

'Tireless' Howard's story will be heard

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The extraordinary life story of the man behind the revival of a host of Cornish traditions such as St Piran's Day is told in a new book published this week.

Howard Curnow, described as 'Cornwall's finest ambassador to the world', died in June, aged 84, but not before completing his fascinating autobiography, *Cornwall My Country*, which tells of his countless exploits, including re-establishing contact with Cornish communities around the world, all in the pursuit of promoting Cornish history and culture.

Howard was behind the revival of Cornwall's St Piran's Day celebrations and responsible for the recent resurgence of interest in Cornish history and culture.

He helped establish Cornish associations and societies throughout the USA, Canada, Australia, Cuba and elsewhere and served for 12 years as chairman of Cornwall Wildlife Trust.

He was also the Hal-an-Tow Crier at Helston's Flora Day for 41 years; persuaded County Hall (Lys Kernow) to fly the Cornish flag outside its offices in Truro; organised and hosted a Grand Curnow Homecoming in 1990 at the family farm for 350 Curnows from all over the world; and planned and led a march to London in 1997 to commemorate the 500th anniversary of An Gof's 1497 Cornish protest march.

In 1990, he accepted an invitation to become a bard of the Cornish Gorsedh, while one of his proudest moments came

in 2009, when he took a group of Cornish students, aged ten to 18, to the Climate Change Conference in Copenhagen, where the TV news gave them the accolade of putting on "the best little show in town".

At the time of Howard's death, Bill Curnow, a Florida-based bard, said: "Messages from around the globe are all sharing the thought that a wonderful friend has gone. And it is equally certain that Cornwall has lost her finest ambassador to the world."

Born in 1936, on his father's dairy farm in St Hilary, near Marazion, Howard was the third of seven children.

He attended Humphry Davy School in Penzance, leaving at 15 for a short-lived spell in the Navy before being enrolled on a four-year engineering course with GEC in Birmingham. Here, while staying at Castle Bromwich, he unearthed some long-lost gardens which today are open to the public.

National service followed, and he found himself at NATO headquarters in Paris, where, at a dinner hosted by a Breton duchess for 16 guests, all from different countries, he was unexpectedly asked to give a talk on Cornwall.

A keen sailor, performer with the St Erth Players, and member of the Young Farmers for many years, he eventually found his way into teaching, culminating in a spell at Helston Grammar, where, as careers teacher, he initiated previously unheard-of work experience trips for senior pupils, who, at one point included the well-known broadcaster Petroc Trelawney.

In 1966, he married Trewey



Davy, with whom he had three children – Jennifer, Jeremy and Nicholas.

Unable to see eye to eye with the education system and flushed with success of his GCH '90 project, he took time off in the 1990s to travel the world, with the aim of bringing far-flung Cornish communities back into the fold.

At home he threw himself wholeheartedly into the cause of Kernow, reviving old tradi-

tions and celebrating the Cornish heritage. Apart from his Helston town crier and CWT duties, singing with Marazion Apollo Choir, the Cape Cornwall Singers and Thraw'd Together, he still had time to build his own house on a corner of the family farm.

Howard spent the last few years of his life very happily in St Hilary with his second wife Elizabeth, whom he married in 2013.

Although diagnosed with

cancer in 2015, true to character, he shrugged off the implications and warnings, but, despite temporarily successful treatment, the illness returned towards the end of last year and he eventually succumbed, aged 84, on Tuesday, June 8.

Friends and observers reckon it is probably true to say that Howard Curnow did as much as anyone to revive interest in Cornwall, not just among the Cornish in Corn-

wall but among its descendants worldwide and its many visitors. He will be much missed across the globe as a result.

Sadly, Howard lost his final battle on the eve of publication of his autobiography, *Cornwall My Country*, a story which takes readers on a journey from his childhood on the farm during and after the war, his education, career and travel, all of which contributed to his indefatigable passion for his homeland.

Following Howard's death, Nick Tregenza, President of the Cornwall Wildlife Trust, said: "He was an extraordinary person – an inspiring teacher with an astonishing record of creating and organising events – open air participation dramas, historical reconstructions, celebrations of Cornish life and community, and very enjoyable country fairs in support of the Cornwall Wildlife Trust, which he chaired for 12 years.

"His most remarkable creation was a street theatre event with schoolchildren, and even a Cornish gig rowing through the canals, in Copenhagen, during the global meeting on climate change."

Songwriter Harry Glasson, his neighbour and friend, whose Cornwall, my Home was the inspiration for the title of Howard's book, added: "Howard and I converged on several levels, mostly concerning Cornwall, wildlife and whisky.

"Howard worked tirelessly for Cornwall and all things Cornish in any way he was able. He was a great ideas man and if you said 'that cannot be done, Howard!' he very quickly found a way in which it could be done. The bigger the obstacle the more determined the man.

"His storytelling is legendary. I loved his digressions and soon learned to keep his original story in mind when he found he needed to come back to it.

"I shall certainly miss his company, his wit, his intelligence and his friendship."

The official launch of Cornwall My Country will take place on Thursday, September 9 at Mount's Bay Sailing Club to be attended by Pol Hodge, the new Grand Bard, Nick Tregenza, President of the Cornwall Wildlife Trust, and Harry Glasson, Cornish folk hero and friend and neighbour of Howard's.

A book written by Howard Curnow (above), an ambassador of Cornish heritage and culture, who died earlier this year, will be published this week.

Left, Howard signing a letter to prime minister Gordon Brown, from all the Wildlife Trusts, asking the government to secure a positive and far-reaching climate change agreement in Copenhagen'. He then took a party of Cornish schoolchildren to the Copenhagen conference.

Right, Howard with former MP Andrew George and Cornwall Wildlife Trust marine conservation officer, Abby Crosby, at the Houses of Parliament in 2013, with a petition seeking marine conservation zones

