

The Renovation of Lamorna's Village Hall

The Way Down to Lamorna

Lamorna (Cornish: Nansmornow or 'valley' and 'sea') is some 4 miles south west of Penzance and 7 miles east of Land's End. It is in the district of West Penwith and lies within the Cornwall Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty (AONB) and on the Penwith Heritage Coast. Lamorna Cove is at the southern end of the Lamorna Valley and is delineated by Carn Dhu (Black Rock) on the eastern side, Lamorna Point on the western side and Mount's Bay to seaward. The South West Coast Path runs through the cove.

The parish boundary is marked by the Lamorna Stream with the civil parish of Paul on the eastern side and St Buryan to the west.

The village, half a mile inland, was originally known as Nantewas. 'Lamorna' now embraces Lamorna Cove and the hamlets of Nantewas, Newtown, Tregurno, Boleigh, Rosemodress, Trewoofe, Castallack, Kemyel and Bossava. All are served by Lamorna Village Hall.

The History and Heritage

The area is of considerable historic and cultural significance, a land of legend. There is plentiful evidence of Neolithic settlements and activity, the best known being the stone circle, known as the Merry Maidens, or Dawn's Men, on the western edge of the Lamorna Valley. This late Stone and early Bronze Age (2500-1500BC) stone circle is renowned for both its beauty and the stories connected to it. It lies in a gently sloping field, a stone's throw from Tregiffian barrow and a number of other ancient sites.

To the northeast of the circle are The Pipers, two 3-metre-high stones, said to be the largest surviving standing stones in Cornwall. A Victorian myth was that the Merry Maidens were local girls who were turned to stone for dancing on the Sabbath, along with the two accompanying musicians, who became known as the Pipers.



A number of fogous, underground, dry-stone structures of Iron Age or Romano-British settlement sites, are located in the locality, as are several Celtic Crosses.

Human activity in the area continued and intensified in the Middle Ages. There are reports of a revolt against the Anglo-Saxon English in the 10th Century by the Cornish Celts (supported by the Danes) which led to a battle at Boleigh. The Saxon king Aethelstan of Wessex is said to have crushed the resistance, led by the Cornish King Huwal, "King of the West Welsh", before continuing on to conquer the Isles of Scilly. However other reports are that Huwal was one of several kings who signed a treaty with Aethelstan.

In the 14th Century there was considerable activity around tin-streaming in Lamorna, which created a number of topographical changes and features which are still evident in the valley bottom today.

Farming has always been an important local industry and continues to be so. The mild winter climate favoured out of season horticultural crops with over a hundred tiny clifftop meadows, known as 'quilllets,' being used to grow flowers, fruit and early potatoes in Victorian times. These were shipped upcountry from Penzance on the recently completed railway system. These small enterprises became increasingly uneconomic from the middle of the 20th Century but the field boundaries can still be seen, as at the Lamorna and Kemyel Nature Reserve.

The quarrying of granite on St Aubyn land on the east side of the Cove also flourished in Victorian times. Lamorna granite was used for many iconic and important buildings, including the Admiralty Pier at Dover; London County Council offices; the Thames Embankment; London Bridge (now in the US) and Portland Breakwater. St Johns Hall in Penzance was built from Lamorna granite in 1867, the top step to the entrance being one of the largest pieces of granite ever quarried. A plinth weighing 20 tons was also sent to The Great Exhibition of 1851 by sea but eventually, due to the hazards of loading ships, stone was sent by road through Newlyn, to the cutting yards in Wherrytown. The quarry eventually closed in 1911. Lamorna granite was also used locally to build Lamorna quay; Mousehole north pier; the Bishop Rock Lighthouse; the Wolf Rock Lighthouse and, not least, Lamorna Village Hall.

The building which now serves as the Village Hall has been at the centre of local community life for more than 130 years. In 1885 Canon Coulson of St Buryan saw a need for a church and day school for Lamorna and had one built there from his own private income. Girls could attend the school until they were ten and boys until eight years of age, after which they were expected to make the daily uphill trudge to St Buryan or Paul schools, depending upon which side of the Lamorna stream they lived.

The land for the building was given by John Hosking, who owned a number of properties in Lamorna, including the Post Office and the Lamorna Inn, also known as the 'Wink'. James Lugg of St Buryan was responsible for the construction of the building, using the famous granite hewn from the local quarry.

Mother said she watched them at work and at mid-day they would come to the Wink for a glass of ale to drink with their dinners of bread and cheese, and heavy cake (hevva) they brought with them in little white cotton bags, specially made and kept for that purpose and known as 'dinner bags'. This building with its ornamental granite pattern shows an example of pride men took in their work.' **Susie Mitchell, Recollections of Lamorna 1977.**

Shortly after the completion of the building, Lamorna became a mecca for artists of the Newlyn School. It is particularly associated with the artist S J "Lamorna" Birch, who lived there from 1908. The colony included Birch, Alfred Munnings, Laura and Harold Knight, Dod and Ernest Proctor, Charles and Ella Naper and Robert and Eleanor Hughes, among many others. Augustus John was also a frequent visitor to the thriving settlement. This period is dramatised in the book and later film, *Summer in February*. The colony was fragmented by the onset of the First World War, but Lamorna Birch remained there for many more years and his painting of our building in 1935 is below.



Later, other artists such as Hannah Gluckstein ('Gluck') and John Tunnard lived and worked in Lamorna. The Lamorna Arts Festival was launched in 2009 to celebrate the original Lamorna Colony and today's local art community, which continues to thrive.

Well known writers associated with Lamorna are John le Carré and Derek Tangye. Dylan Thomas was also a frequent visitor.

The actor Robert Newton (1905–1956) was educated at the school and his ashes were scattered in the sea off Lamorna by his son.

Lamorna's school building became its Village Hall and Community Centre fifty years ago, and was formally bought by a group of local Trustees from the Church in 1968 for £1500. The Lamorna Branch of the Women's Institute played an important role in this highly innovative and far-reaching decision. The hall continues to thrive as a centre and venue for local artists, exhibitions, educational activities, groups and societies and entertainment.

The local economy is now much dependent on tourism, attracted by the landscape, heritage and culture of the Lamorna Valley. The Village Hall can help to promote the economy by providing an attractive venue and hosting events and interesting archive material on local culture, history and heritage.

The Need for Renovation

Whilst the original granite-built hall remains in sound condition and of attractive appearance, the later flat-roofed extension added to house a kitchen and toilets is in a deteriorating

condition and no longer fit for purpose. It is damp, poorly insulated and ventilated and of varying floor and ceiling height. It is also of very unattractive appearance, which detracts from that of the original building.

Of particular concern is that there is no wheelchair or disabled access to the toilets and kitchen, which is no longer an acceptable situation. The local community is of above average age and the hall has an important role in preventing the isolation of older local inhabitants who are often less familiar with modern communication methods, such as the internet and social media. There is also no mobile phone signal in the valley. The village is poorly served by public transport and accessing the nearest bus service involves a walk of more than a mile in some cases, along an unlit road with no pavements. The hall therefore plays a vital role in maintaining social cohesion and well-being. There are no other community facilities in the Lamorna Valley, except for the Lamorna Wink, which is a commercial venture.

Extensive consultations with the local community and stakeholders from further afield have been conducted by the Village Hall Management Committee and over 100 comments, suggestions and letters of support have been received. All comments have been recorded and are available for scrutiny. Examples of just three from VH users are included here:

*The Lamorna Society's objectives are to enjoy, share and preserve the heritage and creative output of the Lamorna Valley - its art, poetry and literature and its social and natural history. The Society strongly supports your plans to renovate and make improvements to the Hall so that it can continue to be used and enjoyed by both residents and people from further afield who love Lamorna and who would wish its rich heritage to be preserved and perpetuated. **The Lamorna Society***

*The hall is enormously important to us, as it is convenient to many members who live in the area and are reluctant to have to travel to Penzance and beyond. Much as we value the Village Hall for our Society, it is also extremely important for Lamorna Valley as a whole. There is a thriving community spirit, which needs to be nurtured not just for now, but for the future. **The Peninsula Garden Society***

*I would like to register my support for the proposal to update and improve the facilities at Lamorna Village Hall. The venue is a great asset locally. Although I do not live in Lamorna, I very much appreciate the opportunity to go there frequently. It plays a great part in the feeling of 'belonging' to this scattered local community. Our lives would be poorer without it. **Sally Corbet, West Penwith resident.***

Funding

The VH accounts show that the income derived from events, activities and rentals of the hall has always covered its operational costs. The Lamorna Village Hall Trust is a registered charity and the Management Committee embarked on a fund raising initiative in 2016 which has so far raised some £7,000. However its assets are insufficient to cover the renovation costs in a foreseeable time-scale and grant aid will be required to complete the project before further deterioration of the building inevitably puts its valuable community role at risk.

Gerald Hayman

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