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

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


### Four Devon Place-Names

*Andrew Breeze*

University of Navarre, Pamplona

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

**Clyst**

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

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

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

---

common stream-name in South Wales (but unknown further north), was
taken by Thomas as a borrowing from Irish. He compared Irish cladach
'shore; rocky foreshore', yet saw an ultimate link with Clyde.\(^3\)
However, Vendryes regarded the etymology of cladach as unknown.\(^4\)

Unfortunately, it is not easy to relate either of these with Clyst,
recorded in 937 and 963 in exactly this form. Jackson described Ekwall's
etymology as not wholly satisfactory, since it had no Welsh, Cornish, or
Breton equivalent (though he admitted that the word postulated by Ekwall
'might well have had <st>'). Jackson's hesitation over Ekwall's arguments
is understandable, since the survival of st poses difficulties in the light
of instances such as Cornish guas 'man-servant' < *upo-stho-, glas
'blue' < *glaisto- (cf. Gaulish glastum 'woad'), and ros 'moorland' <
*pro-sth.\(^5\)

Another approach is therefore possible. It seems not to have been
noted that Middle Welsh clust 'ear' is used in the figurative sense
'estuary, inlet, reach of river'. In a poem written between 1367 and 1382
to Tudor ancestors of King Henry VII, Iolo Goch (c.1325–c.1400)
praises their Anglesey home as Clostrim yw ger clust y môr, 'A cloister
for me it is, by the sea's inlet', where the reference is to the Menai
Straits.\(^6\) In a love poem, Bedo Brywnlys (flourished c.1460) of
Brecknock calls himself Gleisiad waf ar glast afon, 'A young salmon am
I in a reach of river'.\(^7\) If these late-medieval figurative senses 'sea inlet,
river reach' existed in Brittonic at an early date, they would give an
appropriate meaning for the name of the Clyst, especially the first.

Welsh clust 'ear' is cognate with Old Irish cluas 'hearing; ear', and
goes back to *klous-ta (cf. Sanskrit srustih 'obedience'; Old English hlyst

\(^2\) R. J. Thomas, Enwau Afonydd a Nentydd Cymru (Cardiff, 1938), pp. 8–12.
\(^3\) J. Vendryes and others, Lexique étymologique de l'irlandais ancien (Dublin
\(^4\) K. Jackson, Language and History in Early Britain (Edinburgh, 1953), pp. 530
and 533–34.
\(^6\) Geiriadur Prifysgol Cymru, edited by R. J. Thomas and others (Cardiff,
1950–), I. 511; cf. Cywyddau Serch y Tri Bedo, edited by P. J. Donovan
(Cardiff, 1982).

\(^3\) R. Thurneysen, A Grammar of Old Irish (Dublin, 1946), p. 454; Vendryes,
\(^4\) H. Lewis and H. Pedersen, A Concise Comparative Celtic Grammar
\(^5\) Jackson, Language and History, pp. 310 and 311.
Lynton on the north Devon coast. Situated on a ridge half a mile wide, which drops over 800 feet to the sea on one side and the same to the river Lyn on the other, Countisbury is a natural defensive site, and was the scene of a battle in 878 between English and Dane, described by Asser in chapter 54 of his life of Alfred. After wintering in Dyfed, the Danish leader Ubba came to Devon in early 878. There, ‘acting on an erroneous assumption, he met an unhappy death with 1,200 men, at the hands of the king’s thegns and in front of the stronghold of Cynuit [Countisbury].’ When Alfred’s men shut themselves in the fort, the Danes prepared to starve them out, avoiding direct attack ‘since by the lie of the land that place is very secure from every direction except the east, as I myself have seen.’ But the English made a surprise sortie at dawn, killing the Danish leader and many others, ‘a few escaping by flight to their ships.’

Although Stevenson denied it, it has long been accepted that Asser’s Cynuit is the Old Welsh name of Countisbury, as proposed by Earl and Plummer, and accepted by Ekwall and the English Place-Name Society. But this is not quite accurate. It will be argued below that Cynuit is just part of the Old Welsh name of Countisbury, Asser’s arx Cynuit representing a name which would be *Caer Gwynwyd or *Dinas Cynwyd in modern Welsh.

Besides this, we can take issue with the actual interpretation of Cynuit given by Ekwall. He states, ‘Cynuit is identical with COUND and KENNET and with CYNWYD in Wales, but the name here refers to a hill. Countisbury is thus British Canet, to which was added an explanatory Old English BURG. British Canét became normally Old Welsh Cynuit.


Welsh Cynwyd. We may note that Ekwall had to drop the explanation (given in his first edition) of Cynuit by reference to a Celtic stem *kuno* ‘high’. No such word exists, as Jackson pointed out. But Ekwall still claimed that Countisbury derived from a Celtic hill-name, even when his main evidence for this had vanished.

Ekwall’s account thus needs modification. Rivet and Smith considered doubtful any etymological link between arx Cynuit and the British place-name Canetio (Mildenhall, Wiltshire), which survives in the river-name Kennet (Wiltshire), cognate with such river-names as the Kent (Westmorland) and the village of Cynwyd (Merionethshire), on the River Dee near Corwen in North Wales. Although Jackson thought a link between British *Canetio* and Cynuit possible, Rivet and Smith objected that we have no other examples of hill-fort names from river-names. They regard the actual derivation of *Canetio* as unresolved.

It is therefore worth investigating whether arx Cynuit, and thus Countisbury, in fact derives from the personal name represented by Welsh Cynwyd. One Cynwyd figures in a Strathclyde genealogy. He was the son of the Coroticus denounced by St Patrick, and therefore belongs in the fifth century. Another is Cynwyd Cynwydion, also a chieftain in southern Scotland, whose three hundred men, ‘on whatever expedition they might go together, they would never fail’. A third is St Cynwyd of South Wales, who gave his name to Llangynwyd, near Maesteg in

16 Rivet and Smith, *Place-Names of Roman Britain*, pp. 328-29.
western Glamorganshire. Other, obscure bearers of the personal name Cynwyd occur in early Welsh documents. The twelfth-century Book of Llandaff contains a grant datable to c.765 of land at the unidentified Villa Gueruduc, an otherwise unknown Conuit being amongst its lay witnesses. The life of St Cadog, written c.1100 by Lifris at Llanearfan in the Vale of Glamorgan, mentions property of the Llanearfan community at ‘the court of Albrty son of Cynuwt, with the homestead Alt Cynuit.’ So Cynwyd was not a rare name in early Britain.

In the light of this, it makes sense to interpret Asser’s arx Cynuit as referring to a fort which took its name from a person, and not from a hill or river. It would be reasonable to take Cynuit as the name of the British chieftain who built it or possessed it before the English occupied north Devon in the early eighth century, when the name would pass into English (if it was not already known to English soldiers or mariners). It is worth pointing out that Countisbury Hill is a landmark conspicuous from the sea, which is why Asser was familiar with the place, which he would see sailing up the Bristol Channel from St Davids. Countisbury must long have remained familiar to the Welsh by some such name as *Caer Cynwyt or *Dinas Cynwyd, which Asser translated as arx Cynuit.

Jackson established that Brittonic long close e became Old Welsh ui and Old Cornish ui or oi in the later seventh century. We can thus assume the borrowing by English of a Primitive Cornish *Cunuit, to which was added the English genitive -es, with Primitive Cornish *caur ‘fort’ or *dinas ‘fort’ translated by burh. Old English stress upon the first syllable and consequent reduction would then naturally produce the form Contesberia recorded by Domesday Book.

We thus discover the name of an early occupier of Countisbury. His name contained the element Cuno- ‘hound’ abundantly attested in Celtic nomenclature. Jackson remarks that the Celts admired their hunting dogs greatly, so that Cuno- in their personal name had much the overtones that ‘lion’ has for us. It was a name-element born by kings (like Maelgwn ‘princely hound’) and saints (Kenitgern ‘hound-like lord’).

This concludes the arguments on the origin of Countisbury. Once we accept Asser’s arx Cynuit as resulting from a personal name, and not a hill- or river-name, we overcome Rivet and Smith’s doubts about associating the Devonshire Cynuit with the Wiltshire town Cunetio on the River Kennet. We may add a postscript on these river-names, the Wiltshire Kennet, Shropshire Cound Brook, Westmorland Kent and other rivers deriving from British *Cunetiu. Jackson dismissed the idea that a root in *Cuno- ‘dog’ is likely in a river name. But his conclusion is surprising in view of the menagerie of names applied to modern Welsh rivers and streams. Thomas listed nearly sixty examples, including rivers named after swan, heifer, bear, donkey, pig (Bawr; cf. the woman’s name Myfanwy, and Banff in Scotland), marten, wolf, crow, buck, mare, cat, cock, whelp, raven, puppy (Colwyn, one of which gives its name to Colwyn Bay), dog (the Cynlais in Breconshire), chick, beetle, hind, goat, heron, glow-worm, swallow, bees, slug, wrasse, gnat, seagull, boar, hawk, ewe, swine-lice, sow, ram, hen, roebuck, horse, adder, bull, oxen, wood pigeon, and hare. Especially interesting here are streams called Cenua ‘puppy, whelp’ in Pembrokeshire, Colwyn ‘puppy’ (examples in Caernarvonshire, Cardiganshire, Radnorshire, Monmouthshire and Montgomeryshire), and Cynlais ‘dog brook’ in Breconshire. Another (lost) stream Cenua is recorded in the Book of Llandaff, in the region of Llandello-r-fán, Breconshire. If the medieval Welsh named streams after dogs, the ancient Britons might do so too.

---

22 Jackson, Language and History, pp. 330-35.
23 Jackson, ‘Life of St Kenitigern’, p. 298.
The conclusions to draw from the above are, first, that the first part of Countisbury in Devon derives from a Celtic personal name, not a river-name, still less a hill-name (despite Ekwall’s claim); second, that this personal name includes a Celtic element meaning ‘hound’; and, third, that the same root may lie behind the various British rivers called Kennet, Kent, and so on, either because the animal-name was for some reason incorporated in the river-name, or because a personal name was applied to the river (as may be the case with some of the Welsh names cited above). This would also suggest that *Cunetio* (at Mildenhall, a mile east of Marlborough, Wiltshire) was called after the river Kennet, the name of which either meant ‘hound-like stream’, or was taken from a man called *Cunetius*. Given the plurality of rivers called Kennet and the like, the former seems more likely.

Creedy

Credton is a small town seven miles north-west of Exeter. Its name is attested as *Cridie* in 739 (11th), *Cridiantun* in 930 and (in the Anglo-Saxon Chronicle) 977, and *Chrititone* in Domesday Book. The name means ‘tun (settlement) on the river Creedy’; the river itself is attested in 739 (11th) as (on) *Cryidian*, *Cridian*, and in 1244 as *Cridia*.27

The sense of the name Credton is widely recognised.29 Yet the sense of Creedy is left unclear by Jackson, who discusses its form alone, and by Ekwall in his *Dictionary*, who calls it merely ‘a British river-name’.30 The purpose of this note is to clarify the meaning of Creedy, using material published since Ekwall’s account of the name in 1928, when he derived Old English *Cridie* and *Crydie* from Primitive Cornish.

---

29 *English Historical Documents*, edited by Whitelock, p. 496.

---

*Brid < British *Critio-* or *Cridio-*31

The Devon Creedy apparently has a namesake in the Cryddan or Crynth Brook, a stream south of Neath in West Glamorgan. The Cryddan is recorded as *Cruudan Brooke* in 1397 and *Crdydan-Brook* in 1684–85, while Melincryddan ‘Cryddan Mill’, now a suburb of Neath, occurs as ‘the mill of Credan’ in 1296. Thomas linked the name with the Welsh verb *crydu* ‘to shrink, lessen, waste away, pine’, suggesting the stream had a feeble flow with little water, and thought a derivation of Cryddan from Welsh *crydd ‘shoemaker’ was unlikely.32

Welsh *crydu* is a familiar word. It appears in *Armes Prydein* ‘The Prophecy of Britain’, a call for Welsh vengeance on the English composed in the tenth century, possibly in 940 following the capitulation by Edmund the Elder of Wessex to Olaf Guthfrithson at Leicester.33 The poem ends invoking the power of God: *Ny wyw, ny wellyc, ny phyle, ny chryd* ‘He does not wither, he does not despise, he does not waver, he does not diminish’, because God is unchangeable.34 Sir Ifor Williams here compared the line in a poem (of uncertain date) also in the fourteenth-century Book of Taliesin, which declares *Gogwn pan dilyd, gogwn pan wescryd* ‘I know why it [a river] flows, I know why it ebbs away’, where the verb *gnesgryyd* is from the prefix *gos—crydu*.

The use in this second poem of a compound of *crydu* for water in flow accords well with the river-names Creedy and Cryddan. Another sense of *crydu* occurs in the fourteenth-century Book of the Anchorite’s account of St Paul’s vision of the damned, ‘the fire burning them on one side, the ice shrivelling them up (yn y crydu) on the other.’36 In modern

---

Merioneth and Powys dialect, croddu is still used of animals wasting away or getting thinner.\textsuperscript{37}

Welsh croddu has been compared to Middle Breton crez ‘aware’, crezi ‘avarice’, Old Irish credbaid (verbal noun) ‘corroding, shrinking, wearing away’, and, less certainly, Sanskrit krdhu- ‘raccourci, petit, défectueux’; Vendryes cites Loth for an original British *krid- > Welsh croddu-, Breton crez.\textsuperscript{38}

The above allows a sense ‘dwindler, river of weak or limited flow’ for Creedy. That this would make excellent sense is clear from the Ordnance Survey map, where the Creedy appears as scarcely a brook in comparison with the river Yeo, which it joins a mile south-east of Crediton. The contrast would be very obvious in time of flood, for which Devon rivers are still known.

Creedy, then, provides interesting evidence for Celtic speech in Devon. It must have been borrowed by English before the late seventh century, because the English saint Boniface was supposedly born in Crediton in about 675 (he is known to have gone to school in Exeter). By that date the dialects of Brittonic in this region did not have long to survive, since the independence of Devon ended in 710, when Ine of Wessex fought the British king, Gerent. Celtic speech in Devon must thereafter have soon come to an end.\textsuperscript{39} It is interesting to note that Primitive Cornish [\texttheta] was here borrowed as Old English [\texttheta]; this was normal in the settlement-period, and the standard explanation is that this was a necessary sound-substitution, before Old English acquired [\texttheta] by the voicing of [\texttheta].\textsuperscript{40} Surprisingly, it may not be until we cross the River Tamar into Cornwall (where immediately we find names such as Trewithick, in the parish of St Stephen by Launceston, equivalent to Welsh Tre-wyddog ‘wooded farm’) that we find Primitive Cornish [\texttheta] actually appearing as [\texttheta] in place-names.

\textsuperscript{37} Geiriadur Prifysgol Cymru, I, 621.
\textsuperscript{38} Geiriadur Prifysgol Cymru, I, 621; Vendryes, Lexique étymologique, p. C-227.
\textsuperscript{39} Jackson, Language and History, pp. 206 and 558.
\textsuperscript{40} Jackson, Language and History, p. 558.

\begin{flushright}
\textbf{Croyde}
\end{flushright}

Croyde is a somewhat remote village in north Devon, eight miles west-north-west of Barnstaple. It is surrounded by high land except to the west, where it is open to the sea at Croyde Bay. North of Croyde Bay is Croyde Hoe, a headland rising to 326 feet; to the south is a parallel ridge, rising to 518 feet. Croyde village thus lies at the bottom of a valley resembling a trough, about a mile long.

The standard etymology for Croyde is still that given byEkwall. He quotes the forms Crideholde from Domescy Book, Crideho 1242, Crude 1276 and Cridentho 1307. The third refers to the village, the others to the hoe or headland. Ekwall argues that Croyde is really the old name of the headland, which he derives from Old English crýde from crúdan ‘to press, to make one’s way’ (whence ‘to crowd’).\textsuperscript{41} But this is not a very convincing etymology; nor is it obvious that the village takes its name from the headland, and not vice versa. It would also be difficult to accept an alternative derivation from the Old English place-name element crýde ‘weeds, plants’.\textsuperscript{42} The English Place-Name Society suggests that the village is named from a stream, of identical name to that of the river Creedy elsewhere in the county.\textsuperscript{43}

A fourth etymology, which would far better suit the geography of Croyde’s trough-like valley, is in a cognate of Welsh croud ‘cradle’. This word, attested in Welsh from the thirteenth century, has been derived from Celtic *krou-to-, from the root *(s)quer- ‘to fold, twist’\textsuperscript{44} Indo-European and early Celtic ou gave ü (written u) in Old Welsh, Cornish, and Breton: hence Greek boukolas ‘cowherd’, but Welsh bugail ‘shepherd’, Cornish and Breton bugel.\textsuperscript{45} Jackson notes that Primitive Cornish u was taken into Old English as a long y in the Somerset name Creechbarrow. A charter dated 672 (for 682; 16th-century copy) calls it

\textsuperscript{41} Ekwall, Dictionary of English Place-Names, p. 134.
\textsuperscript{43} Gover and others, Place-Names of Devon, I, 43.
\textsuperscript{44} Geiriadur Prifysgol Cymru, I, 613.
\textsuperscript{45} Lewis and Pedersen, Comparative Celtic Grammar, p. 8.
a hill *quidicit Britannica lingua Cructan, apud nos Crybeorh.*\(^46\) He notes the same feature in the Old Cornish name *Iudicæal*, spelt *3yolicael* in the Bodmin Manumissions in a tenth-century Anglo-Saxon context.\(^47\) So there is no phonological objection to a derivation of Croyde, from Middle English *Crude*, from Old English *Cryde*, itself from Primitive Cornish *Crud*. The name would presumably have been borrowed in the seventh or eighth century, during the English settlement of the county. The phonological development of Middle English *Crude* to Modern English Croyde is due to Early Modern confusion between *f* and *oi*, compare Bystock, elsewhere in Devon, formerly *Boystoke*, for the opposite confusion.\(^48\)

---

48 Gover and others, *Place-Names of Devon*, I, 43, and II, 600.