The coastal toponyms of Anglesey

Bedwyr Lewis Jones and Tomos Roberts (pp. 47–53)

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	*Cornish Place-Name Elements.*
EPNE	*English Place-Name Elements*, Parts **1** and **2**.
PN BdHu	*The Place-Names of Bedfordshire and Huntingdonshire.*
PN Brk	*The Place-Names of Berkshire*, Parts **1**, **2** and **3**.
PN Bu	*The Place-Names of Buckinghamshire.*
PN Ca	*The Place-Names of Cambridgeshire and the Isle of Ely.*
PN Ch	*The Place-Names of Cheshire*, Parts **1**–**5**.
PN Cu	*The Place-Names of Cumberland*, Parts **1**, **2** and **3**.
PN D	*The Place-Names of Devon*, Parts **1** and **2**.
PN Db	*The Place-Names of Derbyshire*, Parts **1**, **2** and **3**.
PN Do	*The Place-Names of Dorset*, Parts **1**–**4**.
PN Du	*The Place-Names of County Durham*, Part **1**.
PN Ess	*The Place-Names of Essex.*
PN ERY	*The Place-Names of the East Riding of Yorkshire and York.*
PN Gl	*The Place-Names of Gloucestershire*, Parts **1**–**4**.
PN Hrt	*The Place-Names of Hertfordshire.*
PN Le	*The Place-Names of Leicestershire*, Parts **1**–**7**.
PN Li	*The Place-Names of Lincolnshire*, Parts **1**–**7**.
PN Mx	*The Place-Names of Middlesex* (apart from the *City of London*).
PN Nf	*The Place-Names of Norfolk*, Parts **1**–**3**.
PN Nt	*The Place-Names of Nottinghamshire.*
PN NRY	*The Place-Names of the North Riding of Yorkshire.*
PN Nth	*The Place-Names of Northamptonshire.*
PN O	*The Place-Names of Oxfordshire*, Parts **1** and **2**.
PN R	*The Place-Names of Rutland.*
PN Sa	*The Place-Names of Shropshire*, Parts **1**–**9**.
PN Sr	*The Place-Names of Surrey.*
PN St	*The Place-Names of Staffordshire*, Part **1**.
PN Sx	*The Place-Names of Sussex*, Parts **1** and **2**.
PN W	*The Place-Names of Wiltshire.*
PN Wa	*The Place-Names of Warwickshire.*
PN We	*The Place-Names of Westmorland*, Parts **1** and **2**.
PN Wo	*The Place-Names of Worcestershire.*
PN WRY	*The Place-Names of the West Riding of Yorkshire*, Parts **1**–**8**.

THE COASTAL TOPONYMS OF ANGLESEY

(A short paper presented as a tribute to the late Professor Melville Richards.)

It has been the tradition amongst European scholars to tie place-name studies to documents and records. Onomatologists have stressed the importance of listing as fully as possible the forms of place-names as they have been recorded at different periods right back to the earliest documented usage. It was a necessary approach and must remain the basis of toponymic studies. At the same time it is well to acknowledge that there are areas of study where documentation, and especially early documentation, will of necessity be severely limited. Documents have to do primarily with possession and with rights of tenure. It follows that whereas homestead and settlement names will in general be well documented in state and estate papers, the names of natural topographic features, and particularly those of minor features, will occur but rarely in tenurial records. Coastal toponyms - the names of creeks, rocks, headlands, etc. - and the names of rocks, paths, etc. in unpopulated upland areas are examples: documentation of such toponyms, where it occurs, will tend to be late, and will have to be substantially supplemented by oral collecting from local informants.

Our survey of Anglesey coastal toponyms bears this out. Basing our survey on 6 ins OS maps, on a thorough combing of maps and charts and of documents relating to maritime matters, we built up a collection of coastal names. Few attestations predated 1500. The majority were attested from the XVIII and more especially from the XIX cents. We then tested our collection by field-work in selected areas. In these sample areas we found that approx. 25% of the toponyms which we mapped had no written document-ation: they had only oral attestation. It was also the case that, because of the changes which have taken place in rural economic patterns in the mid XX cent. and because of the increased mobility of population, the orally attested minor topographic names tended to be known only to the older generation of inhabitants.

Of the 760 or so coastal names in our collection, approx. 600 are entirely Welsh; the remaining 160 are either entirely alien or linguistically mixed toponyms. Of the entirely W names the great majority are dual-element toponyms, with the generic usually preceding the specific. *Porth* is undoubtedly the commonest generic: on a coastline of approx. 125 miles it occurs 165 times as a first el., plus two instances of *Henborth* where it is the second el. of a compound following *hen* 'old'. The other common indentation specific is *traeth*, with 22 instances. *Traeth*, a cognate of Corn *treath*, Ir *tracht*, is related to W *trai* 'ebb', and means a sand which is covered at high and dry at low water. *Porth* in W is a borrowing from both Latin *portus* and *porta*, but whereas the fem. *porta* 'gate' gave W masc. *porth* Latin masc. *portus* 'harbour' gave a fem. *porth*, *y borth*. A fem. generic causes lenition of the initial consonant of the following specific in W and this is seen in such Anglesey forms as *Porthaethwy* (from an earlier

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*Porthddaethwy, i.e. porth + Daethwy), Porth Gwyfan 1536/9, Porth Foelfre 1536/9, Porth Ddwynwen 1710, Porth Badrig 1838, Porth Ruffudd 1838, Porth-fain 1838, Porth-fudr 1838, Porth-ro 1838, Porthlydan 1838. The fem. gender of Porth is also indicated by the lenited fem. form of the adj. gwyn 'white' in the eighteen different Porthwen/Y Borthwen names which occur in Anglesey. A later tendency in W not to lenite a proper noun following a fem. generic is well attested in Anglesey toponyms from the sixteenth century onwards in such forms as Porth Cafnan 1536/9, Porth Daniel 1588, etc., and the prevalence of these forms has led to the coastal porth being treated syntactically in some cases as a masc. noun - for example in Porth-maur 1810, Porth-du 1838, Porthlleidiog 1838. Porth is usually defined as 'harbour, haven, port; ferry', possibly also 'inlet, creek'. In Porthaethwy, attested in 1291/2, porth probably meant 'ferry'; in Porth Abermenai, XIII cent., it may well have had the meaning 'haven, port'; but in the great majority of Anglesey instances it meant a wide range of outlets or inlets where boats could be put to sea or brought to land.

The main generics referring to protrusions are trwyn, literally 'nose' but figuratively 'point', with 40 occurances, and penrhyn 'headland' which one finds 18 times besides the five instances where it occurs as a simplex. Generics of off-shore features are ynys 'island' with 60 instances, carreg 'stone, rock' and its plural cerrig which one finds 50 times, craig 'rock' with 20 examples, and maen 'stone' with 10 instances. Ynys, cognate with Ir. inis, from a root meaning 'standing in water', applies to features which are generally larger than carreg, craig and maen, although many of the ynysoedd are little more than small rock outcrops.

A number of the W topographic toponyms are shift names, i.e. names placed upon places by the shift of a specific from one generic to another in the vicinity. Porth names such as Porth Cwyfan, Porth Edwen, Porth Eilian, Porth Padrig, which contain the name of the patron saint of the local church, are of this kind. They do not commemorate saints, as llan and ffynnon names do. They are name clusters formed by taking what is a commemorative personal name in Llangwyfan, Llanedwen, Llaneilian, Llanbadrig and attaching it to porth. Names such as Porth Philip Ddu (in Llandegfan), Porth Ruffudd (in Holyhead), Porth Solomon (in Beaumaris) are different; they are either commemorative or possessive, although we are not able to identify the individuals referred to. Names such as Porth Amlwch and Ynys Amlwch pose a problem of classification. Formally they could be regarded as shift names, but we doubt the value of classifying them in this way. Amlwch is the name of a settlement which grew into a town. Porth Amlwch is 'the creek at Amlwch', Ynys Amlwch 'the island near Amlwch'. Because they are different from the Porth Padrig/Llanbadrig type, they can be classified as geographical descriptive clusters. They occur frequently. Llanddwyn is the name of a former llan or church dedicated to Dwynwen and situated on a spit or island. It has given Ynys Llanddwyn, Porth Llanddwyn, Cesail Llanddwyn (cesail 'armpit' and fig. 'nook'), Gwddw Llanddwyn (gwddw 'neck'). Similarly Cemlyn, the name of a stretch of brackish water formed behind a gravel bank by the shore, has given Porth Cemlyn, Traeth Cemlyn

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Cerrig Cemlyn (*cerrig*, 'rocks'), *Esgair Gemlyn* (*esgair* 'limb' or 'spur'), and *Llyn Cemlyn* (*llyn* 'lake') – the latter documented from 1725 and indicating a loss of awareness of the formation of the name *Cemlyn* itself, from *cam* 'crooked, bent' and *llyn*. These examples reflect the high incidence of location specifics in W coastal toponyms. *Porth* occurs in combination with the names of a medieval township as in *Porth Llechog*, of farms as in *Porth Tyddyn-uchaf*, and of fields as in *Porth Cae Ceffylau*.

Specifics which describe topographic characteristics are common. *Bach*, *bychan* 'small' and *mawr* 'big' occur with *traeth*, *porth* and *trwyn*, as one would expect. One also finds *llydan* 'wide', *helaeth* 'extensive', *Porth-fain* 'the narrow inlet', *Porth-y-dyfn* 'deep water inlet', *Ynys-gron* 'round island'. Colour specifics are numerous, but are drawn from a narrow colour spectrum. *Porth*, *ynys*, *carreg* and *trwyn* are combined with *du* 'black'; *gwyn* 'white' occurs often with *porth* to describe the appearance of either sand or pebbles; *coch*, 'red' occurs with *traeth* and *trwyn*, *melyn* 'yellow' in *Traeth Melynog*, and *brith* 'speckled' in *Cerrig-brith*. *Traeth-gwyllt* (*gwyllt* 'wild, stormy'), *Porth-fudr* (*budr* 'dirty, foul'), and *Porthlleidiog* with *lleidiog* 'muddy' are again examples of descriptive specifics. Others reflect the activities of long-ago. *Cwch* 'boat' and its plural *cychod* occur with *porth*, but so also does *corwgl* 'coracle' and *ysgraff*. *Corwgl* is today the word for a small basket-shaped craft used only on a few Welsh rivers: formerly it referred also to sea-going wicker-framed boats covered with pitch, like the Irish *curach*. Curachs or *coryglau* must have been used for fishing from the three *Porth-y-corwgl* which one finds in Anglesey – in Llaneilian, Holyhead and Rhoscolyn. *Ysgraff*, as in *Porthyrysgraff*, was a different kind of sea going boat, probably larger in size than a coracle: the word is by today obsolete in Anglesey. *Rhwydau* 'nets' in *Porthrhwydau* and *Cerrigyrhwydau*, and the singular rhwyd in *Craig-y-rhwyd*, again reflect an age when fishing was an important part of Anglesey coastal life. Biotic specifics likewise reflect a past economy. *Delysg*, – *duilease* in Ir – was the word for an edible kind of seaweed, English 'dulse'. It occurs in *Porth delysg* in Llanfwrog and in *Cerrig-delysg-crin* 'parched-dulse rocks' in Llanfair-yng-Nghornwy.

Turning to the non-Welsh or mixed-language names, one finds a small number with medieval attestations. A handful of these have long been accepted as Scandinavian in origin. The name *Anglesey* itself is one. It is personal name *Qngull* and *-ey*, 'the island of Qngull', but the form has been influenced by the English *Angle*. Indeed, as early as the XII cent. William of Malmesbury explained the name as 'Anglorum insulas'. Other names of accepted Scandinavian origin are *Priestholm* from *prestr* and *holmr* 'island'; *Skerries*, a group of rocks off the north-west corner of Anglesey, from *sker* 'reef, rock'; and possibly *Maen Piscar*, a small rock off the coast near Rhoscolyn, where we have W. *maen* 'stone, rock' combined perhaps with ON *fiskarr* 'fisherman'. Documentation for this latter name is however late; the earliest attestation we have seen is on the first edition of the OS map. To these examples we would add *Osmond's Air*, documented from 1480, the name of a sandy point near Beaumaris. It is the personal name *Asmundr*

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and ON *eyrr* 'gravel or sand bank'. All the Scandinavian names refer to coastal or off-shore features, suggesting that they were bestowed by Viking voyagers, as indeed historical evidence concerning the Vikings in Wales would lead us to expect.

Southcrook, documented from 1304, is problematic. It is the lost alien name of a spit at the southern end of the Menai Straits. It could be Old N *krokr* 'bend' and another coastal toponym of Scandinavian provenance, or more likely, in our view, it could be ME *crok*. In this case it would belong with other late medieval English generics encountered on the Anglesey coasts, such as *mouse*, *warth* or *wharf*, and *foreland*. There are three small islands called *mouse* off the north Anglesey coast, each identified by a geographical specific, - *east*, *middle* and *west*. At least one of them, probably the easterly, was known as *le Mouse* in the XV cent. Why mouse? Is *mouse* as a coastal name used metaphorically to describe something small in proximity to something bigger, as we find *calf* used in Manx coastal toponyms? Or was it simply that the rock was infested with mice? One recalls Geraldus Cambrensis' testimony that small mice swarmed on Priest-holme. (When the holy men who lived there quarrelled one with another, so Gerald tells us, then the mice devoured their sustenance and forced them to live harmoniously!). One should note also that *Ynys Lygod* and its translated form 'The Isle of Mice' occur as varying names for *Ynys Moelfre*. *Foreland* is dangerously tempting. Combined with *foul* it occurs in 1478 as *le Fouleforland*, the name of the headland at the north-easterly corner of Anglesey, - Carmel Head today. The earliest recorded example of *foreland* in NED occurs in a quotation from 'Sir Gawain and the Green Knight' which includes a much discussed reference to an unidentified Holy Hede and to Anglesey. However, to cause Gawain to come to this far-flung corner of Anglesey would be to take him, and us, way off course. We shall leave him, and note that all the alien toponyms we have listed so far, both Scandinavian and English, are names bestowed independently of the Welsh names for the same topographic features.

Red Wharf Bay is different. All the earliest forms from the XVI & XVII cents. give *Warth* or *Warthe*, suggesting the obsolete *warth* 'shore, strand'. In this case *Red Warth Bay* could have been a translation of W *Traeth Coch* (*traeth* 'strand' + *coch* 'red').

Such translation toponyms do occur, but they are not common, barely half a dozen. *Milne Bay*, east of Cemlyn, attested in the XVI cent., later *Mill Bay*, translates *Porthyfclin*. *Black Point* at Penmon and *Black Rock* in Holyhead translate *Trwyn-du* and *Carreg-ddu* respectively. *Stag Rock*, again near Cemlyn, translates *Carreg-yr-iwrch*. In these cases documentation enables one to conclude that the Welsh toponym precedes the English, but it would be dangerous to assume that wherever double names occur the translation has in every instance been from W. into Eng. The doublet *Salt Island/Ynys Halen*, at the entrance to Holyhead harbour, is a warning. Lewis Morris, the XVIII cent. Angelsey cartographer, gives *Salt Island*: he also adds that "there was a Salt-house formerly erected on the Island".

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Morris does not use the form *Ynys Halen*. For him the W name was *Ynys Gybi*. *Ynys Halen* occurs for the first time in 1839. It is, we suspect, a translation of the English.

Translation doubles, where both parts of dual-element toponyms are translated, are infrequent amongst non-Welsh Anglesey coastal names. Much more common are what appear formally to be mixed-language names, where a Welsh specific is combined with an English generic. A glimpse at the OS map will reveal plenty of examples: *Dulas Bay*, *Cemaes Bay*, *Rhoscolyn Head*, *Wylfa Head*, *Abermenai Point*, etc. These names are in the majority of cases independent of the Welsh names for the same features. A large number are simple location clusters formed by adding *bay*, *head*, *point* to a local toponym. They are convenient labels. Often the label could vary considerably. *Porth Eilian* in north-east Anglesey is an example. It was the name recorded by Leland in 1536-9. It is the local name today. In W the toponym is constant. The same creek is at different periods referred to by five differing non-Welsh forms, - *la baye sancte Elene* in 1297, *the Creek of Saint Hillary* and *St. Hillary's Bay* in the XVI cent., *Lynas Cove* in 1835, *Eilian Bay* more recently. The variants are interesting. Eilian or Elian is the patron saint of the local *llan*, - Llaneilian. In the late Middle Ages Eilian was wrongly identified with Hilary. Later a learned Latinization of the saint's name was coined, namely Aelianus. Aelianus on the tongues of sailors became Lynas. This happened in the XVIII cent. It became the official name of the lighthouse erected on the north-easterly point of Anglesey - at Point Lynas. Lynas Cove locates the creek in relation to the lighthouse. Eilian Bay, like a number of other *bay* forms in Anglesey, belongs to the age of tourism. This is an extreme example, but it illustrates the point that a great many of the apparently mixed language coastal names of Anglesey are descriptive location labels.

The commonest English generics are *rock*, *point* and *bay*. Other less frequent generics are *bank*, *island*, *road*, *cove*, *creek*, *head*, *sand*, *spit*, *slack*, *sound*, *race*, *ridge*, *swatch*, *platter*. A swatch is a passage or channel of water between sandbanks or between a sandbank and the shore. It occurs twice, Midlake Swatch and Penmaen Swatch, for the channels on both sides of Dutchman's Bank at the eastern entrance to the Menai Straits. *Platter*, not recorded in any topographical sense in OED, refers to a submerged platform. Like *swatch* it is a feature on navigation charts.

Independent English names for features with established Welsh names are found. *Cable Bay* is W *Porth Trecastell*; the E name indicates that an Atlantic telephone cable ends here. *Bull Bay* is W *Porth Llechog*: it may possibly be drived from W *Pwll Tarw* (*pwll* 'pool' + *tarw* 'bull'), a lost name for a nearby indentation. *Cable Bay* and *Bull Bay* are rapidly replacing the W toponyms, even in Welsh conversation, as *Church Bay*, the name of a beach popular with tourists, is displacing *Porth Swtan*. *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 therefore to that numerous category of alien Anglesey coastal toponyms, namely

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independent names bestowed by marine cartographers.

Freshwater Bay is a typical example. It refers to the area of coast south of Point Lynas; as *Freshwater Road* it is documented from the XVI cent. Robinson in his 'Sailing Directions for the North and North East Coast of Anglesey' notes that "at the south end of this bay (fresh) water may be procurred". *Freshwater Bay*, where *bay* is synonymous with *road* meaning a stretch of water where ships can ride at anchor, has no corresponding W name, but the watering-place which gave being to the E toponym is known by the recorded *Ceg-yr-afon* 'mouth of the river'. *Freshwater Road/Bay* is a navigation identifier; W *Ceg-yr-afon* is an evolved name which arose amongst the local community. It is significant that a large number of the independent English coastal names refer to off-shore features – *swatch,platter,bank,road,race, ridge*, for which we have not found corresponding W toponyms. *Archdeacon Rock* and *Langdon Ridge* are examples. Both are commemorative names bestowed by two XIX cent. marine cartographers, W.E. Archdeacon and C.H. Langdon. *Bolivar Rock* or *Fenwick Rock*, a submerged rock off Church Bay, is worth noting. Lloyd's Register for 1844 lists a barque *Bolivar*, master J. Fenwick, and we can only conclude that this vessel ran aground here. Other E *rock* specifics, such as *African Rock,Ethel Rock, St. Vincent's Rock, Nimrod Rocks*, are almost certainly the names of ships which were wrecked at these particular locations; they are commemorative toponyms which were at one time warning signals!

Skerries, from ON sker, a group of rocks half a mile long off north-west Anglesey, has already been referred to. In W it is *Ynys y Moelrhoniaid*, 'seals' island', a name documented from the XIV cent. On the first OS map the W names of seven minor topographic features on the Skerries are noted – *Ynys Berchan* and *Ynys Arw* (*garw* 'jagged') for the larger rocks at either end of the central island; *Maen y Caill* (*maen* 'stone, rock' and *caill* 'testicle'), *Maen Guillym*('Gwilym's rock'), *Yr Howlyn, Cerrig-y-pistyll* ('flood rocks') for smaller rocks; and *Porth -yr -allt* ('the creek by the cliff') for the landing-place. On XIX cent. marine charts ten English names of minor features are given, – *African Rock, Gull, Toucan, Passage Rock* to denote rocks; *Cave Point, Flood, Race Point, West Point*, and a little distance seawards *West Platters* and *East Platters*. Only in one instance does one find E and W doubles for the same feature. *Maen Guilym* and *Gull* refer to the same rock. With this exception, what one observes are two independent naming systems, the W system describing *ynysoedd* and a *porth*, locations which were visited by fishermen from the mainland, the E system indicating points, rocks, natural features which were important for navigation.

Alien or linguistically mixed topyms amount to 20% of Anglesey coastal names in our collection. It is a surprisingly high incidence, and in marked contrast to the minute evidence of alien elements in the toponyms of inland Anglesey parishes. Only to a very limited degree can it be attributed to Anglicisation and linguistic replacement. It is rather the case that one has in these coastal toponyms two, largely independent, systems of nomenclature, – one, the entirely Welsh toponyms, in large measure evolved

names, expressing the local inhabitants view of his topographic environment; the other, the alien or partially alien toponyms, in large measure names bestowed by sailors and cartographers from a sea-based perspective. For his collection of the former the toponomist has to engage in oral collecting and by today that task is a matter of extreme urgency.

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