

# **Presentations at the Toronto Cornish Association 10<sup>th</sup> and 100<sup>th</sup> Anniversaries**

## **The Toronto Cornish Association 1904 – 1961**

*by Barbara Gardner-Bray*

Some of you may be surprised to learn that there was another Toronto Cornish Association established long before the current TCA. The original TCA was formed in 1904, 100 years ago this year, and isn't it fitting that our Society's 10<sup>th</sup> anniversary coincides with the centenary of our predecessor? The original TCA ended in 1961, a good run of 57 years. I imagine it began for the sole purpose of getting together first-generation Cornish immigrants in Toronto, to meet, discuss the homeland, its merits, its drawbacks, reasons for emigrating to Canada and to share some laughs, some music and the inevitable pasty or saffron bun.

In 1995, I met a 70-year old Cornishman who periodically visited an elderly relative in Toronto. Wherever he travelled, and he did and still does travel the world, he always looked up names of Cornish in the telephone book and if there was a Cornish Association, he would come along to meet its members.

Many of you will remember Harold Hosking. Harold, originally from St. Buryan in Cornwall, is a member of the California Cornish Cousins and when he knew he was going to be in Toronto, he contacted John Tyacke about meeting with some TCA members. As we had no meeting on at the time of his visit in August 1995, John, as Secretary of the TCA, and I as its President, went out for a meal with Harold and his wife Grace, and Bessie Gannon, to an Italian restaurant which had good food and service, but some very annoying background music which comes across loud and clear on the tape we made of our visit with Harold. We had found out that Harold had been a member of the first TCA and decided to spend the evening quizzing him about it. So we turned on a tape recorder, ordered our pasta, and let him reminisce. He did not disappoint.

This is what he told us.

In late 1944, the Premier of Ontario, George Alexander Drew, went to London looking for people to emigrate to Ontario after the war, in particular he wanted skilled labourers. He was looking for 7000 people to emigrate. Harold came out in 1947, without a job and paying his own way. Harold met a Mrs. Ward when he arrived in Toronto. She was a member of the Cornish Association

and soon convinced Harold to join. Mrs. Ward's maiden name was Harvey, and she came from Kelynack in Cornwall. Her husband's name was Dudley Ward. Harold was a member of the TCA from 1949 -1955, holding various offices, including Vice-President and Sentinel. He must have been Treasurer too, as he joked about not being able to get the \$2. membership fee out of my grandfather, Arthur Gardner. He refused my offer of \$2. to make up for my grandfather's delinquent ways. I had found out at the inaugural meeting of our TCA that my grandfather had been President of the old TCA from 1915-1916. My election as the new TCA's first President seemed fortuitous to say the least.

Some of the other names that came out in our conversation with Harold were Sam and Blanche Stephens, Mr. & Mrs. PJ, Paull, Mavis Hocking (from St. Stephens), Bill Roberts (from St. Austell), Jim Hawton, Dick and Maude Tonkin. This is just a small sampling of the names of members from 50 years ago. Harold remembered something about all these people.

Sam Stephens was the old TCA's last President, He hosted the 1952 Christmas party at his home at 420 Westmount Avenue near Dufferin and St. Clair, Mrs. Paull was in charge of music and entertainment at the 50<sup>th</sup> anniversary dinner in 1954. Part of the entertainment was an all-female choir who performed old Sigmund Romberg tunes. Apparently, Mrs. Paull was very personable and made everyone feel welcome. Mrs. Paull's husband used to recite poetry and Harold recalled one that he remembered during our dinner. "Breathe there a man whose soul so dead as never to himself has said, this is my land, my native land, the land I love the best".

Of course, he had to be speaking of Cornwall. Jim Hawton had been a monumental stone mason in Cornwall, in partnership with two others, before emigrating to Canada He joined the police force when he arrived in Toronto and was a retired detective sergeant when Harold knew him. Dick Tonkin worked at the Massey Harris plant on King Street and had also worked in shipping and at a tannery.

Members at that time consisted of hard-working, not very well-educated, down to earth folk, with some real characters thrown in for good measure.

Apparently, before Harold's time, the TCA held their meetings at the Sons of England Hall on Yonge Street. Later, they would meet at the Independent Order of Odd Fellows Hall at 229 College Street until 1955, when the organization was officially disbanded. From 1955-1961, some stalwarts would meet in different

members' homes, much as we do today, where Euchre was the card game of choice.

Monthly meetings were held the second Tuesday of the month in wintertime. We're not sure why they weren't held the rest of the year. The TCA consisted mainly of Cornish born members and they were a benevolent group who would rally around and help each other if someone fell ill or was out of a job. There was more of this going on in the 30's due to the depression, and during the war tears the TCA raised funds for war charities. Harold remembers that my granddad played organ in a big church somewhere. This would have been St Lukes' Anglican church, of which he was choirmaster.

Christmas parties were an annual special event and gifts were given to any children in attendance. Harold remembers his 2-yr old son, Lorne, receiving a gift at the 1952 Christmas party. As well, true to their benevolent nature, tickets were sold at the November meeting for the annual "turkey" raffle, 10 cents each or 3 for 25 cents. Many tickets were sold, and Harold remembers a very poor family from Lakeview, Port Credit, winning one of these turkeys for their Christmas dimmer.

Monthly meetings would open with an energetic rendition of Trelawney, after which the names of those present were read. "they then proceeded with the business at hand and finished up with an enjoyable cup of tea and a saffron bun. Not unlike our meetings of today, but without the welcome Sleemans. The average attendance at these meetings was about 25, with possibly 50 registered members in total. The membership was ageing in the 1950's, TV had arrived, and the interest of the group eventually petered out. There weren't many younger members, Harold was one of the youngest.

Harold was told that in the 1920's and 30's, members of the TCA would travel by boat from Toronto to Niagara-on-the-Lake for a picnic day out. In Harold's day, most members did not have cars and not much money. Their annual picnic was held closer to home in Toronto's High Park. We now have our own TCA annual tradition of picnicking at Erla and Francis Jose's home in Newcastle every summer. The tradition continues.

Harold left Toronto in June 1957 for California. He had been offered a job working on Boeing jets. The opportunity was too good to pass up. t regret that I did not have an interest in my Cornish roots when my grandfather was alive. So many unanswered questions, so many lost memories of the first Toronto

Cornish Association. Thank goodness Harold came along when he did. His memories have given us just an inkling of what went before.

I'd like to add that since I wrote my talk, I've been doing a lot of searching, at the library, to see if I could find out more information about the old TCA. Much to my surprise, I actually found references in the Daily Globe to another Cornish Society that existed in Toronto as early as 1873. Not only have I found numerous references to the old TCA's activities, the one we knew existed from 1904 - 1961, but now I have uncovered additional information on a third Society. Just to give you an idea of numbers, in 1931, 400 Cornish men, women and children attended an annual picnic at Centre Island.

## **St Piran**

*Rosalie Armstrong*

On Saturday, March 6th, the Toronto Cornish Association celebrated St. Piran's Day (March 5th) with its monthly meeting and a banquet. It was good to recall that Cornish all over the world have been celebrating this day also, most especially on Perran Sands.

The pronunciation of the name of our nation's saint is interesting. Apparently Pir(e)an, (i as in fire), is a modern usage. Piran, (i as in it) is closer to the sound which has come to us from Piran-inspired place names such as Perranporth, Perranuthnoe, Perranarworthal.

Piran himself came from Ireland, as did many of our saints. I have some difficulty with millstones or altar stones as means of transport. However, it is sure that in his luggage a saint would consider an altar stone really important. And what is better than arriving in distant lands and being able to have your grain ground as you are used to on your own familiar millstone.

Often the life of Piran has been blended with that of Kieran of sixth century Ireland. Canon Doble disputes this. The records attribute a full and busy life to Kieran which would have one wonder if he had had time for Cornish adventures too, under the name of Piran. (The Brythonic Cornish would replace the Goidelic Irish letter C(K) with P. However the 300 years Kieran was reputed to have lived and the 200 years attributed to Piran allowed plenty of time for evangelising.

Piran was known to be tall and when his oratory, "The Lost Church", emerged from the sands in the nineteenth century the (headless) skeleton of a tall man was found under the floor. Relics of the saint had been in earlier centuries taken on tour around Cornwall and preserved in silver boxes so presumably the head was given such special treatment\_ The skeletons of a woman holding a child were also found under the oratory, to complete the scene.

The inspiration for our flag, the black of the tin ore and the silver of the refined metal come from the Piran legend.

Piran's arrival in Cornwall onto the exposed Perranporth Bay sets the scene for the religious fervor which must have accompanied him. Perranporth beach is three miles long and has little in the way of shelter. Piran's first chapel on Chapel Rock has been remembered in the name. Remains of walls were visible on Chapel Rock until

the seventeenth century.

It is hard to picture Perranporth beach before the medieval sands engulfed it but Piran moved from Chapel Rock a short distance inland where there must have been cultivable land for a community to grow. The stones of an oratory, dating from the eighth century, still lie entombed in the extensive sands of Perran Sands. This was a small chapel, 29 X 12 feet, which served its community and its saint until the eleventh century when the sand overwhelmed it.

Then, another church was built only a few hundred yards away but across a stream which impeded the advance of the sand. The tenth century Celtic cross stands close by and small parts of the walls remain. This had been a rich community if we can guess by the remains which were much later taken to build the third church. By the middle of the eighteenth century tanners had been given permission to block the stream and so the onward march of the sands resumed till this church was overwhelmed. In 1804 many parts of the second church were taken a few miles inland to Perranzabuloe to build for the third time a church to honour St. Piran and serve the local community. It is a beautiful parish church to bear witness to a once thriving community in the sands, Perranzabuloe.

It is interesting to consider how precarious life must have been for the farmers and tanners of Perran as over the centuries their places of worship and their land were always at the mercy of the encroachment of the ever-moving medieval sands.

The imbibing of alcohol is connected to Piran - both himself and his followers. Perrantide was a special celebration for tanners until the nineteenth century. The cost book for the Great Work of Germoe and Breage in 1759 mentions an allowance for Perrantide. The sum of one shilling to men and sixpence to boys is a very considerable amount of money resulting maybe in them being "as drunk as Perraners".

The historical record is scant, the remains are few but the spirit which pervades perran Sands is tangible. Little wonder we know nothing for sure of Piran who comes to us from the distance of the Dark Ages and from the mists of the Celtic coasts. Whatever is true, whatever is not true in the legends, Piran's influence has been sufficient to reach us across one thousand five hundred years. Perhaps the strength of his spirituality can inspire us yet to continue to be true to the invincible land of Kernow.

## **The Transformation of St Hilary at St Pirantide**

*Howard Curnow*

I woke up this morning and something was different with the world. I did a quick check on my senses .., and, hold it! There's something wrong with my eyes. It is light, but where are the branches of the trees which overhang my bedroom window? The bedroom is filled with a soft, diffused light, but I can't see anything. Did I fit white lacy curtains during the night? Is this heaven?

It was no surprise to find that we had two inches. of snow in the night (as measured on the roof of the car). Yesterday at around 5:00 pm I was working in brilliant sunshine when suddenly, within the space of a couple of minutes, it was dark enough to need a torch. Minutes later it was snowing furiously. It's a blizzard, it's a blizzard. My mind flipped back through the years.

We were little children in 1947 when we, my two elder brothers and I, wondered how we would tell Mother that we had lost our little sister Florence, in a snow drift in one of our far fields. Surely Mother would understand. She often told us (in later years) how her aunt had been lost in the main street of Marazion in the Great Blizzard of 1888. Mothers are designed to be understanding aren't they? On the other hand, maybe we should simply dig her out and forget the confrontation. We did,

Then there was Christmas 1987 when West Cornwall hit the world headlines - well in New Zealand at least. Big brother James, was spending Christmas with second brother, Ken, in Auckland. Each morning, starting at 5:45am, third brother Howard, would milk 91 cows here on the family farm, then wash, eat and get to the College in Helston by 9:00am for a days teaching before returning to repeat the milking process at 5:00 pm.

On that occasion the only snow to fall in the British Isles fell on the Isles of Scilly and the westernmost 25 miles of Cornwall, hence all the publicity. It was two feet deep in the farmyard, and the power cables were down, With no electricity for over a week life down on the farm was, shall we say, difficult.

Every few years we get a flurry of snow which is usually gone by midday, but having poked my nose outside the door, I am pretty certain last night's deposit will be around for another day, maybe.

There is no doubt where it came from -- the snow I mean - from the North,

precisely. The octagonal church spire has a slender triangle of snow adhering to just one face, the north face. The poor daffodils are drooping to the ground with the unaccustomed weight, but a quick check on the primroses reveal their perky little faces, whilst the brilliant camelias create an incredible splash of colour in the monotone of the landscape. Where there's life there's hope. The snowdrops are the cheekiest though. As their name implies, they carry on as though nothing had happened.

On the other hand, the palm trees have a forlorn beauty with each frond holding its allotted quantity of snowflakes glistening in the morning sun. Oh yes! The sun is shining gloriously in a brilliant blue sky with an occasional fluffy white ball of cumulus ...well it is Cornwall isn't it?

As I sit here, looking out to the distant snow-clad Trencron Hill and enjoying a huge, succulent, Florida orange I am reminded that although the children may love it, I hope the snow is all gone by next weekend. We can't have any upsets to the St. Piran's Day celebrations, which this year are spread over most of the coming week in even more corners of the land than previously. The Chough has returned to Cornwall - Kernuw bys Vyken.



## From "Vanishing Cornwall"

*By Daphne du Maurier, 1969*

Cornwall was originally divided into sections known as "Hundreds", though it is not certain quite how and why they came into being. Charles Henderson did not believe that they grew casually from the separation of Celtic tribes, but thought that they were created at a particular time, with the intention of dividing Cornwall into districts in accordance with its geographical features.

The lists go back to the eleventh century, but the Hundreds must have been in existence long before. Their names have a fascinating ring, like all things Cornish: Penwith, Kirrier, Pyder, Powder, Trigg, East Wivel, West Wivel, Lesnewth, Stratton.

The old maps show the nine divisions very clearly, and with the aid of a Cornish glossary it is even possible to hazard a guess at the derivation of those names. It seems as if Stratton, meaning highway, was the first Hundred, for near Stratton town itself was the original highway from the Tamar. The Stratton Hundred starts by the Devon border at Marsland Mouth on the north coast, merging into the second Hundred, Lesnowth, a few miles north of Dizzard Hard. Lesnewth, meaning "the new width", and Stratton Hundreds possess some of the finest coastline in all Cornwall, especially Stratton, where the high coombes or valleys plunge steeply to the sea and buildings, mercifully, are few. Tintagel is in Lesnowth, and Boscastle, and the wildest moors east of Camelford. The Hundred of Lesnowth turns to Trigg, which derives from third and thus means the Third Hundred. It follows the north coast down as far as the Camel estuary, stretching inland beyond Bodmin and the old highway south to Lostwithiel. From the Camel estuary to St. Agnes Head the Hundred of Pyder takes over (Pyder meaning fourth), its eastern border still the great ridge or backbone of Cornwall dividing the north coast from the south.

Beyond St. Agnes Head the stretch of land comprising the towans, the Hayle estuary, and the whole of the Land's End peninsula, including Mount's Bay on the south coast, forms the Hundred of Penwith. There are three renderings of Penwith - "the last promontory," "promontory on the left," and, more intriguing still, "the headland of slaughter." High on these moors of West Penwith are the many quoits and tombs that were the burial places of those first settlers in prehistoric times. Whether they died fighting sea-borne invaders, or in the tribal battle amongst themselves, nobody can tell, but "the headland of slaughter" points to an ancient tradition that in those days of long ago Penwith was a place of strife.

Kirrier, meaning "high coast or border" runs from Port Levan on Mount's Bay to Lizard Point, and thence to the west bank of the Fal, Powder, the seventh Hundred and the "place of oaks" runs from St. Mawes to Fowey-haven. It is well named. This most wooded part of the whole Cornish peninsula, and, with its rivers Fal and Fowey, the most fertile Powder gives way to West and East Wivel, the first running from the Fowey estuary to Looe river, the second to where the Tamar estuary enters Plymouth sound. Wivel, of Wyvell's, means the "shire, of Welshmen or strangers", and this most eastern district of Cornwall could well have been, in early days, given over to intruders, who crossed from the Welsh borders into Devon, and so to Stratton highway in the north.

The nine Hundreds, following the entire coast-line of Cornwall, now make sense: the Highway, the New Width, the Third and Fourth Hundreds, the Left Promontory or Headland of Slaughter, the High Coast, the Place of Oaks, the West and East Hundreds of Strangers or Welshmen.

These Hundreds, through succeeding centuries, made convenient units for the administration of the law, for tithing and parochial systems, and for the manorial rights of the feudal lords; but for those of us more interested in persons than in systems, in customs than in jurisdiction, it is stimulating to discover that, the further west we travel in Cornwall, the further back we go to earlier days and earlier ways, to a greater degree of awe and superstition, even to a change in accent and intonation. The Cornish in the East speak with a burr like the men of Devon - or did, a generation ago, before the advent of television; and this is understandable when it is remembered they live in West and East Wivel, the shire of Strangers. There is little variation as one passes to mid-Cornwall, to the third and fourth Hundreds and the Place of Oaks, but come to Kirrier, the "High Coast", and above all to Penwith, west of the river Hayle, and a sing-song cadence of another pitch falls ! upon the ear; even the vocabulary is, or was, quite different. It was at Mousehole, the little fishing port on Mount's Bay in West Penwith, that the last inhabitant to speak the old Cornish language died in 1777; it was to Madron Well, in the same Hundred, that women brought their infants in May month to be cured of shingles, wild-fires, letters and other diseases, and to be fortified against witchcraft and the evil eye.

Today the coast of Cornwall, comprising West Penwith and Kirrier, from Clodgy Point on the Atlantic to Lizard Point on the English Channel, attracts more tourist traffic than perhaps anywhere else in Cornwall, Coaches, cars, caravans spawn by the wayside, park on the headlands, blacken the coves and inlets during

the summer months from Whitsun to September; but come the equinox on the twenty-third of the month, coinciding with the end of school holidays, and they vanish overnight, leaving the claw to its former barren splendour.