



(Mostly True)

The Story of the Pasty

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Tommy Trevorrow and the Knockers (retold by Rosanne from R. Hunt)

There was once a miner called Tom Trevorrow. One day he heard noises in the shaft and since he didn't believe in the knockers' power 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 cake. The knockers called out, 'Tommy Trevorrow, Tommy Trevorrow, leave us some cake, 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 cake 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 or 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? 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.

This story mentions cake being left for the knockers but Cornish miners in the past have often felt it good practice to appease the knockers in the mines by throwing them the crust of their pasty. 'Tommy Trevorrow' is a story that shows what could happen if they didn't. Pasties have a huge role in the culture of Cornwall but when did it all start?

Les Merton, author of *The Official Encyclopaedia of Cornish Pasties*, claims that there is evidence in a Cornish rock painting that the pasty existed in the area at least 8,000 years ago! The Internet tells us that pasties have probably been made in England since the 13th century. Originally, they were eaten by the wealthy upper classes and even royalty. They came with various fillings including venison, beef, lamb and seafood including eels and salmon. They were further flavoured with rich gravies and sometimes dried fruits. (Smith).

No one knows for sure whether the Cornish invented the pasty, or whether they picked it up from another culture. Mrs R.F. Ellis of Cornwall insists that the Cornish invented it and that it is a diminutive of the star gazey pie (Miller & Westergren). Others think the Vikings may have brought the pasty to the British Isles when they invaded. And another theory states that it may have come from the Italian 'pasta', since the Cornish were great seamen.

Todd Gray, chairman of the Friends of Devon's Archives, found a written pasty recipe between the pages of a 16th-century audit book. He contacted Cornwall's Record Office and they confirmed that the earliest record of a Cornish pasty recipe was written in 1746 – two whole centuries after the one he uncovered (Taylor). But Les Merton said that even although Devon may have the earliest written record, pasty recipes had been handed down in Cornwall since 8,000 BC by word of mouth (Taylor).

The earliest known literary references to the pasty seem to contribute it to the Cornish. From 1150 to 1190 a man by the name of Chretien de Troyes wrote several Arthurian romances for the Countess of Champagne. In one of them, "Eric and Enide", pasties are mentioned: *Next Guivret opened a chest and took out two pasties. 'My friend,' says he, 'now try a little of these cold pasties And you shall drink wine mixed with water...'* Both Guivret and Eric came from various parts of what today is considered Cornwall (Miller & Westergren).

Pasties are also mentioned in the Robin Hood ballads of the 1300's: *Bred on chese, butre and milk, pastees and flaunes and Thys knight swolewed, in throte noight pering/ More then doth a pastay in onen tryly!* The pasty was not unique to Cornwall by this time, a French Chronicler, Jean Froissart (1337-1414) wrote: *With botelles of wyne trusses at their sadelles, and pastyes of samonde, troutes, and eyls, wrapped in towels.* Today the French call the pasty, *tourtiere*. The pasty has even shown up in a William Shakespeare play. In the *Merry Wives of Windsor* (1600): *Come, we have a hot pasty to dinner* (Miller & Westergren). Henry VIII's wife, Jane Seymour was known to be partial to a pasty (Leather).

Around the 18th – 19th centuries the Cornish pasty came into its own to meet the needs of tin mining. With the development of tin and copper mining in Cornwall, the miners who worked long hours in terrible conditions, needed a nutritious yet portable meal, 'croust' as they called it, to last them through the day. Some mines even built huge ovens on the surface to keep the miners' pasties hot until it was time to eat (Lean). The traditional Cornish pasty contained beef mixed with potatoes, onion and turnip. Pasties could even have a savoury end and a sweet end, rather like a two-course meal. A 1905 Cornish dialect dictionary defined a pasty as 'a meat and potato or fruit turnover' (Leather). Cornish housewives also marked their husband's initials on the left-hand side of the pastry casing, in order to avoid confusion at lunchtime. The pasty was filling and easy to carry. The crimp or crust made it easy to hold in the fingers while eating and then the crust was discarded. This was very important, as the miners' fingers were dirty and often had traces of arsenic on them.

There is debate among pasty-makers about how a genuine pasty should be made. Some say it can only be made with short pastry, while others will say puff pastry. Some claim the ingredients must be mixed, while others will swear that the fillings should be laid out in a particular order before the pasty is sealed. The issue that invites the most controversy involves the 'crimp' that holds the whole pasty together. Should the pasty be sealed across the top, or at the side? However, there are some facts that can be agreed upon: the meat should be chopped, the vegetables should always be sliced, and the ingredients must never be cooked before they are wrapped in the pastry. Each pasty must be baked completely from raw. It is this fact that makes the Cornish pasty unique amongst similar foods from around the world (Leather).

The pasty is perhaps the greatest symbol of Cornwall. When the Cornish Rugby team plays an important match, a giant Cornish pasty is symbolically hoisted over the bar before the start of the game. It is a tradition that dates back to 1908, and the original giant pasty is still used to this day.

Traditional fillings include the following (Leather):

- Cornish pasty (Beef, potato and turnip)
- Eggy pasty (Bacon and egg)
- Jam pasty
- Mackerel pasty
- Rabbitty pasty (Rabbit)
- Parsley pasty (Lamb and parsley)
- Rice pasty (Like rice pudding but in a pasty)
- Sour sauce pasty (Sorrel leaves)
- Star-gazing or starry-gazey pasty (Usually a whole herring wrapped in pastry with its head sticking out one end!)
- Windy pasty (left over pasty pastry baked and served with jam and cream)

Miners left Cornwall to find work in the four corners of the world (the Cornish Diaspora) and introduced the pasty to places such as USA, Australia, South Africa and South America. But this wasn't the end of the global spread of the pasty. If figures are to be believed pasties are now one of the Duchy's biggest exports. Recent figures put the total pasty revenue within the Duchy at £150 million per year, with 90 per cent of the pasties produced being sold over the Tamar Bridge (Leather).

The future of the pasty

Many pasties sold as Cornish pasties are not quite up to the name. However, this might be about to change under new EU directives. At present the pasty is being considered for the status of Protected Geographical Indication (PGI) which will mean that any pasty sold as a 'Cornish pasty' will have to have been made within the county (Leather).

Superstitions and stories

It was thought to be bad luck for fishermen to take Cornish pasties to sea.

The devil never crossed the Tamar into Cornwall on account of Cornish women putting everything into a pasty, and he was afraid he'd end up in one (Hancock & Paterson, p. 25).

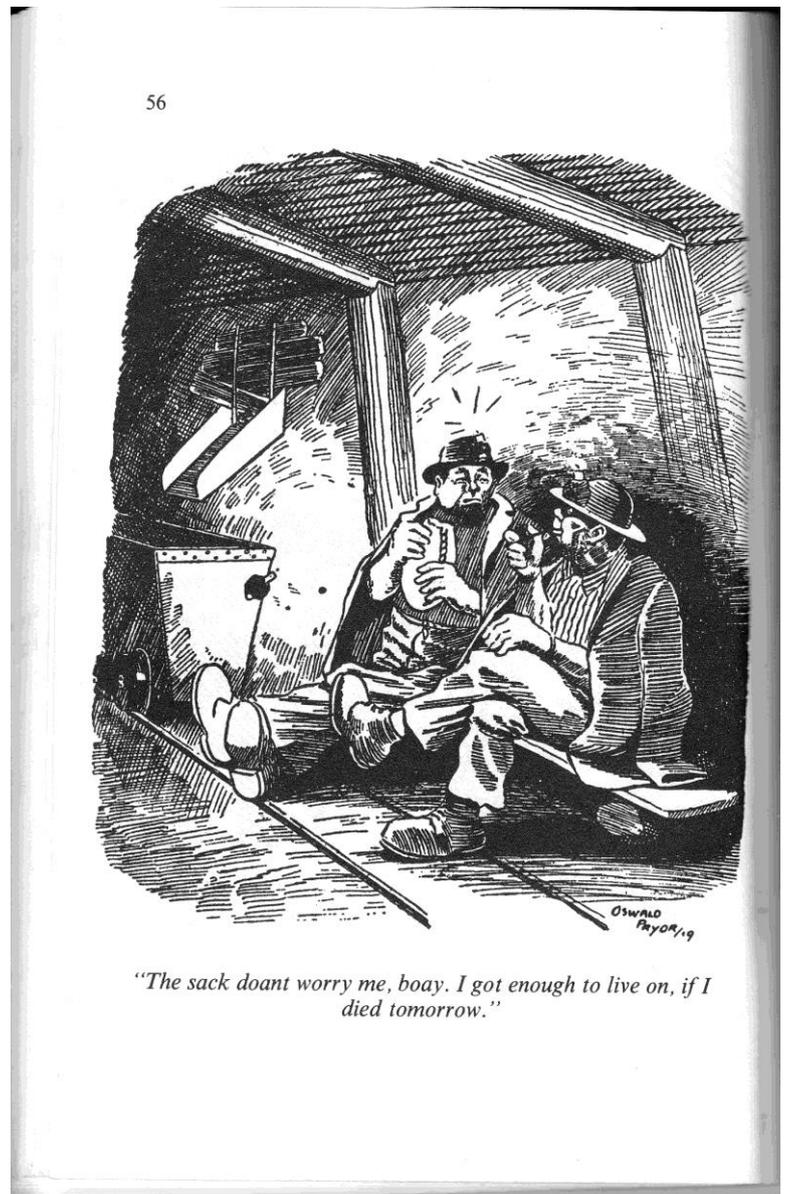
During the 1890's (probably in the Michigan area) a pasty actually started a mine fire. A miner forgot about his meal warming on a shovel, which was the practice there. The pasty eventually caught fire due to the high amounts of lard and the fire spread to the timber holding the walls up (Miller & Westergren).

A group of young farmers in Cornwall held the record for making the largest pasty. The pasty, baked in 1985, took seven hours to make, and measured over 32 feet in length! Amazingly, their record was believed to be beaten in May 1999, when bakers in Falmouth made a giant pasty during the town's first ever Pasty Festival (Lean).

A slang name for the pasty was the 'Oggy'. Some say that when women had finished baking pasties, they would yell down the mine 'Oggy, Oggy, Oggy', and that the miners would reply with 'Oi, oi oi!' Could this be the origin of the popular sporting chant, 'Aussie, Aussie Aussie, oi, oi oi?' (ABC).

On 29th April 2009 a Devon company won the award for best Cornish pasty in a national competition – much to the chagrin of bakers in Cornwall who believe pasties made on the other side of the Tamar cannot be truly Cornish. Chunk of Devon was awarded the honour at the first ever British Pie Awards in 2009. However, Ann Muller, of the award-winning Lizard Pasty Shop in Cornwall, said the triumphant pasty could not really be Cornish if it was made in Devon (Sydney Morning Herald).

Cartoon: Oswald Pryor



Recipe for the Cornish pasty.

This talk wouldn't be complete without a well-worn recipe for the pasty. Any good pastry may be used but it should not be too flaky as it'll leak nor too rich. A very useful pastry is made from 1lb flour, 1/2 lb lard and suet, 1/2 teaspoonful salt. Mix with water. When the pastry is made, roll out about 1/4 inch thick, and cut into rounds with a plate to the size desired.

For the filling use beef (usually a cheap cut such as chuck or skirt), potatoes, onions, and swede (or in Cornwall, turnip). Tradition states that the meat must be chopped, and the vegetables sliced. Add a little salt and black pepper to taste. Lay the rounds on the pastry board with half the round over the rolling pin and put in the filling, damp the edges lightly and fold over into a semi-circle. Shape the pasty neatly and 'crimp' the extreme edges where it is joined between the finger and thumb. Cut a slit in the centre of the pasty, lay on a baking sheet and bake in a hot oven so it keeps its shape (approx 40 minutes at 450 F)

Take a look at these Cornish pasty sites www.cornishpasties.org.uk
Recipes for us
<http://www.recipes4us.co.uk/History/Cornish%20Pasty.htm>

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