

## PLACE-NAMES AND THE HISTORIC LANDSCAPE\*

Place-names are now widely employed by both archaeologists and historians in their studies of the organisation and appearance of the historic landscape. The archaeologist is interested especially in locating new sites and in assessing the significance of known sites, while the historian is more concerned with reconstructing the overall pattern of settlement and the tenurial system which influenced the location and nature of the various components of the settlement pattern. Certain place-name elements are particularly valuable to the archaeologist: elements which may relate to burial sites, such as *beorg*, *hlāw*, *haugr*, *\*burgaesn*, *græf* and *urn*: elements which refer to a supernatural presence, such as *hob*, *pūca*, *pūcel*, *sceocca*, *skratti* and *pyrs*; and elements which may refer to fortifications or Roman sites, such as *ceaster* and *burh*. More important to the historian are the elements which may help to locate lost mediaeval settlements, such as habitative elements incorporated in field-names. Very often the names of places referred to in mediaeval documents as settlements can be shown to survive as farm names or even merely field-names recorded in the nineteenth-century tithe awards. In some cases earlier records or estate maps can be used to show that the field now bearing the name was indeed the site of the settlement, while in other cases earthworks of the mediaeval settlement can be found still existing on the ground. References in field-names to features found in settlements, such as the hall, can also be used to locate earlier settlements.

Place-name elements referring to aspects of the communications systems of various periods, such as *strāet*, *caucie*, *brycg*, *ford* and *ferja*, can be used to help reconstruct the pattern of routes linking areas of occupation and activity. Place-name distributions can even be of value to the post-mediaeval archaeologist, enabling for example the plotting of concentrations of craft industries; thus the areas where the tenting of cloth was especially carried out can be found by plotting *tentour* field-names.

A note of caution must, however, be sounded with regard to the use of place-names by historians for reconstructing general patterns of settlement in certain periods. There has been a tendency to plot the names recorded in Domesday Book for northern England as if these were the names of Late Anglo-Saxon or Early Norman settlements. But Domesday Book and other early Norman documents for the north refer not to settlements but to entire villas and they describe a villa with a central nucleated settlement in exactly the same way as a villa which had no nucleated centre. Indeed some villas never seem to have contained a settlement of the same name as the villa, and this is especially noticeable with those whose names contain elements describing the general topographical features of the villa itself, such as *feld* or *land*. This suggests that in some cases the place-name may first have applied to the whole villa, only subsequently becoming attached to a settlement within it, even though the original meaning might have been quite inappropriate for the settlement site. Further research is required on this subject, but if this was in fact a common phenomenon then the interpretation of early settlement patterns by reference to the names of specific settlement sites, rather than of the general areas of land belonging to the villas, may have to be rethought.

## Notes

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1. A joint paper on this subject is currently being prepared by M. L. Faull and D. J. H. Michelmore.

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## THE COASTAL TOPONYMS OF ANGLESEY\*

European onomatologists have rightly stressed the importance of listing as extensively as possible the forms of place-names as they have been recorded at different periods right back to the earliest documented usage. They have tied toponymy to documents and records. In studying the names of natural topographic features, however, this approach has distinct limitations. Documents have to do primarily with possession and with rights of tenure. Whereas homestead and settlement names are on the whole well documented in state and estate papers, names of natural topographic features, and especially the names of minor features, - creeks, rocks, headlands along the coast, and rocks, paths, etc. in unpopulated upland areas, for example - occur but rarely in tenurial records. In these areas the toponymist has to supplement the documentary evidence with field-work and oral collecting.

Our survey of Anglesey coastal names was based on 6" OS maps, on an exhaustive combing of maps and charts, and on documents concerned with maritime matters. It was augmented by oral collecting in selected areas. In this way we built up a collection of some 760 coastal toponyms. Documentary attestations for the names were on the whole late. Few predated 1500. The majority were attested from the XVIII and more especially from the XIX cents. A significant number had no written documentation. In those sample areas where we conducted field-work, we found approx. 25% of our total collection of place-names were undocumented forms obtained from oral informants. We also found that, because of the revolutionary change in rural economic patterns in the mid XX cent. and the increased mobility of population, minor topographic names tended to be known only to the older generation of inhabitants. This fact, plus the linguistic change from a Celtic language to English - in Wales, as in western Scotland and in the west of Ireland - makes onomastic field work in certain areas a matter of particular urgency.

Of the 760 or so coastal names in our collection, approx. 600 are entirely Welsh: the remainder are entirely alien or linguistically mixed toponyms. The entirely Welsh coastal toponyms are almost all dual-element names, with the generic usually preceding the specific. *Porth* is undoubtedly the commonest generic; it occurs 165 times as a first element on a coastline of approx. 125 miles. *Porth*, a borrowing into W from Latin *portus* and *porta*, is usually translated in place-name glossaries as 'gateway, harbour'. In *Porthaethwy*, attested in 1291-2, it probably meant 'ferry'; in *Porth Abermenai*, XIII cent., it may well have had the meaning 'port, haven'; but in the majority of Anglesey instances it clearly meant any inlet or outlet where boats were wont to be brought to land or put to sea. The other common indentation generic is *traeth*: it means a sand which is covered at high and dry at low water. The main topographic generics referring to protrusions are *trwyn*, literally 'nose' but figuratively 'point', and *penrhyn* 'headland'. Generics of off-shore features are *ynys* 'island', *carreg* 'rock, stone' and its plural *cerrig*, *craig* 'rock' and *maen* 'stone'. *Ynys*, cognate with Irish *inis*, applies to features which are generally larger than *carreg*, *craig*, *maen*, although many an *ynys* is little more than a small rock outcrop.

Turning to specifics, we find that shift names - names given to places by the shift of a specific from one generic to another - are common. Toponyms such as *Porth Eilian*, *Porth Padrig*, containing a saint's name as their second element, are examples. They are not commemorative; they have been formed by taking what is a commemorative element in *Llaneilian*, *Llanbadrig* and attaching it to *porth*. Names such as *Porth Amlwch*, *Ynys Amlwch* are different. *Amlwch* is the creek or harbour at *Amlwch*, *Ynys Amlwch* the island near *Amlwch*. Formally these could be regarded as shift names, but we would prefer to classify them as geographical descriptive clusters. It is a type that occurs frequently in the names of natural topographic features.