

FIELD VISIT TO DEVORAN, 29TH JUNE 2019.

By Derek Stonley.

Fourteen CBMS members assembled at Devoran's Tramways car park to participate in a guided walk by archaeologist and historian Nicholas Johnson, who is a resident of Devoran. Nick had given a talk to the Society about the industrial heritage of Devoran on 11th September 2018, but the post-talk field trip had been rained off.

As background history, Nick explained that William Jenkin, land steward to the Lanhydrock estate, had in the late 18th century identified that estate land on the north foreshore of Restronguet Creek at Devoran was suitable for a port. When in 1819, production of copper ore from the rejuvenated Consolidated Mines at Gwennap increased massively, mining entrepreneur John Taylor promoted the concept of a railway to transport the ore to a port at Point, on Restronguet Creek, whence it would be shipped to smelters in Swansea. Welsh coal for steam power on the mines would be return cargo, while extra freight for the railway would arise from imported timber for the mines. Nine miles of the Redruth and Chasewater Railway were constructed in 1825- 1826 from Gwennap down the Carnon valley. Of four foot gauge, it was among the first to use an edge rail system with flanged wheels on the wagons. Initially horse-drawn, two steam locomotives were introduced in 1854 to cope with increased volume of freight as the railway was extended with branches to mines in the Redruth area.



Nick Johnson explaining the area

The first stop of the visit was at an original level-crossing gate where the railway crossed the Truro-Falmouth turnpike road. The turnpike had been re-routed to pass close to the Perran

Foundry in Kennal Vale to the west, and Nick explained that this prevented further upstream navigation on Restrouguet Creek. Quays therefore were built downstream along the north shore of the creek, and in the 1830s, a planned settlement arose on the Lanhydrock estate land, financed in large part by the Agar-Robartes family.

The walk took us downstream into Devoran, the ground between the road and the shoreline now re-developed with modern bungalows. Previously, this area had been occupied with unloading spurs from the railway leading to ore “hutches” for storage prior to loading at the quays for Swansea. Within the Lanhydrock estate lands, the planned settlement is more in evidence, with lower Quay Road effectively an industrial area where fine 19th century buildings still stand, notably the former offices of the Redruth and Chasewater Railway, and Old Quay House, with the arched engine shed behind and a tank house upslope to supply water for the steam engines. This was the terminus of steam haulage, but the line continued down to Point as a horse-drawn way.

Nick recounted that alluvial tin deposits of the Carnon stream had been exploited since possibly Bronze Age times as far upstream as Bissoe, and by the end of the 18th century the Carnon Stream Works had extended into the tidal limits of Restrouguet Creek. Flanking dykes were built parallel with both banks of the creek and the stream waters diverted to the south side, while a dam across the creek held back the salt water. Manual excavation of the basal tin-bearing gravels also yielded modest amounts of gold, which the labourers were allowed to keep in part lieu of wages. Mining became increasingly difficult as overburden thicknesses exceeded thirty feet, and attempts were made to bring drifts from the shore out under the river muds. In 1822, iron caissons to form a cylindrical shaft were sunk in the river, and a pumping engine built on shore to drain the shaft and workings by means of flat rods.



Carnon Mine Engine House

What remains of this engine house is reputed to be the oldest of its type in Cornwall, but the flat rods became an impediment to increasing river traffic and the Upper Carnon Mine ceased production in 1830, being succeeded by the Lower Carnon Mine further downstream and established on an artificial island built in mid-stream. It being low tide at the time of our visit,

Nick could point out the bounding dykes of the original stream works, and the remains of the artificial island of the Lower Carnon Mine.

Thereafter, the group headed back to the planned village, visiting firstly the Methodist Chapel of 1861, and then the Anglican church of St.John and St.Petroc, 1855-1856, an initial commission for architect John Pearson and a small-scale effort in the Early English Gothic idiom which subsequently came to full fruition in Truro Cathedral and the Anglican Cathedral of St.John in Brisbane, Queensland. From the church the group descended to Market Street, a planned commercial focus for shops (all now converted to private homes) plus a Market Hall and former Primary School, again by Pearson. Ranged parallel above Quay Road is St.John's Terrace of substantial houses with accommodation for servants, while further still upslope is Belmont Terrace of more modest groups of workers' cottages – planned mid-Victorian social engineering.

Devoran's heyday as an industrial port was during the 1850s, but with the collapse of copper mining by 1870, traffic for the railway dwindled to a trickle. The bursting forth of accumulated debris from the neglected County Adit in 1877 silted the upper quays, from which navigation ceased, but a little inbound freight, mostly coal, continued until the railway closed in 1915. The village gradually evolved into the dormitory settlement for retirees and commuters to Truro and Falmouth that we see today. The trip ended suitably at the Old Quay Inn, the CBMS group unanimous in their appreciation of our leader's comprehensive knowledge of his subject, from which we have all benefitted.