

Sample paragraph from Chapter 7, p.190

The Cornish landed class might have scrambled to adopt English ways, currying favour with their English overlords. But it was another matter altogether for the bulk of the Cornish population. Less exposed to English authority, the people were far slower to play ball. Peter Herring et al. interpret the flowering of material culture in Cornwall after the late ninth century as a 're-awakening of Cornwall as an English county with a distinctive character'. Freed from its flawed assimilationist assumption that Cornwall had been miraculously transformed into an English county even before English counties were properly 'counties', this should be re-interpreted as the precise opposite. It's a sign of the Cornish resisting the process of becoming an English county. The Cornish language and the identity based on it survived only because the Cornish people had resisted the Saxons for so long, as in Wales. In the political sphere the Cornish ruling elite had, perhaps wisely in view of the odds, run up the white flag in the ninth century. But this did not mean resistance ceased, only that it moved into the cultural sphere. Moreover, successful cultural resistance was driven largely from below, fanned by the embers of the decentralised, self-governing, confident local society that flourished from the seventh century to the ninth. After their military victory, the English could co-opt Cornwall's ruling elite fairly easily. It was quite another matter to subdue the culture of its people. Unlike the England of King Harold, a relatively centralised, hierarchical, top-down society that succumbed quickly to William's Norman conquest, Cornwall was relatively de-centralised, with light lordship and dispersed authority. As the English were later to discover in Ireland, such societies do not succumb overnight.