

Speech by the Grand Bard - St Keverne 27th June 2014

Gorthugher da oll! Pur lowen ov-vy agas gweles omma tre an vertheryon Sen Keverne, ow kewsel an tavas Myghal Joseph ha Thomas Flamank. Dy'Sul Danky Flamank, diyskynnas Thomas Flamank o rann a'gan solempnita Awen. Ev yw moy ages deg ha peswar ugens bloedh ha pur brout adro y dehengeugh. An gewer yw splann rag an kovheans a vri yn lyver-dydh-yow kernewek ha ny ankevir an dydhyas-ma.

Good evening everyone! I am very happy to see you here in the home of the St. Keverne martyrs, speaking the language of Michael Joseph and Thomas Flamank. This Sunday Danky Flamank, a descendent of Thomas was a part of our Awen ceremony. He is over 90 years of age and very proud of his ancestor. The weather is good for this important commemoration in the Cornish calendar and we must never forget this date.

We are gathered here today to bear witness to the bravery and self sacrifice of Michael Joseph, An Gov the Smith of this parish and Thomas Flamank, a lawyer from Bodmin, two men among many, who have given their lives for Kernow. We remember everyone who has felt the need to rise up and be counted on behalf of Kernow, and in so doing have lost their life because they registered a transgression against the Cornish, in this case paying taxes to the king who wanted to raise money to wage war against the Scots, our fellow Celts. This would have meant Celtic money being used against our fellow Celts, apart from the fact that as a poor nation we did not have the money nor the stomach for taxes in the first place.

Roll forward to this year and on the 24th April, Danny Alexander MP announced that the Government will include the Cornish as a group protected by the Council of Europe's Framework Convention for the Protection of National Minorities. This came as a complete surprise and I have been heartened by the messages of congratulations I have received and the warmth and happiness it has given the Cornish and others who are pleased for us. To be officially recognised as Cornish people has made me and others feel proud, walk a lot taller and have a warm glow inside.

Between these two events, a lot has happened in the Cornish world. The people who lived here in St. Keverne in 1497, would have known no English and spoken the Cornish language. Few would have written it down. Now in 2014 we have an agreed spelling system, the Standard Written Form, which has just undergone a two year review and we hope that now that it is settled, it will not be too long before the language is taught in schools which is our ultimate goal. The government has granted us £120,000 to support Maga, the Cornish Language Partnership to continue furthering the language, which is an important step and we are grateful, but of course we would like to have more money, to have the SAME support that other Celtic languages have in the British Isles, which would mean adding a few noughts on the end of this sum, so that Cornish could be taught in schools, from primary to secondary education.

In July this year, a report will be officially announced that DNA collected from Cornish people with all four grandparents being Cornish, and it will show that we have different DNA to our neighbours in Devon. An Gov and Flamank would not have been surprised at that.

In 936 A.D. King Athelstan of Wessex met King Hywel of Cornwall and they agreed that the border between their countries would be the River Tamar. This should be set as the high water mark on the Devon side and this should be in perpetuity. Up until 1549, the time of the Prayer Book Rebellion, the title used by the English rulers was Anglia et Cornubia in Latin, meaning England and Cornwall. From then on this title was not used. Fast forward to the Queen's Jubilee in 2012, we saw her aboard the barge Gloriana on the Thames, which was displaying the flags of her nation and St. Piran's Banner, the Cornish Flag was amongst them. We hope this will be a permanent inclusion at official events, returning our standing to the time of An Gov and Flamank.

For many years we have been fighting to get a Cornish tick box on the official government census. Many of us have filled in the box marked 'Other' in previous census returns and written the word 'Cornish' next to it. I know that many old people were afraid to do that in case a policeman came knocking at the door afterwards. The numbers who have declared that they are Cornish in recent censuses has grown but at last we have achieved our goal. In the next census of 2021, we will be able to tick the Cornish box, number 06, and declare how we perceive ourselves, not necessarily where we were born. I hope there will be a huge increase from people declaring their Cornishness.

I have spent time with the descendants of Cornish emigrants in Australia, mostly of Cornish miners and they are always sad that when their ancestors were processed by immigration officials on arrival in Australia, they were classed as English, when in fact whole large towns were settled there by the Cornish. In fact two Prime Ministers, namely Robert Menzies and Bob Hawke were of Cornish descent. Now these descendants lead a life with strong Cornish values and really live in a time warp as their Cornishness has not been watered down. Every two years they stage a week long festival called Kernewek Lowender including everything Cornish from the Flora Dance to Cornish Choirs. In fact we hold nothing here to compare with this cultural event.

This year I went to Australia in March for St. Piran celebrations and a Cornish Bardic Gathering in Eaglehawk. This town was founded mainly by the Cornish and some other Celts and this year, the Cornish were asked to march in the procession down the main street as one of the founding fathers of the town. We marched boldly down with a huge number of Cornish flags on high, together with Cornish Association banners. A photo of this is in the minority report to show how the Cornish in Australia feel about their Cornishness.

All these things have been achieved by many Cornish people with their dedicated hard work through whole LIFETIMES. So ...the government has announced their intention to recognise us as a national minority. What happens next?

As I have said, at the moment, the announcement is only stating 'an intention', so we need to be careful. Material has been gathered to show our uniqueness from many sources, including the Eaglehawk procession photo, and will be collated by Cornwall Council and sent to the civil servants in the government, which will form the basis of the 4th UK Compliance Report. This report will then be sent to the Council of Europe and hopefully ratified, probably in the Autumn 2014.

How will granting national minority status improve things for us?

Firstly, there will be no extra money. However, the rewards we will reap are the intangible things. The Convention will put us on an equal footing with other minority groups in the British Isles. As a teacher of primary school children, I know the importance of boosting children's self esteem so that they reach their true potential. This official recognition will boost our confidence, give us the freedom to be ourselves, allowing us to express ourselves and help Cornwall reach its full potential in our British multi-cultural society. Many young people have to go away for higher education and to find employment. Some find their accent is derided and they choose to lose their Cornish accent so that they are taken seriously. Their spontaneity disappears as they measure their words to strengthen the point they are making in conversation. The real Cornish person disappears under a partly false persona. The convention offers protection and emphasises our equality with other minority groups in Britain, not less but the same.

This recognition will give Cornish people the respect they deserve and the confidence to stand tall and be themselves, taking their place in the multi-cultural society that is Britain today.

The Convention by recognising our identity will give us the confidence to promote and develop Cornish Culture and showcase it to others. We would be entitled to enter a team in the Commonwealth Games. We could apply for funding for cultural events and because we have been recognised, funders will be required to accept and not, as often happens now, dismiss the Cornish. This means we will have greater promotion of Cornish artists, films and other pursuits because they are working within their own culture. The Convention will encourage public bodies to ensure that they are treating Cornish people fairly and proportionately. It is a tool which can be used to come down hard on anyone who is prejudiced against an individual or the group as a whole. An individual can choose if they belong to a national minority or not.

As a primary teacher, I know that Cornish national history is not taught in schools. They may be taught about the history of their village, St.Piran or their local saint, but the Prayer Book Rebellion and other important events are not taught to children. Anyone who has had a Cornish education will testify to that. When the T.V. and newspaper reporters interviewed me on the 24th April, the day that Danny Alexander

announced the national minority news, I was amazed at how little the reporters knew about our history and they said things like: Why did we think we were a nation as we were a county and that we were all English. It was woeful. If we are to be a constituent national minority in the United Kingdom, I think the curriculum should include the history of all our constituent nations so that each nation knows their history and the history of the others in the group. This is the only road to tolerance between nations. Ignorance of a nation's history can only lead to disaster as has been shown around the world. History informs the present. By knowing the history it can inform the future. It will foster tolerance to all the minorities living in this British multi-cultural society and encourage them to live together in harmony. I hope Michael Joseph and Thomas Flamank would be pleased with our endeavours and the way we are keeping the flame alive.

Meur rasta hwi oll.

Kernow bys vyken.

Barth Meur