

THE John Harris Society



Newsletter

No 64 Autumn 2018

John Harris: miner, poet, preacher 1820-1884

A ROYAL OCCASION



The Puffing Devil steam engine drives by the Richard Trevithick statue and newly-refurbished Camborne Town Library, watched by HRH the Duke of Kent, during his recent visit.
Picture courtesy of the West Briton.

**JHS members
meet HRH the
Duke of Kent
See page 3**

Birthday Event Special - see back page ►►►

Summer is fleeting by!

I trust you've been able to enjoy the summer weather and are refreshed as the leaves on the trees begin to change colour and many community activities that have been in recess during August, get going again.

Certainly, a diary note that another set of 'Ramblings' were due, stirred my mind about my activities and those of the Society during the last four months or so.



Coleridge's cottage.

Samuel Taylor Coleridge - poet (1772-1834)

While staying with friends in Somerset, Gill and I were taken to the cottage that Coleridge occupied between 1797 and 1800, at Nether Stowey, a rural village on the edge of the Quantock Hills, in Somerset.

The house, now in the ownership of The National Trust, is shown in the photograph together with the plaque and our volunteer host, Richard Atwell, (pictured below), who may well be known to some of you as the former manager of HSBC Bank in Camborne.



He lived at Bridge prior to retirement and knows my niece and her husband who currently work for HSBC Bank!

He had heard of John Harris and we were left thinking that it's such a shame we haven't got John Harris' cottage preserved in the way that this one

is. It was such a peaceful place – even in 2018 – and one could imagine Coleridge composing poetry in the garden.

Indeed, it was here that he wrote some of his most famous poems including *The Rime of the Ancient Mariner*, *Kubla Khan* and *Christabel*.

The house was extended sometime in the past, as when Coleridge and his family lived there, it was just two front rooms, two bedrooms and a lean-to kitchen at the back.

We were reminded of John Harris' cottage with openings but no windows and were drawn to a statement made by Coleridge: "I can endure cold, but not a cold room! If we can but contrive to make two rooms warm and wholesome, we will laugh in the faces of gloom and ill-lookingness." His wife, Sara, was always grateful to their neighbour, Tom Poole, for the help he gave 'to render a miserable cottage an abode of comparative comfort.' There must have been the potential for many miserable moments, 200 years ago!

I was able to share something of John Harris' story with other guides.

Bi-Centenary festival - 16-18 October 2020

Hey! It's only just over two years away! As mentioned in my last 'ramblings', publicity mailing within the UK will take place later this year. May I remind all overseas readers of this newsletter to register your interest and, if you are already committed to attending this event, make contact with The Alverton to discuss accommodation. I need, also, to reiterate that we are seeking sponsorship for the event and if anyone (at home or abroad) can make a contribution, it will be greatly appreciated. (Our treasurer's details are on the back page.)

GDPR & subscriptions

Since writing my last 'Ramblings', one of our members has said on good authority that the General Data Protection Regulations are intended for 'the big boys' rather than small societies such as ours. We are grateful to those members who have returned their GDPR form, but in view of this information, we will continue to use your data, as has been our practice, for The Society's purposes only, unless you advise the secretary to the contrary.

Kind regards to you all!

ROYAL VISIT



Peter Bickford-Smith is introduced to the Duke of Kent by Clerk to Camborne Town Council, Amanda Mugford.



The Duke is welcomed in the landscaped courtyard by Camborne Town Mayor David Wilkins.
Picture courtesy of the West Briton.



Descendant of John Harris, Eleanor Bowell, in conversation with the Duke.

Six members of the John Harris Society were introduced to HRH the Duke of Kent when he visited Camborne on September 18.

The Duke was there to officially open the town's newly-refurbished library, which also houses the town council chambers.

The Society was among several local organisations invited to the event, which culminated in the Duke unveiling a commemorative plaque.

Members of Camborne Youth Band

played Cornish music as the Duke arrived and met pupils of St Meriadoc's Infants School in the newly-landscaped back courtyard.

He then moved inside to meet various local organisations, including members of the John Harris Society, who lined up by their exhibition stand.

President of the Society, Peter Bickford-Smith - whose ancestor George Smith was prominent in helping Harris to publish his work - presented the Duke with copies of *The Extinguished*

Candle Re-Lit and Arthur Langford's book *Git Up And Go*.

He then introduced the five other members, all of whom are descendants of Harris - chairman Paul Langford, secretary Tony Langford, treasurer Christine Cowls, publicity officer Stephen Crossman and a founder member, Eleanor Bowell.

The Duke's visit ended after watching the Puffing Devil steam engine make a memorable drive past the Richard Trevithick statue and library.

Copy deadline for the Spring newsletter: January 14, 2019

Extracts
from the
West Briton
- life in
Cornwall
in the early
19th century

Down Memory Lane
compiled by Eve Parsons

Gundry, the champion wrestler

Redruth Annual Wrestling to take place 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.; Fourth 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 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.

27 October 1843

[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.]

Revictualling vessels at sea

The Scilly pilot craft have been very active during the late long prevailing east winds, in supplying vessels to the westward short of provisions, and they have, no doubt, made a good harvest, but perhaps not a better than they deserve; for it can hardly be expected that a gallon of potatoes should be conveyed 150 or 200 miles to the westward and sold for four pence, or an egg at the rate of three for a penny. We were very sorry to hear that a man-of-war with provisions for ships in want (of which there were many), should lie some days in the Mount's Bay when

she ought to have been westward of Scilly. 14 June 1844

At Dolcoath Mine

Instead of issuing from the bleak hillside, and receiving beer in a shed, the miners issue from the underground labour into a warm room, where well dried clothes are ready for them; warm water and even baths are supplied from the steam furnace; and a provision of hot beef soup instead of beer is ready for them in another room. The honour of having made this change is due to the Right Hon. Lady Basset on the suggestion of Dr. Carlyon. The effect of these praiseworthy arrangements is seen in the facts that out of 451 individuals employed underground in Dolcoath mine, only two have died within the last three years of miners' consumption, and that the sick club of the mine is comparatively rich, it having a fund of £1,500. 21 February 1845

15 years transportation

Cornwall Easter Sessions. John Semmens, 33, pleaded not guilty to a charge of having stolen a ram sheep, the property of Charles Cossentine, farmer, at St. Winnow. The prosecutor, on the evening of Saturday, the 9th of March last, left a ram with some sheep in a field, and next morning found that it had been killed during the night, and the carcase taken away, with the exception of the skin and head. John Simmons, constable, and his son, found, on the Sunday week following, a neck of mutton boiling in the prisoner's house, and also some mutton suet. Prisoner is a miner, and was then joint tributer in Restormel moor, near Lostwithiel, with J. Hambly and J. Hancock. Near their pitch the constable dug up a sack containing one fore and one hind quarter of a ram, and found almost all the other two quarters concealed in Hancock's garden. Two butchers proved that all these pieces corresponded so exactly with the skin and neck of the slaughtered ram, that neither they nor the prosecutor had any doubt as to their identity. It appeared that Hancock and Hambly had taken to themselves the giant-killer's shoes of swiftness and coat of darkness; in other words, escaped the constable by fleeing the country. A verdict of guilty was returned, and a former conviction was proved against the prisoner. Fifteen years' transportation. 11 April 1845

SUMMER WALK



Stroll on a summer's evening



Top, the walk started at All Saints, Tuckingmill; above, David Thomas pointing towards a building of interest; left, by the wall plaque on the old fuse factory building.

The John Harris Society's annual summer walk in Camborne took place at the end of June, led as usual by local historian David Thomas, whose knowledge of the area seemingly knows no bounds.

This year, the walk took us through Tuckingmill, starting off at All Saints Church. David took us around inside the beautiful building, particularly highlighting the ancient font, which is still in use.

We also visited the graveside of John Solomon Vivian Bickford, who invented and built the first steam car. Our president, Peter Bickford-Smith, is a descendant.

We then visited the outside of the Baptist chapel, before viewing the wall plaque in memory of William Bickford, (another ancestor), who invented the safety fuse, actually at the building on which the plaque sits.

We walked to the bottom of the hill

to see the remainder of the huge fuse factory building, and also looked at the former Tuckingmill Methodist chapel and Sunday School.

Another building of interest to view was the now derelict fuse factory building of William Bennett.

David also pointed out a house where a double murder had taken place in the mid-20th century, and we also viewed houses in which various notable people had lived in the past.

AT MURDOCH HOUSE



Presentation on miner-poet at Redruth venue

An exhibition and presentation on John Harris was produced by members of the Society at Murdoch House, in Redruth, on an August Saturday morning.

Presented in connection with the

Cornish Global Migration Programme, an appreciative audience listened to members Eleanor Bowell, Tony Langford, Christine Cows, Stephen Crossman, John Gillbard and Duncan Yeates, take them through a history of

the miner-poet's life, interspersed with some of his poetry. Artwork on display in the exhibition was by students of Truro and Penwith College.

There was also a chance for the audience to buy Harris-related books.

John Harris - A chronological view

COMPILED BY **DEREK REYNOLDS**

Continued from the Autumn newsletter.

1874

Ninth book of poems published, 'Wayside Pictures, Hymns and Poems' (previous poems!).

1875

Tenth book of poems published, 'Walks With Wild Flowers', dedicated to Lord Northbrook.

1877

April - Awarded £200 from Royal Bounty Fund. Eleventh book of poems published, 'Tales and Poems' (mainly prose).

1878

April - John suffered a stroke and wrote his will, aged 57. Twelfth book of poems published, 'The Two Giants' (Drink and War). A poem to Lord Northbrook was included and a short autobiography.

1879

Thirteenth book of poems, 'Monro', (John's poetical autobiography) published. 'His most accomplished and smoothest poem'.

1881

John awarded £100 from the Civil List, thanks to Lord Northbrook (Liberal MP, Falmouth/Penryn). Fourteenth book of poems published, 'Linto and Laneer'. September 17, John's elderly mother Kitty died at Troon.

1882

'My Autobiography' - John Harris published in London.

1883

John fell while visiting Earle's Retreat Almshouses - confined indoors several days. December, struck by spasmodic asthma.

1884

January 7 - John Harris 'passed on to his reward' in the arms of his son John Alfred with his wife by his side - a very peaceful death. He was buried at Treslothan Churchyard - at last reunited with his beloved Lucretia after 29 years. John's 15th book of poems published posthumously by John Alfred and John Gill at Penryn, entitled 'Last Lays'. John Hill also published a lecture, 'John Harris, the Cornish Poet, Lecture on His Life and Works'.

1885

John Howard Harris wrote an updated and condensed version of 'My Autobiography' by John Harris, entitled 'John Harris, the Cornish Poet, the Story of His Life'.

1892

John (James) Alfred Harris died of pneumonia at Falmouth.

1911

Jane (Rule) Harris died at Porthleven after living with her eldest son John Howard Harris for 19 years.

1924

John Howard Harris died at Porthleven. (Headteacher, lay preacher, author/poet).

With acknowledgements to 'The Meads of Love' (The Life and Poetry of John Harris 1820-1884) by Paul Newman 1994; 'My Autobiography' John Harris 1882; 'Dolcoath - Queen of Cornish Mines' - T R Harris 1974; 'Carn Brea' - Michael Tangye 1981.

Derek Reynolds, October 2000.

PERFORMANCE REVIEW



Cornish Women on the Verge twice performed the folk opera on John Harris in St Ives during August.

Delightful folk opera on the life and times of John Harris

Two delightful presentations of *Copper Has Colours*, a folk opera on the life of John Harris, were performed in St Ives during August.

The performances, by theatre company Cornish Women On The Verge, were in an atmospheric old fish cellar in the Porthmeor Studios, a building on the edge of Porthmeor beach, and near the Tate Gallery St Ives.

The portrayal of Harris' life was extremely accurate, and most, if not all, major events were covered in a lovely presentation, much enjoyed by the small but very appreciative audiences in the tiny venue. An enjoyable way to

spend a summer's afternoon.

Members of the John Harris Society committee were able to attend both performances and sold several copies of the book of poems *The Extinguished Candle Re-lit*, and also the book on John Harris and his siblings, *Git Up And Go*, by descendant of Harris, Arthur Langford.

They also took the opportunity to hand out fliers on the 2020 John Harris Bi-Centenary Festival.

Cornish Women on the Verge also gave performances of the folk opera on the St Ives artist Alfred Wallis during August.

King Edward Mine, Troon

An open day was held at the mine in August and certain members attended to promote Harris although demand for their presentations was small. The beautiful weather may well have had an effect, as people were enjoying the outside environment!

Exhibitions

The long standing exhibition staged at Truro College has now been dismantled and the Society is most grateful to Marilla Walker for her encouragement to us and the students. There will be a further opportunity to exhibit there in the near future.

The Society will be making presentations in October to the Cornish Methodist Historical Association's AGM and to the congregation at Baldhu Chapel, as we did two years ago.

Treasurer's notes

Thank you to all members who have supported the Society so well. The committee works hard on your behalf to promote the story of John Harris's life and works.

We rely on your annual membership fees of £6 per person to pay the costs of newsletters and exhibitions etc. If you have not already done so, we'd be grateful if you could either send me a cheque for £6, payable to "The John Harris Society", or pay by PayPal, the addresses for which are both on the back of this newsletter.

You could arrange to pay by standing order on January 1 each year, and if you ring me on 01209 713863, I will give you the bank details.

Once again our thanks,

Christine Cowls

THE JOHN HARRIS SOCIETY

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BIRTHDAY EVENT

Saturday, October 13th, 2018

Guest speaker:

MARTIN BROCKMAN

A talk on

PENLEE LIFEBOAT DISASTER

at Troon Methodist Church Guildroom, 2pm

Admission free / Refreshments

John Harris 1820 - 1884

BY TONY LANGFORD

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,

About
the
poet

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.

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 connected with Cornwall, John Harris, poetry, including other poets and Cornish life.