

Background notes for *Across the Creek*

Author response:

I first got the idea of writing *Across the creek* when reading an old book about Cornish folklore. In it is the amazing statement that the old Cornish thought that some of the piskeys and other types of fairy people went across the seas. I presume this meant when the emigrants came to countries like Australia to work at the mines.

Then I read a story called *The Lost Boy of St Allen*, and how he fell asleep in the forest. When he was found he was full of stories about a lady who took him to an underground crystal cave.

This story made me think about our lost children in Australia – the ones who were lost in the bush and never found. Like picnic at hanging rock. What happened really? Was there another dimension – was there another answer?

I thought up the dragaroo because I wanted to show that the Cornish culture mingles with the Australian and the two have impacted on each other. We have so much Cornish influence in SA that is not always recognised as Cornish.

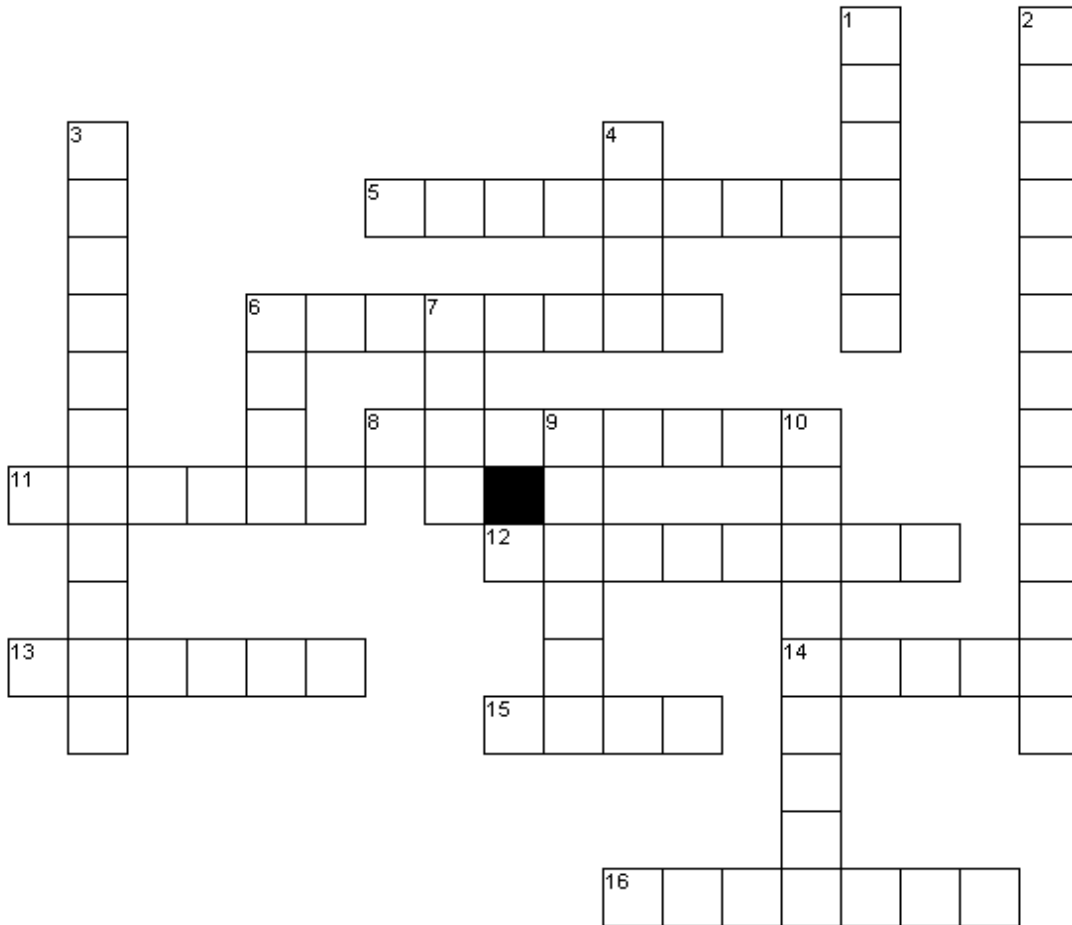
I often have a strong sense of place in my stories. I like to go to a place – it gives me the atmosphere, the ambience for writing the story, and the Kapunda mine did that for me. I was walking around it one day and I realised the story I was thinking about was right here in the mine. A boy could come across the creek into the mine and find a strange land where his friend Jenice is alive after all.

Although children will read this story as the fantasy it is meant to be, in one way, *Across the creek* is a story exploring death. What are fairy stories anyway except ways of explaining the unexplainable to ordinary people? The story of the Pied Piper I believe is an attempt to deal with the pain of people losing their children to the plague. Sleeping Beauty wakes up, so does Snow White, Jenice Trengove is found alive. *Across the creek* gives some alternatives – is there more than we can see.

Some activities

1. What are two of your favorite animals? Put those two animals together. Draw it. Make up a name for the new animal. What characteristics of each of the original animals will it have? What will your new animal do? Write a creative piece with it as a character.
2. Draw a map of your area. Where could there be a fantasy land? What could it be called? Make up a story that happens there. Put your new animal in it too.
3. Make masks of the characters in *Across the creek*.
4. Search out folk lore characters from another country. Make a story with these characters in it.
5. Students choose a country of their choice – maybe one that their grandparents eg came from and find out about the folk lore from that country. Do an oral presentation. Tell about the folklore characters. Retell one of the stories.
6. Talk about good and evil in folk stories. Who is good in *Across the creek*? Is the Lady good or evil?
7. What cultural heritage does Aidan have? How do you know? Find out about your cultural heritage. Tell the class about it.
8. Talk about fear. Aidan feels fear at times. Can you remember when? How does he handle it? Can you feel fear and still be brave?
9. How does Aidan show that he is a responsible and caring person?
10. Retell a folk story. Write it from a different character's point of view or with a different ending.
11. Talk about the 'lessons' learnt in folk tales. Is there anything to learn from *Across the creek* or is it 'just a story to be read for fun'?

Across the Creek Crossword



Across

5. What was the name of the giant?
6. Where did the piskeys come from?
8. Who helped clean people's houses?
11. What was Raff?
12. What was the name of the monster that guarded the creek?
13. What was the name of Aidan's friend?
14. What colour was the lake?
15. Everyone thought Jenice was what?
16. What instrument made the music?

Down

1. What was Aidan's last name?
2. What were the lights called?
3. Where did the spriggans live?
4. Who found the whistle?
6. Where did the giant live?
7. What was the name of the girl from the 1960's?
9. Who wore the possum skin?
10. Who were the warrior fairies?

Background Notes: The Cornish in Australia

Cornish people came to Australia and became miners, farmers and contributed greatly to the economic growth of the country.

Mining – Wherever in the world there's a hole in the ground at the bottom of it you'll find a Cornishman searching for metal. A.K. Hamilton Jenkin.

Thousands of skilled miners came. They could sink shafts, handle explosives, operate and build mine machinery, assess the value of ores and prospect for new deposits. They spoke a Cornish dialect. Traces of this have survived in Australian colloquialisms today.

They were interested in music/singing, festivals, wrestling, and athletics. They ate pasties and saffron buns and cultivated food crops. They could build their own houses and were adventurous and could move on if a mine closed down or a richer deposit opened up.

Cornish culture and ethnicity

The Cornish are a distinct ethnic group in the United Kingdom and are descendants of the Celts who came across the English Channel about 500 BC.

Cornwall is the peninsula on the very Western end of England across the Tamar River. The Cornish kept much of their way of talking and ways of doing things. The Cornish were great miners, farmers and fishermen.

They love singing and music and were religious people. Cornish people immigrated to Australia when the mines opened up as economic conditions were difficult in Cornwall. Many came to Kapunda, Burra, Moonta and Kadina.

Because the Cornish greeted each other as 'cousin' they were called Cousin Jennys and Cousin Jacks. (Jack and Jenny were the most common names in Cornwall at the time). They were hard working and adventurous and created a new home 18,000 kms from their own land. Life was hard for Cornish settlers. Today it is estimated that 20% of people in SA alone have a Cornish heritage.

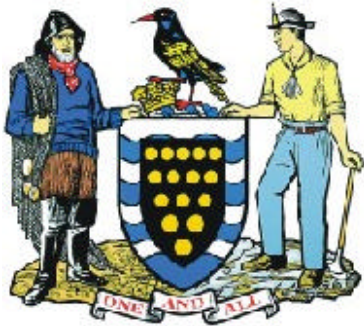


image from <http://www.cornwall.gov.uk/faq/ab-fa02/ab-fa009.htm>

Some facts

1. Cornwall is approx the same size as Kangaroo Island
2. There are more people with a Cornish background living in SA than in Cornwall
3. It is estimated over 20% of SA have a Cornish heritage
4. Kadina, Wallaroo & Moonta are called Australia's Little Cornwall
5. Kapunda is the oldest mining town in Australia and has a statue 7m high of a Cornish miner.

Religion

Most Cornish people were Methodists – Wesleyan, Bible Christian or Primitive. There are many old churches dotted around our Australian countryside that the Cornish built. A famous one is the Moonta Mines church which could seat 1200 people.

Language

Kernewek is the revived language of Cornwall. By the beginning of the 20th century native speakers of Cornish had died out, but a man called Henry Jenner believed the Cornish should speak the Cornish language if only for the reason they were Cornish. He wrote a handbook in 1904 which proved to be the turning point for the revival of interest in the Cornish language. Now Kernewek is spoken again in Cornwall and Cornish studies are taught. Cornish has just been designated as a Celtic language and is now being taught in schools as Welsh is.

Kernow Bys Vyken! Cornwall forever!

Sayings

Raff says a lot of old Cornish sayings. Can you find them all? Here's one: 'We'll be right as ninepence now'.

Names

By Tre, Ros, Car, Lan, Pol and Pen

Ye may know most Cornishmen.

Many names in SA are Cornish eg Goldsworthy, Hawke, Hancock, Angove, Hayes, Woon, Trevilyan, Pengelly, Polkinghorn, Hosking, Pascoe.

And many place names are Cornish in origin eg

Callington, Roseworthy, Rundle Street, Truro, Launceston, Reduth (in Burra area), St Agnes.

Festivals and holidays

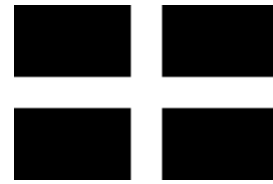
1. The Kernewek Lowender is held in Kadina, Moonta, and Wallaroo every 2 years.
2. St Piran's Day on 5th March. St Piran was one of the many Celtic saints who came to Cornwall preaching Christianity in the 5th century.

In Cornwall, besides St Pirans' Day, there are the following festivals:

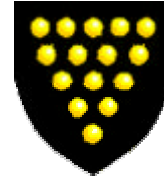
1. Last day in April – Trevithick Day is in memory of Richard Trevithick who invented the steam engine.
2. 1st May – May Day at Padstow. The Hobby Horse makes a tour of the town to commemorate arrival of Summer
3. 8th May – Helston's Furry Day.
4. 23rd June – Golowan and Mazey Day in Penzance celebrating St John. Also midsummer bonfires.
5. 27th June - the Cornish rebels of 1497 against the English are remembered.
6. Autumn – Crying of the neck – an ancient Celtic fertility rite
7. 1st Sat in Sept – the ceremony of the Bards of the Gorseth Kernow.
8. 23rd Dec – Tom Bawcock's Eve in Mousehole.

Flag

A white cross on a black background – commemorates Saint Piran.



The Cornish Coat of Arms - 15 gold coins on a shield, with the motto 'One and All'. It represents the ransom raised in Cornwall for the Duke of Cornwall, captured by the Saracens during the Crusades



Some famous Cornish-Australians

1. Kate Cocks – first police woman in the British Empire
2. George Waterhouse – premier in 1861
3. John Verran – led the first Labor government
4. Don Dunstan – Premier of SA
5. Albert Hawke – born in Kapunda, SA, became Premier of WA
6. Bob Hawke – PM of Australia
7. Sir Langdon Bonython – served in the first federal government, owned 'The Advertiser'
8. Sir Richard Williams – served in the Royal Australian Air Force and was called the 'Father of the R.A.A.F'
9. Henry Hancock – Captain of the Moonta Mine
10. Frederick May – engineer, manufacturer and inventor
11. James Martin – manufacturer and 'the Father of Gawler'.
12. Henry Binney Hawke – from Kapunda, iron founder, producer of iron lace and machinery.
13. Governor Philip King of NSW was born in Launceston, Cornwall.

Food

The Cornish in earlier times based their diet on barley flour, the potato and pilchards.

Soups and stews were eaten and also the famous pasty.

Pasties were filled with different filling according to whose pasty it was – pork, rabbit, fish, eggs, vegetables and even jam and fruit. The person's initial was marked on it. The proper pasty was filled with potatoes, turnip and a little meat and was a meal in itself. Miners' pasties often had apple in one end for dessert. Miners held the pasty by the crust at the top since their hands were dirty.

Cornish jokes

- **A Cornish miner fell down a tin mine shaft. His fellow miners called down the shaft to him, "Ess anythin' brokun?"**
"Naw," he replied, "there's nawthen down 'ere but a few rocks."
- **An Englishman decides to have some fun at the locals' expense. Seeing a rustic fellow at work in a garden he calls out, "I say my man! I don't suppose you've seen a cart load a monkeys around here?"**
The gardener replied, "Why? Falled off 'ave 'e?"

'Has't ee been to Moonta? No? Then ees never travelled!' (Pryor)

- **It was hay time and the top-heavy cart coming from the field had overturned in the lane. Its young driver looked at the fallen load in dismay.**
"Cum in fer a dish o' tay", said a motherly soul to the boy as he stood there. "We'll give 'e a 'and gettin' it right after. You'll feel more like loadin' again after a drink and a sit down."
"Faather won't like un," said the boy doubtfully.
"Faather won't knowt 'bout un," said the woman comfotringly and led the boy, still reluctant, into the ho use to join her family. Half an hour later, all emerged to view the situation, the lad thanking the lady but repeating that his father wouldn't like it at all.
"Rubbish," she said, "I'll deal with your faather. Where's 'e to?"
"Under the 'ay", said the boy.

Cornish folklore



Artwork by Marc McBride

A **piskey** is a Cornish fairy. They can be very mischievous, luring people into difficult situations, and playing tricks. They also laugh a lot. The Cornish had a great belief in piskies. If travellers lost their way they were said to be 'piskey-led'; people thought piskies led folks astray with lights that looked like lanterns. It was believed some went 'beyond the seas' and it is this idea that I built this story upon.

More on the Cornish piskey

The piskey folk according to Couch's History of Polperro are about a span long (9 inches), clad in green and wearing straw hats or little green caps on their heads. Other observers have described them as being rarely seen in any other form than that of a wizened looking little old man. There is only one reference to the female piskey, 'Joan the Wad' who has

become one of the most famous of the piskey folk and regarded as Queen of the lucky Cornish piskeys and consort to 'Jack o' Lantern' the only other of the piskey folk known by name. The piskeys are the cheery wonder workers of Cornwall. Their power is incalculable and wherever they abide good luck attends. Sir Authur Quiller-Couch in one of his books described how the maidens go to the well to intercede with the piskey folk for the name of their true love. It is said the piskey folk have the power of being seen, heard, and felt and as long as you look after them they will look after you. *From Moonta Information Centre.*

The **small people** were said to be spirits of an ancient Cornish race. They help people they like, enjoy dancing and wear colourful clothes, the men wearing usually green, with a blue jacket and a three cornered cap, sometimes with a feather in it. A **brownie** was a kind and good household fairy who helped the family with whom it lived.



Artwork by Marc McBride

Spriggans were a race of warrior fairies, grotesquely ugly and could alter their size at will. They were guardians of buried treasure and also lured children away. I decided to make them the ones in this story to lure people away with lights like lanterns, hence the Jack-o'-lanterns.

The **knockers** were the little people who lived underground in the mines. And yes there was a Cornish **giant** called Trebiggan. He had long arms that could pluck men from passing ships, and it was said he dined on young humans fried on a large flat rock near his cave.

Here's a folk tale about knockers retold by Rosanne Hawke

Tommy Trevorrow and the knockers

There was once a miner called Tom Trevorrow. One day he heard noises in the shaft and he didn't believe in the knockers' power so he threw some stones in the direction of the noises and said, 'Oh shut up and go away.'

A shower of stones came back his way, but he continued working. Soon he sat down to eat his pasty. The knockers called out, 'Tommy Trevorrow, Tommy Trevorrow, leave us some pasty, or you'll have bad luck tomorrow.'

But Tom was hungry and took no notice and he ate it all up and didn't leave them a crumb. Then they sang, 'Tommy Trevorrow, you're so mean to eat all your pasty and leave us none, there's bad luck for you tomorrow.'

Still he took no notice and he sat down to have a doze. When he woke up he saw them – all the knockers resting on their picks watching him. They were only three feet tall; their arms were longer than their legs. They looked dried up and wrinkled like old apples. They had ugly heads with grey and red hair; their eyes squinted, they had hooked

noses and mouths that stretched from ear to ear. They made horrible faces at Tommy Trevorrow and he wondered what would happen.

He couldn't just sit there – what if they attacked him or something? What could he do? Suddenly he thought of his candle. He lit it and finally they melted away, changing shapes like curling smoke.

The next day when he arrived for work with his son he was working in a dangerous place in the mine. He could hear the knockers on the other side of the wall, when all of a sudden the ground began to move under his feet. His son managed to lift him up to the surface by a rope and he was pulled to safety just in time. But all the tin he had dug out, and all his tools, were lost.

In the end he was forced to leave the mine and work on a farm.

Other Cornish folk stories

See the legend of the lost land of Lyonesse in *Wolfchild* by Rosanne Hawke

See the story of Tom Bawcock's Eve in *Sailmaker* by Rosanne Hawke

The story of the Mermaid of Zennor is mentioned in *Zenna Dare* and can be read in Causley's picture book (see below)

Other Australian children's fiction with a Cornish theme or influence.

Broome, Errol, *Splashback*. NSW: Allen & Unwin, 1996

Hawke, Rosanne, *Across the Creek*. South Melbourne: Lothian Books, 2004

Hawke, Rosanne, *Wolfchild*. South Melbourne: Lothian, 2003.

Hawke, Rosanne, *Sailmaker*. South Melbourne: Lothian, 2002.

Hawke, Rosanne, *Zenna Dare*. South Melbourne: Lothian, 2002

Hawke, Rosanne, *Glanville Park* In Press

Vietch, Anthony Scott, *Spindrift*. Australia: Angus & Robertson, 1980

Books with a Cornish atmosphere :

Rubinstein, Gillian, *At Ardilla*. Norwod, SA: Omnibus Books, 1991

Rubinstein, Gillian, *Beyond the Labyrinth*. Vic: Hyland House, 1988

Cornish Children's literature

1. Barber, A., *The Mousehole Cat*. London: Walker Books, 1990. (This story included in *Sailmaker*)
2. Calhoun, Mary, *The Witch's Pig*. NY: W Morrow & Co, 1977.
3. Causley, C., *The Merrymaid of Zennor*. London: Orchard Books, 1999.
4. Manning-Saunders, Ruth, *Peter and the Piskies*. London: Oxford University Press, 1958
5. Quayle, Eric, *The Magic Ointment*. London: Anderson Press, 1986
6. Weatherhill, Craig, *The Lyonesse Stone*. Padstow, Cornwall: Tabb House, 1991.

Other Cornish Stories to tell

1. There are about 16 tales in *English Fairy and Folk Tales*, Ed by Edwin Sidney Hartland. NY: Dover Publications, 2000. (Originally published early in 20th century)

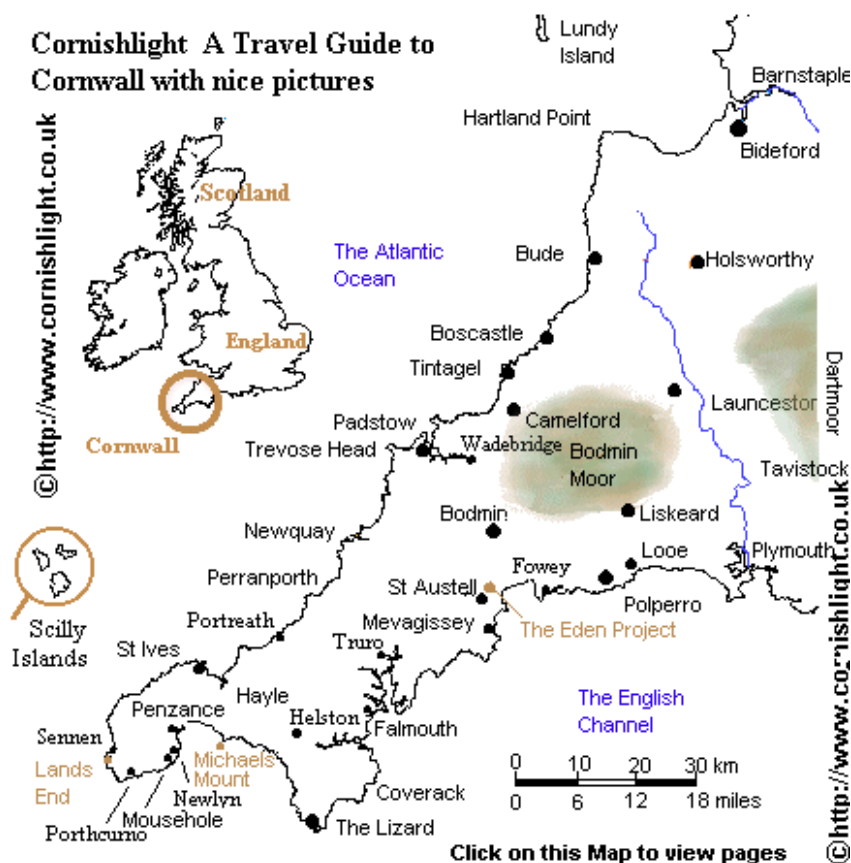
2. Bottrell, William, *Cornish Ghosts and Legends*. Norwich: Jarrold Colour Publications, c 1981.
[William Bottrell was a folklorist in mid 19th century and has three volumes of *Traditions and Hearthside Stories of West Cornwall*, 1873.]
3. Many ideas in Hunt, '*Drolls, traditions and superstitions of Old Cornwall*'. Llanerch Publishers, 1993. Facsimile reprint.
[There are some small publications that make Hunt's work more accessible:
Hunt, *Cornish Folklore*. Truro: Tor Mark Press, pre 1980.
Hunt, *Cornish Legends*. Truro: Tor Mark press, no date.
Hunt, *Customs and Superstitions from Cornish Folklore*. Penryn: Tor Mark Press, 1991.
The address for Tor Mark Press is Islington Wharf, Penryn, Cornwall TR10 8AT]
4. Rowe, Donald, *Traditional Stories and Rhymes*. UK: Lodenek Press, 1971.

Some Links

About Cornwall <http://www.cornwall-calling.co.uk/index.htm>

Kapunda – see web site and map included in article, '*Zenna Dare Trail*'.

Map of Cornwall



Ngadjuri

The Aboriginal spirits in the story were the ones that the Ngadjuri people believed in.

[See Knight, F., Anderson, S., and Pring, A., *The Ngadjuri People of the Mid North of South Australia: walpa juri*, in Press for more information]

Some other Sources

Bettelheim, B., *The Uses of Enchantment*. London: Thames and Hudson, 1975

Briggs, K., *The Fairies in Tradition and Literature*. London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1967

Deane, T & Shaw T., *The Folklore of Cornwall*. London: BT Batsfords, 1975

Hawke, K., *Cornish Sayings, Superstitions and Remedies*. At Austell, Cornwall: K Hawke, 1973

Hunt, R., *The Drolls, Traditions and Superstitions of Old Cornwall* (1881). Felinfach: Llanerch Publishers, 1993

Knight, F., Anderson, S., and Pring, A., *The Ngadjuri People of the Mid North of South Australia: walpa juri*, in Press