



aima

Don't Call it a Comeback!

From Lazarus to Tinker Bell, raising the dead has long been a feat of wonder. However, it takes more than a holy miracle or believing in fairies to resurrect an extinct language, yet that is just what the people of Cornwall in far southwest England intend to do, having taken the strenuous first step of announcing at the end of 2007 an official version of the language.

By most accounts the Cornish language, a gentler version of Welsh's guttural lilt, died in 1777 with its last native speaker, Dolly Pentreath. According to legend, the pipe-smoking fishwife was known to curse people, calling them among other things *kronnekyn hager du* (ugly black toad). Pentreath expired at the ripe old age of 102, sputtering nasty vituperations in Cornish from her deathbed. Dolly's last words? *Me ne vidn cewsel Sawznek!* (I don't want to speak English!)

Apparently some of her countrymen agreed with the old battleaxe as the revivalist movement has been well underway since the 1920s. As the Israelis, Norwegians and the odd Esperanto-speaker (does anyone

actually speak Esperanto?) can testify, codifying a language for use in the modern world is no easy task. From scientific terminology, "implantable cardioverter defibrillator", to flashy lingo, "razzmatazz," a language needs an extensive vocabulary to capture the different aspects of contemporary life. Add to this list the burden of getting people to actually use the language when English is already spoken as the natives' mother tongue.

The UK government has recognized Cornish as a minority language, budgetary funding has been earmarked to teach Cornish in schools, and bilingual signage has sprung up in the region. But give the Cornish an inch and they want a mile. Some locals now demand status as a separate nation, bringing the tally up to five in the Queen's patchwork kingdom: England, Scotland, Wales, Northern Ireland and *Cornwall?* But chances are Cornwall won't get its kingdom unless one of those ugly black toads turns out to be a crown prince. Let the kissing begin! [JM](#)