

NEWLYN HARBOUR: Historical Developments from Favoured Landing Beach to Premier Fishing Harbour



**August 1932 – Newlyn Harbour and Town Looking North West
The Old Quay, South and North Piers**

(Source: <https://www.britainfromabove.org.uk/en/image/EPW039842>)

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Acknowledgments

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Introduction

The MAT are partners in the EU Funded Sustainable and Resilient Coastal Cities project [SARCC](#) which includes a Pilot Study area at Newlyn where the design and construction of an eco-reef aims to create a nature-based solution to minimise coastline damage against surges and rising sea levels. The MAT's involvement includes examining how evidence from archaeology, art, historic photographs, maps and charts can provide a long-term understanding of changes to the coast to help with planning for the future. The Newlyn Pilot area is located immediately to the west of the river Coombe outfall, adjacent to the harbour's North Pier. Find out more about the Newlyn Pilot project [here](#).

Consequently, MAT volunteer Roger Burns has been inspired to look in more detail at the history and development of Newlyn Harbour. A selection of significant storm and tsunami events which predate and postdate the modern harbour development is listed, as is the importance of the Newlyn Tidal Observatory incorporated into the South Pier and which is fundamental to the survey levelling of mainland Britain. The construction and use of the modern harbour piers are highlighted which together have contributed to Newlyn's premier position as a fishing harbour of importance. Mention is also made of boat building carried on at Newlyn. Newlyn Harbour dates back to before 1337 but it was late in the 19th century before construction of the harbour as we know it today started. This article looks at the setting of Newlyn's location, the history including fishing and construction of the present harbour with associated infrastructure.

Location

Newlyn nestles on the eastern coast of the Penwith peninsula, within Mount's Bay which embraces the western extremity of the English Channel north of a line between Porthcurno and the Lizard, depicted in Figure 1.

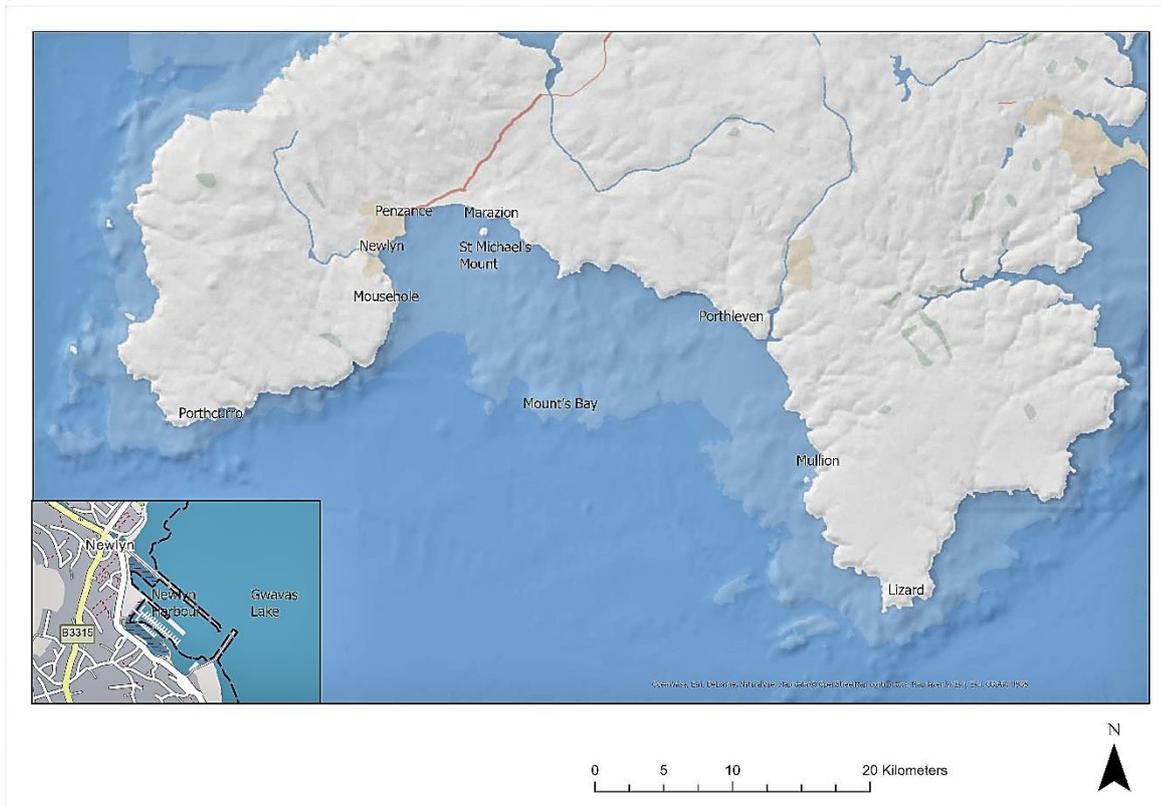


Figure 1: Newlyn Location Plan

Penzance is a conurbation just to the north-east of Newlyn, in the commercial centre of the area and its civil parish includes Newlyn. Immediately adjacent to the modern Newlyn harbour is [Gwavas Lake](#), an area of relatively calm water within Mount's Bay which originally led to Newlyn fishermen landing their catches there.

Geology and related characteristics

The [British Geological Society](#) 1:50,000 scale mapping shows superficial marine deposits of sand and gravel especially along the north shore of the Bay, overlying the Mylor Slate formation, Hornfelses slate and Hornfelses siltstone. Just to the south of the harbour, there is an igneous intrusion of Devonian Gabbro and Microgabbro. The north-east and eastern coastlines of Mount's Bay display a wide variety of deposits. The Penwith peninsula is Land's End granite bedrock detailed as [Carboniferous to Permian - Felsic-Rock](#).

Just to the south of Newlyn is [Penlee Quarry](#) which is now a Site of Special Scientific Interest and which utilised Newlyn harbour to export arisings, as described below. Granite was used in Newlyn harbour construction. Removal of overburden during workings were used with other quarry output in construction of the First World War [Royal Naval Air Station](#) adjacent to the quarry.

Storms and Surges

Newlyn's location, as seen above, is sheltered except when prevailing winds from the south and particularly the south-east prevail, and this led to the construction of a harbour at Newlyn, initially in the 14th century and later 'Old Quay', and then in the 19th century the 'Modern Harbour'. But first, it is pertinent to catalogue a brief selection of significant storms and surges. (Those events with a BGS reference are considered by the BGS to be Tsunami events. Other events are storms). Key dates for the modern harbour construction time line within the following selection are noted.

- 25 November 1738 – *“Severe storm when the weather was hard, stormy, and thick and a very great sea broke down a great part of the Newlyn Quay”* [NA: 1]. The original quay was built prior to 1337 [NA: 2].
- 1 November 1755 – The Mount's Bay Tsunami, arising from the “Lisbon Earthquake” which together with the resulting tsunami killed between 60,000 and 100,000 [BGS Report CR/07/077: A].
- 31 March 1761 – Resulting from a tsunami, widely observed including a detailed account in Mount's Bay, with references at St. Michael's Mount, Penzance pier, Newlyn, Mousehole pier, and Scilly [BGS Report CR/07/077: B].
- 10 October 1809 and 8 November 1809 – Loss of 11 vessels near Newlyn [NA: 3].
- 23 May 1847 – rises and falls of sea level between 0.9 and 1.5m in Mount's Bay [BGS Report CR/07/077: C].
- 4 October 1859 – Reported in the *Royal Cornwall Gazette* of 7 October 1859. *“An Extraordinary Tidal Wave, or series of waves, swept into the Mount's Bay on Tuesday about half-past six in the morning, and the alternate rise and fall of the sea was watched by many spectators until noon. The first wave must have swept into Penzance harbour at least five feet deep, much to the discomfiture of various craft. Several vessels broke adrift; the large buoys at the entrance of the harbour were submerged, a raft of timber and a barge were carried out by the receding wave, and altogether the unexpected visitor caused much commotion. On the Western shore of the Bay this tide was felt in full force at Newlyn and Mousehole, but we have received no account from the Eastern side”*.
- 29 September 1869 – Reported in the *Hampshire Independent* of 2 October 1869. *“A remarkable tidal phenomenon was witnessed on the western coasts on Wednesday, when in several of the small harbours the tide rushed at the rate of five or six miles an hour, and then receded again as rapidly. The rise and fall amounted to five or six feet. Fortunately, it was a neap tide, or serious results might have followed. The run of the sea on the beach at Newlyn was from 90 to 100 feet”*. (c.27.4m to 30.5m). The BGS dismissed this as tsunami event.
- 7 October 1880 – Reported in the *Western Morning News* of 8 October 1880. *“A fearful storm occurred during Wednesday night and yesterday morning on the south-west coasts. Penzance suffered most severely, seven lives being lost by the foundering of a fishing boat, and the casualties among shipping being many and serious. At Salcombe, the master of a ship was washed overboard, and at Newlyn no less than eight fishing boats have been sunk. Plymouth also experienced the gale, though to less extent”*. The storm, with resultant liabilities bankrupted the Mount's Bay Insurance Club [NA: 4] and

this led to a Storm Relief Fund for the fishermen of Mount's Bay who sustained losses in October. The fund totalled £1,754 and 5d (circa £ 216k in 2020) and the accounts, contributors and beneficiaries were extensively reported over 4½ columns in the *Cornish Telegraph* of 6 January 1881.

- The South then North Piers of the Modern Harbour were constructed between 1885 and 1894.
- 26 January 1917 – The *Cornishman* of 1 February 1917 included the following report. *“THE GALE. HEAVY SEAS IN MOUNT'S BAY. A heavy gale from the south-east has been blowing since Thursday, and tremendous seas have been running in Mount's Bay. On Friday, at one period, there seemed have been some diminution, but the wind rose again on Friday night, and on Saturday, the gale was raging with even greater intensity. No great material damage, however, has been reported, though that portion of the inhabitants who reside in the Wherrytown district have suffered considerable personal inconvenience. With each tide, the sea has come up and flooded their premises. People going to and from Newlyn have had to take the path through the fields, the water in the road between the eastern end of the Baths and Laregan river being several inches deep. The Tolcarne Inn at Newlyn also has felt the full effects of the gale, being flooded a considerable depth. Probably never since the houses were built, have the inhabitants of Lanoweth terrace had such an experience, the sea, it is said, coming up against their front door. The work at the railway station was retarded at certain states of the tides”*. Wherrytown and Lanoweth are in Penzance, and the river Laregan (contemporaneous spelling) discharges at Wherrytown 500m east of Coombe river, Newlyn. This storm also resulted in the loss of Hallsands village (<https://maritimearchaeologytrust.org/3407-2/>).
- 25 November 1941 – An earthquake west of Portugal resulted in an observation at Newlyn of “seven waves with a maximum amplitude of about 20cm and lasted about four hours” [BGS Report CR/07/077: D].
- 23 May 1960 – 9.6 earthquake at Chile on 22 May 1960 with sea level influence recorded at Newlyn the next day [BGS Report CR/07/077: E].
- 7 March 1962 – This storm was reported by several newspapers as the worst storm in living memory which affected particularly Newlyn and Penzance, one such report is included in Appendix A. At Newlyn, the Harbour offices were almost breached. The storm unleashed itself on top of a flood tide [NA:4] followed by flooding from heavy rain.
- 28 February 1969 – Recorded at Newlyn from an earthquake west of Portugal evidenced by seiching sea levels on an otherwise calm day [BGS Report CR/07/077: F].
- 26 May 1975 – Yet another earthquake west of Portugal with tsunami consisting at Newlyn of “eight waves with a maximum amplitude of about 6cm lasting nearly four hours” [BGS Report CR/07/077: G].
- 27 October 2004 – a [YouTube](#) of the storm mostly outside the harbour.
- A [YouTube](#) dated 11 March 2008, storm breaking over the South Pier.

Newlyn Harbour – The Old Quay and Fishing

The Old Quay dates back to 1337 or earlier and consists as shown in its modern setting, Figure 2, of an unjointed granite block curved wall with parapet some 300 ft. (c. 91m) long. The old Medieval Quay was rebuilt and extended in 1732 and much of the structure shown in Figure 2 is likely to be 18th century, but is thought to include the older structure within in. The Newlyn Old Quay gave protection to some 40 small vessels, other vessels needing to shelter would have used the headlands or made for Penzance whose harbour dates from 1512 [NA: 5]. The Newlyn Old Quay was 5yds (c.4.6m) wide and water depth at High Water OS was average 6ft (c.1.82m). [I.C.E.:1] Both Penzance and Newlyn were “places to land fish” which originally would have been the respective beaches. Newlyn was well established with fishing back in 1814, with road connections as described by “From Penzance, a carriage-road (not turnpike) proceeds to the Land's-end (eleven miles); leaving the church-towns of Maddern and Sancreet, with the populous village and church of St. Just, to the right; the great fishing-coves of Newlyn and Mousehole, the church of St. Paul, and the church-town of Burian, to the left” [BHO]. The harbour was always dry at low water.



Figure 2: The Old Quay at Low Water - 2020

Pilchard fishing was a mainstay for Newlyn and Cornwall generally [since 1555 when exports were first recorded](#) but overfishing and reduced market opportunities saw a decline by the 1960's. Pilchard fishing had a vibrant [export market](#) to Italy which endured between 1555 and 2005. In 1905, the Pilchard Works started, more information can be read [here](#).

Prior to the nineteenth century, only the area around the Old Quay was known as 'Newlyn' whereas the area of the town where the fish market is situated was known as 'Street-An-Nowan'. At high tide 'Street-An-Nowan' was separated from 'Newlyn

Town'. The lower part of the area around the modern harbour is built on land that was [a beach and reclaimed](#) from the sea, involving overburden from Penlee Quarry in substantial quantity intermixed with large lumps of granite, and finished with a viaduct on piles connecting the two localities by road, completed in late 1908 [NA: 6].

The rail infrastructure was extended to Penzance in 1852 which helped to boost the fish trade at Newlyn as landings could be more quickly transported via Penzance to markets with large demand. Initially, Penzance in 1846 was a terminus for the [West Cornwall](#) Redruth line and shortly afterwards with Truro, and to London by changing trains as gauges were different. The link to Plymouth was opened in May 1859.

Newlyn Harbour – The South Pier – the 1st & 4th Contracts

By 1883, it was clear that the Old Quay was too small for the then fishing fleet, especially during low water [NA: 7]. But similar sentiments had started well before this, in 1865 (see Appendix B). Up until 1873 a number of petitions for building the harbour were presented to the relevant authorities but Penzance, feeling threatened by such a close-by competitor, successfully objected. One proposal gained Board of Trade approval as reported in the *Cornish Telegraph* of 30 July 1873 but was allowed to expire. Matters came to a head as the fishing boats gradually grew larger, and the storm of October 1880 was persuasive in resolving that a harbour be built. Accordingly, plans were resubmitted and on 14 December 1884, the Engineer for the new harbour, Mr. James C. Inglis M. Inst. C.E. of Plymouth attended a meeting of the Newlyn Harbour Commissioners, as reported in the *Cornishman* of 18 December 1884, noting that 11 tenders had been received, most within estimate and from “*mostly well-known and responsible firms*”. By this time, the fisherman had a staunch ally in Mr Thomas Bedford Bolitho who in 1884 was *appointed High Sherriff of Cornwall and was elected President of the West Cornwall Fisheries Exhibition and Bazaar for the Newlyn Pier*. His cousin, Thomas Simon Bolitho loaned £12,000 and the local bank loaned £15,000 towards the cost [NA: 8].

Mr Charles Campbell Ross the MP for St Ives on 29 June 1885 laid the [foundation stone](#) of the new South Pier at Newlyn, signalling the start of building work. The contractor was Messrs Hill and Lester of London and Plymouth who completed the work early in 1887. The South Pier was essentially a breakwater, 707 ft (c.215.5m) long, 25 ft (c.7.62m) wide with 20 ft. (c.6.1m) paved access, commencing just above low water mark and at its head running into 14 ft (c.4.27m) at low water as shown in Figure 3. Construction was *in-situ*

concrete with heavy granite “plums” within the concrete hearting, all founded on rock shelved out to receive the concrete. Facings and steps were granite, and completed with a parapet on the seaward side [I.C.E.: 2].

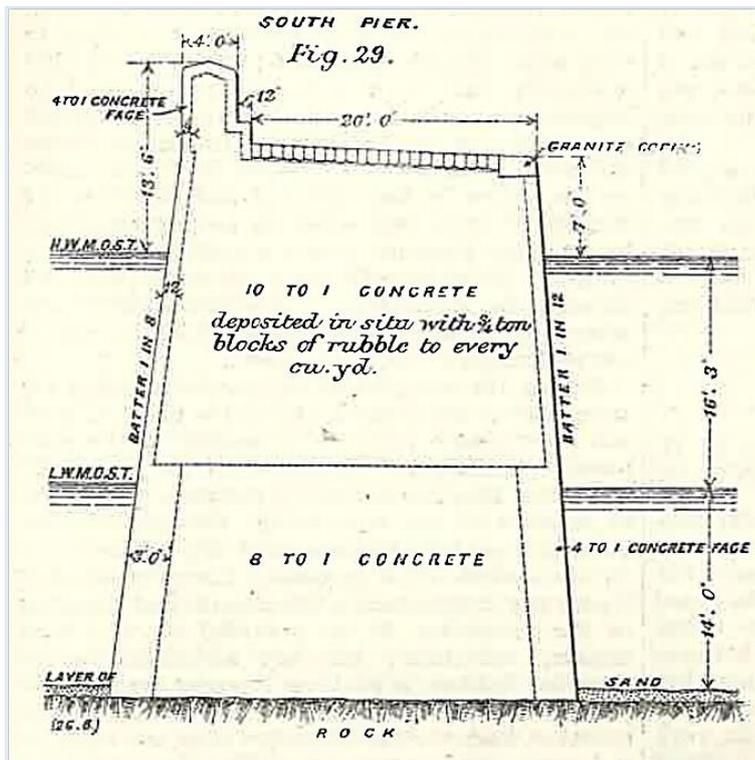


Figure 3: South Pier - Cross Section
Source: Courtesy I.C.E.: 2. See Bibliography

Reference to the first lighthouse on the South Pier is included in Appendix C which details the substantial completion of this phase of the harbour construction in January 1887. Shortly after, the *Cornishman* of 17 March 1887 reported that very low tides presented the opportunity to remove some of the rocky or rough bed of the harbour. The public opening of the lighthouse was held on 20 March 1887 when the occulting light was commissioned.

The *Newlyn Pier and Harbour Order 1884* for the South Pier had authorised a pier 760 ft. (c.231.6m) long. After the North Pier had been built, the South Pier was extended but this required significant funding and plans took time to crystallise, which was the 4th harbour contract. This followed from a

realisation that better protection within the harbour against south-east storms was needed as the then width of the harbour entrance between South and North Piers was considered excessive. Construction commenced in early 1913 but was phased partly due to adverse weather but also to accommodate by agreement between the Newlyn Harbour Commissioners and the Ordnance Survey a Tidal Observatory with stilling well within the pier. The South Pier extension was 100 ft (c.30.5m) and was completed in 1915, as reported in Appendix E and resulted in the harbour entrance being 150 ft (c.45.7m) wide. The Tidal Observatory is a [Listed Building](#), Grade II as of 11 December 2018. A replacement lighthouse was erected at the end of the pier extension, with two lighthouses until 1918 when the first which had served as a lookout tower for the pilots was dismantled, as mentioned in Appendix E. The light was [electrified](#) in 1935, and the iron structure requires maintenance against environmental effects. The South Pier was allocated for stone and similar cargoes, whereas the North Pier was used exclusively for fishing vessels. Note that the overall South Pier length in records is quoted both by including the quay from the original slipway and is also quoted from the change of direction in the quay to the extremity.

Newlyn Harbour – The North Pier – the 2nd & 3rd Contracts

Before the South Pier was extended, the need for a North Pier was readily apparent for protection against storms in Mount’s Bay. Construction commenced on 8 March 1888 and was completed within one year. This contract, the 2nd for the harbour, provided for a pier 1025ft (c. 312.4m) long and 10ft (c.3.05m) wide. During construction, as reported by the *Cornubian and Redruth Times* of 28 September 1888, a vein of tin was struck and a quantity of tinstone was included in the pier structure. Some realignment was needed of the Coombe river at its discharge and armour stone was placed to divert river water away from the toe of the new pier. A 3rd contract was necessary to afford more shelter against southerly and south-easterly storms, because the harbour entrance after the first two contracts was too wide, and it commenced in 1891, being finished in 1893. Contract detail was 890 ft (c.271.3m) with a roadway of 9ft (c.2.74m). Funding pressure had necessitated a slimmer section, and the 3rd harbour contract, to widen the first part of the North Pier and extend the pier towards the South Pier was undertaken. The resultant pier was 40ft (c.12.2m) wide at the

shore end, narrowing to 12 ft (c.3.66m) overall at the far end. Armour stone was placed along the whole seaward side to protect against scour. During construction of the 3rd contract, “.....the presence of a bog patch of great depth about two-thirds of the way along the extension. In bridging this patch a slight settlement took place in the wall, and in order to counterbalance the weight of the latter, the Engineer had several thousand tons of rubble tipped on the seaward side, which had the desired effect of preventing further movement”. [I.C.E.:3] Note that there are differences as reported in the length of the North Pier, and this is thought to be from the extension contract including both the widened section of the original and the actual extension. The completion of the North Pier was occasioned by speeches and children singing (Appendix D).

The finished pier is 1,450 ft (c.442m) long and the indicative cross-sections are shown in Figure 4.

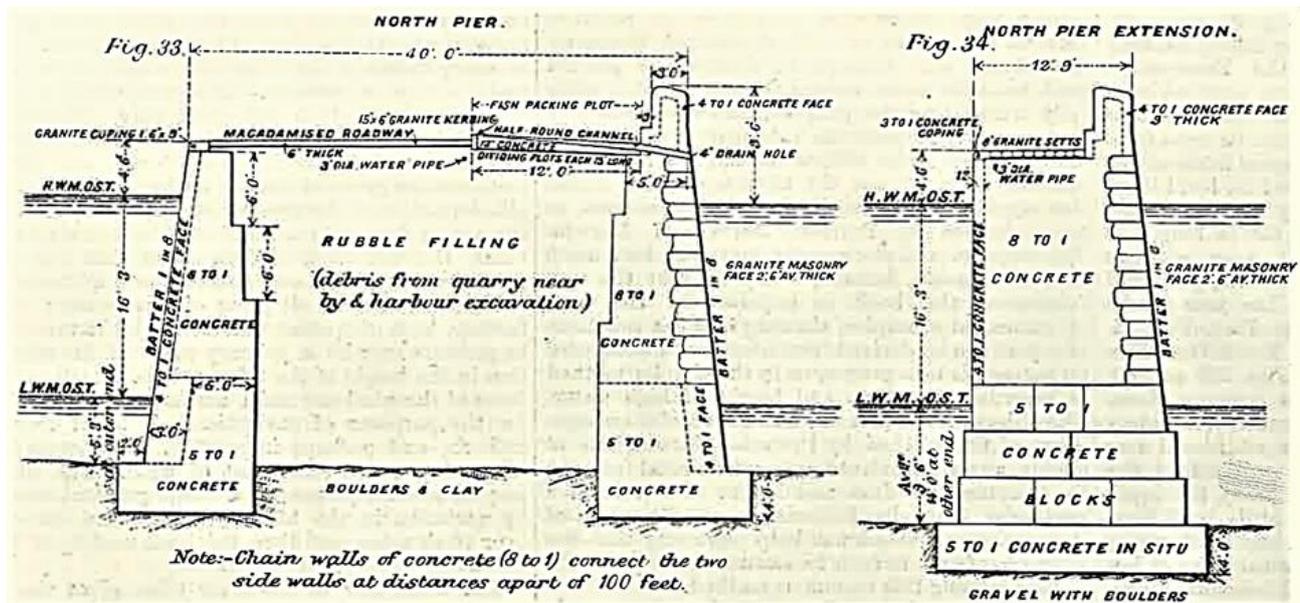


Figure 4: North Pier – Cross Sections

Source: Courtesy I.C. E.: 2 See Bibliography

Not everyone welcomed the harbour. Under a heading The ‘Health of the County’, the *Royal Cornwall Gazette* of 23 November 1893 included the views of the ‘County Sanitary Committee’ reporting for the village of Paul, just to the south of Newlyn: “There has been no less than 37 fresh cases of scarlet fever here during the month, with 2 deaths; and 6 cases of typhoid fever, with one death, it is attributed to inadequate scavenging, and the conversion of Newlyn Harbour into an unscoured cess-pool by the completion of the northern arm of the pier”. During the harbour development, in 1896, the so-called [Newlyn riots](#) took place, occasioned by some fishermen landing their catches on a Sunday, further information is available in a video here: [YouTube](#).

Newlyn Harbour – Mid 1900’s

Characteristics of the harbour upon completion of the South and North Piers are summarised in a Government survey, *Return from the Authorities of the Harbours of the United Kingdom, “Giving a Description of Works within the Last twenty Years”* published by HMSO on 10 August 1903 [I.C.E.: 4]. For Newlyn, this included:

- South Pier built in 1885. 300ft (c.91m), depth 13 ft (c.3.96m) at low water. {Note – the length as quoted is from the change of direction of the quay side. Later extended by 100ft (c.30.5m)}
- North Pier built in 1888 extended 1894. 1,450ft (c.442m), depth not itemised, comprising the first 700ft (c. 213.4m) 40ft (c.12.2m) wide, remaining 750 ft (c.228.6m) 9ft (c.2.74m) wide.
- Excavations at sundry times to deepen harbour and to provide additional accommodation. Cost of the foregoing including purchasing the Old Quay, the lighthouse, buoys and moorings, weighbridge and fish-packing stands £52,875 (approx. £7m in 2020)



Figure 6: The Old Quay with Slipway and Cradle Beyond - Low Water 2020 South Pier with Lighthouse in Background

Newlyn Harbour – The Trawl Pier and the Mary Williams Pier

The Trawl pier dates from c.1899 and was built as shown in Figure 5 southwards from the North Pier so that trawlers of the day could land their fish directly on to the pier. Constructed as a timber platform, outwards from the road viaduct, it was “supported on substantial columns formed by sections of cast iron pipes recycled from abandoned mines” [NA: 10]. By some 70 years later, additional quays were needed to accommodate the increase in size and numbers of fishing boats which led to another investment, the Mary Williams Pier. But it was not until 1979 that work started, [opened](#) by Queen Elizabeth on 28 November 1980. After completion, “the quantity of fish passing through doubled, making Newlyn second only to Grimsby in the annual value of fish landed in England.....the Mary Williams Pier was extended by 90m to provide additional deep water berthing for the larger vessels” [NA: 11]. A pontoon pier for small craft has been established just to the south of the Mary Williams Pier.

Newlyn Harbour – The War Years

First World War From early 1917, the RNAS operated anti-submarine and convoy patrols from a base near the South Pier and is described in detail [here](#). Brief accounts of action are included [here](#). The Newlyn Archive’s *The Story of Newlyn Harbour*, covers the background of the Admiralty presence at Newlyn harbour which, operationally, consisted of Motor Launches from 1915 for patrol vessel duties. There were several vessels lost due to enemy action within Mount’s Bay and the surrounding waters as shown [here](#).

Second World War. Also covered by the Newlyn Archive in the same booklet, there was a clear adverse effect on Newlyn’s fishing, some boats being requisitioned and others subject to regulations imposed by the Admiralty who used the harbour from mid-summer 1940, basing a fleet of fast patrol Motor Launches. An influx of Belgian and Free French trawlers arrived in May 1940 and used Newlyn as their wartime base. Bombing raids in November 1940 and May 1941 caused damage including a Belgian trawler and a direct hit on *Cretehill*, a coal hulk in the harbour owned at the time by Sherwood Hunter of Newlyn from 1928. The

Cretehill, [ON143037](#), was launched by the Scottish Concrete Ship Co. Ltd in Greenock [Scottish Ships] on 27 November 1918 at the order of the War Office for the Shipping Controller in London as a [barge](#), without motive propulsion. It was 54.86m long with 9.6m beam and capable of transporting 1,000-ton cargo. Newspapers reported it at Swansea in June 1919, Sunderland in September 1919, and the *Western Mail* of 3 October 1919 reported that when loaded and under tow from the Tyne to Newlyn, its steering gear was carried away in a gale but was being repaired at Bridlington. The *Western Mail* of 21 November 1933 reported that laden with coal within Newlyn harbour it caught fire in the after hold, presumably from spontaneous combustion. The *Cornishman* of 7 November 1946 reported that *Cretehill*, a coal hulk of 18 years in the harbour was an eyesore in the harbour, no longer needed as diesel engined ships had replaced steam, and the *Western Morning News* of 16 March 1949 confirmed that holed, it was towed to be sunk about five miles from the Runnelstone buoy, having been filled with [air flotation](#) bags for the tow.

In the period 1942-1943, four Air Sea Rescue pinnaces were stationed at Newlyn [NA: 12].

Newlyn Harbour – Dredging, RNLI, Industry and Infrastructure

Dredging

The *Cornishman* of 21 May 1908 reported that the widening of the North Pier during the 3rd contract had “*proved of immense benefit to the large fleet of east coast boats*” removing the previous congested access. The newspaper continued with a report that the Harbour Commissioners were inviting tenders for the dredging and deepening the harbour so as to provide berths at the widened part of the North quay to allow “*craft, such as East coast steam drifters*” to discharge their catches “*at low water spring tides*”. The prospective contract would also improve berthing accommodation at the South Pier.

RNLI

Penlee Lifeboat Station is located in Newlyn Harbour, and is descendent from the first Lifeboat Station in Cornwall (Penzance Branch) and it was the thirteenth Lifeboat station in the UK. The All-Weather Severn Class, *Ivan Ellen*, is moored within the harbour with access at all states of the tide. There is also an Inshore B-Class Atlantic 85, *Mollie and Ivor Dent*. The history of the station is [here](#).

Industry

- *Fishing* Pilchards were a mainstay of the west Cornwall fishing industry from a very early stage. Now, Newlyn is considered the heart of the fishing industry, having long overtaken Penzance which was more reliant on the tin industry. Present day types of vessels include Beam Trawlers, Side Trawlers, Gill Netters, Long Liners, Crabbers, and Hand-line Fishing Boats. Other species such as mackerel supplanted [pilchards](#) as the main catch but rebranded as sardines has seen a revival. The harbour extensions, along with subsequent developments, contributed to Newlyn becoming the premier fishing port in Mount’s Bay and by the early 21st century “*the [largest deep sea fishing port in England in terms of the value of fish landed.](#)*”
- *Boat building* Henry [Peake](#), boatbuilder, was based at Tolcarne, adjacent to Coombe River, from 1835 and built mainly luggers up to the First World War. After the Second World War, the firm was involved with conversion of Admiralty MFV’s to Fishing Vessels. Early vessels used in Mount’s Bay included Mackerel Seine boats, Mackerel Drivers, Pilchard Drivers, and Pilot Gigs – builders included James R. Wills, Richard Warren, William Warren who all predated the Newlyn Harbour, subsequently with J & T Blewett, Joe and Henry Peake, and Triggs Bros through well into the 20th century. Details including plans of some of these boats are available. [Inshore Craft]
- *Penlee Quarry* Formerly called Gwavas Quarry from 1882, newspaper records from the 1890’s mention problems with public footpath safety on a nearby footpath associated with blasting but this was eventually resolved. There are also 1899 newspaper records of schooners *Golden Light* ON47287, Penzance owned and *Flower O’Portsoy* ON69898, St. Ives owned loading stone from the quarry at the South Pier, and other vessels in later years. The quarry was renamed Penlee Quarry in

1890 and on 27 November 1902 a Light Railway between the quarry and South Pier was opened, preceded by a trial run the previous week with a reporter on board, according to the *Cornishman* of 4 December 1902. The [rail gauge](#) was 2 ft (c.0.61m), originally single track over one mile but later twinned, using steam locomotives then from c.1930 diesel locomotives. Tipper wagons were used, and the trains reversed to the quarry after discharging stone into the cargo ships. In 1973, the rail link was [replaced](#) by an electrical conveyor system, and by 1994 the quarry had ceased operations. Shipments were predominantly aggregate, but also rock armour stone, to the Bristol Channel and south coast ports. Penlee Quarry was in 1997 [designated](#) a Site of Special Scientific Interest.



Figure 7: Steam Locomotive with Tipper Wagons 1906

Source: Wikimedia Commons

https://wikivisually.com/wiki/File:Steam_locomotive_with_dump_wagons.jpg



Figure 8: Stone Boat Loading by Conveyor - 1975

Source: Morrab Library

<http://photoarchive.morrablibrary.org.uk/items/show/8790>

- **Coal** Construction of the Harbour also boosted Newlyn's fortunes as it meant commodities such as coal could be imported before the road connecting the two parts of Newlyn was built, thus improving coal supplies to the village of St. Just as noted in Appendix B, and for steamers. From about 1905 for about fifty years, coal was taken during the mackerel season from hulks in the harbour to the visiting east coast fishing steamers, in so-called Newlyn coal barges. These barges can be seen in some period photographs of the Old Quay, hauled above high-water level – they were sturdy craft, about 30 ft (c.9m) long and some 6 ft (c.1.82m) deep driven by oar and could carry up to 10 tons of “*bagged steam coal*” [Inshore Craft]. These craft were thought to be specific to Newlyn.
- **Infrastructure** In 1988 a new *fish market* was built and in 2013 it underwent a major refurbishment which included full-refrigeration and solar panels. It is the largest fish market in England. Other investments can be viewed on the panoramic [fly-around](#). And there is a drive through view in 2014 on [YouTube](#). In 2018, *Ultrabeam Hydrographic* conducted a multibeam sonar and laser survey of the harbour which can be viewed [here](#).

The Tidal Observatory

The Tidal Observatory was located near the end of the extended South Pier, its location chosen due to sufficiently deep water but protected by the harbour from storms, reflective of conditions in the Atlantic Ocean being near the Continental Shelf, and importantly, being on a large stable rock base. The Ordnance Survey specified the dimensions of a concrete block stilling chamber within the pier and its connection to the sea and these was incorporated within the Pier and a small building above was built to accommodate instrumentation. The Observatory was commissioned in 1915 and is central to mainland Britain's survey levelling infrastructure. It has also contributed to records of rising sea levels, which together with the Observatory can be found here (<https://maritimearchaeologytrust.org/newlyn-ordnance-and-other-datums/>).

Conclusions and Summary

The foresight of the fishermen of Newlyn, driven by their need, has to be complimented as well as the endeavour of the Harbour Commissioners over the years in conjunction with local politicians in the reward of a functional harbour placing Newlyn as a premier fishing port. Initially, Penzance authorities successfully objected to Newlyn developing its harbour, fearing loss of trade but this, with Newlyn's endeavour, was overcome and Penzance, which also boasts fishing from 1322 with its harbour extensions up to c. 1890 is now primarily a commercial port with a dry dock.

The history of Newlyn harbour is not dissimilar to other fishing ports where demand for fish created by an expanding population and arrival of the railways at or near established fishing areas led to the need for appropriate infrastructure and harbour development, phased to suit available finance and specific needs. Other examples in the south-west, with approximate contemporary dates, include Brixham 1000-1916 with substantial fishing, Torquay 1800-1895 with limited fishing, and Exmouth 1214-1999 with fishing as one of the commercial uses. Harbour development obviously suited local conditions and requirements and on the Atlantic facing coast, with a once vibrant pilchard fishing industry, is St. Ives 500-1890's but fishing here has reduced. Newlyn and Brixham remain as established fishing ports and play key roles in their respective local economies.

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Appendix A – Newlyn Storm 7 March 1962

Transcribed from the *Liverpool Echo* – 7 March 1962

“Freak Storm Lashes Cornish Coast

300 FAMILIES ARE ADVISED TO QUIT THEIR HOMES

More than 300 families living on the promenade at Penzance and Newlyn were advised to leave their homes between 4 p.m. and 8 p.m. to-day to avoid being trapped at high tide.

This action was taken by police after sea walls at the Cornish coast towns had been smashed by a freak tide, lashed by 60 to 70 m.p.h. gales this morning.

The swirling water lifted fishing smacks bodily from their moorings – one was thrown broadside across the coast road at Newlyn – then swirled inland, flooding homes to a depth of four feet and tearing up roads.

Police with loudspeaker vans toured the danger area warning sleeping householders and some who refused to leave were later evacuated.

At one time spray and waves reaching 30 to 40 feet (c. 9.1m to 12.2m) battered holes in the roofs of cottages near the sea wall.

Fire brigades from all over Cornwall were called as soon as the tide receded to begin pumping water from the houses.

The Automobile Association sent patrols to help police and local authorities with the re-routing of traffic and the erection of diversion and warning signs.

A reporter, telephoning from Penzance, said: ‘Driven by gale force south-westerly winds and a high tide, Newlyn, near Penzance. Is having its worst flooding in memory. Seas started to smash into the village at about 6 a.m. and before an hour was passed the sea wall there and at places along Penzance promenade were breached.

TAKING IT GREEN

On the landward side of the sea wall Newlyn ‘took it green’ as spray and waves reaching 30 to 40 feet displaced tiles and finally forced large holes in the roofs of cottages.

The windows of the historic Tolcarne Inn, formerly the home of smugglers, was severely damaged and flooded out, while in that neighbourhood many people who stayed in their houses despite warnings to move had to be evacuated.’

Police said that tides of 21 feet (c.6.4m) were recorded at Penzance without any danger of flooding. It was the combination of a high tide and strong south-westerly wind blowing inland that caused this morning’s build-up of water.

A resident said. ‘The sea is so high this morning that fishing boats appear to be floating above the level of the harbour. I have never seen anything like it before. In fact, I believe the last time there was anything like this at Penzance was in 1891.’

W.V.S. IN ACTION

Voluntary organisations went into action to help people in flooded homes. The W.V.S. provided food and hot drinks.

For a short time, there were fears for the safety of two Newlyn trawlers which left Newlyn last night and from which nothing had been heard. Then they were reported in Padstow harbour.

There was a danger of fresh flooding on to-night’s high tide at 6.30 p.m. and Penzance Town Council called an emergency meeting to discuss action.

Workmen raced to plug the gaps in the sea defences with sand and concrete.

DEVON, TOO

A fierce south-easterly gale which battered the South Devon coast flooded promenades in the holiday towns and stopped road traffic.

At Torquay the sea front road was under five feet of water at times as waves broke over the parapets. About a dozen cars were trapped and abandoned.

A policeman waded waist deep into a torrent of water to carry a motorist from his vehicle. A scooter rider was knocked from his machine.

Gales and a high tide also caused flooding at St. Peter Port, Guernsey, and traffic had to be diverted from the coast road. Similar conditions caused four-foot floods in Cork”.

Appendix B – Proposed New Harbour at Newlyn, 1865

Transcribed from the *Western Morning News* – 25 October 1865

*“For many years a growing feeling has been expressed in favour of a harbour in that most sheltered part of Mount’s Bay, Gwavas Lake, on the shore of which lies the populous village of Newlyn. The necessity has also been greatly felt for increased protection for the very large number of fishing boats, in which a capital of £60,000 is now embarked, and which lie at open moorings in Gwavas lake, or in the Penzance tidal harbour. In the former case there is of course very great danger of damage to the boats, in the latter very great trouble and expense are entailed on the fishermen, who often have to travel and take their fishing gear backwards and forwards between Newlyn and Penzance. It is also considered probable that Newlyn being more than a mile nearer St. Just than Penzance, a great deal of important coal traffic between these places could be brought to Newlyn harbour with advantage. With these ideas a number of influential gentlemen have met together for some time to consider the formation of a company, and a provisional committee having been appointed, they have secured the services of a competent civil engineer, who has got out plans and estimates as a basis on which a limited liability company may be formed, with a capital of £50,000 in 10,000 shares of £5 each. It is proposed that one arm of the harbour shall start from the Green rocks at Newlyn and run out 1,250 feet (c. 381m) in a direction E.N.E ½ E. with a projecting arm of 250 feet (c.76m) bearing N.E., which will divert the power of the sea from the other arm, and where there will be a depth of 16 feet to 18 feet (c.4.88 to 5.49m) of water at the lowest spring tide. The top will be 30 feet (c.9.1m) wide, and have a pier guard to the south of 4 feet (c.1.22m) high. The other arm will be projected from Tolcarne Rocks to the extent of 1,583 feet (c.482m) bearing S.E. and 30 feet (c.9.1m) wide. This will leave an entrance in to the harbour of 375 feet (c.114m). The whole extent of the harbour thus formed will be about *182½ acres (c.738,550m²). It is considered that this will make a very fine harbour; and lying, as it does, at the entrance of the Channel, it will cause new trade to develop itself, so that it is anticipated that that a good dividend will be realised. For some days past the promoters of this company have been working quietly, and already have a large number of shares subscribed for. During the present week a large meeting of Newlyn fishermen was held on the sands and addressed, after which a great number of shares were taken up.; and it is considered that the gentlemen interested will receive encouragement sufficient to warrant them in publishing the prospectus next week, and drawing the attention of the public to it; and it is hoped that a bill will be passed in the next session of Parliament, so as to enable the harbour to be built within three years of obtaining the Act”.*

£50,000 in 1865 is approx. £6.5m in 2020.

*The area of 182.5 acres was also reported in the *Royal Cornwall Gazette* but the *Cornish Telegraph* reported that the area would be about 80 acres (c. 323,750m²) when the tide was in which is far more aligned with the given pier dimensions.

Appendix C – Completion of the South Pier

Transcribed from the *Royal Cornwall Gazette* – 28 January 1887

“NEWLYN HARBOUR. COMPLETION OF THE SOUTH PIER.

On the 9th of June, 1885, with great rejoicings, the foundation stone of the south pier of Newlyn harbour was laid by Mr. C. C. Ross. From that date to the present the work of constructing this pier has been steadily progressing, and the undertaking is now virtually completed, only the "finishing touches" remaining to be made. The pier forms an impressive object, its massive proportions giving the idea of great protective powers as it offers resistance to the Atlantic billows.

It juts out into the sea 720 feet, leaving the main land from Green street, directly opposite the old Navy Inn. The pier is approached from the roadway by a slip of considerable length and gradient, which is supported on the north side by a substantial and carefully built wall. From the bottom slip the pier runs out in a straight line for 360 feet in an easterly direction on what are locally known as the Garrick Semmens rocks. Afterwards an E.N.E. direction is taken for a similar distance, so that an obtuse angle is formed. The pier has a working way (or breadth available for traffic) of 20 feet from the parapet to the coping, the latter being seven feet above high water. The parapet, which is on the south side, has a variable height of from five to eight feet, and at the end there is an alcove, opposite which will be placed a capstan. There are two flights of steps leading down to the water's edge, one at the angle, and the other at the point, and at the land end there is a cart road and slipway leading to the beach.

The pier is mainly built of concrete, the coping and pitching, and also the steps, being of granite, supplied by Messrs. Freeman and Son. There is some rubble-work in the first section, which is quite out of the sea at low water, but the second half is solid concrete. The manner in which the concrete was deposited was highly interesting. The necessary framework for confining the concrete within the prescribed limits having been constructed it was conveyed to its allotted place in a large box containing about two tons at a time. On arriving at the proper spot, the bottom of the box was suddenly removed and the semi-liquid concrete thus thrown out. This process went on until the whole of the framework by sections became filled, and on the concrete hardening the boarding was removed. By this means a splendid piece of masonry was gradually reared. No blasting was required for preparing foundations, as the concrete was simply deposited on the solid rocks which throughout the whole length form the bed of the pier.

At the point of the pier there is being erected a large wrought-iron lighthouse tower, with lantern, lens, and reflector. It is 27 feet high to the focus, and will be supplied with Lindberg's patent occulting apparatus, as it will shew a white flashing light. The contractors for the lighthouse are Messrs. Jukes, Coulson, Stokes, and Co., London, at £461.

r. J. C. Inglis, C.E., of Plymouth, is the engineer of the harbour works, and the pier has been constructed by Messrs. Hill and Co., under the supervision of Mr. Lester, one of the firms. Their contract amounts to £16,925. They have carried out their obligations in a most creditable and satisfactory manner and Newlyn Pier will long be a memorial to their efficient services. The first clerk of the works, Mr. Trevan, met with a fatal accident some time ago, and the office has since been held by Mr. Lee, Mr. R. Toman, clerk to the Commissioners, has taken an active interest in the undertaking.

Although the pier now finished, affords much-needed shelter and accommodation for the Newlyn boats, much yet remains to be accomplished before the entire harbour scheme can be called completed. A northern pier has now to be built and tenders have already been invited for the undertaking, so that no time may be lost in fully executing the entire plan. The northern pier that is to be— and which has been christened. before it is born the "Victoria" in honour of the Queen in her jubilee year — will be a much more extensive piece of work than that now concluded. There will be about 1,400 feet. of pier- work, pure and simple, in addition to a quay and strand of about 300 feet in length. This quay will start from the bridge spanning the Tolcarne river, and will afford ample accommodation for selling and conveniently packing the fish. After leaving the quay the north pier will keep a straight line towards the point of the new south pier for about 150 feet, it will then turn in slightly for 400 feet, so that it may be lapped by the southern arm of the harbour, the terminating section of about 63 feet in length, turning somewhat more abruptly inwards towards Newlyn. This will leave a clear space of 450 feet between the points of the piers. When all this is done— and such extensive operations will require much time for development— Newlyn will possess a very fine tidal harbour, enclosing a water area at high water ordinary spring tides of thirty acres, and at low water ordinary spring tides of twelve acres, the depth of water at the end of the piers at low water being about nine feet. Already a large part of what are known as the Green Rocks, lying to the north of the new south pier, have been removed by blasting, and before the entire harbour scheme is absolutely completed a good deal of work of this description must be done.

These harbour works at Newlyn are no speculative undertaking. They are being carried out by a properly constituted Board of Commissioners, which owes its existence to the Newlyn Pier and Harbour Orders, 1884

and 1886. The Commissioners are already indebted to the Public Works Loan Commissioners in £20,000, and it is impossible to name the exact dimensions to which this amount may swell by the time the entire scheme is carried out. The estimated revenue from the completed harbour, according to the legalised tariff, will amount to something like £2,500 a year, by means of which the debt will be gradually paid off. This is a sufficiently substantial sum to safeguard the Public Works Loan Commissioners in advancing adequate funds to complete the whole of the harbour works, so that Newlyn may ultimately possess that which has so long been required. (Endorsed Western Morning News)".

Appendix D – Completion of the North Pier

Transcribed from the *Royal Cornwall Gazette* – 5 July 1894

"COMPLETION OF NEWLYN HARBOUR SCHEME. SPEECHES BY MR. T. B. BOLITHO, M.P., AND OTHERS

The quaint fishing town of Newlyn, which nestles below the steep slopes at the western end of Mount's Bay, was made gay with flags, bunting, and triumphal arches, and crowded with fisherfolk in holiday attire on Tuesday, in celebration of the completion of the harbour scheme, by the formal opening of the northern arm. The work was commenced some nine years ago, and has involved an expenditure of £58,000. It consists of a southern arm, 700 feet long, with a lighthouse at the point, and northern arm, 1,400 feet long. The shorter arm was completed some years ago, but the other has only just been finished. A fine harbour has been made, affording safe anchorage for vessels at any state of the tide, and giving ample accommodation for the Newlyn fishing craft, and first-class conveniences for landing the catches. The bulk of the money was borrowed on the security of the tolls, and Mr. T. B. Bolitho, M.P., has materially helped the promoters of the scheme, and on Tuesday he further evidenced his interest in Newlyn and the neighbourhood by laying a memorial stone, and formally declaring the completion of the whole work.

Mr. T. B. Bolitho was met just outside Newlyn by the Penzance Town Band, and several of the Newlyn Harbour Commissioners and others, and accompanied by a large number of people to the pier, where the school children had already assembled. Those present at the stone laying ceremony included Mr. T. B. Bolitho, M.P., Mrs. E. Bolitho, Commander Bolitho, Mr. T. R. Bolitho, C.A., Miss Nera Bolitho, the Rev. T. N. Perkins (vicar), and Mr. and the Misses Perkins, the Rev. J. S. Carah, General Peel Yates, Major Ross, Mr. W. H. Julyan (Mayor of Penzance), Mr. A. Gregory, Mr. J. P. Milton, and Mr. R. Toman. The pier and its approaches were crowded. Letters of regret were received from Mr. C. C. Ross, the Rev. W. S. Lach-Szyrma (formerly vicar of Newlyn), Mr. J. G. Inglis (engineer), Mr. G. P. Bazeley, J.P., and Major Marrack.

The Vicar (the Rev. T. N. Perkins), after reading an address to Mr. Bolitho, and presenting it to him, handed him, on behalf of the inhabitants, a silver trowel and ivory mallet, and asked him to lay the memorial stone.

Mr. T. B. Bolitho, M.P., then laid, amidst cheers, a granite stone, with polished front, bearing an inscription stating that it was laid by Mr. T. B. Bolitho, M.P., as a memorial of the completion of the work.

The Vicar (as chairman of the Newlyn Harbour Commissioners) proposed a vote of thanks to Mr. T. B. Bolitho, to whom, he said, they were deeply grateful for what he had done for the harbour and parish (hear, hear).

Mr. Toman (secretary to the Harbour Commissioners) seconded.

Major Ross, on being called upon to support the motion, referred to the interest his brother, Mr. Charles Ross, took in the movement, and regretted that illness prevented his attending. Personally, he thoroughly sympathised with what they were doing, and congratulated them on the excellent harbour they now had — (applause).

Mr. T. R. Bolitho also supported, and said he looked forward to seeing that pier and harbour do as much for Newlyn as the Albert Pier and the harbour had done for Penzance — (applause).

Mr. W. H. Julyan, in further support of the vote of thanks, said he had come there mainly to hold out the right hand of fellowship on behalf of their neighbours at Penzance, and to wish them all the success they could desire. He did not see that there was any need for jealousy between the two places — (hear, hear). There was room enough for both of them, and no reason why they should not wish one another well. Recently he was at

St. Ives, where they formerly depended upon fishing and mining and upon having a member of Parliament to fleece. They had not got that now— for the fishing had failed and the mines were closed. But they were laying the foundation of a prosperity more enduring. At St. Ives they were catering for visitors— (hear, hear). Newlyn had a great future in that respect. But before they could succeed, they must attend to the instructions of their local medical officer of health. Commercial prosperity was very fluctuating, and therefore it would be well for Newlyn to have two strings to the bow— (hear, hear). He looked forward to the time when Penzance and Newlyn would grow into one town, and therefore he cordially wished them all prosperity— (applause). The motion was carried unanimously.

Mr. T. B. Bolitho, M.P., received with cheers said that whilst he thanked them most sincerely and from the bottom of his heart for their kind expressions towards him, he could assure them that no vote of thanks was required, for he was sufficiently thanked for anything he had done when he looked around and saw the satisfaction upon their faces at the completion of the work (applause). He regretted exceedingly the absence of Mrs. Bolitho, which was due to some misconception, but she had telegraphed saying her thoughts were with them, and hoping they would have a very pleasant day (applause). It was a long time ago— it seemed to him more than a decade— since the foundation stone of the southern arm was laid amidst much rejoicing, and he must say that he did not then think that by 1894 they would have been able to borrow money to the tune of £53,000, and that the money would have been so well applied and be bringing forth good fruit. They had heard that the revenue had increased since the work was commenced. The old pier turned in £42 a year, but they were now getting £2,300 a year, and he did not think it was going to stop there (hear, hear). The harbour was one of the best tidal harbours in the West, and was bound to bring considerable prosperity to Newlyn and its inhabitants (cheers).

The children afterwards sang, and the ceremony concluded with the National Anthem, led by the band.

Subsequently a capital luncheon was served in the Newlyn Church School by Mr. G. Hamlyn, of Penzance. The Vicar (the Rev. T. N. Perkins) presided, and amongst those present were Mr. T. B. Bolitho, M.P., Mrs. E. Bolitho, Mrs. Perkins, Dr. Montgomery, General Peel Yates, Major Ross, Mr. W. H. Julyan (Mayor of Penzance), the Rev. B. W. Aitken, Messrs. W. E. Baily, C.C, J. Q. Couch, R. R. Bath, B. Matthews (Marazion), E. Rogers, R. Sullifant, J. Wright, R. L. Pearce, B. Ridge, J. B. Cornish, J. P. Milton, C. S. Antill, J. Newall, E. R. Lister, A. Hosking, Barnes Richards, G. Pool, W. H. Trounson, and R. Toman.

The toast of "The Queen and the Rest of the Royal Family" having been drunk.

The Vicar proposed "The Health of Mr. T. B. Bolitho," whom he said he had always found most courteous and helpful in every possible way both in connection with the town and the pier (hear, hear). As their representative in Parliament, he thought everyone was contented with him, and he hoped for many years they would go on without political opposition (applause).

Mr. T. B. Bolitho, M.P., said that for years some such scheme as they saw had now been carried out in the harbour had been upon his mind. He had seen it grow bit by bit, and from first to last his interest in it had been sustained in a most remarkable manner. He was not a very sanguine man, and he had found it necessary for his own satisfaction to at times closely question the Newlyn Harbour Commissioners, and in his opinion a man who entered upon anything without making proper inquiries was not worth his salt (hear, hear). For his own part he was glad he took those precautions, and he rejoiced to think there was every chance that distinguished success would crown the efforts of those who had been laboriously engaged in the work (hear, hear). With regard to the fishery itself, it was not in their power to control that to a large degree, though science and such men as Mr. Baily could help them much (hear, hear). He was not very sorry the exhibition at Truro did not result in the promoters having too much money to spare, because he— with every good wish for science— could never quite see that they were likely to attain any very considerable amount of benefit by the erection of a large hall from which lectures on fishery could emanate. If the County Council had built a large hall, they might not only have incurred the expense, but have rendered themselves liable to jealousy and want of co-operation on the part of those places shut out in the cold. He thought some good would come from an itinerant lecturer— hear, hear). If fishermen would keep a record of facts which came under their notice, that collected information might by-and-by benefit all connected with the fishery (hear, hear). He did think Newlyn should wake up and see whether they could not derive some benefit, and do something for the

neighbourhood outside the fishing itself, because circumstances altered, and, as had been well said, they could not have too many strings to their bow. He could not advise too many to stick to the fishery; but when openings occurred, they should be embraced, and he urged upon those youths who had a taste for the sea the desirability of going into the navy, and thereby ensuring for themselves an undoubted and good future (applause).

"The Health of the Commissioners," proposed by Mr. T. B. Bolitho, and responded to by the Vicar and Mr. R. Toman followed.

Aquatic and other sports took place at Newlyn in the afternoon and evening, and fireworks capped the day's enjoyments. A large number of persons from Penzance and elsewhere joined in the amusements".

Appendix E – Completion of South Pier Extensions

Transcribed from the *Cornish Telegraph* – 14 January 1915

"Newlyn Harbour Completion of Extensive Improvements.

The extension of the 100 feet eastwards of the south pier this harbour, the construction of which w«« commenced in the early part of 1913, is now practically complete. The structure, which is of concrete blocks, is carried to rock foundation. It embodies a shaft and tunnel, over which a concrete shed is being erected for the Ordnance Survey Department, making Newlyn the principal tidal observatory station for the whole of the United Kingdom.

At the extreme end of the extension a new tower has been erected, with lantern, which will take place of the old lighthouse. To-day (Friday). January 8th, the existing light will, with the approval of the Elder Brethren of the Trinity, be exhibited in the new tower, and the two red vertical lights, which have marked the outer end of the extension during the progress of the work, will be discontinued

The corporation of Trinity House have also given the necessary statutory sanction to the proposed alteration of the characteristics of the light from the 1st March next, when it will be one flash of one second duration every five seconds. The intensity light, which will then be a dissolved acetylene installation, will be increased to 500 candle power, as compared with the existing 140 candle power light. The old lighthouse will be used as a look-out for the pilots.

There is already a consensus of opinion, not only of local fishermen, but of skippers of visiting fishing craft, as well as masters of steamships and sailing vessels, that the extension has very materially improved the harbour in heavy southerly gales, and the recent strong gales, particularly that on the 1st instant, demonstrated the value of the extension, for although the seas in the Bay were running very high, the enclosed waters of the harbour were practically free from surge or movement of any importance.

The Commissioners' engineers are Messrs. Douglass. Lewis and Douglass, of 15, Victoria Street, Westminster, and the resident engineer is Mr. J. B. Hooper, whose services in this important undertaking, much of it being under water work, have been much appreciated by the Harbour Commissioners".