

The John Harris Society

Newsletter No 55

Autumn 2015



Pendarves woods.

Photo || Eric Parsons

Extract from 'The Seasons' || John Harris

*And Autumn, with the dry leaves in his hand
O'erwritten with the stanzas of the wood,
When the rich grapes, by amorous zephyrs fanned,
Hang by the porch, and cluster near the flood,
Speaking in wisdom's ear that God to all is good.*

Birthday outing on Saturday, October 10th — See page 7 for details

CHAIRMAN'S RAMBLINGS || September 2015

John Gillbard

In my last 'Ramblings', I said that John Gillbard was standing down from the Committee after years of faithful service. His wife, Hester, had been unwell for some time and unexpectedly passed away on 21st June after seemingly successful heart surgery. We express our sincere condolences to John whose Christian faith is shining through this tragedy.

The John Harris Commemorative Plaque in Falmouth

Although we've not heard from the University regarding the possibility of Dawn French unveiling the new plaque, we have fixed it in place of the one that gave incorrect information and are very pleased with how it looks. We had the utmost co-operation and help from the owners of 84, Killigrew Street, Falmouth where the plaque is displayed. It would still be possible for it to be officially unveiled. While fixing it, a man stopped to tell us he had lived in that house for 7 years from when he was 3 years old in 1939. No wonder, our efforts to determine who organised the original plaque proved fruitless!

Birthday Events

You will know that those attending the AGM agreed that a trip should be organised for this year's celebration and it will take place on **Saturday 10th October**. **Please note the change of date** as The Society has been invited to have a stand and make a presentation at a Lowender Peran event which will be held in Newquay on 17th October.

When we started planning outings for The Society a few years ago, we felt we should try to visit places that John Harris visited. We soon realised that with only a borrowed horse or his own feet, his travel had been severely limited. However, he did visit Kynance Cove so that was included in our first outing. That was a very successful event. Full details of the plan for this year are given later and we hope many of you will join in this event. When we visited Helston Museum, a number of people felt more time was necessary than was allowed so we've tried to put that right. Harris did visit Tregonning Hill which The Society visited some years ago so we will return there and trust the weather will be kind to us!

We live in a very different world than the one Harris knew

Gill and I have just returned from two weeks in Norway. We didn't travel by borrowed horse or on foot but by car, coach, plane and Cruise Ship beyond the Arctic Circle to Hammerfest, the world's most northerly town, to Nordkapp (North Cape) the most northerly point in Europe and then to Kirkenes, the town just a few kilometres from the Russian border which some of our party visited! Although we were too late to see the midnight sun, it didn't get dark (as we've experienced it at home this week) so I was able to take photographs around midnight that showed the light sky like an umbrella – an amazing sight!

It is difficult to contemplate how difficult travel was 200 years ago when, today, it is so easy to widen our horizons. Yet Harris found complete inspiration in the natural world that surrounded him and was able to write about his simple home and what must have been a hard life with such good effect that continues to impress his readers today. His 'Bolenowe Hill' environment was so full of 'peace and quiet' that that alone gave him such inspiration. It must, for him, have been a great relief from the total darkness he experienced underground, especially when, working with his uncle, their hat candles failed and they had to crawl on their hands and knees to find the shaft – at great risk to their lives. **JUST IMAGINE WHAT HE MIGHT HAVE PENNED HAD HE SEEN THE MIDNIGHT SUN!**

Subscriptions

Thanks so much to those who have responded to my personal note regarding outstanding subscriptions. Those who have not yet responded are kindly asked to do so without delay.

With kind regards,

Paul Langford, chairman

The Longest Day

Those of you who know me will be aware of my love of books plus all that goes with them, so when our secretary Tony Langford requested Eric and myself to represent the John Harris Society at the launch of a book concerning the Bards of the Gorsedh Kernow I was delighted.

An Awen ceremony for the Bards was held at 11am at the recently restored Carwynnen Quoit. The book was to be available for sale at 1pm at Treslothan Church. We guessed, correctly, that many people would be in attendance and drove down just after midday; luckily a space was available.

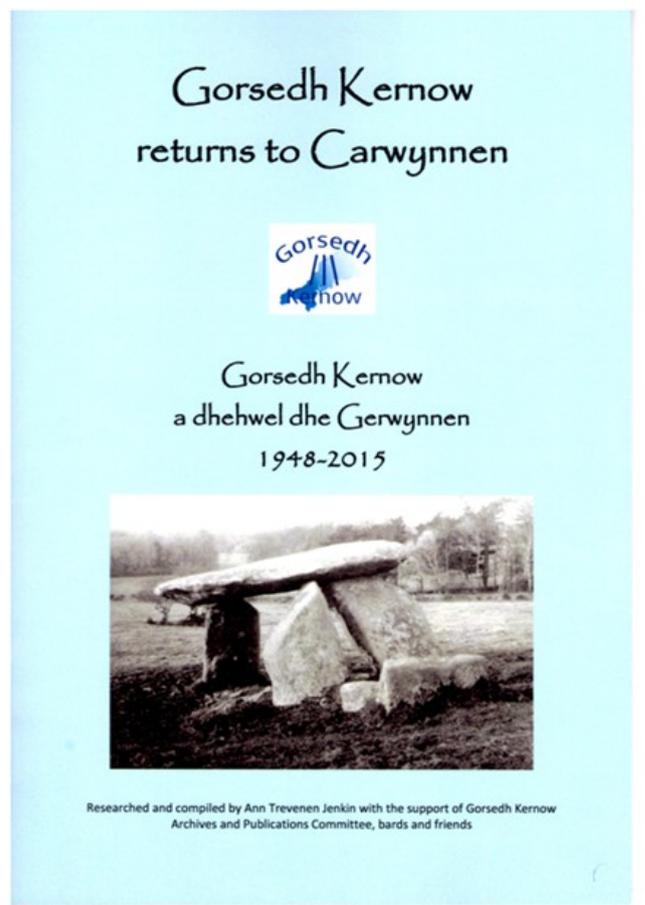
The booklet, A4 size, with attractive blue cover titled 'Gorsedh Kernow returns to Carwynnen' has been researched and compiled by an extremely busy lady, Ann Trevenen Jenkin, past Grand Bard and i/c Gorsedh Archivist. Ann is also concerned with two other books at this time.

The booklet covers the year of 1948 only; the opening of the Cornish Gorsedh at Carwynnen plus brief details of the 19 Bards initiated in that year. Several photographs are included. Three advertisements are on the inside back cover. One is for the John Harris Society placed by our chairman Paul Langford. We were pointed out by Ann to a gentleman from Redruth, who spoke to us about it afterwards. A lady was also interested.

Short addresses, whilst many cameras clicked away, were given by Ann Trevenen Jenkin, who thanked the other Gorsedh members responsible for helping with the booklet production, and another by the present day Grand Bard, Maureen Fuller, who included thanks to the Rev Dom Whitting for the hospitality at Treslothan Church.

I left after getting a good look at the large badge of office worn by the Grand Bard, with two copies of the booklet and a book of poems, feeling that my time, like my money, had been well spent.

Eve Parsons, vice-chairman



DEADLINE FOR COPY FOR NEXT NEWSLETTER: JANUARY 16th, 2016

Camborne walk with David Thomas

Although rain prevented the full walk around Central Camborne, the event took place with the group spending time at Camborne Wesley Methodist Church and Camborne Parish Church. As usual, David Thomas shared his considerable knowledge of Camborne history with infectious enthusiasm.

Describing Camborne Wesley as “iconic in the history of Methodism in Cornwall”, David pointed out many things, including plaques to C V Thomas and Dr George Smith. C V Thomas, a forebear of JHS president Professor Charles Thomas, gave money for the enlargement of the rostrum in 1911 and was instrumental in establishing the commercial and industrial life of Camborne. George Smith, an industrialist, prominent Methodist layman, and prolific author, played an important role in the life of John Harris. He arranged the publication of the poet’s first book, *Lays from the Mine, the Moor and the Mountain* and managed the business aspects of the first seven books. David’s talk at Camborne Parish Church was just as riveting. The only Grade 1 listed building in Camborne, it is the widest church in Cornwall. John Harris was baptised here on 4th November 1820 (subsequently, all his siblings were baptised here), and it was here that his marriage to Christiana Jane Rule took place on 11th September 1845. A former Rector of Camborne, the Rev Hugh Rogers, encouraged the poetic endeavours of John Harris by loaning him books. One of the books was Southey’s *Remains of Henry Kirke White*, of which young Harris said: “I pondered with great avidity and delight”.

A fascinating, informative and enjoyable evening. And the good news is that David Thomas has offered to lead another walk in 2016.

Tony Langford

John Harris at Lowender Peran

When a slot was offered to the John Harris Society at the 2015 Lowender Peran Festival, it seemed too good an opportunity to turn down. So much so that the committee took the decision to switch the John Harris Birthday Event from 17 October to 10 October (See details on page 7).

The event to which we have been invited is being organised by CLEM (Cultural Legacy of European Mining) as part of the Lowender Peran Festival. It will take place on Saturday, 17 October at the Atlantic Hotel, Newquay (morning session) and at Newquay Museum (afternoon session). We have been given the opening slot (10.00 to 10.30am), entitled ‘Mining Poetry’. Other topics to be covered in the morning session are: ‘Mining Songs’, led by Hilary Coleman and the Red River Singers; and a presentation on ‘The exploitation of child labour in European mining’, to be led by Olivia Cerrone and Steve Angove. The afternoon session at Newquay Museum (1.30 to 3.00pm) takes in a mining exhibition and videos.

The John Harris Society is represented on CLEM by Caroline Palmer.

Tony Langford

Treasurer's notes

May I first thank all the members who support the Society so well. The committee work quite hard to promote the story of John Harris and have already held two exhibitions this year, and more are in the pipeline.

None of the committee claim any expenses, and we recently purchased another folding display screen for £127. I am sure you will understand that we rely heavily on your annual subscriptions of £6 per member, so if you have not yet renewed your membership, we would be very grateful if you would do so.

Please either send me a cheque payable to 'The John Harris Society' for £6 per person, or pay by Paypal. The addresses for both are on the back of this newsletter.

Once again, thanks for your support.

Christine Cows

Poems of Cornwall by E L T Harris-Bickford

I have a book 'Poems of Cornwall', published by a Penzance firm F RODDA, in 1892.

It contains poems of some 30 authors, including John Harris together with his two sons Howard and Alfred.

One of the authors to catch my attention was E L T Harris-Bickford. His address was given as Bedford House, Camborne, and he was said to have been the Editor of 'Bickfords Magazine'. The 1891 census shows him aged 31, to be living in Tuckingmill.

His poem to Robert Burns reads as follows:

BURNS

'Poet-Magician, who, with marvellous hand,
Taught Scotland's sons the witchery of song,
Whose tongue — the outlet for a spirit strong —
Sung rapturously of love and native land
In numbers wild, inspiriting and grand;
Thy native hills re-echo still thy strain,
Resounding loud o'er ceaseless, moving main
To wheresoe'er a Scottish son doth stand!

Ah! Matchless prince of northern minstrelsy
Whose bosom heaved with ecstasy divine,
O that more bards could strike the lyre like thee,
Or that one half thy priceless gift were mine:
Then might I trust with some just hope to be
Far nearer that deep pulsing thrill of thine.'

Eleanor Bowell

DOWN MEMORY LANE

MORE EXTRACTS FROM THE WEST BRITON — LIFE IN CORNWALL IN THE EARLY 19TH CENTURY

AGED TEN AND TWELVE

Cornwall Easter Sessions. Simon Jury, 12, and Thomas Chapel, 10, were charged with having stolen a smelling bottle, six current cakes, a pound of raisins, and twenty walnuts, the property of Wm. Richards, of Camborne. It appeared that the two prisoners were seen by the wife of the prosecutor in her shop, on Saturday last; and on going out, the prosecutrix found the things in question taken...A conviction for felony at the last sessions was proved against Jury. Jury---seven years' transportation; Chapel---to be imprisoned till the rising of the court, be once privately whipped, and then discharged.

7 April 1843

ONCE EVERY THREE MONTHS

Bodmin Gaol. The 43rd rule is that all prisoners, except debtors, should have the tepid bath once in every three months. We (the magistrates) thought that unnecessary.

30 June 1843

WITH A COMMON OVEN

To let, with possession at Michaelmas next, the well-known Inn, situate in St Agnes Church-town known by the name of the Fifteen Balls. There is a newly-built Common Oven connected with the Premises, which would be a desirable investment for a person having a small capital, as there is no Common Oven in the place or neighbourhood.

21 July 1843

GUNDRY, THE CHAMPION WRESTLER

Redruth Annual Wrestling to take place at the at the South Turnpike, on Tuesday and Wednesday, 22nd and 23rd of August...The following prizes will be awarded, viz.---First Prize, a silver goblet, value £7-0-0 ; Second ditto, a Silver Cup, value £4-0-0; Third ditto, a Silver Cup, value £2-10-0.; Forth ditto, a Gold-laced Hat; Fifth ditto, a Silver-laced Hat...The parties who have taken the direction of this wrestling in hand, wish it to be known, that T. Gundry, of Sithney, will be excepted from contending for any of the above prizes, as he (Gundry) has not for a succession of years met with anything like an equal match, at any of the wrestlings he has attended, from which circumstance, his presence as a player has had a disparaging effect on the generality of wrestlers; therefore justice demands for him the well-earned title of "Champion of all the English Wrestlers".

11 August 1843

DAIRY CATTLE TO LET

To let, by tender, a Dairy of Twenty Cows, at the approaching season, with the usual quantity of Potatoe Ground, the use of a horse and cart for attending markets &c.,&c., situate about three miles from Penryn and five from Falmouth.

(The leasing of dairy cattle was a common feature of farming in west Cornwall, although usually the numbers involved were smaller. The produce was taken to market by the lessee, money from the sale of this being used to pay the rent. Ground for potatoes was normally included in the lease and these, together with skimmed milk, were used to rear pigs).

27 October 1843

COMPILED BY EVE PARSONS

THE JOHN HARRIS SOCIETY BIRTHDAY EVENT 2015

Dear friends

We are pleased to invite you to this year's birthday event on Saturday 10th October. We are travelling by coach to Helston for a visit to the museum (spending a little longer there than last time). We then travel to Balwest Chapel hall for a Horse and Jockey pasty lunch (or packed lunch if preferred) followed by a walk up Tregonning Hill with stops on the way for poetry readings. I'm told the view at the top is spectacular! For those who are unable, you may stay at the hall, again with poetry readings.

The ladies at Balwest Chapel are kindly supplying us with tea, coffee etc.

The programme is as follows:

- Coach pick-ups: **1. Camborne Railway Station (NB: Magnet now charge for parking in their area) 9.45am**
- 2. Troon layby (by Harris' Garage and the Celtic Cross on Camborne side of the village) 9.55am**
- 3. Troon Square 10.00am**

We will leave Helston at 12.30 to go to Balwest Chapel, and after the walk will depart from there at 3.30 for the journey home.

The coach fare is £9 per person and the pasties are £3 each and are available in the flavours: Steak, Veg and cheese, or Vegetable. Please state preference on the form.

Please complete the booking form below and send to me at 20, Westborne Road, Camborne TR14 7JD, together with a cheque payable to JOHN HARRIS SOCIETY by **October 3rd.**

We do hope you will join us and bring some friends — all are welcome.

Best wishes to all,

Christine Cowls, Treasurer JHS.

THE JOHN HARRIS SOCIETY BIRTHDAY OUTING. Bookings please by October 3rd.

Pasty flavours: Steak, veg & cheese, or vegetable. £3 each. Coach fare £9.

Please reserve.....pasty/ies. Flavour/s..... cost.....

Please reserve.....coach seats. Pick up point:..... cost.....

From.....Phone.....E-mail.....

Address.....

This Newsletter is published three times per year, by the John Harris Society, free to members.

All articles for possible inclusion in future editions to:

Press and Publicity Officer, Stephen Crossman, 8 Rose-an-Grouse, Canonstown, Hayle, TR27 6JN.

Phone: 01736 753912. E-mail: stephenc123@icloud.com

Subscriptions (£6 GBP from 1st Jan. 2012) and other cheques to:

Hon Treasurer, Mrs Christine Cows, 'Trematon', 20 Westborne Road, Camborne, TR14 7JD.

Phone: 01209 713863.

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

Grateful thanks go to all those who have contributed news articles in the past and more articles from you, our readers, will be most welcome for possible inclusion in future editions — anything remotely connected with Cornwall, John Harris, poetry, including other poets and Cornish life.

JOHN HARRIS || 1820-1884



JOHN HARRIS was born in 1820 at Six Chimneys on Bolenowe Carn, near Camborne, the eldest of 11 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 tinstreamer, or — tinner operating in Forest Moor. When he was 13, John went to work underground at Dolcoath. He was to ply this arduous occupation for 24 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 at 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

Visit our website || www.johnharrissociety.org.uk

Visit Facebook page || www.facebook.com/johnharrissociety