



# PPCA Newsletter January 2024

## Introduction

Welcome to January's Newsletter. This month, Terry makes a gun disappear and Bruce follows in the footsteps of another local lad who had big fun in the warm California sun.

## Editorial

A Happy New Year to all our readers.

If that sounds familiar, it's because it's the eighth time I've written it having started editing the Newsletter in August 2016 (as a temporary measure, obviously). This means that I'm rapidly approaching the milestone of my 95th issue at which point I will have produced the same number of editions as Clive. Which makes me think that maybe this is the time to pass on the editorship to someone else to inject some fresh blood into the tired old format.

So if anyone fancies the task of sending out the monthly rejection slips and cobbling something together quickly over the muesli on a Saturday morning, please let me know and I will go gracefully before I'm completely past it.

Ivor Jones

Newsletter Editor

### PPCA January Social - Galapagos Islands Talk by Jane Hitchings

Jane – one of our club members has returned from a trip to the Galapagos Islands and wants to share her wonderful experience with us. All welcome

Tuesday 23rd January at 1900 hrs

Function room at Westward Inn, Lee Mill Bridge,  
Ivybridge PL21 9EE



## Features

### Sir Francis Drake in California by Bruce Burton

Dear PPCAers,

Don't worry, I am not going to flood the Newsletter with articles from the other side of the world, but I thought this might be of interest.

Recently I paddled in a place called Drake's Estero (Estero means an estuary or marshy inlet) which is close to Tomales Bay and the Point Reyes Lighthouse. I had been there before and enjoyed the experience. It is a large, shallow bay with the mouth protected by a sandbar. At low tide there are masses of mud, so picking the time to paddle there is critical. On this recent day it was foggy and a bit drizzly with some more serious rain in the afternoon. We started at the north end of the bay and paddled to the mouth, where we had lunch. Before we stopped we had a look at a plaque on a post that had been placed there by the Royal Naval Barracks, Devonport in 1954 to commemorate Drake's landing in this Bay. I knew about the story of Drake's landing there already, but seeing the plaque has made me research this a bit more. It is a nice link to Plymouth and fond memories and I hope will be of interest to PPCA members.



On December 13 1577 Drake set sail from Plymouth, leading a small fleet of 5 ships. He was in the Pelican, later renamed the Golden Hinde. Ostensibly they were headed to the Mediterranean, but the real purpose was to pillage the West Coast of America and capture Spanish gold and silver, which of course the Spanish had themselves acquired from the Aztecs. One their way through the Magellan Strait, four of the ships was wrecked and only the Golden Hinde continued into the Pacific, Drake going up the west coast of South and Central America raiding Spanish outposts and

accumulating a mass of treasure. However Drake now had the dilemma of how to return to England with his gold and silver. He knew that the Spanish would be on the lookout for him returning the way he had come. To avoid this he set off north along the west coast of North America hoping to discover the Strait of Anian, the reverse direction to the Northwest Passage, which was widely believed to provide an ice-free route to the north of Canada. However bad weather made him turn round and sail south again. The best route home now seemed to be to complete the circumnavigation of the world, but the Golden Hinde was leaking and needed to be fixed before setting off on such a long journey. He found a sheltered bay somewhere in California to careen his ship. The location of this bay has been the subject of much research over the years and just about any bay in the vicinity of San Francisco has been claimed as the spot where he landed. Drake kept a detailed logbook of his voyage, but on his return to England, he gave it to Queen Elizabeth as it was a state secret because it discussed Drake's raids. The logbook was subsequently lost.

Most of the knowledge of his voyage comes from a journal kept by the chaplain, Francis Fletcher. However, thanks to extensive research carried out by the Drake Navigation Guild, Drakes Cove, at the entrance to the Estero has been declared a National Historic Landmark within the Point Reyes National Seashore. Fortunately this means that the whole area is preserved and there is no development in the area and probably, other than the shifting sandbars at the entrance, it does not look very different from how it looked in Drake's time.



Drake stayed in this area for about six weeks while repairs to the Golden Hinde were completed. During that time he had contact with the Coast Miwok people who had an encampment nearby. Apparently they thought that these pale skinned people might be the ghosts of dead ancestors. Drake also declared the area Nova Albion in the name of Queen Elizabeth and set up a post and brass plate. A few years ago a brass plate that seemed to correspond to this was found, but turned out to be a fake.

Sir Francis Drake is remembered by many place names in the area. Sir Francis Drake Boulevard is a major road and there is also Drakes Beach as well as the Estero and Cove. For me it is nice to have these local connections to Plymouth, even if a number of people who I speak to have no idea where Plymouth might be.

If you are interested in knowing more, there is an excellent lecture from a member of the Drake Navigation Guild on youtube , which you can hear by following this link: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=KxvAHy7Nssw>

## Plymouth Sound Snippets #23, The Giant Steps at Penlee Point by Terry Calcott

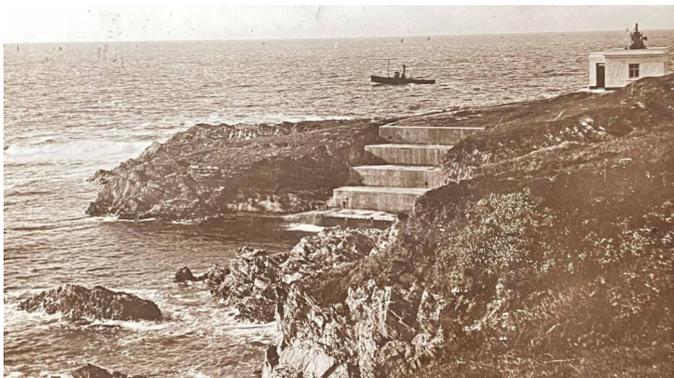
This snippet is about another familiar landmark which we often see when paddling near to Penlee Point, the giant concrete steps at Outer Broady Cove. On a low tide a lovely sandy beach appears, a favourite stop off for a lunch break.

Just up the hill from Penlee Point is the site of the long demolished Penlee Point Battery. An important coastal battery built in the late 1880s to protect the dockyard from being shelled by the largest warships of the time. The original plan for Penlee Battery was for two 13.5-inch 68-ton BL disappearing guns and four 6-inch BL guns. Construction of the battery started in 1889 and the two 6-inch guns were mounted by 1892.

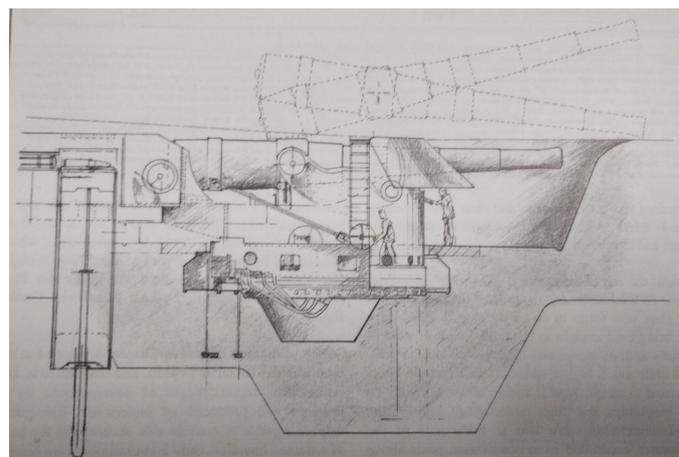
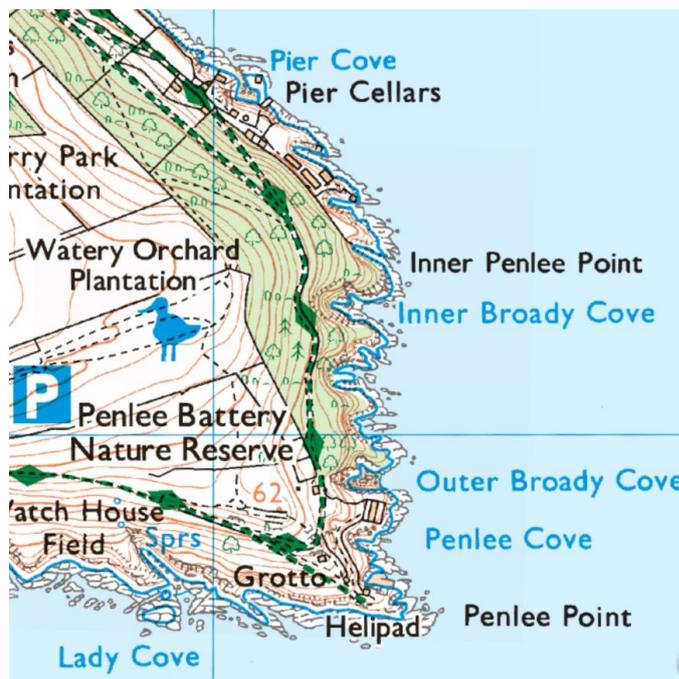


The Concrete Steps at Penlee Point

However, the barrels for the 13.5-inch guns had to be brought by sea on barges, due to their immense weight. By 1892 specially constructed landing steps had been built at Penlee Point. Soon after, the first of the 13.5-inch gun barrels had been landed at the steps.



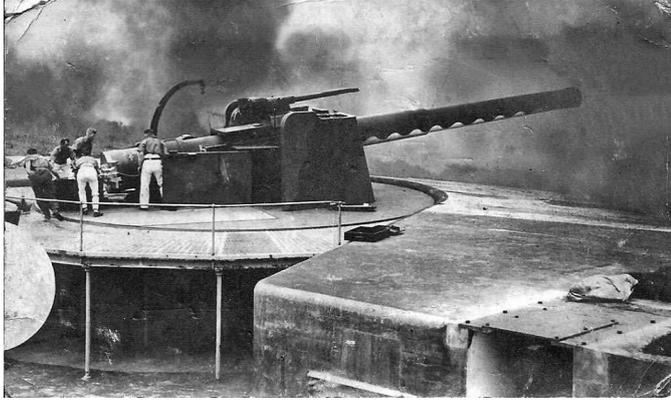
Early Photo of the Steps



13.5 Inch Disappearing Gun

After sitting at the steps for over a year it then took two weeks to haul the barrel up the hill to Penlee Point Battery using 80 horses and over 200 men. By January 1894 it had been mounted but not yet operational. It was the largest gun mounted at Plymouth at the time.

In 1894 after the first test firing of the new gun problems occurred and apparently the foundations of the gun mounting had been damaged. This led to the demise of the 13.5-inch gun and it never saw active service. It remained the only one emplaced in the country until it was dismantled after 1908. Over the years several other gun mountings have been fitted including 9.2-inch guns.



9.2 inch Gun Firing at Penlee Point Battery



View from the Top of the Concrete Steps

## Exchange and Mart

## Discounts and Offers

A selection of discounts and offers are available on the PPCA website. [Click here](#) to see them.

## Next Committee Meeting

Please forward any items you would like considered at the next committee meeting to [secretary@ppca-canoe-club.org.uk](mailto:secretary@ppca-canoe-club.org.uk). They will go to the secretary.

## Next Edition

There is no specific deadline as such for contributions but please bear in mind my general sloth and indolence and let me have anything time-sensitive well in advance.

## Contributions

Please send any contributions to [newsletter@ppca-canoe-club.org.uk](mailto:newsletter@ppca-canoe-club.org.uk)

## Acknowledgements

As ever, I have plundered Facebook for the cover photos - my thanks to all concerned.

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