

# THE GREATER KANSAS CITY CORNISH CONNECTION (SINCE 1994)

A newsletter relating to Cornish history, culture and events of interest to the Cornish of Missouri & Kansas

## A MESSAGE FROM OUR CAHS PRESIDENT—**please read**

Take a minute to think about this—I mean really think about it. Think about your membership in our Cornish chapter, and in the North American CAHS as well.

Does the CAHS fulfill your needs? Do you wonder when it is time to pay the dues? Are you getting the kind of service and involvement you'd like to be getting?

Now, turn the table around on yourself. What kind of member am I? Do I volunteer to assist with the programs? Do I volunteer to be an officer? Do I initiate new projects that will be of value to me and to our organization? Would I get more from the local chapter and CAHS if I gave more time and interest?

During the coming year, your Board is going to be working on new ways to become more involved. Be on the lookout for them, and picture how you might be able to make some specific contribution(s). You won't be sorry!

The local chapter really needs your interest, ideas and participation. Please give it some thought.

## ST. PIRAN'S DAY CELEBRATION Saturday, 8 March 2008



St. Piran's Day in Penzance, 2006

Most everywhere, St. Piran's Day celebrations are getting larger and larger each year! Here's a photo from one a couple of years back in Penzance; and, I place my bet on the yellow-shirted, white-haired adult in the middle being our old friend and family member, Howard Curnow!

This year, the GKCCS will celebrate the occasion with a Pasty Luncheon held at Central Methodist Church, 52<sup>nd</sup> Street and Brookside Boulevard in Kansas City, MO. The gathering will commence at 11:00 AM, serve a Pasty Lunch at 12:00, then be followed with a program pertaining to Celtic Cornwall. This year's St. Piran's Day will be special, and offers a traditional Cornish luncheon followed by a Celtic-Cornwall program to be presented by UMKC Political Science Professor, Dr. Robert Gamer.

Now is the moment to spread the news, and encourage those of Cornish heritage or interest to make their plans and reservations to attend. Don't forget—it takes some time and effort to make Pasties!

Make reservations now while it's on your mind. Contact Cornish Society members below ASAP for reservations. The cost each is \$7.00.

**Contact:** Don Whitman/Marge Roberts at 816-361-1956, or e-mail [donwhitman1@aol.com](mailto:donwhitman1@aol.com) or Nancy Wagner at [snclare@netscape.com](mailto:snclare@netscape.com) for additional information and/or to make reservations for the luncheon. . The charge is for lunch, but admission for the program is free of charge. All are welcome and encouraged to attend.

## 'THA TIMES--THEY ARE A-CHANGIN'

Celtic folk working closer together

Pete Maher, Publisher and Editor of the *Midwest Irish Focus* in Missouri, has written about a positive view among Celtic relationships undergoing a changing trend of late. His editorial on the subject appeared in the January 2008 issue.

From time to time, I have picked up and scanned copies of his Irish newsletter, admired its news and comments, and wished for a sufficient number of Cornish in our community to produce and support more and better communication, such as the Irish distributes. Maher has shed some interesting light on Celtic behavior, which may well contain some lessons for all us with Celtic interest and culture.

Following are excerpts from Editor Maher's January newsletter which seem appropriate for all Celtic folk to consider: "...Yes, I know, this is an Irish newspaper; but we've been including our Scottish cousins in our coverage for some time now, so the appearance of a few extra articles about their gatherings and events shouldn't be so unusual, should it?"

*It wasn't always this way, of course. When we started publishing, we'd approach the Scottish organizations and offer to include them in our coverage in a sort of pan-Celtic offer of fraternity. For the first couple of years just about all we would get would be a chilly reception with a few pointed remarks about our tri-colored logo and a general feeling that we had somehow slighted them by not including them into the name of the publication.*

*But, we took no offense and left the door open to our friends in the various Scottish organizations in the region and simply went about our business of promoting Irish history and culture and, when it intersected, Celtic and Scottish history and culture intersected as well."*

*"...Throughout all this, we kept showing up at Scottish events and making friends and acquaintances in a number of Celtic communities (even the almost-microscopic Welsh community in Kansas City). Everywhere we went we encountered nothing but the grandest, if a bit wary, hospitality from our Celtic hosts. But many still seemed leery of taking part in such an 'Irish' enterprise."*

*"...But, with history aside, don't you think it's time for a little Celtic solidarity? At the heart of the matter for most of us, we are Americans who are proud of our Irish, Scottish, Welsh, Manx, Cornish or Brittany forebears."*

So thanks for the article, Pete, and for including Cornwall on the list of Celtic nations—it will help us all start singing together again! You've made some very good points. Don W

## MAJOR GENEALOGICAL SEMINAR PLANNED FOR CORNISH GATHERING

*The North American Cornish Genealogical Seminar, a major event for those interested in genealogy, will be held at Mineral Point, WI on 26 September 2008.*

*The speakers will be David Holmen from Cornwall with the CFHS data base, David McDonald, a certified genealogist who will be the keynote speaker at Salt Lake City in October 2008, and James Hibbard, archivist at the Wisconsin History Room at the University of Wisconsin, Platteville.*

*This will be held in conjunction with the annual Cornish Gathering at Mineral Point. Start planning to attend now!*

## HELP WANTED!

Have any interest in Cornish/Celtic history and culture, and a little spare time or energy? The GKCCS sure could use some volunteer assistance with a number of things, and would greatly appreciate your interest in discussing them with any of the board members. For instance, help would be most appreciated for such things as the following:

1. Planning programs
2. Hosting meetings
3. Writing articles
4. Presenting programs
5. Recruiting new members
6. Mailing tasks
7. Committee services
8. Telephone reminder calls
9. Update of phone and e-mail lists
10. Recruit new members, et al

The year of 2007 was a period of stress for a number of reasons among our group. It has also called attention to the fact our small organization desperately needs interested parties willing to join in the effort to preserve the local organization and support the North American Cornish Society.

Please re-read the message on page 1 from our CAHS President regarding the status of so many chapters around North America. Working together, we can make a difference in the state of things, and keep the history and culture of our ancestors from being lost forever.

Enhance your self-interest and that of a friend or two by inviting them to attend the upcoming St. Piran's Day Pasty Luncheon on Saturday, March 8<sup>th</sup>. Read more about it in this issue of the GKCCS newsletter.

# St. Piran's Day

## Pasty Luncheon and Program

LUNCHEON: Traditional Cornish Pasties, Coleslaw, Desserts--including Saffron Buns

11:00 AM, Saturday, 8 March 2008  
Central Methodist Church, 52<sup>nd</sup> & Brookside Blvd,  
Kansas City, Missouri

PROGRAM: Our speaker for the occasion will be Dr. Robert Gamer, a Professor of Political Science at the University of Missouri-KC. Dr. Gamer is very fond of the Celtic world and especially Cornwall. He has made a number of visits there, and is particularly familiar with Cornwall and Brittany. So, look forward to a fine and entertaining event, along with a traditional Cornish Pasty Luncheon!



### Pasties Bakin' in the Oven

Reservations are required: In order to set up and plan for sufficient food, tables, etc., we must know in advance how many to expect! Advance payment is preferred and recommended, but pay-at-the door will be accepted as the supply of Pasties is available. Please consider reservations necessary! The charge for each Pasty lunch is \$7.00. (Note: Extra frozen Pasties may be ordered in advance to take home at \$5.00 each. They will be baked and frozen, so you'll only need to thaw, heat and serve them. Place order for extras when making reservations for the luncheon.)

Please telephone (816-361-1956) or e-mail (donwhitman1@aol.com) Don Whitman or Marge Roberts with your reservations NOT LATER THAN FEBRUARY 20th. The extra lead time is needed to ensure the Pasty supply! Or, mail your reservation and check (payable to the Greater Kansas City Cornish Society) in time to reach us by that date. Send to: 24 East 68<sup>th</sup> Street, Kansas City, MO 64113.

Finally, how about bringing some guests for introduction to Cornish food and awareness? This is a perfect time to introduce folks to our organization, and to Cornish and Celtic history and culture.

Help get 2008 off to a great start!

*(This article, written by Bill Curnow of Punta Gorda, FL, and published in the November 2007 issue of the **Cornish Courier**, newsletter of the Cornish Cousins of the Southeast, follows. This may be evidence of little known early North American historical connection to the Cornish.*

*My personal interest is enhanced by knowing that my own (non-Cornish side) of family history goes back to Dorset and Devon in the early 1600's when my ancestors first immigrated to the Plymouth Colony, and shortly thereafter to the Charlestown and Boston areas. Their immigration was not too long after that of J. R., Bill Curnow's subject. DW)*

## **"Who Shot J.R.?" The Cornish at Jamestown Bill Curnow, Punta Gorda, FL**

The Commonwealth of Virginia celebrated its 400<sup>th</sup> anniversary in 2007. The event that launched its history was the settlement in Jamestown in 1607, all of 13 years before the more famous Pilgrim landing at Plymouth Rock.

The Jamestown colony ultimately failed, and schoolchildren hear very little about it when they study American history. But the history of Jamestown may be one of fascinating intrigue and violence, and the Cornish may very well be an integral part of the story. At the onset let me quick to say that this article is inherently speculative, although speculation is based on theories linked to historical fact. It is inspired largely by an installment called "Death at Jamestown" in the PBS "Secrets of the Dead" series.

It was long believed that any remnants of the Jamestown settlement had been swallowed up by the adjacent James River. Early archeological probing had found nothing. However, one archeologist, William Kelso, believed that it was simply a matter of his predecessors having failed to use their shovels in the right place. He poked his shovel into the right place and soon discovered the remains of a triangular shaped fort built soon after arrival of the colonists, a mixed bag of gentry and ordinary laborers all motivated by visions of getting rich on the gold they believed would surely be found in North America.

The scientific team led by William Kelso found a burial within the fort. The cause of death was quickly evident—a musket ball lodged in the shinbone. The archeologists began referring to the skeleton as J.R., and the obvious question was, "Who shot J.R.?" Forensic analysis revealed that the bones were of a young man, age 20 or so. The fact that he was buried in a coffin inside the fort, not in shroud out in the woods, suggested that he was a member of the gentry. And it was the results of the analysis of the chemical and isotopic

composition of his dental enamel that riveted me to the edge of my chair—the young man had very probably grown up in Cornwall!

The Jamestown colony failed. People began dying of horrible symptoms not long after the ship that brought them to Virginia had sailed out of sight. Most accounts of the colony say that the settlers starved, but starvation seems improbable along the banks of a tidal river filled with fish, crabs, oysters, and other marine life. Others have speculated that the settlers died from drinking river water polluted with their own waste, but that explanation seems less than satisfactory when most Londoners were surviving in spite of drinking water out of the grossly contaminated River Thames. A third explanation has emerged from analysis by Dr. Frank Hancock (Research Director, Laboratory Corporation of America) of two journals written by Jamestown colonists and the adjectives and words they used to describe the dreadful symptoms exhibited by dying colonists. Dr. Hancock believes the deaths resulted from arsenic poisoning!

The archeologists have found another bit of tantalizing evidence. Artifacts have been recovered that reflect Catholic motifs, suggesting that at least a few of the colonists adhered to the Catholic faith. Yet Catholicism had become a forbidden faith in 1533 when King Henry VIII broke with Rome by divorcing Catherine of Aragon in order to marry Ann Boleyn. Subsequent establishment of the Church of England and publication of the new order of worship did not set at all well with some members of the kingdom, notably the Cornish who were very much at the core of the Prayer Book Rebellion of 1549. The Rebellion, a violent reaction to forced conversion to Protestantism, was ruthlessly crushed by London, and at least one tenth of the men of Cornwall were murdered in the violent pogrom that ensued. But stubbornness is a familiar Cornish trait, and adherence to the old faith remained a strong undercurrent in Cornish life, particularly in Western Cornwall where English ways remained less dominant.

Arsenic, Catholicism, and Cornishmen—the Jamestown story is becoming very fascinating indeed. How might it all tie together? And why?

Let's deal first with arsenic. Nobody in Great Britain knew more about arsenic than did the Cornish. Tin and arsenic are sister elements that have similar chemistry, and it is no surprise that the two are often found together in minerals. Arsenic was a valuable byproduct of tin refining, a relatively volatile element that was recovered from the flue gas emitted during purification of tin. It had a few legitimate uses including rat poison and felt making, and it certainly had illegitimate uses as well.

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Catholicism brings a political dimension into the story. Why might a few people adhering to the forbidden faith wish to be part of the Jamestown colony? The underground Catholic movement in England and Cornwall received support from the European continent, both from France and more importantly from Spain. Evidence suggests that a number of prominent Cornish gentry families, notably the Arundell family, maintained a strong Catholic conviction, had quiet links to Catholic Europe, and were familiar with the use of arsenic as a poison.

It is perhaps a telling bit of evidence that the only contemporary map of the Jamestown colony, including the distinctive outline of the triangular fort now confirmed by the archeologists, is found in the archives of Spain. Why would Jamestown have been of interest to Spain? What agenda might the Spanish have had with respect to England's attempt to establish a colony on the James River in tidewater Virginia? It must be remembered that the Spanish already had their colonial feet firmly planted in Florida, and they were claiming but not asserting a right to all the land north of the Florida peninsula. Jamestown was, in Spain's eyes, a direct challenge to what they were attempting to accomplish in North America.

So we end with an unsolved mystery and intriguing questions. Did Spain encourage Catholic loyalists in Great Britain to infiltrate the company of settlers and sabotage English efforts to establish a North American beachhead? Is it plausible that any such Catholic saboteurs used arsenic to attack the colony? And is it possible that a young Cornish lad, known to the archeologists as J.R., was shot in the struggle between those attempting to build Jamestown and those attempting to undermine it?

## HISTORY OF CORNWALL... A BROAD AND SIMPLE SWEEP

(We must keep reminding ourselves)

In the beginning...authorities seem to think the Celtic people, who later became known as the ancient Britons, migrated north and west from Central Europe and populated the British Isles many centuries before the time of Christ. Long after they were established throughout the Isles, successive waves of invaders—Vikings, Romans, Angles, Jutes, the Saxons and the Normans—invaded Britain over a period of 1100 years, 44 BC to 1065 AD.

In time, the invaders drove the local Celtic population (those they didn't slaughter) into the far reaches of the Isles. There, in the less fertile, less hospitable regions where rivers, mountains, seas and sometimes great distances helped to protect them, the Celts reestablished themselves in what is known today as the Celtic nations: Scotland, Ireland, Isle of Man, Wales and Cornwall. Another group established themselves across the English Channel in part of coastal France known as Brittany.

That the southwest peninsula of Britain, first known as *Kernow* (which, in the ancient Celtic/Cornish meant 'land of the Kerns) and later Anglicized to *Cornwall*, sheltered many ancient Brits cannot be denied. Although Exeter was the furthest west the Romans built a fortification, it is known they were aware of the Land's End peninsula. The NOTI NOTI stone standing in the St. Hilary churchyard near Penzance is thought to be commemorating the son of an important Roman personage.

One must keep in perspective that, during the time Romans invaded the British Isles, tin mining and smelting had been going on in Cornwall for 1,000 years. There was a popular Cornish legend concerning the time *Christ came to Cornwall*. According to the legend, it occurred during his alleged apprenticeship to Joseph's brother, a merchant of tin and other goods throughout the Mediterranean in that time. Celts tend to believe there is an element of truth in every legend.

The facts are, however, that Cornwall has never been conquered, either by force or by treaty. In 928 AD, Athelstan, the Saxon king, declared the border between Cornwall and England to forever be the east bank of the River Tamar. The present situation in Cornwall, which has developed over the past 1,000 years, is one where there is rule imposed by a dominating power, despite representations made in 1497 by Michael An Gof and Thomas Flamank.

Events shape circumstances, and it is only speculative to say what might have happened without the decline in the tin and (continued next page)



Life's essential materials!

Shown above is a youngster using a pasty for teething, and on the right is bottle of brew from Redruth Brewery. (Mineral Point, WI Museum)

copper industries in Cornwall during the 19<sup>th</sup> century, or what might have been the fate of the Cornish without the simultaneous discoveries of those minerals—and gold—in other parts of the world. The result was that a quarter-million Cornish left their homeland taking their uncanny skills for 'hard rock mining' wherever there were jobs—mostly in North America, Australia and South Africa. One mid-1800's recruiting poster in Cornwall advertised, "500 Cornish miners needed at once in the Keweenaw peninsula of Michigan."

With the depletion of mineral deposits in Cornwall coinciding with the discovery of new ones elsewhere—spurred by the demands of the growing industrial revolution—Cornish miners were in demand for their unique know-how for recognizing the nature of lode-bearing rocks. They also possessed the knowledge for manufacturing the appropriate tools; using those tools in conjunction with explosives; and for crushing the rock and producing the metal. Wherever the Cornish turned up, they knew what to do without having to start from scratch.

By the tens of thousands, the Cornish emigrated. Not merely the miners, but tradesmen and laborers with supportive skills as well: Smelter operators, carpenters, stonemasons, farmers, and others who knew, or could learn to perform, laboring jobs of any kind.

Few other countries so relatively insignificant in size and population can claim as much significance in the amount of opening up the modern world. Its people were literally in the forefront of the industrial revolution. On the other hand, while forging the white-hot edge of technology of the era, Cornwall sacrificed years of accumulated knowledge and wisdom together with the flower of its youth, in the mass exodus to find a living overseas.

And today, the tiny little Celtic country in the far southwest of Britain finds itself at yet another crossroads—perhaps a major intersection! Keeping the traditions and culture alive, as more and more non-Cornish residents make up the population, is threatened. They have little interest in maintaining the heritage—they come for the quaint little villages, temperate climate, outstanding views, and oceanfront vacation spots.

Cornwall is not in open conflict with the English, but it is undeniable that the English have done much to obscure the Cornish identity over the centuries. That may be seen in *English Nature*, the body with control over the countryside, and with *English Heritage*, the organization set up to care for and oversee the ancient Cornish monuments and artifacts—many of which predate any concept of the word English by a few thousand years. Is it any

wonder that identifying signs omitting the word 'Cornish,' yet crediting 'English Heritage,' are viewed with disdain by Cornish residents?

(Prepared by Donald Whitman, with liberal use of information and terminology borrowed from writings and conversations from/with Howard Curnow, a Bard of the Cornish Gorseth, Penzance, Cornwall, and others.)

## Celtic Countries High on the List of promoting 'Green'—Especially Ireland.

Walk through the parking lot of Ireland's largest supermarkets, and you'll be amazed at the evidence of their 'post-plastic bag' era. In 2002, Ireland passed a tax on plastic bags, requiring all customers who want them to pay 33-cents tax per bag at the cash register.

Within weeks, plastic bag use dropped 94-percent. Within a year, nearly everyone was using reusable cloth bags—keeping them in offices and in their vehicles. Plastic bags were not outlawed, but carrying them became socially unacceptable—on a par with wearing a fur coat or not cleaning up after one's dog. One person was quoted as saying, '...when my roommate brings one into the flat it annoys the hell out of me.'

Countries around the world are drowning in a sea of plastic bags, and success in controlling the issue has limited success most everywhere else. Recent measurements show that almost 42-billion plastic bags were used in a month, worldwide. That figure increases by half a million bags every minute. A vast majority is not reused, ending up as waste in landfills or as litter. Since most are not biodegradable, they will remain as litter and waste.

In the last few months, several countries have sought plans to eliminate plastic bags, but efforts have often failed because of heated opposition from manufacturers as well as merchants who argue that it will be bad for business. In Los Angeles and San Francisco, proposed taxes failed to gain political approval, though San Francisco did pass a ban last year.

There are no plastic bag makers in Ireland (most there came from China), and a forceful environment minister gave reluctant shopkeepers little wiggle room, making it illegal for them to pay for the bags on behalf of customers. The government collects the tax, which finances the environmental enforcement and cleanup programs.

While the trend remains popular throughout the Celtic lands, Ireland has gone a long way in establishing world standards and enforcing the idea of reducing the waste. Congratulations, Ireland! We admire your courage and leadership in this effort.

