

## Pawlyn Fish Barrels

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From the 1890s to the 1950s the Pawlyns were prominent West Country fish merchants, and their fish barrels and boxes were a common sight on the quays of Cornish fishing villages and the Barbican in Plymouth. Having collected several images of these receptacles in different settings I now present all of them here, 'for the record'. This specialised (and, maybe, rather strange) quest was sparked many years ago by my mother's recollection that in the Plymouth Museum and Art Gallery there used to hang a large painting depicting a street scene in a Cornish fishing village which clearly featured one or more Pawlyn fish barrels. For my mother this was a matter of great pride, as her grandfather was one of the four 'Pawlyn Brothers' who apparently were the original partnership of fish merchants. I say 'apparently' because the legal status of this family business remains ill-defined to this day. In 1936 the following notice appeared in *The London Gazette*:

NOTICE is hereby given that the Partnership heretofore subsisting between us, the undersigned, James Pawlyn, Josiah Pawlyn, James Pawlyn the Younger, and William Strike Pawlyn, carrying on business as Fish Merchants and Curers, at Newlyn, Penzance, and St. Ives, both in the county of Cornwall under the style or firm of PAWLYN BROTHERS, but under no written articles of partnership has been dissolved by mutual consent as from the eleventh day of October, one thousand nine hundred and thirty-six. — Dated this twelfth day of October, 1936.  
JAMES PAWLYN.  
JOSIAH PAWLYN.  
JAMES PAWLYN, Junr.  
WILLIAM STRIKE PAWLYN.<sup>1</sup>

The purpose and impact of this notice is wholly obscure – how can one dissolve a partnership that never existed as a legal/commercial entity in the first place? – and in any case it did not deter members of the family from continuing to trade (jointly or severally) as 'Pawlyn Bros', or 'Pawlyn and Sons', or 'Pawlyn and Son', for another twenty years or more.

Figure 1 shows the four Pawlyn Brothers: Thomas Allen Pawlyn (1864-1946), Mevagissey; James Pawlyn (1869-1938), Porthleven; George Farran Pawlyn (1871-1957), Plymouth and Padstow; and Josiah Pawlyn (1876-1937), Newlyn. Two of these, James and Josiah, signed the 1936 notice, together with James's sons James Pawlyn the Younger and William Strike Pawlyn. George Farran Pawlyn was my mother's grandfather. According to my mother's sister the four brothers were known as 'Tom, George, Joe, and Jim'.

Figure 2 shows the painting that used to hang in the Plymouth Museum and Art Gallery, *Old St Ives* by Herbert Truman. The Pawlyn fish barrel is evident and undeniable; and although the painting is not as huge as my mother remembered, understandably this was the indelible impression acquired by a young girl seeing her family name in oils for the first time.

Figures 3-11 show Pawlyn fish barrels and/or associated paraphernalia in Mevagissey, Porthleven, Newlyn, St Ives, Newquay, Padstow, and Plymouth. My great thanks to Tony Pawlyn for sending me Figure 8, Robin Boon for finding and giving me the Newquay book featuring Figure 9, and Chris Robinson for donating cleaner copies of Figures 7 and 11, all unbidden. I remain on the lookout for any more such images.

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<sup>1</sup> *The London Gazette* (16-Oct-1936) p.6639, <https://www.thegazette.co.uk/London/issue/34332/page/6639/data.pdf>.

Figures



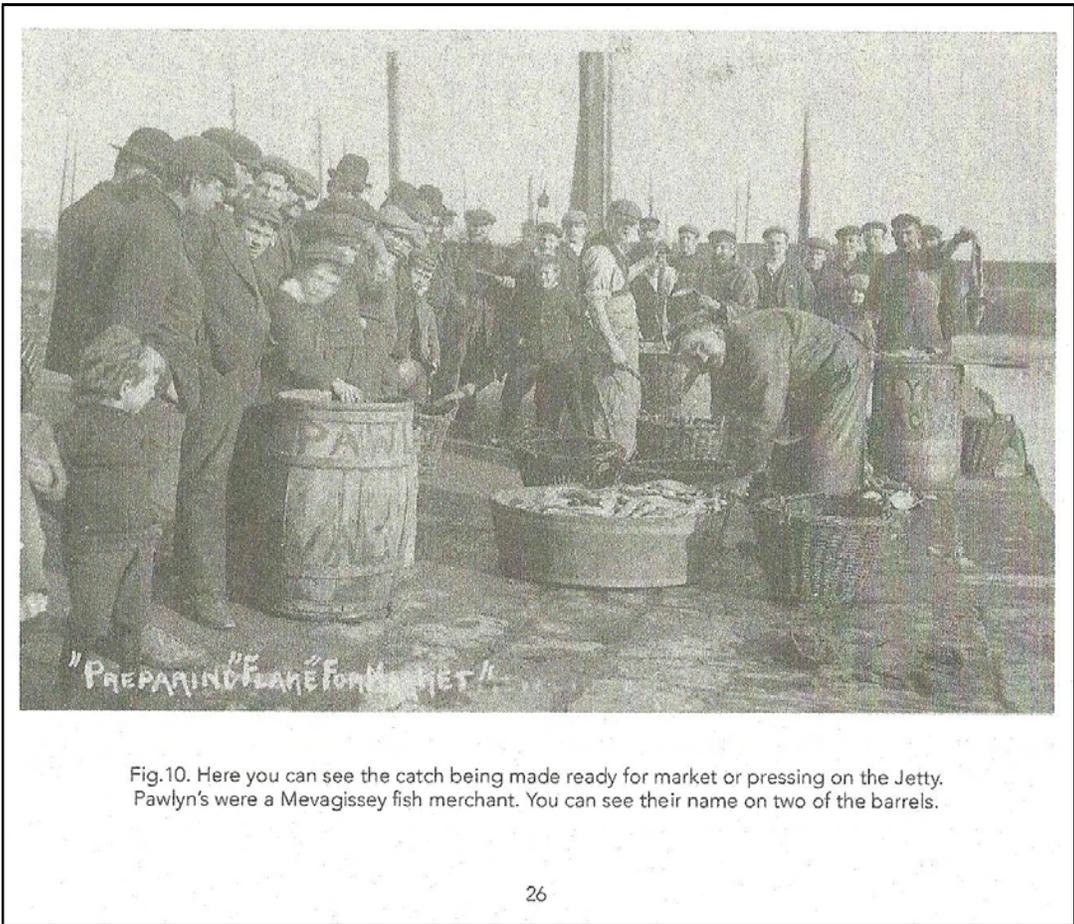
Figure 1 The Pawlyn Brothers.



**Figure 2** Herbert Truman, *Old St Ives* (1934).



**Figure 3** Mevagissey.



**Figure 4** Mevagsissey.

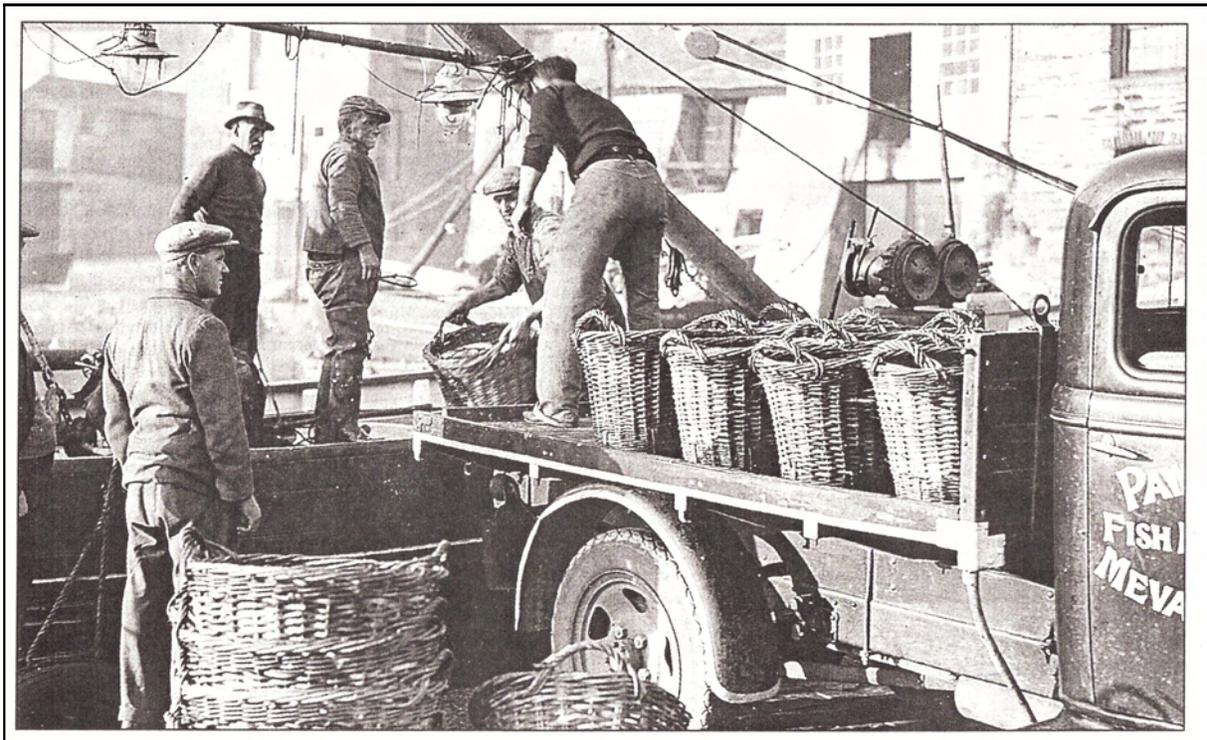


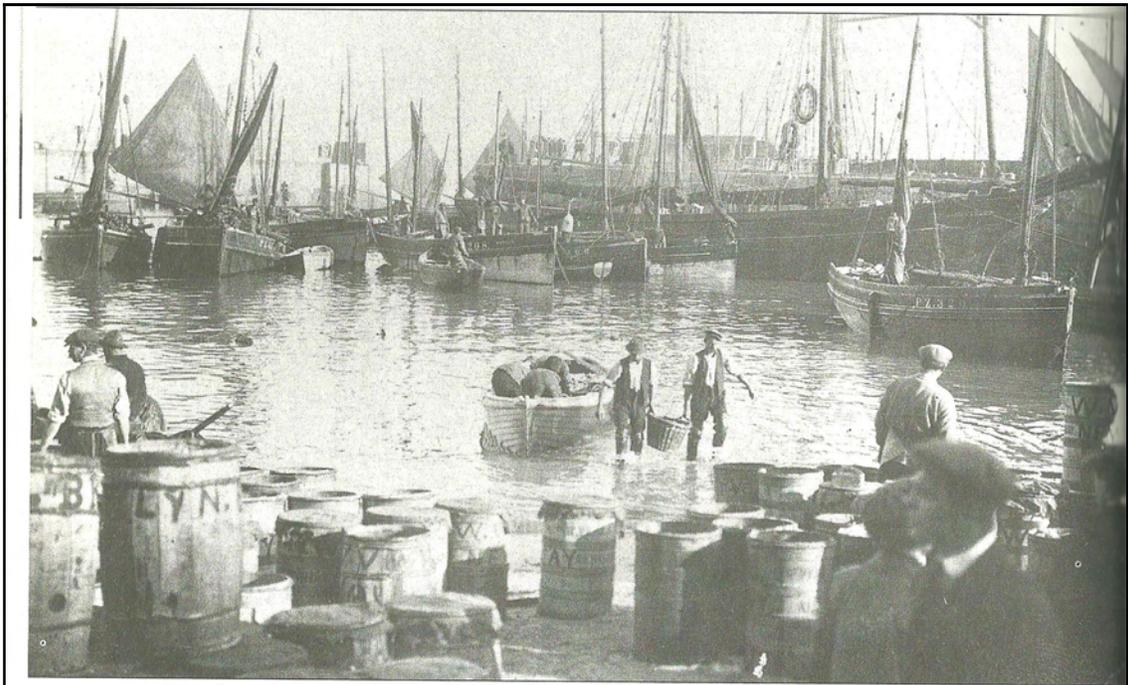


Figure 6 Porthleven.



Figure 7 Newlyn.

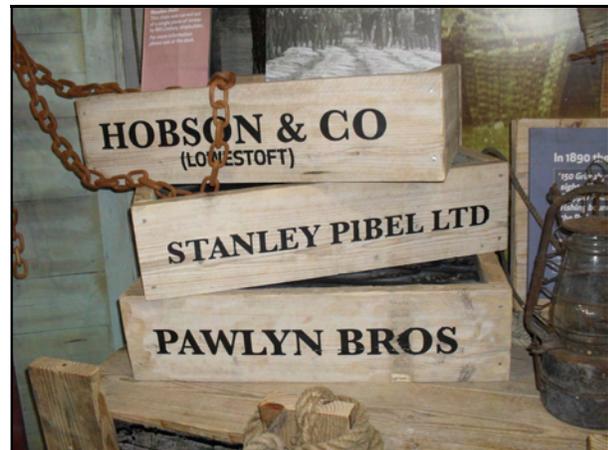




Off-loading the herrings. The fish were carried to shore and put in barrels with salt. Behind the herring boats, the *Amanda* can be made out. She had a long career. She was built at Padstow in 1867 for Captain Henry House and was still sailing in the 1930s, when she was abandoned at Pont Pill, Fowey.

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**Figure 9** Newquay.



**Figure 10** Padstow.



Figure 11 Plymouth.

## Sources and credits

**Figure 1** The Pawlyn Brothers. Photocopy received 2002 from Richard Pawlyn of a photograph formerly in the possession of his great-aunt Jean, a daughter of James Pawlyn (1869-1938).

**Figure 2** Herbert Truman, *Old St Ives* (1934). Download of <https://www.artuk.org/discover/artworks/old-st-ives-148041>. Photo credit: The Box (Plymouth City Council). Painting dimensions: 70.5 cm x 90.5 cm. Accession number: PLYMG.1935.53.

**Figure 3** Mevagissey. Scan of front cover of Jack Dunn, *Memories of Mevagissey, Meva 'Fore Now* (Eliza Kingston Publications 2007), ISBN 978-0-9556323-0-3.

**Figure 4** Mevagissey. Scan of page 26 of Liz Hurley, *A History of Mevagissey* (Mudlark's Press 2017), ISBN 978-0-9932180-2-6.

**Figure 5** Mevagissey. Scan of 'Times Past' archive photograph in *The Western Morning News*, spotted by my mother's sister Pat James in c.2000. Original caption: 'Unloading pilchards in the early morning at Mevagissey Harbour, 1939.'

**Figure 6** Porthleven. Download (with detail) of <http://photographs.museumofcornishlife.co.uk> photograph number HESFM:1994.6426.5. Original caption: 'Men Gutting Fish, Porthleven Quay, 1950s.' Accompanying description: 'Men gutting fish on the quay at Porthleven, possibly 1950s. Four men are dealing with the fish and two men are standing on top of the quay wall. The photograph is taken on the quay in front of The Ship Inn. A fish box can be seen which says Pawlyn & Son, Porthleven. On the right hand side of the photograph is a wooden baulk which has been raised and is waiting in place to be lowered into the harbour mouth when the weather is rough. Jerboa Cottages and the large building at the bottom of Salt Cellar Hill can be seen in the background. Photograph by A H Hawke of Helston.'

**Figure 7** Newlyn. Digital image received April 2020 from Chris Robinson, based on a download from <https://www.pinterest.co.uk/pin/697565429763548355/>. Original caption: 'Pawlyn's fish merchants [of Newlyn Cornwall] were on the Fradgan and up the Coombe.'

**Figure 8** St Ives. Digital image (with detail) received April 2020 from Tony Pawlyn, Head of Research, National Maritime Museum Cornwall, and a grandson of Josiah Pawlyn (1876-1937).

**Figure 9** Newquay. Scan of page 28 of Joyce Greenham and Sheila Harper, *Images of England: Newquay* (Tempus Publishing Limited 1999), ISBN 0-7524-1827-0.

**Figure 10** Padstow. Photograph (with detail) of the Pawlyn Bros hut on Padstow fish quay taken by Allen Page and Cheryl Holloway, 1996-7; photograph of a display in Padstow Museum (which had just reopened having moved to the old Station House) taken by Roger Kingdon, January 2019.

**Figure 11** Plymouth. Digital image (with detail) received April 2020 from Chris Robinson. This photograph of the fish market on the Barbican also appears on page 59 of his *Victorian Plymouth* (Pen & Ink Publishing 2016), ISBN 978-0-9934812-2-2. Original caption: 'The white tiled end wall of the new fish market is on the far left as we look down Quay Road towards the Parade.'