

## 'Crying the Neck' or "Crying Anék"

St Ives Old Cornwall August 8<sup>th</sup>, 2018 at Trewey Farm, Zennor - Courtesy of Harry Mann and family.

After a very wet Spring and a very hot Summer the date for this traditional celebration was announced giving just 10 days notice for arrangements to be made. Harry had left a portion of his field of barley to use but, luckily, had already prepared some sheaves in order to make a small shook in advance as a freak storm over the weekend flattened the uncut barley making it difficult to put into a sheaf.



The sun shone brightly as we all drove to the field on the outskirts of Zennor. A good crowd had assembled: young families eager to be included in this ceremony and a group of campers, who were setting up workshops for introducing techniques such as flint arrow making and sword making to others, swelled the numbers of our St Ives Old Cornwall Society.

Mr Kenny Bassett and Mr Mick Paynter said prayers in both Cornish and English to begin the proceedings.

Harry Mann then showed that Ross Poldark has a rival as he cut the barley with his inherited, but well sharpened, scythe. This implement is as tall as he is with two handles to enable the user to smoothly work along the field. The cut barley was then tied into a sheaf and placed into the prepared shook to create the group of 6 needed. He explained that traditionally this would have been repeated all over the field so the shooks dry out. The rain will run off the shook if it is prepared correctly so that, when dry, 9 shooks can be formed into a mow. The mows would then be taken to form the rick or the threshing machine to separate the seed from the stalk.

Brian Stevens, who with his wife Margaret are keen to promote our heritage, then explained the origin and meaning which are somewhat obscure and pieced together from other countries practices. The farmer's calendar was celebrated here in Cornwall at least 2,000 years ago when Ceres, the sun god, was thanked for the harvest and the belief that he had to be pleased in order to enjoy a good harvest the next year. (Corn is a cereal which is derived from the name Ceres.)

And then Brian told us of their discovery: Margaret was reading Mr Jago's 'Glossary of Cornish dialect 1882' in the Courtney Library at Truro when she happened to come across an interesting item. The title 'Crying the Neck' was said to be so called for a chicken's neck which was formerly sacrificed as part of the celebration. But, according to Mr Jago, *Anék* or *Anaic* (in Irish) means 'save me' which is the object of harvest 'to save the corn'.

Hence when a Cornishman cries –  
*Anék, anék, anék – Hooraa!*  
Its equivalent in English is –  
*Saved, saved, saved, Hurrah!*

This sheaf was then used to make the Corn Dolly which was placed on the barn door after feeding the old one to the chickens and 'Anék of Corn' was hung over the fireplace.

The practice of 'Crying the Neck' or 'Crying Anék' died out around 120 years ago but was revived 90 years ago in 1928.



The ceremonial cries are made to the four points of the compass, commencing:

**North** – the depth of winter, hence the Yule log tradition.

**East** – Spring, time of sowing.

**South** – The sun is at its height: Midsummer bonfires are lit to ripen the corn.

**West** – Harvest time.

The scriptures reveal to us:

‘While the earth remaineth, Seedtime and Harvest,  
and cold and heat, and summer and winter,  
and day and night shall not cease’.

The ceremony in the field was enjoyed by all, especially the children who were allowed, under Harry Mann’s supervision, to hold and use the scythe. The spectators and the saved ‘neck’ or ‘anék’ of corn then adjourned to Zennor Village hall to sing harvest songs and join Pastor Kenny Bassett in saying a prayer of thanks for the harvest. A croust of pasties, saffron and hevva cake was then enjoyed.

