Fastnet

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The Fastnet Rock, actually a fairly close-coupled pair of rocks and a half-tide reef, is some four and a half miles south-west of Cape Clear, Clear Island, County Cork. Its name has not, to my knowledge, been the subject of any previous linguistic study. I offer this brief account as a contribution to a series of works dealing with the onomastics of the edge of the world, which may indicate a craving for Tir na nÓg.¹

The name is attested in the following spellings:²


² Convenient modern reproductions of some of the relevant maps are mentioned in the list, and the books and articles in which they may be found are given here. Other secondary sources are particularized in later footnotes.

fastanai or fastanay Petrus Roselli chart, 1462
Reproduced Mollat, p. 208
fastanai (?) B.L. Egerton 73/29, anonymous Venetian map, c.1479
Reproduced Andrews, plate 1
fastanai anon., Columbus?, c. 1492
Reproduced Mollat, chart 21
fastanai B.L. Egerton 2803, fol. 6r., 1508
fastanai ibid., fol. 6v.
fastanai ibid., fol.8v.
fastanai Dijon portolan chart, c.1510
Reproduced Mollat, chart 26
Fastey B.L. Cotton Domitian A.xxviii, f. 97r; Nowell’s chart of Ireland
Reproduced Crone, map 17
fastonay B.L. Add.MS. 5413; Harleian world map
fastonay Calapoda chart, 1522
Reproduced Nordensköld, XXVI
fastonay B.L. Add.MS. 5415A/5; Diogo Homem chart, 1558
Reproduced Crone, map 15
Fastnei Batista Boazio chart, 1599
Reproduced Haughton, endpapers
Fastonay John Speed, Kingdom of Ireland map, 1610
fastenay B.L. Royal MS. 20.E.ix, f.21v; Jean Rotz, Boke of Idrography
Reproduced Wallis
Fastonay Willem Blaeu, map of Ireland, printed in the Atlas major
(1662), 31635
Fastonay Jansson, Hibernia regnum, 1638
Fastune [perhaps Fastnay] Joseph Moxon, A plat of the Channel [etc.]
1657
Reproduced Robinson
Fastnay Robert Wramblet, The Great Rutter, p. 141, 1671 [orig. c.1600]
Fastnay Joh. van Keulen, Nieuwe Pascaert, vand tuyt syde van Yrlandt,
c. 1680
Fastonee anon., Carte générale des costes d’Irlande, 1693
Fastenay P. Coronelli, map of Ireland, 1696
Fastnet Charles Smith, map of County Cork (in a bearing), 1750
(1991-92), 97-105. Professor Mac Aodha further notes in private correspondence that Fastnet is inexplicably absent from many seventeenth-
and eighteenth-century maps and charts (including the Blaeus').

Fastnet Mackenzie, charts 1 and 6, 1775 (published 1799)
Fastrel Rees, xiv, s.n., 1819
Fastnet Correspondence, The Times, 20 November 1847, p. 7
Fastnet Lewis’s Topographical Dictionary, under Cape Clear Island, 1849

What emerges from these is that the present shape of the name is of recent origin and highly misleading, and that no attempt to base an
etymology on the words or elements ness or net is doomed to success. It shows no sign of being Irish; neither fásach ‘wilderness’ nor the personal name Fachtna, famous as that of the sixth-century saint and bishop of the local see, Rosscarbery, help to elucidate the known spellings. No other even semi-plausible possibilities suggest themselves. Its name in modern Irish is An Charraig Aonair ‘Rock of Solitude’, which is appropriate enough but clearly a separate invention. I regard this Irish name as of recent origin; it is necessary to believe that Fastnet (or, strictly, its ancestor) was once the name current among Irish-speakers, as I shall show below.

If Fastnet is not Irish in origin, the next most tempting hypothesis is that it is Scandinavian, since this language supplies other island names off the southern coast of Ireland. These might include possibly Blasket (Blaascat), County Kerry, if from Common Scandinavian *bla-skeldur ‘blue-shield’; and certainly the following: Dursey (Irish

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4 I have not seen this name in any academic literature, but see e.g. Liam Ó Loideoin and others, Cosán eolais Oideán Chléire (Skibbereen, Co. Cork, 1989), e.g. pp. 10 and 49-50. It is confirmed for me by Professor Brendan Mac Aodha, and the rock appears as Carraig Aonair on the official Irish-language Ordnance Survey 1:575,000 map Éire. To judge by south-coastal toponyms, carraig (here feminine) may be of either gender. The version of the name offered by Jeffery and White is Carrig Aonair [sic] (op.cit., p. 79), presumably collected from the lighthouse-keepers in 1987. This suggests a different syntax, Carrig an Aonair, consistent with an interpretation ‘Rock of the Lonesome Man’; this seems to me to be a mistake.
Oileán Baotr), at the northern lip of Bantry Bay, County Cork, Whiddy (Irish Faoide, but suggestively Erys Weday on Robert Lythe’s map), in Bantry Bay itself, Fota (Fotia), in Cork Harbour, the Saltees (Sailit), off Kilmore Quay, County Wexford, and Tiskar Rock, off Rossmore, County Wexford. There are no certain English names of the required antiquity in the region, and there is therefore no pressing reason to interpret it as Old English (OE) fasten-eg ‘fortress island’ even though that would suit the recorded spellings rather well. It is very doubtful whether eg persisted as a name-element into Middle English times (i.e. the times when English interest in Ireland began) except as a fully-integral part of the words silond and eit. The best provisional solution appears to be that Fastnet is an unusual Scandinavian three-element name, consisting of bros ‘pointed’, tannar (> historical tpny) ‘tooth’ and ey ‘island’. At first sight, such a use of ey is surprising, since this element usually attaches to islands big enough to have some economic or practical usefulness, and usually large enough to permit settlement all the year round rather than just, say, summer grazing or the possibility of fowling. Otherwise in Scandinavian territory bolmir ‘islet’ or sker ‘skerry’ (as in Tiskar Rock) tend to be used, or both for a rock submerged by high tides. However, Kneen notes: ‘The Norse meaning of ey is “an island”, but it is frequently applied to “a rock” around the Mann coast.’ He sees it in Ippney and The Thousa, but


6 See the entry eit in F. H. Stratmann, A Middle-English Dictionary, new edition edited by H. Bradley (Oxford, 1891), p. 191, where the headword is bracketed; its function appears to be a convenient address for accessing the two words mentioned in my text. The Middle English Dictionary gives the word only in place-names and in surNameS derived from place-names or locative expressions. J. Wright, The English Dialect Dictionary, 6 vols (Oxford, 1898-1905), ii, 223-24, gives one very equivocal instance of the word as possibly in a sense akin to those of OE eg in a fixed proverbial expression.

7 J. J. Kneen, The Place-Names of the Isle of Man (Douglas, 1925), p. 40. It is of some interest that bolmir is virtually absent from Man also; it is found in the record, and then only implicitly, only in reference to St. Patrick’s Isle at Peel, the older name of Peel being Holmtrún (Kneen, op. cit., p. 44). This suggests that in Man at least there was room in the later Scandinavian period for a

these are the only two names of rocks containing ey to be registered in his index. The element ey is apparently absent from J. J. Joughin’s list of fishing-marks off the coast of Kirk Patrick and Kirk German parishes. Nevertheless there seems no reason to doubt Kneen’s considered opinion that the element could in that part of the Scandinavian-speaking area have the meaning ‘rock’. In addition, a suggestive parallel is offered by Drangey off the north-west coast of Iceland, where ey has been compounded with oranga ‘pillar of rock (genitive singular)’; there is a seabird cliff there. This is where Grettir the Strong was marooned, according to his saga, and it was therefore habitable up to a point; but we will not be detained by this as the same source declares that he fought with the undead and with a troll.

Kneen’s observation enables us to resolve the problem of a three-element name and make a definite proposal about its history. It is likely that Fastnet was originally called “Hoastam(f)ey” ‘sharp tooth’ to which ey was added in accordance with later Scandinavian usage in the Celtic seas. The works involved in building the lighthouse on the rock in 1849-53 and replacing it in 1899-1903 changed its original profile to some degree, and it is hard to judge the appropriateness of the suggested etymology. But it is not difficult to find viewpoints that are suggestive. Photographs of it in its present state show at least one original vertical face jutting up from the basal reef. Nothing obviously speaks against seeing any such isolated 100ft-high rock as a tooth, and more liberal application of the term ey to land in water, though sker also occurs. I have not found a secure instance of bolmir in southern Ireland, and it appears fairly infrequent in the Western Isles. I hazard the guess that, as the Viking communities of the west of the British Isles became Gaelicized, subtlety of their native lexicon as applied in geographical names was a casualty. S. Hug, Scandinavian Loanwords and their Equivalents in Middle English (Frankfurt am Main, 1987), pp. 258-59, confirms the scarcity of bolmir as a loanword in English in the required sense in literature and place-names; it is practically restricted to the sense ‘dry ground in marsh’. Kneen, loc.cit. (with an allusion to one further name) and p. 56. The Thousa is a well-known shipping hazard equipped with a beacon, providing a nice parallel for Fastnet.

9 Quoted by Kneen, PN Isle of Man., pp. 417-18.

10 Grettis saga Arnunnarssón, edited by B. Sveinsson (Reykjavik, 1921), especially chapters 69-76. The parallel with Fastnet should not be pushed too far, however; there was pasturage for 80 sheep on Drangey (chapter 69) and twenty men had shares in it (chapter 70).
two profiles are shown below to enable the reader to form a personal opinion.\textsuperscript{11}

Profile 1:
The Fastnet from the north-east in 1897

Profile 2:
The Fastnet from the south-west in 1902 during the construction of the new tower

\textsuperscript{11} Charles W. Scott, \textit{History of the Fastnet Rock Lighthouses} (Dublin, 1906). The profiles are from photographs in this book, redrawn by Miriam Coates.
Huss seems to have originally meant 'prickly, capable of lacerating'; compare its cognates, OE *bræs* (used of the Crown of Thorns), and Middle High German *was* 'cutting, sharp'. A derived noun may be seen in Gothic *brasati* 'sharpness, severity', Old Saxon *brasati* 'point'. If the original shape of the rock permitted it, which I cannot now judge, we might take *bræsstarn[æ]* as meaning, quasi-technically, 'canine tooth'. Alternatively, we might consider giving geomorphological significance to the term. Fastnet is a pinnacle of folded and fractured Silurian slate, every exposed edge of which might be considered as a cutting edge, and *bræs* might be thought of as meaning, quasi-technically, 'incisor, cutting-tooth'. In either case, a compound of these two elements is a satisfactory explanation for the form of the name, and it is not necessary to demand greater anatomical detail.

For what it is worth, the relevant words are associated with each other in the Icelandic compound adjective *tannbræs* 'sharp like a tooth' or 'sharp of tooth'; i.e. 'sharp-tongued' in the figurative sense (like the Danish simplex adjective *bræs*). The Scandinavian word *forn* is also found with the appropriate phonology in Tansky Rock, St Oswald's parish, Cheshire.12

The present pronunciation of Fastnet can be explained simply as Irish-mediated. Early Irish had no initial [w] or [hw]; Common Celtic [w] had become [f], which was therefore available to render the Scandinavian string [hw] or its later development [hv] (cf. the Irish form of *Whiddy*, cited above, whatever its etymology). The persistent *f* of the second syllable of Fastnet in early records is readily explained by the proposed origin in *tann[æ]* (if it is not simply one of a range of representations of a schwa-like vowel); Old Norse *ϕ* (< Scand. *a ... u*) is regularly represented by *a* in Middle English, and nothing speaks against its appearing as *a* in Irish, where not affected by adjacent consonants.13

13 Perhaps Scandinavian *bvest* 'white' or *bvesti* 'wheat' + ey. Scand. */i/ is rendered elsewhere by Irish */i/, as in the loanword *bad* 'boat'.
14 E. Björkman, *Scandinavian Loan-Words in Middle English*, 1 (Uppsala, 1900), 289-90, with a caveat about the Scandinavian source of ME *a*. As for names in Ireland, I assume, perhaps prematurely, that Crookhaven and Crosshaven (Co. Cork) contain Scand. *hafn* 'haven'; it is of course possible that these names are English or English-influenced. The Scandinavian personal name *Rognvald* appears in Irish as *Raghball*; see Edward MacLysaght, *Irish Surnames*, 2nd edn (Dublin, 1965), p. 175, and *Irish Families. Their Names, Arms and Origins*, 3rd edn (Dublin, 1972), p. 253.15

15 An apparent parallel for the sprouting of a final *t* is afforded by the fact that the name of the Blasket, County Kerry, is spelt on many medieval charts without one; for instance on one in Guillaume Brusson's *Manuel de pilote* à l'usage des marins bretons of 1546 (reproduced by W. A. R. Richardson, 'The Smallis, Hats and Barrels: navigational and toponymic hazards', *Nomina*, 17 (1994), 71-97, at p. 96) the name is *blasque*, and on Abraham Ortelius's map of 1572 (reproduced by Croone, *Early Maps of the British Isles*, map 16) it is *blasquey*. However, the Irish name is authentically *Blasual*, and the *t* clearly represents an integral part of the historical name. Was the originator of the final *-t* in Fastnet aware of these facts about Blasket, and did he therefore hypercorrect a form within the older tradition such as *Fastne*, which was still current on charts at the end of the seventeenth century?
16 The wreck is first reported in the *Liverpool Albion*, 12/11/1847; *Cork Southern Reporter*, 13/11/1847; carried by *The Times*, 15-20/11/1847. The suggestion of a light on Fastnet is by 'A Sailor', letter to *The Times*, 20/11/1847, p. 7a. I have not been able to track down a copy of the Halpin report, and there appears to be no direct mention of Fastnet in the British

As is often the case in historical linguistics, more can be said about the transmission of a changed form than about the actuation of the change in the first place. For the present name, one can only issue a rather vague appeal to a probable misreading of *-nei* on older charts, coupled with the analogical or folk-etymological value of the word *net* in a famous fishing-ground.15 The earliest form with final -t is found, to the best of my knowledge, on a chart published in 1750 by Charles Smith, followed in 1775 by Murdoch Mackenzie the elder (*Fastnet*; see also footnote 2). However, a precise context for the popularization of the newer form can be provided. The need for a light at a lower altitude than the one on foggound Cape Clear (in use c.1810-53) was brought home by the wreck of the American packet *Stephen Whitney on* 10th November 1847 in fog on the West Coast in Roaringwater Bay, County Cork. A light on Fastnet was proposed in the newspapers, and, in the wake of an official report by the inspector of lights, George Halpin, sanctioned in 1848, begun in 1849 and completed in 1853, the light being lit on 1st January 1854.16 It is in the letter of 'A Sailor'
(clearly an authority on navigation in Irish waters) to The Times, written from London dated 16th and printed 20th November 1847, that the first mention of the place outside the cartographical tradition occurs. Its name appears in the modern spelling. It is no misprint, as it crops up three times in the letter in all. The new spelling is found in Lewis’s Topographical Dictionary of Ireland, which must have been in preparation when the sinking took place. At the time of this infamous wreck, which cost 91 or 92 lives, the pelagic speck of Fastnet must have become known beyond its original area of salience and its name used by people who had no acquaintance with its traditional form. It is clear from the misprinted spelling Fastnél in Rees’s Cyclopaedia that the form of the name was uncertain in the world at large in 1819. Whether Fastnet, Fastnæ or some other spelling was intended is unclear, but the mistake evidently did not strike the proofreader.

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parliamentary papers, including digests of the public accounts, of 1847-53. None of all this is recorded in the official history of the lighthouses mentioned in footnote 11, which is exclusively about construction and engineering matters.

18 Rees, Cyclopaedia, XIV, s.n.

Modern Scottish Gaelic Reflexes of Two Pictish Words: *pett and *lannerc

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*Pett

By way of background and in order to set the scene, it will be useful to look at two maps reproduced from Nicolaisen’s Scottish Place-Names.1 The first is a distribution map of so-called Pit-names and shows English or Scots name-forms containing an element with the modern form Pit which ultimately derives from Pictish *pett, for example Pitenweem, Pitcarmick, Pitlochry, etc. (Map 1, p. 48). There are one or two outliers, but generally these names fall to the east of Scotland. It is this distribution and the distribution of Pictish symbol stones that are largely responsible for the definition of the term ‘Pictland’, an area lying roughly in eastern Scotland between the Dornoch Firth and the Firth of Forth, though extending for some purposes up to the Northern Isles.

The first Gaelic settlements of Scotland north of the Clyde-Forth line appeared in the south-west, in Argyll, Cowal and Lorne, and spread out northwards and eastwards. A distribution map of the element achadh (Map 2, p. 49) which means ‘meadow, field’ in modern Gaelic, but which in the onomasticon also meant ‘farm, steadings’, shows virtually the fullest extent of Gaelic settlement in Scotland. This is of course a generalisation: in Caithness, the line created by virtue of the absence of achadh-names in the north-east represents a meeting of Norse and Gael, although there may be a case for arguing that there was at least some Gaelic settlement of the Orkneys; and the strongest Gaelic-speaking areas of Scotland today are found in the Western Isles, with over 80% of the population in some places being Gaelic speakers but, paradoxically, almost no achadh-names.

1 W. F. H. Nicolaisen, Scottish Place-Names (London, 1972), pp. 153 and 140. This is a version of a paper given at the Tenth International Congress of Celtic Studies, Edinburgh, 1995. I am very grateful to the editor, Oliver Padel, and to Professor Colum Ó Baoill for their helpful suggestions and references regarding this paper.