

## II.—ORIGIN OF THE NAME.

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THE etymology of this interesting place-name can only be the subject of conjecture. The word "Melandra" may be of ancient British origin, or derived through the Cymraeg language from Latin or Latinized Greek. It does not seem to be of Anglo-Saxon or Danish parentage; and as far as local tradition is concerned, that does not afford any help beyond proving the antiquity of this rather peculiar name. The following are suggestions:—

1.—The name may signify Miller's Castle, or Castle of the Mills. We know from Gibbon, and the authorities cited in his history, that the Romans used to gather into certain of their military camps in Gaul and elsewhere vast stores of corn, which were collected for supplying the army and garrisons generally, and for transportation to Rome. In Britain the feeding of the legions and cohorts would be attended with great difficulties, and it would be necessary for large stores of grain to be kept and maintained at fixed depôts upon or near to the main lines of communication, especially in districts remote from any town or city. Melandra Castle may have been used as a fortified depôt for storing and grinding corn.<sup>1</sup> A remarkable number of querns, or hand-mills, have been found there, and many more may have been carried away by the inhabitants of the country after the hill-fortress had been abandoned by the Romans, by whom it might probably be called "Molendinaria Castra." The plural form, "Castra," was used for a military camp. "Molendinarium" means a place of mills, from "molendinum," a mill; and "molendinarius"

<sup>1</sup> "For the inhabitants had been compelled in mockery to sit by their own locked-up granaries, to buy corn needlessly, and to sell it again at a stated price. Long and difficult journeys had been imposed upon them; for the several districts, instead of being allowed to supply the nearest winter quarters, were forced to carry their corn to remote and devious places," etc., etc.—Tacitus, *Life of Agricola*, c. 19.

is a miller. The name having come down through the Britons, and been handed on to us by the Anglo-Saxon or Danish settlers, it may be considered to have escaped very well in being corrupted only to Melandra. But, again, in Cymraeg, or Welsh, the word "melin" (perhaps of Latin origin) means a mill, and "melin-ogryn" is a bolting mill. A corrupt pronunciation by a non-Celtic and illiterate race might easily turn "melin-ogryn" into "melin-odryn," and then, by easy stages, it might become Melandra.

2.—At Melandra Castle some large black wooden posts have been discovered, and it has been suggested by antiquaries that the entire fortification was at first faced with a strong fence of oak timber, and was afterwards re-faced with a breast-work of ashlar stone, considerable portions of which still remain *in situ*. It is probable that the original defences consisted of the high bank of earth, or vallum, with strong oak piles or palisades placed either on the outer face or along the top of the outer edge of the agger. This form of defensive work, or stockade, was common. Now there is a Latin word, "melandryum," which signifies heart of oak, or oak timber. It, of course, comes from the Greek, *μελάνδρουν*. "Melandrya Castra" would thus mean Oak Castle, or Wood Castle (*conf.* Woodchester, a Roman station near Stroud).

3.—"Andras" in Welsh signifies an enemy; also Satan. "Moel Andras" would mean the devil's hill, pile, or fort. Such of the ancient Britons as had not previously seen, or ever even heard or dreamt of, a building made of hewn stone, when they came into sight of this lofty stronghold (perhaps after it had been deserted), and beholding it seated high amongst the wild hills and moorlands of the High Peak, might very well call the place Moel Andras—*i.e.*, the Devil's Hill—they supposing the castle to have risen from the ground by enchantment. We read that the barbarian tribes of Germany, when they first saw a Roman fortress standing alone in the midst of a forest, esteemed it to be the result of necromancy or magic, and to be the work of an evil spirit. Moel occurs in

many Welsh place-names—*e.g.*, Moel Enlhi, a hill in Denbighshire; and Moel Siabod, a mountain near Capel Curig. The Britons were extremely superstitious. Their Anglo-Saxon or Danish successors would hear and adopt the name Moel Andras, not knowing its signification, and the transition would be easy enough to Melandra.

4.—In the Welsh language “melendra,” or “melyndra,” means yellowness, or the tawny colour; “melen,” or “melyn,” means yellow, or tawny (“melin” is a distinct word, and signifies a mill). The stonework at Melandra Castle is of a yellowish or tawny colour. The gritstone of the district (as also of parts of Cheshire and Lancashire) is frequently of a yellowish appearance, especially when newly worked. There is a remarkable similarity between the word melyndra, or melendra, and Melandra. When newly built, the fortress, on its elevated site, would be conspicuous from a great distance, and its appearance might suggest to the ancient Britons the idea of a yellow castle.

The first three of the foregoing suggestions have been submitted to a distinguished antiquary and philologist, who, in his remarks upon them, wrote that “the first and third were certainly more attractive than any he had seen put forward.” The fourth had not then been written. In so obscure a matter, it seems impossible that certainty can ever be attained. These conjectures are submitted with great diffidence to the criticism of expert etymologists, and it is hoped that students of the origin and meaning of place-names, especially those connected with the Roman occupation of Britain, will accept in a spirit of indulgence, and not without some degree of interest, this rather venturesome attempt to elucidate a very difficult subject of enquiry.