

Archival Review: Institute of Cornish Studies

GARRY TREGIDGA

The Institute of Cornish Studies was officially created in 1971 as part of the University of Exeter in association with the former Cornwall County Council. It developed a broad remit in its early years as the archaeologist Charles Thomas, its first Director noted, for the 'study of all aspects of man and his handiwork in the regional setting (Cornwall and Scilly), past, present and future. The development of society, industry and the landscape in our fast changing world is as much of concern [...] as the history of those vast topics in the recent and remote past' (www.exeter.ac.uk/cornwall/research/facilitiesandcentres/ics). This led in the 1970s to a series of projects covering such subjects as archaeology, botany, oral history and place names. Its leadership changed in 1991 with Philip Payton, a political scientist and historian, developing an interdisciplinary New Cornish Studies. This included a specific focus on modern Cornwall since the eighteenth century and a consideration of topics like migration, politics, tourism and ethnic identity.

More recently the Institute has been led by two co-directors, Garry Tregidga and Joanie Willett, who are attempting to bring together interdisciplinary research on Cornwall into four themes: Culture, Heritage and Society; Politics and Government; Economy and Business; Environment and Health. The aim is to share this knowledge with the wider community in Cornwall and beyond to provoke policy discussions over the future. In addition to the four research themes, the Institute is also interested in Cornwall's global connections. Cornish people have



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taken their mining skills in regard to tin and copper all over the world, providing us with links to countries such as the USA, Australia and New Zealand. The area's international trade goes back at least as far as the Bronze Age, and its ethnic heritage and traditions provide connections to other Celtic nations like Brittany, Ireland and Wales. Moreover, there are points of resonance with many other parts of Europe, in particular other rural areas which are also calling for stronger representation and political devolution in an often metropolitan policy environment.

Since its creation the Institute's research agenda has also been developed alongside an active archiving strategy covering areas like religion through the Canon Adams collection, nationalist politics with the Len Truran and Royston Green papers, and Liberal/Liberal Democrat party papers since the 1960s donated by the family of Mary Mann. The Institute also undertook a project to document the Cornish experience of the 1979 and 1983 British general elections. The resulting archive contains letters and newscuttings, alongside election ephemera relating to the various political parties, candidates and constituencies in Cornwall during these two elections. In recent years all of this material has been preserved as part of the Archives and Special Collections at the University of Exeter's Penryn Campus in Cornwall, which is the current home of the Institute (www.library/fxplus.ac.uk/collections/archives-special-collections).

Documentation work has also been developed on an ethnographic basis by the Cornish Audio Visual Archive (CAVA). The CAVA initiative was established by the Institute in 2000 in association with other archival and educational bodies operating in Cornwall with a view to harness the multimedia power of oral history, film, music and photography in order to create a greater understanding of Cornwall in the past and present. The Archive's cornerstone initiative was 'Cornish Braids', which was an oral history programme of over 500 recordings based on the themes of work, religion, politics, leisure and social relationships. These earlier

recordings are accessible to the public at Kresen Kernow, which is a new archive centre in the Cornish town of Redruth that was opened in 2019 (www.kresenkernow.org).

New recordings are now being collected by 'Cornish Story' in order to build on the legacy of CAVA. Cornish Story is another initiative of the Institute that was launched in 2010 as an online dissemination platform that seeks to bring together multimedia recordings from CAVA with other online articles relating to Cornwall's cultural heritage (www.cornishstory.com). This accessible resource is linked to a programme of public engagement events along with a series of books and pamphlets. Current projects include a series of life interviews with



St. Pirans Day Procession - A Cornish Pilgrimage at Penhale Sands. Photograph courtesy of J M Photojournalism

elected politicians and activists associated with political parties operating in Cornwall. This will include Mebyon Kernow, the principal Cornish nationalist party and a member of the European Free Alliance, which was founded in 1951 and initially operated as a pressure group before developing over time into a political party. Questions will look at the subject of cultural memory alongside issues of ideological belief and party strategy. The first stage has been a community-based project at Luxulyan in East Cornwall marking the fortieth anniversary of an attempt to build a nuclear power station in 1980. A successful protest campaign led to the authorities eventually withdrawing the proposal and a memory day in February 2020 led to the collection of new oral history interviews, photographs and written material. Significantly, this pilot project also highlighted the role of the Cornish national movement in the campaign both through the direct involvement of nationalist activists and in the use of Cornish cultural imagery such as its language and ancient flag (a white cross with a black background) at protest events.

Cornish Democracy is another project led by the Institute that brings together research with archiving opportunities. With the relationship between belonging and governance now to the fore as result of the United Kingdom's withdrawal from the European Union it is appropriate to look at a territory like Cornwall that claims to have a strong sense of Celtic identity but that is officially seen as part of England. In recent decades there has been evidence of a cultural renaissance in relation to Cornish music, heritage and language, which was symbolised in 2014 by the British government officially recognising the Cornish as a national minority under European rules for the protection of national minorities (www.gov.uk/government/news/cornish-granted-minority-status-within-the-uk).

Although Cornwall was granted a limited devolution deal in the following year, the status of the existing unitary council is clearly not comparable with the fiscal and legislative powers enjoyed by the Scottish Parliament

or Welsh Sennedd. The Cornish Democracy project therefore seeks to investigate both the Cornish experience and its future potential in the wider context of place-based narratives. Alongside a publication on the subject, a documentation programme covering written sources, online surveys, focus groups, and individual recordings is being developed covering the historical background, community governance, interaction with Westminster, economic concerns and cultural heritage. Participation in the surveys and interviews of the project is not just restricted to political activists since it was felt that an initiative of this nature should seek to record voices from the wider public. This ongoing project will seek to create a useful database for the future.

Documentation is not just limited to Cornwall's contemporary national movement. In 2017 the Institute collaborated with the Cornish Language Office in Truro and local resource providers in a project that attempted to identify, collate and preserve archives relating to the revival of the Cornish language at the turn of the twentieth century. Entitled *Dasserghi Kernewek* (Reviving Cornish), this project brought together both written documents and audio records to create a comprehensive Register of Assets with material held in a variety of archives including the Henry Jenner collection now held in Kresen Kernow (www.dasserghikernewek.org.uk).

Research into the early history of the Cornish national movement in the nineteenth century has recently been extended through the Trelawny project. This is a study of the Cornish anthem 'The Song of the Western Men', which is more commonly known as 'Trelawny'. It was written in 1825 by the Rev. Stephen Hawker but there is evidence that the chorus is far older and was inspired by stories dating back to the seventeenth century. Research combines written resources with oral evidence to explore the anthem's historical evolution through time and the way in which it was co-opted as a political campaign song in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries and was on a cultural level adopted by Cornish

diaspora communities around the world. The project also explores the sometimes contentious nature of the anthem. At one level this reflected criticism on the part of some leading members of the early Cornish movement who objected on religious grounds to Trelawny's association with the Protestant cause and preferred the alternative of 'Bro Goth Agan Tasow' that was based on the pan-Celtic 'Land of My Fathers' from Wales. At a wider level there were others who objected to the transnational origins of the tune since it was apparently based on 'Le petit tambour' from France. Despite these concerns and the existence of other competitors, it is significant that Trelawny continues to be regarded by many as the Cornish national anthem. It is intended that the project will result in a monograph on the subject and a collection of written and oral material will be deposited as part of a planned Cornish National Music Archive at Kresen Kernow and made available to the public on an online basis.

As the Institute approaches its fiftieth anniversary it welcomes the opportunity to collaborate with scholars and archivists associated with NISE. Our approach is to operate at both the micro and macro levels, whereby we promote interactive research through documentation projects at the communal level while at the same time pursuing a comparative approach towards the regions and small nations of Europe in order to foster greater knowledge and understanding. For further details please email cornishstudies@exeter.ac.uk