

Newsletter

Spring 2014

In this Newsletter

This Newsletter has articles about **Ashfield House, Ponsharden, the Tremough Campus and John Harris, miner and poet.**

Please let us have your ideas for the Autumn 2014 issue.



Falmouth's expansion

The growth targets for housing in Falmouth have been set. Where it may occur is not known to us, although sites have been identified, but their location not made not made public.

Our view is that any development should be sustainable and of the highest design quality. You may think it too 'modern', but the picture is of social housing in the Donnybrook Quarter, London by award-winning architect Peter Barber. Follow our website and Facebook pages and debate what you think is good design.

Planning ahead

Prof. Mike Jenks

Falmouth deserves the best, so it is worth questioning what it is that creates the most desirable places in which to live and work. Most towns and cities have evolved over time, and often it is that that makes them special. But planning and designing either new 'garden cities' as recently proposed, or extension to existing places needs a properly planned approach. This should happen for the housing expansion targeted for Falmouth and Penryn.

To plan successfully requires many things to be put in place. First is an understanding of the heritage and special historic features of the town. Second its form and the layout and density of the buildings need to be considered as models that might inform the new. Third thinking ahead requires a clear vision as to how new development integrates into the old and how shops, facilities, social and private housing mix together, and how all is linked by good public transportation. A master plan, or alternative plans need to be drawn up, so everyone who lives there can see what it might be like. It is not good enough to rely on a local land-use plan and the identification of sites, and to let market forces and profit dominate a plan. Can it be achieved for Falmouth? Maybe if a neighbourhood plan is embraced.

Saving the Pendennis Headland

Our Society is positive about good and well designed planning proposals, but will object to the very bad. Again, Pendennis Headland is under threat from inappropriate development. The latest application to seek pre-planning advice is for 76 suburban houses on the open land in front of the Ships and Castles. We have objected to this, as we believe that what remains of the land on the Headland should be protected from any development.

This site and proposal would surround a Civil War defensive structure called Upton Redoubt, which has meaning only if its lines of fire and observation are kept open. Building houses in front of it would not just ruin the interpretation of the headland's defences, but would further damage the archaeology on the site, and destroy remains of some WW2 trenches. It is hoped this will be turned down, and that protection will be put in place to secure one of Falmouth's key assets for residents, visitors and future generations.

Ashfield House, Ponsharden

By Chris Smith

Following the fascinating article in the autumn addition of the society's newsletter relating to the Dissenters Burial Ground, which is located at the foot of the drive up to Ashfield House, it was suggested that I add a few words to that article concerning the history of our house and its relationship to the cemeteries.

Few of the hundreds of people who drive through the Ponsharden roundabout each day probably realise that they are passing through a former hotbed of religious non-conformism. This not only relates to Judaism and the various strands of fundamental Protestantism represented by the numerous gravestones in the cemeteries, but also to a rich vein of Quaker tradition. When Pauline and I bought our house, we knew little of its history so I asked Falmouth's best-known historian, Peter Gilson, and he told me we were in luck as a lady called Morwenna Stephens had just deposited the history of the Ashfield estate with him. Virtually all of what follows was researched and recorded by her and her forebears and the documentation produced is immense and deserves rich praise.

The story commences around 1500 with records of the prominent Quaker family, the Tregelles, who lived on the Penwerris estate, probably working as both farmers and rope makers for local shipping. The family grew in size and wealth and by 1702 the thatched building (the only one in Falmouth) was constructed and at one point, apparently housed 18 adults and children.

Come the early 19th century, the Stephens, a large Quaker family from Hayle, intermarried with the Tregelles. They soon took a prominent position at Ponsharden, building at least 2 'Ashfield Houses' as grand Victorian homes, the second of which was burnt to the ground in 1971. With the growth of mining demand for their rope grew exponentially and a large ropeworks was constructed on the site of the present day Sainsburys. The large range of buildings eventually became the home for the Falmouth Transport Company in the 1940s. The ropewalk itself stretched up the hill towards the site of the present day Four Winds pub, with women spinning the hemp every 20 yards.

By the late 19th and early 20th Century, the Stephens family had acquired the freeholds of much of the Penwerris land from the Bassett family and were clearly wealthy and influential, with various members holding positions of authority in Falmouth. Being Quakers, they were also heavily involved in charitable work including establishing and running schools. The properties were approached from what is today Lamb's Lane and the estate was effectively bounded by Dracaena Avenue, Trescobeas Rd and the by-pass.

When the First World War commenced, the family's intrinsic pacifist inclinations hit them hard. Their reputation suffered and jail was threatened for their principles of conscientious objection. Following the war the depression hit the fortunes of the rope making firm with the loss of demand from mine closures and lack of shipping badly affecting trade.



Ashfield Cottage in 1832, and Ashfield House as it is today in the Springtime

The Stephens started to move into property as a source of income and an architect member of the family laid out and constructed Dracaena Avenue in the late 1920s, selling off the land and the plots as they went. More land was sold, members of the family drifted off to other locations and activities. One, John Stephens, founded the well known Sturge Stephens national estate agency chain. John has left his own history of our house, describing his childhood here, numerous Aunts and cobwebs 4 feet thick when it was abandoned after the death of its owner in 1864 who fell off his horse in Penryn before moving in, leaving the house used as a farm store for the next 30 years.

In 1952 the well-known Dale motor trade family moved in to Ashfield Cottage (subsequently re-named Ashfield House). The Dales had constructed a garage in 1932, on a site close to Vospers as it is today, and had been building up their business in the area ever since.

Ashfield Cottage changed hands 4 times in the 1970s including once to John Milan of Pandora Inn and local restaurant fame, who obtained a change of use to a restaurant for the house, but never implemented it. In 1985 the Co-operative store (Leos) was built on the site of the derelict Falmouth Transport Company buildings and, as part of the work, a new drive to our house was constructed on the Western side and a high wall was built around the 1 acre garden.

The above, of necessity, only skims over a great depth of writing and research by Morwenna which encompasses numerous family diaries, many delightful cameo portraits of life in Falmouth in very different times, accounts of their love affair with trains and the construction of the line to Falmouth, of journeys along the Cornish coast in their yacht Shadow, of tragedies when sons of the family died of disease in far off lands, of evenings spent here with the Sainsburys, Terrys, Cadburys and other Quaker chocolatiers and also with the Foxes and H S Tuke, of their delight at the coming of electricity, wireless and motorcars. It is a portrait of Victorian everyday life far removed from our present day impressions of it being stuffy and humourless.

Morwenna was still alive 11 years ago when I approached to see if she was interested in publishing her book but she felt it was of no interest to anyone other than their family. Sadly I believe she has now passed on and maybe it is possible for some of the inheritors of her work to take a different view. It would be both a tribute to her, their family and valuable resource for local historians.



Ashfield Cottage in around 1910. Quite a crowd for a small house!

John Harris: A miner and poet.

John Harris lived in Killigrew Street, and there is a plaque there in celebration. The John Harris Society approached us, as the plaque may be on the wrong house. We hope to help get it moved.

Here is an extract from his poem 'The Mine'

*Hast ever seen the miner at his toil,
Following his obscure work below,
below,
Where not a single sun-ray visits
him,
But all is darkness and perpetual
night?*

Some of his poems can be read in Redgrove, Peter, (1983) *Cornwall in Verse*, Penguin Books, Harmondsworth, Middlesex.

Falmouth Civic Society

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The Tremough Campus: an interesting past



Tremough: a modern University Campus, a fine old mansion and Italianate garden. The grounds should be visited in the Spring when the rhododendrons are in flower.

Article: Angela Beale. Source: Grose, Margaret (2003) *Tremough, Penryn: The Historic Estate*. ISBN 0954533704

While the University buildings at Tremough present a futuristic image, on our two visits there, we learnt that the site has a history as well.

In the Middle Ages Tremough was part of the Bishop of Exeter's estate. It is possible that a medieval house with a defensive precinct was built. The de Tremough family was recorded there from 1309 until 1538. The next family name mentioned is Roseworn and connected to them the Bloyes family. Roger and John Blois (Bloyes) sold it in 1703 to John Worth.

The mansion built by John Worth in the early 1700s is the one that we recognise now as Tremough House. He built it on an H shaped plan, planted a lime avenue and surrounded it with a deer park. His money came from land and also interests in tin mining and ship ownership. When he died, John Worth

left an estate worth £10,000 which made him one of the wealthiest men in Cornwall. He married Bridget Trefusis of the well-known local family. Their son John's extravagant lifestyle meant that by 1737 Tremough was mortgaged for £6,000. Richard Crow then bought Tremough in 1775, but did not live there.

At the end of 18th century Tremough Academy for Young Gentlemen was set up by Benjamin Barwis. In 1817 his daughters set up a boarding school for young ladies, which continued until the 1850s.

The house was then owned from 1827 by a Packet Captain, John Tilly. On his death it passed to his son Tobias, an attorney who died in 1866. The next owner was Benjamin Sampson who never lived in the house. The house then passed to his nephew, Benjamin Sampson the

younger and he remodelled it, created the Italianate Garden and upper terraces, realigned the drive and transformed the walled garden. Dying at only 47 without children, controversially, his lawyer William Shilson inherited. Shilson was responsible, with head gardener Richard Gill, for the wonderful collection of rhododendrons.

Ownership passed to his son Daniel who never lived at there and in 1926 it was sold to the sitting tenant Mountfort Longfield. He was the last private owner of Tremough and for half a century from 1943 until 1996, it became the home of a convent school run by the order of Les Filles de la Crox. In 1996 the Falmouth College of Arts took over the property and it has expanded ever since. Plans have been made to restore the old house and surroundings so that once again it can stand proud in its setting.

Dates for the diary

Tuesday 18th March, 6.00pm: AGM and talk by **Tim Light**, *Messing about on Boats*, at the Athenaeum Club

Tuesday 22nd April, 10.30am: visit to the **Coastguard Station** - limited spaces so booking needed

Monday 12th May, 6.00pm: Talk by **Jonathan Griffin**, *Aspects of Falmouth's growth through the Artists' Eyes*, at the King Charles Coffee Shop.