

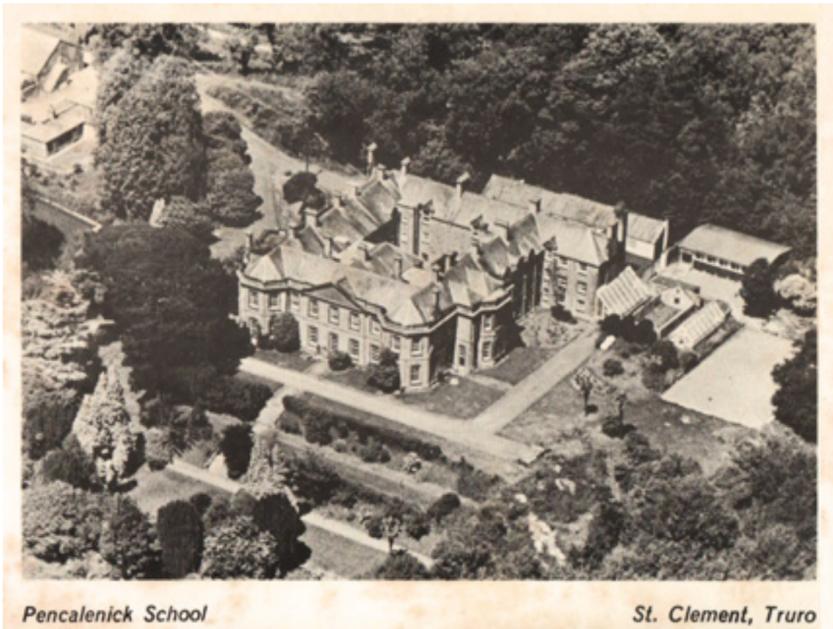


Pencalenick School

Specialising in complex learning difficulties and disabilities



SCHOOL HISTORY



Pencalenick School, in the parish of St Clement, has a rich and fascinating history. Sited in a prominent position overlooking a tributary of the River Fal and surrounded by woodland, this relatively secluded estate is yet a few miles from the city of Truro.

The woodland here was once part of the Forest Of Moresknotable for being one of the largest wooded areas in Cornwall in 1085. It also has an intriguing link with the story of Tristan and Iseult.....the ill fated lovers were said to have been eventually discovered here by King Mark. Moresk, the old name of St Clement, is listed in the Domesday Book and it is likely that Pencalenick was established as a farm around this time. The name itself is derived from the Cornish 'Penkileynyk' meaning 'the end of the place where the holly trees grow'.

The house we know today as Pencalenick School was built in 1881. There was, however, a property on the site prior to this date. Built close to what is now the School playing field the original cottage was later extended to become a much larger Georgian residence.

Unfortunately, the property suffered from extensive rot and when the owner, Mr Williams, leant against the mantelpiece during a game of billiards, it collapsed into the cellar!

Mr Michael Henry Williams had purchased the Pencalenick Estate in 1879 for the sum of £49,000. This included 100 acres of land and the Georgian house, believed to have been constructed from stone and locally made bricks. The Williams family were from Scourier and had made their money from mining, smelting and merchant banking. Mr Williams had been made Sheriff in 1879 and, having made the decision to demolish the original house, set about designing a property suited to his position. In order to achieve this, he enlisted the services of architect James P St Aubyn of London.

The new house was to be situated on high ground overlooking the recently planted Italian Garden with views of the Tresillian River and Lord Falmouth's estate. Built in the Georgian style but with Italian influences the house was constructed from Ashlar stone whilst plans suggest the Northern Wing contains stone recycled from the original property.



There was supposedly some ill feeling between Mr Williams and Lord Falmouth and it is documented in the County Records Office that the house was located in such a way 'that Lord Falmouth could not help but regard its magnificence every time he rode up his drive to Tresillian'. Certainly no expense was spared in the construction of the property. Impressive Tuscan style columns line the front entrance whilst intricate stained glass panels embellish the inner doors of the vestibule adjacent to the main hall, from which a grand oak staircase leads to the first floor. Ornamental wood carvings, friezes and marble fireplaces add a distinctive character to the house; the Arabesque geometric strap work of the ceilings was produced by Italian craftsmen who were working on Truro Cathedral at the time. In fact the extravagant decor of the ground floor resulted in a lack of funding for elsewhere.....hence the absence of decorative features on the upper floors! The principle rooms were located in the front of the house, the Billiard Room to the right of the main entrance (currently the Conference Room), the adjacent Library (a classroom), the Morning Room (the School Library) and the Drawing Room (a classroom). The Dairy, Pantry, Larder and Scullery were situated close to the two storey kitchen and a Gun Room and Brushing Room were located between The Housekeeper's Room and The Servant's Hall in the domestic wing. The east-facing Dining Room is used for the same purpose today.

The 18th Century gardens were further developed by Mr Michael Williams, himself a keen horticulturist. He created the Italian garden with its terraces, steps and formal planting together with exotic palms, phormiums and cordylines and a central fountain which exists to this day. Rhododendrons, bamboos and magnolias were planted; many new specimens were being introduced to Cornish gardens from around the world at this time. Earlier features of the garden included a series of linked ponds in a valley to the south of the house, which are now on land owned by The Duchy of Cornwall, and a late 18th Century walled garden which was close to the original house. A Victorian greenhouse has been carefully taken apart in recent years and renovated at Heligan where it is currently accessible to the public.

Mr Michael Williams died in 1902 and the estate passed to his eldest son, Henry Harcourt Williams who lived there with his wife and family until 1916 when he moved to Penair a short distance away. At this point Pencalenick remained empty until the arrival, in 1918, of Lady Harriet Salusbury-Trelawny, the mother-in-law of Henry Harcourt Williams. In 1927 Henry died leaving the Pencalenick estate to his 12 year old son, Francis Trelawny Williams. Lady Harriet continued to live at Pencalenick until her death in 1932. Apart from being briefly occupied by Lady Rendelsham, the widow of Henry Harcourt Williams who had remarried, the days of Pencalenick as a family home were over. Francis Trelawny Williams took over the estate upon reaching his 21st birthday in 1936 but world events were about to mark a new chapter in the history of Pencalenick.



The arrival of the Second World War saw Pencalenick requisitioned by the War Office. The lodge house gates and railings were removed as scrap metal for the war effort and the grounds used as a training base for the Duke of Cornwall's Light Infantry. The building was used as an Army Field Hospital after Dunkirk in 1940 (as it had been during World War I) and all the rooms off the



main hall became wards for wounded soldiers. In 1942 American troops began arriving and by 1944 the site was the Headquarters of the 1st and 5th Engineer Special Brigades. Armed guards were posted at the front entrance and at all the doors off the main hall.....the reason being that preparations for the D-Day landings were being made in these rooms and Sir Winston Churchill and General Eisenhower are even reputed to have visited the premises. Vehicles and equipment were stockpiled in the woods of the estate ready to be loaded into barges for the D-Day invasion since the secluded creeks of the River Fal were relatively secure for such activities. The troops departed to France and to the beaches codenamed

Utah and Omaha. The 5th Engineer Special Brigade was the first regiment to land at Omaha and suffered huge casualties. The 1st Brigade had more success and one of their party returned to visit Pencalenick in 1995. For the remainder of the War Pencalenick became a Prisoner of War Camp for Italian Officers. Restoration of many of the decorative features of the house is believed to have been carried out by these men.

After the War the house was left empty and fell into disrepair whilst the gardens, whose produce once rivalled that of Heligan at local horticultural competitions, became neglected and overgrown. There are stories of local farmers storing potatoes and coal in the main hall and of children using the site as a playground. In 1948 the house and six or seven acres of land were sold to Cornwall County Council under compulsory purchase whilst the remaining grounds were purchased by The Duchy of Cornwall. It took four years for the house to be restored to a habitable state and in 1952 it opened as a school for the first time.

In its early years as a school for pupils with special needs the emphasis at Pencalenick was on practical and social skills. The first Head Master was Mr Guy Speake and his wife the School Matron, a tradition common to residential schools of the time. Every Sunday, all pupils were taken to church, either the Methodist service at Tresillian or the Church of England service at St Clement. The steps on the terrace to the south of the house leading to the riverside path became known as 'Church Steps' from here on. Photos of the boarding house from this period depict an environment which appears quite austere by today's standards. Mr and Mrs Speake retired after 22 years to Pencalenick Lodge, the thatched cottage on the Truro to Tresillian road which was formerly the coachman's house at the main entrance to the estate. The intervening years have seen significant developments at the school, both in terms of financial investment and in the approach to educating young people with special needs. Pencalenick celebrated its 60th anniversary in 2012 and has, in fact, been a school for longer now than it was ever a family home!



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Pencalenick: a company limited by guarantee

Registered in England:Company Number:
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