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

Time has flown since our first newsletter in January but we’ve been busy behind the scenes continuing to set up The Charlestown History Group and preparing for its, more public, emergence after lockdown. If Covid 19 restrictions allow, we hope to host our first public event and get stuck into some on the ground projects later this summer. There is more information on what we’ve been up and what we’ve got planned on page 6 and you can always get the latest updates from our website and social media pages.

Also in this issue...
- An article on the Charlestown Battery and Cliff Volunteers from well know Charlestown historian: Richard Larn. OBE.
- An introduction to the Charlestown Leat, an often overlooked but vital part the port.
- Part 2 in the story of the search for the Duporth Cup.

We hope you enjoy issue 2 of Digest.

A postcard view of the inner dock in the 1930s. Of particular interest as it captures a narrow window when all threes modes of maritime power, sail, steam and oil, could be seen in port at the same time. (1)
Whilst most visitors to Charlestown will walk around the harbour, probably visit the Shipwreck & Treasure Museum, have a pint and a pasty and then move on, they are missing an important part of the ports history entirely, if they do not visit the site of the old gun battery.

Located on top of the cliff on the west side of the harbour, the coastal path actually runs right past the battery. From the 16th to the end of the 19th centuries, Britain was continually faced with the threat of invasion by the Netherlands, France and Spain, and Charles Rashleigh, having invested a great deal of money in creating the working seaport of Polmear or Charlestown, felt the very real need to defend his investment from a seaborne attack. However the story does not begin in 1789, when Rashleigh commenced the building of his port, but back in the Tudor period. At that time when St Austell Bay was known as Tywardreath Bay, the 16th century Cott manuscript held in the British Museum Library, shows that the only place name in the bay was Polkerris. That name translates from old Cornish as ‘fortified pool or cove’ and at the time had a population of some 40 inhabitants, mostly fishermen, owned by the Rashleigh family of Menabilly. It must have been of some importance since the map which is part of the Cott manuscript depicts coastal defences, including a Tudor watchtower on an offshore rock north of the beach. No doubt considered essential at the time, beneath the drawing of the gun tower are the words ‘not built’. It is interesting that around Polkerris harbour, set in cement are seven muzzle loading iron cannon used as mooring bollards, but where they originated will never be known, and may have been from a shipwreck or earlier battery, but certainly not from a gun tower.

The men were organised in units called Cornish Volunteers, and Henry Tremayne of Heligan who was Commander in the St Austell area, was issued with government muskets and bayonets etc. A different organisation at the time were the Cornish Militia, started in 1798, who wore military uniform, and were an early ‘Home Guard’. The gun battery at Charlestown was built starting in 1793, which had a fife and drum band eventually, which later became the Mount Charles Band. The Cliff Volunteers later merged with the official army artillery who had barracks and storeroom at Bodmin, the local unit now called the Crinnis Cliff battery. For a short time they even had a troop of cavalry. There were many small local ‘military’ units at the time, which recruited and disbanded as the threat of war came and went, leaving unfortunately an unclear overall picture.

The battery at Charlestown was originally armed with 2 x 12-pounder iron cannon, mounted on wooden garrison carriages, which required at least twelve men to man and fire them. The gun complement was then enlarged to 4 x 18-pounders, which warranted a minimum of 25 men. This required the building of four new gun platforms, flat concrete beds to take the weight and recoil of the cannon and a surrounding battlemented defence wall. Now called the Crinnis Cliff Artillery Volunteers, the government sent a senior officer from the Royal Artillery headquarters, Lt. Colonel Enys, to inspect the units at Fowey, Par and Charlestown on 21 June 1805. The senior battery officer at Charlestown was Captain Joseph Dingle, who had the title of Captain Commandant and was the man responsible for Charles Rashleigh’s financial downfall. His 1st Lt. was Captain W. Bowles, 2ndLt. William Quickhard and 3rdLt. Edward Hannah, supported by four sergeants, four corporals, eight bombardiers and 80 gunners. The report on the inspection states that three men were sick, seven absent and two wanting, making for a total of 92 men, spread over the four batteries.

The Cornwall Artillery Volunteers No.4 gun battery as the Charlestown unit was known, continued in its role almost to the end of the 19th century, despite there being no threat from the French. The only time the battery actually fired a shot in anger was when a Royal Navy frigate, not flying an ensign, entered the bay and approached Charlestown. A single shot was fired across her bow, whereupon she raised her ensign and sent a boat ashore with the ships 1st Lt, who congratulated the battery Commander on keeping such a good lookout and the accuracy of his gunners. Correspondence survives regarding a practice shoot of the battery in June 1868.

“The men assembled at the gun-shed armoury, located between the lime kilns in the village, and headed by the brass band, marched to the battery to compete for prizes given by the County Association. The officers present were Captain W. Banks, Lieutenant Kanrick and Williams, and 70 non-commissioned man and gunners. A floating target was positioned at a distance of 1,400 yards and 55 practice rounds were fired at it. Six prizes were awarded for accuracy, Corporal Warne winning 1st prize by actually hitting it,, and Gunner Inch the 6th prize. The weather was fine and a number of spectators attended. “

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The county now had a number of professional Royal Artillery Sergeants seconded from the Bodmin barracks to train recruits and maintain gunnery standards. The Battery members were sent once a year to the Raglan barracks, Devonport, for training courses and drill. In 1860 the Charlestown battery changed its four 18 pounder cannon of four 24 pounder guns, and its members were trained in the use of carbines. A further change took place in 1884, when these guns were exchanged for a single 32 pounder cannon, a massive 3.5 ton gun whose carriage alone weighed 1.5 tons. On 26 July that year the battery and its complement were inspected by Colonel Newman, Royal Artillery, who in his report stated:

“The men were very clean and smart. Saw six rounds fired from the 32 pounder, gun drill very good. Repository exercise well performed. Average attendance of men at drill very satisfactory.”

It was a devastating blow to Charlestown in 1898 when it was announced that the battery was to be disbanded having no real purpose.

The original half-moon shaped outer battlemented wall embracing the battery survives, but its original iron gate has disappeared and the site generally needs attention. The original gun platform bases survive, as do part of the four walls of the powder magazine, otherwise the only evidence of its original use are the holes in the inner wall face where a timber ‘drill shed’ once stood. The 1884 inspection report mentions a ‘repository’ drill, which is deserving of some explanation. Iron cannon in batteries around the British Isles were generally removed and kept under cover from October to April in the winter months. Justification was because most navies kept their ships in port during the winter months, so with little possibility of their use over winter, and to prevent the cannon rusting, they were put into a ‘gun shed’. This was achieved by using a ‘gun-dilly’, an open framed four wheeled cart, pulled by horses, which had a strong central wooden beam with four cross axles and wheels. Sheer-legs and block-and-tackle would have lifted the gun barrel off its carriage, which would be dropped on the ground and the ‘dilly’ placed over the gun barrel. Sheer-legs would then lift the barrel which was secured by rope or chains beneath the central beam, and using horses the gun barrel could then be moved around. It is presumed that the dilly was dragged up and down the coastal footpath track, but whether this was possible moving the 32-pounder gun in later years seems doubtful. In which case the guns may have been dragged across the fields from the Duporth Estate and along Duporth Road hill.

The crenelated northern wall of The Battery. (3)

Richard Larn OBE, Cornish Bard and Knight of Mark Twain is no stranger to Charlestown. He and his wife Bridget have lived in Sea Road, Carlyon Bay and in Ropewalk House, Charlestown, where they co-authored a book entitled, ‘Charlestown, the history of a Cornish Seaport’. After long service in the Royal Navy Richard, on retirement, became Works Director of Partech Electronics, moving the company, owned by Roger and Dorothy Parker, from Welwyn Garden City to Eleven Doors, Charlestown. Richard and Bridget then started the Charlestown Shipwreck Treasure Museum, and the Commercial Diver Training Company, Prodive Ltd. in the Longstore, Duporth Road, before moving into Falmouth Docks. They now live in the Isles of Scilly. and between them have written and had published some 55 books.

The Charlestown Leat by Pete Hancock

The Charlestown leat, I would attest, is an unacknowledged marvel of Georgian civil engineering. Designed and built in conjunction with the harbour, its purpose was to provide a source of water to enable the inner dock to remain full at all states of the tide, as well as facilitate occasionally flushing out any silt or detritus at low tide. Clearly, this would have necessitated a gentle gradient throughout its length, the diligent surveying of a suitable route, as well as the construction of a number of tunnels and embankments. Over two hundred years after its construction, it is still, in part, functioning and is an important component in the working of the harbour. Yet, as we will see, it also once provided water for several other enterprises along its route.

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The source of the leat was originally from the Par River at Bridges near Luxulyan. From here it courses for eight miles in a south-westerly direction towards St Austell, with several sections beneath the ground. It also crosses beneath the North East Distributor Road and on to Boscoppa. Here a spur fed water to Wheal Eliza mine. Now unobtrusively passing modern housing, it originally bordered fields before cascading down the valley containing the Sandy River, on its way being used to drive a water wheel working a set of stamps for a tin mine. It then crosses Sandy River – also capable of being diverted by sluices to be used in the clay works further down the valley - via a concrete aqueduct. Skirting the side of the valley, it passes to the north of Sandy School, crosses beneath Sandy Hill and on beside Michell Road. It then flows through Mount Charles, again crossing beneath the road, then flowing behind Steve Andrew's Tyres and under the bypass.

Now it is on the outskirts of its destination, Charlestown. Here it served a number of roles. At the top of the village, just below Penrice School, it fed a waterwheel connected to the Naptha works, then a grain mill and a Tin Blowing House until 1885. It was also diverted across the road to drive four water wheels at Charlestown Foundry: an overshot wheel dating from 1852 that operated tilt hammers can still be seen. Then it flowed beside fields, before entering the higher of two ponds or reservoirs, where the water was stored and released via sluices as required. Clay-lined, these were well stocked with fish.

Between the top and bottom ponds, the leat powered a wheel at a threshing barn, which was perhaps, later converted to crush china stone, before it ran through the sett of South Polmear Mine. Although no evidence of the leat’s use at the mine remains today, it is inconceivable that some use wasn't made of the flowing water. The eagle-eyed can still see the overhead cables from the sluice building beside the lower pond where they cross the corner of Duporth Road and run beside Barkhouse Lane. These still activate the sluice to the inner harbour. The leat then runs through tunnels and conduits leading to the dock.

This extensive system had to be maintained, and that was the job of the Leat Man, employed by The Charlestown Estate. One recent exponent was Mr John Dove, whose task it was to patrol the whole course once a month and clear any debris, fallen branches, as well as dams built by children (including myself), much to their annoyance!

Extract from the 1842 Tithe map showing the leat and upper pond. (4)

The Duporth Cup. The search for Charlestown’s Holy Grail.

Part 2. To The Potteries. by Andy Trudgian

When, in part 1, we left the search for The Duporth Cup, a late c.18th, unique, ceramic item with great significance to the early history of the port of Charlestown in Cornwall, it looked, like the trail for the illusive Cup, last seen over 40 years ago, had gone cold.

Initial enquiries, to likely Rashleigh family connections, had all turned out to be fruitless. It was time for a different approach, starting with a recap of the Cup as described in Richard and Bridgets Larn’s 1994 book. (5)

“...a very special piece of commemorative porcelain, to be known as the Duporth Cup. This consisted of a saucer 8 ins.(20cms.) in diameter, designed to hold a two handled cup fitted with a domed lid. Dark blue in colour, with a small flower pattern and gilt rim, the centre of the saucer is inscribed, “The Rise and Progress of Charles’s Town”. The cup and lid both show miniature paintings of views from Duporth, the construction of the dock at Porthmear, the beach before work commenced and the harbour wall under construction. Made in great secrecy at the Wedgwood factory...”

Armed with this information, and other snippets gleaned in the search so far, an approach was made to the Wedgwood Archive at Stoke on Trent, which is now part of the Victorian and Albert Museum collection. They, very kindly, immediately set to work on a thorough search and came back promptly with some immediate “concerns” about what was previous known.

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It was the Cup’s porcelain manufacture and its date of 1799, which threw up the biggest issue. Josiah Wedgwood, quite simply, could not have made it as he did not begin making porcelain until at least 1810, preferring instead to concentrate on producing a type of earthenware made to mimic porcelain by applying a creamy white glaze and named, appropriately, creamware. Also, the object simply did not sound like a Wedgwood piece with a dark blue and white decoration being very atypical of anything the potter would have been producing at this time. Additionally, no records could be found in the archives which could point to such an important object being commissioned in 1799 nor a year either side.

At this point, a brief history and explanation of some ceramics terms may be helpful. Porcelain is the production of pottery using china clay (kaolin) as a main ingredient. Fired at high temperature it produces a fine, white, semi translucent body. Porcelain manufacture was well established in China by AD500 and came to Europe in the early c18th. William Cookworthy, who discovered china clay in mid Cornwall in 1748, is generally considered to be the first producer of commercial English porcelain from his factory at Plymouth in the mid. 1760s.

Earthenware, in comparison with porcelain, is a more rudimentary ceramic made of a cruder clay, often mixed with flint, and fired at lower temperatures. It produces a heavier body with a variable and often darker colour. In the late c18th, Wedgwood was leading the way in producing a higher quality earthenware, named creamware. This was made to mimic porcelain by adding small amounts, of the newly discovered, china clay in order to make the body and glaze whiter. After supplying a twelve piece creamware tea set to Queen Charlotte in 1765, Wedgwood achieved great commercial success with this product selling it worldwide, under the Queen’s Ware tradename.

With this new information from the Wedgwood archive, we can summarise the likely origins of the Duporth Cup as one of these three scenarios:

- The Cup is from 1799, or earlier, not porcelain and made by Wedgwood from Queen’s Ware with an atypical decoration.
- The Cup is dated later, from 1810 onwards, made of porcelain by Wedgwood.
- The Cup is made of porcelain but not made by Wedgwood, perhaps made by Champion who partnered with, and later took on Cookworthy’s Plymouth factory before moving it to Bristol in 1770.

Despite now considerable doubts as to the very origin of the Duporth Cup, the search in the Wedgwood archives continued and with definitive evidence emerging of correspondence between Rashleigh and Wedgwood, a link between the two began again to look more certain.

In part 3, we follow up the correspondence between Wedgwood and Rashleigh and with another promising lead emerging, set off with renewed optimism that the Duporth Cup will be soon be found.
Our sincere thanks to those of you who responded to our crowdfunding request for donations to help get some of our projects off the ground. In particular, to support the community archive project. We hope you can see here that anything we have received so far is being put to good use.

If you have enjoyed this publication and/or would like to help us look after the history of Charlestown, do please consider a donation or supporting us in other ways. You can find out how to get involved in the introduction below or from our website.

Thank you again one and all.

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.

The group has set out two key initial aims:

- Be a voice in support of Charlestown’s history, engaging, in a cooperative and supportive manner, with all relevant organisations and stakeholders.
- Establish a community archive, in-line with best practices, to store and protect historical material and to make it accessible to all.

Formed during 2020, the group is currently being administered by a small steering group. COVID-19 has obviously affected our plans, but we hope that by summer 2021 that we’ll be able to start becoming more visible and doing much more to safeguard and promote Charlestown’s History. You too can help.

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. [https://www.facebook.com/charlestownhistory](https://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.
- Join us at one of our events planned to start in summer 2021: historical talks, social events and village tours.
- Make a crowdfunding donation to help us fund our work. Initially we seek some funds to help set up the community archive and to digitise material. [https://www.justgiving.com/crowdfunding/charlestownhistory](https://www.justgiving.com/crowdfunding/charlestownhistory)
- Volunteer your time to help us.

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

charlestownhistorygroup.com

References

(1) Charlestown History Group Archive. CHG/P1496.
(2) Francis Frith Postcard. CHG/P1269.
(3) Charlestown History Group Archive. CHG/P1509.
(4) 1842 Tithe Map. Archives & Cornish Studies Service, Redruth TM/8
(6) Victoria & Albert Museum Collection.
(7) Plymouth City Museum Collection.
(8) St Austell Bay Parish Council. CHG/P1486.

Archive Update

There has been a lot going on to realise our ambition to create a community archive.

Thanks to the generosity of The St Austell Bay Parish Council, we can advise that the archive will be stored and have a community space in the Pattern Hall (8) (pictured below). This is fantastic news and we’ll be working on plans for public access as soon as Covid 19 restrictions allow.

In the meantime, we’ve used your kind donations to purchase materials and equipment to ensure precious documents are preserved and can be stored properly. We’ve also recently purchased a negative and slide scanner which allows us to digitise photographic material from these older formats.

A key part of the archive project is ensuring accessibility and with this aim, we are very pleased to have been accepted to host our catalogue within The National Archives Discovery Database. This will allow anyone to browse the archive and to uncover the treasures it contains. We are currently testing the uploads of our systems with the National Archives and hope to have the archive catalogue online very soon.