

The Names of Blantyre, Carluke, and Carnwath, near Glasgow

ANDREW BREEZE

Blantyre, Carluke, and Carnwath all lie south-east of Glasgow. High Blantyre (NS 6856) is now part of Hamilton; Carluke (NS 8450) is eleven miles beyond, near Lanark; Carnwath (NS 9746) is even further, some eight miles east of Carluke. The names of all three have puzzled philologists. Nevertheless, an explanation of their meaning seems possible.

1. BLANTYRE

Blantyre is recorded as *Blantir* in 1289, *Blanntyre* in 1368–9, and *Blantire* in 1426. Nicolaisen calls these forms ‘unexplained’, though suggesting the second element may be from Gaelic *tir* ‘land’ (Nicolaisen: 54). Yet the name is more likely to be from Cumbric (not Gaelic) as an equivalent of Welsh **Blaentir*. Welsh *blaen*, ‘end, point, summit; headwaters; extremity, limits, uplands’, is a common name-element in Wales, and its cognate occurs in Cumbria at Blencarn ‘rock summit’ (NY 6331) and Blencogo ‘cuckoos’ summit’ (NY 1947), both with Cumbric **blain* (Mills: 40). If the second element of *Blantyre* corresponds to Welsh *tir* ‘land’, a meaning ‘summit of the land, end of the land’ poses no difficulty.

Can we go further than this? It is possible that *tir* is here used in a technical sense. In Welsh law, *tir* was the term for land considered as a possession, so that medieval Welsh lawyers distinguished *tir burdd*, *tir cyd*, *tir cyfrif*, *tir difoddedig* and so on as land that was held as desmesne, by co-tenants, in base tenure, that was escheated, etc. (*Geiriadur* s.v. *tir*, forthcoming). At Blantyre, Cumbric **tir* may thus have meant ‘estate’. Alternatively, it might perhaps have meant ‘ploughland’, as suggested by the Cumbrian place-name *Tallentire* (NY 1035), which is *tal en tir* ‘the end of the land’, taken to mean a headland in ploughing (Jackson, 1963: 64). So *Blantyre* may have meant ‘summit of the estate’ or (just possibly) ‘summit of the ploughland’, rather than simply ‘summit of the land’. In any case, there can be no doubt that the name is Cumbric, not Gaelic.

2. CARLUKE

Carluk is recorded as *Carneluk* in 1315 and *Carluk* in 1359. Nicolaisen takes the first element as the Cumbric equivalent of Welsh *caer*, ‘fortress’, Cornish *ker* ‘homestead’,

and Breton *kaer* ‘homestead’, implying that the 1315 spelling with Gaelic *carn* ‘cairn’ is an aberration. The second element he describes as ‘obscure’ (Nicolaisen: 68).

Yet it is surely cognate with Welsh *llug*, ‘light, radiance, lustre, brightness’, also used as an adjective ‘shining, brilliant, resplendent’. This may occur in *Llug Fynydd* ‘Shining Mountain’, a farm (SJ 0754) in Denbighshire mentioned in pre-Norman poetry associated with Llywarch the Old (*Geiriadur*: 2221; Rowland: 537; cf. Breeze, 1997b: 22–4). Also related to *llug* are Irish *luchair* ‘shining’ and *Leuca* ‘shining one’, the ancient name of the river Lougher (Welsh *Lhwchwr*) on the Glamorgan-Carmarthenshire border (Rivet and Smith: 388). It appears as well with the river Lugg (Welsh *Llugwy* ‘bright stream’) flowing through Lugwardine (SO 5541) just east of Hereford (Mills: 217).¹

It is true there is another word *llug* ‘black’, cognate with Old Irish *loch* ‘black, dark’, Modern Breton *lug* ‘dark, dull’ (of weather). This disappeared early on in Welsh through conflict with *llug* ‘light’, though it survived in the Middle Welsh compound *llugfryd* ‘anger, wrath, indignation, fury; dejection, gloom, sadness, anxiety’ (Williams: 189; *Geiriadur*: 2222). Williams notes that in place-names it is hard to tell one form from another. So an interpretation of *Carluke* as ‘black fortress’ (not ‘bright fortress’) cannot be entirely ruled out.²

On the other hand, if we take the second element as meaning ‘bright’, how do we understand it? The fourteenth-century bard Gruffudd ap Maredudd calls Chester a *goleugaer dec* ‘fair shining fortress’, where *goleu* is Middle Welsh ‘light; bright’ (Lloyd-Jones: 553). The expressions *canncaer* ‘white fort’, *croewgaer* ‘clear fort’, *gloywgaer* ‘bright fort’, and *gwengauer* ‘white fort’ occur elsewhere (*op. cit.*: 95). Yet such forms have no exact equivalent in place-names. The best interpretation of *Carluke* is hence probably as follows. The first element as ‘fortress’ need have meant no more than a mere stockade around a hamlet or manor house, as at Cardurnock ‘pebbly defended place’ (NY 17538) or Cardew ‘black fortified settlement’ (NY 3449) in Cumbria (Jackson, 1963: 80–1). As for the last element, defensive sites in early society were usually named after a person or local feature (stream, wood, hill, and so on; Watson: 365–72; Breeze, 1997a: 99). It is possible, then, that *Carluke* was called after the nearby stream. This is now called ‘Jock’s Burn’, but its original name may have been *Lug* ‘bright one’; compare the Welsh rivers Lugg and Loughor. The most likely meaning of *Carluke* is, therefore, ‘fortified settlement by the stream called “Bright One”’.

3. CARNWATH

Carnwath, near Carstairs Junction, is recorded as *Karneuid* in 1179, *Karneui[t]* in 1172, *Carnewithe* in 1315, *Carnwythe* in 1424, and *Carnewith* in 1451. Watson takes these forms as equivalent to Welsh *carn gwydd* ‘cairn of (the) wood’ (Watson: 386). But this is not persuasive. Cairns rarely occur in or by woods; nor can *carn* refer to a hill or mountain, as at Carn Fadrun in west Gwynedd (SH 2735), since there is no prominent hill by Carnwath, the oldest part of which (with church and medieval motte) is in a

low-lying place where the A70 crosses Carnwath Burn. There is also the major problem of persistent *e* in early forms of the name.

Another explanation is possible. The early forms probably correspond to Welsh *caer newydd* 'new fort'. In other Brittonic languages, Welsh *newydd* and its equivalents (now stressed on the first syllable) had the accent on the last syllable until perhaps as late as the eleventh century, not long before Cumbric became extinct (cf. Jackson, 1953: 682–9). This accords with the derivation proposed here, where *Carnwath* suggests a stress upon the last syllable. If stress had been on the first syllable of Cumbric **newith*, the modern name would probably be **Carnewth*, not *Carnwath*.

Carnwath thus probably means 'new fort'. It is evidence for settlement in early Clydesdale. If the new settlement was mainly agricultural, settlers may have come from Carstairs three miles west. So the name would reveal something about the cultivation of new land in medieval Strathclyde, when both population and economy were expanding. However, another interpretation may be likelier. A major road crosses a stream at Carnwath to this day; the original settlement may thus have been military. The name would suggest a defensive stockade at a strategic ford near the south-east border of Strathclyde. The military significance of the spot is underlined by the medieval motte at Carnwath (now on a golf course). The interpretation proposed here may accord with archaeological data for settlement at Carnwath. If it does, the name of Carnwath is best understood as providing evidence on defence in Strathclyde in the days when it was an independent British state, ruled by kings at Dumbarton, who spoke a language closely resembling Welsh.

NOTES

- 1 For further place-name parallels, some of them on the Continent, see Evans: 221.
- 2 Cf. MIr. *loch* 'black, dark' which, on the evidence of Sc. Gael. *Loch Lòchaidh* (Watson: 50), contained /o:/.

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