

PERRANWHARF: Report of PLHG walk with Chris Burton on Wednesday 20th June 2018.

About 28 people gathered in the car park of the Norway Inn on a fine June evening for an introduction to the many important historic sites which developed around Perranwharf from the mid 18th century onwards. Most of us were familiar with the Foundry (which is sited in neighbouring Mylor parish), but this area has much more of interest to offer, and our Chairman, Chris Burton, is remarkably well informed on this topic.

The wharves, we learned, were originally constructed by Charles Fox, the Quaker industrialist, shortly after 1772 for importing coal for the mine engines and exporting copper ore to South Wales for smelting. Other industries were attracted to the riverside location, and for 50 years Perranwharf was the principal port for the local mines until superseded by Devoran in 1826 with the opening of the Redruth and Chacewater railway. Just beside the car park are the remains of a circular dock which was used as a turning point for the shallow-draft barges bringing limestone for use in the nearby limekiln. The limestone came from Plymouth and was transferred to the barges at wharves sited near the Pandora Inn. The remains of the dock are tucked away and can be easily missed, but the limekiln is well preserved, though heavily masked by ivy. In the river opposite the dock were large timber ponds where Scandinavian timber for the mines was 'pickled' or seasoned in seawater for a few months before use.

The Norway Inn was built as a coaching inn where horses could be changed, when the new Truro-Falmouth turnpike was constructed along the riverbank in 1828. The mail coach left Falmouth daily at 3.am and arrived at Exeter that evening, arriving in London after a further 5 days.

Along the Falmouth Road are several buildings surviving from the heady days of Perranwharf, notably the three linked Riverside houses, serving as a Counthouse for the Foundry, a grocery shop and a tearoom. Another building housed the Mechanics Institute opened by Barclay Fox in 1847 for instructing his employees in mathematics, mining, chemistry, geology and electricity - well ahead of his day. There would also have been stabling for at least 24 horses and mules required for hauling heavy equipment to the mines

After carefully crossing the road we entered the Foundry, which was built in 1791 and was active for nearly a century, finally closing in 1879. The historic buildings have been conserved, repaired and in some parts rebuilt and most have been converted into apartments and houses. New buildings have been constructed on site and more are planned. Although the conservation work on the historic facades (of the Listed Buildings in the World Heritage Site) has been well done, the interior of the factory has effectively been gutted, the former rugged industrial character of the complex has been domesticated, and the site is changed forever.

Recrossing the A39 we walked up Cove hill, past Manor Mill, possibly medieval in origin, an early C19th terrace of cottages for labourers, Georgian style houses for management, and the old Hope and Anchor public house (the anchor is still in situ). Along Tredrea Drive we came to Tredrea Manor, which was built around 1770 by George Fox the first manager of the Wharf and then the Foundry. It has now been converted into apartments and the extensive estate, well known for its fine gardens and woodland walks, has been sold off for housing.

Walking up through the estate past the stables and the great barn we arrived at Church Road and continued down to St Piran's Church in its attractive setting with ancient Churchtown Farm and a few old cottages nearby. Originally the church was a simple Norman chapel incorporated in 1388 into the living of Stithians. The tower is 15th century and the chapel was in a dilapidated state when renovated first in 1842 and virtually rebuilt in 1884. The only surviving vestige of the Norman structure is a tympanum, a decorative carving featuring a 'lamb and flag' motif, set into the south wall above the door.

Leaving the church we walked down the footpath to St Pirans Well, another listed structure with its strong chalybeate spring. The walk took about an hour and half, but in this short space of time Chris took us back 250 years and added a whole new dimension to our appreciation and understanding of the heritage of Perranwharf.

Steve Hartgroves 09/07/2018