

WILLIAM JORY HENWOOD.

In 1805 during the heyday of Cornish tin and copper mining William Jory Henwood was born at Perran Wharf, now known as Perranarworthal. He was to become a brilliant and well respected geologist widely known for his extensive studies of Cornish mines and theories on how the orebodies were formed. In later years he was to enlarge on his experience in Cornwall with work overseas in Brazil, India and North America.

At the age of 17 he began his working life as a clerk in an office at Perran Foundry in a post previously held by his father. The manager of the foundry at that time was George Fox, himself a well known scientist. He recognised the talent of his young employee and provided him with tuition and every encouragement during his five years in the service of the company. He was then commissioned to undertake a survey of Cornish mines largely funded by the Fox family, who had a multitude of mining interests. As a virtually self taught geologist his lack of academic background was more than compensated for by his acute observations. He was soon publishing papers on mining subjects to the Royal Geological Society of Cornwall and the Geological Society of London.

At the young age of 35 he was elected a Fellow of the Royal Society, the most distinguished group of scientists of the day. In 1845 he published a highly regarded and detailed study of the metalliferous deposits of Cornwall and Devon.

Soon after he joined the growing exodus of Cornish miners and engineers emigrating all over the world to find work and make their fortunes. He was appointed manager of the then well known Gongo Soco gold mine in Brazil owned by the British financed Imperial Brazilian Mining Company, who recruited their skilled labour needs from Cornwall. In all this highly profitable mine employed 100 Cornish miners, who were encouraged by Henwood to settle there with their wives and families. A thriving Cornish community grew up complete with Methodist prayer groups and a count house. Henwood opened a school for negro children and promoted the emancipation of the largely slave workforce.

In the 1850's he moved to India at the invitation of the government to report on mineral deposits in the northern parts of the sub-continent.

In 1858 he returned to Cornwall impaired by ill health and settled in Penzance. There he compiled and published a massive volume entitled "Observations on Metalliferous Deposits and Subterranean temperature" for which he received the coveted annual Murchison medal. A beautiful turquoise-blue aluminium and copper mineral found in a mine near Liskeard was named Henwoodite after him. He died in Penzance in 1875.

His parents John and Mary Henwood are commemorated by a window in the south aisle of Perranarworthal church and there is a tablet inscribed "In memory of John and Mary Henwood of this parish ; of their children ; 1853.

Chris Burton. April 2010.