



Market Cross, Penzance, Lithograph by John Skinner Prout  
Published and printed by John Pope Vibert of Penzance Nov. 9th 1882

## Street Names of Penzance

S C Julyan MA

Published in the Old Cornwall Journal Volume 1, journal 6

S C Julyan was the grandson of Penzance historian L J Courtney

In visiting any new town one finds oneself speculating on the meaning of its unfamiliar street-names and the reason for them, when discovered, usually throws light on the history of the place. In most towns we find names, either of royal or otherwise prominent persons, or connected historical events, that will tell us all at once the date of the building or re-naming of the street: thus few towns of any size are without some reminder of our late Queen (Victoria), but Penzance has a better right to its "Alexandre Road" than most, for in person she opened it in 1865. Without good reason we also have several places called "Regent Terrace", etc., after George IV, when during the incapacity of his father (1811 - 1820) he was Prince Regent.

"Clarence House; etc., again reminds us that William IV was Duke of Clarence before he came to the throne in 1830, while "Adelaide" Street is named after his wife.

"Empress Avenue marks the 1897 Jubilee of the Empress Queen there is a sprinkling, too, of "Victoria" and "Albert" names but with so long a reign as that of Queen Victoria these give little help with dates, though "Alberts" may roughly be put down to the years 1840 to 1860. "Wellington" Terrace and Place tell us of Waterloo, while the Crimean War has given us an

“Alma” Terrace. But all these are almost as impersonal as the “North” Street (a variant of Causeway-head), “South” Parade, “East” Street (a variant of “Market-Jew Street”) or “West” Terrace, which we might share with any town, and it is for more local records that we look with most interest.

It is a commonplace that towns owe their existence to some favouring geographical position. Where they have arisen either the dryness or moisture of the climate suits an industry; the land yields specially good supplies of some raw material; a river becomes fordable, bridgeable, or navigable; or a coastline offers some shelter for vessels, or beaching-place for fishing-craft. It was the latter that caused Penzance, and about the harbour we naturally look for its older street-names.

From the earliest days when Penzance could be looked upon as a town it would have had a quay, or “key” as it was often spelt: in the early 18th century we find mention, in Dr Borlase’s letters, of a place for mooring boats or small vessels, with stones planted upright for fastening ropes, that stood near the site of the present Harbour Office. From this the houses must have spread up the hill, and the street leading up from the quay to the newer part of the town would naturally be “Quay” Street. In this we find ourselves close to what is now the Parish Church of St Mary, built about a century ago, but replacing a smaller building that was for many centuries a chapel-of-ease to the mother-church at Madron. This building (and not, as one might suppose, the Wesleyan Methodist Chapel gave its present name to “Chapel” Street, and also its older name, “Our Lady” Street.

Three houses between the Church and the Vicarage were once commonly known as “Rotterdam” Buildings: this recorded the fact that they were built with money from a Dutch prize.

Coming now to the Market House quarter, “Market Place” explains itself, and the “Greenmarket,” now so inconveniently full of huge motor-buses and charabancs, tells us how it was once used for stalls whose owners supplied the town with green-stuff. Northwards we have “Causeway Head,” a century or less ago known as “Caunsehead”; “caunse” being a more local way of saying caucey or causeway, meaning a stone-paved road. This besides the banal “North” Street had the old name “Church” Street, presumably because it led to what was then the parish church at Madron. Farther on we come to “St Clare” Street, and just as we leave the town there is “Chapel St Clare,” explained by a quotation from the Guide to Penzance, 1845, “There was a chapel dedicated to St Clare about midway between the Quay and Madron Church; no part of it remains, but Mr T Coulson recollects having traced its foundations when a boy, in the field adjoining the bound-stone of the town.”

Returning to the Greenmarket, west of it we come upon a series of names connected with "Alverton:" this points back to the possessor of the land at this end of the town about the time of the Conquest, a certain Alwardus. The only other name worth mentioning here is "Buriton" Row. "Buriton" is said to be an old name for Penzance: if so, it is one shared with other places. From Buriton Row an easy way into the Market Place is by way of an opening now often spoken of as "Beare's Passage," from the name of an adjoining shop: I am more interested personally in its older name, "Harvey's Ope," which records ancestors of my own as owning land there, as well as containing the pleasing old word "ope".

"Market-Jew" Street is a delightful name, unique and suggestive of all sorts of interest, a great name for strangers to theorise about, but in fact just such a name as we find in many other towns, "London" Road, "Chester" Street, to take two at random, and merely announcing the fact that one leaves the place by this street to get to another town, in this case Market-Jew, otherwise Marazion.

Many of us can remember when the appearance of this eastern -end of the town was very different. Tumbledown cottages and small houses have been demolished, and larger, neater, but less interesting buildings have been erected in their place: for instance, where Albert Street now stands was once a lane leading down to the sea, known as "Neddy Betty's" Lane. This name it owed to a man, Edward Betty, who kept a small thatch-roofed inn, Betty's Inn, the remains of which could be seen about seventy years ago. The name Betty occurs frequently in the Gulval parish registers, c.1707-1747. My grandfather in his *Half a Century of Penzance*, said, "From the appearance of Neddy Betty's Lane it seemed to have been at one time the eastern entrance to the town," to which Mr J C Batten added that he had gathered from his father that there was a road into the town from the Eastern Green which came under the cliff, and entered Penzance somewhere in Market Jew Street. It was also a Penzance joke in Mr Batten's grandfather's days to speak of a man's coming home "under cliff" when he had failed in any undertaking, meaning that, not wishing to be seen, he had used the lower road and "sneaked in by the back-door" as it were.

New Town Lane on the same side of Market-Jew Street seems to refer to an extension of the town in this direction, in or beyond the lane. Further east on the other side "Penrose" Terrace and "Trewartha" Terrace commemorate, respectively, a land-owner's seat and a builder's name. Back in Market-Jew Street we find "Wood" Street, once "Pump" Lane; at its lower end a pump might have been seen not very many years since, though no waving wood is there. From this we reach "Bread" Street, a modern name due to the bakehouse at its western end. It was formerly and rightly called "Back" Lane, as running behind the back-gardens of Market-Jew Street. From Back Lane we now pass with ease to "Taraveor" Road, but many of us remember fields between them. This road was, and by many still is, called "Bull's" Lane. <sup>(2)</sup> Before 1820, the cattle market was held in what is now called Greenmarket, or one might connect this with the open space at the top of the hill which later served the purpose.

Certain streets named after saints, in what are popularly known as the "Battlefields," were so called by a Roman Catholic landowner who wished to do honour to the holy men of his church. "Belle Vue" and "Prospect" Place are self-explained titles, the latter a misnomer, however, since later building. Empress Avenue, already mentioned, was once a delightful short country walk, with the rustic name, "Gypsy" Lane: this leads to "Barwis" Hill, commemorating the name of a schoolmaster who taught at Penare at the top of it.

There are several street-names that remind one of old local families. "Daniel" place is the most interesting of these, for the Daniels were lords of the manor of Alverton in the 7th century. Alexander Daniel, who built a house at Laregan and died there in 1668, is buried in Madron Churchyard, that of his parish church. His son, George, founded and endowed the school at Madron known as the Daniel School. I owe the following information to the kindness of Canon Jennings, Vicar of Madron: "Daniel Place belongs to the Daniel Trust, and was let out on building leases in 1846. In the will there is mentioned a salt cellar there, and ground for drying fishing-nets. In those days fishing was the great industry of Penzance."

Another interesting street-name is that of "Morrab" Place, etc. I possess a paper relating to the building of St Mary's Place in which its houses are said to be situated in "Croft Morrap" and to be connected by a lane with "Morrap Lane, otherwise known as Parade Street." This croft was bounded on one side by the garden wall of Morrab House, then occupied by Mr Pidwell. "The Folly" is reminiscent of a pleasure-ground that existed there in the first half of the 18th century. Its distance from the town, as in other cases of the sort, was no doubt the occasion of the name of this and of the "Folly Fields" leading to it.

One of the problems of former days at Penzance was the connection of its eastern and western ends by road. It is now easy to pass by Wharf Road to Battery Road, but the land side of the harbour formerly consisted of a stony beach. Alexander Daniel writes in 1664 of "commons or commons of pasture on the waste lands called the Greens, between Laregan and the land under St. Mary's Chapel". This suggests a track across a sandy waste of towans. It was only in 1845 that the Promenade was built, and one still hears it called "the Western Green," or simply "the Green". From this it must have been possible to turn up to Chapel Street and so into the heart of Penzance. Then a short cut was made into Chapel Street by "Vounder Veor" Lane, "which was originally the only carriage road from Penzance to Newlyn, etc.," as my grandfather says in his book. In this name "lane" is not needed, for vounder veor in Cornish already means "great lane." From this, crossing Chapel Street, we get to "Abbey" Street," known in 1825 "New Street Slip," but re-named after a house, in which two ladies lived so secluded a life as to gain it the nickname "The Abbey". "New" Street, like so many New Streets, looks old and shabby. It was certainly not new at the end of the 17th century, for there is an item in the Borough Accounts at that date: "for repairing the way between New Street and the sea for cauncing, carrying stone, etc.. £5 19s. 6d" A court in New Street goes by the name of "Cherry Garden," suggestive of other and happier days when, the street was really new.

Another old way from town to sea is “Jennings Street,” or, until recently, “Lane.” I have it from the late Mr J B Cornish that in 1677 it was known as “Roche’s” Lane, and that in 1795 it was described as “Jennings Lane, formerly Major’s Lane, and previously Street-an-Dudden.””

“Captain’s Row” was a nickname of South Terrace, from the number of ship captains who lived retired, or in the intervals between their voyages, in its houses. “Sandy Bank” is a name that now seems almost without point, but excavations near still show the sand that was once in sight there. “Barbican” Lane and “Battery” Road suggest old defences of Mount’s Bay against the possible landings of enemy ships. The Barbican seems likely to have been an ancient fortification, perhaps Elizabethan, and the battery a more recent one. Battery Road, the most modern road in the town, carries on the name of the now destroyed Battery Square. “Coinage Hall” Street refers of course to the “coining” of tin by striking a coin or corner off the block to be tested, which if it reached the required standard was then stamped. The privilege of coining tin was a valued one, as bringing trade to a town. We read in one of Daniel’s letters to his son, 1664, “Penzance men are about to build a Coinage Hall upon your wastrell of the street below their Market House, which doth rightfully belong unto you as lord of the manor,” and urges him to claim compensation. The charter by which the privilege was obtained was already in the town: it is dated 1663. An entry in the Borough Accounts reads: “To Col. Godolphin’s clerk for bringing home the Coinage Charter, £1. 0s. 0d.” The hall was built in the position referred to, and was in use until 1816, when a larger one, that which names. Coinage Hall Street was built near the Quay.

In dealing with the street-names even of a comparatively small town it is not possible to mention more than a selection of those to which most interest seems to be attached, but Penzance serves well as an example of how much meaning a few such names may have for local historians.

I must add that for my facts I owe much to Mr Millett’s lectures on Penzance and to my grandfather’s Half a Century of Penzance; also to his guide-book, where several of Alexander Daniel’s letters are quoted.

#### Notes

1. “Caunsehead” is probably a translation of the Cornish pen caunse, “end or head of the paved way,” which still survives as “Pednycaunse” at Mousehole. Here the cobble-stones of the town gave way to the unpaved country road.

2 The names are evidently connected, tat-ow being Cornish for “bull.” Zarow meor (not veor) would mean “big bull” Possibly a bull-ring is referred to: a miracle play was called gwary myr, “play-spectacle” and tarowvyr may be “bull-show” similarly

3 Morep or Moreb in Cornish means a rough pasture next to the sea shore.

4 This seems likely to be “Meadow Street,” Street-an Dodn in Cornish, though it is not clear where the meadow could have been.