

Magna Britannia: Volume 3, Cornwall

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CORNWALL - GENERAL HISTORY.

ETYMOLOGY.

RICHARD of Cirencester says that this county took its name from the *Carnabii*; it is more probable on the contrary, that those people took their name from that of the country they inhabited: the truth seems to be that the country was called by its antient inhabitants, *Kernou*, or as the Welch write it, *Kerniw*, or the Horn, from its projecting promontories; that it was latinized to *Carnubia* or *Cornubia*; that when the Saxons gave the name of *Wealas* to the Britons, they distinguished those who had retired into *Kernou* or *Cornubia*, by the name of *Cornwealas*; and their country was thus called Cornuwall or Cornwall: that is, Cornish-Wales. [\(fn. n1\)](#)

Antient Inhabitants, Language, and Government.

From the map of Roman Britain, it appears that the northern part of this county, as far as the river Camel and Padstow haven, was antiently inhabited by a British tribe called the *Cimbri*; the eastern part, as far as Falmouth haven, by the *Danmonii*, and the remainder by the *Carnabii*. Before the coming of the Romans, the *Danmonii* had subdued the two other tribes and usurped their dominions [\(fn. n2\)](#). When the Romans divided Britain into six provinces, Cornwall formed part of *Britannia Prima*; after their departure it became one of the last retreats of the Britons, who seem to have been sometimes under the dominion of the kings of Wales, and sometimes to have been governed by independent sovereigns of their own, either by the names of dukes or kings [\(fn. n3\)](#), till their country was conquered by King Athelstan, and annexed to the crown of England.

By its royal privileges, and the retention of its antient language, Cornwall still continued nevertheless to retain some semblance of a distinct sovereignty. The language, which was a dialect of the antient British, was generally spoken till the reign of Henry VIII., when the introduction of the English liturgy paved the way towards its gradual disuse.

It is said to have been at the desire of the Cornish, that the English service was enjoined in preference to that of their native tongue; whilst in Wales, a contrary system, which has proved the preservation of their language, was adopted [\(fn. n4\)](#). Dr. Moreman, the learned vicar of Menheniot, is said to have been the first in those days (speaking of the kingdom at large), who "taught his parishioners and people to say the Lord's prayer, the belief, and the commandments, in the English tongue, and did teach and catechize them therein [\(fn. n5\)](#)." Mr. Carew, in his survey of Cornwall, published in the year 1602, speaks of the language as then growing fast into disuse. "The principal love and knowledge of this language," says he, "lived in Dr. Kennall the civilian, and with him lyeth buried, for the English speech doth still encroach upon it, and hath driven the same into the uttermost skirts of the shire. Most of the inhabitants can speak no word of Cornish, but very few are ignorant of the English, and yet some so affect their own, as 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, '*Mee a navidra cowza Sawzneck*,' I can speak no Saxonage."

Hals tells us that in the reign of Charles the First, some of the aged people in the neighbourhood of Penryn were quite ignorant of the English language, and that the Rev. Mr. Jackman, vicar of St. Feock, was obliged to administer the sacrament to them in the Cornish. Ray found only one person who could write the language in 1663, but we are told by Mr. Scawen, that not long before the year 1678, a sermon was preached in it by the Rev. Mr. Robinson, rector of Landewednack. In the early part of the last century, as Dr. Borlase informs us, it was still generally spoken by the fishermen and market-women in the extreme southern part of the peninsula; in his Natural History, published in 1758, he speaks of the language as having altogether ceased, so as not to be spoken anywhere in conversation. Some aged people however retained it rather later; Mr. Daines Barrington gives an account of an old fish-woman of Mousehole, the only person he could find or hear of who spoke the Cornish language, when he made the tour of Cornwall in 1768, as related in a communication to the Society of Antiquaries. In 1776, in a further communication on the same subject to the society, it is stated on the authority of a fisherman of Mousehole, that there were then four or five persons besides himself who could converse in Cornish.

Dr. Pryce of Redruth, in his preface to his *Archæologia Cornu-Britannica*, published in 1790, speaks of a very old man then living at Mousehole, as the only person, to the best of his knowledge, who was capable of holding half an hour's conversation on common subjects in the Cornish tongue. He afterwards says that there were a few other ancient persons who pretended to jabber it, but that they were very illiterate, and their speech very much corrupted, although their pronunciation was generally correct. Mr. Whitaker, in his tour to the Lands-End, in 1799, heard of two persons who even then spoke it, but he had not an opportunity of ascertaining the fact. We find, upon inquiry, that there is no person now who can converse in the language, though some old people are acquainted with many words of it, which they have learned from those of the last generation.

A few MSS. are extant in the Cornish language, the most remarkable of which are some interludes [\(fn. n6\)](#), partly written in the fifteenth century, and a poem called Mount Calvary, all of which were translated by Mr. J. Keigwin. Mr. Edward Lloyd, who made a journey into Cornwall to collect materials for that purpose, in 1700, published a Cornish grammar, in 1707. Dr. Borlase gives some Cornish proverbs in his *Natural History*; and at the end of his *Antiquities of Cornwall* has printed a Cornish Vocabulary. Dr. Pryce of Redruth, in 1790, published *Archæologia Cornu-Britannica*, or an attempt to preserve the ancient Cornish language, comprising a Cornish grammar, a copious vocabulary, lists of Cornish names of places with their etymology, the Lord's prayer, creed, and commandments in Cornish, colloquies, a Cornish song, &c. &c.

It seems most probable, that the Dukes and Earls of Cornwall continued to possess that shadow of sovereignty which they were allowed to retain immediately after the conquest of the county by Athelstan. Carew speaks of it as an entire state by the name of a kingdom, principality, duchy or earldom. We are told that the Earls of Cornwall were always privileged with "royal jurisdiction and crown rights, giving of liberty to send burgesses to parliament, and appointing a sheriff, admiral, and other officers [\(fn. n7\)](#)" before the creation of the duchy, which took place in the year 1337, when Edward the Black Prince was created Duke of Cornwall, and the duchy settled by act of parliament on the eldest son of the King of England. Large revenues were annexed to the duchy [\(fn. n8\)](#), and the immediate government of the county vested in the Duke, who has his Chancellor, Attorney, and Solicitor-general, and other officers, his court of Exchequer, with the appointment of sheriffs, &c. &c.

The important concerns of the mining trade (which will be spoken of more at large hereafter) are under a separate jurisdiction, at the head of which is the Lord Warden of the Stannaries [\(fn. n9\)](#) and under him the Vice-Warden, the final appeal being to the Duke and his council. The ancient privilege of the miners to be exempt from all other jurisdiction than that of the Stannary courts, (except in such cases as should affect land, life, or limb,) was confirmed by King Edward III. [\(fn. n10\)](#) The Vice-Warden's court, held generally once a month, is a court of Equity for all matters relating to the tin mines and trade, from which no writ of error lies to the courts at Westminster, but there is an appeal to the Lord Warden, and from him to the Duke and his council, or, during a vacancy of the duchy, to the King and his council. Issues are frequently directed by the Vice-Warden to be tried in the Stannary courts which are held at the end of every three weeks (except in the Stannary of Foy More in which there is scarcely any business for the court), before the steward of each Stannary, and a jury for trying all civil actions arising within the Stannaries in which either the plaintiff or defendant is a privileged tinner. Appeals may be made from this court to the Vice-Warden, and from him as in the other cases. [\(fn. n11\)](#)

King Henry VII., when he confirmed their ancient privileges, granted, that no new laws affecting the miners should be enacted by the Duke and his council without the consent of twenty-four persons called Stannators, chosen six out of each of the four Stannaries or mining districts [\(fn. n12\)](#). The meeting of these Stannators, who are some of the principal gentlemen of property in the mining districts, is called a Stannary parliament, and, on their assembling, they choose a speaker. These parliaments have been convened occasionally by the Lord Warden, as the circumstances of the times have called for new laws, or a revision of the old. The last Stannary parliament was held at Truro in 1752, and continued, by adjournments, to the 11th September 1753.

The Stannary laws of Cornwall were published in an octavo volume in the reign of Queen Anne, and again in folio with the laws and customs of the Stannaries of Devon, by Thomas Pearce, in 1725 and 1750. The Stannary prison is at Lostwithiel: at the same town were kept the ancient records of the Stannaries which were burnt in the civil war.

The assizes for the county were invariably held at Launceston from an early period, till the time of Richard, King of the Romans, who, having built a palace at Lostwithiel, transferred the assizes thither; but on a petition from the men of Launceston, he consented, on the payment of a fine, that they should be held as had been accustomed; and it so continued (except during the ravages of the plague, when the assizes were held at Saltash), till the reign

of George I. In the year 1715, an act of parliament was passed, by which it was enacted, that after the 20th of May 1716, the assizes should not be confined to the town of Launceston. In consequence of this act, they were held alternately at Launceston and Bodmin, till the year 1727, after which they were held solely at Launceston as before, till the summer assizes in the year 1738, when the alternate arrangement, which has ever since continued, was again adopted ([fn. n13](#)); the spring assizes being held at Launceston, the summer at Bodmin.

The quarter sessions were formerly held at Bodmin and Truro, the sessions beginning always at Bodmin on the Tuesday, and being adjourned to Truro on the Friday. About the year 1580, as we find from Carew's survey, this arrangement was altered, and the whole sessions held at each place alternately; but this having been found liable to inconveniences, before the publication of his work (1602), it had been arranged, that the sessions should, "interchangeably, one quarter begin at Bodmin and end at Truro, and the next begin at Truro and end at Bodmin." The Michaelmas sessions are now held wholly at Bodmin, the Easter sessions at Truro, and the Epiphany and Mid-summer sessions at Lostwithiel. This arrangement has subsisted many years.

The county-gaol was formerly at Launceston, being the old prison within the precincts of the castle. It is described by Dr. Borlase ([fn. n14](#)) as a narrow wretched place for human creatures to be confined in, all supposed innocent till convicted; but here, he says, the "innocent and the guilty must be contented to remain till their fate is determined, or a better one is built." This has since been happily accomplished, a commodious and well-arranged county gaol, upon Mr. Howard's system, from a plan of the late Sir John Call, having been erected at Bodmin, under the powers of an act passed in 1778. It was completed in 1780.

Footnotes

- [n1](#). See Dr. Borlase's Antiquities, p. 325, and Whitaker's Cathedral of Cornwall, I. 14, 15.
- [n2](#). See Whitaker's History of Manchester, 1. 94.
- [n3](#). Polwhele's Cornwall, Vol. II. p. 11. in the notes.
- [n4](#). Treatise on the Cornish language, by W. Scawen Esq.
- [n5](#). See Hooker's Synopsis of Devon.
- [n6](#). There are two MSS. of these interludes in the Bodleian library; one on parchment, written in the fifteenth century, the other on paper, written by W. Jordan, in 1611.
- [n7](#). Carew, fo. 79. — With respect to the appointment of sheriff, it appears that when the men of Cornwall gave King John the large sum of 2,000 marks, besides 200 marks in lieu of ten palfreys. to have their county disforested, to be exempt from the forest laws, and other privileges; one of these privileges was, that they should have a sheriff from among their own countrymen; that they should present certain of the best men of the county to the King, who should nominate one of them; that if he should misbehave, he would be removed by the King, and another appointed in his room, but that it should be one of their own countrymen, if one should be found fit for the office, otherwise the King should appoint a sheriff from another county, but one who was not ill-affected towards the men of Cornwall, and would be likely to use them well. Madox's History of the Exchequer, p. 279. The sheriff was to be resident. It appears that the 200 marks was a peaceoffering to appease the King's displeasure conceived against the men of Cornwall. See p. 283.
- [n8](#). The original revenues of the duchy of Cornwall, as granted by the charter of Edward III., consisted of the castle, borough, manor and honor of Launceston, with the park, &c. the castle, manor, and park of Trematon, with the town of Saltash; the castle, borough, and manor of Tintagel; the castle, manor, and park of Restormel; the manor of Climesland, with the park of Keribullock; Tybesta, with the bailiwick of Powdershire; Tewington, with its appurtenances; Helston in Kerrier, with its appurtenances; Moresk, with its appurtenances; Tywarnail, with its appurtenances; Penkneth, with its appurtenances; Penlyn, with the park, &c.; Rillaton, with the beadleship of East Wyvelshire; Helston in Trigshire, with the park of Hellesbury, &c.; Liskeard, with the park, &c.; Calstock, with the fishery, &c.; Talskedy, with the appurtenances; the town of Lostwithiel, with the mills, &c.; the profit of ports, with wrecks, &c.; profits of the hundreds and courts; the coinage of tin, and all the Stannary profits, besides certain manors and boroughs in Devonshire. The whole revenue of the duchy, as computed on an average of three years, after the death of the Black Prince, the latter end of his father's reign, amounted to 2,493l. 7s. 3¼d. per annum. Of this, 2,219l. 7s. 9¼d. arose from the Cornish estates, including 1,016l. 1s. 4d. per annum, which was then the profit of the Stannaries. (See the particulars printed from the original at the Tower, at the end of Lord De Dunstanville's edition of Carew's Survey.) Of the above-mentioned antient manors, Tybesta, Helston in Kerrier, Moresk, Tewington, Tywarnail and Calstock, have been sold within the last fourteen years under the powers of the landtax redemption act. In the reign of Henry VIII. the honour of Wallingford was annexed to the duchy, but the King wishing to resume it, settled on the duchy in lieu thereof, the manors of West Anthony, Crofthole, Landreyne, Portloo, and Port-Pigham; Northill, Trelowia, Tregameere, Trelugan, Treverbyn-ourtney, Landulph, Leigh-Durant and

Tinten, which had been forfeited by the Marquis of Exeter; the manors of Austell, Fentrigan, Trevenen, Gridiow, Porthea-Prior, and the manor and borough of Fowey with the fishery there, all which had belonged to the priory of Tywardreth; and the manors of Carnedon-Prior, Climsland-Prior, Treworgye, Stratton Sanctuary, Eastway, Boyton, Bucklawren and Bonyalva, and the barton of Bradridge, with the advowsons of Trenglos, Warbstow, Stratton and Davidstow, all of which had belonged to the priory of Launceston. The manors of West-Anthony, Crosthole, Landreyne, Austell and Fowey, have been sold under the powers of the act of the redemption of the land-tax. The clear revenues of the duchy, in the fifteenth year of King Henry VIII., amounted to 10,095l. 11s. 9¼d., of which the issues of manors and boroughs amounted to 624l. 17s. 2¼d., the profits of the coinage of tin in Cornwall and Devon, to 2,771l. 3s. 9¼d.; other profits connected with Cornwall, 204l. 0s. 5d. It appears, that in the 44th year of Queen Elizabeth (1602.), the revenues of the duchy were much diminished, the sum total of the clear revenues being then returned at 4,569l. 12s. 2¼d.; of this, 3,713l. 18s. arose from the county of Cornwall; and of this last mentioned sum the profits of the tin were 2,623l. 9s. 8d.; the profits of manors, 846l. 15s. 7½d.; of boroughs, 93l. 15s. 4½d.; of hundreds, 55l. 3s. 8d.; profits of offices, 74l. 13s. 1½d. (Sir John Dodridge's ancient and modern Account of the Duchy of Cornwall, &c.) The present gross amount of the revenues of the duchy of Cornwall, is 22,000l.; of which, 8,500l. arises from the tin-duty in the county of Cornwall, and 3,500l. from rents of manors, fines, &c. in the same county. The tin-duty, before the war, had been nearly 14,000l. per annum. The tenants of the duchy manors are either free tenants, or conventional or customary tenants (*liberi convencionarii*); the former hold their lands as freehold of inheritance, subject only to a chief, or as it is called in Cornwall, a *high* rent to the lord. The conventional tenants hold from seven years to seven years, under a small, reserved rent, and suit and service to the courts, and payment of a heriot. The custom of the manor as to descent is, that the widow has an estate for life, and in case of no male heir, the eldest daughter inherits. In former times there were also bond conventional tenants (*nativi convencionarii*), the other being called free conventional tenants; these bond tenants' estates were subject, on the death of the holders, to the payment of all their chattels to the lord: there were tenants also termed bond in blood (*nativi de slipite*), who held upon like terms, but could not put their sons to school, or marry their daughters, without the lord's consent, and the youngest son inherited the estate. (Extent of the duchy of Cornwall, 11 Ed. III., in the King's remembrancer's office, Exchequer.)

- **n9.** The following is nearly a complete list of the Lord Wardens with their Vice-Wardens, from the reign of Edward VI., chiefly made out by Dr. Borlase:

Lord Wardens.	Vice-Wardens.
Temp. Edw. VI.—Edward Duke of Somerset	Sir Thomas Smith.
1553.—John Earl of Bedford	Sir William Godolphin.
1554.—Edward Lord Hastings of Loughborough	
About 1560.—Francis Earl of Bedford	
1584—1603.—Sir Walter Raleigh	Wm. Carnsew, Esq.
	Sir Francis Godolphin.
	Sir Richard Grenville.
1603—1629.—William Earl of Pembroke	Wm. Coryton, Esq.
1630.—Philip Earl of Pembroke and Montgomery	Wm. Coryton, Esq.
	John Trefusis, Esq.
1660.—Sir John Grenville (afterwards Earl of Bath)	Sir Richard Prideaux.
	Wm. Scawen, Esq.
	Sir John Trelawney, Bart.
	Sir Joseph Tredenham.
	J. Waddon, Esq.

1701.—Charles Earl of Radnor	Hugh Tonkin, Esq.
1702.—Jo. Granville, Esq. (afterwards Lord Granville)	Sir Richard Vyvyan, Bart.
1705.—Francis Lord Rialton (after-Earl of Godolphin)	
1708.—Hugh Boscawen, Esq. (afterwards Visc. Falmouth)	Walter Moyle, Esq.
	John Gregor, Esq.
	Tho. Hearle, Esq.
1734.—Col. John Schutz	Tho. Hearle, Esq.
	John Hearle.
1742.—Thomas Pitt, Esq. of Boconnoc	John Hearle, Esq.
	Christopher Hawkins, Esq.
	Francis Gregor, Esq.
1751.—James Earl of Waldegrave	John Hearle, Esq.
1761.—	Rev. Walter Borlase, LL.D.
1763.—Humphrey Morice, Esq.	Rev. Walter Borlase, LL.D.
1776.	Henry Rosewarne, Esq.
1783.	John Thomas, Esq.
1783.—George Visc. Lewisham	John Thomas, Esq.
1798.—Sir John Morshead, Bart.	
1800.—Rear-Admiral John Willet Payne, Esq.	
1803.—Tho. Tyrwhitt, Esq. (now Sir Tho. Tyrwhitt, Knt.)	
1812.—Francis Cha. Seymour, Earl of Yarmouth	

- **n10.** Carew says that the first charter of privileges was obtained by the lords of the tithings in Blackmore, of Edmund Earl of Cornwall; that the Stannary courts, and the power of holding parliaments (though it does not appear to have been exercised), were granted by this charter, which was to be kept in one of the church steeples, but was not extant in his time. This he states on the authority of Mr. Wm Carnsew (vice-warden), who had seen the charter; by which it is said, that the tax of a halfpenny to the Earl for every pound of tin was first fixed, and the coinage of it appointed. Mr. Tonkin, on the authority of a book which he quotes, called "The Bailiff of Blackmore," says that this charter was obtained of King Edward I. in 1305; that it was kept in the tower of Luxulian church, whence, for greater security during the civil war, it was removed to Lostwithiel, and there destroyed with other Stannary records, by the Earl of Essex's army, in 1644. (See Lord de Dunstanville's edition of Carew's Survey.)
- **n11.** From the information of John Thomas, Esq. vice-warden of the Stannaries.
- **n12.** Namely, Foy More, Blackmore, Tywarnhaile, and Penwith and Kerrier. The Stannators for Foy More are chosen by the may or and corporation of Lostwithiel; those for Tywarnhaile by the mayor and corporation of Truro; and those for Penwith and Kerrier by the mayor and corporation of Helston.
- **n13.** Judgment Roll in the King's Bench.
- **n14.** In his MS. addition to Carew's Survey, in the possession of Sir John St. Aubyn, Bart.