

## **Guizing**

### *Ancient Traditions and Modern Sensitivities*

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Guizing is a Cornish dialect expression describing a custom where revellers disguise themselves in a variety of ways and engage in music, singing, dance and informal theatrical activity. Terms such as “*Guizing*”, *Geese Dancing*<sup>1</sup>, *Goosey Dancing*<sup>2</sup> and *Shalla*<sup>3</sup> often appear in descriptions of Cornish folkloric tradition together with the more widely recognised terms such as “Mummers” and “Morris”. Modern folklorists may separate these traditions taxonomically but the distinction is not so clear in the descriptions of 19<sup>th</sup> Century narrators such as Bottrel<sup>4</sup>. The event known as “Padstow Mummers Day” or “Darkie Day” that takes place in the town during Boxing Day and New Year, involves revellers disguising themselves by dressing up and blacking their faces and can be considered to be part of a “guizing” or “mumming” tradition.

The “guize” tradition at Padstow has recently become the subject of debate as to whether the activity is racist and this article seeks to inform this debate by considering the origins of the tradition, describing the event as it is today and considering the principle elements within the “Padstow Debate”.

### **Midwinter Guizing and the Padstow Mummers**

Compared to May Day, the Boxing Day and New Year’s tradition in Padstow is a relatively modest event and this would seem to have been the case for much of its history. Prior to the 1990s press coverage is limited largely to the local Padstow Echo. In contrast, the local correspondent for the Cornish Guardian regularly contributed articles about May Day and the Padstow Carol singing from the first edition in 1901.

The New Year edition of Padstow Echo 1967 carries a Diary item thanking Mary Magor, Olive Brunyes and Eunice Williams for “*keeping alive the Padstow Darkies by training the young Padstonians with the Darky Songs which have been traditionally sung here, with also the musical accompaniment.*”<sup>5</sup>. A letter From Mary Magor in the same edition praises the children involved and describes the event as an “*Old Padstow Custom we were trying to revive before it goes completely out of knowledge*”. From her description it is evident that there were 15 children involved aged between 7 and 13 who toured the town, called at the homes of elderly people, entertained them with familiar songs and collected for the Red Cross. The photographs accompanying the article show the children in a variety of dress from pyjamas to bow ties and top hats and all with blackened faces.

To trace the event back further some reliance must be placed on local informants such as John Buckingham<sup>6</sup>, who can recollect the event as far back as the 1940s in his own experience and by inference back to his parent's youth in the early part of the 20<sup>th</sup> Century. He recalls having his face blacked with burnt cork by his mother and being sent to sing for his grandmother. Another local informant, Malcolm McCarthy<sup>7</sup> recalls other children of his age being taken "darkying" by Mrs Magor in the 60s and has a picture of his Great Grandmother blacked up with the mummers in 1936 for the Coronation celebrations. He is of the view that the tradition is stems from a mummers play "*I believe that the mummers went from house to house performing their play and got fed up with the same old lines and tried out the new at that time Foster music hall songs. This was enjoyed and response probably favourable and the tradition took off in place of the mumming*".

A photograph in the Padstow archive dated circa 1900s has been cited as evidence of the antiquity of Padstow's mummer's day<sup>8</sup>. Malcolm McCarthy has an original of the photograph with the names identifying them as local people on the back. He is able to identify the location as Treator, one of the main places then visited by the "Obby Oss" on May Day and points out that the mummers may have followed a similar route. It is, however, possible that this was a photo portrait of local performers for a minstrel variety show, which were popular during this period and the Padstow Archive has posters of "The Mississippi Minstrels" and other concert parties taking place during the early part of the 20<sup>th</sup> Century. Certainly the clothing portrayed in the photograph seems more reminiscent of the, top hats and embroidered clothing of Southern Minstrel imagery than guize dancing. From the information we have it is difficult to be sure that this is a picture of the mummers but it does illustrate the popular culture that might have influenced the tradition.

Without documentary records it is difficult to accurately date the origins of the "Padstow Mummers" but the ubiquity of similar Christmas customs elsewhere in Cornwall provides a wider perspective and takes the tradition further back into antiquity. Jenkin describes events during the period between Christmas Day and 12<sup>th</sup> Night in the villages around St Ives and Penzance as "*Nightly invaded by bands of young people attired in strange grotesque costume. In almost every case the boys are dressed as girls and the girls as boys, some cleverly representing historical or local characters, others merely disguised with blackened faces and Nottingham lace veils ... but enjoying themselves as much as if they were frolicking under a midsummer sky.*"<sup>9</sup> Jenkin's description could equally be applied to a photograph of Padstow May Day revellers circa 1910<sup>10</sup> providing us with a link to the general phenomena of "guize dancing".

Hunt<sup>11</sup>, describes guize dancing on Plough Monday (1<sup>st</sup> Monday after 12<sup>th</sup> day) in West Penwith "Maidens as young men, men for maidens. Thus dressed visit neighbours ..... dance ... make jokes.....and the spirit of drollery and wit kept among the people. Music and dancing, they are

kept with liquor then proceed to next house and carry on the same sport.” He goes on to explain that “geese dancing is done in nearly every town and large village. The term applied to all Christmas plays and indeed any kind of sport in which characters were assumed by performers or disguises worn.” This is born out by frequent references to guizing in local Histories<sup>12</sup>, such publications as “Old Cornwall”, and general use as a dialect word<sup>13</sup> Jenkin’s quote from Robert Heath takes us back still further : “ .... *description of Cornwall during the early part of the last century (i.e. 1800s) the costume of the guise dancer consisted of an antique finery such as would now raise envy in the head of a collector. Male players were to be seen in long waisted, gay coloured coats, resplendent with buttons of brass or tin as large as crown pieces and having long ruffles at their breast and wrists. .... The chief glory of the men, however, lay in their cocked hats which were surmounted with streamers and ribbons.*”<sup>14</sup>

The significance of the time of year and the occurrence of the festival just after the mid -winter solstice and just before Plough Monday does provide justification for speculation that the origins of the festival are very old indeed and possibly pre Christian. There is no historical evidence at the moment that can take this suggestion much further but it does enter into the meaning and mythology that has grown around the event.

The Old Cornwall Society Magazines provides two examples of “Darky Songs” in use for mummers plays and Mid – Winter Guizing as late as the early 20<sup>th</sup> Century, “ *Begone from the Window* “ and “*The Derby Ram*”. It is important to recognise that the Old Cornwall Society contributors make it clear that “Darky” was a dialect contraction of “Darking” and referred to the *activity* of blacking faces and not to either black people or a musical genre. There is no evidence of any significance in the different spelling of “Darky” and “Darkie”, the latter being used by the local press.

### **Begone From the Window<sup>15</sup>**

Begone from my window, my love, my Love my Love;

Begone from my window my dear.

For the wind and rain

Have brought him back again

And you’ll get no lodging here

Begone from my window, my love, my Love my Love;

Begone from my window my dear.

The wind is in the west

And the cuckoo's in the nest

And you’ll get no lodging here

Begone from my window, you rogue, you rogue, you rogue;  
Begone from my window you hear.  
For my wife I've proved untrue  
So I throw her out to you  
And you'll get no lodging here

The connection with black faces here is the cuckolding theme and "Darky" refers to the guizers who will serenade the guilty parties with a "Shalla" (an infernal racket made with tins and anything noisy to hand).

### **Derby Ram<sup>16</sup>.**

As I was going to Derby Sir,  
    Twas on a market day  
I saw a fine ram sir,  
    As ever fed on hay

With my ringle dingle derby,  
    With my ringle dingle day  
With my ringle dingle derby,  
    With my ringle dingle day

The latter was also know as a "Darky Song" by John Buckingham<sup>17</sup> but with "Derby" being replaced by "Padstow", he also remembered variants of "Old Daddy Fox" being mixed in with the words of the songs sung.

### **Old Daddy Fox<sup>18</sup>**

Old Daddy Fox went out one night  
When the moon and the stars did shine so bright  
He went in to the old farmers yard

    Where the geese and the ducks did quack so hard, hard  
    Where the geese and the ducks did quack so hard.

Old mother wigger wagger jumped out of bed  
She down with the window and out with her head  
Crying, Rise, Jack, rise, the grey goose is dead

    And the fox is gone out of the town , town

And the fox is gone out of the town.

Out jumped the young one's eight, nine, ten  
They licked up the goose no plate, knife or fork

And the young one picked all the bones, bones  
And the young one picked all the bones

In an information sheet about the Padstow Mummers provided for the Padstow Archive<sup>19</sup> John Buckingham comments *"It would seem from remarks quoted in the local and national press that there is some confusion about the music used. This is understandable given the noisy nature of the performance and the fact that fragments from a number of songs have 'become one' in the evolution of this exuberant performance of street music. . . . . Some of the verses come from old folk songs but the majority were part of that body of popular music written for the Minstrel groups by composers such as Stephen Collins Foster (1826 – 1864). He wrote 'Swanee River', 'Oh Susannah', Camptown Races' and Uncle Ned, to mention a few of his most famous melodies."*

There seems to be a complex process going on here, chaotic even, where celebrative behaviour is passed between generations, shared between communities, borrowed from other calendrical rituals, elaborated on and influenced by the popular customs, dress, music and dance of any given era.

### **Padstow Mummers 2005 and 1983**

Systematic collection of data concerning the attitudes and views of the Padstow Mummers Day 2005 participants by interviews or questionnaires would have been impractical, intrusive and ethically questionable given the background of Police scrutiny. In order to gain further insight into the event therefore, the author accepted an invitation to join the mummers , thus observing the event as a participant. In addition, two volunteers<sup>20</sup> were recruited to observe the event as bystanders and with whom to compare and record experiences. The description that follows draws on the experiences of these two observational routes.

On Boxing Day 2005 the revellers gradually collected together from about 10 am in the Morning at the Padstow social club. Most conversation was informal social exchange but there was some discussion of the concerns expressed about the event by the Police and recognition of the need to use the term "Mummers" rather than "Darkie" as well as caution about the type of costume worn. During a previous year someone had apparently turned up wearing a joke shop "afro" wig and this was felt to be quite wrong and inappropriate. There was also a sense of anger at being misrepresented by people who knew nothing of an event that involved no more than dressing up,

community singing and collecting money for charity, an issue taken up in subsequent correspondents such as Malcolm McCarthy<sup>21</sup>.

Other than a consensus as to which accordionist should lead the music and the route from pub to pub and some organising of the collecting tins, there was no evidence of, and apparently no need for, any formal structure to the event. People simply gathered together, started up the music and when there was sufficient momentum, moved off in a roughly grouped procession to the next venue. About 60 people set off initially from the Social Club and the numbers varied during the day as people processed through the town. Stock costume involved blackened faces, top hats and dinner jackets adorned with ribbons, tinsel and a variety of colourful impedimenta. However for many people dressing up clearly meant a blacked up face and festive decoration added to what ever they would normally have been wearing that day. Only two people were observed dressed in a way that would be exclusively associated with the southern minstrels, two women wearing brightly coloured headscarves. There was certainly evidence of symbolism specifically associated with Cornwall in the form of rugby shirts, tartan and the St Piran's Flag.

The music was driven by a large number of accordions and May Day drums providing an enveloping sound reminiscent of the May Day celebrations. The volume level was high and in excess of 80 decibels in the confined area of narrow streets and public houses. This is significant in that it reduces the importance of the words, which as John Buckingham suggests, become muddled, it also encourages people to join in whether or not they know the words and can sing. A variety of music was used, "Trelawney" certainly featured in the warm up sessions and for the rest of the day they ranged through a wide repertoire of community songs which included "She'll become round the mountain", "Scotland the Brave", "Alabama" and "Camptown Races", all to the same driving May Day rhythm.

It is also interesting to summarise the general theme of explanations and justifications provided in casual conversation by participants and local traders:

- This is a local tradition that has gone on for a long time
- The custom has merged with other things over the years and any offensive language associated with minstrel songs has been removed.
- It's just face painting and dressing up in funny costume
- It is a fertility rite for midwinter.
- It is something to do with miners or people black with coal dust from the cargo ships
- A slave ship was wrecked off Padstow and the villagers blacked up to confuse the slavers and help the slaves escape.

At a more subjective level the observation of two “others” can also offer different insights into the “Padstow Mummers” tradition . The first is the “significant other “ of post modernism and the second is that of the more experiential “other self” with whom participants engage as part of the tradition.

From the perspective of rural studies Murdoch and Pratt<sup>22</sup> define the significant other as “..*those regarded as in some way illegitimate members of society as a result of a variety of social characteristics such as being gay, a single parent, a traveller, a black person and so on.*” Leaving aside for the moment blackened faces, the observers witnessed no activity or language that they would have perceived as demeaning of a racial or ethnic minority group. There was, however, an impression that by the physical domination of space in the streets and especially the pubs, the people of Padstow were claiming back their own territory from the “other”, the “other” being “tourists” and “second homers”. The ironic question here being whether we should add, middle class incomers and tourists, to Murdoch and Pratt’s list or the mummers themselves? Whether one is the “other” or defined by “not being the other” the fact remains that the sense of community, continuity, belonging and tradition is a powerful part of the attraction for those participating in the mummers day and also a factor in the resistance to outside interference. One thing is quite clear, however, black people are not identified as the “other”

The “experiential other” is the “other of carnival”, less tangible than that of post modernism but connects firmly to the sense of belonging and tradition. Dressing up bizarrely encourages revellers to step into an alternative persona and enhances the sense of carnival. The relaxation of inhibitions encourages engagement with the music and atmosphere of the event, further supported by the reassurance that individual contribution will be balanced out by the overall sound.

Although observed without contemporaneous notes it is also useful to recall broad details of the event when visited during the Christmas of 1983. There were no more than 15 or 20 people involved and the costume was less extravagant, with a tendency towards waistcoats rather than dinner jackets but the same principle of random festive decoration with ribbons and tinsel applied. Some faces were roughly blacked with burnt cork but unlike 2005 a number of people had taken advantage of grease paint to emulate the BBC’s Black and White minstrels with white circles around the eyes and red lip stick. As in 2005, the music was driven by May Day style accordions and percussion and in confined spaces was fairly loud. The repertoire of music used drew largely from what might be termed “minstrels” music.

### **The “Padstow Debate”**

In January 1998 the North Cornwall Advertiser ran an item on Padstow’s Darkie Day which was picked up by the National Press and drew the attention of the late Bernie Grant MP, who actively

campaigned to have the festival stopped making the comment that he thought the days of white people dressing up as black people were long gone. There was considerable local anger at the time that Mr Grant had never attended the event himself and was making assumptions without any real knowledge or evidence. The participants felt strongly that their activities gave no cause for offence and that they should not be subject to outside interference<sup>23</sup>.

Following a complaint the police attended the event on Boxing Day 2004 and collected video evidence for submission to the Crown Prosecution Service. The Cornwall Council for Racial Equality denied making the complaint but confirmed that concerns had been expressed to the Police previously<sup>24</sup>. This was again picked up by both the local and the national press<sup>25</sup> who pursued the theme of an ancient custom falling foul of contemporary social mores. In the event the Crown Prosecution Service decided not to proceed with a prosecution and Devon and Cornwall Police responded with the offer "*Looking ahead to the 2005-06 celebrations, the police would welcome working with organisers of the celebrations and partners in order to continue the positive steps taken already.*"<sup>26</sup>

At one level the "Padstow debate" is quite simple and about whether an offence has been committed within the meaning of the relevant legislation<sup>27</sup>. The response of the Crown Prosecution service to this question in 2005 would seem to be that no prosecution was warranted. On another level it is far more problematical and brings us into the wider debate of what we mean by "race" and what constitutes a "racist incident". Under the Race Relations Act 1976 'racial discrimination' means treating a person less favourably than others on racial grounds – meaning race, colour, nationality or ethnic or national origins. The Stephen Lawrence Inquiry Report<sup>28</sup> defines a racist incident as any incident which is perceived to be racist by the victim or any other person. By these definitions any observer perceiving the blackened faces of the Padstow Mummers as demeaning of black people, and therefore racist, turns it into a "racist incident" whatever the intentions of the mummers themselves.

The "Padstow Debate" culminated recently when Diane Abbot MP picked up Bernie Grant's baton and proceeded with an Early Day Motion<sup>29</sup>: "*That this House notes with great relief the decision finally to abolish the century-old Cornish festival of Darkie Day where locals traditionally black-up with charcoal, wear Afro-wigs and perform minstrel songs; is not satisfied however that the decision of some locals to go ahead with the event merely replacing the word 'nigger' with 'mummer' in the traditional songs is sufficient for curbing incitement of racial hatred; further notes with concern that the event is still being advertised as a tourist attraction by the website Cornish Light; and calls on the Government to discourage any repeat of this event.*"



Ms Abbot's Early Day Motion is inaccurate on several counts, the tradition is more than 100 years old, the afro wigs are not part of this tradition and it is the word "darkie", not "nigger" that has been replaced with "mummer". This on the advice of the police and in recognition of the changed meaning and negative connotations of the term "Darkie" in modern English usage compared to Cornish dialect. Furthermore, there is a presumption that "minstrel" music is integral to the tradition whereas it is community singing, which is integral to the tradition some of which may include songs of "minstrel" origin. In preparation for this article a letter was sent to Ms Abbot providing her with background to the events at Padstow on Boxing day, pointing out that traditions of this kind take place all over the U.K. and asked how she would respond to criticism that in selecting Padstow she was guilty of provincial stereotyping. No reply was received but a copy sent to the local North Cornwall MP, Dan Rogerson, elicited the response: "*( I ) completely agree with what you have to say and was pleased to air my displeasure that Ms Abbott chose to criticise local people without taking the trouble to investigate the reality. Sadly this issue will be periodically raised by someone in search of publicity no doubt.*".

The first element of the "Padstow Debate" is therefore the accusation that the festival is either in breach of the law by inciting racial hatred or a racist incident on the basis that it is perceived as such by a victim or other person. This position is not supported by detailed research either into the intentions and attitudes of the participants or the history of the event and is one arguably driven by desire for publicity and political interest.

Participants are quite unequivocal in their position that "Padstow Mummers" is not an event that sets out to demean or offend anyone. Malcolm McCarthy's<sup>30</sup> comment "*We as a group are not going out to intimidate or offend anyone. I personally, if I see a coloured person go and speak to them to put them at ease, not that they seem worried, and have never had any problems or complaints*", is typical of the response received by the author from other participants during the day and from participants quoted in local press coverage or contributing to the letters columns. The point is made that "Mummers" must be seen in the context of Padstow, that there is no significant black minority group living in the area and efforts are made to explain the custom and reassure any black people, resident or visiting that it is not intended to be demeaning or offend.

An important element of the debate is the use of minstrel songs, a genre of music represented by the compositions of Stephen Foster an American music hall performer of the 1830s. There are three issues here, was minstrel music originally conceived within a racist context, are the songs from this genre that entered the community singing repertoire racially demeaning today and lastly,

is minstrel music an integral to the Padstow mumming tradition or an incidental part of a community singing repertoire?

Cockrell<sup>31</sup> discusses the origins of black faced minstrels in some detail and challenges the assumption that it was necessarily rooted in racial derogation. *“What I have wanted to do here is, in part, undercut the tired old story that black-faced minstrelsy is about unrelenting hatred of blacks by working class urban white males, for I believe that interpretation to be ahistorical. It ascribes meaning without understanding context, nor even human nature. It does not seek an ethnography of audience. Who were the people in the Bowery Theatre? How did they come to be there, what did they bring with them? For some in that theatre, I do not doubt that hatred and racism formed bedrock. For some, though, probably most, the basic impulse was simply toward entertainment. Most emphatically we must not underestimate this fundamental human need, and dump and bury post-haste the long standing conceit that entertainment is merely cultural detritus.”*<sup>32</sup> Cockrell is not without his critics, Christgau<sup>33</sup>, for example suggests that he is being overly romantic in his view but nevertheless accepts that the southern minstrels as a music genre had a variety of influences and interpretations.

Even if this musical genre was originally conceived within a context that demeaned black people it does not mean that it continues within this context in a different time and a different culture as Frith<sup>34</sup> show us: *“The problem here is not just the familiar postmodern point that we live in an age of plunder in which musics made in one place for one reason can be immediately appropriated in another place for quite another reason, but also that while music may be shaped by the people who first make it and use it, as experience it has a life of it’s own.”* As the songs of Foster have entered into the community repertoire so the words, music and style have been modified by successive generations losing much of their original significance and meaning. Furthermore it is not possible to enter into, let alone record, the experience of each individual engaging in a community singing event. We have, however already seen from the description of Padstow mummers day the words are negotiable and are likely to play but a small part in the overall experience of a big musical and rhythmic sound.

Although there has clearly been a flirtation with “minstrel” music by the Padstow mummers, the extent to which this is integral to the nature of the event is questionable. In 2005 the proportion of clearly identifiable minstrel songs in comparison to 1983 was greatly diminished without any noticeable impact upon the event. There is some discussion about the date at which minstrel music may have entered into the style and repertoire of community singing employed by the mummers music and although it is the authors view that this may be as recent as the 50s and 60s, some of the participants feel it is much earlier. The fact remains, however, that minstrel music is a relatively

recent influence on a much older tradition in Padstow and an influence that in 2005 had already faded significantly.

A cover story in "Cornwall Today", June 1998, entitled "*Welcomed by One and All*" responds to Mr Grant's criticism and illustrates what might be described as a wider populist position in the "Padstow Debate". The story cites examples of two black families with an essentially positive experience of living in Cornwall before going on to describe Padstow Darkie Day. "*Earlier this year the Campaign for Racial Equality in Cornwall added it's voice to a claim by Bernie Grant that the centuries old custom of Darkie Day at Padstow was racists and evil. On Boxing Day and New Years Day each year town's folk 'black up' and perform slave songs for charity. The event is thought to stem from the days when slave ships sheltered from storms in the camel estuary and the slaves were allowed to come Ashore and sing and dance on the quay. Padstow people were astonished and bemused by the modern day storm, which erupted over what they genuinely believed to be a harmless old custom. ' Racism has never been thought of or meant' declared mayor Alec Rickard and this town's only black resident, Ziggy Holder, added 'As far as I am concerned there is nothing to complain about'.*" There appear to be no shipping records to support the slave ship story, it was in evidence on Boxing Day 2005 and regularly appears news paper reports<sup>35</sup> but only as something to be discounted. It was also an explanation for the event noted from Padstow residents who were casual bystanders in 2005. As a myth which has grown up around the tradition, however, it still serves to illustrate the desire of those involved both as participants or audience to justify the event and demonstrate innocent intentions.

The "Padstow Debate" has implications for other British Traditions and the issue was pursued in an "English Dance and Song"<sup>36</sup> which considered the implications for English Morris Dancing. It seems that 40 years ago the only group to black up were the Britannia Coconut Dancers from Bacup who have since been joined by a number of other Morris sides, especially from the Welsh Border and Molly traditions, apparently encouraged by Cecil Sharp's assertion that Morris Dancers from earlier times had blacked their faces. Cecil Sharp and his fellow revivalist were clear that "*the faces were not blackened because the dancers represented Moors, but rather the dancers were thought to represent Moors because their faces were blackened.*" The article concludes with comments from a number of contributors, but a Morris Dancer by the name of Elaine Bradtke sums up the argument nicely: "*Being a multi-cultural society means tolerating each other's differences, and that includes the customs of the indigenous culture. If something is truly offensive to the general public, it's popularity would make it untenable.*"

In summary, then, the origins of the Padstow Mummers can be traced back to the 1800s with some justification for speculation about much earlier roots. The blackened faces are part of this early

tradition and are customary disguise rather than a deliberate depiction of black people. The music / songs used have changed over time and reflect popular culture in terms of community singing. The popularity of minstrel songs within the community singing repertoire in the mid 20<sup>th</sup> century resulted in these being include in the music for the Padstow Mummers. By 2005 there was much less emphasis on minstrel music, partly in response to concerns about offence which might be taken and but also reflecting the natural evolution of the tradition and popular community singing repertoire.

The “Padstow Debate” polarises between the position that the event is offensive to black people and the position that any offensive interpretation is based on misunderstanding and poor information concerning the background of the event and the attitudes and intentions of the participants. The popular response to the debate reflected in news items and the letters pages presents a common sense position whereby the event is innately innocent and expresses concerns about a “nanny state” and excessive political correctness.

The legal definitions of race and racism, together with to evidence to suggest that a significant number of people would describe their ethnicity as specifically Cornish<sup>37</sup>, allows for an interesting thought experiment and adds a further dimension to this debate. Supposing a person identifying their ethnicity as Cornish were to complain that the overly enthusiastic brandishing of English Flags in Cornwall during the summer of 2006 was confrontational, offensive, and therefore racist. It is reasonable to suggest that the reaction of most people would be that this was political correctness out of control and that the intention of the perpetrators was simply to have a good time and celebrate a football match at the expense of no-one. This of course is much the point being made by the supporters of the “Padstow Mummers” tradition.

The “Padstow Debate” is part of a much wider debate about diversity in modern Britain and what happens when cultural expression in one group is found to be offensive by another. For celebration of diversity to function effectively as a philosophy promoting a healthy society it must be seen to treat all groups equally and risks being discredited if it appears not to do this. In the “Padstow Mummers”, we have a tradition which intends no harm or offence, and has modified its’ language to accommodate changes in word meaning which might result in offence being taken. Any campaign to discourage or ban the event is likely to discredit the ethos of diversity in the mind of many people and confirm the view of the mummers that they are misunderstood and misrepresented.

Merv Davey June 2006

## Notes

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- <sup>1</sup> BBC West Region programme, broadcast 5<sup>th</sup> Jan 1935, by A K Hamilton Jenkin, describes geese dancing and gives instruction on pronouncing s as 'z' : Transcript in Cornwall Centre Library
- <sup>2</sup> English Dialect Society, Glossary of words used in Cornwall: Goosey Dance – Burlesque sport on a Christmas eve.
- <sup>3</sup> Jenkin, A,K,H, "Cornwall And It's People" p249 a band of infernal music with kettles, drums and tea trays.
- <sup>4</sup> Bottrel, W, Traditions and Hearthside stories of West Cornwall, Penzance 1870, page 226: The mummers Play of St George and The Turkish Knight is described as a guise dance
- <sup>5</sup> Padstow Echo, Jan 1967 page 30
- <sup>6</sup> Interviewed by the author in Feb 2006 and showed around he Padstow museum and archive. John Buckingham is a local Historian and a trustee of the Padstow archive who has lived in the town all his life and taken a special interest in the Boxing Day / New Years day traditions of the town.
- <sup>7</sup> Correspondence with the author in February / March 2006. Malcolm McCarthy belongs to one of the families that lead the event and is a regular participant himself .
- <sup>8</sup> Phtograph Padstow Archive, "Padstow Minstrels circa 1900
- <sup>9</sup> Jenkin, A,K,H, Cornwall and It's People 1945, page 422. Hamilton Jenkin was a Celtic revivalist and contemporary of Morton Nance, appearing as the Turkish Knight in at least one of his mummer's plays. He refers to Hunt (See below) as well as drawing on oral history through the St Ives and other Old Cornwall Societies.
- <sup>10</sup> Photograph from Padstow Archive "May Day Fishermen" circa 1910
- <sup>11</sup> Hunt, Robert, Popular Romances of the West of England 3<sup>rd</sup> edition 1881, P392
- <sup>12</sup> For example, *The History of Polperro* and "*Old St Ives, The Reminiscences of William Paynter*" S.W. Paynter,page 46 Published in 1927 recording memories from 1850
- <sup>13</sup> William Sandys Specimens of Provincial Dialect
- <sup>14</sup> Jenkin, A,K,H, Cornwall and It's People 1945, P424
- <sup>15</sup> Old Cornwall Society Magazine April 1927 p 14 – 15, From singing of Jas Thomas
- <sup>16</sup> Old Cornwall Society Magazine, Vol 3, 16 collected by MHN Cuthbert from Joseph Sweet of St Neot and William Pearn of Altarnon in 1934.
- <sup>17</sup> Interviewed 20<sup>th</sup> March 2006.
- <sup>18</sup> St Ives Old Cornwall Society, word sheet from the Old Cornwall Society Festival 1954, Royal Cornwall Museum, Courtney Library.
- <sup>19</sup> Padstow Archive, Padstow Institute.
- <sup>20</sup> Ash Fahy and Jowdy Davey. Ash has a professional background in law, little experience of folk traditions but familiar with the multicultural ethos he has grown with in London. Jowdy – my daughter, has a professional arts background and familiar with Cornish traditional music and dance.
- <sup>21</sup> Maclolm McCarthy, correspondence with the author: 06/04/06
- <sup>22</sup> J Murdoch and A C Pratt, Strange Ruralities, p 53, Contestd Countryside Cultures, Ed P Cloke and J Little , Routledge, London 1997
- <sup>23</sup> Delf, Ray. Correspondence and discussion 16<sup>th</sup> Dec 2005.
- <sup>24</sup> Alastair Wreford, Cornish Guardian 3<sup>rd</sup> March 2005

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<sup>25</sup> De Bruxelles, Simon, The Times 25/02/05; Savill, Richard, The Telegraph 25/02/05,: Allen, Peter, The Daily Mail 25/02/05, also local press: Cornish Guardian 30/12/04, 3/3/05, Western Morning News 15/03/05

<sup>26</sup> Story from BBC NEWS: <http://news.bbc.co.uk> Published: 2005/03/10 16:39:58 GMT

<sup>27</sup> The main body of legislation here is the Public Order Act 1986 with some amendments resulting from the Crime and Disorder Act 1998. Section 17 of the public Order Act defines Racial Hatred as “hatred against a group of persons defined by reference to colour, race, nationality (including citizenship) or ethnic or national origins”. With regard to public performance section 20 describes as an offence the use of threatening, abusive or insulting words or behaviour with an intention to stir up racial hatred.

<sup>28</sup> Available on the Home Office Website [www.homeoffice.gov.uk](http://www.homeoffice.gov.uk)

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<sup>30</sup> Maclolm McCarthy, correspondence with the author: 06/04/06

<sup>31</sup> Dale Cockrell “Demons of Disorder- Early Black faced Minstrels And Their World” , Cambridge University Press, 1997. Detailed exploration of the European and African American influences on the development of the black faced minstrel music hall genre and its social context.

<sup>32</sup> Cockrell page 162

<sup>33</sup> Robert Christou, “Insearch of Jim Crow – why modern minstrelsy studies matter” The Believer, Feb 2004 published on website: [www.robertchristgau.com/xg/music/minstrel-bel.php](http://www.robertchristgau.com/xg/music/minstrel-bel.php)

<sup>34</sup> Frith, Simon, Music and Identity,p 109, Hall and du Gay, editors, Cultural Identity, Sage publications, London 1996.

<sup>35</sup> De Bruxelles, Simon, The Times 25/02/05; Savill, Richard, The Telegraph 25/02/05,: Allen, Peter, The Daily Mail 25/02/05, also local press: Cornish Guardian 30/12/04, 3/3/05, Western Morning News 15/03/05

<sup>36</sup> Schofield, Derek. English Dance and Song – the Magazine of the English Folk Dance and Song Society, Summer 2005, page 12 and Front Cover.

<sup>37</sup> Philipa Aldous and Malcolm Williams, “A question of Ethnic Identity” Cornish Studies 11,University of Exeter Press, 2002, p217, in a survey of School Children in Cornwall 29.2% self defined as “Cornish”.