scrutiny of Wallis's life and work beyond the critical realm hitherto examined.

The confluence initiated by the chance meeting of Wallis by Christopher Wood and Ben Nicholson in 1928 has been described as 'a watershed in the history of modern art'. But, as Robert Jones makes clear, to look upon Wallis's paintings only as an accidental portal to a novel style of painting is to see but half the picture. This book reveals the whole scene.

Since its first publication in 2001 this book has become an essential part of the literature on Wallis, bringing new understanding to his life and work. In 2002 the book received the Holyer An Gof Award from the Cornish Gorsedd and in 2005 Robert Jones was made a Bard of Cornwall, his bardic name being Den Awenek, 'Inspirational Man'.



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- French Fishing Boats
- Lighthouses
- The Recorded Memories of Wallis



Boats Under Saltash Bridge.



St Ives Harbour, late nineteenth century.



Alfred Wallis c.1890.



Alfred Wallis's grave, St Ives.

THE GALLERY – ALFRED WALLIS



Houses at St Ives, Cornwall.

Three-masted Ship and Lighthouse (1900-1905)

Unusually Wallis's paintings were, as he put it 'of my own memory', but I believe some were for a different source of inspiration. One Nicholson is known to have given Wallis a book, The Land of the Wind Ship by Alan J. Williams. The book, which is illustrated with over 200 black and white photographs, tells the story of a voyage from Australia to Falmouth, made by a large sailing ship called the same. There are obvious similarities between the painting and the photographs. It is likely to have been dragged to port the ship of what was, for him, a rather unusual angle. This involved an element of perspective as the painting shows the ship seen from the starboard quarter.

FISHING

Wallis eventually gave up deep sea voyages and worked as a fisherman with the Newlyn and Mousehole fleets, at a time when the fishing industry in this area was thriving. Later in life during this period, our books mention that Wallis worked on a boat called the Flying Boat and made trips around the coast of Britain following schools of fish and sea fishing. By chance I came upon two paintings by Wallis entitled 'The Flying Boat, Newlyn', one at the Wills Lane Gallery in St Ives, and the other in a private collection. The former painted on an old envelope, the other on card.

R217 The Flying Boat, Newlyn (1900-1905)

Flying pages taken from The Land of the Wind Ship.

Example of a typical double page spread



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