



■ Penlee House director Alison Bevan holding *Mount's Bay Fisherwomen* in front of *View from Madron Carr*; both images are in the current Richard Thomas Pentreath exhibition.



■ *Penzance from the Sea*.



■ *St Michael's Mount*, 1862 in mixed media.

Modest man and consummate artist



■ Pentreath's *View of Land's End*.



■ *Gurnard's Head*, a Pentreath pastel.

RICHARD THOMAS PENTREATH (1806-1869)
Penlee House Gallery and Museum

RICHARD Thomas Pentreath would have had no idea that 200 years after his birth, his life and work would be remembered by a bicentennial exhibition in Penlee House Gallery and Museum in Penzance.

He was born in Mousehole a year after the Battle of Trafalgar, in 1806, and upon his death, in 1869, was described in *The Cornish Telegraph* as "a gentleman of unblemished character greatest as a portrait painter, in which, among local craftsmen, he had no equal".

A few years later, in the 1880s, his memory was honoured by a special exhibition of his work in Penzance.

As far as is known the first major exhibition of Richard Thomas Pentreath's work to be mounted since his memorial exhibition of 1884, the current exhibition in Penlee House pays a long overdue tribute to a highly talented artist, "a good husband, father and generous friend, beloved by all who knew him", who has been unjustly ignored for far too long.

A sad state of affairs which has come about largely, perhaps, because of the fact that in the late 1850s, after having lived for almost 30 years with his wife Mary Anne in 16 Chapel Street, Penzance, where their two sons Frederick Richard and Richard, were born, the family left Cornwall for Devon.

The son of the schoolmaster and parish clerk at Mousehole, details of his early life are, if you'll pardon the pun, sketchy to say the least.

He appears to have begun his working life as a sign writer and it is known that he painted two wooden panels at Trelowarren House that must have been pretty good for, as the exhibition booklet, written by Dr Jan Pentreath, tells us, he was later engaged by Sir Richard Vyvyan MP, owner of Trelowarren, to travel with him on the continent and to record some of the places they visited.

Whether he received any kind of formal art tuition or was entirely self-taught is not known, but what is certain is, as the 60 or so works in this



■ A miniature, believed to be a self-portrait.

exhibition demonstrate so clearly, that Richard Thomas Pentreath, surely a modest man as he rarely signed his work, was a consummate artist.

Renowned for his portraits - "his likenesses were so accurate that he had no shortage of sitters" - and his lithographic prints, many of which appeared in such local guidebooks as Vibert's *Views of Penzance* (1833) and JS Courtney's *Guide to Penzance* (1845), he was also a dab hand at landscapes.

A number of his pastel studies of Penwith's cliff scenery are outstanding and among the best things in this exhibition.

The detail in his local landscapes is extraordinary, pictures that are, in a way, early photographic records of the area, much of the joy in this show lies in identifying the topographical changes that have occurred since they were made.

An excellent example of this is *View From Madron Carr*: an oil on canvas which was presented to Penlee House by the Misses Margaret and Una Thomas in memory of their father Herbert John Thomas, grandson of the original owner of Penlee House, it shows the countryside around Madron in which the only building of note is the Workhouse, and a Penzance in which its tallest buildings are its recently built Market House (1836) and

St Mary's Church (1838). Then, too, there is his record of *Queen Victoria's Visit to St Michael's Mount*, 1846, *Penzance from near Castle Horneck*, *View of Penzance from Gulval* and another in similar vein *Looking East*.

From a portrait of the artist's son Frederick Richard Pentreath, clergyman and schoolmaster, to those of Mr and Mrs John Batten, Mayor and Mayoress of Penzance, portraits that were part of the artist's posthumous retrospective exhibition held at the Penzance School of Art in 1884: from views of Land's End and Porthcurno to studies of *Mount's Bay Fisherwomen*, this exhibition is not only a treat but also a revelation.

No doubt many who visit it will be as surprised at the extent of his range as they will be pleased with his paintings.

On the day of its opening it was announced that Penlee House Gallery and Museum had gained a Cornwall Tourism "Visitor Attraction of the Year" Bronze Award, an award which not only recognises the highest standards of quality achieved by Penlee House, but also the fact that it has gained the highest number of local visitors, that it is a gallery and museum in which the locals come first. The prime aim is the promotion of Cornish culture, and they don't come more Cornish than Richard Thomas Pentreath!

Not to be missed, in particular by those who live "around the point" and in general by anyone who lives in Cornwall and appreciates fine art of the first order, this exhibition by Mousehole-born Richard Thomas Pentreath, which is accompanied by a splendid selling exhibition of work by members of the Cornwall Crafts Association, can be seen in Penlee House Gallery and Museum, 10.30am-4.30pm (last admission 4pm) Monday-Saturday, until January 6.

Frank Ruhrmund
● It should be noted that the gallery will be closed during the Christmas period, December 23-27, and on January 1. It should be noted also that at 7.30pm on Tuesday, in Penlee House, Dr Jan Pentreath is giving a lecture on the artist. Members £2 and non-members £3. Advance booking essential - telephone 01736 363625.