

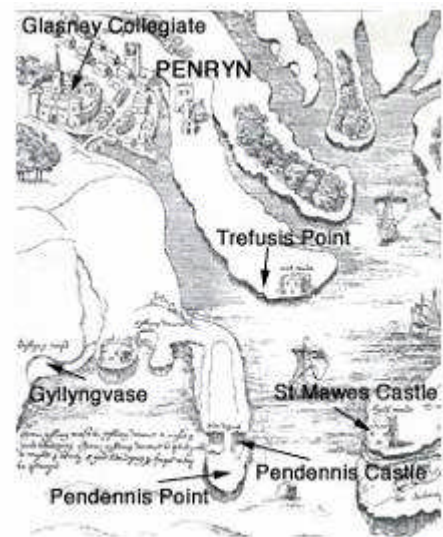


A Brief History of Falmouth



Falmouth is famous for its harbour. Together with the Carrick Roads, it is reputed to be the third largest natural harbour in the world, and is the deepest in Western Europe. It is also famous for being the start or finish point of various round the world record breaking voyages, such as those of Sir William Robert Pat "Robin" Knox-Johnston and Dame Ellen Patricia MacArthur. Apparently Falmouth is a very popular name for a town; to date, 14 Falmouth's have been found around the world. There is one in Cornwall, Jamaica, Antigua, Tasmania, Canada and in the United States, Falmouth can be found in Massachusetts, Indiana, Kentucky, Michigan, Maine, Pennsylvania, Virginia, Illinois & Florida.

Falmouth (*Aberfal*) has come along way since the early 1600's when Arwenack Manor House was probably the only property in the area. When Sir Walter Raleigh stayed with Sir John Killigrew at Arwenack in 1598, he was so impressed with its geographical features that he recommended that the site should be developed as a port. Originally the small hamlet known as Smithwick or Smithick, later became known as Penny-come-quick, (*Peny-cwm-cuic* - "the head of the narrow vale"). It was the site where Henry VIII built Pendennis Castle to defend the Carrick Roads in 1540. Together with St Mawes castle on the east side and Pendennis on the west, the estuary entrance was well guarded. Two other sites for castles were proposed for the area, one at Gyllyngvase and the other at Trefusis point (See map). These two castles never materialised. During the civil war of 1642-1646 Pendennis Castle was the second to last fort held by Royalists to surrender.



Extract from the great map of the West

Sir John Killigrew created the town of Falmouth shortly after 1613. The main town then was at Penryn, two miles away. Penryn is much older than Falmouth and has been a market town from the 13th Century. there is a local rhyme that goes, "Penryn was a flourishing town, when Falmouth was a furzy down". Although there were objections from Penryn and Truro, Falmouth received a charter from Charles II in 1661 (a document which grants the town occupants certain rights). In return a church was constructed dedicated to his father, King Charles I. The new church was consecrated in 1665 and there was soon a cluster of a few hundred homes around the Church of "King Charles the Martyr".

In 1688 Falmouth was made the Royal Mail packet station. Its purpose was to carry mail to and from Britain's growing empire, as a result the town of Falmouth boomed. The harbour of Falmouth was administered by Truro up until 1709, then it lost jurisdiction. For over 150 years, Falmouth was the only place where the mail came in and out of the country, in The Packet Ships. If you were the captain of one of the ships you would have probably landed at Greenbank or Custom House Quay. During these years, Falmouth was

second only to London for knowing the news of the day. Bell's Court, situated up an alley way in Market Street, is best known as the location of the Packet Agent's office at the time of the Packet mutiny of 1810. It was from the steps of this office that Christopher Saverland read the Riot Act to the Packet crews who had mutinied when Customs Officers confiscated the private goods of the crew members which were intended for sale overseas and regarded by the crew as legitimate 'perks'. This building was also used as the Falmouth Maritime Museum from 1985 until it moved to its new site as the National Maritime Museum Cornwall in 2003.

The Falmouth Packet Service operated out of Falmouth for over 160 years between 1688 and 1850.

Steam was Falmouth's undoing. The steamships were faster and more reliable than the old sailing packets and they had no problem reaching London whatever the weather.

In 1805 the news of Britain's victory (and Admiral Nelson's death) at Trafalgar was landed here at the steps of Fishstrand Quay from the schooner H.M.S. Pickle and taken to London by stagecoach. The journey took 38 hours from Falmouth to London, the trip usually took a week to complete.

In 1808 the Board of Trade decreed that Falmouth was to become a compulsory pilotage area. The first pilot's licence was issued on 22nd December, to 38 years old Henry Vincent of St. Mawes, a forebearer of Mrs. Anne Sowden, wife of a retired Falmouth pilot and Falmouth Harbour Commissioners Chairman, Captain Frank Sowden (deceased). At the time of the formation of the Falmouth District Pilot Boat Association in 1887, there were 63 licensed Pilot members, 33 residing in Falmouth and 30 in St. Mawes. There are at present seven pilots serving in the "Falmouth Pilot Partnership".

In 1809, Lord Byron sailed from Falmouth to Lisbon on the Packet ship "Princess Elizabeth", whilst here; he stayed at "Wynn's Hotel" which was to become the "Royal Hotel". The site of these hotels is now a bank with a fitness centre above.

In 1839 Falmouth was the scene of the Gold dust robbery when gold dust from Brazil was stolen on arrival at the port. Lewin Casper, a clerk in a firm of shipping agents, found out that £4,600 pounds sterling worth of gold dust had been landed at Falmouth from Brazil and was being sent on to London. Together with his father, Ellis Casper, he carefully planned a robbery. Its failure resulted in the deportation of the Caspers and their associates to Van Diemen's Land, now Tasmania.

The Falmouth Docks were in the development stage from 1858 and the foundation stone was laid by Viscount Falmouth in 1860. The location of this stone is not known. The first ship to enter the docks arrived in 1861.

On the 12th April 1862, the largest and most "calamitous" fire that probably ever visited the County of Cornwall took place in the High Street (Ludgate Hill), there were not any serious casualties but 400 people were made homeless. Eight years later in January 1870, part of one side of the Market Street was also destroyed by fire and many properties were lost.

The Cornish Railway reached Falmouth on 24th August 1863. The railway brought new prosperity to Falmouth; it made it easy for tourists to reach the town. It also allowed the swift transport of the goods recently disembarked from the ships in the port. The town now has three railway stations; Falmouth Docks railway station is the original terminus and is close to Pendennis Castle and Gyllyngvase beach. This Railway Station had been intended first at Greenbank, an old Packet departure point; but it was decided to make the railway station complementary to the Docks. Falmouth Town railway station (in the Dell car

park) was opened in 1970 and is convenient for the National Maritime Museum, the waterfront, and town centre. Penmere railway station opened in 1925, is towards the north of Falmouth and is within easy walking distance from the top of The Moor.

Falmouth Harbour Commissioners were formed in 1870, and the harbour areas were broken up and administered by different authorities (see Falmouth Harbour Commissioners History below). The early site of the Harbour Office was at the bottom of the hill that leads onto Custom House Quay. This building is now the Front bar and Harbour Lights fish & chip shop. A flag pole was erected in front of the office and used in rough weather to indicate that local boatmen could charge double fare. The Harbour Office moved to its present site, when 44 Arwenack Street was purchased in 1923. The two large buildings to the left of the flag pole were the Customs bonded warehouses, these premises became Taylor's garage and are now Trago Mills. The small building below the Customs warehouses was the studio of controversial artist Henry Scott Tuke until his death in 1929, this then became the offices of the local water boatmen and was the shower & toilet facilities for the Visitors Yacht Haven for about 7 years until 1995, it is now a small gift shop & gallery.



In 1877 Sir William James Erasmus Wilson, a distinguished anatomist and dermatologist, sponsored the transportation of an obelisk from Alexandria to London at a cost of some £10,000 (a considerable sum in those days). The obelisk was to become known as "Cleopatra's Needle".

It was dug out of the sand in which it had been buried for nearly 2,000 years and was encased in a great iron cylinder nicknamed "Cleopatra", the cylinder was 92 feet long and 16 feet in diameter and was to be towed to London. On October 14, disaster struck in storm-force seas in the Bay of Biscay. With the Cleopatra in danger of sinking, the steam ship Olga, which was towing her, sent six volunteers in a boat to take off the Cleopatra's five crew and skipper. The boat was swamped and the volunteers drowned. Eventually the Olga cut the tow rope, leaving the Cleopatra adrift in the Bay of Biscay. It remained afloat and was spotted five days later floating peacefully off the northern coast of Spain. It was first towed into Falmouth, and from there to the Embankment in London.

The Lady of the Lamp, Florence Nightingale, visited Falmouth and stayed at the Greenbank Hotel in 1910. Her name can still be viewed in the register at the hotel today.

During "World War I" the docks were temporarily taken over by the admiralty. Apparently Falmouth lost only six ships of the 58 convoys that sailed from the port into enemy action.

The Second World War was more eventful. The newly extended docks worked at full capacity dealing with convoy casualties and the Carrick Roads & Falmouth Bay rarely had fewer than 100 vessels anchored. The town was bombed by the Germans in 12 raids and 31 people were killed.



It was also the launching point for "Operation Chariot", the famous Commando raid by H.M.S. Campbeltown on the heavily defended docks of St Nazaire in France. This led directly to the sinking of the Bismarck by depriving her of a repair port. An anti-submarine net was laid from Pendennis to St Mawes, to prevent enemies entering the harbour.

A makeshift American army camp was erected on the Beacon in 1944 and Falmouth became full of American soldiers (the friendly invasion). They were based here to practice for the D-Day landings "Operation Overlord".



Many of their manoeuvres took place in the river Fal and local beaches, during their stay they built a slipway at Grove Place for landing craft to be loaded with troops and heavy transport. This is now the Grove Place Boat Park and some of the "Chocolate block" flag-stones that were laid can still be seen behind the Watersports clubhouse. It is said that on the 4th & 5th of June 1944 there were a lot of troop movements in the area and when the locals woke up on the 6th they had all gone.

On Christmas Eve 1942, a woman approached Eric Chinn a 17-year-old police cadet and Police Sergeant Bennett in Arwenack Street, saying that her husband had been murdered. Tobacconist Albert Batemen had been bludgeoned to death with a revolver butt in his shop, which stood near the present site of Trago Mills. The murder became one of the fastest crimes ever solved. Gordon Horace Trenoweth, was captured and hanged for the crime four months later. Apparently he had left the gun at the scene and the police checked the serial number, there were about 12 or 15 suspects of having stolen this gun from a ship at the docks. Trenoweth was one of the suspects and one of the policemen had seen him hanging around the streets, so they decided to call on him on Christmas morning and arrest him. Further evidence was revealed when a repaired bank note was found in Trenoweth's possession. Albert Bateman was a meticulous man who would mend bank notes and this particular one could be traced back to his shop.

The dangers of the Falmouth pilot's are illustrated by a tragic incident in September 1974 when the storm battered ferry ship Eagle, with 170 passengers, limped into Falmouth Bay and called for a pilot. The pilot cutter Kernow made for her, with duty pilot Captain Laurie Mitchell on board; although he managed to get onto the ship's rope ladder from the launch, in mountainous seas, he was thrown or fell from the lurching ship and was caught between ship and the pilot cutter and was lost. The aircrew-man of a helicopter which assisted in the search, said later that when he was in the water, the waves were so high that a tug could not be seen a few yards away. The pilot cutter (L.K. Mitchell, pictured right) was named in Captain Mitchell's memory. More storms hit Falmouth on 12th September 1993, when the tail end of hurricane Floyd came through, winds were estimated at about 60 knots from the east which is "Violent Storm Force 11" on the Beaufort scale. Yachts and moorings were bounced around the harbour causing a lot of damage.



The 15 week Golden Jubilee tour of the UK for Queen Elizabeth II got off to a splash on 1st May 2002 when Her Majesty launched the brand new Falmouth lifeboat, the RNLB Richard Cox Scott on the National Maritime Museum pontoons. Harbour Master, Captain Mark Sansom greeted The Queen and The Duke of Edinburgh on the new vessel and then embarked on a tour of the harbour.



The National Maritime Museum was formerly opened on 14th March 2003 by the Duke of York, HRH Prince Andrew. The building was designed by architect, M.J. Long & R Kentish.

Falmouth now has its own university; it has two campuses in the Falmouth area; the original town site at Woodlane, and the second in the "Combined Universities in Cornwall" campus at

Tremough, Penryn. The University offers undergraduate and postgraduate courses chiefly in the fields of Art, Design and Media.

Falmouth has many literary connections. The town was the birthplace of Toad, Mole and Rat. Kenneth Grahame's classic "Wind in the Willows", began as a series of letters sent to his son. The first two were written at the Greenbank Hotel whilst Grahame was a guest in May 1907. Reproductions of the letters are currently on display in the hotel. Poldark author Winston Graham knew the town well and set his novel "The Forgotten Story" in Falmouth.

The town has been the setting for several films and television programme's. British film star Will Hay was a familiar face in Falmouth in 1935 whilst filming his comedy "Windbag the Sailor". The movie had many scenes of the docks area. The docks area was also featured in some scenes with John Mills for the 1948 film "Scott of the Antarctic". Robert Newton and other cast members of the 1950 Walt Disney movie "Treasure Island", (some scenes were filmed along the river Fal), were frequent visitors to the town. The BBC TV's and ITV's "The Onedin Line", "Poldark" and "Wycliffe" all have been filmed locally.

With its proximity to sheltered and unsheltered waters, Falmouth has long been a popular boating and water sports location.

In 1965 solo yachtsman Robert Manry crossed the Atlantic Ocean from Falmouth, Massachusetts U.S.A. to Falmouth starting in June and arriving in August, in the thirteen and a half foot "Tinkerbelle". This was the smallest boat to make the crossing at the time.



Robin Knox-Johnstone, selected Falmouth as port of departure and return for his epic single-handed non stop round the world voyage in his yacht "Suhaili". Leaving on 14th June 1968, he returned on 22nd April 1969, 313 days later. On arriving apparently "from foreign" he was challenged by a poker-faced Customs official with the time honoured query, "Where from?" to which he replied "Falmouth!"



In 1990 Tom McLean sailed a 37ft long Bottle shaped boat, the "Typhoo Atlantic Challenger" from New York to Falmouth. With his usual panache, he equipped it with a four poster bed, sophisticated navigational equipment to ensure a secure passage for one of the strangest vessels ever to ply the open seas.



Ellen MacArthur completed her single-handed round the world voyage in "B&Q" a 75 foot trimaran. She crossed the finish line at 2229 GMT on 7th February 2007 and arrived in Falmouth at about 11:40 am on the 8th beating the previous mark set by Francis Joyon of 72 days, 22 hours, 54 mins and 22 secs. The Isle of Wight based yachts woman completed the 27,000-mile



voyage in 71 days and under 15 hours.

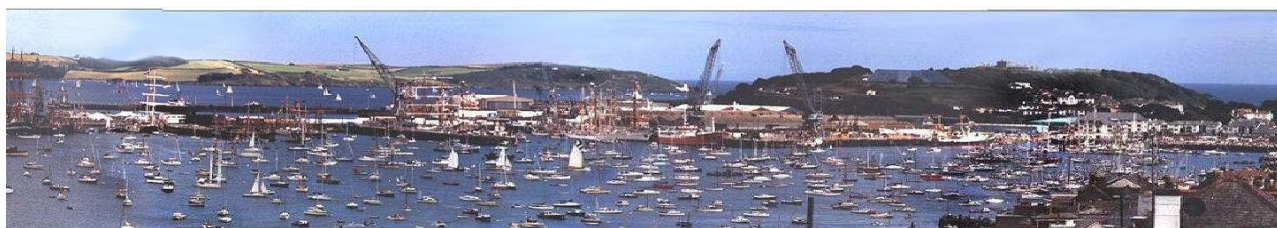
The record for the youngest person to sail single handed around the world was broken on 27th August 2009 when Mike Perham who was 17 years 164 days old arrived in Falmouth bay on his yacht *Totallymoney.com*. Mike sailed originally from Portsmouth on 15th November 2008 and started his epic voyage from Falmouth on 18th November.



While Falmouth's commercial maritime activity has much declined from its heyday, the docks are still a major contributor to the town's economy, although it employs only a fraction of the 3000 people who worked there in the late nineteen fifties. It is one of the largest ports in Cornwall. Falmouth is still a cargo port and the bunkering of vessels and the transfer of

cargoes also keep the port's facilities busy. The port is also becoming very popular with cruise ship operators.

The town has been lucky enough to host four Tall Ships races, 1966, 1982, 1998 and most recently the Funchal 500 in 2008.



Falmouth also saw a total coverage of the total eclipse of the sun at 11:11am on 11th August 1999 where the eclipse lasted just over two minutes, the longest duration in the UK.



Falmouth Harbour Commissioners History



1870 proved to be a turning point in the port's history when the Falmouth Harbour Commissioners came into being on the September 5th of that year. Local shipping agent Robert Richard Broad was appointed the first Chairman of the Commissioners. Under the Falmouth Harbour Order, 1870, the Commissioners had the responsibility to administer Falmouth Bay, Carrick Roads, Cross Roads, and the inner harbour, excluding the area immediately surrounding the docks, and the Penryn River as far as Boyer's Cellars. A total of 16 Commissioners were appointed representing the following organisations: Trinity House (1) Admiralty (1), Board of Trade (1), Borough of Falmouth (4), Falmouth Docks (1), Parish of Falmouth (4), Rt. Hon. Earl of Kimberley (1), Registered ship owners of the port (3).

During the inaugural meeting it was resolved "that dues to be collected be one half penny per ton register on all vessels liable thereto; and that the publication of such rate be made."

Initially, the Commissioners asked the Collector of Customs to collect the harbour dues for a commission not exceeding five per cent of the amount received. Robert Cheesman, Collector of Customs accepted their invitation.

The development of Falmouth Docks attracted a great deal of shipping. New regulations and bye-laws to collect harbour dues and license boatmen were gradually introduced as the Commissioners tackled the job of running the port.

Advertisements for the position of harbour master at a salary of œ150 were published in the Shipping Gazette and other local papers. The Commissioners excluded all men above 55 years and below the age of 32 for the post.

Captain Richard Sherris was appointed harbour master on September 19th 1870. The first five men employed by the Commissioners all had the same christian name. William Henry Worsdel, William Henry Rule, William John Barbery, William May, William Thomas Hall and William Andrew were all sworn in as special constables along with the harbour master. They in fact became the harbour police.

Richard Sherris received the Thanks of the Institution on Vellum from the RNLI in 1881 for rescuing the master of the Whitby brig Marys which ran ashore on Black Rock during an ESE gale. The harbour master and his three man crew carried out the rescue in Commissioners' steam launch Arwenack.

The Commissioners' Harbour Police patrolled the harbour with great vigour in those days. An extract from the harbour master's journal for December 1878 reads: "P.C. Laverty charged a man called Palmer with stealing a 11lb bag of grain from the cargo of the French ship Cygne. Palmer assaulted the P.C. and was subsequently arrested. Magistrates fined Palmer £2 and gave him one month's hard labour in prison."

In the days of sail when crews endured great hardship, poor food and bullying from the ship's officers crew members arriving in Falmouth would contact the harbour police lodging complaints of ill treatment at the hands of their superiors. Another entry in the police journal reads: "Two summons served on the master of the barque Hornby Castle for assault on two seamen at sea. Master fined £5" Other seamen disenchanted with life at sea more often than not deserted their ship. Harbour police working with the County police tracked down the men who were later returned to their vessels. A copy of the receipts and expenditure for the Commissioners from 1870 to 1904 gives a fascinating insight into port revenue and expenditure.

The Board of Trade enquired of the Commissioners in 1880 what type of time balls, guns or other apparatus existed in the port enabling the masters of ships to ascertain correct Greenwich Time. In conjunction with the Falmouth Chamber of Commerce the Commissioners paid £100 in 1897 towards the erection of a Time Ball signal, on the keep at Pendennis Castle, which was lowered each day at 1300 hours allowing ships in the harbour to check their chronometers. The Coastguard station at the castle closed in 1909 and with it went the service.

Acknowledgements:

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