Of Picts and Penguins – Celtic Languages in the New Edition of the *Oxford English Dictionary*

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The *New English Dictionary*, later to become the *Oxford English Dictionary*, was first published between 1884 and 1928. To add new material, two supplements were issued after this, the first in 1933, and another, more extensive one between 1972 and 1986. In 1989, the *Oxford English Dictionary*, second edition (OED2) was published, which integrated the material from the original dictionary and the supplements into a single alphabetical sequence. However, virtually all material contained in this edition still remained in the form in which it was originally published. This is the edition most commonly used today, as it forms the basis of the *Oxford English Dictionary Online* and is also still being sold in print and on CD-ROM. In 1991, a new project started to revise the entire dictionary and bring its entries up to date, both in terms of English usage and in terms of associated scholarship, such as encyclopaedic information and etymologies. The scope was also widened, placing a greater emphasis on English spoken outside Britain. The revision of the dictionary began with the letter M, and the first updated entries were published online in March 2000 (OED3). Quarterly publication of further material has extended the range of revised entries as far as PROTEOSE n. (June 2007). New words from all parts of the alphabet have been published alongside the regular revision.

The treatment of Celtic languages in the OED must be understood against this background. When the first volume of the *New English Dictionary* (NED) was published, the holder of the first chair of Celtic at Oxford, John Rhŷs, had been appointed only seven years previously. Ifor Williams, later to become another pioneer of Welsh studies, was three years old. On the Irish language side, much of the ground-breaking research was being done by Indo-European scholars on the Continent, and Ernst Windisch and Whitley Stokes had begun to publish their series *Irische Texte* in 1880, edited in German. Celtic Studies was only just e-

merging as a separate discipline; there was little published material available, and few experts. However, NED collaborated with Celtic scholars from its beginnings, and early advisers included both John Rhŷs and Whitley Stokes. As in all other fields, the dictionary project has continued to consult with experts throughout its life, and the current revision maintains links with researchers at various academic institutions and at dictionary projects, such as *Geiriadur Prifysgol Cymru* (GPC) and *Faclair na Gàidhlig*. Much of the work in the revision process draws on specialist research in the individual fields, but some original research is also done, especially on the interface between the Celtic languages and English.

To make sure that the revised dictionary is internally consistent, new editing policies have been drawn up in all fields, in accordance with contemporary scholarship and with the help of specialist consultants. The online publication format means that styles and even aspects of policy can be changed if new research makes this necessary, and changes can be implemented retrospectively in published material.

The basic Celtic policy is as follows: The names of the modern Goidelic languages are Irish, Scottish Gaelic, and Manx; the historic languages are Old Irish (700-900) and Middle Irish (900-1200). Very occasionally, earlier Irish can be cited from Ogham inscriptions, but this must be explicitly stated.[1] Irish post-1200 is not periodized further, but dates are added where they can be established. Of the Brittonic languages, Cornish and Breton are periodized as Old Cornish, Middle Cornish, Cornish, and Old Breton, Middle Breton, Breton, respectively, while Welsh post-1200 is usually dated, but not periodized, and the spelling normalized in accordance with GPC. Old Welsh (pre-1200) is occasionally cited as such, without further dating. Gaulish appears occasionally in further etymologies of Indo-European words. Unattested languages are generally referred to without a cited form. Reconstructed forms (in any language) are generally avoided, because many are debated and academic opinion is liable to change very quickly. Of the unattested Celtic languages, British is very occasionally used as a language name, denoting the ancestor language of Welsh, Cornish and Breton;[2] for the group comprising these languages the term Brittonic is preferred. Pictish appears in three entries, two of which will be further discussed below.[3]

As of mid June 2007, more than 60,000 revised or new entries have been published between M and PROTEOSE n., and about 0.5% of these mention Celtic languages in their etymologies. These can appear for a variety of reasons. Often, they are given as cognates for inherited Indo-European words; in this case, only one Goidelic and one Brittonic form is usually given, typically Irish and Welsh. Where the English word is a direct loan from a Celtic language, on the other

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[1]   In OED3, so far only in NEVE n./1 (2003), O' n./3 (2004), OCHIERN, n. (2004), and PEN n./1 (2005).

[2]   PEAT n./1 (2005), PICT n. (2006), POGUE n./1 (2006).

[3]   MONTH n./2 (2002), PEAT n./1 (2005), PIECE n. (2003).

hand, the etymon is cited in its context within the Celtic group of languages and given a further etymology. If the Celtic word is once removed, i.e. the etymon of a primary etymon of an English word, it will be treated similarly, but not necessarily in as much detail. Occasionally, an English word is not borrowed from a Celtic language, but translated from or modelled after it (calque). In these cases, the model is usually merely mentioned, and only given further background, if this is necessary for understanding the English formation. Names are usually treated as separate entities rather than parts of the language. If a name has a significant Celtic form, however, this will be mentioned. Finally, many etymologies mention Celtic languages merely to reject past attempts to link them to the English word. Usually, this is done in a short note, but where the original case for a Celtic derivation had been strong, the counter arguments are discussed in detail. In many cases, Celtic etymologies comprise a combination of the above.

Celtic material is also mentioned in definitions. If these refer to linguistic matters, such as P-CELTIC n. and adj., they are often also looked at by an etymology editor on the OED staff.

In the rest of this paper, examples for the different treatments of Celtic languages will be discussed.

The use of Celtic cognates in Indo-European etymologies is usually a simple and straightforward matter, as can be exemplified by PALM n./2 'the flat of the hand':[4]

> [< Anglo-Norman *palme*, *paume* and Old French, Middle French *palme*, *paulme*, *paume* (French *paume*) palm of the hand (*c*1050), measure of length (*c*1100), kind of ball game (1373; cf. PAUME *n.*) < classical Latin *palma* (also *palmus*) palm of the hand (also applied to the underside of a webbed foot), the width of the palm as a measure < the same Indo-European base as ancient Greek παλάμη palm of the hand, **Old Irish *lám* hand (Irish *lámh*)**, **Welsh *llaw* hand**, Old English *folm*, *folme* hand, palm of the hand, Old High German *folma* palm of the hand, ult. < a differently extended form (-*m*- extension) of an ablaut variant (zero-grade) of the same Indo-European base as classical Latin *plānus* flat (see PLAIN *adj.*/1).] (OED3 2005, my emphasis).

The Welsh word does not need to be dated here, because where it is given as an Indo-European cognate, a word is already implied to be of ultimately prehistoric origin.

Celtic words were borrowed into English at different periods. A medieval borrowing is perhaps shown by PEAT n./1:

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[4] In the following, etymologies are cited in square brackets according to the style of OED3, even where they are slightly truncated; passages quoted from OED3 without square brackets are either minor notes or extracts, or come from other parts of the entry. Words written in capital letters refer to the respective dictionary entries.

[Origin unknown; perh. a borrowing of an unattested Pictish or British word, perh. < the same Celtic base as the suggested etymon of post-classical Latin *petia* PIECE n. (on the assumption that the semantic development was from 'piece' to 'piece of peat' to 'peat'). Cf. post-classical Latin *peta* (freq. 1159-1545 in British sources), app. either < a Celtic language or < English (cf. similarly *turba* turf: see TURF n./1) ...] (OED3 2005).

The earliest attestation of the English word is from a Yorkshire record of 1333, where it appears in a Latin context with English plural inflection.[5] A Cumberland place name *Petepottes*, attested *c*1200 (Armstrong et al. 1950: 247), also seems to contain this word as part of an English formation. The word seems to be almost exclusively northern English and Scottish in early contextual use, and the *Dictionary of the Older Scottish Tongue* (DOST: s.v. PETE n./1) refers to the possibility of a 'Celtic' borrowing, from the same base as of *piece* (which I will further discuss below). Candidates for the donor language in this area are British and Pictish. The semantic development with the earliest use of *peat* as a count noun 'piece of peat, sod' does not contradict the interpretation of PEAT n./1 as related to a word for 'piece, portion'. However, with no related form surviving in Welsh and no evidence at all of a possible Pictish form, this must remain speculative.

A much more secure borrowing into English is POGUE n./1:

[< Irish *póg* kiss (Old Irish *póc*) < the British base of Old Cornish *poc-* (in the compounds *impoc* and *poccuil*), Middle Breton *pocq* kiss (Breton *pok*) < post-classical Latin *pac-*, *pax* kiss of peace, spec. use of classical Latin *pāx* peace (see PEACE n.).] (OED3 2006).

First attested in *c*1675, this is a relatively recent borrowing, but the Irish etymon is a word of considerable age. English *pogue* is here derived from the modern Irish word, i.e. the form of the word which would have been current at the time of borrowing. The Old Irish form is stated in brackets as the earliest attested form, and the further etymology is given as far back as Latin *pāx*; for further discussion of the Latin word the reader is then referred to the entry for PEACE n. (by hyperlink), so it is possible to follow the history of *pogue* back to Indo-European, even though it is not an old word in the English language. The British intermediary between Latin and Irish is posited by Vendryes (1960: P-11), and since it does not have an attested reflex in Welsh, it is exemplified by its Old Cornish and Breton descendants.

The semantic change from 'peace' to 'kiss' happened chiefly within Latin and is illustrated in the etymology; the modern Irish English word retains the sense that its Irish etymon had a thousand years before.

Another recent loan is PIBROCH n., but here, the sense has moved away from that in the donor language.

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[5] "Redditum octo carectarum turbarum que dicuntur petes cum pert' in Skypwyth" (2nd February 1333, Patent Roll 7 Edward III (P.R.O.) i. mem. 24; quoted in OED3 2005; cf. Public Record Office 1893, 401).

[< Scottish Gaelic *pìobaireachd* the act of playing the bagpipe, bagpipe music < *pìobaire* piper (< *pìob* PIPE n./1 + *-aire*, suffix forming agent nouns (perh. cf. -ER suffix/1)) + *-achd*, suffix forming abstract nouns. Cf. Irish *píobaireacht*. In Scottish Gaelic, the term *pìobaireachd* denotes any kind of bagpipe music. The application to ceremonial tunes is a development within English; in Scottish Gaelic, such tunes are referred to as *ceòl mór*, lit. 'great music'...] (OED3 2006).

This word first appears in English in the early 18ᵗʰ century (1719) and is clearly borrowed from Scottish Gaelic. The Scottish Gaelic word has not proved datable, but there can be little doubt that it existed at the time, since it is a morphologically straightforward formation, and bagpipe music had been widespread for a long time before the date of borrowing (cf. Cocks et al. 1980: 21). In English use, the word has narrowed its meaning, so a note has been added on the original scope of the Gaelic word and on the related terminology.

A case of possible borrowing deeper down in the transmission is PIECE n. This common English word is clearly a borrowing from French *pièce*, which has a number of Romance cognates suggesting a Latin origin. So far this is a very standard situation for an English word of medieval date. However, in this case the Latin word is not attested, and the origin of the Romance group of words remains uncertain, although a hypothetical underlying Latin form has been reconstructed on the basis of the Romance evidence. Although OED3 generally avoids citing reconstructed forms, this one has been regarded as important enough to mention, as it forms the basis of a suggested further etymology:

[... The Romance forms point to unattested post-classical Latin forms **pettia*, **pettium*: cf. post-classical Latin *pecia*, *petia* (also *pecium*, *petium*) 'broken piece, fragment', also 'piece of land'. Ult. origin uncertain: see note below.
...
The Romance words are often compared with Old Welsh, Welsh *peth* thing, affair, matter, (usu. derog.) person, Middle Breton *pez* piece, share (Breton *pezh*, now chiefly in sense 'play (on stage, etc.)') and the place-name element *Pit-* portion of land (< a Pictish base (> Scottish Gaelic †*pett* (12th cent. in the Book of Deer), only in place names)) prob. < the same Celtic base as Old Irish *cuit* portion, share (Irish *cuid*), further etymology uncertain. The suggestion is that the underlying Latin word may have been borrowed from an unattested Gaulish cognate of these words.] (OED3 2003).

The reconstructed Latin forms have been compared with a set of P-Celtic words including Welsh, Breton and Pictish, as well as a possible related Irish word, so the whole group is cited here together (cf. Bachellery and Lambert 1987: 281). If any of these words is later cited in a different entry, the reader will be referred here for further discussion.[6]

A number of OED3 entries are calques: words or phrases modelled on foreign examples without actually borrowing the foreign form. There are very few calques from Celtic languages in English; one of the more elaborate ones is the

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[6]   This is likely to happen at QUIDRATHE n., which at the moment is derived from 'Ir. *cuid* part, portion + *ráithe* quarter of a year' (OED2 1989).

obsolete pair PERFLUENCY n. and PERFLUID adj. These only occur in a single work, a translation by John Williams of a medieval work on prosody, published in 1856. Williams attempted to introduce a system of English-language terminology based on the Welsh, but failed. He uses *perfluency* and *perfluid* to translate Welsh *toddaid*, in independent and attributive uses, respectively; both OED3 entries cite the Welsh original in their respective quotations from Williams's text (1856: §1761). OED3 defines *perfluency* as: 'In the terminology of J. Williams: one of the 24 strict metres of traditional Welsh poetry.' (OED3 2005). It is a transparent term in English; while formed of ultimately Latin elements, its meaning as something 'flowing through' is still clear. An English adjective *perfluent*, borrowed directly from Latin, already existed and could serve as the immediate etymon. If an English word is a calque on a foreign language model, OED3 does not always give the full etymology of the model. In this case, however, it seemed necessary to explain the origin of the Welsh word to show where the association with flowing originated. The result is as follows:

> [< PERFLUENT adj.: see -ENCY suffix, after Welsh *toddaid*, the name of the metre (14th cent.), perh. < *tawdd* molten, liquid (13th cent.; < the same Indo-European base as THAW v.) + *-aid*, suffix forming nouns. Cf. (with different, although homonymous, suffix) Welsh *toddaid* molten (1778). Cf. PERFLUID adj.] (OED3 2005).

Consequently, the etymology of PERFLUID adj. looks like this: '[< PER-*prefix* + FLUID *adj.*, after PERFLUENCY *n.* In quot. 1856 rendering Welsh *toddaid*, here used attributively (see PERFLUENCY *n.*) ...]' (OED3 2005).

The treatment of Celtic name forms can be shown very briefly, cf. PADDY n./1, denoting an Irishman: '[< *Paddy* (Irish *Páidín*), pet-form of the male forename *Patrick* (Irish *Pádraig*) ...]' (OED3 2005). The word is first attested in the 18th century, when Irish was more widely spoken, and the Irish form of *Patrick* may have had an influence on the shape of the pet-form, as well as on the English word derived from it, so Irish forms are given of both the full name and the pet-form.

Finally, a number of etymologies contain references to rejected suggestions, such as the following, at POSSET n., denoting a kind of drink, and at PLUM n., respectively. This is the etymology of the former: '[Origin unknown ... Perh. cf. Middle French *possette* (1530 in Palsgrave), although this ... may be a borrowing from English. Irish *posóid* is < English.]' (OED3 2007). While the origin of this word remains unknown, parallel forms in other languages are explained so they cannot be mistaken for the etymon. In the case of PLUM n., the Celtic words had never been suggested to be the direct etymon of the English, but it was felt necessary also to rule them out as cognates, so a note was added: 'Irish *pluma*, Welsh *plwmws* plums, (with singulative suffix) *plwmsen*, *plwmen* are app. < English.' (OED3 2006).

A more elaborate rejection can be seen at PLANXTY n. (OED3 2005), where a serious case could be made for a derivation from Irish. Although the origin is

stated to be unknown, the discussion of the etymology is over 200 words long and cannot be reproduced here verbatim. The discussion begins with an assertion that it is probably not a straightforward borrowing from its Irish equivalent *plancstaí*, but rather that the latter is probably borrowed from English. There are several reasons for that assumption. Firstly, the word is first attested in English in a song title of 1724, spelt in a way that is unambiguously English: *Planksty*, with the letters *k* and *y*, neither of which is part of the Irish alphabet (Neal and Neal 1724: 21). This song title constitutes the first English quotation in the OED3 entry. Secondly, the phonology of the word *planxty* with its complex internal consonant cluster is uncharacteristic of the Irish language (although this is very circumstantial and therefore not spelt out in the dictionary entry). Finally, there is an equivalent Irish word for this kind of music, *pléaráca*, which appears in the Irish titles of many pieces of music called *planxty* in English. This observation was already made in the 19th century by G. Petrie, and his comments are included in the entry:

> Of the Planxty and the Pleraca … the difference seems to me to be only in names which are convertible … In a collection of Irish tunes, chiefly of Carolan's composition, published … in 1810, the term Planxty [is] given as the English name, and Pleraca as the Irish one of the same tune … The tunes called Planxties, as well as those called Pleracas, owe their origin, if not, as I believe, their names to Carolan (Petrie 1855: 13).

Several possible etymologies have been suggested, and these are listed in the OED3 etymology without further comment. None of them can be substantiated or entirely dismissed, but none seems likely enough to be considered the origin without further evidence. The first suggestion is that *planxty* is an imitative formation, representing the sound of a harp being plucked (e.g. O'Sullivan 1958: 152; Dolan 1998: 200). This is quite possible, but imitative formations are often hard to prove. Another suggestion is that it derives from Irish *plancadh* 'striking, plucking of a harp' or the underlying Latin *plangere* 'to strike, beat' (e.g. O'Sullivan 1958: 152; Wall 1995: 105), not directly but with addition of an English suffix. A candidate for this suffix would by -TY/1, 'forming nouns denoting quality or condition' (OED2 1989: s.v.). However, no precursors of this formation are attested. For instance, earlier evidence of the use of *plancadh* or related forms in a song title might be expected, if this was the case. A common suggestion is that *planxty* represents an alteration, perhaps through mishearing, of *sláinte* 'health,' used as greeting or toast.[7] However, no possible intermediate forms are attested, and the environment of traditional music in the early 18th century was probably sufficiently Irish-speaking that such a development is more likely to have occurred through a series of changes, rather than by one sudden

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[7]   This theory is difficult to find in print, but is frequently cited on the internet, often in connection with the Irish folk music band of the same name, e.g. '*Planxty* is believed to be a corruption of the Irish word and popular toast *sláinte*, meaning *good health*' (Wikipedia 2007: s.v. *Planxty*). The popularity of this claim makes it worth mentioning.

radical mistake. The historical environment of the term is also discussed. Both the word and the type of music are strongly associated with the harper and composer Turlough O'Carolan (Toirdhealbhach Ó Cearbhalláin; 1670-1738). He was working within the traditions of his own culture, but he was also in contact with contemporary musical trends on the continent, and he introduced a certain amount of innovation into Irish music (Yeats 1980; O'Sullivan 1958: 144-148). It is likely that he coined the term deliberately in this context, even though the word is not used very much in his own time, even for his own music. It is interesting, however, that the earliest evidence of the word in context (i.e. not in a title) comes from his work. This example is quoted in full in the etymology. An exact date has not been found, so it is dated here *a*1738, on the grounds that it must have been written before his death. It is a line from the *Planxty George Brabazon* (*Seórsa Brabston*), cited with italics representing the Irish script of the edition: '*Hí hó! súd é an siollaire, Hom-bó! dubhshlán duine faoi, him*-jam *plancstaí*, merriment, Sing, dance, drink his health about' (Ó Máille 1916: 177). *Planxty* appears in Irish spelling and script, but between 'jam' (a meaningless syllable of the kind common in Irish traditional song), which both spelling (with *j*) and Roman script identify as English, and the rest of the line, which is entirely in English. Given that the first word *him-* (another meaningless syllable) could be in either language, the whole line could be interpreted as English, despite the spelling of *planxty* as *plancstaí*. It is also interesting that *planxty* here appears to have a sense similar to 'merriment,' a sense which is paralleled by Irish *pléaráca*, the equivalent term for the music (see above).

Occasionally, the OED etymology group advise other editors on the definition of linguistic and related terminology, and this is also true for the Celtic languages. One language which has already been mentioned is Pictish, and the entry for PICTISH n. and adj. has recently been revised. It is essential for OED definitions of language names to conform to their use in etymology. Pictish in this context presented a challenge, since it clearly denotes the language of the Picts, but in the history of scholarship, opinions have shifted as to what exactly this language was. A range of English quotations is given in the entry detailing several of these, including one by John Rhŷs emphatically stating that it is non-Indo-European,[8] and an 18th-century one stating that it was a form of "Erse," i.e. Gaelic.[9] The earliest modern quotation is from a translation (of 1690) of a text based on Bede's *Historia Ecclesiastica*,[10] where *[lingua] Pictorum* is translated by *Pictish* as a formation parallel to *English*, *British*, etc.; the author does not need to have had any concept what Pictish was (Buchanan 1690: 54). Interestingly, the only earlier passage, which was added during revision of this entry,

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[8]   'Pictish being, as I take it, a non-Aryan language' (Rhŷs 1892: 307).

[9]   'Their language is the Pictish, or a dialect of the Erse, spoken in the western isles of Scotland' (Barrow 1760: s.v. *Man*); the author identifies himself as a teacher of Mathematics.

[10]   'quinque gentium linguis ... Anglorum videlicet, Brettonum, Scottorum, Pictorum et Latinorum,' Bede, *Historia Ecclesiastica* I. i. (Moberly 1869: 7).

comes from the Anglo-Saxon Chronicle[11] and is a direct parallel to Bede; it is, however, likely that Bede, and perhaps also the Chronicler, did know what the Picts actually spoke. To accommodate this variety and at the same time give an accurate account of the current use of the word, the definition has been left simple, as 'The language (or languages) of the Picts,' but has been augmented by a note detailing recent trends in scholarship:[12]

> Pictish is attested only in a few personal names and place names and inscriptions. It appears to be a P-Celtic language related to British (the ancestor of Welsh, Cornish and Breton), but distinctive enough to be regarded as a separate language in contemporary sources (cf. quot. OE). The traditional view advocated by K.H. Jackson (in F.T. WAINWRIGHT *Probl. of Picts* (1955) 152) posited a further unidentified and prob. non-Indo-European language alongside this, to account for a number of undeciphered ogham inscriptions. However, since this theory rests mainly on unintelligible, rather than linguistically analysable material, it has recently been convincingly challenged by K. Forsyth (see *Language in Pictland* (1995)) (OED3 2006).

A final example has been chosen to show how in a complex etymology, research into Celtic languages can interact with research into the history of English and other languages, as well as into the cultural history of the wider world.

The bird name *penguin* has often been suggested to be derived from Welsh *pen gwyn* 'white head'. Among the objections brought against this are the claim that penguins do not have white heads and that the Welsh word as a compound would be *penwyn*. To find an answer to this problem, the history of the word needs to be traced not only in one language, but in as many as possible.

One important starting point is that the word *penguin* did not originally denote flightless birds of the southern hemisphere, but their now extinct counterpart in the north, the Great Auk, *Pinguinus impennis* (now *Alca impennis*). This is the primary sense of French *pingouin* (other senses refer to other species of auk, e.g. *petit pingouin* 'razorbill'), the flightless birds of the southern hemisphere are known in French as *manchot*. The Great Auk was unrelated to the penguins of the south, but was similar both in its appearance and in its habits.

First, the three suggestions brought for the origin of *penguin* are: Welsh *pen gwyn* 'white head'; a derivative of Latin *pinguis* 'fat'; and English *pin wing*. There is no evidence to substantiate the latter claim, and no reference to it until the 19th century.[13] The suggestion that *penguin* may derive from Latin *pinguis* (cf. Weddell 1827: 55), on the other hand, is reasonably well-founded. Penguins have a thick layer of fat under their skin and were valued for it by hunters. The Great Auk was hunted to extinction for the same reason. From the 18th century, the penguin was also known in German as *Fettgans* 'fatty goose' (e.g. Krünitz

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[11] In the introductory section of the D-text (British Library MS Cotton Tiberius B iv.), in form *Pihtissc* (Cubbin 1996: 1).

[12] The texts cited are Forsyth 1995 and Jackson 1955.

[13] Mentioned and rejected in OED2 1989 (s.v. PENGUIN n.); the underlying NED article was published in 1904.

1779: 96-97). Also, in several languages the word now has an *-i-* in the first syllable, and this is consistently attested at a very early date. In English, for instance, the word goes back to the 1570s, and a form *pinguin* is attested by 1635. In French, the current form is *pingouin*, and similar forms go back to the earliest evidence in that language (1598 as *pinguyn*). The Great Auk's former genus name *Pinguinus*, also contains an *-i-* in its first syllable. The Latin theory cannot be disproved, but the evidence supporting it is circumstantial, and the earliest attested forms in English (and thus in any language) do have an *-e-* in their first syllable. But even if Latin *pinguis* was not the direct etymon of *penguin*, early influence from it is likely.

If however, Latin *pinguis* was not the etymon, the only remaining theory is Welsh *pen gwyn*. On the face of it, this has the ring of a folk etymology, and has often been dismissed as such with the argument that penguins, or indeed auks, do not have a white head. This is a good argument, even if it is not entirely true. The Great Auk had large white spots on its cheeks, which would have been noticeable from a distance and may have given the illusion of a white-headed bird; the Magellan Penguin of South America (*Spheniscus magellanicus*), which appears to be the species of penguin first given the name (see below) has marked white stripes leading from its neck to its eyes. The other main objection is that in Welsh a compound bird name composed of the elements *pen* 'head' and *gwyn* 'white' should come out as *penwyn*. This is also true, and Welsh *penwyn* is attested as an adjective in the 16th century, as the epithet of the white-haired poet *Dafydd Benwyn*.[14] However, Welsh *pen* 'head' is masculine, and as a noun phrase, 'white head' is still *pen gwyn*, and the chronology suggests that the name of the penguin is a new formation which does not need to conform with the formation of inherited compound bird names. *Pengwyn* does actually occur in Welsh as a single word denoting the Great Auk, but it first appears in the translation of an English text of 1584 (Edwards 1677: 193), and is apparently borrowed from English.

The Welsh theory is greatly supported by the fact that the phrase *pen gwyn* closely matches earliest forms of the word (*penguyn*, *pengwin*, *pengwyn*, and *penguin* are all attested in the 16th century), and some early accounts in English explicitly state the name to be given by Welsh sailors, e.g. (on auks) 'The Countrey men call them *Penguins* (which seemeth to be a Welsh name)' (Ingram 1583: 560), or (on penguins) 'Infinite were the Numbers of the foule, wch the Welsh men name Pengwin & Maglanus tearmed them Geese' (Fletcher 1578: 128).

The Great Auk was known in parts of Northern Europe, but its habitat did not stretch further South than Scandinavia and Scotland. The bird was known in Scotland as *gare-fowl* in English and *gearbhul* in Gaelic, both words ultimately borrowed from a Scandinavian language and comparable to Old Icelandic *geirfugl*. It is likely that sailors from further south were unfamiliar with this bird until they reached North America, where the Auk's habitat extended much further

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[14] A. Hawke, pers. comm.; Dafydd Benwyn is cited in the GPC bibliography.

south. Most of earliest evidence from English and Continental sailors describing the Great Auk treats it as a novelty and refers to Newfoundland and its surroundings. It appears therefore that the bird was first encountered on the American East Coast, where it needed to be named. It seems significant that the earliest evidence also consistently refers to a place called *Penguin Island*, which is described as the home of a sizable colony of the birds:

> New found land is in a temperate Climate … There are … many other kind of birdes store, too long to write, especially at one Island named Penguin, where wee may driue them on a planke into our ship as many as shall lade her. These birdes are also called Penguins, and cannot flie (Parkhurst 1578: 676).

This name is also connected with the Welsh language at an early date. The following passage comes from an account of a mythical medieval voyage, but it refers to the world as it was known to the 16th-century authors:

> But the Iland of Corroeso, the cape of Bryton, the riuer of Gwyndor, and the white rocke of Pengwyn, which be all Brytish or Welsh words, doo manifestlie shew that it was that countrie which Madoc and his people inhabited (Lhoyd and Powel 1584: 229).

The frequent references to Penguin Island, some of which antedate use of the word as a noun denoting the bird suggest that the bird may have been named after the location, rather than vice versa. *Pen* is a common place-name element in Wales, as well as in areas with related languages, such as Cornwall and Brittany. It is the same word for a head, but used in an extended sense 'headland'. Rocks and headlands housing large colonies of birds are often so thickly covered in bird droppings that they appear white. A European example is the Bass Rock in Lothian, Scotland, home to a colony of gannets. This is the basalt core of a prehistoric volcano, and thus naturally black, but it appears light grey, and shines white in the sun. It is conceivable that such a rock in a newly discovered area would be called 'white headland,' or, by Welsh speakers, *pen gwyn*. The passage about Madoc's journey explicitly says that the rock was white, and while this may be an interpretation after the fact, it does show that the connection was made. As the early accounts mention, Welsh speakers were present on these voyages of exploration, but one further complication needs to be mentioned. By the 16th century, the Grand Banks off Newfoundland were fished by Breton sailors, and much of the early exploration of the American north east-coast was done by French seafarers (cf. Charlevoix 1744: 3). Jacques Cartier, who explored Newfoundland in the 1530s, was born in Brittany. It is therefore not impossible that the name was coined not in Welsh but in Breton, where it would be practically identical, except for the spelling conventions of the respective languages. Welsh sailors would have understood it and be seen to understand it by their English-speaking shipmates. The passage from Madoc's voyage (quoted above) places Penguin Island near Cape Breton; this could further support a case for a Breton coinage, but no proof appears to be possible either way.

It is not practical to reproduce here the full etymology as it is now published in OED3, which is over 800 words long. The following is the main transmission, and most of the above argument is detailed in notes:

> [Prob. < Welsh *pen gwyn* white head (< *pen* head, headland (see PEN n./1) + *gwyn* white: see GWYNIAD n.). Cf. Dutch *pinguin* (1595 as *fenguin*; prob. < English), German *Pinguin* (1599 as *pagnies*, 1606 as *pencuius*, both plural; < English or Dutch), Swedish *pingvin* (1685; perh. < German), French *pingouin* (1598 in Middle French as *pinguyn*; < Dutch). Welsh *pengwin* Great Auk (1677 in a translation of quot. 1584), penguin (1872) is prob. < English (cf. also Welsh regional (northern) †*pengwin bach* little auk, razorbill (19th cent. in an isolated attestation)) ...] (OED3 2005).

Acknowledgements

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