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LINGUIST List 26.2575

Thu May 21 2015

Review: Historical Ling; Lexicography: Jago (2014)

Editor for this issue: Sara Couture <sara@linguistlist.org>

Date: 05-Dec-2014

From: Jon Mills <j.mills@email.com>

Subject: An English–Cornish Dictionary



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Book announced at <http://linguistlist.org/issues/25/25-3843.html>

AUTHOR: Frederick W. P. Jago

TITLE: An English–Cornish Dictionary

SUBTITLE: Compiled from the Best Sources

PUBLISHER: Cambridge University Press

YEAR: 2014

REVIEWER: Jon Mills, University of Kent at Canterbury

Review's Editor: Helen Aristar-Dry

SUMMARY

When Jago published *An English–Cornish Dictionary* in the nineteenth century, the Cornish language had become virtually extinct and the Cornish language revival had not yet begun. Jago intended his dictionary to preserve the Cornish language for the benefit of the scholars and antiquarians of his time. This edition published by Cambridge University Press will chiefly be relevant to those who have an interest in the history of Cornish lexicography.

The main body of this book is the alphabetically arranged dictionary itself, which consists of approximately 9,300 alphabetically arranged English headwords, followed by their part-of-speech, Cornish translation equivalents in all their variant spellings, sources and for some entries examples of usage. This main body is preceded by an introduction in three parts, dealing with the history of Cornish, the literature extant at the time that Jago compiled this dictionary, and Jago's remarks concerning his aims and methodology. The main body is followed by seven appendices. Appendices 1-4 include Genesis Chapter 1, the Lord's Prayer, the Creed and the Ten Commandments in Cornish. These are the versions to be found in Williams (1865: 395-6) *Lexicon Cornu-Britannicum*, and to which Jago usefully provides interlinear translations into English. Appendix 5 is a short place-name dictionary for the most part taken from Bannister's (1869) *Glossary of Cornish Names*. Appendix 6 is a copy of Prince Louis Lucien Bonaparte's letter to the *Cambrian Journal* unjustly accusing Pryce (1790) of plagiarism. Appendix 7 is a copy of the Preface to Pryce's (1790) *Archaeologia Cornu-Britannica*, which Jago includes "by way of serving as Pryce's defence" since Pryce clearly acknowledges all his sources.

Jago describes his aims as follows. "1. To collect all the words which would find a place in an English-Cornish Dictionary. 2. To quote some Cornish phrases for the sake of illustration. 3. To give the various forms or spellings of the words just as they are found in the remains of ancient Cornish, without constructing a single word, or phrase, and without alteration or addition. 4. To place the various spellings of the words in a gradational form, for the sake of their being more easily compared. 5. To give one authority at least for each word and phrase, for the sake of an easy reference to the originals." Jago mostly succeeds in his aims with the exception that he perpetuates the misspellings to be found in Pryce (1790) and Williams (1865) that had originated from Pryce and Williams' misreading their manuscript sources.

EVALUATION

It is unfortunate that Jago did not avail himself of those who, in the late nineteenth century, still retained a traditional knowledge of Cornish, such as John Davey of Zennor. Jago (p. iv) mentions the lists of Cornish words contributed to the Cornishman newspaper (1879) by Bernard Victor and a Mr. W.F. Pentreath, but sadly Jago apparently made no attempt to contact either of these potential informants in order to gather further data.

This current edition by Cambridge University Press suffers from the lack of a preface to place Jago's dictionary in its historical context, to describe its significance in the development of Cornish lexicography and the significance that it had for the lexicography of the Cornish revival that followed a few decades after Jago's original edition was published.

This book will be of interest to students of the history of linguistics and more specifically to those studying the history of lexicography or the history of Cornish linguistics. It is not suitable for learners of Revived Cornish, who might be led astray by the title, since this book belongs to a different era, contains several errors and does not give the Cornish words in any of the standardised spelling systems currently being taught. Thus, for the learner of revived Cornish today, Jago's dictionary has been superseded by more accurate and up to date dictionaries, such as those by Nance (1938; 1952; 1955), Nance and Smith (1934), George (1993), Gendall (1997) and Williams (2000).

Prior to Jago's (1887) original edition, three Cornish-English dictionaries had been published. Pryce's (1790) *Archaeologia Cornu-Britannica*, Williams' (1865) *Lexicon Cornu-Britannicum*, and Stokes (1868) *Cornish Glossary*. Jago compiled his English-Cornish Dictionary by simply amalgamating and reversing these three dictionaries. Jago (p. xv) explains his rationale thus, "A Cornish Dictionary without the English-Cornish part of it is like a bird with one wing. The missing wing, imperfect as it may be, I have attempted to supply. What should we say of a Latin Dictionary without an English-Latin division? My wish has been to compile a handy dictionary, so that anyone might find, so far as the remains of the ancient language will allow, what is the Cornish for an English word." Jago (p.xv) acknowledges his predecessors work, "The labours of others have made such a task comparatively easy; indeed, without the works of Williams, andc., this compilation would have been impossible to me, and I have to acknowledge the invaluable assistance derived from all sources."

Jago's dictionary, however, was to play a role beyond Jago's stated aims. The previously published Cornish-English dictionaries of Pryce (1790), Williams (1865) and Stokes (1869) were not lemmatised. Thus any given lexeme might have a number of entries at various places in the alphabetical headword list according to its several inflections and variant spellings. By reversing the dictionaries of Pryce (1790), Williams (1865) and Stokes (1869) to create an English-Cornish dictionary, Jago brought together all the variant forms of each Cornish lexeme under one English headword. Using their newly devised Unified Cornish orthography, Nance and Smith (1934) were then able to standardise the variant spellings found in Jago's dictionary to create their *An English-Cornish Dictionary*. Nance (1938) then reversed the 1934 dictionary to create the fully lemmatised *A New Cornish-English Dictionary*, suitable not merely for antiquarians with an interest in a quaint, dead Celtic language, but essential for those who aspired, as Nance himself did, to revive the Cornish language.

Jago's dictionary is still of use for the historical lexicographer of Cornish, since its English-Cornish macrostructure provides a means to look up all the variant historical spellings of any given Cornish lexeme. This is particularly useful for searching an electronic diachronic corpus of historical Cornish.

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ABOUT THE REVIEWER

Dr Jon Mills lectures in English language and linguistics at the University of Kent. His research interests include the Cornish language, lexicology, lexicography and the teaching of English for academic purposes. He recently provided the Cornish translation for the Oxford Children's Cornish-English Visual Dictionary. His PhD thesis was on Computer-assisted Lemmatization of a Cornish Text Corpus for Lexicographical Purposes. For a list of his publications see <https://kent.academia.edu/JonMills>.

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