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Abstract:

Dolly Pentreath: a "very singular female."

Dolly Pentreath's place in history is as the so-called last speaker of the Cornish language. As such she has gained a certain notoriety in both historical and linguistic circles and thus is frequently mentioned in passing in studies on language extinction in general and the Cornish language in particular, however there are remarkably few academic studies of either her life or legacy. Spriggs and Gendall (2010) examined the epitaphs written at the time of her death, focussing on the Cornish language used within them and their male authors. They also examined the various inconsistencies regarding Pentreath's dates of birth and death, and marital status. Both her contemporaries and nineteenth century antiquarians interested in the Cornish language dismissed Pentreath's claims to be a fluent speaker of the language, and after her death she was portrayed as a figure of fun. Was this because those commenting on her death and legacy were educated men who felt an uneducated woman could have nothing to contribute of worth? Using the British Newspaper Archive, which shows Pentreath continued to hold the public's interest over the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, as a primary source, I am re-examining the "Dolly myth" to consider whether it was, in fact, Pentreath who portrayed herself as the "last speaker" and whether she has been unfairly treated by history. By reassessing Pentreath's place in the history of the Cornish language I hope to show how both her story, and that of the language, might have been manipulated to suit a particular narrative.

Dolly Pentreath has been described as the last speaker of Cornish since her death in 1777, and as such has gained a certain notoriety which continues to this day. In this paper I would like to explore not only how she came to the attention of the wider public and gained this epithet, but also how this has been manipulated to suit a particular narrative, both by nineteenth century antiquarians interested in the Cornish language, but possibly by Pentreath herself; the controversy surrounding her death, burial and subsequent memorial; how interest in her continued since her death, including how this can be traced through the use of the British Newspaper Archive; how Pentreath has been portrayed and continues to be; and examine how as a poor woman of low social status she has been dismissed by male guardians of history.

In 1742 a Captain Samuel Barrington took a sailor from Mounts Bay to Brittany, who, by speaking Cornish, was easily understood by the Breton fishermen they encountered. In 1768 Barrington's brother Daines came to Cornwall and decided to search for Cornish speakers. The Cornish language historian Peter Beresford Ellis describes his search:

He discovered one fluent speaker, Dolly Pentreath of Mousehole, near Penzance, and wrote an account of an interview he had with her. Unwittingly this account gave foundation to the popular myth that Dolly Pentreath was the last speaker of the language.<sup>1</sup>

Barrington travelled around West Cornwall with a guide who told him that he needed to go to Mousehole where he would find "an old woman called Dolly Pentreath, who could speak Cornish very fluently."<sup>2</sup> Barrington asked the guide how he knew this and was told it was because he bought fish from her, and that she would grumble about the price in an unknown tongue to other women in the village. The account continues that Barrington arrived in Mousehole, where he wagered that no one could speak Cornish:

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<sup>1</sup> Peter Beresford Ellis, *The Cornish Language and its Literature* (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1974), 115.

<sup>2</sup> Ellis, *Cornish Language and its Literature*, 115.

upon which Dolly Pentreath spoke in an angry tone of voice for two or three minutes, and in a language which sounded very much like Welsh.<sup>3</sup>

Two other women observing this exchange were laughing at her response.

Upon this I asked them whether she had not been abusing me, to which they answered, 'Very heartily and because I had supposed she could not speak Cornish.' I then said that they must be able to talk the language: to which they answered, that they could not speak it readily, but understood it, being only 10 or 12 years younger than Dolly Pentreath.<sup>4</sup>

Barrington's account was sent to John Lloyd who read it at a meeting of the Society of Antiquaries on the sixth of May 1775. It was subsequently published in their journal *Archaeologia*. In 1772 Barrington had written for news of Pentreath and was told she was now eighty-seven and remembered meeting him.

'She does indeed, at this time, talk Cornish as readily as others do English, being bred up from a child to know no other language; nor could she (if we may believe her) talk a word of English before she was twenty years of age; as her father being a fisherman, she was sent with fish to Penzance at twelve years old, and sold them in the Cornish language, which the inhabitants in general (even the gentry) did then well understand. She is positive, however, that there is neither in Mousehole, nor in any part of the country, any person who knows anything of it, or at least can converse in it.'<sup>5</sup>

It is likely that the man who supplied this later information on Pentreath was Walter Borlase, a member of the local gentry from Penzance, however at the time:

The only response Barrington's letter had, in fact, was a letter written in Cornish and English by a Mousehole fisherman called William Bodener being sent to Barrington who

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<sup>3</sup> Ellis, *Cornish Language and its Literature*, 117.

<sup>4</sup> Barrington, 1768 quoted in Ellis, *Cornish Language and its Literature*, 117.

<sup>5</sup> Ellis, *Cornish Language and its Literature*, 118.

published it in *Archaeologia*. Bodener shows that he, too, had a knowledge of the language and claims that four or five other people in Mousehole could speak Cornish, one of whom must have been Dolly.<sup>6</sup>

Therefore, was Pentreath herself trying to manipulate the information which members of the gentry were passing on about her? She must have known Bodener and the other women in Mousehole. Was financial gain a possible motivation, was she trying to gain attention from these men, or were they manipulating her story for their own reasons, to be more highly regarded as antiquarians, as early anthropologists recording the death of a language? From the very entrance of Dolly Pentreath into Cornish and linguistic history the motivations are unclear.

Barrington's account forms the majority of what we know about Pentreath. The other primary sources concern her birth, the birth of her son, a possible marriage, and her death. However, even these are not without controversy. Pentreath died in December 1777, but this has been contended, with references to her death in 1778, likely brought about by a confusion with her date of burial. More obscure however, has been her date of birth. After her death, a Thomson of Truro wrote an epitaph for her in Cornish:

Coth Doll Pentreath kans a dheu;  
Marow a kleydz ed Paul plea.  
Naoa en egloz gan pobel bras,  
Besed egloz hay coth Dolly es.

Old Doll Pentreath, one hundred aged and two,  
Deceased and buried in Paul Parish too:  
Not in the church, with people great and high,  
But in the church yard doth old Dolly lie.<sup>7</sup>

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<sup>6</sup> Ellis, *Cornish Language and its Literature*, 119.

<sup>7</sup> Matthew Spriggs and Richard Gendall, "The Three Epitaphs of Dolly Pentreath," *Cornish Studies*, 18 (2010): 205.

It is this epitaph, giving her age as 102 which has caused some controversy. Spriggs and Gendall discovered that there were two slightly different Cornish versions of this epitaph published in the early nineteenth century, as well as variations on the English translation.<sup>8</sup> They examined the supposed author of this epitaph, a Mr Thomson of Truro, and considered his knowledge of the Cornish language compared with that of Pentreath herself, including tracing his background to ascertain who exactly he was: a Mr William Thomson, a naval engineer who had worked for some time in Plymouth. Spriggs and Gendall posit that Thomson never actually met Pentreath but was prompted to write the epitaph after a conversation with the Cornish historian Reverend Richard Polwhele in 1789, some twelve years after her death.<sup>9</sup> They conclude the epitaph is unlikely to have ever been placed on Pentreath's grave.<sup>10</sup> However, it is this epitaph which has caused much confusion about what few biographical details we can ascertain regarding her birth.

If Pentreath died in 1777 aged 102, this places her birth in 1675. There are no likely records in the Paul Parish registers, the best fit is from 1692, Doaryte daughter of Nicholas Pentreath, and Jone, baptised on May 16<sup>th</sup>.<sup>11</sup> This would have made Pentreath 85 at the time of her death. Borlase reported in 1772 that Pentreath was 87, making her 92 at the time of her death.<sup>12</sup> Is this an example of Pentreath manipulating the information around her and the interest shown in her by educated men of higher classes, or merely a mistake on her, or his, part? Clearer in the registers is the entry for the baptism of John, base son of Dorothy Pentreath, on October 18th 1729, and for Pentreath's death: Dorothy Jeffery 27th December 1777. A note in the register states "This is the famous Dolly Pentreath (her maiden name) spoken of by Daines Barrington in the *Archaeologia*".<sup>13</sup> This implies that Pentreath married at some point in her life, however, there are no records of the marriage of Dorothy Pentreath and a Mr Jeffrey. Was the register trying to cover up the fact she had a child outside marriage, despite the earlier entry of his birth making it clear he was illegitimate? If so, who might be responsible for this? Spriggs and Gendall suggest it was her son, John, who registered the

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<sup>8</sup> Spriggs and Gendall, "Three Epitaphs of Dolly Pentreath," 203- 224.

<sup>9</sup> Spriggs and Gendall, "Three Epitaphs of Dolly Pentreath," 210.

<sup>10</sup> Spriggs and Gendall, "Three Epitaphs of Dolly Pentreath," 212.

<sup>11</sup> Paul Parish Registers, MOR/REG/16, Morrab Library, Penzance.

<sup>12</sup> Spriggs and Gendall, "Three Epitaphs of Dolly Pentreath," 204.

<sup>13</sup> Paul Parish Registers, MOR/REG/16, Morrab Library, Penzance.

death giving Pentreath his father's name, or could it have been an attempt (either contemporary or by a later hand) by the parish to sanitise the life of their most famous inhabitant?<sup>14</sup> A John Pentreath died aged 72 on 23rd March 1797. Although the figures do not quite match, was this Pentreath's son? If so, he took her surname. However, a quick look through the registers reveals several branches of Pentreaths within the parish. Between 1690 – 1700 alone five children were born to a Nicholas Pentreath, possibly the same man, with further births following in the nineteenth century.<sup>15</sup>

Interest in Pentreath and the remains of the Cornish language continued into the nineteenth century as the language became the focus for several philologists and antiquarians who published editions of medieval manuscripts and compiled dictionaries. In 1860 a monument was erected to Pentreath at the behest of the noted philologist Prince Louis Lucien Bonaparte. Originally it had 1778 as the date of Pentreath's death. In 1887, Dr Fred Jago of Plymouth published his dictionary.<sup>16</sup> The original manuscript, and proof editions, held at the Royal Cornwall Museum, contain a set of letters between Jago and Mr Bernard Victor of Mousehole which are a wealth of information on Dolly Pentreath.<sup>17</sup> Victor was the grandson of George Badcock, the undertaker who carried out Pentreath's funeral. Jago himself published a selection of the correspondence, and a sketch of Pentreath's house, in his *The Ancient Language and the Dialect of Cornwall* published in 1882, and further letters in *The Western Antiquary; or, Notebook for Devon, Cornwall and Somerset* in July, 1887.<sup>18</sup> Jago wrote in *The Ancient Language* that "[i]t being hard to reconcile the [...] differences of dates, and the subject requiring further investigation, the writer went to Mousehole in the summer of 1881, and made inquiries."<sup>19</sup> The first letter Jago received from Victor, dated December 1881 gives some more details regarding Pentreath's position in the local area and her grave.

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<sup>14</sup> Spriggs and Gendall, "Three Epitaphs of Dolly Pentreath," 203.

<sup>15</sup> Paul Parish Registers, MOR/REG/16, Morrab Library, Penzance.

<sup>16</sup> Fred W.P. Jago, *An English-Cornish Dictionary, Compiled from the best sources*, (London: Simpkin, Marshall & Co., Stationers' Hall Court, Plymouth: W.H. Luke, Printer and Publisher, Bedford Street, 1887).

<sup>17</sup> Dr Jago, *English-Cornish Dictionary as it went through the press, also Original Letters about Dolly Pentreath*, Courtney Library, Royal Cornwall Museum, Truro.

<sup>18</sup> Fred W.P. Jago, *The Ancient Language and the Dialect of Cornwall with an enlarged glossary of Cornish Provincial Words, also an appendix, containing a list of writers on Cornish dialect, and additional information about Dolly Pentreath, the last known person who spoke the ancient Cornish as her mother tongue*, (Truro: Netherton & Worth, Lemon Street, 1882). *The Western Antiquary, Or, Notebook for Devon, Cornwall and Somerset*, Vol. VII, No. 2, (July 1887).

<sup>19</sup> Jago, *Ancient Language*, 332.

Though there were several of Dolly's neighbours who had an acquaintance with old Cornish, She became more generally known as a living repository of the almost defunct language from her occupation as a fish-seller or back-jowster, her particular vocation calling her to nearly all parts of the surrounding country, where the good, but perhaps parsimonious housewives, declining her terms and refusing her fish often drew from the ancient dame in choicest Celtic the outpouring of her wrath, for Dolly was a woman of spirit and had a sharp tongue. It has even been said that Dolly used to swear in Cornish.

[...]

She died Decbr 26th 1777, at the age of 102,

At her funeral, the undertaker was George Badcock he being my Grandfather that is the reason I am so well informed, and there were eight chosen fishermen bearers to take her to her last resting place. There was not anything erected on the old lady's grave.<sup>20</sup>

We hear that Pentreath had a reputation for a sharp tongue, speaking Cornish, died at the age of 102, and that Thomson's epitaph does not appear to have been placed in any way on her grave. This correspondence raised awareness of an interesting issue regarding the commemoration of Dolly Pentreath, the memorial stone erected by Bonaparte and Garrett was in the wrong place. In a series of letters, Victor describes the mistake:

May 16th 1882

Dear Sir,

I beg to inform you that I have visited the grave yard of Doll Pentreath this day at noon. And I will give you the correct distance and compass bearing of the Grave to the Monument that was erected by Napoleon, also the distance from the grave to the Chancel door of the Church with the compass Bearing. I took a Mariners Compass with me and a Rule to measure it, so that it should be Correct, 1st The head of the grave from Napoleons monument is South East a point Easterly, Distance 47 feet, 2nd

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<sup>20</sup> Bernard Victor, *Letter to Dr F.W.P. Jago*, [n.d.] December 1881, in Jago, *Original Letters about Dolly Pentreath*, Courtney Library.

The Head of the grave from the Chancel Door is South a point Westerly, Distance 52 feet, I have sent you the plan of the Church also the grave and Napoleons Monument so there can be no mistake, The grave is quite close to the front wall of the Church yard as you will see.<sup>21</sup>

On May 23<sup>rd</sup>, Jago wrote back to Victor to ask how the monument was erected in the wrong place. Victor replied:

May 25th 1882

Dear Sir, I will give you my opinion of where Napoleon got the information from, To erect the monument where it is at present, First I will say as to myself I never saw Napoleon, if so the monument no doubt would be erected in its right place, There was a William Bodinar a fisherman of this place who wrote a letter in the Cornish language on the 3rd of July 1776, So when Napoleon came to Mousehole he came to the descendants of the before mentioned William Bodinar But I am not prepared to inform you wither they gave him any information as to the Present erection of the monument, But the information that I have given you is from my Grandfather who was the undertaker at the funeral, which I gave you to understand before, and that she was carried to her grave by eight fishermen,

But I believe you have a doubt of my information being correct, If you was in Mousehole at this present time you could see a old fisherman by the name of Stephen Blewett who could give you the same information about the grave as I have given you, But of course he knew nothing of Dolly Pentreath, what he and others know about Dolly is handed down from son to son.

I remember my Grandfather quite well, he died with us and I was fifteen years of age when he died.

Dear Sir, This I will inform you that the Descendants of William Bodinar that is alive at Mousehole at Present, can give no information whatever on the Ancient Cornish Language, or about Dolly Pentreath or her grave, or anything connected with her Funeral Procession. I gave you the Plan of the Churchyard wall, and you see there was

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<sup>21</sup> Bernard Victor, *Letter to Dr F.W.P. Jago*, 16<sup>th</sup> May 1882, in *Jago, Original Letters about Dolly Pentreath*, Courtney Library.



two gates and the Monument is Placed In the Position below the upper gate as it should have been placed below the lower gate so there was the mistake by the person who gave the information.

This I can say further that there was no Person who could satisfy any visitor who came there to make enquiries about the grave, before the came to me, there was always a doubt by the Folks that the Monument was not in his right place.<sup>22</sup>

This correspondence brought about the removal of the monument to the spot cited by Victor as being Pentreath's grave, and in addition the date of Pentreath's death was changed to 1777.

The continued interest in Dolly Pentreath can be tracked through the British Newspaper Archive. The Hampshire Chronicle of 19<sup>th</sup> January 1778 reported Pentreath's death, citing as its source a letter written in Newlyn on 9<sup>th</sup> January. Interestingly it says she died at the age of 102, this therefore would appear to pre-date the epitaph by Thomson.<sup>23</sup> The same information was published the following day in the Leeds Intelligencer.<sup>24</sup> Evidently Pentreath's fame had spread far beyond both Cornwall and the Antiquarian circles of London and the claim that she was 102 at the time of her death dates from the event itself. This interest continued throughout the 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> centuries and encompasses local newspapers from all over Great Britain. Often their publication coincides with an event or an anniversary, although articles from the Cornish press are far more frequent and span the entire period from her death. The Bath Chronicle published information concerning the erection of Pentreath's memorial by Bonaparte in June 1861, a year after the event.<sup>25</sup> This prompted the further publication of letters in response to this: on 4<sup>th</sup> July describing the story of Barrington's discovery of Pentreath, and a further letter by the same correspondent on the origin of

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<sup>22</sup> Bernard Victor, *Letter to Dr F.W.P. Jago*, 25<sup>th</sup> May 1882, in Jago, *Original Letters about Dolly Pentreath*, Courtney Library.

<sup>23</sup> "Saturday's Post," *Hampshire Chronicle*, 19<sup>th</sup> January 1778, 2. British Library Newspapers, [link.gale.com/apps/doc/IS3241373180/BNCN?u=exeter&sid=BNCN&xid=c76965ea](https://link.gale.com/apps/doc/IS3241373180/BNCN?u=exeter&sid=BNCN&xid=c76965ea). Accessed 9 Feb. 2021.

<sup>24</sup> "Births, Deaths, Marriages and Obituaries." *Leeds Intelligencer*, 20 Jan. 1778, 3. British Library Newspapers, [link.gale.com/apps/doc/GR3227041794/BNCN?u=exeter&sid=BNCN&xid=27ba1228](https://link.gale.com/apps/doc/GR3227041794/BNCN?u=exeter&sid=BNCN&xid=27ba1228). Accessed 9 Feb. 2021.

<sup>25</sup> "Music, Arts, Science, and Literature." *Bath Chronicle and Weekly Gazette*, 27 June 1861, 7. British Library Newspapers, [link.gale.com/apps/doc/JA3230783588/BNCN?u=exeter&sid=BNCN&xid=c882425a](https://link.gale.com/apps/doc/JA3230783588/BNCN?u=exeter&sid=BNCN&xid=c882425a). Accessed 12 Feb. 2021.

languages.<sup>26</sup> The story was also reported by the Bradford Observer.<sup>27</sup> What I find interesting is that this was a year after the memorial was installed. The focus of the reporting is also on Barrington and Bonaparte, rather than Dolly herself.

The Cornishman of May 19<sup>th</sup> 1887 gives an interesting account of a paper given by George Bown Millet to the Penzance Antiquarian Society in Pentreath's house on May 13<sup>th</sup>. In what would appear to be an example of artistic licence Millet describes the meeting of Barrington and Pentreath thus:

He entered Mousehole in a kind of triumph, and, peering into her hut, exclaimed with all the fire of an enraptured lover, in the language of the famous Greek philosopher, *Eureka*; The couple kissed; Doll soon afterwards gabbled; Daines listened with admiration; and committed her speeches to paper, not venturing to trust his memory with *so much treasure*.<sup>28</sup>

This exact description is to be found in William Bottrell's *Tales and Hearthside Stories from West Cornwall* published in 1870, and is attributed to Peter Pindar, the pseudonym of a Dr Walcot, writing in 1778.<sup>29</sup> It comes from a footnote to Walcot's Ode XXI, published in an 1870 volume of his works.<sup>30</sup> What is not clear is whether Walcot, or his editors, wrote this footnote. Perhaps Millet was quoting directly from a copy of the book. Millet goes on to discuss Pentreath's age at her death, and quotes from the Paul baptismal registers, but states that she 'died without issue.'<sup>31</sup> Therefore were his sources merely the populist accounts available at the time rather than proven research from primary sources? Interestingly, Bernard Victor

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<sup>26</sup> "Editorial." *Bath Chronicle and Weekly Gazette*, 4 July 1861, 8. British Library Newspapers, [link.gale.com/apps/doc/JA3230783639/BNCN?u=exeter&sid=BNCN&xid=b1487592](https://link.gale.com/apps/doc/JA3230783639/BNCN?u=exeter&sid=BNCN&xid=b1487592). Accessed 12 Feb. 2021.

"Editorial." *Bath Chronicle and Weekly Gazette*, 25 July 1861, 8. British Library Newspapers, [link.gale.com/apps/doc/JA3230783792/BNCN?u=exeter&sid=BNCN&xid=af69e02a](https://link.gale.com/apps/doc/JA3230783792/BNCN?u=exeter&sid=BNCN&xid=af69e02a). Accessed 12 Feb. 2021.

<sup>27</sup> "GENERAL INTELLIGENCE." *Bradford Observer*, 20 June 1861, 6. British Library Newspapers, [link.gale.com/apps/doc/R3208037452/BNCN?u=exeter&sid=BNCN&xid=bb4a238d](https://link.gale.com/apps/doc/R3208037452/BNCN?u=exeter&sid=BNCN&xid=bb4a238d). Accessed 12 Feb. 2021.

<sup>28</sup> "Old Doll Pentreath and the Ancient Cornish Language." *Cornishman*, 19 May 1887, 4. British Library Newspapers, [link.gale.com/apps/doc/IG3223388560/BNCN?u=exeter&sid=BNCN&xid=fe17950a](https://link.gale.com/apps/doc/IG3223388560/BNCN?u=exeter&sid=BNCN&xid=fe17950a). Accessed 12 Feb. 2021.

<sup>29</sup> William Bottrell, *Traditions and Hearthside Stories of West Cornwall Vol. 1*, (Penzance: W. Cornish, 1870), 178.

<sup>30</sup> Dr Walcot, *The Works of Peter Pindar Esq Volume I*, (London: Wood, et al, 1801), 95.

<sup>31</sup> "Old Doll Pentreath and the Ancient Cornish Language."

also quotes this exact same passage in a letter to the editor of the Cornish Telegraph of 12<sup>th</sup> May 1882.<sup>32</sup>

A letter to the Editor of the West Briton on the old Cornish language was printed on October 5<sup>th</sup> 1860. The author, who identifies themselves as 'Rusticus' comments:

That Dolly had an apter use of the old vernacular than her neighbours, and especially, as has ever been the case with fish-wives, of its objurgatory expletives, is clear, for the cronies, who were present at Barrington's visit, laughed heartily at their companions *jawing*, understanding the language though they "could not speak it readily."<sup>33</sup>

This is a good example of the dismissal of Dolly Pentreath, and the women who witnessed her meeting with Barrington as being without merit, that Pentreath's status as a fish-wife automatically places her within a particular Venn diagram of the coarse and uneducated. Someone whose language can be regarded as expletives and jawing and was therefore not worthy of note. Perhaps, also, this letter formed the basis of Victor's later letter to Dr Jago in 1881 in which he comments on Pentreath's use of coarse language?<sup>34</sup>

The Cornishman of March 29<sup>th</sup> 1888 contains a further interesting paper read at the Penzance Natural History and Antiquarian Society by a Mr Baily. It details events of August 1887 when the monument erected by Bonaparte was moved from its original position to the spot thought to be above Pentreath's actual grave. Baily recounts the events as he witnessed them, including the discovery of human remains in the spot to which the monument was being moved. He reports:

I was fortunately able to visit the spot without delay; at once inspected the remains; and, with the cooperation of Mr Bernard Victor, examined the ground with a view to

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<sup>32</sup> Bernard Victor, *Letter to the editor of the Cornish Telegraph*, 12<sup>th</sup> May 1882, in Jago, *Original Letters about Dolly Pentreath*, Courtney Library.

<sup>33</sup> Rusticus, *Letter to the Editor of the West Briton*, 5<sup>th</sup> October 1860, in Jago, *Original Letters about Dolly Pentreath*, Courtney Library.

<sup>34</sup> Bernard Victor, *Letter to Dr F.W.P. Jago*, [n.d.] December 1881, in Jago, *Original Letters about Dolly Pentreath*, Courtney Library.

ascertain if any other bodies were buried in the immediate vicinity, but failed to find any trace of others.<sup>35</sup>

He continues with a description of the deterioration of the coffin and then the body itself. Baily then comments of the features of the skull, perhaps an unsurprising topic in the late Victorian era.

The skull was of great interest, being of a most remarkable shape [...] Facial angle considerable. This is worthy of remark, as, from the aspect of the skull, I should have expected to find this angle slight, the frontal region receding, in which case would have been produced a skull of a lower type or a class of intellect, remarkably similar to some of the more savage races.<sup>36</sup>

How is Dolly Pentreath remembered and commemorated today? Within the Cornish language community and language history scholarship, it is generally accepted that she does not represent the death of the language, but she continues to be marketed as such in products aimed at tourists, and her image is used on many items. What I found interesting from a cursory google search was this antique door knocker.<sup>37</sup> Not only does it mention Pentreath's age at her death as being 102, but it is also being marketed at the witchcraft or wiccan market. I'm not entirely sure what the link there is supposed to be. Of greater interest to my own research is this porcelain figurine from the Royal Cornwall Museum collection.<sup>38</sup> Not only is Pentreath named as the figure on the front, but on the back is painted the date 1753. That is, fifteen years before Barrington visited Mousehole. The museum's catalogue only contains the provenance of the item in their collection, nothing about its previous history, or if it can be traced to a particular Staffordshire pottery. I have found reference to other examples being sold at auction, again with the painted date 1753, but so far have not found any further

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<sup>35</sup> "Dolly Pentreath's Remains." *Cornishman*, 29 Mar. 1888, 6. British Library Newspapers, [link.gale.com/apps/doc/IG3223393197/BNCN?u=exeter&sid=BNCN&xid=239db9c3](http://link.gale.com/apps/doc/IG3223393197/BNCN?u=exeter&sid=BNCN&xid=239db9c3). Accessed 12 Feb. 2021.

<sup>36</sup> "Dolly Pentreath's Remains."

<sup>37</sup> "Antique Brass Cornish Witch Dolly Pentreath Door Knocker," Etsy, accessed 19<sup>th</sup> October 2021, [https://www.etsy.com/uk/listing/1080503073/antique-brass-cornish-witch-dolly?gpla=1&gao=1&&utm\\_source=google&utm\\_medium=cpc&utm\\_campaign=shopping\\_uk\\_en\\_gb\\_a-home\\_and\\_living-other&utm\\_custom1=\\_k\\_EAlaIQobChMI5NqalbXW8wIVjoFQBh2ROQ7PEAQYAIABEgIO8PD\\_BwE\\_k\\_&utm\\_content=go\\_12581945440\\_119090483225\\_507889759354\\_pla-303628061739\\_c\\_\\_1080503073engb\\_473753002&utm\\_custom2=12581945440&gclid=EAlaIQobChMI5NqalbXW8wIVjoFQBh2ROQ7PEAQYAIABEgIO8PD\\_Bw](https://www.etsy.com/uk/listing/1080503073/antique-brass-cornish-witch-dolly?gpla=1&gao=1&&utm_source=google&utm_medium=cpc&utm_campaign=shopping_uk_en_gb_a-home_and_living-other&utm_custom1=_k_EAlaIQobChMI5NqalbXW8wIVjoFQBh2ROQ7PEAQYAIABEgIO8PD_BwE_k_&utm_content=go_12581945440_119090483225_507889759354_pla-303628061739_c__1080503073engb_473753002&utm_custom2=12581945440&gclid=EAlaIQobChMI5NqalbXW8wIVjoFQBh2ROQ7PEAQYAIABEgIO8PD_Bw)

<sup>38</sup> Figure of Dolly Pentreath, TRURI: 1944.111.162, Royal Cornwall Museum, Truro.

information as to whether or not these figurines do date from 1753. If so, this raises many questions as to how Pentreath was known of in Staffordshire at this time.

Even within her own lifetime it was evident that people other than Pentreath spoke and used Cornish: the women who were laughing at her comments to Barrington when she was discovered, Bodinar in writing his letter with an update about Pentreath, Thomson writing her epitaph. As part of my own PhD research, I am examining the continued use of Cornish after Pentreath's death. What does seem to be clear is that she was one of the final generation to be brought up speaking Cornish from birth, and if we are to believe Pentreath herself, it was her only language until she reached her 20s.

"Polwhele even casts doubt on Dolly's ability to speak Cornish and, with the usual prejudice of the time, [...] dismissed her and refused to believe that an old 'fish jowster' could have anything to say to men of culture."<sup>39</sup>

Polwhele's view encapsulates the false dichotomy and prejudice at the heart of studies of the decline of the Cornish language. The antiquarians who studied the language, both at the time of its demise in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, and later on in the nineteenth century, either regarded the language as already in terminal decline, or only discussed contemporary use of the language with men of the same social class. How many Cornish speakers, fluent or otherwise, and including Dolly herself, were disregarded or misquoted because they were working class or women, or both?

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<sup>39</sup> Ellis, *Cornish Language and its Literature* , 121.

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