

# Camborne Town Trail

Camborne Town Trail is an enjoyable circular stroll around the town centre. A great way to discover the town's remarkable history through the buildings and architecture which provide clues to the past. Use the town map to help you follow the trail.

## 1. RICHARD TREVITHICK

Camborne has its roots deep in the Industrial Revolution. It lies on the Cornubian Orefield – an area rich in tin, copper, arsenic and other minerals. Mining here began in the Middle Ages, or possibly earlier, and as the mines were dug deeper to reach these valuable ores, more powerful pumps were needed to keep the shafts and levels drained of water. Richard Trevithick (1771-1833), whose statue is outside Camborne Library at the beginning of the Trail, was an exceptionally talented engineer and inventor. He was responsible for improving the efficiency of pumping engines by using high-pressure steam. The Cornish Beam Engine became essential for the removal of water, the raising and lowering of men in the mines and the dressing of ore. It was soon to be used all over the world. As you walk along Cross Street look out for the Masonic Hall built in 1899 on your right.



## WESLEY CHAPEL

Camborne's first Methodist Chapel was built in 1806 on part of the site currently occupied by the Donald Thomas Centre. Sir Richard Vyvyan of Trelowarren Manor near Helston made the building of a new chapel in Chapel Street possible by giving the land, while the imposing granite front was the gift of the Pendarves family. Visitors are invited to view the fine stone structure from Victoria Street where you will see a number of memorial stones including the foundation stone which was laid in 1873 by Sir John St Aubyn of Clowance. Inside the Chapel there are wall tablets of some of the early Church leaders. These include George Smith, Josiah Thomas (mine captain of Dolcoath mine) and Samuel Stephens (founder of Climax Rock Drill Engineering Company). The interior has changed over the years but a number of interesting architectural features remain. The decorative ceiling roses served as the ventilation system for fumes from gas lights, the stained glass windows were installed in 1887 and a new central entrance door was created in 1911.



## 2. THE FORMER PARISH VESTRY

Go left into Church Lane. On your left is the former Parish Vestry and local 'clink'. The Parish Vestry is a Grade II listed building which was built in 1820. The first floor served as a school and also hosted parish meetings. The ground floor area had a 'clink', a lock-up for temporary incarceration of wrongdoers. The building was probably erected as a result of Sturges Bourne's Act of 1819, which gave parishes the power to appoint select vestries "for more effectual execution of the laws for the relief of the poor". Rates were also paid at the Vestry room at one time. The building has until recently been vacant and in a poor state of repair. In 2010 a grant from the Camborne, Roskear and Tuckingmill Townscape Heritage Initiative assisted with a complete renovation of this building using traditional materials and techniques. The building is currently being used by community groups as offices.

## 3. CAMBORNE PARISH CHURCH

Walk around to enter Camborne Church, the Church of St Martin and St Meriadocus. St Meriadoc, also known as St Meriasek, is the patron saint of Camborne. His career is chronicled in Beunans Meriasek – a unique handwritten manuscript in Cornish dated 1504. The churchyard has many reminders of Camborne's hard times with graves of many miners who lost their lives due to the dangerous and demanding working conditions both at home and abroad. Opposite the belfry door is a boundary stone that once stood between the parishes of Gwinear and Gwithian which was erected here in 1904. In 1613 it was known as the 'Meane Cadoarth' or Battle Stone – this name may commemorate a battle that took place at Reskajeage Downs near the North Cliffs. The stone has panels of dots and the story goes that each dot represents one life killed in the battle. The stone continues to hold many mysteries – it was even once used as a common gate post in the 19th century!



#### 4. THE OLD MARKET HOUSE

Turn right on Church Street to find The Old Market House which was originally built in 1802. Following severe storm damage in 1964, a new building was funded by John Francis Basset, the squire of Tehidy. The new Market House opened in 1867 and contained the Town Hall, Magistrates rooms, a Public Hall and Assembly Rooms. Recent changes have involved a £1.3m investment to become the John Francis Basset public house. Here photographic prints and wallpaper with a montage of mining images highlights the rich heritage of Camborne. The town clock, which dates from 1875, is known as the 'little brother' of London's Big Ben as both were built by clock makers 'Dent of London. The clock, a fantastic reminder of the work and precise engineering of the Victorian era, is an important landmark and held very dear in the hearts of Camborne people.



#### 5. RIOTS

By the late 1860s, many mines had failed due to foreign competition. Unemployment soared and many miners migrated to find work, sometimes leaving families behind with little means of support. Local unrest grew until the evening of Tuesday, 8 October, 1873 when riots broke out following the arrest of brothers James and Jo Bowden outside the Market House. A large group of angry miners forced the policemen to retreat allowing the Bowdens to get away, but they were later arrested and given jail sentences of five and six months. This enraged the growing mob of miners and the police had to flee for safety. With the police defeated, the miners went on a rampage, kicking policemen's helmets around the gutters, uprooting iron railings and causing mayhem around the town.

#### 6. COMMERCIAL SQUARE

As you walk down Chapel Street you will see Commercial Square in front of you. Here a tiered fountain features a lovely iron lamp standard, installed in 1890 and once used as a useful watering place for horses, dogs and people! The Square was also the terminus for the Camborne and Redruth Tramway – an early public transport system, in use from 1902-1927. Nowadays, it is pedestrianised with benches and trees placed around the fountain. The area has become a



local meeting place and a very pleasant place to sit on a fine day. On the edge of Commercial Square stands the Donald Thomas Centre, originally built in 1842 as the Literary Institute. Retrace your steps along Trelowarren Street and turn right onto Fore Street to find Trevithick Road.

## 7. CAMBORNE SCHOOL OF MINES

Camborne School of Mines was founded in the late 19th Century to meet the educational needs of the mining industry. Over the years, graduates from the School have worked all over the world and the School is renowned internationally for its educational excellence. As you enter Fore Street you are faced by the Josiah Thomas Memorial building which was once used by the School. It is situated next to the site of the original school building which has since been replaced by shops. The School of Mines built a training facility named King Edward Mine at Troon out of the old South Condurrow mine which proved to be vital to the School's success. The School has now been absorbed by University of Exeter and now offers studies in Renewable Energy as well as Geology, Mining and Minerals engineering.

## 8. PUFFING DEVIL

Richard Trevithick, the famous Cornish engineer and inventor, produced the world's first practical road vehicle propelled by high pressure steam – the 'Puffing Devil'. He first tested it on Christmas Eve, 1801, when it was driven up Camborne Hill (now Fore Street). A few days later the operators, parked the engine outside a local hotel to enjoy a lunch of roast goose. Unfortunately they had left the fires lit and had forgotten to keep the boiler filled with water. Unbeknown to all inside the hotel, the engine overheated and was destroyed by fire! Whatever the precise truth of the matter, this trial marked a momentous event in the history of steam traction. A working replica of the Puffing Devil relives that memorable Christmas Eve by steaming up Camborne Hill on Trevithick Day.



## 9. FORE STREET AND TEHIDY ROAD

By the 19th Century the mining industry and resultant rapid growth of the town had created conditions similar to the 'Wild West'. Success and prosperity for the mining magnates living in their grand houses contrasted sharply with the poverty and overcrowding commonplace amongst mine workers. Rosewarne House was built in 1815 in the Greek Revival style for the Harris family and later became the home of the Holman family. Its imposing architecture and walled grounds differ greatly from the gridded rows of terraced housing built for miners and their families. Further down Tehidy Road look out for a memorial plaque set into the wall, commemorating Trevithick's test run of the 'Puffing Devil'. Return to Trelowarren Street and turn left. Beyond the modern shop front facades you will see many unusual buildings; the Tower House on the corner of Union Street is one example.

## 10. CENTENARY WESLEYAN CHURCH

As you walk up Trelowarren Street, you will see the imposing Centenary Wesleyan Chapel facing you. Built in 1839 to commemorate the centenary of John and Charles Wesley's conversion in 1738, it is still used today. In the 1880s a portico was added and in 1939 and 1999 it underwent extensive renovation. Now known locally as the 'Pink Palace', a visit inside is strongly recommended. This is just one of five Methodist churches which once existed in Camborne and was initially built to cope with the overflow congregation from Wesley Chapel on



Chapel Street, (near the beginning of the trail). The scale of the building demonstrates the strength of Methodism in 19th Century Cornwall and the money which was available to build such structures during this period. John Wesley may have only preached in Camborne four times, but he also gave sermons in the vicinity including Gwennap Pit (an open air amphitheatre). He was followed by other Methodist ministers which resulted in many conversions to Methodism.

## 11. LIFE AS A MINER

The terraced housing on Trevenon Street and Centenary Street is typical examples of the type of dwellings originally built for mine workers and their families. These houses were often overcrowded due to the sudden rise in population at this time. Whilst men were employed underground in the mines, women and children were employed to undertake the many tasks involved in the processing of copper and tin ore on the surface. These women were called 'Bal Maidens', Bal is the Cornish word for 'mining place'. By 1800 there were around 2,000 women and children in the area working on Cornish mines and at least 6,000 by 1851. Jobs included crushing, washing and sorting the valuable ore from the waste rock. The mining industry involved tough manual labour for both men, women and children alike. Due to the growing concern of the plight of children having to work in mines across the UK, an inquiry was undertaken by the Royal Commission in 1842. This led to the '1842 Coal Mines Act' prohibiting the employment underground of all female labour and of boys under 10 years old.

## 12. RED JACKETS PUBLIC HOUSE

Look out for The Red Jackets Pub on Trevenon Street which is named after the militia brought in to deal with the riots in Camborne in 1873. By midnight on 8th October a telegram was sent to Plymouth for the military, and at 4.30am 112 officers from the 11th Regiment of Foot arrived in Camborne via the Great Western Railway. With their bayonets fixed and rifles loaded the infantry patrolled the streets or stood guard over trouble spots like the 'Reynolds Arms' (The Red Jackets Pub). However, they found only peace and quiet. The mob had dispersed and Camborne had returned to normality; surprisingly nobody had been killed. These unruly times are still remembered in the name of the Red Jackets pub.



## 13. HOLMANS

As you return to the start of the trail, on your left lies a large area formerly Holman's No 3 works. Holman's became Cornwall's largest manufacturer of mining and compressed air equipment; at its peak the company employed over 3,500 men. The No 3 Works produced the Cornish Rock Drill – a vital piece of mining equipment adopted worldwide and marketed using the strap line 'Drill British with Holman's'. Sadly what remained of Holman's, then trading as CompAir UK, was forced to close in 2001 as a result of stiff foreign competition. Turning up Trevu Road the manager's house on the left has recently been restored. Next to the railway is a building that was once part of the 'shop window' for Holman's, a reminder of times gone by. On the other side of the road is the Forge originally the engineering yard or maintenance depot for the West Cornwall, Great Western and British railway companies. The Hayle Railway, opened in 1837, linked the port of Hayle with Redruth ran through Camborne. The present station building dates from the mid 1890s. A major housing regeneration scheme is retaining some of the historic buildings on the Holman's site including the former manager's house and rock drill showroom fronting Trevu Road. A grant from the Camborne, Roskear, Tuckingmill Townscape Heritage Initiative has helped fund traditional repairs and architectural reinstatements to the remaining historic buildings on the site.