

Recording of Ben Bruch, made at Truro the 7th July, 2008

Recorder: Rod Lyon

First Part - Reading: 'Solempnyta' by Ben Bruch

Second Part - Free Conversation

Transcript.

RL And now Ben, I would like to chat with you about Cornish and some questions I want to ask. The first is, why did you learn Cornish?

BB It's difficult to answer uh, that question in truth, um, they will be the right occasion, the right place, uh, the right people in my life uh, perhaps is the-the-the answer, uh ...it (was) in the middle of the eighties, and I was at that time, uh, in Massachusetts, um .. and I had been uh, in Harvard University for a number of years but uh, not succeeding very well with my studies there, so, um, I was making a rest from my studies, so, I wasn't in school at that time. But I wanted to learn more about the Cornish and Wel- uh Celtic languages, um .. perhaps Welsh, perhaps a little Cornish, uh .. there was a plan at-at that time to write a novel or something like that, uh .. with uh, things happening in Cornwall - I wanted .. to learn something of the language to uh make a Cornish flavour in that novel .. um, also I did, I did uh, search - I had searched the history of my family and did the branch of the family in the time aw, five hundred years or ago from Cornwall and so there were many things in life at the same time thrusting me towards Cornish, and fortunately there I was - I was in a city in the United States uh, where one can buy books to learn the Cornish language - um there's a book shop in uh, Cambridge, Massachusetts called (?Shaunhoff's), and I found there .. many things .. R Morton Nance's dictionary, a short dictionary uh, 'Holyer an Lerg'h', 'Cor-Cornish Simplified', and things like that .. uh, in the first place I want .. I wanted to learn a few short expressions .. but I did learn uh .. learn more and more and I had a lot of time because I wasn't a student at that time, I wasn't working .. and after a few months I - I learn a lot of Cornish and it was like uh, an addiction and I had to have more and more Cornish, so, uh, it uh, happened.

RLL Well that's marvellous - in God's name, you are fluent now uh, after uh, deciding to learn a few words, but now you can speak like everyone in English here. Well, did you learn your Cornish in an evening class or uh, in school or at home or, everywhere?

RLL In the main I taught myself uh, with books, uh, and after that uh, with tapes, um, at first I bought Nance's dictionary, 'Cornish Simplified' and because they were the uh, the-the cheapest books in the book shop, um, I learnt in the main with 'Holyer an Lerg'h' uh, I like that book for learning Cornish uh, with that one I went through the book once .. and after that twice, three times and after the-the-the third time I learnt

nearly uh, every word that was in the book, um .. (I) could be .. uh, go further um, there wasn't any class uh, at that time, I believe in the whole of the United States so, I learnt with uh, with books - the next thing uh, I did, was um .. um .. uh .. the play 'Gwryans an Bys' from Unified Cornish to Common Cornish. I started with Common Cornish but at this time that is perhaps uh, nineteen uh .. nineteen ninety-five, there weren't many books published in Common Cornish. But I could find a copy of 'Gwryans an Bys' in Unified with an English translation. And I decided uh, to transliterate that into Common Cornish, thus I learnt many new words, and also the rules for writing in Unified and Common Cornish, and that was very good practice I believe um .. and after that finally I did uh, write to, uh, Kowethas an Yeth Kernewek and had 'An Gannas' every month and found uh, at that time they were doing um .. uh, tapes with uh, recordings of the articles - every story published in the uh, magazine, and you could buy the tape um .. and .. listen to him - to it, and I used to do that every night uh, before going to sleep. So, when I was in bed trying to sleep (?there was) Cornish. Uh, and after a few months I believe I learnt uh, more words in-in that way. And after a year or two of that, I came to Cornwall for (the) first time and the Cornish Week-end - that's the first time I spoke Cornish with somebody else after two years learning.

RL And that was in Tencreek.

BB Tencreek - I (wrong word) - uh, uh, recognised (the one and the other) at that time and I did an interview with the radio ...

RL .. that's true -for Radio Cornwall ..

BB .. aw yea, um ..

RL .. when you started to learn Cornish, did you find it difficult to learn?

BB Aw, in some ways - there (wasn't) anyone else in my city, um, uh, who was able to speak any Cornish at all. I didn't have a teacher, I didn't work with KDL uh .. yea when-when I heard of 'Kernewek dre Lyther', it was too late for me - I learn t the language before that and I didn't have to uh, start with that class. But uh, yea, it was a little difficult, at that time I had a cat, I spoke Cornish to my cat, but unfortunately it didn't answer. Uh, that's something to practise a language at least. But, I-I-I like the language and when-when you like something, it's easier, um .. and there was something special about the Cornish language and exactly the same (?yearning) to me to study it. And that's all I can say. I-I-I studied many languages in my life, um .. and some were very easy and some were very, very difficult, but Cornish was .. easy in the main to me - there's something perhaps in my soul uh ... that-that understands the language in (?its) way - that-that is as uh though something (?brings) uh, is lost to me and I recover it with the Cornish language.

RL Well I know that you do a lot for the language today, but can you tell me, what you were doing exactly today?

BB Today. Ah .. uh yea, I am uh, uh, and my friend Albert Bock, uh, here in Truro doing a lecture about the Standard Written Form and, so, we worked together with the 'ad-hoc' group and before that the linguistic working group, um, to try uh .. to make a Standard Written Form for the Cornish language, um, and that was a very important programme, to my mind. When I heard that there was a programme to do that before the (?time) well, two years ago perhaps - I believe that it was .. brilliant work to support the language and-and also to be um .. to be sure that the Cornish language was protected for the future, and so that uh so that more people might learn Cornish, um, and improve their Cornish and talk to each other. So today, um, there was a big meeting of-of Cornish speakers, Cornish teachers um (?here...) um twenty-five of them, and Albert and I did a lecture about the Standard Written Form and so how this-this system will .. work - it's the way to write things and it was done for uh, users of Common Cornish, Unified Cornish, Revised Unified Cornish and Late Cornish. So, it was necessary to split the people into two groups, so the people who speak uh, Middle Cornish - Common and Unified people, and the people who speak uh, Late Cornish and Tudor Cornish, uh, went with Albert, for uh, a time but we also had all the people together to talk together .. about the language like things we must (??) uh .. we must (??) our knowledge of the language, and also to have their ideas uh, about the things uh, that we can all do together to support the language uh, extend uh .. the language, um, get more people to speak Cornish, teach Cornish, and support the-the children uh, who will learn in schools in the years to come, that's something very important for us all, um, and that's the thing we did today - I'm exhausted, I must admit (laughter)

RL Uh, well, you have answered my next question I think, and that is, what to you think about teaching Cornish to children in schools, is it a good idea or .. not?

BB That is uh I believe the most important thing for the language in the future, we must .. teach the children - uh - teach Cornish to the children. Um, also I believe, the children in Cornwall, from what I have heard from Jenefer and Elizabeth um .. who often work with school groups uh, classes and things like that, the children in Cornwall want to learn the language, and that's a part very, very important, very important of the-the culture, so, with that, is to learn about their history, uh their country - about their country um, and also understand all the Cornish uh, they see all around them everyday uh .. for example .. all the place names that are uh, Cornish place names in the main - what are their family names or first names, uh, sometimes. But also I believe it's very good for children to, to learn languages, learning languages is good for the brain, it's good for understanding um, what (?how you will make use in-in-in) the first language in truth. I learn more about English by learning other languages, um

.. that's what I found - I learnt in school in America, with children um, who used to learn Spanish and German, um every year, uh, from uh six years - uh six years of age. So (by) six years of age they will start um two foreign languages .. uh, as well as English.

RL That's very good ...

BB ... for these children, they-they-they understand .. uh more about languages .. they learn more about the cultures, and they learn also how it is .. good to be in a world with many cultures and many uh .. many stories - many stories (of) every country and every people, and that's something important in my mind.

RL You said that the children in the United States start to learn foreign languages around six years of age.

BB It isn't done generally, this is in the school where I learnt but, that's a private school, generally in public schools um .. well, I don't know, in each state and in each city the rules are - are different, but .. to my mind the linguist can-can I can say, the best age for children uh, to learn is under eleven years old - under eleven years old languages can be learnt very easily - I started to learn French (by) five years of age, and I can speak French flu-fluent enough today, and I believe, after learning French as a child. (it was) really easier to learn every other foreign language that I learnt afterwards. So, the first foreign language is the-the most difficult - if you do that (by) six, seven eight years of age before whe-when-when-when it is a game, uh, learning something like that, and-and (?in playing) they will learn songs, plays, and they will eat good things made uh - from customs of these-of these and things like that - and so they will have Cornish ice cream and learn about ice cream, uh, which is teaching Cornish (???) children and that will happen automatically with them. Uh, after eleven years of age it is more and more difficult to learn a foreign language, and it's extremely difficult learning another language, after eleven years of age, with a good accent! Uh, that's why it might-it is a must to start early, uh, start early with languages.

RL Ta-talking about teaching Cornish in schools, should it be done by law, or by the parent's choice?

BB To my mind, it's not good to do things like this by law - it-it is necessary to have uh, laws for uh, uh to say that it's uh, it's good, and it's right to have Cornish in schools - one cannot block Cornish from being something taught in schools, but ... what it is in Ireland the tried to have uh, Irish by law in every school, but the difficulty was - ther wasn't .. many people that coul- uh, uh, that were able to teach the language well, and there were many people who knew how to speak Irish but uh, without any knowledge at all what to do with uh .. twenty children in one room um, and they were very bad teachers - people who learnt Irish in that way said, "I don't want to continue with this language by this horrible teacher." Irish is a language which is destroyed

when you say something wrongly. So, that wouldn't be a good idea for the language. But I believe, if-if-if we start with Cornish for people who **want** to learn .. it can be something that more and more people w-will do, and thus the language can grow. To my mind unfortunately there aren't hundreds of people who know Cornish well enough to become teachers, for every school in Cornwall to have a class for every uh, student. But the number of people can grow uh, slowly. And when there are more people, perhaps like in Wales today when (?where) there is twenty percent of the people speaking Welsh, one can have something where it might be necessary for someone to study a little Cornish in schools, but we must have more people before thinking of that, in my mind.

RL Ben, I thank you for your time.

BB Aw, thanks you.
