

Appendix 4.4 Hal An Tow

Observation:

08/05/06 and 08/05/08

Interview

Howard Curnow 16/05/08

Field Recording:

8th May 2006 .

Summary

The Hal An Tow is part of the Flora Day celebrations at Helston held annually on 8th May, or Saturday immediately before if this falls on a Sunday. The first performance takes place at St Johns Bridge at approximately 8am and is followed by a series of promenade performances around the town finishing up at the top of



Meneague Street later in the Morning, a little before the 12 noon furry dance sets off. Observed in 2006 and 2008, a small crowd waited at St Johns and each of the subsequent venues where a performance area was temporarily roped off. The atmosphere is set by the approaching sound of the Hal An Tow “Shallal” band which comprises of miscellaneous percussion with some accordions and fiddles but is dominated by the sound of May whistles, some the traditional article made from hollowed out elder twigs but mostly sports whistles. *(See link on*

contents page - appendix 4.4 for audio clip of shallal band). The shrill of the whistles is punctuated by raucous shouts of “Oggie Oggie Oggie”.



The costume was a mixture of mock medieval and hippy green with a generous sprinkling of recently cut greenery and occasional glimpses of Cornish Tartan.



Appendix 4.4 : Hal An Tow



The key players were the Town Crier, St George, St Michael and St Piran accompanied by their respective dragons, plus dancers defined by blue dresses, girls bedecked in sycamore representing hedges, singers, banner bearers and musicians.



The banners followed two themes:
a Cornish one defined by the St Pirans Flag and slogans in Cornish



and one depicting various versions of the green man.



Appendix 4.4 : Hal An Tow

Interviewed on 16th May 2008 Howard Curnow (Audio file160508-1) described the history of the revival of the Hal An Tow. Initially it was initially revived by the Helston Old Cornwall Society in the 1930s after a gap of some 40 or 50 years. By the 1960s the initiative had been taken up by Helston School and was lead by one of the teachers, Richard Jenkin, (a member of the Old Cornwall Society, am active member of Mebyon Kernow and later elected to Grand Bard of the Cornish Gorseth). Howard Curnow also taught at the School in the 1970s and was active with the organisation, performance and development of the Hal An Tow subsequent to this and continues in role of Town Crier.

He explained that there had always been some tension between the “Anglo-centric” organisation of the formal Furry dance and the Hal An Tow and pleased at the way that more “Cornwall centric” elements had been introduced to the performance including the recent arrival of St Piran.

Howard described the symbolism of each verse as he understood it:

- In the first verse, Robin Hood and Little John personify the coming of the spring and the “greenwood” and the fertility associations of the Buck chasing the doe.
- The second verse alludes to the story of the Spanish attack on Mounts bay and the goose feathers represent the arrows they were greeted with.
- In the third verse St George represents the universal fight between good and evil
- The fourth verse is a reminder that Helston also has its story of the successful fight against evil in the form of St Michael and his arial dual with a fiend above the town.
- In the last verse Aunt Mary Moses is a personification of mother nature.



Howard Curnow in lower right of photograph leading the Hal An Tow procession in role as Town Crier

Appendix 4.4 : Hal An Tow

Hal An Tow as sung May 2008 (See link on contents page - appendix 4.4 - for audio clip of song)

As sung May 2008

Hal An Tow

Legato

Chorus

Chorus

Hal-an Tow, jolly rumble oh
 For we are up as soon as any day oh
 And for to fetch the Summer home
 The Summer and the May, oh,
 For Summer is a come, oh,
 And Winter is a gone, oh.

As for that Good Knight, St George,
 St George he was a Knight oh,
 Of all the Knights in Christendom
 St George he is the right, oh,
 In every land,oh, the land were ere we go
 The land where e'er we go.

Chorus

Robin Hood and Little John
 They both are gone to Fair oh,
 And we will to the merry green wood
 To see what they do there, oh,
 And for to chase, oh,
 To chase the buck and doe.

But to a greater than St George,
 Our Helston has a right, oh,
 St Michael with his wings outspread
 The Archangel so bright, oh,
 Who fought the fiend, oh,
 Of all mankind the foe.

Chorus

Chorus

Where are those Spaniards
 That makes so great a boast, oh?
 For they shall eat the grey goose feather
 And we shall eat the roast, oh,
 In every land, oh,
 The Land where e'er we go.

God bless Aunt Mary Moses
 And all her power and might, oh,
 And send the peace in merry Cornwall
 Both day and night, oh,
 And send us peace in Merry Cornwall
 Both now and evermore, oh.

Chorus