Celtic Influence on the Isle of Wight Dialect of British English

B.A. Essay

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Abstract

In nineteenth-century dictionaries of the Isle of Wight dialect it was claimed its basis was "purely Saxon" with only French and Latin being acknowledged as having any influence. This is likely to be related to the prevailing view of Anglo-Saxon history at the time which suggested the Celts were either slaughtered, enslaved or forced to retreat to remoter parts of the British Isles. Recent academic research – both historical and linguistic – has disproved this assumption and the proposal that Celtic influenced the English language has been gaining support. It is with this change of stance in mind that this essay seeks to undermine the denial of Celtic influence by drawing attention to examples found in the dialect of the Isle of Wight. Firstly, the Celticity of the toponyms are highlighted as an encouraging indication of Celtic continuity following the arrival of the Anglo-Saxons. After that, a number of features from the dialect are examined; their link is illustrated with Brittonic Celtic and its successor languages such as Cornish, Welsh and Breton. Where possible the dissimilarity of these features with other potential routes of influence is then brought forward, specifically French, the Germanic languages and their ancestor languages. In some cases historical and ethnographic evidence is also used to increase the credibility of the claims. In this way it is illustrated that the Isle of Wight dialect contains a number of lexical items with Celtic etymologies, contains calques of Celtic words and may show signs of Celtic influence on the grammar as well. The conclusion is then drawn that the claim of Saxon purity and only French and Latin influence is unfounded as the Isle of Wight dialect does show signs of Celtic influence.

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1. Introduction

The Isle of Wight dialect of British English was said to be "purely Saxon" by Long in his dictionary of the dialect. The only external influence was said to come from French, and that was minimal, with "scarcely a word of undoubted French" (Long 1886, p. ix). This point of view was also held in other works, such as the English Dialect Society's *Glossary of Isle of Wight Words* which describe the origin of the island's words as being prevailingly Saxon with some Norman and Latin elements (Roach Smith & Smith 1881, p. xi). This perception has remained unchallenged and has been repeated over time (Varley 1924; Lavers 1988). It is perhaps surprising that the question of Celtic influence did not surface in the nineteenth-century considering the large number of Celtic toponyms on the island, many of which were acknowledged at the time as having Celtic origins.

However, contemporary opinion may have had some part to play in this denial of Celtic influence. It was widely believed that the Anglo-Saxon invaders displaced the Celts entirely, slaughtering and enslaving anyone that resisted and the whole pre-conquest population migrated to remoter parts of Britain such as present-day Wales and Cornwall. For example, one nineteenth-century history of the Anglo-Saxons describes "terrible slaughter" against the natives, the "retirement" of the remaining Britons to Wales and how the Celts "writhed" under their Saxon conquerors (T. Miller 1867). In connection with the Isle of Wight there were two claims regarding ethnic origin that often featured in nineteenth-century texts, being repeated from Bede's *Ecclesiastical History of the English Nation* (Scudder 1935, pp. 22 & 189). He had claimed that the people of the island were descendants of the Jutes who had arrived in the sixth-century and that in the seventh-century Cædwalla had attempted to slaughter all the inhabitants of the island who were "entirely given over to idolatry" and replace them with his own Saxons. If this were the case, two attempted (and perhaps successful) exterminations of the Isle of Wight population would result in a very small chance of any linguistic continuity.

Recent evidence however, has shown the Anglo-Saxon invasion may not have led to such slaughter, nor the exile of the Celts. Some genetic studies have shown that in fact the Celts and Saxons lived together and that the genetic history of the "English" successors of the Anglo-Saxons is actually less Saxon than previously suggested. For example, Capelli et al. (2003) demonstrated that there has not been complete population replacement anywhere in the British Isles. Germanic markers found in male Y-chromosomes in England accounted for just twenty to forty percent of the population, a similar level to what was found in the less Saxon influenced region of Scotland. At the same time, there has been increased linguistic examination into

Celtic influence on English, and greater support for the Celtic Hypothesis – that suggests Celtic in fact had a substantial impact on the formation of English – particularly on less superficial areas such as grammar. For example, it has been convincingly argued that the periphrastic *do* came about as a result of Celtic influence. McWhorter (2009) illustrates how it was first attested in Cornwall and the Cornish auxiliary *do* may be the model, with periphrastic *do* also in Breton and a slightly further removed feature in Welsh. Not only does it occur in three Brittonic Celtic successor languages but Breton negates the chance of English influence, and the Germanic *do* serves a very different function, serving as a pragmatic strategy encoding focus rather than a syntactic "place-filler". Another recently examined example of Celtic influence on English grammar can be found in the unusual South-Western and West Midland dialect construction of adverb + infinitive as shown in phrases such as *away to go*. Klemola (2009) shows how the feature has a similar counterpart in Hiberno-English, Middle Welsh, Middle Breton and Cornish but seems to have been absent from older varieties of English. He uses this evidence, together with the construction's geographic distribution - clustering in the South-West and on the Welsh borders - to argue for a Celtic origin. It is with this recent research in mind that this paper seeks to highlight the Celtic origins of a number of features found in the Isle of Wight dialect of British English, in order to disprove the claim of Saxon purity.

The way in which this examination takes place is this. First, the Celticity of the toponyms of the Isle of Wight will be put forward as an encouraging indication of Brittonic Celtic continuity and perhaps indicating the likelihood of the dialect also bearing Celtic influence. The toponyms discussed will be the place-names *Wight, Carisbrooke* and *the Solent,* followed by the more general features of the *-combe* suffix and *the Downs.* Then a number of features found recorded in documents regarding the dialect will be put forward and their link with Celtic languages or their successor languages illustrated. The first group of these features are lexical items with a proposed Brittonic Celtic etymology. The items examined will be *dover/duver, bee butt, murren berries, dewberries* and the word *cagmag.* Next to be discussed will be two lexical items which may form a calque or half-calque with Celtic languages, namely: *snaake's stang* and the *God a mighty's cow* or *lady cow.* The final group to be surveyed is grammatical features of the dialect that may show influence of Celtic, these being: the third person singular personal pronoun *en* and the tendency to answer yes/no questions with a phrasal response. To reinforce the claims, these features will be further compared with the other major contact languages that have influenced English, namely the Germanic languages and French – and where possible their ancestor languages – to highlight the dissimilarity of the features. This is not always feasible, but where it can be illustrated it is hoped this method will give credible

support to the claim these features have either a Brittonic Celtic origin or show Celtic influence in order to disprove the statement that the Isle of Wight dialect is purely Saxon.

2. The Celticity of Isle of Wight Toponyms

It is perhaps a good place to start in drawing attention to the fact that the name *Wight* itself is generally acknowledged as having a Celtic etymology. It is suggested as deriving from a Brittonic word related to the modern Welsh word g*waith* signifying 'turn, course' perhaps indicating 'place of separation'. It was recorded as early as the 2nd century A.D., predating the arrival of the Jutes to the island, and surviving their influence (Mills 1996). The island may also have been known by the Celtic name *Ictis,* if indeed it is the island referred to by the Ancient Greek writer Diodorus Siculus as a transit point for the tin trade to Gaul, though the Scilly Isles and St. Michael's Mount in Cornwall have also been suggested (Davenport Adams 1856, pp. 223-224).

Carisbrooke, the name of an ancient village in the centre of the island, is also likely to be of Celtic origin. Mills suggests the first part may be the lost name of a Celtic river, *cary* (Mills 1996), though what is perhaps more likely is that the name starts with *car* or *caer* which is Celtic for 'fort'. Considering the main feature of the village is the castle on the hills above, which was certainly used in the Roman times and maybe earlier, this seems a plausible suggestion (Brettell 1844). The feature, referring to a fortification, is not unusual in Celtic toponyms as is shown by Cardiff (Caerdydd), Caernarfon and Caerleon (Caerllion) in Wales, Carlisle in Cumbria and Carlyon in Cornwall, and in all these cases *caer* is found in initial position. Indeed, the suggestion of Carisbrooke involving the Celtic word *caer* has been made before: suggesting the name comes from *Caer-broc* 'the fort upon the stream' (Davenport Adams 1866). Either way, whether *caer* or *cary* is correct, there does seem to be a Celtic element to the name Carisbrooke.

The name *Solent* provides another encouraging feature when looking for Celtic influence. The name is applied to the sea between the Isle of Wight and the Mainland and according to Mills is ancient, certainly pre-English, even though its origin and meaning are not known (Mills 1996). This is reassuring as it means that even if the name is not Brittonic Celtic in etymology at least it serves as a sign of continuity in being used before the arrival of the Anglo-Saxons and to still be in use today. If this word of pre-Saxon conquest origin can survive

and pass through into the dialect of English that the island would develop, then it serves as a good indication that other features may also have transferred over.

Another topographical name of Celtic origin is the suffix *-combe* meaning 'valley'. Mills gives the origin of the word as being Old English (Mills 1996) and indeed it does feature in dictionaries of Anglo-Saxon but it is generally accepted that the term has a Celtic origin (Oxford Dictionary). This is supported by the fact it has Celtic counterparts in the Welsh *cwm*, Cornish *cum,* Irish *cumar* and Breton *coum*. The *Lexicon Cornu-Brittanicum* describes also how the word is preserved in many places in Devon and Cornwall (Williams 1865), which is reassuring due to the South-West's historic Celticity. The feature's existence in Breton is also reassuring as it was established before Germanic arrival to Britain and has had minimal English contact since. The *-combe* suffix is frequent on the Isle of Wight, with Mills listing thirteen examples, such as Appuldurcombe, Bowcombe, Gatcombe, Luccombe, Nettlecombe &c. (Mills 1996). Furthermore, some of the settlements listed with the *-combe* suffix were known to be inhabited in Celtic times, for example there are Bronze-Age burial mounds on the Downs at Buccombe, Luccombe and Shalcombe (Grinsell 2015).

The name *Downs*, which is applied to the hills of the island and areas of the Mainland, may also have come through a Celtic route. The term is used to refer to specific hills such as Afton Down, Mottistone Down or Culver Down, but it is also used in a general sense in the term *the Downs* as illustrated by such phrases as "between two downs", "'bottom' of the downs" and "on the downs" (Long 1886, pp. 7 & 38). It is also found fossilised in some place-names such as *Downend*. Mills lists thirty-one place-names on the Isle of Wight with *down* or its variants as part of the name, but actually his list is not exhaustive as Brighstone Down and Limerstone Down are not mentioned (Mills 1996). This word existed in Old English as *dūn* 'hill' but its ultimate etymology may be Celtic, related to Old Irish *dún*, obsolete Welsh *din* 'fort' and can be found in Cornish as *din* and *dun* 'a hill' (Oxford Dictionaries; Williams 1865). It has been suggested the word transferred from Celtic to Anglo-Saxon before migration to the British Isles, but nevertheless it seems *the Downs* on the Isle of Wight may have a Celtic etymology (D. G. Miller 2012, p. 17).

3. Lexical Items with Proposed Celtic Etymologies

3.1 *Dover/Duver*

To begin then, the first Isle of Wight word that may have a Brittonic Celtic etymology is *dover* or *duver* (always pronounced duvver [duvə]). The word does not actually appear in Long's Dictionary, nor in Roach Smith and Smith's glossary but this may be because the term is more topographical than lexical. There are several *duvers* on the island, such as at St. Helen's, Hampstead and historically in Ryde and Seaview but these last two have since disappeared due to development. The name can also be found in street names such as *Dover Street* in Ryde. As to the definition of a *duver* there seems to be some conflicting accounts. Suggestions have included "a sandy waste" (Venables 1860), "the mouth of every ancient creek in the island" (Wyndham 1794), "land formerly flooded (Tomkins 1796) and "an unenclosed plat of grassy land" (Raine 1861). Perhaps the definition given by Albin is the closest, he suggests the term describes "pieces of land close to the sea, consisting chiefly of sand and barren herbage, formerly covered by the tide, but from which the waters, in the course of ages, have gradually retired" (Albin 1806). This last description perhaps applies most to how St. Helen's *duver* is today, and how Ryde and Seaview *duvers* were formally, but in addition to this they all have streams entering the sea and may have marshy parts too.

One proposed etymology for the word is given by Mills who suggests *duver* is descended from an Old French word *douvre* meaning either 'ridge of sand or stones' or 'salt-marsh channel' (Mills 1996). However, this proposition has a number of weaknesses; he only refers to *The Duver* as being in St. Helen's, overlooking the fact there are other *duvers,* which suggests the term applies to a general feature and not one specific place. *Douve* and *douvre* are found in dictionaries of standard French but with the description being that they refer to a *fossé* 'a ditch', the former in particular is normally found in the phrase *douve(s) de chateau* signifying the 'moat' around a castle. *Douve* is also given as referring to a *canal* 'channel' or *égout* 'sewer'. Furthermore, Mills suggests the origin is Old French, however neither of those words appear in a dictionary of Norman, the nearest being *Dovrorre* and *Douree* both referring to the British port of Dover (Kelham 1843, p. 39).

Most interestingly, which links nicely with the Celtic proposition, *douvre* is found in a French etymological glossary with a different referent. It is given as a variant of *dour* which signifies 'water' which it says is found in all the Celtic countries, for example in Breton it is *dour.* It says this word forms a rich group in the dialects of the South of France and lists examples, one being *douvre* which signifies *mare* 'a pond' (Le Héricher 1870, p. 22). So it seems unlikely that the Isle of Wight word came via this route as the words *douve* and *douvres* in standard French refer to moats, ditches, channels and sewers all of which seem to be man-made. Isle of Wight *duvers* though are natural features and were never fortified which rules out

the 'moat' sense of *douve* as well. On the other hand, the word *douvre* is only found in a dialect of Southern France, referring to a pond, and this is not the area of French from which Norman and Anglo-Norman were based. Furthermore, as Long describes, on the island there is "scarcely a word of undoubted French" which perhaps illustrates how little impact the Norman invasion had on the language of the island (Long 1886). Perhaps another indication that French might not be the source for this term is that out of the two-hundred-and-eighty-six place names of the Isle of Wight that Mills examines in his book, only three (aside from *duver*) does he suggest have a French etymology (Mills 1996). One being *Beaper* (apparently from *beau* and *repaire)*, one *Quarr* (*quarr(i)ere*) and the other one being *Francheville* the historic name for Newtown. So with *duver* of dubious French etymology anyway, there are only two current place-names on the island and one historic, which seems to suggest there is little French influence on the Isle of Wight toponymy. This, together with the lack of French in the dialect, gives quite a clear indication of how minimal Norman influence was on the Isle of Wight, and therefore encourages the idea that *duver* is not likely to be of French origin either.

Therefore, it can be proposed that the etymology comes from the Brittonic Celtic word for water, *dwfr* in Modern Welsh, *dour* (also written <dower> and <dofer>) in Cornish and *dour* or *deur* in Breton. Given that *duvers* on the Isle of Wight are situated by the sea, that they often feature the estuary of a stream, and may have been flooded or below sea level in the past, certainly indicate a lot of water. The Modern Welsh word *dwfr* is especially close to island pronunciation of *duver*, with the letter *w* in Welsh orthography representing the sounds /ʊ/ and /u:/ and the letter *f* representing the sound /v/.

It is also interesting to note that the French word *Douvres* refers to the British port of Dover, which itself has a water-related Celtic etymology, with Brittonic **dubras* being suggested, meaning 'the waters' (Hogg 2000, p. 479). Furthermore, in Hampshire, the nearest British county to the Isle of Wight, there are a number of place-names, such as Andover, Micheldever and Candover, which feature the suffix *-dever* or *-dover* which is suggested as being of Celtic origin, signifying 'water' (Varley 1922, p. 81). So, considering the fact French only accounted for three other toponyms (one now archaic), yet the Celticity of toponyms demonstrated above is quite substantial, it seems more plausible that the Isle of Wight *duver* has a Celtic etymology as well.

3.2 *Bee Butt*

The term *bee butt* is recorded by Long as being Isle of Wight dialect for a bee-hive (Long 1886). The term is also found in *A Dictionary of Archaic and Provincial Words* spelt <but>

also meaning 'bee-hive' and Exmoor in Devon is given as the locality (Halliwell-Philips 1852). *The English Dialect Dictionary* also records *but(t)* with Somerset, Devon and Cornwall being given as the areas in which the phrase is used. The description is given that it refers to a straw bee-hive and an etymology is given: from the Old Cornish *butt* meaning 'bee-hive' (Wright 1881). This seems to be accurate as *butt* can be found in dictionaries of Cornish, signifying bee-hive, and in the *Lexicon Cornu-Brittannicum* it comes with the explanation that this is "one of the few old Cornish words still in use in Devonshire and Cornwall" (Williams 1865). So given the evidence that *butt* indeed does descend from an Old Cornish word of the same spelling, referring to the same item is quite convincing, further encouraged by the fact the South West of Britain, where these terms are recorded as being in use, was one of the last areas for the Celts to be overpowered. Given this, it is quite likely the Isle of Wight *bee butt* descends from the Brittonic language of Celtic, considering Cornish is a successor. To support this claim it is useful to compare with the Standard English term *hive* and its counterparts in the other Germanic languages. In Anglo-Saxon the word is *hȳf* meaning 'hive' and the Oxford Dictionary suggests the word was probably related to Old Norse *húfr* 'hull of a ship' and Latin *cupa* 'tub, cask' (Oxford Dictionary). It seems the modern word *hive* has a Germanic origin, and when the modern Germanic words for bee-hive are compared there appears to be none that resemble *butt*: Danish and Norwegian: *bikube* 'bee-cube', German: *Bienenkorb* 'bee-basket', Dutch: *bijen-korf* 'bee-basket', Icelandic: *býflugnabú* 'bee-farm', Swedish: *bikupan* 'bee-hive'. From this, it seems fairly likely the word *butt* did not enter the Isle of Wight dialect from Germanic sources. To solidify the argument for a Celtic source it is beneficial to also compare with French, the other main contact language with English. In Old French, or Norman, dictionaries, the name for a bee-hive is given as *Ruche*, with the description that it refers to a bee-hive made of rushes. The etymology for this word is given as Latin *rusca* 'bark' (de Chesnel 1858). In Modern French, *la ruche* is also found, along with *la place bondé* 'the crowded square'. Evaluating all this, *butt* meaning 'hive' only has a companion with Cornish and its existence in the historically Celtic South-West of Britain is also encouraging. Considering the other source languages that have contributed to English, and the Isle of Wight dialect, it seems there is no obvious comparable term that could account for it.

3.3 *Murren Berries and Dewberries*

These two terms are discussed together as their etymology may be connected. *Murren Berries* is given as island dialect for "the berries of the black briony", and *Dewberry* is described as referring to "the largest kind of blackberry" (Long 1886). Neither of these terms is specific to

the Isle of Wight as both occur in other parts of the British Isles. In Cornish dictionaries, the name for 'berry' is *mor*, which is used for example to refer to 'brambleberries' as *Moran* (Williams 1865). It is not too difficult to imagine how *moran* could over time and through generations have been reanalysed to refer to the berries of the black briony instead of berries in general. Further, *murren berries* are recorded in *Flora Vectensis* and the *Isle of Wight Glossary* as <murrain berries>, a spelling which perhaps may reflect a slightly closer pronunciation to the Cornish *moran* than *murren* does (Bromfield 1856; Roach Smith & Smith 1881). In Anglo-Saxon the nearest word is *mór* meaning 'moor' and is found in the name *mór-beám* which refers to the 'mulberry tree' (Mór. Mórbeám. 2010). The mulberry is quite dissimilar in appearance to the black briony and the Germanic comparatives are not very similar phonetically to *murren*: Dutch *moer-bezie*, *moerbei*, German *maulbere*, Danish *morbær*, Icelandic *mórber*. It is also interesting to note that in all these cases the prefix to 'berry' is one syllable and in most cases forms a compound word. Whereas *murren* has two syllables as does the Cornish *moran*. It also seems to be that there is no word in the dictionary of Norman that could account for the origin of *murren*.

To further complicate matters, the name for 'blackberry' in Cornish is given as *Moran dhiu,* with a plural as *mór diu* the components literally signifying 'berry' and 'black'. This may provide the etymology for *dewberry* given the fact it is black in colour, and according to the dialect, "the largest kind of blackberry". It is also quite easy to see how the term referring to the blackberry could have over time been reanalysed to only refer to a specific type of blackberry. This word for 'black' is also found in Welsh and Breton as *du*. The term *dewberry* is also found in Standard British English, but the definition is slightly different, the explanation being "a trailing European bramble… resembling the blackberry" (Oxford Dictionary). The etymology for the Standard English term is given as deriving from *dew* as in 'condensed moisture', cognate to Old High German *Tau* and Old Norse *dögg* 'dew' referring to the bloom (Patridge 2006). One dictionary actually claims it comes from Germanic *thau-beere*, a corruption of *dove-berry* referring to the dove-coloured bloom, the same name being given to the bilberry in Germany (Wedgwood 1859). These proposed etymologies seem far harder to justify; being related to *tau* referring to 'bloom' on the berry, a name which actually refers to a different berry in Germany. The transition seems easier from *Moran dhiu* meaning 'blackberry' to *Dewberry* also referring to a berry that is black and either from the same bramble family (according to Standard English) or just a larger variety of the blackberry (as signified in the Isle of Wight dialect). It may have just been reanalysed with a compound being made from the new word *berry* and the old word *dhiu* referring to the same plant. It could be

further argued that when *dhiu* came to be first written in English orthography, it was transcribed as *dew* and due to its orthographic similarity with the word for 'condensed moisture' has been presumed to share a common etymology. Indeed, Partridge suggests *dewberry* is "an obvious compound" but perhaps this is not the case (Partridge 2006). If indeed, *murren berries* have a Celtic etymology, coming from *moran,* it is not impossible that *dewberries* could come from *moran dhiu.* Nor is it unusual to have a compound word with both components coming from different languages, as shown above by *bee-butt.*

3.4 *Cagmag*

This Isle of Wight word may also have a Brittonic Celtic origin however a lot of uncertainty surrounds its etymology. Long describes the word as referring to stinking or bad meat, and also to mean 'coarse', 'uncultivated' and 'mongrel bred' (Long 1886, p. 9). *Cagmag* is absent from many dictionaries, including the Oxford Dictionary, and where it does appear the etymology is given as being uncertain. It does appear in the *English Dialect Dictionary* though, with its various meanings listed, including: a tough old goose, tough or inferior meat, unwholesome food, refuse of any kind and anything valueless (Wright 1898, p. 486). It can be taken from this that all the different meanings are united by a sense of something negative. The term is listed in the dialect dictionary as occurring in a large number of counties, those of special interest include: Cheshire, Shropshire, Herefordshire and Gloucestershire (counties which border with Wales) and Cornwall, Devon, Dorset and Wiltshire (counties in the historically Celtic South-West). This geographical distribution is encouraging when considering a Celtic origin for the term; proximity to the Welsh border is likely to encourage Celtic influence either through history or contact, and the South West is a likely region to have Celtic features due to existence of Brittonic in the region to a later period than other parts of Britain, and then the existence and possible contact with its successor, the Cornish language.

In a Cornish dialect dictionary, the term is listed and described in similar terms to the way it is for other areas. The author draws attention to a comparable term in Gaelic and Welsh *cag magu* and suggests in Cornish *cagal* means rubbish (Jago 1882, p. 127). However, *cagal* does not appear in the *Lexicon Cornu-Brittanicum*, but this does not mean suggesting a possible etymology has been defeated. The dictionary does list *cac* as meaning 'excrement' or 'dung' which could be applied to *rubbish* or *bad meat.* This word is also listed as being in Welsh: *cách,* Breton: *cách,* Irish: *cac,* Gaelic: *cac* and Manx: *cuch.* Another word that could account for the first syllable of *cagmag* may be the Cornish word *caca* which means to 'void' or 'evacuate' excrement, which could also be applied – as an end result - to the *bad meat.* This

word too applies to the other Celtic languages; Welsh: *cachu,* Breton: *cacha,* Irish: *cac,* Gaelic *cac,* and Manx: *keck.* Another possible origin that could account for *cagmag* are the Celtic words for *meat,* which when considering that most definitions of this dialect term involve meat seems quite plausible. The words for 'meat' in the Celtic languages are: Cornish: *cig,* Welsh: *cig* or *gig*, Breton: *kig* and formerly in Irish as: *cuach* or *cich.* To attempt to account for the second half of *cagmag* is more difficult; the nearest word to it in the Cornish dictionary is *maga*, a verb meaning 'to feed' with a corresponding term suggested as being found in Welsh: *magu* and Breton: *maga* (Williams 1865, pp. 40, 58 & 243), though in modern Welsh *magu* means 'breed'. It may not be possible to tell which, if any, of these words may account for the origin of *cagmag* but importantly, each of the Celtic options is found both in Welsh and Cornish which is useful when considering part of the distribution of *cagmag* as being on the Welsh borders and in the South West of Britain.

4. Lexical Items that Form a Proposed Calque with Celtic

4.1 *Snaake's Stang*

In his article "Celtic Elements in English Vocabulary", Stalmaszczyk, convincingly illustrates how words with Germanic etymology can actually show Celtic influence by being exact counterparts to their Celtic synonym through calques (Stalmaszczyk 1997). He shows how in the dialect of Cornwall and Devon the word for a weasel – *white neck* – corresponds exactly with the Cornish word *conna-gwyn* 'weasel' (from *conna* 'neck' and *gwyn* 'white'). He illustrates his point with a second calque in Hiberno-English: *devil's needle* 'dragon-fly' from the Irish *snathad-a' diabhail.* His article shows how calques can provide credible support for Celtic origins of certain terms, even when the components in the compound are Germanic in etymology.

Calques can also be found with Celtic for the Isle of Wight dialect, for example with the Isle of Wight word *snaake's-stang* [snake's sting] which signifies 'the dragonfly' (Long 1886, p. 69; Roach Smith & Smith 1881). This word presents a calque with Welsh where there are two terms for dragonfly one being *gwas y neidr* (literally 'adder's servant') and the other being *gwäell neidr* (literally 'adder's needle'). So whilst not an exact calque the latter of the two names generally corresponds to the Isle of Wight dialect term for a dragonfly - *snaake's stang* - involving both a snake element and a stinging or piercing element. This can also be

further related to the Irish *devil's needle*, and in Breton the name is *nadoz-aer* meaning 'airborne-needle'. So, an almost exact calque is provided by Welsh, and three Celtic languages share this needle-like component with the Isle of Wight dialect term. Importantly this component is found in Breton, a language established before the arrival of the Anglo-Saxons and with negligible English contact since.

In order to support this link, the terms for dragonfly can be examined in other languages that have influenced English. It appears difficult to find the name for *dragonfly* in Norman French, Norse and Anglo-Saxon. It was formally known as *adderbolt* which may also be a calque with Celtic. In attempting to look further back it is listed in Jacob Grimm's *Teutonic Mythology* that the name for *dragonfly* is given as *devil's horse, devil's bride* and *devil's nag* (Grimm 1883). If you compare the term in modern Germanic languages there seems to be none which involve snakes or a needle in the name. Consider Icelandic *drekafluga* 'dragonfly', Danish *guldsmed* 'goldsmith', Norwegian *øyenstikker* 'eye-poker', Dutch *waterjuffer* 'water-damsel' and German (historically) *wasserjungfern* 'water Virgin'. When compared with French there is also seemingly no relation, the term in that language is *libellule* which is said to be derived from Latin *libella* meaning 'mason's level' due to their horizontal flight (Libellule n.d.). So, although it is difficult to find synonyms for *dragonfly* in Norman, Norse and Anglo-Saxon, it seems in their successor languages there are no obvious counterparts, and the link with Celtic languages has been illustrated.

Aside from the calque, there is another correlation between the Isle of Wight *snaake's stang a*nd the Welsh *gwäell y neidr*, and that involves the story surrounding the insect. Long describes how on the Isle of Wight there was a belief the dragon-fly had a sting as venomous as a viper and that because they were often seen near brooks or ponds they were said to be guardians of the fish, and sting all "improper persons" who attempted to catch them (Long 1886). This story has a similar counterpart in Welsh folklore. There, stories were told about flying-serpents and snakes inflicting deadly stings. It is also told that in some districts springs and wells were guarded by snakes or dragons (Trevelyan 1909, pp. 19 & 171). Long also describes how on the island, children feared them and used to sing a rhyme telling it to sting the bad boys but let the god boys catch the fish (Long 1886). This superstition in the dragon-fly being a judge of behaviour also has a counterpart in Welsh folklore where it is said in July, the dragon-fly (also known as the devil's messenger) spied on the children and that they had to be extra careful (Trevelyan 1909, p. 261). So it appears both Isle of Wight and Welsh folklore share a belief in dragon-flies; that they are related to snakes, can inflict a venomous sting and are judges of behaviour and guardians of water.

4.2 *God a Mighty's Cow / Lady Cow*

Another example of a calque, or at least a half-calque, can be found with the Isle of Wight terms *God a Mighty's Cow* and *Lady Cow* signifying 'the ladybird' (Roach Smith & Smith 1881; Long 1886). Referring to the insect as a cow can also be found in Welsh where the ladybird is known *as y fuwch goch* 'the red cow' or *y fuwch goch gota* 'the little or tailless red cow'. There are also two variants on the word for 'cow' in Welsh with *buwch* and *muwch* also being able to replace *fuwch* in the phrase for ladybird. In Breton, the name is *buoc'hic-Doue* with *bouc'h* standing for 'cow' (like Welsh *buwch*) and *Doue* standing for 'God'. In Irish as well it is known as *bóin Dé* 'God's little cow' which shares both the cow element and a religious element with the Isle of Wight term. *Bughik-Duw* is the Cornish variant and *God's Cow* features in the Cornish dialect of English which presents a calque (Jago 1882, p. 178). The feature's widespread existence in the Celtic languages is encouraging, as is its existence in the Cornish dialect of English which shows how it has possibly already transferred from one language to the other. Referring to a ladybird as a cow is quite uncommon. In the Germanic languages references to the insect include Old Norse: *freyjuhœna* 'Freyja's hen', which following the introduction of Christianity became the Norwegian: *marihøne*, Danish: *mariehøne* and Faroese: *mariuhønur* 'Mary's hen'. In German it is known as *Marienkäfer* 'Mary's beetle', in Icelandic as *maríubjalla* 'Mary's beetle' and in Dutch as *lieveheersbeestje* 'dear Lord's beetle'. In French the ladybird is commonly known as *coccinelle* but also as *bêtes á bon Dieu* 'Good God's beast'. This occurrence in French is unlikely to be the source for the Isle of Wight term, as already discussed, there seems to be little French influence on the island, and French had contact with the Celtic language of the Gauls in France which may provide the source. Interestingly, the insect is also referred to as *God's cow* in a few Slavic languages, specifically Belarussian: *Божыя кароўкі*, Russian: *Божьи коровки* and Polish: *boża krówka*, all meaning 'God's cow' or 'God's little cow'. Similar names also exist in other European languages but are uncommon. The likelihood of transference from Slavic languages is inconceivable so the reason the name has the same components in these languages as well as in Celtic and French suggests another origin. Perhaps via early Christianity which they all share, though in different branches, but the *cow* part may also have been truly ancient and exist in these languages from a Proto-Indo-European route perhaps which has endured in some languages but become lost or subordinate in others. However, this is not important, what matters is that the feature is widespread in the Celtic languages, including Breton, which rules out an Anglo-Saxon origin. French origin is also unlikely as it would not be able to account for

the phrase's existence in Irish, Welsh, Cornish, Breton and the Cornish and Isle of Wight dialects of English. Finally, the *cow* element of the term is apparently absent from the Germanic languages. As such, it seems the greatest likelihood is that the *God's cow* transferred from Brittonic Celtic into the Isle of Wight dialect, perhaps as a calque, like it did between Cornish and the Cornish dialect of English.

5. Grammatical Elements that May Show Celtic Influence

5.1 *Introduction*

Recently, there has been increased interest and research surrounding the possible influence of Celtic on the grammar of Standard English, Old and Middle English and the dialects of British English, much of which has taken place in the last twenty years. It is a far harder area to definitively tell the origin of examined features when compared to lexical items. It may be impossible to say for sure where some grammatical features come from, however, there have been a number of recent papers on grammatical features and their links to similar features in Celtic languages which have proved credible in their argument. This has been shown above with examples from Klemola (2009) and McWhorter (2009). White lists ninety-two possible grammatical Brittonicisms and as he suggests these potentially Celtic-influenced features show a profound tendency to be first attested in the South-West of Britain (White 2006). This is encouraging for the Isle of Wight dialect which has already been demonstrated to show shared features with the South-West dialects and the Cornish language. Two features in particular that have recently been examined can be shown to feature in the Isle of Wight dialect, namely: the third person singular personal pronoun *en* and answering yes/no questions with a phrasal response.

5.2 *The third person singular personal pronoun en*

 One grammatical feature that may derive from Brittonic Celtic is the third person singular *en* /ən/. This feature is discussed by Klemola (2013). In South-Western British dialects of English a third person singular personal pronoun exists which is *en* /ən/ and apparently is unique to the area. It can refer to animate and inanimate referents with a person and a chimney serving as examples in extracts from dialect recordings. Klemola relates how Murray's etymology in the Oxford English Dictionary for *en* is given as a variant of *hin, hine* the Old English masculine

pronoun and Britton suggests it comes from the same source but occurs as *en* as a result of reduced stress causing phonological change. Klemola suggests though that the origin may be from the infixed form of the third-person singular masculine pronoun <n> in Cornish, which is also found in Breton as <en> or <hen>. It is virtually identical in form with the third person singular e*n* and an example of the Cornish third person singular masculine pronoun is given from Jenner: *mî a'n pes* 'I pray him', though it differs to Middle Welsh where the forms are *'e, 'y,* and *'s*. Further support to this supposed Celtic etymology is given by the features distribution in Devon, Dorset, Somerset, and parts of Wiltshire, Hampshire and Cornwall – counties of the South-West which has a higher level of Celticity than other parts of England. Although not listed here, this feature does exist in the Isle of Wight dialect too. Long notes the feature of third person singular personal pronouns on the island as being *en,* or - as he suggests - more correctly, *'n* which most probably shares the /ən/ pronunciation with the other counties (Long 1886, p. xi). Furthermore, the island term shares the fact *en* can have both an animate or inanimate referent, which is illustrated by Long with the phrase: *I louz he'll gee'n to'n* meaning 'I think he will give it to him' with *'n* referring to both 'it' and 'him' in the same sentence. Consequently, if this distinctive personal pronoun has indeed come about as a result of Celtic influence, it seems the Isle of Wight also shares in the South-West's use of it.

5.3 *Phrasal answers to yes/no questions*

Another grammatical feature of English which may have a Celtic origin is answering a yes/no question with a phrase. Vennemann (2009) draws attention to the fact there is a disparity in usage between German and English with regards to using the words *yes* and *no* to answer questions. In English the words are used far less frequently, instead answers often involve a short sentence consisting of a pronoun and either an auxiliary or modal verb. Examples include, *Yes, I will,* or *No, I won't,* and often *yes* or *no* are dropped entirely to give answers such as *He can* or *I did.* In German, questions which lead to a yes/no answer are responded to with *Ja* or *Nei* alone. Vennemann uses marriage vows to illustrate this point. In German the couple are asked *Willst du…* 'Do you want to…' and the answer given is *Ja!* Whereas in English, *Do you…* and *Will you…* are responded with *I do* or *I will.* Vennemann then examines English grammars for German students and finds evidence that they have to instruct German students about the practice in English of responding with a phrase rather than just *yes* or *no*. After scrutinising Shakespearian and Old English sources to date the feature's emergence, the author then draws attention to the similarity of this feature with Irish and Irish English. In Irish English, questions are answered with a phrase in a similar way to British English, examples

including: *Do you remember…? I do remember…* In the Irish language too, questions are answered with phrases, such as in the case of *An dtiocfaidh tu?* 'Will you come?' *Tiocfad* 'I will come'. Finally, the feature is also highlighted by Vennemann in Welsh, an example in that language being: *A ellwch chi ddarllen?* 'Can you read?' *Gallaf* 'I can'. Due to this feature's existence in at least two Celtic languages, and an illustration of already how it has transferred to a dialect of English, it is suggested that this is the source.

This feature occurs generally in British English anyway but to illustrate the point there are examples from Long of the Isle of Wight dialect where answers to yes/no questions are given with a phrasal response as opposed to a *yes* or *no* answer. When the Isle of Wight dialect variants of *yes* (*oi* and *iss*) are used in reply to a question, they are often followed by *I will, I have, I do* or *I did* which can be seen in Long's dialogues; for instance, in response to being asked if the referent has a calf to sell, the answer is given as "Iss, I have" (Long 1886). These examples, illustrate the pronoun and both auxiliary and modal verbs following *yes* or *no*, as described by Vennemann. Furthermore, there is also an instance of a yes/no answer question being replied to without *yes* or *no.* In reply to the question "Did you get woken up last night?" which has an obvious yes or no answer, the response is given as "I'll warn't it" [I'll warrant it]. Therefore, if answering a yes/no question with a phrasal response rather than *yes* or *no* does indeed come from Celtic contact, then it is found in the Isle of Wight dialect as well as in other variants of English, and the standard itself.

5.4 *Summary*

These two examples, though difficult to definitively say, may show how Brittonic Celtic influenced the English language and the Isle of Wight dialect. It is likely other features of English grammar may also be influenced by Celtic and it has been suggested that English phonology, word order and other areas of grammar have also shown signs of this influence. As time progresses and more research is carried out in this area, new links may be made between aspects of the grammar of British English and the grammar of the Celtic languages. That these features might be part of the Isle of Wight dialect is not unlikely, therefore, over time it is probable that the dialect can be argued to have further Celtic influence on grammar.

6. Results and Conclusion

It is hoped that the results of this survey of the Isle of Wight dialect have convincingly shown Brittonic Celtic origin or influence on the features discussed. Firstly, the toponyms have been shown to bear signs of Celtic influence. The name *Wight* itself may be derived from the Celtic word *gwaith* or the ancient Brittonic name *Ictis*. The name *Carisbrooke* may include the Celtic word *car* 'fortress' which links with the presence of a fortification in the village going back to before the arrival of the Anglo-Saxons. The *Solent* has a name that is described as certainly pre-English, which is encouraging and even if the ultimate etymology is not Celtic, this item serves to illustrate continuity and supports the idea other pre-English items could continue in usage through the Anglo-Saxon period up to the present. The *-combe* suffix has been shown to have close relations in the other Celtic languages as has the word *down* which supports their Celtic origin. There are thirteen names with the *-combe* suffix on the island, and at least thirty-three place-names with *down* as an element. When viewed together this high level of Isle of Wight place-names with a proposed Celtic etymology encourages the suggestion the dialect too may have Celtic influence.

Hopefully, it has been credibly argued that certain lexical items in the Isle of Wight dialect have a Celtic etymology. The examination of the word *dover/duver* involved first undermining the proposed French etymology by illustrating how little influence from French is found in island place-names and in the dialect. The French words that had been put forward as the origin were discredited by illustrating how it mainly referred to man-made features or moats surrounding fortifications which does not fit with the natural feature described on the island. It was then shown how the French words *douvre a*nd *Douvres* have a Celtic etymology which is shared by certain place-names in Hampshire. It is with this in mind, the Celtic word for 'water' is put forward as the proposed etymology for the Isle of Wight *duver*. Next, the term *butt* was shown to exist in the South-Western dialects of British English and have an exact counterpart in the Cornish language, before the Germanic and French terms were compared to disprove that the origin could have come from them. After that, *murren berries* and *dewberries* were examined, with *murren* being suggested as coming from Cornish *moran*, and *moran dhiu* is put forward as the origin for *dewberry.* The accepted etymology, that it is related to Germanic *Tau* and Norse *dögg* is then scrutinised, with attention drawn to the facts that in Germany it is used to refer to a different plant entirely, that the word is phonetically further from *dew* than the Celtic word *dhiu,* and that the proposal the name comes from the bloom to be more unlikely than the descriptive colour name given by Celtic. The term *cagmag* is then briefly looked at. To support its potential Brittonic Celtic origin, the geographic distribution is shown to cluster in the South-West and on the Welsh border which gives a good indication it may have arisen

from a Celtic source or through Celtic contact. A few Celtic words are then looked at as possible source words that may have contributed to part of the name.

Following that, it was credibly shown that there are calques in Isle of Wight dialect of two Celtic terms. The first one examined was s*naake's stang* which was shown to form a calque with the Welsh a*dder's needle* and a half calque with the Breton *airborne-needle* and the Irish *devil's needle*. In comparison Germanic and French names did not share in the snake element or piercing element. Finally it was illustrated how in Wales there were similar folk-beliefs surrounding *dragonflies* to the Isle of Wight custom surrounding them, such as their connection with water and their role as guardians and as judges of behaviour. For the second term *God a Mighty's Cow* or *Lady Cow* it was shown how the *cow* element in this name for the *ladybird* was shared by Welsh, Cornish, Breton and Irish. It was then shown how in Germanic languages the insect is known by different names, though French shared the *cow* component in an archaic name, as did Belarussian, Russian and Polish. Given the prevalence in Celtic languages in Britain but absence from Germanic languages it has been demonstrated that the feature is most likely a calque from Celtic into the Isle of Wight dialect.

The final section illustrated how there were two features of grammar found in the Isle of Wight dialect that have been suggested as showing influence from Celtic. The first was the third person singular personal pronoun *en* which was shown by Klemola to have links to Cornish and Breton. It was then illustrated with examples from the Isle of Wight dialect that the feature also existed there. The second grammatical feature was the answering of yes/no questions with a phrasal response. Vennemann delineated how answering yes/no questions with a phrase rather than one word answers is un-Germanic and a feature shared with Celtic languages. It was then demonstrated how the Isle of Wight dialect shared this British tendency of answering questions with a pronoun and an auxiliary or modal verb.

To conclude, the implication of this demonstration of Brittonic Celticity in the Isle of Wight dialect is that Long's statement that the Isle of Wight dialect is "purely Saxon" has been undermined. Furthermore, it has also shown that Long (1886) as well as Roach Smith and Smith (1881) were mistaken in only acknowledging French and Latin as having any influence on the dialect. Indeed, this survey of a few features in the dialect has only been brief and there is more that can be examined and it is likely more Celtic features are to be discovered. To begin with there is no definitive source for the Isle of Wight dialect, with examples spread over numerous works, and the most widely accessible sources are from the nineteenth-century. If earlier sources could be used it would give a better indication of how the dialect was comprised historically. It is quite likely there will be more calques to be found as well, but as these are not

obvious from first sight it takes long methodical work to find out whether in fact they have a matching counterpart in the Celtic languages. In addition to this, as further research is done into the Celticity of the grammar of British English – an area that only in the last twenty years has undergone significant analysis – there are no doubt more links to be drawn with these features and the grammar of the Isle of Wight dialect. As such, it can be said that the Isle of Wight dialect has been shown to be not "purely Saxon" and that as well as French and Latin it has been influenced by Brittonic Celtic, and as more research is done, its level of Celticity is likely to increase.

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