# Post-Roman Irish settlement in Wales: new insights from a recent study of Cardiganshire place-names

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As with much concerning the sub-Roman period of British history, the incursions and colonization by the Irish of parts of Wales during the fifth to sixth century are not clearly understood, due to the paucity of contemporary documentation. This article focuses principally on the place-name evidence that has been adduced to uphold various contentions as to the nature and spread of early medieval colonization. Some attention is first given to traditional Welsh views of the Irish in the modern period which will aid us in understanding the connotations of *Gwyddel* ('Irishman') in Welsh toponymy. The linguistic similarity of both Irish and Welsh demand that we consider the important concept of 'phonological coequivalence' between languages in sustained contact before we tackle the place-name evidence proper. The main place-name elements discussed are *cnwc* and *meudr,* to which is added a briefer discussion of other reputed Irish influences on Welsh toponymy.

### Welsh traditions that the Irish had preceded them

In the early modern period it was a common tradition in Wales that the Irish had been the aboriginal inhabitants of that country and had preceded the Welsh:

> Y mae *traddodiad* hyd y dydd heddyw ymmysc y werin bobl (er nad ydys yn edrych ar hynny ond megys *hen chwedl*) fod y *Gwyddelod*, ryw bryd yn yr amseroedd gynt, yn *frodorion* Cymru a *Lloegr.*[1]

This notion may have been fuelled, if not begun, by the name of the primitive round stone huts found in parts of north-western Wales which were termed *cytiau('r) Gwyddelod* ('[the] Irishmen's huts') and which were adduced as proof of the vestiges left by the primitive inhabitants on the Welsh landscape. The *cytiau('r) Gwyddelod* are first mentioned in Anglesey in the late sixteenth century by William Camden as *Hibernicorum casulæ* ('Irish cottages'),[2] rendered as

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[1] Evans, *Drych y prif oesoedd* [1740], pp 11–12.  [2] Owen, 'On the circular huts', p. 133; cf. Gibson, *Camden's Britannia,* p. 675.

*killieu'r Gwydhèlod* in 1695 by Edward Lhuyd in his additions to Gibson's revised edition of Camden's *Britannia*,[3] and elsewhere (Rowlands, †1723, *Mona Antiqua*) as *cyttie'r Gwyddelod*.[4]

The word *cwt* (pl. *cytiau*) ('pig-sty, shed') and its congener *cut* (pl. *cutiau*) are not attested earlier than 1547.[5] As they are evidently loans from English that seem to have replaced the older Celtic term *crau* ('pig-sty') they cannot be age-old Welsh terms for the round stone huts.

The terms *cwt* and *cut* are restricted to North Wales.[6] Except for a few parishes at the northernmost tip of the county the term was not known in Cardiganshire, and I take the tradition reported in 1913 that: 'An old man at Pontrhydfendigaid, named John Jones, used to say that remains of "Cyttiau'r Gwyddelod" were to be seen about a mile from Swyddffynnon, near the road to Tregaron, when he was a boy' as showing that the term *cytiau('r) Gwyddelod* had become popularized, in areas where this tradition did not formerly exist through the influence of antiquaries.[7] Ralegh Radford, the Inspector of Ancient Monuments for Wales, noted in 1935 that the hut groups called *cytiau'r Gwyddelod* were not known in Cardiganshire, though they were found in north-western Wales and Pembrokeshire.[8] Indeed, even in northern Wales the distribution of the term *cytiau('r) Gwyddelod* appears to have been restricted. Owen noted:

> The circular huts are sometimes called *Cyttiau'r Gwyddelod*. The word 'sometimes' is used advisedly, for it does not appear that they are invariably so designated. Often and again the writer has asked natives what these remains were and he has received the answer. 'Oh, they are some old ruins.' No other answers could be obtained from, nor any information respecting them given by, many a Carnarvonshire farmer; still, it cannot be denied that in Anglesey these huts are called as above, and that the name is not uncommon in other parts of Wales.[9]

This is confirmed by Fynes-Clinton[10] who gives *bwthynnod crynion* (retranscribed from a phonetic transcript) for the same prehistoric round dwellings, and not *cytiau Gwyddelod*.

In 1695, Lhuyd commented on the significance of *Gwyddelod* in this phrase:

> *Killieu r Gwydhèlod* (*sic*), which I presume to have been so call'd by the vulgar, only because they have a tradition, that before Christianity, the Irish were possess'd of this Island, and therefore are apt to ascribe to that

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**3** Gibson, *Camden's Britannia*, p. 677.   **4** Owen, 'On the circular huts', p. 137.   **5** *GPC,* s.v. *cut*; s.v. *cwt*.   **6** Thomas, *The linguistic geography*, p. 118.   **7** Anon, 'History and traditions of the neighbourhood of Highmead', p. 7.   **8** Radford 'The ancient monuments of Cardiganshire', p. 18.   **9** Owen, 'On the circular huts', pp 130–1.   **10** Fynes-Clinton, *The Welsh vocabulary*, p. 62.

Nation, such Monuments as seem to them unaccountable; as the Scottish Highlanders refer their circular Stone pillars to the Picts.[11]

I agree with Lhuyd that the attribution of these primitive 'huts' to the Irish arose due to their reputed 'primitiveness' rather than due to any firm historical basis. It is clear that *Gwyddel* 'Irishman' was commonly equated with 'primitive' in the early modern period. William Owen-Pughe in *A Welsh and English diction-ary* (*c*.1800) noted that:

> *Gwŷddel* … is the general term in Welsh for a native of Ireland … There is a tradition of Wales's being once inhabited by the Gwythelians … and the foxes are said to have been their dogs; and the polecats their domes-tic cats, and the like.[12]

Other examples of this association of a 'primitive' feature with the Irish include a stone circle in Tywyn (Mers.) known as *Eglwys y Gwyddel*.[13] According to J.E. Lloyd, '*Gryniau Gwyddelod* (Irishmen's ridges) are also shown, the supposed ves-tiges of a primitive agriculture'[14] (probably equivalent to the well-known 'lazy beds' of western Ireland and Scotland).

The term *Gwyddel* by itself was also pejorative in the early modern period: '*gwyðal*, … pl. *gwyðelod*, … "Irishman". – As term of reproach: *gwyðal hyl*[*l*]*'*, according to Fynes-Clinton.[15] Rhŷs noted in the Ogwen valley (Caerns.) that:

> … the sayings of the old people to this day show that there is always some spite between our nation and the Gwyðyl. Thus, for instance, … if a man proves changeable, he is said to have become a Gwyðel ('Y mae wedi troi'n Wyðel'), or if one is very shameless and cheeky he is called Gwyðel and told to hold his tongue ('Taw yr hen Wyðel'); and a num-ber of such locutions used by our people … Expressions of this kind are well known in all parts of the Principality.[16]

A treacherous sand-bank near Bangor was called *Banc Yr Hen Wyddeles* ('the Old Irishwoman's [sand]bank') (Llanfairfechan, Caerns. SH6678; in English it is known as Dutchman Bank).[17] These pejorative connotations may have been commoner in north-western Wales in the early modern period as this area must have seen a great number of Irish people displaced by the violence and poverty of seventeenth- and nineteenth-century Ireland. In 1741 we find a Welsh writer

**11** Gibson, *Camden's Britannia*, pp 677–8.   **12** *GPC*, s.v. *gwyddel*.   **13** Barnwell 'Eglwys y Gwyddel', pp 241–2.   **14** Lloyd, *HW*, p. 111.   **15** Fynes-Clinton, *The Welsh vocabulary*, p. 190. See also Mac Cana, above, p. 27.   **16** Rhŷs, *Celtic folklore*, p. 472.   **17** Jones, *Yn ei elfen*, p. 101. *Yr Hen Wyddeles* was popularized as a nickname of the then prime-minister Margaret Thatcher by the Welsh radio presenter John Roberts Williams in the 1980s.

commenting: 'The house of correction was open'd yesterday, *tipyn o gwt ail i un mochyn*. It's intended chiefly for Irish vagabonds.'[18] Furthermore, the pejorative Welsh view of the Irish appears to go back to the medieval period.[19] Indeed Hamp and Koch interpret the etymology of *Gwyddel* – the Brittonic name of the Irish, attested as early as the seventh century – as referring to 'a group belonging to the woods, forest people', by convincingly arguing that its root *gŵydd* ('wild') is ultimately a reflex of an old root that also gave *gwŷdd* ('trees'). One need only compare Latin *silva* ('wood') and its French derivative *sauvage* ('savage') to see how 'primitiveness' is equated with 'woods, trees'.[20]

Returning to the historical argument, scholarly opinion initially went along with the traditional view which believed that the Irish preceded the Welsh as the aboriginal people of Wales and England, as can be seen in the following extract from Lhuyd:

> Y Gwyðelod ymma hevyd a vyont yn yr hen oesoeð vrodorion Lloegar a Xymry pryn ai kyn yn duad ni ai yn gyvamserol, a pób yn or ðay, ni ellir mor duedyd; ond tebìka oll yn vy meðul i, i bod nhu ymma kyn yn dyvodiad ni ir ynys. (partly retranscribed)[21]

This argument, that the Irish were the aboriginals of Wales, was elaborated in most detail by John Rhŷs,[22] followed by the great Welsh medieval historian John Lloyd.[23] However, in contrast, the accomplished German scholar Kuno Meyer, marshalling medieval Irish sources, argued that the Irish were settlers from Ireland and not the ancient inhabitants.[24] Rhŷs' arguments were patently weak, and Meyer's view that the Irish presence in western Britain in the early Middle Ages was was the result of settlement from Ireland has ever since been the most widely accepted amongst scholars who have studied the question.[25]

### Irish implantation in the fifth and sixth centuries

That people from Ireland settled in some numbers in western Wales about the fifth century is generally accepted, mainly on the basis of the bilingual

**18** *GPC,* s.v. *cwt.*   **19** Cf. Parry, *Gwaith Dafydd ap Gwilym*, p. 542.   **20** Hamp, 'Goídil, Féni, Gynedd', p. 47; Koch, *The Gododdin*, p. xcviii; Rey, *Dictionnaire historique,* s.v. *sauvage.*   **21** Lhuyd, *Archaeologia*, 'At y Kymry'.   **22** Rhŷs, *Celtic Britain*, pp 4, 212–14; Rhŷs, *Early ethnology*, p. 12; Rhŷs, 'The Goidels', p. 21; Rhŷs & Brynmor-Jones, *The Welsh people*, pp 81–83. In his first book (*Lectures on Welsh philology*, pp 19–24, 186–89), it is clear that Rhŷs initially believed the ogam inscriptions found in Wales simply represented an older form of Welsh prior to the development of the letter <*p*> in the sixth century.   **23** Lloyd, *HW*, pp 96–7.   **24** Meyer, 'Early relations', p. 69.   **25** O'Rahilly, *Ireland and Wales*, pp 5–34; Thomas, *Britain and Ireland*, pp 58–66; Dillon, 'The Irish settlements', pp 1–11; Richards, 'The Irish settlements', 133–62; Thomas, 'Irish colonies', 251–74; Miller, 'Date-guessing and Dyfed', 33–61; Coplestone-Crow, 'The dual nature', pp 1–24; Ó Cathasaigh, 'The Déisi and Dyfed', pp 1–33.

Latin/ogam inscriptions found in Wales. However, the scale and duration of the Irish 'colonization', along with its influence on the native Brittonic population, remain a matter of debate. Scholarly consensus seems to be in general agreement concerning:

•   that raids from Ireland are known between the fourth and the sixth century.

•   that the bilingual inscription of *Uoteporix/Uotecorigas* demonstrates that Irish remained a currently-spoken language in south-western Wales up to at least AD 550.

What documentary references to Irish incursions and settlement we have are difficult to exploit as they were all written much later, and subject to the vagaries of oblivion, omission and contemporary political propaganda. The last overviews were by Coplestone-Crow, in 1983, and by Kirby, in 1994,[26] but even were I able, it is not my purpose here to give a sustained interpretation of the various skeletal historical accounts mentioning a post-Roman Irish presence in southwestern Wales. I would, however, like to draw attention to relevant facts of the place-name evidence.

## *Phonological coequivalence*

To understand why early Irish loans into Welsh dating from the Irish presence in south-western Wales in the fourth to sixth centuries are likely to remain untraceable we must understand the concept of phonological coequivalence between two similar languages in a sustained contact situation.[27] During the fifth–sixth centuries when there was an extensive Irish presence in western Britain, both Brittonic and Goidelic speakers were familiar – up to a certain point – with each other's languages. This was aided by the fact that both languages were closely related, and shared a number of features, which, when recognized, could be adapted to the etymologically corresponding sound of the borrowing language, and become indistinguishable from a native word. These

**26** Coplestone-Crow, 'The dual nature'; Kirby, 'The political development', pp 318–42.   **27** Phonological coequivalence is distinct from the common phenomenon of phonological substitution – e.g. the tendency of French speakers to replace English voiced <*th*> with <*z*> – in that the substitution is not made because the sound of the lending language is lacking in the recipient language, but because a pattern of coequivalence has been established between both languages. Weinreich, *Languages in contact*, p. 28, after talking of 'simple substitution of phonemes', briefly mentions the same phenomenon as 'various analogy patterns', giving as an example Danish *maskine* adopted from German *Maschine* (itself from French *machine*) on the analogy of such native cognates as *sko ~ Schuh*.

'recognized' features established a pattern of coequivalence between the two languages. Watson emphasized the same point when referring to the contacts between different Celtic languages in early medieval Scotland:

> … one thing which is obvious, namely that the change from one language to another is greatly helped when the two languages are closely akin and have a certain amount of common vocabulary. Modern Gaelic and modern Welsh, though they differ so much that the Welshman and the Gael are quite unintelligible to each other, have nevertheless a large common element which makes Welsh very much easier for a Gael than an Englishman, and *vice versa*; in early times the similarity was greater. As regards the place-names, some elements of ordinary occurrence are the same in both languages, with perhaps a shade of difference in meaning; some others are so similar that the Gaelic speaker, who understood them quite well, readily turned them into their Gaelic forms. These are general considerations which, I think may be usefully kept in view.[28]

This pattern of phonological coequivalence is amply evidenced by doublets attested for the same personal names and place-names in early Irish and Welsh sources, especially in southern Scotland where the Goidelic and Brittonic languages were in contact for a prolonged period. Examples include:

• The Brittonic kings of Strathclyde about AD 600 are given as Old Welsh *Riderch Hen* and *Tutagual*,[29] but latinized as Old Irish *Rodercus filio Tothail* in the Life of Columba.[30]

• Ifor Williams noted that the personal names *Dyuynwal Vrych* and *Nwython*[31] corresponded to the Old Irish names of historical persons *Domnall Brecc*, *Nechtan*.

• *Bangor* (Caerns.) was known in Old Irish as *Bennchair*,[32] *Bennchor Moer s.a.*634 in Irish Annals.[33] *Mynyw,* the old Welsh name of St Davids (Pembs.), was known in Old Irish as *Muine*.[34] The Old Welsh toponymn *Pen Guaul* referred to Scottish Gaelic toponym *Ceannfhàil* (Eng. *Kinneil*).[35] This phonological coequivalence is perpetuated in the English/Scots spellings of the

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**28** Watson, *The Celtic place-names of Scotland*, p. 346.   **29** Phillimore, 'The *Annales Cambriae*', pp 172–3.   **30** Jackson, 'The sources', pp 319.   **31** Williams, *Canu Aneirin*, p. xli. *Nwython* is an incorrect modernization by the copyist for what should have given *Neithon*, which is indeed found elsewhere in Old Welsh sources: Phillimore, 'The *Annales Cambriae*', p. 172. **32** Ó Riain, 'The saints', p. 390.   **33** Lloyd, *HW*, p. 193.   **34** *Cill Mune* in the *Martyrology of Tallaght* (eds Best & Lawlor, p. 20); the *Martyrology of Óengus* (ed. Stokes, p. 80) has *Cille Muni*.   **35** Watson, *The Celtic place-names of Scotland*, pp 46–8.

Scottish towns *Glasgow* and *Perth* – of Brittonic or Pictish origin – contrasting with Scottish Gaelic *Glaschu* and *Peart*.[36]

• In Wales *Dinllwydan* (SH3666, Aberffraw, Angl.), seems to contain a Welsh adaptation of the name of an Irish ruler *Liathán* (Modern anglicized Irish surname *Lehane*) whose sons were reputed to have conquered lands in Britain after the departure of the Romans.[37]

• The same personal-names found in versions of the Pictish King list compiled about the mid-ninth century,[38] contrast the 'Pictish' forms *Uurguist*, *Unuist*, *Oinuist* to the Old Irish forms *Fergus/Forgus*, *Óengus*. The 'Pictish' forms may possibly have been Brittonic: cf. OW. *Gurgust*, *Guorgust*, OB. *Uuorgost*, *Uurgost*, *Gurgost*; OC. *Unust*, MW. *Unwst*.[39]

• The bilingual Latin/ogam inscribed stone of Castell Dwyran (Carms.) dating from about AD 550 shows Latin *Uoteporigis* against ogam *Uotecorigas*.

Most of the above examples suppose the existence of phonological coequivalence spanning the fifth to seventh centuries. As both languages increasingly diverged during the period 500 to 1000 recognition of shared features would naturally lessen and loans would be more likely to retain the phonology of their original language; thus there would be less phonological coequivalence. The examples of phonological coequivalence between Brittonic and Irish cited above show – amongst other features, we find the common replacement of the fricatives [$\chi$, $\theta$] by the stops [g, d], and vice versa – that phonological coequivalence had evidently stopped by the ninth century,[40] after which time Irish scribes wrote *Onoroit* (< W. *Anarawd*), *Cair Ebhroc* (< W. *Caer Efrog*), *Brachaineoc* (< W. *Brycheiniog*);[41] whilst on the Welsh side scribes wrote the forms *Terdelach* (< Ir. *Toirdhealbhach*), *Dwthach* (< Ir. *Dubhthach*), *Mwrchath* (< Ir. *Murchadh*).[42] The progressive disappearance of phonological coequivalence explains why a Goidelic form borrowed into Brittonic about 500 could give Modern Welsh *meudr* – indistinguishable from a native Welsh cognate of Modern Irish *bóthar* – whilst

**36** Ibid., pp 356, 385–6.   **37** Meyer, 'Early relations', p. 61; Richards, 'Some Welsh place-names', pp 374–5.   **38** Jackson, 'The Pictish language', p. 144.   **39** Uhlich, *Die Morphologie*, pp 246–7, 259–60, 286.   **40** For the sake of simplicity I have avoided the complex issue of precisely dating the forms given as this does not affect my general point. I have kept in mind the century when the person referred to was living.   **41** Bartrum, *EWGT*, p. 33.   **42** Unless specifically noted the forms are from Evans, *Historia*, pp cxiii–cxvii. The vocalism of the forms *Liethan*, *Cruachan* found in the ninth century (Dumville, *The Historia Brittonum: 3 The 'Vatican' recension*, pp 68, 107) – whose Welsh equivalents would be *Llwydan*, *crugan* – lead us to think that they were copied from an Irish manuscript rather than forms found in contemporary Welsh.
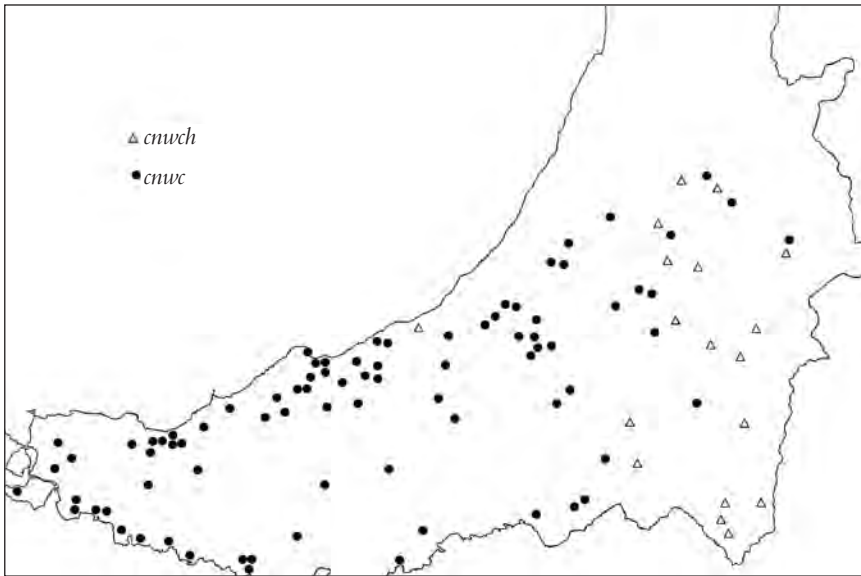
an Irish form borrowed into Welsh about, say, 1500 would give Modern Welsh *cnwc* (the native cognate being Modern Welsh *cnwch*).

Since the development and contraction of phonological coequivalence between languages in contact situation are not well understood, more method-ical study of the phenomenon would be welcome. Some things Ó are certain: phonological coequivalence is not applied in a blanket fashion in every instance. In contrast to the above examples of phonological coequivalence between Irish and Brittonic which date from the sixth–seventh centuries, it can also be shown that in a class of words thought to have been loaned from the late fifth century onwards[43] from Brittonic, but of Latin origin, such as *eclais* [eglǝs′], personal name *Pátraic* [pa:drǝg′], etc., stops are preserved. This latter class of words have no cognates; this suggests that phonological coequivalence at this time depended mostly upon identification with a native Celtic word. It is clear that phono-logical coequivalence can be incomplete, that is to say that it can operate on an individual feature in a wholly independent fashion; a phenomenon which seems exemplified by Old Irish *Finnio*, a hypocoristic form of the celebrated sixth-century Irish saint *Finnian* (and a form which Léon Fleuriot argued, confirmed the Brittonic roots of the saint also known in Old Breton as *Uinniau*, Welsh *Gwynio*).[44] Whatever the merits of the argument as to the nationality of *Finnian*, what is particularly interesting for us with respect to the hypocoristic version of his name is the fact that phonological coequivalence is only partial, for whilst the medial <–*nn*–> rather than <–*nd*–> and final <–*o*> 'preserve' features of Brittonic, the <*f*–> has been 'remodelled' in a regular Irish fashion. There seems to be no easy way to explain why some features are selected for substitution whilst others are not, but a more sustained and wide-ranging study of phono-logical coequivalence might reveal patterns as to how this phenomenon works and perhaps enlighten us a little as to how contacts between populations speak-ing different languages develop.

## *The place-name evidence*

The fairly common occurrence of *Gwyddel* ('Irishman') in Welsh toponymy is not unambiguously diagnostic of Irish settlement (or reputed Irish settlement) as there seems to exist another term *gwyddel* meaning 'brushwood'.[45] Neverthe-

**43** McCone, *Towards a relative chronology*, pp 31, 91.   **44** Fleuriot, 'Le "saint" breton Winniau', pp 607–17. The Irish saint's name *Finnio* can only be explained as derived from the Brittonic personal name *Uinniau*: Dumville, 'Gildas and Uinniau', pp 209–10. Pádraig Ó Riain, whilst disputing that this makes *Finnio* a Briton, does not dispute that the form *Finnio* 'essentially derives from a single Brittonic-based form': 'Finnio and Winniau', p. 193.   **45** I will discuss this in a forthcoming work as it is a complex and difficult question that submits to no easy resolution.

2.1 Distribution of names in *cnwch* and *cnwc* in Ceredigion

less there are other terms which have been taken to be connected with the early medieval Irish settlement. Since 1960, the date of publication of the most elaborate discussion on the subject by Melville Richards, it has been taken as axiomatic that 'Linguistic traces of the Irish colonies survived … in the topography and dialects of south-west Wales.'[46] In toponymy the traces of Irish influence most quoted are the elements *cnwc* 'hillock' and *meudr* 'lane'. Both are understood and productive terms in Welsh: the former is in use throughout Welsh-speaking Pembrokeshire, western Carmarthenshire and Cardiganshire south of Ystwyth; the latter is confined to Welsh-speaking Pembrokeshire with overspills into western Camarthenshire and south-western Cardiganshire.[47] That *cnwc* is a word borrowed into the Welsh language is proven by the final unvoiced <–c> rather than a final voiced <–g> (cf. ME *streete* 'street' > W. *stryd*). Due to its distribution mainly in south-western Wales and Anglesey it has seemed to be a borrowing from Irish *cnoc* whose Welsh cognate *cnwch* 'hill' is also found in Cardiganshire. In Figure 2.1 we see what appears to be clear complementary distribution between the two elements *cnwc* and *cnwch*, with the prevalence of

**46** Richards, 'The Irish settlements'; Ó Riain, 'The saints', p. 378.  **47** See toponymical distribution maps of *cnwc* in Richards, 'The Irish settlements', and of *meudr* in Richards, 'Welsh *meid(i)r*', p. 129.

*cnwch* forms in the mountainous east of the county (as was noticed by Williams),[48] and *cnwc* towards the south-western seaboard.

The complementary distribution in Cardiganshire is in keeping with the fact that most of Richards's easternmost examples from Breconshire, Radnorshire and north-eastern Carmarthenshire also seem to be *cnwch* rather than *cnwc*. Richards remarked on the distribution of *cnwc* and connected this to medieval administrative boundaries. He referred to the medieval kingdom of Dyfed, which had an Irish dynasty: 'The concentration of *cnwc* forms tallies very well with the ancient boundaries save in two instances.'[49] Since the distribution of *cnwc* did not coincide exactly with the boundaries of Cardiganshire (the ancient kingdom of Ceredigion) but seemed to stop at the boundary of the medieval cantref of Penweddig, Richards emphasized: 'In the north the concentration of *cnwc* forms stops short at the Ystwyth and Wyre, with *cnwch* appearing in a cluster between Ystwyth and Rheidol.'[50] Richards gave credence to E.G. Bowen's supposition that this boundary was important on the basis that it divided the influence of the cult of Padarn to the north from that of Dewi (Saint David) to the south, with a wholly hypothetical proposition that Dewi ministered to the Irish whilst Padarn did not.[51] In fact Llwynddewi (which gave its name to the more recent village of Capeldewi near Aberystwyth, north of the Rheidol), as well as Llanbadarn Trefeglwys and Llanbadarn Odyn (which lie many miles south of this boundary), show the complementary distribution of the two saints' cult to be illusory.[52] In any case, the boundaries of the cantref of Penweddig are so clearly defined by geography that we might ask whether it was the medieval boundary or the underlying geographical feature that gave rise to the particular distribution of a linguistic feature.[53]

Since *cnwch* is a native word and *cnwc* is a borrowed one, one is tempted to explain the lack of *cnwc* in the mountains as indicating the limits of Irish settlement, but as Richards has emphasized, the distribution of *cnwc* was not that of Irish place-names, but that of an area in which the loanword *cnwc* gained acceptance:

> It will naturally be appreciated that there is no intention of asserting that any *cnwc* form is a relic of the fifth and sixth century, but that they seem to indicate the area in which this borrowed form found acceptance.[54]
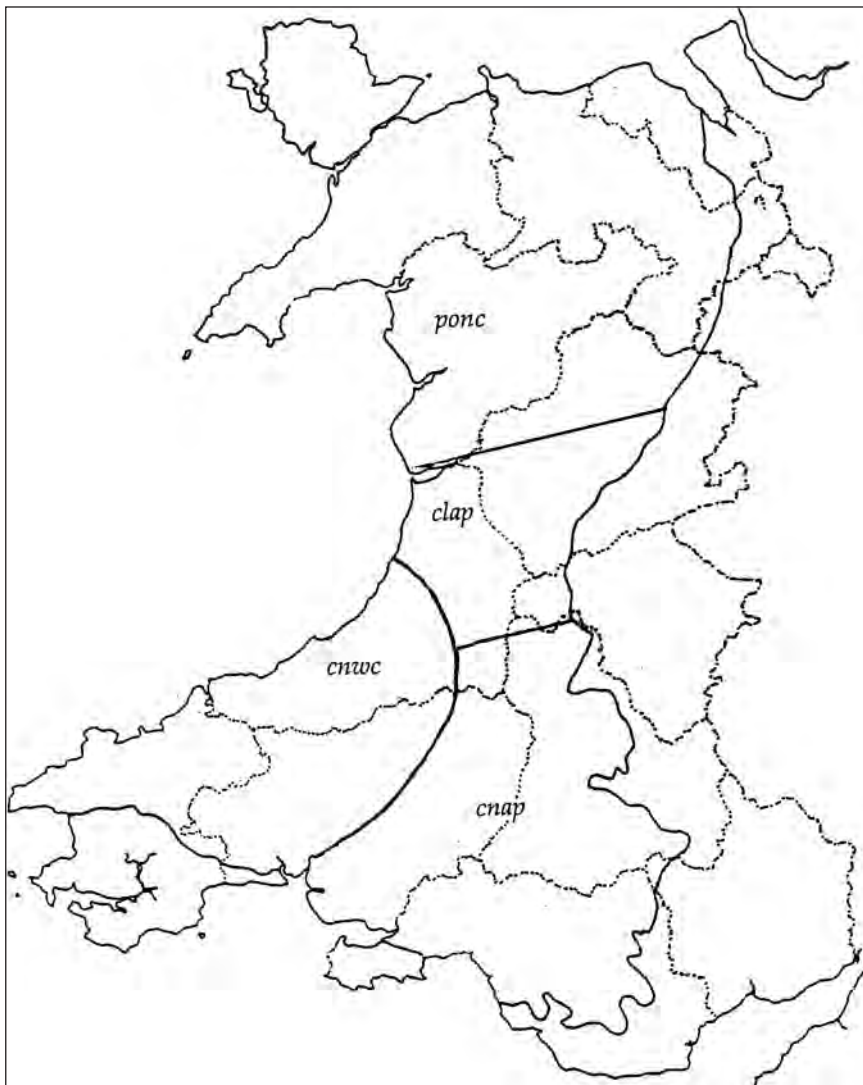
**48** Williams, 'Cyfansoddiad', p. 268.   **49** 'The blank area in south Pembrokeshire is a good indication of the way in which earlier Welsh names have been almost completely submerged in that part by successive waves of various representatives of the Germanic languages, Norse, English and Flemish.': Richards, 'The Irish settlements', p. 152.   **50** Richards, 'The Irish settlements', p. 151.   **51** Bowen, 'The Celtic saints in Cardiganshire', p. 15.   **52** Wmffre, *PNC*, pp 608, 712–13, 1016.   **53** Wmffre, *Language and place-names,* pp 373–7.   **54** Richards, 'The Irish settlements', p. 149.

Thus none of the place-names with *cnwc* in Cardiganshire are to be taken as Irish names, but are Welsh ones, formed using the Welsh term *cnwc* – admittedly originally a loaned term.

The link between *cnwc* as a Welsh dialect word and the Irish occupation of the early Middle Ages may be more coincidental than substantial, for one can also suspect *cnwc* to be a loan from the English of Pembrokeshire. Its toponymic distribution is similar to the Welsh term *iet* ('gate') which assuredly is a word loaned from the English of southern Pembrokeshire. The Welsh term *parc* ('field') is also a loan from English and shows a similar south-western distribution. There does exist an English *knock*, Old English *cnocc* meaning 'hillock',[55] to which we can compare the dialectal Danish *knok* ('little hillock').[56] The term *knock* is attested (1697) in the English of the anglicized medieval colony of Gower (Glams.) meaning 'a round hill',[57] as well as in the toponymy of the anglicized medieval colony of southern Pembrokeshire, e.g. *Knock* (Clarbeston), in 1331 *La Knoc*, in 1472 *Le Knocke*;[58] *Blacknuck* (Henrys Moat), in 1591 *Black Knock*;[59] *Mill Knocks* 1609 (unloc., Narberth);[60] *Knokwyll* 1524 (unloc.).[61] An added reason for questioning the Irish origin of *cnwc* is the difficulty in explaining how the – admittedly few – examples of *cnwc* in eastern Wales could be attributed to the influence of Irish, e.g. *Cnwc* (SO0600, Merthyrtydfil, Glams.). Such examples are likelier to contain *cnwc* from an English rather than an Irish origin (though the matter may be complicated by the fact that unless we check the Welsh pronunciation – where possible – or have plentiful documentary sources the Welsh element in some of these names may prove to be *cnwch* rather than *cnwc*).

Two well-known toponyms thought to contain *cnwc* as far as possible from likely Irish influences are found in the Welsh Marches: *Knucklas* (Rads.) on the border with England; and *Knockin* in the Shropshire lowlands. Whilst the *Concise Oxford dictionary of English place-names* derives *Knockin* from Welsh *cnycyn*, and compares '*Knukyn* (monticulus) 1307–23 Chester (Chs)',[62] we would not be surprised if *Knockin* was of Brittonic or archaic Welsh, rather than of purely Welsh origin. If so the root would be identical to *cnwch* rather than to *cnwc*; cf. English *brock* ('badger') from the Brittonic cognate of Welsh *broch*. Those place-names in England derived from Celtic hill-terms, *viz. Knock* (Westm.),[63] *Knook* (Wilts.), *Conock* (Wilts.), *Cannock* (Staffs.),[64] are assuredly from an ancestor of *cnwch* and not *cnwc*.[65]

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**55** Smith, *English place-name elements,* vol. 1, p. 103.   **56** Pierce, *The place-names of Dinas Powys hundred*, p. 42.   **57** Emery, 'Edward Lhuyd', p. 106.   **58** Charles, *The place-names of Pembrokeshire*, p. 406.   **59** Ibid., p. 63.   **60** Ibid., p. 406.   **61** Ibid., p. 760.   **62** Ekwall, *Concise Oxford dictionary of English place-names,* p. 282.   **63** This name probably refers to Knock Fell, the nearby mountain.   **64** Ekwall, *The concise Oxford dictionary of English place-names*, pp 85, 121, 282.   **65** The origin of *Cnwclas* is less assured. It may be that *Cnwclas* was a re-welshification of *Knucklas*, itself an anglicization of an original *\*Cnwchglas*. The simpler and natu-

2.2 Geographical distribution of usual words for 'hillock', 'knoll' in Welsh:
*ponc, clap, cnap, cnwc*

By the same geographical considerations, the attested examples of *cnwc* and *cnycyn* found in north-western Wales – also few – are simpler to explain as loans from Irish *cnoc* than English *knock*, so that we must allow that Welsh *cnwc* may well have different origins according to area. It is also possible that the south-

ral analysis, 'Y Cnwclas, for Y Cnwc Glâs, the green knoll', by Henry Owen implies an English rather than an Irish origin to *cnwc: The Description of Pembrokeshire,* iii, p. 332.

ern Pembrokeshire *knock* was itself a loanword, either from Welsh *cnwc*, which
I think unlikely, or from Irish *cnoc* which I believe is somewhat more likely,
given that the Irish term *ráth* ('fort') is found sporadically in the English-speak-
ing areas of southern Wales.[66] Whichever language is deemed to have given the
term, *cnwc* can only have been introduced into the Welsh language at roughly
the same period as the loan terms denoting 'hillock' found in other areas of
Wales, *viz. cnap ~ clap* in the southeast, *bonc ~ ponc* in the north, all of English
origin, and all of which must postdate the twelfth-century Anglo-French irrup-
tion into Wales.

The element *meudr* ('lane') has also been taken to reflect Irish occupation.
It is certainly not a Welsh word with a wide distribution, and has always been
(as far as the evidence shows) restricted to Pembrokeshire, and the adjoining
parts of Cardiganshire and Carmarthenshire.[67] Whilst it is an exact correspon-
dent to Irish *bóthar* ('road'), it is not phonetically demonstrable that (as with
*cnwc*) it is an Irish borrowing; that is, it could be argued that *meudr* is a Brittonic
cognate rather than a loan from Irish.[68]

It is evident that if both *cnwc* and *meudr* are indeed loans from Irish, they
must represent loanwords borrowed at wholly different periods. I would sug-
gest that if *meudr* (older form *\*beudr*) was a loan from Irish it was borrowed at a
very early period, say about the fifth–sixth century, for subsequently we would
have had in Welsh something approaching *\*both(o)r* or, later still, *\*bohor*. The
term *cnwc* must have been borrowed much later than the fifth–sixth century,
for an earlier loan would have been either equated and merged with the native
*cnwch*, or subsequently borrowed as *\*cnwg*.

### *Other putatively Irish names*

In the course of the last two centuries a number of other Welsh toponyms have
been explained as Irish, though none are wholly certain. The following
Cardiganshire place-names have at one time or another been unconvincingly
interpreted as Irish: *Seilach* (Penbryn) from Irish *saileach* ('willow'); *Lochdyn*
(Llangrannog) containing Irish *loch* ('lake'), *Clarach* from Irish *clárach* ('flattish

**66** Rhŷs, 'The Goidels in Wales', pp 19–20. The *Rhath* found in *Amroth* (Pembs.) is likelier
to have a wholly different origin: Thomas, *Enwau Afonydd*, p. 155; Williams, *Enwau Lleoedd*,
p. 60.    **67** The spelling *meudr* is a normalization of the commoner spelling *feidr* which shows
anomalous lenition of a feminine noun (the initial <*m*–> being found regularly in the plu-
ral form *meidri* for *meudrydd*). The <–*u*–> is assured by the etymology and by the documented
forms such as *voidir*, *foydir*, etc. Hesitation between an initial <*b*–> and an initial <*m*–>, whilst
not regularly found, is also attested with other Welsh words such as *bawd* (originally *mawd*),
and *moes* (originally *boes*).    **68** For the etymology see Hamp, 'Irish *bóthar*, Welsh *meidir*', p.
172.

[place]').[69] The suffix –*ach* is especially prone to be interpreted as the common Irish adjectival suffix –*ach*,[70] and this despite the existence of a native –*ach* in Welsh, well-attested as a diminutive or pejorative plural suffix, in examples such as: *coedach, dwrach, papurach*. This –*ach* is in origin a geminated byform of the suffix that gave Modern Welsh –*og*, from an earlier Middle Welsh –*awc*. All these suffixes are derived from Common Celtic –*āk–*. The diminutive/pejorative function of gemination in Brittonic might also be illustrated by the doublets *gwraig* ('wife, woman') against *gwrach* ('hag, witch'), with no need for Irish influence to be posited. Geraint Gruffydd thought that the hydronyms *Corf*, *Brennan, Conach* had 'a distinctly Irish look to them'.[71] They are all in fact Welsh, and more than a surface resemblance is needed to claim a name to be Irish. It is such surface resemblances that led Lhuyd, in the late-seventeenth century, to believe that certain Welsh toponymic elements similar to Irish, such as *ban*, *lhwch*, *drum*, *wysg*, proved the Irish had lived in particular parts of Wales. The interpretation of the terms *ban*, *llwch*, *trum*, *wysg* (all Brittonic cognates and not loans from Irish) was generally accepted by scholars for a long time, even as late as Lloyd who noted that *Cwmllwch* (Brecs.) and *Cenarth* (Carms.) – to which he contrasted *Pennarth* – 'continued to wear their Irish dress'.[72] Rhŷs had noted *Cennarth* (*sic*) as semi-Goidelic, which I think impossible since *Cenarth* is pronounced [ke:narθ] and not [*kɛnarθ] which rules out Irish *ceann* (OI. *cenn*, *cend*), with long <*n*>, as the first element.[73] Likewise T. Gwynn Jones supposed Irish influence in a number of place-names in north-eastern Wales; but whilst one can discount the connection of *Moel Fama* with Irish *mám* 'gap', Jones's assertion that the traditional local pronunciation *Y Ddisart* for Diserth (Flints.) preserved the Irish original deserves some consideration.[74] R.J. Thomas noted [–rt] rather than [–rθ] in a number of other place-names distributed throughout Wales, e.g. *Sychart* for *Sycharth* (Denbs.), *Llwydiart* for *Llwydiarth* (Monts.), *Cribart* for *Cribarth* (Brecs.), *Llechart* for *Llecharth* (Glams.), etc., and also referred to possible Irish influence.[75] However against this supposition one can note that many of these places are not near any known Irish area of influence. Furthermore, since we never find *\*Y Gart* for the common toponym *Y Garth*, the restriction of this phenomenon to the unstressed final syllable suggests a purely Welsh phenomenon consisting of a development of unstressed [–rθ] to [–rt] subsequent to the development of the penultimate stress accent which occurred many centuries after the medieval Irish colonization.[76]

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**69** Wmffre, *PNC*, pp 141, 294, 1236–7.   **70** For example, 'Moreover place-names in –*ach* beside Welsh –*og* show an Irish ending': Dillon, 'The Irish settlements', p. 8.   **71** Gruffydd, 'Why Cors Fochno?', p. 10.   **72** Lloyd, *HW*, p. 122.   **73** Rhŷs, 'The Goidels', p. 22. Wmffre, *PNC,* p. 65.   **74** Jones, 'Ôl y Gwyddyl yn Nyffryn Clwyd', pp 137–8.   **75** Thomas, *Enwau afonydd*, p. 5.   **76** For other examples of alteration of consonants in final position (simplification of consonantal clusters, elision and alteration of final consonants), see Wmffre, *Language and place-names*, pp 87–96.

## *Later Irish influence*

Irish influence in Welsh toponyms is well-evidenced following the initial period of Irish settlement of the fifth to sixth centuries, especially on the Welsh church. In later centuries Welsh saints' *Lives* sought an Irish equivalent to their saints and to note their cults in Ireland. At the same time, Welsh clerics sojourned in Ireland by for educational purposes (cf. the *cælibes als colideos vocant* living on Bardsey *c*.1191).[77] This influence is understandable when one considers the size of Wales, its generally inimical relationship with England and the English, and the historical ties of the Welsh and Irish churches. Amongst Welsh churches with Irish cults, the most obvious is the common *Llansantfraid*, but others are *Llangolman*, *Llangwyfan*,[78] *Llanffinan*, *Llanbadrig*. The form of the saints' names betray their Irishness, in the case of *Colman* with syncope of the medial syllable typical of Goidelic not Brittonic, and in the case of *Padrig*, with the lack of affection of vowel *\*Pedrig*, which shows it to be a loan later than the development of internal vowel affection of the late seventh century.[79] *Cwyfen* and *Ffinan* are names explainable only as derivatives of the Old Irish personal-names *Cóemgen* and *Fionán*.[80]

Ó Riain's recent equation of all Cardiganshire saints whose name contain the element *gwyn–* – i.e. *Gwynnwys*, *Gwynnen*, *Gwynllau*, *Gwyndaf*, *Gwenog*[81] – with 'local realizations' of the cult of *Finnian*, who was the tutor of Columcille (†597),[82] as well as his equating of *Findbarr/Finnian* with other Irish saints with *finn–* (i.e. *Findlug* and *Fintan*) strains credulity, especially as no other unambiguous evidence supports such identifications being made. I thus disagree with his general thesis that: '… Irish influence on the saints of Cardiganshire has largely been obscured by the effects of localization.'[83] In a number of instances

**77** Giraldus Cambrensis, *Itinerarium Kambriae* II §6 (ed. Dimock, p. 124).   **78** The form of the Denbighshire *Llangwyfan* has final <–*a*–> even though in the thirteenth-century tract *Bonedd γ Saint* the form is given as *Kwyven*, Bartrum, *EWGT,* p. 61.   **79** Jackson, *LHEB,* pp 609–11. Jackson's conclusion that it is earlier is based on the arguable premise that Middle Welsh (*sic*) *eneidfawr* is a direct reflex of fifth-century *Anatemori* (< CC. *\*Anatiomaros*) rather than a simple composition of *enaid* and *mawr* (in fact *GPC*, s.v. *eneidfawr*, gives the first attestation of *eneidfawr* as of 1829). We can discount Jackson's special pleading (*LHEB*, p. 609), that 'there is … no reason to suppose W. *Padrig* is not ancient, lacking affection under the influence of the Latin.' The medieval toponym Llanbadrig, the most reliable Welsh attestation, suggests *Padrig* stands for the Irish Patrick as it lies on the Anglesey coast facing Ireland. **80**The saint *Byrnach* found in Middle Welsh as *Bernach* and in the toponyms *Llanfyrnach* (Pembs.) and *Llanfrynach* (Brecs.) was traditionally said to have been an Irishman. Despite this, and the Irish appearance of his name, I have not found any similar name in Old or Middle Irish sources, though it might be an epithet turned name, as the epithet *bernach* 'gapped (teeth)' is found in *Diarmait Bernach*: *DIL*, s.v. *bernach*.   **81** Indeed the name *Gwenog* most emphatically does not contain *gwyn* 'white' or its feminine version. See Wmffre, *PNC,* pp 265–6.   **82** Ó Riain, 'The saints', pp 381–3.   **83** Ó Riain, 'The saints', p. 378. See also

treating the influence of the Goidels and the Britons on each other Ó Riain displays an unsatisfactory treatment of Brittonic phonology which vitiates his conclusions that the Irish church had a formative influence on the early British church, but for reasons of space I will have to demonstrate this elsewhere.

*Conclusions*

The foregoing should be sufficient to demonstrate that no direct connection can be proven between toponyms and Irish colonization of the fifth to sixth centuries. It therefore follows that the actual areas of settlement of the Irish in those far-off times cannot be illustrated by the distribution of *cnwc* toponyms – *pace* the assertions of most scholars who subsequently quote Richards' 1960 study. Another reason for doubting the use of these particular place-name elements to prop up theories on where the Irish settled is the fact that these terms are not generally found in the oldest place-names, that is to say common names such as *Pencnwc* and *Penfeudr* are found more often applied to little cottages than to the substantial farms which usually continue medieval landholdings.

Coplestone-Crow views the lack of ogam inscriptions and the abundance of Irish toponymic terms in Cardiganshire as indicating settlement by Irish colonists without an aristocracy against areas such as Breconshire with many ogam inscriptions and a lack of Irish toponymic terms as indicating an aristocratic hegemony.[84] Welsh toponymy gives no basis for such a conclusion. Careful sifting of the toponymic evidence leaves one with the conclusion that the undoubted Irish post-Roman implantation in Wales has hardly left a trace in Welsh toponymy. This enables us to hypothesize that the nature of the Irish implantation in the fourth–sixth centuries may have been an aristocratic domination of Brittonic populations to which was probably added local pockets of scattered colonies of Irish-speakers, rather than a wholesale settlement by Irish-speaking peoples with a concomitant displacement of the Brittonic populations (though the toponymic evidence does not exclude the latter possibility).

Jankulak, below, pp 143–4.   **84** Coplestone-Crow, 'The dual nature', p. 17.