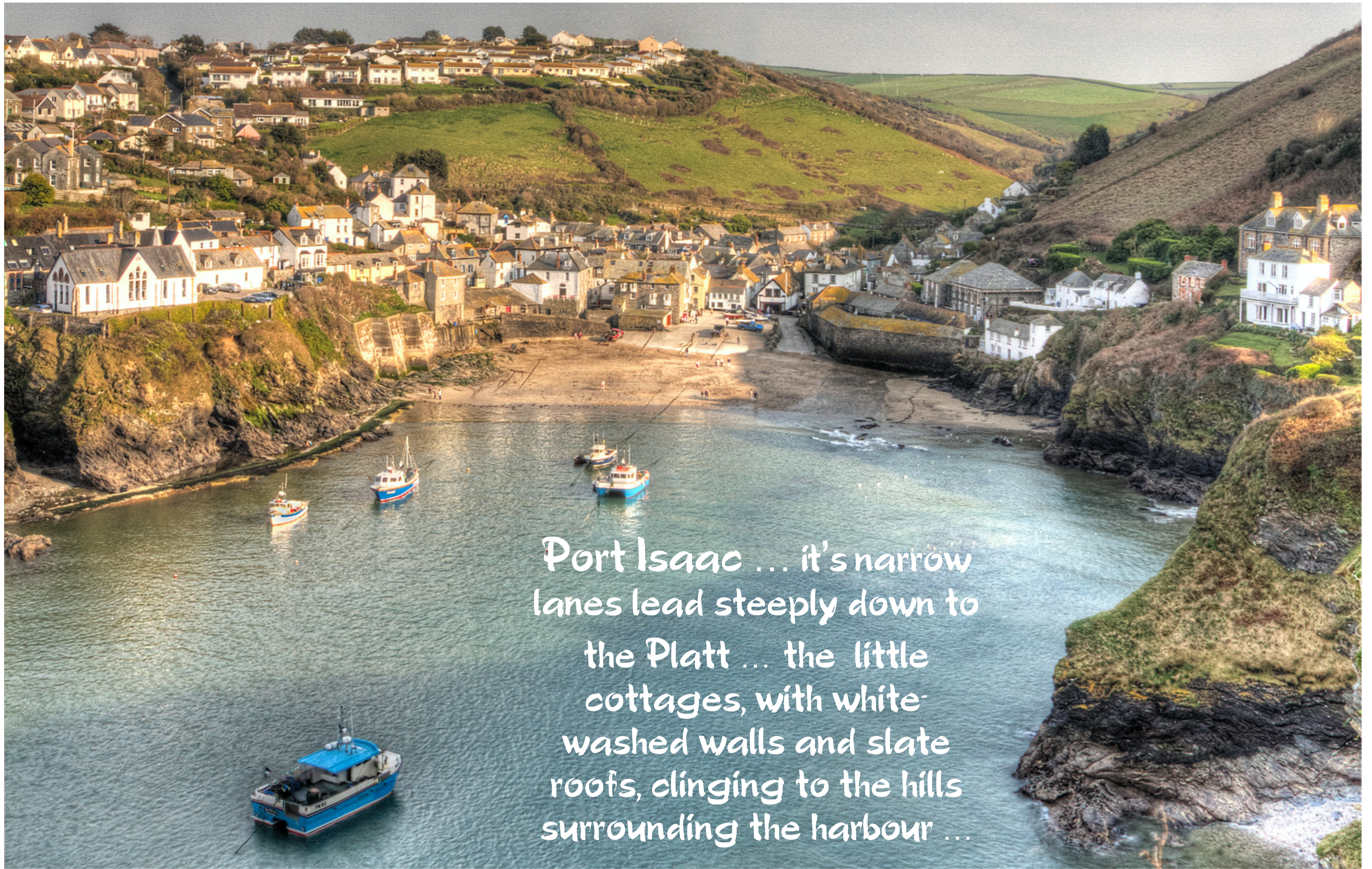


PORT ISAAC

50.5938°N, 4.8300°W

"It appears to be secluded from the rest of the world" (1820)



Port Isaac ... it's narrow lanes lead steeply down to the Platt ... the little cottages, with white-washed walls and slate roofs, clinging to the hills surrounding the harbour ...

Sitting snugly between Lobber Point on its west side and a slightly shorter headland to the east, Port Isaac's natural harbour is one of the safest on the north Cornwall coast. The village is part of St Endellion Parish alongside Port Gaverne, Trelights, St Endellion and part of Port Quin. Twice a day the great Atlantic Ocean rolls in from the north and then out again. To the south is the sheltered valley with its steep sides through which flows a river that becomes the Leat as it enters the village and passes beneath and to the side of the road and several buildings.

Since the ending of the last ice age, early man would probably have found our coastal lands a fine base for hunting and fishing, but few artefacts have been left behind. The first written evidence of the village name, found in the 1338 Havener's accounts (Havener was the official whose duty was to collect fishing tithes on behalf of the Duchy of Cornwall) refers to 'Portusek' and describes the settlement as a fishing village. Both Rose Hill and Church Hill date from this period and it is thought that Rose Hill would originally have led straight to the beach. Port Isaac is likely to be a derivation from the Cornish Yzack' meaning corn. Records from the 17th Century show this part of North Cornwall was a major grain producer and no doubt had been for centuries before. Our sheltered port would have been the ideal place to export any surplus.

During the reign of Henry VIII (1509-47), the port was improved by the building of the Tudor Pier, the remains of which are just visible at low tide inside the western breakwater.

In 1536, John Leland referred to Port Isaac and its pier:

"Porthissek, a pretty fisher village ... and there is a pier and some succour for fisher boats."

About fifty years later, John Norden's comments suggest the safety given by that pier had led to considerable growth of Port Isaac, with a corresponding decay at Port Gaverne.

*"Portissick: a hamlet and haven, wounderfully increased also in buyldinges of late yeares by fishinge.
Port-kerne, [Port Gaverne]: a litle cove for fisher-boates; and ther was somtymes a crane to lifte up
and downe suche comodities as were ther taken in to be transported, or browght in and unloden:
and ther have bene divers buyldinges, now all decayde since the growing of Portissick."*

With the arrival of large shoals of pilchards in the late 18th century, there was a resurgence in the fishing industry. This required new buildings to process the catch, with four fish cellars constructed in Port Isaac and four in Port Gaverne. The foundations of our existing fish cellar by the beach are clearly much older than the rest and are built of upright slate stones. This is similar to the construction of the Tudor pier and may well be the foundations of the original 16th century cellar on this site. Only the cellar by the beach is in use today, with the Good Intent cellar being demolished to build a new village school in 1876 (now the Old School Hotel), and the others converted to living accommodation and holiday properties.

By the 19th century, those early exports of grain had tapered off with all produce utilised locally. There was a corn mill just up the valley, and there may have once been a mill in the centre of the village, as the deeds of the Slipway Hotel mention a mill next to the property. Greengates, just across the street, the remains of a 'teagle' (tackle) hoist for raising sacks can be seen above the first floor window in Middle Street.