

The name of Baddegai, near Brecon

By ANDREW BREEZE

Baddegai (SN 984238) is a farm five miles south-west of Brecon; it stands by Byddegai, a torrent rushing into the Tarell, a tributary of the Usk. Thomas called the stream *Baddege* and gave the attestations *Podogau* of 1661 (in Theophilus Jones's *History of the County of Brecknock*), *Pathegy* of 1793, and *Paddegge* of 1795. He compared these with *Nant Pedecou*, a brook by St Maughan's (SO 4617), near Monmouth, and *Cilpedec* or *Kilpeck* (SO 4430), near Hereford. Both these occur in the twelfth-century Book of Llandaff. He thought all showed versions of a personal name, with *Peddeg* as the shorter form and *Peddegou* the longer, the *B* of *Baddege* being due to soft mutation after *Nant*.¹

Yet Thomas was surely misled. A personal name *Peddeg(ou)* is otherwise unknown. There is reason instead to take Old Welsh *pedec(ou)* and the like as a loan from Latin *pedica* 'trap, snare'.² Arguments for this are strengthened by Bawdrip 'badger trap', Somerset; Snargate (TQ 9928) 'snare gate', Kent; Stildon (SO 7169) 'animal-trap hill', Hereford and Worcester; Trafford (SP 5248) 'trap (for otters?) ford', Northamptonshire; and Wookey 'trap, snare', Somerset. On this basis *Nant Pedecou* would mean 'stream of snares', *Cilpedec* or *Kilpeck* 'snare nook, snare covert'. Similar names will have occurred from palaeolithic times, when bone needles were first used to sew with gut or sinew: materials also useful for making snares or nooses to catch a hare, rabbit, boar, deer, marten, fox, grouse, or other creature. If so, *Baddege* in Powys would ultimately come from Old Welsh *pedecou* 'snares'. The stream was that in a valley 'of snares', which gave its name to the farm. It would have had woodland and undergrowth where animals might be caught.

If this etymology is correct, it has several implications. It explains an obscure toponym, indicates resources used for getting food, and offers information on the ecology of the Brecon Beacons in early times. Baddegai on one side of them can be compared with *Cyfarthfa* (SO 0407) on the other (by Merthyr Tudful), explained by Sir Ifor Williams as 'place of barking, place where hounds held game at bay', which also suggests the prey found on these hills.³ Nevertheless, we may recall here a warning of Alcock, who thought hunting was of minimal importance in the early Welsh economy, its prominence in Welsh law and romance being due to its role as sport.⁴

It is also striking that the British language (ancestor of Welsh) should borrow the Latin word *pedica*, used by Vergil, whose *Georgics* describe winter as a time to set springes for cranes (*gruibus pedicas*) and nets for deer.⁵ *Pedica* can thus be added to the scores of Latin words that entered British during the Roman occupation of Britain and are used in Welsh even now. Like *pedica*, many of these refer to daily life, including *catena* 'chain', *cena* 'dinner', *coquina* 'kitchen', *frenum* 'bridle', *funis* 'rope', *pontem* 'bridge', and many more.⁶ However, Old Welsh *pedec* 'trap, snare' did not survive into the medieval literary language and so is known only from place-names. These cannot, therefore, be recent. *Nant pedecou* survives in a charter of about 850.⁷ The other forms will be as ancient. Even though there is no record of Baddegai until 1661, then, its name must be much older.

It might seem curious that Welsh should borrow Latin *pedica* when native equivalents must have existed. Jackson discussed this phenomenon, however, noting as an example that *pontem* drove out native *briva*, 'perhaps because the Roman bridge was an impressive work of engineering whereas the Celtic one would be a rough affair', like the clapper bridges of Exmoor. So the Roman *pedica* was probably better than or at least different from its British equivalents. But even Jackson could not see why Latin *piscis* 'fish' replaced native **escos* 'fish'.⁸ (Might this be because it was the word of Roman dining tables, learnt by the British slaves who did cooking and waiting?)

The writer's attention has been drawn to Gyfartha (SN 990241), a farm about half mile to the north-east of Baddegai, which is attested in the Tredegar deeds in the National Library of Wales as follows: *Tere y Gavarthya* in 1562, *Tir y Gyvarthva* in 1572, *Tir y gavarthva* in 1596–67 and 1609. This is useful indirect evidence for the present etymology. The meaning is 'land of the "barking place", where hounds kept game at bay. It hence underlines the original importance of hunting in this valley. At Baddegai, game would be caught with snares; at nearby Gyfarthfa, with hounds.

So the farm of Baddegai off the main road from Brecon to Aberdare provides information on early hunting, as well as the impact of Latin on Celtic language and culture. It may be that other obscure place-names in Britain contain elements reaching the Celtic languages from Latin. Kilpeck 'snare covert' has already been mentioned. Tardebigge (SO 9969), near Bromsgrove, where the Worcester and Birmingham Canal tunnels through a high ridge, seems another. It apparently represents English *at* plus the equivalent of Welsh **ardd y byg* 'height of the magpie' (with the asterisk representing a reconstructed form, and **pyg* 'magpie' deriving from Latin *pica* 'magpie'). The mountain of Pen-y-Ghent in North Yorkshire would be another instance, if it means 'summit of the foreigners', the last element being equivalent to Middle Welsh *gynt* (from Latin *gentes*) 'aliens, pagans'; that is, the Vikings who established the kingdom of York in 866.

In short, these and other examples show how much remains to be done on the derivation of Welsh and English place-names, to say nothing of their historical and archaeological implications. We are far from the evening of our labours.⁹

NOTES

1. R. J. Thomas, *Enwau Afonydd a Nentydd Cymru* (Caerdydd, 1938), 22.
2. A. C. Breeze, 'Kilpeck, near Hereford, and Latin *Pedica* "Snare"', *Nomina* 25 (2002), 151–2.
3. Ifor Williams, *Enwau Lleoedd* (Lerpwl, 1945), 32.
4. Leslie Alcock, *Dinas Powys* (Cardiff, 1963), 39.
5. A springe is a snare used to catch small game, especially birds. The word occurs at *Hamlet* I.iii.115, where Polonius says the Prince's oaths of love to Ophelia are 'springes to catch woodcocks'.
6. M. P. Charlesworth, *The Lost Province* (Cardiff, 1949), 64–76; K. H. Jackson, *Language and History in Early Britain* (Edinburgh, 1953), 78–80.
7. *The Text of the Book of Llan Dâv*, ed. J. Gwenogvryn Evans (Oxford, 1893), 74, 169, 172; Wendy Davies, *The Llandaff Charters* (Aberystwyth, 1979), 94, 106, 107.
8. Jackson op. cit. (note 6), 77–8.
9. Cf. Richard Coates and Andrew Breeze, *Celtic Voices, English Places: Studies of the Celtic Impact on Place-Names in England* (Stamford, 2000); R. A. Coates, 'The significances of Celtic place-names in England', in *The Celtic Roots of English*, ed. Markku Filppula *et al.* (Joensuu, 2002), 47–85.