

PORTREATH HARBOUR HISTORY

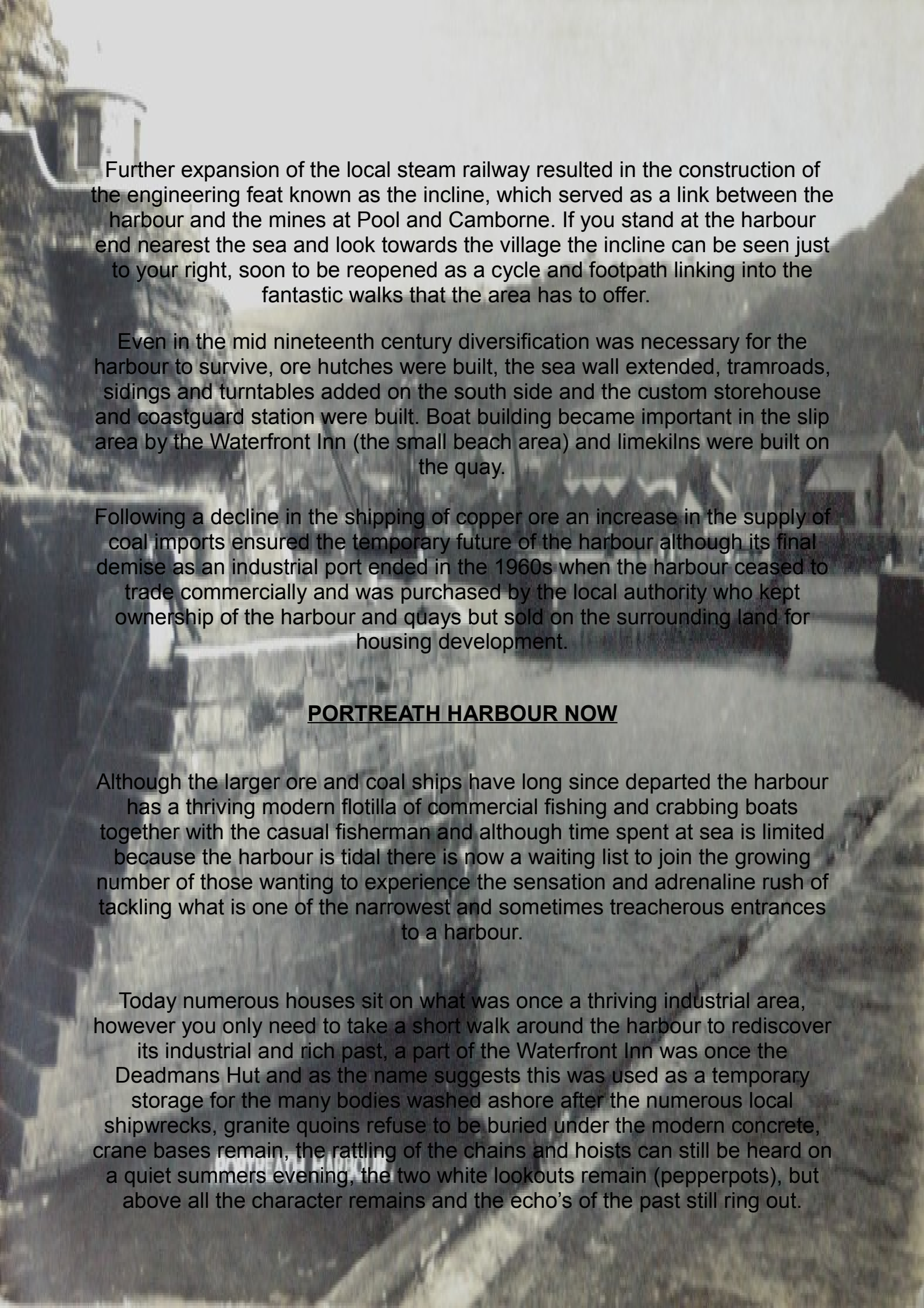
The original quay was located to the left of the beach as you look out to sea, Amy's cove; this was however lost to the sea in the mid 18th century, the old track serving it can still be seen making its way down the grassy bank.

In 1760 Portreath became a viable port when the current pier was constructed which gave a sheltered space for the small sailing vessels to load copper ore and begin their round trip to Wales. The ships never sailed empty as on the return trip the boats were heavily laden with coal to power the ever-expanding mines in the area. As the demand for this coal to steam the big mine pumping engines grew it became necessary to enlarge the harbour and extend the pier. The outer basin was excavated in 1801 providing space for 25 vessels with the harbour undergoing further expansion some twenty years later with the excavation and opening of the inner basin. Fishing boats also used the harbour and a seine fishing company was established in 1800, fishing mostly for pilchards.

Housing was now required for the many labourers and workers connected with the harbour and surrounding works and so Harbour Terrace, Tregear Terrace and Glenfeadon Terrace were built. A cottage at Amy's side existed, aptly named Smugglers Cottage and although now almost completely rebuilt a house still stands on the original site. *(Some of these cottages and terraces can be seen in the historic photos section of this website.)*

In the early 1800s the powerful families of the Bassets at Tehidy, Williams of Scorrier and Foxes of Falmouth who between them either owned substantial land interests at Portreath or had interests in the shipping of the copper ore mainly through their ownership of many of the local mines built what was to become the first private plateway (iron tram rails laid to assist the mules and donkeys pulling the laden ore carts) between Portreath and Poldice to aid the ore and coal movements to and from the mines. This is now known as the tramroad and can be walked or cycled for its entirety all the way to Devoran on the South coast, unbelievably this was engineered on an almost level plain for its entire length.

PORTREATH HARBOUR,



Further expansion of the local steam railway resulted in the construction of the engineering feat known as the incline, which served as a link between the harbour and the mines at Pool and Camborne. If you stand at the harbour end nearest the sea and look towards the village the incline can be seen just to your right, soon to be reopened as a cycle and footpath linking into the fantastic walks that the area has to offer.

Even in the mid nineteenth century diversification was necessary for the harbour to survive, ore hutches were built, the sea wall extended, tramroads, sidings and turntables added on the south side and the custom storehouse and coastguard station were built. Boat building became important in the slip area by the Waterfront Inn (the small beach area) and limekilns were built on the quay.

Following a decline in the shipping of copper ore an increase in the supply of coal imports ensured the temporary future of the harbour although its final demise as an industrial port ended in the 1960s when the harbour ceased to trade commercially and was purchased by the local authority who kept ownership of the harbour and quays but sold on the surrounding land for housing development.

PORTREATH HARBOUR NOW

Although the larger ore and coal ships have long since departed the harbour has a thriving modern flotilla of commercial fishing and crabbing boats together with the casual fisherman and although time spent at sea is limited because the harbour is tidal there is now a waiting list to join the growing number of those wanting to experience the sensation and adrenaline rush of tackling what is one of the narrowest and sometimes treacherous entrances to a harbour.

Today numerous houses sit on what was once a thriving industrial area, however you only need to take a short walk around the harbour to rediscover its industrial and rich past, a part of the Waterfront Inn was once the Deadmans Hut and as the name suggests this was used as a temporary storage for the many bodies washed ashore after the numerous local shipwrecks, granite quoins refuse to be buried under the modern concrete, crane bases remain, the rattling of the chains and hoists can still be heard on a quiet summers evening, the two white lookouts remain (pepperpots), but above all the character remains and the echo's of the past still ring out.