



News from the History Group Research Team



As it is St. Piran's day on the 5th of March when the St. Piran flag is flown all over Cornwall, I thought I would write a little about him and a local family connection.

St. Piran was a 5th Century Cornish Abbot or Saint. He is the patron saint of tin-miners, and Cornwall together with St. Michael and St. Petroc. It is said that some of the secrets regarding the making of tin were communicated to their ancestors by St. Piran himself. According to legend, he was born in Ireland where he performed miracles, but his powers started to make a group of local kings in Ireland wary of him. They decided to throw him into the sea with a millstone around his neck to try and drown St. Piran, but he survived by floating to Perranporth beach.

St. Piran's Day began as a traditional holiday for tin miners in Cornwall, and the festival for the week leading up to this day was known as Perrantide, as far back as the 1800's or even earlier. There is little description of specific traditions associated with this day, apart from the consumption of large amounts of alcohol and food – now there's a surprise!

The day following the St. Piran's Day was known by many as "Mazey Day", a term which has now been adopted by the revived Golowan Festival in Penzance. The phrase "drunk as a Perraner" was used in the 19th Century in Cornwall to describe people who had consumed large amounts of alcohol.

It may surprise you that until the 1950's and 60's you would not see the "Cornish Flag" flying from flagpoles, and such an integral part of Cornwall as we do today. In fact, those who did fly the flag were considered as anything from misguided radicals to dangerous revolutionaries. Our local connection is Richard Gendall, the Uncle of Jonathan March who lives in St. Tudy. Richard was almost single-handedly responsible for reintroducing St. Piran's flag. It was Richard and a fellow cultural activist Helena Charles who discovered a reference to a white cross on a black background in a book from the 1700's. Richard said in a newspaper article "It was not long after the war, and some of us who had been away began to feel the need to express our Cornishness". He would go around putting stickers of the flag all around Launceston after dark to get the message across. They were soon taken down, but he didn't give up.

I say well done and thank you to Richard Gendall for giving us the Cornish Flag back – a symbol of Cornish identity known all around the world!

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