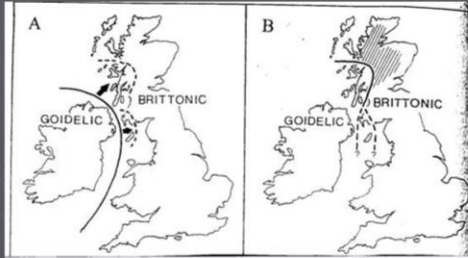


Aberigines: Britons and Gaels



- ▶ Brittonic spoken in Britain
- ▶ Goidelic spoken in Ireland
- ▶ Both unaware of shared origin
- ▶ Each unintelligible to the other

The Celtic languages which still survive today can be divided into two distinct halves. On the one hand, we have the Brittonic or Brythonic half, which is P-Celtic, and on the other we have the Goidelic or Gaelic half, which is Q-Celtic. Broadly speaking, when these islands first entered the historical record, the earliest sources suggest a very simple scenario where Brittonic was spoken on the island of Britain and Goidelic was spoken on the island of Ireland (as per Map A above).

Ewan Campbell, in his 2001 article *'Were the Scots Irish?'* - the source of the above maps - challenges the traditional assumption that the Gaels 'invaded' Argyll in the fifth century and instead proposes that there were Gaelic-speakers in that particular part of Scotland as far back as the Iron Age (Map B).

T.F. O'Rahilly, meanwhile, long argued in the opposite direction, that Brittonic was spoken in Ireland before Goidelic. Campbell's view would have very little impact on the overall map of Britain, but is also revisionist, in conflict with even the early Irish chronicles themselves, while O'Rahilly's view has been criticised as *'not convincing'* by Karl Horst Schmidt (*The Celtic Languages*, p. 75).

There are two points with respect to the relationship between Brittonic and Goidelic, however, which seem to be uncontroversial. The first is that Brittonic was unquestionably spoken over all of the island of Britain at least as far as the Forth-Clyde isthmus (roughly modern day Edinburgh and Glasgow), and the second is that these two languages have been mutually unintelligible since their first appearance in the historical record.

Patrick Sims-Williams in his now famous, if not infamous, paper *'Celtomania and Celtoscepticism'* (p. 12) notes that *'the medieval and early modern Welsh and Irish had absolutely no idea that they were fellow Celts'*. In stark contrast to this, *'the medieval Welsh and Bretons...were certainly aware of their kinship as Britons'* (p. 25). This does not mean that Brittonic and Goidelic were not related languages. They undoubtedly were. It rather means that they had separated too long ago for their speakers to be aware of it. David Greene once *'arrived at a date of circa 700 BC for the period when the ancestors of Irish and Welsh began to diverge'* (quoted in *The Celtic Languages* p. 84). This then begs serious questions about collectively labelling them together in any later historical context.

Aberigines: Britons, Gaels and Picts



A linguistic view of
about the year 400?

- ▶ Red: Brittonic
- ▶ Green: Goidelic
- ▶ Blue: Pictish
- ▶ The Picts first enter history in the year 297 CE

Another group who came to prominence, albeit later, were the Picts who lived to the north of the Forth-Clyde isthmus. Their status and origins have been the source of much debate to such an extent that, in the middle of the last century, F.T. Wainwright wrote a book entitled *The Problem of The Picts*.

There is no historical mention of Picts at all until the year 297, when that label was given to them by the Romans in the context of the 'Painted People' who made a nuisance of themselves by raiding Roman Britannia from the north. None of the earlier Roman expeditions to northern Britain made reference to them, and, as we shall see, by the year 297, the Romans had been in Britain for 250 years.

The map in the slide above is meant to reflect the linguistic situation in Britain in about the year 400 (albeit accepting Ewan Campbell's hypothesis that there were Gaelic-speakers in Argyll) on the eve of the Romans' departure.

- The red represents Brittonic
- The green represents Goidelic
- The blue represents Pictish.

Pictish is treated as a language distinct from Brittonic, and the Picts were indeed a distinct people of late Roman and early medieval Britain. This is not in doubt. Perhaps more open to question is why no mention had been made of them until the dawn of the fourth century.

Pictish and Welsh place-name elements

Pictish:

- ▶ Aber
- ▶ Caer
- ▶ Carden
- ▶ Lanerc
- ▶ Perth
- ▶ Pett
- ▶ Pren

Welsh:

- ▶ Aber
- ▶ Caer
- ▶ Cardden
- ▶ Llanerch
- ▶ Perth
- ▶ Peth
- ▶ Pren

Problem solved?

The above slide contains the seven main Pictish place-name elements in the column on the left. Every one of these has a cognate in modern Welsh, shown in the column on the right. This supports the convincing view put forward in, Forsyth, K. (1997), *Language in Pictland: the case against non-Indo-European Pictish*, (Utrecht, Nodus Publishing), that Pictish was simply the most northern branch of Brittonic.

This is not to suggest that Pictish was not a distinct language in its own right, it most certainly was, just as Welsh, Cornish and Breton would come to be. Rather it implies that Pictish was just the first form of Brittonic to go its own way, and that this event took place gradually during the course of the Roman occupation of Britain. This would have been plenty of time for a Brittonic language based to the north of the Romans' furthest point of influence on the Forth-Clyde isthmus to diverge from the Brittonic language to the south of it.

The Abers of Scotland, being Pictish, are testimony to the similarities between that language and other Brittonic languages such as Welsh and Breton, both of which have an abundance of Aber place-names themselves. The equivalent word in Gaelic is Inver, as in Inverness, Inveraray and so on.

The slides which follow contain examples of Brittonic place-name elements found across England and Scotland. They are listed in alphabetical order against their equivalents in modern Welsh. For the reasons given above, a small number of Pictish place-names have also been included amongst them.

Aberigines: Brittonic Place-name elements in England and Scotland

- ▶ **Aber** (*river mouth/confluence*): Aberdeen (Aberdeen), Aberdour (Fife), Aberfeldy (Perth), Aberfoyle (Stirling), Aberlour (Moray), Abernethy (Perth), Applecross (Highland), Arbroath (Angus), Lochaber (Highland)
- ▶ **Afon** (*river*): Avening (Gloucestershire), Aveton (Devon), nine rivers Avon (six in England and three in Scotland), Netheravon (Wiltshire) Strathaven (South Lanarkshire), Upavon (Wiltshire), and even that most English of places, Stratford-upon-Avon (Warwickshire)
- ▶ **Blaen** (*head/upland*): Blencarn (Cumbria), Blencogo (Cumbria), Blencow (Cumbria) Blennerhasset (Cumbria), Blindcrake (Cumbria)
- ▶ **Bryn** (*hill*): Bryn (Shropshire) Malvern (Worcestershire)
- ▶ **Caer** (*fort/fortified town*): Cardurnock (Cumbria), Carlisle (Cumbria) Carluke (South Lanarkshire) Kirkcaldy (Fife) Kirkintilloch (East Dunbarton)

Many of these names have become altered over time or converted into words familiar to speakers of other languages. A good example of this is the place-name **Orchard** in Dorset. The original meaning of which was **place at the wood**, and would in modern Welsh be *argoed*.

Aber: Applecross has nothing to do with apples, being first recorded as Aporcrosan (i.e. Abercrosan), similarly Arbroath was originally recorded as Aberbrothok.

Blaen: It can be seen that all of these examples are found in **Cumbria**, a place-name which is itself cognate with the word **Cymru**, and where a form of Brittonic held on until at least the twelfth century.

Bryn: Bryn is identical to the modern Welsh word, whereas the *Vern* in Malvern is an example of the sound change known as ‘mutation’. Both elements of Malvern are Brittonic, *Mal* being *Moel* (bare). In modern Welsh, Malvern would be *Moelfryn* i.e. **bare hill**.

Caer: This element will be largely Roman or post-Roman in origin, as they were responsible for a lot of forts. Surprisingly then, the **kirk** place names are a corruption of **caer** and do not refer to churches. A common element in modern Welsh place-names like Caernarfon and Caerleon, as well as in Anglicised forms like Cardiff and Carmarthen, the English equivalent is **cester** or **chester** as in Chester, Leicester, Manchester, Worcester and so on.

Aberigines: Brittonic Place-name elements in England and Scotland

- ▶ **Coed** (*wood/trees*): Chatham (Kent and Essex) Cheadle (Staffordshire) Cheetham (Manchester) Cheetwood (Salford) Chetwode (Buckinghamshire) Chideock (Dorset) Chittoe (Wiltshire) Culchet (Warrington) Culgaith (Cumbria) Dalkeith (Midlothian) Datchet (Windsor) Inchkeith (Fife) Keith (Moray) Lytchett (Dorset) Morchard (Devon) Orchard (Dorset) Pencoyd (Herefordshire) Penge (London) Penketh (Warrington)
- ▶ **Cog** (*cuckoo*): Blencogo (Cumbria) Penicuik (Midlothian)
- ▶ **Craig** (*rocky hill*): Blindcrake (Cumbria), Crayke (North Yorkshire), Creak (Norfolk) Crick (Northamptonshire) Greysouthen (Cumbria) Pencraig (Herefordshire)
- ▶ **Crug** (*mound/hill*): Creech (Dorset and Somerset) Crich (Derbyshire) Cricket (Somerset) Crigglestone (Wakefield) Evercreech (Somerset) Gilcrux (Cumbria) Penkridge (Staffordshire)
- ▶ **Cul** (*narrow*): Culchet (Warrington) Culgaith (Cumbria).

Coed: Names completely made up of Brittonic elements include Chittoe (**thick wood** = *coed* + *tew*), Culchet and Culgaith, both of which mean **narrow wood** (*cul* + *coed*) and Pencoyd, Penge and Penketh, all of which mean **end of the wood** and are identical in construction and meaning to **Pencoed** near Bridgend, Wales. Lytchett means **grey wood** and is identical to **Llwydcoed** near Aberdare, Wales.

Cog: Blencogo (Cumbria) Penicuik (Midlothian). All elements in both these place names are Brittonic, being equivalent to **Blaen y Gog** and **Pen y Gog** in modern Welsh.

Cul: Culchet (Warrington) Culgaith (Cumbria). Both elements in these place-names are Brittonic and been referred to above under **coed**.

Aberigines: Brittonic Place-name elements in England and Scotland

- ▶ **Dâr** (*oak*): Darenth (Kent) Dartford (Kent) Darwen (Blackburn) and the rivers Derwent (Cumbria, Derbyshire, Durham and Yorkshire)
- ▶ **Dol** (*water meadow*): Dalkeith (Midlothian) Dallas (Moray) Megdale (Cumbria) Meigle (Perth)
- ▶ **Dulais** (*dark stream*): Dawlish (Devon) Dewlish (Dorset) Dowlish (Somerset)
- ▶ **Dŵr** or **Dwfr** (*water*): Andover (Hampshire) Calder Water (South Lanarkshire) Callander (Stirling) Callater Burn (Aberdeen) Callender (Highland) Cawdor (Highland) Dover (Kent) Dovercourt (Essex) Doverdale (Worcestershire) Wendover (Buckinghamshire)
- ▶ **Ffrwd** (*stream*): Renfrew (Renfrewshire) Winford (North Somerset) Wynford (Dorset)

Dâr: Dartford was previously Darwentford. All the above mean **oak tree river**.

Dol: The second elements in Dalkeith and Dallas names are Brittonic also, and correspond to *coed* and *ffos* in modern Welsh.

Dulais (dark stream) is itself a combination of *du* + *glais*. All three of these are found in neighbouring counties in South West England

Dŵr / Dwfr: The place names above from Scotland form a sub-group, all of which mean **hard water** (i.e. *caled dŵr*). Of the rest, Dover's location on the water now makes a lot more sense, doesn't it? Wendover is also a fully Brittonic name meaning **white waters**.

Ffrwd: All the elements in the above words are Brittonic. Renfrew meaning **point of the stream** and corresponding to modern Welsh *rhyn* and *ffrwd* while Winford and Wynford both mean **white stream** - modern Welsh *wyn* and *ffrwd*.

Aberigines: Brittonic Place-name elements in England and Scotland

- ▶ **Hawdd** (*pleasant/easy*): Hodder (river in Lancashire and Yorkshire) Hodnet (Shropshire)
- ▶ **Llanerch** (*glade*): Lanark (Lanarkshire) Lanercost (Cumbria)
- ▶ **Llwyd** (*grey*): Leatherhead (Surrey) Lichfield (Staffordshire) Lytchett (Dorset)
- ▶ **Llyn** (*pool/lake*): Linlithgow (West Lothian) King's Lynn (Norfolk)
- ▶ **Llys** (*court*): Leece (Cumbria) Liss (Hampshire) Treales (Lancashire)
- ▶ **Maen** (*stone*): Broadmayne (Dorset) Methven (Perth)
- ▶ **Moel** (*bare*): Malvern (Worcestershire) Melrose (Scottish Borders)
- ▶ **Mynydd** (*mountain*): Mindrum (Northumberland) Minto (Scottish Borders) Minton (Shropshire)
- ▶ **Nant** (*stream/brook*): Hodnet (Shropshire) Nenthead (Cumbria)

Hawdd: Both elements in both these place names are Brittonic, Hodder being **pleasant water** – *hawdd* + *dŵr* while Hodnet means **pleasant brook** – *hawdd* + *nant*.

Llwyd: Leatherhead is a superb example of words being familiarised by speakers of another language, having nothing to do with leather and nothing to do with heads. The original meaning was **grey ford** which in modern Welsh would be *llwyd* + *rhyd*.

Moel: All the elements in these two names are Brittonic, meaning **bare hill** and **bare moor** respectively. The modern Welsh words would be *moel* + *bryn* and *moel* + *rhos*.

Aberigines: Brittonic Place-name elements in England and Scotland

- ▶ **Pen** (*end/head*): Pencoyd (Herefordshire) Pencraig (Herefordshire) Pendlebury (Salford) Pendleton (Lancashire) Pendock (Worcestershire) Penge (London) Penicuik (Midlothian) Penketh (Warrington) Penkridge (Staffordshire) Penn (Buckinghamshire) Pennard (Somerset) Penrith (Cumbria) Pensax (Worcestershire) Pensby (Wirral) Penselwood (Somerset) Pentrich (Derbyshire) Pentridge (Dorset) Penwortham (Lancashire) Torpenhow (Cumbria)
- ▶ **Perth** (*thicket*): Larbert (Falkirk) Perth (Perth)
- ▶ **Prys** (*bush/thicket*): Prees (Shropshire) Preesall (Lancashire) Priston (North East Somerset)
- ▶ **Rhos** (*moor*): Roos (Yorkshire) Roose (Cumbria) Ross (Northumberland and Herefordshire) Rossington (Doncaster)
- ▶ **Rhyd** (*ford*): Penrith (Cumbria, England) Tretire (Herefordshire, England)

Pen: Another common element with examples all over the island. The **Pencoed** examples have already been mentioned under **coed** above. Penrith is also fully Brittonic, meaning **end of the ford** and corresponding to modern Welsh **pen** and **rhyd**.

Rhyd: Both elements in both place names are Brittonic. Penrith has already been referred to above, while **Tretire** means **long ford** (**rhyd** + **hir**)

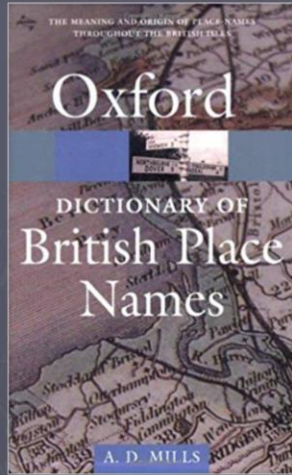
Aberigines: Brittonic Place-name elements in England and Scotland

- ▶ **Tre(f)** (*settlement*): Menstrie (Clackmannan) Moray (Morayshire) Ochiltree (Dumfries) Tranent (East Lothian) Treales (Lancashire)
- ▶ **Trwyn** (*nose/point*): Troon (Ayrshire)
- ▶ **Twrch** (*boar*): Pentrich (Derbyshire) Pentridge (Dorset)
- ▶ **Twill** (*hole/hollow*): Tollard (Wiltshire, England)
- ▶ **Uchel** (*high*): Ochil Hills (Perth) Ochiltree (Dumfries) River Oykel (Highland)
- ▶ **Wen/Wyn** (*white*): Wendover (Buckinghamshire) Winford (North Somerset) Wynford (Dorset)
- ▶ **Ynys** (*island*): Ince (Cheshire and Wigan)

Tre(f): All elements in all of the above are Brittonic. In modern Welsh they would correspond to *maes* + *tre*, *môr* + *tre*, *uchel* + *tre*, *tre* + *nant*, *tre* + *llys*, respectively.

Twrch: **Pentrich** and **Pentridge** both mean **boar's hill** and are identical in construction and meaning to **Pentyrch** just outside Cardiff, Wales.

Aberigines: Summary



- Confirmation of the extent of Brittonic
- All of England and much of Scotland
- Increasing from east to west
- Cornwall (and Wales) not included

Although an interesting topic, there is no requirement as part of this module to attempt any formal understanding of place-name elements. The objective of this unit was to indicate the geographical extent of Brittonic place-names across Britain. It can be seen that they abound all over what is now England and Scotland, providing strong evidence that the language was spoken in all those locations. There are nevertheless a higher proportion in the western parts of the island, reflecting, as we shall see, a gradual loss of territory from east to west.

For the purposes of this exercise, and due to the survival of its own Brittonic language until the modern era, Cornwall has not been treated as a part of England. Had that been done, the list of Brittonic elements in England would have been far too long. It is also worth noting that the list shown in the previous slides is representative, not exhaustive.

Those wishing to delve further into this particular aspect of linguistic history will find *The Oxford Dictionary of British Place Names* or its revised quick reference version *A Dictionary of British Place Names* (2011, OUP) to be invaluable resources, with 'fossilised' examples from every language historically spoken across these islands.