

Bishop Trelawny and the Cornish National Anthem

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Sir Jonathan Trelawny was raised at Trelawne Manor Estate which is situated in the Parish of Pelynt where I lived with my family from the age of 7 – 18 years. Trelawne is just off the Looe – Polperro road on the way to the village of Pelynt. My mother, who was a Church Warden at the Church of St Nun, Pelynt for 25 years, continued to live at Trelay, our family farm on the edge of the village until she died in 2007. Trelay's boundaries are very close to Trelawne Manor Estate. My mother was an avid local historian and instilled in me a love for family & local history.



We were particularly proud of our connection to Bishop Trelawny. It wasn't until I prepared this piece for a presentation that I gave to the Toronto Cornish Association that I really understood why Bishop Trelawny was so well loved and respected by so many.

Credit for this picture of the Bishop goes to Sir Godfrey Kneller.

The documents indicate that Jonathan Trelawny, great grandfather to Bishop Trelawny, purchased Trelawne Manor Estate from Queen Elizabeth 1st. In 1600. It is quite coincidental that the family name is almost the same as the estate name except for one letter. The family tried for many years to change the manor name to the family name. Sadly, this Jonathan did not live long enough to really enjoy his new home. He died four years after the purchase of the manor, leaving a very young family. Eventually, Bishop Trelawny's grandfather John who became a Baronet, took over the estate when he became of age.

This branch of the Trelawny family lived in very troubled times. King Charles 1st. was in conflict with his parliament and eventually the Civil War

erupted. Several of the Trelawny men became familiar with the Tower of London. Bishop Trelawny's grandfather John and father, also called Jonathan while fighting for the Monarchy found themselves imprisoned in the Tower of London on several occasions.

In spite of their important titles and the large family property, the Trelawnys' encountered considerable financial difficulty having given all the family silver and cash to the Royal cause. It was during these troubled times in 1650, just a few months after Charles was beheaded that Jonathan, who was to become a Bishop and a well-loved Cornishman throughout the world, was born. In spite of their financial struggles and no doubt, in large part, by marrying into wealth, the Trelawny family managed to hold on to Trelawne Manor Estate until the early 1900's.

From an early age Bishop Jonathan was taught the importance of being a Royalist and a Trelawny. He also learned to love Cornwall. He spent his childhood roaming around the grounds and fields of Trelawne Manor Estate. He enjoyed fishing, hunting, and shooting and was also interested in local history in later life.

Jonathan must have been quite a smart lad as his father thought it worthwhile to send him to school in London. At the age of 18 he continued his studies at Oxford. Jonathan's elder brother John had his future mapped out for him. He would become manager of the family estate. His other five brothers chose military careers, but Jonathan chose the church. He was ordained in 1676. In 1677 Charles 2nd appointed him as a Royal Chaplain. This was certainly a prestigious position but didn't come with the much-needed salary to support the family estate.

In 1680 Jonathan's elder brother John died leaving Jonathan with the daunting task of administering the will and much debt. John's estate was valued at just over £700 and included a large flock of sheep, cattle, pigs and horses as well as clothing and furniture. He also had part share in a sand barge which would have been used to transport sand for fertilization up the West Looe river from where pack ponies could carry the sand up to the hilly Trelawne fields.

In spite of his esteemed position both in the Royal Court as 3rd Baronet and the Church as a Royal Chaplain Jonathan's financial obligations far exceeded his income and the family home at Trelawne was badly in need of repair. Fortunately for Jonathan he was able to find a beautiful and wealthy wife!

Rebecca was the 14-year-old daughter of Thomas Hele of Bascome in Devon. She was also co-heir of the family estate. The couple married at Eggbuckland Church in Plymouth on March 31, 1684. On November 8, the following year, Bishop was appointed Bishop of Bristol. It was four years after this on June 8, 1688 that Jonathan, along with six other Bishops was arrested and put into the Tower of London for petitioning against the Declaration of Indulgence introduced by King James 2nd. The Declaration granted religious freedoms to Catholics. Trelawny and others recalled the horrors of life in England under Catholic rule during Queen Mary's reign and didn't want a repetition of those harsh and frequently violent times.



As a member of a long line of faithful Royalists, and as a Bishop, it must have been difficult for Jonathan to challenge the King. Seven Bishops sat trial at Westminster Hall, London for opposing the Declaration of Indulgence. They were accused of treason, punishable by death if found guilty. News of Bishop Trelawny's arrest sent panic waves throughout Cornwall. Thankfully, they were all found not guilty and were released at the end of June that year. There were celebrations of all kinds throughout England. In Looe the two town canons were fired with great solemnity. Later that evening a grand party began in typical Cornish style. Food was a plenty and the beer flowed freely!

Life seemed to settle after this significant event for the Bishop and his wife, Rebecca. They already had two daughters. Between 1691 – 1694 three sons were born at Trelawne followed by another daughter. Another son, Edward was born in 1699. Edward later became Governor of Jamaica. Poor Rebecca continued to have children until three years before her death in 1707. She was age 40. Sadly, two of the later babies were born dead, or died shortly after birth. The last child, another son became Rector of South Hill and Lanreath, the village next to Pelynt.

At age 60 Bishop Trelawny was left with a large young family to raise and an equally large home to maintain alone, as well as his duties to the Church and Royal Court. He and Rebecca had spent time and money trying to improve Trelawne Manor and bring back some of its former glory. On July 19, 1721 Jonathan Trelawny, Bishop of Winchester died at his London home in Chelsea at

71 years. It took the family two weeks to organize the removal of his body from London to Cornwall. On Thursday, August 3rd the coffin was brought with great funeral pomp and state through the streets of Chelsea to Salisbury, to Honiton and Exeter and finally crossing the Tamar to come home to Cornwall.

The last stage of the journey was well attended by the Cornish folk who dearly loved their Baronet & Bishop. The streets of Looe were lined with silent people paying their last respects as the coffin was slowly carried down the steep hill, over the bridge and up to the equally steep hill towards Trelawne. The Bishop was buried in Pelynt Church. His body was laid to rest in a vault beneath the Trelawny Aisle inside the church. Here also is his Bishop's Crook and his coffin plate.

You may be wondering what has happened to the Trelawny family Cornish home. Like so many grand properties, the upkeep made it nearly impossible to maintain and the family sold the Manor House and some of the grounds in 1920. It has since been turned into a holiday camp for camper vans, caravans and tents. The main hall, built in 1450 and updated in 1690 by the Bishop, housed slot machines until a few years ago. Today it houses billiard tables.



There is still a strong interest in this ancestral home and Cornwall by Trelawny family members. Sir John Trelawny, past President of the London Cornish Association took a keen interest in Cornish affairs. To this day, each year in Pelynt Parish on June 30th. a celebration of the Bishop's Release from the Tower is held and so Pelynt proudly ensures that the Trelawny name is upheld the Trelawny history and our Cornish Heritage is not forgotten.