

The John Harris Society

Newsletter No 31 Autumn 2008

The second verse of 'Treslothan'

By

John Harris Lays from 'The Mine, the Moor, and the Mountain.'

I well remember in my early days  
How beautiful thou wert! a cot or two  
Just peeping through thy shining robe of leaves,  
And shedding on the' enchanted traveller  
Sweet showers of nectar from the garden-rose.  
Ay, one there was, more beautiful than all,  
Which lingers with me as a glittering gem  
Amid the shadowy vistas of the past,  
The happy home of poetry and love !  
Alas! how changed! The voice of song has ceased,  
And hearts unstirr'd by music slumber there.  
The silent wallflower, as I hie along,  
  
Looks sadly on me with its weeping eyes,  
Unpruned, untended, fluttering in the breeze,  
And sighing for the hand that nurtured it.  
That hand is frozen with the frost of death,  
In the damp grave beneath an aged tree.

Oft in the twilight have I wander'd here,  
Par from the turmoil of the noisy crowd,  
And, resting on thy grave-stones, harp in hand,  
Have wept and wept again, and wish'd at last  
My bones should rest in this sequester'd spot  
With those I love on earth. So let it be.

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Dear friends and members

Doesn't time fly? It seems only days since Eric and I edited Newsletter number 30. We have again received interesting articles for this edition. Many thanks to the contributors.

Especial Thanks must go to Diane Hodnett for her donation of an original letter, written by John Harris, which she has kindly presented to the John Harris Society.

Those of us on the committee offer sincere gratitude on behalf of our members for Diane's generosity. The letter will be on display at the Troon Methodist Guild Room on the occasion of the Memorial Birthday celebrations to be held on the 11<sup>th</sup> October. Details are included with this Newsletter. Those of us that regularly attend this event will know that we do have an enjoyable day. If all goes to plan David Thomas, local Historian will be with us once again. Everyone is welcome so please come along and share it with us.

The Anthology of John Harris's works we are hoping to publish has taken another step forward. Eric will add a few lines to this letter to keep you in the picture.

Eve Parsons, Chairman.

#### Progress report on the John Harris Anthology

We have selected over one hundred poems and items of prose and a few more may be required in the final compilation.

A number of quotes for printing obtained by John Gillbard have been considered by the committee members and three have been selected to accompany our application for a grant. We have been advised the process is likely to take up to two months. The successful grant may be assisted by input of subscriptions from our Society and/or individual members.

Eric Parsons. Press and Publicity Officer.

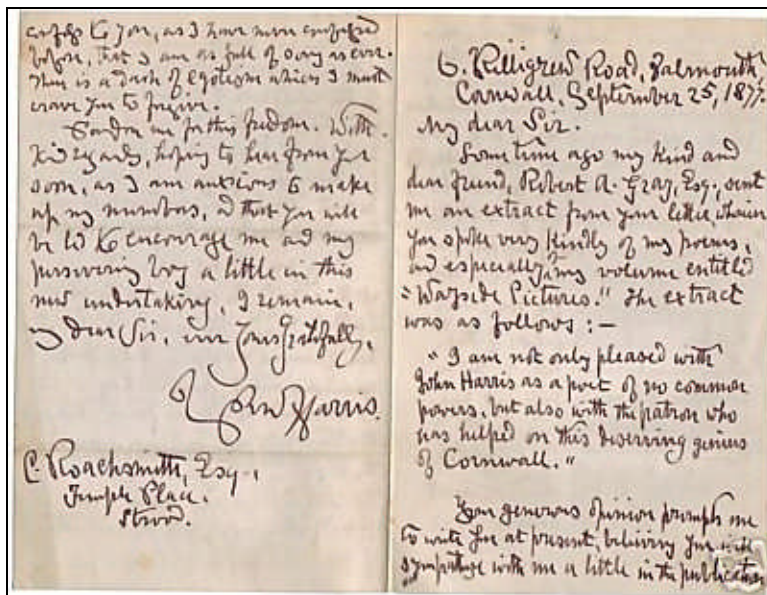
Diane Hodnett, our friend in Ireland who also runs the official John Harris Website:

<http://members.lycos.co.uk/johnharris/>

The original John Harris letter will be stored carefully with our collection of JH books and I have produced a copy overleaf for you all to read and study.

Eric Parsons

I have endeavoured, with the help of Elisabeth Rickard and Eve Parsons to produce an accurate transcription of the John Harris letter on the previous page. There maybe errors which we ask you to forgive and we trust you will have pleasure in reading this original example of a letter written by John Harris himself. It demonstrates clearly his language and style of expression sadly lost in modern times. Eric Parsons.



6, Gilligrew Road,

Falmouth,

Cornwall.

September 25, 1877

My Dear Sir,

Some time ago my kind and dear friend, Robert A. Gray, Esq., sent me an extract from your letter, wherein you spoke very kindly of my poems, and especially of my volume entitled 'Wayside Pictures.' The extract was as follows:-

'I am not only pleased with John Harris as a poet of no common prowess, but also with the patron who has helped this deserving genius of Cornwall.'

Your generous opinion prompts me to write at present, believing you will sympathise with me a little in the publication of a volume of 'Tales and Poems,' a prospectus of which I herewith enclose. You will see by this, that my son, who is an invalid, will prepare some illustrations, for it. In this way I hope to help him on, so that by and by he may be able to earn his own living at his adopted art of wood engraving. I shall have the little book tastefully set out by hand, so that it may be a nice looking present. If you can, thank you in consideration of this, and in consideration, too, of the struggles of genius, befriend me a little by subscribing to the volume, you will not only gladden my own heart, but also the heart of my persevering, patient boy.

I scarcely need inform you that Mr Gray has again charmed me with his usual kindness. He is one of the children of consolation whom the Lord loveth. It gives us much delight to know that he is so far recovered from his rather recent illness; and we trust he may long be spared as the friend of truth.

Pray do not let my existence at the ends of the earth in the very land of Jack the Giant Killer and his famous exploits, deter your generous heart from writing me. I cannot exist on fame, though the trumpet may be blown ever away the crags of the Land's End, of the Lizard rocks. I am a Grandfather now, with the entreaty of Grandchildren in my ears: yet I confess to you, as I have never confessed before, that I am as full of song as ever. There is a spark of egotism which I must crave you to forgive.

Pardon me for this freedom. With kindliness, hoping to hear from you soon, as I am anxious to make up my numbers, that you will be led to encourage me at my persevering a little in this new undertaking, I remain, my dear Sir, I am Yours faithfully,

John Harris

C. Roachsmith, Esq.,

Temple Place,

Stroud.

We are indebted to our friend Diane Hodnet for donating this special document to the John Harris Society.

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### A Story of Cam Brea reprinted

Surfing the net can be one of the greatest time-wasters of life today, but, occasionally, it can throw up something of great interest. Such as when I recently came across details of a reprint of 'A Story of Cam Brea, Essays and Poems' by John Harris.

I was surprised to see it has been issued by Kessinger Publishing of Montana, USA and not by a Cornish or British publisher. Although, perhaps my surprise was misplaced given the strong connection between the Harris family and the USA (see 'GIT UP AND GO A History of Cornish Mining Families' by Arthur Langford, Miango Books).

Located near the Glacier National Park in Montana, Kessinger Publishing claims on its website to be "dedicated to publishing and digitally preserving important literature for future generations." It achieves this by using advanced technology and has published thousands of rare, scarce, and out-of-print books, ensuring they are still easily available to the public.

'A Story of Cam Brea,' has been released under Kessinger's Legacy Reprint Series. A blurb inside the book states: "In the interest of creating a more extensive selection of rare historical book reprints, we have chosen to reproduce this title even though it may possibly have occasional imperfections such as missing and blurred pages, missing text, poor pictures, markings, dark backgrounds and other reproduction issues beyond our control." It goes on to say: "Because this work is culturally important, we have made it available as a part of our commitment to protecting, preserving and promoting the world's literature."

The text of page 60 of my copy is missing and some of the borders appear as wavy lines rather than straight, but these are my only quibbles. It is issued as a paperback. The price is listed as \$27.95 in the USA. At the time of writing (August 2008) it is available in the UK from Abebooks, from 9.92 plus postage. (See: [www.abebooks.co.uk](http://www.abebooks.co.uk)).

Kessinger Publishing are to be congratulated on making this book available at an

affordable price. Even those fortunate enough to own an original may wish to buy this paperback edition for reading and thumbing through, thus helping to preserve their cherished copy.

Tony Langford

HOME COMING

By Bryan Teague

From you have I been absent for a term,  
But now I cross Brunell's great railway span

Above the Tamar I can reaffirm  
Allegiance to my loved and sainted land.

I breathe a purer, nonconformist air  
And bathe in light that nurtures life and art.

Your red and crested granite tors declare  
Your fiery blood, your stubborn pride and heart  
To melt unseemly ore. I dig your dress  
Of green with gold and purple hues, and long  
To see you brave the rampant waves with grace  
And fortitude and lie in beach sarong.

I love your Celtic air of mystery,  
Your rousing poetry of history.

Travel In Our Village

from

The Cornish Magazine Vol.11.1899.

Edited by A.T. Quiller-Couch. (Q)

Our village was as far from the sea as it was possible to be and yet to be in Cornwall. Sometimes seagulls passed high above our heads, but they must have travelled fifteen miles, and still have fifteen miles to travel before finding leisure to settle down behind a ploughman in fields such as ours. We never saw them wheeling aimlessly about with garrulous chatter, or folding their white wings carefully after alighting on the water, silently they came into our landscape, and swiftly they left us, always flying in a straight line, and high above our highest towers and trees.

We who saw them pass were not great travellers ourselves. Most of us had been once in our lives to Dozmare Pool, which was said to be a whole mile in circumference, and which certainly had a boat upon it. But few of us had ever been to the sea or ever hoped to go. The carpenter of our village had been to London, and must therefore have seen it, for there was nothing great or strange that could not be seen 'up to London'. The Home-coming of Ulysses to Ithaca was as nothing compared with the day when our carpenter returned from London.

We made him sit down on a log in the middle of the church town, and there was not a man, woman, or child who did not come to hear the story of his travels. Even old Cherry Pearce was there. She was stone deaf, but she feasted her eyes at all events upon the man who in his own person had been all the way to London, and was sitting there as if he were a common mortal. She went home earlier than the rest, for the summer night had fallen, and beetles buzzed blundering about before we were tired of listening open-mouthed.

Henceforth we thought scorn of Frankie White down to Varlick, who only used to go part of the way to Polperro for the fish he had to sell, and besides he was blind in one eye, good man though he was. And not much better did we now think of John Tregear, though he had been a thousand times to Launceston on a market day, and has brought back medicines, prescriptions, letters, Methodists Papers, and Tea, all stowed away, with a red handkerchief in his hat. John brought no story home to tell, beyond the current price of butter; And besides I myself had ridden to Launceston on our old grey mare before I was eight years old or knew any better than to spend my turnpike penny on a sweet stall.

So John was of no account where our celebrities were reckoned. But there was still Jan Preddis. He had never been to London, it is true, but he had a son in Plymouth, and he himself was known to have been repeatedly away over the moors to some strange place where coal was landed from the sea. It was in his farm wagon that the coal had come to us, which folk bought so sparingly at sixteen pence a hundredweight. Of course every cottage in the village had its heap of faggots and its turf-rick from the moors.

What appetising odours met our nostrils on a frosty morning when a mingled fragrance of rashers and fried potatoes and hot smouldering turf was given out from every chimney! And such chimneys! An old man used to sit snug and warm in the corner of one of them where he could look up and see the stars, beyond the bar where the kettle hung by chains, while granny fried his supper on the hearth-stone.

But already we had begun to want stoves in our kitchens, and grates in our parlours like the folk up the country; and it followed that we must have coals to burn in them, and that Jan Preddis must go to Boscastle to fetch them for us. Certainly it was a ruinous expense; but a labourer who carried home a quarter hundredweight of coals upon his back felt himself to have risen in the world, and had sensations of elation. So it arose out of our luxurious habits that Jan Preddis was a traveller. When asked by some boy in who's heart the world was set, and who hungered accordingly, whether it was not a brave long way to Boscastle, he would

answer, "Iss 'tes sure 'nough you," but otherwise was not communicative.

I have travelled far since those old days, but have never had so sweet a joy as that which came to me when Jan Preddis yielded to the longing in my eyes and promised, upon the solemn condition that I must be a "Gud boey" (Boy—pronounced so as to rhyme with no other word in English that I know ), that I should ride with him to Boscastle one day and look upon the sea.

So one morning, in the starlight, we passed slowly out of our village towards the unknown. Not one chimney had begun to send up its wreath of blue smoke, not a boy beside myself was stirring. By the time the first door creaked upon its hinges and the earliest villager sniffed the morning air Jan and I and the wagon were out of the parish. We had passed the school, (What joy that was!) we had crawled along by the meadow whence the last load of hay had come to the mowey at home that June day when a plump rosy-faced girl had caught me in her arms and kissed me through a circle made of a wisp of hay, more to her satisfaction than to mine, as I hope and believe. Down below there, that circlet of hay would be found, one day in the coming winter, in the middle of the rick, put there by Pollie's hands, after the kissing, "To make sweet hay she said"

That was certainly a great day, but not to be compared with this. Now we were out upon the bleak and silent Dewstow Moor, slowly measuring mile after mile of the rough cart track towards the coast. How eerie, even to our eyes, looked the low one-roomed hovel by the roadside, and how strange the wild looking children who hung about, unkempt, and gazed at us. Afterwards I never passed a moorstone post or saw a herd of shaggy bullocks that had passed a season out to moor, without recalling those urchins or their hut.

The sun was well up in the sky by the time we reached the summit of the moorland. Belated tufts of heather-bloom shone purple among the blocks of granite. The broad expanse of moor, unbroken by hedge or tree, entranced me. And what was that away against the distant sky? My heart gave a leap, but Jan did not say it was the sea, and I dared not ask. So we rumbled on without a word. Jan, I now think, was probably asleep, and I was entering alone into the presence of the wide and awful sea, encircling all the ways of men. I could endure the strain no longer; I must know the secret of that strange expanse.

"Iss, that there's the say, sure 'nough", Jan roused himself to say.

"But what are those things that I can see far off against the clouds?"

"Oh, they there be vessels."

A pause to take that in and make it all my own. The sea and vessels! I had only read about such things in books and seen them in pictures, and here they were before my eyes, and much more wonderful than I had ever read or dreamed. Then to faith, and vision too, succeeded questioning and doubt.

"But, Mr Preddis, those vessels there, are high up in the clouds; how can that be."

Jan must have noticed this appearance, so common and so striking where the sea is viewed from the high inland moors of Cornwall, and was ready with an explanation. "Oh," said he, "Volks say there's mountains in the say like there be 'pon land, and they ships be 'pon the mountains, I reckon."

He had heard some sailor's yarn, perhaps about the sea running mountains high, or, still more likely, had read in his bible of those who do business in great waters, who go up by the mountains and down by the valleys and are at their wits end. And here on a late summers morning, when the mists were gently lifting, we saw the very thing ourselves. At all events we thought we did, and further questioning was needless. Slowly we went down the hill toward the little town of Boscastle. For all I know there may now be there a great hotel, a brass band and a pier. I have not the heart to inquire.

What I remember to have seen on that morning is a queer little place, with a small shop, and a store for coal and salt, and the possibility of potato pasties besides; and, further

on, a sort of deep and tortuous rift in the rocks, up which came a boat or two and the smell and roar of the ocean, now out of sight beyond the sheltering cliffs. How long it took to bargain over those coals, how entirely trivial and irrelevant even the pasties were that day to me, with the calling of the sea in my ears and in all that little town, I have no words to tell.

At last Jan was ready. Step by step we climbed the monstrous cliffs on their landward side. Then, high above it all we looked down upon the multitudinous up-thundering of those green and purple waves of the Cornish sea breaking upon the perpendicular face of the cliff, roaring in its chasms, and recoiling far back again after each shock, the spray of it carried high upwards toward Arthur's sun-lit castle. I feasted eyes and ears in mute astonishment and awe.

It must have been a perfect day, as I think upon it now, with a landward breeze upon a high tide; an ideal day on which to see the Cornish coast and enjoy it even to the hundredth time. A hundred times have I seen it since, but never with such inexpressible delight.

*Bliss was it in that dawn to be alive,*

*But to be young was very heaven.*

Did Wordsworth know how literally true those words might on occasion be??

While I was looking Jan came to my side and spoke.

"Do 'ee see that land yore there a long way off?"

I saw a small low cloud; was that the land?

"Iss, fay, that's of it, and folks do say that there's the land of Heaven."

I looked in to Jan's face to see if that was the very truth, and Jan was as serious as a celestial vision required. Besides he was Superintendent of our Sunday school at home, and would not make a jest of sacred things. It must be true. And why not, indeed? Had I not always been taught that Heaven was a happy place far away from earth among the clouds? So, as I stood there, with the earth behind and the great sea in front, I made no doubt I had a glimpse of Heaven itself, far off and bathed in light and glory. Of that vision I spoke to no-one, not even my mother. It was too sacred for speech.

Gradually it faded from my memory, I think, for I do not remember anything of the nature of a disillusionment through all my boyhood. But twenty years after, in Manchester of all dismal places, I was reading a prosaic guide-book which informed me that Lundy Island, off the north coast of Cornwall, had long been in the possession of a family of the name of Heaven. It was in fact the land of Heaven as Jan had said. Then it was I laughed aloud at last. It took twenty years for me to see that joke, but at least I saw it and could laugh. In the meantime Jan had gone forth to see the good land in very deed. The other day I stood beside his grave in Varlick Cross, and beside him lies Jane, his wife, who used to know so well when I had stolen apples from her orchard, her "Hocken's greens" for hoarding, for she had counted them upon the tree, good careful soul. There where they lie at rest in the silent sunshine the distant hills look blue and purple all the summer's day, and you can hear the sweet inland murmur of the stream below.

Henry Turner Hooper.

Taken from the Cornish Magazine, 1899 by Eve Parsons.

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A John Harris Find.

*The Living Breath of Cornwall.*

Readers enjoy finding a subject they are interested in an unrelated book and likewise writers like to find a story that can lead them to write an article in an unexpected source.

Both of these applied when I bought, *'The Living Breath of Cornwall'* by Nigel Tangye from a local charity shop.

Nigel Tangye 1909 -1988 was the brother of Derek Tangye (author of *'The Minack Chronicles'*) and grandson of Richard Tangye (manufacturer of engines). One of Nigel Tangye's most noted books was, *'The Story of Glendorgel.'*

*The Living Breath of Cornwall* was one of a series of books about Nigel Tangye's ketch, *Spray*. In this book, the author tells of his sea voyage of adventure aboard *Spray* from North Cornwall to Land's End. Chapter VII is entitled, *'John Harris: the Miner, the Heart and the Song.'* The *Spray* is only five miles from Land's End. After his interesting read of the 1851 Wilkie Collins book, *'Rambles Beyond Railways.'* Tangye is looking for Botallack Mine. He spots the remains of this extraordinary mining achievement on those precipitous cliffs.

Tangye now turns to John Harris to relate what it was like below ground:

*Below were caverns grim with greedy gloom  
And levels drunk with darkness: chambers huge  
Where Fear sat silent, and the mineral-sprite  
For ever chanted his bewitching song:*

Three verses in all are quoted from *The Mine*. Tangye continues he would like to quote more from it as it is, *great stuff*, but there is more he wants to tell us about this miner, this poet, this family man. A verse describing how John Harris felt one winter's day on a visit to Penjerrick comes next:

*If such, Penjerrick, be thy winter scene  
How Eden-hued in summer's flashing sheen!*

A brief biography follows and includes a reference to introducing the place that poetry has found in his John Harris's life:

*the song angel to comfort me. walking at my side among the mineral splinters, rocks and rubbish, and whispering in the narrow lanes and grassy meadows as I travelled homewards, sweeter utterances than language can reveal.*

To show the many sides of John Harris and his writing, Tangye quotes the full poem, *The Faces at the Pane*; the story of two little girls born to his wife Jane:

*Two little girls with gleaming eyes  
With soft and shining hair  
And sweetest prattle on their lips  
Were watching me from there.  
One in the grave is sleeping now*

*And one has crossed the main  
Yet still I see, where'er I be*

*The faces at the pane.*

It is worth emphasising the point that Harris wrote about life as he saw and experienced it, Tangye fully understands this and remarks about the contrast of a sensitive human being above ground and the brave working man below ground.

John Harris during his life time may only have been known to a few people, today his life is open to all through his writing. In 1882, two years before John Harris died, a reviewer wrote about him:

'He is a living signpost to others along the way to success, and absolute proof - if proof be wanting - that genius is as much a gift to the poor man as it is to the rich man, and that it buds and blossoms as well in a humble cottage as it does in a luxurious studio or a castigated mansion.'

One of the important things about the John Harris Society and its newsletter is the sharing of how others feel John Harris; therefore I recommend getting a copy of 'The Living Breath of Cornwall,' published in 1980 by William Kimber & Co, from the library to read in full what Nigel Tangye wrote about the man he described as a poet of nature, a delightful sensitive rhymester and loving parent with an unsentimental faith in God.

Les Merton, August 2008.

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*UNDER A LOURING SKY*

*By*

*Brian Teague*

*When Kernow sat under a louring sky,  
Its life flickering through fire, earth and wind,  
Deities haunted the woods mossy floor  
Beneath a dark mantle of mystery.*

*Foul monsters and serpents lurked in deep caves,  
Spirits inhabited the springs and wells,  
While fearsome winds roared with deific wrath  
As worshippers breathed the glade's occult air.*

*Then a blaze of light from the hidden sky  
Reached down to warm responsive Celtic hearts,  
Aglow with a virtuous, virile faith.*

*Surfing the spiritual waves, holy men,  
At one with the great wave breaking, landed  
On Kernow's shore, smoothing the furrowed sand.*

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As we descend, Gunwalloe Cove and Church open on us, the former as delightful a spot in which to spend a long summer's day as can be well imagined; the latter an ancient structure, said to have been erected as a votive offering by some rescued mariner. The Churchyard walls are washed by the sea; the unpretending belfry is detached from the Church, being built against the side of a hill which rises between it and the sea. On the point outside formerly stood a stone cross, where it must have been the first evidence of human workmanship which presented itself to any one approaching the land. It has long been thrown down, and is said to be now lying at the bottom of the stream which winds its way down the valley.

If this be the case, it is much to be hoped that it may soon be restored to the spot where it was piously erected. In the absence of all record, it may be conjectured with some plausibility, that the rock on which it stood, was the very one on which the founder of the church secured his footing after his shipwreck. If it be, as some maintain, a superstitious feeling which leads to the restoration of crosses, that is surely a laudable superstition, which would

commemorate the fact, that an unknown Christian, who lived in days beyond the memory of man, here gave Glory to God for an act of mercy, in saving him from sudden death. A rather wide valley runs up from Gunwalloe Cove, with so gradual a rise, that a great part of it is marshy; the little river which flows through it appears in many places to be almost motion-

less. It is lined, and sometimes almost filled with flags and other aquatic plants, among which the great spear-wort, a rare plant in the south of England, is very conspicuous.

Beyond Gunwalloe Church, the land rises and the coast again becomes bold for a short distance. The cliffs, though not very lofty, are precipitous, and offer no chance of escape to any unfortunate vessel which may chance to be driven in within reach of the rocks. About the year 1785, a vessel laden with wool, and having also on board two and a half tons of money, was driven ashore a few hundred yards west of the church and soon went to pieces.

From: 'A Week at the Lizard' by the Reverend C. A. Johns. 1848.

Eve feels that the following might be entitled— 'Industry.'

#### PETER SKEWES: A MINER-FARMER

Peter Skewes [a miner at Wheal Unity] resides at Blackwater, in the parish of St. Agnes; he holds a small tenement consisting of about an acre and three quarters of land, the soil of which is naturally sterile. This is divided into two nearly equal plots. One of these he plants with potatoes; the other he tills to wheat; and so on alternately; every year one of his little fields producing potatoes and the other wheat. By proper attention in the cultivation he has on average, 80 Cornish bushels of potatoes, and nine of wheat, each season. He keeps two donkey's which graze on the neighbouring common during the summer, and are partly fed with the straw of his wheat in the winter; with these he carries coals, &c. for his neighbours, and collects manure for his ground. The refuse potatoes, &c enable him to feed a pig which, with fish, purchased in the season, affords all that is required for food, in addition to the produce of his fields, and little garden. In this way has Peter Skewes passed the last seven years, and supported a wife and family; now consisting of six children, not only without parish aid; but with a degree of comfort and independence of which there are not many examples in his situation in life.

Life in Cornwall .4 July 1817

#### THE BELLS OF GWENNAP

On Tuesday last, there was a ringing match at Gwennap; the Camborne ringers got the first prize, which was six silver-laced hats; the Redruth ringers got the second, a gold-laced hat; and the Gluvias ringers the third, six pairs of gloves.

Life in Cornwall 1st August 1817

THE FIRST METHODIST SOCIETY

Died at Redruth, on Tuesday last, at an advanced age, Mrs. Phillipa Andrew, widow of Mr. Joseph Andrew, a respectable grocer of that town. Mr. and Mrs. Andrews formed part of the first Methodist Society established by the Rev. John Wesley in this county; from which time, to the day of their decease, they continued firmly attached to the principles they embraced.

Life in Cornwall 12 September 1817

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