



Looking at Penzance

(compiled and edited by Margaret Perry)

Cornish - The Tongue of my Fathers

(See translation on page 2)

Goel Yowann (Goel Sen Yowann an Besydhyer)

Tan Goelowann (Philip Knight)

Hwi a wra y wodhvos seulabrys, dell waytyav vy, yth yw Sen Yowann an Besydhyer sans tasek Pennsans, hag y kevir y 'benn sans' war gota arvow hengovek an dre yndella. Dres kov den, us o yn Pennsans ha'y drevow ha treveglosyow kentrevok dhe solempnya Goel Sen Yowann, po 'Goel Yowann', an 24ens a vis Metheven. Dell hevel, y'n oesow kyns devedhyans Kristoneth dhe Gernow, y fedha Kres an Hav solempnys gans gordhyoryon an howl.

Nans yw meur a gansblydhynow, y fedha synsys fer war an Kay dhe Woel Yowann. Yn 1825, ha dres lies blydhen wosa henna, yth esa kemmys a dus neb e di ma na ylli an bush mar vras omvovya heb lavur meur. Dew dennvos veur dhe'n fer o an myns bras a sevi stallow ena, ha'n vyaj berr a-ves dhe'n porth yn kokkow, 'mor rag unn diner' y hanow kemmyn. Dhe'n fer ma bys nessa hanter an nownsegves kansblydhen, an tavernyow a wort a igor dres oll an nosweyth.

Androweyth Goel Yowann, mowesi byghan a vedha gwelys ha garlontow bleujennow orth aga fenn, po torgh orth unn skoedh. An hengov teg ma a dhuryas bys nans yw kans blydhen ha hanterkans, pan vedha bagasow a vyrgheis meur aga gras yn stretys agan trevow ha penndraow a Bennwydh, hag yntredha re rych ha boghosek, gwiskys oll yn gwynn, ha dhedha powsyow afynys gans del lowr ha lieskweyth gans folenn owr ynwedh. Hag y fedhens orth darasow, po y'n gorthugher, ow tonsya gans aga breder po kuv kolonnow.

A-varr y'n gorthugher, nebes pelyow ayr a dhyllens i, ha tus yowynk a vora yn skathow hag enowi golowys liwek ha tewlel fusennow y'n ebrenn. Unn didhan meur y'n gorthugher, may hwre myns bras a dus omjunya ganso, a vedha gorfennys gans an vebyon ha mowesi, dres oll a gentreveth an Kay. Dornow a synsens ha gul linenn hir, ha resek a wrens der an stretys yn unn lamma menowgh dres an tansysyow esa ow leski yn isel lemmyn. Yn kettermyn, an dons usys a vedha 'Neusenna an naswydh', may hwre an dus garma 'Kraw! Kraw!' Ena, an penn-kopel, y sevens i aga diwvregh, hag ow talleth gans an re dhiwettha, an dus erell a boenya yn-danna, yn unn geschanjya aga leow.

Nosweyth, an 23ens, y fedha Pennsans yn-dann rewl tus yowynk a'n dre ha dhedha hwans meur a dhiskwedhyans tanek! Erbynn naw eur, linenn a valyers tarr, keffrys hag yntredha traweythyow tansysyow bras, a vedha ow leski yn kres pub fordh veur an burjestra. A bub tenewenn an balyers ha dhiworta pals a flammow ha mog, y teuthens ha mos, mebyon ha myrgheis, ow kasa dhe leska a-dro dh'aga fennow faglennow poes gwrys a dharnow bras a ganvas po saghlenn plegys, beudhys yn tarr, ha kentrys orth pennow lorghow neb tri po peswar troes-hys aga hirder.



Golowan (the Eve of St John the Baptist) - Translation

Philip Knight (Tan Goelowann)

You will already know, I hope, that St John the Baptist is the patron saint of Penzance and one finds his 'holy head' on the traditional coat-of-arms of the town therefore. Many centuries ago, it was the custom in Penzance and its neighbouring towns and villages to celebrate the Feast of St John, or 'Golowan' on 24th June. Apparently, in the ages before the arrival of Christianity in Cornwall, Midsummer would be celebrated by sun-worshippers.

Many centuries ago, a fair was held on the Quay at Golowan. In 1825, and during the many years following, so many people went there that the huge crowd could not move without a great struggle. Two great attractions at the fair were the large number of stall-holders, and the short trip out of the harbour in fishing boats, commonly known as 'a penn'orth of sea.' At this fair, until the latter half of the 19th century, the inns would remain open throughout the whole night.

On Golowan afternoon, little girls would be seen wearing garlands of flowers around their heads, or a wreath over one shoulder. This attractive tradition lasted until 140 years ago when, in the streets of Penwith, groups of graceful maidens, among them rich and poor, would be dressed in white, their dresses decorated with laurel leaves, and often with gold leaf too. They would be in door-ways, or, in the evening, dancing with their brothers or sweethearts.

Early in the evening, a few balloons would be released, and young folk would go to sea in boats and set fire to coloured lights and send rockets into the sky. One great amusement in the evening, when a good number of people joined in, would be concluded by the boys and girls, principally from the neighbourhood of the Quay. They would hold hands and run through the streets, often leaping through the bonfires now burning low. At the same time the customary dance would be 'Thread the Needle' when folk would shout 'An eye! An eye!' Then the head couple would raise their arms, and beginning with the last, the other people would run under them, changing places.

On the evening of the 23rd, Penzance would be under the control of youths of the town, intent on fiery Manifestation! By nine o'clock, a line of tar barrels, with large bonfires often between them as well, would be burning in the middle of each main thoroughfare of the borough. On each side of the barrels emitting abundant smoke and flame, there would come and go young men and women, swinging around their heads torches made of large pieces of canvas or folded sackcloth, steeped in tar, and nailed to the ends of sticks some three or four feet in length.

