

Newsletter

Autumn 2013

In this Newsletter

This Newsletter has articles about **Falmouth**, the **Dissenters' Burial Ground** and **Print Studios at Jubilee Wharf**, and a glimpse of our newsletter 40 years ago.

For the next issue in the Spring of 2014 please feed us ideas, short articles, photos, or any issues you would like us to raise.



New signs in the town

The BID initiative has funded a new suite of signs aimed at helping tourists find their way and understand a little bit about Falmouth. They certainly add colour to the scene.

BID is looking for ideas for the next 5 years to make improvements to Falmouth's central area. Any ideas, please let us know.

What next for Falmouth?

Prof. Mike Jenks

Falmouth is a vibrant place, full of activity and events. This year saw the celebrations of the 150th anniversary of the coming of the railway, with a steam engine on the Moor, and the Splash festival attracting 'the country's most inspiring artists, writers and illustrators'. The regular events such as Falmouth Week and the Oyster Festival bring in the crowds, and next year the Tall Ships will visit in late August, and Falmouth will be full to capacity.

All add to a healthy economy with major employers including the Universities, the docks and Pendennis, and tourism. But there are pressures which may take off some of the gloss. Major cuts in funding from Cornwall Council will negatively affect services and the maintenance of the town. The outcome of the application to dredge the harbour and ensure the viability of the docks is not known, but even if the trial dredge is positive, conditions imposed could negate any gains. Students contribute a lot to Falmouth's economy, and should be welcomed, but some control is needed with purpose built and well managed accommodation helping to stop the spread of houses in multiple occupation (HMOs).

There is a clear need for affordable and social housing. Sites for housing expansion will have been identified in the Town Framework (now called the Development Plan Document). We have been unable to see this or be involved, but it may appear for consultation in December. The Local Plan is unlikely to be approved until mid-2015. The exact numbers of houses will be specified, and it will be a political decision over which local people will have virtually no say.

So what can our Society and members do to help guide Falmouth's future? We should continue our opposition to HMOs, our support for dredging, and for sustainable development. Our aim must be to ensure that growth does not happen badly, but is well designed and appropriate to need. What constitutes good design is almost always contended. Would like to know what you think. We will be using our website and Facebook pages to highlight 'good' design examples from around the UK and Europe. Be sure to follow it as we would like to hear from you.

The Dissenters' Burial Ground, Ponsharden

By Robert Nunn and Tom Weller

Over the past year restoration work has been taking place at the Dissenters' Burial Ground, a disused cemetery at Ponsharden. This small, historically important site was used by the independent religious congregations of Falmouth and Penryn, who until the early 19th century had lacked a dedicated place to bury their dead. In the spring of 1808, a wealthy Falmouth merchant called Samuel Tregelles¹ who held land at Ponsharden took pity on the congregations and gave them a field which lay near the turnpike road into Falmouth. Adjacent was an older Jewish cemetery, which also survives today. For a century the Dissenters' Burial Ground was intensively used and carefully maintained by its loyal congregations.

The Burial Ground was opened with great rejoicing in 1808 and lavished with expensive architectural features, but by the 1930s the graveyard was all but abandoned. Throughout the 20th century the cemetery's neglect worsened. Self-sown trees and extensive root networks split and destroyed many of the headstones. Vandalism became rife; numerous headstones and vaults were smashed, the mortuary building was levelled, several graves were robbed, parts of the boundary walls were knocked down and the original arched entrance (still visible from the main road in to Falmouth) began to collapse. Dense,

invasive scrub masked most graves from view and severely restricted access to the site.

In early 2012 the plight of the burial ground came to the attention of Robert Nunn and Tom Weller, two residents of Falmouth who share an interest in the town's history. They discovered that little was actually known about the surviving monuments on site and the lives they recorded; a full transcription project had never taken place and many headstones were deteriorating so rapidly that it was probable many inscriptions would be lost before anyone had documented them. Forming a volunteer group, Nunn and Weller approached Falmouth Town Council with the offer to log and tidy the cemetery.

The site is part of a Scheduled Monument, so consent was needed from the Secretary of State via English Heritage. Permission was granted by all parties concerned, and work began in May 2012. Due to its overgrown nature, the site was carefully cleared by hand to expose all monuments and ensure nothing was overlooked. Large quantities of broken glass, industrial litter and used syringes were encountered. Grass seed and native wild flowers were replanted where the thick scrub had previously held sway. Displaced or shattered headstones were gathered up and moved to their original positions.



40 years ago

The survey took one year to complete and will be published as a 450-page book in early 2014. A total of 91 monuments were recorded, listing 203 lives. However, extant burial registers show that over 500 bodies lie beneath the grass, indicating a large number of unmarked graves². Because of the poor treatment the small cemetery had received during its latter years, the volunteers initially assumed that the persons buried there perhaps occupied the margins of local society.

The truth turned out to be very different; the cemetery holds the remains of many important and industrious people who were at the heart of local business, civic and social affairs. James Cornish (1792-1858) was several times Mayor of Falmouth and knew Benjamin Disraeli. Elizabeth Elliott (1733-1827) is credited with introducing the printing press to Cornwall. Josiah Devonshire (1796-1872) was builder and surveyor to Lord Wodehouse and twice moved the Killigrew Pyramid which can now be seen opposite Arwenack. Aldermen of Falmouth and Penryn, Packet ship captains, surgeons, ministers, lawyers, wealthy merchants, high-ranking Freemasons and of course normal townfolk lie beneath the ground at Ponsharden. Most hailed from Cornwall, but Ponsharden's maritime position also saw a large number of non-native interments. Walter Morris, a Welshman, died at the Greenbank Hotel after a voyage from Madeira, and a number of Scottish folk are also commemorated on the graves. Another vault contains the remains of Alexander Robinson, a wine merchant from Regent Street, London who died whilst in Falmouth. When his wife died twelve years later her body was brought down from the capital to be laid alongside him.

Work is progressing well at Ponsharden. Nunn and Weller's volunteer group have been granted custodianship of the site and are overseeing the on-going task of keeping the site tidy, restoring ecological diversity and stopping further vandalism. They are also working closely with Falmouth Town Council, English Heritage and several other organisations to ensure the burial ground's damaged architectural features are sensitively restored, from individual tombs to the main ornate entrance. It is hoped that one day the site will be safe enough to be reopened to the public, so that its important history can once again be quietly enjoyed.

For further information on the project or survey book, please contact Robert Nunn and Tom Weller via Falmouth Town Council or email dissentersburialground@yahoo.co.uk.

1. Cornwall Record Office: Burial Records X850/1 (including Church History)

2. Cornwall Record Office: Burial Records X850/1/2/3/25/26

Photos: Before and after restoration work, and the Fish headstone which was found scattered across the site

The second Civic Society Newsletter in 1973 noted the success of its campaign against a 'monstrous' block of flats at the top of the High Street. Other wide-ranging issues were highlighted including traffic and drainage. Here are a couple of extracts, the first responding to a transport study:

"The Traffic Sub-committee of the Civic Society recommended that:

1. Traffic should approach the shopping centre from the extreme South East of the town and not via Woodlane as indicated in the study.
2. Access to the Quarry Car Park should be through a comprehensive redevelopment of the site of Rider's garage.
3. The main approach road from Truro should skirt Penryn to the west and join the present A39 at Ponsharden.
4. Two-level parking near the beaches would be preferable to any extension of existing parking facilities at ground level, as recommended in the study."

The second is about drainage:

"Most members will by now know of FLUSH. Untreated sewage is currently pumped into the sea surrounding Falmouth. FLUSH is campaigning for a sewage treatment plant to be provided by the new Carrick District. (some things do get better! FLUSH stands for Falmouth League for unpolluted sea-water and harbours!)"

Lucky escapes all round!

Extracts mined by Angela Beale

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<http://www.facebook.com/pages/Falmouth-Civic-Society/573370802673192>

Jubilee Wharf, Penryn - John Howard Print Studios



Photos by Mike Jenks; Etching by John Howard 'Kennall Vale Cornwall, Study I'

Our visit in May was to John Howard's Print Studios at Jubilee Wharf in Penryn. It was doubly interesting, first to see an artist at work and find out what was involved in making prints, and second to see an iconic sustainable building.

The name 'Print Studios' is because it is not just John's personal space, but is set up as an open resource for other artists who wish to do their own work. There are printing presses, work surfaces, tools of the trade, and all the facilities needed for etching, dry point work and wood/lino cuts. Not only are established and emerging artists able to work there, but it is also a learning space. John provides

mentoring and tutoring to those who are starting up. It is a lively and creative place to be.

John gave us a demonstration of how an etching was done on a copper plate. We were shown how the plate was polished and waxed, allowed to draw on it and then shown how acid was used to etch the image, clean it off and prepare it for printing. Our scribbles were simple enough, but it gave an insight into the immense amount of skill needed to produce the real thing, of drawing on plates in mirror image, of the many layers and stages it goes through to achieve depth to the image. And this says nothing of artistry and creativity. We

saw that in John's portfolio of work, and as can be seen from the image above, his work is stunning.

There was also the chance to look at the 'green' building, designed by Bill Dunster of the Zed Factory. It is a thriving mixed use development of studios, a cycle shop, Miss Peapod's café, Jumbles Day Nursery, offices and residential accommodation. There is also a well-used community room. It is a confident expression of a new approach to design. Could it be a model and a way forward for Falmouth's sustainable development in the future?

Dates for the diary

Monday 28th October, 3pm KCM Coffee House. Terry Chapman will give a talk "**The Enys of Enys**" Many of you will have visited the gardens at Enys, Penryn at bluebell time but did you know the story of the house and family?

Tuesday 19th November - Lunch at the Marine Bar, Falmouth Marina. Following the very successful lunch we had last year, we thought we'd repeat the occasion. It gives everyone a chance to chat and find out what's going on in an informal setting. Details have been emailed, but if not received do get in touch with Angela Beale whose contact details are at the top of this page.