

Trelawny

Variant of a Cornish ballad, The Song Of The Western Men, written in 1825 by Robert Stephen Hawker [1803-1875] Vicar of Morwenstow, and antiquary. Known as the unofficial Cornish National Anthem, this song is often heard at Cornish rugby matches and similar civic gatherings.

Jonathan Trelawny [1650-1721] was one of seven Cornish bishops imprisoned in the Tower of London in 1688. In 1687, James II, a Roman Catholic, challenged the authority of the Church of England by setting out a Declaration of Indulgence towards Catholics; the following year, he instituted a second Declaration, insisting that it be read in every church in the land. Seven bishops, including Trelawny, refused to read it. James in retaliation imprisoned the bishops. Fearing a popular demonstration, James had the bishops transported by river through Traitors' Gate into the Tower of London. On 30th June, 1688, the seven bishops were brought before the King's Bench in Westminster Hall and charged with seditious libel. To popular acclaim they were acquitted.

John Trelawny, grandfather of Bishop Jonathan and one of the leaders of the King's party in Cornwall, was also committed to the Tower by the House of Commons, for 'certain offences against the liberty of free election' and 'contempt of the House'. He was held for a month before being released by the King, so the chorus, around which Hawker wove his own ballad, may well date from at least 1627.

With a good arm and a trusty sword. A merry heart and true.
King James's men shall understand. What Cornish men can do.
For we would know the where and when. And shall Trelawny die?
Here's twenty thousand Cornish men. Would know the reason why.

Chorus

*And shall Trelawny live?
Or shall Trelawny die?
Here's twenty thousand Cornish men
Shall know the reason why.*

Then up and spake our captain bold. A merry wight was he.
Though London Tower be Michael's hold. We'll set Trelawny free.
We'll cross the Tamar, side to side. The Severn is no stay.
Then arm in arm and one and all. And who would bid us nay.

And when we reached old London's wall. A pleasant sight to view.
Come forth, come forth ye cowards all. Here's better men than you.
Trelawny, he's in keep in hold. Trelawny he may die.
But twenty thousand Cornish bold. Would know the reason why.