

LENITED AND UNLENITED FORMS AFTER *TRE*-

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A discussion paper for the Signage Panel

1 INTRODUCTION

It is well known that the rules of initial mutation in Cornish place-names are not always observed. This paper is concerned with the failure of lenition (soft mutation) of *m* to *v* in the second element of names beginning with *Tre*-. One might expect such names to contain *Trev*-, but there are a large number of cases which contain *Trem*-.

The change of [m] to [v] took place in stages, according to Jackson (1953); the result of lenition was at first a strongly nasal bilabial consonant denoted by [μ], but still written <m> by scribes versed in Latin. Later the consonant lost its bilabial character, but was still nasal; this stage was denoted by [ṽ] by Jackson. English had no such sound: English scribes sometimes perceived it as similar to [m], and wrote it as <m>, and sometimes they perceived it as similar to [v] and wrote it as <v>. Eventually the consonant lost its nasality and became [v], in place-names usually written <v>.

We also have to consider the change of [b] to [v]. This was simpler, having just one intermediate step, the bilabial form of [b] denoted by [β]¹, but still written . This changed to [v], which in place-names was usually written <v>, but sometimes <f>.

The sound-changes may be summarized in the following table, with Jackson's dates appended:

	British		Late British		Primitive and Old Cornish		Middle Cornish
Supposed sound	[m]		[μ]		[ṽ]		[v]
Date of change (A.D.)		475		650		1100	
Usual spelling	<m>		<m>		<m, v>		<v>
Supposed sound	[b]		[β]		[v]		[v]
Date of change (A.D.)		475		650			
Usual spelling					<v, f>		<v>

We also have to bear in mind that *trev* was previously **treb*-.

¹ Bilabial [β] occurs in Spanish between vowels, but confusingly, it is sometimes represented by and sometimes by <v>, e.g. *beber* 'to drink' [be'βer] and *vivir* 'to lie' [bi'βir] (Harris & Vincent 1998:90)

2 METHOD

A list was compiled of place-names in Cornwall beginning with *Treb-*, *Trem-* and *Trev-*, and their historical forms were examined. The principal sources for these data were Gover (1948)², augmented by a web-site by Bond (no longer available). A large number of different categories, shown in the following table, needed to be disentangled. Of the 325 place-names in the list, 120 (37%) could not be assigned to a particular category. Only the non-shaded categories are considered in this paper.

Spelling	Origin	Mutation written?	No. of cases	Example	Parish	Qualifier ³
<i>Trev-</i>	<i>tre + b-</i>	yes	28	Trevean	(numerous)	<i>byghan</i>
	<i>tre + m-</i>	yes	48	Trevassack	(3 cases)	<i>Masek</i>
	<i>tre + f-</i>		6	Trevenwith	St Keverne	<i>finwedh</i>
	<i>tre + v-</i>		3	Trevarledge	Advent	<i>val rych ?</i>
	<i>trev + vowel</i>		43	Treveglos	(3 cases)	<i>eglos</i>
	<i>tre + consonant</i>		16	Trewinnick	St Kew	<i>Gwynnek</i>
	<i>tre</i> (indeterminate)		120	Trevarrick	Goran	?
	false <i>tre</i>		6	(see section 4 below)		
<i>Trem-</i>	<i>tre + m-</i>	no	36	Tremaddock	St Neot	<i>Masek</i>
	false <i>tre</i>		2	(see section 4 below)		
<i>Treb-</i>	<i>tre + b-</i>	no	9	Trebeighan	Landrake	<i>byghan</i>
	<i>tre + p-</i>	yes	9	Trebost	Stithians	<i>post</i>
	false <i>tre</i>		1	(see section 4 below)		

It is evident that the same name is found both with and without lenition, e.g. Tremaddock and Trevassack, Trebeighan and Trevean.

3. LENITION OF [b] AND [m] IN PLACE-NAMES WITH TRE-

There seems to be no significant difference between original *b-* and *m-*, as regards their appearance in place-names, so on the map below they are both plotted, though with different symbols.

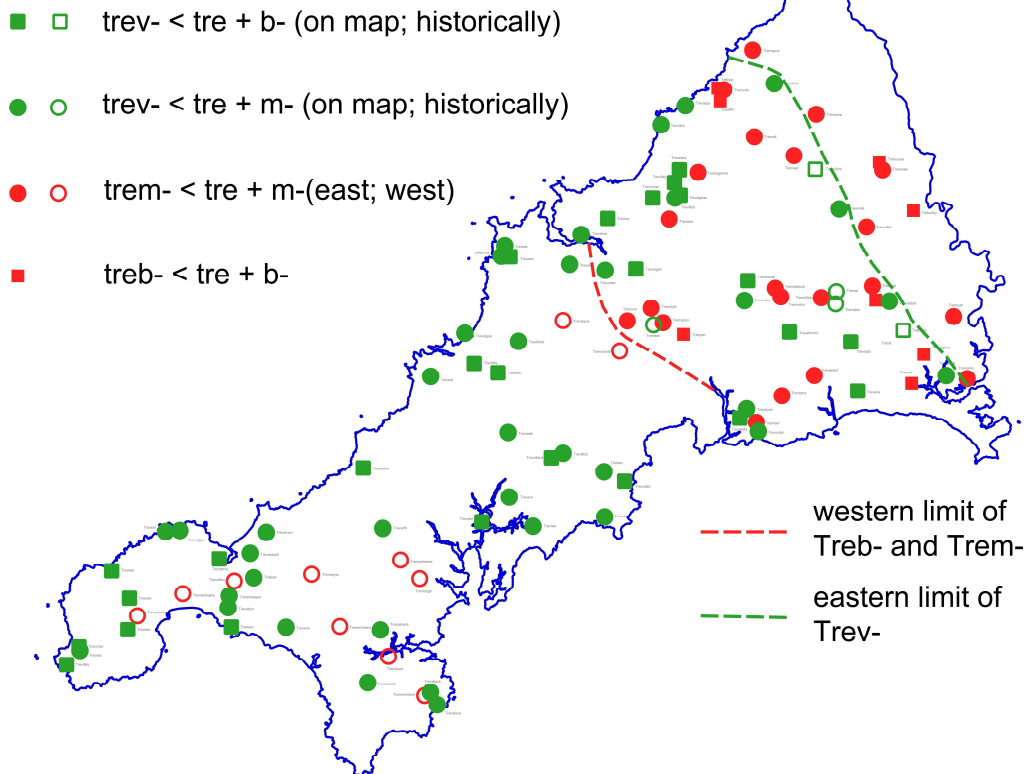
The map shows three distinct areas:

- in the far east, only *Treb-* and *Trem-* are found.
- otherwise east of the Fowey-Camel line, a mixture of *Treb-* / *Trem-* and *Trev-* is apparent.
- to the west of the Fowey-Camel line, most of the names have *Trev-*; but there is a significant number of cases of *Trem-*, marked on the map by red rings.

² As frequently noted by Oliver Padel, Gover (1948) contains numerous errors. These are less important in a statistical study than in an in-depth examination of individual names.

³ The elements listed in this column are spelled in *Kernewek Kemmyn*; bold italic is used for this orthography.

Treb-, Trem- and Trev-



There is insufficient evidence to determine clear dates for the changes *Trem-* > *Trev-* and *Treb-* > *Trev-*. Pairs of forms (*Treb-* and *Trev-*; *Trem-* and *Trev-*) are common in the fourteenth century, but *Trev-* forms are found which are much older than that.

It is necessary, however, to account for the cases of *Trem-* in the west, and this is best done by considering them individually.

Place-name	Parish	Qualifier
Tremethick	Madron	<i>medhek</i> 'doctor'
Tremellen	St Erth	<i>melin</i> 'mill'
Tremayne	St Columb Maj.	<i>men</i> 'stone' ⁴
Tremayne	Martin in M.	
Tremayne	Crowan	
Tremenheere	Stithians	<i>menhir</i> 'longstone'
Tremenheere	Wendron	
Tremenheere	St Keverne	
Tremenheere	Ludgvan	
Tremodrett	Roche	<i>Modres</i> 'Modred'
Tremough	St Gluvias	<i>mogh</i> 'swine'

The words *medhek*, *melin*, *men* and *menhir* are common enough for them to have been understood by English speakers. Indeed, *menhir* has been borrowed into standard English. It is therefore quite possible for English speakers to have used a form of these place-names in which the lenition of [m-] to [v-] was not recognized, and it is this form which has prevailed. The word *mogh* was perhaps not so commonly known, but the place (now spelled Tremough) certainly would have been; it is close to Glasney College, where the Ordinalia were probably composed. At the time of Glasney's foundation (1265), English speakers were probably pronouncing the name with [m], and this form remained.

Further east, the name Tremodrett is archaic in that it retains /-d/ (spelled <-tt>) instead of being assimilated to <-s>. Likewise, the <m> is archaic in an area where one would expect <v>. This may be attributed to English speakers being familiar with the name Modred.

5. RECOMMENDATION

The grammatical rules of revived Cornish require that after *Tre-*, both /b-/ and /m-/ are lenited to /v-/. It is recommended that this lenition be shown as *Trev-* in place-names in revived Cornish, irrespective of whether <Trev-> is actually found in the historical record.