

SHORTER NOTICES

THE NAME OF TRUNCH, NEAR NORTH WALSHAM

by Andrew Breeze

Trunch is a village in north-east Norfolk, two miles from the North Sea, two miles north-east of North Walsham and six miles south-east of Cromer at TG 2834. Its name appears as *Trunchet* in Domesday Book, the foundation charter of Castle Acre priory (1089), and documents of c. 1145 and 1209; as *Truch* in 1203; *Trunch* in 1254; and as *Trunche* in 1257. Ekwall thought it might derive from the name of the French monastery of Le Tronchet, which possessed land in Norfolk, but this is not convincing. Preferable is his alternative proposal that the name is of native Celtic origin, the *Trun-* resembling the second element of *Restronguet*, the name of a Cornish creek meaning 'ford (*res*) of the headland (*tron*) wood (*cet*)'. If so, the Norfolk name would mean 'headland of the wood'.¹ This etymology is cautiously accepted by Mills, who describes Trunch as 'possibly a Celtic name meaning "wood on a spur of land"'.²

There is certainly a Celtic form represented by Welsh *trwyn* ('nose, headland, promontory'), Cornish *troen* ('nose, headland, promontory'). It gave rise to the name of Troon near Ayr, where a conspicuous cape runs out to sea (though the name may have been influenced by Gaelic *an t-sròn* ('the nose, the headland', with silent *s*).³ In any case there are many Welsh capes called *trwyn*, such as *Trwyn y Gwyddel* ('Irishman's Cape') in the Lleyn Peninsula of west Gwynedd. In Cornwall we have *Halldrunkard*, the alternative name of Hallworthy, north of Bodmin Moor on the Launceston–Camelford road, which is nothing to do with drunks but means 'marsh of a promontory-wood' (*troen goes*).⁴

Yet there are two objections to the derivation of *Trunch* from a form giving Welsh *trwyn* 'nose, headland'. Firstly *trwyn* has been derived from **prugnos*.⁵ But there is no sign of British *g* in forms of *Trunch*, which there should be, as this sound had not been lost in the 5th century when East Anglia was seized by the English. We may contrast *Maegla* in the *Anglo-Saxon Chronicle* for 501, and *Coinmagil* and *Farinmagil* in the same for 577, both annals representing British *maglo-* 'prince'.⁶ Secondly, although Cornish *troen* (for example) is used of inland places, as *Halldrunkard* proves, it is not appropriate for the landscape at Trunch. *Halldrunkard* lies by the end of a long narrow ridge, but Trunch is on a wide level plateau, with spot-heights of 132 feet, 118 feet, 142 feet, 135 feet and so on.

Another derivation thus appears preferable. *Trunch* seems rather to derive from the British form giving Welsh *drum*, *trum* 'back', a cognate of Irish *droim* 'back'. These are all familiar in place-names. Old Irish *druim* was used of landscape features in early times, when *Druim nAlpuind* 'The Back of Alban, the Back of Scotland' was the Gaelic term for the great range of mountains separating Argyll from Pictland.⁷ Many Irish place-names begin with *Drum-*, such as *Drumcliff* in County Sligo (where Yeats is buried). The same is true of Scotland. An interesting example is the old name of Dumfries, recorded in about 1136 as *Dronfres* 'ridge of thickets'.⁸

The Welsh equivalent *drum* is found as *trum* in early records. In the *Gododdin*, a series of laments for North British warriors wiped out in an attack on Catterick about 600, both variants occur in one line, in which the poet Aneirin claims the support of Gododdin lords 'in the valleys beyond the ridges (*trumein*) of Drum Esyd' (somewhere near Edinburgh).⁹ In 'The Praise of Tenby', an unknown 9th-century Dyfed bard calls for feasting and merriment: 'Let anger, under a

ban, speed away over the hills (*trumein*)'.¹⁰ The Welsh and Irish forms have been regarded as cognates of Latin *dorsum* 'back; ridge' and Greek *deiras* 'ridge of a chain of hills; neck'.¹¹

Trunch lies on a plateau two miles broad, with valleys to north and south. There are still woods a mile west of Trunch; whether ancient or not, they show that woodland may grow in this region, which has many areas of sandy infertile soil, especially near Cromer. Hence there is good reason to regard *Trunch* as coming from a British form meaning 'wood on an upland', since Ekwall's explanation of the ending in *chet* poses no difficulties, while change of *m* to *n* shows sound-substitution (the sequence *-umch* not occurring in English).

If the above derivation from the equivalent of Welsh *trum* 'back; upland' and *coed* 'wood' is correct, it provides an exact account of the origin of *Trunch*, revealing it as a rare Celtic place-name in Norfolk. Mills has doubts as to whether the name is Celtic or not, but these would seem groundless. We may also rule out his translation 'spur'. *Trunch* does not derive from a form related to *trwyn* 'nose, promontory', but from a form related to *trum* 'back; (broad) ridge, headland, upland'. This is appropriate for the situation of Trunch, which lies on a plateau not a spur.

A Celtic etymology for *Trunch* also provides information on post-Roman settlement in the region. So rare are Celtic names in East Anglia that scholars have considered Anglo-Saxon settlement there as something of a 'clean sweep'.¹² But the name *Trunch* proves that British communities survived in north-east Norfolk. It may be compared with a handful of other Norfolk names, including those of North and South Creak (cf. Welsh *craig* 'rock') near Wells-next-the-Sea, and King's Lynn (cf. Welsh *llyn* 'lake') in west Norfolk. In the context of English colonisation, it is perhaps significant that Trunch lies away from the valleys of the Yare, Wensum, and Tas, where most evidence for early Anglo-Saxon settlement in Norfolk is found.¹³

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1. Eilert Ekwall, *The Concise Oxford Dictionary of English Place-Names*, 4th edn (Oxford 1960), 481; O.K. Schram, 'Place-Names' in *Norwich and its Region* (Norwich, 1961), 141-9, at 142. I thank A.J. Davison for alerting me to the latter reference.
2. A.D. Mills, *A Dictionary of English Place-Names* (Oxford, 1991), 335.
3. W.J. Watson, *The Celtic Place-Names of Scotland* (Edinburgh, 1926), 191; *The Poems of Taliesin*, ed. Ifor Williams (Dublin, 1968), 123-4; W. F. H. Nicolaisen, 'Troon', in his *The Names of Towns and Cities in Britain* (London, 1970), 182.
4. O.J. Padel, *Cornish Place-Name Elements* (Nottingham, 1985), 235, and *A Popular Dictionary of Cornish Place-Names* (Penzance, 1988), 94, 196.
5. John Morris-Jones, *A Welsh Grammar* (Oxford, 1913), 156.
6. K.H. Jackson, *Language and History in Early Britain* (Edinburgh, 1953), 461, 463-4.
7. Watson, 12, 74; cf. the Ordnance Survey *Map of Britain in the Dark Ages*, 2nd edn (Southampton, 1966).
8. Watson, 421-2; Nicolaisen, 'Dumfries', in *Names*, 85.
9. *Canu Aneirin*, ed. Ifor Williams (Caerdydd, 1938), 26; K. H. Jackson, *The Gododdin: The Oldest Scottish Poem* (Edinburgh, 1969), 137-8; on the poem, cf. A. C. Breeze, *Medieval Welsh Literature* (Dublin, 1997), 13-20.
10. Ifor Williams, *The Beginnings of Welsh Poetry* (Cardiff, 1972), 164, 165; cf. Breeze, 25-7.
11. Morris-Jones, 154, 186, cf. Holger Pedersen and Henry Lewis, *A Concise Comparative Celtic Grammar* (Göttingen, 1937), 153; Ifor Williams, *Enwau Lleoedd* (Lerpwl, 1945), 24; Rudolph Thurneysen, *A Grammar of Old Irish* (Dublin, 1946), 135; *Gwaith Dafydd ap Gwilym*, ed. Thomas Parry (Caerdydd, 1952), 477.
12. Jackson, *Language*, 202-3, 221-2, 229, 234-5.
13. cf. Ordnance Survey *Map of Britain in the Dark Ages*.