

The St Austell Town Trail



Building stones trail

STARTING POINT:

The gates at the entrance to the pedestrianised Fore Street, in the heart of St Austell.

LENGTH OF WALK:

1 km along streets & well-maintained paths.

GREEN EXTENSION:

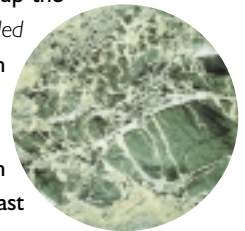
Cycle down the Pentewan Valley Leisure Trail, along the track-bed of the mineral railway to Pentewan.

St Austell's prosperity has depended first on tin mining then, pre-eminently, on the china clay industry. 'White gold', as china clay has been rather fancifully called, was trundled through the streets down to the port of Charlestown. The design of the gates came from the pulley wheels used in getting the waste out of the pits and onto the great, conical tips – the Cornish Alps, another fanciful name!



This trail highlights only some of the building stones – there are others to discover! Near the gates is an ornate granite, limestone and red brick building: the granite at least is local, from Luxulyan. It is hard to carve such a coarse rock – the crystals (of *feldspar*) are up to 5 cm long – so there is little detail in the work.

Granite is just recycled Earth's crust (i.e. *overcooked sediment*) but up the street, on the left, is a building faced with serpentinite (often called 'serpentine': it contains the mineral *serpentine*), originating deep down in the mantle below the crust, and now quarried in the Italian Alps. This rock is a breccia, broken up and then naturally cemented together, and looking very different to Cornish 'serpentine' from The Lizard. A further walk along Fore Street takes you past Woolworths with a side wall of grey bricks made from china clay waste,



with sparkling white mica crystals, and then a bank below Biddick's Court with local brownish and greenish cut-slate blocks, and a whitish limestone with broken fossils, decidedly alien to Cornwall! Nothing much to detain you when the parish church is ahead, with superb 15th century carvings in Pentewan stone, basically a fine-grained granite (called 'elvan' locally). But do take a look at the

drinking trough erected in 1890. Mostly white Italian marble, on a local granite plinth, with a 'slate' roof of marble, a good range of flora and fauna (**just what can you find?**), and contrasting pillars and bowl of luxullianite, a highly valued 'granite' from nearby Luxulyan. Up the street to your left is the 1844 Market House, mostly made of granite from Carn Grey, just east of the town. The building is worth exploring for its vaulted entrance, leading to a spectacular open space with cast iron pillars supporting yellow pine beams.



If the church is open the Norman font is one of the best in Cornwall, and even if you're unlucky you can see fine detail in the Pentewan stone used externally. Behind the church is the 1898 'Red Bank', which refers to the bricks rather than any communist leanings! To the left is a fine building in elvan with lower courses of coarser (*Luxulyan*) granite, and limestone columns from Torbay or Plymouth, full



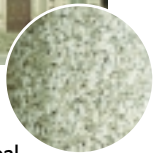
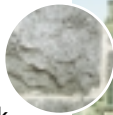
of fossils – corals, shells and others. Cornwall was a muddy sea when those areas had coral reefs – but at least the climate was tropical! Up the street (*High Cross*) for a hundred metres, on the left you'll find the 1829 Quaker Meeting House, elvan (*with attractive iron stains*) in front, cheaper slate to the side; and across the street is the old parish cemetery. Just



inside the entrance the highest tombstone against the wall is Charles Rashleigh's. He built Charlestown at the end of the eighteenth century, for the pilchard fishery, and for tin, copper and china clay exports. Many of the tombstones are in slate, from Delabole in North Cornwall.



Back down High Cross Street and – avoiding the traffic – 100 metres down South Street, which is now a main road, to the Masonic Hall with columns of granite (*another variety!*), and walls made of very light topaz granite (*yet another*) - St Stephen stone - and the dark 'schorl', a local quartz-tourmaline rock (*best seen at Roche Rock 9 km to the north-west of St Austell*). And if you dine at the White Hart Hotel, just below the church, you can enjoy the pictures by John Nash of the china clay pits. But for most people it will be the short walk back to the starting point.



White gold? The average selling price of china clay is around £80 a tonne, real gold fluctuates rather more, and comes in fewer grades, but several million pounds is the correct order of magnitude!