

Introduction

Contacts

Harbour Office tel 01736 366113 VHF #12

Penzance Sailing Club tel 01736 364989 <http://www.pzsc.org.uk/>

Penzance Harbour consists of an inner drying area, and a wet basin accessed through a gate only open for 3 hours or so each high water. Once inside boats can lay in complete safety at reasonable rates. The wet dock can be used to leave your boat unattended for a few days to go exploring ashore if bad weather delays your plans.

As the depths of water around the harbour area are shallow, in strong onshore winds the seas get very rough, breaking over the harbour wall. Obviously in these conditions Penzance cannot be classed as a harbour of refuge, and should not be approached. Newlyn provides the only alternative in the Mounts Bay area in these conditions, and even then it is wise to wait until high water before attempting entry.

Penzance town itself is by far the largest in the area and is rather colourful and full of character. It is a busy market town as well as being a popular tourist centre, and all provisioning needs can be met, together with good transport links.

There were plans afoot for a 200 berth marina in Penzance with all tide access, as well as MDL proposing another 195 berth marina nearby at Port Penlee, between Newlyn and Mousehole. At present the plans for Penzance have been shelved as the funding has been withdrawn and there is not much movement on the conversion of the quarry at Penlee. It is understood from local sources that constructing a suitable entrance into the marina under the Mousehole road is causing some heartache. It is hoped to do some serious dredging in Penzance harbour itself but that will mainly effect the area beside the Ferry berth and the approach to the Wet Dock.

Update 2016 Local opinion is that the MDL plans for a marina at Penlee Quarry may never come to fruition but only time will tell if that is justified. Penzance has made little progress towards developing a marina so for the moment the layout remains the same while various groups hold meetings to decide the on the way ahead.

The cargo vessel serving the Scillies (which docks against the wet basin north wall) is being replaced by a bigger vessel which will take up more valuable room.

Update 2022 Penzance now comes under the administration of the Cornwall Council and has a website at [Penzance - Cornwall Harbours](#)

Approach

If approaching from the East the visiting yachtsman or motorboater will need

..... to go south of the South Cardinal Mountopus Buoy YB (Q(6)+LFI 15s). This marks a 1.8 m Shoal, and you will see St Michael's Mount on the starboard bow. Penzance can be located by the conspicuous tower of St Mary's Church. By night the white sector of the light (sectored light, FI WR 5s) on Penzance harbour South Pier will show you the safe sector of approach.

Further Pilotage Details...

If approaching from the South take note of Gear Rock Beacon, an isolated danger mark, red and black with two black spheres as a topmark (FI your (2) 10s). This should be left well to port, while aiming for a position to the east of the lighthouse at the end of the South Pier. Again, the white sector of the South Pier light shows the safe approach.

Approach from the West involves leaving the Runnelstone S Cardinal, St Clements Island, Low Lee E Cardinal (Q (3) 10s), and finally Gear Rock Beacon, mentioned above, all on your port side before turning north towards the harbour entrance.

Once outside the harbour, you may well be involved in a bit of a wait until the gates of the wet dock open, normally HW-0200 till HW+0100. Visitors mooring buoys are provided during the season due South of the lighthouse, in

about 2 m LAT. You can wait here until entry is possible, and in settled offshore weather even stay overnight. Alternatively you can anchor well clear of the harbour entrance to the East or the North-East in approximately 1.5 to 2 m LAT.

In onshore weather it may be possible to tie up on the inside of the South Pier, in a berth used by the Scilly Isles ferry. It is usually clear from 0930 till 1830 on weekdays. The best plan is to contact the harbour master on VHF, he monitors channel 16 and works on Channel 12. Alternatively phone him on 01736 366113 . He will be able to advise you of the gate opening times for free flow traffic into the wet basin, and about the possibility of using the inside of the South Pier.

At night vertical lights are shown from the harbour master's office on the north side of the dock gates, three vertical reds mean the gate is closed, three vertical greens mean the gate is open. The harbourmaster keeps normal office hours, but is also there for night time openings of the gate.

Once the gates have been opened you may make your way in with permission from the harbour master, and he will probably be standing outside of his office to greet you and direct you to a berth.

Berthing

As you enter the wet dock you will be allocated a berth by the harbour master or his assistant.

In the busy summer months you may well have to raft up, and the charges (2022) are up to 12 metres £18, from 12 to 15 metres £25 and over 15 metres £1.85 pmpn. This makes Penzance an attractive option should you need to leave your boat. Shore power is available on a card.

The drying outer harbour is reserved for local boats only, but it may be possible with the harbour master's permission to dry out alongside Albert Pier, if you need to attend to any problems below the waterline.

Facilities

The berthing master will issue you a key to the showers and toilets which are by the Harbour Master's office at the lock gates. Freshwater is available on the Quays, small quantities of diesel can be obtained by arrangement with the harbour office, petrol can only be obtained in cans from a garage near the railway station. For large-scale bunkering facilities, the harbour master can arrange a road tanker to fill you up on the quay. Calor and camping gas refills are available at the nearby chandlers, Penwith Marine services.

Marine and Electronics engineers are in town, sail makers at Long Rock a bus ride away, but in general repair facilities are limited for yachts, although a lot of heavy work seems to go on with fishing vessels etc.

There is a laundry near the station, and Internet facilities available at the library. The major banks are all represented (c/w cashpoints), and the Co-op supermarket will be found, along with other shops for provisions.

Penzance Sailing Club, is based on Albert Pier, telephone 01736 364989. Link to website below:

<http://www.pzsc.org.uk/>

Trailer Sailer's will find the Harbour Slip near the Sailing club in a corner of the car park, there are charges. Access is available for one half of the tidal range, there is a 5 kn speed limit in the harbour to be observed by PwC's as well as boats, but waterskiing is allowed offshore.

The town is well capable of catering for a hungry and thirsty crew, with numerous pubs and restaurants, and in addition has rail links direct to London and the North and a ferry service to the Scilly Isles. Train information is available on 0845 748 4950, bus and coach information on 01209 719988.

There is no longer a helicopter service to the Scillies having been replaced by an Skybus service from Lands End Airport (about £100 pp each way); for details see:

<http://www.islesofscilly-travel.co.uk/timetables/flights-to-scilly-isles-skybus/>

What To Do

Eating drinking and entertainment.

Penzance is well served, with over 30 pubs altogether and many restaurants within easy reach of the harbour. All tastes are catered for ranging from the humble fish and chips, Italian, Chinese, Thai, and Indian.

The town has two nightclubs and a cinema, younger or young at heart crewmembers will find plenty to do here.

If you are weather bound in the harbour you could consider a trip inland to the north coast of Cornwall or to Land's End, there is also a regular bus service to St Michael's Mount. A day trip to the Scilly Islands could even be mounted from here.

During the last week in June the little-known Golowan Festival takes place, celebrating ancient Celtic traditions. It seems to be a great opportunity for everyone to let their hair down, with music, dancing, fireworks and street theatre. Everyone seems to really enjoy themselves, especially the late night revelries in the giant beer tent, with great live music and dancing. It is well worth the effort to be in Penzance at this time, and if you stumble on this festival by accident as I did, you will probably be pleasantly surprised.

Below are some links to help you find your way around the shore side facilities:

<https://www.eatoutcornwall.com/restaurants/penzance/> Eating Out

<http://www.beerinevening.com/pubs/results.shtml/el/Penzance%3BCornwall/> Drinking

<http://www.penzance.co.uk/> follow the links on the left hand side to entertainment for Nightlife

History

Bronze and Iron Ages

Evidence of Iron Age settlement can be found in Penzance in a number of sites including Lescudjack Castle, an Iron Age settlement within the current Penzance parish boundaries.

Middle Ages

Evidence of historical settlement from this period can be found in the St Clare area of the town, where a chapel not unlike St Anthony's existed dedicated to St. Clare or Cleer. Throughout the period prior to Penzance gaining borough status in 1614 the village and surrounding areas fell within the control of the Manor of Alverton and was subject to the taxation regime of that manor.

Although the first historical mention of Penzance (as a place for landing fish) was in 1322 in local manorial records, the town was, until the 17th century, overshadowed by its near-neighbour Marazion. (Marazion was recorded in the

Domesday Book of 1088 and is the oldest chartered town in Britain, having been granted this status by King Henry III in 1257.) In medieval times and later, Penzance was subject to frequent raiding by Turkish pirates. The name of one of Penzance's oldest buildings 'The Turk's Head' pub is said to be a reference to these incidents. There is however, no written evidence to this effect.

Tudor and Stuart period

Plague

In the summer of 1578 Penzance was visited by the plague. The burial registers of Madron (where all Penzance births, deaths and marriages were recorded) shows a massive increase in deaths for 1578, from 12 the previous year to 155. This is estimated to be about 10% of the population of the village at the time. The plague also returned in 1647 and the registers again show an increase of from 22 burials to 217 in one year.

Spanish raids

Being at the far west of England, Penzance and the surrounding villages have been sacked many times by foreign fleets. On July 23rd 1595,[several years after the Spanish Armada of 1588, a Spanish force under Don Carlos de Amesquita, which had been patrolling the Channel, landed troops in Cornwall. Amesquita's force seized supplies, raided and burned Penzance and surrounding villages, held a mass, and sailed away before it could be confronted..

Penzance as a town since 1614

The reason for Penzance's relative success probably stems from the 15th, 16th and 17th centuries when Henry IV of England granted the town a Royal Market. Henry VIII later granted the right to charge harbour dues, and King James I granted it the status of a borough.

During the English Civil War Penzance was sacked by the forces of Sir Thomas Fairfax apparently for the kindness shown to Lord Goring and Lord Hoptons troops during the conflict[

Penzance borough council undertook several major projects, including the building of the Market House (which was the home of the Corn Exchange and the then Guildhall), and the harbour, the first pier of which was built in 1512. The southern arm of the pier was built in 1766 and extended in 1785.

Civil improvements in this period included the construction in 1759 of a reservoir which supplied water to public pumps in the streets.

Penzance has a long-standing association with the local parish of Madron. Madron Church was in fact the centre of most religious activity in the town until 1871,[13] when St. Mary's Church (prior to this period a Chapel of ease) was granted parish status by church authorities.

In 1755 the Lisbon earthquake caused a tsunami to strike the Cornish coast over 1,000 miles away. The sea rose eight feet in Penzance, and ebbed at the same rate.

19th century

At the start of the 19th century (1801), the town had a population of 2,248. The census, which is taken every ten years, recorded a peak population in 1861 of 3,843, but it then declined, as in most of Cornwall, through the remainder of the century, being just 3,088 in 1901.

By the time Queen Victoria came to the throne in 1837, Penzance had established itself as an important regional centre. The Royal Geological Society of Cornwall was founded in the town in 1814 and about 1817 was responsible for introducing a miner's safety tamping bar, which attracted the Prince Regent to become its patron.

The pier had been extended again in 1812 and John Matthews opened a small dry dock in 1814, the first in the South West. In 1840 Nicholas Holman of St Just opened a branch of his foundry business on the quayside. These facilities proved valuable in supporting the steamships that were soon calling at the harbour in increasing numbers.

Gas lighting was introduced in 1830 and the old Market House was demolished in 1836. Its replacement, designed by W. Harris of Bristol, was completed at the top of Market Jew Street in 1838. St Mary's Church, another prominent feature of the Penzance skyline, was completed in 1836, while a Roman Catholic church was built in 1843. Another familiar building from this period is the eccentric Egyptian House in Chapel Street, built in 1830. The first part of the Promenade along the sea front dates from 1844.

After the passing of the Public Health Act (1848), Penzance was one of the first towns to petition to form a local board of health, doing so in September that year. Following a report by a government inspector in February, the Board was established in 1849 which led to many facilities to enhance public health. The report shows that most streets were Macadamised or sometimes paved, and the town was lit by 121 gas lamps from October to March each year, although they were not lit when there was a full moon. Water was supplied from 6 public pumps, and there were a further 53 private wells. There were no sewage pipes at the time, waste being collected from the main streets by a refuse cart.

Penzance railway station, the terminus of the West Cornwall Railway, opened on 11 March 1852 on the eastern side of the harbour, although trains only ran to Redruth at first. From 25 August 1852 the line was extended to Truro, but the Cornwall Railway linking that place with Plymouth was not opened until 4 May 1859. Passengers and goods had to change trains at Truro as the West Cornwall had been built using the 4 ft 8¹/₂ in (1,435 mm) standard gauge, but the Cornwall Railway was built to the 7 ft 0¹/₄ in (2,140 mm) broad gauge. The West Cornwall Railway Act included a clause that it would be converted to broad gauge once it had been connected to another broad gauge line, but the company could not raise the funds to do so.

The line was sold to the Great Western Railway and its "Associated Companies" (the Bristol and Exeter Railway and South Devon Railway) on 1 January 1866. The new owners quickly converted the line to mixed gauge using three rails so that both broad and "narrow" trains could operate. Broad gauge goods trains started running in November that year, with through passenger trains running to London from 1 March 1867.^[20] The last broad gauge train arrived at 8.49pm on 20 May 1892, having left London Paddington station at 10.15 that morning. The two locomotives, numbers 1256 and 3557, took the carriages away to Swindon railway works at 9.57, and all trains since have been standard gauge.

The ability of the railway to carry fresh produce to distant markets such as Bristol, London and Manchester enabled local farmers and fishermen to sell more produce and at better prices. The special "perishable" train soon became a feature of the railway, these being fast extra goods trains carrying potatoes, broccoli or fish depending on the season. In August 1861 1,787 tons of potatoes, 867 tons of broccoli, and 1,063 tons of fish were dispatched from the station. Fruit and flowers were also carried, the mild climate around Penzance and on the Scilly Isles meant that they were ready for market earlier and could command high prices.

The completion of the railway through Cornwall made it easier for tourists and invalids to enjoy the mild climate of Penzance. Bathing machines had been advertised for hire on the beach as early as 1823, and the town was already "noted for the pleasantness of its situation, the salubrity of its air, and the beauty of its natives". The town's first official guide book was published in 1860 and the Queen's Hotel opened on the sea front the following year. It was so successful that it was extended in 1871 and 1908.

At the same time as the railway was being built more improvements were being made to the harbour, with a second pier on the eastern side of the harbour, the Albert Pier, completed in 1853 to provide even better shelter for shipping, and a lighthouse built on the Old Pier in 1855. The Scilly Isles Steam Navigation Company was founded in 1858 and placed in service the first steam ship on the route, SS Little Western. In 1870 the new West Cornwall Steam Ship Company joined the route, taking over the Scilly Isles Company the following year.

Penzance, with its dry dock and engineering facilities, was chosen as the western depot for Trinity House that serviced all the lighthouses and lightships from Start Point to Trevoise Head. It was opened in 1866 adjacent to the harbour and the Buoy Store became the Trinity House National Lighthouse Museum until 2005 when Trinity House closed the museum.

Inside the new station.

Penzance Harbour. In 1875 a local newspaper described the railway station as a large dog's house of the nastiest and draughtiest kind but a series of works improved this part of the town during the 1880s. The original station was rebuilt with the present buildings and train shed over the platforms (1880). The lower end of Market Jew Street was widened and a new road was built to link the station with the harbour over the Ross Swing Bridge (1881), allowing the construction of proper sewers beneath. A larger dry dock replaced Matthews' original facility (1880), and a floating harbour was made (1884) with lock gates to keep in the water at low tide.

Around the headland, public baths were opened on the Promenade in 1887 and the Morrab Gardens with its sub-tropical plants was opened two years later. A bandstand was added to the gardens in 1897.

20th century

In 1901 the town had a population of 3,088. The census taken every ten years recorded a continuing decline in population until 1921, when just 2,616 people were recorded, after which it climbed rapidly to 4,888 (1931) then 5,545 (1951) - the population had more than doubled in twenty years and was now larger than at any time in the past. (The census boundaries changed in 1981 so these figures do not directly compare with those stated for the current population)

A proposed electric tramway along the Promenade to Newlyn, which would then have continued as a light railway to St Just, failed to gain authorisation in 1898, instead motor buses were put into service on 31 October 1903. These linked Penzance with Marazion and were operated by the Great Western Railway, being introduced only 11 weeks after the railway's pioneering service between Helston and The Lizard. They were considered a success, carrying 16,091 passengers by the end of the year, so were followed the next spring by further routes to Land's End and St Just. These services developed into the First Devon and Cornwall bus network that still serves the area and is still centred on a terminus alongside Penzance railway station.

The dry dock was sold on 25 August 1904 to N. Holman and Sons Limited, the engineering business that had been trading in Penzance since 1840. New workshops were built during the 1930s and the facility continued to provide facilities for the Scilly ferries and other merchant ships, as well as Trinity House, the Royal Navy and Royal Maritime Auxiliary Service. In 1951 a new vessel for the King Harry Ferry on the River Fal was launched, built on the keel of an old landing craft. In 1963 they even built a steam tug, the Primrose.

Land was reclaimed beside the Albert Pier in the 1930s to allow the railway station to be further enlarged at a cost of £134,000.^[22] The 1880 building was retained but extra platforms and sidings were provided to enable it to handle more perishable goods, and also the increasing numbers of tourists travelling to the area.

In 1905 a new bandstand had been built on the Promenade opposite the Queen's Hotel, and the Pavilion Theatre opened nearby in 1911, complete with a roof garden and cafe.

Travel to Penzance was easier than ever, with the Great Western Railway introducing the Cornish Riviera Express on 1 July 1904, which left London Paddington at 10:10 and arrived in Penzance just 7 hours later, two hours faster than the previous quickest service. (In 2007 it leaves Paddington at 10:05 and takes 5 hours and 5 minutes.) The railway actively promoted local tourism with the production of postcards that were sold at its stations, and the annual publication of a guide book, *The Cornish Riviera*, in which SPB Mais described it as "a suburb of Covent Garden, and a great fishing centre ... there is always something going on in its harbour".

1923 had seen a new road link the harbour area and the Promenade, and in 1933 the St. Anthony Gardens were built, followed two years later by the Jubilee Bathing Pool opposite. Tourists could now make full use of the whole seafront between Penzance and Newlyn harbours.

Transport

Penzance is located approximately 5 miles (8 kilometres) from the end of the A30 road and 286 miles (460 km) or 5 hours by car from London.

Penzance railway station is situated at the bottom of Market Jew Street and close to the harbour. It is the western terminus of the Cornish Main Line which runs above the beach to Marazion, affording passengers good views of St. Michael's Mount and Mount's Bay. Most services^[34] are operated by First Great Western, both local services to St Erth, St Ives, Hayle, Camborne, Redruth, and Truro, and direct trains linking Penzance with Plymouth, Exeter St Davids, Bristol Temple Meads, Reading and London Paddington. The Night Riviera train offers an overnight sleeping car service to and from Reading and London. Journey time to Plymouth is typically under 2 hours; to Bristol around 4 hours, and London less than 5¹²/₁₂ hours.

CrossCountry run a small number of services (departing in the morning, returning in the evening) via Bristol and Birmingham New Street to Glasgow Central via Preston and Carlisle, also to Dundee via Leeds, York, Newcastle and Edinburgh Waverley. The journey time to Birmingham is just under 5¹²/₁₂ hours, and nearly 10 hours to Glasgow.

The bus and coach station is adjacent to the railway station from where National Express operates coach services to London Victoria (taking around 9 hours) via Heathrow Airport. Local bus services run by First Devon and Cornwall connect Penzance with most major settlements in Cornwall, including Truro, St. Ives, St Just, St Buryan,

Land's End, and also Plymouth in Devon.

A ferry service is operated between Penzance Harbour and the Isles of Scilly by The Scillonian III, carrying both foot-passengers and cargo. Sailing time is approximately 2 hours and 40 minutes. Alternatively, a passenger helicopter service operates from Penzance Heliport to the Isles of Scilly run by British International Helicopters. Flying time is approximately 20 minutes. A bus service run by the Skybus Airline Service connects with Land's End Airport for fixed wing flights (15 minutes) to the Isles of Scilly. This service operates from the railway station, near the taxi rank, rather than the bus station.

Newquay Airport is 41 miles (66 km) away and offers flights to Gatwick, Stansted Dublin and Cork airports. Plymouth Airport^[37] is 77 miles (124 km) away has services to Gatwick, Bristol, Dublin and Manchester airports.