

## II.

### NOTES ON THE WORDS *MEN* AND *MAIDEN* IN BRITISH TOPOGRAPHY. By DAVID MACRITCHIE, F.S.A. Scot.

In writing upon the antiquities of Cornwall, Professor Max Müller observes<sup>1</sup> that "one of the large stones with rock-basins is called the *Mên-rock*, rock being simply the interpretation of the Cornish *Mên*." And of those special pillar-stones which we in Scotland generally know as "bore-stones," he remarks<sup>2</sup> :— "They are called *Mên-an-tol*, hole-stones, in Cornwall; and the name of *tol-men*, or *dol-men*, which is somewhat promiscuously used by Celtic antiquarians, should be restricted to monuments of this class, *toll* being the Cornish word for *hole*, *mên* for *stone*, and *an* the article." He adds further<sup>3</sup> :— "*Kist-vaen* . . . means a stone-chamber, from *cist*, the Latin *cista*, a chest, and *vaen*, the modified form of *maen* or *mên*, stone." The same word is again seen in the compound "*men-hir*"; and, in short, throughout the Cymric districts of Brittany, Cornwall, and Wales, the word *man* or *men*, with its labial letters sometimes modified into *v* or *f*, signifies *stone*.<sup>4</sup>

<sup>1</sup> *Chips from a German Workshop*, 1870, vol. iii. p. 319.

<sup>2</sup> *Op. cit.*, p. 283.

<sup>3</sup> *Op. cit.*, p. 278.

<sup>4</sup> The Welsh *maen* (seen in "*Pen-maen-mawr*") has the compound derivatives *hogfaen*, a whetstone (*hog*=whet), and *cistfaen*, defined by Spurrell as "a British monument, consisting of four flat stones placed at right angles, with a fifth on top"; *cist*, as in Cornish, Gaelic, and Lowland-Scotch, signifying a "chest, coffer, or box." The Cornish spelling *mean* occurs in "*Gwreans an Bys*" (1611). And in Breton we have "*men-hir*," "*lichaven*" or "*licaven*," and "*peulvan*" (Souvestre's

Of special stones denoted by this word, some Cornish examples are the *Mên Scrifá*, or Inscribed Stone, *Mên Perhen* and the *Mên-Rock*, both in Constantine parish, and the circles called the *Dawns Mén*, some five miles west of Penzance. With regard to this last, Max Müller says<sup>1</sup> that the name, which signifies "the dancing stones," "was soon corrupted into dance-men, and a legend sprang up at once to account for the name, viz., that these men had danced on a Sunday and been changed into stones. Another corruption of the same name into *Danis-mên* led to the tradition that these circles were built by the Danes." Yet another misconception is indicated by Mr G. F. Tregelles, who states that, about four miles from St Colomb, "is a detached menhir, 7 feet 6 inches high, . . . called the 'Old Man,' . . . and Mr W. C. Borlase points out that 'Old Man' sounds very much like 'huel maen' or 'sun stone.'"<sup>2</sup>

"A still more curious name for these circles," continues Professor Max Müller,<sup>3</sup> "is that of '*Nine Maidens*,' which occurs at Boscawen-ûn, and in several other places in Cornwall. Now the Boscawen-ûn circle consists of nineteen stones, and there are very few '*Nine Maidens*' that consist of nine stones only. Yet the name prevails, and is likewise supported by local legends of nine maidens having been changed into stones for dancing on a Sunday, or some other misdeed. One part of the legend may perhaps be explained by the fact that *mêdn* would be a common corruption in modern Cornish for *mên*, stone, as *pen* becomes *pedn*, and *gwyn gwyn*, etc., and that the Saxons mistook Cornish *mêdn* for their own *maiden*." An early recorded instance of this misconception is that of Hals, who, writing about the year 1700, describes "nine large moor stones commonly called the Nine Maids, or Virgin Sisters; probably

*Les Derniers Bretons*, i. 105). A special Breton example is that of *Men Jensel*, the name of the rocks lying off Cape Ushant on which the unfortunate "Drummond Castle" struck in June 1896; and in the same locality occurs the name *Ar Men*.

<sup>1</sup> *Op. cit.*, pp. 284-5.

<sup>2</sup> Pp. 16-17 of *The Stone Circles of Cornwall*, by George Fox Tregelles. Reprinted from the *Transactions of the Penzance Natural History and Antiquarian Society*, 1893-4.

<sup>3</sup> *Op. cit.*, p. 285.

set up in memory of so many sister nuns heretofore interred there.”<sup>1</sup> This last example shows us an exceptional case of the number of stones agreeing with the English numeral *nine*; although it is pretty evident that the Cornish word represented by that sound has some other meaning. It is, moreover, interesting to note that in this case of the year 1700 we have the form *maid*, instead of *maiden* or *men*. It may well be questioned whether the *d* in *gwydn*, *pedn*, and *médn* does not represent an obsolete form, instead of being a modern corruption as Max Müller states.

Be this as it may, it is clear that the Cymric word for *rock* or *stone* has gradually become confused with the English words of similar sound but different meaning,—*man*, *men*, *maid*, and *maiden*. Without pausing to consider how far other districts of South Britain may furnish parallel evidence, I shall now turn to our own part of the island.

“The Maiden Way” which comes northward through Cumberland has, I think, been pronounced by Dr Macdonald to be a drove road, and not a Roman causeway. It ought, however, to be mentioned in this connection; as also a “Maiden Castle” situated in the same county.<sup>2</sup> Dr Stuart, who cites these two, speaks also of “the Maiden Stone” at Ayton in Berwickshire,—“a striking rock on the coast, isolated at high water”; and there are, further, the “Maiden Bower Craigs” near Dumfries.<sup>3</sup> Going northward along the coast from Ayton, we come to “The Maidens” off North Berwick, and their offshoot, “The Maiden Foot,” a dangerous submerged rock near the entrance to the harbour; off the south end of the Isle of May lies the “Maiden Hair” rock; and then at St Andrews, on the sea-shore, there is the natural rock-pillar called “The Maiden Rock.” Inland in Fife there is “The Maiden Castle” of Collessie, “where are the vestiges of an ancient fort”;<sup>4</sup> and, in the Falkland district, there is another ancient

<sup>1</sup> Quoted by Mr G. F. Tregelles, *op. cit.*, p. 10. The stones referred to form a circle in the parish of Wendron, between Redruth and Helston.

<sup>2</sup> *Sculptured Stones of Scotland*, vol. i. p. 3.

<sup>3</sup> Mr F. R. Coles, to whom I am indebted for this last reference, mentions an interesting local custom connected with these rocks.

<sup>4</sup> *Sculptured Stones of Scotland*, vol. i. p. 3.

fortification known as "The Maiden Castle."<sup>1</sup> [I have been subsequently informed by Sheriff Mackay that there is another "Maiden Castle" in the neighbouring parish of Kennoway.] Returning across the Forth, we find "The Maiden Castle" of Roslin, on the banks of the Esk, "where parts of the foundations of a fortress are to be seen";<sup>2</sup> and the more notable "Maiden Castle" of Dunedin or Edinburgh. Of this last-named, an anonymous writer of 1718 remarks:—"The Castle was formerly call'd *Castrum puellarum*, i.e., the Maiden Castle, because, as some say, the Kings of the *Picts* kept their Daughters in it while unmarried: But those who understand the ancient *Scots* or Highland Language, say the Words *Ma-eden* signify only a Castle built upon a Hill or Rock."<sup>3</sup> Whether this writer has analysed the word accurately may well be questioned. But the point to be noticed is that, about two centuries ago, it was believed that at least *this* "Maiden Castle" really derived its name from a Celtic term meaning "the castle of the rock."

Proceeding northward across the Firth of Tay, we encounter a name which at once recalls the many stone circles of Cornwall designated "the nine maidens." This is a well beside the old churchyard of Strathmartine, near Dundee, known as "the Nine Maidens' Well," and associated in popular tradition with certain nine maidens, and also with the sculptured stone called "St Martin's Stone." This stone is one of two which, Dr Stuart states, were dug out of the old churchyard about the year 1796.<sup>4</sup>

Some twenty miles farther north is the parish of Menmuir (spelt "Menmoreth" about 1280 A.D.); and Mr Johnston, in his *Place-Names of Scotland*,<sup>5</sup> suggests that the first syllable of this word may be the Cymric *men*, "a stone." Certainly, Menmuir possesses one well-known sculptured stone; and a local rhyme, quoted by Mr Jervise in our *Pro-*

<sup>1</sup> It is situated on the southern base of Black Hill, S.W. from Falkland House, and about mid-way between Falkland and the station of Gateside.

<sup>2</sup> *Sculptured Stones*, *loc. cit.*

<sup>3</sup> Slezer's *Theatrum Scotiae*, edition of 1718, p. 7.

<sup>4</sup> For references to this place and its tradition, see the *Sculptured Stones of Scotland*, pp. 20 and 24; the *New Statistical Account of Scotland*, "Forfarshire," p. 54; and the *Dundee Evening Telegraph* of 17th July 1895.

<sup>5</sup> 1892, p. 180.

*ceedings*,<sup>1</sup> speaks of the "Killievair Stanes," as though there had once been several. In Aberdeenshire there is "the Maiden Craig," "a remarkable rock in the gorge of a little valley, about three miles from Aberdeen";<sup>2</sup> and a little to the north-west of that is the famous "Maiden Stone" of Chapel-of-Garioch. This sculptured stone has two different traditions relating to "maidens"; both of which Dr Stuart rejects. Had the name occurred in Cornwall, Professor Max Müller would undoubtedly have classed *maiden-stone* with *mên-rock*, regarding both as mere translations from one language into another. In connection with this particular "Maiden Stone," Dr Stuart further observes that near it is "a paved road . . . called the Maiden Causeway," and that Gordon states that "this stone is contiguous to a small Danish fort called 'the Maiden Castle.'" In this same quarter of Scotland mention may be made of the sculptured stone at Manbean, in the parish of Elgin; where the first syllable of "Manbean" suggests a comparison with "Menmuir," and the possibility that both names are derived from the Cymric *man* or *men*, a stone.

As an important contribution to this detail, I may quote from a letter received from my friend the Rev. Dr Stewart ("Nether Lochaber"), to whom I had written on the subject. He observes as follows:—"A few Welsh words do here and there occur in the topographical nomenclature of the Highlands. Examples are Glen *Nant*, 'twixt Taynuilt and Loch Awe. At the head of Glencoe we have '*menhir-chlach*,'—somewhat tautological, and meaning 'the rocky-stony-place.' In my own parish is '*menhir-a-cheo*,'—'the misty-rocky-height,' or 'rocky-place.'" Of these place-names the first is specially interesting, as the addition of the Gaelic *clach* to the Cymric *menhir* forms an exact parallel to the "*mên-rock*" of Cornwall. In the latter case, English has displaced Cymric; in the former case, Cymric has been displaced by Gaelic,—which is rather suggestive.<sup>3</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Vol. ii. (1854-7) p. 462.

<sup>2</sup> *Sculptured Stones of Scotland*, vol. i. p. 3.

<sup>3</sup> A kindred illustration is furnished by the Rev. J. R. Johnston, in his *Place-Names of Scotland* (Edinburgh, 1892):—"CARR ROCKS (Crail and Berwick-on-Tweed). Tautology: G[aelic] *càrr* . . . a rock." The first of these is the Carr Rock or Carr Brigs, off Fife Ness, while the other seems to be the "East Carr" and "West Carr," two miles to the south of Eyemouth. (It is interesting to note that

On our western coasts there are sea-rocks distinguished similarly to those already specified between Berwick and St Andrews. Dr Munro, in referring to some Ayrshire antiquities, speaks of "the pretty little bay, known as the 'Maidens,' on account of a few fantastic and weather-beaten rocks that rear their heads above its surgy waves."<sup>1</sup> Then, westward from Stranraer, and close to the Antrim coast, is a group of rocks also called "The Maidens"; while, much farther to the north, off the Isle of Skye, are the rocky islets called "MacLeod's Maidens."<sup>2</sup> To the north-west of "MacLeod's Maidens" is the sea-loch of Loch Maddy in North Uist, which derives its name from two similar rocks at its entrance, known to English-speaking people as "The Maidies," and in Gaelic as "Maddy-More" and "Maddy-Grisioch."<sup>3</sup> This distinctive "Maddy" occurs again in "Craigmaddie," near Glasgow,<sup>4</sup> where there is a cromlech known as "The Auld Wives' Lift." In both of these cases, I think, "maddy" has been popularly derived from the Gaelic *madadh*, "a wolf." But in view of the many sea-rocks and other stones distinguished as *maids* and *maidens*, it seems as unreasonable to suppose that "The Maidies" of North Uist were so called because they resembled wolves, as that exactly similar rocks elsewhere resembled maidens.<sup>5</sup> In one instance, indeed, that of "The Maids of Bute," two boulders on the hillside opposite Tighnabruaich, a certain resemblance to

immediately to the south of these Carr Rocks we have the equally tautological name of "Ross Point.") A little to the east of Tantallon Castle we have also the "Carr Rocks," with one in particular styled "The Great Carr." In all these cases we have parallels to *men-rock*, *maiden-stone*, and *menhir-chlach*; the only difference being that, while *carr-rock* appears to be a union of Gaelic and English, those names just quoted appear to unite Cymric with English, and Cymric with Gaelic. Possibly the *Maiden-Hair* rock, off the Isle of May, ought also to be regarded as coming within the last category; assuming *hair* to represent an aspirated form of *carr*.

<sup>1</sup> *Proc. Soc. Antiq. Scot.*, vol. xvii. p. 433.

<sup>2</sup> It is perhaps right to state that Dr Stewart of Nether Lochaber regards this name as quite unconnected with *men* and *menhir*; but I venture to think that a fuller consideration of the subject may modify his opinion.

<sup>3</sup> According to the phonetic spelling in F. H. Groome's *Ordnance Gazetteer of Scotland*, s.v. "Lochmaddy."

<sup>4</sup> Two miles N.E. of Milngavie.

<sup>5</sup> In the *Old Statistical Account*, vol. xv. p. 279, Craigmaddie is spelt *Craig-madden*. Here we have a close approach to the English or Cornish form "maiden."

the female figure may be noted ; but this resemblance is eked out, if it is not created, by the use of white paint.

In Shetland we have at least two pillar-rocks, isolated from the parent cliff, which are known as "The Maiden Stack,"<sup>1</sup> and there is a third, near Papa Stour, called the "Frau-a-Stack," which, two centuries ago, was held to mean "Our Lady's Rock," and had a traditionary story of a *maiden* who was imprisoned on its summit. "They must have had some difficulty in getting the young woman up, unless she could climb like a cat, or they hoisted her up," observes Mr J. R. Tudor, who records the tradition.<sup>2</sup> This word *frau* is said to be the Danish *frue*, "mistress" or "lady"; and such a word may well exist in Shetland (although I do not find it in Edmondston's or Jakobsen's glossaries). But Mr Tudor points out<sup>3</sup> that "Munch says *Friarstakker* is the usual name for such steep isolated stacks on the Scandinavian coast"; and I venture to suggest that the Danish *fri*, equivalent to English *free*, is more likely to be the root of the word.<sup>4</sup> At any rate, we find similar rocks off the north point of Foula styled the "Friar Stacks" (no doubt once pronounced Freear Stacks). To suit this form of the word, it is not unlikely that the Foula rocks will eventually be said to resemble "friars," if the comparison has not been already made. But, considering the question as a whole, this association of *frue*, a lady, with a rock resembling other so-called "maidens," does not appear to me as anything more than a coincidence—striking, certainly, but not more striking than the fact indicated in the title of this paper, that the Cymric word for a rock should have branched off (with apparent consistence) into the English-sounding forms of *man* and *men*, *maid* and *maiden*.

One other variant remains to be noticed, that of "old man," already

<sup>1</sup> One at the Mull of Eswick, and another near the Grind of the Navir. (See p. 504 of Tudor's *Orkneys and Shetland*, London, 1883.)

<sup>2</sup> *Op. cit.*, p. 503. It may be mentioned that Mr H. G. Aldis, F.S.A. Scot., informs me that, when he visited Papa Stour in 1897, he only heard the name "Maiden Stack" applied to the rock in question.

<sup>3</sup> *Op. cit.*, pp. 503-4.

<sup>4</sup> See Larsen's *Dansk-norsk-engelsk Ordbog*, s.v. *fri*: *at staa fri-t*="to stand solated, detached, to be exposed to view."

cited in Cornwall; where Mr Borlase has assumed it to signify "sun stone" (= *huel maen*). In Scotland we have the "Old Man" of Hoy and the "Old Man" of Storr, pillar-rocks situated respectively in Orkney and Skye. Whatever may be thought of Mr Borlase's translation of "old" as the Cornish word for "sun," it can hardly be said to fit in in either of these cases.<sup>1</sup> Yet in view of the many instances here adduced, it is difficult to see why the word *man* should not be regarded as the Cymric "rock" in these two instances as much as in any of the others.<sup>2</sup> And as for the question of the survival of Cymric words in Scotland, it is a fact that the Cymric numerals are even yet used by Ayrshire schoolboys in their counting-out games, and that there are many Cymric place-names throughout Scotland.

Finally, it must not be too hastily assumed that every place-name of this kind is traceable to the Cymric word for rock and stone. *Maidenkirke*, for example, seems clearly to owe its name to St Medan. Moreover, the names of places often become greatly abbreviated and corrupted; and all such names must be judged from their earliest known spelling. But, discounting all this, when any rock or stone in Scotland is distinguished by such forms as *man*, *men*, or *maiden*, the presumption seems obviously to be that the etymology is identical with that of similar place-names in the Cymric regions further south.

In his *Early Races of Scotland* (vol. ii. pp. 356-358), Colonel Forbes-Leslie discusses the ethnology of "Maiden" as a place-name, and gives a considerable list of places so distinguished. Of those not included in the above paper are the "Maiden Castles" of St Vigeans, Forfarshire; of Dunipace, Markinch, Fife; of Campsie, Stirlingshire; of Stanemore, Westmoreland; of the neighbourhood of Durham; of the neighbourhood of Dorchester; and at Llanarth, Cardiganshire ("Castle Moeddyn"). And, after pointing out that Maidstone, in Kent, was known as "Maydenstan" in 1303, he goes on to remark:—"The

<sup>1</sup> Since this paper was read, it has been pointed out to me that if *huel maen* signifies "sun-stone" in the sense of a *dial*, then it might quite well be applied to any isolated pillar-rock.

<sup>2</sup> The "Old Man" of Storr is rendered in Gaelic at the present day as *Am Bodach*, i.e., "The Old Man." But this may be merely a modern translation from English into Gaelic after the original meaning was forgotten.



primitive monuments in that neighbourhood—viz., at Aylesford and Addington—suggest an argument in favour of *Maydenstane* [*sic*] having a common origin, whatever that may be, with the Maiden Castles and Maiden Stones of Wales and Scotland.”