

Thesis abstract

The reformulation of territorial identity: Cornwall in the late eighteenth and nineteenth centuries

Territory remains a focus for identification and territorial identity an enduring topic of scholarly research. This dissertation explores the territorial identity of Cornwall in the late eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. The study does three things; it defines Cornish identity on the basis of concepts of distinction, integration, process, narrative, context and scale; it applies the model of regional identity formation proposed by Anssi Paasi; and it develops the disciplinary approach of the new Cornish Studies. The subject of the dissertation is the period after the fragmentation of a linguistically based ethnic identity and before the reconstruction of a 'Celtic' Cornish identity. A comparative investigation of this phase of the history of identity transformation restores continuity between Cornwall's industrial and post-industrial periods and provides an account of modern Cornish identity. The first part of the dissertation reviews representations of Cornwall and its people in the early nineteenth century. The focus then shifts to discuss the structures and institutions – economic, social and religious – around which identities cohered. The argument of the thesis is that industrialisation based on deep metal mining gave the Cornish a renewed pride as inhabitants of one of Europe's first centres of industrialisation. In this sense Cornwall resembled other industrial regions in the early nineteenth century British Isles. However, it also differed from them, most notably in its demography, in the social relations produced by rural industrialisation and in the way its historians had re-fashioned a history of the Cornish as a distinct group. By the later nineteenth century a hybrid identity had emerged, one based on a regional pride induced by industrialisation but one that also looked back to symbols of ethnic distinctiveness. This regional identity nested within identities of Englishness and Britishness that constrained its political potential.