

Kernow Brand

“Cornish” is synonymous with good quality produce using natural ingredients. Usually with a higher price attached, such products often have a St Piran flag or a Cornish shield, or perhaps a picture of St Michaels Mount or Tintagel castle. “Cornwall” and “Cornish” have been carefully constructed for many years and just saying “Cornwall” conjures up idealised images of childhood holidays, beaches and iconic scenery for whole swathes of populations across the world.

The attraction of “brand Kernow” is how it appeals to “place marketing”; this is a magical panacea that local government uses to market their locality inwards to local populations and outwards to investors, holiday makers and businesses. This usually manifests in top-down initiatives that “gentrify” a location using art works that reference local heritage. This can be seen in Redruth whose main street is now watched over by a heroic miner cast in bronze, although it is not so clear what is being referenced by Redruth’s bronze wellington boots that look like dogs!

What “Brand Kernow” does not conjure up is any person, image or face. Cornish “celebrities” are muted and dislocated, divorced from the homeworld of childhood fantasies. This is because official policies continue to construct Cornwall as a playground for people from anywhere else. This was first highlighted by CoSerg’s book “Cornwall at the Crossroads” published (1991?) but there has been no discernible change in policy in the last twenty five years, and Cornish people continue to be excluded from any debate, and Cornish people are airbrushed out of “Brand Kernow”.

The exclusion of Cornish people from the “tourist gaze” and “brand Cornwall” explains the dislocation many people find when they attend Cornwall’s heritage attractions. For instance when the Olympic torch began the British section of its journey at Land’s End the prominent use of the Cornish language with which visitors had previously been welcomed visitors was removed. There had been a large sign in both Cornish and English, but this was altered and now the main sign only gives the English name of the place. The Cornish name has been relegated and is now only included with other foreign languages. This gives the clear impression that the Cornish are “foreign” in our own land, and explains why Cornish people turn their back on this and similar attractions whose behaviour has offended and alienated the local population.

It does not seem that any voice has challenged the official presentation of “Brand Kernow” since *Cornwall at the Crossroads*, although this lack may not be the case – it may instead be testament to those who control Brand Kernow that dissenting voices have been stifled and marginalised. Regardless of whether voices have or have not challenged the official line, in effect the brand continues to exclude and alienate the people it purports to represent.

So what is to be done? For Brand Kernow to work it must start to appeal to people who live here, further it needs to particularly embrace the people of Cornwall. You do not have to be born in the duchy to be Cornish, but if you embrace our language, culture and independent spirit then we would be proud to call you Cornish. So who are the Cornish?

Cornish people have a long history, older than English. Cornish hospitality was praised as early as 300BC by Pytheas of Massalia in the record of his voyage. The Celtic Spirit in Cornwall manifests in our independent spirit. Over the centuries, continued exploitation has made Cornish people clever and resourceful making us able to make a lot out of a little. Overcoming adversity ourselves gives us sympathy with all those suffering adversity, and so we are averse to discrimination and prejudice in all of its forms. This same impulse makes us kind and welcoming, unless you try to make us into something that we are not!

Repositioning Cornish people so that we are central to Brand Kernow is an overdue project; perhaps it is only possible now since the recognition of the Cornish as a national minority. Cornish people are great, with a generosity of spirit matched by our humour. We love Cornish people, and we want people to be central to our brand: Kernow!

This blog “the faces of Cornwall” showcases the amazing characters who live in our beautiful Duchy.

These selfies were taken of people speaking our Cornish language.

The comedian Kernow King’s humour is sympathetic to Cornwall, rather than denigrating Cornish folk like some do!