

PLACE-NAMES
of CORNWALL in general
and PILLATON in particular

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GENERAL RULE

when studying place-names

Do not rely on forms taken from the map,
but collect as many historical forms as possible.

Historical forms of SEATON

map	Seaton	1613	Seythen
1884	Seaton	1598	Seythin
1809	Seaton	1584	Sythian Bay
1699	Ceton	c. 1540	Seton Bridge
1673	Seaton	c. 1540	Setoun
1654	Three Seaton Hills	1441	Seythen
1650	Sithian Bay	1397	Seythin
1650	Sythian Bay	1302	Seythyn

What does the place-name **Seythyn** mean?

We do not know, but two suggestions are:

- an otherwise unknown Cornish word from Latin *sectionem* ‘a cut’ (a reference to the deep valley between Trebrowbridge and Seaton)
- The Cornish word **sethynn** ‘a dart’
(lots of rivers are named
after the concept of an arrow)

NAMES

having one simple element

ENGLISH

Temple

Rock

Hatt

CORNISH

Looe

Kea

Gweek

Hayle

Logh

Ke

Gwig

Heyl

‘lake’

saint’s name

‘village’

‘estuary’

ENGLISH NAMES

with two elements - **Examples**

Oxford

Dartford

Bedford

Castleford

Bideford

Hessenford

Cambridge

Uxbridge

Stockbridge

Cowbridge

Sladesbridge

Newbridge

ENGLISH NAMES

with two elements - **Structure**

- The first element describes the second, and is called the **qualifier**.
- The second element usually refers to a geographic feature, and is called the **generic**.
- The qualifier is usually **stressed**, and the generic is usually **unstressed**.

CORNISH NAMES

with two elements - **Examples**

pons 'bridge'

Ponspren prenn 'wood'

Ponsleggo lusu 'ashes'

Ponsbrital brottel 'brittle'

Ponsmain men 'stone'

Ponsmear meur 'great'

Ponshallow halow 'marshes'

rys 'ford'

Rissick sygh 'dry'

Resoon goen 'down'

Respryn brini 'crows'

Retallick talek 'browed'

Reddavallan avalenn 'orchard'

Rosecraddock Karasek (name)

CORNISH NAMES

with two elements - **Structure**

- The first element is usually the generic.
- The second element is usually the qualifier.
- As in English names, the qualifier is usually stressed, and the generic is usually unstressed, **but** these are the other way round from English.

Assibilation: Trenant Trenans



Trenant 1086

tre ‘farmstead’ +
nans ‘valley’

‘**valley farm**’

Unlike Trenance
further west, this name
does not show
assibilation

Names of towns in Cornwall (1)

Penzance Pennsans

1284 Pen~sans Middle Cornish *pen* ‘head’ + *sans* ‘holy’

1368 Pen~sant shows older form with <-nt>

1698 Pen~zans first form to show <z>

map Pen~zance

Because the second element is the qualifier, the stress is on the second syllable: Penzance.

Names of towns in Cornwall (2)

Redruth

Rysrudh

1259 Ridruth

Old Cornish *rid* ‘ford’ + *ruth* ‘red’

1302 Redruth

first form as on map

1361 Risdruth

first form showing <s>

Because the second element is the qualifier, the stress is on the second syllable: Redruth.

Names of towns in Cornwall (3)

Liskeard Lyskerrys

c.1001 Lys~cerryt Old Cornish *lys* ‘court’ + *kerwyd* ‘stags’
(or a personal name meaning ‘stags’)

1375 Lys~kyrrys form with final <-s>

1378 Lys~kerd first disyllabic form

1379 Lis~kerret form often seen today

1699 Les~keard first form with <ear>

1714 Leas~card first form with <ar>

map Lis~keard

Because the second element is the qualifier, the stress is on the second syllable: Liskeard.

Names of towns in Cornwall (4)

Penryn	Pennrynn	‘end of a bluff’
Launceston	Lannstevan	‘church-site of Stephen’
Bodmin	Bosvenegh	‘house of monks’
Lostwithiel	Lostwydhyel	‘tail-end of wooded land’
Camborne	Kammbronn	‘crooked hill’
Truro	Truru	‘triple boiling’
Helston	Hellys	‘ancient court’

Effect of Cornish stress on English place-names

We have seen that in many disyllabic Cornish place-names, the stress is on the second syllable, because this is the qualifier,

e.g. Penzance, Reddruth, Liskeard;

this pattern is extended to English names where one would expect the opposite:

Torpoint, Salttash, Wadebridge

Anglicized pronunciation of Cornish place-names

Heligan Helygenn ‘willow-plant’

Tideford Rysteudhi ‘ford on turbulent river’

St Keyne S. Keyn (name of saint)



Pennros ‘end of a spur’

Cornish names with **an** ‘the’

Some Cornish place-names comprise two nouns with the definite article **an** between them, e.g.

Castle an Dinas **Kastell an Dinas** ‘castle of the fort’

Crows an wra **Krows an Wragh** ‘cross of the witch’

Pedn an Drea **Penn an Dre** ‘end of the town’

Parkandillack **Park an Deylek** ‘field of the dungheap’

Ponsanooth **Pons an Woedh** ‘bridge of the goose’

Praze an Beeble **Pras an Bibell** ‘meadow of the pipe’

Translating English names

Some places in Cornwall either had a Cornish name which has been lost, or never had one.

It is customary to translate such names, e.g.

Torpoint → Penntorr

Wadebridge → Ponsrys

Falmouth → Aberfala

Others have Cornish forms which were given early in the Revival, e.g. Saltash → Essa

Callington → Kelliwik

Different names for the same place

Since some place-names in Wales are quite different in English and in Welsh,

- Swansea / Abertawe
- Fishguard / Abergwaun

we should not be surprised to find a similar situation in Cornwall:

- St Ives / Porthia St Blazey / Lanndreth
- Newquay / Tewynn Pleustri

FRENCH NAMES

Name on map	Modern French	English meaning	Cornish translation
Barripper	beau repère	<i>beautiful retreat</i>	Argelteg
Doublebois	double bois	<i>two-fold wood</i>	Koes-dewblek
Grampound	grand pont	<i>great bridge</i>	Ponsmeur
Malpas	mal pas	<i>false step</i>	Kammdrog

Sub-divisions of names

Cornish	Latin	English	English
wartha		Over	Upper
woeles		Nether	Lower
meur	magna		Great
byghan	parva		Little

Pillaton *Trebeulyow*



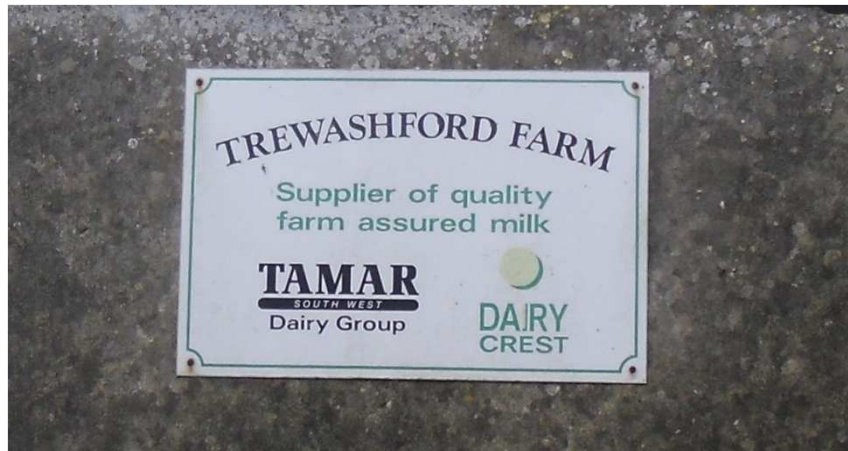
Piletone 1086

Old English *pīla-tūn*
'settlement defended
by stakes'

Trewashford Trewolghrys

Washforde 1360

Trewashford 1727



English *wash* + *ford*

Cornish *tre* 'farmstead'
was appended later

'ford at a washing-
place'

Mushton *Treueur*



Tremor 1086

Mucheltoune 1626

Old English

micel ‘great’

+ *tūn* ‘settlement’

Identified with *Tremor*
in Domesday Book

Rowse *Ros*

Rous 1459



probably Cornish *ros*
'spur'

Pollborder *Pollbodhowr*



No historic forms

Polborder *Pollbodhowr*

Polbothor 1200



Cornish *poll* ‘pool’

+ *bodhowr*

‘filthy water’

‘pool of filthy water’

Tremoan *Trevoen*

Tremon 1327



Cornish *tre* ‘farmstead’
+ ? *moen* ‘ore’

Trehill Trevena

La Hylle 1265

Hille 1349

Trehill 1616



English *hill*

Cornish *tre* ‘farmstead’
was appended later

Hornifast



Karvugeledh

Herdenefast 1200

Old English

hierdena-fæsten

‘stronghold of
herdsmen’

Pentillie

Penntylli



Built and named by Sir James Tillie, c.1698

Tillie is believed to be a Cornish surname.

Ford

Fordh

La forde 1200

*Foorde alias West
forth* 1649



English *ford*, but note
also Cornish *fordh*
'road'

Smeaton

Trewovyon

Smitheneton 1200



Old English *smiðe-tūn*

‘settlement of the
smiths’

Beira / Beria

Kelli



Labera 1244

Old English *beara*
'grove'



Kernock

Kernek

Kernek 1302

Cornish *kernek*

‘abounding in
corners’



Four rhyming names

Pillaton *Piletone* 1086 Old English *pīla-tūn*

‘settlement defended by stakes’

Sillaton *Selaton* 1298 Old English ? + *tūn*

Villaton *Vyleton* 1429 Old English *filiðe-tūn*

‘hay settlement’

Rillaton *Rislestone* 1086 Cornish *rys* ‘ford’ +

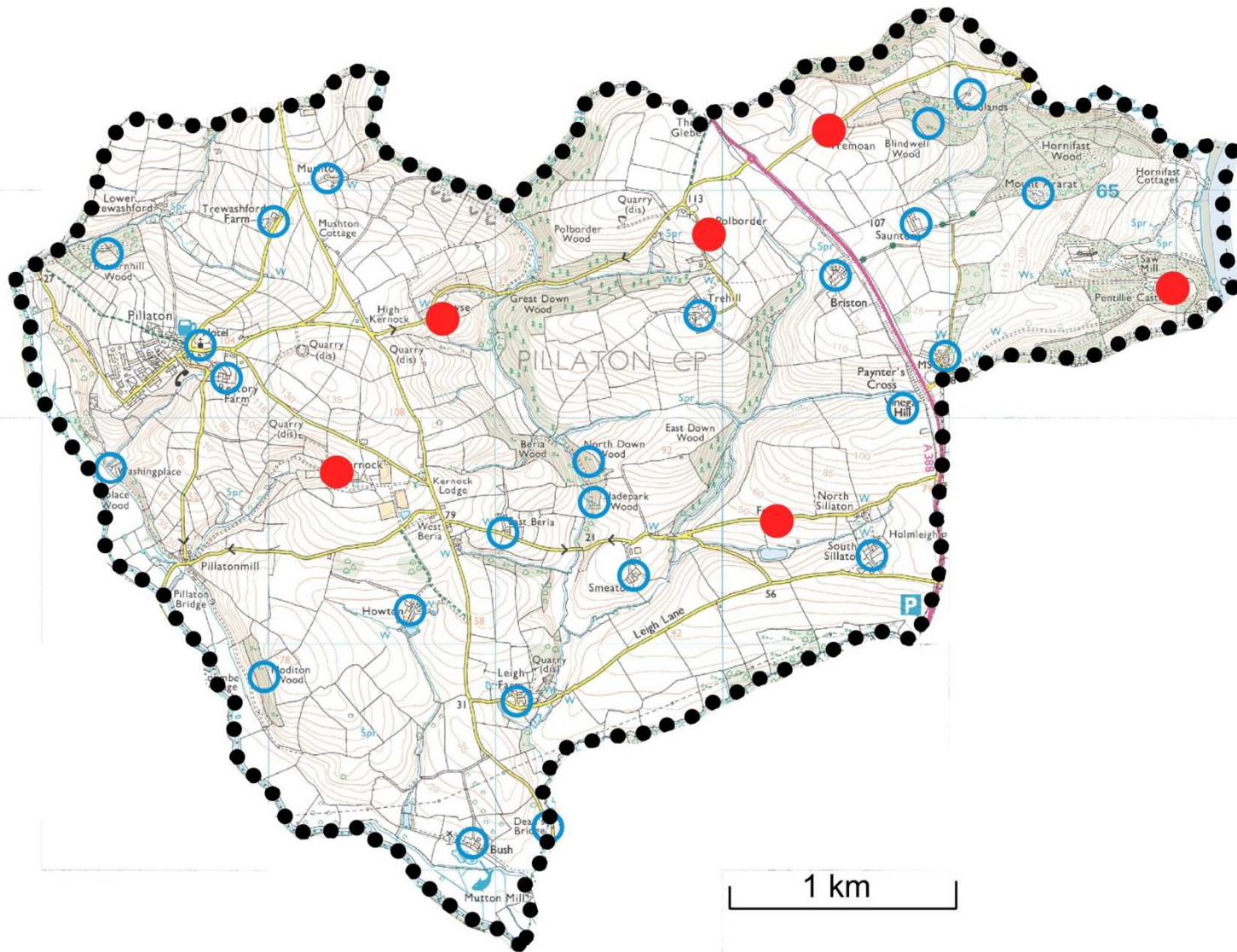
lys ‘court’ + English *tūn* ‘settlement’

Bilingual name-plate

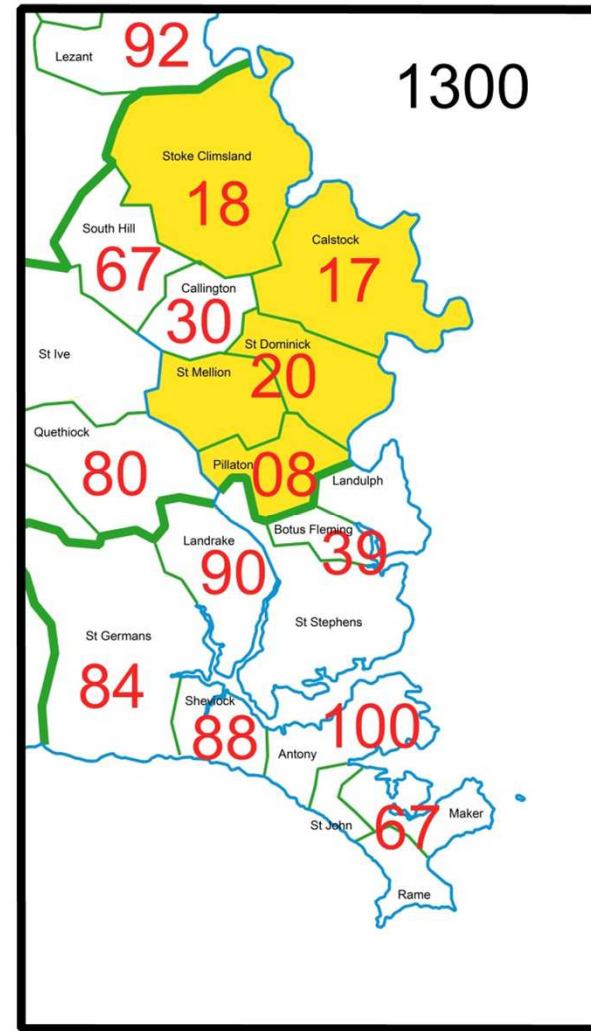
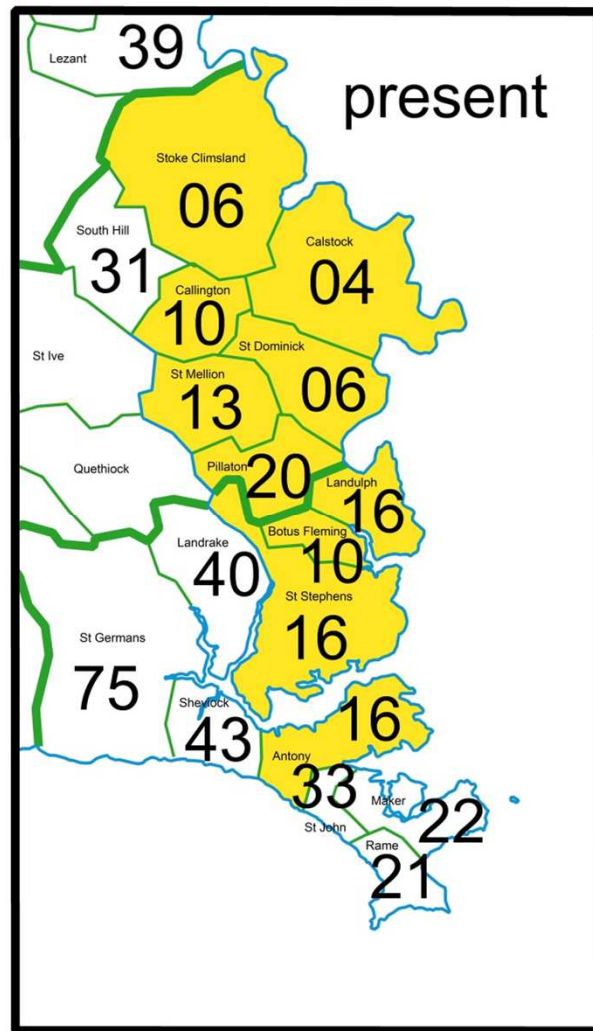


Primary Cornish names ●

Primary English names ○



Percentages of Cornish names



RECAPITULATION

- Only 20% of the primary names in the parish of Pillaton are Cornish.
- Pillaton is one of a number of parishes bordering the Tamar with few Cornish names.
- This is thought to be due to very early (9th century) settlement by Saxons.
- There was, however, a recognition that Pillaton is in Cornwall by the addition of *Tre-* to names.