

Gorsedh Kernow's Tribute to Bill Phillips Sept. 2014

As Grand Bard, representing the College of Bards of Gorsedh Kernow, I would like to express the shock we all feel on the passing of our fellow bard, Bill Phillips, who was a dear friend to so many of us. The only comfort we have is that he died doing what he loved best, playing golf, with his friends, on his usual Tuesday morning.

Although Bill was an Australian, if you scratched the surface, he was a Cornishman who was proud of his roots. He has worked hard for Kernow all his life, especially in his retirement and this was recognised by the Gorsedh when he was invited to become a bard at Bude Castle in 1993. The bardic name he chose was Mabwyn Whel Ros, meaning Grandson of Wheal Ros, the mine his family worked in.

This year Bill and Gwen had hoped to come back to Kernow for the Gorsedh, but he reluctantly decided to stay at home and be sensible. Last week he told me that his doctor had said and I quote, "Go to Cornwall, you can die there just as well as here." The doctor, turning to Gwen, said, 'Bill would love to be cremated in Cornwall and the ashes spread on the family farm.' Bill continued, "I did not want to be a burden on anyone but as the time draws near [to the Gorsedh] I have never felt better." And this is the essence we can take comfort from- He never felt better.

Bill and Gwen have been to Cornwall many times. After researching their families, they have tramped about visiting old graves and locations, looking for the evidence of their Cornish forebears. They have also been to many Gorsedhow and that was when we, as bards in Kernow, first met Bill and Gwen. Bill was always larger than life and we all took to him. Many of us have repaid the compliment and gone to Australia to join the Cornish bards in Australia for their Gatherings. For years, Bill and Gwen have opened their home to weary travellers from Kernow. Their hospitality is boundless and on a personal note, Bill always raised the flag for me over the front door, hence I dubbed his home the Cornish Embassy in Melbourne.

This year's Gorsedh was held on the 6th September in Torpoint. Bill took a great interest in it and was thrilled with the three new bards from Victoria: Wendy, Derek and Rob. He said, "We send our best wishes for a very happy Gorsedh, and note there are some very happy folk in Victoria." Many people sent him photos of the Gorsedh and reports. He replied as follows: "There is no doubt from all the information and photos I have received it was a wonderful Day. Congratulations, you did very well. I have many wonderful photos of very happy people. I have put all the photos together in one file. This is a great day for the Cornish here in Victoria."

Bill has talked to me on several occasions about CAV and the way forward. He was a true Patron in this respect and as you can hear from his comments he is very proud of CAV and the way you are moving forward.

Bill was very interested in the young people, their lives and what they were doing. He doted on his grandchildren and would help with advice and in practical ways. Two weeks ago, I sent him a request for help with a young student who is writing a thesis on the music the Cornish brought with them on emigration to Australia. I thought Bill would be the one to ask. And sure enough the reply came back, "Anything Maureen orders I obey as any good and faithful servant. I have collected Cornish music including some music I have found that early Cornish migrants wrote or

brought with them." Sadly this student will have to find another source, but this demonstrates how willing Bill was to help anyone, known or unknown.

Personally, I am devastated and will miss my dear friend and supporter. On the last occasion I saw him, we had lunch with Gwen and he had two desserts, nothing savoury, firstly a Cornish cream tea and then he fancied a dessert on a platter, one of those deconstructed dishes, fifty ways with a raspberry. God bless his sweet tooth!

All the bards send their sincere sympathy and condolences to Gwen and all the family. Our love and thoughts are with you and we extend this to all the members of CAV, who have lost a wonderful patron, a valued member and dear friend. We are all part of the Cornish family, who had to scatter to the four winds to find work. But on occasions such as these, we are as one, united in our shock and grief, standing shoulder to shoulder with you in our thoughts, remembering a remarkable man, who will leave a huge whole in our lives. But remember the Cornish saying, "Not lost, but gone before." Rest in Peace Bill, you deserve it.

Maureen Fuller / Steren Mor

Grand Bard of Cornwall / Bardh Meur Kernow

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