



LETTER TO CORONER

19<sup>th</sup> April 2023

BY EMAIL AND BY POST



Mr R Guy Davies  
Assistant Coroner  
Coroner for Cornwall & the Isles of Scilly  
Pydar House, Pydar Street  
TRURO TR1 2AY

Dear Mr Davies

Reference: Inquest into the death of Mr James Francis Parson

We are in receipt of your letter and report dated 22 February 2023 following the inquest into the death of Mr James Francis Parson. May we extend our sincere condolences to the family of Mr Parson.

We were made aware of the disappearance of Mr Francis following the Porthleven Food Festival in 2022 on Monday, 24 April when Police Officers came to our offices whilst conducting their initial investigations into Mr Parson's disappearance. There was no further contact from the authorities following these initial enquiries and it was by way of the Media coverage that we learned that Mr Parson's body had been discovered in the Isles of Scilly some weeks later.

It was only in February this year, following the publication of your report, that there was any suggestion that Mr Parsons may have entered the water the weekend of the Festival by way of the Harbour walls.

We work very closely with the Porthleven Food Festival and have done since the Festival's inauguration 15 years ago. Each year, Porthleven Harbour & Dock Company grants a right for the Festival to use the Harbour Head, the Shipyard and other areas within the Inner Harbour over the 2-3 days of the festival. This is granted on the basis that the Festival take responsibility for all health and safety matters, and to that end, they work closely with Cornwall Council Health & Safety team to put these measures in place. In the 15 years since the Festival was established, we are not aware of any major incidents or injuries and certainly no persons entering the water even though alcohol is a feature of the Festival.

Since the Harbour Dock Company was acquired in 1977, it has expended considerable sums with the benefit of advice from consultants to provide railings around the entirety of the Inner Harbour, part of the Outer Harbour where there is public access and the entire length of the Outer Harbour to the point where the jetty/pier/breakwater begins.

The pier has railings to one side but not the side which defines the entrance of vessels into the Harbour. These are omitted to avoid members of the public from potential interference to vessels entering the Harbour and because the narrow width of the Harbour is such that the handrail extending the entire length and including the rounded end of the pier is available to be within arm's reach. Notwithstanding this, the Harbour & Dock Company maintains clearly readable notices warning of dangers which arise from the conduct of members of the public. In historic settings such as Porthleven, of which there are many around the country, it is requisite that locals and visitors alike take responsibility for own their welfare and safety, especially if there are signs indicating dangers.

Having read your report, it would seem there is no evidence of where the deceased fell into the water or that he fell at all. There are many areas beyond the Harbour where it is just as possible that Mr Parsons may have entered the water from the rocks in the Outer or Inner Harbour or from Porthleven beach or indeed other areas close to Porthleven.

Nothing in the report points to failure of the Harbour & Dock Company to recognise potential public danger. Indeed, the report implies that Mr Francis' death is unexplained notwithstanding his state of intoxication.

Over the years, the Harbour & Dock Company has given the utmost priority to safety aspects of the Harbour and continues to do so each year. We are satisfied with the measures we have in place which include railings, signage and lifebuoy aids. Being a popular holiday destination, Porthleven attracts thousands of visitors each year without incident which clearly demonstrates the Harbour is a safe environment.

We are committed to ongoing reviews of health and safety issues and will continue to do so in consultation with appropriate consultants and advisors. Any suggestions on further improvements to health & safety issues will of course be considered very carefully. We will continue to work closely with the Porthleven Food Festival and other groups that might use the Harbour for publicly attended events in the future.

Yours sincerely

