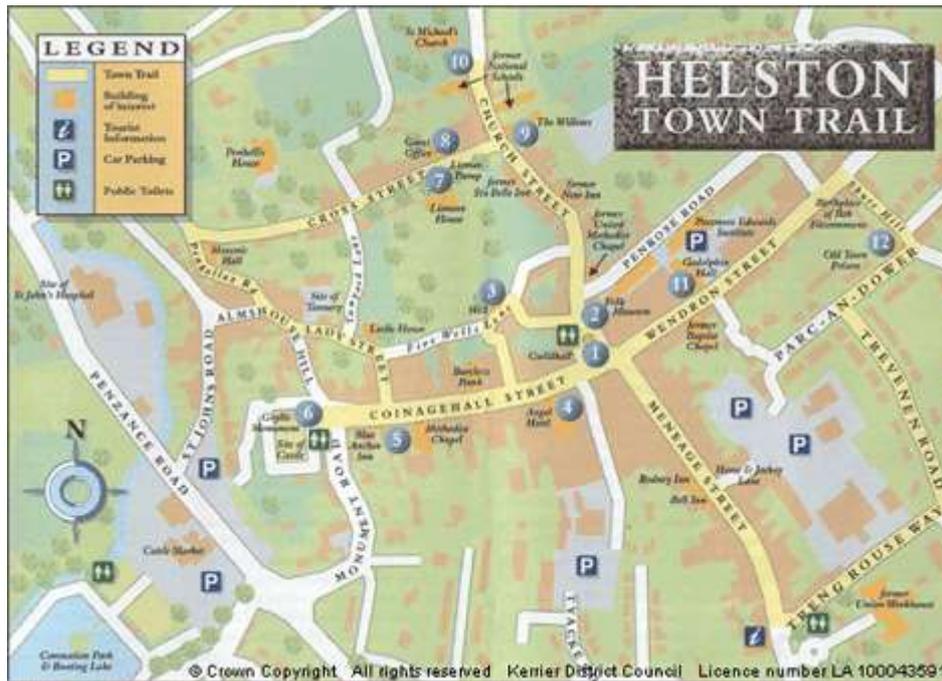


## Town Trail



1. The Town Trail sets off from the steps of the Guildhall. Built of granite ashlar in 1839 on the site of the old market house, the Guildhall contains the Council Chamber, Mayor's Parlour, a large function room (once the Corn Exchange), and the Town Clerk's office. Stand here at midday on May 8th and you'd better have your dancing shoes on – it's the starting point for the principal Furry Dance.



2. Turn down Church Street and on the right you'll soon see the Helston Folk Museum, created in 1949 and one of the finest in Cornwall. Inside you'll find relics from shipwrecks, tin mines and farms, and a feast of stories from the area's past. Originally built as a new market house in 1837/8, the front of the building housed the butter and egg stalls and at the rear was the meat market. One of the mayors named in carved granite over the arches is Glynn Grylls whose house, Lismore, you'll be passing later.

If you were here on a market day in the 1850s, you'd have witnessed a bustling street scene: barrow boys unloading horse-drawn wagons; crates of geese and chickens; housemaids scurrying off towards Cross Street with their purchases; farm lads nipping down Church Street to a nearby a tavern; noise and hubbub everywhere.

On the roof at the rear you can see the bell which was rung at the start of every market day. The cannon outside is from HMS Anson, wrecked on Loe Bar in 1807 with the loss of over 100 lives. Continue past the Red Lion Inn and turn down a narrow passage on your left known as Wheelbarrow Lane. Further along the cobbled passage you'll notice wedges of granite built into the steps to allow a smooth ride for the barrow's wheel.



3. You come out in Five Wells Lane, once a cobbled service road to the gardens and stables of the fine houses of Cross Street. Across the lane to the left, down a flight of cobbled steps, is the well. In the 18th century this would have been quite a meeting place, with townfolk washing clothes and filling buckets with the clear well water from the spout. Note the inscription above the well: Thomas Cock, Mayor 1703. Continue a little further on down Five Wells Lane and turn up the first alleyway on the left. You emerge into Coinagehall Street.



4. Cross over, head towards the Angel Hotel, the 16th century town house of the Godolphin family. It has been a hostelry since the mid-1700s and crops up frequently in tales of Helston's history. It is said that the hotel is named after the Archangel Michael who conquered the Devil. It was used as an excise and temporary gaol for smugglers, and later a posting house and tax office; Coinage Hall officials stayed here; magistrates dined here after a day on the bench and local societies held balls and meetings here. In April 1975, the landlord Valentine Ohlenschlager was killed; shot five times by one of his staff.

As you continue down the street, you'll be walking beside the small water channels, or kennels, which divert stream water from the top of the town down the sides of the street. Across the street is Barclays Bank, originally built in 1755 as the house of Hugh Rogers, who later became the first Squire of Penrose. Although the building was reconstructed in 1933, look up and you can still see the date 1755 on the heads of the drainwater pipes. Further down, on the left, you'll pass the Methodist Chapel, built during 1888/89 by WJ Winn, Helston-born building contractor, Borough Engineer and Surveyor, who was also responsible for Lloyds Bank and the Mullion Cove Hotel.



5. Soon you'll arrive at the thatched Blue Anchor Inn, originally a monks' rest house, which became a tavern in the 15th century. Miners received their wages in the pub, which is possibly the oldest private brewery in the country. The brewery is at the back, next to the old skittle alley and the beer, Spingo, comes in three strengths. The inn has a colourful history. In 1717 the landlord took the wrong side in an argument and was stabbed to death. In August 1791, landlord Jimmy James had his head fractured by a bayonet in a bar-room dispute with two soldiers, Ben Willoughby and John Taylor. Willoughby was later hanged at Bodmin. In the tin mining boom years, the Old Blue, as it is still called, must have been a difficult inn to run; in 1828 a man fell to his death in the well, and in 1849 the landlord James Judd hanged himself in the skittle alley.



If you're wondering where the Coinage Hall was, which gave the street its name, stand outside the Blue Anchor and look over towards the Factory Shop. From the late 16th century to about 1810 your view would have been interrupted by a long narrow row of buildings – the Duchy Officer's house, the Gaol, and the Coinage Hall, which had incorporated the Chapel of our Lady at the Reformation in 1546 – in the middle of the

thoroughfare. The Chapel of Our Lady was in existence before 1243 and the street was originally named Lady Street, until 1788.

6. Cross the street at the bottom, just before the bend, and walk through the arch of the imposing Grylls Monument, erected in 1834 to the memory of Humphrey Millett Grylls. He



was a Helston banker and solicitor whose actions kept open the local tin mine Wheal Vor and saved 1200 jobs. A vellum copy of the Latin eulogy written for Grylls by the Revd. Derwent Coleridge was put in a bottle and deposited in a hole made in the first stone laid at the south-west corner of the monument. It is, of course, still there.

The first bowls rolled out on Helston's bowling green, one of the oldest in the country, in 1764. The Bowling Club was founded in 1760 and today has about 130 members. On Flora Day, dancers parade in and out under the monument and around the perimeter

path.

As you stand beside the bowling green, you're on the spot where Helston's castle once stood, standing guard over the Cober valley and the western approach to the town. The original castle was probably a palisaded enclosure surrounded by a bank and ditches, replaced by a more robust stone structure in the 1270s for Edmund, Earl of Cornwall. Probably not as permanent as hoped; the castle was in ruins by 1478.

Walk back up the left side of Coinagehall Street, noting the paving stones carved to influence rainwater into the kennels. Looking up the street 100 years ago, you'd have seen a street packed with stagecoaches, loading up with mailbags and Victorian tourists bound for St Keverne, Kynance and Lizard village. Turn left after Chymder House down Lady Street. Follow the road round to the left, passing Leslie House on the right, built in 1810 for a wealthy tin merchant, and requisitioned for use by the Women's Land Army in the Second World War. On the corner opposite, to your left, the room on stilts was, in the mid-19th century, part of a school for 60 boys and girls.



In those days, if you turned this corner at 7.00 am on a weekday, you would have met pupils trooping in to repeat lessons, often by candlelight, with headmaster William Charles Odger waiting sternly at the door. The morning air would have been tainted with the smells wafting from Cunnack's Tannery down Tanyard Lane.

Continue down until the road joins Almshouse Hill, named after a row of church-owned almshouses which stood at the top of the hill in the 18th century, providing shelter for the parish paupers. Turn first right along Penhellaz Road and, as the road bends to the right after the two bollards, take in the view over the wall on your left. Ahead of you the Cober valley stretches out towards Loe Pool, the largest freshwater lake in Cornwall, and the sea beyond. Standing here before the 13th century, you might have seen sea-going vessels making their way up the tidal river to the riverbanks below you, where they would load up with tin and leather.

From this vantage point in the early 1300s, you'd be looking over a busy trading area, but large boats would no longer be able to make it across the huge sandbank, Loe Bar, which in 1302 cut off Helston from the sea for good. The newly-built Helston Castle would be standing proud up on your left (on the bowling green) with perhaps the Earl of Cornwall's archers patrolling the battlements. Down to the right, beside the Penzance Road, would be St John's Priory Hospital, founded in 1220, where a prior and two brethren would be looking after ailing travellers and lepers; its doors were open until about 1580 – you can see carved stones from the hospital in the Helston Folk Museum. From medieval times, you would have seen, to the right of the hospital, St John's Mill; the building is now on the far side of the main road, converted into flats. Continue past the Masonic Hall, originally built in 1827 as a Commercial & Mathematical Academy, from where you'd have heard 60 pupils reciting their tables under Josiah George Barnes, headmaster. Turn right into Cross Street and you're walking along Helston's finest thoroughfare, once cobbled and lit by gas lamps, flanked by grand houses. Lawyers, bankers and businessmen developed quite a power base here, reflected in the architecture.



On your left is the driveway to Penhellis House. Built in the early 1800s for the Ratcliffe family, it is still the town's most impressive dwelling. It was designed by George Wightwick, a noted Plymouth architect who was also responsible for the Grylls Monument, the Guildhall and Helston Grammar School. It has been a privately owned since 1981 and is now a care home. On the left further on you'll pass Church Lane, an old bridleway leading to St Michael's Church.

7. Further on, No. 5 – the Great Office – has housed solicitors for over 200 years, including the Ratcliffes of Penhellis House. Built in the early 1700s, with later extensions, it was a base for Helston's early banks, looking after the accounts of local mines. It was once the home of the town's Registry Office.

8. Opposite, in the wall at Lismore is a cast iron pump bearing the date 1844 and it's easy to imagine carriages watering their horses here whilst their bosses were negotiating deals in the Great Office. Lismore was built in the early 1800s for Glynn Grylls, seven times Mayor of Helston, a solicitor and brother of Humphrey Grylls. On Flora Day, the Gardens open to the public and mark the halfway point for dancers, who take refreshment on the lawn. Walk on to the junction with Church Street, and note the Maltese Cross in the hedge, which gives Cross Street its name.

9. The Willows, opposite in Church Street, was built in the late 1700s. It became the home of many of the town's worthies, including foundry owner Sir Henry Toy, before becoming Kerrier District Council offices in 1939.

Turn left up Church Street to pass the town's former National Schools. The school furthest up on the left, beside the church steps, was built in 1828 and closed in 1957. The young Bob Fitzsimmons used to train in the hall. The school housed girls and infants after the boys moved to the later building, on the right hand side of the street, in 1894. It closed in 1963.



10. Climb the steps to St Michael's Churchyard with its enormous carved granite blocks covering family vaults. Near the porch you'll see the monument to Henry Trengrouse, a Helston cabinet-maker, who, after witnessing the appalling wreck of the *Anson* in 1807, invented a rocket apparatus for shooting a rescue line to a stricken vessel, to which was affixed the 'bosun's chair', later known as the breeches-buoy. The invention saved thousands of lives and although not honoured in Britain, Trengrouse was presented by the Tsar of Russia with a diamond ring for saving the lives of his countrymen. However, the inventor was later forced to pawn the ring and he died penniless in 1854. You can find a prototype of the apparatus in the

museum.

The present church, built of granite from Tregonning Hill and a gift from Lord Godolphin to the Borough of Helston, was erected between 1756 and 1763 on the site of a former church, demolished after being struck by lightning. The architect was Thomas Edwards of Greenwich and the result is a typical town church which would have looked at home in the suburbs of London. Much of Helston's history is reflected in the memorials inside, including a stained glass window showing angels dancing the Furry Dance. The impressive 24-branch chandelier was a gift from the Earl on the church's opening in 1763.



Retrace your steps down Church Street, once the trading centre of the town. The second building after the Cross Street junction was until 1913 an old inn, The Six Bells to commemorate the hanging of six new bells at the church in December 1767. Further along on the left is the site of the New Inn (now 15 Church Street). Quiet enough now, but this is the spot where, in 1548, William Body, the King's Commissioner,

met a violent end. Body had been granted the right to strip churches of Catholic artefacts, and began his job at nearby St. Keverne. At Helston he met a grim-faced crowd who dragged him from a house and stabbed him to death. After the blood-letting the mob rioted, and Helston became a no-go area for days until the magistrates, led by Sir William Godolphin, rounded up the ringleaders, including the priest from St. Keverne. They were taken to Tyburn and hung, drawn and quartered.

As you climb the hill towards the Guildhall, you'll pass the remains of the United Methodist Chapel, built on the site of a brewery in 1838, demolished in 1969. A short way up Penrose Road is the Passmore Edwards Institute, erected in 1898 as a Science & Art School, extended in 1905 to become Cornwall's first County Secondary School. The son of a Blackwater carpenter, John Passmore Edwards became a wealthy newspaper owner and donated huge sums of money for Cornish libraries, schools and hospitals.

Continue up Church Street, past the Museum, up Market House Steps and turn left into Wendron Street. As you walk up the hill, look up to your right and you'll see the roof of a Baptist Chapel, built in 1836/7. It became a furniture showroom in 1902 and, just before the Great War, the Flora Cinema.



11. Godolphin Hall, the imposing granite building on the left, has been the home of the Godolphin Club since 1976. It

was built in 1888 on the site of Helston's Grammar School which stood here from 1837 to 1885. To the side of the building you can see the original mock Tudor Gothic entrance to the school. Further along you'll pass a 17th century thatched cottage, the reputed birthplace of Bob Fitzsimmons, the boxer, Helston's most famous son.



12. Shortly after this, turn right up Shute Hill. On your right at the top is one of Helston's more sinister buildings, the Borough Prison with its grim iron-bolted doors. Built in 1837, the prison had two cells for daytime use and six for overnight detention; the gaoler and his family lived upstairs. You can see the spikes which prevented escape through the drains, although in 1847 John Ford, a Germoe farmer, climbed up the chimney whilst awaiting transportation for receiving stolen goods. One of the gaolers, until his dismissal in 1860, was James Fitzsimmons, father of Bob. The gaol closed in 1866.

Turn right along Parc-an-Dower, left along Trevenen Road and right into Trengrouse Way. The large building on your left, visible above the trees, was from 1948 to 1996, Meneage Hospital. It was originally built in 1855 as the Union Workhouse for the severely poor from local parishes. In 1895 there were 115 inmates who spent their days breaking stones, picking oakum or engaged in other menial work. For this they would receive shelter and meagre food.



Turn right at the bottom of Trengrouse Way and make your way down Meneage Street, once an area of splendid houses and popular inns. The Bell Inn is mentioned in the early 18th century and the Rodney in 1780, when the name changed from the Admiral Boscawen to the Lord Rodney, another admiral who in that year won a spectacular sea battle. Horse & Jockey Lane refers to an ancient inn, once on the corner, that closed in the 1920s. Eddy & Sons splendid art-deco shop-front came from Birmingham in the 1930s whilst the original entrance portico was removed to Lismore, where it still stands today. Continue down to Wendron Street and back to your starting point.

## The Godolphins



When the carriages of the Godolphin family pulled into Helston, it's likely that people in the street would doff their caps. For hundreds of years, up to the mid-18th century, the Godolphins grew wealthy on the proceeds of tin and were regarded with deference by the townsfolk.

Distinguished Godolphins included John, Lord High Sheriff of Cornwall in the 15th century; Francis, who in 1595 repelled 200 Spanish marauders who had set fire to the village of Mousehole; and Sidney, who became Lord High Treasurer to Charles II. They followed the traditional life of landed gentry, acting as magistrates and representing Helston in Parliament. The dynasty ended in 1766 with the death of Francis, 2nd Earl of Godolphin.

The family home of Godolphin House, a few miles from Helston, is reported to have had 40 chimneys in 1690 and, for a time, the Angel Hotel was their town house.

### **The Coinage Hall**



Just as farmers took their cattle to market, mine owners would bring their tin to Helston's Coinage Hall. Until the coinage system was abandoned in 1838, officials at the hall weighed and valued tin which was then auctioned. 'Coinage' comes from the French coin for corner, as the quality of tin was assessed by cutting a corner from an ingot.

For the three or four day coinage sessions, which were held twice a year, Helston became a carnival town. At the midsummer coinage in 1595, when 110,000lbs of tin were recorded, you'd have seen quite a spectacle. Carriages everywhere; merchants, some coming as far away as the Mediterranean; wagons creaking under the weight of 31/2 cwt tin block; porters scurrying around; beggars, pedlars and musicians. The inns would be heaving, and you'd have heard cheers ringing out from the cock pit at the back of the Angel Hotel. You may also have seen Sir Francis Godolphin come into town to oversee his tin, embossed with the family's Dolphin stamp.

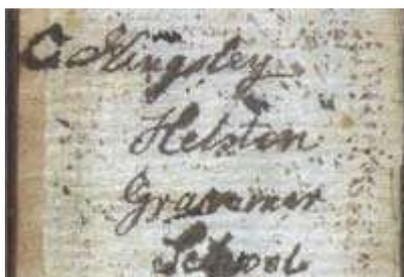
### **Flora Day – a tradition rooted in the distant past**



The Furry, or Flora, Dance is perhaps Helston's greatest claim to fame. It is held annually on May 8th, the Christian feast day of the apparition of St. Michael, Helston's patron saint, and although the origins of the Furry Dance pre-date Christianity, the early church adopted and then transformed pagan rituals. Ancient Cornish folk would celebrate the triumph of life (spring) over death (winter) in a fertility ritual in woods close to the town. The revellers would dance back in a procession, laden with flowers and sycamore branches. You can see traces of this ceremony in the Hal-an-Tow, on the morning of Flora Day.

Nowadays, the Helston Town Band lead four processional dances throughout the day and thousands throng the streets to cheer them. For the midday principal dance, invited participants wear top hats, tails and dress gowns, and weave in and out of shops, houses and gardens.

### **The Eton of Cornwall**

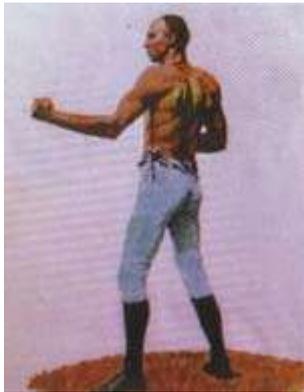


When Helston Grammar School moved from its location by the Coinage Hall to Wendron Street in 1835, the headmaster was Revd. Derwent Coleridge, son of poet Samuel Taylor Coleridge. Charles Kingsley, the famous writer, was a pupil from 1832 to 1836 with his younger brother Hubert, and Coleridge mentions them both in his diary: 'The elder Kingsley is ... in short, half mad. The younger is a thief and a liar, and a runaway. He stole two silver spoons... took himself off, and was within an ace of getting aboard one of

Don Pedro's recruiting vessels...,' Hubert died at the age of 14 and is buried in St Michael's churchyard.

In his memoirs, Charles describes one of the masters at the school, the Revd. C A Johns, who inspired his interest in botany during rambles over the Lizard. Johns wrote many books, including 'A Week at the Lizard'.

### **Bob Fitzsimmons**



Born in 1863, Fitzsimmons was the first boxer to be world middleweight, light heavyweight and heavyweight champion and the only Briton to have achieved this. He was often called Lanky Bob because of his long thin legs clad in padded tights. Fitzsimmons fought against Tom Sharkey in San Francisco in 1896, under the watchful eye of referee Wyatt Earp, the famous deputy marshal of Tombstone Arizona. Earp disqualified Fitzsimmons in round eight for punching below the belt! Fitzsimmons broke both hands during the bout which lost him his heavyweight title, fighting a man 50 pounds heavier. He retired in 1914 and died in Chicago three years later.