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 strainings 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!
The Christmas season
No doubt, like me, you’ve seen the thrill on children’s faces when opening their presents. Our experience was enhanced by our Helen asking me to wrap up 15 very small individual presents for 5 year old Tamsin! It was a delight to see Tamsin’s face. Someone recently wrote, asking why young people today should be bored and went on to compare today’s presents with those of his childhood – a sixpenny toy from Woolworth’s, a few nuts, an orange and an apple in his stocking! “I was over the moon with delight” he said. It made me wonder what Christmas presents were like in John Harris’ day almost 200 years ago? He wouldn’t have been given a ‘sixpenny toy from Woolworth’s’ but an apple and a few sweets could well have brought him pleasure. Now we’re (seemingly suddenly) well into the new year and focusing on life’s issues. May it be for us all a time of reflection, courage and hope as we long to see a better, safer world, and continue to support The John Harris Society.

Lowender Peran event (Cornwall’s International Celtic Festival)
The Society was asked to have a part in the above event - held for the first time in Newquay rather than Perranporth - over a period of a few days in November. Tony, Christine, Eleanor, Caroline and I either spoke about Harris or read a number of his poems to the delight of the audience that included The Red River Singers, who followed us by presenting reflections of their relatives or friends who lived almost a century ago, and singing mining songs. The first spoken piece was about someone who lived in a miner’s cottage in Lanner – where I was born and still live. Later, they were intrigued to hear a little of my family connections with mining, which brought my Grandfather and his family to the village from Troon in 1917.

Redruth Story Group Carol Concert
We were again invited to display some of our exhibition material for this event, held in December at Redruth Baptist Church rather than in Murdoch House and St Rumon’s garden. I was very pleased to read Harris’ poem ‘The Christmas Carol’. It was also an opportunity to sell some books and Caroline’s DVD on Harris.

A new year so subscriptions are due
Could I respectfully remind you of the importance of paying the £6 subscription for 2016. Christine intends being on hand at the AGM, but if you are not able to attend, please send on your money to her. Details are on the back of this newsletter.

The Sensory Trust
The Sensory Trust is a national charity, based in Cornwall, that ‘make places accessible, attractive and meaningful for everyone, regardless of age, disability or background’. Tony and I recently met with their Lynsey Robinson and Alan Renton of King Edward Mine (KEM) to talk about John Harris. After a tour of ‘John Harris Country’ which included Bolenowe, Dolcoath, Troon and Treslothan, we went to
Members of the John Harris Society, who took part in the Lowender Peran event, from left, Eleanor, Tony, Paul, Christine and Caroline.

Chairman’s Ramblings continued

KEM where Tony was interviewed about John Harris for a forthcoming audio trail focusing on KEM. Lynsey intends to record schoolchildren reading some of the poems of John Harris.
To interest the local community in the project, the Sensory Trust is holding an ‘Open Day’ at Troon Church Hall on Saturday, 27 February from 10am to 4pm and has requested the help of the John Harris Society. Anyone is welcome to attend.

Our Annual General Meeting – Troon Chapel Room – 20 February at 2pm
Please note the information on the inside back page.
We are sorry to be losing Eric Parsons as a committee member and must thank him most sincerely for all his support for other members and his contribution to the wellbeing of The Society over many years. He continues as a member of The Society and we wish him well in health. It is vital that we recruit more committee members. Our Constitution allows up to 12. Every Officer is out of office at the AGM so please do your best to elect people as the continuation of The Society depends on having a good, active committee. We have co-opted Tony Jasper, from Ludgvan, to advise and assist us in planning what we hope will be called ‘The John Harris Festival’ as we promote the Poet in 2020 – his bi-centennial year.

Guest Speaker
After completing the business of the day, we look forward to hearing again from Jean Charman, our guest speaker.
This year's John Harris birthday outing in October was much enjoyed by all who went on it.

Members and friends travelled by coach, having been picked up at Troon and Camborne railway station, to Helston Museum, for a second visit by the society to this fascinating place of Cornish history.

We were able to enjoy a longer time there than the previous occasion, so people had more time to take in all there was to see. There was also even time to grab a coffee in a local café.

From there we went to Balwest Chapel hall for a Horse and Jockey pasty lunch. Our grateful thanks go to the ladies at Balwest Chapel, especially Mollie Smith, for the kind and generous hospitality, and we enjoyed a welcome cup of tea or coffee to accompany the pasty. Lunch was followed by a walk up Tregonning Hill to take in the spectacular views at the (quite breezy) top, and then there were poetry readings in the old preaching pit, before walking down the hill to board the coach to take us home.
Looking around Balwest Methodist Chapel.

On the birthday outing.

On the visit to Helston Museum.
A Strange Affair at Linkinhorne

A strange affair has just happened at Linkinhorne, near Callington. Last week William Henry Budge Seymour, a minor, working at Phoenix mine, was found dead in the mine. It was supposed that he had died in a fit, and a verdict to that effect was returned at a coroner’s inquest. He was interred on Sunday, the 2nd inst., at the burial ground at Darley Chapel, followed, as is customary, by a great concourse of mourners and friends. But a neighbour of the deceased next night dreamed that a gentleman, in a carriage and pair had driven up to the house of the mother of the deceased, and said that her son was not dead, but had been buried alive. This dream had been noised abroad, and the next night seven or eight men went to the graveyard, dug up the coffin, and carried it to the chapel. They unscrewed the coffin lid, and there was their comrade, natural as in life, and apparently still living and breathing. So convinced of this were they that they sat him up, and while some attempted to revive him by stimulants and friction, others ran off to the nearest surgeon, two miles distant. The surgeon, Mr. Newsam, soon arrived, and examined the body amid great excitement on the part of the revivalists” and then pronounced the man was dead, and had been dead for some days. Mr. Newsam rebuked the men for their folly and desecration, and waited until they had interred the coffin, which they did with all speed, but the matter is still causing much sensation in the vicinity.

10th March 1879

Thrown in the engine-pool

Some miners employed in East Pool mine, hearing that one of their number was in the habit of ill-treating his wife, agreed to “serve him out” for it. They set a watch on his conduct, and when he next appeared in the dry-house he was seized, bound with a rope, thrown into the engine-pool, and dragged under water until he was almost exhausted. He was then released, and took out a summons against three of the men, but the matter has since been compromised.

9th June 1879

Camborne-by-the-sea

We shall soon be hearing of “Camborne-by-the-sea”! Now the District Council has nearly completed the path to the beach at the North Cliffs, preparations are being made for the influx of business, or bathers, or the passing of by-laws which will be enforced there. In the bad old days, when the beach was inaccessible to any but the extremely young and active, conventionality on the beach was unheard of. But now all this is to be changed. Civilisation is to be brought to the water’s edge. In future the beach will be divided after the manner of country chapels of the last generation, males this side, females that side. Proper dresses will be worn as a matter of course. The spot will be made more romantic by ornaments being placed round in the shape of noticeboards. It is not yet stated whether a n….r troupe will be engaged. Perhaps it will amuse some of our young men if the band, now they are in a manner, cast adrift, would oblige by officiating in that capacity.

20th August 1896

An old offender

Truro Police. On Monday Samuel Glasson, alias the Ferret, of Truro, was charged with drunken conduct, and breaking in the door of the house of John Tippet, beer shop keeper. He was fined 5s with costs, and was required to find two securities, in £10, to be of good behaviour for the next twelve months, in default of which he was sent to the house of correction until the next sessions. Glasson stated that he had been in the house 26 times, that he had eaten 14 Christmas dinners there.

17th November 1843
A fancy bazaar at Redruth
Mr Goldspink has opened a bazaar of fancy articles in the long-room of the shoe market at Redruth. On Wednesday evening, a great number of persons attended, and we regret to say, that in consequence of the very insecure state of the beams, the floor broke, and precipitated the company, with a large part of Mr Goldspink’s valuable stock of goods, into the stables under the room. Several persons received very severe contusions, and the loss of goods to the bazaar is estimated at nearly two hundred pounds.

A Portuguese visitor to Kynance
One day last week, during the absence of Mr Heesom of Kynance Farm, near the Lizard, a beautiful Parrot was driven into the servants’ hall, by a bird of prey. The visitor was received with a hearty welcome, and appears to be delighted with his quarters, in proof of which he amuses his hospitable benefactors with some long yarns in Portuguese language. The bird is supposed to have deserted a vessel off the Lizard.

Oysters at Falmouth
Owing to scarcity in the eastern grounds [the Thames estuary], the oyster has swelled into importance in Falmouth harbour, and attracted the attention, not only of fishermen, but of shoemakers, carpenters, masons, and even labourers in agriculture, who now drop their usual implements, and ply the oar, and the dredge, to bring these [shellfish] to day light. From 150 to 200 boats may now be seen on a fine day dotted over the surface of the harbour, engaged in this fishery. From the scarcity to the eastward, the price given is great, and all the fishermen, and others, engaged in it derive handsome wages, and are indeed making little fortunes. It may be calculated that not less than seven thousand pounds worth of oysters will be exported from Falmouth harbour this season.

Author Nigel Tangye’s view of John Harris
John Harris Society vice-chairman Eve Parsons discovers this author’s writing on John Harris: the Miner, the Heart and the Song

Browsing through my bookshelves I came across a delightful copy of Nigel Tangye’s ‘The Living Breath Of Cornwall’. This prolific writer, with well over a dozen books, the majority about Cornwall, the proud owner of a sailing ketch ‘Spray’, invites his readers to share his experiences as she cruises down the long line of high cliffs of North Cornwall.

Amongst his writings in this book are ‘The Tangye Brothers of Illogan’, ‘The Saint of Golden, Cuthbert Mayne’, both previous interests and studies of mine. The reason I’m offering this for inclusion in the John Harris newsletter is Nigel’s writing on ‘John Harris: the Miner, the Heart and the Song.’ Nigel states: Among the books I have on board at the moment is one written in 1851 called ‘Rambles Beyond Railways’ and consists of ‘notes in Cornwall taken afoot’; the author is Wilkie Collins, and one of the places he visited was Botallack Mine. After quoting the instructions for Wilkie’s visit, Nigel describes what he can see of the mine from ‘Spray’ but says he will let a miner tell us all. He then prints three verses of John Harris’s ‘The Mine’. Describing it as “Great Stuff,” he says: “And I would like to quote more from it, but we have other songs to hear from this miner, this poet, this family man, John Harris (1820-84) of Troon, near Redruth, so let me
show you his other side, his love of nature. This is how he felt one winter’s day on a visit to Penjerrick."

‘I first beheld it when the wintry clouds were rolling grandly through the murky air;
And flocks of starlings, wheeling to their home, like sound of many waters, murmuring there.
Here graceful trees, the green, the rich, the rare, so chastely grouped, in fairy fringes stand;
And limpid rills and crystal waterfalls, and breathing song like notes from angel-land,
Old winter here is reft of his command.
Red roses bloom, and fragments fill the breeze,
Here forest birds from off a friendly hand, pick their rich meal, and flutter ‘neath the trees;
If such Penjerrick, be thy winter scene, How Eden-hued in summers flashing sheen!”

Nigel goes on to describe John’s home life, growing up, schooling etc. After referring to that period he quotes John again.

‘All the time I was working I had the song-angel to comfort me, walking at my side among the mineral splinters, rocks and rubbish, and whispering in the grassy meadows as I travelled homewards, sweeter utterances than language can reveal.’

He goes on: On the way to and from the scene of my labours through long lanes bramble-covered, and over meadows snowy with daisies or blue with hyacinths, or whispering Carnes redolent with the hum of bees, the beautiful world around me teemed with syllables of song.

‘Haste, lovely lark, arise to meet the morn that ope’s her dewy eye above yon hill
Haste, sooty blackbird, to the flowery thorn, haste gilded linnet to the purling rill
Come Contemplation, who does love to dwell where Solitude sits silent in her cell.
Come soothing muser, listen to my sigh as o’er the fragrant heath I take my way
To mark with joy the dawn of bursting day.
And hark! The drowsy night-god murmurs by, dull sleep awakes, the lowing kine are up;
The sun looks forth from yonder streaky sky, I hail the golden orb, and onward life
To drink the wine from morning’s fragrant cup.’

Nigel comments: Not great poetry maybe, but what a precious joy to summon for a young miner as he faces a day of telling toil, trudging across the heath on his way to work. And work! At the age of 14 his father took John down the mine for the first time, and just pause for a moment and visualise what this phrase actually meant.

Dolcoath mine was at that time 1600 feet deep. A shaft, of which there was more than one, was the way in which a man got down to his working. Instead of seeing this as a shaft going down to the bowels of the earth, imagine a vertical channel going up a mountain 1600 feet; then imagine 80 or 90 ordinary ladders fixed one on top of the other. How would you like to climb up that, rung by rung to get to your work? To work chiselling rock for eight hours, and then climb down 1600 feet by ladders, any false step, or misjudgement, or weakness leading you to inevitable death? And then, (doing it in the dark?) with only a candle on your helmet secured by a handful of clay to help you? And have three miles to walk home? That is how the prospect must have seemed to John on that first day as a ‘man’ at the time.

Nigel quotes John: My father went before me with a rope fastened to his waist, the other end of which was attached to my trembling self. If my hands or foot slipped from the rounds of the ladder perhaps my father might catch me, or the sudden jerk might pull us both into the darkness to be bruised to death on the rocks. Sometimes the ladder went down through the middle of a huge cavern, warping and shaking at every step, and with the candle stuck to my hat I could
not see from side to side.

Sometimes they slanted one way, sometimes another, and sometimes we had to climb over craggy rocks crashed into the void where a slip of the foot would be our doom. And when at last we reached our working place, a huge cell in the hollowed rock, I looked up in boyish expectation to see the moon and the stars, and was quite disappointed to find nothing but the blackest gloom. Foolishly I picked up a stone to see if I could reach the far away roof, which rebounded back nearly upon my head. This silly experience was never repeated.

But the climbing evening after evening, that was the task of tasks. Ladder after ladder, ladder after ladder until they seemed interminable, and the top would never be reached. Panting and perspiring, after stopping again and again, we reached the top at last, where the pure air of heaven fanned our foreheads and filled our lungs with new life, though our flannel dresses could not have been wetter if immersed in a river.

Nigel remarks: And to think, enduring that experience was not just a one-off job but one that John Harris and all his mining colleagues had to do every day of a six day week, the day being divided into three shifts of eight hours each. For 23 years he suffered this hard toil. The first of his tasks being wheeling the slabs of mineral from his father’s working along a narrow level to the shaft. Here he tipped it into a pile which was then put into a bucket and drawn up to the surface.

Quoting John: ‘The level was very uneven so that the barrow, which had a lighted candle stuck in the front end, often slipped from my hands. Some of the corners too were jagged and abrupt, against which I struck my joints knocking off the skin until the blood ran down. Child that I was I had made up my mind not to cry, but the tears forced themselves out of my eyes upon my face, which I had to wipe away with my clayey fingers and tugged and pulled at the heavy barrow.’

Nigel continues: A passage follows from John that today we can at first think of as overdoing the sentimental to an extent of even overdoing the sentiment. Nevertheless, if we take the trouble to read the verse that follows it becomes touchingly sincere.

‘I thought of my mother’s smile’ John muses, ‘the welcome which awaited me at home, and the dear bower of heather where I would watch the moon rise by and by, and I struggled on in my mining yoke, chanting quaint couplets of new-made rhyme to the echoes of my cavern. Today I’ve thrashed my old tin rib till I can thrash no more While streams of perspiration ran unchecked from every pore A fire-cloud drank my spirits up, how longed I for the breeze A hoary-headed woodman quaffs among the forest trees

Nigel writes: The years rolled on and difficult though it is for us trying to cope with the comparative ease of modern life to believe it, John became, ‘Inured to my severe toil, but the muse never left me above ground nor below’. Poetry, he wrote, was everything, the great unspoken inspirer, ay, the upholder of my life’

There is a charming poem, Nigel writes, encouraging us to consider who is writing it. It is none other than ‘The Faces At The Pane’ which he feels is enhanced if, while reading it, one visualises from whom the memory comes. A miner who labours deeply underground, as far away as one would expect a poet to be.

Nigel ends with these words:
This contrast between the sensitive human being above ground and the brave stoic of a man
working all his days in the dark nearly 2,000 feet below ground, is something for all to marvel at.

The life of John Harris, obscure and unknown to all but a few is open to us all through Poetry. My reason for presenting him to you through this book is so that the bushel covering the light from this little known Cornishman may be moved to one side a little more and the light freed to shine on a wider readership.

As one reviewer wrote in 1882 two years before his death: He is a living signpost to others along the way to success and absolute proof — if proof be wanting— that genius is as much a gift to the poor as to the rich man and that it buds and blossoms as well in a humble cottage as it does in a luxurious studio, or castellated mansion. The literary Athenaeum declared his poems to be a ‘phenomenon’ even in our own age — earnest, strong and sweet with a father’s love and all domestic affections:

For my part, Nigel writes, I just relish the company of this poet of nature, this delightfully sensitive rhymester, this loving parent with his unsentimental faith in God. I cannot do better than let him bid us farewell with a splendid Kiplingesque rallying cry for all of us.

‘Courage weary workers! ’tis not always dark,
Comes the welcome morning, sings the soaring Lark.
Eat your food with gladness Aiding natures plan:
Give the world a whistle, do the best you can!
Plough the straightest furrow pull the strongest oar
Never mind the hardship when you reach the shore,
Ever in your efforts aiding natures plan,
Give the world a whistle, do the best you can.

‘The Living Breath of Cornwall’ by Nigel Tangye, was published in 1980, when the author was in his 70s.

Photographs of the birthday outing and Lowender Peran event in this newsletter have been supplied by Caroline Palmer and Paul Langford.
NOTIFICATION OF THE ANNUAL GENERAL MEETING 2016

The Annual General Meeting of The John Harris Society will be held at Troon Methodist Guild room at 2pm on Saturday, 20 February. Following the transaction of various items of business, we will welcome our guest speaker Jean Charman who will make a presentation entitled

Cornwall Bys Vyken

Refreshments will be served.
Free entry but donations welcomed for The Society.

Nominations are invited for the various Officers and Committee Members.
At the AGM all Officers and Committee Members are out of office so each position is vacant. The Offices are listed below and the Constitution provides for there to be up to twelve members on The Committee. The current members of The Committee who are prepared to stand for re-election are listed and you are invited to submit names in advance of the AGM as shown below. Mr Eric Parsons will not be standing for re-election. Standing Order 102:3 states that 'It will be assumed that any Member so nominated will have agreed that the nominator may put their name forward'. Phone numbers are given below to help you.

NOMINATOR: ____________________________________________________________

President: Prof. Charles Thomas (3 year appointment to Feb. 2018)
Chairman: ______________________________________________
Vice Chairman: __________________________________________
Secretary: ______________________________________________
Treasurer: ______________________________________________
Press & Publicity Secretary: ________________________________
Auditor: ______________________________________________
Committee Members:

____________________________________________________________________

____________________________________________________________________

Standing for re-election are: Mrs Eve Parsons (717543), Mrs Christine Cowls (713863), Mrs Elisabeth Rickard (715840), Ms Caroline Palmer (890102), Tony Langford (215918) and Paul Langford (213146) [Stephen Crossman (01736 753912) is standing for re-election though he is not currently a Committee Member.] (All phone numbers are preceded by code 01209 unless otherwise stated.)
Nomination papers must be received by Saturday, 13 February. Please forward them to Tony Langford, St Hilary, South Downs, Redruth TR15 2NW or by email to tonylangford@miango.fsnet.co.uk.
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.