

METHODIST TEA-TREATS IN CORNWALL¹

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Tea-treats were held in conjunction with Sunday Schools, and in Cornwall these were emerging in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries. At that time Sunday Schools provided a basic education in reading, writing and numeracy and religious education was not as prominent as it later became. Sunday Schools not only existed among Methodists but the Church of England and the older nonconformist churches such as the Baptists, Congregationalists and Quakers had them as well.

It must be remembered that many children worked during the week and Sunday was the only day when they could be taught. There are indications that a desire to treat children emerged quite early in some areas especially during the occasional holidays such as Whit-Monday which was generally observed in Cornwall and perhaps feast days as well as Mid-Summer, especially in mining areas. It is not known just how early anything resembling a tea-treat first appeared among Cornish Methodists.

There is an account² of the anniversary of the Hayle Sunday School which took place in June 1827 on Whit Monday. The Hayle children were joined by the Angarrack branch of the school and 600 children went in procession with the two Wesleyan ministers at their head, "to the heights of the Towans" and reached a natural amphitheatre "carpeted with nature's green". "Appropriate" hymns were sung after an address by the Rev. Thomas Martin after which they returned to the chapel for tea and cakes. They then went to the beach, formed a circle where prayer was offered and hymns sang and, on the way back, rested for a while at Riviere House and may well have sung a hymn there.

In the same year, according to Frank Mitchell's *Annals of an Ancient Cornish Town*³ there was a meeting of the Redruth Sunday School Union on Saturday 14th August of 1900 children with their teachers. They could not hold it in the School field because of bad weather so tea and cake had to be taken in the Methodist Chapel. The event may well have involved a number of separate Sunday Schools but some of the ingredients of the later chapel Tea-treats are here.

In 1831, at Falmouth, the fiftieth anniversary of the founding of Sunday Schools by Robert Raikes, in 1780, was celebrated by the Sunday Schools of the town in procession. (There were similar celebrations across Cornwall in 1880 for the centenary of the movement).

At Morvah, in 1835, a Sunday school was established with a hundred children and twenty five teachers. The minutes of that Sunday School record how on Saturday 25th June 1836, *the day appointed for the Tea-Drinking- the weather being fine the children walked two and two, attended by the teachers, to the top of the watch (a hill so called) which commands a fine prospect of the*

1 Expanded and revised from talk given at the CALH Conference 2009.

2 *West Briton* 8.6.1827.

3 Quoted by Mavis Phabey *Old Cornwall Journal* 2000 p.39

western part of Cornwall extending from the Land's End to Redruth.

The children sang;

I sing the almighty power of God,

That made the mountains rise,

That spread the flowing seas abroad,

And built the lofty skies.

Watchcroft at 820' is the highest point of the Penwith Hills and the hymn would have been appropriate. At the close of the walk the children were treated to tea and cake. Morvah in those days was a mining parish and for many of the children this would have been a rare treat. The teachers would hope that, as well as enjoyment and healthy air, there would be an appreciation of the greatness of God shown in creation. This was not usually the object of later tea treats. At Morvah there *was* a procession, we don't know how formal, and tea and food were served.⁴ The date was close to the 23rd of June which was St John's Eve and marked by bonfires. Morvah Wesleyans continued to have their treat on or close to that date.⁵

While in Camborne, Thomas Collins, the Methodist minister stationed there at the time, formed a ragged school at Redruth for the children who were poor. On Whit-Monday, May 25th 1849, in order *to save them from the perils of the noisy, revelling fair at Redruth*, he took them by train to Hayle. That journey must have been one to remember.⁶

Three days later on the 28th May 1849 the scholars of a Hayle Wesleyan Sunday School held their Gala Day and *perambulated* through different parts of Hayle and Copperhouse. A number of scholars came from Camborne by train and assembled on the Towans where they were *regaled* with cakes and milk.⁷ The numbers were large but "monster meetings" to show solidarity with a cause happened in those days. There was much here which was characteristic of later tea-treats. The train used by Thomas Collins would have been on the Hayle Railway, which ran then only from Redruth to Hayle, and it must have been very exciting to travel in open trucks behind a steam engine! At the end of June 1849 300 children were treated on Hayle Towans to cake and milk. (The absence of tea in both cases is noticeable).

On Whit-Monday 1857 the Penzance Wesleyan Association Sunday School held their annual tea treat that year on Trencrom Hill. About a hundred members and friends *repaired to that wild elevated spot*. They came by the West Cornwall Railway to St Erth station and then walked up to the top of the hill. Tea was *furnished* by Mrs Quick of Trencrom. The Penzance Band played during the tea and an *agreeable afternoon and evening was spent*.⁸

In the press report there are hints that this was not the first annual tea treat of this Sunday school

4 Harvey (2007) pp.3,22-44.

5 S.C. Rowell (1989) p.26.

6 Coley. Samuel "The Life of Thomas Collins" n.d. pp.297-8.

7 RCG 1.6.1849.

8 RCG 24.7.1857.

and that going to Trencrom may have been one of a number of venues used by them.

The tea-treat is established.

By 1860 Tea treats in connection with the Sunday school had become annual events and in many cases the form did not change for a hundred years or more.

Tea Treats were also held in connection with Bands of Hope and followed a similar format to that of the Sunday school where they had a procession with a band, a tea and games in a field. They also carried banners. The Band of Hope Union was a temperance organisation which worked closely with Sunday Schools well into the twentieth century. The Mount Hawke Band of Hope Tea-Treat had as many as two bands and paraded with banners in 1861, ending up for tea in Mr Garland's field. (Chacewater and St Day bands were used). However, it was quite an event the following year. From Mount Hawke the Redruth and St Day bands led the party to St Agnes and from thence to Trevaunce Pier which was a distance of three miles! They then had their penny trips on the boats, returning to Mount Hawke for the tea. The day was rounded off by a concert.⁹ In the early days the Sunday Schools of a town or a district combined together to hold tea treats. This had changed by the middle of the nineteenth century as the Sunday Schools became more associated with particular churches. There was no longer a strong feeling that unity and solidarity had to be shown for the sake of the whole movement.

In the nineteenth century it was more usual for the tea-treat to be held, not on the beach, but in a field close to the chapel. Even in towns and villages with more than one Methodist chapel, each held to its own. One cannot help feeling that the pictures of the procession of the children of Newlyn Centenary with their banner held at the forefront was a defiant gesture towards the other part of Newlyn, Street an Nowan! Centenary (Primitive Methodist) and Trinity (Wesleyan) kept to their own traditions and there was a competitive spirit. The same could be said of the chapels in Mousehole. Even where the denomination was the same, as at Hayle (Copperhouse and Foundry), both Wesleyan, that rivalry was still there.

Prior to the treat the children would go in procession around the village or town accompanied by a brass or silver band. The children would then "repair" (the word used in the press) to the field for games and to be "regaled" with tea and buns.

Before the Second World War the tea-treat as a town or village event was often being replaced by an outing to the sea-side. It was a reversion to an earlier form but it did remove the event from the local community.

During the war outings to the seaside were difficult so those who had opted for such outings returned to the more traditional form of tea-treat. For example, High Street Methodist Church, Penzance, went up to Treneere where there was a field. Mousehole (Zion) also reverted to the field near Paul Church.

Sunday school minute books and treasurer's account books show that a great deal of business and

9 Ashley Rowe *The Chapel at Mount Hawke* (Journal of the St Agnes Museum Trust) p.15f

expense was associated with the tea-treat. Buns had to be bought and each child would have, as of right, a free bun. Adults would have been expected to pay but it was necessary to know how many children were to come and a band had to be booked. It was hoped that a farmer or landowner would “kindly lend” a field. In many cases it would have been the same field but the sun did not always shine and there would be times when the schoolroom or chapel hall would have to be resorted to.

Pre-First World War photographs of tea-treats show the children dressed in immaculate clothes as they went in procession, the white dresses of the girls contrasting with the dark suits of the boys. Since the procession probably ended in the field where the tea and the games were held, the dress seems hardly suitable for these activities! The adults also wore clothes which they wore in chapel. Men would be in dark suits and hats, ministers perhaps with straw hats and women dressed as they would be for chapel, after all photographers often attended these occasions and issued postcards showing the treat!

It was not only villages which had processions but also the larger Cornish towns such as Redruth where the occasion, in the early years of the twentieth century, is very vividly described by Frank Glasson of St Austell.¹⁰ This was in connection with the large United Methodist Chapel and it seems always in blazing August heat; so much so that the route had to be shortened as time went on. The ministers and Sunday school superintendents had the honour of leading the procession and there were three bands and then the whole hierarchy of adults down to the smallest children accompanied by their mothers. The Union children were also there dressed as immaculately as any of the others. The procession would be over a thousand strong and special trains brought in people to witness the celebration. Afterwards the children had plenty of opportunities to spoil their clothes as cherries, strawberries and much ice-cream was consumed. There were balloons and fireworks, but no mention of games. All this was held in Lanyon's Gardens and Penventon. The whole thing came to an end when the Sunday School decided to go to Carbis Bay for their tea-treats.

J.F. Odgers wrote about how Camborne (Wesleyan) Sunday School abandoned the yearly day out to the seaside at Hayle in 1865 and had a tea treat similar to that at Redruth. First they met at Wesley Chapel for a service with three hymns and an address. There was then a procession where thousands of people lined the route. Each child had to bring a cup which was tied round the neck by ribbons. They went through the gardens at Lowennac (Basset Road) and then Veor before reaching Trevu Field (Beacon Hill). Here they had the “famous” bun and drank tea. Mr C.V. Thomas, a very prominent Methodist, later bought the field so that the tea-treat could take place at the same venue.¹¹

Fishing villages such as Mousehole often had more than one chapel and each would try to outdo each other in the celebrations which took place at different times. The boats had to be home and

10 Rev. Thomas Shaw ed. *Book of Memories of Cornish Methodism in Two Parts*. (Cornish Methodist Historical Association 1994) pp.57-60.

11 J.F. Odgers *Camborne Wesley Chapel. Notes on the History of the Sunday School. 1810-1950*.

this meant that the tea-treat had to be in the late summer. This applied to Sunday School Anniversary so that both parents had the opportunity to hear their children recite in chapel. Anniversary hymns were carefully practiced and the same hymns and pieces would be sung at certain times during the procession. Mr Percy Harvey who attended Zion United Methodist Chapel at Mousehole recalls the tea-treat or 'gala' as it was called. It was the custom for the Zion children to collect snails before the Wesleyan tea-treat as it was believed that collecting snails brought on rain so spoiling the occasion for them. You could be quite sure that the Wesleyans were doing the same for the United Methodists! The huge banner was proudly paraded and this can still be seen in the St Clement ex Wesleyan Chapel showing Christ calming the storm. The procession would wind its way through the narrow streets and along each pier, the band playing. Paul had a band in those days so it would either be them or some other band locally.

Forms were taken up to a field near Paul Church and also the Wesleyan (!) urn so that refreshments were ready quickly. After tea there were games which included, as in a number of tea-treats, "kissing in the ring."

However, the Mousehole Gala suffered the same fate just before the last war of so many of the others when the charabanc took the children to some resort such as Carbis Bay or Praa Sands. The Gala was restored during the war but it did not continue afterwards.

Liz Harman gives a very good description of the Newlyn Centenary tea-treat which like Mousehole was also referred to as a "Gala"¹².

Fun and Games in the Clay District and Elsewhere.

Edgar Tucker of Bethel, near St Austell, remembered Bethel Feast Day which was held on Whit Monday. It seems that it was a half day's holiday because the celebrations had to be held in the afternoon, the men being at work in the morning. It did take the form of a tea treat. The Sunday school classes and teachers with banners went in procession with Mount Charles Band. They marched through much of the eastern end of St Austell before going into the Sunday school room for tea. Here was Saffron cake, yeast cake, slab cake, jam and cream splits. A feature quite common was that certain persons did certain jobs year by year and woe betide anyone else who tried to do them! At Bethel Billy Whale boiled the water, and Mick Bartlett stoked the furnace. They then went to the field for games which included the inevitable kissing in the ring. It all ended with a floral dance through the village.¹³

The floral dance may or may not have been unique to Bethel but there was often a procession where the children wound their way through streets and gardens. This was often referred to as the "Serpentine" and at Trewartha where they wound their way through the crowds it was the Serpentine Waltz." This took place near the end of the evening with a Mr Ruddle leading with the band. The very last activity was a game called the "Jolly Miller" where the same Mr Ruddle stood in the middle of the circle to see fair play. The "Serpentine" may have come in some other instances before the tea. The "Trewartha Tea-Party" took place in June on a Monday during a

12 Liz Harman *Now 'Ark to Me* Cornish Tales (Linkinhorne 2008). pp.82-87.

13 Ed. Shaw *Memories Part 2* p.51.

school day and, until 1905, the children did not have the afternoon off until a new headmaster granted it.¹⁴

One of the most detailed descriptions of tea-treats is to be found in R.S. Best's *Clay Country Remembered*. Best writes about Trewoon which is a village adjoining the western side of St Austell but close to the great tip at Burngullov and can be called a "clay village." It was felt important, in their celebrations, to excel the neighbouring communities of Gover and Lanjeth. St Dennis or such other bands as Stenalees, Indian Queens, Foxhole, Sticker, Bugle and Mount Charles would *be in attendance*, as the posters always put it. Trewoon itself did not have a band. One of these bands led the parade through the village and played on the field, *kindly lent*, as the posters again always put it by one of the farmers and the choice was dependent on whether the hay had been cut or not.

The saffron bun was described as *big as cow pats in a field* (one hopes that this association did not always reflect each year the activities of lately grazing cows so often turned into a harvested field of hay before the tea-treat!). The bun was well studded with currants and with *oozing richness was food fit for the gods*.

Tea was sugary (presumably the traditional Cornish Methodist boycott of sugar as a protest against slavery was relaxed for this occasion!).

Having eaten well, athletics followed with prizes for every starter. Bigger lads played cricket or football and the *tinnies* amused themselves with *tag, Sally-go round or Kissing Ring*. (In most places the latter activity was not confined to the *tinnies*!). There were *stannins* (stalls) with confections, lucky dips and balloons.

The *stannins* would not necessarily be organised by the Sunday school. A photograph of a tea-treat in 1894 held by the picturesque thatched Roseworthy Chapel which stood by the old A30 road between Camborne and Connor Downs shows beautifully decorated 'gypsy style' caravans which must indicate that travelling traders were drawn by the prospect of large numbers attending the event. They would set up their stalls which would sell sweets and other 'goodies.'¹⁵ I don't suppose anybody minded George Gerry cashing in on the occasion at the St Agnes (Wesleyan) tea-treat. He was an elderly white bearded gentleman, the central figure of a group, posing for the camera, dispensing his wares which were limpets from a basket. Even the policeman, very Edwardian with a walrus mustache is "in attendance" and obviously enjoying the occasion very much.

F.L. Hoare¹⁶ wrote that the games at tea-treats were *Kiss in the Ring, Rounders and Snakes*. He described how when the music stopped *a long trail was formed, circling round until the leader was surrounded by several rings of players*.

14 Christine North *A History of Trewartha Methodist Chapel Veryan* . p. 12 ff.

15 J.Osborne & D.Thomas *Victorian and Edwardian Camborne through the eyes of the Camera* p.38.

16 F.L. Hoare MSS in Penzance Old Cornwall Archives, Morrab Library, Penzance.

Snakes, is interestingly in the plural. Dr. Garry Tregidga, speaking at the (CALH Conference 2009) well described the *Snail Creep* which was part of the tea-treats in the Bugle area and such processions which were not merely parades through streets but involved an element of “ritual” have very old if not ancient origins. *Serpentine walks, serpentine waltzes*, already mentioned, were similar sorts of activities where children moved snake like through streets and gardens are probably related. Penzance at mid-summer had a ritual rather similar with all ages taking part .¹⁷ The *Snake or Serpent Dance* has been well described¹⁸ as remembered in the Clay District around St Austell and it is claimed that it has its origin in the medieval dance called the *Farandole*. In the Clay District it would round off the celebrations rather than being the children’s procession before the tea and games. Adults would also take part. The *Foral Dance or Furry Dance* which famously survives at Helston is remembered as part of Tea-treat celebrations in the Clay District. How far back they go in that area is not known.

Canon's Town. A History of a Tea Treat

The village of Canon's Town lies between Hayle and Penzance and is divided by the very busy A30 road. Right up to recent times, with the exception of 1929, the tea treat was usually held in a field close to the chapel so that water could be boiled in the schoolroom. If the action was some distance away Mr Broad would have to be called upon to lend his horse and waggon to carry forms and other equipment to the site. In 1934 it was languishing since an announcement was made that if it was not supported by the public then it would no longer be held at home. There was a parade through the village but that would have been difficult when traffic levels increased. There were games. While the children had their tea in the field the adults had theirs in the schoolroom.

The war of 1939-45 may have saved the tea-treat at Canon's Town since many evacuees came and food was scarce but permits were obtained from the Food Office for the provision of supplies of tea and sugar so they were able to have something extra. Tea-treat saffron buns were still provided. Mr Tregarthen provided the milk for the tea.¹⁹

Celebrations which involved elements of the Tea-treat.

Dozmary Pool, Piran Round and Porthleven.

There were regular occasions which were not tea-treats as such but contained much if not all those elements. In most cases Sunday School Anniversaries were held on a Sunday and was separate from the tea-treat which was held on a weekday. The anniversary services and recitations were confined to the chapel. However, it is remembered that at the time of the First World War St Luke's Chapel held their anniversary tea at nearby Dozmary Pool and Rose held theirs at Piran Round.

At Porthleven the St Peterside celebrations which marked the feast of St Peter took place around the time of the feast day (29th June). The origins of the celebrations are uncertain but it is thought that the parishioners, before the village had a church of their own in the nineteenth century, went

17 Cooke. G.A. *A Topographical and Statistical Description of the County of Cornwall* (McMillan c.1830) pp.188ff.

18 Davey. Alison and Merv. *Snail Creeps and Tea Treats* (Bodmin 2008)pp.15-16.

19 Cedric Appleby *Canon's Town Methodist Church* (1978) pp.10-11.

in procession to whatever parish church their part of the village belonged to. So there were separate processions to Sithney and Breage. At some stage the Methodists took a leading part with the children of the two Methodist Sunday Schools but not on the same day.

Elsie Balme²⁰ remembers two celebrations on separate days. As at Newlyn and Mousehole there were two Methodist chapels. Fore Street (Wesleyan) held their procession on the 29th June while Peverell Road (Bible Christian) held theirs on the 30th unless Sunday intervened somewhere. Both celebrations took a similar form.

At 2.30pm (though usually 3pm.) there was a hymn, prayer and a march around the town with a band. A heavy Sunday school banner was carried by two older boys and the children carried flags of a number of nations. During the Second World War there were occasions when there was no band and the procession stopped at certain points for the singing of hymns. One would imagine Sankey Hymns such as *Will your anchor hold* and *Let the lower lights be burning*. As a child Mrs Balme was irritated by the old men singing the choruses over and over again before the procession resumed and Kitto's Field seemed for long so far away.

This field was used for the drying of nets but on these occasions it was cleared of such things and the grass cut. A big marquee was erected and there were urns so tea and saffron buns were consumed. Games followed. During the war evacuees were present and they entered into the occasion very easily and this was also true of other places at that time.

In common with tea-treats held in towns and villages themselves, the public were involved to some extent **and** Mrs Balme remembers a small circus.

Bands.

An important contribution to the Tea-treat when held at home was made by the band. The proliferation of bands, both brass and silver, in Cornwall is remarkable. Angarrack Wesleyan Sunday School was engaging bands right up to 1954, at least. In 1886 they paid Copperhouse Band £1. 10s. Eleven years later Copperhouse was charging £2.10s. In 1919 they engaged the prodigious Camborne Town Band for £7.10s. But it must have been a rare luxury for next year it was back to Copperhouse at £5. So Copperhouse had it until 1928 when St Erth made its first appearance at the tea treat charging £5.10s. Perhaps fearing price competition they managed to reduce next year to £4. 14s. 7d! Next year (1933) Hayle came at £5, then Camborne Junior. Marazion Band came a couple of years and in 1937 they played indoors! Considering the size of the schoolroom there it must have been quite overpowering. Other bands were Hayle Silver, St Ives Town, Lelant, Penzance Salvation Army and Penzance Silver. Costs went up after 1945. In 1950 Penzance Silver charged £12. 10s.²¹

The band would be treated to refreshments which they would find very welcome after their exertions. No doubt there were complaints at times that they spent too much time with refreshments or, even worse, to hostelry nearby!

20 Elsie Balme *Seagull Morning. The Cornwall of My Childhood*. Tabb House (1890)p.69ff.

21 Angarrack Sunday School Treasurer's Book. In Cornwall Record Office. Recent Accession.

These bands also appeared at Canon's Town with the addition of the Home Guard Band during the war. (What a shame that Capt. Mainwaring's platoon did not have a band !)

A disaster was averted at Canon's Town in 1935. A minute of that year contained a proposal ' to write to Mr Tanner of St Ives for the price of his radio van and, if cheaper than the band, to engage it for the tea-treat.'

Perhaps the radio van was more expensive but I hope that that was not the only reason why such a horrible alternative to live music was rejected! ²²

In the early days of tea-treats the Bible Christians in the Luxulyan Circuit objected to bands as a minute in their Quarterly Meeting in 1861 indicates;

As the Anniversaries of Sunday Schools in this Circuit are celebrated in a way that is prejudicial to spiritual prosperity and derogative to the promotion of intelligence and morality: we earnestly recommend to our friends the propriety of dispensing with Bands of Music. ²³

Tea-treat Venues.

Often the same field was often used for the treat but sometimes changes had to be made when the state of cultivation of that field did not allow it.

Some Sunday Schools were within walking distance of the grounds of a mansion and often the resident gentleman or lady would allow the Sunday school to have their tea and games there. Even if they were not Methodists they were generally sympathetic to their use by the local Sunday school. Redruth Wesley used Penventon, grounds belonging to Sir Arthur Carkeek, a leading contractor for major engineering projects and a Methodist. Camborne Wesley used Trevu which belonged to Dr. George Smith, (a leading Methodist layman and scholar) and Pool (Wesleyan) used Captain Paull's grounds at Trevenson. Trenowth was permitted to use Tremough and Nancegollan used Bickford Smith's grounds at Trevarno. Bickford Smith was yet another leading Methodist and inventor of the safety fuse. The Williams family let Scorrier Wesley use land at Scorrier House. Near Penzance, in 1885, Mr Bolitho, not a Methodist, kindly let the Parade Street United Methodist Chapel in the town use Trewidden.

Liz Harman remembered that Newlyn Centenary (Primitive Methodist) used the Steer Field at Trereife, the property of the Le Grice family. The Le Grice's were not Methodists, but they provided plenty of dry wood for the fires to boil the water for making tea. In gratitude the entire Sunday school would go to the house and sing a hymn for the squire and his lady. ²⁴ Newlyn Trinity, (Wesleyan) also used Trereife.

There were locations which had a certain scenic or historical value. The use by Morvah Sunday School of Watchcroft has already been mentioned but there was also Carn Brea which offered spectacular views. Beatrice Morcom remembered that St Luke's Chapel Sunday School on Bodmin

²² Appleby op.cit. pp.10-11.

²³ John Rowe, *Bridges Methodist Church, Luxulyan, 1885-1985*. p.24.

²⁴ Liz Harman op.cit. pp. 82-87.

Moor held their anniversary which included a tea at Dozmary Pool. Mr John Rapson has provided me with photographs of this event held as late as 1968 & 1969. Another case of an anniversary with tea in the open air was at St Piran Round where Rose Sunday School celebrated. Sithney Wesleyan Sunday School went to Antron where each child not only received tea and a bun but also an orange which is an interesting addition to the usual practice.

To the Beach.

Canonstown, as already indicated, in 1929, tried taking the children away to the beach. On this occasion it was Praa Sands. Berryman's cars were hired to take the children. The officers paid 6d, and the other adults 1/-. The tea-treat would, on this occasion, have become less of a village event.

As we have seen some of the earliest treats did involve travelling to a more distant place than the field near the chapel. For some Sunday Schools a day away from their immediate locality offered attractions. Finding a day when people were off work would have been difficult before Bank Holidays were introduced later in the nineteenth century.

Praa Sands may also have been an early venue for the Hayle Sunday Schools but the most popular venue in West Cornwall was Carbis Bay where, as early as the late 1870s, John Payne cleared mining waste near the beach on which site emerged Payne's Tea Rooms. They not only provided refreshments in the tea-garden but there were also swings, see-saws and roundabouts as well as a shop selling buckets and spades and everything else for the beach.

Mr Payne was a Wesleyan and the gardens were soon patronised by Carbis Bay (Wesleyan) Sunday school. There was another Methodist chapel in Carbis Bay (Chyangweal) which was the New Connexion chapel near the present "Tesco's." They used the other tea-gardens, "Williams's." Mr Williams belonged to the Methodist New Connexion. Chyangweal therefore used Williams's tea-rooms being a New Connexion chapel²⁵.

Soon other Sunday Schools were coming to Carbis Bay. First of all they came in Jersey cars and then by train. Carbis Bay station is right by the beach and right up to about 1960 long trains packed with Sunday school scholars made their way from Penzance, Camborne and Redruth. The trip to the tea-rooms and the beach cut out the need for so much preparation for catering and booking bands. The children enjoyed the train journey and the informality of not being forced to wear best clothes.

There was always the problem of the weather and, on one occasion, Canon's Town Sunday School spent the whole day in Payne's Tea Rooms.

Once Sunday schools began to go away for their tea-treats there was a desire to go further afield. Newquay, throughout the twentieth century, was growing as Cornwall's premier resort and could offer a boating lake which became popular with the children. Here, the train journey was even

25 Lena & Donald Bray. *St Ives Heritage* (Redruth 1982 p.75f).

longer and included the long branch line with its many halts from Chacewater. As Sunday Schools became smaller some of them joined together to go off on the treat by train but even then one hears that different schools occupied their own part of the beach!

Newlyn (Trinity, Wesleyan), when it went over to sea-side locations used Sennen, Carbis Bay, Marazion and Portreath among other places.

The Purpose of Tea-treats.

There have been suggestions that the tea-treat and its accompanying procession was an expression of openness in the face of a suspicion held by certain clergy and others in authority that such meetings of children with unlicensed teachers could be subversive.

In the early days the motive may well have been the relief of poverty, at least for a day. Some of the earliest tea-treats in West Cornwall involved large numbers of working-class children from the rather dreary industrial areas of Camborne and Redruth. The Sunday school gave them the only education that was available and the rest of the week was spent working long hours. The excitement of the train ride to Hayle and the fresh air of the Towans relieved the children from a poor environment. They had food which was rather better than they would have had at home. Today Morvah would not be regarded as an industrial area with a poor environment but in 1836 there would have been mining and the children of the recently formed Sunday school seemed to have had the same need to have been taken out of their environment as they went on expedition to Watchcroft. As described above it also met a spiritual need as they experienced some of the wonders of creation. In much of the nineteenth century Creation was seen as a place where the Creator's hand could be seen and, except for flood damage at the time of Noah and human activity, it was where it had been left by God on the seventh day of Creation. Geology and Darwin had yet to make their impact!

The Victorians certainly believed that 'the devil found work for idle hands to do' and the few days of idleness during the year, two of which were Whit Monday and the miner's mid-summer holiday, were occasions when children could fall for the temptations of the world. The tea-treat would take them off the streets or away from, as Thomas Collins believed when he organised the trip to Hayle in 1849, the allurements of a local fair.

It has been suggested that the processional part of the tea-treat was a demonstration of good order. For some, such as the Revd. Richard Polwhele, meetings in the 1830s of children as well as adults were dangerous in the light of the revolutionary fervour which he believed existed and could break out from any gathering. For this reason he was even against Sunday Schools. The public spectacle of orderly and well-dressed children marching behind a banner showed that Sunday Schools were orderly institutions and posed no threat to public order.

By the mid-nineteenth century tea-treats were associated much more with the chapels from which they grew rather than the Sunday Schools of a locality in general. It is easy to see a sense of pride here, especially where there were rival Sunday Schools such as in Newlyn and Mousehole. The procession was expressive of their solidarity with their part of the village especially in the case of Newlyn and other places in Cornwall.

Wartime.

During the Second World War many evacuees came to Cornwall. There were children from large urban areas many of whom had not seen the sea, cattle, farms and green fields. Their culture was very different from the Cornish children among whom they were settling. Yet children with the strong accents of big cities and unused to the Methodist culture of Cornwall joined Sunday-Schools and went on tea-treats. The Cornish children were equally unused to the evacuees. The evidence is that they all integrated well in both the weekly Sunday school activities and the tea-treats. The Sunday Schools played an important part in preventing a damaging social upheaval. With rationing in force and all sorts of wartime restrictions, the tea-treat brought a certain amount of colour into the lives of young people. As in the past a certain poverty was being relieved and in both World Wars there is evidence that the authorities made concessions for that one day and, with the pooling of resources, a certain amount of ingenuity in food preparation, wonders could be achieved!

During the First World War Wall Sunday School near Hayle was able to send tea-treat buns to ex-scholars serving in the forces.²⁶

Today many Sunday Schools have ceased and others are small in number. In the summer months beaches are very crowded and children are taken to inland centres such as 'Flambards,' 'Dairyland' or a steam railway. The Methodist District organises events which can be attended by scholars from several Sunday Schools. Although there is the demise of many Sunday Schools there are still places where something of the tea-treat survives.

Perhaps there is enough here to show that the tea-treat, while following traditional forms did not always hold to these rigidly. There were reversion to older practice and perhaps unintentionally preserved much of older traditions which could have been lost as well as fulfilling a social need and bringing enjoyment to many young people.

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Mistakes of fact and interpretation are entirely my own.

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Details of other books appear in footnotes.

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