

CORNISH FEDERATION OF MALE VOICE CHOIRS

MASSED CHOIR CONCERT

**Supporting those of Cornish descent affected
by the bush fires of last February in Victoria, Australia**

ST MICHAEL'S CHURCH, NEWQUAY

7.30 pm, SATURDAY 20TH FEBRUARY, 2010

On the 7th February 2009 ('Black Saturday') a horrific bush fire swept through St Just Point and Long Gully in Bendigo, Victoria, Australia destroying property and taking lives. Such an event occurring so very far away would appear to have little more than general humanitarian interest to those who live in the far South West of the UK until one registers the familiarity of one of the locations – St Just Point (sometimes now referred to locally as 'Pasty Point'). Yes, there is a direct link with a Cornish St Just, that in Penwith, for this area of Australia was settled and developed by Cornish miners who were the only ones deemed skilled enough in hard rock mining to extract the gold that was discovered in the area. Indeed, an advertisement in the Bendigo Advertiser newspaper of August 1861 read, "*Wanted: miners at St Mungo Gold Mining Company Works. None need apply to John Addicoat except practical miners from St Just, Cornwall.*" Some of the property destroyed in the fire would have been recognisable to anyone familiar with the traditional mining buildings and cottages found within the Duchy and even the names of some of those who perished in the fire have a recognisable Cornish connection.

Today, Bendigo is arguably the largest city of Cornish descendants in the world! It has a thriving and active Cornish Association including seven members of the Gorsedd of Cornish Bards. Cornish festivals are held regularly in the Greater Bendigo area, with the next, 'Welcome Back Cousin Jack', taking place at Eaglehawk in March of this year. There is enormous and passionate local pride in Bendigo's Cornish mining heritage. It appears that William Tom, a Cornishman, was one of those who first discovered payable gold in the area in 1851, starting a gold rush which brought in Cornish miners from the South Australian copper fields and then from Cornwall itself. By 1880 Bendigo had become the world's richest gold field, a position it held until 1954. Even the first Australian pound note featured a picture of a Cornish miner drilling in the Victoria Quartz Gold Mine in Bendigo. By 1881, 49% of all heads of households that were British born in what is now Bendigo were native born Cornishmen while 41% of the females were Cornish.

As the mining settlements expanded and developed professions and businesses other than mining were required and many of these were provided by people of Cornish descent. Jimmy Jeffery, a Wesleyan lay preacher from Illogan, led the first church service in the area, standing on a stump which is today the site of a church. Henry Madren Leggo, whose parents came from St Just in Penwith, set up a food processing business which still survives today. Fletcher Jones, the son of a Cornish miner, set up a tailoring business which eventually became Australia-wide. Many mayors

had Cornish ancestry with names such as, Delbridge, Hoskins, Dunstan, Semmens, Michelson, Bennetts, Truscott, Grainger, Snell, Jeffrey and Nankervis. James Henry Curnow, born in 1861 in Ludgvan, was mayor five times and, welcoming the Prince of Wales to Bendigo in 1920, stated, to rousing cheers, *"Your Highness, as Duke of Cornwall you will be pleased to know that it was the Cousin Jacks who made Bendigo and when your Highness visits the mines this afternoon you will note that 90% of the miners are Cornish."*

The choirs in the Cornish Federation of Male Voice Choirs feel a strong affinity with such passionately Cornish people living so far away from Cornwall, indeed many of the members of the Kernow Male Choir which visited this part of Australia in 2003, singing at the opening ceremony of the world's largest Cornish festival, the bi-ennial 'Kernewek Lowender', were also members of Federation choirs. The Federation's first inclination was to raise funds to support those who lost property and/or loved ones as a result of the fire. However, it appears that a public appeal, insurance companies and the Australian Government have been able to provide what financial support is required. Consequently, in discussion with members of the Bendigo Cornish Association and the Victoria Cornish Association, it has been decided that it would be both fitting and appropriate for the Federation to contribute to the erection of a monument in the St Just Point area marking and celebrating its Cornish heritage. As Tom Luke, Past President of the Cornish Association of Victoria, committee member of the Cornish Association of Bendigo and Bard of the Cornish Gorsedd, Bardic name: Colon Hag Enef yn Bendygo (Heart and Soul in Bendigo)) observed, "St Just Point may never look the same again but its Cornish heritage will always be remembered." (Tom is also holder of the Paul Smales Award for Service to Cornwall, awarded at Launceston in 2003.)

We invite Cornish people, with or without family connections in Australia, to show their concern for and kinship with their Cornish cousins. Help the Federation to raise as large a sum as possible to contribute to the erection of this monument by attending the concert presented by a massed choir of the Cornish Federation of Male Voice Choirs at St Michael's Church, Newquay at 7.30pm on 20th February 2010. Admission will be £5, payable on entry. Ring 01822 612140 to reserve places. Details are available on the Federation web site www.fed-cornishchoirs.org.uk or ring Jim Christophers on 01822 612140.

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8th January 2010