

PLACES AND PEOPLE OF PERRANWELL

MELLINGEY.

During the 18th and 19th centuries a number of substantial and elegant Georgian and Victorian style houses were built in the parish each surrounded by splendid gardens. The builders of these properties and later residents have made valuable contributions to the wellbeing of the community and to that of the County or distinguished themselves in other walks of life. Mellingey was the grandest of these properties, but sadly destroyed by fire in 1940 and subsequently demolished.

Melyn is Cornish for mill and **gy** is a form of **chy** meaning house. The name is almost certainly related to the existence of a fulling mill recorded at Mellingey in 1615. Fulling or tucking mills were quite common in Cornwall at that time, when sheep farming was an important local industry. Fulling is a step in woollen cloth making, which involves the cleaning of wool to eliminate oils and dirt and making it thicker.

In the mid 17th century permission was granted by the landowner, the Pendarves of Roscrow, for a tin blowing house and stamping mill at Mellingey. Both the fulling mill and the stamp mills would have used water power from the Trewedna stream. During the same period contracts for the farming of an extensive area of land around Mellingey were drawn up between the Pendarves's and a tenant John Thomas.

It is possible that a farmhouse shown on the beautifully presented manorial map of 1691 was on the site of the future mansion. It was close to a well used road linking wharves on Mellingey creek with the Gwennap copper and tin mines and also near the old turnpike road between Truro and Penryn. A strategic location, a sheltered southerly aspect and a major expansion of a simple blowing house into a smelter and a consequent increase in the passing trade probably contributed to the rebuilding by the Thomas family of a simple dwelling into a comfortable home.

Sometime around the turn of the 18th century Richard Thomas, who was born in Falmouth in 1779, inherited the estate. He was a well educated and highly respected civil engineer with wide ranging interests and unquestionable ability. He first made a name for himself by publishing in 1815 a comprehensive guide to Falmouth, one of the earliest town guides. It was very popular with the many people then thronging a busy port. The hotels, boarding houses and shops were doing a thriving trade with people bound for mining ventures in the Americas or on official business or trading in all parts of the British Empire.

In 1819 he produced a detailed geological and mining map of the Camborne to Chacewater area. He was commissioned to survey many proposals for tramways from the mines to the ports in Cornwall to replace the use of mule trains, which were unable to cope with the rapidly increasing amount of ore exported and coal and timber imported. He was responsible for the construction of the Redruth to Hayle tramroad, where initially the wagons were pulled by mules until replaced in 1858 by the first steam locomotive made in Cornwall. He was a keen advocate for a railway along the spine of Cornwall from Exeter to Falmouth, which might have been advantageous at present times. During the course of his surveys for tramways, roads and mining development he made a detailed inventory of the numerous barrows, earthworks and other archaeological remains in the County, very many of which have since been destroyed for hedge making.

In his later years at Mellingey the expansion of the arsenic smelter in the valley just below the house was creating fumes said to be like a fog day and night and poisoning his fruit and vegetables and even the livestock. In 1851 he was instrumental in suing the manager of the smelter, who in a celebrated case at Bodmin Assizes was deemed to be creating a public nuisance and the smelter closed down a few years later. Five years later he sold Mellingey and moved to his sons home in the Scillies, where he died in 1858.

The house was then bought by John Jose, a colourful and energetic character, who had made a fortune in mining ventures overseas. He was born in 1836 in Vogue, the son of a Gwennap miner and he spent his teenage years working in the local mines. Along with many local

miners he left Cornwall to seek his fortune in the silver mines of Mexico. He then moved to Chile to join his brothers in mining ventures there. Shortly afterwards he was wounded and his brother was killed in a fracas with mutinous soldiers. Not to be deterred he formed a company with another Cornishman called Samuel Lean and bought a copper mine near Tocopilla in the arid and mountainous north of Chile. It turned out to be incredibly rich and very soon huge profits were realised. It was to become the largest copper mine in the world. The company introduced steam engines built at Perran Foundry and established a copper smelter at Tocopilla, a town with a thriving Cornish community. It is ironic that Cornish miners and British capital exploiting the rich copper resources of Chile made a major contribution to the collapse of copper mining in Cornwall and the resulting distress.

John Jose returned to Cornwall with his fortune and settled at Mellingey and in 1883 rebuilt the house as an imposing, handsome gentlemen's residence set within a beautiful terraced garden. He lived in grand style with a butler and many servants, retaining his South American connection with llamas grazing his fields. He became involved in a range of local business activities as a leading promoter and shareholder in mining ventures, banking, shipping and hotels. In 1889 he was elected as an alderman in the first Cornwall County Council and later became a JP for Cornwall.

He was an earnest Wesleyan, generous to many causes and gave land and substantial money towards the building of the imposing Wesleyan chapel in Perranwell with the foundation stone laid by his wife in 1879. He built the Institute on Station hill as a library and for the further education of the many out of work miners and foundry workers.

He died in 1895 at the age of 59 and is buried beneath an elaborate memorial in Perranarworthal churchyard.

Shortly after his death a long running and bitter dispute with the Basset estate over water rights for the Trewedna stream came to a head and a court ruling supported Mrs Jose. Her success was the cause of wild jubilation in the village with a rapturous welcome on her arrival at the station, huge bonfires lit and guns fired

For many years Mrs Jose lived in the mansion and entertained villagers with Sunday school treats and other festivities, whilst the garden was lovingly cared for. Sadly in 1940 the house burnt down in indeterminate circumstances and some 12 years later was demolished. It has been replaced by a more modest residence within part of the original garden and the rest of the estate has been developed for housing at Keeble Park.

Surviving from the days of John Jose is an attractive Victorian - Gothic style lodge complete with a little tower, now known as Bay Tree lodge on the main road opposite Perranwell Station

Chris Burton. 29th July 2010.

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1. Richard Thomas surveyed Redruth to Point Railway. B. Simpson.
 2. E. window of church presented by Mrs J. Jose.
 3. Expand water rights story.
 4. After Mrs Jose?
 5. Meetings at the Institute around 1900 of the Society for Mutual Improvement - Institute overall little used.