

Bounded by heritage and the Tamar: Cornwall as ‘almost an island’

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Abstract: This article considers the manner in which the English county of Cornwall has been imagined and represented as an island in various contemporary contexts, drawing on the particular geographical insularity of the peninsular county and distinct aspects of its cultural heritage. It outlines the manner in which this rhetorical islandness has been deployed for tourism promotion and political purposes, discusses the value of such imagination for agencies promoting Cornwall as a distinct entity and deploys these discussions to a consideration of ‘almost-islandness’ within the framework of an expanded Island Studies field.

Keywords: almost islands, Cornwall, Devon, islands, Lizard Peninsula, Tamar

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Introduction

Over the last decade Island Studies has both consolidated and diversified. *Island Studies Journal*, in particular, has increasingly focussed on islands as complex socio-cultural-economic entities within a global landscape increasingly affected by factors such as tourism, migration, demographic change and the all-encompassing impact of the Anthropocene. Islands, in this context, are increasingly perceived and analysed as nexuses (rather than as isolates). Other work in the field has broadened the focus from archetypal islands—i.e., parcels of land entirely surrounded by water—to a broad range of locales and phenomena that have island-like attributes. This tendency has been manifest in various initiatives, such as the project of the journal *Urban Island Studies* in 2015–2016 and in the call for an “Expanded Concept of Island Studies” (Hayward, 2016) and subsequent material published in the journal *Shima*.

The opening editorial essay in *Urban Island Studies (UIS)* declared the journal’s focus as a corrective to mainstream Island Studies, which it characterised as premised on “futile provincialisations of an island rhetoric that tacitly accepts the dominance of the centre in its championing of the periphery” (Grydehøj et al, 2015, p. 4). In addition, it identified the manner in which island concepts can be “deployed to metaphorically describe developments in urban space” (Grydehøj et al, 2015, p. 1). The latter aspect was realised in articles such as Andexlinger

(2015), which analysed the island-like identities of suburban areas in Vienna and Tyrol (Austria); Brooks (2016), which analysed Jamaica's Ocho Rios resort area as a tourist enclave within Jamaica that was being contested by local populations; and Swaminathan (2015), which analysed how Mumbai has developed as both a major port centre and one whose digital 'ports' have played a significant impact in its contemporary development.

Complementing *UIS's* agenda, *Shima* has explored related fields, such as the constitution and operation of micronations and the integration of terrestrial and aquatic elements in assemblages generated by human livelihood activities. Another topic, initially explored in the themed issue in which the call for an "Expanded Concept of Island Studies" appeared (v10 n1), is that of peninsular locations that may have minimal and/or inaccessible connections to adjacent mainlands and thereby exhibit 'islandish' attributes. This aspect is manifest in one of the two French terms for peninsulas, *presqu'îles* (the other being *péninsules*) (see Fleury & Raoulx, 2016 for discussion). The former term refers to peninsulas that are almost (*presque*) islands (*îles*) due to the narrowness of the land link between them and another adjacent landmass. This sense of (some) peninsulas being 'almost islands' has resulted in their characterisation as such by those seeking to represent the locales in various manners for various purposes. In some cases, geography and cultural difference from adjoining areas make such characterisations highly tenable, Gibraltar or the Crimea being cases in point. In other locations, the ascription of such a status represents an interpretation that seeks to emphasise disconnection and difference over connection and shared histories and attributes. Such interpretations arise from various imaginative, rhetorical and/or strategic impulses and can gain substantial traction in communities. The recent history of the English county of Cornwall serves as a case in point.

Cornwall occupies the southwestern tip of a peninsula that is bounded by the Severn estuary to the north and by the English Channel to the south. The four main counties on this extended peninsular area are (west to east) Cornwall and Devon (which have coastlines on both their north and south sides) and Somerset and Dorset (with the former having a Severn estuary coast and the latter an English Channel one). Together with the metropolitan area of Bristol (on the Severn Estuary), the four counties are often collectively referred to as 'The West Country'. Despite their location on the peninsula, Somerset and Dorset are rarely referred to and/or conceived of as being peninsular. Similarly, Devon is regarded as being somewhat of a transitional region to the peninsular tip county; definitively part of 'The West Country' but quite separate (in conceptual terms) from its southwestern neighbour. There are two main reasons for the apparent disconnection between the adjacent administrative areas. One is geographical. While their present-day borders do not follow it entirely, the two countries have long been recognised as separated by the River Tamar, which rises close to the north coast of the peninsula and then flows down to Plymouth Sound in the south, where it feeds into an estuary of approximately 6 km in width (Figure 1). In this regard, Cornwall has an insular aspect that derives from its marine and riverine borders (with the small area of the north coast that isn't divided by the Tamar requiring the 'almost' characterisation). Prior to the development of coaching roads and bridges in the medieval period, the Tamar was a substantial barrier to cross-county travel (particularly in its southern reaches), requiring boat transfers across its waters. Foot or horseback passage between the two counties was limited to fordable areas of the mid-upper Tamar or via direct land access in the far north. The construction of an arched granite bridge near Gunnislake in the early 1500s improved access but it was not until 1859, with the opening

of the Royal Albert Bridge between Plymouth, on the Devon side, and Saltash, on the Cornish one, that rail access into Cornwall was facilitated. Road traffic across the lower Tamar had to wait longer, with the Tamar road bridge opening adjacent to the rail bridge in 1961 (and then being substantially widened in 2001).

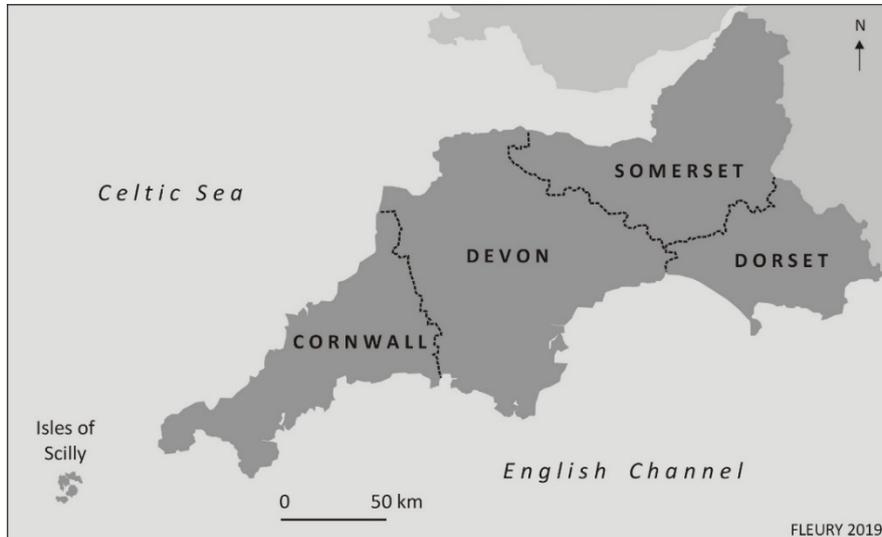


Figure 1: The four counties of England's southwestern peninsula. *Source:* © Christian Fleury, 2019.

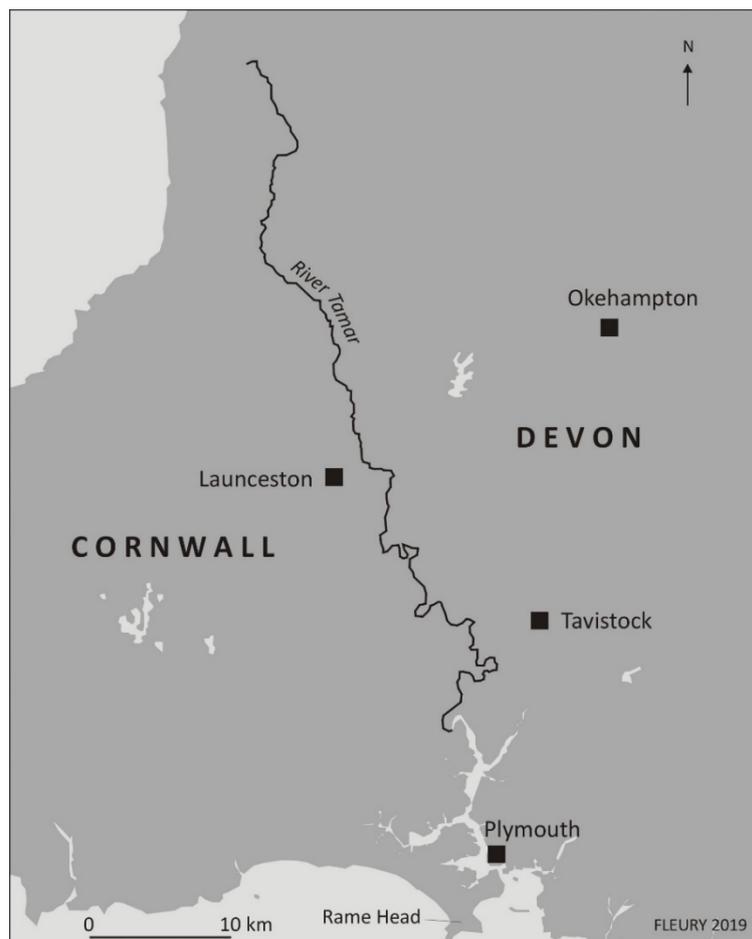


Figure 2: Map of the Tamar River, dividing Cornwall and Devon. *Source:* © Christian Fleury, 2019.

Culture, and particularly language, has complemented the Tamar's role in differentiating the counties. While both counties share a Celtic heritage, Cornwall's is far more apparent (through its persistence in the form of material culture, literary/dramatic history, place-names and folklore) and has been actively promoted by a variety of groups, including pro-autonomy activists and tourism agencies. Devon's Celtic past and heritage is (now) far paler, having largely disappeared by 1000 (as a result of substantial Anglo-Saxon incursion into and influence over the county) and has not been subject to anything like the degree of contemporary re-assertion that Cornwall's has. (Indeed, its advocates often perceive their claims to Devon's Celtic heritage as being actively disparaged by Cornish Celtic activists—see CFCD Forum, n.d.). Cornwall's Tamar border is significant in this regard in that it appears to have been an impediment (or, at least, retardant) to Anglo-Saxon expansion into Cornwall in the medieval period. As a result, Kernewek, the Cornish Brythonic language, flourished until the mid-16th century, when a series of English initiatives, including the imposition of language strictures arising from the 1549 Act of Uniformity (standardising English as the language of [Christian] worship) began to marginalise it as a public language. By the 1800s the language was regarded as effectively dead. Somewhat surprisingly, it subsequently recovered. Due to a series of initiatives it is now spoken by a small number of county residents as a conscious cultural affirmation of Celtic heritage. (Official recognition of the tenacity of activists' successful language revival efforts was provided by UNESCO in 2010, which acknowledged Kernewek's resurrection by changing its status from 'extinct' to 'critically endangered' in its 2010 edition of the *Atlas of the World's Languages in Danger*.)

Destination branding and marketing

The allied activities of destination branding (i.e., creating a distinct identity for a location) and the marketing of that brand identity are a recent refinement of more gradual (and often quasi-organic) processes whereby destinations become known for and patronised by tourists on account of particular factors such as their climate, landscape, built environment, cuisine, social mores and/or intangible cultural assets. Destination branding and marketing are designed to create a competitive edge for particular locations that vie with others for tourist visitation. The branding aims to create an imaginative impression of a location in advance of tourists' visits to it that, in turn, influences the manner in which they engage with the destination upon their arrival. Faced with a welter of competing locations, clarity of destination branding is crucial to attracting tourists, just as the ability to deliver the experiences promised in marketing is key to tourists' degree of satisfaction with their visits (Beerli Palaccio & Martin-Santana, 1998; Pereira et al, 2012).

The types of destination branding and marketing processes described above occurred in late 19th-century Cornwall, albeit in a less decisive and ad hoc manner than modern market promotion, and had a profound effect on both internal and external perceptions of the county. Faced with the decline of Cornwall's mining industry, a number of prominent individuals perceived the potential to increase tourism. The problem they had in achieving traction in the UK domestic market was that the same rail networks that bridged the Tamar and offered increased access to the southwest were offering improved access to a host of other coastal locations. As Perry has emphasised, while the county responded by building accommodation and related infrastructure for tourists in the late 1800s, by the early 1900s it was apparent that:

these were necessary, but not sufficient, conditions to bring tourists to Cornwall in substantial numbers. For all around Britain and on the Continent, holiday resorts were mushrooming, some with easier access to big cities, as well as superior social and entertainment infrastructures. Tourism was more than ever a cut-throat business, and tourism operators elsewhere were meeting the challenge by creating their own distinct regional identities to give them a competitive edge over their rivals. (Perry, 1999, p. 97)

As Perry goes on to detail, a conference called by the mayor of Truro in 1900, and a subsequent working party, explored various approaches to destination branding Cornwall so as to allow it to compete with the successful promotions being run by its neighbour Devon (Perry, 1999, p. 97). While the individuals involved failed to reach any consensus, leading entrepreneurs such as Silvanus Travail argued for the branding of Cornwall as a separate place from England and actively promoted the county's ancient past in his tourism establishments. This branding developed further in the 1920s, albeit in a highly fanciful way that converged with elements of emergent Cornish Celtic revivalism. As Perry has characterised:

And so it was this Celtic-Mediterranean concept of a land of mystery and magic, where the sun always shone, that became a powerful marker of Cornwall's territory and language, and even, as Payton and Thornton have argued, a 'major influence on the cultural construction of Cornwall that emerged in the intervening period'. (Perry, 1999, p. 102)

The latter was complicated by the formation of a 'hybrid identity' wherein "imaginings of (Celtic) difference combined with that of being an English county" (Deacon et al, 2003, p. 11).

This marketing angle appears to have been successful in the post-War period in that there was something of an influx of English tourists, retirees and other internal migrants into Cornwall in the 1950s and 1960s. These developments raised concerns over the potential erosion of Cornish identity and contributed to the rise of the pro-autonomy Mebyon Kernow party (see Deacon et al, 2003). If anything, occasional national media coverage of the party, together with the Kernewek language graffiti campaigns carried out by anonymous activists in the 1970s, could be argued to have strengthened visitor perceptions of Cornwall as a place of difference (however disdainfully the political aspect of that difference was regarded outside of the county; see, for instance, McCrumb, 2012).

Senses of separation and difference continued to be a feature of Cornish tourism promotion and commentary in the late 20th and early 21st centuries. One notable aspect of this was an intensification of a particular characterisation of Cornish difference, with the county often referred to as effectively 'islanded' in tourism promotional materials. While this does not appear to have derived from any single deliberate attempt at destination branding, it is so prevalent as to represent a significant modern inflection to Cornish representation.

Research for this article uncovered an extensive list of such references in recent tourism literature, of which the following two are exemplars:

The ancient duchy of Cornwall is in the extreme southwestern part of England... This peninsula is a virtual island—culturally if not geographically. Encircled by coastline, it abounds in rugged cliffs, hidden bays, fishing villages, sandy beaches and sheltered coves. (Moore, 2010, p. 423)

With its whitewashed seaside villages and greener-than-green countryside dotted with Celtic ruins, the Cornish peninsula is a hybrid of historical attractions and natural beauty. From its subtropical gardens to its steep cliffs that cascade into the Atlantic, Cornwall has an island feel, and is, in fact, almost an island, nearly separated from the rest of Britain by the Tamar River. (Thompson, 2014, n.p.)

These two brief characterisations emphasise the county's 'islandish' aspect, as does an (unattributed) item published on the *Cornish Story* website in 2018 which explores the similarities between Cornwall's supposedly 'islandish' identity and that of the Shetland and Orkney Islands, located to the north of Scotland.

As previously discussed, the Tamar is often represented as a crucial element in defining and generating Cornwall's 'almost island' status:

The River Tamar is one of the most important features of southwest England. Its source is just a few miles from the peninsula's north coast, yet it flows southwards towards the English Channel. Since the river forms the border between Devon and Cornwall for most of its length, Cornwall is almost an island, surrounded by the river and the sea. (Tamar Valley Tourism Association, n.d.)

Indeed, this has also led to various whimsical references to the Tamar border as a 'hard', regulated one, mainly as a mild tease for tourists and migrants to the county. There is, for instance, a considerable anecdotal history of staff on trains crossing over the Tamar into Cornwall asking passengers to have their passports ready for inspection (McCready, 2015). There have also been various roadside signs making similar points at various times, one of which (Figure 3) now also has its own Facebook page to perpetuate the hoax.



Figure 3: Hoax Tamar Bridge Cornish Border Control sign. *Source:* Tamar Bridge, n.d.

Cornish Border Patrol T-shirts are also sold at various retail outlets in the county and there is even a 'Kernow Passport' available, a novelty item aimed at the tourist market with a front cover that proclaims 'Independent Republic of Kernow'. Tourists are invited to have their passports stamped at various nominated locations to record their travels. As the company website declares:

Your own passport to Cornwall—a unique souvenir... Welcome to Cornwall, separated from the rest of Great Britain by the River Tamar. You and your family now have a unique opportunity to record your visit. (Cornwall Passports, n.d.)

Another, notably wry acknowledgement of the Tamar as a border space between two counties with distinct cultural identities occurred in 2016 in the form of the so-called 'Tamar Test Match' contest between Cornish and Devonian cricket teams. Held on the neutral space of a temporarily exposed sandbar in the Tamar (Hayward, 2017, p. 12-13), the match formed the focus of an extended event that included the singing of Cornish and Devonian folk songs and a performance by the Cornish Wreckers Morris dance troupe.

Despite its ubiquity, the Tamar's defining presence as a barrier between the counties has also been regarded more sceptically. One recent, high-profile example was that of (then) British Prime Minister David Cameron who responded to (predominantly Cornish) concern about plans to create a new parliamentary constituency that would straddle the county borders by declaring "it's the Tamar not the Amazon, for heaven's sake" —thereby raising the ire of Cornish autonomists (Morris, 2010, n.p.). The nature of Cornwall's small contiguous link with Devon, north of the Tamar, has also attracted more humorous attention. One Cornish Bed and Breakfast establishment's website currently declares, "Almost an island, Cornwall is 85% surrounded by water—and we are working (digging!) on the other 15%" (Fieldings B&B, n.d., n.p.). Taking a longer-term view, a posting on the Democracy Forum website responded to discussions of the likely impact of climate change on Cornwall's coastlines by speculating that "It may well end up being an island though" (Lankou, 2013, n.p.).

Spatial differentiation

Along with its riverine border, Cornwall's distinct Celtic cultural aspects underpin its claims for a distinct identity. Chapter Seven of Marcus Tanner's (2004) volume *Last of the Celts* (a survey of residual Celtic culture in Europe and elsewhere), for example, is entitled 'Cornwall: "Almost an island"' and is prefaced with a quote from A.S.D. Smith that states, "Without the language, Cornwall is just another English county" (2004, p. 219). Tanner also goes on to quote John Bolitho, the Archdruid of Cornwall and Grand Bard of the Gorsedd, as similarly stating, "Don't forget we are *almost* an island" (2004, p. 221). In the contemporary context, the 'islanding' of a small group of Cornish Language revival speakers within a United Kingdom where English is the dominant language is apparent and derives from a specific context that Stoyles has described in the following terms:

Physical isolation provides the key to Cornish history. A rocky peninsula, jutting out some 90 miles into the Atlantic Ocean, Cornwall stands at the extreme south-western corner of the British Isles. Surrounded by waves on all sides but

one, it is practically severed from the adjoining lands to the east by the River Tamar, which runs almost from sea to sea. Following the collapse of Roman rule in Britain, this natural fortress became a place of refuge for many of the original British inhabitants (sometimes referred to as 'Celts') of these islands, after they were driven westwards by Saxon conquerors. An independent British polity was established in Cornwall, and was defended against Saxon incursion for many hundreds of years. Not until 838 were the 'West Britons' finally subdued - and for centuries after this Cornwall retained many of the marks of a separate country. (Stoyle, 2001, n.p.)

Some academic works have reiterated this theme and given it a broader geographical context. As promotional material for Payton et al's *Maritime History of Cornwall* (2014) identifies:

Cornwall is quintessentially a maritime region. Almost an island, nowhere in it is further than 25 miles from the sea. Cornwall's often distinctive history has been moulded by this omnipresent maritime environment, while its strategic position at the western approaches—jutting out into the Atlantic—has given this history a global impact. (University of Exeter Press, 2014, n.p.)

These historical perspectives have informed and have been reinflected by various groups seeking devolution and/or autonomy for Cornwall. Advocates for a Cornish Assembly, in particular, have drawn on the 'almost island' aspect as a key element of their campaign. The Senedh Kernow (Cornish Constitutional Convention) initiative, in particular, used this aspect in its response to the UK Government's White Paper, *Your Region: Your Choice: Revitalising The English Regions* (2003). Senedh Kernow's online response, entitled *Your Region, Your Choice: The Case for Cornwall*, places Cornwall's island-like insularity and difference at the head of their arguments:

Geography is a key differentiator. This includes the overall settlement pattern, the lack of large cities and that Cornwall is a 'virtual island'. Transport, housing, planning, tourism and economic development are tightly linked and there is a long-standing, but frustrated, interest in the development of trade along the 'Atlantic Arc'. These factors mean that a careful, considered and tailored approach is required when developing strategy. Overall, Cornwall requires its own, integrated approach. (Senedh Kernow, 2003)

Many of the subsequent points in the document variously reiterate and derive from this aspect in moving towards the characterisations that Cornwall is a "special case" within the UK, as a "cultural and linguistic region [that] is independently recognised as such" (Senedh Kernow, 2003, p. 3), requiring a "special relationship" to England "as a Celtic region that is both part of England and separate from it" (Senedh Kernow, 2003, p. 3).

The strategic value of asserting an 'almost island' status for Cornwall at the time of consideration of greater autonomies for English counties derives from a number of factors. One concerns borders. Unlike countries or counties that may have disputes about either the precise course a border line takes and/or concerns about population groups residing on the 'wrong'

side of the border (in terms of their perceived identities and affiliations), islands are very neatly delineated by their marine coasts—i.e., the island *is* the island, fair and simple. In the United Kingdom, at least, a number of islands offer themselves as paradigms of a substantial autonomy that falls just short of independence. The clearest examples of this are the Isle of Man and the Crown dependency bailiwicks of Jersey and Guernsey. These have both a substantial appeal for Cornish autonomists, on account of the extent of their internal self-government—including operation outside the UK taxation system—and on account of their retention of ancient languages as planks for their claims for distinct identity (Manx Gaelic in the Isle of Man and the Norman French dialects of Jèrriais and Guernésiais, in Jersey and Guernsey respectively). The presence of Kernewek in Cornwall (and its UNESCO recognition) thereby invites a comparison to the aforementioned islands that highlights Cornwall’s minimal autonomy. Yet the autonomy of the Isle of Man and the Channel Islands is due to a number of complex historical factors that are distinct to their regions and history, rather than to their islandness per se. It is notable in this regard that neither the Isle of Wight nor Anglesey (Ynys Môn) have achieved any substantial degree of autonomy from the UK (see Grydehøj & Hayward, 2011; and Moore, 2005, p. 127–157, respectively). In Cornish terms, the Scilly Islands also illustrate the limited extent of autonomy that results from separation from dominant mainlands. While the Council of the Isles of Scilly is a separate authority to Cornwall Council, the Islands form part of the Duchy of Cornwall and their inhabitants vote in the (mainland) St Ives parliamentary constituency.

Cornwall’s internal ‘almost islands’

Mirroring assertions of Cornwall as an ‘almost island’ within the United Kingdom, various agencies have recently asserted the Lizard Peninsula as an ‘almost island’ within Cornwall itself. This assertion primarily reflects the manner in which the eastern side of the Lizard Peninsula is bisected by the Helford River, a broad ria (flooded river valley). Tourism promotional material often exaggerates this aspect as part of its attempts to brand the peninsula as a distinct tourism destination. The ‘Visit Lizard’ Website for example—which refers to its region as the “magical Lizard Peninsula”—describes it as:

A secret backwater—almost an island, girded on three sides by the sea and the fourth by the meandering waters of the Helford River, only a tiny land bridge connecting us to the rest of Cornwall. (Visit Lizard, n.d., n.p.)

(Note that the “tiny land bridge” in question is approximately 10 kilometres across and that the peninsula is linked to Helston by the A3083 road that runs across the area in question; see Figure 4.)

Similarly, St. Keverne’s promotional website states:

With the sea on three sides and the Helford River to the north the Lizard Peninsula is almost an island, a high plateau surrounded by the sea, with numerous hidden little coves and beaches. (St-Keverne.com, n.d., n.p.)

And a Lizard rental accommodation website similarly states:

Surrounded by sea and the Helford River to the north, the Lizard peninsula is almost an island and has been given the status of an area of outstanding natural beauty. (Lizard Cottages, n.d., n.p.)

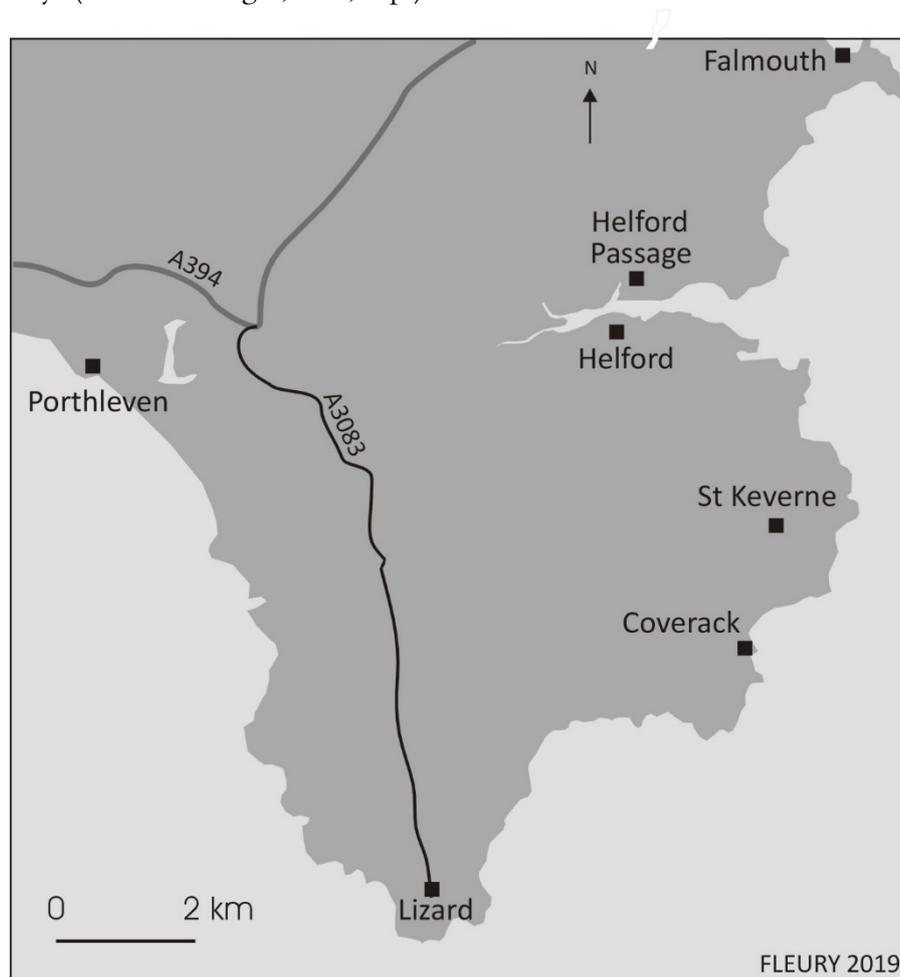


Figure 4: Lizard Peninsula. *Source:* © Christian Fleury, 2019.

In aggregate, such characterisations (which are repeated in other websites and printed promotional information) can be understood as an attempt to create a brand image for the area that distinguishes it from other areas of Cornwall (such as the St Ives area on the North Coast or the Penwith/Land's End area to the West), which attract significant numbers of tourists. Similar factors apply to the occasional characterisation of other areas of Cornwall in such terms. See, for instance, the following description of the Rame Head area in southeastern Cornwall (Figure 2):

The Rame Peninsula is located to the South East of Cornwall, close to Plymouth in Devon. The peninsula is almost an island with 11 miles of sea coast and only a small 1.5 mile land boundary. The peninsula is surrounded by the English Channel and Whitsand Bay to the south, Plymouth Sound and Cawsand Bay to the east, and the estuaries of the River Lynher and Tamar, the Hamoaze, Milbrook Lake and St John Lake to the north. The entire area of the peninsula is a designated Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty. (Visions of the Rame Peninsula, n.d., n.p.)

Without any of the underpinnings of cultural difference that serve to distinguish (Celtic) Cornwall from the remainder of England, the assertion of the Lizard and Rame Peninsulas' 'almost islandness' is more clearly a rhetorical description and one that appears to have little buy-in from residents of the area who have no history of perceiving themselves as separate from the remainder of Cornwall nor of seeking enhanced autonomy from the remainder of the county. In this regard, the rhetoric is directed to an external constituency, i.e., potential tourists, rather than being reflective of any local perception.

Conclusion

The characterisation of Cornwall as 'almost an island' in both tourism literature and in statements made by pro-autonomy groups reflects the extent to which it is in the interests of both to imagine and promote Cornwall in such a manner. But the characterisation has different inflections and implications. For pro-autonomy groups, their arguments and prospects of success might be significantly more advanced if Cornwall *was* separated by a stretch of sea from Devon. Indeed, it is possible to imagine an alternative universe where such geography existed and had allowed Kernewek to persist to the present in as organic a manner as Gaelic language has managed to continue in other western islands such as the Aran group, Anglesey or the Isle of Man. Had such a situation existed, the political landscape may have been significantly different. In this regard, the 'almost' has a sense of wistfulness, of a missed opportunity. In the case of tourism however, the 'almost' aspect is a substantial plus. If Cornwall was actually an island it is unlikely that tourism would have developed so early and to such a large extent, given the logistical difficulties and costs involved in ferry or air links between the (imagined) island and the English coast. The element crucial to the 'almost island' marketing is precisely that Cornwall is *not* an island that requires ferry or aviation links. It can be smoothly accessed by rail or road, yet has (or can be argued to have) a key attribute of islands that is attractive to tourists, namely its apparent difference from the mainland—an attribute that gives tourists the sense of them having temporarily departed normal existence and an increasingly homogenised national culture. The Tamar stands as a convenient marker of the transition between the two, and the crossing provides a clear sense of transition between cultures and heritages. In this regard, the value lies in the 'almost' rather than the 'island'.

As this article has identified, Cornwall has been subject to a range of imaginative, rhetorical and strategic characterisations as an island-like entity that have informed aspects of its social identity, tourism brand and political orientation. This analysis is significant for Island Studies in that it illustrates the affective power and potency of islandness as a concept even when the subject of such a characterisation is not a (geographically defined) island. This underlines the manner in which the two developments within Island Studies identified in the Introduction—of islands as nexuses and of expanded concepts of islands—are complementary. Islandness is both central to Island Studies and to a number of entities that metaphorically render themselves as islands. The islands central to Island Studies thereby have figurative echoes across a range of landscapes and these merit consideration by Island Studies researchers for their different articulations of island(ish) identities. While some of the latter are metaphoric—reflected in common figures-of-speech such as 'islands of calm' in busy environments, 'heat islands' in urban areas, etc.—peninsular 'almost islands' constitute something of an interzone between archetypal

islands and metaphoric ones. As geo-cultural entities in their own right, they merit analysis. As projections of islandness onto non-islands, they illuminate the core attributes of their metaphorical referents, i.e., the separateness perceived to accrue from watery boundaries between smaller and larger landmasses and the distinct qualities of societies perceived to exist in such locations. In this manner, 'almost islands' serve to problematise binary differentiations of islands and non-islands and to remind Island Studies scholars of the need to resist easy assumptions about the uniqueness of island societies or, at least, of such uniqueness primarily conceived as 'other' to the assumed homogeneity of continental mainlands and/or larger islands.

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