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NEW ZEALAND CORNISH ASSOCIATION
Est. 1962
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NEWSLETTER

Lyther-nowodhow

Kowethas Kernewek Mordir Nowydh

January – February 484 – mis Genver - mis Hwevrer 2026

Best wishes for all our readers for 2026. We're starting off this year's newsletters with a stunning picture of the aurora borealis over Cornwall. The engine house at Wheal Coates is silhouetted in the foreground.

Storms

There have been reports in NZ about a solar storm, the strongest in over 20 years, that could affect our electricity supply and devices but it has had a more beautiful impact on the skies over Cornwall. It produced dazzling aurora on 19 January much further south than usual. A great way to kick off the year.

Thanks to Jenifer Penny, a Tasman member, for alerting me to the news.

Storms of another type have been filling our headlines recently especially about the north and east of NZ. They have brought loss of life and untold damage and sorrow.

On the opposite of the globe, Cornwall has had similar experiences. Storm Goretti cut a swathe across Europe. A red wind warning was issued for western Cornwall and the Isles of Scilly. When it struck on 8 January a wind gust of 198 kph (123 mph) was recorded by the National Coastguard Institution at Padstow. Huge seas were recorded all around the coast with waves like the one shown smashing into the breakwater at Portreath. There were road closures, extensive power outages and hundreds of trees uprooted. Thousands of households were without water for days. One man was killed when a tree fell on his caravan at Mawgan near Helston. Further north in the UK there was widespread disruption caused by heavy snowfall.

Followers of our Facebook group will have seen a comment from a friend in Cornwall saying, "It was awful and very frightening...the worst storm I have ever known."

The British government failed to call a national emergency following the storm. Some local voices, including Andrew Geroge, MP for St Ives, are questioning why Cornwall did not receive the help from national authorities that other places in the UK would get.

Another severe weather warning was issued just a few days later as Storm Ingrid bore down on Cornwall. This time , damage was less wdiespread but there was "significant tidal flooding" and this photo shows the impact along the Promenade at Penzance.

Winning architecture

Two Cornish buildings featured in the 2025 Royal Institute of British Architects (RIBA) awards.

The Story of Emily museum in the village of St Ive near Liskeard (not to be confused with the seaside town, St Ives) won the South West and Wessex Building of the Year 2025. The museum tells the story of Cornish heroine, Emily Hobhouse, who campaigned against Britain's use of concentration camps during the Boer War. The award citation states: "The understated but highly distinctive zinc-clad new exhibition building is a remarkable addition [to the Rectory where Emily was born in 1860 and surrounding heritage buildings]. Its unnerving, abstract entrance signals the uncomfortable history that is told inside. What could have been a largely black-box experience internally has been elevated by the precise coordination of daylighting, which is used to great effect."

The museum complex has the restored Hobhouse family home furnished in 1875 style, exhibitions on the Boer war and tells the story of Emily's fearless humanitarian crusade to protect innocent women and children caught up in the African war.

The second award winner was a house in Mawgan Porth, which was also long-listed for the national House of the Year award. It appeared in the recent Grand Designs series on TVNZ covering the House of the Year.

It goes slightly against the grain to celebrate a house built in an area already labelled 'Hollywood by the Sea' for use as a holiday home. As I have reported before, second homes are resented in Cornwall and many other tourist destinations because they raise property prices, are unoccupied for large parts of the year and push locals away from the more attractive locations. In this case two families pooled resources to commission a house on a stunning clifftop location overlooking the beach. The house uses local materials for the exterior stone cladding, interior plastering and timber features. At least it contributed to the local economy by providing work for local builders and engineers.

Borrowing some of the architects' picturesque wording; their clients wanted "to maximise views of the sea and sky as a backdrop to the sandy beach and the sheltered private garden. From the outside, the building is recessive, sunk deep into its dramatic cliffside setting. External materials were chosen for their visual interest and durability. From the inside, the house is designed to showcase the breathtaking Atlantic panoramas".

Minerals

Cornwall is well-known for its long history of extracting minerals, mainly tin and copper. According to an article in the industry media, Cornwall is now on the cusp of a major rebirth. Perran Moon, Labour MP for Camborne and Redruth, says that the British government's strategy to produce 10% of the UK's mineral needs domestically could help "unlock the Cornish Celtic tiger". Cornwall's unique geology has it well-placed to play a large part.

It is home to the Camborne School of Mines (CSM) which is internationally renowned as a centre for metalliferous mining education and research. It began life in 1888 in the centre of Camborne with King Edward Mine for practical training in both underground and surface work. In 1975 it moved to purpose-built facilities in Pool. Then, in 1993 it was incorporated into the Department of Earth and Mineral Sciences of Exeter University. This resulted in its relocation to the Tremough, Penryn campus of the university in 2004. Graduates can be found in all major mining areas around the world. In 2023 CSM led a sophisticated aerial electromagnetic survey of around 100km^2 of land from United Downs to Redmoor near Callington. A state-of -the-art sensor was towed beneath a helicopter to provide greater insight into underground resources.

Lithium will be a key contributor in the future and it is found in hot springs in and around the granite backbone of Cornwall. In fact, it is the largest reserve of lithium in Europe. Demand is growing rapidly for lithium for batteries and renewable energy storage systems as the world increases its reliance on electricity as an energy source. Cornish Lithium is an exploration and development company running several promising projects. One is repurposing a disused china clay pit at Trelavour near St Dennis. A

Lithium production plant

demonstration lithium production plant was opened there in 2024. Exploration for lithium is centred around Redruth where four sites are potential sources from the waters that circulate deep underground.

South Crofty tin mine closed in 1998 and there have been rumours and speculation about its reopening ever since. The current owners, a Canadian company called Cornish Metals Inc., plans to restart tin production in mid-2028. The economics are now strong because tin prices have recovered. The tin is the highest grade ore in the world not currently in production along with deposits of zinc and copper ore. Plus, the UK's National Wealth Fund committed £28.6 million as a cornerstone investment in a public equity raise. A total of £57.4 million was secured in March 2025. So far, water has been pumped out giving access to levels 350m down and revealing that the tunnels and even a 1950s pumping station are intact and in good condition. There are currently 80 people working at the site and numbers would increase to 300 when the mine enters production. This time South Crofty and Cornish tin mining may actually get back in action.

Institute of Cornish Studies

The Institute of Cornish Studies (ICS) was established in 1971 as a collaboration between the then Cornwall County Council and the University of Exeter. It is led by co-directors Garry Tregidga and Joanie Willett whose research is split into five themes: Cornish democracy, language and dialect, culture and heritage, society and economy and the diaspora.

Shortly before Christmas, I met Joanie Willett who, as well as her role with ICS, is also Associate Professor in Politics at the University of Exeter (Penryn Campus) while she was touring New Zealand and Australia to establish links with the diaspora down under. During our wide-ranging chat over a coffee and mince pie in Greytown, I was able to tell her about the Association and to direct her to the Cornish engine houses at Waihi and on Kawau Island as places with strong Cornish influences to visit before heading to Tasmania and Victoria. We agreed to increase the relationship between our organisations.

You can follow ICS through Facebook or via the University of Exeter website at

www.exeter.ac.uk/research/centres/ics/

Kernewek protected

The Cornish language has been officially recognised under Part III of the European Charter for Regional or Minority Languages.

Having initially been protected under Part II of the Charter since 2002, the intervening 24 years has seen a resurgence of the use of Kernewek in everyday life. It means Kernewek now enjoys the same level of promotion as all the other Celtic languages recognised across the British Isles, including Welsh, Manx and Gaelic.

The outspoken MP for St Ives said, "I remember being the first to speak Cornish in Parliament with my opening remarks in my maiden speech in May 1997. It caused quite a stir then. But now it's considered a norm. I was then proud to introduce the Cornish oath when swearing in to the 2005 Parliament, but now it's used by all our MPs, and with pride. Though fluent speakers are few, that doesn't undermine the significance of this important further recognition."

Others are now calling for greater use of Kernewek on road signs and signposts. Edward Rowe (aka Kernow King) has started a petition to make all place name signs bilingual in Cornwall.

Whales

Humpback whales are appearing off the Cornish coast more frequently. Marine scientists are unsure of the reason. It could simply be that whale populations have grown since the 1986 ban on hunting them imposed by the International Whaling Commission. Another theory is that they are changing their migration routes from their polar feeding grounds in the summer to their tropical winter breeding sites. The stopover around Cornwall maybe caused by lack of food elsewhere forcing the whales to divert closer to land to source nourishment. There have been sightings from the coasts of Newquay, St Ives Bay and Land's End.

One frequent visitor to the waters around the Isles of Scilly has been a whale (pictured) named Pi because of a scar on its dorsal fin in the shape of the mathematical symbol. It is difficult to determine the gender of a whale because you have to get close underneath them. Usually the only clue is when there is a calf present. A local wildlife watcher was able to capture a "one in a million" opportunity from a camera drone as Pi rolled over on the surface. Locals were excited to celebrate a gender reveal (without pink or blue balloons). With no regard to her privacy or embarrassment, the photo was circulated around the world's cetacean specialists who agree that Pi is female.

Canned pasty?

Artificial intelligence (AI) is supposed to be the next industrial or technological revolution and a lot is being said about its potential. On the other hand, we all have to be vigilant about what we see and read these days. The products of AI can be convincing as well as totally misleading.

This next photo comes with a warning. The very thought of it is disgusting but it took me a few seconds to register that it was not 'real'.

Meetings

In Christchurch, fifteen members were present for a lovely afternoon gathering on 6 December.

Online meeting

Our next Zoom meeting is scheduled for Thursday 5 March, St Piran's Day, at 7:30pm. It seems a great way to celebrate the legendary Cornish feast day. St Piran is patron saint of tinners and Mark Thomas will give a presentation about Dolcoath Mine and the role of Captain Charles Thomas in its success.

We now have a Zoom subscription so will not be restricted for time.

A link will be sent to all members who get their newsletter by email a week before the meeting. Details to log in are:

Meeting ID: 862 6611 1858
Passcode: 702941

As well as Christmas celebrations, members marked Les Mitchell's 91st birthday with a cake placed on the afternoon tea table for all to enjoy.

Heather was joined by Nadine and Ivy for Christmas musical entertainment including leading everyone in singing festive carols.

Les talked about The Witches of Cornwall.

There was more fun with a game of bingo managed by Celia. Barbara had organised 'scratchies' to see who had won the surprise Christmas parcels that had been donated at meetings over the previous 3 months.

On 11 December twenty-five Hawkes Bay members enjoyed their end-of-year function at the Thirsty Whale in Napier. The theme for discussion after lunch was Cornish castles. Members had been set the challenge of researching and reporting on one of the many castles dotted around Cornwall. Four met the challenge and spoke about St Michael's Mount, Launceston Castle, Pengersick Castle and the two castles flanking the entrance to Falmouth Harbour, St Mawes and Pendennis Castles. There are pictures on our website.

Places mentioned in this newsletter

A rather crowded map, this time...

That's it for this newsletter my 'ansomes. See 'ee again dreckly!

Nick