

“I think our first major investment in tourism was a tap and a chemical toilet.”

Kathy Stedeford furrowed her brow in concentration and continued:

“Yes, it would have been in 1970 and I was trying to get Bryher campsite going, while building up Bryher Boats with David. Until then, the campsite was just one of our fields but we took the wheelhouse off the old *Faldore* and put it in the field, with the chemical toilet inside. With that and the tap, it seemed the height of luxury camping! Unfortunately, these great advances for the visitors meant that I was responsible for emptying the loo six times a day but we all have to start somewhere.”

We were chatting in the open-plan office of Isles of Scilly Inclusive Holidays on Bryher. From its large windows, there is a commanding view of the channel between Tresco and Bryher and up towards St Mary's. The office is alive with the ringing of phones and the click-clack of computer keyboards. Along with Kathy's business partner, Gill Dan, the business currently employs another five people. This is where the humble beginnings of the tap and chemical toilet have taken Kathy. Her company offers visitors to Scilly an all-in-one package of travel, accommodation, transfers and insurance. Kathy explained:

“What we are good at doing is cutting out the hassle. People can just call us up, tell us what they want to do and their budget and we do all the rest. There are no hidden costs.

We draw on years of experience and knowing both our clientele and the islands really well.”

Kathy knows all about the potential difficulties of travelling to Scilly. Originally from Bristol, Kathy first arrived on the islands in July 1966. She had come to work as a receptionist at the Island Hotel on Tresco.

“I was dropped outside the Mermaid on St Mary's at 7.00pm and told that I'd find my boatman inside. I had all my bags and was dressed in all my mainland finery... I just wanted to go home. I managed to prise Sid and Ken Jenkins out of the bar and they dropped me on Tresco. The next morning, when I started work, I discovered that all three of the other receptionists had resigned before I arrived. It was not an auspicious start.”

Despite this, Kathy was soon to find that she had come to just the right place.

“I just loved it here. The work was brilliant – I really discovered my organisational skills... and my bossiness! I was part of a tremendous team with George Leatherbarrow and Kate Parkes. There was so much going on outside of work too with youth clubs and drama clubs. I had planned to go travelling to New Zealand but I soon forgot about that.”

It was not too long before Kathy fell in love with more than just Scilly. In October 1969, Kathy married David Stedeford, Bryher boatman, and left Tresco for Bryher. The next few years found Kathy looking to a number of means to earn a living.

“We still had a few fields left from my father-in-law's time as a flower farmer so we did the odd box of flowers or two. Rosalie Tildsley and I even used to collect shells off the beaches and send them off to the mainland. During the holiday season, I started the campsite going and did teas from the house. Every little bit counted – I can remember buying a portable typewriter from my cream tea tips.

The season was a lot shorter than it is now, however. Easter used to be very quiet on Bryher, we had very few visitors. One family, the Lawsons, who used to come at that time every year but they were a rarity. Mind you, they clearly loved it. Three of the four children now live on Tresco: Robin runs the pub and Andrew's the Head Gardener.”

For Kathy, the crucial development in the islands' tourist industry came in the late seventies.

“Barnsley Ward and Roy Graham on St Mary's realised that the islands were simply not being promoted. They wrote to everybody involved in tourism on Scilly to come to a meeting on St Mary's. From this the Isles of Scilly Tourism Association was formed. With some funding from the British Tourist Authority, we produced a small leaflet. Everything was voluntary, of course. I stuffed endless envelopes. Everybody made a real effort to get Scilly on the tourist map.”



# smooth operators





*The ladies of Isles of Scilly Inclusive Holidays ...  
Robyn Bennett, Gill Dan, Kathy Stedeford, Zoe Dan, Ginny Hulands.*

It was while Kathy was promoting Scilly that the idea to start Inclusive Holidays came about. She had been away to an exhibition at Exeter, spreading the Scilly word to travel agents in the south-west, when she was approached by a British Rail manager. He chatted to her about their inclusive tour fares and encouraged her to start a company bringing visitors to Scilly. In 1983, Isles of Scilly Inclusive Holidays was born.

“At that stage I had absolutely no experience of the trade at all. I worked from the kitchen table and the ironing board, with the kids, Sam and James helping. I didn’t even take deposits. The old portable typewriter came in handy though.”

Since those days the business has steadily grown, its success built on reputation and dependability. In 1991, Kathy took on Gill Dan to help cope with Inclusive Holidays’ gradual expansion. Gill explained:

“As the mother of six children, I used to just come up in the evenings and weekends. The weekends were easier as I could bring my two year old, David, up to the office with a box of toys and he’d be happy. My role has developed rather since then, most notably a couple of years ago when Kathy made me a partner!”

Gill and Kathy knew each other for some time before working together. It was Gill’s mother, Kate Parkes, who had been Head Housekeeper at the Island Hotel when Kathy arrived on Scilly.

For several years the company’s marketing manager was Kathy’s daughter Sam, who returned from London to join the family business. Now married with a young son, Sam runs Sylina Guest House on St Mary’s.

A sense of family continues to dwell in Inclusive Holidays’ office. Two of Gill’s daughters, Georgie and Zoë, work for the company full-time. James Stedeford, Kathy’s son, regularly puts in an appearance as a partner and boatman of Bryher Boats, which is also run from here. It was as children that Sam and James helped their mother send off her first brochures from the ironing board in their kitchen. The clients who telephone Inclusive Holidays may not be aware of the company’s history but they will know of its quality service. For Kathy it is simple:

“Everybody who works for Inclusive Holidays absolutely loves the islands. It is what we are about, both as travel agents and as people. The service that we offer is unique: we are island-based, island-staffed and, between us all, Inclusive Holidays has over 160 years experience of island life. I like to think that if you need help or advice booking a holiday on the Isles of Scilly then you can’t do better than come to us.”

With that Kathy smiled and said:

“Just don’t ask me for help with your chemical toilet...”

**Isles of Scilly Inclusive Holidays - Tel 01720 423239  
[www.islesofscillyholidays.co.uk](http://www.islesofscillyholidays.co.uk)**