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The names of Chaceley, Meon, and Prinknash have been obscure. Yet the first seems to refer to the wood or clearing of a Briton called Cadui or Cadwy; the second to a stream called ‘flowing one’ by the Britons; while the third apparently contains Celtic elements meaning ‘tree’ and ‘ridge’ with an English suffix meaning ‘ash tree’ or ‘headland’.

Chaceley

Chaceley (SO 8530), a village downstream from Tewkesbury and across the Severn, has a problematic name. It occurs in 972 as *Ceatwesleah*, where the last element is English *leah* ‘wood; clearing’. Since Hugh Smith rejected derivation of the rest from **Ceatwe* (a personal name he called ‘imperfectly evidenced’), modern opinion has taken the first part as Brittonic and perhaps equivalent to Welsh *coed* ‘wood’.¹ ‘Brittonic’ refers to languages deriving from British, the Celtic language that divided into later Welsh, Cornish, and Breton. It contrasts with ‘Goedelic’, the branch of Celtic represented by Irish, Scottish Gaelic, and Manx.

The first part is certainly not English. Yet there are difficulties in explaining it from the Celtic for ‘wood’ (which would give *-ewes-* only by assuming a suffix). If we look again at Hugh Smith’s **Ceatwe* we find that, although this is unknown in other English sources as a personal name, it is familiar elsewhere as a Celtic one. It is *Cado* or *Cadwy* in Welsh, and *Cadoe* in Old Breton. The most famous person of the name was the son of Gereint, prince of Devon and Cornwall, who makes a semi-legendary appearance in the lives of Celtic saints. The life of St. Carannog describes Cadwy as a contemporary of King Arthur; the 9th-century life of St. Winwaloe calls him ‘king of Britain’. In a later Welsh triad Cadwy was remembered as one of the three men of Britain who were ‘most courteous to guests and strangers’.² As for the name, this is easily related to the Celtic element *Cad-* ‘battle’, as in Gaulish *Catuos*.³

One would like to link Chaceley with this chivalric figure, but this can hardly be, as his associations were with the West Country. The settlement at Chaceley surely belonged to another Briton of the name. As such it resembles other places in England, such as Catsley (SO 7279) in Shropshire (attested in Domesday Book as the wood or clearing of a man called Cadog), Dewsbury in West Yorkshire (the stronghold of a Briton called *Dewi* or David), and Brenchley (TQ 6641) in Kent (the home of somebody, perhaps a Cornishman, called Brenci).⁴

So it seems *Ceatwesleah* or Chaceley was the wood or clearing of a Briton called Cadui or Cadwy. If it was, we solve a problem that has troubled philologists for generations. We also strengthen the evidence for Celtic survival by the Severn, which the English would have reached by A.D. 600, occupying the territory beyond some 50 years or so later.⁵ Professor Coates of Sussex University has mapped out and listed the cluster of British toponyms in the country west of Chaceley. Five miles beyond is low-lying Corse (SO 7826), with a Celtic toponym (cf. Welsh *cors* ‘marsh, bog, swamp, fen’); three miles further on across the river Leadon (cf. Welsh *llydan* ‘broad one’) is Pauntley (SO 7429), with church and manor house neatly situated in a hollow

(cf. Early Modern Welsh *pantlle* ‘hollow, dell, small valley’) by the river bank.⁶ The name of Chaceley is thus useful information for Celtic survival in early Gloucestershire, where it seems that a Briton or man with a Brittonic name continued to occupy land by the Severn, even after the English conquest.

Meon

Meon Hill (SP 1846), three miles north of Chipping Campden, rises nearly some 160 metres above the Vale of Evesham to a flat summit occupied by a hillfort.⁷ The name is attested as *Mene* in 1086 and 1236, *Muna* in 1159, *Mina* in 1190, *Muena* in 1191, and *Muene* in 1196, all referring to a settlement. (Meon Hall and Lower Meon still exist on the hill’s north-east side.) Ekwall took this as a hydronym, comparing the river Meon in Hampshire and noting that Meon Hill lies between two arms of a north-flowing brook.⁸ Coates agrees, suggesting a link with Old Irish *moín* ‘treasure’, though admitting that meaning and application are unclear for Meon Hill and the river Meon alike.⁹

As regards the Hampshire Meon, Rivet and Smith emend the 8th-century Ravenna Cosmography’s *Maina* (variant *Mavia*) to *Moina*, comparing Gaulish *Moenus* (the river Main of Germany) and Middle Irish *Main* and *Maoin* (from **Moina*), now the Caragh river of Kerry. They also refer to the Miño river, anciently *Minus* (now forming the north frontier of Portugal), and the Polish rivers Mién and Mianka. They take the root as probably Celtic **mei-* (cf. Latin *meo* ‘I go, pass’), with a sense ‘to go’ (hence ‘moving one, fast-moving one’).¹⁰

Two points may be made here. First, although Irish *moín* perhaps has a Brittonic cognate in Welsh *mwyn* ‘benefit, advantage, value, profit; treasure, wealth’, this is uncertain. In any case *mwyn* is not recorded as a place-name element, so can probably be ruled out as regards Meon Hill.¹¹ (Coates’s Irish river might relate rather to Middle Irish *moín* ‘dumb, silent’, but this is still less relevant in the present context, as it has no known Brittonic cognate.) Second, Rivet and Smith’s case for the river Meon needs slight qualification as regards Meon Hill. This has a stream on its slopes, but small and not fast-flowing. Another approach to the problem, using Welsh evidence, seems securer.

The obvious Welsh analogy for *Mene*, *Muna*, *Mina*, and *Muena* in early sources is *Menai*, the name of the straits separating the island of Anglesey from the mainland. The earliest attestation seems to be in a poem, nominally of the 6th century (though Professor David Dumville shows good reasons for dating it to the 9th) praising a Powys king’s aggressions against his neighbours, which included ‘An expedition beyond Menai (*Menei*)—the rest was easy; / Battle in Crug Dyfed—Aergol on the move’.¹² Aergol was a 6th-century king of Dyfed, and Crug Dyfed is perhaps Banc-y-Warren (SN 2047), an ancient tumulus outside Cardigan.¹³ More secure for early spelling is *Mene* (for *Menei*) in the 9th-century *Historia Brittonum* (chapter 75). As well as the Menai Straits there is a stream called Menai, attested in 1332 as *Menei* and running past Pant-y-defaid (SN 4344) in Ceredigion; another Menai flows near Abergynolwyn (SH 6706) in south Gwynedd; and the river Mynian (SJ 0851) of south Denbighshire has been taken as ‘little Menai’.¹⁴ Yet another stream is called *Menei* in the 12th-century Book of Llandaff: it seems to be the brook (now renamed) entering the Wye at Aberffrw (SO 3509), Monmouthshire. Wendy Davies regards it as the river Monnow at Monmouth town (SO 5113), but this seems unlikely.¹⁵

So it is clear that *Menai* was used of small streams through the whole of early Wales. As regards etymology, Sir Ifor Williams proposed a link with the Welsh verb-nouns *myned* ‘walk, go’ and *tremynu* ‘walk, wander’. The sense would thus be ‘one that moves’ (with cognates in Latin *meare* ‘to move’ and Russian *minovat* ‘pass by, be over’) and hence little more than ‘stream’ or ‘flood’.¹⁶

The forms *Mene*, *Muna*, and so on for Meon in early Gloucestershire therefore suggest an etymological link with the Menai Straits and various obscure streams in Wales. *Mene* would originally have referred to the brooklet rising by Meon Hall and flowing northwards past Lower Meon to Lower Quinton and beyond. If so, we could rule out a link with Irish *moín* 'treasure'. The forms would bring us back (by evidence from medieval Wales rather than ancient Europe) to Rivet and Smith's association of the Hampshire Meon with the Celtic root **mei-* 'move' in Welsh *mynd*, cognate with Latin *meare*.

If, then, at Meon Hill we have the same element as at the Menai Straits, Nant Menai in Gwynedd, Abermenai in Ceredigion, and so on, we would have a simple name meaning 'mover; stream' borrowed when the English occupied the Vale of Evesham area after about A.D. 500. This derivation should hence interest archaeologists and others as indicating a persistent British presence on the Gloucestershire–Warwickshire border, perhaps on the site of Meon Hall and Lower Meon. The editor of this journal tells the writer that though Meon Hill is now in Warwickshire, it was in Gloucestershire until 1935, when the parish of Quinton was transferred from one county to the other. Its name certainly links it with Gloucestershire (rich in Celtic toponyms), and not with Warwickshire (poor in such). The Welsh evidence also tends to confirm Rivet and Smith's explanation of *Meon* in Hampshire, though we need not think of the river there as fast-flowing.

Prinknash

Prinknash, four miles south-east of Gloucester, is famous for its medieval hunting-lodge (rebuilt by the last abbot of Gloucester), which in modern times has housed a community of Benedictine monks. Yet its name, pronounced 'Prinnage', has puzzled scholars. It occurs in 1121 as *Prinkenese*, the last element being taken as English *ash* (the tree).¹⁷ The rest has seemingly remained obscure.¹⁸

Given this difficulty, the first part may perhaps be Celtic, with an English suffix. This should cause no surprise. The names of both Gloucester and Cheltenham are such linguistic hybrids, with their last part English, but their first part Brittonic.¹⁹ If so, the first element at Prinknash would be equivalent to Welsh *pren* 'tree'. This has been found elsewhere in England, as at Pimperne, 'five trees' (Welsh *pump pren*), in Dorset.²⁰ It certainly occurs in the Scottish place-name elements *prim*, *pirn*, *prin*, and *pren*. These occur at Primrose (second element *rhos* 'moor') in Lothian, Borders, and Fife; *Trepren*, 'homestead of (the) tree', now Traprain, in Lothian; *Pryntaytoun*, 'tree of (the) smallholding', now Pirntaiton near Stow, in Lothian; and Printonan, 'tree of the marsh', in Borders.²¹ Another example may occur at Prendergust, situated by a prominent hill on the English border and apparently meaning 'homestead of the tree by a block-shaped hill'.²²

Pirntaiton in Lothian and Printonan in Borders suggest the first element of *Prinkenese* 'Prinknash' means 'tree'. As for the second element, this would be Brittonic **cein* 'ridge', as in Middle Welsh *kein* 'back, ridge', Old Cornish *chein* (glossing Latin *dorsum* 'back'), Modern Cornish *cein* 'back, ridge', and Middle Breton *queyn* 'back'. Welsh *cein* has been obsolete in ordinary speech for nearly a thousand years, but survives in the name of Ceinmeirch 'ridge of horses' south of Denbigh. It also provides the name of Sir Gawain's horse Gryngolet (originally *Keincaled* 'hard back, firm back'; a steed that would not toss his rider even in danger).²³ In Cornwall the village of Kenwyn is situated on a *keyn wen* or white ridge that looks down on Truro.²⁴

Together, these Welsh, Cornish, and Breton forms allow us to derive the name of Prinknash from the equivalent of Welsh *pren* 'tree' and *kein* 'ridge'. This meaning seems confirmed by local topography, Prinknash being on the slope of the Cotswold escarpment, which rises to form

a prominent wooded ridge. This was surely known to the Britons as the ‘tree ridge’ (unlike other ridges which had lost their forest cover). As for the last element here, although Ekwall’s link with *ash* is possible, it may relate rather to English *ness* ‘cape, headland’, referring to one or both of the spurs of land that overlook Prinknash Abbey from the north-east and south-west.

If the above reasoning is correct, then, it explains an enigmatic English place name; provides evidence for British survival after the English seized Gloucester in 577; reveals another Celtic toponym in Gloucestershire; and confirms the wooded nature of the area in pre-English days, so that it would always have been a good place for hunting.

Notes

1. A.H. Smith, ‘The *Hwicce*’, *Franciplegius: Medieval and Linguistic Studies in Honor of Francis Peabody Magoun, Jr.*, ed. J.B. Bessinger and R.P. Creed (New York, 1965), 61; A.D. Mills, *A Dictionary of English Place-Names* (Oxford, 1991), 70; Richard Coates and Andrew Breeze, *Celtic Voices, English Places* (Stamford, 2000), 298.
2. *Trioedd Ynys Prydein*, ed. Rachel Bromwich (Cardiff, 1978), 195, 297; *Culbrwb and Okwen*, ed. Rachel Bromwich and D. Simon Evans (Cardiff, 1992), 71.
3. K.H. Jackson, *Language and History in Early Britain* (Edinburgh, 1953), 380; D. Ellis Evans, *Gaulish Personal Names* (Oxford, 1967), 173.
4. Mills, *Dictionary of English Place-Names*, 105; Coates and Breeze, *Celtic Voices, English Places*, 145–6.
5. Jackson, *Language and History in Early Britain*, 204, 240.
6. Coates and Breeze, *Celtic Voices, English Places*, 298, 299, 349, 362, 378.
7. *Ibid.* 300, 338, 378.
8. Eilert Ekwall, *The Concise Oxford Dictionary of English Place-Names* (Oxford 1960), 322.
9. Coates and Breeze, *Celtic Voices, English Names*, 300, 338.
10. A.L.F. Rivet and Colin Smith, *The Place-Names of Roman Britain* (London, 1979), 419.
11. *Geiriadur Prifysgol Cymru: A Dictionary of the Welsh Language* ([Cardiff,] 1950–), 2519; Joseph Vendryes, *Lexique étymologique de l’irlandais ancien: Lettres M–N–O–P* (Paris, 1960), M 59–60.
12. I. Ll. Foster, ‘The Emergence of Wales’, *Prehistoric and Early Wales*, ed. I. Ll. Foster and Glyn Daniel (London, 1965), 229; *The Poems of Taliesin*, ed. Ifor Williams (Dublin, 1968), 1; D.N. Dumville, ‘Problems of Historicity’, *Early Welsh Poetry*, ed. B.F. Roberts (Aberystwyth, 1988), 3, 12.
13. Foster, ‘Emergence of Wales’, 229; A.C. Breeze, ‘Did a Woman Write the *Four Branches of the Mabinogi*?’, *Studi Medievali* 38 (1997), 692 n. 13.
14. R.J. Thomas, *Enwau Afonydd a Nentydd Cymru* ([Cardiff,] 1938), 29–30; Ifor Williams, *Enwau Lleoedd* ([Liverpool,] 1945), 43.
15. Thomas, *Enwau Afonydd a Nentydd Cymru*, 29–30; Williams, *Enwau Lleoedd*, 43; Wendy Davies, *The Llandaff Charters* (Aberystwyth, 1979), 110.
16. Williams, *Enwau Lleoedd*, 43; A. C. Breeze, ‘*Beowulf* and *The Battle of Maldon*: *trem* “pace” and Welsh *tremyn* “journey”’, *Notes and Queries* 238 (1993), 9–10.
17. Ekwall, *Concise Oxford Dictionary of English Place-Names*, 374.
18. Cf. *The Place-Names of Gloucestershire*, ed. A.H. Smith (English Place-Name Soc., 1964–5).
19. Coates and Breeze, *Celtic Voices, English Places*, 299, 300, 378.
20. *Ibid.* 295, 354.
21. W.J. Watson, *The Celtic Place-Names of Scotland* (Edinburgh, 1926), 351–2.
22. A.C. Breeze, ‘*Prendergust*, Borders’, *Scottish Language* 20 (2002), 134–5
23. *Idem*, ‘*Gryngolet*, the Name of Sir Gawain’s Horse’, *English Studies* 81 (2000), 100–1.
24. O.J. Padel, *A Popular Dictionary of Cornish Place-Names* (Penzance, 1988), 102, 190; Mills, *Dictionary of English Place-Names*, 193.