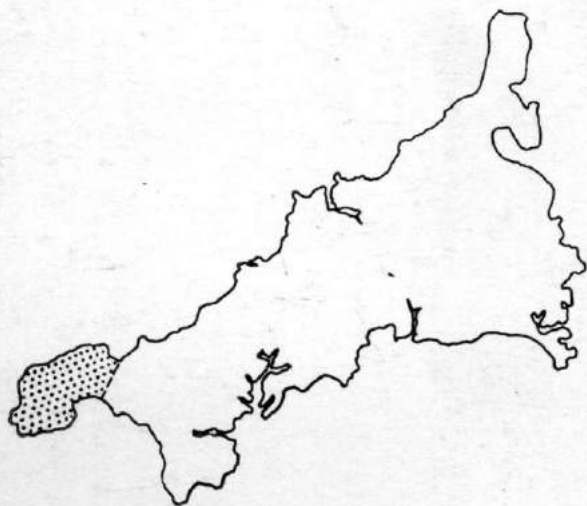


THE DEATH OF CORNISH



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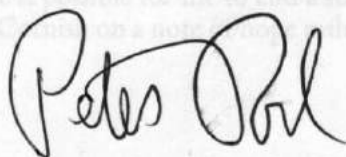
THE DEATH OF CORNISH

(1600 - 1800)

by

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1975

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AUTHOR'S NOTE

This booklet contains the text of my Address to the International Congress of Celtic Studies at Penzance in April 1975. Some additions and corrections have been made, and full references given, but the spoken form has been retained. My best thanks are due to Professor Charles Thomas, Director of the Institute of Cornish Studies, for inviting this contribution, and to Mr. Oliver J. Padel, Research Fellow, for his most helpful comments on my text. I am deeply grateful to Lord St. Levan and to the Royal Institution of Cornwall for use of the portraits of Dolly Pentreath and William Gwavas, and to Mr. R. D. Penhallurick for drawing the map. Above all, I am conscious of my debt to the late Robert Morton Nance, so much of whose research is included in these pages, and whose life's work made it possible for me to end a survey of a tragic phase in the history of Cornish on a note of hope rather than despair.

Abbreviations used in footnotes:

CWBF O. J. Padel, *The Cornish Writings of the Bosen Family*, 1975.

JRIC *Journal of the Royal Institution of Cornwall* (NS, New Series).

OC *Old Cornwall* (Journal of the Federation of Old Cornwall Societies).

RMN Robert Morton Nance.

CORNISH is unique among the Celtic Languages in that it became extinct as a spoken language, apparently for ever, in about 1800. It is also unique in that it has been revived in this present century, to become the only Celtic Language of which the users are now increasing in number rather than decreasing.

Cornish, like King Charles II, was "an unconscionable long time dying", and my task is to review the final two centuries of its decline towards extinction, from 1600 to 1800, and to recall some of the personalities who tried to save it, or at least to record it while there was still time. I must start, though, as I shall end, by paying tribute to a personality of our own time, Robert Morton Nance (1873-1959), our great scholar-patriot, the revered leader of the revival of Cornish, whose memory is still green among us; in addition to all his other work for Cornish, he subjected the literary fragments of its decline to a close and affectionate scrutiny and published dozens of papers and notes on the subject.¹

I will try to deal with the events of these two centuries accurately, but I cannot do so objectively; to me this is one of the saddest stories ever recorded, the slow but inevitable loss of the most precious part of Cornwall's cultural heritage, the symbol of her claim to be a Celtic nation. If this makes me guilty of (in the words of an academic critic of Nance), "scarcely scientific revivalist local patriotism",² then so be it; there are many worse things to be, and it is a designation I should be proud to share with the greatest of my countrymen.

We are fortunate that the state of Cornish in about 1600 was recorded by Richard Carew (1555-1620), whose *Survey of Cornwall* was first published in 1602, and by John Norden (c. 1548-1625), whose *Description of Cornwall* was apparently compiled between 1597 and 1604, though not published until 1728.³

¹ For memoir and bibliography of RMN, see the Memorial Volume, *A Glossary of Cornish Sea-Words* (1963), pp. 9-23, 195-204. For the period 1600-1800 see especially 'The Cornish Language in the 17th Century' (OC VI 1 (1961), p. 20) and 'When was Cornish Last Spoken Traditionally?' (JRIC NS VII 1 (1973), p. 76).

² Prof. C. L. Wrenn of Oxford, quoted OC VI 5 (1963), p. 203.

³ W. Ravenhill, *John Norden's Maps of Cornwall* (1972), p. 18.

Carew noted the affinity of Cornish with Welsh, claiming that it was "more easy to be pronounced, and not so unpleasing in sound", and that the noun was placed before the adjective; then he recorded the numerals, and a few conventional greetings and less conventional oaths and insults, such as *pedn mowzack*, "stinking head", and *molla tuenda laaz*, which he thought meant "ten thousand mischiefs in thy guts" but which really means "the curse of God in thy guts". He mentioned that the Lord's Prayer, the Apostles' Creed, and the Ten Commandments had been used in Cornish "beyond all remembrance", continuing:

. . . the English speech doth still encroach upon it, and hath driven the same into the uttermost skirts of the shire. Most of the inhabitants can speak no word of Cornish, but very few are ignorant of the English; yet some so affect their own, as to a stranger they will not speak it; for if meeting them by chance, you enquire the way or any such matter, your answer shall be, *Meea navidna cowza sawzneck*.

He thought that this meant, "I cannot speak English", but in fact it means, "I will not speak English"!⁴

Carew neither knew nor cared much about Cornish; he lived at Antony in SE Cornwall, far distant from the western areas where Cornish was spoken, and believed so strongly in *The Excellency of the English Tongue* that he wrote a book so entitled. He would have heard Cornish spoken only when he came west to visit his property at Pensignance in Gwennap, or his friend Sir Francis Godolphin in Breage; and it seems that he must then have met some rather rude and unco-operative Cornish speakers.

Norden was not Cornish, but was a diligent and accurate observer and recorder whose account of the western hundreds is much fuller than Carew's. Of Cornish he states:

. . . of late the Cornish men have much conformed themselves to the use of the English tongue . . . from Truro eastward it is in manner wholly English. In the west part of the country, as in the Hundreds of Penwith and Kerrier,⁵ the Cornish tongue is most in use among the inhabitants, and yet though the

⁴ R. Carew, *The Survey of Cornwall* (1602), pp. 55, 56.

⁵ For extent of these Hundreds, see map, p. 20. Penwith Hundred extended from Land's End east to Scorrier, but the name 'Penwith' is sometimes used loosely for the Land's End peninsula only, properly called 'West Penwith'.

husband and wife, parents and children, master and servants, do mutually communicate in their native language, yet there is none of them in manner but is able to converse with a stranger in the English tongue, unless it be some obscure people, that seldom confer with the better sort. But it seems that in few years the Cornish Language will be by little and little abandoned.⁶

Thus by 1600 Cornish was already in decline, virtually extinct in central and eastern Cornwall and confined to the western parts beyond Truro, and even there the number of monoglot Cornish speakers was small, although no doubt Cornish would still have been the first language of most of the rural inhabitants other than the gentry. There is an interesting record of bilingualism 10 miles east of Truro as late as 1595, when some Church Court depositions record that two women of St. Ewe were talking together both in Cornish and English.⁷

The tragedy is that the crucial decision which was to lead to the eventual extinction of Cornish had already been taken, decades before 1600; namely the decision not to give Cornwall a Cornish Prayer Book and Bible, as Wales was given Welsh ones commissioned by Act of Parliament in 1563. Evidently, even by that date, the number of monoglot Cornish speakers, who could not understand services and Bible readings in English, was already so small that the prodigious labour of preparing Cornish translations was considered pointless. Had the decision gone otherwise, in all probability Cornish, like Welsh, would never have died out; certainly many hundreds of words of Cornish would have been preserved which were in the event lost beyond recall. But in the second half of the 16th century there were Cornish scholars who could have carried out the task: such men as John Tregear, who translated Bishop Bonner's Homilies into Cornish, probably soon after their publication in 1555; Dr. John Kenall (d. 1592), the influential and pluralist Parson of St. Columb, an ecclesiastical lawyer with whom, according to Carew, lay buried "the principal love and knowledge of this language"; and Richard Pendrea, who as a Catholic Priest in exile preached in Cornish before King Philip III of Spain in Valladolid in 1600.⁸

⁶ J. Norden, *Description of Cornwall* (1728), p. 26.

⁷ A. L. Rowse, *Tudor Cornwall* (1941), p. 23.

⁸ H. Jenner, 'A Cornish Oration in Spain in 1600', *Rep. Royal Cornwall Polytechnic Soc.* 90 (1923), p. 61.

We must consider the evidence for the survival of performances of Cornish miracle plays after 1600. Carew, writing in 1602, speaks of the "gwyary miracle" in the present tense as continuing in his time, but in a debased form, the players no longer attempting to learn their parts, but merely repeating the words after a prompter who followed behind them with the text in his hand. This apart, there is no record of any performance of a Cornish miracle play after 1600 until modern times, and the outbreak of Civil War in 1642 and the following years of turmoil and Puritan ascendancy would surely have killed them, if in fact they continued for so long. The only MS of the latest of these plays, *Gureans an Bys*, the Creation of the World, ends with a statement that it was written by William Jordan in 1611, apparently implying not only that miracle plays were then still being performed, but also that new ones were being written. However, both Whitley Stokes and Morton Nance thought that the play was written considerably earlier and that Jordan was only a transcriber, not the author.⁹ Nothing is known of Jordan, except that he is believed to have lived at Helston,¹⁰ but it seems improbable that anyone would have composed this play, with full stage directions for actual performance, as late as 1611; we must be thankful that someone found it worth while to copy it.

The Civil War brought to Cornwall the first outside observer since Norden to record the state of the Cornish Language. Richard Symonds was an officer serving in the Royalist army during Charles I's victorious personal campaign in Cornwall in 1644; he had antiquarian tastes, finding time to copy many inscriptions from churches and also to jot down a few words of Cornish, the numerals, and four greetings, though no curses of the type recorded by Carew. He stated:

This language is spoken altogether at Goonhilly and about Pendennis, and at Land's End they speak no English. All beyond Truro they speak the Cornish language.¹¹

This information is unlikely to have been obtained at first hand, since the campaign did not extend west of Lostwithiel, and probably Symonds obtained it by questioning Cornish speakers serving with

⁹ *The Creation of the World*, ed. Whitley Stokes (1863), p. 4; ed. RMN (1959), p. i.

¹⁰ So stated by Keigwin in his translation, 1691 (Tonkin MS quoted JRIC NS IV 2 (1962), p. 166).

¹¹ R. Symonds, *Diary of the Marches of the Royal Army during the Great Civil War* (Camden Soc., 1859), p. 74.

him. We know that there were Cornish speakers in the Royalist army, since William Scawen recalled years later that when some men had deserted to the other side, an unsuccessful attempt had been made to induce them to return by the use of Cornish.¹²

Symonds' record of the area in which Cornish was spoken resembled that of Norden, but the number of Cornish speakers was doubtless declining rapidly, and the monoglots were probably becoming very rare. This is reflected in the declining use made of the language in Church; William Hals records having been often told by William Jackman, Vicar of Feock, that he had been compelled to administer the communion in Cornish until about 1640 "because the aged people did not well understand English".¹³ At least one Cornish Parson preached in the language until well into the second half of the century; Scawen recorded in 1678 that he had been told by Francis Robinson, Rector of Landewednack, that he had done so "not long since", Cornish being the only language well understood by his congregation.¹⁴ This is the last record of any part of a service being conducted in Cornish, except for an undated note in the Gwavas MSS, following a Cornish translation of the 100th Psalm by an un-named inhabitant of Newlyn, *Ma an mableean ni e gana terwitheyaw waran zeell*, "our clerk sings it sometimes on Sunday". This is more likely to refer to the English than to the translation, which does not scan, but it raises a possibility, though no more, that Cornish was still heard in Paul Church early in the 18th century.¹⁵

In 1662 John Ray the naturalist visited Land's End and noted as follows:

Mr. Dickan Gwyn lives not far off, in St. Just Parish, who is the only man we could hear of that can now write the Cornish language. We met with none here but what could speak English; few of the children could speak Cornish, so that the language is like, in a short time, to be quite lost.¹⁶

¹² W. Scawen, *Antiquities Cornu-Britannic* (note 28), in Davies Gilbert, *History of Cornwall* IV (1838), p. 217.

¹³ W. Hals, *History of Cornwall* (1750), p. 133.

¹⁴ Scawen, *op. cit.* (note 12), p. 216; RMN, 'The Proposed Landewednack Tablet', OC II 10 (1935), p. 44.

¹⁵ RMN, 'A Cornish Translation of the Hundredth Psalm', OC I 9 (1929), p. 33; CWBF, p. 38 (attributed to Thomas Boson, or perhaps John Boson or Oliver Pender).

¹⁶ Itinerary of John Ray, 1662 (*Memorials of John Ray* (1846), p. 190).

“Dickan Gwyn” was actually “Dick Angwin”, Richard Angwin of Bojewyan in St. Just. In 1667 Ray was in Cornwall again, and this time he visited Angwin and obtained some words of Cornish from him. On this visit he commented:

He is esteemed the most skilful man of any now living in the Cornish language, but being no good grammarian, we found him very deficient. Another there is, Pendarvis by name, who is said to be a scholar, who doubtless must needs have better skill in the tongue.¹⁷

We cannot now judge Angwin’s scholarship, since tragically all his MSS were destroyed by his relatives after his death, which occurred at an advanced age in 1675. Nicholas Boson described him as “the greatest and the eldest of the late Professors of our Cornish Tongue”, though recalling disapprovingly a spectacular misinterpretation of a Cornish place-name, Angwin having interpreted *Keverango*, “[the meeting place of the] Hundreds”, as meaning “Goats all”.¹⁸

Angwin was the oldest of a small group of Cornishmen, mostly living in the far western districts where the language was still spoken, who busied themselves on its behalf in the last forty years of the 17th century and the first thirty of the 18th; without the work of Richard Angwin, John Keigwin, Nicholas Boson, William Scawen, William Gwavas and Thomas Tonkin, our knowledge of Cornish in its final phase would have been small indeed. They saw that the language was dying before their eyes, and that the forces working to that end were irreversible; what they could not save, they set out to record. They corresponded in Cornish; compiled word-lists; collected and wrote verses, proverbs, epitaphs and other fragments; two of them wrote accounts of the state of the language, and one did pioneer work on the MSS of the medieval Cornish literature. Their unspoken motto was that used in modern times by the Old Cornwall Societies; *Cuntelleugh an vrewyon us gesys, na vo kellys travyeth*—“Gather the fragments that are left, that nothing be lost”. This they did most thoroughly, but their work cannot be styled a revival of Cornish, in any meaningful sense of the word “revival”. The language continued to decline throughout the years of their

¹⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 189. See also C. Henderson, ‘Nicholas Boson and Richard Angwin’, OC II 2 (1931), p. 29.

¹⁸ N. Boson, *Nebbaz Gerriau* (note 22), ed. RMN, p. 337, CWBF, p. 26.

work, and in fact died soon after them; their importance was as witnesses and chroniclers of this decline.

John Keigwin, the greatest scholar among these men, was a member of a family of merchants long established at Mousehole, a small fishing village in Mount's Bay, three miles west of Penzance.¹⁹ His great-grandfather, Jenkin Keigwin, had died defending Mousehole against the Spaniards who raided Mount's Bay in 1595. His father, Martin Keigwin, had lived in both Brittany and Wales and acquired some knowledge of their languages, and John Keigwin was learned in Latin, French, Greek and Hebrew as well as in Cornish, in which last Boson attributed to him "more special skill and learning than any that have been this time long before, or that will come after in all likelihood". Gwavas called him "the most knowing of all that I conversed with, being bred a scholar". Keigwin was the only man before the 19th century to work on the literature of Middle Cornish; he transcribed and translated virtually the whole of that literature as then known, the *Ordinalia*, the *Creation*, and the *Passion Poem*. His work has been much criticised, and for the most part unfairly so, since none of it was published until more than a century after his death, and then by an editor, Davies Gilbert, whose total ignorance of Cornish was matched by his appalling carelessness. Keigwin rather merits the affection of all Cornishmen, and the respect of all scholars, as a pioneer who devoted much of his life to this task with little prospect of publication and none of monetary reward. It is unlikely now that his work will ever be published, since it has been superseded by that of Norris and Stokes, but nothing must deprive him of honoured status as the first man, and the only one in his time and for long after, to work on these texts. Of his other Cornish writings, mention is due of his translation of King Charles I's Letter of Thanks to the Cornish people, for their services in the Civil War, written in 1643 and still displayed in English in many of our churches; Keigwin's translation was made many years later, purely as an academic exercise, with the comment, "though it may be kept a monument to posterity in

¹⁹ Keigwin was baptised at Paul 9 Jan. 1641/2, buried there 20 April 1716. A study of his life and writings is much needed; for a brief appreciation see J. Ledbury, *Devon & Cornwall Notes & Queries* XXX ix (1967), p. 247.

the English tongue, yet Cornish men may not do amiss (to whom it is peculiar) to record their merits in their own".²⁰

I have already quoted Nicholas Boson both on Angwin and on Keigwin; Boson was himself one of the leading figures in this little group of Cornish students.²¹ He lived at Newlyn, another fishing village in Mount's Bay between Penzance and Mousehole, in the heart of the Cornish-speaking area, but he records that when he was a child his mother prevented him from learning Cornish by forbidding the servants and neighbours to speak to him except in English, and that he knew no Cornish until he grew up and went into business. Gradually he acquired a good knowledge and also a great love of the language, although appreciating that it lacked many words which had to be supplied from Latin or English. He wrote in both Cornish and English a short essay called *Nebbaz Gerriau Dro Tho Carnoack* (A Few Words about Cornish),²² in which he summed up the state of the language as follows:

Our Cornish tongue hath been so long on the wane that we can hardly hope to see it increase again, for as the English confined it into this narrow country first, so it presseth on still, leaving it no place but about the cliff and sea, it being almost only spoken from the Land's End to the Mount and towards St. Ives and Redruth, and again from the Lizard to Helston, and towards Falmouth, . . . within which little extent also there is more of English spoken than of Cornish, for here may be found some that can hardly speak or understand Cornish, but scarce any but both understand and speak English; therefore it seems difficult to stay and recover it again, for the old men dying away, we find the young men to speak it less and less, and worse and worse, and so it is like to decay from time to time.²³

²⁰ RMN, 'John Keigwin's Translation of King Charles I's Letter of Thanks to the County of Cornwall', OCl4 (1926), p. 35, I 5 (1927), p. 26, III 8 (1940), p. 321 (from Gwavas MSS, British Museum Addnl. MSS 28554).

²¹ Nicholas Boson was buried at Paul 24 April 1703; persons so called were baptised there in 1624 and 1653, and he seems more likely to be the former. His relation to John Boson (d. 1730) and Thomas Boson (d. 1719) remains to be proved, but it does not seem that either was his son. See Henderson, *op. cit.* (note 17).

²² The only surviving MS of this work is at RIC, a transcript made in 1750 by Rev. Henry Usticke, and has been edited by RMN (JRIC XXIII 2 (1930), p. 327) and by O. J. Padel (CWBF, p. 24).

²³ *Nebbaz Gerriau* (note 22) ed. RMN, p. 336, CWBF, p. 24.

As well as for the information it contains, *Nebbaz Gerriau* is important as being the only surviving example of a formal prose composition in 17th-century Cornish, and its language is typical of Cornish at this stage of decline; English words and word-order appear, and intrusive *d* and *b* consonants such as are also found in contemporary forms of place-names, the verbal particles are rarely written, and the initial mutations show little conformity with grammatical rules.

Apart from this essay, Boson wrote two other works of interest to students of Cornish. One of these, *The Duchess of Cornwall's Progress*, survives in fragments only, showing that it was written mainly in English, partly in Cornish, and was a curious jumble of local folk-lore and topography, telling how a Royal Duchess visited Land's End and the country around.²⁴ Boson wrote this as a fairy-tale to amuse his children, but probably derived its theme from the visit of Catharine of Braganza to Mount's Bay in 1662 when on her voyage from Portugal to marry Charles II. More important is Boson's Cornish tale *Jowan Chy-an-Horth, py an Try Foynt a Skyans* (John of Chyannor, or the Three Points of Wisdom), also written for his children, but with the serious aim of teaching them Cornish. It tells how a labouring man left his home in St. Levan parish and worked for three years for a farmer east of Marazion; at the end of each year his master offered, and John accepted, instead of wages, a piece of wisdom; these were:

- (1) *Na wreta gasa an forth coth rag an forth noweth* (Do not leave the old road for the new road).
- (2) *Na-wreata ostya yn chy may fo den coth demedhys dhe venen yowynk* (Do not lodge in a house where an old man is married to a young woman).
- (3) *Byth gweskys dywyth kens gweskel unwyth* (Be struck twice before striking once).

On his homeward journey John put all these maxims to good use, and the story ended happily with his being re-united with his wife and in possession of all his wages, which his master had hidden in a cake. Similar tales are found in Scotland and Brittany, and several versions of the Cornish story were recorded in English by folklorists in the last century; indeed, the tale was still being told at

²⁴ Bodleian MSS Carte 269, ed. A. K. Hamilton Jenkin JRIC XXI 4 (1925), p. 40r, ed. O. J. Padel CWBF, p. 8.

St. Levan from oral tradition early in this century.²⁵ Boson's Cornish language version has a curious history; it was recorded by Lhuyd when he visited Cornwall in 1700, and later printed by him, by Pryce, and by Davies Gilbert.²⁶ In this century it was used by Nance as the kernel of his text-book, *Cornish for All*, first published in 1929; has been twice recorded for the use of modern Cornish students; and in 1969 was published in pamphlet form by the Cornish Language Board, with Nance's translation and unified text. Nicholas Boson would have been proud, but also astonished, to find it used for its designed purpose of teaching Cornish three centuries after it was written.

One of Nicholas Boson's relatives, John Boson, was himself a student of Cornish, and to him is attributed the so-called *Pilchard Rhyme*, a short poem on the methods employed in Mount's Bay to cure pilchards for export to the *powtooben*, or "hot country", the Mediterranean.²⁷ As Henry Jenner remarked, this is not a very poetical subject, but the rhyme is interesting as describing a process very familiar to many of these recorders of late Cornish, and part of the daily life of the fishing community in Mount's Bay where the language found its last refuge.

The other account of Cornish at this time was written by William Scawen, who was a much older man than Keigwin or Boson (being in fact the former's uncle) but who did not become interested in Cornish until late in life. He lived at Molenick in St. Germans, at the opposite end of Cornwall from where the language was spoken; he served in the Royalist army in the Civil War, was imprisoned by the Parliamentarians in Pendennis Castle, and at the Restoration was rewarded by being made Vice-Warden of the Stannaries, an important position in the administration of the Cornish tin trade. In 1678 he attended Launceston Assizes where the Lord Chief

²⁵ R. Hunt, *Popular Romances of the West of England* (1865) II, p. 115; W. Bottrell, *Traditions and Hearthside Stories of West Cornwall* II (1873), p. 77; S. A. Opie, 'A Traditional Version of the Folk-tale of John of Chyanhorth', OC II 2 (1931), p. 14; F. B. Perry, 'A Scottish Gaelic Jowan Chy an Horth', OC V 6 (1955), p. 254.

²⁶ The original MS is not extant, though the Gwavas MSS include John Boson's rendering of the first part. The story is printed in E. Lhuyd, *Archaeologia Britannica* (1707), p. 251; W. Pryce, *Archaeologia Cornu-Britannica* (1790), p. 55; D. Gilbert, *Creation of the World* (1827), p. 202; and has now been edited by O. J. Padel (CWBF, p. 14).

²⁷ RMN, 'The Pilchard Rhyme', OC III 4 (1938), p. 169; CWBF, p. 43.

Justice, Sir Francis North, in his chamber after the court, reproached Scawen and others present for the loss or decay of the language, and enquired if any MSS in it survived. Someone said that there were none, whereupon Scawen announced that he himself had a MS of the *Passion Poem*. From this chance encounter arose Scawen's determination to try and arrest the decline of Cornish, and from then until his death in 1689 he devoted much time and energy to this cause, despite discouragement from members of his own family who thought it absurd that he should set about restoring a language which he himself could not speak or understand. Enlisting the help of Martin and John Keigwin, Bosen, and "one John Read a man intelligent in the tongue" who styled himself "Joohan Lansend-man", he compiled a work called *Antiquities Cornubritanicæ*, but unhappily died before it could be published; it was published a century later in 1777 and several times since, but never satisfactorily.²⁸

Much of Scawen's work consists of a confused and fanciful account of aspects of Cornish geography and history, but it includes a long list of the causes of the decay of the language. He complained that the present age was altogether given to new things, and the old put aside, Cornish being spoken only by a few in a small corner of the county, and that very corruptly. There were still a very few aged monoglots, and Scawen mentioned especially the very ancient woman of Gwithian (named elsewhere as Christian or Chesten Marchant), who had died c. 1676 and had habitually used an interpreter, though she had partly understood English.²⁹

His more convincing reasons for the decline of Cornish were:

The loss of contact with Brittany.

The cessation of miracle plays.

A general stupidity to be observed in the whole county.

(If one accepts "stupidity" as meaning "apathy", then how right he was! If ever a language was lost by apathy and indifference, then it was Cornish. Users of the language have never been persecuted, or even officially discouraged, it just faded away over the centuries, the main reason being simply that the

²⁸ The MSS of this work (see O. J. Padel, *Catalogue of MSS and Printed Books on the Cornish Language* (1975) nos. 13-15) have never been properly collated; an appalling printed version appears in D. Gilbert, *History of Cornwall* IV (1838), p. 190.

²⁹ Scawen in Gilbert, *op. cit.*, p. 216; Tonkin MS 'B' RIC, p. 133.

Cornish did not care enough for it and turned to English for reasons of practical convenience or social snobbery.)

Discouragement from the gentry, who tended to laugh at poor people who spoke Cornish, and also to marry into families from outside the county and even to change their own Cornish names to suggest Norman descent.

The near vicinity of Devon, with resulting English influence on the place-names of East Cornwall.

The coming in of strangers of all sorts, especially traders in tin and fish and ministers of religion.

The lack of a Prayer Book in Cornish.

The failure of people who knew Cornish to correspond in it (a failure which Scawen himself persuaded some of them to remedy).

The failure to preserve MSS in the language (such as those of Angwin, which Scawen had vainly tried to secure).

Scawen's work included a small but interesting collection of Cornish proverbs, a nucleus which was to grow much in the hands of later collectors. Several proverbs counselled the necessity for silence and discretion, perhaps reflecting the disturbed and dangerous political situation then current. One advised, *Nebas Gueriow yw y Guelhow* (few words are best), and another reminded, *Nyn Ges Goon hep Lagas na Kei hep Scovarn* (There is no down without eye nor hedge without ear). There is also the proverb, familiar from its use by Boson in *John of Chyannor*, about never leaving an old road for a new, but Scawen amusingly misunderstood it to mean, never leave an old wife for a new!

We must now mention two much younger members of this group of Cornish students, who were almost exact contemporaries, William Gwavas (1676-1741) and Thomas Tonkin (1678-1742). Gwavas, though actually born in Suffolk, came from a family long established at Gwavas in the Parish of Sithney near Helston (not at Gwavas in Paul as often supposed). He became a barrister, a wise choice of profession since his inheritance included the fish tithe at Newlyn and Mousehole, which caused many disputes and years of litigation between the Gwavas family and the fishermen, ending in 1730 with judgment of the House of Lords in favour of William Gwavas. He lived for much of his life at Penzance, and was an indefatigable writer and collector of letters, verses, proverbs, epitaphs and other passages of Cornish, his mentor in the language

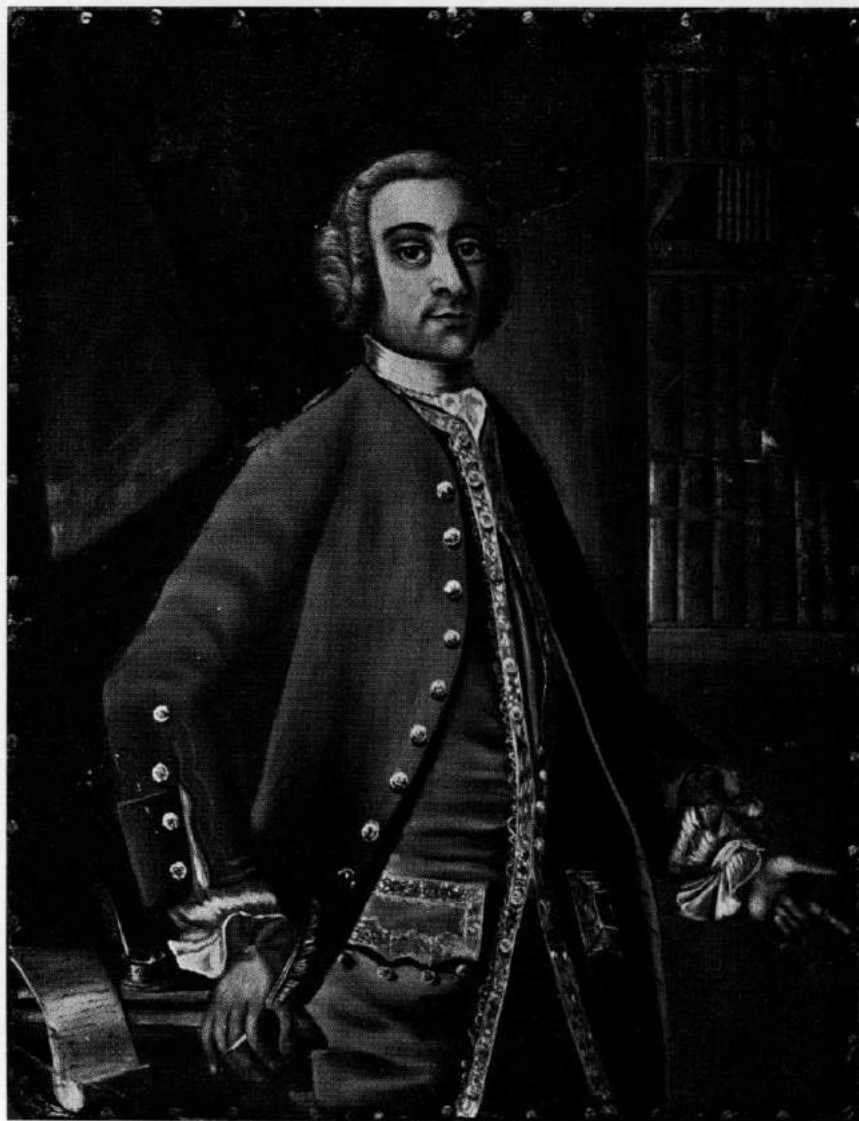
being John Boson. His MS collection in the British Museum³⁰ is the most important source of such material; he acknowledged as his helpers and informants Keigwin, John Boson and his cousin Thomas Boson, Oliver Pendar of Newlyn, James Jenkins of Alverton near Penzance (who was greatly respected by his contemporaries as the last of the real writers of Cornish, but of whose work only two poems copied by Gwavas survive), John Odger at the Lizard, and "several ancient persons in Paul, St. Just, St. Keverne etc. both men and women that could speak the modern Cornish, although they knew not how to write it, or rightly to divide the words and sentences". In 1710 Gwavas wrote in Cornish to an un-named correspondent in America with a translation of the Apostles' Creed, this implying that some Cornish speakers had emigrated and that the language was spoken, or at least understood, in America before it died out in Cornwall.³¹

Like Gwavas, Thomas Tonkin lived a life full of lawsuits, but unlike Gwavas he lost the most important one, and with it the family estate of Trevaunance in St. Agnes, so that his later years were spent in Gorran parish. Much of his life was devoted to the collection of material on the topography, natural history, parochial history and language of Cornwall, but unhappily none of his work was published in his lifetime and only fragments since.³² He never lived in the Cornish-speaking area of the far west, and most of his knowledge of the language was derived from Gwavas, and thus at one remove from John Boson. In 1736 his collection of modern Cornish pieces and his vocabulary seemed on the point of publication, and were dedicated by him to Gwavas; the dedicatory letter contained the following passage:

³⁰ BM Addnl. MSS 28554; the RIC has a transcript of this (Gatley MSS) and another original Gwavas MS which includes a short autobiography (W. C. Borlase, 'Autobiographical Notice of William Gwavas', JRIC No. 21 (1879), p. 176); the Bilbao MS (note 32) includes Gwavas title litigation papers and his letters to Tonkin.

³¹ RMN, 'The Cornish Language in America', OC I 1 (1925), p. 37.

³² See H. L. Douch, 'Thomas Tonkin—an Appreciation of a Neglected Cornish Historian', JRIC NS IV 2 (1962), p. 145, for biography and list of MSS. Tonkin's MS 'B' at RIC contains copies of letters from Lhuud and many late Cornish pieces; another MS containing his vocabulary and letters from Gwavas is in Spain (H. Jenner, 'Cornish MSS in the Provincial Library at Bilbao', JRIC XXI 4 (1925), p. 421), but there is now a copy at RIC.



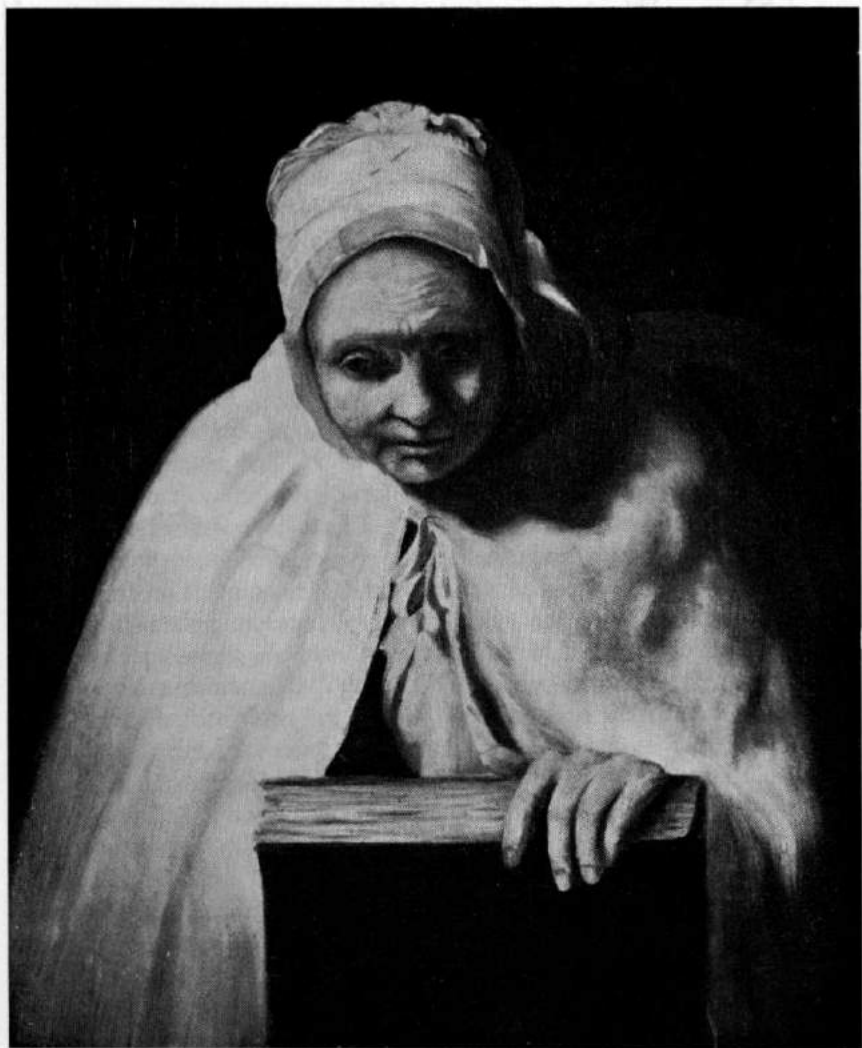
WILLIAM GWAVAS

Portrait at Truro Museum (artist unknown)

*(Reproduced by permission of the
Royal Institution of Cornwall)*

*(Photo by
Charles Woolf, Newquay)*

As for the subject of rural life, spoken, it is reduced to such a small nook of the country, and these ancient persons that still



DOLLY PENTREATH

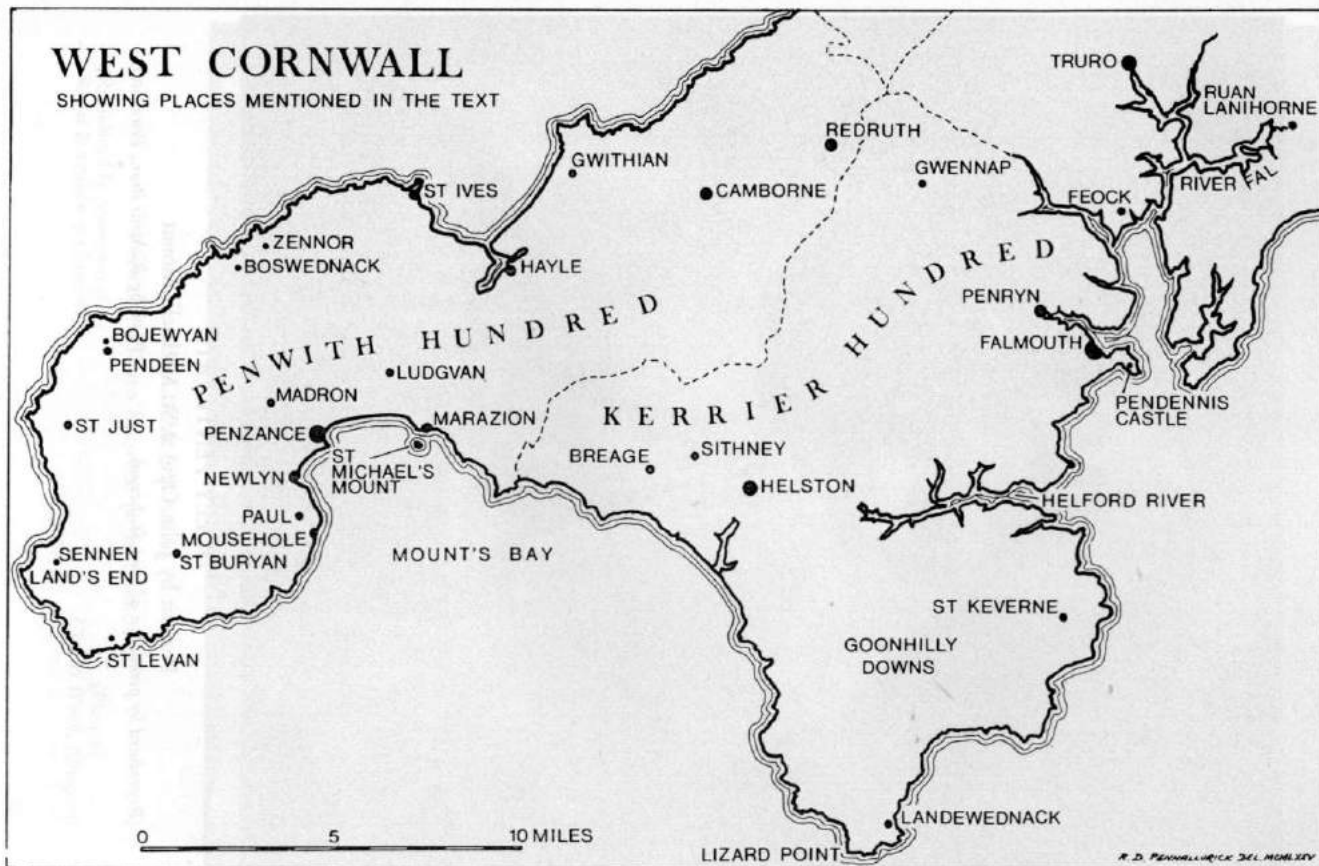
Portrait by John Opie at St. Michael's Mount

(Reproduced by permission of Lord St. Levan)

(Photo by Richards Bros., Penzance)

WEST CORNWALL

SHOWING PLACES MENTIONED IN THE TEXT



0 5 10 MILES

R. D. PENNALLORICK DEL. MONSIEY

As for the vulgar Cornish now spoken, it is reduced to such a small nook of the county, and those ancient persons that still speak it, are even there so few, the language itself so corrupted, and they too for the most part such illiterate people, that I cannot sufficiently commend your great industry in gathering together so much of it, and that so correct, as you have now enabled me to set forth; since what it has been my fortune to collect myself has been so little in comparison, as not to deserve the naming separately.³³

Tonkin went on to criticise the compiler of another Cornish Vocabulary, William Hals (1655-1737), known to posterity as the most inaccurate of all Cornish historians; his Cornish language collection was described by Pryce in 1790 as "a most strange hodge-podge of Hebrew, Greek, Latin and British words, confusedly heaped together", and by Nance in our own time as "an attempt by one who knew next to nothing of Cornish to impose on others who knew even less".³⁴

For most of the two centuries under review, those working on Cornish in Cornwall had little encouragement in the county and none from outside it, but in 1700 they received the inspiration of a visit from the pioneer Welsh Celticist Edward Lhuyd (1660-1709), then collecting material for his massive comparative study of the Celtic languages. He came with a letter of introduction from that great Cornishman, Sir Jonathan Trelawny, Bishop of Exeter, who 12 years before with six of his brethren had defied James II and risked his head to save his country from tyranny; Trelawny had previously commissioned some of Keigwin's work on the Cornish texts, and now he put the results at Lhuyd's disposal. Lhuyd was in Cornwall for only four months, but his stay was eventful; the Cornish were not then accustomed to the ways of visiting antiquaries, and Lhuyd and his three assistants, walking round with knapsacks on their shoulders, asking questions, copying inscriptions, and generally prying into every hole and corner, aroused great suspicion and alarm, eventually suffering the indignity of being arrested at Helston and taken before a Justice on suspicion of being thieves. They were quickly released on production of a letter from Tonkin,

³³ Bilbao MS (note 32), printed by F. W. P. Jago, *English-Cornish Dictionary* (1887), p. 203.

³⁴ W. Pryce, *Archaeologia Cornu-Britannica* (1790), p. iv; RMN, unpublished MSS, RIC.

but worse still befell when Lhuyd took passage from Falmouth to Brittany and was arrested at Brest as a suspected spy; again, letters from Tonkin to contacts in Brittany were the means of his release.³⁵

Lhuyd's visit was perhaps the most important event in the modern history of Cornish, but is not fully recorded. He lived to publish only the first volume of *Archaeologia Britannica*, in 1707, and died two years later, following which his MSS were scattered and, for the most part, lost. He began the Cornish section of the book with a dedicatory address, *Dhan Tiz Hegaraz ha Pednzhevik Pou Kernou*, "to the courteous and noble inhabitants of the County of Cornwall" (tactfully forgetting the others), in which he stated that he had obtained some Cornish from the mouths of people in the west of Cornwall, especially in the Parish of St. Just, and had received word-lists from Keigwin, Nicholas Boson, James Jenkins, and Mr. Eustick of St. Just. He then printed a grammar of the language, followed by Boson's story of *John of Chyannor*, described as "a specimen of modern Cornish", but in fact in Lhuyd's own highly individualistic spelling, which no Cornishman would ever have written, and with a Welsh translation. He recorded that Cornish was spoken throughout the parishes of the West Penwith peninsula, and along the south coast as far east as St. Keverne, but that "a great many of the inhabitants of those parishes, especially the gentry, do not understand it; there being no necessity thereof, in regard there's no Cornish man but speaks good English". The Cornish section concluded with a promise to print in the second volume his Cornish vocabulary, collected when he had visited the county, and lately improved. Apart from this book, the other surviving records of Lhuyd's visit are scattered: some letters to Tonkin printed by Pryce in 1790; drawings of archaeological sites, early inscriptions and church monuments, in the British Museum;³⁶ topographical notes on some Cornish parishes, at the Bodleian;³⁷ and, most important to us, his Cornish Vocabulary at the National Library of Wales. This is not a fair copy, but a small note-book in which Lhuyd jotted down words of Cornish from time to time, some from oral and some from written sources. It is evidently the book he used in the field when collecting words during his stay in Corn-

³⁵ Pryce, *op. cit.*, pp. 225, 226 (notes by Tonkin on Lhuyd's letters).

³⁶ Stowe MSS 1023-4 (Cornish section in 1023).

³⁷ Rawlinson MSS D. 997 (copy also at County Record Office, Truro).

wall, and also contains his Cornish poem on the death of William III in 1702.³⁸

There is great need for a full study of Lhuyd's visit to Cornwall and his work for the language, such as has recently been provided for Scotland.³⁹ We owe to him the discovery that the ancient Vocabulary in the British Museum, found by John Anstis and hitherto believed to be Welsh, was in fact Cornish, being the main surviving record of the early phase of the language.

Lhuyd's visit in 1700 marked the exact half-way point in our period, and superficially his record of the area in which Cornish was spoken is little different from that of Norden a century before. This, however, is misleading; Cornish may not have lost much territory during the 17th century, but within that territory the number of speakers declined so drastically that so astute a local observer as William Borlase was to believe that it had died out early in the 18th. It is clear that by then the language was limited to the West Penwith peninsula, and to a few people, mostly old people, in a few places in that peninsula, especially in Mousehole. Lhuyd's reference to the language being spoken round the Lizard to St. Keverne, and Gwavas's acknowledgment to people in those places, are the last authentic records of it elsewhere than in West Penwith. In other parts of Cornwall in the 18th century, its position must have been similar to that in West Penwith in the 19th, with only traditional fragments being remembered. Thus John Whitaker (1735-1808), who from 1777 until his death was Rector of Ruan Laniorne, just east of Truro, commented on the total ignorance of the people as to Cornish and the meanings of their place-names, but recorded that in 1791 there was still current among old men the saying *Hurlian yu ghen guare nyi*, Hurling is our sport.⁴⁰

Logically one would expect Cornish to have survived on the Isles of Scilly, isolated 25 miles west of Land's End, longer than on the mainland, but in fact there is no record of the language having been spoken there, although the existence of Cornish place-names shows that it was at some date. In 1750 Robert Heath stated that the language spoken in Scilly was "a mixture of the West Country

³⁸ Llanstephan MSS 84; see W. L. Davies, *Cornish MSS in the National Library of Wales* (1939), p. 12, and RMN, unpublished MSS, RIC.

³⁹ J. L. Campbell and D. Thomson, *Edward Lhuyd in the Scottish Highlands, 1699-1700* (1963).

⁴⁰ J. Whitaker, 'History of Ruan Laniorne', JRIC NS VII 2 (1974), pp. 109, 143.

dialect with the Common English".⁴¹ The absence of late Cornish on Scilly is a mystery which I cannot pretend to have solved.

Dr. William Borlase (1696-1772), the greatest Cornish scholar of the 18th century, cannot be reckoned as one of the little group of enthusiasts who laboured so hard to preserve Cornish and of whom Gwavas and Tonkin were the last survivors, although as a young antiquary Borlase did correspond with Tonkin and later made full use of his MSS. He was born at Pendeen in St. Just parish; in 1722 he became Rector of Ludgvan, three miles east of Penzance, and lived there until his death 50 years later.⁴² Much of his long life was spent in collecting material on Cornish history, natural history, antiquities, topography, genealogy, heraldry, and the language, and he was more fortunate than Tonkin in that he was able to publish his pioneer books on the *Antiquities of Cornwall* (first published in 1754) and the *Natural History* (1758). Much of his work remained unpublished, and among his MSS is an important volume of late Cornish remains, much of it taken from the Gwavas and Tonkin collections.⁴³ In the *Antiquities* Borlase published a 50-page Vocabulary of Cornish, compiled from all sources available to him including the works of Scawen, Keigwin, Lhuyd, Tonkin, Boson, Gwavas and Hals, but he made no attempt to collect further material from surviving Cornish speakers at Mousehole only six miles from his home; this was for the adequate though astonishing reason that he knew nothing of them! It seems unbelievable that a man of immense scholarship, keenly interested in Cornish, who spent a lifetime in accurate observation and recording, could have failed to realise that all this time Cornish was being spoken so close to his home, but such was the fact; in 1758 he wrote that about 50 years since it had been generally spoken in the Parishes of Paul and St. Just, the fishermen and marketwomen of the former and the tanners of the latter conversing for the most part in Cornish, but that by the time of writing it had "altogether ceased, so as not

⁴¹ R. Heath, *Account of the Islands of Scilly* (1750), p. 173.

⁴² P. A. S. Pool, 'William Borlase, the Scholar and the Man', *JRIC NS V 2* (1966), p. 120.

⁴³ *Memorandums Relating to the Cornish Tongue, 1749* (Enys MSS, County Record Office, Truro), described by H. Jenner, 'The Borlase MS', *JRIC XIX 2* (1913), p. 162.

to be spoken anywhere in conversation".⁴⁴ In the introduction to his vocabulary he wrote:

... with languages as with buildings, when they are in a state of decay, the ruins become every day less distinct, and the sooner the remains are traced and copied out, the more visible both the plan and the superstructure will appear.⁴⁵

Few Cornishmen could equal Borlase in tracing out remains, but somehow he failed to notice that these particular ruins were still inhabited, and it was left to a total stranger to the county, Daines Barrington (1727-1800), to find some of the inhabitants.

Barrington was an example of that very English type of scholar, the general antiquary; by birth the son of a Viscount and by profession a Judge, his interest and publications ranged widely over legal history, the Roman invasions of Britain, Anglo-Saxon literature, the history of playing-cards, arctic exploration (in theory rather than in practice), and natural history; he was one of those to whom Gilbert White wrote the letters which became the *Natural History of Selborne*. His interest in Cornish originated in 1746 when his brother, Captain Samuel Barrington, in the course of naval duties took a sailor from Mount's Bay who spoke Cornish well enough to be able to talk to Breton sailors, but it was not until 1768 that Daines Barrington headed west in search of Cornish speakers. His quest was soon rewarded; having drawn a blank at Land's End, he was guided by an innkeeper to Mousehole to meet an old fisherwoman called Dolly Pentreath, to whom he was introduced as one who had laid a wager that no one lived who could talk Cornish; upon this she "spoke in an angry tone of voice for two or three minutes, and in a language which sounded very like Welsh". Two other old women were listening nearby, and told Barrington that Dolly had been abusing him very heartily, as he had supposed that she could not speak Cornish. They also told him that they themselves could not speak it as readily as Dolly, but that they understood it, being ten or twelve years younger. Having thus ascertained that the language yet lived, Barrington returned east, only to find that no one would credit his evidence as being contrary to a direct assertion by the great Dr. Borlase. Not for another four years did Barrington seek confirmation; Borlase died in the summer of 1772,

⁴⁴ W. Borlase, *Natural History of Cornwall* (1758), p. 315.

⁴⁵ W. Borlase, *Antiquities of Cornwall* (1754), p. 374.

but his brother Walter Borlase, the Vicar of Madron, was able to report that Dolly Pentreath still lived with her intellect unimpaired, and could walk six miles in a day, though deaf and bent with age. She claimed to have been brought up from a child to know no other language than Cornish, to have sold fish in that language in Penzance at the age of 12, to have talked no English until she was past 20, and to be the only person who could then converse in Cornish. She was maintained partly by parish poor relief, and partly by fortune-telling and gabbling of Cornish. Armed with this further information, Barrington published his first article on Cornish,⁴⁶ urging that some Celtic linguist should visit Mousehole and obtain Cornish vocabulary from Dolly and her neighbours before it was too late.

Dolly Pentreath had spent her life in poverty and obscurity, suddenly to become a minor local celebrity in old age as a result of this chance visit. Her actual age has often been considered a mystery, largely induced by a bogus epitaph which claimed that she died aged 102; she appears, however, to have been born in May 1692,⁴⁷ so that she would have been 76 when seen by Barrington in 1768 and 85 when she died in December 1777, soon after her portrait had been painted by the great Cornish artist John Opie, then on the threshold of fame.⁴⁸ She enjoyed a rather spurious posthumous reputation as the "last speaker of Cornish"; this we know to be incorrect, but she may well have been the last native-speaker, brought up to speak nothing but Cornish. She became the subject of many stories and legends, most of them obviously without foundation, and many years after she died her grave in Paul churchyard was marked by a fine monument, erected by Prince Louis Lucien Bonaparte. The tragedy was that neither Daines Barrington nor anyone else ever troubled to record her rich repertoire of fish-wifely abuse; we can only speculate on the amount of Cornish which died with her, but it may have been great. Only one frag-

⁴⁶ D. Barrington, 'On the Expiration of the Cornish Language', *Archaeologia* III (1776), p. 279. The additional information about Dolly Pentreath is in a letter from a gentleman un-named by Barrington, but whose home was named as Castle Horneck, the seat of Walter Borlase.

⁴⁷ Doaryte, daughter of Nicholas Pentreath, baptised at Paul 16 May 1692. A Dorothy Pentreath was baptised there 17 May 1714, but could hardly have been the very old woman seen by Barrington in 1768.

⁴⁸ A. Earland, *John Opie and his Circle* (1911), pp. 20, 55, 306.

ment survived, and that by the purest chance, the curse *Cronnack an haqar dhn!* (the ugly black toad!) hurled at a local squire who upset her basket of fish; it was printed in 1870 by William Bottrell, who claimed to have obtained it from an old woman of Sennen who knew Dolly well.⁴⁹

Barrington never returned to Cornwall, but his interest in Cornish did not end with the discovery of Dolly Pentreath; his second article⁵⁰ contained information about other Cornish speakers. Two of these were dead, a nurse called Jane Cock who had been born at Newlyn and had died *c.* 1756, and another nurse called Jane Woolcock, also born at Newlyn. Three were still alive: these were an un-named inhabitant of Truro (probably the mining engineer Tompson whom Polwhele met in 1789 and considered to know more Cornish than Dolly had ever done);⁵¹ John Nancarrow of Marazion, aged not more than 40 in 1777 (probably the man of that name who emigrated from Marazion to Philadelphia);⁵² and William Bodinar, a Mousehole fisherman. Barrington printed a letter written by Bodinar in both Cornish and English in July 1776, the English being as follows:

My age is 65. I am a poor fisherman. I learnt Cornish when I was a boy. I have been to sea with my father and 5 other men in the boat, and have not heard one word of English spoke in the boat for a week together. I never saw a Cornish book. I learnt Cornish going to sea with old men. There is not more than 4 or 5 in our town can talk Cornish now, old people 80 years old. Cornish is all forgot with young people.⁵³

The Cornish text is of great interest as being the last passage of authentic Cornish writing to survive, and is an excellent piece of Late Cornish, comparable with that written by Boson a century

⁴⁹ W. Bottrell, *Traditions and Hearthside Stories of West Cornwall* I (1870), p. 184.

⁵⁰ D. Barrington, 'Some Additional Information relative to the Continuance of the Cornish Language', *Archaeologia* V (1779), p. 81. His informant as to Jane Cock was 'the Rev. Mr. Penneck FRS', presumably Rev. Richard Penneck (1728-1803), and as to Nancarrow and the inhabitant of Truro, James Phillips, a London bookseller.

⁵¹ R. Polwhele, *History of Cornwall* V (1816), p. 43.

⁵² *Cornwall to America in 1783* (from the Journal of Paul Burall), p. 11; A. L. Rowse, *The Cornish in America* (1969), pp. 103-4.

⁵³ The letter is still in possession of the Society of Antiquaries, and the signature is 'Bodinar', not Bodener as printed by Barrington. See RMN, 'William Bodener's Letter', OC III 7 (1940), p. 306.

before. Bodinar survived Dolly Pentreath by 12 years, dying in 1789, but it is noteworthy that he was not a native speaker like her; he had first learnt Cornish when going to sea with old fishermen, whereas she had learnt it in earliest childhood.

One cannot say when Cornish died out as a spoken language, both because of the lack of information about people of obscure social standing, and because of difficulties of definition. When does a language die out? Is it with the death of the last native speaker, or when there are no longer two people capable of holding a normal conversation? After the death of Bodinar, there is no evidence of the survival of anyone who could speak Cornish fluently, and no reliable witness claims to have met such a person. In 1799 John Whitaker went to Land's End in a vain search for Cornish speakers, like Barrington 30 years before; he was told that an old man at St. Levan would sell him as many words of Cornish as he would choose to purchase, and that an old woman who spoke Cornish lived at Newlyn, but he failed to visit either.⁵⁴ In 1808 the Rev. Richard Warner of Bath travelled west to Land's End and made assiduous search for Cornish speakers without success, though he thought it likely that the language "still lurked in some hole or corner, arrived to the last fluttering pulse of its existence".⁵⁵ In round dates, we can agree with Nance:

Even in its last strongholds, Cornish by 1800 was no longer used in daily speech by anyone, young or old, but remembered only occasionally and in fragments. These would often be numerous enough to give the impression, to those who understood nothing of them, that . . . their traditional holders must have been able to converse in Cornish. But these people would have been quite unable to take their words and form new Cornish sentences with them, and still less would they instinctively think in Cornish. They knew some Cornish, but as a language they could not speak it. . . . We must accept 1800 as being about the very latest date at which anyone really spoke Cornish traditionally, as even the remnant of a living language, all traditional Cornish since then having been learned parrot-wise from those of an earlier generation.⁵⁶

⁵⁴ J. Whitaker, *Supplement to Polwhele's History of Cornwall* (1804), p. 41.

⁵⁵ R. Warner, *A Tour through Cornwall in 1808* (1809), p. 358.

⁵⁶ RMN, 'When was Cornish Last Spoken Traditionally?', *JRIC NS VII* 1 (1973), p. 81.

If it were dead, the language had not lacked an obituary. In 1790 William Pryce (1735-90), a Redruth mine surgeon,⁵⁷ published *Archaeologia Cornu-Britannica*, the first book to be devoted entirely to the language. It contained Lhuyd's Cornish grammar; *John of Chyannor* in Cornish, Welsh and English; Tonkin's long Cornish Vocabulary; some interpretations of place-names; specimens of Cornish prayers, mottoes, proverbs and rhymes from the Gwavas, Tonkin and Borlase MSS; Lhuyd's letters to Tonkin; and his Cornish poem on the death of William III. Pryce has often been heavily criticised, and with some justice, for his failure to make clear how little of the book was really his own; he characteristically borrowed for his preface passages from Tonkin's dedicatory letter to Gwavas, so that Tonkin's remarks on the state of the language in 1736 have been thought to refer to 1790. But Pryce deserves the thanks of all later students of Cornish for printing much important material which might otherwise have been lost.

I must conclude with a few reflections on Cornish after 1800. It may have been dead as a spoken language, but it survived in three ways: first in many hundreds of dialect words, a few of which are still known to and used by elderly people, such as *clunk*, to swallow, from Cornish *collenky*. Secondly it survived in thousands of place-names, names of farms, villages, towns, fields and natural features, many of which will survive as long as Cornwall is inhabited and the percentage of which in the West Penwith peninsula is in the upper 90's. Thirdly it survived in many traditional fragments, sometimes remembered with the meanings and sometimes just as gibberish, and especially in versions of the numerals which were recorded in many places in West Cornwall throughout the 19th and into the 20th century.⁵⁸ Sometimes, as Nance pointed out, these traditional fragments may have misled hearers into thinking that their holders were actual speakers of Cornish. In 1859 Matthias Wallis of St. Buryan certified to Prince Louis Lucien Bonaparte that his grandmother, Ann Wallis, who had died about 15 years before in her 90th year, had spoken Cornish well in his hearing, and that it had also been spoken by Jane Barnicoate who had been dead

⁵⁷ A. Pearson, 'William Pryce MD', OC VII 9 (1971), p. 388.

⁵⁸ RMN, 'Twentieth Century Traditions of the Cornish Numerals', JRIC XXI 3 (1924), p. 300; W. D. Watson, 'More Traditional Cornish Numerals', JRIC XXII 1 (1926), p. 113.

only two years.⁵⁹ Since Ann Wallis was born c. 1754, she may have had a genuine traditional knowledge of Cornish, the extent of which must remain doubtful. John Davey of Boswednack, Zennor (1812-91), was said by Hobson Matthews, the historian of St. Ives, to have been able to converse in Cornish on a few simple topics; Davey undoubtedly knew a good many fragments of Cornish, passed to him by his father, a schoolmaster, some of them genuinely traditional and some taken from Pryce's book; but Professor John Westlake, who had known Davey well and collected many words from him, never heard from or of him that he could converse in Cornish on any topic.⁶⁰

As Cornish had died through the neglect of the majority of the people who should have cherished it, so it was largely un lamented by them. Much valuable work on the texts was done in the 19th century, but nearly all by non-Cornish scholars, such as Edwin Norris and Whitley Stokes, and too many Cornish people shared the views expressed by Davies Gilbert in the introduction to his dreadful edition of the *Passion Poem* in 1826:

No one more sincerely rejoices, than does the editor of this ancient mystery, that Cornish . . . has ceased altogether from being used by the inhabitants of Cornwall. . . . No infliction on a province is equally severe, or irremediable, as the separation by a distinct speech from a great and enlightened nation, of which it forms a part, a separation closing against it most of the avenues to knowledge, and wholly intercepting that course of rapid improvement which eminently distinguishes the present age from all other periods in the history of man.⁶¹

There was no thought of revival until the beginning of this century, and that Cornish now lives again, however artificially, we owe to two great men, Henry Jenner (1848-1934) and Robert Morton Nance. The revival is normally considered to date from the publication in 1904 of Jenner's *Handbook of the Cornish Language*, with its rousing call:

⁵⁹ Certificate with Bilbao MS (note 32); JRIC NS VII 2 (1974), p. 174.

⁶⁰ J. H. Matthews, *History of St. Ives* (1892), p. 404; RMN, 'John Davey of Boswednack and his Cornish Rhyme', JRIC XXI 2 (1923), p. 146; MS notebook of Prof. John Westlake, formerly in possession of the late Mr. A. W. Andrews, Zennor.

⁶¹ D. Gilbert, *Mount Calvary* (1826), p. v.

Why should Cornishmen learn Cornish: . . . The question is a fair one, the answer is simple. Because they are Cornishmen. Jenner and Nance chronicled the decline of Cornish, lamenting the lost opportunities of the past; if only the Bible had been translated, if only the MSS of Angwin had been saved, if only Scawen and Keigwin had published, if only Borlase or Barrington had collected more from Dolly Pentreath and William Bodinar; but thanks to them, we can claim that in this century most opportunities have been taken. Cornish is now no longer a dead language, and we have a Cornish Language Board to see that it never again becomes one. Let us remember Jenner and Nance with the scholar-patriots of the past, and reflect on the truth behind the ancient rhyme which Edward Lhuyd collected from the parish clerk of St. Just in 1700:

*An lavar koth yw lavar gwir,
Na boz nevra doz vaz an tavaz re hir;
Bez den heb davaz a gollaz i dir.
The old saying is a true saying,
A tongue too long never did good:
But the man with no tongue lost his land.*⁶²

⁶² Letter, Lhuyd to Tonkin, 16 March 1703, in Pryce, *Archaeologia Cornu-Britannica* (1790), p. 229. For a slightly different version see Lhuyd, *Archaeologia Britannica* (1707), p. 251, Pryce, *op. cit.*, p. 54.