

Graham Sandercock 25-3 Translation

Graham: Good enough, OK, start here?

James: Yeah

Graham reads aloud the story.

James: Very good, well done, very hard to read aloud something like that.

Graham: It isn't easy, all the forms were mixed there.

James: Yeah, I don't know when it was written.

Graham: Published early in Kernewek Kemmyn twenty years ago or something like that, isn't it written there?

James: Well there is an editor's note, that's Ray Edwards, October nineteen eighty seven.

Graham: That's the same year Kernewek Kemmyn started.

James: OK, we'll move to the third part of this conversation when I'll ask open questions if I can. Graham, why did you learn or study Cornish?

Graham: Well, it's hard to say. I remember my grandmother who wasn't an educated woman at all, saying something, while all the family there, and nobody in the room understand a thing she said, and she said that was Cornish, but it wasn't Cornish, Cornish dialect, and she said afterwards in her words herself it isn't proper Cornish, it isn't, her words 'not proper Cornish'. So, I remembered that, me being perhaps six or seven years old, and remembered that all my life and Cornish wasn't seen or Cornish heard or Cornish taught anywhere in my opinion. I remember also seeing Peter Pool's book 'Cornish for Beginners' in a shop in St.Ives, there is a memory, clearly I remember, clear about that, while I was perhaps fourteen or thirteen years old, I'm not sure, and then going to university in Liverpool there was lots of Welsh and Irish people and all my family are Cornish from...I don't know how many years, and I felt a need to show that the Cornish language wasn't unimportant (?) and that Cornish wasn't part of England, so I bought the book and started to learn a bit, in truth, after a year I knew more Cornish than the Irish people knew Gaelic. So, that's the reason, that was far, far from home (?) but also when I was in school myself I loved languages and that was the strongest, the strongest subjects in school were French, German, and I did Latin also and Russian, some languages after and in my opinion lots of subjects in school were hard but languages were very easy to learn so all the things came together...to make me learn Cornish. I learnt some before returning to Cornwall, then going to Wella Brown's class in Saltash, he was a very, very good teacher and there was a strong class there also and a chance to speak, in those days there wasn't hardly a person in all the country who knew how to speak well, in my judgement there was Wella, Julyan Holmes and Len Orme in Camborne and outside of them there wasn't a conversation at all, all the people in the Gorsedh for example they say 'myttin da, fatla genes' and then everything in English. So, at that time there was a feeling growing for Cornish to be a spoken language again instead of something to study, something historic I think.

James: That's very interesting about your grandmother doing dialect, where in Cornwall was she?

Graham: St.Austell, Bethel in St.Austell.

James: Is that the China Clay area or something?

Graham: No, well, well perhaps yeah, her father used to work Carclaze as I believe,

Karglas...much of that is hard...my mum's sister, who's now ninety years old, still lives there now in St.Austell, she has lived there all her life, she didn't move away through the war or anything, all her life the same small area of St.Austell, I would like to go one day and do a recording of her speaking in English, there is, there are things being lost in dialect as well.

James: There is, I believe there's a special language in the clay country, almost a language itself, the same as the West Cornwall area or something like that.

Graham: Yeah well, in those areas there isn't a lot of visitors and my other grandmother came from 'Stenek Glas', Stenalees, so her family is more in the middle of the clay country than my other grandmother but all of them used to work in the china clay business and there isn't, it isn't the same now, there are strangers, if you like, living in that area or visitors, everyone used to think that the area was very ugly but it wasn't, I love the area in truth.

James: Yeah and me. How do you use Cornish everyday?

Graham: Well, through the internet everyday, writing things for 'An Gannas', everyday I'm receiving e-mails in Cornish, answering in Cornish, writing, I'm teaching Cornish to my wife now, second wife, my first wife was fluent in Cornish, the second one is more new to the language, she can understand lots but she doesn't want to go to a class so the language is spoken in the house everyday and used everyday and I'm a teacher in a school in Plymouth and there are lots of Cornish children who go there and lots of them have found songs I've sung on the internet and they ask me everytime 'how do you say that in Cornish?', so everyday there are lots of students in the school who say 'myttin da' and 'dohajydh da' also and children of that age learn quickly and easily so I hear and I speak, I write and I read Cornish everyday, and lots of phone calls in Cornish also like from you.

James: What are you doing today on behalf of the language, at this time?

Graham: Perhaps less than before truthfully. I'm still chairman of Kesva an Taves Kernewek, that is important work in my opinion, perhaps putting reins/brakes on some people who are going too wild. I'm still editing 'An Gannas' after thirty years. That was started by me after I became a bard. In those days there wasn't anything, almost nothing to read except old things. About that time, between nineteen seventy, no nineteen seventy three, there was lots of young people coming to the language who wanted to speak and write, offer their new ideas so that was a good time to learn Cornish. Apart from henna I don't know, that's enough.

James: What's your idea about the language in the future, what's your dreams?

Graham: Without doubt I'm happy that it's been taken under the government's chartour, I'm not exactly sure how it will go forward, it's unfortunate if Kemmyn will be left to one side for the Standard Form to be taught in schools but Cornish being taught in schools is a very big advancement and, as it seems, there is a desire to children in school to learn the language and we can't deny that Cornish will be going to a higher level in life of Cornwall than perhaps ever before, so that's good, good to see more around written in Cornish, marvellous that people think that it's not something silly, weird people, that was the case a quarter of a century ago or something like that, when I was learning in the first place to learn Cornish you must be a mad man or something but now, that was wrong completely, that was the opinion of the press, opinion of the ruling classes but...it's changed completely now and the standing of the language, the level of the language, the state of the language is a thousand times better already, so dreams are becoming true.

James: Why do you think that the the language is more common now?

Graham: Well, in my opinion, starting in the age mentioned before when every student of the language was seen as something strange, really those people weren't strange, they continued

and continued and worked and worked voluntarily and all the advancement in Cornish and the standing in the papers and television and papers of the people is because people worked and worked and continued, teaching/learning, sending letters. That is like...the word is perhaps 'yskynnans' (going up an incline), that's like carving a stone, you have to get a small bit, small bit and eventually there is a pattern there. In my opinion, the view of the people in the language is changed completely and people don't laugh anymore 'that's a Cornish cuckoo, how stupid is that' like a 'Cousin Jack' or something. That's, that idea is like the American 'Uncle Tom' to express the spirit of the people really. So, we are advancing for sure but all the quarrels, the trouble, the fighting between us, that has hindered us over fifteen years I believe.

James: And also it's good to see signs written bilingually.

Graham: True.

James: And things like that and...

Graham: Also...when there will be signs that people can see, then you start to think 'oh what's the meaning of that?' or, for example, when I go to Wales I go 'what is it?', or it doesn't matter in what country where there's another language, well people like me look and 'what's the meaning of that word?' and thusly that teaches more.

James: Yeah marvellous, marvellous, what did you do in the Cornish revival?

Graham: Well as I said before, I have been in the middle of the Cornish Language Fellowship since it was started, I'm not sure how many years, well thirty, I'm not sure when it started really um in first place the Grand Bard was Chairman of the fellowship and when they changed the constitution, because lots of Grand Bards didn't know how to speak enough Cornish, I became the chairman of the fellowship, continuing for maybe twenty years, I'm not very good with dates and years.

James: Nor me.

Graham: I can't remember exactly and also the Board...the time John Page was Secretary, when I became a member, after Wella for a long time. I published lots of books, songs, writing well lots, lots of things, some of them interesting, some of them not, and I intend to continue doing it.

James: You enjoy yourself doing all that work?

Graham: Yeah, I'm happy doing things like that, I'm somewhat tired with all the political things, sometime I get tired with lots of meetings with people talking for hours without, without success but I can suffer some of the meetings but enough is enough.

James: Yeah, I can understand that. When you were a student was there other people who knew Cornish?

Graham: Um, there wasn't, there wasn't really as I said before, people such as Wella were fluent in my opinion. Julyan Holmes was the best because he was almost the same age, same years of age as I am and lived nearby so there was a chance of meeting and chatting, practising. But after that while I was teaching in Lostwithiel at first, and Bodmin and Liskeard, well there was lots of very good students, conscientious people who became fluent in the language and with that, well, there was more people to converse with.

James: So, there was one or two, three at the most.

Graham: And, because I spoke Cornish to the children, three children, and they were bilingual completely when they were young, going, getting older and going to school the English became

stronger but they were fluent enough and lots of people came to my house to hear the children, like being in a zoo or something, people paid, well they didn't pay, to come and see those strange people. But the thing was, in my opinion I believe that it's right to teach the children Cornish and that didn't harm their English or their learning, and those three can still speak Cornish although, well two of them live away but one is left in Cornwall.

James: That's Gawen.

Graham: Yep.

James: Marvellous, very good um was the language in school or home when you studied the language or when you were young?

Graham: No, well I didn't learn anything when I was young, no Cornish at all in the family. In truth my father was somewhat against the language, he said well if you want to learn a language it's more important to learn French or something but eventually, when he was a grandfather and the children were growing up he changed his mind somewhat, that's, well that's political again, people were born for twenty years and went through the war, the world war, the second world war, they were against, my father was against nationalism if you like, because he, he didn't think that Cornwall was a country and if Cornwall were to try and be a country it would be like Hitler or something, very mixed up, the word 'nationalism' was mixed up with the language in Cornwall, an ugly word to them, and I can understand why but it wasn't the same sort as those politics. So, but in my own house, now as an adult, there's Cornish in the house all the time.

James: OK, was it difficult to study Cornish, if it was, why?

Graham: Well, firstly as I said I lived far from Cornwall and there wasn't lots of books, there wasn't sound recorders or tapes or cassettes of the language at all. The books were somewhat dry and heavy and grammatical, that was alright for me, I can learn languages like that but the biggest difficulty was that there wasn't anyone to talk with, especially living in Liverpool um I didn't know, I didn't know any other person in all the world who knew a word of Cornish, now with, there wasn't a telephone or internet only writing letters. So, difficult to do it in that way but now it's no more difficult to learn Cornish than any other subject, every subject you want to learn you must study, if you want to learn about cars or something it's necessary to study, if you want to be a nurse you must study and take exams, the same to do, well you know in order to study a language you must study well enough, it isn't, it isn't hard if, if, there is a desire to spend time doing it but it isn't hard exactly in my opinion.

James: Well, there needs to be a desire to someone also.

Graham: Yeah if, well if, with Cornish perhaps it's not important to people in their work, if you're a doctor for example you must study and there is, there is a reason to do the study you must do it in order to become a doctor, but for languages, um well Cornish, you can say, you could say that there's not a reason at all and there are people who say that. Um everyone can speak English so what's the point? Um but, unfortunately lots of people do think like that because the language is deep in the nature of the country, Cornwall and Cornish go together although it was nearly dead, the two go hand in hand in truth.

James: When you were a student was there a 'yeth an werin' or something like that, well was there people...?

Graham: Well it was starting and there is, it wasn't an organised 'yeth an werin' but I can remember going to the pub with Julyan Holmes and we chatted somewhat in Cornish but no, no, 'yeth an werin' meetings started perhaps ten years after that. 'Yeth an werin' groups were good, I can remember people who used to come every week and not say a word at all and then after six months that were starting to speak really well and um to listen, without doubt the people studying

the written language at the same time but coming to the 'yeth an werin' listening, listening, thinking um feeling the sound patterns of the language and...at first like a baby or something, immediately the words start to stream out, so 'yeth an werin' serves well, to stretch the class if you like, extend the academic study.

James: Where did you go for the 'yeth an werin'?

Graham: The first place I'm not sure but in Liskeard there was one in the pub by the station, 'Tavern an Karow' for years. Oh the first was after my class in Lostwithiel, we went everytime in the pubs to speak a bit in Cornish, but mostly in English, they weren't special 'yeth an werin' but in Liskeard for a time it was very strong.

James: Have you had enough of talking?

Graham: Yes if that's enough listening.

James: Well that's very good, very good, that's fifty minutes, that's marvellous. I would like to thank you for henna, is there something else you want to say?

Graham: No, I don't think so, I will think of something afterwards perhaps.

James: Yes that's always the case. OK that's the end of the discussion.

Graham: Thanks.

James: Thank you.