

## The Truro Cordwainers' Play : a "New" 18th Century Christmas Play

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### *Abstract*

The Christmas play hitherto attributed to Mylor has been re-ascribed to Truro in the late 1780s, using biographical information concerning the actors, and physical characteristics of the manuscript. It becomes the oldest Saint George play to feature Father Christmas and the Turkish Knight, and has textual parallels with Irish folk plays.

### *Introduction*

The subject of this paper is a manuscript folk play text that has hitherto been ascribed to Mylor, Cornwall (SW8235). A transcription was first published by Thurstan Peter (1916) who stated that it was "used" by performers in the latter half of the 19th century. However, the more I looked at the text, and compared it with early manuscripts from Lincolnshire [1], the more I felt that the "Mylor" text must have been written down earlier, in the late 18th or early 19th century. My reasons for thinking this were initially nebulous, based on a combination of spelling practices and the inclusion of large passages of literary text.

Helpfully, the script gives the names of the actors who performed the play. In theory therefore, it should be possible to tell from biographical information in official records when and where these people lived, and thereby determine a likely performance date. In the course of pursuing this line of research, the original manuscript was also located, which meant that the nature of the paper and handwriting could also be taken into account.

### *Previous Studies*

The "Mylor" play is a long text of 41 speeches, written semi-literately with dialect spellings. In essence, it is a standard Hero/Combat play, with Saint George and the Turkish Knight, although it is padded out with various large additions, two of which are from known literary and ballad sources. The script names five actors, and as the play has fifteen characters, they obviously doubled up parts. In fact the distribution was remarkably equal, with each actor playing exactly three different characters - even the actor with only 10 lines in total.

The text is well known to traditional drama research, having appeared in print three times. The manuscript was first published by Thurstan Peter as a literal transcript in *Notes and Queries* in 1916. Regarding its provenance, he states:

"I have in my note-book... ..a curious and interesting copy made by me from a MS. used by some Cornish performers in the latter half of the last century. The players of this Cornish version - which I subjoin - went from house to house and performed in the open, borrowing a mat 'for the Turkish Knight to die on' if the ground were damp.

The libretto is from a MS. in the possession of John D.Enys (1905), who got it from Mylor. The original is written by a very illiterate man; but I have followed it closely for fear of wrong conjecture. For the same reason I have kept the *lines* of the original" (Peter, 1916, 330; Original emphasis)

The Royal Institution of Cornwall (RIC) now holds the relevant notebook. Peter's transcript appears in his *Notebook No.2* (T.Peter, 1905), but the only accompanying notes comprise the second paragraph quoted above.

It is from Peter's statements that the place and date of performance have been taken. However, Peter also referred to the play in his earlier book *The Old Cornish Drama* (T.Peter, 1906). He highlighted the mixed historical subject matter of the play - mentioning "the incident of Henry V and the tennis balls" and the seizure of Quebec - and quoted one short passage. He gave the anecdote about borrowing mats, as follows:

"A friend tells me that he well recollects as a child that the performers borrowed mats on which to die!"

It seems likely that the friend was J.D.Enys, and therefore that this anecdote came from his personal memories of the 1840s or 1850s at Enys, Penryn (SW7936), which is adjacent to Mylor [2].

Also in 1906, the text was the subject of a query from "Ygrec" in *Notes and Queries*. This item does not add anything to the provenance of the script. Rather it requests the identity of a quoted extract, which we now know to be the ballad *King Henry Fifth's Conquest of France*. The real identity of "Ygrec" was presumably Thurstan Peter.

Peter's notebook contains two loose items (one letter and one postcard) from R.J.E.Tiddy of Trinity College, Oxford. It would appear that Peter had lent him his notebook. In his letter dated 26th April 1914 Tiddy comments:

"I will copy it as soon as I can and return the book to you. Mylor is a few miles from St. Just where my father's family comes from so I am particularly pleased to have this play..."

On 2nd May 1914 Tiddy sent Peter the postcard:

"I return your Notebook with very many thanks. The Mylor play is quite the most interesting I have come across, and I wish I had time to set to work on it at once. I am extremely glad that you copied it literatim.

I have no doubt that you can decipher it a good deal better than I could, but in the long vacation I shall attempt to 'restore' the text and will if I may, send my attempt to you for comment, though I do not of course wish to trespass on your time. I expect you have already recognised the Ballad fragment in it, but in case you have not identified it, it is in Child's English and Scottish Popular Ballads (David Nutt, 1906) No.164 'King Henry Fifth's Conquest of France.' I must try collecting in Cornwall and if I do get enough specifically Cornish material I will remember your kind suggestion about the Royal Institution. Yours very truly R. J. E. Tiddy."

Unfortunately, we do not have Peter's side of the correspondence. Presumably his letters may have been in Tiddy's papers, but their whereabouts cannot be traced. It is unlikely that Tiddy did "restore" the text before going to war in 1915, because when the play was subsequently republished in his posthumous book *The Mummings' Play*, it retained its original orthography (R.J.E.Tiddy, 1923, 68, 148-156). Tiddy's book gave the location of the play merely as "Cornwall". On the other hand, he gave several substantial footnotes regarding internal historical evidence, and literary parallels to some passages of the text. In summary, these are:

- The inclusion of Addison's *Rosamond, an Opera*, Act I, scene i, as soliloquies following the cure (J.Addison, 1707)
- The dramatisation of much of the ballad *King Henry Fifth's Conquest of France* (c.1730) in the latter half of the play.
- "bing bing" - referring to Admiral Byng, who was tried by court-martial and shot on the 14th March 1757 for failing to relieve Minorca - Speech No.28.

- “vornal bould” - referring to Edward Vernon, who captured Portobello on the 20th November 1739 - Speech No.29.

E.K.Chambers published the text for the third time as "The Mylor Play" in his book *The English Folk-Play* (1933, 71-82). He did little to analyse the play, other than to repeat the internal evidence and literary parallels footnoted by Tiddy. He did, however, remark that the cure had been "much dislocated", and that the description of Vernon's exploits had been mixed up with the capture of Quebec by General Wolfe in 1759.

A letter in the Carpenter Collection from E.H.Enys dated 11th February 1935, indicates that he and Carpenter tried and failed to find the "Mylor MSS" when the Harvard scholar visited the Enys mansion during a collecting trip to Cornwall. However, although the letter tells Carpenter that Enys later found the manuscript after this visit, there is nothing in the Carpenter Collection to show that Carpenter subsequently followed it up. As far as I am aware, the text has not been the focus of any other academic attention since Carpenter.

### ***The Manuscript***

Enquiries at the Cornwall Record Office (CRO) revealed that the manuscript is in their safekeeping. It is inserted loosely in an album entitled the *Enys Memoranda*, which is a miscellany of charters, letters and other documents relating to the Enys family and the Enys mansion (SW7936) from the time of Queen Elizabeth I onwards. The manuscript is not dated, but its CRO catalogue entry reads:

"f.22. Text of a Christmas mummers' play with the names of the persons taking the various parts. (1) n.d. 18th cent."

Their attribution of the manuscript to the 18th century date was apparently based on the physical appearance of the manuscript. There is nothing explicit in the manuscript, nor elsewhere in the *Enys Memoranda*, to confirm the date of the play. Similarly, there is nothing at all to confirm that the play was performed in Mylor or Enys, or indeed anywhere else specific. J.D.Enys was a noted bibliophile, and acquired much material, including manuscripts, from house clearance auctions, and that may be where he obtained this manuscript (CRO, personal communications).

An examination of the original manuscript reveals the following. It is written on four sheets of hand made Pott-sized paper (15 inches by 12.5 inches), which were folded in half for writing [3]. The paper has a circular Britannia watermark [4]. Such watermarks are common in papers of the 18th and early 19th centuries, and they often have a countermark giving the manufacturer's name and/or date. In this case there is no clear indication of the manufacturer or date, except perhaps the presence of the letter "H" within the watermark frame. If this is the initial of the manufacturer's name, it may represent J.Holyoak, who was active in the period 1780 to 1800 (W.A.Churchill, 1935), but this requires confirmation by a paper historian.

The handwriting is in a generally well-formed sloping hand, starting large at the beginning of the manuscript, but becoming more compact towards the end. The smudgy appearance of the manuscript seems to be the result of wear and tear. However, there are several handwriting errors, most of which appear as more specific smudges where there have been attempts at erasure by wiping or washing off the ink (rather than simple crossing out). Capitalisation is often omitted or used erratically, except for names. This is particularly noticeable with the word "I", which nearly half the time is not capitalised, although for some reason it tends to be consistently capitalised or not capitalised on any given page. Punctuation is totally absent except for initials in actors' names and a couple of rare apostrophes. The lines are laid out as prose, although there are a few attempts at verse format on the early

pages, and sentences run on without a break. The text is, however, broken up by speech designations. Spelling is often non-standard and reflective of dialect pronunciation in an unaffected fashion. There can therefore be no doubt that the scribe was dialect speaker.

The style of handwriting has many similarities with that of the 1780 Revesby manuscript (M.J.Preston et al, 1976). There are loops on the ascenders and descenders, except for lower case "t"s and some "d"s, which are straight. Also, the ascenders on most lower case "d"s, curve backwards with a prominent hook, similar to the "d"s in the Revesby manuscript. The long "s" is used in double "s" ligatures, but nowhere else. This is essentially limited to the speech designations for "Henry Crossman", as the only other occurrence of "ss" is in the word "bless" within the text itself.

The manuscript reveals that it was prepared by someone who was used to writing. It may be unfair to describe the writer as illiterate, although the non-standard spelling of even common words does suggest a limited education. Having said that, the lack of capitalisation and punctuation is not unusual in an eighteenth century manuscript (M.J.Preston et al, 1999, v), and spelling practices were more flexible. The use of the long "s" was also common in the 18th century, falling from use in the early 19th century.

Speech designations are given as the actors' names on separate lines, with a generous indent. A speech number, given in words, accompanies the first four designations. Thereafter speech numbers are appended as figures using a sequence that runs throughout the whole script. At least some of the figures appear to have been added later. This is indicated by their alignment, and by the fact that the numbers are missing from page four, without a break in the sequence between pages three and five. This suggests that two pages were turned over by mistake during the numbering process. There is a gap for speech number 18 between pages 5 and 6. This clarifies a speech on page 2 that appears on its own in the lower half of the side. Its speech number has been corrected, and is difficult to discern. T.Peter thought it was 12 or 13, but on closer inspection it is clearly the missing speech number 18.

The layout of the speeches on the folded sheets is complicated. The first sheet is written on one side only, with the first speeches down the left hand half of the sheet. These continue onto the top of the right hand half, with the inserted speech number 18 lower down. A small square of paper has been snipped out of the bottom right hand corner of this sheet, of a size that might have been used for writing a receipt or note. However, if so, this seems strange, because one complete half of the last sheet is unused, and that would have made a better target for spare paper.

Taking the folded second sheet, the first side has speeches, but its verso is blank. However, both sides of the remaining half are written on. On the folded third sheet, there are speeches written on the first and third sides only, their versos being blank. The fourth sheet has writing in the left hand half of one side only. Given this complicated layout, it is fortunate that the speeches are numbered. Indeed it may have been the reason why the speeches were numbered in the first place, although the fact that speech numbers were omitted from one page still leaves some scope for error, made worse by the sheets being loose.

### ***Thurstan Peter's Transcript***

Thurstan Peter's transcript appears to be reasonably accurate as regards spelling and orthography. There are a few capitalisation errors, and a few incorrect letters (e.g. "pees" instead of "pus" - meaning "purse"). The only significant orthographical difference is the speech designation for "F.Rowe". The "F" does not resemble other capital "F"s in the manuscript. It does however resemble the capital "J"s, although it has the appearance of

being crossed. I believe it to be a "J". "F.Rowe" is therefore identical with "John Rowe", this actor playing the bit parts of "father Christmas", "sampo" and "ould belzey bob".

Other than orthography, Peter's main error was to place the page of unnumbered speeches incorrectly between speeches 17 and 19. The consequences are the dislocation of the cure, remarked on by Chambers, and the incongruous assignment of two adjacent speeches to William Williams, once as the Doctor and then as the "bloody Woror". Although there are indisputable examples of similar adjacent speeches elsewhere in the manuscript (speeches 20 and 21 are both assigned William Solomon, and speeches 25 and 26 are assigned to Henry Crossman), the correct position of the unnumbered page should be between speeches 11 and 12. The full sequence of pages and speeches is therefore:

- Page 1 - Speeches 1 to 3 - Introducer and "father Christmas"
- Page 2 - Speech 3 (continued) and 4 - "king of egypt" - [plus speech 18 for insertion]
- Page 3 - Speeches 5 to 11 - Dispute between "son George" and the Turkish Knight
- Page 4 - Unnumbered speeches - lament, "sampo", plus the doctor's travels and cures.
- Page 5 - Speeches 12 to 17 - the cure and the Turkish Knight's plea for pardon
- Speech 18 [from page 2] - "ould belzey bob" (supernumerary)
- Page 6 - Speeches 19-23 - "bloody Woror", "little man John", and King of France...
- Page 7 - Speeches 24-27 - *King Henry's Fifth's Conquest of France*.
- Page 8 - Speeches 28 to 31 - "bing bing", "vornal bould" and conclusion

This corrected sequence is more consistent with other plays. The Doctor's speeches are more coherent, and "ould belzey bob" appears more conventionally after the cure, along with the other supernumeraries. Also, Williams's incongruously adjacent speeches are separated (although those of Solomon and Crossman remain).

### ***The Actors***

Five actors are named in the script - William Solomon (48 lines), John Rowe (*alias* "F.Rowe" - 10 lines), Pentecost Langdon (*alias* Penty Landin - 66 lines), William Williams (48 lines) and Henry Crossman (82 lines). This set of names seemed sufficiently distinctive to justify searching genealogical sources for a time and place where they coincided. In searching, it was assumed that the actors would have been approximately the same age. On the other hand, it was not assumed that they had lived in Mylor. Therefore, records for the whole of Cornwall were searched for the period from 1759 (the most recent historical allusion in the text) to 1905 (the year T.Peter obtained the text from J.D.Enys).

Figure 1 shows the location of key places mentioned in this paper. They are all on the western shore of Carrick Roads in western Cornwall, which is itself at the extreme south western tip of England.

In assuming that the play was performed by a single synchronic generation, the question then arose of what age the actors were when they performed the play. Three references to Cornish plays, dating from the early 19th century, state that they were performed by children and very young people [5]. This strongly implies that they would have been unmarried, which is an important consideration for genealogical research. Unfortunately, Davies Gilbert's account of western Cornish performances in the late 18th century does not give the age of the performers (D.Gilbert, 1823). However, it seems reasonable to assume that 18th century performers were of the same age group.

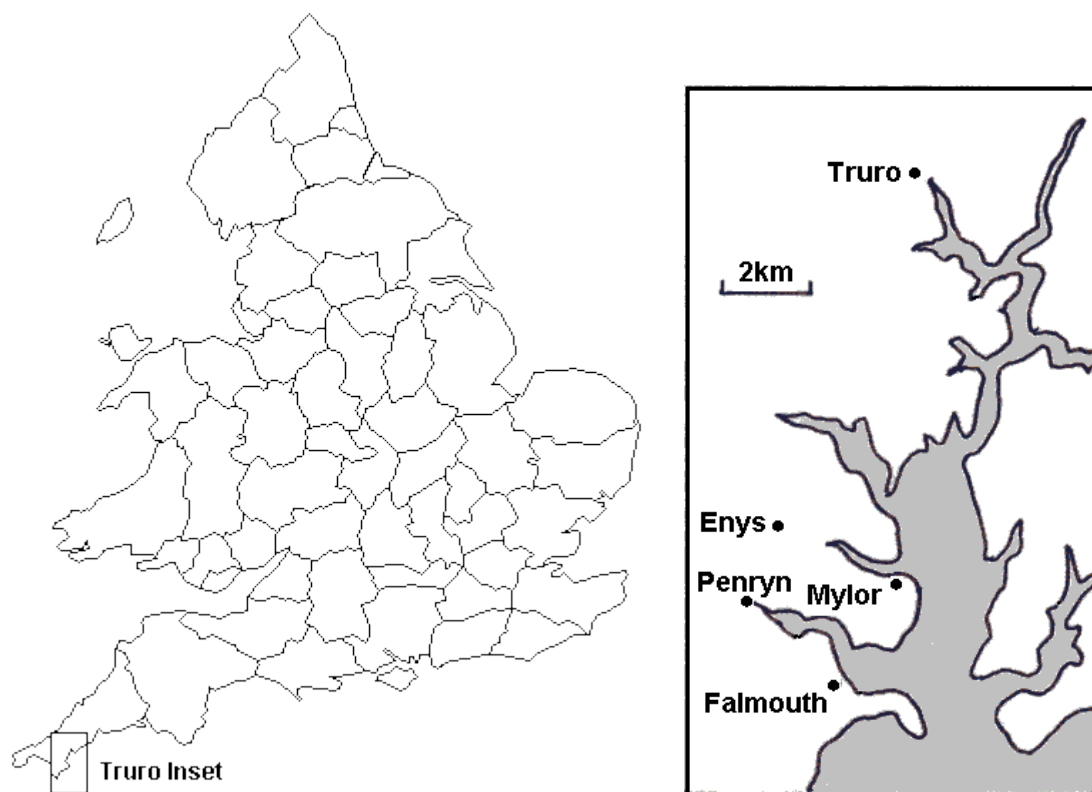


Figure 1 – Maps showing the location of Truro and Mylor

The initial approach was to search family history sources on the Internet for information on people with the actors' names in Cornwall. A variety of websites were used, the most useful of which was the *FamilySearch* database of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-Day Saints (1999-2001). Subsequently, key biographical details were checked and supplementary material located in parish registers and church accounts for St. Mary's and Kenwyn, and other manuscript sources held by the Cornwall Record Office and the Royal Institution of Cornwall. The more useful sources included S.E. Gay et al (1940), Cornwall Family History Society (1984), the Myra Williams Burial Index (2000), Kenwyn Parish Registers, Kenwyn Churchwardens' Accounts (1780-1814 and 1814-1846).

A general pattern emerged of the names appearing in ones and twos in scattered locations and dates throughout Cornwall. However, all the names did come together convincingly in relative abundance during the period in one place. That place was not Mylor. A few isolated records were found relating to Mylor, for people named John Rowe and William Williams, but both these names are common in Cornwall, and the occurrences at Mylor appeared no more significant than other isolated records elsewhere in the county. The place where the actors' names did come together was in Truro (SW8244), particularly the central Truro parish of Saint Mary's, and the extensions of Truro in the parish of Kenwyn [6]. Together, these formed the manor of Truro and Kenwyn, which was owned by the Enys family [7]. These districts were investigated in more detail.

The distinctive name Pentecost Langdon turned out to be not quite as unique as it first appeared. Pentecost was a traditional family name passed from father to son over a 200-year period, and similar situations also applied to the other actors' names. This was potentially a problem because there could have been several generations with parallel names that might have been possible teams. However, fortunately, there was only one generation where all the names were synchronised; the generation born between 1768 and 1772, which for brevity I shall call the generation of 1770.

Four of the five names come together impressively in one document - the Constable's List for Truro compiled in 1803 [8]. There are six entries in the Truro list for men with our actors' names, of whom three were enrolled in the Truro Light Infantry Volunteers. Four are listed as cordwainers (i.e. boot and shoemakers) - Henry Crossman, John Rowe, William Solomon and William Williams. The remaining two are another William Williams (servant) and another John Rowe of unstated trade. It seems probable that the latter John Rowe was a cordwainer too, because six other Rowe men are listed as cordwainers, as are two more Solomons. There can be no doubt that members of the generation of 1770 are present in this list. It is also certain that they all had cordwaining family connections, whether or not they were cordwainers themselves

In total there are 18 entries in the Truro list for men of the four families. By contrast, the Constable's List for the neighbouring parish of St. Clements has only five, three of whom are called John Rowe, of diverse trades, including a father and son. The absence of any Langdons from either list is probably because they lived in the neighbouring parish of Kenwyn, for which no list is available. (Martha Langdon, a daughter of Pentecost, was christened in 1806 in Kenwyn.)

Pentecost Langdon was christened on the 29th May 1768 in Gwennap (SW7340), about 6 miles south west of Truro. However, both his parents - Pentecost senior and Susanna - hailed from Kenwyn, Truro. Also, by the time he married Jane Vivian on the 24th October 1791, he was living in Truro. All their children were christened in Truro or Kenwyn, which takes us to the year 1808. Unfortunately, I have not been able to find the date and place of his death or burial. Pentecost senior was born in 1728, and will have been too old to have performed in this play. Pentecost junior interrupted the family tradition by not naming any of his sons Pentecost. His youngest son John resumed the tradition in 1846, however this Pentecost is too recent to have been the actor in the manuscript.

Henry Crossman was baptised on the 5th April 1772 in Truro, and died in Truro on the 14th May 1849. He was one of the witnesses to the marriage of Pentecost and Jane Langdon in 1791, and he was entered in the Constable's List of 1803 as an unmarried cordwainer. There is nothing in the parish records for Truro and Kenwyn to indicate that he ever married or had children.

William Solomon was born on the 22nd November 1769 in Truro, and was christened on Christmas Eve. His parents were James and Mary (*née* Crossman). He married Mary Sara on the 5th April 1795 in Truro, which is where all his children and some of his grandchildren were born. He died on the 24th December 1839 in Truro, leaving a will, in favour of his wife (CRO, 1839). It is likely that this William Solomon is the lame cordwainer listed in the Constable's List for Truro. One of the witnesses to William's will was Richard Solomon, and the Constable's List also gives a cordwainer with this name. Another witness was Mark Rowe, who may have been the "taylor" in the List. On the other hand, the will gives William's trade as "painter", but he may have changed profession in old age. Incidentally, the style of William Solomon's signature bears no resemblance to the handwriting of the play manuscript.

With William Williams, the situation is less clear, because three William Williams' were born in the town in the period 1769 to 1772, with a fourth born in 1776, all to different parents. I have been unable to identify any further biographical information for the two baptised in 1772 - one each in Kenwyn and Truro. It is possible that they died in infancy, which might explain why there are only two William Williams in the Truro Constable's List.

The William Willams who is most likely to have been the actor in the play, because of the similarity of his age with the other actors, was baptised on the 12th February 1769 in Kenwyn. His father was Francis Williams. William married Mary Merrifield in Truro on the 28th March 1790, and he was buried in Truro on the 12th August 1827. His age makes it likely that he was the cordwainer in the Constable's List.

Also because of his age, the other William Williams in the Constable's List - the unmarried servant - was probably the son of William and Jane, baptised on the 17th March 1776 in Truro. It is possible that his father was the William Willams born about 1746 and buried in Kenwyn on the 5th July 1833 at the ripe old age of 87. William senior would not have appeared in the Constable's List because at 57 he was too old to qualify.

John Rowe is the actor's name for which the least satisfactory biographical information is available. The closest match, in terms of date is the John Rowe baptised in Kenwyn on the 5th October 1772, and who married Sarah Williams on the 18th July 1793 in Camborne. His age and marital status are consistent with him being the cordwainer in the Truro Constable's List. However, there is an older John Rowe, married on the 8th April 1770 in Truro, who just possibly could also be the cordwainer. Then again, if he was over 22 years old when he married, he would have been too old to qualify for the list. This is cutting it fine. I have not been able to find records for the second John Rowe in the List of unstated trade, unless it is the one baptised in distant Lanivet (SX0364) on the 9th October 1774 and who married Jane Pascoe in Truro on the 3rd September 1797. However, his age and marital status do not seem to tally with the "2nd Class" status of this person in the List. On balance, the John Rowe born in 1772 is most probably the play actor, because of his similar age, his marriage to a member of the Williams family, and his likely cordwaining occupation.

#### ***True Location and Date of the Manuscript***

While the available biographical information for the actors is incomplete, there is nonetheless sufficient, taken with physical aspects of the manuscript, to reach some firm conclusions. The first is that the true location where the play was performed was Truro rather than Mylor. This is because Truro/Kenwyn is the only place where all the actors' names come together at the same time.

For the same reason, the second conclusion is that the play was performed by a generation born between 1768 and 1772. The four known marriages for this generation were at roughly the same age between 1790 and 1795, and in 1803, at least four of the five actors were working as cordwainers. In fact, members of the Rowe and Williams families were still listed under Truro as boot and shoemakers in Pigot's Directory of 1830. Naturally, the actors' deaths were not synchronic. The three known deaths were between 1827 to 1849. In addition to their shared cordwaining trade, there are documented links between the families. Most directly, Henry Crossman witnessed the marriage of Pentecost and Jane Langdon. Less directly, James Solomon - Willam's father - married Mary Crossman. Lastly, a member of the Rowe family - Mark Rowe - witnessed the will of William Solomon.

The biographical dates, plus the nature of the paper and handwriting of the manuscript all firmly point to date in the late 18th century or early 19th century. The characteristics of the watermarks and the orthography suggest that the date is more likely to be 18th century. This is also supported to some degree by the subject matter of the text. It includes references to military events in the mid 18th century, but does not have any references to people or events from the Napoleonic Wars. This suggests that the play predates the Napoleonic Wars, especially as Napoleonic heroes featured in 19th century folk plays in many parts of England, including Cornwall (e.g. W.Sandys, 1833, cx).



The text is relatively long and sophisticated for a folk play, and probably required actors of mid-to-late teenage as a minimum. Local practice appears to have been for the plays to be performed by young unmarried actors. The earliest marriage among the actors was 1790, and if the correct John Rowe has been identified, he may have moved to live in Camborne when he married in 1793, if not before. Consequently, it is possible to deduce that the play was performed sometime in the late 1780s. This makes it one of the oldest available English folk play texts.

### **Textual Parallels**

The text of the Truro play is a *pastiche* containing a mixture of lines from traditional folk plays, literary sources, and lines that appear to be unique to Truro. Their approximate relative contributions are as follows:

- 40% of lines - Found in other folk play texts
- 15% of lines - Addison's *Rosamond : an Opera*
- 10% of lines - The ballad *King Henry Fifth's Conquest of France*
- 35% of lines - Not yet found elsewhere in folk plays or in literary sources.

In the last category, there are about 90 "extra" lines. Some of these lines could simply be regarded as abstruse variations of lines found in other folk play texts. Others have the appearance of coming from literary or ballad sources. I therefore ran an exhaustive series of searches for keywords and phrases from the extra lines, using a variety of spellings, word stems, and so on, in the *Literature Online* or *LION* database (Chadwyck-Healey, 1996-2001), which is currently the most comprehensive available full text database of literary sources. I also ran searches, as far as was possible, against a combination of the *Digital Tradition* and *Bodleian Broadside* databases (D.Greenham et al, 1988-2001, and Bodleian Library, 1999). The *Digital Tradition* database is a full text database of the lyrics of traditional and other songs, but its coverage is dependent on good will of its contributors, and there is no formal quality control. However, it is a useful tool for identifying song titles and first lines, which can then be investigated further in the *Bodleian Broadside* database and elsewhere. The Bodleian database is only searchable on titles, first lines and subject terms, but images of the original broadsides can be viewed and read on-line, often with multiple editions of a given ballad. Despite the wealth of material in these three databases, my searches failed to find any of the Truro lines, except for the following, spoken by the King of France:

but let him com I will thonder him  
back he can not me with stand  
*my milk wite corls my rid Caps my yallow fethers*  
deccar my resoralsou stout and bould

The italicised phrase appears in the following excerpt from Deloney's (1626) *Iohn Winchcomb (Iack of Newbery)*:

"When Iacke had receiued this charge, hee came home in all haste , & cut out a whole broadcloath for horsemens coates, and so much more as would make vp coates for the number of a hundren men : in short time hee had made ready fifty tall men well mounted in *white coates, and red caps with yellow feathers*, Demilances in their hands..."

The match between the italicised phrases is reasonably convincing, but it is an isolated case. There is nothing else in the adjacent text and context that suggests Deloney's prose was used as the source for this part of the Truro text.

Returning to the literary inclusions and the diverse content of the Truro text, this is by no means uncommon in English folk plays. Craig Fees (1994, 3) gives an excellent overview of stage plays and non-Saint George themes in English folk plays. The Truro text also adds

ballad sources to Fees' discussion, although one Robin Hood ballad - *Robin Hood and the Tanner* - is already known to have replaced Saint George's combat in some plays (e.g. Shipton-under-Wychwood in R.J.E.Tiddy, 1923, 209-213). The re-dating of the Truro text brings the focus of this phenomenon to the late 18th century and the first half of the 19th century, with most of the identified literary and ballad sources predating 1750. Fees cites several Cornish sources in his discussion, including W.Borlase (1758) - scripture subjects, D.Gilbert (1823) - drama-like Christmas sports, R.Hunt (1865) and W.Bottrell (1873) - "Duffy and the Devil", and R.Hunt (1896) giant, Blunderbuss and Tom, with St. George and the Turkish Knight attached. To these can be added the following contemporary observations:

"...Scarcely any two sets of actors perform them alike, though the characters and plot, if it may be called one, are similar.

So little do the actors know the history of their own drama, that sometimes General Wolfe is introduced, who first fights St. George, and then sings a song about his own death. I have also seen the Duke of Wellington represented..." (W.Sandys, 1833, cx).

This, together with Fees' sources, therefore indicates that the Truro play very much conformed to the local pattern of its day.

Setting the literary sources aside, the Truro play has textual similarities with at least three sub-types of the traditional hero-combat play:

- The Irish plays, typified by the *Christmas Rhyme* chapbooks, of which the earliest example is dated 1803-1818 (G.Boyes et al, 1999).
- A group of plays typified by the presence of the characters Father Christmas and the Turkish Knight, which occurs in the southern half of England. There is no known published archetypal source for this group plays, therefore the ensuing discussion draws mainly on other plays of this type from Cornwall.
- *Alexander and the King of Egypt*, typified by the Newcastle and Whitehaven chapbooks of that title, of which the oldest edition is dated 1746-1769 (M.J.Preston et al, 1977)

### *Irish Parallels and their Implications*

The main similarities between Truro and the Irish plays are Saint George's introductory speech and Beelzebub's part, although there are a few other matching lines. I will compare the Saint George speech first:

<b>Truro Play</b>	<b>Smyth &amp; Lyons (1803-1818)</b>
Hear comes I son George from England have I sprung sum of my worndras works now for to begin first into a Closat I was put then into a Cave was lock I sot my foot upon a Rockke Stone their did I make my sad an griveus mone how many men have I slew and rund the firehe dragon throe	Here come I knight George from England have I sprung one of those noble deeds of valour to begin seven long Years in a close Cave have I been kept and out of that unto a prison leapt and out of that unto a rock of Stone 5 where there I made my sad & grievous moan Many a Giant I did subdue I run the fiery Dragon thro' & thro' I freed fair Sabra from the stake what more could mortal man then undertake 10 I fought them all courageously and still have gained the victory and will always fight for LIBERTY here I draw my bloody weapon shew me the man that dare me stand 15 I'll cut him down with my courageous hand
I fought them all Courragesly and stil got of thire victory England's right England admorroration now ear I drow my bloody meepon ho is the man that doth be fore me Stand I will cut him down with my Courrageus hand	

Setting orthographical differences aside, the variation between equivalent lines in the two speeches generally consists of unremarkable paraphrasing. Lines No.7 have radically different wording, but essentially convey the same type of boast - that is success in battle. I am not aware of Truro's "how many men have I slew" occurring in any other text.

The significant difference is line No.13, which is worthy of further discussion. As far as I am aware, the use of the word "admorratio[n]" [admiration] is unique to the Truro version of the line, although the line conforms to a pattern found elsewhere, where a variety of alternative rhyme words are used. The most common alternatives are "nation", "reason" and "wrong", all of which more or less rhyme with the subsequent "bloody weapon" line. With this degree of variation among the sixteen or so examples I have been able to locate, it is difficult to say what the original couplet would have been. Conflating several similar versions, one distinct variant of the couplet appears to be:

England's right and England's reason  
That makes me carry this bloody weapon

However, the variant that is more relevant to Truro is:

England's right and England's nation  
Here I draw my bloody weapon

The rhyme seems not to be satisfactory in either variant, and the other variations may have arisen as a result of attempts to resolve or improve the rhyme. Because of its Anglo-centric sentiment, it is easy to imagine that the latter variants might not have been popular in Ireland. However, an Irish adaptation was recorded in Ballybrennan, Wexford about 1818:

For England's right and Ireland's nation  
Here I draw my bloody weapon (P.Kennedy, 1863)

The few other occurrences of this variant I have found from Ireland use the same wording. From the Irish perspective, it may be an improvement on the English version, but it still could have been at odds with Irish sensitivities of whatever persuasion. This could explain the use of a replacement line regarding liberty in the Irish chapbook texts and their derivatives. Furthermore, the capitalisation of the word "liberty" in the early 19th century editions of the chapbooks (Boyes et al, 1999) suggests a deliberate attempt to indulge protestant Irish sentiments [9]. The verses of the Irish chapbooks are all in couplets, but in using the "liberty" line, a pair of couplets is transformed into a triplet plus an isolated line. It is likely, therefore, that the "liberty" line was substituted for an earlier "nation" line.

A conclusion to be drawn from this discussion so far is that there appear to have been two early versions of the Irish plays – the chapbook version, and a pre-chapbook version. Evidently, the Truro and the pre-chapbook Irish versions originally drew their material from the same ultimate source. While the Truro text predates the Belfast chapbook (the earliest Irish text) by 10 to 15 years, the ultimate textual source could equally have been Irish or English. In Ireland, a standardised pre-chapbook form (e.g. Ballybrennan), was used as the basis for the *Christmas Rhyme* chapbook. A few changes or adaptations were made for the chapbook, but along the way some material was evidently lost. Most obviously, the cure is missing from the chapbook, even though the doctor is called in.

Returning to the "nation" couplet, in England these lines normally come immediately after the following variant of Prince, King or Saint George's self introduction:

I am Prince George that noble knight  
Who shed his blood for England's right

In some versions, George may be "valiant" rather than "noble", and his blood may be "spilled" or "spent" for England's right, or "...lost by English fight". This couplet itself may be succeeded by an alternative to the "nation" couplet, as follows:

England's right I will maintain  
I'll fight for old England once again

To complicate matters, the latter lines also appear in the Truro play in speech 17:

had it ben a thousand or ten thousand such men as thee i would fight  
for to mentain grait britans right  
great britians right iwill mentain  
and fight free for england wance again

It seems possible therefore that two different versions of the traditional play were collated in the Truro text.

The Truro text lacks the Irish couplet about freeing Sabra. On the other hand, Sabra's name is typically found in other Cornish plays, in the line:

By which I gained fair Sabra the King of Egypt s daughter

The above line comes from the text published by D.Gilbert (1823), and similar lines can be found in the texts published by W.Sandys in Hone's *Every-day Book* (W.Hone, 1826, 122-126) and in Sandys' own *Christmas Carols Ancient and Modern* (1833, 177). This line also appears in the play from Silverton, Devon (H.E.Fox-Strangways 1899/1900).

The texts of the Irish folk plays before about 1900 conform to a single standard, albeit with a small number of variations between the chapbook and pre-chapbook versions. However, plays with "Irish" features are found in a number of locations outside Ireland - Tenby, Hulme, Manchester, the Isle of Man and of course Truro, all on or close to the Irish Sea coast. There remains the question of how the texts were transmitted. Irish immigration may account for the occurrences in Hulme and Manchester (E.Cass et al, forthcoming), but fast packet shipping may also have been a factor. It was, for instance, the reason why there were Liverpool readers of *The Royal Cornwall Gazette* in 1802 [10].

### ***Father Christmas and the Turkish Knight***

At this point I need to digress to make the observation that there appears to a distinct sub-type of the Hero/Combat play (as defined by E.C.Cawte et al, 1967, 27 & 37) that is characterised by the co-occurrence of Father Christmas and the Turkish Knight. For instance, out of a representative sample of 31 plays containing at least one of these characters, 23 (74%) contained both. I hope to explore this hypothesis in more detail at a later date, but for now I will make a few general remarks regarding the sub-type's cast and geographical distribution.

Father Christmas is the introducer of the play, and Saint/King George is the hero, with the Turkish Knight as his adversary. As with all Hero/Combat plays, the Doctor is brought in to cure the loser of the conflict. A particular characteristic in this sub-type is that the Doctor carries with him a bottle of elecampane. (The bottle of elecampane is also found in the Irish plays, which also have a Turkey Champion with different lines, rather than the Turkish Knight.)

Plays of this sub-type are most well known from Hampshire and adjacent counties, but they are also found in the West Country. There is, however, no obvious published archetype, such as a chapbook, that can be used for the purposes of comparison. For this study, therefore, I have used four other texts from Cornwall – two different unlocated versions (W.Sandys in W.Hone, 1826, 122-126, and W.Sandys, 1833), Camborne (R.J.E.Tiddy, 1923,

144-147) and St. Keverne (R.M.Nance, 1925). I will use the descriptive designation *Father Christmas and Turkish Knight* (or just *Father Christmas* for brevity) for this group of plays.

Truro is the oldest of the *Father Christmas and Turkish Knight* plays, but this does not necessarily make it the original source, although it is of course likely that all the plays of this sub-type did ultimately develop from the same original text. The principal difference between Truro and the other *Father Christmas* plays is Saint George's introductory speech. As already discussed, Truro has the speech used in the Irish plays, whereas the other *Father Christmas* plays have a different speech, such as the following:

Here am I, Saint George,  
That worthy champion bold.  
And with my sword and spear  
I won three crowns of gold. (W.Sandys, 1833, 177)

### ***Alexander and the King of Egypt, and Evolutionary Implications***

The above speech (for Prince George) is also found in the *Alexander and the King of Egypt* chapbook text, as are certain other *Father Christmas and Turkish Knight* lines. Because Truro does have other lines that are found in the *Alexander* text, and in fact has more such lines than *Father Christmas*, Truro's omission of the Prince George speech is significant. A probable explanation is that the "Irish" speech was substituted deliberately when the Truro plays was compiled from its various sources. Otherwise, the main *Alexander* lines that also appear in Truro are the speeches of the King of Egypt and Sampo, plus a few of the Doctor's lines.

Allowing for slight variations in the wording, the presence of lines from *Alexander and the King of Egypt* in both the Truro/*Father Christmas* and Irish plays provides clues as to their possible evolution. All the *Alexander* lines that appear in the Irish plays also appear in the Truro/*Father Christmas* plays. On the other hand, the elecampane speech and the seemingly related Turkish Knight and Turkey Champion characters occur in the Truro/*Father Christmas* and Irish plays, but not in the *Alexander* text. Consequently the evolutionary links between the *Alexander* and Irish plays must have involved the Truro/*Father Christmas* plays as an intermediate. Three ancestral routes are possible:

- *Alexander* → Truro/*Father Christmas* → Irish

In this case, *Alexander* lines are lost at each step, and other new lines are added.

- Irish → Truro/*Father Christmas* → *Alexander*

Here, *Alexander* lines are added at each step, perhaps to replace older speeches.

- *Alexander*

↗

Truro/*Father Christmas*

↘

Irish

Here, lines are added on *Alexander* branch, but are lost on the Irish branch.

Of these, *Alexander* → Truro/*Father Christmas* → Irish is the most likely. This is because, firstly, the dates of the versions are consistent with this lineage [11]. Secondly, there is a strong tendency for texts to lose lines during transmission, rather than gain them, and this is the only route where each step entails a loss of *Alexander* material.

**Unidentified Traditional Parallels**

While the three sources discussed above account for nearly all the Truro lines that are found in other folk plays, there remain a number of relatively common Truro lines that have not been covered. The more notable examples include:

- Introductory speech No.3:
 

hopen the doar and Lat me in  
i hope your faver i shall wind  
wether irise or wether ifoll  
i will do my endeavour to please you all
- Lines from Saint George's speech No.17:
 

great britians right iwill mentain  
and fight free for england wance again
- The Doctor's cure from speech no.13:
 

are jack take a little of my drip drop  
pour it up in the tiptop
- Lines from the final speech No.31:
 

here comes i that never come yate  
with a great head and litle wit

These speeches are found in a variety of other folk plays, but it is not yet possible to tell if they come from another distinct class or classes. They may, however, provide useful leads in the search for such Hero/Combat sub-types.

**Conclusions and Residual Issues**

The key conclusions to be drawn from investigating biographical information on the actors listed in this manuscript are that its actual location should be Truro rather than Mylor, and that its date of performance must have been in the late 1780s – making it one of the oldest known English folk play texts. This corrected date is also supported by physical characteristics of the original manuscript. In addition, it has been possible to determine the correct order of speeches, as a result of which the text conforms more to conventional sequences than the earlier published transcripts.

Someone with more ready access to archives in Cornwall may be able to find further information to fill the gaps in the actors' biographies. Such information should improve confidence in the new place and date. Similarly, an expert paper historian may be able to contribute more precise information on the date and provenance of the manuscript's paper.

A consequence of the re-dating of this text is that the inclusion of literary and ballad material in English folk play texts is now focused on the late 18<sup>th</sup> and early 19<sup>th</sup> centuries, emphasising that the plays were generally more variable in content during this period than later. No new literary or ballad parallels were found during this study, but it would be worthwhile repeating the search in the future, when more material has been added to the various full-text online databases.

Investigation of parallels with Irish texts reveals the presence of a version that predates the Belfast *Christmas Rhyme* chapbooks, and from which the chapbook text was imperfectly derived. Further study of the lines in Irish plays that are not in the *Christmas Rhyme* chapbooks ought to reveal more about this pre-chapbook version. For instance, it is possible there could have been a slightly different Irish chapbook that pre-dates the known Belfast

versions, such as, perhaps, the untraced Cork edition mentioned by Thomas Crofton Croker (1826-1854). There is also scope for investigating how texts were transmitted between Ireland and mainland Britain and/or *vice versa*.

In comparing the Truro text with other plays, I have suggested that the hitherto catch-all Hero/Combat play probably contains a number of distinct sub-types, and one such sub-type is typified by the presence of the characters Father Christmas and the Turkish Knight. Examination of common and omitted lines between different versions of the plays that are related to Truro suggest the following ancestral line:

*Alexander and the King of Egypt* → *Father Christmas and the Turkish Knight* → Irish plays.

Although Truro text is the oldest known example of *Father Christmas and the Turkish Knight*, the inclusion of Irish material makes its position in this pedigree unclear.

Lastly, it would be interesting to know how the manuscript came to end up in Mylor. Boase's *Collectanea Cornubensia* has an entry that states temptingly:

"Rowe, John, member of board of guardians d Mylor from the effects of a fall down stairs 20 Sep 1869 aged 83" (G.C.Boase, 1890, 844)

This is unlikely to be our John Rowe, because he was too young, being born about 1786, and anyway, John Rowe is a common Cornish name. However it is possible that a descendant of one of the actors could have moved to live in Mylor, taking the manuscript too.

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### ***Notes***

- [1] The facsimiles of the 1779 and 1780 Revesby manuscripts have been published by M.J.Preston et al (1976 & 1999). Baskervill (1924) published five early 19th century texts from Lincolnshire, the original manuscripts of which are in the British Library (E.Peacock, 1823-1842).
- [2] John Davies Gilbert Enys was born in 1837, registered at St. Gluvias, Penryn. He emigrated to New Zealand from 1861 where he farmed the Castle Hill Station, Canterbury, becoming a District Councillor and a Justice of the Peace. He returned to the family mansion at Enys, Penryn, in 1891 on the death of his brothers. There he became a County Councillor for the Mylor Division of Cornwall. He died in 1912. His bookplate shows a heraldic emblem of three feathers. (From various sources, including papers in the *Enys Memoranda*.)
- [3] The sheets were folded in half for writing. This is evidenced by the word "sum" [*sic*] in speech number five which appears in the top right of its sheet. Because the rough corner of the deckle edge is incomplete, the "m" was written on the sheet below, which in this case is the sheet with unnumbered speeches. When working on the latter sheet, the scribe evidently felt that the "m" was an error or blemish and crossed it out. However, with the sheet folded, the original word can still be clearly recognised.

- [4] The paper has laid markings, with watermarks in the centre of each half of the folded sheet. The main watermark is a crowned insignia showing Britannia seated above a crossed shield, holding out an olive branch in one hand and with a trident or spear inclined over her other arm. She sits within an inner circle 2.25 inches in diameter, and an outer double circle 3-3/16 inches in diameter. The space between the circles is void, apart from the letter "H" above Britannia's head. The crown resting on the top of the circular badge is 1-1/8 inches tall, including the cross, and about 1-3/4 inches wide. The countermark is a smaller circle 1.5 inches in diameter, containing either a decoration or an emblem. Its nature is not totally clear. It may be the flower head of an iris or flag. Alternatively, it may be inverted relative to the figure of Britannia, in which case it could be a representation of three feathers, or possibly a fleur-de-lys. If it does show three feathers, they could represent George IV when he was Prince of Wales (born 1762) and/or Prince Regent (from 1811 to 1820).
- [5] Three Cornish sources refer to age of the performers. Firstly, Fortescue Hitchins and Samuel Drew wrote in 1824: "... the practice of these dramatic exhibitions is almost wholly confined to children, or very young persons." (F.Hitchins & S.Drew, 1824). Secondly, soon afterwards, "J.S. jun" referred to the actors of an unlocated Cornish play as "boys" and "urchins" in a florid letter written to William Hone for his *Every-Day Book* (W.Hone, 1826, 74-75). Thirdly, William Sandys, writing in 1833, stated that in the West of Cornwall, the plays were performed "only by persons of the lower order, chiefly young persons..." (W.Sandys, 1833, cx).

It is also worth noting that a small loose leaf at the very end of the *Enys Memoranda* has the following quotation from Polsue's (1868) volume of *Parochial Records of Cornwall*, which relates to Penryn:

"Christmas plays have been continued in this town from time immemorial; but the performance of these dramatic representations are now almost wholly confined to very young persons and boys."

The wording of the latter half of this sentence seems to paraphrase the wording in Hitchins and Drew.

- [6] The family names do not feature as property owners or occupiers in a book on Kenwyn Churchtown and vicinity (J.Palmer, 1996), which suggests that they lived elsewhere in Kenwyn parish, most probably in the built-up area abutting the Borough of Truro.
- [7] The Enys family were, and still are, major landowners in western Cornwall. Samuel Enys bought the manor of Kenwyn and Truro in 1706. Their country mansion is at Enys, near Mylor Bridge and Penryn, but they also had town houses in Truro.
- [8] The Constable's Lists were compiled in 1803 for each parish, as part of the mobilisation for the war with France. They list all men between the ages and 17 and 55, giving their occupations, and classifying them into four broad categories according to age and marital status, as follows:
- 1st Class - Men between 17 and 30, unmarried, no children living under 10 years
  - 2nd Class - Men between 30 to 50, unmarried, no children living under 10 years
  - 3rd Class - Men between 17 to 30, married with 2 children under 10 years
  - 4th Class - Remainder of men between 17 and 55



There are also remarks regarding infirmity and membership of the local militias. The RIC holds the Constable's Lists for the Borough of Truro and the adjacent parish of St. Clements, but the list for Kenwyn either no longer exists, or has been lost.

- [9] While "liberty" has a long history as a war cry for revolutionaries world-wide, in Ireland the slogan "civil and religious liberty" is particularly associated with the protestant Orange Order.
- [10] In 1802, the masthead of *The Royal Cornwall Gazette* boasted "Circulated with utmost expedition through London, Liverpool, Hull, Bristol," etc.. This was because Falmouth, being the westernmost port for packet ships in England was often the first recipient of news from overseas, and the direct packets to Liverpool could deliver the news faster than the time it took for coaches to reach London and then travel on to the provinces.
- [11] *Alexander and the King of Egypt* is currently the oldest known full Hero/Combat text, dated by M.J.Preston et al (1977) somewhere between 1746 and 1769. Truro is the oldest *Father Christmas and Turkish Knight* text, now dated in this paper in the late 1780s. The earliest Irish text is the Smyth and Lyons chapbook dated somewhere between 1803 and 1818 (G.Boyes et al, 1999)

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