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. This paper is interested especially in locating new sites and in assessing the significance of known sites, while the historic records and documents are being used in 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 relate to burial sites, such as beorg, kilu, karpr, burgen, group and uru: elements which refer to a supernatural presence, such as holy, pinn, pinnol, wirwinna, skiddis and byrns; and elements which indicate locations or Roman sites, and topography. It is more important to the historian are the elements which may help to locate lost medieval settlements, such as habitation elements incorporated in field-names. Very often the names of places referred to in medieval 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 medieval 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 strre, canale, brweag, fawr and ferfa, 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-medieval archaeologist; 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 contour 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 Domeday Book for northern England as if these were the names of Late AngloSaxon or Early Norman settlements. But Domeday Book and other early Norman documents for the north refer not to settlements but to entire villages and they describe a vill with a central nucleated settlement in exactly the same way as a vill which had no nucleated centre. Indeed some villages never seem to have contained a settlement of the same name as the vill, and this is especially noticeable with those whose names contain elements denoting the general topographical features of the vill itself, such as field or land. This suggests that in some cases the place-name may first have applied to the whole vill, 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 is 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 vills, may have to be rethought.

Notes

* This paper, which was delivered at the tenth annual Conference of the English Place-Name Society, will be published in full in the English Place-Name Society Journal, 11 (1976-9).

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

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THE COASTAL TOPONYMS OF ANGLESEY*

European onomasticians 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 origins of the name, and in assessing its topographical and historical implications. 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 household names and well domestic names are the whole domain of states 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 this way, therefore, we have to supplement the documentary evidence with field-work and oral collecting.

Our survey of Anglesey coastal names was based on 60 OS maps, on an exhaustive combing of OS maps and on documentary and oral fieldwork. 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 are on the whole late. Few predate 1500. The majority were attested from the XVIII and more especially from the XIX centuries. A significant number had no written documentation. In those sample areas where we conducted field-work, we found approx. 23% 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 the case of Welsh coastal terms - makes onomastic fieldwork 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. Forth 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 Aberconwy, 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 indication generic is trach; it means a sand which is covered at high and dry at low water. The main to geographical generic applications referring to cliffs are crag, literally 'nose' but figuratively 'point', and peirryn 'headland'. Generics of off-shore features are yny 'island', carreg 'rock, stone' and its plural cerrig, ogof 'rock' and mawen 'stone'. Ynyg, cognate with Irish Inis, applies to features which are generally larger than mawen, ogof, mawen, although many an ynyg 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 Elian, 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 and applying it to a non-commemorative name. Names such as Porth Amlch, Yny Amlch are different. Amlch is the creek or harbour at Amlch, Yny Amlch the island near Amlch. 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.