

## The Kent Place-Name Brenchley

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Brenchley is a small village in Kent, five miles east-north-east of Tunbridge Wells, two miles south of Paddock Wood. It is situated 300 feet above sea level within the fringe of the High Weald, an ancient forest region cleared and settled from the late Anglo-Saxon period onwards. Even though the Brenchley area is now characterized by miles of orchard, there is still much woodland.

The name Brenchley provides a clue to its history. Ekwall provides the early forms *Braencesle* c.1100 (citing the *Textus Roffensis* as his source), *Brencheslega* 1185, *Brancheslegh* 1230, and *Brenchesle* 1242. The second element is *lēah* 'clearing'. Ekwall says the first 'appears to be a personal name *Brænci*, which is of obscure history.'<sup>1</sup>

The difficulties about *Brænci* can be cleared up if it can be shown to be the Brittonic personal name first attested as Old Cornish *Brenci* (pronounced 'Bren-gi', according to the normal spelling-conventions of Old Welsh, Cornish and Breton). The name occurs in the manumission of a group of slaves recorded in the Bodmin Gospels (London, British Library, MS Add. 9381).<sup>2</sup> This particular *Brenci* was freed by bishop Wulfsize (c.959-93).<sup>3</sup> The Welsh cognate *Brengi* or *Bryngi* is also known. Garthbrengi 'Brengi's plot of land', a tiny village and parish three miles north of Brecon, figures as *Garth Bryngi* in a poem to St

David by Gwynfardd Brycheiniog (flourished c.1180).<sup>4</sup> There is or was also a *Gallt Brengv* 'Brengi's Wooded Hillside' in Gwent.<sup>5</sup>

The etymology of these forms has been accepted as the unflattering 'stinking dog, stinkhound', since Welsh *braen* means 'stinking', and *ci* means 'dog'.<sup>6</sup> But the more noble explanation 'raven hound, crow hound' has recently been suggested, from Welsh and Cornish *bran* 'raven, crow' (a form familiar in Celtic names) which had undergone *i*-affection.<sup>7</sup> No doubt the sense depended on the social status of the holder, a Cornish slave having less choice in this matter than another.

In any case, these forms allow us to identify the Kent place-name Brenchley as perhaps being due to a settler with a Cornish name. It is interesting to see Cornish *e* represented by Old English *æ*, though that may here, as elsewhere, stand for 'e'; or possibly *ae* in *Textus Roffensis* is the non-Kentish equivalent of Kentish *e*; compare West Saxon *mæsse* 'mass' for Kentish *messe*.<sup>8</sup> More potentially worrying would be the borrowing of Old Cornish *-n-g-* here as *-nc-*; Old English had a single internal [g], albeit only after nasals (as here), so there was no barrier to Cornish *-n-g-* being borrowed as *-ng-*. However, there are parallels to this sound-substitution, such as Welsh Bangor borrowed as OE *Bancor* and Primitive Welsh \**Pengrüg* borrowed as OE *Pencric*.<sup>9</sup> However interpreted, the name Brenchley would seem to be evidence for a Welshman, Cornishman or Breton who, presumably, took part in the clearing of the Kentish Weald in the Anglo-Saxon period. It is worth also noting that the place-name contains an English genitive singular of the

<sup>1</sup> E. Ekwall, *The Concise Oxford Dictionary of English Place-Names*, 4th edn (Oxford, 1960), p. 63.

<sup>2</sup> N. R. Ker, *Catalogue of Manuscripts Containing Anglo-Saxon* (Oxford, 1957), p. 159.

<sup>3</sup> *Councils and Ecclesiastical Documents*, edited by A. W. Haddan and W. Stubbs, 3 vols (Oxford, 1869-78), I, 681; also M. Förster, 'Die Freilassungs-urkunden des Bodmin-Evangeliars' in *A Grammatical Miscellany Offered to Otto Jespersen*, edited by N. Bøgholm and others (London and Copenhagen, 1930), pp. 77-99 (no. XL, p. 95); cf. K. Jackson, *Language and History in Early Britain* (Edinburgh, 1953), pp. 59-60.

<sup>4</sup> Melville Richards, *Welsh Administrative and Territorial Units* (Cardiff, 1969), p. 73; *Gwaith Llywelyn Fardd I ac Eraill o Feirdd y Ddeuddegfed Ganrif*, edited by Kathleen Anne Bramley and others, *Cyfres Beirdd y Tywysogion*, 2 (Cardiff, 1994), pp. 443 and 469.

<sup>5</sup> J. Lloyd-Jones, *Geirfa Barddoniaeth Gynnar Gymraeg* (Cardiff, 1931-63), p. 522.

<sup>6</sup> cf. Jackson, *Language and History*, p. 465; O. J. Padel, *A Popular Dictionary of Cornish Place-Names* (Penzance, 1988), p. 16.

<sup>7</sup> A. J. Hughes, 'The Old Cornish Personal Name *Brenci* and Middle Welsh *Brengi/Bryngi*', *Cambridge Medieval Celtic Studies*, 22 (1991), 95-99.

<sup>8</sup> A. Campbell, *Old English Grammar* (Oxford, 1959), p. 87.

<sup>9</sup> Jackson, *Language and History*, p. 557, and remarks made there.

Brittonic personal name, showing that the place-name was coined by English-speakers, not Brittonic-speakers; it is not a Celtic place-name. This is what one would expect anyway, in a name with an English generic element.

This derivation allows us to rule out Sawyer's hesitant identification, in a Kentish charter of 724, of *Brentingesleag* (where the nuns of Minster-in-Thanel possessed swine pastures) with Brenchley.<sup>10</sup> (Perhaps *Brentingesleag* lay further east than Brenchley, near other places mentioned in the charter.) There is therefore no reason to think Brenchley had been cleared for swine pasture as early as the eighth century.<sup>11</sup> In fact, if the *Brengi* of Brenchley were a Cornishman, it would be unlikely to be an ancient settlement at all. The subjection of Cornwall culminated in the battle of Hingston Down in 838, though the Cornish still had some measure of independence a century later, in the time of Athelstan.<sup>12</sup> It is thus difficult to think of the Cornish as settling elsewhere in England until the conquest was long past, and they were assimilated into English society. The name *Brenchley* may, therefore, be of the eleventh century or little before. It is worth remembering here how late it was before the clearing of the High Weald was carried out, even if we must not be too ready, in Lennard's words, 'to fill the vacant spaces of the Domesday map with imagined woodland'.<sup>13</sup> Analysis of the name Brenchley thus provides unusual evidence for the kind of men who first settled the great Wealden Forest, as also for the movement of population in late Anglo-Saxon England.

<sup>10</sup> P. H. Sawyer, *Anglo-Saxon Charters. An Annotated List and Bibliography* (London, 1968), no. 1180.

<sup>11</sup> cf. F. M. Stenton, *Anglo-Saxon England*, 3rd edn (Oxford, 1971), pp. 283-84, discussing the charter of 724.

<sup>12</sup> Jackson, *Language and History*, p. 206.

<sup>13</sup> R. Lennard, *Rural England 1086-1135* (Oxford, 1959), p. 9 (cf. pp. 12-15); P. F. Brandon, 'New settlement: South-Eastern England', in *The Agrarian History of England and Wales*, II, 1042-1350, edited by H. E. Hallam (Cambridge, 1988), pp. 174-89 (pp. 179-80).

## Four Devon Place-Names

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The Devon place-names Clyst, Countisbury, Creedy (a river giving its name to Crediton, near Exeter), and Croyde have all been of disputed origin. What follows argues that all four names can be shown to be of British origin, and that they are thus evidence for Celtic survival in Devon. The four names are discussed in alphabetical order.

### Clyst

The Clyst, for most of its length more a stream than a river, runs some twelve miles through low-lying country in south-east Devon, entering the estuary of the Exe five miles below Exeter. It gives its name to ten villages, hamlets, and farms. Closest to the sea is Clyst St George, then Clyst St Mary, Bishop Clyst, Clyst Honiton, West Clyst, Broad Clyst, Ashclyst, Clyst St Lawrence, Clyst Hydon, and Clyst William (the last deriving from Old English *æwielm* 'spring', and not the Christian name).

Ekwall relates the name *Clyst* to Latin *cluo* 'I wash', Old English *hluttur* 'clean', the river-names Clyde in Scotland and Clydach in Wales, and proposes the meaning 'clean stream'.<sup>1</sup> But the present note tries to show that Ekwall's association of Clyst with these cognates is unfounded, and that another and simpler solution is possible.

Clyde and Clydach may be dealt with first. Clyde is certainly a British name meaning 'the washer, the strongly-flowing one', presumably the name of the river-goddess, as Watson observed.<sup>2</sup> Clydach, a

<sup>1</sup> E. Ekwall, *The Concise Oxford Dictionary of English Place-Names*, 4th edn (Oxford, 1960), pp. 113-14; compare J. E. B. Gover and others, *The Place-Names of Devon*, English Place-Name Society, 8-9 (Cambridge, 1931-32), I, 3.

<sup>2</sup> W. J. Watson, *The History of the Celtic Place-Names of Scotland* (Edinburgh, 1926), p. 44; A. L. F. Rivet and Colin Smith, *The Place-Names of Roman*