

THE John Harris Society

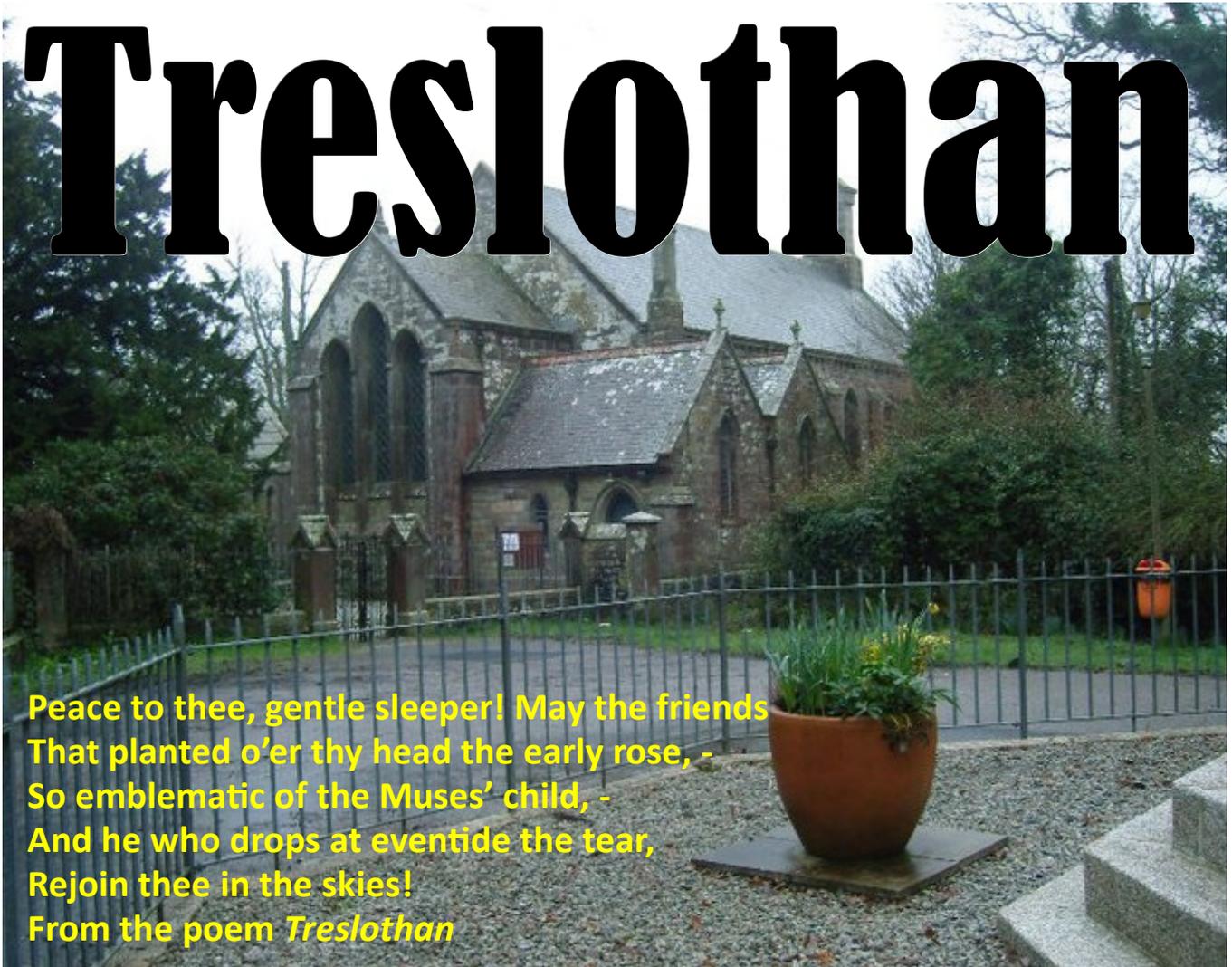


Newsletter

No 58 Autumn 2016

John Harris: miner, poet, preacher 1820-1884

Treslothan



Peace to thee, gentle sleeper! May the friends
That planted o'er thy head the early rose, -
So emblematic of the Muses' child, -
And he who drops at eventide the tear,
Rejoin thee in the skies!
From the poem *Treslothan*

■ The beautiful setting of Treslothan Church, where a dozen or so people gathered for the Society's annual summer walk in June. See page 6.

BIRTHDAY EVENT

FOLK OPERA on Alfred Wallis, fisherman and painter

Troon Chapel Guildroom, October 15, 2016, 3pm.

Man-Engine Puppet celebrates the 'Tinth' anniversary of local World Heritage Sites

The Man-Engine visited Camborne on 3 August and was welcomed by crowds of people who thronged the main street and Commercial Square from where its full transformation was clearly visible. It was an impressive sight! Naturally, people have been asking what would happen to it after it reached Geevor Mine – the final stop-off for this journey – and we heard of the plan to take it to 176 sites in 40 countries to where Cornish miners had emigrated. Prior to seeing the display, a number of members gave information about Harris' early life and read some extracts from his works to a very small audience in Tyacks Hotel. The size of the audience bore little relevance to the effect as we sold two books and made two new members for the Society!

Exhibitions and talks

A small display of exhibition material should soon be in place at Newquay Museum. It is possible that further exhibitions will be held at Truro & Penwith College and Falmouth University over the coming months.

We took part in Redruth's International Mining and Pasty Festival with the hope of achieving further publicity for and sales of the anthology *The Extinguished Candle Re-Lit*.

However, apart from selling one to Australian visitors and one to a member of the Society, sales were very slow, although some interest was shown and leaflets handed out. We were, however, most grateful to Mark and Julia Pratten for the loan of their Gazebo, for which the weather was ideal! A photo of the display is shown above.



On November 6, Baldhu Chapel, which overlooks Wheal Jane Mine site, is holding a special service to celebrate mining and miners and Tony (L) and I have been authorised by the committee to speak for 15 minutes (as requested!) on Harris. Please see the special advert within this newsletter and support us on the day, if you can.

An appeal for help!

We struggled to find enough available committee members to staff the Mining & Pasty Festival for the whole day so it would be very good to have a 'bank' of members willing to help on such occasions. One of our problems is not knowing many of our members personally so a list of names would be most helpful to call on. Of course, not all exhibitions require staffing. Please pass your name to Stephen, Christine or me. Contact details are on the back page.

Storage of original Harris books

Discussions have been held with Falmouth University about exhibitions and they raised the question of the storage of the original books owned by the Society as they have air-conditioned, constant temperature facilities. The books would be stored in locked glass-fronted cases. We were shown the public access areas



■ **Members of the John Harris Society reading some extracts from the poet's works in Tyacks Hotel.**
Picture by Camborne BID

where readings could take place and assured of the presence of a responsible officer at all times the books are being studied. Discussions have not been finalised as we would need to be able to take books off site from time to time. We are aware that these have to be decisions of the Annual Meeting but any comments you have would be valued in the interim period.

The Shakespeare connection

Gill and I were unable to view John Harris' 'Ode to Shakespeare' in the Great Bard's Museum as intended because its opening hours were inconvenient. However, we have heard since that some years ago, members Eleanor Bowell and Jay Harris (USA) did view it there.

DVD available

As reported last time, Caroline Palmer and Pol Hodge produced a DVD in 2004 on John Harris which is now available on general release at a cost of £4. Caroline can be contacted on 01209 890102 or by email at caroline@monkeyrockdesigns.com. We sold two of her DVDs at the Pasty Festival, one of which has gone to Australia!

2020 event

Plans for the bicentenary event, 'The John Harris Festival', continue apace and at our next committee meeting we expect to approve a flier which will be widely distributed across the world seeking expressions of interest. Tony Jasper's considerable experience in organising this sort of event will, I am sure, result in a very special time and although four years hence, we have to be planning now, particularly for the overseas visitors who are already expressing interest in it with some planning to be there.

Tony Jasper has invited anyone who wants to keep up-to-date with developments to pass their contact details to him at tony.jasper@btinternet.com. The Alverton Hotel (Truro) will be the base for the festival with keynote speakers and visits to 'John Harris Country'.

Birthday Event – Troon Chapel Guildroom, 3pm, on 15 October 2016

Member Sue Farmer and her associates will be presenting her Folk Opera on Alfred Wallis, the Cornish fisherman and painter (1855-1942). Some members have already seen it and greatly appreciated it. There will be an update on the year's activities and the 2020 plans and the meeting will be followed by something we haven't tried before – a **Bring-and-share tea**. Do come and bring your friends – and something to eat! Let's celebrate John Harris' 196th birthday together!

Cornwall's first pillar boxes

Two of these letter boxes have been set up in Truro, one in Lemon Street, and another in Frances Street, and are likely to be very convenient to the inhabitants of those parts of the town. A complaint, however has been made to the police, that on Tuesday last, some mischievous parties threw in small stones, and part of a burnt cigar into the Lemon Street box.

5th December 1856

Cornwall Book Hawking Society

Mr James Cochrane, the travelling hawker was also present at a meeting of the Cornwall Book Hawking Society, and exhibited his pack, or box, as furnished with books, prints, etc., for his daily journeys. When full it was as heavy as a strong man could carry on his pack stick over his shoulder, and it appears that his system is to replenish his pack every morning from his local store, which in its turn is replenished from time to time by the secretary from the central depot...It appears from the report of the society, which was read at the meeting, that the hawker's district, comprising the four deaneries of East, West, Powder, and Kirrier is an extensive one, and his first circuit occupied the whole period of nine months during which the society has existed. He is now commencing his second circuit. The sales consisted of 61 Bibles, 22 Testaments, 104 Prayer-books and Church services, 361 small books and tracts, 990 single pictures and packets of pictures, and 930 bound books of various sizes.

These sales by the hawker have been effected by his taking his pack to the cottager's door as originally intended, and by his occasionally taking a stall in the market.

18th June 1858

[The society came into being about 1858 and ceased its operations in 1863. It was one of forty in the country created for the door to door sale of religious books, including those of the Society for the Promotion of Christian Knowledge (S.P.C.K).]

Immense gold nugget

Captain John Ivey, of Brea, Camborne, has just received a letter dated 4th June from his son in Australia, who left this country on his return to Australia in January last. He states that a few days previous to his writing, an immense nugget, weighing 2,217 ozs, 10 dwts., or nearly 185 pounds, had been extracted at Ballarat from a claim belonging to 22 Cornishmen. Nine of the fortunate men belong to the parish of Illogan, and among them Mr. William Jeffery, the early Californian digger, and his brother Mr. Richard Jeffery, who brought the monster to light. This is by far the largest nugget yet discovered, and in three days exhibition for the benefit of the Ballarat Hospital, it has realised about 100 pounds.

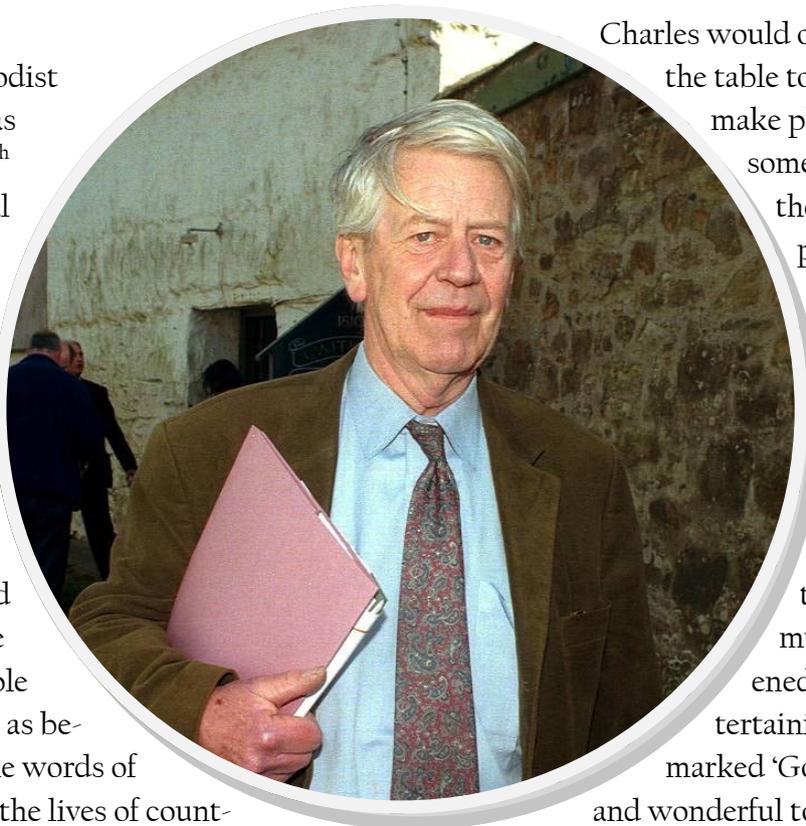
27th August 1858

Charles Thomas: A great Cornishman remembered

Truro Methodist Church was packed on Friday, 8th July for the memorial service for Professor Charles Thomas. Led by the Revd Ian Haile, a former chairman of Cornwall Methodist District, there were hymns, tributes and readings, punctuated by choral music. The gathering drew people from all walks of life as befits a man who, in the words of Ian Haile, “enriched the lives of countless people.”

The choral music was sung by members of Truro Cathedral Choir. All the girl choristers attend Truro School where Charles was a governor from 1977 to 1990. Extracts from Charles’s books *Christianity in Roman Britain to AD500* and *Exploration of a Drowned Landscape* were read by Flora Thomas and Nicholas Thomas respectively. The tributes were given by Professor Dame Rosemary Cramp, Professor Emeritis Peter Fowler, Nicholas Johnson, Charles’s son Martin, and the broadcaster Kate Adie.

A friend of Charles and his wife Jessica for almost 40 years, Kate Adie recalled visits to Lambessow, their home at St Clement. She told how by the time she made it down to breakfast, Charles would have read the papers, both local and national. This led to stimulating conversation over the breakfast table that might range from “the state of the Liberal Party to civil war at the BBC.” And of how



Charles would often disappear from the table to write letters and make phone calls to discuss something he had read in the local or regional press. Kate Adie also expressed admiration for Charles’s breadth of knowledge, from Cornish history to archaeology and much else in between. He was “so much more enlightened, informed and entertaining than any button marked ‘Google’ – wise, witty and wonderful to know.”

Two hymns – *Guide me, O Thou great Jehovah* and *Dear Lord and Father of mankind* – were sung and the service concluded with a rousing rendition of *Trelawny*. The organist was the talented Philip Davey.

Following the service there was a reception at the Royal Cornwall Museum in River Street, where tables with pasties and nibbles were dotted between various exhibits. An appropriate location, for Charles Thomas loyally served the Royal Institution of Cornwall over many years, holding many offices including that of president. And it was at the museum that he delivered a memorable lecture on John Harris to members of the Cornwall Methodist Historical Association in March 1984.

The whole event was dignified, yet laced with humour, and to a high standard. A fitting memorial to an outstanding son of Cornwall.

Tony Langford



■ Carwynnen Quoit, which was re-capped in 2014.

Ghostly experiences on society's summer walk

Around a dozen people enjoyed the John Harris Society's summer walk on a late-June evening, guided by local historian David Thomas.

The annual walk in the Camborne area has become a firm fixture in the society's diary, and is undoubtedly much enhanced by David's in-depth, expert knowledge.

The leisurely stroll began at Treslothan Church, with a look around the inside of the church and information on its fascinating history. Then it was outside into the cemetery, where the group gathered around the grave of John Harris. David mentioned one or two ghost stories connected with the graveyard, and the company then moved on, glancing nervously behind them as shadows began to emerge as the sky darkened.

It was then onto Stennack Woods, where the path proved a little muddy. It was a lengthy, but enjoyable walk through the woods, and the company eventually came out onto the road leading to Carwynnen Quoit.

There, the group, while sheltering under the quoit as it began to drizzle, was able to enjoy the views and listen to a little of the history of the quoit, and how it had been recently renovated. Some members of the group then visited the beautifully kept grave of Pip Richards, situated in the top corner of the Carwynnen Quoit site. Pip had been instrumental in the quoit's renovation.

Everyone then made their way back to their cars at Treslothan Church, having enjoyed yet another information-filled evening in the Camborne area.

Copy deadline for the Spring newsletter: January 16, 2017

The experience of great poets throughout the ages

I recently borrowed a book from my sister, Marguerite Williams, which contained copies of some lovely poems which our Grandfather wrote on occasions of family and friends birthdays, anniversaries, etc.

He was Jacob Harris, nephew of John Harris.

Inside the book was a newspaper cutting dated 24th Sept 1932, from a publication called "John O'London's Weekly". It was a letter from a R.W. Browne of Leicester, and it read as follows:

Sir, Like Mr John H. S. Rowland I am wondering why another famous Cornish poet has been omitted from Mr Strong's list of the poets of Devon and Cornwall (July 30th). I refer to John Harris, the miner poet whose "Wayside Pictures, Domestic Tales and Ditties" to say nothing of his Peace Poems, charming Lyrics, beautiful Hymns and sturdy and stately Sonnets are deserving of a prominent place in the library of every devotee or lover of the muses. He who wrote in that charming prize-winning "Ode on the Birthday of William Shakespeare":

He solved the human heart,

Like mariner his chart,

And Passion's every phase was known to him;

And when the full time came,

Forth burst the mighty flame

To blaze and brighten till the stars are dim

Loved now the wide world round,

Where human hives are found,

By prince, and peasant following the plough.

The sailor on the sea,

The yeoman on the lea,

The miner digging in the earth below.

This quotation must suffice.

In one of his letters, dated Sept 11th 1881, from Falmouth, he wrote: "Old friends die, and it is not easy to get new ones. Anything but poetry for the lords of creation. I walk on alone, with little sympathy from those around me, though I sing in praise of my county, and its incomparable beauties. A word of good cheer is as strange to me as a ten-pound note; a fast-talker and the loud cymbal beaten are crowned with fame. Men shrug their shoulders at song and turn their backs upon the singer, as much as to say 'we have had enough of it.'"

The experience of great poets throughout the ages. And a great poet he really was. His collected poems were published in 1874, and dedicated to Robert Alexander Gray, of London, prefaced with a charming dedicatory poem.

Eleanor Bowell

Songs of Praise for Cornwall's Mining History

To celebrate Cornwall's rich mining heritage, Baldhu Chapel (by Wheal Jane Mine), will be holding a Service of Thanksgiving on November 6th, 2016 at 2:30pm.

The City of Truro Male Voice Choir will be performing at the service, which will also feature memories of life in the mines as recorded by John Harris.

Entry to the service will be by donation. Refreshments will follow in the Sunday School Hall, where there will be the John Harris exhibition on display.

All are very warmly welcome to the service.

The John Harris Society

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

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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.

Website:

www.johnharrissociety.org.uk

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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 tin-streamer, 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