

Celtic Cornwall

(Exploring Identity)

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KERNOW BYS VYKKEN

Introduction

Celtic Cornwall? Is this a title than can be given to my little ancestral land by the sea in north west Europe? There have been competing views about what constitutes Celtic Cornwall. As Amy Hale stated in an article; *“During the course of the (Cornish) Revival too much time and energy has been spent justifying Cornwall’s Celticity!”... One asks, why was there any doubt?”* To which I am tempted to reply – ‘who cares? .. we know we are the Celtic Cornish so let’s get on with life!’ But given that you have probably come expecting a workshop on the very subject I had better restrain myself.

In essence today I will seek to explore with you the dual nature of being Cornish - that of the context in which one exists, and a continuing Celtic identity which largely comes from within. Along the way I will heavily draw heavily on others who are more learned than me, look at some elements such as language, and we may also have some fun.

It is worth looking first in depth at the two words that make up the title of this workshop.

Celtic?

Whenever and wherever the term Celtic is used, it seems to mean something different! There is part of me that says, ‘well that’s very Celtic!’ I am sure we all hold a different picture in our minds.

Cornish academic Bernard Deacon reports: *One hundred years ago Cornwall’s very future as a Celtic nation lay teetering on a knife edge. In 1901 the meeting of the Pan-Celtic Congress in Dublin had voted 32-22 to postpone a decision on Cornwall’s membership of the Congress. Doubtful about Cornish claims to be ‘Celtic’ because of the ‘death’ of the Cornish language, some of the leading lights of the Celtic Congress resisted its admittance. This was despite the claims of Louis Duncombe-Jewell, who had, virtually single-handedly, made the Cornish question a ‘very burning one’ for the Congress. In an emotional essay entitled ‘Cornwall: One of the Six Celtic Nations’, he had reeled off a long list of Celtic characteristics, from the literary remains of the language to archaeological remnants, to holy wells, to the fairy lore of the Duchy, and to the characteristics of the inhabitants.*

Yet it remained an uphill battle to convince those 'custodians of Celticity, guarding their self-appointed right to adjudicate as to who or what might legitimately be termed "Celtic". The reason

was simple. Like most educated Europeans of the late 19th century the early Celtic Congress had moved from the romanticist notions of earlier centuries but now equated nationality with language. In the absence of a living Celtic language there could be no living Celtic nation. In 1904 ... Henry Jenner, author of the first major text of the revived Cornish language, published in the same year, succeeded in convincing once and for all the Pan-Celtic Congress that Cornwall was Celtic.

That Celticity is so much now recognised in Cornwall that it even finds itself being routinely asserted in official Cornwall County Council publications. Recently on that English constructed body's web site a welcome in the Cornish language was in clear view. Council's emblem there contains the motto "One and All – Onen hag Oll" (that is English and Celtic Cornish sitting side by side).

For most people, and for much of its life, the qualifier 'Celtic' has signified the past. In that sense the word itself is deeply traditional, looking back into the mists of time for the authentic heritage of the Celts, delivered more or less intact to succeeding generations. The very title 'Celtic Cornwall' ... evokes heritage and traditions. It's the 'heritage and traditions' that are Celtic - implicitly surviving in or threatened - by a 'changing world' that is not! Such a deeply traditional reading ... might, however, be challenged. For 'traditions and heritage' do not come to us intact and are not, despite what we might believe, unchanging. On the contrary, all traditions have a history and an origin. And traditions may change the world as well as be changed by it.

What about the test of language use. With Wales having only 20% of the people speaking Welsh; maybe somewhere between 5 and 10% of the population of even lower Brittany having a working knowledge of Breton; the proportion of Scots Gaelic speakers in Scotland now lower than 2%, and in the Isle of Man around 0.1% of the population are able to hold a (limited) conversation Manx). Even in Ireland three quarters of the population have little or no competence in Irish. Clearly, if we were to confine Celtic traditions to those communities which actually make use of a Celtic language in their day-to-day lives then this would lead to a very restricted view of the Celtic heritage.

Cornwall has a distinct Celtic language, of the Brythonic group, and this was spoken over all the present land area of Cornwall in the 9th Century, and even up to the 15th century it was the dominant language of over half of Cornwall. It lingers on today! - we will return to language later.

What about a looser definition of 'Celtic?' - one that includes a selection of the cultural attributes of a people as being Celtic. It could be material artefacts, such as stone crosses and holy wells or more abstract emotions, such as 'hireth' as the Welsh say, or a taste for peculiar types of poetry. This looser definition introduces a certain flexibility but also opens up vast areas of dispute as to what should be included and what excluded. It attracts modern imaginings of druidic practice and of genetic uniqueness that I will not cover, or even countenance, in this workshop.

Some look back to the ancient La Tene or even Hallstatt cultures of central Europe and reject the claims of the Cornish, or indeed at times anyone from the modern Celtic (Atlantic) fringe of Europe. I don't think they can realistically wind back the clock that far!!

It is one thing for others, observers, to ascribe Celticity to the Cornish but when the people themselves do so the die is cast. How had the Cornish stumbled out of the Celtic twilight as Celts? It is difficult to date precisely when the Cornish began to apply the description 'Celtic' more regularly to themselves. In 1826, in his introduction to an edition of the mystery play 'Passyon agan Arluth', Davies Gilbert described Cornish as 'a dialect of the Celtic language.' He did so sure in the knowledge that at the beginning of the 18th century Edward Lhuyd's comparative research into the Celtic languages and his field-work in Cornwall had firmly established the Cornish language as part of that broad linguistic family.

The description of the Cornish as Celtic had also been picked up by the Cornish antiquarian William Borlase in his Antiquities and Monuments of the County of Cornwall of 1754 and 1769. In 1859 the Reverend Charles Colwell told his Wesleyan Methodist hearers that they were 'the real descendants of the 'Cornish Celts'. What makes this all the more interesting is that it occurred at The Burra Burra

mine in South Australia, reflecting the changes that had started to happen to ‘who are the Cornish?’, which we will address shortly. ‘

Centuries on from these worthy gentlemen we now in the 21st century have many superficial “Celtic” symbols (eg. Art styles, new age neo-druidic rites, jewellery) that also occur across Europe, Americas, Oceania, and even Japan. I do it myself – eg. I (half) joke that I’m tenacious because I’m Cornish!

Most put aside pre WW2 (and some recent) attempts to have race (a term still loosely used) as a basis, or alternatively now using DNA to slice through the soup of heredity that makes up all Europeans. I throw it out emphatically. The Cornish are a mongrel lot, a mixture made up of such-like as the hunter gatherer people who repopulated from Iberia after the last Ice Age, with infusions of Beaker folk, Celtic traders from Europe (and people from the Mediterranean?), traders and fishermen from the coasts of the Atlantic, Irish, Saxons, Bretons returning, and the English of the past 80 years.

In Cornwall, where both the linguistic basis of Celticity is less secure and where other aspects of heritage, notably its history of industrialisation and Christian revival, have served to complicate simplistic notions of ‘the Celtic’, there has been a tendency since at least the 1920s, if not earlier, to embrace a wider definition of Celtic tradition

To a self professed Cornish Australian Celt like myself perhaps the answer is a humble one – really a sifting and blending of theories – like making a Pasty - we are Celtic because in our historically recorded home, some of the people from whom I am actually descended: spoke a Celtic language, had significant aspects of social organisation, customs and traditions, and most importantly self-image - and that these have come down through the centuries so that when the ancient Greek term Celtic came into modern use 3 centuries ago Cornwall clearly fitted – if not like a glove - despite other influences at work (and there were many).

My argument here is that, in contemporary conditions, adopting such a definition is both more realistic and more illuminating. In Cornwall at least, “the Celtic” has not just been changed by a ‘changing world’. That is just too passive a way to look at things. Instead, ‘the Celtic’ is playing its part in changing that world and has the potential to change it even further. And perhaps this is made more possible in Cornwall precisely because of our ‘slightly semi-detached’ status in the Celtic world, as one wag put it.

Cornwall?

Having put aside the word Celtic for now, what about the word Cornwall? What is Cornwall? On this debate rages (well, in narrow Anglo-centric circles) outside of the Cornish community, under the dead hand of the United Kingdom government in Westminster and it’s quangos.

Let us step back in history first. In 664AD The Synod of Whitby determined that ‘England’ was ‘again’ an ecclesiastical province of Rome, with a formal structure of dioceses and parishes. The so called Celtic Church of the British Kingdom of Dumnonia (roughly modern day Cornwall, Devon, and some of Somerset) however was not party to the decision and thus the Church in Cornwall remained monastic in nature for another 400 year, and after.

The Anglo Saxon Chronicle records that in A.D. 825 *“This year a battle was fought between the Welsh in Cornwall and the people of Devonshire, at Camelford”* (in modern day mid-north Cornwall). The Cornish were still seen by the Saxons as ‘Whealas’ or “strangers/foreigners”. Thirteen years later it also records; *“This year came a great naval armament into West-Wales, where they were joined by the people, who commenced war against Egbert, the West-Saxon king. When he heard this, he proceeded with his army against them and fought with them at Hengeston, where he put to flight both the Welsh and the Danes”*.

So 400 years after the Roman legions left, and 250 years after the Battle of Dyrham the Cornish were still Welsh, ie. Celtic Britons. Note that the ASC – for A.D. 577, says, “This year Cuthwin and Ceawlin fought with the Britons, and slew three kings, Commail, and Condida, and Farinmail, on the

spot that is called Derham, and took from them three cities, Gloucester, Cirencester, and Bath"). This split the Britons ('Whealas' to the West Saxons) between what was thence termed North Wales

(Kingdoms in modern Wales and the northern Kingdoms such as Rheged) from those in West Wales (Dumnonia, with its sub-kingdom of Cernyw).

In 936AD, perhaps the most significant event happened. In 927 Hywel, King of West-Wales was recorded in the ASC as being under the governance of King Athelstan of Wessex by agreement - there being no record of Athelstan taking his military campaigns into Cornwall. It seems probable that Hywel agreed to pay tribute thus avoiding further attacks and maintaining a high degree of autonomy. Athelstan 9 years later sets 'for ever', the border between his kingdom and that of the Cornish at the east bank of the River Tamar, practices ethnic cleansing against the Cornish at Exeter (*William of Malmesbury 'cleansed of its defilement by wiping out that filthy race'*).

In 944AD however Edmund, successor to Athelstan, styled himself '*King of the English and ruler of this province of the Britons*', referring to Cornwall - thus making it clear that Cornwall was not formally incorporated into the English state.

Prior to this the West Saxons had pushed their frontier across the Tamar as far west as the River Lynher, but this was only temporary. It was long enough, however, for Saxon settlement and land charters to influence our modern day inheritance of placenames: between the Lynher and the Tamar there are today many more English than Cornish place names, as is also the case in that other debatable land between the Otter and Tamar in north Cornwall. There is evidence however that to the east up to the 14thC parts of south Devon were Celtic speaking. The cultural border was more fluid.

The true significance however is in the nearly 1,100 year old definition of the eastern border of Cornwall. Although it was the English who defined the boundary, not then aligning to the cultural or linguistic boundary, nevertheless an enduring border it has become (between what was Celtic on the west and what was English on the east). There is no scope for doubt therefore on the physical territory for what we call Cornwall.

What is also true is that the Cornish live under a duality of identity! It manifests itself in a number of ways The Cornish and English/British duality, the Just Cornish and Celtic Cornish duality, and the Cornish Born and Cousin Jack duality.

None of these are in fact mutually exclusive, and I am concentrating today particularly on the Celtic Cornish identity.

Some Elements of Identity

Let's now explore some elements of that identity ...we will of course only touch the surface ...

Popular consciousness

*The originator of this theory, Antonio Gramsci (1971) considers that any subordinate group holds dual consciousness – **one** that is not its own and is "borrowed" from another group (in Cornwall's case the English, and thence British state). **The other** is "its own conception of the world, even if only embryonic", a conception which manifests itself in action "but occasionally and in flashes" (Burton, 1996).*

Gramsci argues that for the people of any given society, culture provides the mechanism for a meaningful conception of their world and their place within it, and that in any subordinated society, there are certain "popular" imperatives which are much stronger, more tenacious and more effective than those of the official "morality" of the ruling elite. The 'philosophies' of the subordinated Cornish population, according to Burton (1996) "draw upon many ideologies: Celticism, Catholicism, Methodism, capitalism, old customs, folklore and so on". Each of these fragments vies for domination and each is at odds with the hegemonic (English) culture.

Cornish academic's Deacon and Payton recognised this when they wrote in 1993, *"The sense of belonging to an imagined Cornish community now rests upon a wider set of symbols than before, a changing repertoire which includes co-opted elements from other cultures and newly re-invented*

'traditions'" This 'mosaic of meaning' is often challenged by everyday experience, producing a potentially contradictory consciousness within a cultural group". It also extends past the geographic and administrative bounds of Cornwall to give an international dimension through the great dispersion of the 19th and 20th centuries to North America, Oceania, and elsewhere. It manifests itself in those of Cornish birth, 'incomers' who truly connect with Cornwall, and of course descendents of the Cornish around the world.

Constitutional

The United Kingdom does not have a written constitution. It does have ancient constitutional institutions. The Duchy was established in 1337 by Edward III of England for his son, Edward, Prince of Wales, from the long existing Earldom of Cornwall. According to William of Worcester, writing in the fifteenth century, Cadoc was a survivor of the Cornish royal line at the time of the Norman Conquest of England in 1066 and was appointed as the first Earl of Cornwall by William the Conqueror. So even the Earldom reflected the earlier Celtic kingdoms.

The Duchy of Cornwall is, with the Duchy of Lancaster, one of the two Royal duchies in England. The true nature of the Duchy, and whether it should be considered to be "in England", is a matter of dispute in Cornwall. The eldest son of the reigning monarch is automatically the Duke of Cornwall.

In the late 1850's there was a successful submission by the Duchy of Cornwall involving a dispute with the Crown over the latter's claim to Cornwall's foreshore. The Duchy described Cornwall as a Palatine state that had always been held apart from England and that the entire jurisdiction of the Crown within Cornish borders was held by the Duke. In other words the reigning monarch's writ did not extend to Cornwall and the ancient boundary fixed over 900 years previously between Cornwall and Wessex was confirmed as the east bank of the river Tamar. This was also confirmed much more recently by the Tamar Bridge Act 1998. Interestingly that makes Cornwall arguably not technically part of the United Kingdom, except in a technical sense when the Duke is also on the throne, and it also means that England could one day become a republic and Cornwall stay a Dukedom.

So Cornwall is a land bounded in the east by the River Tamar, and is also a Duchy (whose lands do not at all align with the territory defined, having more land out of Cornwall than in it), and it is also an administrative unit of England. Cornwall has sent MPs to the United Kingdom's Parliament since very early times, however whilst in 1832 Cornwall sent 44 MPs (albeit from what was called 'rotten boroughs' with limited suffrage and tiny populations) - by 1888 Cornwall was the 'County of Cornwall' with only 12 MPs at Westminster! This though brought greater self government and suffrage and still recognised the ancient national border. The Local Government Act of 1888 established an administrative entity called Cornwall County Council. It has lasted until next year, when in April 2009 a new Unitary Authority, name still to be decided, with 130 elected representative will take it's place under the Local Government Act of 1992.

For many the Cornish Stannary Parliament is the ancient parliament of Cornwall - The Charter of Pardon 1508 recognises the Cornish Stannary Parliament as the original government of Cornwall, containing the right to veto all English law prejudicial to the cultural and 'property' interests of the Cornish people centring upon the control of Cornish mineral wealth. The existence of the Stannary Parliament and Court has never been revoked.

History

I won't dwell here, for there is much already said, but it is essential to understanding our subject to realise that history, or more properly the past, is very important in Cornwall and to the Cornish. As

Sir Neil Cossons (formerly Director of the Science Museum, London and now ironically Chair of English Heritage) stated in the West Briton Newspaper in 2002 – *“Cornwall’s past is it’s future!”*

Robert Morton Nance had started the still vibrant Old Cornwall movement. In the first editorial of the movement’s journal *Old Cornwall*, published in 1925, Nance listed the ‘ancient things’ that made up

the spirit of Cornwall, ‘its traditions, its old words and ways, what remains to it of its Celtic language and nationality’. The motto of the Old Cornwall Societies is *“Cuntelleugh an brewyon us gesys na vo kellys travyth”* (Gather up the fragments that are left that nothing be lost)

Old Cornwall was also all around the people. Not Celtic, but lived with by the Celtic Cornish for hundreds of years, are the standing stones, menhirs, fougous, barrows and Neolithic fields – they cannot be missed, as nor can the more Celtic landmarks such as hill forts, Celtic stone crosses, and oratories of the Celtic Church which also almost clutter up the landscape.

Amy Hale has written in 2002, *“Although today the abandoned mines are not icons of the Celtic revival in Cornwall in the same way as the Cornish language and the annual gathering of the Cornish bards may be, there is no doubt that the remains of native industry are embraced by revivalists, and underscore a Cornish sense of ethnic difference.”*

In 1940 John Legonna had already summed it up when he wrote, *“A better knowledge of the Cornish past should give us the understanding and the grit whereby we become better Cornishmen, more useful-to-Cornwall Cornishmen of today.”*

Mining

Although not peculiarly Celtic it is impossible to consider Cornwall without knowing about it’s mining past. The great wave of energy and creativity released in Cornwall by that other huge influence, Methodism and it’s attendant liberal political philosophy, came just as the great inventions of the Industrial Revolution based on steam swept Cornwall with its huge and ancient mineral riches into the mainstream of British life. The Cornish economy was one of the first to industrialise (and a first to de-industrialise) - the population burgeoned (almost doubling during the 1700’s) and, unlike much family history supposition of in-migration, mostly from natural growth. This growth was based on a very narrow band of industry centred on tin and copper mining and it’s attendant heavy engineering, Cornwall through Trevithick, Davy, Woolf, Sims, Grose, Gilbert and many others, was at the forefront of technological innovation. Copper mining spread from its Gwennap/Camborne/Redruth heartland to the east and the west. Tin did not pale by comparison, with the giant Dalcoath moving from copper back to tin.

What was peculiar about the Cornish was that they worked on much the same basis as they had when they mined in the bronze and iron ages. They worked Tut Work, not for wages but for a payment on the amount and richness of the ore that they extracted.

The technological innovation which accompanied Cornwall’s mining pre-eminence in the 18th and early 19th century also led to its emergence as a principal centre of engineering excellence. By 1850 it was said the Cornish had a greater experience of deep mining and mine pumping than the rest of the world put together. Entrepreneurs such as the Bassett, Fox, and Lemon families showed similar independence of spirit and single-minded determination as their mining and engineering cousins. With this came the export of men, women, and expertise to all corners of the world. What some revisionist Cornishmen today half-jokingly call the Cornish Empire. The sun did not set on this one either with Australasia, North and South America, Africa, and even Asia included. At the bottom of every hole was a Cornishman, and their tributing and ticketing systems. Cornish mine Captains were welcome anywhere. The rise of Australian and North American copper fields such as The Burra, Moonta, Grass Valley, and Mineral Point and Goldfields such as Bendigo, Ballarat, and The Rand drew Cornish expertise and backed by British capital flowing out of London these areas boomed. By 1860 Cornwall was booming, the centre of the universe, with thousands of its best going out into the empire until it seemed the whole world was Cornish. We Cornish figuratively and literally had our place in the sun.

Within 30 years however it was almost over .. with metal prices down and rich loads in new lands, often mined by the immigrant Cornish, the mining industry in Cornwall was increasingly at home the mines were becoming 'knacked' or played out. Of course to begin with new ones opened just as fast but soon miners flocked overseas as the growing population could not be accommodated. As the skilled Cornish worked rich deposits in Australia or North America competition become greater for

the mines at home, and more closed. Cornish technology slowly became dated, and the mines more marginal: more mines closed. Only China clay and a little tin hung on. The descent into crisis (so described by Philip Payton) was complete by the 1890's when the County and Diocese arrived, and across the world vibrant modern Cornish culture brought forward Associations such as that in SA in 1890. As population plummeted by tens and even a hundred thousand, agriculture contracted, and the fishing grounds were becoming played out too. The 1890s depression added fuel. For the next 20 years Cornwall was supported by pay cheques sent home to families from places like the Rand, Kalgoorlie, and Grass Valley. As Philip Payton says "Cornish culture was confident but 'fossilising' fast". Even today for perhaps millions of people of Cornish birth and descent around the world an element of identity is a mining 'memory'.

Language

"*Me ne vidn cewsel Sawznek!*" I will not speak English! So are recorded the words of a reputed last monoglot native speaker of the Celtic Cornish language, Dorothy or Dolly Pentreath, in Mousehole, west Cornwall in 1777. As the First Fleet was setting out for Australia the Celtic Cornish language was still being spoken, and only a few miles from where my ancestors hail. By the end of the 19th century Cornish phrases disappeared from everyday use and the last native speaker was probably John Davey of Zennor who died in 1891. We do not know if any of the language came to Australia before the past 80 years. Note that others suggest Chesten Marchant, who died in 1676 in nearby Gwithian as the last monoglot, and there are native speakers born in the last 30 years due to the language revival.

The Cornish language (in Cornish variously: *Kernowek*, *Kernewek*, *Curnoack*) is one of the Brythonic group of Celtic languages (Brythonic also includes Welsh, Breton, the extinct, and some suggest Gaulish). The languages Scottish Gaelic, Irish and Manx are part of the separate Goidelic group. Cornish shares about 80% basic vocabulary with Breton, 75% with Welsh, 35% with Irish, and 35% with Scottish Gaelic. By comparison, Welsh shares about 70% with Breton. Cornish has frontal mutations, a subject I do not want to elaborate much on today. Cornish continued to function as a community language until the late 18th century, and was revived early in the 20th century.

Cornish started to diverge from Welsh towards the end of the 7th century AD and the earliest known examples of written Cornish date from the end of the 9th century AD. These were in the form of glosses scribbled in the margins of a Latin text - Smaragdus' Commentary on Donatus. They were originally thought to be in Old Breton, but Prof. J. Loth showed in 1907 that they were in fact Old Cornish. Old Breton and Old Cornish were very similar and are easily confused. Old Cornish was used from about 800-1250 AD and traces of it also survive in some place names in eastern Cornwall. The Cornish used between 1250 and 1550 is known as Middle or Medieval Cornish and quite a lot of literature from this period still survives, including religious plays, poems and sermons. Literature in Late or Modern Cornish, the type of Cornish used between 1550 and the end of the 19th century, includes folk tales, poems, songs, and translations from the Bible.

After Henry Jenner published that Handbook in 1904, Robert Morton Nance (1873-1959), reconstructed a version of Cornish he called Unified Cornish (*Kernewek Unys*) based on Medieval miracle plays and borrowing words from the middle and late periods and even from Welsh and Breton. Nance also devised his own spelling system. In 1929 Nance published his work in a book called *Cornish for All*. In 1967 the Cornish Language Board (*Kevas an taves Kernewek*) was set up to promote the language. The version of the language they promoted was Unified Cornish and their efforts attracted considerable interest. During the 1980s as an increasing number of people became interested in Cornish, they started to notice the inaccuracies and shortcomings of Unified Cornish.

Over the past 20 years several different spelling systems, with their basis in different periods of Cornish use, from Medieval to the 17th Century, have been used. Today, and I mean almost today, meetings are being held to confirm what is being called Standard Written Form, so that long awaited government recognition, ie. funds, for language teaching can be obtained and regular teaching done in schools, rather than only by enthusiasts.

The most popular versions of Cornish are currently Kemmyn (Common Cornish) developed by Ken George and Unified, the version of Nance (which is used by the Cornish Gorseth), though other versions also have supporters, eg. Modern or Cornoack was taught at the Uni of Newcastle 12 years ago. The differences between the various versions of Cornish are not huge and do not prevent speakers from communicating with one another. Perhaps 300 people are 'fluent' and over a thousand more have had varying degrees of formal exposure to it!

Some families have been bringing up their children with Cornish as their first language, though often, like friends of mine it doesn't guarantee continued use. Cornish names are popular for children (my daughters are Lowenna (Joy) and Kerensa (Love), pets, houses and boats. People are writing and performing songs and poetry in Cornish, and the language is taught in some schools and at the University of Exeter. There are a number of magazines solely in Cornish: *An Gannas*, *An Gowser* and *An Garrick*. BBC Radio Cornwall have regular news broadcasts in Cornish, and sometimes have other programmes and features for learners and enthusiasts. Local newspapers, such as the *Western Morning News*, often have articles in Cornish, and such newspapers as *The Packet*, *The West Briton* and *The Cornishman* also support the language. The first ever feature film entirely in Cornish, *Hwerow Hweg* (Bitter Sweet) was released in 2002, and a number of other films in Cornish have been made since then. The Internet has led to an explosion of sites and resources. Our language is a subject that could well make a workshop in itself, if I was past Grade 1, the elementary level of learning, myself.

Sample text:

"Yma pup den genys frank hag equal yn dynyta hag yn gwryow. Ymons-y enduys gans reson ha keskans hag y tal dhedhans omdhon an eyl orth y gela yn sperys a vredereth".

Translation:

"All human beings are born free and equal in dignity and rights. They are endowed with reason and conscience and should act towards one another in a spirit of brotherhood".

The English based dialect of Cornwall has a distinct vocabulary with traces of Kernewek, the historic language of the land, and West Saxon. Indeed the geography of dialect in Cornwall is complex and rich, with two main dialect areas and a third, transitional zone. Study reveals that Cornish dialect not only has a sound system far removed from Modern English and Cornish, but also has its own grammar. has been classified as just a dialect of English. There has been little academic study and no standard orthography offered, but it is a living tongue. Today when the term Cornish dialect is referred to, it is understood it is an old dialect of the English language spoken by a Celtic people in a Celtic territory, who were losing their old language. Sadly the days are gone when one small area in Cornwall talked in a different dialect and accent from another Cornish area. Many residents at this time could be identified with their dialect or accent as being from a certain part of Cornwall.

Today Cornish dialect speakers agree it is a case of use it or lose it. The exact of a poem that follows have been written phonetically in the hope that when read aloud the sound of the dialect will be heard.

It is called *Our Cornish Heritage*, by Harry 'Safari' Glasson:

*Oh well I tell 'ee boy, Cornwall's in some state
Well 'ee d'ent part of a England at any rate
We're more akin to Brittany, Ireland, Scotland, Wales
We got history on our side ta balance up the scales*

We don't mind being called a Duchy, but a Kingdom's what we are

*And 'tis been stated many times by lawyers at the bar
'A palatine state extraterritorial to the English crown'
(George Harrison eighteen fifty eight)*

*Do 'ee knaw in nine thirty eight when Athelstan was King
He was a proper man and yo, he dud a proper thing
He made a boundary of the Tamar and all west belong to we
So we're Cornish and were Celtic, not English, don't 'ee see?*

Many dialect words come from the late Cornish language but this dialect developed alongside West Saxon in the eastern parts, and can vary across the country. Fred Jago, a doctor in Plymouth but who hailed originally from St Austell in mid Cornwall, published a book *The Ancient Language and the Dialect of Cornwall* in 1882. In this, he prefigured the Old Cornwall movement by arguing that the Cornish dialect was the 'link between the old and new tongue, between Celtic and English'.

Music, Song, and Dance

It is in music and in song where the duality of Cornish identity also shows through. Alongside songs adopted from America or written in modern times, are old songs with music that may be even older.

The Hal An Tow, a song with its true meaning lost in time. With words now in English harking back to Elizabethan and Victorian times, it has an older feel in the chorus

*Hal-an Tow, jolly rumble O
For we are up as soon as any day. O
And for to fetch the Summer home
The Summer and the May, O,
For Summer is a come, O,
And Winter is a gone, O.*

Sung before the Furry Dance, on Flora Day in Heston, which is on St Michael's Day, it has been performed for many centuries. Flora Day is clearly a Spring festival, the first after Winter, when nature's seeming barrenness gives place to fertility and life - the Furry dance is an expression of the joy at the triumph of life (Spring) over Death (Winter), the passing of darkness into light, the emergence of man victorious from the eternal struggle for survival.

Delyo Syvy, a song (as with so many Cornish songs) about love or just fornication, comes down to us with its original Cornish words (late Cornish spelling note).

*Peleah ero why a moaz, moze fettow teag
Gen agoz pedn due ha goz bleaw mellin?
Me a moaz than venton sarra wheag
Rag delkiow sivy ra muzzy teag*

Some of the music that has survived has a Breton feel, perhaps from our cousinly roots, or from the constant movement between our lands (my GGM was from Dinan, and another ancestor from Brittany via Guernsey).

Dancing was and is a favourite pastime, and the dances reflect two strands – workers (often miners and fisherman) letting their hair down over a pint, and community. The Cornish dances may be roughly separated into four categories: Furry Dances - Ritual processional dances for feast and fair days. Set or Scoot Dances - For use at Troyls or similar event. Circular Dances - for special occasions and involving large numbers of people, and, Solo Dances - 'show-off' dances performed by individuals and more local in origin. Most of the Cornish dances are now utilised at Troyls to ensure their continuity through common usage. Some of the dances show Breton influences.

Food

Again a subject that could have a whole workshop. It is hard to say what is Celtic, or at times even Cornish about food ... as universal a need with limited ingredients food is! The Pasty is the quintessential Cornish dish. Gingerbreads in Cornwall became known as Fairings and are thin ginger biscuit. Saffron Cake evokes interesting trade links of old with Spain and the Mediterranean. Congress Tarts – well I just love them. So I gratuitously print some recipes for you to try, to get a taste of Cornwall.

RECIPES

Cornish Ginger Fairings

(Originally made as a special fair day treat in Cornwall)

Ingredients: 2 cups S.R. flour, 1 cup sugar, 3 tablespoons golden syrup, 125g margarine, 1 level teaspoon bi-carb, 3 heaped teaspoons ginger, 1 egg. Instructions: Melt syrup & margarine. Sift together flour, sugar, bi-carb & ginger. Beat egg & add to slightly cooled syrup mixture. Stir in the dry sifted ingredients. Roll into small balls, flatten top, place on greased trays. Bake 10-15 mins at 180 C or 350 F. Can make up to 60 depending on size of ball.

Cornish Pasties

(Made to feed the tin & copper miners their crowst or lunch.)

Ingredients: 1lb plain flour, pinch salt, 5 ozs Margarine/Butter, 5 ozs Lard, cold water, raw finely diced steak (chuck or similar), sliced Swede turnip, diced Onion or Leek, sliced Potato, seasoning to taste. Egg. Parsley. Instructions: Rub Lard into the flour and salt to resemble fine breadcrumbs, mix to a dough with enough cold water. Roll into a rectangle and dot the top 2/3 pastry with marg., fold up bottom 1/3 and top 1/3 down. Turn pastry so that the open end is nearest to you and repeat the process until all Lard is used. Chill pastry in refrigerator for 1 hour. This should be enough pastry to make 1 dozen small pasties. Roll pastry out into 12 circles using a small plate to size. Place a small amount of raw sliced Potato in the centre of the pastry. Add a small amount of raw diced steak, sliced Swede, diced onion, also on pastry. Season to taste, add some chopped parsley and a nob of Marg. Seal edges by crimping securely, brush top with beaten egg, make a small slit in the top and bake at 450 F for 15 mins, in the top of a pre-heated oven. Lower oven to 325 F and put on lower shelf. Cook for a further 25-30 mins.

Congress Tarts

Make raw short pastry cases in patty tins. Put a spoonful of jam in each case, and cover with the following mixture: 4 oz ground almonds, capful of almond essence, 2 oz margarine, 2 tablespoons of castor sugar, 1 egg. Mix all together, spread over jam, making sure mixture reaches the edge of the pastry cases. Decorate with strips of pastry if desired. Bake 10-15 mins at 370°F or 190°C or until lightly browned.

Everyday Saffron Cake

Recipe (pre-metric so please convert)

3lb plain flour, 1lb Lard & Margarine (mixed), 6oz sugar, 1 1/2 lb dried fruit, 4-6oz candied mixed peel, 1 teaspoon salt, 1 dram good saffron, 1oz yeast, warm milk and water to mix.

1. Cut Saffron into small pieces with scissors
2. Place in basin and cover with boiling water
3. Leave overnight to steep
4. Rub Lard/Marg into flour and salt.
5. Add sugar and fruit
6. Cream yeast with a little sugar. Thin with tepid water, and scatter a little flour on top. Leave in warm place until frothy.
7. Using hand, mix saffron, yeast, and enough tepid milk & water with dry ingredients to make soft dough. Knead well.
8. Cover with greased paper and a clean cloth and leave in a warm place until doubled in size.
9. Turn onto floured board and knead till the fruit starts popping out.
10. Shape into cakes, loaves, or buns. Then put into well greased tin/s. Buns are usually put on a greased baking sheet.
11. Put into a warm place to 'plum up'.
12. Bake -

Buns: 440 F 15-20 mins

Cakes: 425 F 15 mins then 30 mins at 400 F.

Cakes or loaves need 40-50 mins at these temps but should sound hollow if tapped on base, though the crust will be soft.

Some Customs

Hurling or Hurlin' (Cornish: *Hurlian*), is an outdoor team sport of Celtic origin. It is played with a small silver ball. It is not to be confused with the Irish game of the same name which allows the use of sticks. Once played widely in Cornwall, the game has similarities to other traditional football or inter parish 'mob' games, but certain attributes make this version unique to Cornwall. It is considered by many to be Cornwall's national sport along with Cornish wrestling.

Wrasslin is a form of wrestling similar to judo, which has been established in Cornwall (South West of the UK) for several centuries. The referee is known as a 'stickler', and it is claimed that the popular meaning of the word as a 'pedant' originates from this usage. It is colloquially known as "wrasslin" in Cornish dialect. It is closely related to Gouren, Breton style wrestling, and sometimes called Celtic Wrestling. The wrestlers in the Cornish style both wear tough jackets enabling them to gain better grip on their opponent. All holds are taken only upon the wrestlers jacket, grabbing of the

wrists or fingers is forbidden as well as any holding below the waist. Although all holds are to be taken upon the jacket the flat of the hand is allowed to be used to push or deflect an opponent.

The objective of Cornish Wrestling is to throw your opponent and make him land as flat as possible on his back. Three Sticklers (referees) watch and control each bout whilst also recording down the score of points achieved in play. Four Pins are located on the back of a wrestler, two at the back of each shoulder and two either side just above the buttocks. If a wrestler manages to throw his opponent flat onto his back, simultaneously scoring with all 4 pins they score four points in that single throw and this is called a "Back" to which the bout is then finished and the throwing wrestler is the winner. The Sticklers will each raise their sticks when they perceive a Back has been achieved. If two sticklers raise their sticks but one does not a back is still awarded. Bouts have been held in Australia over the past 8 years.

Crying the Neck is a traditional ceremony revived and celebrated since the early 1920s by the Old Cornwall Societies. In September as the last of the harvest of corn or grain has been cut, a small amount is left. The farmer picks up his long-handled scythe and with slow sweeping movements cuts his way through the remaining stalks. These are gathered together and tied round with twine, then the golden bundle is raised above his head, first to the East, then the South and the West. *I Have'n, I Have'n, I Have'n* - he shouts. *What 'ave ee? What 'ave ee? What 'ave ee?* - we reply. *A Neck! A Neck! A Neck!* - he shouts, triumphantly *Hurrah! Hurrah! Hurrah!* - all shout with glee, then in Cornish *Yma geneff! Yma geneff! Yma geneff! Pandr'us genes? Pandr'us genes? Pandr'us genes? Pen Yar! Pen Yar! Pen Yar! Houra! Houra! Houra!* This is followed by much merriment, and in olden days the last sheaf was made into a 'corn dolly' to capture the spirits, which would be kept through the winter and burnt in the hearth at Spring.

The Cornish Piskey was a figment of the imagination of the superstitious Cornish people in centuries past? Believing in the 'Spriggans' (little people) or Bucca who could play tricks, cast spells, steal babies, etc., the Cornish folk would respect their presence and be careful not to do anything to disturb them, especially those in mines, the 'Knockers'. The Piskey however was a mischievous little creature, always laughing at someone or some thing, and ready to play tricks on folk who walked home across a misty moor or along a lonely cliff path. Piskies are considered to be a lucky charm, if you respect them, they will bring you good luck. The Cornish piskey, in the transitional pose of facing to the right, squatting with arms folded around the knees, turning the face with a wide grin, can be made as a charm on a necklace or bracelet, key ring, etc.

Gorseth

There were said to be three (3) gathering places for the ancient Celtic Bards in Britain; one is thought to be Boscawen Un in Cornwall! It is true that Bardic traditions died out in Cornwall by the 11th C. In 1928 however the Cornish Gorsedd (Gorseth in the Cornish language) was re-established by Henry Jenner (who was also the father of the language revival) based on the invention of the Welsh Gorsedd in the 1700's - which by the turn of the 20th C had established a respected presence. Since that first gathering at Boscawen Un, near St Buryan, 1200 or so Cornish people have been so honoured (60 or so in Australia). In the Cornish ceremonial the leader is called the Grand Bard, and all bards wear blue robes with a head-dress. The Arwon (3 rays of the sun) is the Gorseth symbol! The Gorseth exists to maintain the national Celtic spirit of Cornwall and to give

expression to such spirit; to encourage the study of Cornish History and the Cornish Language; to foster Cornish literature, art and music; to link Cornwall with the other Celtic countries. It promotes a spirit of peace and cooperation amongst those who work for the honour of Cornwall. There are only Bards of the Cornish Gorseth with a Grand Bard as leader of the circle. The gathering ceremonies are completely in Cornish, and have a procession, ceremonial, young dancers and music.

The 'Open' (or robed) Gorseth of all Bards worldwide is held on the first Saturday in September each year rotated to a different site within Cornwall – this year it will be Looe. There are occasionally meetings of Bards elsewhere in the world where a number of other Bards live, such as in Australia and North America! The last was at Ballarat in March this year, the next in South Australia next May and California in July. Bards around the world swear on investiture that they will continue their work for Cornwall, and for the manifestation of the Cornish Celtic spirit! Each Bard takes on a name in the

Cornish language which is unique. eg. Kevrenor (meaning builder of links, or linker) is my Bardic name.

Kernow Bys Vyken

Today Cornwall is a vibrant place, but only half of the population sees themselves as Cornish. It is at the forefront of change to Internet based community action, a greener economy, but is the poorest part of Britain for it's native residents, plus real constitutional change eludes us despite a 50,000 signature petition to the UK government. St Piran's cross flag is flown by many more people than would call themselves nationalist despite, or perhaps because of, clumsy bureaucratic attempts to suppress it. Faux Celtic symbolism is used for marketing Cornwall, but hey it's better than St George and green fields. Our 40 year old tartan is worn as if it was always ours, there is a burgeoning in writing, music, dance, and theatre, despite the dumbing down of BBC Radio Cornwall. An Internet Facebook site called *Proud to be Cornish* has over 3,400 mostly young truly proud Cornish, many forced away from their land by study or work, the Cornish proud of who they are while English question who they are. A 56 year old American called Jim Wearne sings, "This isn't England."

What does all this have to do with Celtic Cornwall? Identity! I've given you a small if meandering kaleidoscope - 11 pages of views, facts, and opinions.

You make your own minds up, but for the Cornish, it'll do! Fact .. it's a proper job my bird!

Meerasta dhe why oll. Kernow bys vyken!

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Disclaimer: This is largely a collation, with an infusion of my own thoughts. As this is not an academic work or published book I have not shown all references – if you don't see yours, just have a warm feeling that you've helped Cornwall.

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Talk to the Celtic Cultural Experience, Saturday 24 May 2008; Teralba, NSW