



Digest

Issue 3
Summer 2021

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Welcome to Digest. The historical journal of the Charlestown History Group.

Unfortunately the CV19 lockdown hasn't eased soon enough to save the Charlestown Regatta, which for a second year has had to be cancelled.

2021 was due to be the 50th anniversary of its modern revival and whilst we will have to wait another year to be able to celebrate, we thought we'd bring you some photos looking back to Regatta day at the harbour 50 years ago. (1).



Some positives of the easing of CV19 restrictions have been that we've been able to start meeting in person and to begin work on some practical projects all aimed at enhancing the history of Charlestown. See page 6 for all the latest news from the Charlestown History Group.

We hope you enjoy issue 3 of Digest.

Past issues of Digest can be download from:
charlestownhistorygroup.com/digest/



Several interesting stones have been used in the construction of Charlestown Parish Church. The surrounds to the windows and doors and the quoins are made of a fine grained granite which came from a quarry beside the B3274 between Stenalees and Hensbarrow. It is similar to “St Stephen’s Stone” which is a kind of pale coloured granite which has been used in churches all over Cornwall. The medieval St Piran’s Church in Perran Dunes used St Stephens stone and the interior of the Cathedral is lined with St Stephen’s stone, partly because it is so light in colour. However, the granite from Hensbarrow is slightly different, as it contains veins of turquoise, a patch of which can be seen in the exterior tracery of the east window of the Chancel. This granite has also been used in the past as an ingredient in ceramics as a kind of china stone, because of its very low iron content, but nowadays interest is more focused on the fact that this granite has the distinction of having the highest lithium content of any granite in SW England, mostly contained in the mineral zinnwaldite. With increasing demand for Li-ion batteries for electric cars, as well as many other electronic devices, there is much interest at the moment in using this type of granite as a source of lithium. The granite is weakly altered to china clay; the church cleaners know this all too well, as they often find dust from the disintegrating granite around the pillars, pulpit etc.



The War Memorial and north-west sides of the Church (2)

The main bulk of the rubble masonry forming the walls of the Church is a slightly slaty mudstone, originally bluish-grey when fresh, but weathering buff. It would originally have been laid down as a muddy sediment on the sea floor about 390 million years ago. The exact source of the stone is a mystery and even several eminent geologists who have looked at the stone were unable to ascertain exactly which quarry it came from, although it is almost certainly local. Unfortunately the stone is slightly weathered, which makes it weak and susceptible to disintegration. A major fund raising exercise is just starting to raise the money to repair the masonry and the roof of the north side of the Church; the south and east sides having been dealt with a few years ago.

Another interesting stone used in the Church is “Duporth Stone”, which is similar to the better known “Polyphant Stone” from near Launceston. This comes from the small headland within Duporth Bay. It forms the dark green panels on the Rood Wall between the Chancel and the Nave. It was also used for some of the columns forming the pillars of Truro Cathedral.



Sunlight highlights the mudstone on the north elevation of St. Pauls Church, Charlestown (3)

The War Memorial in the Church yard is made from a granite quarried in the Luxulyan valley; it is very coarse grained. The late Ken Larcombe told me the Luxulyan valley quarries ceased production in the 1930s, so this war memorial is probably one of the last products from that area. Large scale granite quarrying took place in the Luxulyan valley in the first half of the 19th century and cut dimension stone was exported all over the world at that time.

It may seem strange that the well known Pentewan stone was not used in Charlestown Church, but this is probably because the quarries at Pentewan were no probably longer active by the mid nineteenth century. Pentewan stone was used for Holy Trinity, St Austell and for the front façade of the 1828 Charlestown Chapel (Listed Grade 2*).

Memories of Charlestown People

by Sue Facey

When my family moved to Charlestown in 1965, the village was still very self sufficient. Most of the people who lived there had been born there and in a lot of cases their parents and grandparents were Charlestown born and bred too. Charlestown Estate was strictly controlled by Lady Florence Crowder who lived at the top of the village. I was told that it was she who decided what colour the cottages would be painted and even what colour the crane down on the harbour should be

A lot of the inhabitants earned their living from the harbour and the estate but many families had to subsidise their wages by opening up their homes for B&B in the summer months. My own mother in-law, Goldie, took in guests and made and sold clotted cream from the house when her husband, Nip, had a small dairy herd at Holmbush. The sons of Ken and Dulcie Honey at the Rashleigh Arms had to move into a shed in the garden during the summer months!

Most of the trades were represented in the village - Carpenters, plumbers, electricians and blacksmiths plus many more, all employed by the Estate and all expected to turn out for "Gate Ho"

There were no supermarkets so the wives would shop at the two grocery shops and the local butchers. This was where information was shared, divulged and sometimes embellished and a very important part of life back then. My Dad had a chair in his shop so that old Mrs Blight from around the corner could come in, sit down and catch up on the local news. This chair was apparently responsible for several pregnancies in the village but Mrs Blight was safe as she was over seventy!

The shop closed at six pm daily and one pm on Tuesday half day. Without fail, Mrs Farrow would come in at two minutes to six or two minutes to one and settle herself down on the chair whilst we tore around with her shopping list [no self service back then]. There was a hairdressers and a pub and no real need to leave the village, few people had cars anyway. Tesco coming to St Austell town soon changed all that; The butcher struggled on for a few years - Reg Hodge eventually giving up for others including Wally Huxtable and Perry Trays to take it on. The bottom shop was subsequently sold when my Dad retired but was never able to sustain the far - reaching delivery rounds and the seven members of staff [including family] that it had supported. Rose tinted glasses maybe, but a community that was never quite the same again!

Before there was Charlestown

by Pete Hancock

Can you picture a time before Charlestown existed, or even St Austell? The area to the west of the present village was labelled as Gwallon Downs on old maps, and to the north of that, extending beyond Mount Charles, lay Slades Moor, suggesting the land was wild and uncultivated. High ground with commanding views, such as the ridge between Charlestown and Gewans, was favoured for burial mounds. *The National Gazetteer of Great Britain and Ireland* published in 1868 says that Gwallon Downs had recently been enclosed, mentioning there were traces of a British camp and several barrows. Of these, **One Barrow**, possibly so-called because it was isolated from the others, was excavated in 1805. Canon Hammond in *An Account of St Austell* (1897) says, 'the workmen' discovered a square enclosure of undressed stone, containing a multitude of bones and a sepulchral urn. (Page 292). This suggests they weren't trained archaeologists, hence they had no qualms about reinstating the remains in a nearby hedge! The site of this barrow now lies beneath Penrice School buildings. Cornwall Council's Historic Environment website shows a further six barrows once lay just to the east of Porthpean Road and were levelled to create the school's playing fields. Also, a further seven barrows, arrayed in a north-south line, once existed on the Foundry site, as well as one between Charlestown Road and the entrance of Mill Lane. A further well-spaced trio were north of Campdown Cemetery. However, a Bronze Age cup-marked stone still exists on land to the north-east of Polmear Farm, although further investigation has not been possible as it lies in farmland.

The Longstone, or Giant's Staff, is a 12-foot high granite monolith, now standing incongruously in the midst of the verdant playing fields of Penrice School, and is said to be Tregeagle's lost walking stick. The legend is recounted by among others, John Murray in his *Handbook for Travellers in Devon and Cornwall*, published in 1865 (p. 250). Disregarding the legend, it is also known as Gwallon Menhir. Canon Hammond speculated that this 'rude obelisk' possibly indicated the site of a battle or burial, adding a footnote that there are frequent mentions of Wallen in old records, the area comprising 46 acres of waste in the reign of Edward I (page 292).



The Longstone on Gwallon Downs (4)

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Whilst clearly focussing on Charlestown, it would be remiss of me not to mention nearby sites. At **Castle Gotha** is a small Iron Age oval settlement, once completely enclosed by a bank and ditch. It is close enough to the larger and better defended fort at Black Head for the occupants to have sought sanctuary there in times of serious trouble.

It is clear to see why the headland at **Black Head** was chosen for an Iron Age Promontory Hill Fort. Easily accessible from Trenarren, and affording wonderful views, today the site is owned by the National Trust. The irregularly-shaped enclosure was defended by three parallel rampart banks and outer ditches at the narrow northern entrance point. These may have been augmented by timber palisades. Evidence of a stone circle has been found near the entrance. One can picture these Iron Age people setting out in small fishing and trading boats, and perhaps landing at the cove that would eventually become West Polmear.

The Duport Cup. The search for Charlestown's Holy Grail.

Part 3. The Rashleigh / Wedgwood link.

by Andy Trudgian

When we previously left the search for The Duport Cup, a late c.18th, unique, ceramic item with great significance to the early history of the port of Charlestown in Cornwall, doubts had been raised about the cup's date and even whether, as was originally thought, it had been made by Wedgwood.



The last known image of The Duport Cup from the 1980s (5)

That said, the likely links between Wedgwood and Charlestown were still the best avenue to provide further clues about the origins of The Duport Cup.

The great potter, Josiah Wedgwood I, visited Cornwall in 1775 on his exploration for materials to advance his ceramics and also to see for himself what William Cookworthy had been up to since the Quaker and Chemist had discovered china clay in Cornwall in the mid-1740s. It was no longer a secret that china clay was being used to make fine porcelain bodies as Cookworthy had already patented its use in that process. Wedgwood, however, was looking at china clay as an agent to whiten the body and glaze of his earthenware-based ceramics.

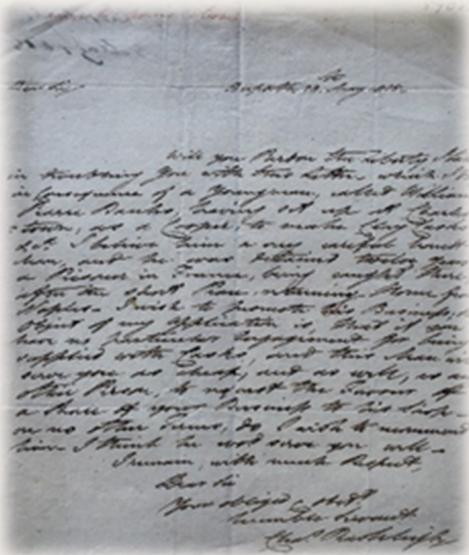
Whilst in mid-Cornwall, it is likely that Wedgwood, mindful of the difficulties of getting china clay out of the Duchy and into his landlocked pottery in Staffordshire, learned of the nearby small hamlet of Polmear which was already, albeit yet without a harbour, being used for cargo for the St Austell area and had already been used for the shipping of small amounts of china clay to Cookworthy's pottery in Plymouth. The Trent and Mersey canal, running beside Wedgwood's pottery at Burslem, Stoke on Trent, was nearing completion, opening the possibility of a direct sea trade route with Cornwall via transshipment at Liverpool. Could Polmear, as early as 1775, been in Wedgwood's mind as the ideal location for a china clay port?

There is no direct evidence that Wedgwood met Charles Rashleigh during his visit to the locality in 1775, but by then Rashleigh had just bought land at Duport and begun the building of his future home. Whilst he was yet to purchase the land and foreshore at Polmear, could this new interest in china clay have stirred a thought in Rashleigh's mind or did the two men correspond in some way, giving each other an idea? Whilst we may never know exactly, within 15 years of Wedgwood's visit, Rashleigh had begun work on his harbour with china clay being shipped out from its earliest days.

That Polmear was in Wedgwood's mind in some way is underlined by the fact that he is believed to have even considered setting up a pottery in the village. It was only because of the difficulties of bringing in the vast amounts of coal that such a venture would need, that he didn't follow up on the idea. (6)

More definite evidence for the relationship between Charles Rashleigh and The Wedgwood company came from this letter, from the Wedgwood archive, written in Rashleigh's hand in 1815. The transcript of such offers a fascinating snapshot of the character of Rashleigh and the industry of Charlestown at that time. (7)

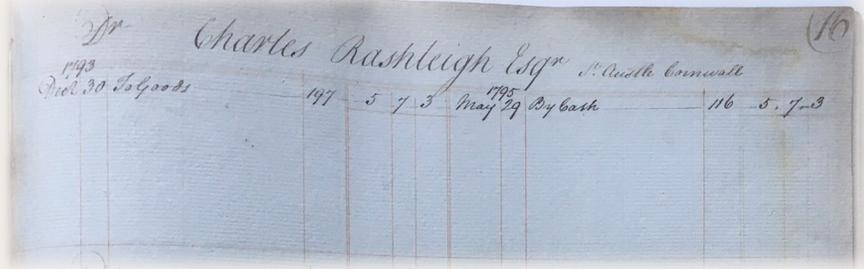
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Letter from Rashleigh to Wedgwood with transcript (7)

A deeper look into the Wedgwood archives was initiated and after several fruitless searches, a fascinating item was found in a ledger from Wedgwood's London showroom. Could this be the purchase of the Duporth Cup?

This entry details a sale to Charles Rashleigh of on December 28th 1793 for "goods" to the value of £5. 7s 3p. (Interestingly, not paid until May 29th 1795).



Entry in Wedgwood Ledger (8)

Initial excitement, that this could indeed be the Duporth Cup, gave way to a more sober analysis with three main doubts emerging:

- 1793 is 6 years earlier than the previous date given for the Cup's creation and therefore even less likely to be porcelain and certainly not made by Wedgwood at that time. (see part 2).
- The entry suggests a purchase by Charles Rashleigh himself and deviates from the story that the cup was purchased by grateful port workers and presented to Rashleigh as a surprise gift.
- £5. 7s 3p inflated for today's value equates to about £800 and whilst the Duporth Cup is a fine piece of ceramics this seems way over the top for such a small object. Comparisons with other sales listings from the Wedgwood sales ledgers from that time suggest that £5 would have been able to purchase an entire set of tableware containing scores of items.

So, this ledger entry cannot be related to the Duporth Cup and although it further underlines the Rashleigh - Wedgwood link, it is simply a record of a sale, between two Georgian associates, and probably relates to a new set of tableware bought for the dining room at Rashleigh's Duporth Manor House.

With the closeness between them proven, it now seems inconceivable that The Duporth Cup was not made by Wedgwood and commissioned either by Rashleigh himself or someone close to him.

Whilst this all adds to the story, was I any closer to finding the Duporth Cup? Although it now felt that I knew the characters involved and the Cup itself intimately, in some ways it seemed as elusive as ever. That was until my search unveiled a tantalising new lead. Was the Cup seen in public at a lecture in the Royal Cornwall Museum in the 1980s?

In part 4 we set off on a slightly different path and follow up this latest, hot lead. Surely now The Duporth Cup will soon be found.

Requested prices Cornwall?

Duporth 19th July 1815

Dear Sir,

Will you pardon the liberty I take in troubling you with this letter which I do, in consequence of a young man, called William Pearce Banks [or Danks?] having set up at Charles-town as a cooper, to make clay casks &c. I believe him a very careful, honest man and he was retained twelve years a Prisoner in France, being caught there after the short Peace * returning home from Naples. I wish to promote his Business; the object of my application is, if you have no particular engagement for being supplied with casks, and this man will serve you as cheap, and as well, as any other Person, to request the Favour, of a share of your Business to his Shop – on no other terms, do I wish to recommend him, I think he will serve you well.

I remain with much respect,

Dear Sir

Your obliged & obedient

Humble servant

Charles Rashleigh

[* this would be the Peace with France of 1802-1803]

News from The CHG

With space limited, please excuse a bulleted list of what we've been up to in the first part of this year :

- Complete field survey of Wheal Polmear mine to inform a bid for it's greater interpretation and protection.
- Support for the Parish Council in review of Historic England's listings and to enhance those that need it.
- Establishment of community archive and historical interaction space. (See Archive Update)
- Preparation of plan for protection and improvement of late c18th. Gun Battery. We'll be saying more on this over the summer and will need your help.
- Research into Charlestown's brick making history and the planning of a practical workshop to support it. (see brickmaking workshop to get involved).

Lots going on and lots more to come. Thanks to everyone for your kind words and support in what we are trying to achieve and we look forward to working with you all protecting Charlestown's History.



Brickmaking Workshop

Sunday 1st August 2021 at 1pm

Join us for an informative and practical afternoon exploring one of the village's oldest industries.

Learn how bricks were made, have a go yourself and learn all about our work to uncover the history of brick making in Charlestown

at The Brickfield Project Site, Blackpool China Clay Works,
Trewoon.

£3 per person. Spaces limited and booking essential. See our website for more details and ticket booking.

The Charlestown History Group's mission is to research, protect and promote the unique and varied history and heritage of Charlestown for the benefit of current and future generations.

We need your help, please do get involved, here's how :

- Interact with us. Share your memories and experiences of Charlestown as we create a vibrant historical forum.
- Join our Facebook group and keep on top of what is going on. www.facebook.com/charlestownhistory
- Contribute material to the community archive where it will be protected for the benefit of current and future generations.
- Undertake historical research and add it to the history of Charlestown.
- Submit an historical article for publication in Digest.
- Join us at one of our events.
- Volunteer your time to help us.
- Make a crowdfunding donation to help us fund our work.

www.justgiving.com/crowdfunding/charlestownhistory

Archive Update

Our plans to create a community archive and historical interaction space, at The Pattern Hall in Charlestown, continues. You now can visit the archive between 10am and noon every Tuesday. (Please do contact in advance to let us know you are coming).

Whilst cataloguing of the archive is an ongoing process, we are pleased to have begun uploading the catalogue, as part of The National Archives, for everyone to see and use the material we hold.

discovery.nationalarchives.gov.uk/details/a/A17335435

References

- (1) Charlestown History Group Archive. CHG/P1539.
- (2) Charlestown History Group Archive. CHG/P1272.
- (3) Colin Bristow. CHG/P1545.
- (4) Charlestown History Group Archive. CHG/P1212.
- (5) Charlestown. The History of a Cornish Seaport. Richard & Bridget Larn 1994.
- (6) The Wooden Ships and Iron Men of the Cornish China Clay trade. George Bainbridge
- (7) V&A/Wedgwood Collection, MS E10-8908, transcript by David Thomas & Andy Trudgian. CHG/S93.
- (8) V&A/Wedgwood Collection.

You can find more information about the aims and work of The Charlestown History Group on our website and you can contact us by email. curator@charlestownhistorygroup.com