

THORNS OF BUDE

PIONEERS OF PHOTOGRAPHY – TINTAGEL TO CLOVELLY

David and Stuart Thorn

The Thorn photographers were pioneers of the art in Bude, in Cornwall. This book celebrates their enormous contribution to Cornish history. Over 250 fantastic images taken from their original glass negatives, many never before published, show the landscape, seascape and shipwrecks, of North Cornwall, as it was in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, packed with personalities and characters, recalling the hard but gentle pace of Cornish life as well as the incidents that live on in the memory of the Cornish people. The advent of photography captured the moment as it was. We are transported back to an age often regarded as romantic. However, life was so different from ours today: we have glimpses of the trials and tribulations of the time.

Harry Thorn was the first photographer in Bude village, as it then was, in the 1850s (population around 600). He started to record the events of the day. Inevitably these included many shipwrecks which were a common occurrence. He did not have the advantage of wealth - his father was a carpenter and he was one of ten children, but he started a career in photography from very little and became accomplished at the new art. He was a true pioneer for Bude in a field with many hazards, particularly the chemicals used, about which not a lot was understood. It is probable that the chemicals led to his early death, at the age of thirty-eight, in 1876.

In the 1860s he was joined by his sister, brother and later his niece, who carried on the business after his death until 1928. Between them they have left us with a wonderful pictorial record of the area from Clovelly to Tintagel. After 1900, many of their photographs were printed as Postcards which immediately appealed to collectors and this continues today. Their legacy to Cornwall has not yet been fully appreciated – this book will give them the recognition they deserve.

ABOUT THE AUTHORS

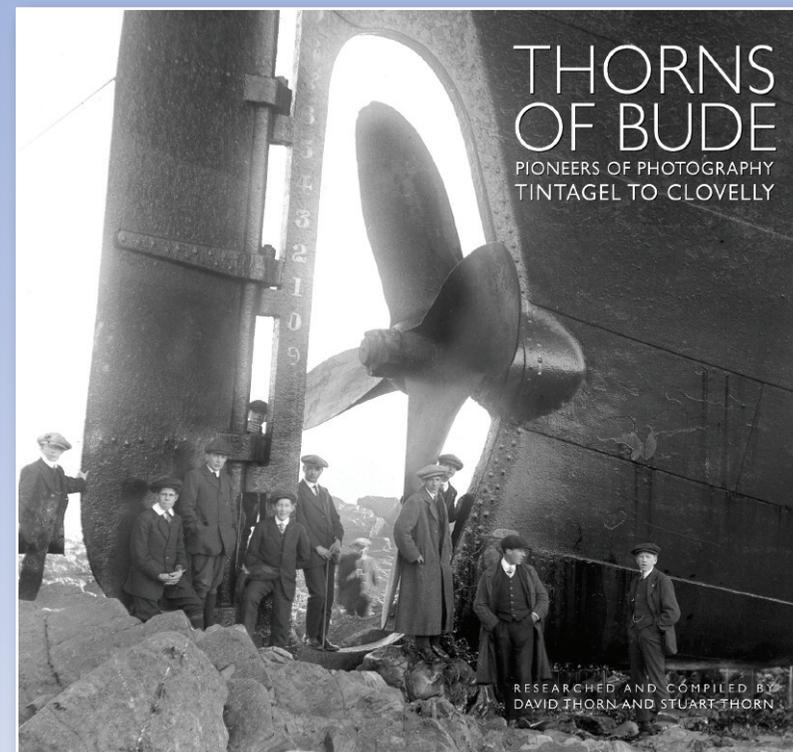
David Thorn was born in 1944, in Bude. He spent his childhood in Hertfordshire, but frequent visits to Bude with his parents gave him a love of the area and its past. Having qualified as a Mechanical Engineer, he followed a career in the motor industry in the Midlands, but eventually returned to live in Bude with his wife and two sons in 1977. Having turned to art restoration, since 1989 he and his family have run his grandfather's jewellery business, started in 1921. The Thorn family archives are extensive and were passed on to him upon his father's death. The information about his relatives' photography past, although well known to him, became more relevant with the documents available, but it was only in recent years that he decided to investigate their contribution to Bude's history.

David's cousin Stuart Thorn was born in 1943 in Bude, where he spent his formative years. His father was a member of the Old Cornwall Society, first curator of the Bude Museum, Bard of the Cornish Gorsedd (Ystoryor Bud), gave talks on both local churches and shipwrecks and collected information now in the Bude Museum archive. Stuart studied Fine Art at Redruth and Falmouth Schools of Art at a period of great international significance, with lectures from artists from the St Ives School including Terry Frost and Denis Mitchell. Their inspiration still fuels a life-long love of painting. He lectured at Cornwall College and went on to become a successful international graphic designer. Over the last forty years Stuart has collected Thorn postcards, especially with the S Thorn credit. As the years passed and the collection increased it seemed necessary to give credit to the Thorn photographers. Realising David felt the same gave rise to their collaboration and this publication.

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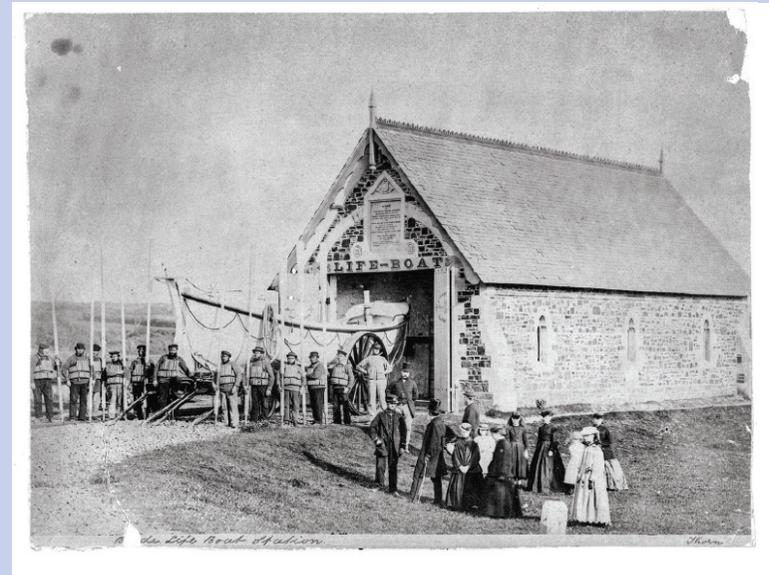
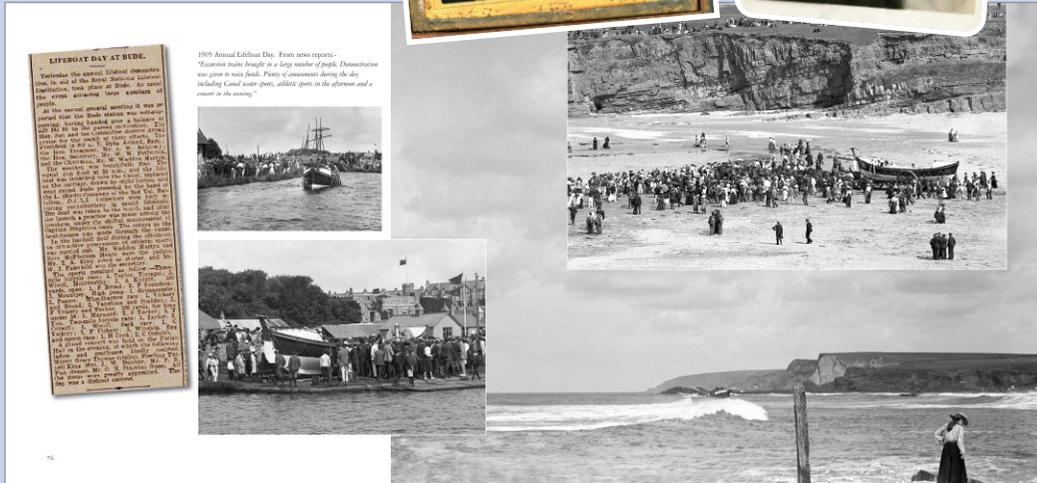
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Right: William Henry Brown and Lewis Thorn. William was a horseman and Lewis a painter. They are shown with the tools of their trade. A Harry Thorn Ambrotype from the late 1850s. (MJ)

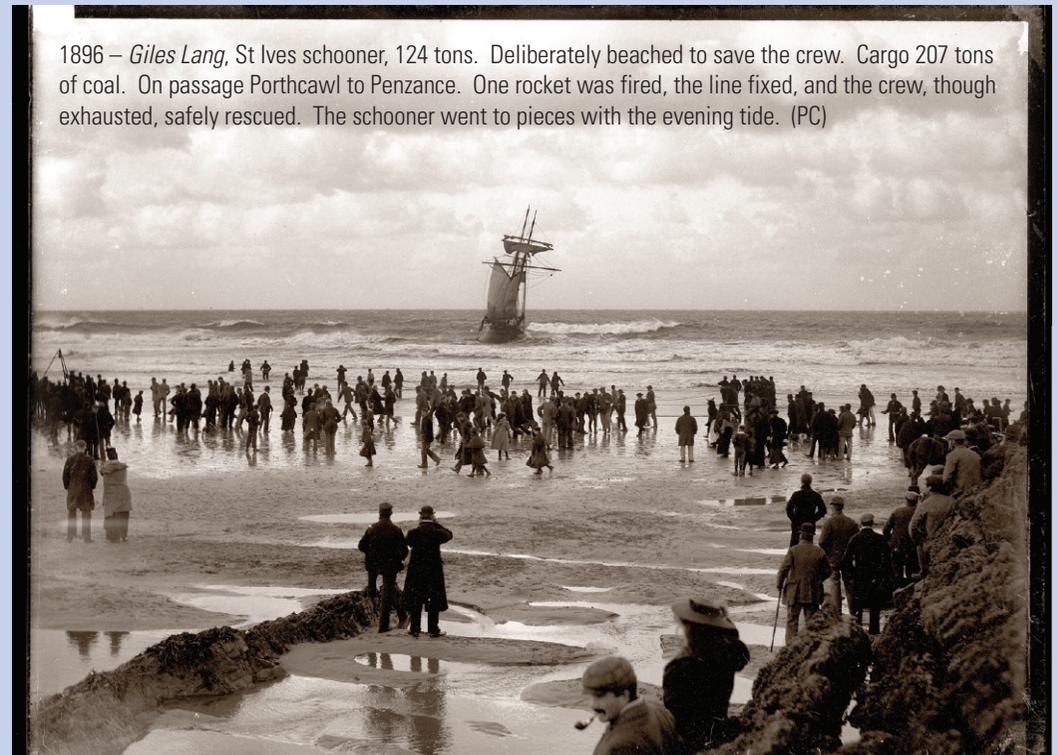


Far right: From left to right – Spencer Thorn, Louisa (his wife), Nellie and Sarah Thorn. (RST)

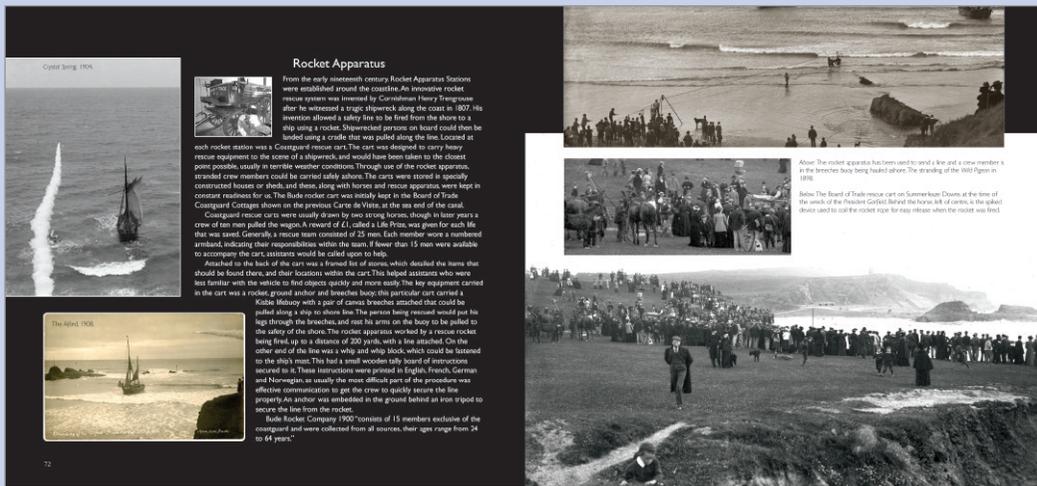
Examples of double-page spreads.



1863 – Bude's new Lifeboat House and lifeboat – the Elizabeth Moore Garden I. An albumen print from a full plate Wet Collodion negative, written along the bottom edge of the negative by Harry Thorn. The date of this photograph and the date the Lifeboat House was built makes this almost certainly the opening day of the new Lifeboat House and the new boat. 18th June 1863. (BM)



1896 – Giles Lang, St Ives schooner, 124 tons. Deliberately beached to save the crew. Cargo 207 tons of coal. On passage Porthcawl to Penzance. One rocket was fired, the line fixed, and the crew, though exhausted, safely rescued. The schooner went to pieces with the evening tide. (PC)



Rocket Apparatus

From the early nineteenth century, Rocket Apparatus Stations were established around the coast. An innovative rocket rescue system was invented by Commodore Henry Fitzgerald after he witnessed a tragic shipwreck along the coast in 1807. His invention allowed a safety line to be fixed from the shore to a ship using a rocket. Shipwrecked persons on board could then be

hauled using a cradle that was pulled along the line. Located at each rocket station was a Coastguard rescue cart. The cart was designed to carry heavy rescue equipment to the scene of a shipwreck, and would have been taken to the closest point possible, usually in terrible weather conditions. Through use of the rocket apparatus, stranded crew members could be carried safely ashore. The carts were stored in specially constructed houses or sheds, and these, along with horses and rescue apparatus, were kept in constant readiness for use. The Bude rocket cart was usually kept in the Board of Trade Coastguard Cottages shown on the previous Carte de Visite, at the sea end of the canal.

Coastguard rescue carts were usually drawn by one strong horse, though in later years a crew of ten men pulled the rigging. A reward of £1, called a Life Prize, was given for each life that was saved. Generally, a rescue team consisted of 25 men. Each member wore a numbered armband, indicating their responsibility within the team. Fewer than 15 men were available to accompany the cart; assistants would be called upon to help.

Attached to the back of the cart was a framed list of names, which described the items that should be found there, and their locations within the cart. This helped assistants who were less familiar with the vehicle in that objects quickly and more easily. The key equipment carried in the cart was a rocket, ground anchor and breeches block; the latter was carried in a Kibble Helvey with a pair of canvas breeches attached that could be pulled along a rope to secure the person being rescued, instead of his legs through the breeches, and one by arms on the body to be pulled to the safety of the shore. The rocket apparatus worked by a rescue rocket being fired up to a distance of 200 yards, with a line attached. On the other end of the line was a whip and whip block, which could be lashed to the ship's mast. This had a small wooden coil of instructions secured to it. These instructions were printed in English, French, German and Norwegian, as usually the most difficult part of the procedure was effective communication to get the crew to quickly secure the line properly. An anchor was embedded in the ground behind an iron tripod to secure the line from the rocket.

Bude Rocket Company 1900 consisted of 15 members exclusive of the coastguard and were collected from all sources, their ages range from 24 to 64 years.

Above: The rocket apparatus has been used to send a line and a crew member in the breeches block being hauled ashore. The stranding of the 1861 Pigeon in 1876.

Below: The Board of Trade rescue cart on Summerleas Downs at the time of the wreck of the Pigeon in 1876. The horse in the foreground is the white spotted horse used to pull the rocket line for every disaster along the coast.