Bardh Meur – Map Stenek Vur
Grand Bard – Pol Hodge

Kannas Bardh Meur – Gwythvosen
Deputy Grand Bard – Jenefer Lowe

An Spyrys Keltek a Gernow - The Celtic Spirit of Cornwall

Syrra/Madama

Gorsedh Kernow is a cultural institution formed in 1928. It does not seek or play any part in political life. It is a celebratory, learned and developmental body which lies at the heart of modern Cornish culture. It understands culture to be, in the broadest sense, those events, behaviours, thoughts and expressions which constitute a distinctively Cornish, and therefore Celtic way of life. As such, whilst not an actively political body, Gorsedh Kernow recognises that politics is a key part of the way of life of any social group, and the way in which politics is practised thereby constitutes a key element of culture. This is as prevalent in Cornwall and in the culture of Cornish people as it is in any discrete cultural group anywhere in the world.

With this in mind Gorsedh Kernow wishes to make the following observations about the proposal to institute a Cornish mayoralty.

Cornish society has at its core the family, and the extended family. Many settlements, particularly those with early roots, are founded upon the linkage of a number of families, their intermarriage, interdependence and commonality of skills, styles of worship, modes of social organization, and forms of self-expression. There is generally an economic pulse at the heart of such communities, and this will have a key influence over cultural identity. There is much evidence for understanding the core values of any society in its mythology.

At the core of Gorsedh Kernow and other Cornish life is a strong connection with the myth of King Arthur. The role of Arthur himself as 'first amongst equals', and an imperfect leader who sets much store by the counsel of his peers (knights), and expresses this physically and symbolically by convening at a round table, all contribute to a clear imagery of fundamental democracy.

Such an imagery may also be found in the organisation of the mining industry (tribute system), the share fishing boat and in family-founded agricultural networks. In Cornwall, uniquely, the cultural egalitarianism is reflected in matters of gender equality – traditionally in Cornish culture women have played an equal (at least) role in shaping produce and materials for market, in land ownership and inherited tenure. These aspects of Cornish life, as well as the more modern adoption of Methodism as a religious expression with its governance rooted in the equality rendered by democracy, all conspire to demonstrate that democracy did not begin with Magna Carta or the Levellers, or the 1832 Great Reform Act, or with the Chartists or with universal franchise. The spirit and practice of Cornish democracy reaches back into the roots of our social foundation and is at the core of our culture to this day. It is an element of our identity which the vast majority of Cornish people wish to see endure and evolve.

Skrifennyas – Sethir
Secretary – Jerry Jefferies Ebost / Email secretary@gorsedhkernow.org.uk

A second aspect of Cornish culture which deeply imbues our lives is the constitutional identity of Cornwall as a kingdom which has, in its history, morphed into a Norman Earldom, and in modern times – i.e. from
1337 – in to Duchy Palatine which pertains to this day. The Duchy has several aspects to it – it has its 'Assession Manors' (the crux of its land holding), its regulation via the Stannary of the Cornish mining industry and, by dint of the scope and scale of mining and mining resources, a legislative and legal writ which extends into general Cornish society.

Thirdly, it has the privileges, rights and duties of the sovereignty of Cornwall, which was ceded by Edward III in the Charter proclamation of 1337. This sovereignty includes a right of the Duchy to impose taxes on metal production that, in turn, in theory at least, gives the stannator the right to pay tax, not to the Crown but to the Duke. This was last tested during the 1980s when adventurers in a Cost Book Company set up under Stannary Law claimed exemption from the Poll Tax – a claim which was neither contested or disproved at law. The Stannary Convocation is comprised of 24 elected Stannators who elect their Chair from emongst their number. It was last formally convened by Ducal writ in 1753, forty five years after the 1707 Act of Union.

Whilst the Stannary remains extant, it is dormant. The Duke agreed by giving Assent to the County Councils Act 1888 that Cornwall should be administered like a county by a Cornwall county Council. This pertained until 2010, when the unitary authority, combining county and district councils, was created, following a strong and influential campaign to establish a modern Cornish Assembly. Throughout this period the principle of localities electing representatives to sit in chambers of governance, electing from amongst their elected peers a 'first amongst equals', and reaching policy and budgetary decisions consensually has held firm, and has been supported by communities. There is no demand in Cornwall to change the notion of forming an assembly of representatives for the governance of the whole of Cornwall, from whose number shall be elected leaders. This is a firm principle which holds firm throughout Cornish society – it affects churches as much as sports clubs, elective chambers or synods. No case for change has been made.

Gorsedh Kernow fears that should the democratic principle be distorted as proposed, then it will affect the fabric of social order in Cornwall, which is already under significant pressure owing to confusions about culture deriving from the very sudden influx of population, new media and forms of communication, and the quickening pace of everyday life – none of these currently pressing factors seems likely to endure – markets are fickle, fashions change, lifestyles change according to circumstances – such things as climate change, conflict, inflationary cost of living – affect them.

Therefore, Gorsedh Kernow wishes to raise serious and considered concerns about the impact of imposing a directly elected Mayoralty upon a society which is not structured and sympathetic to such a notion. The package of measures proposed to 'sweeten the pill' does not seem to the Gorsedh to amount to anything nearly sufficient enough to merit sacrificing principles for pragmatic gain. In particular, the Gorsedh considers that a one-year injection of half-a-million pounds to support the Cornish language and culture is a token gesture, short-term and vague.

What is needed is a sustained revenue investment over at least two generations to enable the growth and development of this fundamental cultural tool to foster colloquial usage, creative expression and a sustainable first language community. We believe that, if a financial package is available, then it should be used over the full (i.e. thirty) years to form a meaningful and substantial cultural endowment for Cornish culture.

Skrifennyas – Sethir
Secretary – Jerry Jefferies Ebost / Email secretary@gorsedhkernow.org.uk

We also believe that any such profound change in culture should demonstrate both the evolutionary path and full commitment to the formation of an enduring Cornish Assembly to govern all domestic public services, including health, law and order, heritage and the environment, and a reformed Stannary mechanism to regulate the rapidly emerging modern Cornish mining industry (on which the devolution 'deal' is worryingly silent). Nothing less, and probably much, much more, will be good enough.

Yn lel

Pol Hodge
Mab Stenek Veur
Bardh Meur Gorsedh Kernow

Skrifennyas – Sethir
Secretary – Jerry Jefferies Ebost / Email secretary@gorsedhkernow.org.uk