By the 1800s, the main local industries were fishing, farming, mining, quarrying, coasting and some boat building. Boats landed loads of coal, timber and stone and then loaded slate and local metal ore both here and at Port Gaverne. But the coastal trade began to decline, the better off people began to leave and most of the houses were occupied by the 'poorer' people.

"The largest and most densely populated place in the parish with about one hundred and forty houses, inhabited most by seafaring people. As mean, dirty and tumultuous place as can well be conceived, a refuge for all rag tag and bobtail from all quarters and without the least control or government, the streets narrow and filthy as almost to render them impassable in time of wet weather."

But times were changing and in 1895 The London & South Western Railway arrived and began to transport slate directly from the Delabole quarry. There was a bonus though; the railway also began to bring the first tourists to Port Isaac - practically overnight, tourisim had arrived and the livelihood of Port Isaac changed completely.

Road transport dealt the final blow to coastal shipping and local men had to look further afield for work, often overseas. On the plus side the fishing industry continued to thrive until in the 1920s the pilchards failed. The fishermen turned to winter herring fishing that continued until the mid 1940s when the herring shoals also failed and were replaced by mackerel. Fast forward to today and the main catch is crab and lobster that is sold in the locally in fish shops and restaurants and further afield, up to London and to Europe.

Even today, if you sit on the Platt watching the world go by, you can get a feel for what a fisherman's life was like all those years ago. Moorings for the boats run the full length of the beach and everything is always ruled by the sea and the tides - only when the water is a certain height can the fishing boats put out or return.

The breakwaters were built in the 1920s and 1930s with materials brought down from Lobber in large iron buckets suspended from a 'blondin' wire stretched across the harbour from cliff to cliff. The eastern breakwater (underneath the Old School) was built first, using local stone - until the local contractors went bankrupt. You can still see the join where new contactors eventually took over and completed the work in concrete. The red beacon as a statutory port side marker to guide boats entering the harbour.

With less than 1000 permanent residents today, the population of Port Isaac has not changed that much during the last two hundred years. The main difference is that almost all the people used to live in the old village below the Old School and there were hundreds of children playing in the streets and on the beach. Today about 80% the houses at the bottom of the village are second homes. But the very fabric of this beloved and special village remains the same.

"There is no doubt that this is the way to approach Port Isaac, from St Endellion on the Polzeath side of the port. The final hill is very steep ... Not until you round a corner do you see any sign of Port Isaac at all. Then you see it all, huddled in a steep valley, a cover at the end of a combe, roofs and roofs, tumbling down either steep hillside in a race for shelter from the south-west gales. A fresh water stream pours brown and cold along the valley, under slate bridges, between old houses, under the road and out into the little harbour ..."

John Betjeman