

# The John Harris Society

---

Newsletter No 37

Spring 2010



To a Cluster of Primroses

By John Harris. Photo: Eric Parsons

*Your graces have been sung  
Bards of sweetest strain;  
But this shall tune my humble lyre,—  
I see you once again!  
I see you peeping forth  
Beneath the budding trees,  
And I adore the Mighty One  
Who made such flowers as these!*

*Stars of the waking dell,  
Ye constellations bright,  
How like the eyes of those we love  
Ye steal upon the sight!  
Blushing in solitude,  
Where Peace and Silence reign,  
Ye early children of the spring,  
I see you once again!*

*A little while ago,  
These banks were very dry;  
But now they are the loveliest spots  
Beneath the April sky.  
And since I see you here,  
O let me not complain,  
But put my trust in Providence;—  
I see you once again!*

*Chaste, lovely little things!  
Dame Nature nurses you;  
Ye quaff the breeze that murmurs by,  
And drink the falling dew:  
And 't is my faith that He  
Who made the Primrose-flower,  
Can raise my body from the dust  
To bloom in Eden's bower!*

*Ye come and pass away,  
As gayer roses do!  
For many friends, since last spring-tide,  
Have pass'd away with you.  
In this sweet primrose-dell,  
Ye blossom but to wane:  
Thank God for His preserving care,—  
I see you once again!*

John Harris (1820-84) 'The Cornish Miner Poet': an exploration of the cultural construction of place and the creation of Cornish identity., An extract from a dissertation by Jacqueline Anne Harding.

Non-Cornish outsiders often employed hellish imagery to present the industrial landscape of Cornwall. William Maton was reminded in 1797 'of the labours of the Cyclops in the entrails of Mt. Etna' and an un-named author wrote, in the same decade, 'The dismal scene of whims, suffering mules, and hillocks of cinders, extends for miles. Huge iron engines, creaking and groaning, invented by Watt, and tall chimneys, smoking and fuming, that seem to belong to 'Old Nicholas's' abode, diversify the prospect.'

Alan Kent points to Harris as 'the first poet to begin to express and comment on the age of industrial process.' He adds, 'In the verse we see a powerful identity shaping process, with the Cornish at the height of their modern powers and prowess.' Harris records the miners' expertise and dedication, 'Here were ends / Cut through hard marble by the miner's skill, and 'Yet here men worked, on stages hung in ropes.' He celebrates both new technological developments, 'Help of the miner brave, Man-engine, hail to thee' and the innovators responsible, 'Hurrah for thinking minds above!' He extols the 'improvements of the age as a 'blessing and a boon to mining men.'

(The Cornish Poet.) His fulsome celebration of industrialization is, however, ambivalent, undercut by subversive possibilities which reveal more about its human cost than these sentiments suggest. Harris does not romanticize the effect of industrialization; rather his intimate knowledge leads him to develop a nightmarish view of the mining landscape. Pre-empting Emile Zola's *Germinal*, mine workings are personified by Harris as terrifying, voracious and destructive, 'Lanes where ruts yawn'd hungry, and dark pits, / whose open mouths led into treacherous mines.' Mines are presented as open wounds, inflicted with violence, ('hack'd away') to reveal the 'earth's red ribs.' Mines are not simply abstract symbols; they are concrete representations of the relationships between the land and the people who live and work on it. Harris' detailed descriptive passages reveal 'not only their function but also the context of their use, the social relations through which they are used.'

The activity at the surface of a mine is the focus of a stanza in 'The Mountain Prophet.' (Songs from the Earth,) Its all-consuming, alienating mechanical influence on the landscape and its inhabitants is starkly delineated in the opening line, 'A mine spread out its vast machinery.'

The influence of Milton's *Paradise Lost* is pervasive; Harris has 'clearly been inspired by Milton's account of [Satan's] Fall in his descriptions of the mine.' Fire and smoke dominate the opening of the stanza but Harris' technical vocabulary ('fire-whims,' 'crusher,' 'giggers', 'lander') and references to industrial processes place the imagery firmly in reality: hell, he suggests, is here, on earth. Harris focuses in rapid succession on the different areas of industry around the shaft, 'Here engines,' 'Here blacksmiths,' 'Here girls,' 'Here a man-engine'. The sibilance and plosive alliteration of three economical lines suggest the activity, noise and pollution of the steam-powered pumps;

Here engines, with their huts and smoky stacks,  
Cranks, wheels, and rods, boilers and hissing steam,  
Pressed up the water from the depths below.

Personification and fricative alliteration emphasize the super-human effort involved in winching products from the mine by use of a steam powered machine;

Here fire-whims ran till almost out of breath,  
And chains cried sharply, strained with fiery force.

Continued...

The physical exertion experienced by the machinery suggests the intimate relationship between the human and mechanical mine workers. This reinforces the close identification of the Cornish miner with mining technology and prepares us for Harris' compassionate and unflinchingly realistic presentation of the hardships experienced underground. Miners' lives were short and brutish; life expectancy among miners in St. Cleer (forty-five miles from Carn Brea) was twenty-one years in the first half of the nineteenth century, in St. Just (twenty-three miles away) it was twenty-five years. Harris' imagery suggests (as does his repeated use of 'man-engine' in this poem and elsewhere) that to the mine owners, miners were dehumanized, expendable. Harris takes Milton's extended mining metaphor and grafts it on to his personal experience, making explicit the idea that hell is not an abstract concept but a physical reality for those employed underground. He heaps image upon nightmarish image to suggest the horror of the scene, 'slimy boys were swarming,' 'A huge fire-stamps was working evermore,' 'The noisy lander by the trap-door bawled With pincers in his hand,' 'troops of maids with heavy hammers.' Onomatopoeia and harsh alliteration add to the impression of noise and chaos. Enjambement increases the overwhelming sense of relentless toil and suffering. The stanza concludes;

The cart-man cried, and shook his broken whip;  
And on the steps of the account-house stood  
The active agent, with his eye on all.

The caesura after 'cried' slows the pace and encourages the reader to consider the implications of the stanza. The threatening figure of the 'agent' at the 'account-house' points to Harris' political awareness of the exploitative nature of the mining industry in Cornwall. Unlike Zola, however, Harris directs his anger to the symbols of exploitation rather than offer a critique of the system itself. Although acutely aware of social injustice, and the suffering it causes, his response is tempered by the stoicism instilled by his class and faith and, perhaps, by a pragmatic understanding of the need to avoid alienating potential patrons.

Drawing on his unique position as a poet and a miner, Harris constructs a vivid representation of the underground mines: 'Don't fear to trust me; for I have been there.' The severe rhetorical question, 'Hast ever seen a mine?' subverts the peripheral status of Cornwall. (Songs from the Earth,) The Cornish audience is drawn into a shared community while non-Cornish readers are forced to acknowledge their marginal status. Harris' conventional imagery and simple syntax reveal the strange beauty of the subterranean world,

Copper has colours different in the ores,  
As various as the rainbow -black and blue  
And green and red and yellow as a flower;  
Gold-coloured here, there dimly visible.  
(Songs from the Earth,)

but its horror is conveyed in, 'Below were caverns grim with greedy gloom, /And levels drunk with darkness.'

Asyndetic listing and onomatopoeic alliteration develop the idea of relentless oppression;

The heat, the cold, the sulphur and the slime,  
The grinding masses of the loosened rock,  
The scaling ladders, the incessant grime  
From the dark timbers and the dripping block,  
The lassitude, the mallet's frequent knock.

To be continued in next issue.

## JOHN HARRIS'S 1841 MANUSCRIPT COPY BOOK:

A record most of us still make are New Year resolutions - do we not ? - and most of those resolutions fade away; but here is one small New Year 2010, resolution that I'm fulfilling now. That is to put into print, as a public record, the nature of what seems to be the only surviving John Harris manuscript of any size and how it came to be in my custody. What more appropriate setting than our Newsletter ?

Late in 1982 a Helston dealer (not a bookseller) rang me at the Institute of Cornish Studies to say that a client, a lady who with her husband was disposing of items cleared some years earlier from her late uncle's house in Breage, had shown him 'a handwritten poetry notebook' that, it appeared, had belonged to someone called John Harris. Did I know who this was, and was I interested ? Heart beating fast, I mumbled that I might be; and then, though this would involve missing a dental appointment, that by chance I would happen to be in Helston the next morning. I rushed over, was shown the item, immediately suggested what seemed to be a very generous price - in fact, about a tenth of what the book would fetch now at auction or in a Roger Collicott sale catalogue. We went to call on the lady (this was 9th December 1982), she accepted my cheque (and agreed to sign a short paper about her ownership), and I drove home a happy man.

The provenance of John Harris's book to be described in a moment, is as follows and of course I am indebted to the Langfords for helping, me to work it out. When John Harris himself died at Falmouth, this book was among material inherited by his son James Howard Harris (b.1857) and his wife Catherine (Jenkin), b.1854; they were married in 1881 and lived at Porthleven. Howard Harris died there in 1924, his wife in 1922. Their first daughter was Catherine Winifred Harris, born at Porthleven in 1882, who in 1906 married a Mr William Polglase of Breage. She apparently inherited (after 1924) her grandfather John Harris's book from her father. Catherine and William Polglase themselves had no children; she died in 1965, and he in 1971 at their Breage home. But William Polglase did have a sister, who married a Mr Sidney C.Hoskin of Porthleven; and these Hoskins had a daughter Linda, who married a Mr Dyson of 75 Trelawney Road-in Helston. In 1971, when William Polglase died (with no issue), the Dysons had to sort out and clear his house. Now, eleven years later, Mrs Dyson was disposing of the remnants.

I duly got Mrs Dyson to sign and date the following; 'This volume of John Harris's poems in his hand belonged to Mr William Polglase of Breage, who was the uncle (by marriage) of my father Mr Sidney C.Hoskin. Mr Polglase's wife Winifred' (full name, Catherine Winifred Harris) was believed to be a Harris of Bolenowe. We found this volume in William Polglase's house in Breage. (Signed by Mrs Dyson, 'L.Dyson,' in my presence at her home, 9 December 1982, A.C.Thomas.) In fact Linda Dyson's mother, a sister of William Polglase, meant that Mrs Dyson's uncle William had married John Harris's grand-daughter - no closer connection - but at least this was all properly recorded. I was assured that no more Harris items had emerged in 1971.

William Polglase, to complete the record, was a boot-maker at Breage. The volume in question is a bound notebook, overall 7 1/2 inches wide and 9 1/4 inches high (or 190 by 255 mm), thin card covers with remains of dark marbled paper and a (repaired) thin brown leather spine. John must have bought this at a Camborne shop and inside the front cover, top right, is a pencil squiggle that might have read '2/6' (two shillings and sixpence; quite a sum). Since the first entry ('A Sonnet'), also inside front cover, is dated below with 'John Harris September 2nd 1841 Bolenowe Carn' we do at least know when this was. The last dated entry is June 1844 (in ink); inside the back cover, in pencil, 5 lines, is 'Mr John Harris / 7 Wellington Terrace / Falmouth.'

Clearly he kept this all his life and indeed published, as written or with modifications, most of what is in it. Once in my custody his book was duly listed and catalogued in our Catalogue of (Cornish) MSS; first listed in the 1940's at our old Camborne home, Lowenac - now Lowenac Hotel - this large collection, mostly 19th-20th centuries but including earlier items, has three categories. C = Cornwall in general; CAM = specifically linked to Camborne and its daughter-parishes in all aspects; and F as our family.

Continued...

John Harris's book was duly listed as Lowenac MS CAM.50, and a few loose items found among its pages - two letters to him from Joshua Pox of Tregedna, and part of a John Harris sermon in his own hand (published in our newsletter earlier) - as CAM.54 and CAM.55.

The book of poems has 178 un-numbered pages. It contains 54 poems, some very short and squeezed-in three or four to a page, some taking up five or more pages; some are in ink (broad and narrow nibs) and a few in pencil. A list of these contents, by their given titles, has been deposited with the John Harris Society. It would be a mammoth task to discover (a) if, and if so where and when, all of these were published, and (b) if published, as written here or with major and minor emendations. Clearly when he had filled this book John bought more; alas, none seems to have survived. On the last page a marginal note, tiny writing, lists as 'Under Consideration' seven future creations ('Spring - To a Robin - Old Winter's Soliloquy,' etc.).

As for its inception, in September 1841 John (born 14 October 1820) was not quite 21, lived at Six Chimneys, worked at the mine, earned very little and must have saved what he had to buy a bound copy-book. A possible reason for doing so may be concealed in the opening 'A Sonnet / For My Copy Book,' with heading 'John Harris his Book September 1841 Bolenowe Carn,' very neatly penned on fourteen just-detectable pencilled lines. This was published, with facsimile, in our newsletter No.11, March 2002, pp. 5-6; and I am now pretty confident that it was inspired by his rebuffed love for his friend Eliza Thomas at Treslothan. Probably he wrote the poem several times and then opened his new copy-book with the final version; Are there any more major John Harris MSS lurking in a forgotten cupboard? Who knows? At least this one has been saved for posterity and merits this slightly longer note.

Charles Thomas—January 2010

---

Can you recognise when and where this photo was taken, or any of the people. No prizes, but any information would be welcome.

The picture was sent to the John Harris web site, and Diane Hodnet emailed it to me for identification.



More extracts from the West Briton—Life in Cornwall in the early nineteenth century.

### THE ROYAL CORNWALL MILITIA

The Royal Cornwall Militia . . . have for some time past been doing prison duty at Dartmoor. We are happy to hear that the country at large is likely to derive considerable advantages from their services there.

Forged Bank of England and provincial notes had been fabricated by the French prisoners, and previous to the arrival of the regiment had been circulated to a great amount. By the honesty of our countrymen in refusing considerable bribes to pass them out of the prison, and by their activity in seizing those offered to them, this ruinous and illegal traffic will be prevented, as the Bank of England has adopted measures to that effect. It appeared on examination before J. Elford, Esq., that more than fifty Frenchmen were daily employed in counterfeiting our paper money.

5th April 1811

[Dartmoor prison was built in 1809 to accommodate French prisoners of war].

### CELEBRATIONS ON THE MINES

[At Dolcoath], tables and benches were prepared for 1500 under the windows of the counting-house, where some of the principal adventurers and their friends met to celebrate together with their men, the return of peace. Flags of all nations were displayed throughout the mine, which with innumerable triumphal arches, added much to the gaiety of the scene, and the whole was rendered complete by a cloudless sky. On a signal given by a cannon, the captains marched in their companies of men, women and children, preceded by a band of music to their appointed tables: half a loaf, two pounds of beef, and three pints of porter were allotted to each individual.

At the United Mines, Michael Williams Esq., presided; here 1200 persons sat down to dinner at tables which formed a square, the extent of which measured 138 feet on the outside, and 102 on the inside; the whole of this space was enclosed by boughs of trees, which produced a pleasing effect. There were but two entrances to this square, over which were placed boughs of trees to represent triumphal arches; there were also flags displayed at proper intervals, with mottoes painted thereon, descriptive of the happy event. In the centre of the square, a booth was judiciously erected, measuring 34 feet by 17, and which contained the provisions, etc., 29 cwt. of excellent beef, was dressed, 1,200 lbs. of bread and 600 gallons of strong beer, was provided. The gentlemen with their agents assisted the labourers at their table, nor did they sit down to their own repast until their dinner was concluded.

1st July 1814

### A PUBLISHED APOLOGY

I, John Hooper, of the parish of Gwennap, in the county of Cornwall, yeoman, do hereby acknowledge that I have, to the injury of the character of Samuel Phillips, of the parish of Redruth, miller, said that he had a quantity of china-clay found in his mill, which I cannot prove, and do verily believe to be false, and have obtained forgiveness, on my publishing this in the West Briton, and Cornwall Gazette, newspapers, twice. As witness my hand, John Hooper. Gwennap May 30th, 1814.

10 June 1814

*[Owing to the general shortage of flour, adulteration with foreign matter, in order to increase its bulk, was not uncommon. The first case of this kind in Cornwall had been discovered a few weeks earlier at the Treyew grist mills, Truro, where china-clay was being incorporated with the flour produced. Its consumption had caused illness not only in Cornwall but also among the French prisoners-of-war in Dartmoor and Wellington's Peninsular army].*

A book review of, 'Where Shadows Lie.' by Katie-Louise Merritt.

It is always a delight to welcome a new local author—especially one who is a member of the John Harris Society. That delight is further intensified when the author's first novel is such a pleasurable read as this one is.

The book is set in the Camborne area, and follows the fortunes of Kitty, otherwise known as Elizabeth. Much concentration is placed on Kitty's home-life. Her family is clearly one of great love and security. Not only so, but there is much humour there. This humour is often portrayed in rich Cornish dialect-based conversations.

Dialect-based conversations are to be found throughout the book, and are often used to bring further to life such festivities as the annual fairs in Camborne and Redruth, or perhaps visits to the seaside, St Martins Church, Camborne Library. There are anecdotes a-plenty of Cornish life, many of them surely having been stored for many years in the authors memory.

A deep love of Cornwall is manifested throughout the book. The significant detail of the descriptions both of the Camborne area and of the coast, strike immediate chords with all who share the author's affection for the area, and would surely awake similar warmth in readers to whom the places described are unknown. For instance—

*"They turned towards the sea on an ancient sandy track, where the breeze was cut with the shelter of the dunes. The air was still with a feeling of timelessness, and Kitty was aware of the old ones, their whisperings through the pores of the sand, as the path led them over a medieval village, long buried by sand blowing across the field for centuries from a break in the cliffs on the southern side of Gwithian beach. The Marram grass zinged as they trudged, with buckets and spades swinging...."*

Evocative indeed—enough to create a boom in the West Country Tourist Industry!

Not only the beauty of Cornwall, but also its mystique, are expressed. This makes a fitting background for the adventures of the young heroine. Whilst full of childish mischief, Kitty also has another side to her character, an other-worldliness, full of angel presences, of co-incidences and flashbacks into a past which would otherwise have been unknown to her. Nowhere is this evidenced more clearly than in the frequently-visited Nancarrow House, now partly in ruins, but full, for Kitty, of scenes and people from another age. She finds the sightings of them both unnerving and exhilarating.

As Kitty grows up, she becomes involved with two men—Terry, who has been a lifelong friend, and Laurence, who has come to work and study at the School of Mines. Her subsequent choice takes her away from Cornwall to Malaya. If the book has a flaw, it is in the tedium of life in Malaya, where there is nothing else to do but to be waited on by the native servants, and go to parties with friends. The reader catches Kitty's ennui and sense of purposelessness. Indeed, the writer also may have felt it, for in the midst of her telling of this foreign country, is a sharply-detailed description of a childhood Christmas in her Cornish home. Both Kitty and the reader welcome it with a sense of relief!

What is the right category for this novel—romance? Fantasy? An evocation of Cornish life? Perhaps a mixture of all three. Certain it is that the author knows well the people and places which she wrote about, and her vividly expressed detail speaks of the autobiographical. And, whilst the bulk of the novel is written in the third person, the dramatic opening sentence is in the first person—

*"I came with the snow."*

As an autobiography—or a mixture of fiction and fact we know as 'faction'—the story is complete. There is more to be told about this heroine who came with the snow and who has such a good memory—and we anticipate eagerly the next volume of her story.

Dawn E. Williams.

## Chairman's Report

Dear Members,

My apologies to you all for not being able to be with you at the AGM and thank you for all your good wishes during this time of hospitalisation and recovery, which is going satisfactorily. A special thank you to Vice Chairman Joan for chairing the AGM in my absence.

I understand the AGM was well attended and all went well and I would like to thank all who helped with the preparations and work in the kitchen. Also, a very sincere thank you to our speaker Adrian Mitchell, I believe his talk was most interesting and thought provoking.

I hope to be with you at our next event when I should be well recovered.

Eve Parsons., Chairman.....

## Press & Publicity Officers Report.

Dear Friends,

The winter months have been very quiet as far as activities within the society, apart from the AGM which passed as a very pleasant day. I was invited to have a table at St Pirans Day Fair where a number of books and walks were sold and interest was aroused in the work of our society from those attending.

Much of my time has been taken up lately caring for my wife and visiting hospitals and clinics etc., plus the extra tasks involved around the home. However, Eve is well on the road to recovery and I would like to thank all of you for your kind thoughts.

I hope you enjoy this edition of our Newsletter and I thank all contributors for their efforts.

Eric Parsons., Press & Publicity Officer.....

### My Own Beloved Hills by John Harris

*My own beloved hills!  
How beautiful ye rise,  
In all your silent majesty,  
Ascending to the skies!  
A cottage here and there  
Is glancing from your crest,  
And many a little tender flower  
Is nursed upon your breast.*

*My own beloved hills!  
My thoughts will to you soar,  
When deep in Plutus' copper-caves  
Hard-toiling for the ore.  
My own beloved hills!  
The dwelling-place of Best,  
The summer-home of Solitude!  
Of silent heights the best!*

*And when I dream of peace,  
I always dream of you:—  
Of sublunary happiness ?  
Then ye are present too!—*

*Of spots of purest joy,  
Gladdened by sun and shower?  
O, then my spirit quaffs the breeze  
Within my mountain bower!*

*And here I am again  
On Nature's rocky throne,  
Weaving the locks of Solitude!  
Once more I am alone!  
And as on each dear spot  
I rest my watery eye,  
I'm thankful that I have again  
The happiness to sigh;—*

*The happiness to weep  
Apart from human eyes,  
Watched only by the birds and flowers  
Of myriad hues and dyes!  
Watched only by my Father God,  
Who all creation fills,  
Who made the flower-enamelled vales,  
And my beloved hills!*

I have included here one of the poems from our recently acquired book 'Wayside Pictures, Hymns, and Poems.' This one is 'Falmouth.' On your next visit to Falmouth, try to put yourself in the shoes of John Harris whilst reading this poem. (Ed)

### Falmouth

*I SAW it first when April shoots  
Were shining on the tree,  
And daisies, gladdened by the sun,  
Looked up on lawn and lea.  
I left my cot when but a boy,  
And, crossing mead and moor,  
Gazed I upon its harbour waves  
Which kissed the pleasant shore.*

*I never shall forget when first  
It burst upon my view,  
And from a neighbouring cove I saw  
Its ships and waters blue,  
'And tower, and terrace, ocean-girt,  
Which met me from the hill:  
'Twas beautiful! 'twas beautiful!  
And so is Falmouth still.*

*Like some old poem of the past  
Imbued with Nature's fire,  
The more we read, the more we love,  
And wonder and admire:  
So is this sea-port of the south  
Yet more and more endeared,  
As years fill up the calendar,  
Where now my home is reared.*

*Here barks from every nation meet,  
With streaming flags unfurled;  
Securely here in peace they ride,  
Each ship a floating world.  
Here come the fish in shining shoals,  
The shelly creeks among;  
And sweet it is across the tide  
To hear the rower's song.*

*How beautiful the country walks  
Along the sea-beach low;  
Where ocean-birds perch on the crags,  
And white waves come and go!  
The distant hills are thronged with fays,  
And from each brake and bower  
A thousand mystic voices rise  
To laud Jehovah's power.*

*Oft from the street I turn away,  
As peals the solemn bell,  
When Eve, with glow-worms in the moss,  
Sits musing down the dell.  
And O, how sweet it is to stand  
Upon the pebbly shore,  
And hear across the gathering dusk  
The dripping of the oar!*

*Can bluer waves, or greener fields,  
Or flowers by zephyrs fanned,  
Or fairer face of maid or boy  
Be found in any land?  
O, like a lion in his lair,  
Surrounded with the sea,  
Is old Pendennis, castle-crowned,  
A sturdy watcher he.*

*I've travelled where the waters roar,  
And where the hills are high,  
Whose lofty summits seem to soar  
Into the distant sky.  
But fairer scene, O Falmouth mine!  
Has never met my view,  
Than thy green fields and sloping heights,  
And waves and waters blue.*

This Newsletter is published quarterly by the John Harris Society, free to members.  
All enquiries and articles for possible inclusion in future editions to:-  
Mrs Eve Parsons. 11, New Street, Troon, Camborne. TR14 9EW  
Tel: 01209 717543

\*\*\*Note NEW e-mail address: jhsociety1@sky.com\*\*\*

**Visit our Web site: [www.johnharrissociety.org.uk](http://www.johnharrissociety.org.uk)**

**Subscriptions and other cheques to Hon. Treasurer Elisabeth Rickard**  
**23, Fore Street, Troon, Camborne. TR14 9EF**

The editor wishes to thank those who have contributed to our newsletters in the past and welcomes more articles from you, our readers, for possible inclusion in future editions. Anything remotely connected with Cornwall, John Harris, poetry, including other poets and Cornish life please.

### **John Harris (1820-1884)**

John Harris was born in 1820 at Six Chimneys on Bolenowe Carn, near Camborne, the eldest of eleven 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 thirteen, John went to work underground at Dolcoath. He was to ply this arduous occupation for twenty-four 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 in 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 2008