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Twentieth Century Cornish Lexicography and Language Revival
Jon Mills
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The Revival of Cornish

• 1901 Cowethas Kelto-Kernuak
• 1929 Unified spelling
• Today
  – Several hundred speakers
  – A very small number have been raised from birth as bilingual
The Corpus

- Old Cornish
- Middle Cornish
- Modern Cornish
- Revived Cornish
Analogy with Welsh and Breton

- Williams (1865) *Lexicon Cornu-Britannicum*
- Lewis (1923) *Handbook of Middle Cornish*
- Morton Nance & Smith *Unified Cornish*
- George Kernewek Kemmyn
The Major Dictionaries

1865 Williams’ *Lexicon Cornu-Britannicum.*
1887 Jago *An English Cornish Dictionary.*
1938 Morton Nance *A New Cornish-English Dictionary.*
1952 Morton Nance *An English-Cornish Dictionary.*
1991 Gendall *A Students Dictionary of Modern Cornish.*
1993 George *Gerlyver Kernewek Kemmyn.*
1997 Gendall *A Practical Dictionary of Modern Cornish.*
Standardisation

• The phonemic principle
  – George (1993)

• Use of attested forms
    • a single preferred spelling for each lexeme from those spellings that are attested in the historical literature.
Unified Cornish

- 1929 *Cornish for All* (Morton Nance)
- 1934 *English Cornish Dictionary*

**middle, n.** cre₉-s; perveth.

- 1938 *Cornish - English Dictionary*
Sources for the 1938 dictionary

- Texts
- Borrowings from Middle-English
- Welsh & Breton cognates
- Dialect English
- Place names
Microstructure in the 1938 dictionary

†cryÂ¬s, m., pl. -yow, shirt, shift, chemise; *cryÂ¬spows, f. waistcoat, jacket, blouse, c. oferyas, cassock.

cryÂ¬s, m., pl. -yow, shake, shiver, quiver, quake; crysya, vb. to shake, etc.: dorgrys.

cryÂ¬s: see creÂ¬s.

creÂ¬s (creys, cryÂ¬s, Late creas), m., middle, centre, midst; mid-section of buddle (D.); adj., middle: yn ewn-gres anodho, right in the middle of it: Mor C., Mediterranean; Kernewek-C., Middle Cornish; Gew Graze, Kimyell Craze, etc., place-names.
Unified Cornish

- 1950 “Cornish Words Occurring in Tregear MS.”
- The 1952 Dictionary
- The 1955 Dictionary

creñs, m., adj. middle, centre.
Neologisms

**bicycle**, n. *margh horn.*
(Morton Nance & Smith 1934)
← Breton, marc’h-houarn

**BICYCLE dywroıs f -ow dyw, roıs**
(Snell & Morris 1981)

**pennskol** {1:N:0(kows)} FN university,
institution of higher education [C: PENN-<head>SKOL]
universyte (Ton 1504)

(George 1993)
Ghost words

YLOW n music.

– ‘lew’: mist
– ‘music’ / ‘muzzick’: mist
– Welsh:
  ‘eilio’: to compose
  ‘eilon’: music
  ‘alaw’: music
Our Institute takes the view that the so called Unified Spelling invented by Nance has never been explained, i.e. we have never had any real discussion of the principles on which it was based. We regard the dictionaries with their high proportion of words invented by the comparative method as suspect, because they don't give dated forms, and we feel that some of the lost words can probably be recovered from dated Middle Cornish place-names and may prove to be other than the forms invented for them by Nance. Lastly, following the work of the Leeds Survey of English Dialects, we suspect that the pronunciation currently used for modern Cornish (based on an ultimate form of Wessex Middle English) may be wrong and that the true phonetic range is still just recoverable from an area west of an isogloss that cuts off the Land's End and part of the south side of the Lizard.
Kernewek Kemmyn

- George's 1993 Dictionary

\[
\text{kres} <\text{centre}> \{8:MLP:4\} \text{ AJ central MN centre [C: IE \*kr-su (lp)] } \{ B \text{ kreiz; cf. W craidd}\}
\]
\[
\text{kres} <\text{faith}> \{8:M:*\} \text{ FN faith [U:] } \{ \text{MidB cret, W cred}\}
\]
\[
\text{kres} <\text{peace}> \{8:ML:*\} \text{ MN peace [U]}\]
Problems with Kernewek Kemmyn

• Unsound reconstruction of Cornish phonology
• English translation equivalents
• Many inaccuracies in the data given in the dictionary
• No consensus for a system which is demonstrably unsound
Modern Cornish

**middle**, (n.) crease (R), crees (NB), kreis (JB), creas (T), krêz (L), creys (2299, 973), *in the m.*, en crease (R), en kreis (JB), *in the m. of the country*, en creys an powe (2299), *into the m.*, tha greys (973),

**middle**, (a.) krêz (L), m. finger, bêz krêz (L) craze (top).

(Gendall 1991)

**CREASE** (1) [kre:z]  *m. & a.* -sow middle, centre, middlings; central; ridge-tile; *en c.*, in the middle; *en c. an pow*, inland, right in the country; *tha g. an beaze*, in(to) the centre of the world/earth; *an beaz c.*, the middle finger; *var. creis* [WR]

**CREASE** (2) [kri:s]  *m.* creosote, carbolic acid [TR, < Gr kreas]

(Gendall 1997)