

Tresillian Walking Group

March 5th is known throughout Cornwall as St Piran's day and is celebrated in a variety of places on the day. At Perranporth, the story of St Piran was enacted on the following Sunday but the walking group sneaked in on the Saturday to look for the famous Oratory.

We used part of the walking instructions from the iWalkcornwall.co.uk web site because many of us had been there before. The website walk actually started at Holywell Bay and was much longer than we proposed to do considering how wet it had been and one day we will try it out. Having said that I would definitely recommend the iWalks site for not only the clear directions but also the mounds of information about the history of the sands, the Penhale camp, the cliffs and flora and the mining history

I have included extracts from the website about St Piran and his oratory.

"St Piran was born in Ireland in the 6th century. According to legend, he had miraculous powers and a group of kings grew afraid of his powers. They, somewhat unsportingly, tied a millstone round his neck and threw him into the sea. However due to his powers, the millstone floated and he was washed ashore at Perranporth.

Saint Piran is the patron saint of tin-miners and is generally regarded as the national saint of Cornwall. St Piran's flag - the white cross on a black background - is said to represent the black tin ore and white molten metal. Celebrations on St Piran's Day (5th March) involve lots of alcohol and gave rise to the expression "drunk as a Perraner".

Some time in the 6th Century, St Piran was thought to have landed near Perranporth, where he built a tiny chapel (also known as an Oratory). This is thought to be the oldest Christian site in Cornwall. The original chapel was probably built of wattle and daub. A little later, this was replaced by a stone building. This small chapel was finally abandoned in the 10th century, due to the encroaching sand.

St Piran's oratory lay buried under the sand dunes for nearly a millenium, until 1835 when some stones were noticed, sticking out from the dunes. It was excavated and found to be in remarkably good condition. It was thought to be the oldest extant building of worship on mainland Britain, second only to Iona Abbey in the Western Isles of Scotland.

Within the oratory, one of the walls contains a stone inscribed with upside-down Roman capitals which is thought to date back to the 6th or possibly even the 5th

century. It is therefore postulated that the building may have been constructed using remnants of an earlier chapel on the same site.

After it was excavated, quite a number of the stones were stolen as "souvenirs" and it suffered constant erosion by wind, sand and rain; eventually two of the walls collapsed. In 1910, an ugly concrete bunker was built over the oratory to protect it. In the 1980s, the bunker was removed and the remains of the oratory were reburied beneath the sand to protect it from both the elements and vandals. The oratory once again lay beneath the sand with a small mound marking it. Steps lead to the top, on which a small granite stone sat, inscribed with the words St Piran.

In 2000 a trust was set up to re-excavate the Oratory. Work began in October 2013, and the Oratory is now uncovered.

There was once a churchyard in the dunes surrounding St Piran's Oratory and Church. As the sands shift, or during excavations, human bones have occasionally been exposed. Near the Oratory doorway, the skeleton of a woman was uncovered with a child in her arms. Other skeletons discovered in the early 20th Century were all laid out East-West with their legs crossed.

After St Piran's Oratory was abandoned in the 10th century due to the encroaching sand, another church was built a little further inland beside the Celtic cross. Known as St Piran's Church, this was built around 1150 and then enlarged in the 15th century. It was abandoned in 1804 and much of the stone and fittings were moved to a new site, further inland at Perranzabuloe, leaving just the foundations that you see today.

St Piran's cross stands close to the remains of St Piran's church. This is one of two three-holed crosses in Cornwall (the other is near Wadebridge), but it may simply be the 4th hole just wasn't finished in both cases. The cross is certainly likely to be as old as the church and probably older. It may well be the one referred to in a charter of AD 960 as "cristelmael".

In 2014, the skeletons of 2 adults and 10 children were excavated which have been dated to the 8th or 9th Century. These pre-date the St Piran's Oratory building and it is thought that they may relate to an earlier building on the site".

The walking group parked up by Perran Sands holiday park and continued walking along the road in the Penhale Camp direction. We finally swung onto the dunes and wandered around in the general direction of the Oratory. We had to negotiate some standing water before we headed towards the cross and then onto the oratory itself.

There was a large pool of water around the oratory and it looked in bad shape with quite a lot of fencing keeping in parts to keep us safe. Apparently there are designs afoot to restore and eventually cover it in the future so that people will be able to enter into it again.

We walked back over the dunes by a path and then split up into two groups, one heading over the dunes back to Perranporth to meet up at the Watering Hole for refreshments, and the other group to walk back over the sands. Unfortunately the tide was coming in so the beach walkers had to climb the ramps by the holiday camp so as not to get wet! Once back at the Watering Hole, we walked back to our cars via the golf club.

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Our April walk was around Messack Point starting from St Just-in-Roseland car park near the church. Due to it being Easter time and many of our group occupied with their families etc. so only five walkers decided that we would still give it a go.

Again, we used the iWalkcornwall directions and I have included them so that the reader can not only do the walk but get the history as well. **Please take care on this walk if it has been raining. Use a stick and proper footwear.** The start and finish go over slate and it is easy to slip on. (One badly sprained wrist for Janet Pridmore unfortunately).

## **St Just to Messack Point**

### **Directions**

1. Turn right out of the car park onto the road and immediately right through the churchyard gate. Then bear left down the concrete path and make your way through the churchyard to the church (keeping left after you pass the well). Bear right at the church to an arch (lychgate) signposted to the holy well.

St Just In Roseland Church is based on a 13th Century building that was remodelled in the 14th and 15th Centuries and then reworked fairly heavily in a 19th Century restoration.

During Victorian times, the area around the church was landscaped into gardens using semi-tropical species that are able to survive in the mild climate beside the river. The granite blocks alongside the path to the church are inscribed with quotations from the Bible.

2. When you reach the arch signposted to the Holy Well, turn right to go through it and follow the path along the edge of the creek, past the path to the holy well. Continue to reach a waymark.

Before Christianity, the Pagan Celtic people of Cornwall worshipped wonders of the natural world. Where clean, drinkable water welled up from the ground in a spring, this was seen as pretty awesome. Where the springwater

dissolved minerals, for specific conditions (e.g. deficiency in a mineral) or where the water was antibacterial, the water appeared to have healing properties. The sites were seen as portals to another world, and is why fairies are often associated with springs.

3. Keep left at the waymark and follow the path, passing over a stile, to reach a gate.
4. Go through the gate and follow the remainder of the path then cross the driveway to the building opposite and bear left onto the waymarked path. Follow the path to a stile.
5. Cross the stile and continue ahead on the narrow path to reach a kissing gate into a field.
6. Go through the gate and follow the path along the left hedge of the field to reach a kissing gate in the far corner.

During the summer, the wildflowers in the meadow attract butterflies including the Common Blue and Yellow Brimstone.

7. Go through the gate and follow the path over a concrete walkway and stile to a waymark and footpath sign. Turn left, signposted "Circular Walk via Messack Point", and follow the left hedge to a gap into the adjoining field.
8. Go through the gap and continue ahead to meet the line of trees on the left. Follow along the trees to a gate in the far hedge.
9. Go through the gate and follow along the left hedge. Pass two pedestrian gates until you reach a third with a green waymark.
10. Go through the gate and follow the path over a pair of footbridges to a gate into a field.
11. Go through the gate and head towards the farm gate in the top-right corner of the field, but stop short at a gap in the hedge with a waymark on the opposite side.
12. Go through the gap and then through the gate to the left of the waymark. Then follow the left hedge all the way along the large field to a pedestrian gate on the far side.
13. Go through the gate and cross the driveway to a gate opposite signposted "Messack Point Circular Walk". Go through the gate and follow along the left hedge to a gate in the far corner.

Although there is fresh water flowing down the rivers, as the tide begins to rise, the majority of the water in the creeks is seawater. Therefore on rocky outcrops such as Messack Point, rockpools containing seawater are formed by the ebbing tide which support saltwater species such as anemonies.

14. Go through the pedestrian gate on the right of the gate, then bear left from the metal sign to stay in the field and walk parallel to the right hedge. Continue to the bottom of the field to reach a gate.

As you descend the hill, there are views across Carrick Roads to Falmouth.

Falmouth harbour is one of the largest natural harbours in the world and the deepest in Western Europe. The large waterway of Carrick Roads, forming the junction of seven estuaries, was created after the Ice Age from an ancient valley which flooded with the rising sea levels as the ice caps melted.



*Looking back towards Falmouth © L. Jones 2016*

15. Go through the gate and descend to some large trees, then turn right and follow the path parallel to the creek. Follow the path through the woods, eventually crossing a bridge and then climbing to a gate into a field.

Beneath the trees, a path leads down onto the rock platform on the point. From here there are panoramic views back up St Just Creek to the left and along Carrick Roads to the right.

16. Go through the gate and follow the right hedge to a footpath sign. Stay in the field, signposted Turnaware, and keep following the right hedge until you reach a waymarked gate.

The hedge on the right contains hawthorn trees.

The hawthorn tree is most often found in hedgerows where it was used to create a barrier for livestock, and in fact *haw* was the Old English word for "hedge". The flowers of the hawthorn are known as "May Blossom" and were traditionally used as decorations in May Day celebrations. Now, however, the hawthorn generally doesn't flower until the middle of May. The reason for this is that May has moved! Until 1752, Britain used the Julian Calendar which had leap years every 4 years but no other corrections. This results in a length of day that is fractionally too long, so the first of May gradually slipped forwards over the centuries. By the 1700s, the first of May was 11 days ahead of where it is today.

In Mediaeval times, bringing hawthorn blossom into the house was thought to bring death and it was described as smelling like the Great Plague. The explanation for this is thought to be that the hawthorn blossom contains trimethylamine which is one of the first chemicals formed when animal tissue

decays. Young leaves of the plant can be used in salads as the chemical is not present in the leaves so these taste nutty rather than of death.

17. At the waymark, go through the gate on the right and turn left to follow the path between the hedge and fence to another gate. Go through this and follow the path between the electric fence and hedge to reach a gate on the far side of the field.

Electric fences are powered with a car battery which charges a capacitor to release a periodic pulse of electricity; this is often audible as a quiet "crack" which is a good indicator that a fence is powered. The power is not high enough to cause serious injury but touching an electric fence is nevertheless unpleasant in a similar way to stinging nettles.

Where footpaths cross an electric fence, there is often a section that unclips with plastic handles. Ensure you re-clip this on passing through so animals cannot escape. The connecting cord between the handles is conducting so avoid touching this and be aware of any dangling rucksack straps. If you are answering the call of nature in the vicinity of an electric fence, be mindful of the conductivity of electrolyte solutions.

18. Go through the gate and follow the path through the bushes to a gate.
19. Go through the gate and turn right to cross the lane to a waymarked gate on the opposite side of the lane. Go through the gate into the field and follow the left hedge past one waymark to a second waymark.
20. At the second waymark, pass the brambles and gorse then bear left to descend to the path beneath the trees. Follow this in the same direction you were walking to reach a gate and go through this to continue beneath the trees. Carry on until you emerge into a field.
21. Continue ahead to cross the field to the bottom corner and reach the stile and footpath sign that you encountered earlier. Cross the stile and follow the walkway back to the kissing gate.
22. Go through the kissing gate but bear left to follow the path along the top hedge of the field, passing a path to a metal field gate, to reach a small metal pedestrian gate.
23. Go through the gate and follow the path through the bushes to a stile.
24. Cross the stile and follow the path to reach a road.
25. When you reach the road, turn right and carefully follow the road past the 30mph and narrow signs until you reach a Public Footpath sign on the right beside Jasmine Cottage.

The parish of St Just in Roseland was recorded in 1046, just before the Norman invasion, as "Ecciae Sci Juste".

The first records of the settlement around the church are a little later, from 1202, but this used the Cornish name *Lansioch*. The name contains the Cornish word *lann*, meaning "enclosed cemetery", which is typical of settlements dating from the Dark Ages. The remainder of the name is thought to be from a Celtic saint's name. It's therefore likely that the church is on the site of an older churchyard, possibly dating from the Dark Ages, and the presence of the Holy Well further supports this.

When maintenance work was carried out on the church in the early 20th Century, a Roman coin was found beneath the floorboards, indicating that there may have been settlement in the vicinity of the church prior to the Dark Ages.

26. Turn right down the footpath and follow this to a gate.

The name for the Roseland Peninsula derives from the Celtic word *ros* which can be used to mean a number of things including "moor", but the meaning most applicable in this case is "promontory".

27. Go through the gate and follow the left hedge to reach a pair of gates.

28. Go through the gate on the right and follow the path to reach the waymark that you encountered at the start of the walk. Turn left and follow the path back towards St Just churchyard to complete the circular route. You can follow the path leading from the stile just before the Holy Well as a short-cut to get to the drive leading up to the car park.

During the spring, if you encounter a patch of plants with white bell-shaped flowers, smelling strongly of onions, and with long, narrow leaves then they are likely to be three-cornered leeks. The plants get their name due to their triangular flower stems and, as the name also suggests, they are members of the onion family and can be used in recipes in place of spring onions or leeks. They are at their best for culinary use from February to April. By May, they have flowered and the leaves are starting to die back".

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Our final walk in May was a quick wander around the Roseland area, we have often walked in this area because it is such a stunning place to go to. The walk was 3.2 miles long and started and finished at the National Trust car parks at Porth Farm, St Anthony just above Froe Creek. O.S. Explorer Map no. 105 O.S. Grid Ref: SW902382.

There are two walks from here heading for St Anthony's Head but we chose the shorter walk. Janet led the walk and we started by going crossing the road and then courtyard before bearing right and taking the beach path and right again onto the coastal footpath signposted St Anthony. We walked along passing the end of Towan beach and continued towards Porthbeor Beach, which is unfortunately closed to the public at the moment because the steps inaccessible at the moment.

When we got to the roped off steps, we turned immediately right and crossed the field and a stile in the hedge before turning right onto the road. At a junction signposted to Bothortha, we turned left and continued until we spotted a National Trust sign for Place Ferry.



St Mawes from Place Manor ferry slip © L. Jones 2016

The road turned into a track, which led us down to Place Manor, quite a magical setting with great religious significance and after stopping for a quick drink and a wander down on the jetty, we walked back up to the NT footpath and continued to walk left (with our backs to Place Manor) through woodland with the river always on the left.

We were heading back to Porth Farm but although signposted one and a quarter miles, this was uphill and twisty. We had to take care on this bit because there were a lot of roots to step over. So this bit took time.

We walked parallel to Froe / Porth Creek and crossed a long footbridge at the end before picking up the path running parallel to the road. We emerged in the lower car park at Porth Farm and made our way into the courtyard for a lunch of pastys, cakes etc. and very good coffee and teas. Excellent walk and I recommend it. The walks are available on a leaflet at the Thirstea Co.tea van, plus the great refreshments of course. It is a good idea to book your pasty before setting out to the beach or to the walk.

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