Cornwall’s Tin Mining industry dies, but the works of John Harris lives on. Thanks to JH Society.

Photo: Eric Parsons.

oooOOOooo

January by John Harris

The New Year wakens like a peevish child
In Winter’s chamber. Nature, his dear nurse,
Rocks him upon a rolling cradle-cloud,
While the cold winds lift up their voices loud,
Filling the underworld with straining wild,—
A tempest lullaby! In heaps up-piled
The white snow fills the land, a drapery chaste,
On mead productive, moor, and rocky waste.
Echoes the flail from the old barn of thatch,
The wild duck shelters in the frozen fen,
The redbreast hops upon the wooden latch,
And King Frost lords it o’er the icy glen.
Heap up another log. How sad to be
Abroad in such a gale on land or sea!
CHAIRMAN’S RAMBLINGS – WINTER 2013/14

THANKS – AND HEALTH UPDATE
I am so grateful to our Vice-chair, Eve, for taking my place at committee meetings and putting pen to paper for the last newsletter. Perhaps you feel she didn’t ramble like I do! But I’m back again! Two related spells in hospital have taken their toll though my recovery has gone generally very well and I was able to take the chair for the November committee meeting.

GREAT EXCITEMENT!
Eric has included in this issue as much as space will allow regarding William Catcott – the man who told Harris of the competition for the Shakespeare Tercentenary Prize – and of the contact Eric’s had with an excited researcher who discovered that Catcott came to Cornwall to see John Harris and wrote poetry about him. Read on!

APPOINTMENT OF OFFICERS OF THE SOCIETY
Eric Parsons had no interest in poetry when his wife, Eve, at the invitation of Society founder David Everett, got involved with the John Harris Society but offered his help and has done a sterling job as Press & Publicity Officer over a number of years and for which we are all most grateful. This has included production of the Newsletter. There will be need to nominate someone else to fulfil this role. It’s an open playing field and nomination papers for all officers and the committee are enclosed for return prior to the AGM which meets at Troon Methodist Church on February 22. In past years, the Members’ response in nominating officers has not indicated a huge interest in the subject – or a lack of knowledge about likely candidates - which is a great shame because it is these people who hold The Society together all through the year. SO PLEASE DO FULFIL YOUR RESPONSIBILITY AS A MEMBER AND COMPLETE THE NOMINATION FORM.

ANNUAL ‘BIRTHDAY’ OUTING
The Society’s trip to Falmouth and St Mawes in October proved a real success though it was disappointing that only 10 people took the ferry to St Mawes. For some of the group, the cream tea at The Idle Rocks Hotel – sitting outside on the veranda and soaking up the sea and sun as well as the luscious scones, jam and cream – was a highlight!

Two other Members joined us at Falmouth and we all viewed the plaque that recorded John Harris having lived in Falmouth. Unfortunately the information on the plaque is wrong and it is affixed to the wrong house – it should be on the adjoining one – so the Committee will be taking steps to investigate the possibility of correcting this situation.

THE COMMITTEE REALLY DO NEED YOUR IDEAS FOR FUTURE TRIPS.

SUBSCRIPTIONS
Can I again remind all Members of the payment methods:-
Subscriptions (£6 per annum due on 1st January) can be paid by Standing Order to Lloyds TSB Bank plc, Market Square, Camborne TR14 8JT. Sort Code 30-97-00 Account No. 00480676 A/c Name: The John Harris Society. Standing Order forms are available from your Bank. Cheques made payable to ‘The John Harris Society’ can be sent to our Treasurer: Mrs Christine Cowlis, 20 Westborne Road, Camborne TR14 7JD (01209 713863).
Overseas subscriptions can be paid via PayPal to my email address (shown again on the back of this newsletter) but here it is: paulandgill@durlston500.fsnet.co.uk
Please ensure that any changes to current contact details are passed to both Tony and Christine – their details are again on the back of this newsletter.

‘Thank you’ to all Members for your continuing support for The Society.
Paul Langford

Press and Publicity Officers Report

Sadly, this will be my final report as Press & Publicity Officer and my last edition of the Newsletter. I assisted Eve and Derek Reynolds to produce the editions in 2002 and gradually took over full editorship in 2003/4. I am deeply indebted to all who have submitted copy over these years and trust you will support the next P/P Officer in a similar manner.

My computer skills have greatly improved since I started and at one time I lost the records of previous editions when up-grading my computer. I have since copied every edition since the formation of the society and they remain available for reference by interested parties. These files will be passed on to the secretary and/or to the next Press and Publicity Officer.

Please support my successor with your own articles of interest to all our members.
I have resigned from this post as I have other subjects I am studying and wish possibly to publish a book or two in future. Much of this study is via the internet and requires my full attention and my spare time.
I will of course continue to support the society in any way I can and trust it will continue to thrive. Thank you all.
Eric Parsons.

This greatly simplified diagram shows the principal upon which the man-engine worked. See text page 11
I received an email from a lady (Clare Blackmore) in Wells, Somerset, enquiring if we knew of a William Catcott (1808-1870) Known as the ‘Baker Bard’ of Wells. She had found two lines only of one of John Harris’ poems –

Who taught thee in thy native Wells
But nature’s language in his dells....

I contacted Professor Charles Thomas to ask he knew of this poem and sure enough he phoned me the next day to tell me he had located it in JH’s book, Shakespeare’s Shrine…Not the first two lines but two lines of the 7th verse!

I sent this information back to Clare and she replied –

“Thank you so so much. I am endeavouring to give William Catcott the local status he deserves having been lost to Wells for 150 years. So far the City Council have agreed to name a road after him on a new development and I have to give a presentation to the Civic Society in order to persuade them to back me in getting a Blue Plaque for William’s birthplace. I will use John Harris’s poem as part of that. I wonder how the two poets came to know of each other?

William was very much Wells based having had a bakery in the city for most of his life (hence the Baker Bard title) The local paper published some of his poems but his book “Morning Musings” was not published until his death in 1870.

It was very kind of you to find the poem for me. Thanks again. Clare.

Then an amazing coincidence…Clare’s husband had studied at the Camborne School of Mines earlier and lodged at “Six Chimneys” Bolenowe, the original home of John Harris!!!

Spurred on, Clare searched the records of the journal and found:-


“A few weeks ago I visited my birthplace. The dear old croft I have written so much about and love so well is now ploughed up and converted into a field of corn. When I saw the green oats waving in the breeze and mused on happy hours of rhyming passed in my mossy bower now mine no longer and stripped to me of all it’s inspiration, the heath and thyme all rooted up and burnt in the fire, I sat down and shed many tears. Thus it is that changes come over all sublunary things and the poet as well as the politician is forgotten in the rush of the world after gain. I write this to you thinking my desolated bower would be a nice subject for your pen. J.H.”

The first verse of this poem :-

Forth from the spirit crushing town
In rosy springs fresh morning hour
O'er glittering glade and golden down
Towards his dear old native bower
The miner poet tripped along
The dew drops glistened on the flowers
The merry birds were full of song
How lovely seemed this earth of ours.

Later John Harris writes:-

William Catcott, subject of this brief memoir became known to me some fourteen years ago. He had then published a small volume of poems entitled ‘Morning Musings’ which attracted some attention in his own immediate neighbourhood. This volume he sent to us, which was the beginning of our friendship.
The poems were gentle, chiefly written on local themes and bore evidence of a close observant mind. Though they lacked finish and the true fire of high song, he next published a little brochure which he called ‘Lyrics.’ This contained one of his best poems, ‘The Plough’ which is of itself a sufficient ground to his claim as a minor poet.

From his visits to us on two different occasions we had a brief opportunity to observe his character, which was that of cheerfulness and truth. When we were first introduced to him in our little sitting room he said with his usual smile which he ever wore on his countenance;

“I am come to settle my little bill for your Carn Brea.”

Think of a poor baker travelling a distance of upwards of 200 miles to discharge a debt of a few shillings.

Then from the Wells Reporter Friday December 2nd 1870

The late William Catcott, the Baker Bard.

John Harris the Cornish poet has contributed the following to the memory of the late Baker Bard of Wells.

Few lives of individuals are less replete with interest than is that of the rural poet. He grows up in fellowship with nature and the fields and flowers are his choicest friends. He is content with the quiet of his home path and satisfied that others should reap the honours of war, field and flood. The voice of song in the thicket on the summit of the wild mountain, in the river, ringing glen or in the shadow of the pine forest when the eve nymphs are abroad is enough for him and he leaves the laurels of the mailed combatants without competition. True Cervantes was a traveller, a soldier and a poet but the camp and the court are both unpropitious to the muses.

The mountains are his teachers, crags and storms
Old tumbling waterfalls, low fluting rills,
And flowery valleys, fragrant with perfumes,
Woods, trees, birds, brakes the cattle of the field,
Stars, constellations, the chaste holy moon,
Old Ocean lifting up his awful voice,
And thundering in the ear of the drowsy night,
Each atom of God’s glorious universe
Is the fond teacher of the musing bard.

These visits have been celebrated by him in his verses which will be found in his new book published only a few months ago. That he was kindly disposed towards all his fellow creatures and ever ready to lend a helping hand to the sons and daughters of distress is fully testified by all with whom he came in contact. His nature was altogether unselfish: he strove as far as in him lay to do unto to others as he would be done by and we admire him more as a man than as a poet.

Were there more William Catcotts, ours would be a better and a brighter world. His love for nature was deep and untiring; creation had an unflinching friend in him. All things pure and good and beautiful in the moral and physical universe were appreciated by the self-taught baker bard who strove to elevate his countryman by his life and songs.

His health naturally good had been failing for some time of which he often spoke during his correspondence to his friends and this no doubt accelerated the publication of his poems in a handsome volume about 8 or 10 months ago and we cannot doubt he was most anxious to accomplish this work before the end.

This book should be dear to his fellow citizens as the production of one of themselves. Had he lived a little longer he would have revised his productions and smoothed much of their roughness away so that they would have acquired more than a local reputation.
But let it be remembered that William Catcott was a worker from his childhood to the time of his death. The Baker Bard was a bachelor and never knew the joys a good wife, sons and daughters could bring. Here Clare Blackmore adds---

At this point in the article someone has cut out an advertisement on the reverse of the page but the article ends with........

For all flesh is grass and all the glory of man has the flower of grass. The grass withereth and the flower thereof falleth away but the word of God endureth forever.

(Clare)…It appears that during their friendship, William Catcott informed John of the Shakesperes Tercentenary Prize that John entered and won.

SHEPTON MALLET JOURNAL AND WELLS REPORTER.

Our readers will be interested to know that John Harris, the Cornish poet, author of the poem of the Tercentenary Shakespeare prize which won the gold award offered at Coventry in April 1864 has now a new volume in the press which will be entitled ‘Bulo Reuben Ross, a Tale of the Mannacles, Hymn, Song and Story’. This will be the 7th book of essays and poems which Mr Harris has published within the last 20 years which shows he has been a diligent worker in the fields of fancy. It is an important and serious undertaking for a working man to publish so many volumes successively on his own responsibility, which must have already entailed an expenditure of several hundred pounds. This is a fact that ought not to be forgotten in connection with the Cornish Poet and should command the sympathies of all those who desire to encourage talent. Of his best work, ‘Luda’, The Athenaeum December 12 1868 says:

Two true towers of the field appear next from the pile of books before us. These are represented by ‘Luda a lay Of The Druids’. Of the author we have ere had pleasure in writing with praise as a simple natural poet such as every race but too rarely produces and of a kind which differs to the core from that of sentimental and whining bards who so frequently publish what should be hidden. Mr Harris was a Cornish miner who has written verses which, compared with those that spring from some ardent claimants on the public purse, are as the wine of flowers to the stagnant water of a froggy pool. Without any regard to circumstances of the author or his original position for we are sure so manly a man and cheery a thinker would rather have it so, we testify fully to the freshness and vigour and the beauty of most of his verse.

I continue this article with the first verse of ‘An ode to John Harris’ by William Catcott:-

All hail Sweet minstrel of the west! And sing about their votaries praise
Thou prince of bards- of men the best! Nor will the woodland silent be
I’ll greet thee with a homely lay For every leaf on every tree
And trill a grateful song today. Will lisp in thy enraptured ear a lyric such as poets hear,
Me thinks thy native hills and dells, And every pasture path and plain
Which oft have thrown their magic spells And sunny nook and shady lane
Around thy poet-soul will ring And heather down and bushy brake
A sweeter strain that I can sing, Shall music to thy spirit breathe
And streams will ripple out a line, And true poetic chaplets wreath
And with the voiceful glens combine For thee – thou taught in Nature’s school
To chant their most delightful lays Thou lover of the beautiful.

Another email from Clare Blackmore:-
I think that although William Catcott was a bachelor he may have found love on his visits to John Harris in Cornwall, he talks of someone “a friend at Truro” sending him primroses by post.

Cornish Pimrose in 1864:

Thanks, thanks for the flowers
From Cornwall’s green bowers
Those primroses sweet tho’ drooping and pale
have put me in mind
Of lov’d friends warm and kind.

And then in 1869 he writes:  Cornish Violets.

From some warm western dell
These violets come to tell
Again their cheering tale that spring is near
Where bursting buds are seen
And milkmaids notes are ringing strong and clear.

And oh! before my mind they bring a maiden kind
Sweet and fairer than the summer rose
I've seen her smiling face
In her dear native place
And heard her voice where heather grows.

Beside her in the train
I’ve rattle’d o’er the plain
And watched the trees and hedges dance along
And once ’twas our sweet lot
To find a poets cot
Beside the sea and listen to his song.

Swift flew the summer hours
We spent among the flowers
That gemmed the gifted minstrels fair domain
And so much kindness rare
Was lavished on us there
We long to hear his strains again

But clouds are shading now
My weary, aching brow
And wasting sickness with her humbling hand
Has swept away the flowers
That decked life’s earlier hours
And left me hoping for a better land.

Yet still down in the west
My spirit fain would rest
Where loving hearts and kindred spirits dwell
And by some rippling rill
Near Ellen’s dear old hill
I may at last lay down and sigh.

Clare has sent several emails to me containing more of the poetry of ‘The Baker Bard,’ and I intend printing it into a folder and make this available to all members to study and enjoy. It is possible that his work may be published and more of his relationship with our John Harris could come to light.

It should not be forgotten that William Catcott encouraged John to enter into the competition for the Shakespeare’s Tercentenary Prize.

I have produced a booklet with the full story to date and will have copies available at the AGM.

Compiled by Eric Parsons.
A beautiful June evening is the only way to describe the weather as we set off from Tesco’s car park for our tour of East Camborne in the footsteps of John Harris (1820 - 1884).

Had John Harris been there? This was one of the first questions posed by our guide, David Thomas when we entered Camborne Centenary Methodist Chapel. David’s question referred to the chapel’s opening following the 1839 revival in Methodism in Camborne. Camborne Wesley chapel (built to seat 1,200 people in 1828) was declared too small so Centenary was built as an overflow chapel to accommodate 800 people.

In the graveyard to the rear of the chapel we observed the grave of George Smith - the great supporter of Harris in getting his poetry published. Smith lived from 1800 to 1868 and his granite vault memorial is the tallest in the graveyard. He was the son of a mine carpenter who rose to great heights. (He married Elizabeth Burall Bickford, a daughter of William Bickford and the change of surname to Bickford-Smith happened after one of George’s sons received an inheritance from a member of the Bickford family.) David described George Smith as promoting the 3 Ms – ‘Methodism, Mining and Merchanting’. Harris, of course, dedicated some of his poetry to George Smith.

We then saw the grave of Captain Josiah Thomas, Manager of Dolcoath Mine. A man, born in a humble cottage at Knave-Go-By, who rose to the top of his profession. His memorial was erected by employees of Dolcoath Mine which must speak volumes about the man. It is said that 8,000 people formed his cortège to walk from Camborne Wesley Chapel to his grave at Centenary.

The Holman vault is there too - about to be renovated by the Old Cornwall Society. Moving inside the chapel, we were shown the original curved communion area (now behind the pulpit) which copied Wesley’s chapel in City Road, London.

We went on to Dolcoath Avenue via the new link road provided by the demolition of a number of the original Holman buildings opposite what is now Tesco. This Avenue was described as a road that had 1 mile of shafts; the deepest one being ½ a mile deep. The Camborne-Redruth area’s mines produced between 1/3 and 1/5 of the world’s copper in the early nineteenth century. How staggering that such riches should have been on our doorstep and yet some miners earned so little when they couldn’t find the copper?

The Methodist revival referred to above saw the Church of England fighting back with the building of Treslothan Church in 1842 and All Saints at Tuckingmill in 1845 - which we could see in the distance. We continued to the former Dolcoath Count House - now a second hand store and one time home of the original Camborne Technical College - where John Harris would have gone to collect his pay (if he had earned any through mining valuable rock).

David informed us that the Basset Estate covered an area from Dolcoath to St Euny (Redruth Coombe). There were 20 to 30 stamping mills in Harris’ day between Dolcoath and Gwithian (where the ‘red’ river discharged into the sea). The Dolcoath stamps were sited where the F T Williams travel depot is now. It was also on the road between Dolcoath and Six Chimneys at Bolenowe that John Harris once encountered the terrifying apparition of the dark spectral figure of a man on a horse, which made such an impression on him. Did he encounter the Devil himself?

We were encouraged - as we stood at the junction of Dolcoath Road and the Tuckingmill Valley Road to visualise the ‘Harris’ view before the railway embankment was built. To the right lay the village of Brea, once referred to as St Michael’s Foot, while Carn Brea, with its stark reminder of the mining heyday in the form of the Basset monument, gave David the opportunity to tell us that when the head of the Basset family - Lord de Dunstanville - was buried in 1835, 20,000 people formed the cortège from Tehidy House to Illogan Church.

Prepared by Paul & Tony Langford and David Thomas.
More extracts from the West Briton---Life in Cornwall in the early nineteenth century.
Compiled by Eve Parsons.

REDRUTH COTTAGE GARDENING SOCIETY
On Wednesday, the 14th instant, the third annual meeting of this society was held in the Classical School Room, Redruth and a very gratifying meeting it was to all who have taken an interest in the institution. The system of distributing seeds to cottagers has been extensively acted on in this parish, and we are happy to say with very encouraging results. A gentleman in the room related [one] instance of persevering confidence in the judgment of the officers of the society, which it may not be amiss to give here: A poor old woman had received a gift of some lettuce seed, from which she had reared some very good lettuces, but whatever trouble it had cost her to rear the vegetables, it cost her a great deal more to discover how to use them. She had boiled them, she said, and had not liked them cooked in that manner; and then she had fried, and stewed, and we believe, baked them; and not suiting her palate either way, she seemed to think it useless to repeat the cultivation. As this was not a solitary instance of un-acquaintance with the uses of the produce of the seed so kindly distributed, would it not be as well to give a little information on this subject?

23 August 1839

SILVER FROM PENPOLL SMELTING WORKS
A large plate of this valuable metal was taken from the furnaces of Messrs. Michell and Co’s lead works, at Penpoll, near Truro, on Tuesday se’n’night. The precise weight of this plate we do not know, but we believe it was about 7,000 ounces. The plate extracted the preceding month weighed between 6 and 7,000 ounces, and we understand that the quantity of silver in its purest state obtained at the works during the last twelve months exceeded 50,000 ounces.

27 July 1838

STEALING BEES AND HONEY
Cornwall Summer Assizes. Anthony Cock, 37, was charged with stealing three butts of bees, with the honey and comb, the property of Mr. James Mann [who] is a yeoman living at Boswarton, near Penzance; has a garden behind his home where he keeps bee hives; saw his bees safe on Saturday the 21st of July; on the next morning at five o’clock they were all gone; the bees were killed and there was no honeycomb left. James Mann, jun., is a constable at Gulval where the prisoner lives, went with the prosecutor to the prisoner’s house; the door was bolted on the inside, he afterwards got into the house, and found the prisoner in the chimney. Witness then went up the stairs, which he found covered with dead bees; he then went into the bed-room and found more dead bees; the prisoner’s sister was in one of the beds, of which there were two in the room, and refused to get up till witness told her he would upset the bedstead if she did not get up. She rose and he then found some honey-comb under the sacking of the bed and dead bees and honey in various parts of the house.

….Guilty. Six months' hard labour.

3 August 1838
A Whitsun Weekend by Eve Parsons.
Engaged as I am at the present time in writing a few years of family history I’ve come across a two day excursion with my Father and two brothers.

It was a Whitsun weekend. We lived at Roscroggan, near Camborne. After walking to Redruth on Saturday morning we visited friends of Dads, by the name of Thomas, where we were welcomed with buns and cocoa.

In the afternoon we were taken to Fair Meadow at West End, Redruth. Anderton and Rowlands Fair pitched there every year. This was our first ever visit to a fairground, very exciting! We were given money for a ride on the ‘Noah’s Ark’ plus a penny each for sweets or pop corn.

Leaving the fair Dad bought us a bag of chips for our tea, to eat on the walk home.

On Sunday morning we set off again, taking pasties and lemonade for mid-day picnic, walking this time to Gwennap Pit. Dad was familiar with this ancient preaching place but I and my brothers had never seen such a strange construction. A gentleman, one of the local preachers, came to address the congregation. He told us about a great preacher who had visited the pit in the 1700’s and declared it ‘The most magnificent spectacle he would ever see this side of heaven!’ of course in his day there would not have been any seats, people would have stood anywhere to listen to John Wesley who came to Cornwall on many occasions.

Giving out his verbal sermons to the congregation, he also visited Carn Brea commenting on the ‘Druid Alters’ and there great antiquity.

John Harris also considered Carn Brea worth writing about. One of his many tomes was titled ‘The Story of Carn Brea,’ thought by many to be his finest work.

As a thirteen year old I had no knowledge of any of the foregoing but did tell Mrs Basset (Sunday School Teacher at Roscroggan) of our adventurous weekend. She was pleased we had learnt something from visiting Gwennap Pit!

Note:- Peter Stanier, editor of ‘Cornwall’s Literary Heritage’ wonders if “This might have been the first time that a man of seventy years had been heard by 30,000 people at one time.”

Eve Parsons.

OUTING TO St MAWES.

Saturday October 12th saw a lovely Autumn day when a group of twelve met in Falmouth to commemorate the Birthday Anniversary of JOHN HARRIS.

A few went first to Killigrew Terrace, where the Poet lived at some stage after leaving Troon - I say a few because not realising that it was the Oyster Festival-some of us found parking somewhat challenging to say the least and arrived a little later than planned!

Eventually we all met up at the Prince of Wales pier and the majority of the party then boarded the ferry for St Mawes, at a very reasonable return fare of £5.

There were poetry readings at various points, chosen with the locations of Falmouth and St Mawes in mind. At St Mawes we wondered around at our leisure and then made our respective ways back on the ferry to Falmouth and home. All in all, a very lovely afternoon.

Eleanor Bowell.
The Cornish Man Engine. (From ‘Cornish Magazine’ July 1964)

The appallingly harsh conditions prevailing in Cornish mines during the not-so-good old days of the industry’ prime resulted in a correspondingly high mortality rate among the underground workers. Bad air, contaminated by rock dust and powder fumes, added to the incredibly hard toil of breaking and raising ore with the absolute minimum of mechanical aids, sapped the men’s health and strength at an alarming rate, so that it was quite the usual thing for them to be flung on the industrial scrap heap at the age of forty or even earlier, victims of heart disease, silicosis and other ailments resulting directly from the nature of their arduous employment.

Of all the varied causes contributing to this sad state of affairs, probably the most harmful was one which might not be suspected at all by those having no direct personal knowledge of mining, and that was the sheer physical efforts expended by the men in descending and ascending the shafts every day to reach the “levels” in which they worked. If we take the depth of the average large mine at 200 fathoms—and there were many far deeper than that—then the workman, to reach the bottom, would have to climb down 1,200 feet of mostly perpendicular ladders, ascending the same distance again on his return. A hardened mountaineer, working in fresh air and daylight, would consider this a good day’s “stint” in itself; but the miner, in addition, was expected to perform his regular “core” of underground toil in the bowels of the earth. No wonder the men sickened and aged so quickly; it would have taken a Titan, let alone a Cornish giant, to endure for long under such conditions as these.

By the second quarter of the last century the high death rate among Cornish miners was already causing much concern among the more humane and philanthropic people in the county; and one of them—Mr. Charles Fox—decided to do something about it. Recognising the important part played by ladder-climbing in breaking down the miner’s health, this gentleman offered, in 1834, through the Royal Cornwall Polytechnic Society, three premiums for the best improvement on the existing system. The competition was won by a Cornish engineer called Michael Loam, his invention, which had the great merit of requiring only a very slight adaptation of machinery already in use on the mines, being known as a man-engine.

It may safely be presumed that every reader of this newsletter is familiar, if only from the examination of models and photographs, with the traditional Cornish pumping engine which once did duty on almost every mine in the county. Housed in one of those tall, narrow buildings which still dot our countryside, this engine was fitted with a “bob,” which, in working, dipped its nose six, eight or ten feet towards the shaft, before raising it again to complete the stroke. To this nose was fastened beams of wood, or rods, which, bolted together, extended to the bottom of the mine. In descending, these rods forced up the water—the miner’s biggest enemy—through pumps to the adit or surface, where it drained away.

Now, Michael Loam’s idea for convening a pumping engine, for raising water, into a man-engine for raising miners, was as follows: Assuming that the length of each “stroke” of the engine was ten feet, then at every interval of ten feet a bracket was fixed to the rod, on which a man could stand, with a corresponding platform placed at every ten feet in the shaft. A miner, by stepping on to a rod bracket as the rod descended, and then to a shaft platform, when it began to rise, would be carried down into the mine ten feet with every stroke of the engine, without himself having to descend a single foot. By reversing his actions, and “riding the rod” on the upward part of its stroke, he could get from the bottom of the shaft with equally little effort, and an even greater saving of time.

See diagram at bottom of page 3.  

Edited by Eric Parsons.
This Newsletter is published three times per year, by the John Harris Society, free to members. All enquiries and articles for possible inclusion in future editions to:- c/o Tony Langford.

New Press & Publicity Officer. Please note that Eric Parsons will not be standing for re-election as from the AGM as Press & Publicity Officer. Meanwhile all items for inclusion in the next issue to Secretary Tony Langford.

***Note our e-mail address: jhsociety1@sky.com***

(A new email address will be created after the election of new Press & Publicity Officer)

Visit our Web site: www.johnharrissociety.org.uk

Subscriptions (£6.00 GBP from 1st Jan. 2012) and other cheques to

Hon. Treasurer:- Mrs Christine Cowls

‘Trematon,’ 20, Westborne Road, Camborne. TR14 7JD (01209 713863)

Or by PayPal to:- paulandgill@durlston500.fsnet.co.uk

The editor wishes to thank those who have contributed to our newsletters in the past and welcomes more articles from you, our readers, for possible inclusion in future editions. Anything remotely connected with Cornwall, John Harris, poetry, including other poets and Cornish life please.

John Harris (1820-1884)

John Harris was born in 1820 at Six Chimneys on Bolene Carn, near Camborne, the eldest of eleven children.

Largely self-educated - he started school when he was six or seven years old before finishing at the age of nine - John had an insatiable appetite for reading from his early years. On his ninth birthday he started work, briefly as a ploughboy, then for a tin-streamer, or—tinner operating in Forest Moor. When he was thirteen, John went to work underground at Dolcoath. He was to ply this arduous occupation for twenty-four years, seeing the famous mine pass from copper to tin.

Poetry, or verse-making as he called it, had been part of John’s life since his first attempts at rhyme in school when he was just eight years old. Whatever he was doing, verses were forming in his mind and he scribbled these down whenever and wherever and on whatever he could. He used the clean side of cast-off labelled tea wrappers, and when no paper was available would scratch his poems on slate, using a sharp pointed nail. In his mining days his miner’s ‘hard’ hat was sometimes used for this purpose. When no ink was available, he used blackberry juice. He fitted his writing into a busy life that, apart from his work and his family responsibilities, included being a Methodist lay preacher and a Sunday School teacher.

John Harris left Dolcoath in 1857 to take up an appointment as a Scripture Reader at Falmouth, a post which he threw himself into with enthusiasm. He continued writing poetry, and began writing peace tracts and became a Quaker.

John Harris died in 1884 and lies buried in Treslothan Churchyard.

Tony Langford 2008