

A Slippery Customer: proto-Indo-European **(s)lei-* and its progeny in some place-names in Britain¹

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*'Twas brillig, and the slithy toves
Did gyre and gimble in the wabe...'*

When we hear those words of Lewis Carroll, we have little difficulty in grasping that, whatever *toves* might be, they are probably slippery, slithery, slidy, slimy, slick, sleek and slug-like. The many likely or possible descendants of Proto-Indo-European **(s)lei-* in English give us a clue to the ideas associated with that root: ideas of being polished, slippery, smooth, something that slides readily or is easily slipped over.²

In this paper, I shall propose that this **(s)lei-* root may offer us a clue to a range of early Celtic place-names in the Great Britain, chiefly river-names, and in particular the notable family of river-names of the 'Leven' type. Such names have long been referred by place-name scholars to an Indo-European root **lei-*, but that has generally been given senses like 'flow', appropriate but vague when applied to rivers. I shall suggest that there are characteristics shared by these particular rivers that support a more specific interpretation reflecting the connotations of **(s)lei-*, and shall seek to explain how, in some related hydronyms, derivatives of that root may be hard to distinguish from those descended from another proto-Indo-European root, meaning 'to pour, fill up'. In the course of this discussion, I shall also explore the problematic association of 'Leven' and other 'Lev-' names with elm-trees.

¹ This is a revised and expanded version of a paper delivered to the First International Conference on the Earliest Linguistic Strata of Ireland and Scotland, held at Queens University Belfast on September 5th-6th 2008. I am grateful to Queens University for their hospitality, to Prof Michéal Ó Mainnín and his colleagues who organised the Conference, and to several participants who drew my attention to relevant examples of place-names, especially in Ireland. Being much less acquainted with the topography or the early recorded forms of these Irish place-names, I have made only cautious reference to names in that country, but obviously my hypothesis needs to be tested against Irish, and Continental, examples.

² J. P. Mallory and D. Q. Adams, *The Oxford Introduction to Proto-Indo-European and the Proto-Indo-European World* (Oxford, 2006), §20.9, pp. 345, 347.

My examples will be drawn from the whole of Great Britain, though I shall pay especial attention to those in a region that includes southern Scotland and northern England: obviously the present Anglo-Scottish border is anachronistic in the considering the earliest linguistic strata, and it happens that a substantial proportion of the ‘Leven’ river-names, are found in Britain between Fife and the Humber, Loch Lomond and Morecambe Bay—the part of Britain where I have been studying Celtic toponymy for the past ten years.

***(s)lei- in the Celtic languages**

To begin with, a few basic principles of Proto-Indo-European and early Celtic philology that apply to this root **(s)lei*, with apologies to those much more expert in such matters than I am.³

Firstly, the initial [s-]: this is fugitive in words descended from this root in many languages including Goidelic, and is lost in Brittonic.⁴ Secondly, the diphthong [ei] is smoothed in early P- and Q-Celtic to a long vowel [ē], so the root in Brittonic or Pritenic is **lē-*. By the mid-first millennium AD, the diphthongal tendency had begun to reappear, and in Old Welsh, the consequent **leʰ* underwent drastic retraction, so that the modern Welsh outcome is *llwy-*. Next, we must take into account that defining characteristic of Indo-European, vowel-gradation, though we have only to note one ablaut variant, the zero-grade, which in the case of the diphthong [ei] simply lacks the [e], leaving us with [i], so we have **sli-*, which becomes early Celtic **li-*.

So far as I know, there are no words in any Celtic languages directly descended from the unmodified roots **lei-* or **li-*. In the place-names to be examined, the root is always modified with a following consonant (known as a root-determinative). In the majority of cases, the consonant is a bilabial, either [b] or nasal [m], so we have four possibilities in early Brittonic, **lēb-*, **lēm-*, **lib-* and **lim-*. Finally, in more senses than one, these modified roots emerge in place-names formed with one or more adjectival or nominal suffixes, such as *-et-*, *-an-*, *-ic-*, etc.

³ I am very grateful to both Dr Graham Isaac and to an anonymous referee for their advice on a number of philological points. Errors and confusion throughout this paper are, of course, my own.

⁴ However, it should be noted that Old Irish *slemon* ‘slippery, smooth’ retains the initial sibilant: see below under “The ‘Leven’ family”, especially note 8.

The ‘Leven’ family

In the first part of this paper, I shall review topographical evidence which may support the view that Leven, and other related names of rivers (and, possibly, of territories) in Great Britain, derive from **lēb-* or **lēm-* with a suffix *-no/ā-*.⁵ The closest parallel for such a formation in Welsh vocabulary is *llwyfan* ‘a platform, a stage’, from **(s)leib/m-anā- > *lēb/m-anā-*,⁶ related to Middle Irish *léiben*, Modern Irish and Scottish Gaelic *leibheann*.⁷ The modern Welsh word (recorded only from the 16th century) means ‘a floor or platform’, but in the Goidelic languages it refers to a wide range of level surfaces, natural or artificial.⁸

⁵ Necessary background to my argument is K. H. Jackson’s treatment of intervocalic *-m-* in *Language and History in Early Britain* (Edinburgh, 1953), especially §98–9, pp. 486–91, also his discussion of the reduction of the root vowel in Anglicised forms, *ibid.*, §204(A), p. 672. *-[a]mno/ā-* might be a participial suffix, as it may be in *Alauna* < **Al-amnā-*; see P. de Bernardo-Stempel, ‘Das indogermanische *m(V)no-* Verbaladjektiv in Keltischen’, in *Indogermanica et Caucasicas: Festschrift für K. H. Schmidt*, edited by R. Bielmeier and R. Stempel (Berlin, 1994), pp. 281–305.

⁶ On IE *ei* > close *ē* in early Celtic, see Jackson, *Language and History in Early Britain*, §28(10), pp. 330–1.

⁷ *Mír léiben* may well be a loanword from Brittonic.

⁸ Perhaps related, and common in place-names, are Middle Welsh *llyvyn* > Modern Welsh *llyfn*, along with Cornish *leven* (see H. Wyn Owen and R. Morgan, *Dictionary of the Place-Names of Wales* (Llandysul, 2007), p. 1v; O. J. Padel *Cornish Place-Name Elements*, English Place-Name Society, 56–57, (Nottingham, 1985), p. 148), and Old Irish *slemon*, becoming Modern Irish *sleamhain*, Scottish Gaelic *sleamhuin*: all these mean ‘polished, slippery, smooth’. If *slemon* and *llyvyn* are from the zero-grade form **(s)li-b/m-nā*, the survival of initial *s-* in these supports the derivation of the whole family of Celtic ‘smooth, level’ words from the Indo-European root under consideration. However Middle Welsh *llyvyn* was monosyllabic, in spite of the spelling, as is confirmed by poetic metre: in the Cornish and Goidelic forms, the vowel in the second syllable has been intruded, **libVn-*. Welsh *llefn* ‘kidneys’ (i.e. smooth things) < **lib/mna* (possibly neut. pl. in origin?) may also belong here; for the semantics, cf. Welsh *ysgyfaint* ‘lungs’ beside *ysgafn* ‘light’. Old Welsh *limnint* ‘they polish, make smooth’, may be from the same root as *llyfn*, though note P-Y. Lambert’s comparison with OIr *lomraid* in ‘Étymologies’, *Études Celtiques*, 17 (1980), 169–80 (p. 180). Old Breton *limn* glosses Latin *lentum*, implying a rather different sense, perhaps ‘slimy, sticky’; the Modern Breton noun *limn* ‘a file’ is from Latin *līma*, itself a descendant of **(s)lei-*. See further under “‘Gliding’ or ‘pouring’?” below.

***lēbonā-**

In Yorkshire, there were two rivers named Leven. The one in the former East Riding (*Leuene* from Domesday Book onwards) now survives as a village-name:⁹ the course of the river has been modified by drainage, but it flowed fairly directly across exceedingly flat, marshy land west of Holderness towards the Humber. That in the old North Riding (*Leuene* [1218x31] 15th ct, and 1268 on)¹⁰ rises on Kildale Moor on the north side of the North Yorkshire Moors, but it flows for most of its length (admittedly in a more winding course than most of the Levens) through lowland country below the Cleveland scarp to join the Tees near Yarm. Both these rivers were in areas of primary Anglian settlement, so it is likely that the proto-English speakers encountered them as **leⁱβan* < **lēb-(a)n-*,¹¹ with a non-nasal medial consonant which Old English speakers would have treated as [v], having no intervocalic [b]. In the fifth century, **leⁱman* with a nasal would still have been audibly different, and the river-names would have been Anglicised as **lēman*.¹²

On the other hand, most of the other examples are commonly assumed to have had a nasal determinative [-m-]. This is suggested by the possible connection between these ‘Leven’ names and the Roman-British names containing the element *Lemanā-*, as well as the apparent association of some of the northern examples with the Welsh or Gaelic forms of words for ‘elm’: however, both these lines of thinking raise problems, to which I shall return below. Staying for the moment with **lēb*, if the early Celtic form was **lēbnā*, nasalisation of [-b-] in the cluster [-bn-] would have been normal, i.e. **lēbnā* would become **lēmnā*, and the Yorkshire Levens would have to be explained by the intrusion of a svarabhakti vowel inhibiting nasalisation, **lēbVnā*. If, on the other hand, the suffix was *-anā*, we need to consider a parallel stem **lē-m-*. Now, Indo-European *(s)*lei-m-* gives us (West and North) Germanic **slīmaz*, English ‘slime’, Latin *līmus* ‘mud’, and Greek *λειμόν* ‘a wet place’ and *λειμάζ* ‘a slug’, so an early

⁹ A. H. Smith, *The Place-Names of the East Riding of Yorkshire and York*, English Place-Name Society, 14 (Cambridge, 1937), p. 72.

¹⁰ E. Ekwall, *English River-Names* (Oxford, 1928) p. 251; A. H. Smith, *The Place-Names of the North Riding of Yorkshire*, English Place-Name Society, 5 (Cambridge 1928), p. 4.

¹¹ If the suffix were **-mn-*, cf. note 5 above, the *-b-* could only be explained by simplification of the cluster *-bmn-*.

¹² Contrast the R. Lymn in Lincolnshire, discussed below, under ‘*lib/μ*’.

Celtic **lēmanā-* may well have existed alongside **lēbanā-* as a river-naming term, but its meaning would have still been to do with slippery surfaces and slithery movement.

****lēmanā-* in the south and west**

The earliest-documented name in Britain that is apparently from **lēm-* is that of the Lypne or East Rother in Kent (a former river, straightened to form the Royal Military Canal).¹³ The Roman *Portus Lemanis* and the modern settlement-name Lypne derive from the river-name, Roman-British *Lemana*. It flowed eastwards across the northern part of Romney Marsh, below the chalk escarpment, into the English Channel: a classic example of a river flowing across flat territory. That the river-name here was **Lēm-anā-* seems very probable, though—as we shall see—we may not be able to infer a similar etymology for all the *Leman-* names found in Classical sources.¹⁴ If so, early speakers of southern Old English would have heard **leⁱuan-*, which they would have adopted as **līman-*.¹⁵

There are few other names in southern Britain that can be confidently ascribed to this root. The R. Luney in Cornwall flows from granite upland near St Mewan down a steep-sided valley into Veryan Bay: it is only relatively ‘smooth’ as it approaches the sea by Caerhays. However, Padel derives the name, with ‘?’, from Cornish *leven* ‘smooth’ with the name-forming suffix *-i*.¹⁶ He also sees a possible lost stream-name in Porthleven, which does lie next to the extensive stretch of low-lying, sandy coast enclosing Loe Pool.¹⁷

¹³ Ekwall, *English River Names*, p. 244; A. L. F. Rivet and C. Smith, *The Place-Names of Roman Britain* (London, 1979), pp. 385–6.

¹⁴ See below under ‘**lēmanā-* in Cumbria and Scotland’, especially note 27.

¹⁵ Jackson, following Ekwall in this case, assumes a short *-e-*, raised to *-i-* here by early OE speakers (though *-em-* would also have subsequently become *-im-* in neo-Brittonic): see Jackson, *Language and History in Early Britain*, §6, p. 282; §204 (A2), pp. 672–3. On the problem presented by the OE (mis-?)interpretation of *-is* as a dative plural, see *ibid* §98(1), pp. 486–7 and V. Watts, *The Cambridge Dictionary of English Place-Names* (Cambridge, 2004), p. 389. If the etymology proposed above is correct, the *-ī-* would only have been shortened in late Middle English, following contraction to *Limne* 1475 etc.

¹⁶ Padel, *Cornish Place-Name Elements*, p. 148.

¹⁷ *Ibid*; see also O. Padel, *Cornish Place-Names* (Penzance, 1988), p. 142. As *leven* remained current in Cornish these names are not necessarily early.

The R. Lowman in Devon rises in the Blackdown Hills and flows down across relatively level territory to join the R. Exe at Tiverton. The topography, and *Lemene*, an associated settlement name, 1297, favour another **Lēm-anā-*, but other early forms are so various as to leave the origin very uncertain.¹⁸

In Wales, Pont y llwyfen in Llandinog Carmarthenshire is of interest.¹⁹ It is on a brook flowing down from steep hills, but then out across flat land to join the Afon Tywi south-west of Llandovery. The bridge is at the point where that brook was crossed by the Roman road from Llandovery to Carmarthen. There are about a dozen different places in Wales whose names contain *llwyfen* (in one case, *llwyf*), but most of these are likely to be named after prominent elm-trees. Pont y llwyfen could of course be ‘elm-bridge’, but the topography here does suggest that **Llwyfen* might have been the name of the (now apparently nameless) brook, and even that the place could have been known to the Romans as **Pons Lemanae*.

Further north in Wales, Afon Llefenni (Merionethshire) rises at Waun Llefenni in mountainous country to the south-east of Cader Idris, and flows down to join the Afon Dulas at Aberllefeni, which in turn joins the Afon Dyfi.²⁰ *Lloyveny* 1558 × 1603 implies **Llwyfenni*, perhaps from **lēman-* plus the naming suffix *-i* mentioned above.²¹ The modern **Llef-* may reflect shortening of the (unstressed) initial syllable in neo-Brittonic, but the possibility of an ancient hydronym with short *-e-*, **leman-*, is one we shall have to consider, along with the possibility that the form **Llwyf-* arose from chance similarity to the ‘elm’ word.²² It is not a likely place for

¹⁸ J. E. B. Gover, A. Mawer and F. M. Stenton, *The Place-Names of Devon*, 2 vols, English Place-Name Society, 8–9 (Cambridge, 1931–2), I (1931), 9. Other early forms include *Leman* 1612, but also *Lonmine*, *Lonmele* and *-luma* 1086, *-lumene* c.1166, *Luminee* 12th century [1329], *Lomene* 1284–6, *-lomene* 1303, all in related settlement names, as well as *Lomund Water* 1577. The preservation of intervocalic *-m-* this far west is, in any case, surprising.

¹⁹ Thus on OS map 1832, but Pant y llwyfen on the current edition; it is wrongly entered in Archif Melville Richards <www.e-gymraeg/enwaulleoedd/amr> at Llandinog Mon, but the map reference given there confirms the correct location.

²⁰ Archif Melville Richards s.n.

²¹ But *-enni* could reflect **-annjā-*, cf. Afon Gafenni/ Gefenni: see Wyn Owen and Morgan, *Dictionary of the Place-names of Wales*, s.n. Abergavenny, pp. 6–7.

²² See below under ‘*lemanā-* in Cumbria and Scotland’ and ‘The question of elms’. It could be from **liman-*, possibly related to the Goidelic words for ‘elm’, but see note 46 below.

elms, but nor is the territory low-lying or level—far from it, though Cwm Llefenni is, for these parts, a relatively wide, flat-bottomed valley. It must remain very doubtful.

****lēmanā*- in Cumbria and Scotland**

As I have mentioned, the greatest number of river-names of the ‘Leven’ type are to be found in northern England and southern Scotland, and these merit particular attention.

The short River Leven in Cumbria (formerly in Lancashire-over-Sands) is one of three ‘Levens’ that flow from substantial lakes: it drains from Windermere over glacial moraine and coastal sand and saltmarsh into Morecambe Bay.²³

In northern Cumberland, the Black and White Lynes rise in the Border hills, but below their confluence near Bewcastle the River Lyne flows pretty directly through lowland territory down to the Solway mosses, where it joins the Border Esk near the head of the Solway Firth. The Lyne and its twin headwaters are recorded as *Leven* from 1259 onwards, not becoming Lyne until the 18th century.

In one of the *awdlau* of Old Welsh, or possibly even earlier, date in the Book of Taliesin, there is reference to a battle at *Argoet Llwyfain*, ‘before the wood of Leven’.²⁴ Those eager to locate Urien’s kingdom of Rheged in Cumbria are wont to identify this with the Cumberland Lyne, though—as we are seeing—there are several other candidates and the name does not necessarily indicate a river: it could well be a district-name. The form *Llwyfain* is one of those which have led toponymists to associate names of the ‘Leven’ type with elm-trees, Welsh *llwyf*: I shall return to those shortly. In any case, it necessarily entails a long first vowel **lēb/m-* < **leib/m-*.

In West Dunbartonshire, the River Leven²⁵ has much in common with the Windermere Leven, flowing as it does from Loch Lomond through glacial moraine and rich silt down to the Clyde below the ancient citadel of

²³ E. Ekwall, *The Place-Names of Lancashire* (Manchester, 1922), p. 191; Ekwall, *English River Names*, pp. 250–2; D. Whaley, *A Dictionary of Lake District Place-Names* (Nottingham, 2006), p. 209.

²⁴ *The Poems of Taliesin*, edited by Sir I. Williams (Dublin, 1968), VI, p. 8, l. 20; see also the Introduction pp. xlv–xlvi and p. 77 n.

²⁵ W. J. Watson, *History of the Celtic Place-Names of Scotland* (Edinburgh, 1926) p. 119.

Alclud, Dumbarton. Its modern Gaelic name is *Abhainn Leamhain*, and *Leamhain* is the Gaelic name of the loch too, while the suffixed form *Leamhnaich* names the surrounding district, Lennox.

However, with this case we encounter a few problems. Firstly, we have to note once again that *Leamhain* is identical to the genitive singular or nominative plural of the modern Gaelic word for ‘elm tree’, *leamhan*. A second problem is presented by Ptolemy’s *Λεμαννόσιος κόλπος*, apparently the southern boundary of the *Καληδονίοι*, Caledonians, which was presumably somewhere in the vicinity of the Firth of Clyde.²⁶ Obviously it is tempting to associate this with the river- and loch-name **lēmanā-*, but *κόλπος* is ‘a gulf, a bay, an arm of the sea’ and there is no such feature directly associated with the river-mouth. It may refer to Gare Loch or Loch Long, though these are separated from the Lennox lowland by fair-sized hills and by the Roseneath peninsula between the two lochs; this chain of hills actually forms the tail of *Druim Alban*. It might even have been a name for the Firth of Clyde. Moreover, Ptolemy’s *-ε-* suggests a short vowel in the first syllable, so it cannot be assumed that *Λεμαννόσιος κόλπος* incorporates the element **lēman-*: as with *Afon Llefenni*, we may have to reckon with an ancient hydronymic element **leman-*, with a short first syllable, whose meaning and relationship (if any) to **(s)lei-* must remain obscure.²⁷

A further question concerns the relationship between the Gaelic and Anglo-Scots names for the loch: some scholars consider that Lomond is simply an Anglicised form of *Leamhain* (which Nicolaisen interprets as

²⁶ Watson, *History of the Celtic Place-Names of Scotland*, p. 19; Rivet and Smith, *The Place-Names of Roman Britain*, p. 387.

²⁷ See under ‘**lemanā-* in the south and west’, and further under ‘The question of elms’, below. A hexameter of Ausonius, *Ordo Urbium Nobilium: Narbo*, XI.19 in *Ausonii Opera*, edited by R. P. H. Green (Oxford, 1999) XXIV. 113, referring to Lake Geneva as the source of the Rhone, ends ‘... *genit/ōrē Lē/manno*’: this again implies short **Lem-* (being the final syllable of the penultimate foot, a dactyl). Among recent discussions of this and related names, P. Sims-Williams, *Ancient Celtic Place-Names in Europe and Asia Minor* (Oxford, 2006), p. 83, lists it under the heading LĒMO- ‘elm’, though his footnote acknowledges the etymological uncertainty surrounding this word; G. R. Isaac, ‘Scotland’ in *New Approaches to Celtic Place-Names in Ptolemy’s Geography* edited by J. de Hoz, E. R. Lújan and P. Sims-Williams (Madrid, 2005), pp. 196–7, acknowledges also the ecological improbability of ‘elm-water’, but note that neither addresses directly the possibility of a short *-e-* form **lem-*.

‘elm’²⁸). However, it is also the name of the great mountain overlooking the loch, Ben Lomond, which is in Gaelic *Beinn Laoimhuinn*, and I follow Watson²⁹ in deriving the Anglo-Scots name Lomond from P-Celtic **lumono-*: as modern Welsh *llumon* this is ‘a beacon’, but in mountain names it seems to signify one perceived as ‘central’, as in the case of *Pumllimon*, Plynlimon, at the heart of Wales.³⁰ The Gaelic form *Laoimhuinn*, interestingly and significantly, is not simply a Gaelicisation of the P-Celtic or Anglo-Scots form, but a Q-Celtic descendant from the same early Celtic **lumono-*, implying awareness of this mountain among Goidelic-speakers at an early date.³¹

It is intriguing that there is a close association between **lēmanā-* and **lumono-* both here and in Kinross, where the R. Leven flows from Loch Leven in the Lomond Hills. This river runs for most of its length fairly directly, without great bends, through relatively low-lying country in Fife, and enters the Firth of Forth through a flat, sandy estuary with dunes and (in earlier times) salt-marshes.³²

Territorial names from **lē-*

What I have said so far suggests something of a family resemblance among the rivers of the ‘Leven’ family: they are watercourses that flow, fairly directly and so quite rapidly, without slow meandering, across territory which is (especially in their lower reaches) relatively low-lying and flat. Three of them drain glacially-deepened lakes, flowing initially over moraine; most, as they approach their estuary or confluence, flow

²⁸ W. F. H. Nicolaisen, *Scottish Place-Names*, new edn, (Edinburgh 2001), p. 228. See also below, under ‘The question of elms’.

²⁹ Watson, *The History of the Celtic Place-Names of Scotland*, p. 212.

³⁰ See E. Hamp, ‘Varia 1. On the fundamental IE orientation’, *Ériu*, 25 (1974), 253–61 (pp. 256–58). Watson’s suggestion, *The History of the Celtic Place-Names of Scotland*, p. 212 n.1, that ‘Standard’ in southern Scottish and northern English hill-names arose from confusion between this element and Welsh *lluman* ‘a standard’ is maybe too ingenious. For Gaelic *laom* in hill-names, cf. Kenlum Hill (Anwoth) and Kendlum (Rerrick), both in Kirkcudbrightshire, both **ceann-laoim* ‘beacon-head’.

³¹ Watson, *The History of the Celtic Place-Names of Scotland*, p. 212.

³² This is *Leuine* 1040 × 57, *Leuen* 1150 × 53, etc. I am grateful to Dr Simon Taylor for information on this river-name. The modern pronunciation of both the Scottish Levens, with a long first vowel, probably reflects the prosody of the Gaelic forms: it is not a guide to their earlier history, nor evidence either way as to their relationship with those in England.

through sand, marsh or mudflats. An early Celtic river-name that suggests ‘sliding, gliding rapidly over a smooth surface’, would seem, on the face of it, a plausible etymon.

However, the northernmost Leven in Britain, Gaelic *Leamhain*, Inverness-shire/Argyll, presents a slightly different picture. It originates as the Blackwater and other burns draining mountain bogs and small tarns high on the *Druim Alban* watershed, where the railway line to Fort William runs between the remote stations at Rannoch and Corroul; it flows down a straight, narrow glen (detained now by the Blackwater Reservoir) into Loch Leven in Lochaber.³³ The territory around most of its length is far from flat: Glen Leven is overlooked by chains of Munros to the north and south. However, the lower end of Loch Leven lies in a giant amphitheatre, where towering mountains overlook an area of quite level ground around Ballachulish at the foot of Glencoe and down to Rubha a’ Bhaid Bheithe, where Loch Leven drains into the sea-loch Linnhe. The name Leven here seems to belong primarily to the loch, but perhaps **Lēmanā-* referred also to its setting, unique on the Highland west coast.

The possibility that names of this type may have referred additionally or even primarily to the relatively level territory surrounding a river, especially in its lowest reaches, is strengthened when we consider some formations probably involving other formations with **lēb-* or **lēm-*.

Aberlady in East Lothian is recorded as *Aberlauedy* c.1221, *Aberleuedi* 1214/29, *Aberleuedy* 1336, *Abirlady* 1542.³⁴ *Aber-* is, of course, the important Pritenic, northern Brittonic and Welsh element meaning ‘a confluence or estuary’. Aberlady is indeed at a markedly flat, sandy estuary with constantly shifting dune and sandbank formations: a derivative of **lēb* or **lēm* might well be involved. If so, there seem to be two suffixes, **-et-* and **-ico-*, together becoming neo-Brittonic³⁵ **-edig*.

³³ I am grateful to Dr Kay Muhr for pointing out to me that the R. Blackwater in Ireland flows across what was known in Old Irish as *Mag Léim*, implying that **Lēm-* was the former name of the river: both the Scottish and the Irish Blackwaters drain extensive areas of peat-bog.

³⁴ Watson, *The History of the Celtic Place-Names of Scotland*, pp. 460–1. On the attempt in the Aberdeen Breviary to associate this name with Gaelic *lobh* ‘putrefy’, and so with *Aberlessic* in the ‘Herbert Fragment’ of the Life of St Kentigern, see A. MacQuarrie, *The Saints of Scotland* (Edinburgh, 1997), p. 120.

³⁵ Here, I would say, ‘Brit-Prit’: it is reasonable to suppose that the P-Celtic of Lothian had a good deal in common with that across the Firth of Forth.

*-et-, a nominal suffix appended to nouns or adjectives, would give *lēb/m-et-, ‘a polished, smooth [river, etc.]’. The latter, an adjectival suffix,³⁶ would presumably have been a secondary addition to a pre-existing name, perhaps referring to ‘territory around the river *Lēb/meto-’; compare *Leamhnaich* / Lennox, *lēmanāco-, ‘territory around the river and loch *Leamhain*’.³⁷ *Lēbetico- or *lēmético- would have become, by the mid-first millennium AD, *leiβedīg or *leiuedīg; by the central middle ages, either would have become *levedig. *Levedig would have sounded to speakers of late Northumbrian Old English or proto-Scots very similar to *levedi*, the descendant of earlier Old English *hlæfdīge* ‘loaf-distributor’, our modern word ‘lady’, and it is not surprising that the modern name has emerged as Aberlady. However, the river here is not the *Lady, but the West Peffer Burn, twin of the East Peffer Burn; between them, they almost make an island of the North Berwick headland. Peffer, from Brittonic or Pritenic *pebro-, is itself an ancient and interesting river-name meaning ‘bright, radiant’, perhaps referring to the upper reaches of the burn, but it is of course quite possible that *Pebro- was originally the name only of the eastern burn, and the more appropriate *Lēbeto- or *Lēmeto- belonged to the western one.

I have pointed out above that *Argoet Llwyfain* in the Book of Taliesin may well refer to a district rather than a river. In the same group of *awdlau* we also have a number of allusions to *Luyuenid*.³⁸ This is plausibly identified with the River Lyvennet in Westmorland³⁹—at least, there are no other place-names in Cumbria or elsewhere so closely comparable, though, again, we should note that *Luyuenid* is not a river, but (apparently) the location of Urien’s chief residence, or the district in which that lay—and, again, there is a hint of elms. The Lyvennet is, it must be admitted, unlike most of the Levens: it is more of an upland stream, rising on Crosby Ravensworth Fell and flowing, in a fairly straight course, parallel to the

³⁶ Similar in meaning to *-āco-*, becoming Welsh *-awg*, Irish and Scottish Gaelic *-ach*, and possibly a secondary development from that in Brittonic: see P. Russell, *Celtic Word-Formation: the Velar Suffixes* (Dublin 1990), pp. 68–76, 80–4.

³⁷ See above, under ‘*lēmanā- in Cumbria and Scotland’. That formation could well, of course, be Gaelic, but may reflect an early (P- or Common) Celtic ancestor.

³⁸ Williams, *The Poems of Taliesin*, IV. 21, p. 4; VII. 19, p. 8; VIII. 27, p. 10; IX. 10, p. 11; X. 18, p. 12: see Introduction pp. xlv–xlv and pp. 57 nn., 109 nn.

³⁹ A. H. Smith, *The Place-Names of Westmorland*, 2 vols, English Place-Name Society, 42–3 (Cambridge, 1967), I, 10, and see also Introduction pp. xxx–xxxii.

M6 motorway and West Coast main line on their long descent from Shap Fell, down to join the Eden near Temple Sowerby. However, the Eden Valley widens in a fairly flat, marshy area above and around this confluence, and it is conceivable that a formation **lēbanijo-* or **lēmanijo-* referred to this district.

There are a couple of cases where a formation from **lēm-* may have been a territorial name not associated with a specific river. Aberlemno in Angus preserves a name with the adjectival suffix *-ācā-*, modern Gaelic *-(e)ach*: it is comparable to the formation in *Leamhnaich*, Lennox.⁴⁰ The situation here is complicated, as the stream at Aberlemno is not called Lemno, though there is a stream of that name elsewhere in Angus. The location is far from flat, though there is low-lying land downstream as it flows towards the South Esk. This was, to judge by its sculptured stones, an important place in Pictish times, and perhaps Gaelic *Leamhnaich* < Pictish **Levnaug* < eCelt **Lē-m-an-acā-* was the name of a district, in which Aberlemno was an early centre of power or a ritual site.

Leeming Lane in Yorkshire North Riding is an ancient ridgeway on the Magnesian Limestone south of Catterick, followed by Dere Street, the Great North Road, and now the A1: it is a route of great historic importance. Leeming Beck is a very modest stream running down the east side of the ridge, but the name, if it is from **lēm-*, is more likely to refer to the fairly broad, level area on the ridge-top around Leeming Bar.⁴¹ However, this would be exceptional as an ‘upland’ **lēm-* formation and early forms like *Liemwic* c.1200 leave it in doubt. *Leaming* and *Leam* are recorded in the *English Dialect Dictionary* from the northern counties as a word for an ancient road or a place on such a road:⁴² this usage probably derives from the famous Leeming Lane, though of course a common origin in **lēm-* is possible. *Leaming* House at Watermillock in Cumberland, likewise on a ridgeway followed by a Roman road, is probably an example of this dialectal usage, though it could be ancient.⁴³

⁴⁰ Watson, *History of the Celtic Place-Names of Scotland*, p. 464.

⁴¹ Smith, *The Place-Names of the North Riding of Yorkshire*, p. 227; Ekwall, *English River Names*, p. 247, derives the stream-name tentatively from OE *lēoma* ‘light’.

⁴² J. Wright, *English Dialect Dictionary* (London, 1898–1905) s.v.

⁴³ A. M. Armstrong, A. Mawer, F. M. Stenton and B. Dickins, *The Place-names of Cumberland*, 3 vols, English Place-Name Society, 20–22 (Cambridge, 1950) I, 257, *Whaley Dictionary of Lake District Place-Names*, p. 209.

Finally under this heading, a formation with root-determinative *-n-* is likely in Leen in Herefordshire, which was formerly both a river- and a district-name, but now survives only as a farm-name. It is an area of very flat, marshy land north of Leominster, which was named from the Leen (*Leonis monasterium* 1080 × 90).⁴⁴

The question of elms

So where do elms come in? The received view among Indo-European philologists these days is that the (North and West) Indo-European words for ‘elm’ derive from a root with an initial laryngeal plus vowel, **h₁elem*.⁴⁵ This best explains Slavonic forms like Russian *ilem* as well as Latin *ulmus* and Germanic forms like English ‘elm’, but it raises a problem for the Celtic words: Welsh *llwyf* seems to imply **leim(an)-*, becoming early Celtic **lēman-*, while Old Irish *lem*, later *leamhan* or *leamhán*, requires something like **liman-* to give early Goidelic **leman-*.⁴⁶ Eric Hamp has proposed an alternative derivation, from our **(s)lei-m-*, zero-grade **(s)li-m-*.⁴⁷ His assumption that elms are characteristically ‘slippery’ is much more true of the American Slippery Elm, *Ulmus rubra*, with its characteristically viscous cambium than it is of European species. Admittedly, modern Irish *leamhán* can mean ‘cambium’ of any tree, but this is probably a generalisation of the mutated form of *sleamhán*, which can also mean ‘cambium’. *Sleamhán* belongs to the **(s)lei-* family, but it is impossible to say whether *leamhán* in the sense of ‘cambium’ has fallen together with the ‘elm’ word from a different root, or whether the two senses are semantic variants from a common **(s)lēman-* < **(s)lei-*. Nevertheless, the important point in the context of our enquiry is that the Welsh word appears to reflect a diphthongal form of the Indo-European ‘elm’ root, which (whether or not it was related to **(s)lei-*) would have

⁴⁴ B. Coplestone-Crow, *Herefordshire Place-Names*, British Archaeological Reports, British Series 214 (Oxford, 1989), pp. 6–9, 156. See below for discussion of R. Lyne, Northumberland and R. Leen, Nottinghamshire, both of which Ekwall, *English River Names*, p. 247, associated with this name.

⁴⁵ Mallory and Adams, *The Oxford Introduction to Proto-Indo-European*, §10.1, pp. 159–61, especially p. 162: note that *Ulmus mantana* [sic] should read *Ulmus glabra ssp montana*; see also P. Friedrich, *Proto-Indo-European Trees* (Chicago, 1970).

⁴⁶ However, Sims-Williams, *Ancient Celtic Place-Names*, p. 83 n. 40 argues that this is uncertain. See also note 27 above.

⁴⁷ E. P. Hamp, ‘On Notable Trees’, *Bulletin of the Board of Celtic Studies*, 30 (1982), pp. 42–4.

fallen together with our ‘smooth’ word at some point. If the ancestor of the ‘Leven’ names was **lēm-anā-*,⁴⁸ this could have been in the early Celtic period; if on the other hand it was **lēbanā-* or **lēb/m-nā-* (the vowel in the final syllable of historical forms being intrusive),⁴⁹ the homophony would have arisen only in neo-Brittonic.

The only native elm in north Britain is (or, sadly, was) the Wych Elm, *Ulmus glabra*. This did not form single-species stands or elm-woods, but occurred in clusters or as scattered trees in mixed broadleaf woodland, often with oak, but especially with ash.⁵⁰ Elm would have flourished on rich alluvial soils, such as those in the vicinity of most of our ‘Leven’ rivers, but it disliked waterlogged or flood-prone conditions, it was not a riverside tree. Admittedly, Indo-European tree-names do wander between species: modern English ‘lime’ is probably a metathesised form of ‘elm’, **lem* that replaced Old English *lind* (but confusion between elm and lime is unlikely in much of the north, where lime was probably not native).⁵¹ A group of Cornish and Breton words with a root (or a pair of confusable roots) **elμ/eμl* applied to both elms and aspens—aspens are, of course, riverside trees, but so commonly so as to be hardly a distinguishing feature.⁵²

In any case, the idea of major rivers being named after trees, whether individual specimens or collective species, seems questionable. Peter Kitson has presented a convincing argument that the ‘Derwent’ family of

⁴⁸ Or, indeed, the ancestor of Welsh *llwyfan* ‘stage’, see above under “The ‘Leven’ family”.

⁴⁹ See note 8 above, and cf. Welsh *llyfn*, though this is from a zero-grade form of the root; see above, under “The ‘Leven’ family”.

⁵⁰ O. Rackham, *The History of the Countryside* (London, 1986), pp. 232–47; O. Rackham, *Trees and Woodlands in the British Landscape*, rev. edn (London, 1990) pp. 19–23; O. Rackham, *Woodlands* (London, 2006), pp. 360–62.

⁵¹ Rackham, *History of the Countryside*, pp. 68–71; Rackham, *Trees and Woodlands*, pp. 26–31; Rackham, *Woodlands*, chapter 4, especially pp. 82–90: the predominant lime-tree of ‘wildwood’ in the south was the Small-Leafed Lime, *Tilia cordata*.

⁵² Padel, *Cornish Place-Name Elements*, p. 92; note, along with Padel’s discussion there of Cornish *elaw* “‘elm-trees’ (?)”, Rackham’s observation, “elms, now so typical of Cornwall, are apparently absent from its place-names”, *History of the Countryside*, p. 209. On OE *æspe* in place-names, see A. H. Smith, *English Place-Name Elements*, 2 vols, English Place-Name Society, 25–26 (Cambridge, 1956), I, 5, s.v. *æspe*, and D. Parsons and T. Styles with C. Hough, *The Vocabulary of English Place-Names (Á-Box)* (Nottingham, 1997), p. 34, s.v. *æspe*: it does not seem to occur in river or stream-names.

river-names derives from an ancient hydronym **drawant-* (from proto-Indo-European **dreh_a-* ‘run’) which happened to become similar in sound to the Brittonic inflected (ultimately singularive) form **derwen-* (from Indo-European **deru-*, ‘oak’).⁵³ When our **lēmanā-* (or, to cover all possibilities, **(s)lēb/m(a)nā-*) as a river and/or district-name had become a homophone of the ‘elm’ word, such a name would doubtless have suggested elms to Celtic speakers, though it was a false guide to the real origin.⁵⁴

This is not to rule out the possibility that lesser streams could well be ‘elm-brooks’.⁵⁵ Lem Brook in Worcestershire might well be from Brittonic **lēm* ‘elm’.⁵⁶ It rises in Old Red Sandstone hills in the Wyre Forest, being one of the headwaters of the Dowles Brook that flows down to the Severn at Bewdley. It is a little hill-stream, quite unlike any of the ‘Leven’ family. It is overlooked by Lem Hill, and in a district where a prominent elm-tree or stand of elm-trees might well have marked either the stream or the hill (if the latter, the stream was named after the hill).

However, as to the widely-accepted derivation of the ‘Leven’ type and several other river-names from the early Celtic ‘elm-tree’ root **lēm-*, I agree with those who have criticised this on both phonological and ecological grounds, but suggest that some river-names of this type did come to be equated, by speakers of Brittonic and Goidelic, with forms of their words for ‘elm’, as a result of phonological coincidence.

This obviously has implications for other river-names (and a few district-, island- and settlement-names) belonging to this ‘Leven’ family, including perhaps those in Classical sources containing the element *Leman-*,⁵⁷ in Britain, Ireland and on the Continent.⁵⁸ Full consideration of

⁵³ P. Kitson, ‘British and European River-Names’, *Transactions of the Philological Society*, 94 (1998), pp. 73–118.

⁵⁴ See above, under “**lemanā-* in Cumbria and Scotland”.

⁵⁵ However, Smith, *English Place-Name Elements*, I, 150 does not list any English hydronyms with *elm*.

⁵⁶ Ekwall, *English River Names*, p. 243.

⁵⁷ Even if some (at least) of these preserved an ancient hydronymic element with short *-e-* (see note 27 above), the similarity between **leman-* and **lēman-* would probably have been sufficient to prompt the kind of etymological mis-identification that Kitson perceives in those from **drawant-*.

⁵⁸ On the Continent, the best-known example is *Lacus Lemannus*, Lac Léman, Lake Geneva, but see note 27 above. There are also the river-name Limagne in France, and a good many place-names and ethnic-names with *Lem-* or *Lim-* which may or may not

these would be beyond the scope of the present paper. Suffice to say that the still largely-held view that these all refer to elm-trees may merit critical examination.⁵⁹

‘Gliding’ or ‘pouring’?

The case I am presenting is similar to that put forward by L.-F. Flutre in 1957 and supported by Rivet and Smith which derives such names from an Indo-European root **lei-*:⁶⁰ that would indeed be the ‘standard’ Indo-European form from proto-Indo-European **(s)lei-*. However, these scholars take that root to mean ‘pour, flow’, seeing it as the etymon of Welsh *llif*, ‘a flood, deluge, stream, current’,⁶¹ and this assumption has informed the most commonly proposed alternative to **lēm-* ‘elm’. But Welsh *llif* must be < **līmo-*, entailing IE **lē-*, certainly not **lei-*.⁶² *Geiriadur Prifysgol Cymraeg* very reasonably associates *llif* with the Irish verb [*do-*]*linim* ‘I flow’ and, more remotely, with the verb *línaid* ‘fills’ and the comparative adjective *lía* ‘more’.⁶³ Current scholarship derives these in turn from ablaut variants of proto-Indo-European **pelh₁-*, meaning ‘pour, fill up’.⁶⁴ Moreover, Flutre, again followed by Rivet and Smith, propose an early Celtic **lim-* meaning ‘marsh’, making a semantic leap

be associated either with **(s)lei-* or with elm-trees. See P. Sims-Williams, *Ancient Celtic Place-Names*, p. 83–84, with n. 40 and map 4.6. With regard to Ireland, Dr P. McKay assures me (pers. comm.) that, in his view, several place-names in Ireland with *leamh* or *leamhán* are much more likely to refer to ‘level’ places or (in the mountains, especially) to sloping ‘inclined planes’ than to elms.

⁵⁹ The scope of such a comprehensive consideration is hinted at by Isaac, ‘Scotland’, p. 196–7: “Various comparanda seem more immediately relevant [sc. than the Celtic ‘elm’ words], e.g. Gk *leimōn* n ‘meadow’, *limén* ‘harbour’, Latin *limus* ‘crooked’, *limes* ‘border...’, ON *limr* ‘twig’”: *leimōn* and *limus* are both likely to be from **(s)lei-*; for *limes*, see note 76 below.

⁶⁰ Rivet and Smith, *Place-Names of Roman Britain*, pp. 385–86.

⁶¹ Wyn Owen and Morgan, *Dictionary of the Place-Names of Wales*, p.23, derive the island-name *Enlli*, Bardsey, from ‘[t]he intensive prefix *an-* or *en-*’ and ‘*llif* with loss of final *-f*’, but Isaacs comments ‘there is a good chance that *Ynys Enlli* stands for earlier **Ynys Fenlli* “Island of Benlli”, a legendary figure’.

⁶² Jackson, *Language and History in Early Britain*, §16 p. 304 and §17(2) p. 305.

⁶³ *Geiriadur Prifysgol Cymraeg II* Cardiff 1987 s.v. See also ‘**(s)lei-* in the Celtic languages’, especially note 8, above.

⁶⁴ Mallory and Adams, *The Oxford Introduction to Proto-Indo-European*, §19.2, p. 319. If it is a cognate, *llif* might possibly be from a lengthened grade form with metathesis, **plēh₁-m-*.

from ‘flooded land’, although the root would rather suggest a fast-flowing, powerful river. In any case, while such a word could be derived from the zero-grade **(s)li-*, the ‘Leven’ names formed from **lēb/m-* require the e-grade **(s)lei-* becoming early Celtic **lē-*. If there was such a word as **lim-* in early Celtic, it could not have been the direct ancestor of Leven. **(s)lei-*, I argue, might present a more satisfactory starting-point for consideration of these names, both formally and semantically.

On the other hand, early Celtic roots showing the sequence **li-* could indeed derive either from the zero-grade **(s)li-* and carry a sense of ‘gliding smoothly’, or from **lē- > *lī-* as the early Celtic root of *llif* and *[do-]línim*, with a sense of ‘pouring, flowing’.⁶⁵ Changes in vowel-quantity in both neo-Brittonic and Middle English can leave the root vowel-length uncertain, so when dealing with river-names, we may not readily be able to distinguish between the two senses. The relationship between names implying **lim-n-* or **lin-* is highly problematic, but still, in some cases, topographical considerations may help us to see a balance of probability.

****lib/μ-***

Ekwall, in his discussion of the ‘Leven’ and related groups of river-names referred to Ptolemy’s Λιβνίου ποταμού έκβολάι, naming a river in western Ireland.⁶⁶ Whether it was the R. Leven in Co. Galway or the R. Laune in Co. Kerry,⁶⁷ it would appear to be a member of the **(s)lei-* family, but a different formation from that of the British ‘Leven’ names: it seems to

⁶⁵ If there was a naming element **leman-* with short *-e-* (see note 27 above), that vowel could have been raised to *-i-* before the nasal consonant, especially in neo-Brittonic when it was in pre-stress position: see Jackson, *Language and History in Early Britain*, §6(20), pp. 278–79.

⁶⁶ Ekwall, *English River Names*, pp. 250–52, 277.

⁶⁷ The river, presumably **Libnio-*, is identified with the Galway Leven by J. Koch, *An Atlas for Celtic Studies* (Oxford, 2007), § 14b and §14.2, but with the Laune in Kerry by P. de Bernardo Stempel, ‘Ptolemy’s Celtic Italy and Ireland: a Linguistic Analysis’, in *Ptolemy: towards a linguistic atlas of the earliest Celtic Place-names of Europe*, edited by D. N. Parsons and P. Sims-Williams (Aberystwyth, 2000), pp. 81, 103. Both rivers are Modern Irish *Leamhain*. The former drains from Lough Rea below the Slieve Aughty Mountains, but flows for much of its length through low-lying country to its estuary, perhaps Ptolemy’s έκβολάι, in Dunbalcaun Bay. The latter drains from Lough Leane and flows through fine agricultural land down to Dingle Bay. Both have much in common with others we have visited, especially those flowing from lakes.

incorporate the zero-grade **(s)li-* with the bilabial determinative and suffixed *-n-* and the adjectival *-jo-* that we have seen in **lēb/manijo-*, Lyvennet.⁶⁸

The River Lymn in Lincolnshire rises on the Lincolnshire Wolds but soon flows down to and across the Lincolnshire Marsh (where it is now channelled as the Steeping River) to the North Sea at Gibraltar Point, south of Skegness. It seems a likely relative of the ‘Leven’ family. It is a closely similar formation to **Libnio-*, but we can be sure that the root-determinative here was nasal: like the Yorkshire Levens north of the Humber it is in an area of very early Anglian settlement, and in this case, the Germanic-speakers heard the consonant as a nasal and preserved it as *-m-*.⁶⁹

The short River Lim or Lyme rises from springs in chalk upland just north of Uplyme in Devon and flows quickly, partly underground, down into Lyme Bay at Lyme Regis, in Dorset.⁷⁰ Its course is quite steeply downhill all the way, without any ‘level’ stretch, so it seems much more likely to be from the ‘pouring’ root.

The River Leam in the English midlands rises near Hellidon on the Northamptonshire ironstone belt, but flows for most of its rather winding course through fairly low-lying country to Leamington and thence to the Warwickshire Avon. Early forms are *on Limenan* (956 [11th century]) etc.⁷¹ In Devon, the River Lemon rises on the eastern edge of Dartmoor below Hay Tor and flows fairly directly down to the Teign at Newton Abbott.⁷² Even in its lower reaches, the land it flows through is only relatively level. Both the Leam and the Lemon are probably **Lī/i-m-enā-*, but whether ‘sliding or ‘pouring’ is uncertain.⁷³

⁶⁸ Such a zero-grade form may be the etymon of Modern Welsh *llyfn* Cornish *leven*, Old Breton *limn*, ‘level, smooth, sleek’, but see note 8 above.

⁶⁹ Ekwall, *English River Names*, p. 244: *Limene* 12th century (1331), *Limine* 1276.

⁷⁰ Ekwall, *English River Names*, p. 274; Gover, Mawer and Stenton, *Place-Names of Devon*, p. 8.

⁷¹ Ekwall, *English River Names*, p243, J. E. B. Gover, A. Mawer and F. M. Stenton in collaboration with F. T. S. Houghton, *The Place-Names of Warwickshire*, English Place-Name Society, 13 (Cambridge, 1936), p. 4: *on Limenan* 956 [11th century], *Leomen-* 1033 [c.1200], *Lemin-* from 1232, *Leam* from 1576.

⁷² Gover, Mawer and Stenton, *Place-Names of Devon*, p. 9: *Lymen-* 10th century [1323], *Limene* 1244.

⁷³ Llyfni (flowing into Caernarvon Bay), with at least 3 others (Brecknockshire, Denbighshire, Glamorgan) in Archif Melville Richards, are from Welsh *llyfn* with the

Morley Lime (with Morley Farm and Morley Lane) in Derbyshire is not, and is evidently not derived from, any river- or stream-name.⁷⁴ The name apparently refers to a low dome of waterstone and sandstone rising above boulder clay on the edge of the coal-measures. It is just conceivable that it was a district-name referring to the relative ‘smoothness’ of the hill, but it remains very obscure.⁷⁵ It certainly has no connection with the (interrupted) series of ‘Lyme’ names that is found along the western edge of the High Peak from the Manchester embayment south to head of the Trent, and extending west along the Severn-Weaver watershed. Richard Coates has discussed these fully, giving convincing reasons why they should not be associated with the ‘Leven’ or ‘Lyne’ river-names (nor, indeed, with elms).⁷⁶ If he is right with his alternative proposal, Brittonic **līm-* adopted from Latin *līmen* or *līmes*, Lymbrook on the Derbyshire / Yorkshire (West Riding) border—surely a very ancient boundary—is likely to have the same origin (the adjacent Limb Hill being a back-formation).⁷⁷

***lin-**

The Northumberland Lyne, unlike that in Cumberland, is *Lina* c.1050 and consistently so in subsequent records, implying **li-* plus a dental nasal root-determinative [-n-].⁷⁸ Such a formation could be from the ‘pour, flow’ root, but this modest river, though it rises in gently hilly country near Longhorsley, flows for most of its length across the Northumberland coastal plain, some five miles wide at this point, into the North Sea at Lynemouth. A ‘smooth’ interpretation seems likely.⁷⁹

nominative suffix *-i*, but need not necessarily be early; R. Llynant (Montgomeryshire, Merioneth → R. Dovey), formed with Welsh *-nant* ‘valley’, is a secondary formation from the valley-name, not early.

⁷⁴ K. Cameron, *The Place-Names of Derbyshire*, 3 vols, English Place-Name Society, 27–29 (Cambridge, 1959), I, 486.

⁷⁵ Elms could well have flourished here, but there is no trace of **lēmu* in early forms.

⁷⁶ R. Coates, ‘The Lyme’, *Journal of the English Place-Name Society*, 36 (2003–04), 39–50.

⁷⁷ Cameron, *Place-Names of Derbyshire*, II, 240–1. As suggested in Coates, ‘The Lyme’, at p. 49, the vowel would have been shortened before the *-mbr-* in Middle English, prior to the back-formation of Limb Hill.

⁷⁸ Ekwall, *English River Names*, p. 276.

⁷⁹ The vowel could have been lengthened in a neo-Brittonic monosyllable **līn* or ME inflected **līne*.

As mentioned above, Ekwall associated the Lyne, and the Herefordshire Leen, with the River Leen that flows from near Newstead Abbey down through the city of Nottingham to the Trent.⁸⁰ The part of Nottingham around its confluence with the Trent was marshy and notoriously unhealthy as late as the 19th century, but variation in early forms, including *Liene* c.1200, *Lene* 1218 on, *Leen* 1232 makes the association with the Northumberland Lyne questionable.

The Cornish R. Lynher rises near Altarnun on the east side of Bodmin Moor and flows south down a long, deep valley to St Germans, where it turns east (and acquires the alternative name St Germans River) to flow across tidal mudflats until it joins the Tamar at Saltash.⁸¹ The formation is probably **līnārā-*, root **lī-* with determinative *-n-* and the common river-naming suffix *-ārā-*; the long vowel (reflected in modern pronunciation) makes ‘pouring’ more likely. The R. *Lynor* in Devon, now Spratford Stream, is a tributary of the R. Culm: it gave the parish of Leonard its name. It seems to be a similar formation, but the root is uncertain.⁸² In the East Lothian parish of East Linton there is a 15th century record of a place named *Lyneringham*; a field named Laringham Hill may hint at its location.⁸³ The generic *-ham* is undoubtedly the early Northumbrian Old English *-hām*, ‘a farming settlement, a homestead with its associated land’ probably dating from the earliest phase of Northumbrian colonisation in the seventh century. The connective *-ing-* is presumably the name-forming suffix *-ing²*, so *Lyneringham* is the ‘farm named after *Lyner*’, strongly suggesting another river-name of this kind. However the river on which East Linton stands is the East Lothian Tyne, which itself has, of course, a very ancient name. Still, the Hedderwick Burn flows from the Lammermuirs down through the hamlet of that name to run parallel to the Tyne in

⁸⁰ Ekwall, *English River Names*, p. 247; J. E. B. Gover, A. Mawer and F. M. Stenton, *The Place-Names of Nottinghamshire*, English Place-Name Society, 17 (Cambridge, 1940), p. 5.

⁸¹ Padel, *Cornish Place-Names*, p. 112: *Linar* l.11th century, *Liner* c.1125.

⁸² Gover, Mawer and Stenton, *Place-Names of Devon*, pp. 9, 549; Ekwall, *English River-Names*, p. 275.

⁸³ J. Bain, ‘Notes on the Trinitarian or Red Friars in Scotland, and on a recently discovered charter of Alexander III confirming the foundation of Houston by Cristiana Fraser, widow of Sir Roger de Moubray’, *Proceedings of the Society of Antiquaries of Scotland*, 12 (1887), pp. 28–32; W. Patterson ‘East Lothian’ at <www.spns.org.uk/CtEastL.htm>. I am grateful to Mr Patterson for additional information about the location.

the lowest-lying part of East Linton parish, at the foot of gently-sloping land below Laringham Hill, and on through fairly level territory to join that river in Tynningehame parish. *Lynner-* might have been an earlier name for that burn: if so, in its lower reaches, it could be said to ‘glide’.

River- and territorial names of the ‘Lyme’ and ‘Lyne’ types are even more problematic than the ‘Leven’ family. Nevertheless, these topographical considerations suggest that one might cautiously propose a derivation from the zero-grade form **(s)li-* plus a nasal root-determinative at very least for the Lincolnshire Lymn and the Northumberland Lyne.

Conclusion

The aim of this paper has been to draw attention to the topographical considerations that seem to favour a derivation from proto-Indo-European **(s)lei*, early Celtic **lē-*, for several rivers in Great Britain. That root seems to offer an appropriate semantic denotation for rivers that flow for much of their courses—fairly directly, not in a sluggish or winding way—across relatively level land, and/or for the land over which they flow. This applies especially well to the ‘Leven’ family of river-names in northern Britain. More tentatively, it is suggested that **(s)lei-* or its zero-grade **(s)li-* may also be relevant to some other river-names of the ‘Lyme’, ‘Lyne’ and ‘Lynher’ types, and to possible territorial names referring to land that is, in some sense, ‘smooth’.

The Classical *Leman-* names present difficulties which are beyond the scope of this paper to discuss in detail. Suffice to say that they may not all be of the same origin: if they had a long *-e-*, derivation either from **(s)lei-* or from the root of Welsh *llwyf* ‘elm’ is possible. However, the association with elm trees may, as I have argued, be illusory as far as the ultimate origin of the ‘Leven’ type names is concerned, though it could well be an association with a very long history.

None of the names considered in this paper can be regarded as straightforward, and this contribution to the discussion of them makes no claim to offer the last word on the subject. Undoubtedly a full examination of the philological questions they raise would require further consideration of these British names in the context of a similar review of the topography, and a much more extensive discussion of the etymology, of the (probably or possibly) related river- and other place-names in Ireland and on the Continent. Nevertheless, these topographical observations may carry the debate a little further forward.