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THE NAME OF THE ISLAND OF ANNET, ISLES OF SCILLY, CORNWALL

The three earliest attestations of the Scillonian island-name *Annet* (UK Ordnance Survey NGR SV 860088) are in Assize Rolls of 1302, 1306 and 1336 (Padel 1988: 50). The spellings are respectively *Anec* (with commonplace confusion of <c> and <t> in medieval hands), *Anete* and *Anet*. The name has proved intractable. Thomas (1985: 43) explains it as deriving from Cornish *anneth* 'dwelling',[1] but that should result in a modern name of the same pronunciation. I suggest instead that it derives from Old Irish *andóit*, a solution which has the merit of consistency with a minor emerging pattern in the toponymy of England, as I shall explain below.

Following an original suggestion by Stokes (1893: 43; see also MacBain 1911, s.v. *annaid, annoid*), the word *andóit* is generally reckoned to be a borrowing from the postclassical Latin *antītāte(m)*[2] < *antīquitāte(m)* in the sense 'ancient foundation', and to have been mediated by Brittonic (see *DIL* s.v. *andóit*, following Vendryes).[3] That being so, we should consider first whether our Cornish place-name could simply be a Brittonic survival. The form of the borrowed word would have changed by the expected battery of sound-changes up to about 600 CE as follows:[4]

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[1] See Padel (1985: 8) on this rare element, probably compounded with **bod*, itself meaning 'dwelling', in both names in which it occurs.

[2] This reduced form is found in Du Cange.

[3] On the vowel stressed in British Latin, see also Jackson (1953: especially 124, 132), McManus (1983: 61-65), Etchingham (1993: 154).

[4] The first few forms are of course strictly Britticized Latin, rather than Brittonic, but the inflectional morphology of the word in British is not at issue here, and the Latin forms simply stand for their British equivalents.

antīquitāte(m)

→ *antītāte(m)* [by an undatable syncope within Vulgar Latin of the pretonic syllable]

→ **antitāte(m)* [by undatable shortening, in Latin, of the pretonic vowel (Jackson 1953: 269-70)]

→ **antidāde(m)* [by intervocalic lenition (Jackson 1953: 543-61, especially 554-56)]

→ **antidǭde(m)* [by rounding of [ā] (Jackson 1953: 287-301, especially 287)]

→ **antidǭd* [by loss of post-tonic syllables (Jackson 1953: 618-33)]

Such a form would have been exempt from syncope of internal unstressed vowels because of the heavy resultant consonant cluster *[ntd] (Jackson 1953: 652-54). By this stage, we have reached the later sixth century, and the philological history laid out is sufficient to show that a Brittonic source is impossible, as there are no subsequent changes which remove or relevantly modify the sequence [tid], where the [i] would cause later internal *i/j*-affection of the vowel of the initial syllable. One would therefore expect **Enteded* and later **Enteses* in Middle Cornish if the name were of the postulated origin and simply Brittonic. If, on the other hand, Stokes was right, and the word went from Brittonic into Irish, it must have been borrowed after lenition, say after about 500 CE on Jackson's absolute chronology, because of the existence of the first [d] in the Brittonic form (< earlier [t]). Irish *andóit* must also show complete syncope of the post-tonic second syllable. The shift of stress to the first syllable is an expected consequence of borrowing into Irish, and the loss of second syllables which were post-tonic in Irish in around

500 is well understood (Thurneysen 1946: 67-69; Jackson 1953: 132-33; McManus 1983: 63).[5]

Accepting, then, that a Cornish place-name of the appropriate form could not represent a direct survival of the word *antitāte(m)*, we must also accept that the Irish derivative of this word returned to Cornwall to be embodied in the name *Annet* at a not precisely determinable time. I shall suggest below a possible Cornish cultural scenario; briefly for now, the Cornish may have used the Irish descriptive term as used by a hermit to describe his own retreat, or had the notion of a hermitage explained to them by the immigrant Irish community, and then borrowed the term (at least for use as a name).[6] I freely admit that the word as hypothetically borrowed must have been used loosely, since *andóit* had a precise technical meaning in the Irish church which ought to imply the incorporation of Annet into the Irish ecclesiastical system, but I press on believing that the linguistic evidence is consistent with derivation from this term and noting that the term underwent a somewhat comparable semantic bleaching in Scots Gaelic, as we shall see below.

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[5] As to the supposed origin of the term: whatever its phonological merits, Stokes's etymology 'ancient foundation' is not compelling for two reasons: (i) descendants of the proposed source of the Irish word are not found in the Welsh or Cornish record, as Greene complained (1968: 82), though that does not make the suggestion impossible, as McManus notes (1983: 61, n. 118); (ii) the applicability of this word to a Christian building in the British context from which it supposedly sprang needs full explanation. I adopt the conventional etymology in the absence of any other. If it is wrong, the essential point of this note, that a Cornish place-name embodies an Irish word, is not affected, and the niggling worries about Brittonic lexical history that I have just mentioned will go away. We may note for the record that, to Irish lawyers, the term signified, and 'therefore' originated from, *a ndo-fhet* 'that which takes precedence' (Etchingham 1993: 154, n. 30) and, of course, on the Stokes/Clancy view (see below), that represents the true position of these establishments in the ecclesiastical hierarchy.

[6] There is no evidence for the use of *andóit* in the toponymy of Ireland. The claim made here is essentially that it was a term heard in Cornwall and appropriated for use in the local circumstances of Scilly as a descriptor which became a toponym.

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Irish [nd] did not become [nn] until around 800 CE (Thurneysen 1946: 93); *annóit* and variants with final <d> and with no length mark are attested in later Old Irish. If the word had entered a Brittonic/pre-Cornish environment with the sequence [nd] intact, this could have been replaced by [nn], since the sequence [nd] no longer existed in Brittonic by 600 (Jackson 1953: 508-13); if the word arrived with [nn] already developed, this would have been adopted in Cornish. An appeal to simplicity suggests, but does not prove, that the word arrived after about 800. By whichever route it arrived, the geminate was eventually simplified as expected in the Middle English record.

The word would have been borrowed with regular Proto-Cornish final stress. It is safe to believe that Old Irish <ó> ([o:]) was identified with the phonetically similar *[ɔ:] which the word would have had in Cornish if it had survived from British. This regularly developed to [ö:] and then to [e:] in those syllables which lost their stress in late Old Cornish when stress moved to the penultimate syllable (Jackson 1953: 288). Final <t> in the range of medieval spellings available is either a Cornish spelling taken up into the legal-administrative record or a Middle English rendering of the Cornish final [d] (spelt <t>) which must have been substituted for Old Irish [d´] (spelt <(i)t>) — as often in absolute-final unstressed position in Old English/Middle English. The vowel-shortening is also automatic in an English unstressed syllable.

The remaining phonological difficulty concerns why final [d] (spelt <t>) was exempt from the Cornish change of [d] to [z] (spelt <s>) in a range of positions including word-final (Padel 1988: 29-31). But there is no easy explanation of any final [d]/<t> in a name in Cornwall unless it was borrowed into English or administrative Latin before about 1100 when the relevant change occurred, and the plausibility of this is very hard to assess. What is apparently the early Middle Cornish/Middle English version of this name is the one that fossilized as the official form, and for some reason apparently became the local spoken form (there being no evidence whatever for the expected *An(n)es*), even though the maintenance of <t>/[d] is

unusual in a place so far west in the Cornish-speaking region and so late to lose the language.

Turning now to the Irish word itself: *DIL* (1913-76: 334-35) lists 23 occurrences of the feminine noun *andóit* in Old Irish, starting with an early metrical glossary-poem known as *Forus focal*, of debatable date (Stokes 1893: 5). The suggested gloss is 'ancient foundation, church having a special connection with a patron saint and from which others have been founded (?)' [the (?) is in *DIL*], and an *andóit* is distinguished from an *eclas* as being an *eclas* that takes precedence over others (cf. Clancy 1995: 96). The word has been established as appearing in the various simplex names of the form *Annat* or *Annet* in Scotland (Watson 1926: 170, 250-54; modern Gaelic *annaid*). According to Watson, the original meaning in Irish was 'church of a patron saint; church containing relics of a saint'. He notes that none of the places now called *Annat*, or having names containing this element, have traditional associations with identifiable saints, but he observes that they are always linked with an ancient chapel or cemetery or both. MacDonald (1973) also studies the element as it appears in Scotland (including adjacent parts of north-west England), and notes its absence from Irish place-names. He believes that Watson overstates the association with extant religious sites of high antiquity,[7] but concludes that 'whatever the niceties of its present technical meaning … [it] had often, at least in practice, the connotation "old church" (138-39)', and had lost any technicality in its drift into ordinary usage. He assigns its usage to the ninth or tenth centuries (or possibly as early as the eighth), giving as the likely context the abandonment of sites during the social chaos caused by Scandinavian invasions and the Scots' occupation of Pictland. Against him, Clancy (1995) argues, though with caution in the face of some complex facts, that an *andóit* was indeed a mother-church, and that many seemingly insignificant places named *Annat*, or including the word in their names, record the association of a place with an *andóit* rather than the location of one. For instance, he speculates that *Tórr na h-Annaid* (MacDonald's site 52), near Bun-

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[7] MacDonald (1973: 137) notes that 'frequently there is nothing but the name.'

essan in Mull, contains a reference to Iona (Clancy 1995: 92, n. 7).
He argues that the place of a Scottish *andóit* in the system of pastoral
care had some similarities with that inferrable from the earliest Irish
sources, and at one point he allows the possibility that the term may
have been in use for such a church in Scotland as early as the seventh
century (1995: 113) whilst its main period of usage in its technical
sense (1995: 111) was broadly compatible with that suggested by
MacDonald: between 800 and 1100.

We can safely conclude that the Goidelic term meant 'holy place'
— or probably something more specific in that semantic field, either
'abandoned church' or 'mother church' — but in any case a site of
considerable age, as the generally accepted etymology implies (see
below). However, if MacDonald is right that in its usage in Scotland
the word had undergone a significant semantic bleaching, it is
preferable to consider the Scillonian *Annet* as reflecting the early
Irish usage, meaning or implying the association of the place with an
individual. The island is very small, and no record exists of
endowments of or dependencies on any establishment there. It can
therefore hardly be either the establishment of a 'saint' leading a
community of monks, nor a mother-church with dependencies either
in the sense envisaged by Clancy or on the model of the English
establishments studied by Blair (e.g. 1993). Rather, a hermitage
might be envisaged, consistently with the long Irish tradition of
hermit-saints in remote places.

I know of no archaeological or historical study devoted to Annet,
and therefore no report of any remains of a church, chapel, cemetery
or hermitage, actual or documentary. There is a casual reference to
'several prehistoric sites' in Thomas (1985: 237), but the point is
undeveloped. Anything still there is unlikely to be disturbed further
except by birds which dig tunnels for nests, as the whole island is
now a puffinry and general bird-sanctuary. Annet does not get a
mention in Thomas (1957-58), but the same author (1978) conducts a
general review of whether the religious life of early Scilly was in the
hands of hermits or priests. He recalls that king Olaf Tryggvason is
said in *Óláfs Saga Tryggvasonar* (chapter 31) to have been baptized
in Scilly by a 'hermit' (*einsetumaður[inn]* as late as the late tenth
century; this event is situated in modern Scillonian folklore on

Tresco, by false association with the 'abbey' there. A hermitage on Annet would be consistent with Thomas's earlier view that the eremitical life was anciently common practice in Scilly and elsewhere (Thomas 1971). He now believes (1978: 40) that '[n]one of the pre-Norman, pre-1114 [ecclesiastical] sites can be said to bear convincing resemblances to any of the known 'hut-and-oratory' hermitages [of the Irish type]', but even if one accepts his revised view that the ecclesiastical remains in Scilly represent some kind of parochial and sub-parochial, i.e. priested, structure, Annet is prob-ably the one island suitable for an Irish-style anchorite. It was an island even before the sea-level rise which took place between about 700 and 1100 CE and created the modern archipelago, and it has probably always been a separate island since the Bronze Age. There are at least 5 fathoms (around 10 metres) of water between Annet and its neighbour St Agnes at mean high water, more than between any other pair of islands except St Mary's and the formerly united St Agnes and Gugh. Annet and St Agnes-Gugh were probably the only eminences which were separate islands even at the time of the unity of the proto-Scillonian mainland (Thomas 1978: 40-42). Annet has always been the remotest island which is more than just a rock, and it is also remote in that it lies beyond St Agnes-Gugh from the perspective of St Mary's on the putative former mainland.

Of course, one needs to ask: why is it legitimate to appeal to Irish at all? We know of Irish cultural influence in north-east Cornwall and the Tamar valley around 500 CE, the fruits of which are a set of ogam inscriptions (Okasha 1993: 19, with discussion of individual stones elsewhere in the text) and a set of church-dedications recalling the legend of the children of Broccan (Thomas 1957-58: 63-64; Padel 1988: 21-22), a king in south Wales whose historical self is believed to have been Irish or of Irish descent. A further influx of Irish influence is known in the west of the county, around St Ives Bay, about 100 years later. The evidence for this may include the so-called grass-marked pottery of Irish inspiration but made of clays from The Lizard (Ivens 1984; Cornwall County Council 2002), and certainly does include a group of church-dedications to saints traditionally held to be Irish (Thomas 1957-58: 67). One might associate the name of Annet with the second wave simply because it

is nearer to the St Ives area than to north-east Cornwall. But given that Irish hermits had a culture of voluntary extreme remoteness, that is not a necessary inference. Moreover, the tradition of Irish hermit-saints persisted well after 600. There is no real obstacle to belief in an Irish hermitage on Annet after 800 in view of the description of Thule given to the Irish monk Dicuil by three Irish monks who had visited it in 795 (Tierney 1967) and in view of island-names in Iceland of the form Pápey '[Irish] priest's island' which testify to hermits in the traditional year of the Norse discovery of Iceland, namely 870. Most strikingly of all, the Parker (A) text of the *Anglo-Saxon chronicles* records that as late as 891 '… three Scots [i.e. Irish] came to King Alfred in a boat without any oars, from Ireland, from where they had stolen away because they wanted for the love of God to be abroad — they did not care where'; their names are recorded, and they finished up in Cornwall (Swanton 2000: 82).[8]

Whilst mainland places called *Annat* and the like in Scotland are not necessarily remote at all, there are some on small islands (MacDonald 1973: 142), e.g. Shiant (NG 411982) and Killegray (about NF 975846). The remoteness of the Scillonian Annet recalls these, and also the remoteness of the Irish hermitages which, in my view, account for the names of Irish origin *Lindisfarne* and *Domnoc* (Walton Castle) in England (Coates 2000a, 2000b). These are due to the influence of the Irishman Aidan and the Burgundian Felix (trained in a monastery of the Irishman Columbanus in Gaul) respectively. Both of these also contain or comprise an Old Irish generic word for a piece of ecclesiastical land and a church: *ferann* and *domnach* respectively.[9] The parallels with the proposed solution for *Annet* are compelling; only the name of the saint of Annet is missing from the story, and that is presumably because s/he was not involved in missionary work with recorded royal support like the

[8] The manuscript is, of course, roughly contemporary with the events described.

[9] The discussion of *Lindisfarne* in Coates (2000a) contains an error of interpretation which will be corrected in a further paper; I believe that the fundamental point, that the generic of *Lindisfarne* is of Irish origin, remains valid.

others. A further Irish-derived name-pair evidently belonging in this category is recorded in the *Anglo-Saxon Chronicles* (Swanton 2000). Flat Holm (Glamorgan), an island in the Bristol Channel, is referred to as *(æt) bradan relice, (into) bradan reolice* (annals 918 [914] (A) and 1067 (D) respectively). Version D calls the adjacent Steep Holm (Somerset) *(æt) steapan relice* (annal 915 [914]). These names, though English in form, evidently contain a word, perhaps in use as a name, borrowed from Old Irish *reilic* 'cemetery' (< Vulgar Latin *reliquie*), and not from the Welsh borrowing of the same item, which is *rhelyw* and means 'relic' (see Jackson 1953: 403 for the phonology). Such a name for an island is evidently consistent in a general way with the claim of this paper about Annet.

There is, then, a minor pattern of Irish place-names in islands or coastal sites of southern Britain associated with Irish monasticism; and though archaeological or documentary evidence for monasticism on Annet is lacking, other signs permit us to place this name in the same group.[10]

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[10] These Irish items are also discussed together in Coates (2006). This group of names is of course distinct from the Irish settlement-names in the Lake District and the Wirral peninsula, whose historical background is well understood (Wainwright 1948-2000; *PN Cu.* III, xxii-xxvii; Fellow-Jensen 1985: 303-06, 347-48; Coates 1997-98). However, it is notable that scholars have not readily conceded that Irish names in the Lake District really do testify to ethnically and linguistically Irish settlements; Fellows-Jensen (1985: 348) in the end ascribes such coinages to Scandinavian-speakers aware of Gaelic onomastic practices.

ABBREVIATED REFERENCES

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Du Cange *Glossarium ad Scriptores Mediae et Infimae Latinitatis* by Charles Du Fresne, seigneur du Cange, with supplement and additions by Pierre Carpentier and G.A.L. Henschel (Paris 1688/1840-57).

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