

Dear Reader,

Of course I'm writing this overlooking the beach. It's about 70 degrees, the coffee's going down sweetly, and from my seat at the café I can see that the surf school is about to start training a new bunch of tiny wetsuits. Best of all, this all sort of counts as work. I've been coming down to St Ives, Cornwall (as opposed to the St Ives in Cambridgeshire; that would be a really stupid sat-nav mistake), since I was 18.^{1,2} My mother had just died, and I had to clear my head. I was vaguely aware of some sort of connection the town had with artists, I had probably heard of Barbara Hepworth, but mostly I just wanted to get to the end of England. So I took a train, found a guesthouse when I arrived, and fell in love with the place in ten minutes. Everyone talks about the gauzy Mediterranean light and the slightly hippyish vibe, but there's something else as well: no-one can quite believe their luck. Everyone, even people working here, is smiling. Coming from London, that's what you want.

Thirty-five years on, the guesthouse is still here, near the Tate. But now I have my own small place. It's in the middle of town, no view to speak of, but only three minutes to the beaches and four to Hepworth's house (if you haven't been, go: truly inspiring).³

I'm down here about one week in four, perhaps ten days a month if I've got a deadline. It's still where I come to clear my head, the only place I can really think creatively and do proper work rather than drudge work. I get up early if I'm firing, and don't worry about meal times or other annoying things. My kids and friends (grown-up kids!) come down usually when I'm not here, and use St Ives as most sane tourists do, for pleasure.

But today I went old-school, and I sat overlooking the beach editing my next book, an extraordinary collection of letters that contain the best love story I've ever read – a wartime romance, not at all clichéd, full of passion, worry, jealousy and tiny psychological dramas. I've just read a passage where the man finds a blood clot in his mouth and thinks it's early TB. The doctor tells him it's due to whistling.

More soon!

Wish you were here,
Simon.⁴

Of course I'm writing this overlooking the beach. It's about 70 degrees, the coffee's going down sweetly, and from my seat at the cafe I can see that the Surf school is about to start training a new bunch of tiny websters. Best of all, this all sort of counts as work. I've been coming down to St Ives, Cornwall (as opposed to the St Ives in Cambridgeshire, that would be a really stupid sat-nav mistake) since I was 18. My mother had just died, and I had to clear my head. I was vaguely aware of some sort of connection to town had with artists (I had probably heard of Barbara Hepworth, but mostly I just wanted to get to the end of England. So I took a train! ...)

¹ The St Ives in Cornwall and the St Ives in Cambridgeshire have both been cited as inspiration for the traditional English folk riddle, 'As I was going to St Ives':

*As I was going to St Ives,
I met a man with seven wives.
Each wife had seven sacks,
Each sack had seven cats,
Each cat had seven kits.
Kits, cats, sacks and wives,
How many were going to St Ives?*

The wikipedia entry on this riddle proposes the answer as being any of 0, 1, 2, 7, 9, 2753, 2800 and 2802, depending on your reading of the riddle's grammatical ambiguities. This footnote has very little to do with Simon's letter, besides the impossibility of hearing someone say 'St Ives' without Pavlovianly responding with a reference to seven wives.

² The correct postcode, if using a sat-nav to visit Simon's Cornish bolthole, would be TR26, as opposed to PE27 for the St Ives in Cambridgeshire.

³ On Barnoon Hill, St Ives, Cornwall. Open daily, 10.00-17.20, March-October; open Tuesday-Sunday, 10.00-16.20, November-February. Closed 24-26 December. Admission £6.60/4.40.

⁴ Simon Garfield's most recent book, *To The Letter: A Curious History of Correspondence*, is a celebration of letter-writing throughout history which contains some fine examples of postal practices and personal correspondence, and has quickly become required reading for anyone seeking to work in our offices. We particularly enjoy the story, on p.264, of the nineteen year old Reginald Bray arranging to have himself posted home in 1900.

Simon Garfield has also published fine books on maps, fonts, stamps, wartime diaries, purple dye, the Mini, and wrestling, amongst others. He divides his time between London and St Ives.