

Antiquarian Surveys of Cornwall

- ▶ Polydore Vergil (1534)
 - ▶ Andrew Borde (1542)
 - ▶ Richard Carew (1602)
 - ▶ John Norden (1605)
 - ▶ William Scawen (1688)
 - ▶ Edward Lhuyd (1707)
 - ▶ William Borlase (1750)
- ▶ *the people hereabouts be very ignoraunte*
- ▶ *we have Indians....in Cornwall, Indians in Wales, Indians in Ireland*

Numerous surveys of Cornwall and the Cornish were published by ‘antiquarians’ over the centuries. Below are listed most of the better known ones, with links to online versions where available:

Polydore Vergil: *Historia Anglica* (1534)

<http://www.philological.bham.ac.uk/polverg/contents.html>

Andrew Borde: *The Fyrst Boke of the Introduction of Knowledge* (1542)

<https://archive.org/details/fyrstbokeintrod01boorgoog/page/n6>

Richard Carew: *The Survey of Cornwall* (1602)

<http://www.gutenberg.org/cache/epub/9878/pg9878-images.html>

John Norden: *Survey of the Duchy of Cornwall* (c. 1605)

William Scawen (‘father of the Cornish language revival’): *Antiquities Cornu-Britannic* (1688)

Edward Lhuyd: *Archaeologia Britannica* (1707)

<https://archive.org/details/archaeologiabri00lhuygoog/page/n5>

William Borlase: *Memorandums of the Cornish Tongue* (1750)

‘*the people hereabouts be very ignoraunte*’ is a comment apparently made by a group of gentlemen visiting Penryn in the 1540s.

The ‘*Indians*’ comment was made by Roger Williams, a puritan preacher, in 1652 (Stoyle. p. 17)

Polydore Vergil *Anglica Historia* (1534)



'the whole Countrie of Britain...is divided into iiii partes: whereof the one is inhabited by Englishmen, the other of Scottes, the third of Wallshemen, and the fowerthe of Cornishe people, which all differ emonge them selves, either in tongue, either in manners, or ells in lawes and orinaunces'.

One of the first basic descriptions of Cornwall can be found in Polydore Vergil's *Anglica Historia* (manuscript completed 1513, first published 1534)

The wording in the slide above sees him imitating Caesar's famous first lines from *De Bello Gallico* (The Gallic Wars). Just as Caesar was contradictory with his use of the term Gaul to describe the land of the Gauls as well as that of the Belgae and the Aquitani, so Vergil uses England for 'England proper' on some occasions, but for the whole of Britain on others, a confusion sometimes still seen today.

He gives an introductory description here:

1. The whole of England, (which is now called by the double name of England and Scotland) is an island set in the ocean opposite the shore of France, and is divided into four parts. The first is inhabited by the English, the second by the Scots, the third by the Welsh, and the fourth by the Cornish.

As far as Cornwall is concerned, in keeping with the *Anglia et Cornubia* tradition mentioned earlier, it is clearly not considered part of England. He confirms this again here:

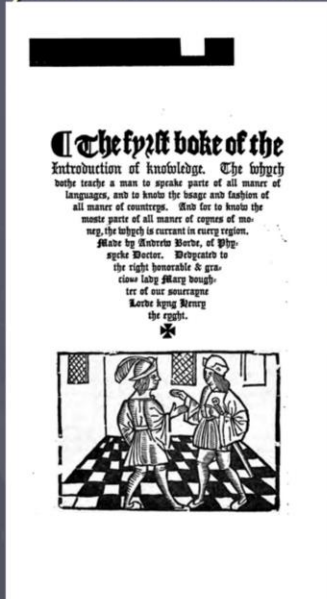
3. So this England, the first part of Britain, is bounded on the east and south by the ocean, on the west by the borders of Wales and Cornwall, and on the north by the river Tweed, a river which separates the English from the Scots.

Below we see a brief description of Cornwall's location, and a sentence on the Cornish language.

9. There follows the fourth and final part, which they call Cornwall. It is bounded on the east by England, and has the sea surrounding it on the south, west, and north. Their language is very different from English, but has some affinities with Welsh, since both names share the same words for many things.

Although some of Vergil's content was controversial, these basic descriptions do not seem to be. The work was undertaken at the request of Henry VII.

Andrew Borde (1542) *Fyrst Boke of the Introduction of Knowledge*



- Information on many countries
- England, Wales, Ireland, Scotland and many more
- Chapter on England has 'apendex' on Cornwall (only)
- Almost as long as Chapter on England

The content pages of the Fyrst Boke of the Introduction of Knowledge by Andrew Borde, published in 1542, note that:

The fyrst chapter treateth of the naturall disposicyon of an Englyshman, and of the noble realm of England, and of the mony that there is vsyd. [And of Cornwall]

The seconde chapter treateth of the naturall dysposicion of Walshmen, and of the cowntre of Wales, teching an Englyshe man to speake some Walshe

The thyrd chapter treateth of the naturall dysposicion of an Iryshman, and of the kyngdomeshyp of Irland, also teching an Englyshe man to speake some Irysh, and of their mony

The fourthe chapter treateth of the naturall disposycyon of a Scotyshe man, and of the Kingdom of Scotland, and the speche of Scotland, and of their mony.

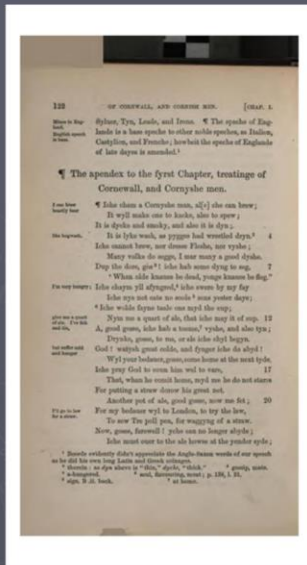
The various spellings of the word 'disposition' by the same author on the same page should be enough to tell us that it was not only Cornish that lacked a standardised orthography at this time.

There are many more chapters than these, looking at the 'natural disposition' of various peoples across Europe and the Middle East, however the ones above are the most relevant to us, along with Chapter xxxiii which includes Lytle Briten (Brittany) but makes no mention of the Breton language.

The Chapter on England has an appendix on the treating of Cornwall and Cornishmen. This appendix is about four pages long compared to the six pages given to the whole of England. There are no appendices for any other region. Once again, as with Vergil, an ambiguity between England proper and other countries 'under the dominion of England' is further evident elsewhere. Apart from Cornwall having its own appendix, Wales and Ireland their own separate chapters. Nevertheless, the chapter on England notes that:

'In Englande, the Walshe tongue is in Wales, The Cornyshe tongue in Cornewall, and Iryshe in Irland, and Frenche in the Englysshe pale.

Andrew Borde (1542) *Boke of the Introduction of Knowledge*



- *Cornwal is a pore and very barren countrey*
- *In Cornwall is two speches*
- *No Cornyshe man dothe number aboue xxx*

The appendix on Cornwall starts with an imaginary stereotype of a Cornishman referring to himself and his country. This is followed by the author's description of Cornwall, which is poor and very barren '*of al maner thyng except Tyn and Fyshe*' and a brief account of the food and drink and '*theyr chief fewel*'.

There is a paragraph on the Cornish language which starts like this:

"In Cornwall is two speches, the one is naughty Englysshe, and the other is Cornyshe speche. And there be many men and women which cannot speake one word of Englysshe, but all Cornyshe".

This is followed by some examples of numbers in Cornish which '*never go above 30*' and then '*A talk in Cornish and English*' which includes some typical useful phrases of the day such as '*Woman, bringe me some fishe!*' Regardless of the outdated content, the examples used have a much more modern feel to them than the religious language of the miracle plays, and represent the first examples of what we might call 'conversational Cornish'. Here is a sample, with the (early modern) English on the left and the Cornish on the right:

God morow to you syr!

Dar day dew a why serra!

I do thanke you, syr.

Dar dala de why, syra.

How do you fare?

Vata lew genar why?

How many myles is it to London?

Pes myll der eus a lemma de Londres?

Syr, it is thre houndred myle.

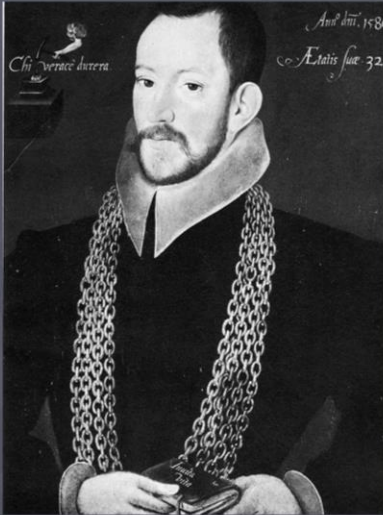
Syrra, tray kans myle dere.

God be wyth you!

Dew gena why!

Apart from the inconsistent spelling, it is clear that Borde sometimes literally did not know where one word ended and another started, as seen in the examples of 'myll der' and 'myle dere' for 'mile' which should be written as one word (cf. milltir in Welsh). Nevertheless, it is a fascinating glimpse into the more everyday language of the early modern period.

Richard Carew (1602) *The Survey of Cornwall*



*Durdatha why, is Good
morrow to you.
Trenestatha, Good night.
Fatlugan a why. How do
you?
Da durdalathawhy. Wel I
thanke you.
Betha why Iawanneck:
Be you mery.
Benetugana: Farewell.
(p.56)*

Richard Carew was a native of the parish of Antony in the east of Cornwall. From a prominent gentry family, he was a skilled translator, educated at Christ Church College, Oxford. During the 1580s he was both High Sheriff of Cornwall and MP for Saltash. He was a personal friend of Sir Walter Raleigh.

By the time of the publication of his *Survey* at the beginning of the seventeenth century, the Cornish language had all but disappeared from this part of Cornwall and Carew's not totally supportive stance towards it may be just as much to do with geography as with his association with the English establishment, reflecting an east/west split in attitude. A few years after the *Survey* he wrote *An epistle concerning the excellencies of the English tongue* which may leave us in little doubt as to his opinion of that language.

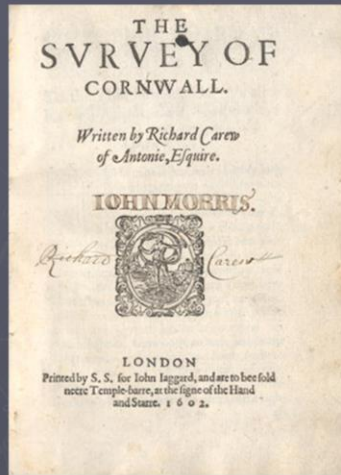
In the introduction to the first book, the words *the Cornish people call it Kernow* offer us the earliest example of what Cornwall was called by its native inhabitants. He also mentions the language's link to Welsh, showing us that the common ancestry of Welsh and Cornish (and Breton) was well known:

'And as the Cornish names hold an affinity with the Welsh, so is their language deduced from the same source, and differeth onely in the dialect. But the Cornish is more easie to bee pronounced, and not so vnpleasing in sound, with throat letters, as the Welsh.' (p. 55)

Again, separate words are written as one long word, but the similarities with Welsh can be seen. The **nesta** in *trenestatha*, for instance, is cognate with 'nos da' (good night) and the **benetu** of *benetugana* is cognate with *bendith Duw* (the blessing of God), as good bye in English comes from a contraction of 'God be with ye'.

Richard Carew (1602)

The Survey of Cornwall



...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 Cowzasawzneck": "I can speak no Saxonage"

The above quote from page 56 of Carew's *Survey* refers to the reluctance of many Cornish to speak in English. Interestingly, the first part of the quote is nearer the mark than his translation at the end, as 'Meea na vidna cowz a sawzneck' actually means **I will not** speak English, rather than **I can not**.

Here is the piece in its full context:

*Which termes, notwithstanding though they witnes their spite on the one side, yet retayne they as great a prooffe of their deuotion on the other: for **the Lords Prayer, the Apostles Creed, and the ten commaundements, haue beene used in Cornish beyond all remembrance.** But the principall loue and knowledge of this language, liued in Doctor Kennall the Ciuilian, and with him lyeth buried: for **the English speach doth still encroche vpon it, and hath driuen the same into the vttermost skirts of the shire.** Most of the Inhabitants can no word of Cornish; but very few are ignorant of the English: and yet some so affect their owne, as **to a stranger they will not speake it: for if meeting them by chance, you inquire the way or any such matter, your answers shal be, Meea nauidua cowzasawzneck, I can speake no Saxonage.** The English which they speake, is good and pure, as receyuing it from the best hands of their owne Gentry, and the Easterne Marchants: but they disgrace it, in part, with a broad and rude accent, and eclipsing (somewhat like the Somersetshire men) specially in pronouncing the names: (p.56)*

Carew also offers some information on the different types of status that Cornwall has 'enjoyed' over the years:

Cornwall, as an entire state, hath at diuers times enioyed sundry titles, of a Kingdome, Principality, Duchy, and Earledome; (p. 77)

John Norden (c. 1605) *Speculum Britanniae pars Cornwall*



The Cornish people for the moste parte are descended of Britishe stocke, though muche mixed since with the Saxon and Norman bloude; but untill of late yeares retayned the Britishe speache uncorrupted as theirs of Wales is; for the South Wales man understandeth not perfectlye the North Wales man, and the North Wales man little of the Cornishe, the South muche.

John Norden was an antiquary and cartographer from Somerset, who, at the turn of the seventeenth century, set about putting together the *Speculum Britanniae*, containing maps and descriptions of various counties in the south east of England and the Channel Isles. In 1610 he finished a description of Cornwall, which was geographically distant from everywhere else he surveyed, the next nearest being Hampshire. Despite the date of completion, it was not published until 1728.

The quote from him in the slide above is of interest in that it implies that Welsh speakers from South Wales would understand Cornish as much as they would the Welsh spoken in North Wales. Even if only speculation, it nevertheless indicates the type of relationship that these Brittonic ‘dialects’ were thought to have with each other.

It is also worth noting here that the ‘*Britishe stocke*’ referred to by Norden means British in the sense of Brittonic or Ancient Britons. British was not used by, for example, the English or the Scots to describe themselves until at least the Union of the Crowns, and not to any real extent until after the Act of Union which created the Kingdom of Great Britain in 1707. Prior to that ‘British’ meant much the same as ‘Welsh’ – whether of the Cambrian or Cornish variety.

Norden goes on to add that the use of English was growing in Cornwall at this time. Even those in the west who would speak Cornish as a rule were able to converse in English if they had to. This of course, is a rather different scenario to the ‘*Meea na vidna cowz a sawzneck*’ one painted by Carew in the very same decade.

The quote is taken from Henry Jenner’s 1873 paper *The Cornish Language* for the Philological Society

Edward Lhuyd (1707) *Archaeologia Britannica*



- ▶ The most thorough survey of the Cornish language
- ▶ Undertaken when a living vernacular
- ▶ Phonetic script to note pronunciation
- ▶ Information from native speakers

Many of the surveys noted thus far have been of a generic or even stereotypical nature, and often undertaken by people who had no particular interest in their topic of study. Lhuyd, on the other hand, made an in-depth study of the Cornish language based on his travels there, and meetings with Cornish speakers. This he put in his *Archaeologia Britannica*, and although the full publication is concerned with all of what we now call the Celtic languages, Lhuyd gives a thorough description of Cornish contained within over 30 very full pages, and consisting of an introduction written in Cornish to the people of Cornwall, a Cornish grammar, a traditional tale written in Lhuyd's phonetic script with a Welsh version opposite, and a list of all the parishes where Cornish was still spoken at the beginning of the eighteenth century. All of these were in Penwith and Kerrier (basically the Land's End and Lizard peninsulas).

The information contained within this survey is so important that it needs to be treated separately, and examples from it will be used in the next unit when looking at actual samples of the Cornish language from the period c. 1660 – 1800. One factor that needs to be singled out, however, is his General Alphabet for Cornish Pronunciation (p. 225). This was his International Phonetic Alphabet of the day, and without it, our knowledge of how the language sounded would be very much the poorer. Apart from the descriptions of the sounds, we also have the added benefit of the same symbols being used for other languages, as was the case with *Daralla Jooan Chei a Horr* (The Legend of Johnny Ram's House) where the Cornish and the Welsh were written side by side with the same symbols. Given that Welsh is thankfully still with us, we can use the symbols used for Welsh to confirm the sounds of Cornish. The script does look a little odd, but it was intended as a guide to pronunciation, not as a standard orthography.

The Two Williams: Scawen and Borlase



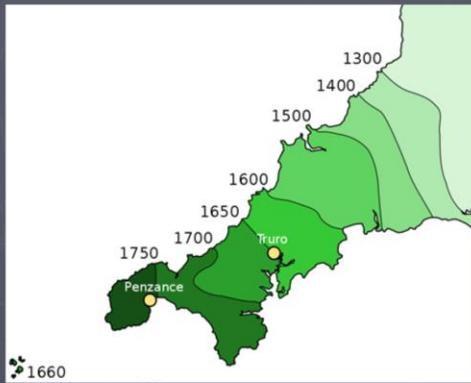
In 1688, William Scawen wrote a manuscript entitled *Antiquities Cornu-Britannic*. It contained a Cornish version of the *Passio Christi* along with an essay on the decline of the Cornish language (one of several, as we shall see). Scawen was passionate about all things Cornish, encouraging his Cornish-speaking friends to write to each other in the language, and taking an interest in its promotion. This is all the more interesting when considering that he came from the more Anglicised southeast of Cornwall, not far, in fact, from the home of Richard Carew. He was briefly MP for St Germans and for East Looe in the Short Parliament of 1640.

In 1750, William Borlase wrote his *Memorandums of the Cornish Tongue*. This was an attempt at writing a dictionary and grammar of Cornish along the lines of what Lhuyd had done some forty years earlier. In complete contrast to Scawen, Borlase was from Penwith in the far west of Cornwall where the language would still (just about) have been alive around him. Although Borlase did have books published on the natural history and antiquities of Cornwall, neither this book nor Scawen's have ever been published, which means that the manuscripts are the only copies in existence. Both had to have restoration work done on them in 2013.

Image Left: A page of Scawen's version of the *Passio Christi*

Image Right: Portrait of William Borlase

The westward retreat of the Cornish language



- ▶ Gradual decline from east to west
- ▶ Some differences in attitude between east and west
- ▶ Place names 'fossilised' in earlier forms in the east

There can be no doubt that the Cornish language did retreat westwards, as it ultimately lost its battle for survival, and did so in the far west. However the speed and extent of that loss are in dispute. Henry Jenner in his *A Handbook of the Cornish Language* claimed that Cornish was spoken as far east as the Tamar until the fifteenth century. Martyn Wakelin, on the other hand, in his *Language and History in Cornwall* has English in the eastern parts of Cornwall at a much earlier date, as early as the eighth century (pp. 204-205), with the two languages in competition from that point onwards. Ken George has attempted to trace the number of Cornish speakers through the centuries based on a gradual reduction in the proportion of Cornwall which was still Cornish speaking, painting a picture similar to the one in the map above in the slide (Payton, p.109), whereas Nicholas Williams literally moves in the opposite direction and goes even further than Jenner, stating that '*there is good evidence that until the Reformation, i.e. the middle of the sixteenth century, Cornish was probably spoken as far as the Tamar.*' (ibid). Finally, as we have seen, Edward Lhuyd in his *Archaeologia Britannica* actually lists the areas where Cornish was still spoken in 1700 and these are all in Penwith and Kerrier (around the Land's End and Lizard peninsulas).

As happened in Wales, those who were Anglicised first (usually the gentry) often held a different, invariably negative, view of their fellow countrymen who had retained the vernacular. Elements of this can be seen in Carew's *Survey of Cornwall*. Mark Stoye in his book *West Britons* regularly distinguishes (e.g. pp. 21-24) between the people of Cornish speaking west Cornwall and their more Anglicised compatriots further east, and there is a clear attempt here to link the speaking of Cornish with the rebellions that took place between the fifteenth and seventeenth centuries, seeing in them an attempt to maintain a distinctive Cornish identity. For this to be true, of course, then a distinction has to be made between the specifically Cornish elements of those rebellions and the wider grievances held further afield. The rebellions took us as far as the Civil War. We shall now examine the century and a half following it, and start talking in Cornish as opposed to talking about it.