



# Perran-ar-worthal

## Local History Group

### The History of the Cornish Language

Dr Linnea Glynné – Rule gave a talk on the History of the Cornish Language to the PLHG on Friday 18<sup>th</sup> January 2019. She explained that Cornish is descended from the Celtic languages of continental Europe and has several forms and dialects, but that a lack of early records make it difficult to date. The major writings are the Passion Plays, “Pascon Agan Arluth” written at Glasney as part of the Cornish Ordinalia around 1390. The Beunans Meriasek, a play written in 1504 and the longest work in Cornish, is about St Meriasek, a Breton priest with a reputation for performing miracles who came to Cornwall and set up an oratory in Camborne, and is now their Patron Saint.

Is Cornish language dead? Dolly Pentreath was reported as being the last Cornish speaker and she died in 1771, but it is thought that it did continue, especially in the far South West amongst the fishermen who counted fish in Cornish. Henry Jenner, a Celtic scholar and Cornish cultural activist initiated the modern Cornish revival around 1875. Wladislaw Lach-Szyrma, Vicar of Newlyn, and Jenner visited older people, making notes of the Cornish language they knew. In 1876 a Cornwall Congress set up a society to collect together the remnants of the language. Now there are recognised accredited exams in Cornish (78 people passed exams in 2018) and some MPs swear their oath in Cornish. UNESCO have named Cornish as a critically endangered language.

We did try out a few words of Cornish...Merasta (Thank you), Myttinda (Good morning) Nos dha (Good night), but the legacy of the Cornish language is very much alive in the place names of Cornwall:

<u>Sowsnek (English)</u>	<u>Kernwewek (Cornish)</u>	<u>Meaning</u>
Hayle	Heyl	Estuary
Baldhu	Bal du	Black Mine
Gyllingvase	Gilan vase	The shallow Inlet
Gyllingdune	Gilan down	Deep inlet
Bissoe	Besow	Birch trees
Penryn	Penryn	Promontory