



# CORNISH HISTORY NETWORK NEWSLETTER

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**President: Dr John Rowe**

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## **Editorial**

by Garry Tregidga

Since we are fast approaching the second anniversary of the launch of the Cornish History Network it is perhaps an appropriate moment to review our current position. With a rising membership, a regular programme of seminar events and healthy debate in the newsletter we have established the CHN as a central player in the field of historical research on Cornwall. Another positive sign was the success of our recent **Gender and Locality** symposium at Newquay which actually proved to be more popular than the conference sub-committee had anticipated. Apart from attracting many local delegates, we were surprised with the amount of support we received from outside the region. The conference format itself, with a good mixture of speakers ranging from local institutions to the University of Glasgow, established a comparative framework which will provide the basis for next year's symposium on **Mining: Communities and Culture**.

Yet we cannot afford to be complacent. In May the Network, supported by the Institute of Cornish Studies and the College of St Mark and St John, will be launching its own online journal – *The Cornish Historian*. Articles on all aspects of the history of Cornwall and the Cornish people can be submitted for consideration, and will then be refereed by an editorial advisory panel of distinguished academics from Britain and abroad. During this year we will be forging links with other European institutions, such as the University of Western Brittany (see p.11), while on a practical note the Network will be implementing a new constitution with the aim of enabling members to influence our future activities.

These developments are timely given the recent progress of the Combined Universities in Cornwall Initiative. The prospect of some form of Cornish University, an idea incidentally that was raised by the Rev. W.S. Lach-Szyrma back in 1904, provides the Network and the Institute with an ideal opportunity to promote the new Cornish historiography to a wider audience. Given these circumstances I am keen to encourage a debate, involving both professional and amateur historians, on the next stage of our development. How should we strengthen our role as the Cornish centre for historical studies? What improvements should be made to the newsletter and the seminar programme? What sort of service do YOU want from the Network? I would welcome your views on the CHN, both positive and negative, for inclusion in subsequent editions of the newsletter.

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Please send any comments or contributions to:  
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## CIVIC PRIDE IN TRURO IN THE EARLY C19th

Before considering whether there were, or were not, examples of civic pride in Truro in the early 19<sup>th</sup> century, it is necessary to address the question: what is civic pride? Asa Briggs, in different works, refers to 'city pride' and 'civic duty'. The former relates to a belief held by many residents of the newly expanded towns, filthy health hazards though such towns were, that they enjoyed a greater freedom than their country cousins; freedom from aristocratic influence and from the dead hand of tradition. Rapid growth also created an impression of vitality that was lacking in rural areas. Although Truro's expansion hardly compares to that of Manchester, it is certainly possible to detect such 'city pride' in Truro in this period, in the political and religious reform movements reviled aristocratic influence and revered the sense of the modern. But this 'city pride' does not quite suit the purpose, for it lacks a sense of place; pride was in the fact of the city rather than the individual town, it makes no difference whether it is Liskeard or Leeds.

The same problem, the same lack of a sense of place, affects the term 'civic duty'; the impression is of an obligation to society, on a local basis, to promote, say, sanitation and 'useful knowledge', but the emphasis is on the fact of local scale rather than the individual locale; a middle class version of *noblesse oblige*. This paper is concerned with a sense of civic pride that had Truro as its specific object.

Perhaps the best known C19th examples of civic pride are the West Yorkshire woollen towns, with their competitive town hall construction. Bradford's massive new town hall was seen by the leading lights of Leeds as a challenge and the champions of retrenchment abandoned all idea of financial restraint in order to re-establish Leeds' prominent position as not only the pre-eminent town in West Yorkshire but visibly so. Other towns in the area followed suit in attempting to express their sense of local pride through bricks and mortar. This Yorkshire 'town hall mania' occurred in the 1850s, but Manchester and Birmingham had constructed edifices to civic pride 20 years or so before.

Truro too had a new town hall in the middle of the century, officially opened with a grand ceremony on 5 November 1847. There were, of course, numerous speeches extolling the virtues of both town and hall. Is this an example of civic pride on the West Yorkshire model? In their report on the revised plans for the hall, in August 1845, the *West Briton* suggested that 'the building will probably take precedence of all others of the description in the county'. There is, however, little to suggest that this was the motivation that lay behind the decision to build the hall. The title by which the hall is referred to may cast some light. The expressions 'town hall' and 'new hall' were used as a kind of shorthand. On official occasions such as the laying of the foundation stone the building was referred to as the New Law Courts and Market House. These functions not only provided its name but also its *raison d'être*. Rather than any notions of a monument to the glory that was Truro, the prime motivation appears to have been commercial – more market space was needed; this was not only of benefit to the trade of the town but also to the council coffers, as they derived a considerable income from the letting of space in the market. The legal functions of the Municipal Buildings also required more room, especially as the Vice-warden's Stannary Court had taken to sharing the premises in the early 1840s. There does appear to have been some desire to produce an imposing edifice, but functionalism won out over cost; the tower was scaled down to the modest item to be seen to this day, and the galvanised iron originally intended for the roof was replaced by the cheaper Delabole slate.

Truro had gained an Improvement Act in the C18th, the only town in Cornwall to do so, and had acquired a new one in 1835, just before the Municipal Corporations Act was passed. Truro's new Improvement Act had been gained by a coalition of all strands of political thought in the town, despite the fact that these differing factions had been at daggers drawn over municipal reform, and over the fall of the Melbourne government only months before. Support for the Improvement Commission in Truro, and for the temporary Board of Health established in 1831, may be considered the best examples of civic pride in the town in the early C19th.

While there is certainly an element of self-interest involved, both commercial and personal, the provision of paving, lighting, drainage and clean water was quite simply of benefit to Truro as a whole. Even areas that did not receive such amenities were assisted in cleansing their streets, to a certain extent. In response to a report in the *West Briton* suggesting that many people were asking 'What is the Truro Board of Health about?', the secretary of the Board, E.J. Spry, responded with a letter to the paper, published 11 October 1833, relating that they had collected more than £150 worth of manure, erected two sluices to clean out the Kenwyn river, built new and repaired old sewers, built 'necessaries' in some of the densely populated courts: 'Brushes for whitewashing, and handbarrows for carrying manure to the carts are lent to any poor persons who may apply to the surveyor'. He concludes: 'I think I may refer with some satisfaction to the very clean state of our streets and courts and ask what has the Truro Board of Health left undone? Civic pride there, it would seem.

Improvement Commissions and Boards of Health were not required by law but were sanctioned by Acts of Parliament. They were augmented in their efforts to improve the physical and moral wellbeing of the town by various charitable organisations: these included a Library, a Humane Association (to assist the needy), a Teetotallers Society, a Horticultural Society, a Bible Society, the Truro Debating Society (later the Truro Institution), the Society for the Promotion of Christian Knowledge and a Geological Society. Many of these were simply branches of national organisations and all of them display slightly sinister signs of being concerned not so much with improvements to the town as with to the inhabitants of it. The formation and operation of such associations would appear to owe more to a sense of civic duty than of civic pride.

The same cannot be said for the honouring of those who contributed to the well-being of the town. In 1833 Robert Glasson, landlord of the Seven Stars, was presented with 'plate' in recognition of his efforts in establishing the monthly cattle market in Truro. Such presentations were unofficial and partial – not all 'the great and the good' of the town appreciated the cattle market and there were frequent attempts to get the 'nuisance' moved away from High Cross; both the Radical and the Tory candidates were presented with plate after the 1832 election, by their supporters, in recognition of their supposed services to the town. While the latter two examples may owe more to national politics than local pride, that of Glasson was at least a response to material contribution to the town, albeit one of appeal only to certain sections of it.

More permanent, perhaps, and certainly more public, was the honouring of local boy Richard Lander. While not a civic institution, Lander's elevation to the top of a phallic symbol in Lemon Street could be considered an example of local pride – glorying by association with the achievements of a son of Truro. In fact, the monument appears to have been something of an accident. If newspaper reports of the Landers' activities can be taken as evidence to the degree of interest in his home town and county then the response was distinctly lukewarm, though the *Royal Cornwall Gazette* did carry a report from the expedition the week before Richard Lander died. Despite this possible lack of interest, Truro did decide to honour him and a subscription was opened to make the customary presentation of plate. Over £80 had been raised when news was received of his death. Unable to make the presentation, the committee decided to erect a monument, but it is clear that this was not the original intention when the subscription was raised, nor therefore was there any intention to elevate Lander above all his fellow townsfolk. Pride there may have been in his achievements, but no more than in the establishment of a monthly cattle market.

While the construction of the town hall exhibited no inter-town rivalry along West Yorkshire lines, a letter to the *West Briton* in July 1835 suggested otherwise. The subject was the illumination of the Town Clock with gas; the motivation for the letter was that 'the little town of Redruth' already enjoyed such a privilege. In a shocked *post scriptum* the author refers to rumours that even St Austell was considering such a move! 'Truro surely ought not to be outdone by its neighbours?' Hardly conclusive proof, it is true, but the main argument in support of the point is a fear of Truro being left behind by rival Cornish towns.

If civic pride, in the sense of an emotional attachment to one's home town existed it was not amongst the so-called 'leading citizens' of Truro. So far as civic pride *was* exhibited by these leading citizens it was in the form of civic duty, the carrying out of which confirmed their

status as leading citizens. When not pure self-aggrandisement a commercial edge would generally be found. The building of the new Market Hall belongs to the latter category; the foundation of the various societies and institutes to the former. The activities of the Improvement Commissions contain elements of both motivations while also being, perhaps, the clearest example of civic pride to be found amongst Truro's civic institutions.

*David Thomson*

## SOME SOURCES FOR CORNISH MIGRANTS IN MINES OUTSIDE CORNWALL

In the **Durham Record Office** is a colliery agreement book that was previously the property of the Wingate Grange Colliery, Co. Durham. This agreement book contains a list of all those Cornishmen who agreed to work at the colliery following strike action by miners in Durham. Each man had to sign a declaration dated 6<sup>th</sup> November 1866, signed and witnessed by Ralph Henderson acting on behalf of the owners of Wingate Grange Colliery. A certain sum, ranging from £2-8 pounds in old money, was advanced to each Cornish miner and was to be reclaimed from his wages. The agreement book gives the name of each miner, his hometown or county and the relative(s) that would be making the journey to Durham with him. Some examples include James Knight of Liskeard, accompanied by his wife and family; Michael Vivian of Liskeard, accompanied by his wife and family; John Lark and James Rundle of Calstock, both accompanied by their wives and family and Joseph Moyle of St Clare [Cleeve] accompanied by his wife and family.

The manuscripts Library of the **National Library of Ireland**, Kildare Street, Dublin, has numerous documents relating to the copper and sulphur mines of the Vale of Avoca, Co Wicklow. The manuscripts are numbered 16304-16348. Of particular interest to Cornish historians will be manuscript 16309, that contains the minutes of the half-yearly and annual meetings of the Associated Irish Mine Co. an enterprise that was directed by the Williams family of Cornwall. Cornish names such as Hocking, Williams, Oates and Davey appear. The Williams, a famous mining dynasty familiar to most Cornish historians, had acquired mining rights in Avoca as far back as the end of the eighteenth century. Their influence on the Irish mining industry was great and is still visible today in the form of some splendid Cornish engine houses in the Vale of Avoca that are earmarked for restoration.

*Sharron Schwartz*

## FORTHCOMING EVENTS

### LECTURES BY PROFESSOR NICHOLAS ORME

Professor Nicholas Orme of the Department of History at the University of Exeter will be speaking on the subject of the **Saints of Cornwall** at 6.30 for 7.00 p.m. on Thursday 4 May at the Chapter House of Truro Cathedral. This event is organised jointly by the Cornwall branch of the Historical Association, Devon & Cornwall Record Society and Truro Cathedral.

Professor Orme will also be the guest speaker for the AGM of the Royal Institution of Cornwall at 7.00 p.m. on Wednesday 24 May. On this occasion he will give a lecture on **Nicholas Roscarrock**

### CORNISH PLACENAMES

Dr Jon Mills of the University of Luton will be giving a talk at Boscastle Village Hall on Wednesday 19 April on the subject of **Cornish Placenames**. This event is organised by the Boscastle Local History Society. Further details are available from Ann Knight (tel: 01840 250 381)

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## **Local History in Cornwall: past achievements, future prospects.**

A symposium on the current state and future prospects of Local History in Cornwall.

**Past achievements? Future prospects? Some personal views.**

- short presentations by a panel including tutors of regional and local history and speakers from the Cornwall Association of Local Historians, the Cornish History Network, the Cornwall Records Office and the Institute of Cornish Studies.

**Local history in practice.**

- examples of local history projects from St. Ives, Lanner and Bodmin.

**Local history in the new millennium.**

- Should we encourage more collaboration and how?
- What topics and issues of Cornish local history need researching?
- Cornish history and local history – is local history in Cornwall too local?

**15th April, 2000, 10 am to 4 pm.  
at Richard Lander School, Tresawls Road, Truro,  
Prior enrolment essential – telephone 01872 274503 for details**

**Fee: £ 10**



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## MERRITTRICIOUS?

It is good to get replies to one's letters, for if Hegel is right, we shall get nearer the truth by this dialectical method. I am not setting out to condemn John Opie or Thomas Merritt. I should be pleased to own an Opie but I would be a fool if I pretended that I owned something the quality of a Rembrandt or even a Raeburn. Merritt can be good fun to sing but one must see it for what it is, folk culture. What worries me is that we have too many people in the county who value the secondary more than the great. One can well imagine them going into an antique shop and missing the bargain Van Gogh for £1 so that they can buy some trifle just because it has Cornwall stamped on it. Cornwall has produced a world class engineer in Trevithick but it would be intellectually dishonest to pretend that we have produced any of the world's greatest artists or musicians. However, does it really matter? We seem to have a Cornish inferiority complex in trying to boost ourselves. If in some fields we have been second rate let us grow up and admit it. The world has not ended yet and Cornwall can still achieve lots of things. Only by being totally honest about the past can we do better in the future. As for Australia it is generally recognised that the country culturally has taken on a new lease of life. I don't think it can really be argued that what was once a cultural desert was a cultural delight in the past. (It is not without significance that it has produced the characters of "Dame Edna Everidge" and "Sir Les Patterson" who perhaps could be described as myths).

I am proud to be Cornish but I don't see this as depending one way or the other on the county's past achievements. Being Cornish is an attitude of mind such as a liking for individualism and a refusal to be overawed by the establishment. The attitude to the class structure is different in Celtic lands. Quite frankly I wouldn't give much more than the proverbial two pence halfpenny for much of what is claimed to be Cornish culture namely rugby, male voice choirs, St Piran's flag and the kilt. Much of this is really a late *ersatz* working class culture anyway.

Regarding Cornish Nationalism I am not saying it does not deserve to be taken seriously but that it is the wrong sort. Nor am I denying the importance of myths which got Nazi Germany into a nice mess. One can distinguish two sorts of myths. The type Dr Payton is talking about seem more like the Biblical sort. The Creation story in Genesis cannot be taken literally but it was an attempt to explain the inexplicable and it tells one something importantly true about the nature of man. To call this a lie would be preposterous. However, most of what is going round in Cornwall bears no relation to this. Lies is not the academic word for them, this I accept, but in reality this is just what they are because they are such strangers to the truth. Let me give examples of some of these popular myths from my own field of study. The Methodist Chapels were largely built by voluntary labour – the truth is just the opposite, even Billy Bray paid masons, carpenters and a thatcher if you read the story. He seems to have built little himself. Methodism appealed particularly to the miners – church attendances were worst in the mining areas. Wesley's appeal was to the working men who became its leaders – the leaders of Methodism were farmers, shopkeepers, tradesmen and as soon as the industrial revolution got going there were many industrialists. The real factor is that a new middle class was emerging who found their place in the sun in Methodism. Baptist Registers for country areas show as many working men in the Anglican ones as in the Methodist registers. The Bible Christians were poor – the truth is that they were rural and had a job getting into the towns and in some cases were prosperous farmers. The Methodists got their chapels built despite opposition from the landed gentry – there were a very minute number of cases of this happening but the landed families were good to the Methodists and gave them free land for their chapels and opened their bazaars. These type of myths have hindered the understanding of Cornish Methodism. Some seem to have appealed to people who wished to give history a left wing twist. One's duty in history must be to expose this type, for the truth is what counts above all else. I accept that there is the other type of myth but I would contend one would have to look hard to find them in the world of Cornish studies. One can understand why they are popular with folk on the ground. In the words of Doctor Relling in Ibsen's *The Wild Duck* "Take the life-lie away from the average man and straight way you take away his happiness".

J.C.C. Probert

## LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

### Dr Payton and Mr Probert

The fascinating interchange between Philip Payton and John Probert in the November 1999 issue of the *CHN Newsletter* raises a question of importance to academics in Cornwall. Should they follow the well-trodden path of students in flora and fauna, art and archaeology, sociology and economics, and treat Cornish experiences as case studies to test the global hypotheses of main-stream literature? Or should they march under the Cornish banner, and see their *raison d'être* as investigating (or strengthening?) the formation of a Cornish identity? I do not wish to take sides – to me, Philip and John are neither Dr Jekyll and Mr Hyde nor Dr Watson and Sherlock Holmes – but I wonder what other members of CHN think?

Ronald Perry

Dear Editor,

John Probert in his article in this *Cornish History Network Newsletter* paints me as an unashamedly pro-Cornish writer with nationalist and left-wing tendencies and a high regard for folk and working-class culture. He's dead right.

Philip Payton

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### **A MAN OF CONTRADICTIONS: A LIFE OF A.L. ROWSE** by Richard Ollard

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This interesting and well-named book adds a lot to our understanding of him but one cannot help feeling that three sources are badly neglected.

My uncle took me to see him not long before his stroke and death. One was reminded of the vulgarity of an Edwardian self-made industrialist except that Dr Rowse's factory made education. To leave the description here would be grossly unfair. There was certainly nothing vulgar about the house for it was furnished with the humility that comes with good taste. This is borne out in the illustrations in Ollard's book. Ollard on page 115 records him buying art by the leading British artists of the pre-war period. However, was he so knowledgeable as Ollard makes out? The evidence exists. Philips of Par auctioned the house contents (sale 2/7/1998) and we can reconstruct his library. The Cornish Studies Library in Redruth have the sale catalogues of his books and there is a list of small number which went to the Royal Institution of Cornwall. These may not be complete but they raise a number of questions. The house furnishings though tasteful were at times somewhat pedestrian, and they lacked the sort of unusual items a person with the knowledge of antiques might buy. The library was thin on books on art and more so on music. One is surprised that when he went abroad he doesn't seem to have been buying much in the museums and there is a thinness of books in foreign languages. There are of course some splendid and valuable history books but at times it is patchy outside his period and he doesn't seem to have been buying heavily in later life. He was certainly not a polymath. I would suggest we have in these another source for biographical research. Redruth also has a catalogue of John Betjeman's library and many surprising lacuna appear. However in fairness it must be remembered there has been in recent years an explosion in books on the arts. This is also true of classical music. An ordinary man can, with CDs, have a vastly bigger collection of music than a great conductor could have in the days before long playing records about 50 years ago.

Ollard makes little use of memories from Cornwall. He tells on page 253 that Rowse was hard done by the lady he helped who wrote her autobiography *A Cornish Waif's Story*. I do not believe it is exactly as Ollard says. My mother taught the lady's children as a young teacher and years later her husband did gardening for my parents and the lady used to visit us often. She was certainly demanding and no doubt drove Dr Rowse mad. However, according to her Rowse had broken his word by including Redruth in the book, endangering her anonymity and she wrote to L.P. Hartley of the authors' society because Rowse was not paying up some royalties.



I can give two other memories of him. In about 1955 I heard him give a lecture in Camborne and Mr Hayman, the local Labour MP, was present. Rowse made jokes against the Labour party in a way that was rude towards Mr Hayman. I am told by someone involved that Rowse, in recent years, agreed to address a Rotary club in Cornwall and was greeted by the chairman with the words "You're from Cambridge aren't you Dr Rowse? Such stupidity proved too much and Rowse turned his back on the chairman and refused to speak to him for the rest of the evening.

Finally Ollard ignores the wealth of material in the *Cornish Guardian* in the inter-war years. When at the age of 22 he was made a Fellow of All Souls his mother was interviewed (*Cornish Guardian*, 13/11/ 1925). She commented that he started to go to school at the age of 3, adding 'it has been a brave job to rear our family on father's wages and though we are not educated people ourselves, we believe in the value of a good education for our children'. In the same article F.R. Pascoe, the Cornwall Secretary for Education, who knew him well, described him 'as modest in manner as he is gifted in mind'. This seems perfectly true as this is how he comes over at this age, as when he was interviewed on receiving his scholarship (6/10/1922). We know he called on Quiller Couch to see what his chances were of getting the scholarship (30/3/1939).

We see him as the Labour candidate speaking to the St Austell Women's Institute on 'Famous Cornish Women' (12/1/1939) and opening the new St Austell Fire Station (23/3/1939). He fought a brave fight against appeasement (2/5/1935 and 22/9/1938) at a time when Maurice Petherick MP was saying talk of war was exaggerated (26/10/1933) that he hoped Franco won in Spain (17/11/1938) and giving every reason why we shouldn't get involved with Czechoslovakia (16/10/1938).

Ollard seems to suggest that his strength was his literary ability. One feels that in Cornwall he has been overrated as an historian, underrated for his literary style and not praised enough for his brave stand against appeasement.

In closing I return to my visit. Despite Rowse's veneer I felt that there was an element of warmth with him. One wonders if he had not antagonised so many people whether he might not have been a much-loved figure in Cornwall.

*J.C.C. Probert*

## REPORT ON *LE CENTRE DE RECHERCHE BRETON ET CELTIQUE*

When recently attending a conference on European regional politics held at the University of Western Brittany, I was fortunate enough to be given a whistle stop tour of the Research Centre for Breton and Celtic Studies (CRBC) by its director Professor Roudaut.

The CRBC has a collection of over 40,000 books on various Celtic subjects, which I was informed is the largest such library in France. All the titles have been computer indexed and in addition to this there are some 1,500 journals (I noticed a copy of *Cornish Studies*: 7 on prominent display).

The sound archive, which is in the process of being made more accessible through digital technology, contains thousands of hours of material including recorded broadcasts, music and interviews. This is a resource which I intend to investigate further on future visits on behalf of CAVA (Cornish Audio Visual Archive).

Later this month Dr Tregidga and myself will be discussing the idea of joint projects between the Breton Centre and the Institute of Cornish Studies/Cornish History Network at a meeting in Brest.

*Treve Crago*



## CORNISH AUDIO VISUAL ARCHIVE

*A community project of the Institute of Cornish Studies*

The aim of CAVA is to explore the historical and cultural life of Cornwall through oral history and related film or photographic evidence. A six-month pilot study by the Institute of Cornish Studies has already identified and located over 500 hours of valuable recordings covering community life, historic houses and gardens, religion, mining, farming, fishing, migration, politics and the arts. Apart from preserving existing material, CAVA is developing an extensive network of researchers pursuing ongoing projects from Saltash to Scilly. With YOUR support we can create a greater awareness of the unique identity of Cornwall and its people.

I Material from the archive can be used for books, drama productions and television/radio programmes.

I The move towards a University of Cornwall provides a unique opportunity to develop our role as a resource provider for new higher education courses.

I We will organise exhibitions and presentations at the community level and provide an advisory service for the educational use of oral history and film material in schools and colleges.

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☐ I would like to become an associate member of CAVA (annual membership £10; overseas and societies £15). Benefits include a regular newsletter, discounts on publications and a special concessionary rate for admission to our regular programme of events.

☐ I enclose a donation in support of this exciting project. Please keep me informed of future developments.

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