PREFACE

THIS DICTIONARY is a major contribution to the revival of the Cornish language, and, as such, will be welcomed by Cornish speakers everywhere as a primary reference tool. The dictionary is intended to increase the vocabulary of Cornish to meet the needs of speakers of Revived Cornish. It implements the reform of Unified Cornish orthography which Nicholas Williams presented in *Clappya Kernowek* in 1997.

The history of the Cornish revival during the 1980s and 1990s is not a very happy one. One cannot edit and publish a Cornish dictionary without becoming aware of the partisanship and infighting the revival has suffered with regard to the question of Cornish orthography. Nor can one view such partisan division in a Celtic country with anything but sorrow. A review of the choices Cornish speakers have with regard to the orthography of Revived Cornish may shed some light on the direction they may wish to take as the revival proceeds into the twenty-first century. At present, there are no fewer than seven varieties of Cornish orthography from which to choose.

1. Old Cornish
2. Middle Cornish
3. Late Cornish
4. Unified Cornish (Nance's *Kernewek Unyes*)
5. Modern Cornish (Gendall's *Curnoack Nowedga*)
6. Common Cornish (George's *Kernewek Kemmyn*)
7. Unified Cornish Revised (Williams' *Kernowek Unys Amendys*)

What are Cornish revivalists to do? Old Cornish, Middle Cornish, and Late Cornish are not living languages. Their orthographies are not regular or standardized. They have limited vocabularies which are insufficient for modern use. They can, of course, be mined as source material, as they have been by all those involved with the revival of Cornish. It must be assumed that any word used in these varieties of Cornish is a legitimate Cornish word – whether a word of Celtic etymology or a word borrowed from Latin, French, or English – since Old, Middle, and Late Cornish were written by people for whom Cornish was a natural tongue. Edward Lhuyd's texts may be considered to be exceptional here, but even his words deserve to be considered authentic as Lhuyd had access to native informants.

R. Morton Nance's *Kernowek Unys* is the cornerstone upon which the Cornish revival was based, and any revision of Cornish must reckon

with it as such. In my view, *Kernowek Unys* must be considered the most secure basis for a standard Cornish orthography. It has had over 70 years of use and is a robust normalization of the orthography of the rich Middle Cornish sources. Revision of flaws in this standard is in order; replacing it is not.

Richard Gendall's *Kernowek Noweja* is founded upon Late Cornish of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. Gendall asserts that because this form of the language was closest to our own time it should therefore be the basis for Revived Cornish. There are two problems with this view. First, as Williams has shown (in a number of publications, primarily 1995, 1996, 1997), Late Cornish differs significantly from Middle Cornish *only* in its orthography (Jenner held the same view (1904:x–xi)). Second, the orthography of Late Cornish is both erratic (in its lack of standardized forms) and foreign (being based on Modern English orthographic practice)*. Furthermore, *Kernowek Noweja* introduces an unnecessary barrier, inconveniencing Welsh or Breton speakers who wish to learn Cornish, and inconveniencing Cornish speakers who wish to learn Breton and Welsh, because its orthography is so irregular. Late Cornish material is difficult for modern readers and scholars to understand, precisely because of its irregularities. Gendall's extensive work in analysing Late Cornish materials is important; of great service to the Cornish revival, in my view, would be to make use of his work to transcribe that lexical material into normalized orthography, based on *Kernowek Unys Amendys*.

In the 1980s *Kernowek Kemyn* was promulgated as a new "standard" for Cornish. This was a mistake. This variety of Cornish was invented based on a computer analysis of a number of Cornish texts. The validity and accuracy of Ken George's computer database (which is not in the public domain, unlike the authentic Cornish sources) is open to serious question.

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* Some may argue that other Cornish orthographies are also "foreign" because they are based on Latin or Middle English orthographic practice. Such a view would imply that Irish orthography or Swedish orthography (based on Latin and Low German respectively) are also "foreign" and that Irish should properly be written in Ogham and Swedish in Runic. An interpretation of this kind would leave Cornish with no "native" orthography at all. So the choice is simple: query the regularity of a Latin-based orthography *vs*. a Modern English-based orthography, and one discovers at once that the Latin-based orthography is far more regular than the English-based. Modern English orthography is quite idiosyncratic and should be considered unsuitable to write any language other than English.

Nance normalized traditional orthography and offered a pronuncia-
tion scheme based on that normalization. Such a scheme must be con-
jectural since we cannot know how Cornish was really pronounced.
Subsequent scholarly research has given rise to Williams' amendments
to Nance's normalization, because it appears that certain distinctions
overlooked by or unknown to Nance did obtain (*e.g.* UC **flogh** 'child',
fleghes 'children'; UCR **flogh**, **flehes**). Both Nance and Williams give
a guide to pronunciation of their normalized orthographies and are
content to let speakers of Neo-Cornish develop their language
naturally based on those guidelines.

George, on the other hand, believed that he had found in traditional
orthography a complete underlying phonemic system, and was so
confident in his reconstruction that he offered a wholly new ortho-
graphy based on that phonology, and promulgated that orthography
as representing the "real" pronunciation of traditional Cornish. His
faith in his reconstruction was unwarranted. It included the infamous
tj/dj distinction, which posited for Cornish a pair of phonemes which
were shown by Williams to be bogus and impossible for Cornish.
Faced with the facts, George recanted his position and revised both his
phonemic system and his orthography, which had been promoted
previously as perfect. Indeed one may observe *en passant* that George
has at different times since 1986 offered no fewer than four different
explanations for the variant spellings (such as <**gallosek**>, <**gallogek**>
'powerful') in the texts:

- that the graphs <**s**> and <**g**> represented a phoneme /ɟ/ to be
  rewritten <**dj**>;
- that Williams was correct in assuming a variation [s] ~ [dʒ];
- that the sound represented was a distinctive (although by George
  unspecified) variety of **s**;
- that the sound in question was [z].

George's reconstruction also posits for Cornish a threefold distinction
of vocalic length similar to that of Welsh and Breton, although the
evidence suggests rather that such distinctions had been lost by the
Middle Cornish period. *Kernowek Kemyn* also ignores the feature of
vocalic alternation common to Welsh and Cornish, but absent in
Breton (*cf.* the imperatives *bydd/byddwch* [bɨːð (*or* bɪːð), 'bəðux]; **bydh**/
bedheugh [biːð, 'bɛðɛwx]; *bez/bezit*) [beːs, 'beˑzit], because George
believes, unreasonably, that Middle Cornish and Middle Breton were
very much more similar than they were. George allows a pre-occluded
pronunciation of the final segment in **tam** 'piece' [tæᵇm], etc. and
gwyn 'white' [gwɪᵈn], etc. Williams has shown that pre-occlusion and
George's putative threefold distinction of length are mutually

exclusive. Williams has also demonstrated that George's distinction between two long vowels [ɔː] <**o**> and *[oː] <**oe**> is spurious, and indeed George himself has admitted that in words like **cor** 'wax', **con** 'supper', **gor** 'knows', and **whor** 'sister' the vowel is not his <**oe**>, but his <**o**> (although he continues to spell such items <**koer**>, <**koen**>, <**goer**>, and <**hwoer**>). So much for a 'phonemic' orthography. Both Williams and Mills (1999) have shown from the spellings and the rhymes of the texts and on theoretical grounds that George's threefold opposition in the diphthongs /iw ɪw ew/ is fantasy – a series that is, incidentally, without parallel anywhere in Brythonic.

Mills has demonstrated that the statistics George offers as proof of his system are themselves questionable and bear little relation to the texts from which they have been drawn. Indeed Mills claims that virtually every one of George's statistical analyses is mistaken. Statistics are valid only when the researcher uses them correctly. Dr Mícheál Ó Searcóid of the Department of Mathematics, University College, Dublin has shown (1997) that George has failed to translate linguistic problems properly into mathematical formulae and that, in consequence, George's computations are meaningless.

Cornwall lacks its own university with a proper department of Celtic studies. Had such an institution existed in the 1970s and 1980s when the revival was quickening in pace, it is likely that Cornish would have been spared the over-hasty adoption of *Kernowek Kemyn* and all the problems it has created. *Kernowek Kemyn* is a house of cards susceptible to criticism both of its fundamental principles and of the details of its expression. It is not the unassailable "standard" that its supporters hold it to be, and it is based on circular arguments and a good deal of wishful thinking. If traditional orthography is clear enough to enable the derivation of a complete historical phonology, why not simply normalize it and allow Cornish speakers to use traditional orthography to write a traditional language?

Dunbar and George (1997) responded to Williams' criticisms (1996) of *Kernowek Kemyn*. This response is comprised of a good deal of specious linguistic argument and rather abusive rhetoric regarding "Dr Williams" and his criticisms, unsubstantiatied claims about the prevalence and popular acceptance of *Kernowek Kemyn*, and questionable assertions about the "extensive consultation" and consensus that the Cornish Language Board made with speakers throughout the country before abandoning *Kernowek Unys* in favour of *Kernowek Kemyn*.

It is *Kernowek Kemyn* which should be abandoned.

Ken George was, indisputably, right to recognize that there were faults in *Kernowek Unys*. But he was not by any means the first. Many Cornish scholars had already done so. Henry Jenner himself stated this, before *Kernowek Unys* had even been codified.

> The system cannot in the nature of things be strictly accurate, but it is near enough for practical purposes. Possibly there is much room for controversy, especially as to such detail as the distribution of long and short vowels, the representation of the Middle Cornish *u, ue, eu* sometimes by *ī*, sometimes by *ē*, and sometimes by *eu* or *ew*, or of the Middle Cornish *y* by *i, e,* or *y* or occasionally by an obscure *a, o,* or *u,* and it is quite likely that others might arrive at different conclusions from the same evidence, though those conclusions might not be any the nearer to the sounds which Cornishmen of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries really did make. As for grammatical forms, it will be seen that the writer is of opinion that the difference between Middle and Modern Cornish was more apparent than real, and that except in the very latest period of all, when the language survived only in the mouths of the least educated persons, the so-called "corruptions" were to a great extent due to differences of spelling, to a want of appreciation of almost inaudible final consonants, and to an intensification of phonetic tendencies, existing in germ at a much earlier period. (Jenner: 1904:x–xi)

The solution, however, was not to invent a new variety of Cornish orthography. It was to revise *Kernowek Unys*. This Williams has done with his *Kernowek Unys Amendys*. Williams himself recognizes that *Kernowek Unys Amendys* is not necessarily the last word in Cornish orthographic reform. It is, however, a step in the right direction.

Revived Cornish must, of course, be *reasonably* authentic in its phonology, its grammar, and its orthography. *Kernowek Unys Amendys* may be considered to be all of these: Williams' infusion of Tregear's Cornish (unavailable to Nance in 1929) into the system has brought *Kernowek Unys* from the stilted scholarly artificiality for which it has been criticized much closer for representing a *natural* phonology for Cornish.

So, what *are* Cornish speakers to do? They have chosen to revive their language. All they need to do is to select an authentic (not necessarily *the* authentic, it being impossible to establish *the* authentic) phonology, grammar, and orthography. Revived Cornish in this regard will, does, can, and should not differ, in the principles of its "authenticity", from Revived Hebrew, now the national language of Israel.

The following is a discussion of the merits of today's extant variants of Cornish with regard to these criteria.

The phonology of Revived Cornish

The phonology of *Kernowek Unys* is authentic but defective (for instance, in not accounting for Cornish [œ] and [ø:]); its defects have been recognized by users of *Kernowek Unys*.

The phonology of *Kernowek Noweja* is authentic, being in its own way a revision of the phonology of *Kernowek Unys*, taking Tregear's Cornish, and English dialects in Cornwall, into account in analysing the English-based orthography of the Late Cornish texts.

The phonology of *Kernowek Kemyn* has been shown to be an inauthentic phonology of Cornish.

The phonology of *Kernowek Unys Amendys* is authentic, being based on exhaustive and expert linguistic analysis of Middle and Late Cornish texts, Lhuyd's phonetic description, and Nance's phonetic reconstruction. Its phonology is for all intents and purposes the same as that of *Kernowek Noweja*, though it is a bit "older" (that is, near to Cornish spoken in its heyday rather than to Cornish spoken immediately before its demise).

The grammar of Revived Cornish

The grammars of *Kernowek Unys*, *Kernowek Kemyn*, and *Kernowek Unys Amendys* are by and large quite authentic. The grammar of *Kernowek Noweja* is authentic, but in its regularization of the Cornish pronominal system, for instance, is an example of a language in decline.

What we can be glad of is this: that there is indeed a root Cornish, examined by Cornish speakers of all theoretical backgrounds, which satisfies everyone. It is commonplace for good Cornish speakers to observe that they can converse easily with other good Cornish speakers regardless of the orthographic practice to which each may adhere.

There is already, *de facto*, a single Revived Cornish language – all that Cornish speakers need to do is to choose a single orthography with which to represent it.

The orthography of Revived Cornish

The orthographies of *Kernowek Unys* and *Kernowek Unys Amendys* are authentic, based on Cornish texts of *ca.* 1500–1610. Each suits its phonology quite well. Revisions of those phonologies will naturally necessitate some orthographic alterations as well.

The orthography of *Kernowek Noweja* is based on Modern English orthography, devised by seventeenth-century speakers of Cornish who did not know the earlier tradition of writing their language. As such it is authentic – but it is hardly suitable to be the basis for Revived Cornish. Had its seventeenth- and eighteenth-century practitioners known traditional Cornish orthography, they would almost certainly have preferred it themselves.

Neil Kennedy's argument (1996:180–81) that Anglophone Cornish speakers experience an "emotional pull" toward and "a sense of ownership" of *Kernowek Noweja* because its orthography is familiar to them from roadsigns and anglicized placenames almost seems to imply that Anglophone Cornishmen are not bright enough to learn a "foreign" orthography. I am certain that this is not what Kennedy means, but an analogy with the Gaelic languages may prove illuminating here. Attempts made by Shán Ó Cuív and others in the 1920s to respell Irish according to English orthography – to make it easier for learners – failed across the board, because Irish speakers preferred traditional Gaelic-based orthographic principles to English-based ones. Likewise, it can be observed that Manx Gaelic, retaining its traditional English-based orthography, is generally *ignored* by readers of Irish Gaelic and Scottish Gaelic, precisely because its orthography presents an irritating barrier to comprehension. Speakers of Revived Cornish do *not* have to choose to maintain such a barrier by preferring Late Cornish orthographic habits to the more vigorous and widespread Medieval Cornish orthography.

The orthography of *Kernowek Kemyn* is based on its defective phonology, and it has been shown that this is not always consistent even with its own "phonemic reconstruction". Its inventor has stated (Dunbar & George 1997) that he is unconcerned with whether his system is based on historical Cornish texts or on a 70-year foundation in *Kernowek Unys*, but rather – because the population of Cornish speakers is small – he asserts that it does no harm to abandon so many centuries of tradition in favour of his computer-based normalization. One cannot help but note that if Cornishmen and Cornishwomen were truly unconcerned with their tradition, they would most likely not be learning and using Cornish at all.

The vocabulary of Revived Cornish

If *authentic* is defined narrowly as 'attested', Revived Cornish *cannot* be authentic with regard to its vocabulary if its speakers wish to discuss the life of the twentieth and twenty-first centuries. Williams states in his Introduction below that authority for words is not given: "Notice that no attempt has been made in the present work to indicate the source of any particular item." The sources are, variously, primary medieval materials, primary Tudor materials, Middle English, Middle French, Breton, Welsh, Modern English, and new coinages of the compiler's own devising. The inquisitive reader may wish to ferret out the sources of the words contained in this dictionary – but the practical one will simply take from the dictionary the words required.

This dictionary may help Cornish speakers to return to their roots in Nance, and to adopt *Kernowek Unys Amendys* as Standard Cornish. For *Standard Cornish* is what the Cornish revival needs, and it is time for Cornish speakers to choose a standard. After 70 years of *Kernowek Unys*, the revival has now also had a decade and a half of experience reckoning with *Kernowek Kemyn* and *Kernowek Noweja*. With the lessons which have been learned from those varieties of Cornish, it is time to get back to the solid base established by Nance and his students, modifying it where necessary. Williams has provided such corrections to grammar and orthography in his *Kernowek Unys Amendys*, and those revisions are reflected in the orthography used in this dictionary.

I believe that Nance would have welcomed *Kernowek Unys Amendys* and condemned both *Kernowek Noweja* and *Kernowek Kemyn* as being counterproductive to the goal of the Cornish Revival. Staunch supporters of these varieties of Cornish should, in my view, simply and quietly, adopt *Kernowek Unys Amendys*, and contribute to its further development. It is certain that future generations will thank them for doing so. For the alternative would be to continue, divided and factioned, despite the obvious merits of Williams' revision of the work of Nance and the inadequacy of other orthographies.

It is my sincere hope that Cornish speakers will find in this dictionary – twice the size of Nance's English-Cornish dictionary with more than 24,000 headwords – a primary source for modern Cornish words, and that it will enable them to finally resolve to adopt *Kernowek Unys Amendys* as Standard Cornish: one Cornish, to be used by all who would truly wish to see Cornish used by Cornishmen and Cornish-women in the twenty-first century.

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Dublin, July 2000

A note on the first edition

Every book has its history, and this English-Cornish dictionary is no exception. Many modern dictionaries for major languages are produced from complex and expensive databases and are generated automatically from these. Not so this dictionary, which has been typeset by hand, based upon the compiler's original word-processed files. These were augmented, iteratively, during the editing process to include a good deal of additional vocabulary. While every effort has been made to expunge editorial errors, the reader may find articles in which a superfluous *a.* or *n.* may appear, or which fail to mark "**I** *a.*" and "**II** *n.*" consistently; such errors are a result of the way the dictionary was built up. Corrections of these errors, as well as errors of hyphenation, alphabetical order, etc., are welcomed.

We are acutely aware of the fact that, while doubling the available vocabulary of Revived Cornish for modern use, we may have introduced terms which may prove to be unacceptable to Cornish speakers. We make no apologies for the UCR orthogaphy used here, as we consider the convention presented to be consistent with traditional Cornish phonology, standardized to a reasonable norm not greatly different from the normalizations established by Jenner and Nance. We do welcome, however, comment of any kind related to vocabulary or phrases, especially where terms in current use have been over-looked.

Errata submitted to the publishers will be made available online at **http://www.evertype.com/gram/ecd-1-errata.html** before their incorporation into subsequent editions of the dictionary.

M. E.