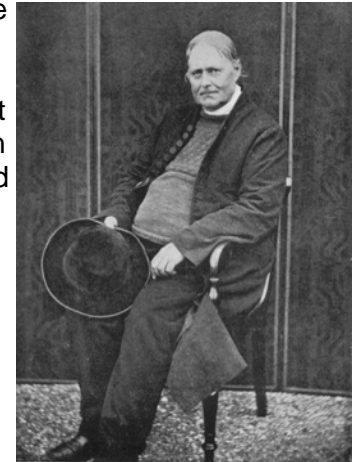


## Rev'd. Robert Stephen Hawker



*Robert Stephen Hawker was born at Stoke Damerel in Devon on the 3rd of December 1803 . He graduated from Oxford in 1828, and he became vicar of Morwenstow in 1834 where he stayed for over 40 years. He was a poet and collector of folklore. His most well known poem "The Song of the Western Men", better known by its chorus , " And Shall Trelawney Die", is often called the Cornish national anthem.*

On the coast of north Cornwall is a small village called Morwenstow. The village stands high on the cliffs above the Atlantic Ocean; at the foot of the cliffs are reefs of huge jagged rocks, and the beach is full of great boulders. This part of the coast is famous for shipwrecks, and in the past the people of Morwenstow used to look forward to storms, because when a ship was wrecked on their beach they would loot the wreck for food and objects to sell. These people were very poor, and sometimes they came close to starving. When things got very bad for them they would go out onto the cliffs at night with their lanterns – ships out at sea would see the lights and think it was a safe harbour and would turn to sail straight onto



the cruel rocks. The villagers of Morwenstow would have another ship to loot, but, of course, they would have also murdered innocent sailors as well.

In 1834 a new vicar called Robert Stephen Hawker came to Morwenstow. He was a rather strange man – he wore a purple three-quarter length coat and underneath the coat a huge chunky fisherman's jersey in order to show people that, like Jesus, he was a "fisher of men". There was a small red cross woven into the side of the jersey to show where the spear was plunged into Jesus' side at the crucifixion. He wore a pink brimless hat, rather like a fez, and big black sea boots that came all the way up to his knees. He always carried a carpenter's pencil because Jesus was a carpenter, and his walking stick was shaped like a sword to show people that he would fight off the Devil. He loved animals a lot, and believed that animals had souls and would go to heaven too. He had a huge pig which he kept as a pet and which he took out for walks round the parish, and he also had nine cats which followed him to church and would even go up into the pulpit with him! A lot of people thought Hawker was really rather strange!

Hawker was very worried about the poor people of his new parish, and upset by the number of wrecks that he saw on the coast near the village. He was horrified when he saw his parishioners looting the dead bodies of sailors for anything valuable. Sailors who drowned in shipwrecks were usually buried on the beach where they were found, without a Christian funeral, because nobody could tell whether they were

Christians. Hawker collected driftwood and built himself a hut overlooking the sea where he could watch for wrecks. After every storm he would collect the bodies of the dead sailors from the beach and carry them up the cliff where he buried them in the cemetery of his church.

Of course, Hawker wanted to help the poor people of his parish as well as the dead sailors. He also knew that they would prefer to grow their own food on their farms rather than wait around for wrecks. Rev'd Hawker believed that when plants and crops grew it was a wonderful gift from God. He felt that if he could persuade his parishioners to join together to celebrate God's harvest then God would bless them, the crops would come, and they would not need to loot ships to keep them alive. He also hoped that he would be able to persuade them to come to church to celebrate harvest, instead of partying and getting drunk, which was what they usually did at harvest time.

So in 1843 Hawker invented the very first Christian celebration of **Harvest Festival** . He invited his parishioners to a Harvest service on the first of October, when he used bread made from the first cut of corn for the communion service. This new style Harvest Festival was very popular, and soon lots of other vicars were copying Hawker's brilliant idea in their own parishes. And that is why we have Harvest Festivals in churches today!



*Hawker's Hut was built by the Reverend Robert Stephen Hawker who was the vicar of nearby Morwenstow church for 40 years from 1834. It is constructed of drift-wood collected from along the coast and nestles into the hillside. It is now in the care and protection of the National Trust and it is probably their smallest property! The vicar was responsible for giving a Christian burial to sailors who were drowned in wrecks along the coast and he used the hut to watch for wrecks and to write poetry.*