

Grand Bard's Speech at Torpoint Gorsedh 2014

We are very happy to be here today in Torpoint for our Gorsedh. As Grand Bard, I welcome the Mayor of Torpoint, Councillor Mike Pearn and his wife. We are very honoured to be here today and thank you for allowing us to gather here on the Lawns of the old Thanckes House, the mansion of 3rd Baron Graves. The Graves family mansion dated back to the reign of Richard III. Torpoint has worked very hard for many years to support our needs, with kindness and cheerfulness. Thank you very much for welcoming us so warmly. Also I welcome our other guests and our delegates from Brittany and Wales. We are very happy to have you with us.

I would also like to welcome back to the Circle our bard Rosen Wyn Evrok, White Rose of York, Marjorie Trevanion. At the age of 102, this is a magnificent effort and I am sure you are the oldest person ever to be in the circle and thus a record. Long may you come to the Gorsedh. Health and happiness to you. Can we please give Rosen Wyn Evrok a round of applause?

When one looks at the history of Torpoint one of its notable residents was Dr. John Langdon Down who isolated the gene defect, which became known as Down's Syndrome. But the most noticeable things in Torpoint are the ferries and the mighty Tamar. As a natural place of passage, ferries must have been in operation for centuries and indeed old prints show craft crossing back and forth to Dock (the original name of the Dockyard). The first steam ferry running on chains came in 1834, designed by James Meadows Rendell. Today the river is crossed here by three chain ferries which carry vehicles and pedestrians across the 500 yard wide tidal estuary. They are the world's largest chain ferries. Another first for Kernow!

We stand here today looking out over this mighty river, the Tamar, the territorial boundary between Kernow and England. This boundary was first recorded in 936 A.D. when King Hywel of Cornwall and King Athelstan of Wessex agreed the high water mark on the Devon side was to be the border between Kernow and England in perpetuity.

This river, our river, has seen much action in times past and been the life blood to people who have lived beside it. It has been a means of transport since man arrived. It has seen Viking ships sail up to the Danescombe Valley at Calstock when the Cornish allied with the Vikings against the Saxons at the Battle of Hingston Down in 838 A.D. It has seen Spanish raids in nearby Cawsand when the village was burnt down. In the last century, it witnessed the massive building of ships across the water for two World Wars and the consequent bombing of the dockyard. But to the Cornish, the river is simply 'THE GREAT DIVIDE', between Kernow and England.

This year the first World War is being commemorated and with the dockyard across the Tamar being so important to the people of Torpoint and within sight of this field, we think of all those soldiers who left here and from other ports to fight, many of them Cornishmen, so

that we might live in peace. We remember not only those from these shores but also those from the Diaspora, who fought under another flag but were Cornishmen in their hearts. In Australia this year I was able to go to the War Museum in Canberra. On the memorial plaques you could see many Cornish surnames who served as Anzacs and three Cornishmen gained the Victoria Cross at Gallipoli, namely William Symons, William Dunstan and Albert Jacka. In Kernow, there were also three winners of the Victoria Cross. They were Horace Curtis, James Fynn and Ernest Pitcher. We remember all Cornishmen who fought whatever their rank and the families they left behind. We salute them all for their bravery and sacrifice.

At the Proclamation in Torpoint on the 12th April this year, I said, "In Cornwall we are still fighting for the recognition of our nation; we need our difference and distinctiveness to be recognised by all." Then on the 24th April, only 12 days later, Danny Alexander MP announced that the Government would include the Cornish as a group protected by the Council of Europe's Framework Convention for the Protection of National Minorities. To be officially recognised as Cornish has its merits, but this is something, we the Cornish, have known all our lives.

In a recent report it was announced that DNA collected from Cornish people with all four grandparents being Cornish, showed that the Cornish have different DNA to our neighbours in Devon. I quote, "One theory for the difference in their DNA, is that they are a "relic" population, tracing their ancestry back to the tribes that colonised Britain after the last Ice Age 10,000 years ago." This applies to the Welsh as well and all I can say is that I, for one, am very happy to be a relic!

Up until 1549, the time of the Prayer Book Rebellion, the title used by the English rulers was Anglia et Cornubia in Latin, meaning England and Cornwall. From then on, this title was not used, presumably because we had rebelled. No record exists of any formal annexation of Cornwall to England in law. So there you have it, evidence backed by Science and History. It is time for things to change.

After recognition, what happens next? Firstly there will be no extra money. However, the rewards we will reap are the intangible things. The Convention will put us on an equal footing with other minority groups in the British Isles. We saw the Cornish Flag flying with all the other national flags on the Queen's barge Gloriana, so we need to see the Cornish flag flying every time all the national flags are flown in the British Isles.

I would also like to see more Cornish flags flying in Kernow, demonstrating our nationality and distinctiveness. In the next census in 2021, we will be able to demonstrate our Cornishness by ticking the Cornish box; the number of the box is 06. At the next Commonwealth Games on the Gold Coast in Australia in 2018 we are entitled to have a Cornish representation. Even if the team was only one person, just to see our flag being paraded would be a start. We will need a benefactor for this! The Convention, by recognising our identity, will give us confidence to promote and develop Cornish Culture

and showcase it to others. We could apply for funding for cultural events and because we have been recognised, funders will be required to accept and not, as often happens now, dismiss the Cornish.

Also we need a fairer slice of the economic cake. I understand that 90% of the Arts Council's budget for music in the South West, does not get past Bristol. This prejudice has got to stop. The Convention will encourage public bodies to ensure that they are treating Cornish people fairly and proportionately. It is a tool which can be used to come down hard on anyone who is prejudiced against an individual or the group as a whole.

As regards teaching and the national curriculum, all children in the British Isles should be taught the history of each constituent nation from its beginning, the history of these islands. **This** is the only road to tolerance between nations. Ignorance of a nation's history can only lead to disaster as has been shown throughout history around the world. History informs the present. By knowing the history it can inform the future. Education will foster tolerance to all the minorities living in this British multi-cultural society and encourage them to live together in harmony. Let us travel forward in the hope of a brighter future.

Kernow bys vykken.

Maureen Fuller/ Steren Mor

6th September 2014

