

The Guldhise (Harvest Festival) and Crying the Neck at Withiel 2006

The Guldhise is the traditional Cornish Harvest supper, from “Gool” meaning feast and “dheys” meaning rick. The Rev Stephen Hawker was inspired by the Guldhise traditions of his native North Cornwall to re-introduce the Harvest Festival into the Calendar of the Church of England. The first service was held in Morwenstow in 1843 and quickly gained popularity to become the widely celebrated service that it is today.

One of the customs associated with the Harvest Supper was “Crying the Neck” which continues to be celebrated across Cornwall. The custom as it takes place in Withiel is well documented historically



In 2006 the ceremony was held at Blackhay Farm Withiel. After a short prayer read by John Bennalack, Mark Hawken cut the last of the corn and raised the “neck” in the air to with the cry in Cornish and English.

After the ceremony there was a short service in Withiel Church and followed by the “Guldhise” - Harvest Supper in the village hall and a Cornish “shout” or singing session which was rounded off with Trelawny.

Crying the neck is repeated 3 times, facing east, south and then west but not to the north (no good comes from the north):

Cutter shouts

Yma Genev! Yma Genev! Yma Genev!

All reply

Pand'r us genes? Pand'r us genes? Pand'f us genes?

Cutter

Pen yar! Pen Yar! Pen Yar!

All reply

Houra! Houra! Houra!

And again in English

Cutter

I ave'n! I ave'n! I ave'n!

All reply

What avee? What avee? What avee?

Cutter

A neck! A Neck! A Neck!

All

Hurrah! Hurrah! Hurrah!

The Old Cornwall Society Journal of 1929 records a description by Mrs Burton:

"The calling of the neck took place on the evening of the day in which the last of the wheat had been cut and there was great rivalry among the farmers of the parish as to who should be the first to finish the wheat-cutting. On the occasion when I myself heard it the Rector of Withiel who farmed the Glebe, finished first, and the calling took place that evening in the Rectory Grounds.

Between 6 and 7 o'clock all the folk in the village, who were able to get away from their homes trooped to the Rectory, and took up their positions opposite the front door. On the steps which led up to it, the men who were to do the "calling" were already standing. These had been chosen not for the musical quality of their voices but for the strength of their lungs, as their ambition was to be heard as far afield as possible.

The leader held the "neck" in his hand. This was a small sheaf of wheat made from the finest ears, specially selected. It was tied with bright coloured ribbons just underneath the ears and the outside straws were woven into several plaits into which flowers were inserted.

Each of these was arranged around the inner straws in a curved position, something like the handle of a loving cup. The straws were then trimmed to a uniform length, and again tied with ribbons two or three inches from the bottom.

The leader stepped forward, and holding out the neck at full length called out in stentorian tones "I hav'n!" three times. The next man thrice responded with "what av'ee?" after which the next man responded with "What Hav'ee" after which all the harvesters shouted "A nack!" also three times. All the spectators then joined in calling "Wooraw!" (Hurrah). And this was also repeated three times.

This concluded the ceremony, and the villagers went back to their homes. The harvesters were regaled with a hot supper in the Rectory Kitchen, where the neck was hung from one of the rafters till the morning of the next Christmas day, when it was given to the best dairy cow as a special tit-bit for her breakfast."

Stan Opie provided further details of the Withiel ceremony in the Old Cornwall Journal of 1930

"The following ceremony is remembered at the putting in of the the "crow" or "crow sheaf" in the building of the rick. This would be well raised on poles (6 or 7 lengthways with the cross poles) laid across the tops of the stone "keps and posses" (caps and posts). The "Mow stead" or rick was built up sheaf by sheaf and when it came to the putting in of the top corner sheaf the following verse would be proclaimed so that it could be heard all over the parish:

The crow sheaf is in, tis time to begin

To drink strong beer, and we've got it 'ere

While one of them would lift the beer jar"