PLACE- NAMES AND THE HISTORIC LANDSCAPE

Place-names are among the most widely employed by 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 landscape is reconstructed by re-creating 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, hlæw, hammer, borgarene, groaf and wulf: elements which refer to a supernatural presence, such as helg, pina, pinæ, bonnéou, skátt and byrs; and elements which may relate to iron smelting, e.g. Roman sites, and to topography, such as elements which are 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 stræt, caenoe, breng, 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-medieval archaeologist, for example the plotting of concentrations of craft industries; thus the areas where the weaving of cloth was especially carried out can be found by plotting tenont 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 vills and they describe a vill with a central nucleated settlement in exactly the same way as a ving which had no nucleated centre. Indeed some vills never seem to have contained a settlement of the same name as the ving, and this is especially noticeable with those whose names contain elements describing the general topographical features of the ving itself, such as field or land. This suggests that in some cases the place-name may have first been applied to the whole ving, 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 vills, may have to be rethought.

Notes

* This paper, which was delivered at the tenth annual Conference of the English Place-Name Society Journal, 11 (1970-9).

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

M. L. FAUL

MAKEFIELD

---

THE COASTAL TOPOYMS OF ANGLESEY

European onomatómatos 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 time when the land is not yet cultivated. In studying the names of natural toponyms, however, this approach has distinct limitations. Document names have to do primarily with possession and with rights of tenure. Whereas historical toponyms of the whole landscape are the objects of study 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 Anglesey our aim was to supplement the documentary evidence with field-work and oral collecting.

Our survey of Anglesey coastal names was based on 66 OS maps, on an exhaustive compilation of older maps and on oral informants. 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 Valleys, as well as the decay of written and oral tradition - 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. Forth is undoubtedly the commonest generic; it occurs 165 times as a first element on a coastline of approx. 212 miles. Forth, a borrowing into W from Latin portus and porta, is usually translated in place-name glossaries as 'gateway, harbour'. In Porthaethwy, attested in 1212-1, it probably meant 'ferry'; in Porth Abermaen, 13 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 generic for applications referring to underwater features is ynyg, literally 'hole' but figuratively 'point', and penrhyn 'headland'. Generics of off-shore features are ynyg 'island', carreg 'rock, stone' and its plural cerrig, craig 'rock' and maen 'stone'. Ynys, cognate with Irish íth, applies to features which are generally larger than ynyg, 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 generic from one 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 commenomatory element and applying it to a generic. 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.
The non-Welsh or mixed-language names include a small number with medieval attestations. Three of these - the name Anglesey itself; Ngaull and -eyg, Priestholm (pwaer and holm), Skerries (from eker) - have long been accepted as Scandinavian in origin. To these we would add Osmond’s Air, documented from 1480, the name of a sandy point near Beaumaris. It is the personal name Ammoner and Old N eygr 'gravel or sand bank'. Southrook, documented from 1304, the lost name of a spit at the southern end of the Menai Straits, is problematic. It could be Old N krokr 'bend', or more likely Middle E crok. In the latter case it would belong with the small number of other medieval English generics, such as mice, wark or whar', and foreland, found in Anglesey coastal toponyms.

Red Wharf Bay is worth noting. All the earliest attestations, from the XVI and XVII cents., have warth or worth, suggesting an original warth 'shore, strand'. In this case Red Wharf Bay may well have been a translation of Welsh Traeth Coch (traeth 'strand' + coch 'red'). Such translation toponyms do occur. Milne Bay, east of Cemlyn, attested in the XVI cent., later Mill Bay, translates Porthfelin (porth + felin); Black Point at Penmon translates Trewn-du (trewn + du 'black'). Stag Rock, again near Cemlyn, translates Carreg-yi-wrch (carreg + article yr + iwrch 'stag'). Translation doubles of this type, where both parts of dual-element toponyms are translated, are, however, infrequent. Much more common are what appear formally to be mixed-language names, where a Welsh specific is combined with an English generic, - Dulas Bay, Cemais Bay, Wyllia Head, etc. Many of these mixed names are independent of the Welsh names for the same features, and are best regarded as simple location clusters formed by adding bay, head, point to a local toponym. They originated as convenient labels amongst clerks and cartographers. These partly alien location designators could vary considerably from period to period and from document to document. Porth Eilian was the name recorded by Leland in 1536-9 for a creek in north-east Anglesey. It remains the local name amongst Welsh speakers. The same inlet is referred to by five differing alien location clusters, - 'the baye named Elen' in 1297, 'the Creek of Saint Hilary' and 'St. Hilary's Bay' in the XVI cent., 'Lynas Cove' in 1835, 'Eilian Bay' more recently.

The commonest English generics are, as suggested, rook, point, bay. Other less frequent generics are bank, island, road, crow, creek, head, sand, stack, sound, nose, ridge, match, platter. Platter, not recorded in any toponographical sense in OED, refers to a submerged platform. Like match, a passage or channel between sandbanks, it is a feature of navigation charts.

Independent English names for features with established Welsh names do occur. Church bay is the Welsh roth swan (porth + swan 'whiting' - and not, as folk etymologists claimed, the portus where Suetonius landed!). Church Bay is first documented on a 1816 chart of Holyhead Bay. It was bestowed, we suggest, as a navigation landmark referring to a nearby church, and belongs to that numerous category of alien Anglesey coastal toponyms - many referring to off-shore features for which we find no Welsh name - which were bestowed by marine cartographers.

At the outset of this paper we noted a total of 160 coastal toponyms which are linguistically mixed or entirely alien. An incidence of 20% of names containing at least one non-Welsh element is in marked contrast to the minute incidence of alien or mixed-language names occurring in the toponyms of inland Anglesey parishes. Only to a very limited degree can this high incidence of non-Welsh elements be ascribed to Anglicisation and linguistic replacement. It is rather the case that one has here two different systems of nomenclature - one, the thorough Welsh toponyms, in large measure evolved names, belonging to the indigenous local population, and viewing coastal topographic features from a land-based perspective or from the perspective of small-boat fishing; the other, the non-Welsh system, to a considerable degree bestowed by voyagers and by maritime cartographers, and viewing coastal features from a sea-based perspective.

Notes

* A summary of a paper given on April 15th, 1978, at the tenth annual Conference of the Council for Name Studies.

BEDWYR LEWIS JONES

TOMOS ROBERTS

University College of Wales, Bangor.