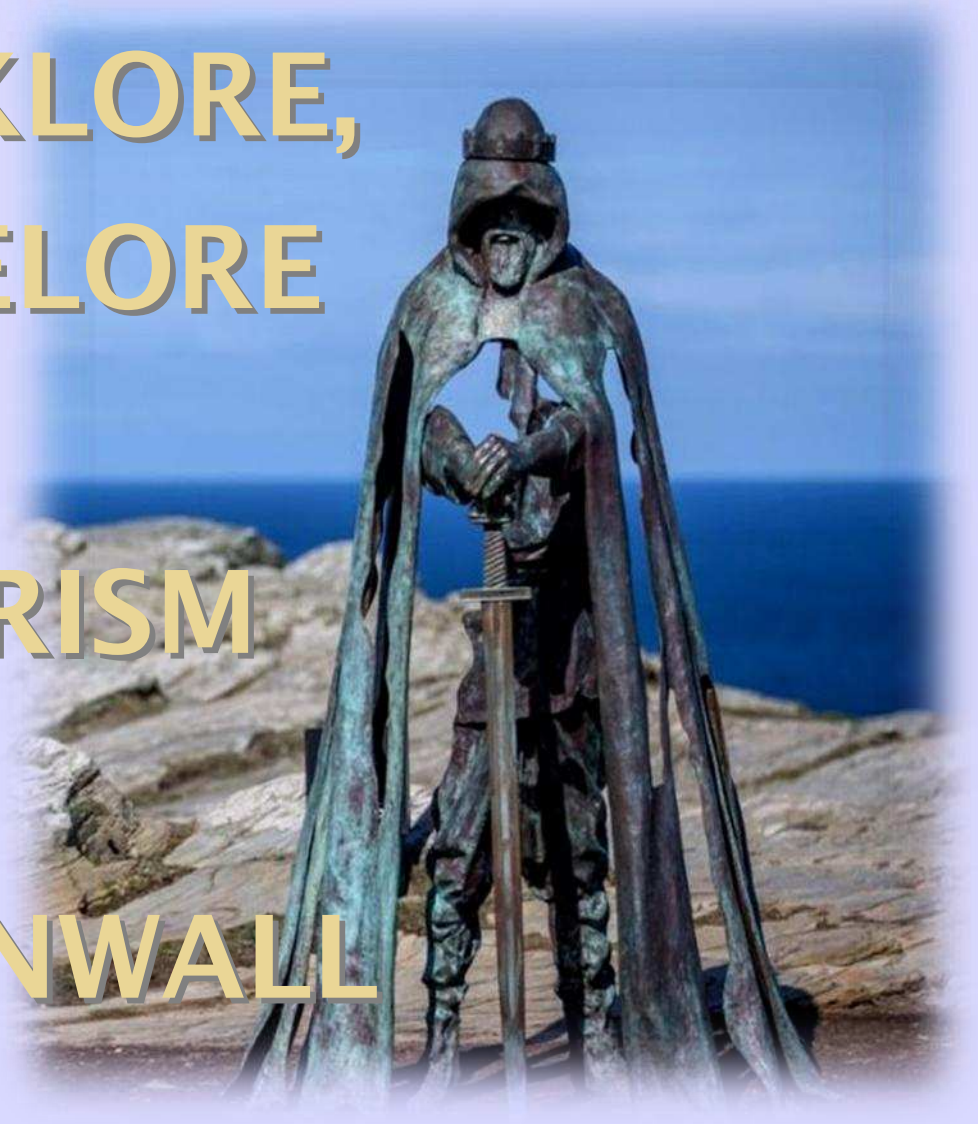


FOLKLORE, FAKELORE AND TOURISM IN CORNWALL



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Gorsedh Kernow Conference 2017

Folklore Fakelore and Tourism in Cornwall

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Opening presentation for the Gorsedh Kernow Conference

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“Cornish Culture and Tourism – Friends or Foes? “

Setting the Scene

I can remember as a child visiting friends homes and being warned to keep quiet “Shush we got emmets ”as if it was some kind of embarrassing pest infection. From the perspective of a 12 year in 1960s Newquay there was an element of truth. The Bed and Breakfast culture and losing part of your home to strangers for the summer months was something we all endured but not always stoically as is witnessed by the very term “Emmet”! Tourism was seen as the economic master that we were totally dependent upon and subservient to.



This idolisation of tourism was brought into question in the seventies. In a parliamentary statement the MP for North Cornwall John Pardoe described tourist wages as ludicrously low and only for 5 months of the year which left whole communities dependent upon benefits. ¹ Using examples like St Ives and Newquay he suggested that the higher an area’s investment in tourism the higher the unemployment figures and the lower the average wage. Tourism risked being a white elephant that we were too scared to discard of because there was nothing else.

Fifty years on the tourist industry in Cornwall has developed enormously with a much extended season and many all year round attractions. Tourism remains associated in people’s minds with second homes, high house prices and over stretched Health services in high season but there are also positives. It is part of a burgeoning hospitality and leisure industry in Cornwall which promotes everything from Cornish cuisine and craft ales to world class surfing events. There is also a developing festival scene with the potential to promote and support many aspects of Cornish cultural identity.

Our conference today explores these very issues. How the tourist industry has changed and is it more sensitive to the needs of Cornish people? How is Cornish culture portrayed by the tourist industry and could this be improved? Do the creative communities of Cornwall offer an opportunity for cultural tourism? Should we be thinking beyond tourism for Cornwall to proposer in the 21st Century? The ultimate cultural test for tourism is of course its relationship with the Cornish language and whether there can be a mutually beneficial relationship.



Looe Music Festival 2017: promoting Cornish cultural identity with Cornish language events

Folklore, Fakelore and Tourism in Cornwall

I would like to get the ball rolling by looking at one area of Cornish cultural identity and its relationship with tourism: folk tradition. Almost from the point of emergence as discrete field of study within wider social anthropology fears were expressed that folk traditions risked corruption by the commercial interests of tourism and the term “Fakelore” was born.² The fear was that traditions such as folk dance would be corrupted and changed from a pure, original form in order to attract tourists. It was particularly aimed at European countries that suddenly discovered colourful traditional costume and dramatically choreographed dances as their tourist industries developed.

Modern understanding of folk tradition presents it as a dynamic process rather than historical stasis and closely linked to a community’s sense of identity.³ This being the case then using and adapting traditions to assert identity within the context of tourism may not be quite so “fake”. Tourism could be seen as having a positive impact upon cultural identity. Conversely, if folk tradition is interpreted and imposed upon a community by an outside agency to promote tourism then the concept of “fakelore” works quite well. This presentation looks briefly at four examples of the interaction between tourism and folk tradition in Cornwall and considers positive and negative outcomes.

Folk Tradition:

Dynamic Process

- **Informed by past but not fixed historical state**
- **Passed person to person / generation to generation**
- **Expression of community identity**

GWR and early tourism

Throughout the nineteenth century Cornwall was a crucible for technological development and more than 100 years later our school of mines remains a global leader. By the early 20th century Cornwall’s language and roots within the Celtic world were also well recognised. But this was not the Cornwall that the GWR publicity machine thought would sell its new tourist industry. They wanted to sell a mystical seaside retreat and a land apart.⁴ They drew upon the research into Cornish legends and customs of people like Quiller Couch to acknowledge a distinctive Celtic Cornwall but one that was ultimately a GWR invention.



Early 20th century GWR Poster



A land apart we can live with but the peasant costume in this poster is certainly fakelore.

Dodgy dialect postcards and Cornish Piskey land were also products of the GWR publicity machine leaving us with a negative rural stereotype of Cornwall that still dominates Westminster thinking to this day.

Newquay Heva Dance

Newquay was of course prime real estate for development of the GWR tourist idyll but we have a quite different twist on the relationship between tourism and folk tradition here. Furry dances were once widespread across Cornwall with some towns boasting their own distinctive dance. Two world wars impacted seriously upon the tradition, however and by the 1950s few places had kept it up. In Newquay the North Cornwall Furry was historically danced on mid-summer's eve in a procession up to the bonfire on Pentire Headland. This was adapted as a tourist attraction with a dance through the streets on Wednesday evenings in the summer months.

It proved popular but Newquay was determined to have its own furry dance and in 1961 the event organisers commissioned a song, music and dance to be written.⁵ The lyrics drew heavily on the work of Newquay's Old Cornwall Society recorders to capture a wonderful image of the town's history and the traditions surrounding the Pilchard industry. The Dance was called the Heva after the huer's cry from their lookout over the bay that alerted the town to the arrival of a shoal of pilchards.



It was certainly driven by the commercial interests of tourism but it was not fakelore. It belonged to the people of Newquay and told the story of their town. It was also a natural development within the tradition of Cornish furry dances and marked a watershed in this tradition. Since this date there has been a steady increase in the number of towns and villages reviving or re writing their furry dances to the point where it is again widespread in Cornwall.⁶ This was definitely a positive outcome of the relationship between tourism and folk tradition.

Guizing traditions

Guizing is a Cornish folk custom, or set of customs that has an interesting relationship with tourism. In 1882 Jago described Guizing as Cornwall's answer to the English Morris.⁷ In essence it is a group of people disguising themselves with veils, masks and mock posh or bizarre costume. They process around the streets with music, songs, dances sometimes with a play or mock court and a sense of otherworldly chaos. Guize dancing in Cornwall falls into three groups, those with a long continuity, those revived after a significant gap in time and those newly created but inspired by Cornish folk tradition.



Guize Dancers: in veils, masks, mock posh and bizarre costume, described in Jago's Cornish dialect vocabulary of 1882 as Cornwall's answer to the English Morris



*The Bodmin Play :
a revived tradition, not fakelore*

The Padstow Obby Oss, Helston's Hal an Tow and the St Ives Guizers are examples of those with a deep rooted provenance unrelated to tourism but the May time events do pull the crowds which makes local traders happy. The Bodmin play is an example of a revived Guizing custom⁸ and St Agnes's Bolster Day is a relatively new creation but inspired by folk legend. Both are community events created with an eye to attracting people to their respective towns but not strongly influenced by tourism.



*St Agnes Bolster Day:
A new tradition but not
fakelore.*

The Polperro Mock Mayor was revived in 1996 based on an early nineteenth century description by Jona-thon Couch.⁹ Along with a furry dance it was intended to provide a strongly Cornish element for an otherwise eclectic Polperro festival. It is very community based and has on occasion changed times and routes to accommodate the work pattern of the fishermen who took part. It has helped to maintain the story of Polperro and provides an opportunity for the expression of Cornish identity. It is doubtful that it would have been revived if it were not for tourism but it fits the definition of folk tradition rather than fakelore.



Penzance's Golowan festival was started in 1991 with the express intention of promoting early season tourism. Initially there was a deliberate policy of focussing on Cornish music, dance folk customs. These customs included midsummer bonfire, serpent dances and Guize dancing with a horse skull Obby Oss. The festival has metamorphosed to become more of an arts festival on Cornish identity.¹⁰ The revived customs nevertheless remain core events popularly supported by local people.



Golowan Midsummer festival in Penzance



Montol Midwinter festival in Penzance

The Montol midwinter festival is a creation inspired by Cornish folk traditions and draws on the enthusiasm generated by the Golowan festival. Golowan and Montol are high profile events that have served to inspire the revival of other Cornish customs and can be seen as an example of a positive relationship between Cornish folk tradition, identity and tourism.

Golowan and Montol are high profile events that inspire the revival of other Cornish customs : an example of a positive relationship between Cornish folk tradition, identity and tourism.

Folk legends and tourism

Cornwall shares first millennium Arthurian legend with its fellow Celtic nations and the Gorsedhow of Wales, Cornwall and Brittany all draw upon the romance for their ceremonies. The legend has given rise to folkloric interpretations of mysteries like the large rectangular shape on Bodmin Moor which is called King Arthurs hall. Folklore, what people thought and said, tells you about the people who tell the story rather than the structure itself. It is interesting how the folkloric notion of a glorious Arthurian past in Cornwall resonates with Bernard Deacon's proposal for the existence of a first millennium Golden Age in Cornwall.¹¹



King Arthurs Hall on Bodmin Moor : legends rooted in the Golden Age of first millennium Cornwall



English Heritage creating fakelore at Tintagel for commercial reasons.

The Arthurian legend in Cornwall is part of Cornwall's story. It is a small piece of a large jigsaw that comprises our distinctive cultural identity. The Great Western Railway publicity machine pirated our folk tradition in the early 19th century to create fakelore for its own commercial purposes and did lasting damage to the Cornish identity. The question I pose as this conference opens is whether English Heritage is guilty of creating fakelore for commercial reasons by drawing Cornwall into the story of England?

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Telynyor an Weryn
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Notes

- 1 John Pardoe, Assistance to Improve Tourist Amenities and Facilities, House Of Commons 28/07/1972.
<https://www.theyworkforyou.com/debates/?id=1972-07-28a.2265.0>
- 2 Dorson, Richard M. "Is Folklore a Discipline?" *Folklore*, vol. 84, no. 3, 1973, pp. 177–205. JSTOR, www.jstor.org/stable/1259723.
- 3 Merv Davey, PhD thesis, "As is the manner and the custom" Exeter University 2011, p37
- 4 Philip Payton, "Paralysis and Revival: The Reconstruction of Celtic - Catholic Cornwall 1980 -1945." *Cornwall: The cultural construction of place*, Ed Ella Westland. (Penzance, Patten Press,1997), p. 34.
- 5 "The Heva Song" Souvenir Programme, Newquay 1961, Lyrics by Nigel Tangye, Music by H Whipps and Dance choreography by Miss Rowland, Crantock Street Junior School.
- 6 Merv Davey, Alison, and Jowdy Davey. *Scoot Dances, Troys, Furrys and Tea Treats: The Cornish Dance Tradition*, (London: Francis Boutle & Co, 2009), p.33.
- 7 Fred W. Jago, *The Ancient Language and the Dialect of Cornwall* (Truro: Netherton and worth, 1882.) Entry under Guise Dance: "A kind of comical or Bal masque at Christmas. Polwhele calls is the guise or disguise dance, for so the Cornish pronounce guise (geeze). This dance answers to the mummers of Devon, and the Morrice dancers of Oxfordshire &c. In Celtic Cornish ges, means mockery, a jest."
- 8 Pat Munn, *Bodmin Riding and other similar Celtic customs*, (Bodmin, Bodmin Books Ltd, 1975).
- 9 Jonathon Couch, *An Historical Account of the Village of Polperro in Cornwall and Its Neighbourhood*. 1815.
(Truro, Lake, unidentified date)
- 10 Richard Harris, Exeter University, Institute of Cornish Studies, Tremough Campus, Penryn, unpublished paper 2014
- 11 Bernard Deacon, *Cornwall's First Golden Age: from Arthur to the Normans*, (London, Francis Boutle,2016).