

**A GLOSSARY OF CORNISH NAMES,  
ANCIENT AND MODERN, LOCAL,  
FAMILY, PERSONAL, & C.: 20,000  
CELTIC AND OTHER NAMES, NOW OF  
FORMERLY IN USE IN CORNWALL**

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Celtic and Other Names, Now of Formerly in Use in Cornwall by John Bannister

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# GLOSSARY OF CORNISH NAMES,

ANCIENT AND MODERN, LOCAL, FAMILY, PERSONAL, &c.:

20,000 CELTIC AND OTHER NAMES,

NOW OR FORMERLY IN USE IN

CORNWALL:

*With derivations and significations, for the most part conjectural, suggestive and tentative of many, and lists of unexplained names about which information is solicited.*

BY THE

REV. JOHN BANNISTER, LL.D., VICAR OF ST. DAY.

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"Si quid novisti rectius istis  
Candidus imperti; si non, his utere mecum."

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WILLIAMS & NORGATE,

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TO  
**AUGUSTUS SMITH, ESQ.,**

OF TRESCO ABBEY, ISLES OF SCILLY,

R.W.G. MASTER OF

THE PROVINCIAL GRAND LODGE  
OF  
ANCIENT, FREE, AND ACCEPTED MASONS  
OF  
CORNWALL,

This attempt to illustrate the Nomenclature of the  
"FIRST, LAST, AND BEST COUNTY IN ENGLAND,"  
and to shew how much of the old and but recently extinct Vernacular is still  
preserved in

ITS LOCAL NAMES,

Those of Towns, Villages, Hamlets, Hundreds, Parishes, Manors, Estates, Farms,  
Tenements, Fields, Moors, Mines, Hills, Headlands, Rocks, Rivers, Streams,  
Coves, Camps, Tinbounds, Fishermen's-marks, &c. ;

ITS FAMILY NAMES,

Both ancient and modern, native and foreign, territorial, local and official,  
patronymics, sobriquets, &c. ;

AND PERSONAL NAMES,

Those found on the ancient Inscribed Stones of the County ; the Patron Saints of the  
several Parishes and extinct Chapelries ; manumitted Celtic Serfs in the  
Bodmin Gospels, their Saxon Manumitters and Witnesses ;  
Tenants in Domesday, &c., &c. ;

by giving  
the various meanings that have been assigned to many of these, and the authorities  
for the same ; conjectural derivations and tentative renderings of  
others ; lists of unexplained names, &c., &c. ;

A WORK OF MANY YEARS LABOUR,

BUT A LABOUR OF LOVE,

IS BY PERMISSION DEDICATED BY HIS OBEДИENT AND OBLIGED SERVANT AND BROTHER,

JOHN BANNISTER, P.M. Tregullow, 1006,  
P.P.G. CHAPLAIN OF CORNWALL.

*Ficrags, St. Day, Cornwall, Feb. 25, 1871.*

IN PREPARATION,  
*Introductory and Supplementary to*  
THE GLOSSARY OF CORNISH NAMES,  
*By the same Author,*  
THE  
NOMENCLATURE OF CORNWALL:  
IN WHICH WILL BE GIVEN  
ADDITIONS TO, AND CORRECTIONS OF, MISTAKES AND MISFITS IN  
THE GLOSSARY.  
—  
HINTS AND HELPS SOLICITED.



## PREFACE.

THE close of the 18th century witnessed the final extinction, as a spoken language, of the old Celtic vernacular of Cornwall. Dolly Pentreath, who died in 1788, has had the credit of being the last person who could talk and scold in this tongue; but William Bodenner, who died about the year 1794, at a very advanced age (102, the same as Dolly Pentreath's), could "converse with old Dolly," and "talked with her for hours together in Cornish"; so says the historian, Polwhele\*; and further he says † of Tomson, "a native of Truro, an engineer or maker of engines for the use of mines," who, as well as he knew, might be alive when he wrote, "he knows more, I believe, of the Cornish language than the old lady, whom he celebrated, ever knew." "I met him at Plymouth Dock" (now Devonport) "in 1789; the old man, hearing my name announced, saluted me instantly with the motto of my family," *Karenza wheelas karenza, love worketh love.*

The only known literary remains of the old language are very meagre. They are the following ‡: "Mount Calvary," a poem of little more than 2000 lines, of the 15th century; five miracle plays (*Guarements*) or dramas—three, "The Origin of the World," "The Passion of our Lord Jesus Christ," and "The Resurrection, with the Death of Pilate," of about the same date—one dated 1611, "The Creation of the World, with Noah's Flood,"—and another dated 1504, "The Life of St. Meredocus, Bishop and Confessor," discovered in 1869, by Mr. Wynne, among his manuscripts in the Peniarth library; a Vocabulary of the language as it was spoken about the 10th or 11th century §; another Vocabulary, § with the corresponding Welsh, Armoric and Irish words, collected by the learned Edward Lhuyd, at the beginning of the last century, when the language was fast dying out; a Grammar by the same with a Preface in Cornish, of the language as it was spoken in his day; he also gives us an old "Tale"; and, "An Elegy on the death of William the Third," of his own composing. There are also two or three versions of the first chapter of Genesis, the Creed, the

\* "Language, Literature, and Literary Characters of Cornwall," p. 19. † *ib.*, p. 43.

‡ "The Ancient Cornish Drama, edited and translated by Mr. Edwin Norris," v. 2, p. 437; Preface to "Lexicon Cornu-Britannicum, a Dictionary of the ancient Celtic language of Cornwall, in which the words are elucidated by copious examples from the Cornish works now remaining, with translations in English, and synonyms from the cognate dialects of Welsh, Armoric, Gaelic, and Manx," by the Rev. E. Williams, of Rhydycroesau; "Chips from a German Workshop," by Professor Max Müller, v. 3, p. 268. § "Vocabularium Latino-Cambriticum," British Museum, Bibl. Cotton., Vespasian A 14, printed as it is written, by Zeuss in his "Grammaticæ Celtae," p. 1199; and by Mr. Norris arranged alphabetically, &c., in his "Drama," v. 2, p. 319.

§ "A comparative Vocabulary of the Original Languages of Britain and Ireland," Title II of his *Archæologia*. In Title I, "Comparative Etymology," there are also long lists of Cornish words.

Lord's Prayer, and the Ten Commandments; \* a pastoral song; another on the curing of pilchards; many proverbs, wise saws, and riddles; some colloquies and colloquial phrases; a few mottoes on the coats of arms of the old families, and epitaphs; a letter written in 1776 by William Bodenner; and a few other small trifles.†

But though these are the only known literary remains, they are not the only remnants of the old tongue. Scawen, writing about two centuries ago, says, "The Cornish tongue hath mostly resided for some ages past in the names of the people, the gentry chiefly (?), and in the names of places observed to be significant mostly as to the site, &c., or for something eminent about them."‡ The discovery of a meaning of these names in the old language, which would fit the places, has long been a favourite pursuit with the antiquary; Camden in his *Britannia*, Carew in his *Surrey*, Norden in his *Speculum*, (i.e. *Mirror*), Scawen in his *Dissertation*, Hals, Tonkin, Polwhele, Hitchins and Drew, Davies Gilbert, Sir John Maclean, and others, in their *Parochial and Family Histories*, Baxter in his *Glossarium*, Lhuyd and Pryce in their *Archæologia*, Borlase in his *Antiquities and Natural History*, Whitaker in his *Cathedral*, Blight, Murray, Black, Besley, &c., in their *Guides or Handbooks*, and many others in various works and papers on the peculiarities of the county, have thus given translations of many hundreds of these names, some good, some bad; some right, but perhaps more wrong.

The first aim of the compiler of the following work was to collect together as many as possible of the names which had thus been translated. He then saw that the analogy of these, assistance that he might expect from various parts of the County, a knowledge of the old language, and some acquaintance with its kindred dialects, would enable him to give fair and reasonable explanations of many other names. He proceeded to collect these names from the histories, gazetteers, and directories of the county; from old deeds and other documents; from maps § and plans; from newspapers

\* To be found at the end of Davies Gilbert's "Mount Calvary" and "Creation," and of Williams's *Lexicon*.

† Most of these minor pieces may be seen at the end of Pryce's "Archæologia"; Davies Gilbert's "Mount Calvary," &c.; and in the *Journal of the Royal Institution of Cornwall*, No 5, p. 7. Amongst others Mr. Davies Gilbert gives "A protestation of the Bishops in Britain to Augustine the monk, the Pope's legate in the year 600 after Christ"!! a piece of not twenty words. Bodenner's letter is given in "Archæologia," v. 5, p. 88, and an extract in Mr Sandys' "Specimens of Cornish Provincial Dialect." Boson's song on the curing of pilchards is in the *Journal R.I.C.*, No 5, p. 14. Mr Williams gives a corrected version of the Creed, Lord's Prayer, Ten Commandments, and First Chapter of Genesis at the end of his *Lexicon*. He is also preparing for publication the "Life of St. Mersecoema."

‡ Davies Gilbert's "Parochial History," v. 4, p. 209.

§ That the compiler was right in his expectations, the list of authorities, references abbreviations, &c., p. 297, will prove; and he desires to express his best thanks, not only to those whose names are there given, but also to the many others who have rendered him assistance, some of whom have desired that their names might not be published, and as a consequence, when he has agreed with their views, he has not distinguished their renderings from his own, except it may be by the omission of a †, the mark of uncertainty. Among his helpers he can reckon dignitaries of the church, and members of both houses of parliament; learned professors at the universities, parsons and methodist preachers, both founders and local; doctors, and lawyers, and land surveyors; officers of the army and navy, and members of the society of friends; national schoolmasters, and registrars of births and deaths; mine agents and miners; master mariners and fishermen. The following notice of the *Glossary* in the *Western Daily Mercury*, almost too flattering to be republished by the compiler, shows well how these and others can help. "To criticise adequately such a work as this would demand an acquaintance with its subject-matter as great as Dr. Haunster himself possesses, and to this not even the omniscience of a journalist would pretend. But to make suggestions as to the correct rendering of special words is within the province of any scribe of the district, and we can hardly recommend Cornishmen with a little leisure a more graceful employment, than thus helping Dr. Haunster in his illustration of their county's history." By such help, in some cases, crude guesses at the meaning of the names have been turned into correct renderings.

¶ More especially *Martyrs*, 1748, &c. In these and the *Index* he published, which was afterwards republished by the late Rev. W. Wallis of Bodmin, the names are most accurately spelt; and a reference to those will generally show in what parish in the county the more important places, the names of which are given in the *Glossary*, are found.

and bills of sale; and lastly from the Tithe Apportionments of the several parishes. These last have proved a most prolific source, but at the same time a very puzzling one. Here, in many parishes, every field has its distinctive name; and, more particularly in the western parts of the county, many of these are decidedly Celtic; some so correctly spelt that it can at once be said what the derivation is (i.e. what words enter into their composition), and what is the plain meaning of the names. But in a far greater number of cases it requires a familiarity with the general Celtic nomenclature of the county to enable one to see in the badly spelt name, resemblance to any known words; and often they have been so distorted from the fair, simple, rational meaning that they bore in the Celtic, that they appear to be common English names with a frivolous, foolish, absurd meaning. In giving these and other names in his Glossary, the compiler has not attempted to correct the spelling,\* so as to make the meaning he supposes the names ought to bear more evident. In every case, as often as seemed necessary, he has given in *italics* (*within parenthesis*) the Celtic words, generally in their primary form, which he supposes have entered into the composition of the name. Very often, in consequence of the grammatical laws of initial mutation,† common to all Celtic languages, and still oftener, from there being no fixed orthography for the Cornish branch, and the utter ignorance of the language by the surveyors, who wrote down the names of the fields, and the labourers and farmers who told them the names.|| names that perhaps had never been written or spelt before, there may seem to be little resemblance between the supposed roots and the name; and hence it has often been said, by a little manipulation you can make a name mean anything you like: vowels go for nothing, and the consonants † may be changed for any other. But this is not the case; as, notwithstanding a great amount of latitude that is allowed, there are certain fixed canons, which must be attended to, and which limit the range of conjecture.

What has just been said with regard to field names, given in comparatively recent times, and which, to those who gave the fields the names by which they are called in the Tithe Apportionments, were scarcely proper names at all, but common appellatives, descriptive, in their vernacular, of "their scite on high or low ground, their relative situations," ‡ their shape, particular trees growing in them, their produce—wheat, barley, &c., or derived from the animals feeding in them, or birds frequenting them, some event that happened in them, or some former owner or occupier, is true of other names. Those who first wrote them down were probably ignorant of the language in which they were significant; and those who pronounced the names commonly had no idea of their etymology,|| and could neither write nor spell; so that the scribes had to

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\* It is possible that the spelling, though bad, may lead another to a better derivation and meaning than the compiler has been able to discover.

† In all languages letters of the same organs are liable to be mutually interchanged, often according to the caprice of individual pronunciation; but in the Celtic languages this is done by fixed grammatical rules, e.g. *bre*, a dwelling, becomes in certain cases *dre*, *drea*, but could not become, as Dr. Charneck in the preface to his *Patronymica Cornu-Britannica*, p. xii, says it does, *fre*, *fre*, *fre*, *fre*, &c.; it is a dental, *f* a labial, and they are not thus interchanged; but *b* in *bre*, *bre*, a hill, is a labial, and therefore this word assumes these latter forms in certain cases when entering into the composition of proper names.

‡ Polwhele's "History of Cornwall," vol. 1, p. 196.

|| Tonkin, writing to Gwavas, 1786, a sort of dedication to his Cornish Vocabulary, the manuscript of which came into Dr. Fryce's hands, and, as he acknowledges, was largely used by him, says, "I may add too, that very few of those who speak the language, can give any tolerable account of the orthography, much less of the etymology or derivation of those words which they make use of, and are many times apt to