

CHAPTER 8

THE PROTO-INDUSTRIAL SOCIAL COMPROMISE

The argument of the previous chapter was that patterns of mobility provided one context for identity formation in Cornwall. In this chapter we pursue this contextual aspect in order to review aspects of the social relations of Cornwall in its industrial period. In doing this, moreover, the discussion cannot confine itself solely to context. For in pursuing the context of identity in Cornwall, we inevitably return to issues of process and narrative.

The social history of Cornwall, the relations between social groups and the patterns of authority and dependence that held social relations together added to that 'space of possibilities' within which the Cornish identity was transformed during industrialisation. This chapter looks at three readings of Cornish social relations in this period. First, and most briefly, we revisit a dominant contemporary reading of social relations in early nineteenth-century Cornwall. Second, we assess the most influential academic reading of social relations in nineteenth century Cornwall, one firmly established in the mainstream of post-1960s British social history. Finally, we suggest a third, more 'etic', reading of some features of the Cornish industrial experience. Elements, individually present in other places, were combined in Cornwall in a unique social compromise, constructed during the eighteenth century and lasting through to the 1840s. By utilising the concept of 'discourse' at this point we are able to explain more comprehensively certain unique aspects of Cornish social relations in the early nineteenth century. Furthermore, in reconceptualising

the history of class relations in Cornwall we introduce a sense of process into the constraints of material and narrative structures and contexts.

As we argued earlier, mining was the dynamic sector of Cornwall's economy and, by the early nineteenth century, miners were the largest occupational group in Cornwall. The dominant outside reading of the miners was that of well-ordered and civilised paragons of the progressive spirit permeating the industrial regions of Britain (see Warner, 1809, 297). By the 1840s, Tuckett, comparing the Cornish miners with other labouring groups, concluded that they presented 'the brightest picture we have met with, of the condition of any considerable body of the labouring class in England at the present day' (Tuckett, 1846, 536-537).

Although described by Tuckett as a 'class', Cornish miners steadfastly – admirably in the opinion of a succession of bourgeois commentators – refused to act like other sections of this 'working class'. As Rule has pointed out, the representation of Cornish mining as 'strike-free' and the Cornish miner as unsullied by the trade unionism and Chartism convulsing other industrial regions in the 1830s and 40s became a 'cliché as one writer picked up from the account of another' (Rule, 1992b, 250). 'No one has heard of disagreements between the Cornish miners and their employers – no combinations or unions on the one side or the other exist' wrote the mine manager John Taylor in 1834 (cited in Burt, 1969, 38-39). Collins found 'few grumblers' (Collins, 1852, 78). Strikes were 'unheard of in the Cornish mines' (Leifchild, 1857, 146) and the miners supposedly remained 'comparatively indifferent to political agitation' well into the 1850s (Merivale, 1857, 312).

Because of this reputation, in traditional historical readings the Cornish working class has been a void or absent group. Without the characteristics traditionally

associated with a class or labour consciousness the Cornish rarely feature in work produced by British social and labour historians since the 1960s (for a rare mention see Hobsbawm, 1964, 30).

An absent working class? British historians and social class

Social class and class identities were at the forefront of the social history written by British historians from the 1960s onwards. For Marxist and non-Marxist alike, class became the central organising concept applied to understanding nineteenth century society (Perkin, 1969; Thompson, 1968). By far the most influential voice amongst this body of work was that of E.P. Thompson, in his path-breaking *The Making of the English Working Class*. For Thompson, people produced classes in a dialectical process during which their agency operated within the limits and parameters set by economic structures. Classes, as a result, were historical relationships produced by the acts and thoughts of real people in real places but people who were, nevertheless, anchored to a particular economic context, their experience moulded and contained by that context. Thus, underlying Thompson's cultural marxism there remained an ultimately materialist account of class formation (Sewell, 1990). For twenty years most British social historians accepted the broad model of class proposed by Thompson.

Furthermore, there was a distinct tendency to assume a teleological process of class and labour formation. From this viewpoint groups and times that were seen as diverging from a 'naturally driven path' became problems in methodological terms (Price, 1991, 251). This explains why so much has been written about the 'problem' of working class reformism in Britain in the mid-Victorian period, after Chartism (see Kirk, 1984, 5-11). In a similar way, in Cornwall the 'problem' as to why the

miners were not more involved in early unionism and in the Chartist movement has taken central stage. But, just as the earlier focus on the 'working class quietism' of mid-Victorian politics has been described as an 'old chestnut' (Wahrman, 1996, 346), so it might be proposed that the absence of a class identity amongst the Cornish miners deflects our attention from a fuller understanding of the context of their actual lived identities in the early nineteenth century (for a similar argument applied to small rural producers in the nineteenth century see Reed and Wells, 1990, 217).

In the 1980s, the pendulum swung away from 'materialist' accounts. Gareth Stedman Jones (1984) suggested that more attention be given to 'languages of class' rather than the economic structures underlying class formation. And, seeking the languages of class in the early nineteenth century, Jones and, later, Patrick Joyce (1991) were unable to find them. People in the nineteenth century, argued these revisionists, adopted languages of populism or of democracy but only rarely saw themselves as class subjects. Writers influenced by post-structuralism echoed these conclusions. Class had no fixed meanings at all; instead nineteenth-century languages of class were 'complicated, heterogeneous and variable' (Scott, 1992, 174). Materialist accounts of class as the dominant identity of industrialising Britain were being challenged by idealist accounts that viewed class as just one identity among many, if that.

The debate over class and the 'linguistic turn' in social and labour history was waged with some heat for a decade from the late 1980s (The key interventions were Palmer, 1990; Joyce, 1993, 1994, 1-20, 1995; Mayfield and Thorne, 1992, 1993; Lawrence and Taylor, 1993; Vernon, 1994; Kirk, 1994a, 1996; Jones, 1996; Price, 1997). While idealists accused materialists of an economic reductionism,

materialists counter-charged idealists with linguistic reductionism. To some extent both positions are guilty of caricature. Social historians working within the 'Thompsonian' tradition have been alert to the meanings of language and culture, while most historians adopting the linguistic turn have, in their published work, not denied the existence of reality. In recent years there have been signs of a cooling of the debate. Joyce has called for a 'return to history' while others have pointed to common ground between Thompson's work and post-structuralist concerns (Joyce, 1997, 1998; Steinberg, 1996, 1997). Later in this chapter we will propose one way in which material and idealist accounts of class formation may be combined. But first, just how exceptional were Cornish mining communities in the early nineteenth century?

Cornish exceptionalism

By 1851, as Figure 8.1 indicates, miners were the dominant occupational group in many districts of Cornwall, especially the west. In this and other ways, they manifested some of the structural preconditions cited as necessary for group identity (see Cornell and Hartmann, 1998, 167.) (Fishermen would be another group with an obvious occupational identity.) But, as Savage (1996, 72) demonstrates, not all isolated and self-enclosed communities with dense social ties facilitated working class mobilisation; just as many displayed political passivity. This included Cornish rural industrial communities.

For example, in the literature on British social history, Chartism plays a pivotal role in narratives of class formation. This movement, expressing political demands in a language of class opposition, if not class conflict, and linking up dispersed local

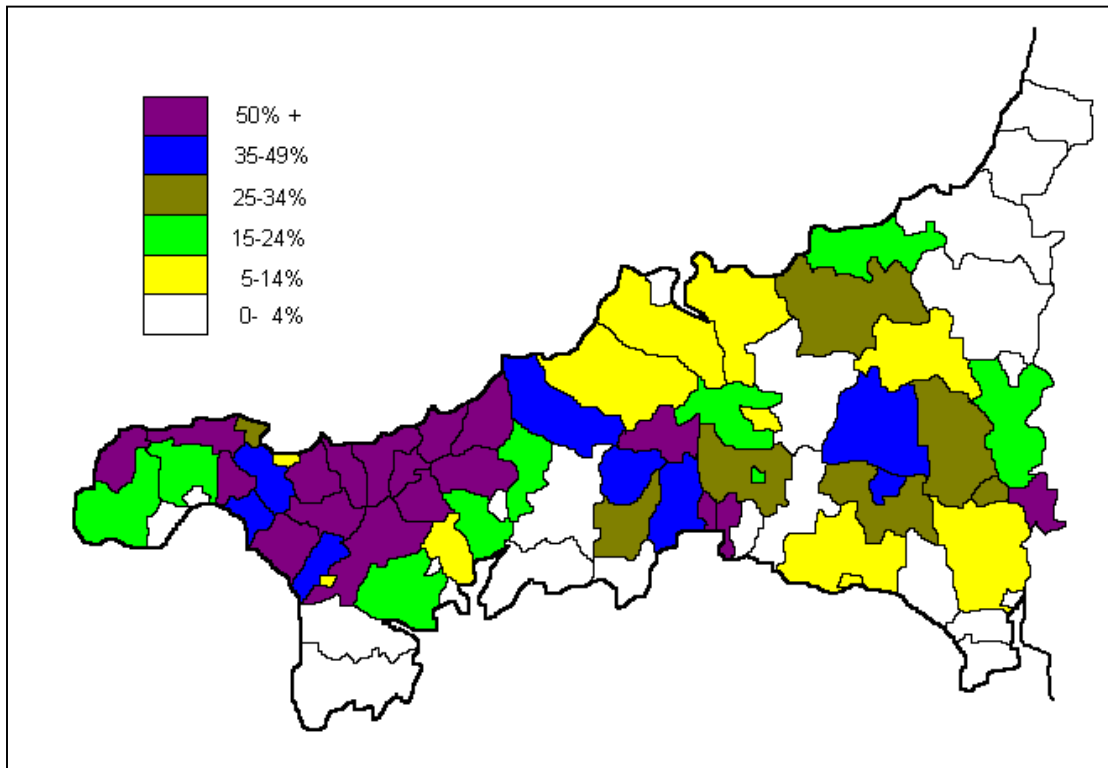


Figure 8.1: Proportion of miners and quarrymen, 1851

communities into a national movement directed at the centre of political power, has been viewed as a moment of crystallisation of consciousness, although the debate continues about the class nature of that consciousness (Jones, 1984; Kirk, 1998, 137). In Cornwall, however, the absence of widespread Chartist activity, especially among the miners, has been taken as indicating the absence of class consciousness, a position bolstered both by contemporary accounts of a consensual and strike free society and by later historical readings (see Hamilton Jenkin, 1927, 332; Payton, 1992a, 87-88, 140-141). And yet, when removed geographically from Cornwall, Cornish miners were just as likely to organise and unionise as any other group, as their role in the Burra Burra strike in South Australia in 1848/49 would suggest (Davies, 1995).

Therefore, in order to explain the absence of Chartism, unionisation and strike activity, attention has to be directed at local social relations. In a series of articles Rule has advanced the proposition that, as individual variables also occur in regions where unionisation and strikes were widespread, we must explain Cornish miners' exceptionalism through a combination of factors, a 'configuration of quietism', the 'combined or cumulative effect [of which] could be the outcome of an environment impropitious for the growth of trade unionism and popular political radicalism of the kind exemplified by Chartism' (Rule, 1992b, 248/249. This re-states his argument of 1971a and is re-affirmed in turn in Rule, 1998). Principal among these cumulative factors was the tributing method of wage payment. This involved competitive and individual wage bargaining between groups of miners and mine captains. Tributing combined with Methodism, which siphoned off potential allegiance through its popular revivalism. Methodist opposition was compounded by landlords' paternalism, producing a 'web of dependence and deference', the cost book system of financing the mines, which had led to 'the practical disappearance of the employer', and distance and isolation from other industrial regions (Rule, 1992). Rule's work indeed takes us a considerable way towards explaining the lack of industrial organisation among Cornish miners before the 1860s. However, extending this to a model of Cornish 'working class quietism' more generally is less convincing. In particular, its shortcomings are an overly narrow definition of collective activity and insufficient contextualisation of the miners' non-work experience. For, as we shall see below, there is considerable evidence that Cornish communities were not over-determined by work and the social relations of the workplace.

'Quietism' assessed

An absence of explicit and formal combinations does not mean there was no collective organisation. Rule himself has drawn attention to the established custom among the miners of not bidding at the regular auction of tribute pitches against the *pare* (group) of miners who were already working that pitch (Rule, 1992a, 253). This, together with evidence for widespread 'kitting' or cheating on tribute bargains, implies a level of collusion among groups of miners and the existence of 'tacit combinations' (Rule, 1987 and Rule and Wells, 1997, 53-66). These co-existed in early nineteenth century Cornwall with other examples of collective organisation.

Rule has claimed that 'miners lacked the experience of the independent mutual funds which played a clear role in the development of artisan trade unions' (Rule and Wells, 1997, 59). But, the evidence appears to contradict this. In 1839 there were five miners' Friendly Societies in Cornwall, one in mid-Cornwall and the other four in the west. That in mid-Cornwall and one of those in the west had been formed before 1825. This was at a time when there was only one similar society in the south Wales coalfield (Southall, 1988, 471). As mines were opened in east Cornwall, miners' Friendly Societies took root there as well (see *WB*, 2 July 1842). More generally, Friendly Society membership in Cornwall was relatively high early in the century. In 1815 the number of members of Friendly Societies in Cornwall was equal to 10.4 per cent of the 1811 population (calculated from Gosden, 1961, 22). Only the industrial counties of northern England, plus Monmouthshire and neighbouring Devon, had higher rates of Friendly Society membership. As many as 29-33 per cent of the adult male population of Cornwall or 42-48 per cent of

families were supported to some extent by Friendly Society funds in 1815 (Gorsky, 1998, 493). Gorsky's detailed analysis of membership at parish level also indicates that the mining parish of Illogan had one of the highest densities of Friendly Society membership (1998, 495). It seems that membership of independent mutual societies co-existed with the insecure and dependent support of the employer-run sick clubs for miners. Significantly, in 1841, Tremenheere noted, in relation to independent benefit clubs, that people in the mining districts 'are strongly inclined to their formation'. Moreover, 'the population is strongly adverse to the interference of gentlemen in their concerns' (BPP, 1841, 92-93). This indicates a hitherto unstressed but important role for benefit societies in the self-identification of mining communities.

Furthermore, extending a description of 'quietism' from the political consciousness of Cornish miners to the outlook of the broader community stretches the concept too far. In 1772 the meaning of 'quietism' is first documented as 'a state of calmness and passivity ... repose, quietness, tranquillity' (Onions, 1973, 1731). Yet, less than a year later, in January and February 1773 Cornish miners engaged in one of their periodic collective actions, descending in large crowds on local markets and towns, demanding and obtaining lower prices for grain (*Sherborne Mercury* 1 February 1773; 22 February 1773). The role of 'food riots' in Cornwall suggests we should reject the concept of 'quietism' as a general description for Cornish labouring communities.

For Rule has shown that major instances of food rioting occurred regularly in Cornwall from 1729 to 1847 (Rule, 1970; 1971a, 146ff). Thompson has noted that 'notoriously the Cornish tanners [*sic*] had an irascible consumer consciousness, and

a readiness to turn out in force' (1993, 213). Bohstedt, quantifying the numbers of riots in the crisis decades of the 1790s and 1800s, found that the number of riots per 10,000 persons in Cornwall in this period was almost three times higher than in the most riot-prone parts of England – London, Nottinghamshire and Devon (Bohstedt, 1983, 239). Yet Rule insists that such examples of collective action be clearly bracketed off from 'industrial disputes per se' (Rule and Wells, 1997, 6). Food riots merely 'revealed the miners' conservatism and commitment to a prior political economy, rather than their potential for political radicalism' (Rule and Wells, 1997, 80). But Rule's mentor, E.P.Thompson, in establishing his classic case for food rioting to be seen as a part of the 'moral economy of the crowd' pointed out how, 'while their moral economy cannot be described as "political" in any advanced sense, nevertheless, it cannot be described as unpolitical either, since it supposed definite and passionately held notions of the common weal' (Thompson, 1993, 188). Indeed, the crowd, bent on establishing their 'moral economy', undertook actions that look remarkably similar to contemporary bodies of striking workers elsewhere. In Cornwall the miners, at the core of the majority of rioting crowds, could 'ensure that all males effectively struck work and then mobilised to secure moral economic conditions' (Rule and Wells, 1997, 5). For example, miners from Charlestown United went from mine to mine in mid-Cornwall in 1847 calling out workers, preparatory to descending on the market at St.Austell (*WB*, 18 June 1847). Such tactics, and the mutual purpose behind them, suggest that the ends may have differed but the means were very similar to much early nineteenth century strike action in industrial northern England.

If crowd action in Cornwall to control the food market involved many of the same features as strikes and political mobilisation, then continuing to ignore these

when studying the collective behaviour of working people would seem untenable. Indeed, Kirk does not distinguish food riots from trade unions, attacks on machines, cooperatives, Friendly Societies and political organisations. For him, these were all ways in which workers could act collectively (Kirk, 1994b, 7). If we accept this approach, then the notion of 'quietist' Cornish mining communities rapidly dissolves.

The concept of 'quietism' therefore rests on too narrow a definition of collective agency. Instead of viewing the Cornish working class as a community with an absence of labour history we need to reconstruct the social relations of Cornwall. In moving to the preferred reading of this chapter we will first clarify the context for the emergent identities of the period before the mid-nineteenth century. In this way, incidentally, we shall also begin to link the economic and political spheres of people's lives with the social and the cultural.

Merchant capitalism and independent communities

As we saw in chapter 5, two groups dominated Cornish society in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries. Landlords owned the land and mineral rights and sometimes invested directly in mines adventuring and other industrial activities. Over the eighteenth century merchant capitalists had joined them, diversifying their trading interests into smelting and the advance of credit. This produced a social matrix in west Cornwall that resembled a form of merchant capitalism. Kirk (1994b, 22) summarises the distinction between merchant capitalism and industrial capitalism. The former rests on the exchange and distribution of finished goods; merchant capitalists act as commercial agents and assume banking functions. In the latter, the focus moves from accumulation

through exchange to accumulation from production and control over labour processes. Merchant capitalism tends to accompany an exchange-based critique, of monopolies, speculators and bankers, and attention moves beyond the workplace. In contrast, in industrial capitalism the flash point becomes the workplace and the social relations embedded in it.

Moreover, merchant capitalism produces a particular relationship between capital and community. Sider (1986, 37), in the context of Newfoundland, has explained how 'tradition' emerges in the context of merchant capitalism. In conditions of merchant capitalism production of commodities occurs alongside the relatively autonomous reproduction of communities. Merchant capitalism produces a space for 'independent' communities and, in this space, 'traditions' emerge, involving an increased 'local or regional particularity' (Sider, 1986, 86). Cornwall was not merchant capitalist in the same sense as Newfoundland. Nonetheless, this comparison resonates across the Atlantic. Both places contained communities that, on the one hand, experienced tightening bonds because of their shared occupational culture but, on the other, were simultaneously 'hollowed out' as their powerlessness was exacerbated. In mining communities there was an increased density of interactions within a distinct occupational culture, one in which new eighteenth century 'traditions' such as tributing retained an echo of the early-modern free miners. But these traditions had themselves been consolidated 'as a result of the needs of the capitalised industry to develop a sophisticated method of payment' that 'would ensure the largest degree of application possible from unsupervised labour' (Rule, 1981, 67). And at the same time the tentacle-like spread of market relations and a global market for tin and copper was, by the end

of the eighteenth century, exacerbating the vulnerability of these same communities.

Sider's insights connect the materialist logic of accumulation with an idealist logic of tradition and allow us, to some extent, to explain the paradoxical combination of 'new' recognisably capitalist forms and 'traditional' institutions and forms of behaviour in eighteenth century Cornwall. Within such a merchant capitalist milieu folk culture itself became part of the battleground. Collective self-assertion was a struggle against appropriation and an assertion of the relative continuity of community. Tight bonds of kinship and dense networks of community gave rise to a community consciousness. As their propensity for food rioting shows, these communities dominated by mining were sufficiently cohesive to deploy important shows of strength in defence of a moral economy after the 1720s. (For the distinction between 'communities dominated by mining' and 'mining communities' see Burke, 1986, 194.)

But were the communities created by merchant capitalism really independent? The literature veers confusingly between narratives of independence and dependence. Rule, for example, has pointed to the weaker hold of paternalism and deference among mining communities in the eighteenth century, with their 'special sense of being "communities apart" ' (1981, 18 and 208). But he has also argued that a 'web of dependence' existed, whereby charity and patronage from the landed class guaranteed deference and order from the poor (1992b, 255-257). It is not difficult to find examples of such patronage. William Jenkin, the steward at Redruth for the Hon. Charles Agar of Lanhydrock, in 1795 gave £1.11s.6d. to a 'poor woman whose husband was killed a few days ago in Tincroft mine' and made an 'advance [of £12] to purchase corn and flower [*sic*] for the labourers in Tincroft mine in

conjunction with their adventurers' (CRO CL317). But it is significant that this landlord influence was mediated through stewards. With the notable exception of the Basset family, who lived at the heart of the central mining district at Tehidy, between Camborne and Redruth, most mineral lords resided at some distance from their mining properties. Furthermore, the estates of Cornish landowners were not concentrated, being dispersed over a wide reach of Cornish countryside (Jaggard, 1999, 152). There were, it is true, other factors producing dependence. One such was the system of subsist in the mines, an advance of pay on expected earnings, which combined with widespread use of credit at the shops to produce dependence on mine captains and shopkeepers (BPP, 1841, 89). This was a dependence that may have been felt more keenly on a day-to-day basis than the indirect impact of the more remote landlord effected through his steward.

Moreover, considerable counter-evidence exists for independent 'manners' alongside such webs of dependence. Miners, like early nineteenth century artisans (Rule, 1985, 26), were described as possessing 'that independence of feeling, and the reluctance to have recourse to the poor-rate, which characterise the class to which they belong' (BPP, 1841, 93). For one local middle class contemporary, the miner was a:

man of frank and independent manners. He is not often *insolent*, but he is usually *blunt*. Something beyond this must be said of many, of the younger men especially. Indeed, rudeness – a want of civilization – is the most unfavourable feature of the mining as compared with the urban or agricultural classes. [There was a] 'character of independence – something American – to this population' (BPP, 1842, 759).

Barham went on to pinpoint the causes: a lack of social contact with the adventuring classes, the system of wage payment for underground miners, with its

impression of independence, combined with the ever-present chance of limited social mobility through a good period of earnings. The tributer, in particular, could hope to join those 'wealthier individuals near him, who have for the most part, at no remote period, occupied some of the lower steps of the ladder on which he himself now stands' (BPP, 1842, 759).

Charity and patronage from stewards and the gentry may, indeed, be evidence as much for the presence of independent as dependent communities. The steady drip of charity was a necessary ransom on property provided in the face of a potentially turbulent crowd. In a letter to the Home Office, Thomas Cummins of Bodmin, clerk to the Tywardreath division of the Powder Bench, reported in 1830 that 'it requires the greatest attention, care and caution on the parts of the Magistrates to keep such a body of men [the miners] in order' (PRO HO 52, letter from Thomas Cummins, 17 August 1830). At this time of the Swing riots in southern England magistrates were unwilling to provoke the population: 'we deem it inadvisable' wrote the magistrates of the western division of Penwith, 'in the present quiet and orderly state of this part of the Kingdom, by a public act of our own to create alarm, or to show an unmerited distrust of the peaceableness and loyalty of the neighbourhood' (PRO HO 52, letter from magistrates of the Western Division of Penwith, 16 December 1830). Local magistrates were wary of communities that were not fully tied into the restrictive threads of patronage.

Class and space

We need, finally, to reinsert space into this account. Workplace and place of residence had long been separate in the mining districts, with the development of large mines since at least the mid-eighteenth century. This facilitated the

appearance of a distinct culture, outside traditional social ties (cf. Katznelson, 1985, 267). Geographically separate mining communities and an absence of contact with the middling classes, plus the short hours of work of underground miners had, in the eighteenth century, already produced that society where, as one St. Just respondent to the Children's Employment Commission in 1841 later reported, the miners were 'less subject to a master's control' (BPP, 1842, 761). The miner, in particular, was part of a crowd, regularly meeting in large numbers. This was noted with some trepidation by the propertied classes. In 1842, there were several reports of the miners' habit of meeting together on a Saturday, the 'crowds of idle youths', the 'congregating in large numbers on market days' and the tendency to 'congregate in large masses, without efficient discipline' (BPP, 1842, 761). Earlier, in 1796, three Cornish JPs had gone so far as to write to the Home Secretary expressing their concern that, in relation to mining communities, 'no Magistrate can attend in Person ... for the Civil Power to venture amongst them, unattended by the Military, would ... be unsafe, dangerous and thoroughly ineffectual' (cited in Wells, 1983, 258).

Such evidence of the independent temper of local communities dominated by mining can be related to a crucial contribution to the literature on class formation and space developed by Savage (1996). He suggests that territorial space is important in terms of class formation in two ways. First, particular places become habitats for certain social groups and thus become the bases for collective identity (Savage, 1996, 59). But, in building on this, Savage proposes, secondly, that 'class formation can take place as social classes stretch across space by building networks which link members of that class together' (1996, 59). He then introduces a significant insight.

On the one hand the density of some networks allow the construction of solidaristic and communal ties on an intra-locality and segmental basis. On the other, the construction of social networks of a wide range, linking members across many different sites, creates an extensive inter-locality basis for solidarity. The latter is clearly necessary for class formation on anything more than a limited, community level. However, the two networks, those with a high density and those with a wide range, may in practice compete. Thus, the involvement of individuals 'in wide-ranging networks may preclude them from the dense local world of the neighbourhood' (Savage, 1996, 69). At the same time dense ties may produce a cultural self-containment that inhibits wider links. Savage concludes that 'dense ties do not in themselves appear to be enough to sustain class formation at the level of political mobilisation'. Instead, 'political mobilisation depends upon the creation of links between specific places' (1996, 74/75). What Savage is saying here is that local networks may give rise to group identities but it was only with the construction of territorially more extensive networks that these identities could be amalgamated within more explicitly class conscious forms of identity.

Savage's network model takes us some way towards explaining the particular historical geography of early nineteenth century Cornwall. Here were communities dominated by the mining industry, culturally differentiated and collectively integrated, exhibiting the dense network ties conducive for a solidaristic community identity. Yet these were apparent class communities without a language or a consciousness of class. This was because the dense ties of the local crowd did not exhibit a great range.

Charlesworth (1994, 10) has observed that, in contrast to food riots in Devonshire and counties to the east, riots in 1795 and 1801 in Cornwall were

sporadic and confined to market days, suggesting a reaction primarily reflecting the rhythm of the market place. To the east he detects clear waves of protests in both those years, with centres in Exeter and Plymouth, implying an active communication of protest. This he ascribes to the presence of a 'trade unionist organisational network', which facilitated mobilisation across a range of different localities. Such contacts did not exist in Cornwall where, following Savage, the dense community solidarities of unsupervised Cornish rural-industrial communities were in tension with extended inter-community networks.

Dispersed paternalism

Independent communities in the eighteenth century were not, moreover, entirely restricted to the mining districts. In the 1760s Thomas Carlyon was experiencing considerable aggravation from the fishing communities at Mounts Bay. In 1766 'the ungrateful behaviour of the masons in leaving the work' at Mousehole quay was upsetting him, as were the 'exorbitant demands of the Newlyn [fish] cellar women'(CRO ML 781). In February 1768 the Newlyn women were demanding the maintenance of a customary rights to 'druggs' (dregs of the catch) and 'skimming the washing troughs'. Viewing this as a 'cloak for embezzling things' Carlyon determined to abolish the custom (CRO ML 791, letter 3 February 1768). In May the women were still holding out despite threats to import women from nearby villages 'in order to break the back of all those wicked combinations' (CRO ML793, letter 26 May 1768). Some fishing communities, also enmeshed in smuggling activities, were, it appears, difficult to control.

Yet they were not out of control. In Cornwall, as in other regions, a balance was reached, a 'negotiated compromise ... between the economic and social pressures of

dependence and independence' (Price, 1986, 83). In coal mining areas coal owners in the 1840s turned to 'strategies of paternal social control' that produced a structure of autonomy at work and dependence above ground. In Cornwall the compromise differed in subtle ways. There was no visible class of mine owners, exerting influence in both workplace and community. On the other hand, there was no single major landlord, such as Lord Penrhyn, who dominated mid-nineteenth century Welsh slate quarrying communities (Jones, 1981). Paternalism was present but in different forms, exercised by the agents of the adventurers, the captains, in the mines and by the agents of the landlords, the land stewards, in the community. The pattern of dispersed paternalism that had emerged in eighteenth century Cornwall was a particular local version of compromise. And what further qualified the pressures of merchant capitalist accumulation and stripped away some of the consequences of paternalism was the ambiguous position of a proportion of the mining community in relation to wage dependence.

Partial proletarianisation

Various writers on early nineteenth century Cornwall have viewed the Cornish labouring household as 'semi-proletarian', citing the 'commonly held image' of the miner as a 'worker-peasant', partly engaged in mining, partly in subsistence and family farming and partly engaged in seasonal work such as fishing (Rose, 1987, 110, 120). Metaphors of 'archaism' regularly surface, implying a group not fully engaged in capitalist commodity relations. Indeed, Jenkin, in a discussion of Rule (1971b, 10) made an intriguing link between such archaism and Cornwall's status as a 'pioneer industrial area'. We can build on this insight by proposing that the relatively early negotiated compromise of 'dispersed paternalism' reached in

industrialising eighteenth century Cornwall both crystallised some apparently pre-capitalist non-market forms of commodity production and proved sufficiently durable to persist largely unchanged into the 1840s. As we now realise from comparative work on areas outside Europe, the history of labour relations is not a simple linear one of the movement from unfree to 'free' wage labour. There is a variety of intermediary forms of partial proletarianisation (c.f. Amin and Linden, 1996). Cornwall offers a historically and geographically specific variant of this.

Cornish underground miners' relative work autonomy did not differ significantly from other mining regions. What was more different - at least in comparison with coal mining districts - was the extent of access to non-commoditised production of housing and food (for owner-occupied landholdings in Wensleydale and Swaledale among lead miners in the 1840s see Hallas, 1998). This can be seen in turn as part of a well developed 'economy of makeshifts', mixing earned income with charity, savings, access to customary rights, help from neighbours and kin and other sources of income (c.f. Kidd, 1999, 2).

Self-built houses with a low ground rent and some land on which food could be grown provided families with a subsistence 'safety-net' that supplemented earnings from mines employment. In 1841 Stephen Davey, a Redruth magistrate, reported how he and his brother 'have been in the practice of granting leases on three lives to the miners, especially in the St. Agnes district, of one, two or three acres of coarse land, on which they are bound to build a house of a certain description' (BPP, 1842, 830). The Daveys were continuing a well established practice, one attested on marginal land on the Basset estate in Illogan in the second half of the eighteenth century (Rowe, 1953, 225/226). The annual rent on these leases was around five shillings an acre in 1841, with a fine of £30 to £50 to set up a new life.

The cost of building the house was £35-50 (BPP, 1841, 84). The ability of the potential leaseholder to meet these capital costs was enhanced by the tribute payment system which resulted in great variability of earnings. Contract bonanzas enabled the purchase of a three life lease and the building of a cottage. In the Redruth Poor Law Union it was suggested in the mid-nineteenth century that 'thousands of cottages have been built by miners. They occasionally get a "sturt", that is, they come upon a body of ore suddenly, and that gives them a sum varying from £50 to £200 or £300. The first thing they do with it is to build a cottage' (BPP, 1856, XVI, 17).

In the evidence to the Children's Employment Commission in 1841 William Petherick, manager at Dolcoath, Camborne, stated that 'a great many of our miners get houses and little plots of their own', while Edward Carthew, agent at Balleswidden, echoed this; 'a great portion ... live on little plots of their own' (BPP, 1842, 838, 847). Barham summed the situation up as 'a very great number of miners are now located on leaseholds of an acre or two' (BPP, 1842, 753). Such access to land could make a considerable difference to the living standards of a mining family. Rose (1987, 119) estimates that a three acre smallholding might contribute half the cash value of the average family's food budget in the later nineteenth century. But contemporary accounts do not quantify the number of families with access to smallholdings. In his survey of the mining population in 1841 Tremenheere found that 23.5 per cent of 685 miners in the Redruth, St. Just and St. Blazey districts owned their own cottages (BPP, 1841, 84). But it is unclear how much land was attached to these cottages.

Perhaps because of this uncertainty there is disagreement about the economic importance of smallholdings. Some writers have tended to romanticise the

significance of the level of access to land. Rose states that 'at least until the mid-nineteenth century, it was the norm for the Cornish miner and family to have some access to land for subsistence production' and that miners' cottages were 'typically surrounded' by plots of a half to three acres' (Rose, 1987, 113). In contrast, Rule notes that the dual occupation of tinner-husbandman of the early eighteenth century became less frequent with the rise of a more specialised workforce in the more heavily capitalised copper mines (Rule, 1970, 73). He suggests that, by the 1820s, the increase of population must have had restricted opportunities for the renting of smallholdings (Rule, 1971a, 57).

Evidence from the tithe apportionment surveys of 1839-43 suggests that the incidence of smallholdings varied considerably from parish to parish in the early 1840s.

Table 8.1: Smallholdings, c1840 (% of total occupiers)

Parish	1-5 acres	5-20 acres	Total
St.Agnes	34.1	13.0	47.1
Redruth	17.7	8.2	25.9
Carnmenellis, Wendron	12.9	43.9	56.8
St.Erth	11.8	5.6	17.4
St.Hilary	12.5	8.0	20.5
Ludgvan	5.7	6.6	12.3
Pendeen, St.Just	5.4	5.4	10.8

Source: CRO TA 2, TA 197, TA 249, TA 59, TA 87, TA 129, TA 95

In upland Carnmenellis 71 per cent of the 93 families headed by copper miners and 81 per cent of the 16 families of tin miners held land in 1843 (CEBs, Wendron,

1841 and CRO/TA 249). In St. Agnes, where over 70 per cent of the male workforce was employed in mining in 1851, access to smallholdings was also common; involving perhaps as many as a half of mining families, more if holdings of less than an acre are included. Significantly, in view of Rule's comments about population growth, even in the more urbanised parish of Redruth, almost a quarter of all households occupied at least an acre of land as late as 1840. However, to the west access to smallholdings of over one acre decreased and at Pendeen, a community like St. Agnes dominated by mining, they were much less common.

Barham pinpointed the factors that lay behind differential access to land. There were two, 'the disposition of the lords to grant such leases' and the 'relative denseness of the population to the quantity of unoccupied land' (BPP, 1842, 754/755). Rose confirms the latter point: in urban areas 'even small allotments were out of reach of miners' by the 1840s (Rose, 1987, 123). But the relevant point here is that, in 1841, the vast majority of miners still lived outside towns. As late as 1851, on a generous definition of urban that includes the parishes of Camborne and Redruth, where at least half the people in 1851 lived outside the built up areas, 78 per cent of male miners lived in rural parishes (see Law, 1967). In areas where smallholdings were less available, such as in the newer mining districts of east Cornwall in the 1840s, wages were higher by as much as ten shillings a month, a fact put down by the *Morning Chronicle* reporters in 1849 to lack of cheap housing and allotments (Razzell and Wainwright, 1973, 26). But access to cheap housing and food was still clearly an important factor in some districts as late as the 1840s. It remained the experience of a considerable minority of mining families, especially those where the heads were engaged in the more skilled, higher status tribute contracts.

Moreover, access to the means of subsistence was not restricted to leases of land. Smallholdings made up just one part of a wider system of what Barham termed 'collateral aid', a system, moreover, that had changed and developed over the previous half century. It is suggestive that, by 1840, collateral aids were 'most concentrated' in the far west, in St. Just parish where, as we have seen, larger smallholdings were less commonplace. Here, joint ownership of cows and shares in fishing boats provided added opportunities for labouring families (BPP, 1842, 754). But the most widespread collateral aid was the practice of farmers giving potato allotments to labouring families. This occurred widely in the early nineteenth century across western England but it had become particularly common in Cornwall by the 1830s (Razzell and Wainwright, 1973, 28; BPP, 1834, XXVII, 445-447; evidence of Joseph Vivian and Stephen Davey in BPP, 1842, 830, 839. For the existence of the practice outside the mining districts see Rowe, 1996).

Tremenheere described how the system worked:

The miner obtains a stock of potatoes, without, in general, any money-payment; the farmer in that case allotting a perch of land for each load of household manure furnished by the miner. The latter plants and draws the crop, the farmer preparing the land and carting the manure, of which he has the benefit for the corn crop of the following year. The number of perches which a miner can thus secure depends usually upon the quantity of manure he can collect; and this again greatly depends on his facilities for cutting turf or furze for fuel, of which the ashes form the staple of the manure. Those who are most careful will endeavour to cultivate from 30 to 60 perches, which, in ordinary years, at two Winchester bushels to a perch, will supply their families for some months; enabling them also to feed a pig, perhaps two, and to reserve seed for the year following (BPP, 1841, 88).

This practice was 'a common and growing one' in 1841 (BPP, 1842, 754) and appears to have emerged over the previous 30 or 40 years. The growth in cultivation of the potato has been dated to the 1790s, and by 1801 the proportion of the arable area in St. Just under potato crops was already 25 per cent, although in the rest of Cornwall it was much lower (Overton, 1996, 102). But it would appear that potato cultivation extended rapidly as population rose into the 1830s.

An important element in this system was customary access to common land, providing a source of fuel. Regular excursions to collect furze from the commons involved the whole community in the early nineteenth century, a practice that Burke sees as indicative of the lack of a clear sexual division of labour (Burke, 1986, 194). Employment of girls and young women at the surface works of mines had given women a taste of economic and social freedom and independence, an independence that was symbolised through conspicuous spending on clothes and accompanied, Burke suggests, by a lack of deference towards men (Razzell and Wainwright, 1973, 28; Burke, 1986, 194). For women, an early experience of 'free' wage labour and continuing participation in community activities outside the home and, for men, the centrality of the smallholding and its cottage in their leisure time, meant that 'boundaries between the world of work and the world of home were less rigidly drawn' (Burke, 1986, 194). Smallholdings, collateral aids and access to subsistence goods outside the market combined with notions of domesticity and patriarchal ideas shared with wider eighteenth century artisan culture (Rose, 1992). What emerged was a community of 'patriarchal sexual cooperation' rather than the patriarchal hierarchy pure and simple that was establishing itself in the better paid sections of the British working class by mid-century (Clark, 1995, 126-130).

It is likely that these relations of 'patriarchal sexual cooperation', along with women's experience of mines surface labour, had their own geography and one that differed from the overall geography of mining communities. Female surface workers were much more likely to be concentrated in the four parishes of the central mining district (Camborne, Illogan, Redruth and Gwennap) in 1851 than were male miners (surface and underground). This district accounted for 46 per cent of female mine workers but only 28 per cent of male miners (1851 CEB sample). In 1847, during the corn riots of that year, women played a prominent role in the central mining district. At Pool, between Camborne and Redruth, it was the women who 'commenced beating the door of the (corn and flour) store house with large stones' before one of them 'ran across the road to a smith's shop, and seized a sledge hammer, with which she gave such determined blows at the door that it soon yielded and the mob rushed in' (*WB*, 11 June 1847).

Cornish society in the early years of the 1800s, with its merchant capitalist elite, its dispersed paternalism and its partially proletarianised workers, many of whom exercised a degree of autonomy in the work process and who, outside work, lived in 'traditional' households, resembles the industrialising Bradford described by Koditschek. There, before 1815, there was a 'world of few social distinctions, minimal division of labour above the level of the household, and little centralised knowledge or political authority', a society defined by Koditschek as 'proto-industrial' (1990, 53). Proto-industrialisation was shattered around Bradford by rapid urbanisation after 1815, an urbanisation that was incompatible with 'traditional cultural forms and institutions'. But in Cornwall no similar levels of urbanisation occurred. The form of an 'independent' and 'traditional' community, one retaining a consumer rather than producer consciousness of exploitation,

remained in place for another generation, although the core processes were continually undergoing change. The 'collateral aids' described here were, moreover, part of a rich 'economy of makeshifts' in west Cornwall. This can in turn be located within a broader picture of a culture of welfare which, in its emphasis on making-do rather than dependency, possessed features in common with those in the north-west of England (King, 2000, 259-264).

From context to narrative

But a context of independent communities and partial proletarianisation is not all the story if we are seeking to explain the group identity of the Cornish labouring subject. Even the materialist social historian hints at the role of narrative. Thus Kirk proposes three criteria of class feeling, *constituency*, the size and character of bodies of workers with common identities, being joined by *independence*, a separate set of ideas, institutions and value systems and *hostility*, the level of commitment to a world uncontrolled by other classes (Kirk, 1994b, 11). The second and third of these criteria move from the objective to the subjective, although consciousness remains, in his view, a reflection, albeit indirect, of social conditions.

Others look upon self-awareness and self-consciousness differently. In an important article synthesising the ideas of the 'linguistic turn' among historians, Cabrera (1999) has argued that reality only takes on meaning through concepts and categories. Consciousness does not directly reflect social conditions. Instead, social conditions acquire a certain meaning 'within a particular framework' (Cabrera, 1999, 80). Therefore, consciousness is seen as a 'linguistic mediation between individuals and their social contexts', something achieved rhetorically, through and by language. Thus, groups may be subordinate and lacking resources.

But this will only be read as 'oppression' if an appropriate language is available.

Cabrera rejects the charge of linguistic reductionism by emphasising both that the 'real' exists – the subordination – and that patterns of meaning are transformed and changed within social practice and through social agency.

These patterns of meaning or conceptual networks are usually termed 'discourses', a 'coherent set of categories which, in a given historical situation, works as a basic organiser of social relations' (Cabrera, 1999, 81). People articulate the meaning of the world and their experience within it through such discourses. But changes in historical conditions work to destabilise discourses, which are subject to constant rhetorical adjustments and a process of differentiation (combining and contrasting existing meanings to make sense of new conditions). When a discourse loses efficacy and no longer operates as a 'minimum discursive consensus' it is replaced by other discourses or discursive frames, but these always possess some link, some 'intertextuality', with preceding discourses. Thus Sewell (1990) reads the production of working class consciousness in the early nineteenth century as the transformation of the previously existing discourses of collectivism and radicalism. This approach is clearly relevant to issues of identity. For, in this light, it is the rhetorical constructions of discourse that fix identity as a means of social action. Discourse therefore supplies the link between social conditions or material reality and the world of meanings.

If we argue back to the Cornish situation from this position we can achieve a fuller understanding of working class identities, or their absence, in early nineteenth century Cornwall. It was Chartism that was, for many historians 'a truly hegemonic force in many working class communities' (Kirk, 1998, 76). But not in Cornwall. Rule (Rule and Wells, 1997, 67-80) has pointed out how the Chartist mission to

Cornwall of 1839, while making links with pre-existing Chartist artisans at Truro and Hayle, failed to touch the mining population. In comparison with the near contemporaneous teetotal agitation, Chartism was to be a damp squib among the miners, whose involvement was only tentative and sporadic.

But what is striking in the comments of the Chartist missionaries in Cornwall are the regular references to the absence of a language of exploitation among the people. One of the missionaries, Abraham Duncan, wrote in 1839 of the 'ignorance of the people upon general politics', whereas his partner Robert Lowery reported that 'the People have never heard of the agitation, and know nothing of Political principles' (Jenkin, 1982, 58). A third missionary, William Cardo, who was sent to Devon, briefly visited Cornwall and he, too, remarked that 'the people were in the greatest ignorance concerning politics' (Jenkin, 1982, 61). But this cannot be read as a generalised unawareness of all political issues in Cornwall. During the 1820s, a vigorous alliance had emerged to bring together farmers, small town professionals and other middle classes in the cause of political reform (Jaggard, 1999). And there is evidence both that groups in the mining districts had liaised with the London Corresponding Society in the 1790s (Wells, 1988, 153/154) and that some, at least, of the language of the French Revolution had percolated local culture. William Jenkin was told in 1795 that St. Just miners had planted 'the tree of liberty ... I am sorry to hear several cant words amongst the tanners much in use amongst the French' (in Jenkin, 1951, 33). See also Gilbert, 1817, 98 for an account of a Redruth man toasting Tom Paine). But the language of constitutional reform had not been transformed, during the 1810s, 1820s and 1830s, into a language of class exploitation which could make sense of the more 'economistic' message of the Chartists in 1839.

How might we explain this absence of a language of exploitation?

Negatively, we might point to the absence of a strong artisanal tradition in Cornwall. The marginal role of domestic out-working in the eighteenth century Cornish economy meant that there was no entrenched artisan class that, under increasing pressure from the 1800s onwards, would become the 'radical reactionaries' at the core of new critiques of the emerging industrial capitalist economy (cf. Calhoun, 1982, 7). With this factor we must also associate that lack of range of local networks noted earlier. The particular compromise of dispersed paternalism created in and around the copper mining industry in the eighteenth century produced independent occupational communities with dense, local network ties but weak ties with other communities, even within Cornwall.

On the positive side we might cite four factors. First, the discourse of the moral economy of labour (Steinberg, 1996b, 9) still, in Cornwall, seemed to work. Food riots could achieve their desired outcome as late as 1830. Reciprocity maintained a continuing influence amongst the landed and merchant capitalist classes in Cornwall. Furthermore, on a day to day basis, as we have seen, an influential proportion of labouring families in the rural-industrial districts were protected from the more unpredictable repercussions of the market by their tenurial access to three life leases and housing, customary rights and subsistence food production.

Secondly, these in turn linked to memories of the free and independent tinner-husbandman of the eighteenth century and earlier. E.P.Thompson noted that the tradition of the free miner 'coloured responses' among 'Cornish tin miners' into the nineteenth century (Thompson, 1968, 68). More to the point, it persisted in colouring responses even among the now greatly expanded copper mines workforce (Wood, 1993, has also noted how memories of the independent free miner

conditioned class consciousness in late eighteenth century Derbyshire mining communities). Although the genuinely dual occupation tin streamer/miner-farmer was restricted to a few upland areas by the 1840s (the 1851 Census only records such dual occupations in the Carnmenellis area and near Luxulyan in mid-Cornwall), access to subsistence production kept alive the image of the 'worker-peasant'.

This imagining was not the only one militating against the discourse of an exploited wage labourer. Cornish mining communities had become home to a cottage religion that, by the 1790s, provided many of the rituals and symbols of everyday life. Wesleyan Methodism came to Cornwall early and established itself before working class political radicalism appeared. This offered another discourse which fixed another identity, as the repentant and saved sinner. It was not an identity that necessarily precluded class-based action or organisation, as can be seen in Methodist communities in the north-east of England during the nineteenth century. But the way it had permeated life in Cornish communities meant that it provided what Rule has termed 'competitive opposition' to class politics (Rule, 1992b, 258 and 1970, 82-83). Indeed, it is such an important element in the historical geography of the Cornish identity that it will receive special attention in the next chapter.

Finally, another competitive subject position available to the labourer in Cornwall was that of a 'Cornish man' or 'Cornish woman'. In the eighteenth century the crowd in many parts of England and Wales used the slogan 'one and all' to indicate their solidarity and determination at times of action over corn prices (for examples from Pembrokeshire and Berkshire in 1766 and 1795 see Thompson, 1993, 236, 238). Food riots in Cornwall, too, echoed to the cry of 'one and all' and, by the 1790s, the slogan was being regularly invoked. A handbill at St. Just in that year,

calling on the people to 'muster and be independent' ended 'So one and all ... so one and all' (Rule, 1971b, 158). However, with the decline of food rioting as a collective response in other parts of Britain after 1810 and the continuing predilection of Cornish communities for this form of protest, 'one and all' became seen as a particularly Cornish slogan. In 1839 the Truro radical and Chartist, John Spurr was using it at a meeting about the Corn Laws. 'I will have no compromise ... The Cornish motto is "one and all", and let us all go together on this occasion. Let us either have our rights, or let us be content till we get them' (Rule, 1976-77, 53). By this time 'one and all' had become more than the cry of the hungry and angry: it was the 'Cornish motto'.

However, it was a motto that could be made use of in ambiguous ways. For Spurr, a man with a sense of class consciousness, it was a slogan for the oppressed, but for others it had different meanings. Thus, Tremenheere referred to it as 'in any matter which recommends itself to the general opinion of the county, a unity of action among all classes appears still to be occasionally manifested. In such cases the Cornish motto, 'One and All' may be recognised as still possessing some degree of vitality' (BPP, 1841, 100). The discourse of Cornishness that had been popularised in the first quarter of the nineteenth century had adopted and adapted 'One and All' for its own purposes. In doing so it provided an alternative imagery for all classes in Cornwall, cutting across potential class-based identities. The Cornish crowd was, by 1847, being hailed in terms of their Cornishness and appealed to in a language that in this context emphasised social consensus. During the riots of that year a *West Briton* leader writer could pretend to be shocked at 'the use of threats which we are ashamed should proceed from the mouths of Cornishmen and Cornish women' (*WB*, 18 June 1847). By the 1830s this territorial identification was working

against the formation of class identity in Cornwall. It could be used by some as a consensual veil for their own economic interests. Nevertheless, appeals to a common sense of Cornishness also demanded that those same interests maintained a certain degree of reciprocity and a web of charity that looked back in some respects to 'tradition' and, incidentally, acted to bolster the values of the moral economy of labour. A consensual identity of Cornishness thus worked to reinforce the traditional discourse.

Reconceptualising Cornish social history

By the 1840s that traditional discourse was fragmenting. Elements within the local middle classes were being drawn more to ideas of liberal rather than moral economy (see *West Briton* editorial on Ireland, 15 January 1847) and the compromise of dispersed paternalism, established in eighteenth century conditions, was under pressure. The 1847 riots were the last serious generalised crowd actions in nineteenth century Cornwall. However, these riots were as much a response to change as a sign of continuity with past traditions.

Had not the potato blight appeared in 1846, it is unlikely that the rioting of 1847 would have taken place on the scale it did. Failure of the potato crop undermined the importance of the miner's potato patch and threw his family into a state of more overt dependence on the market. An editorial in the *Royal Cornwall Gazette* summed up the dilemma:

In past seasons the industrious cottager or miner could rely on his potato crop in aid of his wages. With store of potatoes, the pig fed with the refuse of the crop, and a few hundreds of fish salted by in the Autumn, his winter comforts were secured; but his crops have failed, and he has nothing but his

wages to rely on, with bread nearly double its usual price (*RCG*, 22 January 1847).

As the reporters from the *Morning Chronicle* wrote two years later, the loss of the potato crops was 'a great blow' to mining families (Razzell and Wainwright, 1973, 28). In the short term it led to the explosion of 1847 as communities resorted to understood ways of dealing with food shortages. But in the long run the potato blight heralded the breakdown of the traditional compromise. The social structures that had allowed a space for independence were dissolving. By the 1850s enclosure was more for commercial farming than for the creation of further smallholdings. The rising cost of leaseholds was making life increasingly difficult for new entrants. Non-market, subsistence production was still possible, but was becoming more difficult (Rose, 1987, 123-125).

At the same time new languages were appearing as the old discourse of the moral economy began to splinter and lose its effect. During the 1847 riots some of the crowd of quarrymen and miners who had descended on Wadebridge to stop the export of corn 'paraded the streets, one carrying a barley pasty on the point of his stick, and another a red flag' (*WB*, 21 May 1847). Here were two symbols of a 'new' Cornwall. First, the pasty was a symbol of a regional industrial community that was seeing itself through the lenses of an all-inclusive regional identity by the 1840s, an identity that helped to produce the mass audience for the dialect stories of the 1850s. Second, the red flag echoed the symbolism of blood that E.P. Thompson notes emerging elsewhere from the 1810s (1993, 257). This may indicate a new openness on the part of the Cornish crowd to wider influences.

By the 1840s, too, there were at least some people in Cornwall speaking the language of Chartism. A certain level of Chartist activity was maintained in west

Cornwall, especially in the towns of Penzance and Truro but also at Camborne and St. Ives (Jenkin, 1982). And, while still infrequent, strike action occurred at local mines. Rule claims there were only seven strikes in the local mining industry between 1793 and 1859 (Rule, 1992b, 253). But most of these actually took place in the years after 1840 (for examples see *RCCG*, 29 May 1840; *WB*, 1 April 1842; 15 April 1853). And in 1866 there was a major strike in east Cornwall and west Devon over the formation of a trade union (Deacon, 1983). While Rule is correct in stating that none of the strikes before 1859 were 'connected with the activities of a pre-existing trade union' there was, significantly, talk of forming a union during a strike at Consolidated Mines in 1842 (Rule, 1992b, 253; *WB*, 1 April 1842). Other Cornish workers were also taking strike action in the 1840s and 1850s. These included granite quarriers (who had formed union branches in 1840), clay workers, building workers, pilchard seiners, shoemakers and even farm labourers (Rule, 1986, 318; Jenkin, 1984; *WB*, 3 October 1845, 8 September 1848, 8 March 1850, 12 April 1850, 1 April 1853, 12 November 1858, 14 October 1859). Cornish communities were actively involved in other new forms of collective activity. For example, Cornish working class communities took full part in the first major surge of co-operative society formation outside Lancashire in 1857-63. By 1872 the geography of co-operation revealed more societies in Cornwall than in neighbouring (and larger) Devon (Purvis, 1986, 195).

What this flickering of collectivist activity suggests is that Cornwall, after the 1840s, was converging with other industrial regions in terms of its working class-based institutions (for this argument see Deacon, 1997). By the 1850s, there was a discernibly increasing range of network contacts and even some unionisation. Older social relations were disintegrating, undermined by the rise of commercial farming,

the greater confidence and self-identity of tenant farmers as a class (see Jaggard, 1999 and c.f. Randall et al, 1996, 7) and continuing processes of urbanisation and the improvement of long-distance communications. The discourse of a moral economy and independent communities clung on, especially in the long established rural mining districts of west Cornwall. Here, in particular, early industrialisation had preceded the ideas of class, and Wesleyan Methodism, as we shall see in the next chapter, provided a cocoon of institutions that surrounded labouring families and communities. Nevertheless, this discourse was now in direct competition with other meanings. And, as access to housing and other resources enabled the costs of emigration to be raised more easily within 'traditional' communities, mass emigration began to be felt most keenly after 1840 in exactly those places where 'tradition' was strongest. Cornish working class communities were beginning to disintegrate at just the time when trade unions elsewhere were establishing themselves permanently among semi and unskilled workers.

Conclusion

Therefore, Cornish labouring communities had lived within a local compromise of dispersed paternalism, one created in conditions of merchant capitalism in the eighteenth century and permitting considerable space for independence. A discourse of independence and of moral economy had flourished within the networks of west Cornish communities and the durability of this compromise, with its partial proletarianisation, guaranteed the effectiveness of this local identity into the early 1840s. This success also explains, in addition to the limited range of contacts with spatially extended networks, the difficulties that some competing discourses met with, for instance those of the Chartists in 1839. At the same time

social relations in Cornwall, and the discourse of independence built around them in working class communities, could co-exist with other representational frameworks. Indeed, other meanings were central to the identity of the Cornish in the period before the 1840s. The rituals and imaginings that gave meaning to many Cornish people, and the symbolic repertoire they turned to was not political at all, but religious. It is to Methodism, which played such a central role in nurturing identities in Cornwall in its industrial period, that we must now turn.