

Recording of Polin Prys, made at Falmouth the 25th of April, 2008

Recorder: Rod Lyon

First Part - Reading: 'Story of Goldilocks and the Three Bears, translated into Cornish
by Roger Bailey and Polin Prys

Second Part - Free Conversation

Transcript.

RL And now, we must talk about Cornish. A few questions I want to ask you - the first is, why did you learn Cornish?

PP Well ... well I learnt Cornish because it was the language of my forefathers and I wanted to learn their own language and um .. all of my forefathers on my grandfather's side were .. uh .. and um .. from uh, St Just, uh, St Buryan uh, all the countryside around, and um, between them there was also ... Dolly Pentreath, was a fore- was a fore- ... well foremother - perhaps that would be better to say - and uh, it was because of that I wanted to learn um, (?...) Cornish. When I was uh, young, uh .. in those days, and uh, um I went to the class - there was a class in Falmouth - in Falmouth College, in- in those days, uh .. taught by uh, Michael Polkinghorne, and uh .. in that class there was also uh, people like Ron Williams? .. and uh, well other people like Mavis Timms .. sh- she is a Bard, and uh, Mts Mitchell Fox ... Davis - I don't know eho else uh, other people - uh ...

RL ... so, you learnt in an evening class ...

PP ... oh certainly, yea ...

RL ... and learnt something at home as well or ...

PP ... well, myself at home, uh yea, I .. uh, I worked o- in the language at home as well yea, but, in the evening class, here in Falmouth, and uh, at the end of the .. um .. that year, I- I did the first grade exams .. and after that I went to Canada, and I studied there for the third grade exam, so, I was- I was reading .. um .. texts and uh .. well .. I- I was writing letters to Mavis, for .. full of questions to ask Michael .. about the texts, and things I can't und- I couldn't understand.

RL And so uh, a problem for you when you were in Canada?

PP Well I- I was on my own at home .. well .. learning Cornish, certainly yea, yea, with my books yea.

RL Was that all?

PP And ... with **one** dictionary, the Morton Nance dictionary, Cornish-English - there wasn't another dictionary in ...

RL ... and also doubtless, "Cornish Simplified"?

PP Ah yea, yea Caradar yea Caradar, Peter Pool and um, that dictionary, yea, that was all.

RL After you returned to Cornwall, you went I believe to London, to teach; is that correct?

PP Ah .. well, it's- it's not exactly correct ah, I came here again .. to Falmouth, and uh, I had to .. I succeeded in the third grade exam, when I was - in - when I was in Canada. I- I did the exam in my own house with some uh friends, to- to be - to be an invigilator or something yea, so, but, uh, it wasn't - there wasn't a chance to do the, the oral .. exam, so I had to do that here .. and there- there was my own exam with Talek in Talek's house and .. this was .. this was, aha ...

RL ... difficult because ...

PP ... (? heavy-going) ha-ha ya ...

RL ... because he was deaf, that's the thing so ...

PP ... deaf and with a long beard - he spoke in his beard- in his, in his beard ha-ha ...

RL ... [mumble, mumble ...]

PP (hwarth) ny vern ...

RL ... but, I always hear uh, from you, and from other people about you who are from London.

PP Yea, well after that I went to London uh, with (?Treeve) and someone who was teaching a class in London, hum .. I went there as well, and he said to me, "Oh, oh that's brilliant, I shall return to- to Cornwall next week, so, you can teach the class," oh ... so I .. I became a teacher of that class um, almost immediately.

RL Many years ago - how many years?

PP Now it's .. phooph .. eleven .. thirty-one years.

RL Well it's a loong time ...

PP ... yea ... (laughter) .. and in the first place, the class was- was- was um .. at Carol Steers house, it was, she- she lived close to Marble Arch, and after that she went away to Cornwall uh, I was studying drama in the City-Lit in London - in the centre of London, that's the bib institute, a big college for uh, adults, so I we- went there to- to ask the people there if- if we could um .. put the claa in the college ... they said yes (?..) that's good, and uh, so, um, thirty years old now the class in the college uh .. in- in London. Ah there's a celebration for that .. there's a party uh, this June, for that.

RL I was chatting to someone this week who said something about a pub, close to the City-Lit ...

PP ... Ah ...

RL ... he told me that there used to be a good group of people there speaking Cornish - one corner speaking Cornish and another corner speaking Welsh, is that ...?

PP ... ah, in the past that was true in - it's not the same these- these days, but concerning the (? ..) there was the Welsh class as the Cornish .. the Cornish class, and all of us (would) meet in the pub afterwards ... but now ah, the Welsh class I- I- I don't know, perhaps it's- it's not the same day now .. uh .. I'm not sure what day it is, so, it isn't the same thing, but there- there is a 'Yeth an Werin' in London sometimes, um, usually in- in my flat, when I was (?am) there, and uh, sometimes in other places.

RL All the years you taught in London ...

PP ... mm ...

RL ... who did you teach? Can you remember - can you remember all- all the group in .. members of the group?

PP ... awh, yea, very strange people, amongst them, well there's Matthi Clarke, and, Neil Kennedy and who else, well many .. other .. people, but ah inter - well, alia - um ...

RL ... did you teach Phillip Chadwick and Tony Hak?

PP Oh sure - well, they are in the class now, Tony is tr- teaching the advanced group now - the class is split into three groups now, um beginners, middle amd advanced.

RL So, you uh, you are living in Cornwall again now ...

PP ... now ...

RL ... so, uh, what are you doing with the language these days - do you use it everyday in some- some way?

PP Well, I can't use the language every- everyday no ... there's a class here Tues- uh, Tuesday and uh, a 'Yeth an Werin' every month, and I'm- I'm still going to London for the class every- every two weeks, more or less.

RL Still?

PP Yea (?...) still, yea.

RL Oh I thought that you were retired in Cornwall ...

PP ... oh no- no- I'm not, I'm not, no, no, I was going every two weeks or three weeks, I do that, and uh, I taught a strong group with Gary Retallack and when I was (?am) there, I am teaching and when I'm not there, Gary is teaching.

RL So everything is continuing nicely?

PP Oh sure, sure, b- b- but when - well, it's not without- without me, the class is in- in my name still, I am still, well, I am still the teacher, and for the exams I went - well I do go uh every, uh, year for the exams (? ...) the exams.

RL How many in the class now?

PP Ooh .. fifteen, uh, sixteen, seventeen ...

RL ... young people, people of um .. ages ...

PP ... awh all the, all the um .. ages.

RL All ages, all people.

PP There's Jowdy Davey, ah ...

RL ... awh ...

PP ... ah, she is in my- in- in my group now, and uh, well, yea, many people.

RL So, what are your thoughts concerning the language in the future? Do you have a dream, uh ...?

PP Well, it would be brilliant if there were people speaking Cornish all around but I don't know if this is (?....) in my- in my- uh, life, who knows .. perhaps it will be uh ...

RL ... do you think that the language will be stronger in the future - stronger than it is now?

PP Ah .. well .. I hope .. the language is- growing stronger every year as- as .. well in my mind.

RL For me, uh, there are more and more people learning Cornish, but the majority of them want to write the language - I want to hear everyone speaking it, that's the thing, and for me there isn't a language at all without it being spoken.

PP Well, that's true. In our- in our class, uh, we- we make a lot of -- conversation, we don't write much in the class.

RL Well that's good news for me, I like that .. uh, always, uh, it comes to my mind, uh, over the years - children - ...

PP ... mm ...

RL ... for me, the start of Cornish should be amongst the children. What do you think, about that - children learning at home or starting to learn at school, or in primary school or play school, or what?

PP Well in school would be good - um -at home it isn't easy because of a lack of other children to- to speak with them, um, this is the difficulty - the children have to learn with other people .. all the- all the people know- .. all the Cornish speakers here in Cornwall they are all um, in- in uh places ... other places. That's the ...

RL ... scattered around.

PP ... yea.

RL Yea. The problem I see amongst families, uh, usually there is only one member of that family that speaks Cornish ...

PP ... mm ...

RL ... for me in my house, I speak ...

PP ... mm ...

RL ... my wife can't ...

PP ... that's the difficulty ...

RL ... and in the majority of- of- of families there is only one member ...

PP ... mm ...

RL ... so, it will be very difficult for children to learn. If Cornish was spoken at home, between the two, the two parents, the children will ...

PP ... that's the (? ...) ...

RL ... be learning naturally ...

PP ... this- this (? ...) ya.

RL But, concerning learning Cornish in schools, should there be a ruling ... of the government? The children must learn or ... by choice?

PP ... Well no- this isn't a good idea, I believe, because always uh, the children (?who don't like) to do things, it's not uh ... it's not uh ...

RL ... ah that are set by rule ...

PP ... by rule yea, and uh .. if something, um .. has to be done, they don't want to do it, this is the difficulty.

RL Like me in school. if there was something that I didn't want to do ...

PP ... mm ...

RL ... um, well I tried ...

PP ... mm, ya ...

RL ... to do everything to avoid it.

PP Ya .. this is, this exactly the- the case, yea ...

RL ... Thank you very much.
