

The John Harris Society

Newsletter No40

January 2011



Photo by Eric Parsons

Spring

by

John Harris

*From the doorway of the south,
Whence the breeze is stealing,
Comes young spring, with gentle voice,
O'er the meadows pealing
Here a darling crocus peeps,
There a primrose yellow,
And the violet by the brook
Noddeth to its fellow.*

*Larks are scattering songs around,
Early trees are sprouting,
Ploughman whistles o'er the ground,
All the winds are shouting.
Valleys tell the valleys much
Of the days a-coming,
And the rivers roll their joy
Where the woods are humming.*

*Mosses fill their cups with wine
For the coming fairies,
And the vernal rain-drops shine
Where the landscape varies.
Life is stirring in the sap
Of the Withered larches,
And the rose half-shows its bud
In the forest arches.*

*Robin calls his mate to build,
By the hawthorn bushes,
While the dingle rings its joy,
Redolent with thrushes.
God is speaking in the earth
Of our daily duty,
Soon will come the happy May
Rich in bud and beauty.*

Tribute

*In a quiet Cornish churchyard, where the moss and primrose grow
Lies a poignant little secret which not many people know,
For over in the corner the sighing branches hide
A buried Cornish poet with his daughter at his side.
His wife is elsewhere, not from choice. They languish here alone,
But what a tale of struggle lies underneath the stone.*

*The hands that penned the writings are stilled for ever now,
No more they'll sketch descriptions of the blossom and the bough.
Yet the dead hands reach to guide us across intervening years
As through the prose and poetry they map his hopes and fears
From the first few crippled letters as he learned to write his name
To the strong and simple lyrics that brought him praise and fame.*

*The eyes that saw so clearly are for ever closed and blind
But we still may share their vision in the pictures of the mind:
We see the stream, the valley, a child's beloved face,
The mist of dawn ascending in a proud, secluded place.
The brooding darkness of the mine. We feel the miner's plight
And the kiss of golden sunshine as he comes into the light.*

*The ears that heard the birdsong will never hear again
The bells that ring on Sunday, the patter of the rain -
But still I hope that somewhere, if his strong faith is true,
He hears his child's laughter and sees her face anew.
And perhaps he hears us passing, as we leave to peace profound
This humble miner-poet who has gone back underground.*

By Rosemary Aitken



Carwinnen Quoit near Treslothan.

Although my Granny, Edith (Harris) Langford was the Poet's niece, I don't claim any great poetic skills although my father was quite good at writing a few lines for me to say on Sunday School Anniversary days when I was young However, as the day for our son Jonathan's wedding to Wendy approached in 1995, his future Mother-in-law felt I should write a poem to be read at their reception, so two days beforehand, I prepared a poem entitled 'ON THE OCCASION OF OUR SON'S WEDDING.' Sometime later, I saw a request for poetry to be offered for publication in 'Poetry Now South West' and that resulted in the following poem being published in 1996. No Shakespeare prize here and still waiting for royalties, but I hope you enjoy it.

Paul Langford.

On the occasion of our Son's wedding.

*In January ninety-four the ring was on display.
The months ahead saw love just grow.
They looked toward this day.*

*That year just came and went it seems, priorities quite torn.
With jobs and flats and church life too, another year was born.*

*In January ninety-five, Wendy exclaimed, 'This year!'
The weeks reducing one by one, today was drawing near.*

*The weeks were soon reduced to days, frustration too crept in.
Plans all achieved, just left to wait, a husband now to win.*

*For Jon, the time has just flown by amidst the youth work strain,
The dishes and the washing too, all water down the drain!*

*So now we've come to share your joy with family and friend.
Now we've two daughters and a son. Our joy will have no end.*

*'Marriage takes three. God, you and me,' so says a card you've had.
Our prayer would very simply be, may His heart make yours glad.*

Paul Langford.



In the past I have repeatedly requested contributions from members for inclusion in our Newsletter and I am delighted to tell you that my pleas have born fruit, with items from Elisabeth Rickard, Paul Langford, Rosemary Aitken and Diane Hodnett. Thank you!
The following letter, addressed to Elisabeth Rickard from Howard Curnow follows:-

Howard Curnow
St. Hilary Churchtown,
Penzance.
Sept. 21st. 2010

Dear Elisabeth,

I should like to share with you and your team the pleasure experienced when the postman drops the John Harris Society Newsletter on the door mat.

As ever, I immediately stop what I am doing, make a cuppa, sit down and read the Newsletter from end to end.

Invariably everything is of great interest to me, particularly in No 39, reference to West Cork and Dodgeville, Wisconsin, places I know well and where I have followed traces of the Cornish.

I remember saying to you once that it seemed that J.H.S. events always clashed with less interesting, but unavoidable dates in my diary. Thus it was, sadly for the visit to the King Edward Mine and so it will be on 16th October, when I shall be fulfilling a singing engagement in West Wales with Marazion Apollo. My apologies for absence.

Whilst putting pen to paper – yes, I should be delighted to do my bit in helping to keep costs down, by receiving the Newsletter electronically in future.

With kind regards,
H.C.

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Editors notes:- email of Newsletters, Revised Constitution, Annual General Meeting.

Very few members have expressed their wish to receive Newsletters by email, so at the moment the savings on paper and postage would be minimal. Also, I am including - Nomination forms and other printed matter with this Newsletter, so that it is not practicable to split the posted copies from email. As a case in point – enclosed are copies of the revised constitution the committee hope you will approve or comment on at the A.G.M.

The Annual General Meeting of the John Harris Society will be held on Saturday 26th February 2011 starting at 2 pm in the Troon Methodist Guild Room. Mark the date in your diary.

Please study the draft constitution enclosed carefully and should you wish to suggest any amendments then do so at the AGM.

Following completion of the J.H. Society business we shall have the pleasure of an interesting talk on local mining past and present, delivered by Alan Buckley.

Press and Publicity Officer, Eric Parsons.



The 'Bob' from Fortescue's engine house, Grenville mine, in 1922. It was being removed to South Crofty. Can anyone name the Troon and Beacon men in the photo? The engine house in the right background is Gould's engine house. It stood right beside the road, near King Edward mine, but on the Troon side of the road. Only the stump remains now. The photo is embossed - 'Bennetts Photographers' in the bottom right hand corner.

Your comments to the editor – Eric Parsons please.

From Diane Hodnett

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Steam engine passing through Troon. Photo – Eric Parsons.

Victorian Inspired 'Tanka Poems' written by members attending the A.G.M. 27th February 2010.

Those of you who were at the A.G.M. on the 27th February 2010 know what the challenge was and how it came about. Following the presentation on Cornish Landscape in Victorian Poetry, two concepts of poetic place were discussed; the psychological and the real. The members were challenged to construct a 'Tanka poem' based on two sets of differing photographs. One set of images based on eighteenth century Cornish mining and one set of images based on twenty-first century Cornish tourism. The results given below were achieved in five minutes and are anonymously testament to the passion and creativity of the members of the John Harris Society. I hope you enjoy them as much as I have and find them of interest. My thanks go out to all those members who contributed to making the afternoon a great success.

Adrian C. Mitchell.

*From the deep and dark
To where wandering blue plays,
Hardship and pleasure
Are masters in their own ways
Past and future entwined now.*

*Drudgery a work place
Thoughts elsewhere with danger around
Choice denied in youth
A future darkened by
Real poverty and sorrow.*

*From the dark mine-stack
From noise, heat, stench, dust that chokes,
Now he has gone home
To sleep among the bluebells,
Where his sweet Lucrecia lies.*

*Padstow is my town
Dark deep mine my daily chore
The shift ends in light
The journey home, long and slow
The welcome there, valued high.*

Continued.....

*Work not holiday
Dark dirt instead of sunlight
Confin'd or open-air
Stone rubble for bright gorse heath
Shifts and graft not serenity.*

*Is the dream county
Superimpos'd on mine waste?
Or are the old mines
The real thing that matters most
My mind sees them both together.*

*Real life down the mine
Stone, sweat, water, heat, rats and noise
Strong hours trial the land
Distant views of s seascape
Clear bright, but not my Cornwall.*

Adrian Mitchell

OooOOOooo



Dear Friends,

I am starting off this January Newsletter by wishing A happy and healthy 2011 to you all. I trust that the days leading up to it and the white Christmas we experienced didn't cause you too much inconvenience. Our sincere thanks to all of you who sent us such lovely cards, we did appreciate them.

I must remind everyone that the A.G.M. is to be held on February 26th. The necessary paperwork, nomination forms and proposed new constitution etc., enclosed. Please give them your best attention, and respond accordingly, as there are changes of officers and committee this time. We who are involved at present are looking forward to another year of growth.

We have managed once again to engage an interesting and entertaining speaker this year in the person of Alan Buckley. He is a local writer of mining history, some of you will know of his work. I have not personally heard him speak but I own several of his books on his years of working in the industry, I am anticipating a pleasurable afternoon and look forward to meeting you there.

Eve Parsons-----Chairman.

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The Early Snowdrop.
By John Harris.

*I know not what dear name to call thee by
Which was not used before:-
A country maiden where the valleys lie,
Resting when day is o'er?*

*A thought! new burnished from the poet's mint,
Flung on a world of scorn,
Where sorrow swelleth, and where love is stint,
And tender hearts are torn?*

*A child of mystery, which the frosts have spared
Under the cold white moon,
Telling of islets by soft gales prepared
To hail a sunnier noon?*

*A sunnier noon? Yes, it is on its march,
With blue skies overhead,
When bud and bird make bright the forest-arch,
Which now appears so dead.*

*They ask me why I love a thing so pale,
A face so snowy white,
Smote with the sleet, and harassed with the gale,
From morn till darksome night?*

*God gave the love, as God has given the flower,
From His unfailing store,
And so I thank Him at this stormy hour
That thou art come once more.*

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

THE HATTERS TRADE

Wanted, a woman who understands cutting rabbit skins. Apply to Cotton (near Colonel Peter's) in St Merrin, who will give sixpence per pound more than is now given by any hatter in the country.

25th October 1811

MEDICINES of 1811

Sleeman, Druggist, Truro, has received the following valuable medicines from their respective proprietors, viz:- Cephalic snuff; Ching's worm lozenges; Charcoal tooth powder; Dalby's carminative (A drug for flatulence) Daffy's elixir; Ford's balsam of horehound; German corn plaster; odontalgic, a specific used for the toothache; Pomade divine; Roche's embrocation for the whooping cough; Roseate powder for superfluous hairs; Taylor's remedy for deafness; Trotter's Asiatic tooth powder; Tolu lozenges;

25th October 1811

THE SCARCITY of FLOUR

At a meeting of the Associated Attornies of the County of Cornwall, assembled at the Easter sessions, held in Truro, on the 7th day of April 1812, it was proposed, and unanimously resolved, that during the present scarcity of corn, we will not permit pastry or puddings of any kind, of which flour shall form an ingredient, to be made use of in our respective families, and that we will in every other respect, as far as we possibly can, contribute to lessen the consumption of flour.

10th April 1812

EXPORT OF CORN PREVENTED

At Padstow, a vessel laden with wheat, for Plymouth, was discovered leaky; upon examining her, a large hole (made with an augur) was discovered in her side, supposed to have been purposely done by some of the poorer sort of people, who have for a long time been so much distressed by the high price of corn

2nd October 1812

A Review of;

SPARGO'S CONFESSION

By Donald Rawe.

Presented with 'Spargo's Confession' by its author, and fellow member of John Harris Society, Donald Rawe, I asked, "What is it about?" I was told, A little of everything concerned with romance and smuggling. It proved to be that and much, much more.

The secret years of James, a young man intent on making life easier for himself and hard working parents, eventually breaking the law for which he could pay dearly. The social life of the wealthy, and less well off families of the period, eighteen ten –eighteen twenty-two. We learn much of the history of the area, (Lodenek) which we know as Padstow, schooling, trade, legal and illegal, food, including meals together with recipes.

Working for his father he learns the art of navigation and dealing with overseas businesses. Later, when as Captain of his own craft, it takes him across the channel he copes well with what is expected of him. As a healthy, strong good-looking young man James has the daughters of the wealthy falling in love with him.

His humble beginnings render him capable of sympathising with, and helping those in need. When he needs help himself who will give it? A change of career direction and the love of the chosen lady makes for a satisfying end.

What makes this book stand out for me, and after reading it for my own pleasure, I reread it, is the poetry. The quality of which I wasn't anticipating. In this respect I found myself searching out copies of Byron's and Shelly's works which I hadn't looked at in a long time. Thank you Donald, Keep up the good work. Spargo's Confession should sell well.

Eve Parsons.

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Thoughts

By John Harris

*Should a sweet thought come to thee,
Beautified by lake and sea,
Store it where thy treasures be.*

*If thou dally, it may fly
Where there is no sea or sky,
Though rich pearls within it lie.*

*Held when first it fires my breast,
It may bring some wanderer rest,
Who without it were unblest.*

*Fair the tree which blossoms fill,
Lilies by the limpid rill,
But sweet thoughts are purer still.*

*Thoughts build up the poet's fame,
Gild the good man's honoured name,
The true patriot's deeds inflame.*

*All beside them perish must,
Obelisk and flattering bust,
Thoughts shall live when stars are dust.*