

St.Dennis Village Place Names

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The place names found in St.Dennis parish all have their root in the Cornish language with a few exceptions like Whitepit and Whitemoor which are obviously English and probably arise from the last few hundred years when English replaced Cornish as the first language in this area.

By the time of the first great survey of landholdings, The Domesday Survey undertaken in 1086 by the new rulers of these islands, the Normans, the Cornish language was the first language of peoples across the Duchy. English only replaced Cornish as a first language in the Mid Cornwall area around 1500 or 1600.

The border between Celtic Cornwall and Saxon England was drawn in AD 936 and some settlements are found in the far east of Cornwall with place name endings in Ton, Ham, Worthy, Bury etc., which indicates a Saxon influence.

Settlements in Cornwall follow a traditional Celtic pattern of many small hamlets some with a small church town but others with the parish church remote from the main settlement. The Saxon development was one of larger villages and towns.

These small hamlets, often no more than a few cottages around a farm were known as “trefs” in the Cornish language which explains why so many places in Cornwall start “Tre” sometimes followed by a personal name of a landowner or prominent local leader or chief of the community as in Treviscoe “Tref Osker” translated as “Octers Farm”. But many have a Cornish language suffix as well as in Nanpean meaning “little valley”

Other Cornish place name prefixes which confirm this scattered pattern of small settlements are Bos/Bod “a dwelling”, Car/Ker “an enclosed farm”, Chy/Ty “a house” and Hendra “the old or home farm”.

In the Norman Domesday Survey four landholdings were mentioned in St.Dennis parish; Dimelihoc (modern Domellick), Karsalan (Carsella), Widewot (Gothers) and Treuret (Terice).

The Normans sometimes misinterpreted a Cornish place name or substituted one of their own, for example, St.Dennis. St.Dennis has no connection with the patron saint of Paris but is a misinterpretation of the Cornish “Dinas”, a hill fort, in which St.Dennis church stands, it should really have been called Tredinas/Tredynas, “the settlement by or of the Dynas or Dinas” or even Landynas/Landinas “the religious enclosure of the Dynas”.

Similarly neighbouring Roche should be in Cornish Angarrick “the rock” or Tregarrick “the settlement of or by the rock” instead it was recorded by the Normans in their own Norman French language for rock, Roche.

But let's start with the three hamlets which made up the central community in St. Dennis parish, Trelavour, Whitepit and Hendra. These developed as separate hamlets, the 1841 Tithe Map of the parish shows them as three distinct small hamlets with fields between each one.

St. Dennis was only known as the parish and was not regarded as a unified village until the 1890's surprisingly. Records show that people described their abode as "Trelavour in the parish of St. Dennis", for example.

A West Briton note from a St. Dennis correspondent in the mid 1890's said "our three hamlets of Trelavour, Whitepit and Hendra are now joined together as one village by recent infill of houses between them".

Trelavour

Tre, as I've mentioned, is Cornish for a very small settlement, perhaps no more than a farm with a couple of cottages. Originally recorded in 1327 as Trelowargh, Lowargh is a very old Cornish Christian name which fell out of use some 800 years ago, so the name originally meant Lowargh's farm or settlement.

Hendra

First recorded in 1327 contains that "Tre" element again but in the form of "Dre" and "Hen", Hen means old in Cornish. So it means the Old Farm or Old Settlement or Home Farm. It usually referred to the winter residence or permanent residence of the farmer who would take his livestock up to higher grazing in the summer. Hendra Lane and Hendra Downs spread the use of the word up to that higher ground.

Whitepit/White Pit

I've no idea! It has been recorded in parish records for nearly 200 years and I've seen it strangely recorded as "Widdows Pit" on one occasion. Is that a misspelling of Whitepit? Was there a small excavation there revealing white clay to give the name? There is no evidence of any small pits or quarries there that I have come across.

Rostowrack

The "watery down or heath land" from the Cornish "Ros" meaning heath, moorland or downs and "Dowrick" meaning watery place.

Bodella

Contains the Cornish place name element "Bod", meaning a homestead. The ending could mean elm trees so the "Homestead by the elm trees" possibly or could be another personal name for example "Ella's homestead"

Carsella

Contains the Cornish place name element "Car", an enclosed farm or settlement, sometimes a fortified farm. Recorded in the Domesday Book as Karsalan. Again the ending could be "of the elm trees" or a personal name

Gothers

First recorded as Gothfos in 1334, probably "the place by a stream with a wall or bank", but a landholding at Gothers is also mentioned in the Domesday Book by the name Widewot.

Goss Moor

Nearby Tregoss means “Fen Farm” so Goss maybe an anglicisation of the Cornish “Cors” meaning a fen or marshy ground. But there is a chance that it may mean “Goose Moor”. Gosmour was mentioned in 1502 and Geese were indeed kept by St.Dennis people on the pools created by Tin Streamers on the moor. Tin Streaming, which my Great, Great, Great grandfather did in the early 1800’s, would certainly have been an industry on the moor for centuries. There was a Goose Fair held in St.Dennis in the 1800’s when geese were driven off the moor up to the village and sold.

Parkendillack

Parc in Cornish is an enclosed land or field, so it was originally a field name and means “the field of the dung heap”

Enniscaven

Ennis means an island in the Cornish language and when you look at a map Enniscaven is indeed an “island” of slightly higher ground above the surrounding marshy moorland. First recorded in 1357 as Enescauen containing the Cornish “Scawen” or Elder Tree, so it’s the “Island with the elder tree or trees”.

Penrose Veor and Penrose Vean

Contains the Cornish place name elements “Pen”, meaning head or end, and “Ros” meaning a heath or moorland. So it is the place at the head (or end) of the moor (the Goss Moor) depending on which ever way you are looking at the moor. Veor means “great or big” in Cornish and Vean “small”, so it was used to distinguish between two Penrose’s and even today I think that Penrose Veor is the larger of the two farms or settlements.

Ennis (near Gaverigan Bridge)

Same meaning as in Enniscaven i.e. an island, and again it refers to a place which is an “island” in the middle of marshy ground or surrounded by streams. And once more Ennis Vean and Ennis Veor denote the smaller and larger of the two places

Domellick

The first part of the name “Dom” is a corruption of the Cornish “Dyn” for Dynas/Dinas, a hill fort and relates to the Iron Age Dinas just above it on the hilltop within which the parish church is situated. The second part is from an old Cornish personal name Mailoc or Mailek who was probably a local tribal or community leader whose name is now lost in antiquity, so it should be Mailoc’s or Mailek’s fort or Dinas.

And it would have referred to the hilltop Iron Age fort only, but it has “migrated” down the hill to the farm probably because the fort would have been part of the farm’s tenement in centuries past, possibly before any religious activity on that site.

Trerice

That “tre” element again meaning a farm or small settlement. The ending could be the Cornish “Reys”, “at the watercourse”, or “Res”, “at the ford”, or even from the personal name Rhys as in “Rhys’s Farm”. Another landholding mentioned in the Domesday Book.

Prazey (Hendra & Trelavour)

From the Cornish “Pras”, a common or open space in a village and although Hendra Prazey doesn’t seem to fit that description today don’t forget the building of houses and the railway embankment in the last 150 years have encroached on that space.

Carne

In Cornish a “stony or rocky place”, which fits the place well because until probably the date that the churchyard was enclosed in 1826, the area around the church hill was strewn with rocks and boulders. It’s reported that people had to pick their way around them to go to the church. They were cleared and used in the building of the churchyard boundary wall and in field walls around the church hill. Many large boulders can be seen going down the hill known as “Steep Carne”

Carnegga

Not easy this one. It may contain the Cornish prefix “Car” (walled farm) but is more likely to be a plural of the Cornish “Carnek” a craggy, rocky place or maybe even of “Carn” (a stony place) and is not far from Carne itself. And like the hill on which the church stands although there are cleared fields today it probably wasn’t so a thousand years ago.

Menna Wartha and Menna Wollas and Menna

“Mene” means hill, from the Cornish “Meneth”. Wartha means “Upper” and Wollas “Lower”, so probably denotes two settlements or homes at two different points on the hill, and Menna just means a location near a hill, probably the one on which the church stands.

Whitemoor

No real idea. It is obviously not of Cornish origin, I heard someone suggest many years ago that it referred to the white Cotton Grass which covered the downs before Dorothy China Clay works was started, or maybe it referred to white clay and the reason for the clay work?

Whitemoor moved over the parish boundary from St. Stephen parish into St.Dennis later in the 1800’s some people in the 1911 census described their birthplace as “Whitemoor, St. Stephen” and others as “Whitemoor, St.Dennis”

Gaverigan

Not strictly in St.Dennis parish as it is in St.Columb Major parish but it abuts our parish and is well known to St.Dennis people. It was first noted in 1302 and means “white or fair stream” an ancient manor house once existed nearby.

Fal

The name of the river which runs through part of the parish and in places forms a parish boundary. It is an ancient Celtic name whose meaning has been lost.

It rises a few miles away in Roche parish near Pentivale, or “Penfenten Fala” in 1320 and means “the head spring of the Fal”. Its actual source is a bit further up the hill behind Coldvreath Mill.

Cleers

Possibly from the Cornish “Clegar” meaning “Crag”.

Retew

Probably from the Cornish “black or dark ford” the “tew” ending being the Cornish “dhu” for black.

And so to local place names which I have found researching the census returns for the parish from 1841 to 1911. These do not have any root in the Cornish language but are local “nicknames” for features and come from a usage mainly in the last 150 years or so.

Brewers Hill

There are two, you all know one, the Brewers Hill which climbs up through Trelavour Downs to Whitemoor. That, years ago, was actually John Brewer's Hill, a John Brewer lived there in early 1900's. The other Brewers Hill is Nellie Brewers Hill which drops down after Atlantic Terrace toward Newmoor & Enniscaven, again named after a lady who lived there possibly a relative of John Brewer?

Best's Hill

Which is the short cut down to Hendra Road coming from the Treviscoe direction which avoids Hendra cross roads. There used to be a cottage halfway down the hill on the left which was occupied by an Edward Best and his family in the 1911 Census. I can remember my dad referring to it as Best's Hill.

Coads Hill

Which was how the School Hill up from Trelavour Farm on the bottom corner was called many years ago, a Mr. William Coad lived on the hill around the year 1900.

Green Lane Hill

The short nip down from Gothers Farm toward Enniscaven.

St.Lawrence

The area at the very top of Trelavour Road on the left where the footpath sign points at the houses in towards the Downs. Known up until the late 1800's as Higher Trelavour. A Day School and Poor Houses were located there in the 1840's.

Downs Lane

Trelavour Road was known as "Downs Lane" for many years up until around 1900. The 1901 census does mention Trelavour Road but it only refers to the houses at the very bottom on the flat around where Metheralls Garage used to be. Beyond that there were no houses up to St.Lawrence until after World War 1 and the 1920's.

Well Lane

Now known as Wellington Road. It was so named because a water chute fed by a spring issued from the hedge roughly opposite today's Kent Close, so wasn't really a "well" as such. Actual wells were constructed much later in the lane but they weren't built by the mid 1800's when Well Lane was first mentioned as the only properties in the lane then were the two cottages on the left hand bend going down the lane. The houses in lower Wellington Road were built around 1900 and those in much of the upper part of Wellington Road date from the 1920's.

White Gate

First mentioned in the 1881 census and occupied by a Railway Guard called James Liddicoat, a St. Columb Major man. It was later the residence of a Station Master in 1891 and 1901, probably looking after the adjacent loading wharf and in 1911 by a GWR Gate Keeper, Yericon Rowe from St.Austell.

The building was probably needed after the Cornwall Minerals Railway upgraded the Treffry Tramway line after 1873 and by using steam locomotives felt the need for the level crossing to be permanently manned. Its name presumably comes from the white level crossing gates.

Tods Hole

Probably most people know this out on the edge of the Goss Moor the other side of Enniscaven. Usually spelt Toads Hole on the 19th century census returns so probably refers to Toads and not the country name for a Fox – Tod. In the 1841 census it was referred to as “Frogs Hole” which supports the theory that it refers to Toads rather than Foxes.

Newmoor

The name of a small farm and a couple of cottages on the road passing Penrose farm to Enniscaven, mentioned from the mid 1800’s and obviously of English language origin

Gilley

Gilley Mill, a corn mill, was at the far eastern end of the parish on the border with Roche parish just off Cleers Hill.

Egypt

Another puzzle, we know it today as the small hamlet on from Carsella Farm, but the origin of its name is not known. It may come from the corn mill built near Carsella and appearing on the 1861 census as “Egypt Mill”, that mill was also referred to as Bodella Mill in 1851 and again in 1871 and 1881. It fell out of use sometime between 1881 and 1891, so old photos of that mill can be narrowed down in date.

The houses along from Carsella which we now call Egypt were known a hundred years ago as Trerice Terrace.

Some might suggest that the name Egypt comes from the “pyramid” shaped china clay industry sand tips but that is unlikely as they would not have been much in evidence 170 years ago.

Rolly Polly or Roll Poll

Taking its probable position from the 19th century census returns would place the couple of houses found here near St.Dennis Consols Clay Work at Crown Mine. Taking the turning opposite Cross Winds Stables just past the yard for Commercial Plant Repairs Rolly Polly can be found following a right hand turn down this lane.

The text of this article, including accompanying notes, are mine but acknowledges references to works by Cornish historians like Craig Weatherhill and Oliver Padel and others, please do not post or share from this site

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