

SEMINAR SERIES 2007

FRIDAY 15 JUNE - 1.00 TO 2.30

Professor Philip Payton

Director, Institute of Cornish Studies, University of Exeter HRC Visiting Fellow

*Biography, Place and Identity: Writing South Australia's
Cornish Heritage*

As I argue in my forthcoming book *Making Moonta: The Invention of 'Australia's Little Cornwall'* (University of Exeter Press, 2007), South Australia's copper-mining districts – and Moonta and environs in particular – have long insisted upon a unique and superior position within the Cornish transnational identity: exemplified today in the biennial 'Kernewek Lowender' festival, billed confidently as 'The World's Largest Cornish Festival'. In this seminar, I want to look a little more closely at the life and work of one man, Oswald Pryor, who in his cartoons, essays and celebrated local history *Australia's Little Cornwall* (Rigby, Adelaide, 1962), was a central figure in the creation of this 'myth' and its perpetuation over time. Here, I want to argue, is an important case study of the relationship between (auto)biography, place and identity.

Born at Moonta Mines in South Australia in 1881, Oswald Pryor was the son a mine captain (manager) and his wife who had emigrated from Cornwall to Moonta via Ballarat in Victoria. Oswald was employed initially as a 'pickey-boy' (ore sorter) at Moonta, later becoming 'grass captain' (surface manager) until the mines' closure in 1923. But by then he had already demonstrated his talent as cartoonist, essayist and amateur local historian, contributing (among other things) to the *Sydney Bulletin* and, in the evening of his life, producing his *Australia's Little Cornwall*. This book was the culmination of Oswald Pryor's efforts over rather more than half-a-century to enhance – even 're-invent' – Moonta's special identity and its 'unique' position in the Cornish transnational world. Here Pryor reflected his own autobiographical sense of self (his 'composure') onto Moonta and environs, and its people and their history. Along with the active collusion of a range of other actors, from academic historians to heritage tourism entrepreneurs, the Pryor construction of Moonta and the Cornish in South Australia has remained dominant and virtually unchallenged: something I want to begin to unpick in this seminar.

Biographical information

Philip Payton is Professor of Cornish & Australian Studies at the University of Exeter, Cornwall Campus, where he is also Director of the Institute of Cornish Studies. He was also (2004-2006) President of the British Australian Studies Association, and is currently Vice-President. Philip completed his first doctorate (on 'The Cornish in South Australia') at the University of Adelaide in 1978 and his first book *Pictorial History of Australia's Little Cornwall* was published in the same year. Subsequently, he has written extensively on a range of issues – emigration, mining and maritime history, ethnicity and identity – and recent books include *Cornwall: A History* (2nd ed. 2004), *The Cornish Overseas: A History of Cornwall's Great Emigration* (2nd ed. 2005) and a biography *A.L. Rowse and Cornwall: A Paradoxical Patriot* (2005). His latest book, *Making Moonta: The Invention of Australia's Little Cornwall*, is scheduled for publication during 2007. He is also editor of the series *Cornish Studies*, published by University of Exeter Press.

ALL WELCOME

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