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Clovelly, Devon

Richard Coates (pp. 36–44)

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For further details or to join the Society, please contact:

Mrs Christine Hickling
English Place-Name Society
School of English
The University of Nottingham
NG7 2RD

Tel: 0115 951 5919

Email: name-studies@nottingham.ac.uk

ABBREVIATIONS OF COUNTIES AND EPNS COUNTY SURVEYS

Co	Cornwall
Ha	Hampshire
He	Herefordshire
K	Kent
La	Lancashire
Nb	Northumberland
Sf	Suffolk
So	Somerset
Wt	Isle of Wight
CPNE	<i>Cornish Place-Name Elements.</i>
EPNE	<i>English Place-Name Elements, Parts 1 and 2.</i>
PN BdHu	<i>The Place-Names of Bedfordshire and Huntingdonshire.</i>
PN Brk	<i>The Place-Names of Berkshire, Parts 1, 2 and 3.</i>
PN Bu	<i>The Place-Names of Buckinghamshire.</i>
PN Ca	<i>The Place-Names of Cambridgeshire and the Isle of Ely.</i>
PN Ch	<i>The Place-Names of Cheshire, Parts 1–5.</i>
PN Cu	<i>The Place-Names of Cumberland, Parts 1, 2 and 3.</i>
PN D	<i>The Place-Names of Devon, Parts 1 and 2.</i>
PN Db	<i>The Place-Names of Derbyshire, Parts 1, 2 and 3.</i>
PN Do	<i>The Place-Names of Dorset, Parts 1–4.</i>
PN Du	<i>The Place-Names of County Durham, Part 1.</i>
PN Ess	<i>The Place-Names of Essex.</i>
PN ERY	<i>The Place-Names of the East Riding of Yorkshire and York.</i>
PN Gl	<i>The Place-Names of Gloucestershire, Parts 1–4.</i>
PN Hrt	<i>The Place-Names of Hertfordshire.</i>
PN Le	<i>The Place-Names of Leicestershire, Parts 1–6.</i>
PN Li	<i>The Place-Names of Lincolnshire, Parts 1–7.</i>
PN Mx	<i>The Place-Names of Middlesex (apart from the City of London).</i>
PN Nf	<i>The Place-Names of Norfolk, Parts 1–3.</i>
PN Nt	<i>The Place-Names of Nottinghamshire.</i>
PN NRY	<i>The Place-Names of the North Riding of Yorkshire.</i>
PN Nth	<i>The Place-Names of Northamptonshire.</i>
PN O	<i>The Place-Names of Oxfordshire, Parts 1 and 2.</i>
PN R	<i>The Place-Names of Rutland.</i>
PN Sa	<i>The Place-Names of Shropshire, Parts 1–6.</i>
PN Sr	<i>The Place-Names of Surrey.</i>
PN St	<i>The Place-Names of Staffordshire, Part 1.</i>
PN Sx	<i>The Place-Names of Sussex, Parts 1 and 2.</i>
PN W	<i>The Place-Names of Wiltshire.</i>
PN Wa	<i>The Place-Names of Warwickshire.</i>
PN We	<i>The Place-Names of Westmorland, Parts 1 and 2.</i>
PN Wo	<i>The Place-Names of Worcestershire.</i>
PN WRY	<i>The Place-Names of the West Riding of Yorkshire, Parts 1–8.</i>

Clovelly, Devon

Richard Coates

The editors of *PN Devon* (70) declare that this is "a very difficult name", and offer competing solutions, English and Brittonic, neither (or none) totally satisfactory. The English-language solution involves Old English *clōh* 'ravine', a word suitable for the famous cleft in the coastline in which the present village lies, and possibly *felg* 'felloe' (cf. Ekwall, *DEPN* 177, *s.n.* Felpham). An alternative offered in *PN Devon* for the second element follows a suggestion of Ekwall's to the editors of *PN Sussex*, namely a supposedly related form meaning 'harrow' and hence 'fallow land' (*PN Devon*, under the supposedly related name *Velly* in Hartland parish (76-7); some grounds for believing such a meaning-shift is plausible are given there also). The first suggestion, based on *felg*, is presented in more detail in Ekwall (1959: 40-1), where the second is recanted, along with Ekwall's earlier view (1936: *s.n.*) that the second element was *lēah*, and his even earlier one that the name was Brittonic (1924: 28). This solution, or set of solutions, is obviously improbable. *Clōh* is a North Country word, not attested in a major name south of Cheshire, and *felg* is not actually attested anywhere at all in the required sense. When Ekwall (*DEPN*, *s.n.*) explains *felg* as denoting a hill shaped like a felloe or wheel-rim segment, the explanation has an air of shiftiness about it, as the element is suspected of having a different application, viz. to a coastal feature, in the case of Felpham. Moreover, the compounds 'ravine-felloe' or '-fallow' hardly make good sense; and if the name is truly a compound, then the prosodic pattern of the modern name, with stress on the second syllable, does not fit. If it is a phrasal name rather than a compound (this would suit the prosody), it would need to be explained as '(place called) Felloe or Fallow at or near a clough or a place called Clough'. I do not know of any name with such

a structure (which would be analogous to *Water Orton* or *Fen Drayton*) recorded as early as *Domesday Book*, which is where Clovelly is first attested. It is almost inconceivable in any case that this could be correct, as such a name-structure would appear to require some adjacent place to be called *Felloe* or *Fallow* too, and distinguished from "Clough" *Felloe* or *Fallow* by some other specifying element. There is none (but see further below and note 3); the early spellings of the last syllable of nearby *Velly* (always *-lye*) do not suggest OE *-lg* (expected to yield ME *-l(o)3 > > -low*) any more than those of *Clovelly* do.

PN Devon's Brittonic option involves a relative of Welsh *clawdd* 'ditch, pit, etc.' (like Blomé (1929) following a suggestion of Ekwall's which cannot be entertained exactly as published because he proposes that the Welsh word itself appears in this name (1924: 28)), and the Old Cornish personal name *Beli* (as in *Trevilley*, Cornwall) or *melyn* 'mill'. This is not *a priori* unreasonable. The boundary of Cornwall is about five miles from Clovelly, and evidence of Cornish cultural debris is not hard to spot in the region. The undoubtedly Cornish (though of course anglicized) place-name *Trellick* appears in the adjacent Devon parish of Hartland (*PN Devon* 76); other Cornish names appear in north and west Devon, certainly *Kelly* near Launceston and *Landkey* near Bideford, certainly the first elements of *Rosedown* in Hartland, *Molland*, and of the various instances of *Nympton*, and probably *Landcross* near Barnstaple; *Galsham* in Hartland may contain a Brittonic personal name (*PN Devon* 73); and there is evidence of the veneration of St Petrock and St Nectan in local church-dedications. However, the detail of the claim in *PN Devon* will not measure up to scrutiny as it stands. *Clawdd* in Welsh place-names does not mean 'ditch' alone, but 'man-made earthwork', i.e. both the bank and the ditch out of which the building material was dug, as *Clawdd Offa* 'Offa's Dyke'. This meaning can be confidently reconstructed for Brittonic, witness the RB hillfort name *Vindocladia* 'White-Earthwork(-place)', the modern Badbury Rings (Dorset; Jackson 1970: 81). It is therefore wrong to say that the Cornish analogue of this word could denote the natural cleft in which the village lies. Worse still, the words *clawdd* and its Cornish counterpart *cleath* are masculine (as are its cognates in Irish and Breton), and any name

following them would therefore not be liable to the initial consonant mutation presupposed by *PN Devon's* solution. Jackson observes (1953: 226) that the stress-pattern of the name suggests Brittonic origin, but he does not advance any specific proposal.

Previous commentators appear to have been mesmerized by the site of the present village. The famous tourist-trap (National Grid Reference SS 318248) is not an original village nucleus or even a hamlet, but a deliberately planted fishing community. It was founded, with a new pier, in the late sixteenth century by George Carey, lord of the manor, as stated in his will dated 9/8/1601 (quoted in Hoskins 1988: 105, and cf. also Ellis 1987). Carey probably embarked on this difficult and costly endeavour firstly to provide a better harbour on this very hazardous coast, and secondly as a way of offering a new livelihood for villagers displaced by the emparking of the vicinity of the manor-house. (I have not been able to date this event precisely because the court rolls were destroyed in a fire there in 1789, but the nucleus of the present manor-house is said to be Tudor (Hoskins 1972: 370) and its construction could have gone along with emparking.) It is certain that, like other nearby parishes such as Hartland and Woolsery (Woolfardisworthy), Clovelly consisted of its present scattered farms and hamlets (e.g. Hugglepit, Stitworthy, Slerra, Burscott, Wrinkleberry and Kennerland) from the earliest times, one of which became the churchtown (the site of the present church and manor-house, SS 310251). It is also certain therefore that the name does not refer to the site of the modern village, and reasonable to suppose that no one of these hamlets had a greater *a priori* claim to give the parish its name than any other. That would mean that any long-established significant physical feature in the parish would be the likely name-source.

By anyone's reckoning, the "immense series of entrenchments" (*VCH Devon* I: 593) constituting the unexcavated "fort" of *Clovelly Dykes* (SS 311236) is the obvious candidate.¹ This was formerly also known as *Dichen* (Camden (Gough) I: 61*), *Dickens* or *Dickenhills* (*VCH* I: 593). Adjacent to it is the hamlet of *Dyke*, mentioned in *PN Devon* (71) but misleadingly compared by the editors with the adjacent but separate farm *Westdyke* (*Westdich* 1333 SR (p)). However, *PN Devon* does not

connect the parish-name with these huge ramparts, the second largest ancient earthworks in the whole of Devon (according to Hoskins), which stand at their highest some eleven feet above ground level, and take over fifteen minutes to circle at a brisk walk. From a formal point of view, there is no objection to connecting the first syllable of the name with Cornish *cleath* 'dyke'. This would have been Primitive Cornish [klo:ð] from approximately 500 A.D. to some undetermined time before the (late?) tenth century, according to Jackson's chronology (1953: 299-300), and the English arrived in the area probably some time around 700. A possible context is provided by the annal for 710 in the *Anglo-Saxon Chronicle* (A and E), dealing with Ine's and Nunna's battle with Gerent, king of Cornwall. By this time, in English, a new [ð] had arisen due to voicing of [θ], and would have been available to render Primitive Welsh/Cornish [ð] (cf. Luick 1914-21: § 639, Anm. 4). Presumably it would have been lost early in element-final position before another fricative (see below), hence the lack of direct evidence for it. Since *cleath* is masculine, the second element must therefore begin with an unmutated initial consonant; the [v] cannot be original, as such a sound must be a mutation-product in element-initial position in the Brittonic languages. The [v] of *Clovelly* must therefore be explained as an English phenomenon: the characteristically southern and western development of Old English /f/ in element-initial position or the general English pronunciation of Old English intervocalic /f/. It would not be surprising to find this spelt *f*- in some early sources, and this is in fact the case: *Clofely* (1296), *Clofeli* (1306) (*PN Devon* 70). I suggest therefore that we are dealing with a Cornish personal name of the same stock as either *Felec* (cf. Welsh *ffelaig* 'bright; lord') or *Filii* (poor spelling for **Fili*), as seen in the Cornish parish-names *Phillack* and *Philleigh* (and Welsh *Caerffili*); for these, cf. Olson and Padel (1986: 45-6, 48-9), Padel (1988: 138-9). Whilst greater certainty is impossible, perhaps *Felec* (i.e. /feleg/) is worth closer attention as (a) the first vowel suits exactly, and (b) there are good instances of the early (possibly variable) loss of final -c (/g/) in Old Cornish as early as c.1201- though admittedly not as early as *Domesday Book* in which *Clovelly* is first recorded. These include the place-names *Langurra* in Crantock,

Lanreath, *St Tudy* and *St Winnow* (Padel 1988: 74, 107, 174, 180).² Having said this, however, it is possible that there was a similar personal name which really had no original *-c*. This is suggested by the place-name *Trevilley* found in *St Teath*, *St Columb Minor* and *Sennen* (drawn to my attention by Oliver Padel); in each instance, the medieval record consistently shows *-e-* in the penultimate syllable. But such a name could contain the *Beli* mentioned above, with initial consonant mutation after the feminine noun *tre(f)* 'farmstead'.

Topographically, this interpretation, 'Fele(c)'s earthworks', is acceptable. The earthworks are pretty central in the parish. They are probably alluded to by the name *Burford* (SS 307220) in the same parish; this is probably 'ford (on the road) leading to the *burg*', being near the parish boundary on a minor road leading directly to the western extremity of *Clovelly Dykes*.

Superficially, this solution appears to lose the advantage present in that offered by both *PN Devon* and *DEPN* of connecting *Clovelly* with the name of the farms *Higher* and *Lower Velly* just over the parish boundary in *Hartland* (both parishes being in the erstwhile royal hundred of *Hartland*). *Higher Velly* is just over one mile from the *Dykes* and from modern *Clovelly*, not four as stated in *PN Devon* or two as stated by *Ekwall* (1959 – though he measured from the modern village). This name begins with *F-* in thirteenth- and fourteenth-century documents, and may be regarded as showing the English element-initial voicing mentioned above. *Ekwall* spells out clearly why he regards this as an application of the word *felg*, but the curved ridge on which his solution depends is obvious neither on large-scale maps nor on the ground. By contrast, there are Cornish place-names aplenty (though normally late, I admit) that consist of a bare personal name, usually interpreted as that of a local saint, and often corresponding with the dedication of the parish church or other local chapel. *Velly* has never been more than two farms, so far as I know, except for the remains of a chapel marked on the OS 1:25 000 map at *Higher Velly* (SS 293243). Nothing is known of the origin or the original dedication of this chapel. It is speculatively interpreted by *Chope* (1940: 81) as "probably" the private chapel of *St James* belonging to the *Velly* family who lived there, but I have

discovered no shred of evidence for this or any other interpretation in all Chope's voluminous writings on Hartland (200-odd essays and a book based on them). Taking this into account, it is clearly not out of the question, even if Chope is right, that it originated as a Cornish-style religious site whose dedication persists in the farm-name. And although it is as speculative as Chope's account, it is not at all far-fetched to believe in an individual called *Fele(c)* who was enough of a saint to warrant a chapel in his honour and enough of a secular (war)lord to give his name to the Dykes. Many Celtic saints appear to have been claimed as princ(ess)es of a royal house – as indeed many Anglo-Saxons were sacral princ(ess)es – and Padel (1988: 87) specifically opens the possibility that the saint commemorated in the name of the Cornish parish of Gerrans was the same man as the early eighth-century king Gerent (cf. more guardedly Olson and Padel 1986: 45). It is possible that this *Fele(c)* was the man commemorated in the name of Phillack (see above), but that suggestion goes further than the evidence warrants.³

If the story just offered carries any degree of conviction, readers may be interested to return to the farm-name *Trellick* in Hartland, mentioned above as evidence of Cornish language and culture in what is administratively Devon. The place is not central in hundred or parish (SS 236231), and is of no particular consequence in medieval times. It is mentioned only once by Chope (1940: 9), and that simply to report the etymology given in *PN Devon*. It is recorded in the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries as *Trevelak*, *Treverek* and *Treveleck*. The editors of *PN Devon* (76) connect it, reasonably enough, with the Cornish *tre(f)* 'farmstead' and either of the Welsh personal names *Eloc* or *Maeloc*. But it is perfectly possible (if not wholly secure) that it could be derived from **tre Felec* and that the phonological changes giving the modern name can be understood as English. It is exasperating to anyone seeking to give a unified explanation of the names *Clovelly*, *Velly* and *Trellick* that /k/ is systematically absent in the first two names and systematically present in the third, when there is so much resemblance between portions of the names otherwise.⁴

An alternative account of a relation amongst these three names might

be given. There is a recurrent tendency for Celtic saints' names to appear in pet-forms, using either the suffix *-oc* or a prefix of originally possessive meaning, especially *to-* 'thy'. Ke was clearly known as **To-Ce-* (cf. *Landegea*, the churchtown of Old Kea, Cornwall, *Llandygai* (Carnarvonshire/Gwynedd), *Landkey* (Devon) and *Lantokai* (Somerset, now Leigh-on-Street); Padel 1988: 130), and the Welsh saint best known by the Breton form of his name, Brieuc, is commemorated as *Tyfriog* (**To-Brīgāc-*) in the Welsh place-name *Llandyfriog* (Cardiganshire/Dyfed). Padel (1988: 162, 174, 180) also speculates that St Tudy/Tudec might be identical with the famous Breton saint Tudgual (often misspelt *Tugdual*); and that *St Winnow* and *Towednack* (**To-Winnoc-*) might commemorate the equally famous St Winwaloe. The common thread here might allow us to believe in the preservation of a (royal) saint's name in one form in a place-name, but in the survival of the name of the same individual as a secular magnate in another form in another, even adjacent, one.⁵ Such an explanation, however, leaves some doubt about exactly what to propose as the base-form of the name in question, and so tends to suggest that we are, after all, dealing with two separate personal names *Fele* and *Felec*. If the evidence is felt to warrant a united account of all these names, then on the whole, the account involving a name *Fele(c)* with variable realization in adjacent place-names appears preferable to the one involving presence or absence of a suffix.

Whatever view is taken of the origin suggested for *Trellick*, it can be proposed with some confidence that *Clovelly* is a Cornish name meaning 'earthworks associated with *Fele(c)*', a person whose name may survive unadorned in the adjacent farms and vanished chapel called *Velly*.⁶

Acknowledgement

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Notes

1. This dates from the early Iron Age according to Hoskins (1972) and (possibly) from Roman times according to Pevsner (1952). Cf. also Carter (1927).
2. There is further possible evidence for the instability or eccentric development of final *-c* in the history of the place-name *Landulph* (Padel 1988: 106), though the etymology of this name is not certain.
3. Somewhat against this account is the fact that persons named from this place are referred to as *atte Velye* or the like in a tenant-list of 1301, the use of ME *atte* 'at the' suggesting that *Velye* is a common noun; but *atte* occurs in this document alone. Note rather *Ricardus atte Velye, Rogerus de eadem* (same document, Chope 1902: 445); whilst *de* is known to function like *atte* on occasion, there is no necessity to interpret it that way, as it may govern a true place-name. A person is surnamed *la Felye* in the 1333 Subsidy (*PN Devon* 76). However the oldest attestation (1287) shows no definite article. In any case, the distinction of the two farms, even in the Middle Ages, as *Higher (Over-)* and *Lower (Nether-)* (never *the Higher/Lower*), and the naming of tenants as *de Overefelye*, may tell in favour of the account as given. There are uncertainties here. On the relevant prepositional usage, see McKinley (1990: 87-8). *Over Velly* is clearly so called to distinguish it from *Nether Velly*, and not from *Clo-velly* as Ekwall's account (1959: 40) implies.

It is not entirely out of the question that *Velly* represents a Cornish name with ellipsis of *Tre-*, though this phenomenon is usually later than 1300. If that were the case, the possibility would open of the name's duplicating that of *Trellick* in the same parish (see directly below). Either it is most implausible that the name should be duplicated in the same parish, or the suggestion provides a rationale for the conscious formal differentiation of the two names.

4. There is a further similar name *Trevellick* in Michaelstow (Cornwall), recorded from the fourteenth century (*PN Devon* 76), on which I can shed no further light; it is not in Padel (1985, 1988). The spellings in the fourteenth-century record are like the third of those for *Trellick*: *Treuelek, Trevalek*. Oliver Padel informs me that a similar name also exists in Tintagel.
5. It is true that the hypocoristic forms are found as saintly not secular names in all the instances I have mentioned. In that sense, the secure facts are the wrong way round for the suggestion here about Clovelly, which places the hypocoristic form in *-oc* (or whatever) in the farm-name, and the regular personal name in the names of the earthworks and chapel.
6. A person bearing the name Richard *Vyllysdon* appears in the records of Hartland in 1458 (Chope 1902: 434), but in the absence of direct evidence for such a place, no attempt will be made to weave this into the account of the toponymy. Readers will see the reason for paying attention to it, however.

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