

# The Trevan Book

In 1834 John Watts Trevan, who lived in White House Cottage on Roscarrock Hill, put together his comprehensive 328-page manuscript on the parish of Endellion and its inhabitants as it was just prior to the Victorian era. This fascinating document has pen portraits of the families and people living here eg. fond of a tipple..., got pregnant by the Baptist preacher..., run off and left his family..., reputed a witch..., and many more of Trevan's forthright comments and opinions. It also describes local wildlife, fishing, mining, boats and who owned them, imports and exports, together with details of local wrecks between 1800 and 1834. Trevan illustrated the book with his own watercolour drawings, showing some of the people, buildings and views, including a map of Port Isaac numbering all the properties to show who owned them at that time.

The Port Isaac Local History Group purchased the manuscript in 1999 and it is now on permanent loan at the County Records Office in Truro, to be available for future historians. The group has now published the complete manuscript, together with all its illustrations in full colour, as a hardback book at an affordable price. Copies, priced £10, are available from *Secrets*, Port Isaac.

The following extract is what Trevan wrote in his book about fishing in Port Isaac.

## Fishes & Fisheries Etc.

**Whales** are not infrequently seen here. Not many years since a whale came into the cove at Port Isaac, about the time of high water, supposed to be sick, happening to strike on a rock it blew the water to an immense height in consequence thereof. It turned again and went out, otherwise it is supposed it would come in and land on the beach. It was of the spermatic kind.

**Grampus** [an old term for dolphins in general, now more usually applied just to Risso's Dolphin]. The Grampus likewise at times is seen here in the autumn and by their blowing and splashing the water and coming so near the fishing boats, as sometimes to cause considerable alarm for fear of their stoving the boats.

**Sharks** of various kinds visit this coast at all times of the year. A shark of extra ordinary size and furious aspect was caught last year, it measured nine feet four inches in length and three feet two inches and a half round its longest part. It was exhibited for some days after to the admiration of all that beheld it.

**Seals.** In fine weather seals may be seen at all times playing about at Pine Haven and Fairlee [Varley] sands. There are two caverns which they frequent, one between Pine Haven and Port Isaac, and the other round the East side of Castle Rock, Porth Karn Hvn, and at which place they are frequently caught. As one that was caught there was kept at Port Isaac, and at times carried round the country for a show, but some person or persons out of envy or spite opened the door one night, where it was kept, and let it out, when it immediately set off towards the sea. In scrambling through the streets it was met by a country jowder or fish carrier who was almost frightened out of his wits, thinking he had met the devil. But however the poor seal eventually got clear off to sea.

**Rays** are the most plentiful about Christmas they are frequently of amazing size. A Skate Ray was caught not long since that weighed more than three hundredweight. The fisherman had the greatest difficulty in dragging it into the boat after they had hauled it up along side.

**Porpus's** [Porpoise]. It is a very fine sight to see the turnings and gambollings of these sea hogs. In about September and October they come here in vast shoals praying on the pilchards and herrings. They are not infrequently caught by entangling themselves in the fishermen's nets. They are generally about four to five feet long by two and a half in girt. The Tunny fish appears to be of the same specie as the porpus.

**Monk.** The monk is as curious a fish as is ever seen on our coast. The time they are mostly caught is about July and August and at times they attain a very large size. They are never made use of as food.

**Divelfish** [Devilfish - John Dory]. This fish noted for its awkward form and monstrous large mouth is not infrequently caught in autumn.

**Sunfish.** These fish likewise visit this coast in July and August and are always seen and caught with a gaff while they lay asleep on the wave of the water on a fine calm sunny day. These fish have not been very plentiful for these several years past, nor are they fit for human food.

**Cod & Ling.** These fish come on the coast in vast shoals from Christmas to Ladyday. At times, when the weather will permit, great quantities are taken, but the least have been taken this year that was ever remembered in consequence of the perpetual gales of wind. Whitings commonly are caught in great numbers about this time of the year.

**Conger.** The conger is caught here at all times of the year but they are most numerous in the spring. Some of them are very large and exceedingly vicious. Not more than a week or so since, a very large one was laid out on the beach amongst other fish for sale, when it rose up more than half its length in the form of a serpent and made a dart at a child, when, providently, a person standing by snatched the child back who was unconscious of its danger from this formidable fish. They not infrequently attack the fishermen in their boats when first caught.

**Turbot.** The Turbot is rather a scarce fish. There may be about, say, half a dozen caught in the run of the summer. About twenty years since they were very plentiful and sold dog cheap.

**Mackerel.** These fish are seen in great shoals and are taken by the hook and line in the summer and sometimes they are caught in the herring season in the herring nets, there being no regular mackerel craft here for the taking of them. There have been scarce any caught this last year in consequence of such very boisterous weather.

**Pilchard.** This is the most important of all the fishing on this coast. About thirty years since pilchards came here in such abundance that several gentlemen of the neighbourhood resolved to have a sean [seine] on this with every appearance of success. Adventurers from all quarters began to adopt the same plan, then it was heave and go who and who should have parts. Committees were formed to adopt the most eligible plans. Large and extensive cellars were begun to be built. Seines and other materials connected thereto ordered to an outlay of about the tune of thirty thousand pounds and all was hustle and confusion for two or three years at Port Isaac, Port Quin, and Porth Karn Hvn. Some of those seans as the 'Good Intent' meet with singular success having caught nearly twelve hundred Hhds [hogsheds] of fish the first year, and some of the other seans had minor successes and soon fish were caught for eight or ten years after, some of those seans taking from six hundred hogsheds and others of less quantities upon an average, yearly. But from that time to this the fish have scarcely visited the coast, in consequence thereof several of the seans have been cut up and sold with all boats and other materials thereunto belonging, and the cellars either sold or falling into decay. About twenty Hhds were caught this last year by the joint adventure of the following seans, 'Union' at Porth Karn Hvn, 'Industry' at Port Isaac, and 'Fenice' [Venice] at Port Quin. The fish make about £3.10s per Hhd now in the Italian market but the Neapolitan Government at present lay an import duty of eighteen shillings per hogsheds, and the Tuscan about the same.

**Herrings.** The herring fishing was some years since very prosperous, ten or dozen of large boats coming in twice in the course of a night and shake out so that in fact the beach at Port Isaac would be almost covered with fish every morning, when the weather permitted their going out from Michaelmas to Christmas. People from the country from thirty miles around coming here for herrings. In fact they have been caught here in that abundance, at two different periods of about forty years, that they were bundled and carried off in skiffs to Bristol to be smoked for red herrings. Mrs. Wattis' Malthouse that was, but now converted into dwellings, and the preventive boathouse by the lowermost bridge at Port Isaac, was built entirely for the above said purpose of smoking by a Mr. Scantlebury, a Quaker, about a hundred and fifty years since – but of later years very little have been caught, and this last year not more than a few dozens.

**Halibut.** The halibuts in general are scarce and seldom caught on this coast.

**Pollack and Wrath** [Cornish dialect for Wrasse]. In the spring of the year these fish are caught by setting what is called a tramble which is a net made in the common form of a herring net but having two others attached to it one on each side composed of a stout twine with very large meshes through which the fish go on either side and by forcing the middle net into the one opposite are caught by entangling themselves in the taut or slack part thereof but at other times they are caught from the rocks and cliffs with the hook and line with a worm that is caught in the rocks at low water for bait but this is not infrequently attended with danger as two boys named Chalk and Martyn, apprentices to Mr. Bishop of Treore were washed off a rock and drowned but a few years since.

**Tubb and Gurnet** [both species of Gurnard]. It is the best of sport when these fish are plenty to go out fishing for as fast as a person can bait two or three lines each line with two hooks attached thereunto so fast may they fish be hauled in. It has been said the first person who ever offered Gurnets for sale in this Parish was called Henry Millar but in general called Harry Dingey from Tintagell who resided at

Port Isaac a short time, before which they were given away when caught more than enough for the catcher use. These fish are mostly caught all the year round but especially in the summer months in abundance and seldom or ever fail.

**Longnose** [Garfish *Belone belone*]. In the time of the pilchard fishing, quantities of these fish come on the coast. They appear to be some- thing of the same species as the pilchard. They are seldom eaten but mostly used for bait and for which they are excellent.

**Lobsters.** This is by no means an unprofitable fishing, several boats are employed in this occupation in the summer season, manned generally by the old invalidated seamen. They not infrequently make forty shillings a week each. The country all around are supplied besides the towns of Camelford, Bodmin, Wadebridge, Saint Columb, and Padstow from Port Isaac.

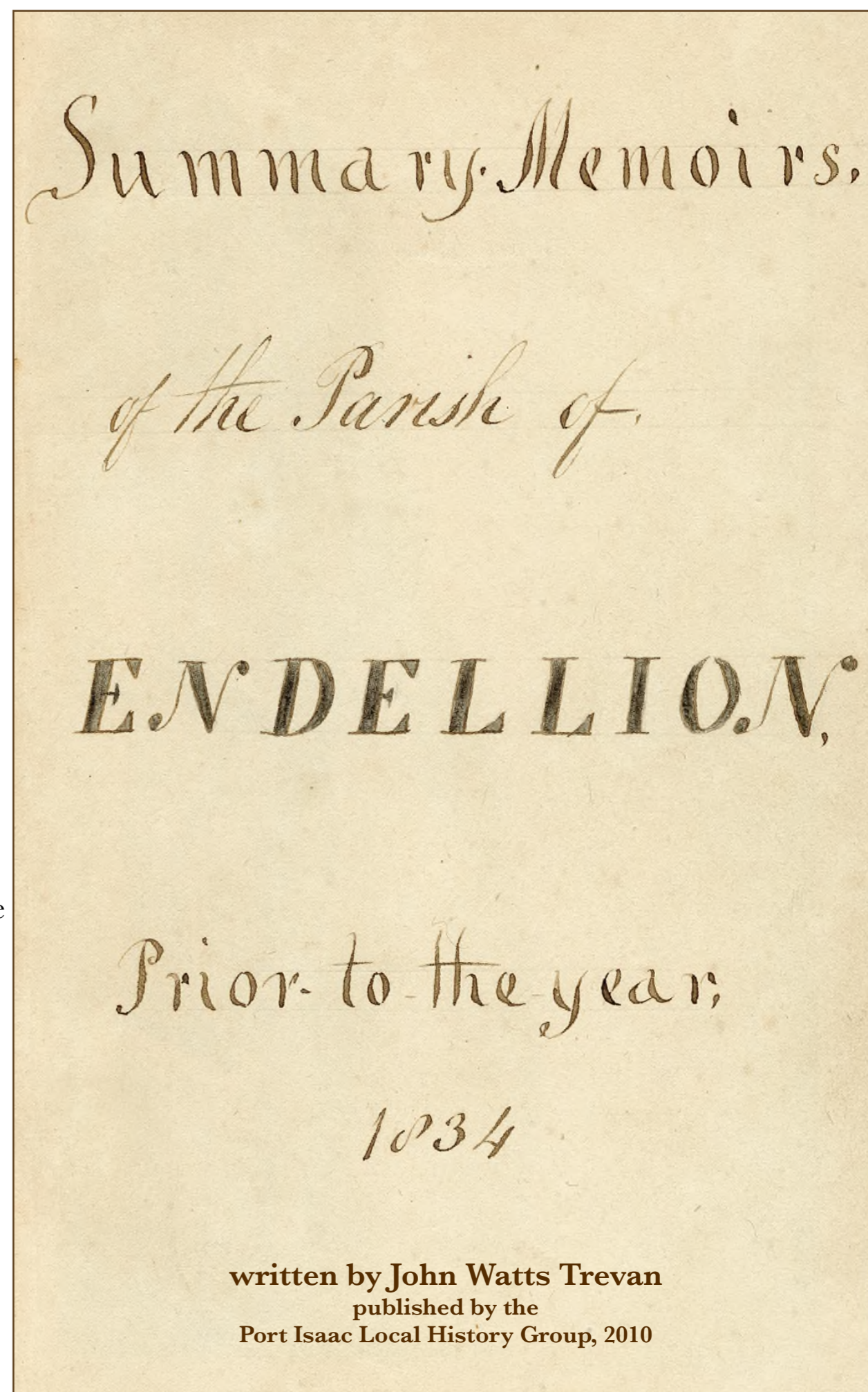
**Crabs** are likewise caught in the same pots with the lobsters but they are not to be compared for size to the crab caught on the south of the county, those on the south being so much larger.

**Blubers** [Jellyfish - the Blue Jellyfish *Cyanea lamarkii* or the Root-mouth jellyfish *Rhizostoma octopus* are still common summer visitors]. Some summers the blubers are plentiful, but this last year they have failed. These fish cause a curious sensation to the hand when squeezed, something similar to the sting of nettles.

**Cuttle.** In the autumn of some seasons these fish are not infrequently caught in the herring nets, they look very curious by having so many feelers.

**Starfish.** Starfish, some summers, are abundant on this coast.

And a vast variety of other fish as the plaice, soal, bream, dogfish, etc., etc., besides oysters at Fearlee Sands, Port Isaac Bay, and on some flat rocks inside the entrance of Port Isaac Haven, commonly called the flats. They were first brought from the Mumbles and sown by the old Captain Francis Richards and crew, about seventy or eighty years since.



Shooting of the Sean in Port Isaac Bay