

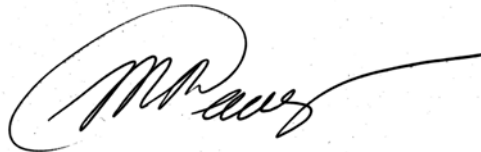
**“As is the manner and the custom”**  
***Folk tradition and identity in Cornwall***

Submitted by Mervyn Rex Davey to the University of Exeter as a thesis for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy in September 2011

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I certify that all material in this thesis which is not my own work has been identified and that no material has previously been submitted and approved for the award of a degree by this or any other University.

Signature:

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'M. Davey', with a large, sweeping initial 'M' and a long horizontal stroke extending to the right.

***Mervyn Rex Davey***

## **Abstract**

The distinctiveness of folk music and dance traditions in Cornwall is at best ignored and at worst denied by the wider British folk movement. Within Cornwall itself, traditional music and dance is not widely recognised as a serious art form. This study challenges this position by arguing that failure to recognise Cornwall's folk tradition as a distinctive and creative art form is due to hegemonic power relations not the intrinsic nature of Cornish material. It contributes to the debate about the distinctiveness of Cornwall's historical and cultural identity and shows that folk tradition has an important place in contemporary Cornish studies.

This study examines the evolution of folk tradition in Cornwall from the early nineteenth century through to the present day, the meanings ascribed to it and the relationship with Cornish identity. The subject matter is at once arcane and commonplace, for some it is full of mystery and symbolism for others it is just "party time". It is about what people do and what they think about what they do in relation to the wide spectrum of activities associated with traditional music and dance. These activities range from informal singing sessions and barn dances to ritual customs that mark the turning of the year.

In order to establish a research methodology this study draws upon the paradigms of memory, oral history and discursivity. These paradigms provide a range of insights into, and alternative views of, both folk tradition and identity. Action research provides a useful enquiry tool as it binds these elements together and offers a working ethos for this study. Using this model a complex and dynamic process is unveiled within folk tradition that offers a quite different perspective on its relationship with identity and brings into question popular stereotypes.

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