THE "ALLEN" ELEMENTS IN CORNISH PLACE-NAMES
A discussion paper for the Signage Panel

Background

There are a number of place-names in Cornwall which include the element "allen", spelled in various ways. The question has arisen as to whether the element in all of these should be treated (and spelled) the same way, or not.

Sources

Received wisdom suggests that there are three similar but different sources to be considered.

1) A word meaning 'coltsfoot', the perennial plant *Tussilago farfara.* This appears in Welsh and in Old Breton as *alan*; it is not attested in traditional Cornish, but in the revived language appeared for the first time in GLKK 1993, spelled ***alann*** (with <nn> because the Welsh plural is *alannau*). No etymology is available, but the word is assumed to be Celtic in origin. It is quite plausible that a place abundant in coltsfoot might have this word in its name.

2) A word meaning 'deer, stag', represented by Old Welsh *alan.* This word is not attested as such in Breton or in Cornish, but is thought to be the same as the boy's name **Alan**. The earliest examples of the boy's name Alan come from Brittany (e.g. St Alan, bishop of Kemper, *c.*500 A.D.). Brythonic personal names were often those of animals. The etymology of this word is given in detail on pp. 77-78 of Schriver: *Studies in British Celtic Historical Phonology.* It comes in the first instance from Proto-British **alanī;* the *–ī* caused final i-affection, giving rise to another form of the word, represented by Modern Welsh *elain.* Further back, the word is related to many others in various Indo-European languages, and may be the same as the word for 'coltsfoot'.

3) A Proto-Celtic river-name **alaunā,* whose meaning is disputed; one suggestion is **al-* 'bright, white' (cf. **alargh, Alba**) + **-aun* 'full'. This is identified with the Welsh boy's name *Alun.* It appears in Padel's CPNE as ***alun,** which is an Old Cornish form

Since the first two of these sources may be combined, there are only two types to deal with, Old Cornish **alan* and **alun.*

Phonology

Whatever the source, we are usually dealing with spellings of the form <alXn>, corresponding to a pronunciation ['a.lXn]. All that we have to do is to decide, from the historical spellings, what X stands for. We need to draw on our knowledge of the historical phonology of unstressed vowels in closed final syllables.

In Old Cornish *alun, <u> represents the rounded vowel [y]; in Middle Cornish this would have been unrounded to [ɪ], so that the spelling *alyn* is more appropriate.

In Old Cornish *alan, the second <a> represents /a/, which would remain unchanged throughout Middle and Late Cornish. However, because unstressed final /e/ and /o/ fell together with /a/, we sometimes find /a/ written as <e> or as <o>, especially from c.1525 onwards.

We therefore distinguish two types, *alyn* and *alan.* A useful but not infallible guide to interpreting X is as follows:

X	date	Sound	Type
u	early	[y]	*alyn*
y		[I]	*alyn*
i		[I]	*alyn*
a	early	[a]	*alan*
e	late	[a]	*alan*
o		[a]	*alan*

Individual cases

A list of place-names potentially containing either *alan* or *alyn* was drawn up from a data-base of Cornish place-names. Each one needs to be examined individually. The historical cases given are unlikely to be exhaustive.

Burthallan
Grid ref.   503407
Parish   St Ives
Location: Coastal shelf west of St Ives; no rivers here
1361   Bosworthalan###
1361   Bosworthalon###
1367   Bodrevelen
1523   Borthalan###
1541   Borthalan###
1816   Burthallan###
1820   Borallen###
1844   Burthallan###
map   Burthallan
Remarks: The 1361 forms suggest *bos worth Alan* 'house at the (?river) Alan', but there is no river here. P.A.S.Pool included 1367 *Bodrevelen* in his list of historic forms; this could be *bos drev Alan* 'house of the settlement of (a person) Alan' (note the difference between *bos* and *trev*). This name therefore looks like an *alan*-type

Lancallan

Grid ref.   001448
Parish   Goran
Location: On the plateau, 1.5 km west of Mevagissey

```
1280  Nanscalen
1287  Nanscalan
1356  Nancalan
1390  Nanskalan
1584  Nancallan
```

Remarks: This name was thrown up by a search for <-alan> in the files, but it appears to contain "kalan" rather than *alan*, and is therefore excluded from the list.

Nanstallon

Grid ref.   036672
Parish   Bodmin
Location: 3 km west of Bodmin, in the valley of the River Camel

```
1392  Nanstalen
1412  Lantalan
1438  Nanstallen
1513  Nanstalan
1884  Nanstallan
map   Nanstallon
```

Remarks: The river here was once called Allen, but this name was transferred to the tributary which flows between Delabole and Sladesbridge. Therefore the name was probably in Old Cornish *nant* + river-name **Alun*. It looks as if the *alan*-type was substituted, giving **nant Alan*. This was then re-interpreted as *nant* + personal name *Talan*. In Middle Cornish, *nant* was replaced by *nans,* giving *nans Talan.*

Nantellan

Grid ref.   944497
Parish   Creed
Location: 800 m east of the River Fal

```
1357  Nanstalan
1357  Nantelan
1360  Nanstellan
1374  Nantelan
1558  Nantallan
1884  Nantellan
map   Nantellan
```

Remarks: Although the place is close to the River Fal, the spellings <-alan> and <-elan> suggest that we have here an *alan*-type, i.e. the Old Cornish form was **nant Alan.* Subsequent development was as in the case of Nanstallon, though the <s> does not appear in recent forms.

Penhallym

Grid ref.   213975

Parish   Jacobstow

Location: Undulating terrain 4 km from the sea, east of the River Strat

```
1086  Penhalun
1086  Pennalun
1244  Penalun
1270  Penalym
1270  Penalym
1284  Penalyn
1284  Penelyn
1296  Pennalyn
1303  Penalym
1303  Penhalym
1306  Penalym
1399  Pennalyn
1399  Penlyn
```

Remarks: The spellings clearly indicate an *alyn*-type rather an *alan*-type, but it is not certain that the second element really represents the river-name. The only river in the area is the Strat, whose Cornish name was written *Neth = Nedh*. Was Padel correct in including this name under ***alun**? The first entry for 1086 suggests *penn + hal + goen*.

Redallan

Grid ref.   619317

Parish   Breage

Location: just south of a tributary of the River Hayle

```
1289  Huthnans juxta Redalan
1345  Reddalan
1346  Redalen
1812  Redallan
1842  Redallen
1884  Redallen
```

Remarks: The first element looks like *rys* 'ford'; the second seems to be an *alan*-type. The name could mean a ford built by a person called Alan, or if Alan was the name of the stream, then one presumes that the *alan*-type has been substituted for the former *alyn*-type.

River Allen

```
1199  Alan
1200  Alan
1284  Aleyn
1284  Alen
1285  Alan
1302  Aleyn
1345  Alan
1381  Aleyn
1424  Alan
1540c the ryver of Alawne
1748  St Allen river
```

Remarks: The early forms with *Alan* suggest that the river was named after the saint, and not the other way round; i.e. this is an *alan*-type.

Ruallen
Grid ref.   ?
Parish: St Agnes
Location: ?
```
1338  Ruallen
1540  Rualen
1735  Rualyn
```
Remarks: Not found on map; meaning is obscure; may not contain *alyn*-type.

St Allen
Grid ref.   823505
Parish: St Allen
Location: on a ridge between two north-south valleys
```
1235  Eglossalan                         Cornish
1261  Sanctus Allunus                    Latin
1269  Ecclesiam Sancti Aluni             Latin
1270  Seynt Alun                         English
1281  Ecclesie Sancti Alluni             Latin
1284  Lanergh juxta Sanctum Alunum       Latin
1291  Ecclesia de Sancto Aluno           Latin
1302  Kelly in parochia Sancti Aluni     Latin
1302  Eglosalon                          Cornish
1322  Eglosalon                          Cornish
1342  Ecclesia de Sancto Aluno           Latin
1376  Seynt Alen                         English
1454  Seynt Alen                         English
1454  Trewronek juxta Seyntalyn          English
1493  Seynt Aleyn                        English
1510c Trereys in St Allen                English
1699  St Allen     Gascoyne's map        English
1730  St Allen                           English
1840  Eglosellan                         Cornish
1884  St Allen                           English
map   St Allen                           English
```
Remarks: The Cornish forms seem to be *eglos* + *alan*-type; but the Latin forms
             have the *alyn*-type. This is inexplicable.

Tregantallan
Grid ref.   711323
Parish   Constantine
Location: over 150 m above sea-level, 400 m south of the A394
```
1260  Tregantalan
1302  Tregentalen
1359  Tregantallen
1448  Tregentalen
map   Tregantallan
```
Remarks: Evidently a name in *tre*-, but the qualifier is not clear; it may contain
             alan-type.

Tregarland
Grid ref.   257574
Parish   Morval
Location: 1 km east of the East Looe River
```
1198  Crugalein
1201  Crugalen
1202  Crugalin
1211  Crugalen
1365  Curgalyn
1427  Kyrgalyn
1493  Curgalen
1507  Kurgalyn brigge
1726  Tregalland
1884  Tregarland
map   Tregarland
```
Remarks: This is a name with a false *tre*. The early forms show clearly that the
                first element is ***krug*** 'tumulus';   the spelling of the second element
                correspond more closely to the ***alyn***-type.

Trevellan
Grid ref.   810485
Parish   Kenwyn
Location: about 500 m west of the River Allen
```
1327  Trevalan###
1580c Trevallon###
1884  Trevellan###
```
Remarks: This looks like ***trev*** + ***alan***-type. The farm may be named after the
                nearby river, but it may be named after the saint.

Tresallyn
Grid ref.   893733
Parish   St Merryn
Location: about 3 km S.W. of Padstow
```
1270  Trevalsalyn
1284  Trevesalin
1284  Trevesalyn
1290  Trevusalin
1320  Trewesalin
1380  Tresalen
1884  Tresallyn
map   Tresallyn
```
Remarks: The 1270 entry looks like ***trev*** + ***als*** + ***alyn***-type, but the location is
                well inland, so ***als*** may be incorrect.

<u>Discussion</u>

It would be neat if all the place-names thought to be associated with rivers belonged to the *alyn*-type, and all the others to the *alan*-type, but this is by no means the case. There appears to have been confusion at an early period between the two. Under these circumstances, the best that we can do is to treat each case on its merits, and decide which of the two types it fits best, irrespective of the location, taking into account only the historical spellings.

Name on map	Parish	GR	Type	Recommended spelling in KK
Burthallan	St Ives	503407	alan	*Bosworthalan*
Nanstallon	Bodmin	036672	alan < ?alyn	*Nansalan*
Nantellan	Creed	944497	alan	*Nansalan*
Penhallym	Jacobstow	213975	?alyn	*Pennalyn*
Redallan	Breage	619317	alan	*Rysalan*
River Allen	St Allen	------	alan	*Alan*
St Allen	St Allen	823505	alan	*S. Alan*
Tregantallan	Constantine	711323	alan	*Tregantalan*
Tregarland	Morval	257574	alyn	*Krugalyn*
Trevellan	Kenwyn	810485	alan	*Trevalan*
Tresallyn	St Merryn	893733	alyn	*Trevesalyn*

Dr Ken George
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