**7 Place names – the last 4**

Ynys means an island, so Ynys Mon (Anglesey), Ynys Enlli (Bardsey), Ynys Byr (Caldy) and Ynys Dewi (Ramsey) obviously all mean a piece of land surrounded by water. Note that those names in English betray a Norse derivation in SEY. Yet ynys occurs inland many miles away from any sea as with Ynysybwl in the South Wales valleys. We find a whole group locally in Bronwydd, where Trefynys and Pentrefynys farms, Cwmynys smallholding and Troedyrynys estate down in the village, all bear witness. Why? Well originally Ynys had another meaning – it meant a protruding piece of land above a river meadow – so it all makes sense in the Gwili valley. Ynysybwl reminds one of Trebwl farm near Bronwydd, and the fact that Bwl comes from the French “boule” meaning a bowl shaped valley. Interesting to note that a Trebwl also occurs in Brittany.

The origins of some names are very old, reflecting the routes of ancient track ways on higher ground, when movement through valleys was both difficult and dangerous. Bwlch means a gap, so Bwlchbychan (small gap), Bwlchgwyn (white gap), Bwlchyronnen (ash gap) and Bwlchyrhyd (gap by the ford), tell us where ancient man trod warily. Much later came the Romans. You can still pick your way along some of that old Roman road from Bronwydd to Llanpumsaint, but you can also track its course through place names. Climbing northwards it passes Troedyrhyw (foot of the hill) above Bronwydd, past Penrhyw (top of the hill) before Nebo and then descends to another Troedyrhyw at Coopers in Llanpumsaint. Marching a few more hundred yards those Romans established a fort at Rhydygaer on the Cerwyn a few hundred yards short of where the church would one day be built. To strengthen their hold on the area a further, a fort emerged at Penygaer in Nebo above the Gwili. You can be pretty certain that where Caer occurs there was a Roman fort, so Caerfyrddin (Maredunum) clinches it.

Llandre farm, once opposite the church, denoted an ecclesiastical settlement, Llain and Lleine meant strips of land tended to by serfs around the Middle Ages. Centuries ago maximising the use of sunlight was even more vital for crop growing and keeping warm than nowadays. Homestead names prove that they succeeded at Fronhaul and Fronheulog (sunny hillside) and Frondeg (fair hillside). Other sheltered spots are revealed by the word gilfach, evidenced by Gilfachmaen (sheltered stone), Gilfachfawr and Gilfachfach (large and small shelter). Esgair is an old Welsh name for leg, and a quick helicopter trip over Esgair farm or Esgair hamlet near Conwil would reveal a ridge of land shaped like that human limb.

Coch (red) occurs frequently in place names all over Wales ,Penrhyncoch (red headland) near Aberystwyth, Gilfachgoch in Glamorgan , and Rhosgoch (Red Roses) in Pembrokeshire. Way back in time when places were being christened the landscape looked far different from today’s manicured fields and hedges, with thick vegetation dominating arm in arm with ferns, reeds and gorse. So at certain times of year parts of the countryside looked a reddish brown colour. Locally Frongoch (red hillside), Gorsgoch (red marsh), Penrhiwgoch (top of the red hill) appeared. Down in the village we have Clytiau Cochion (red strips of land).

Some names are very easy, everyone knows that Pandy was a fulling mill and some of our elders can still remember it in action. Waunyrhelfa was obviously hunting land. Others can be very difficult and I’ve left two of the vaguest till last, namely Pantiouar and Bwlchtrap, both in Nebo. One expert reckoned that Pantiouar came from Pant-ar –fryn (a depression of land on a hillside), but Iouar does not sit comfortably with that. Another expert thought Iouar referred to cold water and possibly a lake. A quarter of a mile below Pantiouar lies Bwlchtrap farm, the other imponderable. Bwlch (gap) is easy but what of trap? Was it a mill leet or a fish trap connected to that idea of a lake, something that attracts and detains? Another explanation connects trap to a refuge for thieves. I think Nebo people would prefer the first explanation!

One could go on and on with place names, but unless there are requests to the contrary I intend this to be the last. Should anyone have a query then please get in touch.

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