

LEWANNICK SEVENTY YEARS AGO. Interesting Reminiscences.

**(By the Rev. H. T. Hooper). Published in the Cornish & Devon Post 7<sup>th</sup> April 1934**

There cannot be many people now living who are able from personal knowledge to describe village life near Launceston seventy years ago. Up to 1865, when I was ten years old, I had hardly known any other place than Lewannick, in which parish I had been born. To-day it is no doubt possible to get there very easily from Launceston by motor 'bus, but when I was a boy you could do the journey only on foot or by such chance conveyance as might be going that way. One of my early recollections is of going to Launceston on horseback when my legs were hardly long enough to hold on to the old mare, named Phoebe, which carried me.

MONEY TO PAY THE TUBNPIKES.

I had some pence with which to pay the turnpikes at Holloway Cross and at the spot near Launceston where the road to South Petherwin branches off. The first of these I dodged by going down a lane through Treguddick Mill (then known as Poad's Mill) a lovely spot where an old bridge crossed the trout stream and where there was a gloomy pond at the foot of a disused quarry, a pond with creatures in it. If I had kept to the main road I should have passed a wayside cross of granite just outside Lewannick. If there is now a depression in the grass by the cross it is because there was a sawpit there. On the other side of the road is a place in the rock where a coffin and its lid had been carved out at some time or other. Going down a steep hill I should have come to Two Bridges, another scene of quiet loveliness.

I remember one Sunday morning I was leaning over one of the two bridges when I heard a splashing in the water and a creature came out of it at the foot of the bridge, a creature which might have been mistaken for a dog if its legs had been a good deal longer. Then I went along to Polyphant to fetch some medicine from Dr. Sargent and, while I was waiting alone in the surgery, I was amazed to see a much more fearful beast sprawling about on the floor, more like a gigantic spider than anything I had ever seen. When the doctor came back with the medicine he told me it was a lobster. So I told him about my own beast at the bridge and found him to be intensely interested in it. "Why man, that's an otter," said he, and being evidently something of a sportsman, he was eager to know all about it. So I learned more of natural history that morning than I was likely to learn at Sunday School, in the afternoon.

But now for Lewannick itself, the "church town," no less. Approaching to it from the wayside cross the first house on the left was occupied by a solitary old gentleman named John Sleep, who every fine day carried a huge telescope on his shoulder when he went for a walk. Over his doorway either he or somebody else at some time or other chiselled the words, "Parva Domus Magna Quies," which might as well have been Chinese for anything the villagers could understand of it, except perhaps the parson and the schoolmaster. Mr. Sleep once gave me sixpence for repeating to him Cowper's "John Gilpin" and, as that poem is prodigiously long, I think I earned the money.

A GENERAL STORE.

A little farther along on the left the parson's kitchen garden extended down to the road and opposite to it was the Post Office, which was also the village shop. Inside the shop there was always a peculiar composite sort of smell; and no wonder, for you could buy there drugs (senna, cream of tartar and the like), tobacco, drapery, tailoring (done on the premises), grocery, coal, salt, tools, hats, butter, salt fish, powder and shot, cheap toys, eggs, barm, saffron, flour, bread, Garibaldi bootlaces and biscuits (the woollens were also called Garibaldi), and knitted woollens, sweets, clogs and pattens, stationery, oranges, earthenware, crockery, cheese, kettles and pans, lamps and candles,

and anything else you were likely to need or want. I have heard a child there asking for "a pennorth of diaklum (diachylum plaster for wounds), and please mother says will 'ee put it down," and down it went, the shopkeeper using a pen stuck into a jug of ink on the counter to make entries in a ledger kept in a drawer with the raisins which we called figs and with which our mothers made "figgy puddings." That shop had been extended at some earlier time and the newer portion had been built over a well, with a windlass and wooden bucket, in such fashion that the well was in my time in the floor of the dairy, and down into its dark and cool depth they used in summer time to sink the butter and Cream; for the shopkeeper had half-a-dozen cows.

#### A CLANKING CONTRAPTION

Next door was the village carpenter. If you heard his hammer on a Sunday you might be sure that it was a coffin he was making and so old Mrs. So-and-So must have died. A little further on was a cottage which took in the village mangling. The mangle was a great clanking contraption, a box full of granite stone and made to pass to and fro on rollers round which the linen had been wound. Opposite to this cottage was the shoemaker's workshop with pictures hanging in it of Tom Sayers, Jim Mace, and other historic personages; and it was with the aid of these portraits that I got a knowledge of pugilism so extensive and peculiar as to surprise my Sunday-school teacher. The man used to make for us stout and heavy boots, with nails in the soles and "skutes" on the heels. Once when I was being measured for a pair I requested that they might be made so as to creak, which I conceived to be a mark of distinction, and the man told me he could do it with barley-sugar, but it would be a penny extra.

#### A TALKING FISH.

By this time you were in, the heart of the village. The public-house stood there, the "Archer Arms," the arms of the Archer family of Trelaske, a mile or so away. In the stable of the inn I remember the exhibition of a "Talking Fish: admission one penny." The creature turned out to be a seal and it did certainly make a sort of noise when its owner spoke to it. Turning here to the right you came to the village well, Blaunder's Well; and turning to the left you came to the church and the smithy, and, further on, to a hut built of old tin trays and owned by a dwarf whose sons were also dwarfs though his daughters and their mother were of full height. In the hut he kept a donkey and ferrets.

Still further on was the Wesleyan Chapel and school at Trevadlock Cross on a hill a mile away from the village. One night everybody was alarmed to see the chapel on fire, but it was found to be nothing worse than the moonlight shining on the roof of wet slates. From the graveyard at the chapel you could see to the south the dim blue hills, Hawk's Tor and the rest, about which Baring Gould used afterwards to write enthusiastically in his books.

#### BEFORE THE FIRE OF 1890.

The church as I knew it was of course the old church long before the fire of 1890. The Truro bishopric had not then brought a wholesome revolution into Cornwall. In my days you could have written your name with your finger in the dust which lay thick upon the altar cloth, and spades and brooms were kept in the old carved oak pews. Away up in the roof a picture of King David looked down upon us, well out of harm's reach. Mr. Archer, the then vicar, had succeeded, though perhaps not immediately, a Coleridge whose nephew became the great Lord Chief Justice of that name. Him I never saw nor heard of, but also I heard of and seldom saw Mr. Archer. I was instructed to take off my cap to him when I did see him or the squire, and I am prepared to declare that neither then nor since have I been any the worse for that. There was no day school provided by the church, nor even a Sunday School unless it was a dame's school in a cottage: there was in fact no school-room that I can remember; and, though I knew all the boys and girls in the village, I never so much

as heard the word Confirmation. It is all very different now, but in those days there was nothing for it but the Wesleyan chapel with its excellent schools.

I must start a fresh paragraph to tell of William Hall, the schoolmaster at Trevadlock Cross. He came to us from London with his bride and he lost no opportunity to assure us that our country lanes were far more interesting and beautiful than the streets of London. Children of farmers and farm labourers came to school from long distances and brought their pasties with them for dinner. In winter Mr. Hall would direct one of the girls to collect the pasties an hour or so before dinner-time and keep them moving to and from the centre of a sheet of iron placed upon the top of the stove. Our mothers had marked the pasties, but it was something of an adventure to disregard the marks when the distribution came. In summer a pair of swallows nested in the timbers of the roof, coming in through a window which the master would never allow to be closed. Once a week he used to give us a blackboard lecture (of which H.M. Inspector took little note) on the lives and works of the English poets. Years afterwards I was talking with a group of undergraduates in St. John's College in Cambridge and the conversation happened to turn upon a minor poet of the 18th century, Henry Kirke White, whose monument is opposite to the college gate. Not a man of them had the faintest idea who Kirke White was, and whatever I was able to tell them about him was a recollection of one of those lectures in a remote village school in Cornwall. I owe to William Hall more than I can adequately estimate. Before I was ten years old he had awakened in me a love of literature and of all things good and beautiful. His personal and unobtrusive godliness was even more winsome than his teaching. I like to think that his talents were not wasted even at Lewannick.

**(To be Concluded)**

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(Continued from last week).

The native characters also, or some of them, were noteworthy. There was John Jeffery, the rather sinister dwarf with his ferrets. There was John Priddis whose name was really Prideaux, and I have often wondered how he came by it. It was he who used to fetch coals and salt from Boscastle for the village shop. One day he took me with him for the greatest adventure of my childhood. We started early on a summer morning. On the moor beyond Altarnun I got my first glimpse of the sea; "Iss fay, that's of it sure enough," said John. "But, Mr. Priddis, why are the ships up in the sky?" "Well, my boy, they say that the sea runs mountains high and I reckon them ships be 'pon the mountains."

### **THE LAND OF HEAVEN**

At Boscastle the waves were dashing wildly up the cliffs, an ideal day for a boy's first sight of them. "Do 'ee see that land vore there a long way off?" I could see what looked like a low and sunlit cloud in the distance. "Well, they do say that that there's the land of heaven." John's face was so serious as was fitting for a celestial vision and, besides, I had always heard that heaven was a place of light and glory far away, so I took him at his word. Twenty years afterwards I read in a guide-book that Lundy Island was owned by a man named Heaven. It had taken me twenty years to see John's joke and I laughed aloud at last.

Then there was old Penwarden who had the air of a man who had seen better days, a gruff man who talked little, but with a curious reminiscence of some sort of culture. He had the habit of kicking aside every stone that lay in his way upon the road. Also there was John Tregear who used to walk to Launceston market every Saturday and bring home the price of butter and eggs in his head and a medley of other things for the villagers in his pockets and in his capacious top-hat.

Another well-known character was John Turner who kept the shop and was my great-uncle. On almost every Sunday he would mount his old mare and go away to preach at all sorts of chapels within a circuit of about ten miles around Launceston. On a week-day, at least once a week, he would be at the Trevadlock Cross Chapel and sometimes, when the minister could not come from Launceston, he would conduct a burial service. It would be hard to say whether the shop or Methodism had the first place in his thoughts. I remember him discussing with old Penwarden the strange use of the word "celebrated" in relation to both the Holy Communion and Berry's Celebrated Blacking. I used to browse among his books in a sacred sort of room upstairs, mostly commentaries and sermons and biographies of Methodist preachers, not exactly alluring to a child of, say, eight years old, but I found pleasure in the mere act of reading English words. Among the rest there was an illustrated Bible and I remember a tragic picture, labelled "Ehud slayeth Eglon," which for atrocity surpassed Punch and Judy and was equally harmless. The books were supplemented every week by a Methodist newspaper called the "Watchman" and by the "Echo," a London evening paper just then started. For the rest I had a small library of my own which included the "Pilgrim's Progress," a story called "The Basket of Flowers," Watts's Hymns, and Cowper's Poems, this last having been given to me by Mr. Hall. Also a Wesleyan hymn-book with a brass clasp to it.

#### A FIFE AND DRUM BAND

But we were for obvious reasons, not a reading people at Lewannick. In the long evenings of one winter the men and youths of the village started a fife and drum band among themselves and paraded the village making noises which seemed so little horrible to me that I extorted eighteen pence from my mother to buy a fife in the hope that I might be allowed to join the band, but by the time I could play the National Anthem the band was dis-banded. There came along also the Volunteer movement or the Militia, I don't remember which, but I do remember a mild-mannered youth, who was one of my uncle's tailors, strutting around in a military uniform. This also did not last long enough to be of historic value in the defence of the nation.

#### A KISS TO MAKE SWEET HAY.

Our holidays were what ought to have been holy days. On the day before Good Friday, which we knew as Holy Thursday, there was the village fair and it gave us a thrill to see booths set up where we could buy all sorts of useless things at a penny. On Good Friday, much to my pious uncle's indignation, the cricket season began, or what we called cricket ("rickets," to be strictly accurate). It was played with a thing more like a hockey stick than a bat, and with balls made by ourselves of cork knotted over with whipcord. In the school holidays, which extended to a whole fortnight in the year, I used to visit my grandmother at Crooker (Trecrogo, near South Petherwin), a sturdy old soul who, finding herself lonely after my grandfather's death, set out at seventy years of age to live with her sons in Canada. Harvest time also was a real holiday for boys and girls, the hay harvest especially. I remember a big rosy-faced girl who caught and kissed me through a circle of hay which she then thrust into the rick, "to make sweet hay" she said. We were still capable of idyllic impulses in those days but I do not remember any other survival of primitive harvest traditions. In the hot afternoons women folk used to carry tea and saffron cakes into the harvest field, a pleasant interlude which was known as "drinking."

#### THE LOCAL "DENTIST."

Just before hay-time there came the school anniversary. I remember to this day the mingled smell of saffron cakes and hot tea and cream and the flowers and branches of trees which decorated the schoolroom. In the hour before tea we had been examined by Mr. Hall in reading and arithmetic in the presence of a crowd of admiring parents who had been invited to put to us questions of their

own and had but diffidently responded to the invitation. I believe there was a sermon in the evening but I have no vivid recollection of that. We did not, however, count among our holidays an occasional visit to the village blacksmith, who was also the village dentist, to have a tooth drawn out by the muscles of his brawny arm and a pair of iron pincers.

#### PRIMITIVE ILLUMINATION.

I remember the day when the railway was started at Launceston and I was thought too young to be taken there with a wagon load of folks to see the illuminations. All I could do was to join other boys in singing a song, which I think was actually printed, "You can travel by steam, as all the folks say, From Lanson to London upon the railway." By way of consolation I was taken later to Launceston to see shops lighted by gas. My earliest recollection of lighting was that of tallow candles sold at the village shop in bundles strung together by a string passed through a loop in the wicks and known as long or short sixteens. The iron candlesticks into which they were stuck came in usefully to scrape the hair off the skin of a newly-killed pig with the help of plenty of hot water. As we advanced in luxury the shop began to stock "composite" candles which did not need snuffing quite so often. At last came paraffin lamps, hoisted up at the chapel on what looked like bed-posts and relieving the chapel-keeper of the duty of snuffing candles before the sermon.

#### HOW SUNDAYS WERE SPENT.

At the chapel on Sundays I sat where I could watch the men come in. Every man of them on entering went through the ritual of holding his hat in his left hand while with the right hand he smoothed down his hair over his forehead. My grandmother once lectured my mother for brushing my hair back from the forehead and so ministering to my inordinate vanity, and even my mother would not allow me to jump or run on a Sunday. The older people at chapel had never been taught to read and so the preacher used to interrupt the singing by reading aloud each two lines of a hymn. During the sermon it was no uncommon thing for a man to stand for a few minutes if he had begun to feel drowsy. At home we spent the intervals of Sunday in reading the Methodist magazines and "The Sunday at Home." Whether "The Leisure Hour" was also suitable for Sunday reading was never quite decided.

The sanitation of the village and of surrounding farms, and even of the school, was on Eastern rather than Western models. There were sights and smells which I will not attempt to describe. Happily the sunshine and the fresh air acted as a sufficient disinfectant and we had no worse epidemics than scarlet fever and measles.

#### LOCAL DIALECT.

I wonder whether the local dialect is still heard round about Launceston. There were dialect words which my mother, who was something of a purist in language, used to scold me for using, and when long afterwards I found they were good old English words for the most part, it was too late for me to defend myself. It is an important fact in local history that nearly all our dialect words were not Celtic, but Saxon, and are now traceable in Sweet's "Student's Dictionary of Anglo-Saxon." That means that the Saxon invaders drove the British some distance to the Westward of the Tamar. The fact that some Celtic place-names (Lewannick may or may not be one of them) survived the invasion means only that the Saxons had no reason to alter them. When I lived long afterwards in Penzance, people there would not recognise me to be a Cornishman, and I remember how at Lewannick we used to hear of the oddities of the people "down west." We were of different

nationalities, and we knew it. It would be interesting to know whether the following Saxon words are still extant around Launceston. Let it be understood that my spelling of them is merely phonetic; to give Sweet's spelling of them would in many cases obscure the sound of them for local ears, but they are all to be found in his dictionary: layt, a mill stream; lew, sheltered; heel, to cover up (potato plants); holm, holly; skat, to split; skode, to scatter; voach, to tread down; mawn, basket; settle, a seat; vyares, young pigs; withy, willow; eevul, a hay fork; aiglets, hawthorn berries; till, to set a trap; arrish, stubble field; linney, a shed; vitty, seemly; cloam, earthenware; cricket, a stool; barm, yeast; wug, to the right (spoken to horses); lake, a stream; mow, sheaf; mowey, rickyard; plum, soft; appledrone, wasp; stogged, stuck fast in mud; cark, to prepare horse shoes for ice; butt, a bee hive; harve, harrow (agriculture); I saw *on* the newspaper; I know *by* a bird's nest.

The following are not traceable in Sweet but may nevertheless be Saxon words not found in extant Saxon literature: keels, skittles (compare German Kagel); trade, stuff (slightly contemptuous); wisht, melancholy; craim, to squeeze; custus, cane for punishment; glaze, to stare (occurs in Shakespeare); strub, to ravage a nest; slone, blackthorn fruit; sharps, shafts of a cart.

Here are some further words which I remember; they may possibly be Celtic or Scandinavian: Skute, shoe iron; cawtch, a sticky mess; por, a hurry; brave, moderate; stag, male bird; squab, sort of pie. Finally glainey, guinea fowl, is evidently the Latin gallina, but how on earth did it reach Lewannick?

In Lewannick to-day there are no doubt motor cars, telephones, wireless sets, and other unforeseen miracles; and probably less of religion moreover. But there are things which do not change, the summer sky, the clear streams, the ancient trees, the Lent lilies and the primroses, the singing of birds, and the joy of having a child's outlook upon these common things which to him are of the most wonderful. I am always thankful that my earliest impressions and ideals came to me from kind-hearted men and women in Lewannick who feared God and were loyal to the service of His church.

THE END