

**President**

Judy Wright  
12 Beaumaris Street  
Outram  
Dunedin 9019  
Ph: 027 534 7197  
E-mail: judywright13@hotmail.com

Web Site: [www.nzcornish.nz](http://www.nzcornish.nz)

**Secretary & Treasurer**

Nick Bartle  
49 Lohia Street  
Khandallah  
Wellington 6035  
Ph: 04 280 7501 or 027 578 8568  
E-mail: nzcornishassociation@gmail.com

Facebook: NZCornish



Est. 1962  
Founder: Cliff Trevelyan  
Trevelyan an Tyrnoweth

**Kowethas  
Kernewek Mordir  
Nowydh**

# N E W S L E T T E R

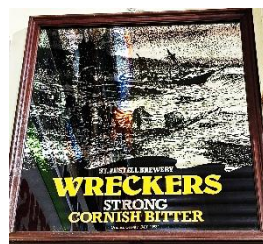
L y t h e r - n o w o d h o w

Welcome to the September/October newsletter. I love it when I hear back from members and there were three responses to the last issue.

## Cornish beer sign

Continuing from the story of my travels, Wellington member, Lynne Griggs, was in contact to say that, while she was on holiday in Australia she went on a paddle steamer cruise on the Murray River with her husband, Gerald. A day excursion took them to The Great Aussie Beer Shed Museum in Echuca, Victoria.

The museum's collection includes thousands of beer cans, tap tops, handles, barrels, bottles, signs, brewery manufacturing equipment and machinery. Amongst its high-density displays Lynne spotted a mirror sign from Cornwall. She explained that, to reduce the colourful reflections from nearby signs, she had to lie on the floor to get a good photo! Thanks for going to such great lengths and well done for spotting Cornwall.



The mirror advertises St Austell Breweries' Wreckers Bitter. Wreckers was a 4.8% strong ale but is no longer in production.

The brewery was founded in [St Austell](#) as a family-owned company in 1851 and has been operating at the same site on Trevarthian Road since 1893. It is now home to a small-batch brewery where they explore new recipes and ingredients. The company also owns the Hare Brewery near Bath (not in Cornwall!) which they claim to be a state-of-the-art modern facility.

## Fishermen's superstition

The coastal theme in the last newsletter was popular. Nelson member, Francesca Menzies, responded with another odd fishermen's superstition.

A thin membrane, called the caul (or amniotic sac) surrounds babies while they are in the womb. A fraction of babies are born with a portion of this membrane intact on their head. Even fewer are born with the caul in its entirety and it must be removed quickly so the baby can breathe.

Fishermen are superstitious about the risk of drowning. In the distant past, the membrane became associated with the ability of babies to live whilst completely submerged in their mothers' waters. So, seamen thought that having a baby's caul with them onboard ship would prevent them being drowned.

It seems macabre by today's standards but, in the 18<sup>th</sup> and 19<sup>th</sup> centuries, preserved cauls were sold by families and midwives. There was a thriving market. Sailors would pay high prices for cauls that had been air-dried on paper and subsequently framed or placed in a small pouch or locket to be worn as a lucky talisman. Adverts placed in newspapers of the time asked prices as high as 20 guineas (about \$9,500 today).

Charles Dickens famously opened *David Copperfield* with details of the historical practice:

*"I was born with a caul, which was advertised for sale, in the newspapers, at the low price of fifteen guineas. Whether sea-going people were short of money about that time, or were short of faith and preferred cork jackets, I don't know;..."*

## Online meeting Wednesday, 14 October 7:30pm.

The main topic of our next online meeting will be the early arrival of Cornish people in New Zealand and the history of the NZ Cornish Association.

There will also be some humour, music and plenty of time to chat.

Log in with these codes:

Meeting ID: 869 3648 1365  
Passcode: 001008

There will be an email reminder with a link a few days before the meeting.

## Navigation

In response to comments in the article about navigation, Virginia Graham, a member in Hamilton, pointed out that there was a location in Dusky Sound NZ, that

had the most accurately fixed longitude and latitude position in the world.

On his second voyage with the Resolution in March and April 1773, James Cook carried a chronometer that was an exact copy of John Harrison's design described in the last newsletter. With this instrument on board, William Wales, the ship's astronomer, cross referenced measurements of the angles of the sun and moon with Greenwich mean time and pinpoint his location. Cook and his crew occupied the area for five weeks and it is now fittingly known as Astronomer's Point.

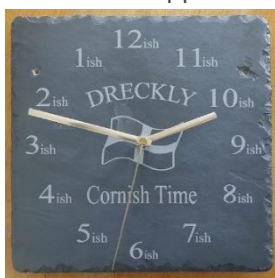


## Cornish alphabet

D

For this issue we will talk about several Ds.

Firstly, one of the best-known dialect words is 'Dreckly' which, I think, is derived from the English 'directly' meaning straight away, immediately or very soon. 'Dreckly' can have almost the opposite meaning. Like the Spanish mañana, dreckly implies that something might happen eventually but to no particular deadline – 'don't hold your breath' – so comes with a healthy dose of irony. There are many fun ways of celebrating the concept such as the pictured clock. It is made of a recycled Cornish slate roof tile and runs backwards.



That links nicely into the second "D" - Delabole slate. A quarry in north Cornwall is thought to have been in operation in Roman times. Records of slate on the site date back to the 12<sup>th</sup> century. There were five quarries in the time of Queen Elizabeth 1 that supplied slate to Brittany and the Netherlands which was transported by horse and cart for shipping out of [Port Gaverne](#). The five quarries combined into one larger open pit in 1841 and it continued to grow into the largest slate quarry in Great Britain. The arrival of railways in the late 19<sup>th</sup> century made transportation much easier. The mine gave its



name to the local railway station which then formed the focus for the amalgamation of three small hamlets, Pengelly, Meadrose and Rockhead, into the village of [Delabole](#) seen today. The mine was the deepest man-made pit in the world until it was overtaken by massive open-cast mines in

America and Australia. At its peak there were over 1,000 workers at the mine producing 120 tonnes of slate daily. In the 1970s there were financial problems the caused the company to go into liquidation. It was run under

receivership by Rio Tinto Zinc until there were a management buy-out in 1999. Since then, the Hamilton family has acquired all of the company and it remains in local ownership. These days, things are much more mechanised and 'boutique' with a workforce of around 40.

The grey-blue slate has a silky sheen and is used to make a wide range of ornamental articles (like chess boards, bowls, platters, pastry boards and house signs) but the product range extends to gravestones, flooring, worktops, architectural stone and industrial minerals. It is best known for roofing tiles. Traditional Cornish roofs are made with a triple lap gauge in which three layers of tiles are overlapped with a bedding layer of wet lime mortar laid between the tiles and pointed at the edges. This results in very durable roofs that are seen in fishing villages where they need to withstand strong winds and sea water. Known as 'scantile' roofing, it also involves different sizes of slate with the largest at the lower eaves and smallest at the top ridge.

Our third "D" was one of those people who could turn their hand to anything successfully.

Humphry Davy was a genius who triumphed in the fields of chemistry and physics and has had whole books written about him so this is a very short outline of his achievements.

Born in [Penzance](#) in 1778 to a wood carver, Humphry was educated at grammar schools in Penzance and [Truro](#) but did not do particularly well at school. After his father died in 1790, his godfather and guardian arranged for him to be apprenticed as an apothecary to the local surgeon. This introduced him to chemistry and provided contacts who encouraged him in his interests and gave him access to their private library and a laboratory.



In 1798 he was recruited as an assistant at a medical research lab in Bristol called the 'Pneumatic Institution' where he was introduced to gases. Experimenting on himself he developed a way of purifying nitrous oxide and proved that it was not harmful to breathe. He recognised its intoxicating effects and

coined the phrase "laughing gas". He later noted that it might be used as a general anaesthetic during surgery.

In 1801 he joined the recently-formed Royal Institution and began to give very popular lectures which were as much dramatic entertainment as educational. He also started investigating electricity and produced the first incandescent light by passing an electric current through a thin strip of platinum. He developed increasingly strong sources of electricity that enabled him to electrolyse a range of compounds. Through that method he was the first to isolate the elements potassium, sodium, barium, calcium, strontium, magnesium and boron. He proved that diamonds were a pure form of carbon by using lenses to concentrate the sun's rays and ignite the gemstones.

Davy's most famous invention was the miners' safety lamp. Explosions of firedamp (a mixture of methane and oxygen) in underground mines had caused hundreds of deaths. In the new lamp the flame was surrounded by a fine iron gauze that prevented any ignition of methane from spreading outside the lamp. The fine wire soon rusted in harsh underground conditions and other inventors went on to refine the design. Davy had refused to patent his invention so that others could produce similar lamps, saving more lives.

Davy was knighted in 1812 and was created a baronet in 1818, the first such honour to be bestowed on a scientist. In 1820 he was elected to the presidency of the Royal Society.

Towards the end of his career, high profile work by Davy on reducing corrosion of ships' hulls became an expensive failure for the navy. He was also involved in accusations of plagiarism and descended into arguments with his assistant, Michael Faraday, who became a highly successful scientist in his own right.



Davy had known many famous people outside the scientific community such as Samuel Taylor Coleridge, William Wordsworth and Lord Byron and wrote poetry and prose himself. He died in Geneva in 1829 following strokes. 43 years later a statue to him was unveiled at the top of Market Jew Street in Penzance. He is seen holding his life-saving safety lamp.

One more "D" – **Daffodils**. Cornwall and the Isles of Scilly produce almost 90% of the UK's commercial daffodils amounting to as much as 900 million stems with a retail value of £100 million (\$240m). The milder climate supports



flowering weeks ahead of the competition.

The largest grower is Varfell Farms, based in [Longrock](#), which has been in the daffodil business since 1885. It now supplies over 200 different daffodil varieties as cut flowers and bulbs. It uses a range of innovative

and modern techniques such as a 10-year crop rotation plan involving a wide range of cereals and vegetables to ensure soil health. Tellingly its website offers three languages other than English – Bulgarian, Polish and Romanian – revealing its reliance on seasonal workers.

I was interested to find that there are many varieties of daffodils and narcissi with Cornish names. Next time you are thinking about planting for Spring look out for 'Cornish Dawn', 'Cornish King' and 'Cornish Chuckles'.

## Made in Cornwall

One of my little piskies around the country who provide snippets of Cornish news alerted me to a rare find in Christchurch. The pisky was browsing in a charity shop for clothes for her 4-year-old daughter. She spotted a cute skirt and hoody outfit with lots of ruffles and patterns – perfect! The pisky was surprised to find that the label read "Lizzie Shirt - Made in Cornwall".

Who is Lizzie Shirt? 'Lizzie Shirtie' was an eccentric wizened old pedlar in 19th century [Falmouth](#). She met packet ships as they came into port to barter for their unusual wares from exotic locations along their trading routes. As she plied her trade along the waterfront, children would flock around her for sweets, toys and bric a brac from her big basket. She would often be seen at country fairs and tea treats.



The children's clothing brand, set up by Sarah Bond, took its name from the old pedlar. Sarah's gran would say, whenever Sarah looked dishevelled "Tuck your shirt in. You look like Lizzie Shirt!" The name stuck.

Sarah studied fashion design at the Falmouth School of Art and has years of experience in the industry. She started her business from home with a small grant and two noisy sewing machines in the attic. She now has a studio near the waterfront in Falmouth where she designs and makes children's clothing. Nearly all of the materials used are made in Britain.

Lizzie Shirt sells online and supplies only two other outlets – in Truro and St Ives - but does not currently ship overseas. That makes it quite

surprising that the outfit made its way from that single manufacturer in Cornwall to Christchurch NZ and then into the hands of my pisky.

## World record cream tea



As a fundraising project Cornwall Hospice successfully broke the world record for the largest number of people to eat a cream tea in one place at one time. The record was held by the Mercedes Benz marketing team who, at a vehicle launch, assembled 1,088 on the waterfront at Xiamen in China in 2019 (it seems an unlikely place).

The event in Cornwall was held at the Royal Cornwall Events Centre at [Whitecross](#) near Wadebridge on 22 September this year. The old record was smashed by 2,483 people. The record is recognised by Guinness World Records and rules required that each person had to eat all of the scone, jam and cream as well as drink a cup of tea. There was no mention of a rule around whether it was a Cornish cream tea (jam first and cream on top) or the Devonian version.



Cornwall Hospice is a charity that runs two facilities. The Mount Edgecumbe Hospice in St Austell was the first to be built and opened in 1980. The [Hayle](#) hospice started as a small number of dedicated beds in St Michael's Hospital but the purpose-built St Julia's Hospice took over in 2012. The hospices provide free end-of-life care and operate independently from the NHS for the majority of their funding. Income comes from public donations, legacies, a weekly lottery, and a network of over 30 charity shops across Cornwall.

## Meetings

The Christchurch branch met on 8 August 2026 when president, Jeanette Beaumont, welcomed twelve members who braved a particularly wintry day.

There was lively chat and brainstorming where to buy pasties for upcoming events, keeping in mind that Christchurch is hosting the NZ Cornish Association BGM in May (see inset).

Heather led the usual music session with 'Cornish Lads,' and then members learned how to count from one to ten in Cornish.

Finally, Celia King shared a video of a unique film of the West Country from her late father's collection that was thoroughly enjoyed by all.

Twenty intrepid members travelled along SH50 to visit the Gwavas homestead and gardens in Hawkes Bay on 10 September. A tour of the gardens was followed by lunch in front of a welcoming open fire and then a tour of the 160-year-old house.

Members who had recently visited Cornwall told the story of how they used a bus day-pass to explore Penzance, [Porthleven](#), [Helston](#) and [St Ives](#); very cost-effective and resourceful.

There was a birthday theme for the 12 September meeting in Christchurch to celebrate the 59<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the branch. Cornish songs and a lesson in Kernewek were in keeping with the theme.

Heather talked about ancient holy wells in Cornwall. There are around 200 and many have associated legends and traditions as well as Christian connections.

Judy Wright, national president, was at the meeting and encouraged members to join in our three-monthly Zoom meetings. She also told them about presentations on Cornish subjects she had given to a genealogy group in her local community.

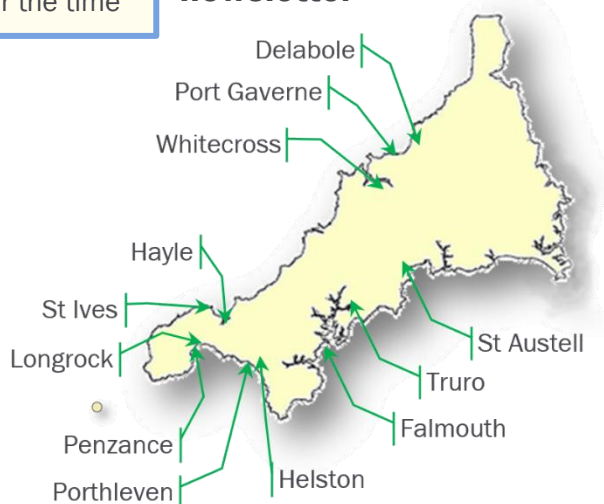
There was a quiz and a birthday cake shared at afternoon tea.

More details and photos are on our website.

## 2027 national meeting

A date for your diaries to let you plan ahead and make travel arrangements – the next biennial national meeting will be held in [Christchurch](#) on [Saturday, 15 May 2027](#) starting after a pasty lunch. More details nearer the time

## Places mentioned in this newsletter



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

*Nide*