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President Tremayne Carew Pole

Torpoint Organisation of the Year 2013-2014

Registered Charity No. 1043650

TAHC Newsletter September 2026

Dear Friends and Volunteers,

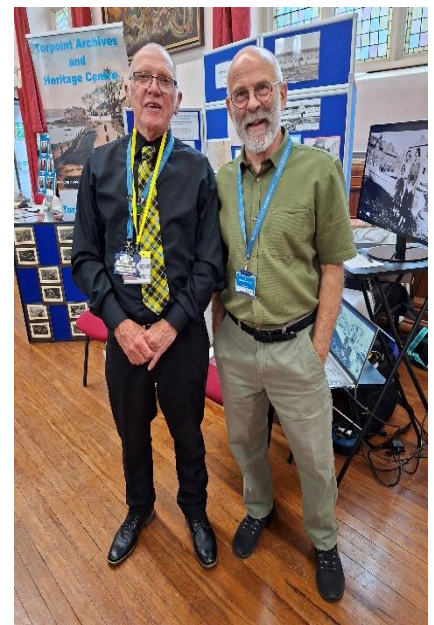
It has been a very busy and interesting month for the Archives team of Volunteers.

On Sept 5th, a Family History Day(FHD) was held at Liskeard Town Hall.

This event was organised by South East Cornwall Museums Forum (SECMF) to which TAHC is affiliated.

Six volunteers, Angela, Ann, Julie, Rose, Bill and John spent the whole day at Liskeard.

Bill and Ann are posing in front of Torpoint's display, with Angela in the costume of a nineteenth member of staff who may have worked at St German's Union (the Workhouse)



German's Union (the workhouse) was chosen as the theme for TAHC's contribution to the FHD.



The Union Workhouse, Union Road
built 1839.

Parishes had always provided some support for poor village inhabitants. There had been a Poorhouse in Millbrook for many years. However, those living in poverty were on the increase. In Cornwall, the mining and fishing industries were no longer flourishing and work on the land was seasonal. Families found it difficult to support elderly and sick members of their families.

In 1834, Parliament passed new Poor Laws.

A senior member from each parish was chosen to meet members from other parishes, to form a union. Each union would build new premises to provide residential accommodation for the poor.

Thirteen parishes from South East Cornwall formed the St Germans Union.

After much deliberation, the Torpoint location was selected, because of the easy access by water. It was at the far end of Union Road. It was the first Union House to be built in Cornwall.

TAHC has information about the cost of the site, the cost of the construction and a copy of the first meeting of the Guardians.

TAHC volunteers have noted the names of all the inmates and staff from the 1841 until the 1921 census.

The criteria to gain a place were very strict and life within the institutions would have been spartan. Our ideas of life within a workhouse are coloured by the Charles Dickens story, *Oliver Twist*.

No doubt if the Board of Guardians did not appoint an humane Master and Mistress, some workhouse life could be horrendous. It is necessary to bear in mind that the alternative could be starving to death in a ditch! No horror stories have been recorded about life in the Torpoint workhouse.

In most of the Torpoint records, many inmates are very old, insane or receiving treatment.

The Infirmary provided valuable help to inmates and Torpoint residents.

The girls were given training to get employment for domestic service and the boys education prepared them for work in the RN Dockyard or the Armed Services.

Dr Sydney Vinter was appointed as the Medical Officer of Health in 1900.

He lobbied Torpoint Urban District Council and Cornwall County Council to get better fresh water supplies and sewerage systems for Torpoint in general, and the schools and the workhouse in particular.

An indication that the St Germans Union was well run, is that the Master took time to record the full name of each inmate in the Census returns.

Births and deaths that occurred, were registered as having taken place at 42 Union Road.

These register entries did not show "workhouse", which could have carried a stigma.

The building was closed in 1938 and any remaining inmates were relocated to Launceston.

The derelict building became a playground for adventurous children in the 1940s and 1950s.

In 1962, Union Road was renamed Marine Drive. The Workhouse building was demolished and modern flats were built on the site.

Cyberheritage Facebook site is administered by Steve Johnson. He has digitised many historical photographs.



Margery found this photograph on his site. Hockings Pianos in Devonport was an impressive store. It reflects some social history of Victorian and Edwardian times. Girls from upper and middle class families would usually have private piano playing and singing lessons. Musical evening spent around the piano would be a favourite family entertainment.

The reason this shop interests TAHC, is because of the ferry photograph below.



This is often referred to as “The Hocking “ ferry, a complete misnomer, merely because it carried an advert for the shop!

It was the fourth chain ferry, brought into service in 1878. There was still only one set of chains so only one ferry was operated.

Willoughby Bros of Stonehouse built this ferry. It was larger than the third ferry, which had also been built by them in 1871.

This fourth ferry had 2 funnels and 2 prows, with a centre engine house.

The passenger deck was above the engine house with no shelter from the elements.

The crossings could be wet, windy or warm for foot passengers, with soot from the funnels for good measure!

Much more information, memorabilia and ferry photographs are in TAHC collections.

We are very pleased to welcome Elaine back to the Team of volunteers and Trevor as a Friend of TAHC . The volunteers give over 200 hours of their time each month, working in the premises and at home, but donations from Friends help to pay our overheads. A replacement for a 7 year old printer has just been sourced by Paul. Paul has also put another MP4 display on the large Library monitor.

Ann represented TAHC at the Civic Service. Susan Knott has shared her video of this parade.

Visitor numbers have been up this month, including 4 from Canada and 2 from Australia.

Mary greeted the Saturley family from Calgary., Canada. An ancestor of the family had been born in No 18 Fore Street exactly 100 years ago. The other Canadian visitor from the Toronto area was a member of the Harris family. Kim had grown up in Torpoint and had been a member of youth rowing teams. Harriet Hills, the High Sheriff of Cornwall visited the Archives, when the Mayor, TTC Councillor, Julie Martin, gave her a tour around Torpoint.

Sue and Maurice ran the card shop in Tamar Street for many years before emigrating to Perth, Australia. They return to Torpoint most years to visit family members and always call in to the Archives on these occasions.

Visitors are always welcome. If you are making a special journey it is wise to e mail your intention, to ensure that a volunteer will be available.



Mike Pearn, MBE
Chairman

The next Get Together is at 11 am on Thursday October 8th in CHAT, Macey St