

St. Agnes Village Trail

Start at Trelawny Road Car Park. A short and leisurely walk to inspire shopping, eating and drinking. Goin': Easy, (hard surfaces 95% of the way) one moderate hill.

The essence of any village is its people. As each generation leaves its mark on the development of a village we inevitably lose touch with the significance of what they leave behind. Piecing together some of the evidence that connects the interesting nooks and crannies of the village of St. Agnes with the people who shaped it, is what this trail guide is about. *At each stop, listen for the voices from the past and imagine the scene - these voices are shown in green italics.*



First, head for the red telephone box at the entrance to Trelawny Road **A**. Take a look at the telephone number, you'll see that it ends with the digit "1." The first telephone exchange was established in St. Agnes in 1928 with just 23 subscribers. Call St. Agnes: 1 and you would be connected to St. Agnes Post Office. This became the public phone which then moved to a phone box which over the years was placed in several locations in the main street. Despite a succession of modern prefixes, it remains the first telephone number in St. Agnes. With a camp bed for the night operator, the exchange was available 24 hours a day, each caller being greeted with *"Number please."* Then, it was possible to be connected just by asking for a person by name. Today, St. Agnes is digitally enabled and has broadband.

Anciently known as Bryanak (Bre means hill in Cornish), St. Agnes owes its development principally to tin mining which mushroomed after the 16th century. By any standard, the life of the tin miner or bal maiden was hard and opportunities for personal improvement were few. **Turn left at the road junction; you are now in Vicarage Road.** Virtually opposite Goldies Café stands St. Agnes Miners' and Mechanics' Institute **B**. Given to the public in 1893 by John Passmore Edwards "in perpetuity, for literary and scientific benefit", the building was essentially, a men's institute. Sadly, there is no longer a library for 'personal improvement' at the Institute, but the building remains a tangible reminder of the past industry of this once important mining district. An impressive portrait photograph of John Passmore Edwards hangs in the hallway **C**. *Listen to him: "You can claim me, whatever else I might be, as a parishioner of St. Agnes and I look upon my birthplace and early associations with a deep and undying interest." In more recent times, paused in a game of snooker, former miner, Percy Truran, is engaged in a light hearted argument with Richie Pearce over the facts of some incident from sixty years before. Richie was adamant, but as Percy resumed his shot he retorted "Well, I hope yer donkey (pronounced as in monkey) die". A miner's donkey was an important animal and many were kept in the small fields around the village. This almost extinct insult was an insult indeed!*

St. Agnes Meadery **D** stands five doors on from the Institute .

It was built in 1881 as the Oddfellow's Hall -

a friendly society set up to protect and care for its members - it had a special significance for many working

families in St. Agnes at a time when there was no welfare state, trade union or National Health Service. The hall became the Regal Cinema in 1933. In 1975, The Salzburg Connection (1972), an action adventure starring Barry Newman, was the last film shown, by which time Bingo was also regularly on offer. Sold and revamped as "The Little Puppet Theatre" in 1978, it became the Meadery in 1984. *Is that Clark Gable's voice we can hear in an echo of Gone with the Wind? "Frankly my dear, I don't give a damn".* **Walk on.**

On your right, between the Cornwall Café and Sally's Bistro **E**, stands a corner shop, latterly a shoe shop, but in the early 20th century it belonged to Thomas Delbridge, confectioner and shipping agent **F**. From the mid-19th century until mining in St. Agnes all but ended, just before World War I, it was here that many miners bought their passage to hard rock mining regions around the world. In 1905, for example, one special rate on offer was New York for £2.



Some returned, but many did not. *Listen, someone is crying.* John Carter is saying goodbye before returning to Kapunda in South Australia "All day visiting and saying good bye to my dear friends, some of whom cleave to me and kissed me in tears. Spent some time with my dear aged Aunt Mary and kissed her a last goodbye for this life. 'Tis sad to say farewell."

Continuing along Vicarage Road, to your left, behind the Pottery, stands a roofless engine house (the only one of West Kitty's three engine houses still standing) built in 1892 to house a 40" (cylinder diameter) beam engine used to pump water out of the southern end of West Kitty Mine at Thomas' Shaft [G](#). The engine is today held in storage by the Science Museum in London. Religion and singing were important to many of the miners who worked here. As they emerged from the mine at the end of their "core" (shift) it was not uncommon for someone to strike up a tune and as each man left his level to join the ascending throng, the shaft would fill with the rich sound of men's voices



The massive engine house and headgear of West Kitty Mine (Reynolds' Shaft) was visible from Vicarage Road.



in harmony. Needless to say, West Kitty Mine had a male voice choir [H](#), its conductor, John Angwin. One "pare" of miners even composed a Christmas carol underground on the lid of a dynamite box. Known as John Rogers' Carol, this simple tune is still occasionally played in the Church at St. Agnes. *Listen. "Ring out the bells....." Merry Christmas!*

Feel, through the soles of your feet, a double blast from underground, perhaps a signal to one miner's wife that he is on his way home. Such explosions underground were once commonplace in St Agnes.

*So many people want to talk to us. **Keep going, down the hill past the Post Office** (then past the "Fission" Chip Shop) **until you come to the St. Agnes Hotel; opposite is St. Agnes Church.** You are now in Churchtown, the ancient heart of the village. It was near here, early in December 1756, that some 600 miners including upwards of*

100 horses and several women gathered to march on Padstow. Corn shortages threatened starvation and there was rumoured to be corn stored there. The next day they arrived at Padstow, plundered what corn they could find and either sold or gave away what they couldn't carry. They stayed all night in the town "huzzaiing and carousing", the last not leaving until ten o'clock the next morning. *These were hard and wild times...*

With the development of mining, Churchtown became the commercial heart of the village **I** with a market, several pubs, hotels, shops, and (next to the church) a bank. *Thomas Tonkin, of the manor of Trevaunance, said of Churchtown, "There has been time out of mind, in this little town which consists of about forty houses, a weekly market kept for all sorts of wares, and victuals, except corn, on Thursdays, which induced me in 1706 to endeavour to get a Patent for a market on the said day and two fairs yearly,"* but a petition from Truro stopped it and St. Agnes never quite became a fully fledged market town. Nonetheless, ordinary weekly markets continued until the end of the 19th

century, as "Cold Water" Richards remembers, "From the top of Town Hill to the Lytch gate in front of the Church there was a large Market House....but at this period it was slowly dying out."

The cobbles in front of several of today's shops hark back to the days when the whole of Churchtown was cobbled and the market standings and market house truly made the place feel like a town.



H



I

Inside the church



Miners at West Kitty mine.



To the right of the Church tower just before the main entrance, stands an ancient Celtic cross thought to date from the 7th century. A thirteenth century chapel on this site gave rise to a church built in 1484 when the population had grown much faster than that of the settlements of the mother church of Perranzabuloe.

In the 1830s, Tom Chynoweth explains: "As for that there story they goat 'bout us, that we dunged our tower to make un grow, 'twas nawthin moore than this: 'I'll have iuy grow oal roun' the tower' says the passon.' 'And so you shall my deer,' says the churchwarden. And when the passon was gone, he beganned to put some in: a Trura man looked in and

seed un, and thoft he was dungin' the tower, to make un ġraw, and went hum and said so: and from that time they do ax how the tower do ġit on. And that's how it was, and nawthin' moore. And the ivy never ġrawd, nor the tower, of coose; and the moore the pity, for he's oncommon short."

In 1848 the old church was largely demolished and rebuilt in its current form, the tower remained from the church of 1484, so this is certainly one of the oldest structures in Churchtown, built at a time when use of the Cornish language would have been commonplace. Inside the church one of the survivals from the old church is an interesting Elizabethan carved wooden figure of a hungry man which supports the alms box for the poor.

Back tracking slightly, next to Lee and Co. is an example of an Ope (usually pronounced "op") or op-way, a path linking Churchtown with the "back of town" (alias West Kitty, after West Kitty tin mine which worked from 1863 until 1915, employing 378 people at its peak in 1905). **Take a stroll up the op** and feel the antiquity of the lime-washed cottages. It is still possible to discern the one up, one down stone and "cob" (a form of compacted earth) cottages incorporated into the modern buildings. **Bear right along the road at the rear of the St. Agnes Hotel.**

The St. Agnes Hotel car park was once a field where the hotel cow was kept. Part of this small "field" was the hotel garden, one of many vegetable plots around the village.

c.1905



L

c.1910




Blacksmith at West Kitty mine.



c.1905






P

As Mr. Harper recalls, "Lots of miners had small holdings. My father kept fowls out at the croft where Dobles are."
In this way, families made ends meet. **Continue to the junction, turn right back towards the church, then left, past St. Agnes Bakery down Town Hill.**

Look left for the nine stepped cottages of Stippy Stappy formerly known as Cottage Row . Built around 1841 and owned by the Hitchins family who managed St. Agnes Harbour, many of the tenants were sea captains or seamen. When the Hitchins estate was auctioned off in 1929 the average price fetched for each cottage was £60.

Further down Town Hill on the right is a boarded-up granite entrance to some steps . *Stand back! That group of running men you can hear just about to burst out of the gate are Coastguards racing for the Cove, there is a ship in trouble and the rocket apparatus needs their help .*

With Peterville Woods on your left and then the Peterville Inn, you are now entering Peterville, named after the Peter family who once lived here. During its industrial heyday, Peterville was known as Dirtypool because of the dirty pool which formed at its lower end. On the site of Images of Cornwall stood a wheelwright's shop and opposite in what is now Siestas was a single storey forge . Peterville was obviously a great place for story tellers (and still is!). *Gunner Dick's forge (Richard Stephens'), as John Tregellas tells us, "was sufficiently capacious, (besides containing the fire and forge tools, a water trough, used to receive and cool the heated tongs, etc.), to admit of a circular seat sufficient to hold ten or twelve gossips, who, every evening, sat there and enjoyed the heat of the forge, and increased its smoky atmosphere by puffing their short and well-blackened tobacco pipes."* Past the Tap House to the entrance to Wheal Kitty Lane, stands a wooden bench which has long been a similar gathering place for story tellers, one of whom told of a "true" incident where a plague of rats was flushed out of the village. *"Rats! Rats? Why, you've never seen rats like it. One of 'em cleared a five bar gate in one bound, and he was carryin' a Alsatian dog in his mouth!"* Such were the stories at the old men's bench.

Find British Road and head up to the Cleaderscroft Hotel 200m on the right . Built in the 19th century, this was the home of the Hancock family who were variously connected with the mining industry. *George Coulter Hancock was famous for his no nonsense approach. A note to the milkman next to two jugs (rather than the usual one for the milk to be ladled into) read: "Put the milk in one and the water in the other, we will do our own mixing, thank you."* Further up the hill on the right stands Mr. Hancock's coach house, a three-storey building two of which, you will notice, are accessible from ground level. Next door is the old school, the playground now a lawn, its classrooms now apartments .

The school holds so many voices from the past. The images of the classroom are so readily conjured. In his office, the head master is writing in the school log book:


24.12.1895 – This school is re-opened today after the long closing because of diphtheria.

Mistress absent through illness. School carried on by Pupil teachers.

21.4.1896 Object Lessons – Revision of the Whale, the Cat, the Camel and the Elephant.

1.5.1896 – Taught the children a new action rhyme "Sing a Song of Sixpence".

Hark - can you hear them?

By walking up one of the lanes beside the school you will see, set behind it, the St. Agnes Coastguard headquarters with its fine bay window on the first floor; beyond lie the Coastguard Houses. **This is private property.** Built in the 1890s and with a telephone connection to the lookout on the coast, the rocket apparatus with its breeches buoy could be made ready at a moments notice should a ship run aground . Two days after Christmas 1900, the clipper Seine was wrecked at Perranporth where the local team failed to get a line to the stranded crew. A poem excerpt tells more. (St. Anns is the local pronunciation of St. Agnes where 'g' is silent!)

As soon as St. Anns gear was fixed,
The elevating done,
The rocket flew with the small line,
St. Anns was number one.

Back down to British Road, turn right and continue up the hill and through the gate on the left next to the entrance to the Methodist Chapel (built in 1860 for a congregation of nearly 1000). **Walk through the Garden of Rest to the far corner where there is a gate-house** which is in fact the old mortuary. It was here that Dr. Whitworth would carry out his post-mortems. **Cross the road to the Railway Inn and either pass through its doors(!) or take the route just to the left of the building into its car park and through the gate to the start of our walk.** On this last stage, look up to your left at the pine trees set on top of an old mine tip. This is the evidence for Dorcas' Shaft, part of the Polbreen tin mine. The name of the shaft is derived from a sorry tale. In a nearby cottage once lived a woman called Dorcas. One night the poor creature lost her reason and threw herself down the shaft! Although her broken body was recovered and removed for burial, her spirit remained in the mine, where it took a malicious delight in tormenting the industrious miner, calling him by name and luring him from his work. Although no one is credited with having seen the ghost, her voice caused much trouble and more than one miner is reputed to have had his clothes torn from his back by the spirit. However, Dorcas once saved the life of a miner by calling his name so persistently that he left his "end" to find out who was calling him. No sooner had he moved than the roof of the level fell on the spot where he had been working. The lucky miner for ever after declared that he had been saved by Dorcas. Although the spirit has not been heard for many years, some still claim to have "felt her presence". *Can you feel it?*

Bibliography

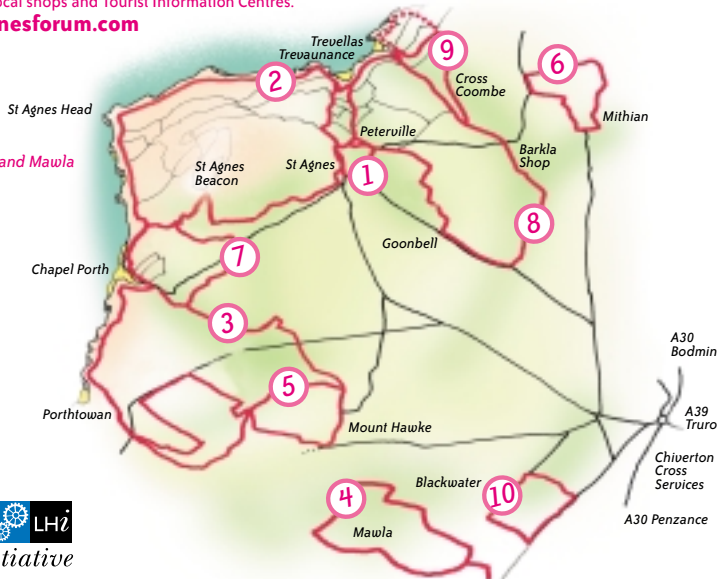
- The St. Agnes Posts by Bill Morrison, Journal of the St. Agnes Museum Trust No. 5, 1989.
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- St. Agnes Parish 1850 – 1920 A Photographic Record by Clive Benney, 1988
- Friendly Retreat The Story of a Parish by Maurice Bizley, 1955 (reprinted 1994).

This map is one of a series available from local shops and Tourist Information Centres.

For further information visit www.stagnesforum.com

- Walk 1 St Agnes Village Trail
- Walk 2 St Agnes Beacon
- Walk 3 Porthtowan, Banns Vale, Mount Hawke and Chapel Porth
- Walk 4 Wheal Rose, the Poldice Plateway and Mawla
- Walk 5 Mount Hawke
- Walk 6 Mithian Walk
- Walk 7 Wheal Coates, Chapel Porth and Wheal Laurence Valley
- Walk 8 Water Lane, Wheal Butson and Jericho Valley
- Walk 9 Jericho Valley and Cross Coombe
- Walk 10 Blackwater

St Agnes 2000
Regeneration Forum
Chairman - John Slater
Parish Rooms
St Agnes
Cornwall



walk number

1

ST. AGNES

HERITAGE TRAIL

St Agnes village trail
1 1/2km or 1 mile

