

Red Admiral

Robin was nineteen, the same age as Toby had been when he ferried me to the Tamar at the beginning of my Mirror meanderings. Robin had transported Epic and me to the quiet lay-by location, five miles south of Truro. High (spring) tide was around eight o'clock that evening. Butterflies prevented a morning start. It was not a fear of the 'north five, occasionally six' shipping forecast, for I would be in sheltered waters for a while, but two five by five feet canvasses. One depicted a tortoiseshell, the other a red admiral. The large oil paintings seemed fairly abstract at first glance – the 'sitters' bringing their own powerful, personal arrangements to the compositions, leaving me little more than managing magnification.

I had overseen the hanging of the paintings in the new Crown Court in Truro. The building preceded the new Tate Gallery (opened two weeks earlier in St Ives) by a few years. The same architects were employed on the projects which featured expansive white-walled interiors – hungry for paintings. Judge Taylor thought it a good idea to enhance the Court with works of art. So it was thanks to the 'hanging Judge' that my mind was taken away from my return to the tributaries for a few hours (including the 'elusive' Fal – almost explored two years earlier).

Where was Epic bound? Nostalgia suggested St Ives where I spent that long hot summer. From the kitchen window of the second hotel in which I worked, when stockpot tending allowed, I gazed over Porthmeor at scenes captured by a plethora of painters over the last century. The assistant chef, with doughnut experience, did more than avert his gaze from the simmering bones. A descriptive oil painting depicting a 'Tateless' view of the beach, buildings and Island, accompanied me home after an exciting and varied six-month sojourn.

As a destination for Epic, St Ives, though desirable, seemed out of the question. Wild water, off the Lizard, Land's End and Cape Cornwall, was reason enough to suggest a South Coast destination.



Red Admiral, Blue Bosun

Oil on canvas 6'4" x 5'2" 2001

(The details of the 'Bosun' are in fact taken from a Blue Pansy, tropical butterfly.)