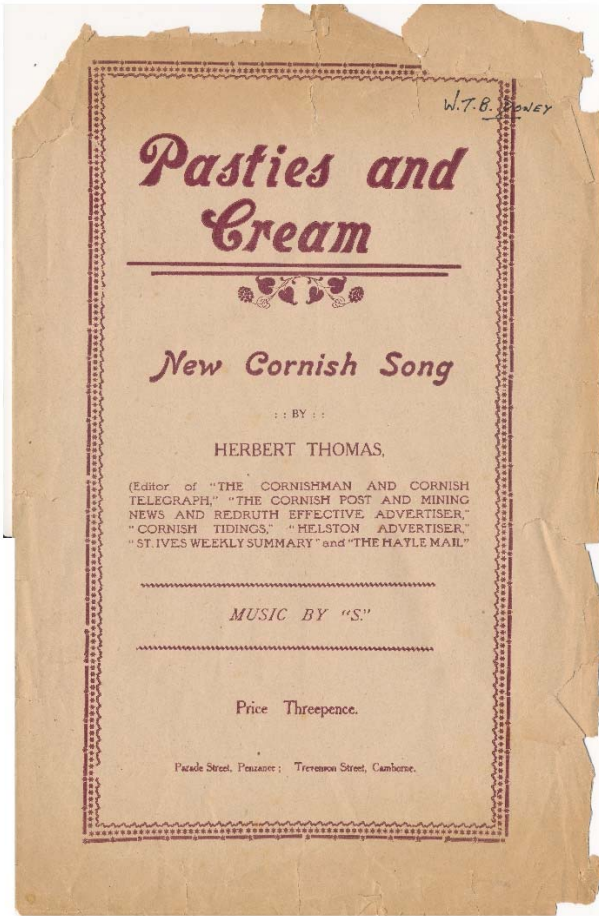


Pasties and Cream

Herbert Thomas



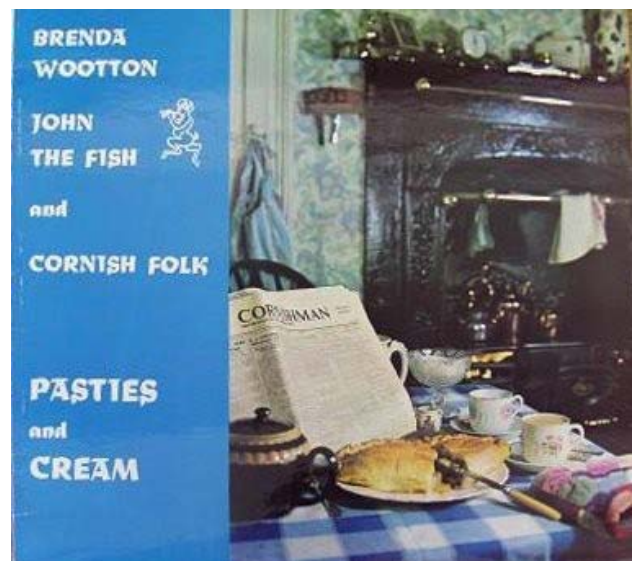
The score for this song was sent to us by Sue Ellery-Hill, daughter of Brenda Wooton the celebrated Cornish singer. It was the title track for an LP released by Brenda and John the Fish through Sentinel Records in 1971 and in many ways marked the beginning of her professional career as a singer.

The lyrics were written by Herbert Thomas and published without music in the "Cornishman" Newspaper in 1903 and again in 1907 this time with a score composed by the anonymous "S". It is likely that it was first published as sheet music in 1914 when we see a number of adverts in the press advising that "Pasties and Cream – Copies of this Cornish song by the Editor can be had from this office – Price 3d; by post 4d to any part of the world".

Herbert Thomas (1866-1951) was born in St Day and worked in a Mining Office in Redruth before emigrating to Montana where he took up employment as a reporter. He returned to Cornwall in 1889 and joined the staff of the "Cornishman" eventually becoming editor and a well known public figure.¹ He published a number of songs and poems on Cornish themes in the "Cornishman" during his

time as editor but it is "Pasties and Cream" that captured the public imagination. We see reports of it being sung at events at home and across the Cornish Diaspora and being sung by Cornish troops in the First World War. It has to be said that Herbert Thomas was a good publicist and these reports were often in papers he edited!

The lyrics provide a window into early 1900s Cornwall. There are some authentic dialect expressions in the lyrics: nuggies is another term for knockers, the mine spirits; scrowlers are fish broiled over an open fire; and clome refers to the clome ovens built into Cornish cottage chimneys.² At the same time the "rugged cliffs", "blue skies", "smugglers" and a "star spangled sea" could be straight off posters from the Great Western Railway publicity machine. In 1909 the song was indeed used as part of tourist promotion by the GWR when an invited group of journalist from Northern England were given a guided tour of West Cornwall.³



The emphatic use of the word "county" is partly a lyrical device but also reflects on Cornish social history. When the lyrics were written Cornwall County Council was still a novelty having been created in 1889

following the “Local Government Act” of the previous year.⁴ For some this was a betrayal of Cornwall’s distinctive identity for others their new “County of Cornwall” was something to be proud of. Use of the word “county” especially in the sense of an “English County” was challenged by the Celtic revival. This challenge was voiced by people like Henry Jenner, first president of the Federation of Old Cornwall Societies and inaugurated as the first Grand Bard of Gorsedh Kernow in 1928.

It is interesting that Herbert Thomas was also part of a small group of people initiated as Bards of Gorsedh Kernow at the ceremony in 1928. Both the induction of new bards and the ceremony itself involved confirming allegiance to Cornwall as a Celtic Nation. Does this mean that he no longer saw Cornwall as the county in his song or that for him being a county did not prevent Cornwall from also being recognised as Celtic Nation? At the time when the song was written Great Britain was divided across the political spectrum between those who believed in a centralised “Union” and those that saw devolution in the form of “Home Rule” for the constituent nations as the way forward. Cornwall had in fact returned a MP on a platform that included home rule for Cornwall in 1885.⁵

Some songs like Trelawny stay the course and some drift in and out of popularity over time. “Pasties and Cream” seems to have lost out on the popularity stakes by the 1940s⁶ possibly because it would not have been fully embraced by the Celtic revival. In the second half of the 20th century it was overtaken by Cornish anthems like Kenneth Pelmeare’s “Hail to the Homeland” and Harry Glasson’s “Cornwall My Home.”

Merv Davey July 2020

¹ E.g. “Cornish Ditties,” *Cornishman*, 16/07/1903 and 23/07/1903

² Paul Phillips, Dialect dictionary, Federation of Old Cornwall Societies Website.

³ “The Land of Pasties and Cream”, *The Cornishman*, 16/09/1909

⁴ These new administrative counties were based on geographic entities that had been in existence at the time of the Norman Conquest, see Frederick A. Youngs *Guide to the Local Administrative Units of England*, Vol.I: Southern England, (London, Royal Historical Society, 1979) pp. xii–xiii. In Cornwall this meant that responsibilities and powers from the Duchy of Cornwall (a kingdom in the Saxon period and an earldom immediately after the conquest) were transferred to the new Cornwall County Council. Cornwall was administered as a county in the modern sense from then until it became a unitary authority with increasing devolution in 2009.

⁵ Charles Conybeare, elected Liberal MP for Camborne and Redruth in 1885, see: Philip Payton, *Cornwall: A History*, (Fowey, Cornwall Editions Ltd, 2004). p.237 - 267

⁶ A correspondent in the *Cornishman* 23/09/1948 comments that the song is not as well known as it ought to be.

PASTIES AND CREAM.

NEW CORNISH SONG.

Words by HERBERT THOMAS.

8.

The musical score is written for voice and piano. It consists of several systems of staves. The first system includes a vocal line and a piano accompaniment. The lyrics are: "I sing of the County of pasties & cream, Of pilchards & herrings that sparkle and gleam—In the dear old County of Corn-wall! The land of pas-ties and cream! The land of the mi-ners and fish-er-men bold, The land of the smug-glers in sto-ries of old, Where men go a'courting, & maids are not cold, In the dear old Coun-ty of Corn-wall! Corn-wall, Corn-wall, the dear old County of Corn-wall! Pasties and cream, Tin in the stream, Pilchards and herrings that sparkle and gleam! Though we may roam, Cornwall's our home—The dear old County of Corn-wall!"

Dynamic markings include *Svo.*, *mf*, *p*, *ra*, *crca*, and *f*. The score includes a **REFRAIN** section.

2 Oh! know you the County of pasties and cream,
With hay in the meadow and tin in the stream—
In the dear old County of Cornwall?
The land of pasties and cream!
The boats trail their nets through the star-spangled sea,
The miners go down where the nuggies may be,
And black eyes are laughing 'pon you and 'pon me
In the dear old County of Cornwall!—REFRAIN.

3 Wherever we go 'tis of pasties and cream,
Of clome and of scrowlers we Cornish will dream—
From the dear old County of Cornwall!
The land of pasties and cream!

No cliffs are so rugged, no seas are so blue,
No sands more like silver, no maidens more true,
No land such a loadstone to me or to you
As the dear old County of Cornwall!—REFRAIN.

4 If we watch the grey shores sink down in the sea
No traitors to home and our sweethearts are we—
To the dear old County of Cornwall!
The land of pasties and cream!
Wherever we travel our home will be dear,
For loved ones we'll toil, and for Cornwall we'll cheer,
For we'll send home a smile, though we keep back a tear,
For the dear old County of Cornwall.—REFRAIN.
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