

Newton St Cyres History Group

December Meeting

Our Christmas meeting took us back 250 years to a Devon and Cornwall familiar to us, and yet very different from the present. We went on a journey with the Reverend John Penrose, his wife, and his daughter Frances Penrose. Through the letters of John and Frances home to Penryn, where the rest of the large family were being looked after by his daughter, Peggy, we followed a journey of 180 miles by private chaise and stage coach up to Bath and back again, in 1766.

John Penrose was the second son of an Exeter tailor and was educated at Exeter High School, and then went as a poor scholar to Exeter College, Oxford. He had been a curate in Shobrooke, and Rector in Sowton, and had married Elizabeth Vinecombe, daughter of a clergyman at Exeter Cathedral. He was then appointed as the vicar at Penryn. He and Elizabeth had seven children, five girls and two boys. During the Bath stay, Peggy, at the age of 19, looked after the home and the younger children, ranging in age from 7 upwards.



The journey was undertaken because the Reverend was badly afflicted by gout, and was going to take the waters at Bath. The letters to Peggy describe much of the detail of travelling, finding food and lodgings for the travellers and their horses, and remind us that a short motorway trip for us (3½ hrs according to the RAC) with service stations en route, took a week in 1766, and was a serious and even dangerous enterprise, requiring much planning and endurance. Arrangements were made to stay with friends or at an inn, lodgings had to be booked in Bath, and the roads west of Exeter were narrow and hilly. There was no Turnpike Road yet built across Bodmin Moor and so the way went south through Redgate, a few miles north of Liskeard. The Reverend became so stiff that he had to be carried in and out of the chaise, and could not put his hand to his mouth or dress himself.

The travellers passed through Bow and stopped for lunch "we rid through a good deal of very bad roads and stop't at a place call'd Bow to bait our horses, and we ate some biscuits and drank some wine". They then proceeded to spend the night with Mr and Mrs Pearse at Yendacott, evidently old friends. Yendacott is now farmed by and is the home of the Brock family and is in Shobrooke parish just a little to the east of Shute Cross. The house was rebuilt after a fire early in the twentieth century. Because the Reverend was too unwell to make an early start, they then travelled slowly to

Cullompton to pick up the Exeter to Bath stage coach the next morning, thus having a later start. There were three stages a week in the summer season. George their manservant returned the vicarage chaise to Yendacott where it was stored until needed for the return journey, and then took the two horses back to Penryn. A chaise might travel 25 miles a day, but a stage coach could cover 40-50 because it picked up new horses at each stage. A journey was slower if one's own horses were used and had to be 'baited' that is rested, fed and watered. The Penrose's luggage travelled separately by slow carrier, and when they reached Bath, Frances Penrose wrote to her sister *"I hope our clothes will come tonight, or I know not what I shall do"*.

The Reverend Penrose took note of what he spent, because he was not a wealthy man and the costs of the trip are interesting. For example, at an inn at Lostwithiel, *"Supper, veal cutlets and tarts, poor cyder, stale ale, good punch. Expence, landlords bill 18s 7d – gave the servants 2s 5d – total one guinea"*. One estimate of inflation shows that £1 was worth about £118 now, so 2s 5d is worth about £14. Both he, and his daughter Fanny, wrote down the details of what they ate at their various meals, so that the family at home knew exactly how their parents and sister were getting on. At Trebartha, on the way to Okehampton, they stayed the night and had dinner as follows: *"Our dinner boil'd beef, shoulder of mutton roasted, hogs pudding, oysters fried in batter, black currant tart, garden stuff etc. Writing about dinner, again reminds me of my breakfast at Lostwithiel; excellent hot rolls with our tea."*

Once in Bath, the Reverend Penrose took the waters and slowly improved, and on 30th May met John Quicke of Newton St Cyres, who married the double heiress Jane Coster, widow of Robert Hoblyn of Nanswhydden. His letter home to Peggy on May 31st reads *"received yesterday compliments from Mr Quick of Nanswhydden. He and I met the day before in the Pump Room, but did not call one another to mind. As soon as we parted, I was told who he was. I would afterwards have visited him, but he had left Bath"*.

At the beginning of June the Penrose party left Bath to make the return journey to Penryn. By now the Reverend was well enough dine *"at Mr Lake's in Crediton Parish, about a mile from Shobrooke Church"* and to visit friends in Dawlish and Topsham, and also to preach in Shobrooke Church. They returned safely to Penryn, and such was the success of the trip that it was repeated the following year. This time, however, he unfortunately caught jaundice, but he lived for another ten years, being greatly mourned by his family and parishioners on his death. Fanny married the Rev William Hocker, who had accompanied them to Lostwithiel on their first trip, and died in 1834 at the age of 92.



Thanks to Roger Wilkins and Christopher Lee for their excellent performances, and to Jean Wilkins
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and Malcolm Brooks for the narration and background information. Thanks also to Margaret and Michael Wheaton who told Jean about the published book of letters. Thank you Jane (Bailey) for the costumes and make up.

Next meetings

Meetings are usually on Thursday evenings in the village hall club room and start at 7.30pm.

We have no special membership arrangements. Everyone is welcome. There is a small charge of £2 which includes tea and biscuits.

For further information contact Jean 851337 Isobel 851351

2014

Feb 20th

Peter Howard 'Devon Landscape Painters'

We are waiting to be surprised but Prof Howard has already told me that Gainsborough spent much time at Cowley Place learning to play the piano!

Mar 20th

Main Hall Caradoc Doy on 'Plant Hunters and Veitch Nurseries'

Combined talk with Gardening Club and Friends of the Arboretum

On May 15th Chris Southcott, Tim Sedgwick and Malcolm Brooks will be presenting an evening on 'Newton St Cyres and the Exeter Crediton Railway' and would be glad if anyone has photos, information or memories they would be able to contribute before that date.

They will soon be giving details and contacts in the Newton Wonder.

Chris Southcott is interested in any memorabilia about the Newton St Cyres football club, which has its hundreth anniversary this year. He is hoping to have a display at The Revels next summer.

