
The Smalls, Hats and Barrels:
Navigational and Toponymic Hazards

W. A. R. Richardson
Flinders University, Adelaide, South Australia

The earliest surviving manuscript charts which include reasonably legible inscriptions around the more southerly coastlines of the British Isles are by Italian or Majorcan/Catalan cartographers of the late thirteenth and early fourteenth centuries.¹ The earliest surviving manuscript sailing directions including the same area are in Low German,² Italian,³ French,⁴ Portuguese⁵ and English.⁶ They date from the fifteenth century, but undoubtedly contain some matter copied,

¹ Tony Campbell, 'Portolan Charts from the Late Thirteenth Century to 1500', in The History of Cartography, edited by J. B. Harley and David Woodward (Chicago, 1987), I, 371-463, especially pp. 449-56.
² Das Seebuch, edited by Karl Koppmann (Bremen 1876). (Contains a place-name glossary).
⁴ The Rutters of the Sea: the Sailing Directions of Pierre Garcie, edited by D. W. Waters (New Haven and London, 1967). (Contains a place-name glossary.) The individual works reprinted are separately paginated in addition to Waters’ overall pagination.
⁵ Livro de marinharia, edited by J. I. de Brito Rebello (Lisbon, 1903).
probably several times, from originals perhaps a century or more older. A recent article on Wolf Rock emphasised the wealth of sparsely-exploited place-name source material on the British Isles, available on early charts and in early sailing directions, mainly of non-British origin. Details were given of the types of error to be found on charts, because of inaccurate information, uncritical copying and the misplacement of inscriptions. Incredible errors in sailing directions were due to frequent careless copying, especially by scribes with little or no knowledge of things maritime. Printed sailing directions (rutters), when they became available, were not necessarily much better, since the printers had to work initially from manuscript originals. Proof reading, if any, seems to have been remarkably ineffective.

Some practising mariners produced works of popular travel literature which were a strange combination of sketchy sailing directions, historical ‘facts’ and often hopelessly erroneous information from ‘classical’ authorities. One was João Afonso, or Jean Alfonse, a renegade Portuguese pilot living in France and working for the French. In his Les voyages antarenteux (1559) he includes a description of the coast of Wales. After leaving Bristol, he states that the coast turns west-north-west and west ‘iusques a Marie spirituelle, qui est vne roche en la mer de Myneford, en la manche de Souange. D’icy court la costa au Nortest, iusques a la ville de Chichester . . .’ (‘as far as Marie spirituelle, which is a rock in the sea of Myneford, in the channel of Souange. From here the coast runs north-east as far as the town of Chichester’). It is not difficult to recognise Milford Haven or St George’s Channel, which had been correctly rendered as ‘la manche de S. George’ a few lines earlier, while Chichester is obviously a careless mistake for Chester. But what is Marie spirituelle?

From its given position and its description as a rock, it is presumably what are now known as The Smalls, with their lighthouse and helicopter pad, and/or the Hats and Barrels (Map 1, p. 92). But the name bears no resemblance whatsoever to any of those names, nor to any other names just off the Pembrokeshire coast.

8 Jean Alfonse, Les voyages antarenteux (Poitiers, 1559), fol. 21r.

B. G. Charles’ scholarly studies of Pembrokeshire place-names provided no hint of a solution to the name, nor did F. J. North’s articles. The latter provided a good introduction to manuscript maps and charts including Wales, but nowhere could I find any systematic study of place-names in Wales which made use of sailing directions.

Many of the rocks and islands off the Pembrokeshire coast and in the Bristol and St George’s Channels bear names of Old Norse origin. They include Ramsey, Skomer, Caldey, Lundy, Skokholm, Grassholm, Middleholm (Midland) and Gateholm, and Flatholm and Steephom much nearer Bristol. Each is composed of two Old Norse words, one specific, and one generic, either ey or holmr, both meaning ‘island’.

Some of these islands have, or have had, Welsh names as well. Thus Ramsey is known in Welsh as Ynys Dewi and Ynys Dyfnog, after saints associated with it, St David and St Tyfannog; likewise, Caldey has been known as Ynys Byr, after another lesser-known saint, St Pyr(o). Ramsey has also been known as ynyss yr hyrddod ‘the island of the rams’, an interesting Welsh translation of the first element of its Old Norse name by someone who believed it to be the English word ‘rams’. A more elaborate form of the same mistaken identification is Rams eyes in an English translation of some French sailing directions of the first decade of the sixteenth century.

Many of the lesser islands and rocks off the Pembrokeshire coast are now known only by Welsh names; notable exceptions are The Bishops and Clerks, and The Smalls, Hats and Barrels.

The first of these one might reasonably presume to be so called in reference to St David and his Clerics. However, another seemingly possible origin was suggested in an article in the Haverfordwest and

12 Lewis Morris, Plans of Harbours, Bars, Bays and Roads in St George’s Channel ... 1748, ([London ?], 1748; facsimile reprint, Beaumaris, 1987), p. 21, a chart of Ramsey Sound.
13 Waters, p. 79/31.
Milford Haven Telegraph in the latter part of the last century.14 It claimed that three hundred years previously a fleet of merchant ships returning from Spain was wrecked on those rocks just west of Ramsey. Supposedly there were only three survivors, Miles Bishop, and James and Henry Clerk, whence the name of the rocks concerned. The source of the story is not given, and the surnames of the survivors are so suspiciously convenient that it seems probable that this is a typical example of popular etymology. This would seem to be confirmed by the fact that the rocks figure as the Bishoppis and his clerksis in the anonymous Sailing directions for the circumnavigation of England which date from at least as early as the middle of the fifteenth century.15 The existence of another Bishop and his Clerks in the Isles of Scilly suggests that the term was used for a large rock surrounded by smaller ones.16

Further doubt is cast upon this story by George Owen who, in a strangely punctuated passage written in 1594, obviously relying on local informants, makes quite clear the ecclesiastical associations of the name at that time. It reads:

A seeboard this Iland Ramsey rangeth in order the Bushop and his clerkes being vii in Nomber, all wayes seene at lowe water who are not w/o some small Quiristers, who sheue not themselves, but at spring tydes, and calm seas,

The chiefest of thes ys called of the inhabitantes the Bushops rokke one other Carreg y rossan, the third Divighe, the 4th emskir, the rest as yet I haue not leard their names if they have anye... The Bushop and those his clerkes preach deadly doctrine to their winter audience...17

The second component of the emskir he mentions, now Em-sger or South Bishop on modern charts, with its prominent lighthouse, would clearly seem to be Old Norse sker 'skerry'; the first part looks as though it is a corruption of Enis (Modern Welsh ynhis) 'island', the ni

14 Newspaper cutting kindly provided by Mr Thomas H. Bennett of Newport. Unfortunately I have been unable to trace the issue number and date.
15 See O. J. Padel, A Popular Dictionary of Cornish Place-Names (Penzance, 1988), pp. 53–54; for the bissoppis & his clerkes also appears, misplaced north of the Scillies instead of south-west, on Nowell’s map of Ireland, mid-1560s (n. 31, below).

having been miscopied as m, and the final s having merged with the initial s of sker.

If not merely all the major Pembrokeshire islands have names of Old Norse origin, but also at least one of the Bishops and Clerks, it seems strange that The Smalls, Hats and Barrels all appear to be English names.

Since The Smalls are a group of very ‘small’ islands or rocks, the origin of their name would appear to be self-evident. However, there are good grounds for believing this to be another case of popular etymology at work. It is most unusual to find any place-name consisting of an adjective alone, without a following noun to indicate the nature of the feature concerned. Furthermore, in English place-names, at least, the size-indicating adjectives are nearly always ‘little’ and ‘great’, or the Latin parva and magna, and are only used when two nearby places with the same name need to be distinguished. This is clearly not the case here. ‘Small’, when an element in English place-names, is almost always traceable back to OE smael ‘narrow’.18 The related modern Norwegian, Swedish and Dutch words smal, and the German schmal, all retain the meaning ‘narrow’.

As for the Hats and Barrels, one might well think them names bestowed on account of the sighting of flotsam in their vicinity. If so, the wreck responsible must have occurred in the late 1600s, for that is when some form of both names first appeared. The latter name, for some 40 years after its first appearance, was always spelled without a final s; this is possibly of some significance.

If we look back to the earliest names recorded in runters in the vicinity of The Smalls, Hats and Barrels, we find what are evidently three different names, though their spellings vary significantly.

One name appears as ismael in Italian sailing directions attributed to Alvise Cadamosto and published by Rizo in 1490. It appears once on its own, its position being indicated as 150 miles north-north-east of Sorlenga (the Scilly Isles), once as ismael e astronal, and once as ismael e stronal.19 In Low German sailing directions of the mid-fifteenth century or possibly rather earlier, the name figures as dat eylant van Ysmal, de eylande Hysmal, and de undeypte [‘shoal’] het Hysmal unde

19 Kretschmer [see n.3 above], p. 432/24.
Ostermal unde Gransol (Grasholm). In English sailing directions, also of the mid-fifteenth century or earlier, the same name occurs, as smal of skidwale, kidwall and small, and the smale and Skidwalles. From the contexts in Pierre Garcie’s Le grant routier et Pyllotage there would seem to be no doubt that la malle and la male are also versions of the same name. In the same contexts the name appeared as la Malle in André Thevet’s Le grand insulaire et piloteage (1586).

The second name recorded in sailing directions in the same area before 1500 we have already seen as skidwale, kidwall and Skidwalles, in association with small, smal and smale respectively in the above-mentioned English manuscript. The names astranal and stronal that appear on two occasions in association with ismael in the Italian sailing directions do not look at first glance as though they have any connection with skidwale etc. However, if one bears in mind that the n in both spellings could well be an example of the very frequent confusion between n and m in early manuscripts, and similarly the t in each case an example of the common c and t confusion, the recognition difficulty is considerably lessened. When one looks at the Low German text, one finds Ostermael (referred to almost certainly incorrectly as de huuck van Ostermael ‘the cape of Ostermaal’) associated with dat eylan van Ysmal, and Ostermael placed between de underpye het Hysmal and Gransol [Grasholm]. It looks very much as though the m, r and t in each case are misreadings respectively of w, t and c, all three being very frequent copying errors. In any case the consistent context association would seem to eliminate any doubt regarding the identification of the Italian, English and Low German versions as indicating one and the same feature.

The third name appears only in anonymous early French sailing directions, Le routier de la mer (1502–1510), almost certainly by Pierre Garcie, in Robert Copland’s English translation, The Rutter of the See (1st edn 1528), in Pierre Garcie’s Le grant routier et Pyllotage (1st edn 1520), and in one other collection, The booke of the Sea Carte, or

Rutter, an anonymous sixteenth century work clearly deriving in part from a French source. The fact that no version of this third name appears in either the surviving Italian, Low German, English or Portuguese manuscript sailing directions mentioned above, inevitably suggests that it is of French origin.

In Le routier de la mer the name appears as nasquin gouales, masquin goales and Masquin goales, and in Copland’s translation as Naskingucoles, Maskin geelo and Maskin geols. In Garcie’s Le grant routier, in the same contexts, it appears as nasquin goulales, masquyn goales and Maskyn goales. In The booke of the Sea Carte it figures as Maskyn geoles, Maskyn geols and Maskyn geols. These last sailing directions also give the name Maskyn alone, in a context quite different from any of the others mentioned; there will be cause to comment on this later.

In each of the sets of French, or French-derived sailing directions, the feature is mentioned first along with two islands, Fel, fer, ffer etc. (almost certainly versions of Caldey’s Welsh name, Ynys Byr), and Coloms, coulomp, coulompe, or variants thereof (almost certainly Skokholm), in connection with the moon and tides. The loss of the initial s in the latter name is possibly a ‘correction’ by a copyist or printer under the impression that it was named after St Columba, or perhaps a ‘correction’ by someone who believed it to be a mistake for some spelling of colombe ‘pigeons’. The second mention in each case places the feature 33 leagues north of Cape Cornwall. The third mention locates the feature west-south-west of some version of the name Grassholm.

In Copland’s translation of Le routier de la mer, Maskin goles is stated to be 2 leagues from grasshorne, but that is not stated in the French original or in Garcie’s work. Since all three of these versions state that the yle de Fer etc. and Mylforde etc. are two leagues apart, it

20 Koppmann [see n.2 above], 20/VI/15, 20/VI/22 and 21/VI/27 respectively.
21 Waters, pp. 192/146, 192/163 and 193/195 respectively; and Gardiner, pp. 17, 18, and 20 respectively.
22 Waters, 328/124/G.46.
24 All three works are reprinted in facsimile in Waters; the first is of the sole surviving copy (first edition?), the other two in editions of 1557 and 1521 respectively.
25 The booke of the Sea Carte, called the Rutter, British Library, MS Add. 37024.
26 Waters, 147/20/A.12, 147/21/A.13 and 147/21/A.13 respectively.
27 Waters, 79/31/C.12, 80/32/C.13 and 81/33/C.13 respectively.
28 Waters, 308/104/G.35, 326/122/G.42 and 326/122/G.42 respectively.
29 The booke of the Sea Carte, fol. 25v–26r.
30 Waters, 81/33/C.13.
looks suspiciously as though Copland's eye strayed, and that he applied the two leagues figure to the distance between Maskin geole and grashormes, as well as to that separating Fel (Caldey) from Mylforde.

The first cartographical appearance of any rendering of small seems to be on Laurence Nowell's map of Ireland of the mid-1560s, where one finds Smalle.\(^\text{31}\) An anonymous chart of c. 1508 does show an island named stual just west of gaxol (Grassholm), but this could be some corrupt rendering of some version of the skidwale name such as estotual.\(^\text{32}\) From Waghenae's Spiegbel der Zeevaerdt (1584–5)\(^\text{33}\) onwards some version of Small is common, but fairly early in the seventeenth century, versions began to appear with a final s added, possibly because it was by then known that there was more than one rock there. Thus, in Willem Jansz Blaeu's The Sea Beacon (1645) we find such renderings as I. Smeals, the Smalles and the Smaels.\(^\text{34}\)

An interesting example of the misplacement of names occurred in connection with The Smalls in a number of Dutch sea atlases sometime during the first half of the seventeenth century, and continued in them until at least the end of the century. See, for example, Jan van Keulen's sea atlas (Map 2, p. 93).\(^\text{35}\) Scakum is undoubtedly a version of Skokholm, found elsewhere as Skabum and Skakum (cf. Grassum for Grassholm and Gettum for Gateholm) reflecting popular pronunciation. Kamey, or Camey, as it sometimes appears, is either a version of Ramsey, or more probably of Skomer, originally scaldemey. Neither name, of course, really has anything to do with The Smalls; both were shifted from their proper positions as a result of the mistaken copying of a chart by someone ignorant of their true positions, and were subsequently described in sailing directions as being where the cartographer concerned had placed them. Sailing directions were sometimes partially descriptions of charts, and some

\(^{31}\) Laurence Nowell, [Maps of the British Isles], British Library, MS Cotton Domitian A.xviii, fol. 97r.

\(^{32}\) Anonymous chart, British Library, MS Egerton 2803, fol. 6v.

\(^{33}\) L. J. Waghenae, Spiegbel der Zeevaerdt (Leyden, 1584–85; facsimile reprint, Amsterdam, 1964), chart [1].

\(^{34}\) W. J. Blaeu, The Sea Beacon (Amsterdam, 1643; facsimile reprint, Amsterdam, 1973), chart 74 and pp. 57 and 63 of the Third Part.

\(^{35}\) J. van Keulen, De Nieuwe Groote Lichtende Zee-Fakkel (1716–53; facsimile reprint, Amsterdam, 1969), II, chart 15.

charts were composed from descriptions in sailing directions. Thus, in the text of Blaeu's The Sea Beacon one reads:

Southeast and by south about ten leagues from the Tuskar [a rock off the south-east coast of Ireland], by two little llands close one by another, about foure leagues from Grassholme, called the Smalls . . . the northermost is called Skakum, and the southermost is called Camey.\(^\text{36}\)

By about 1700 the name Smalls had become fairly firmly established in that spelling, sometimes preceded by the definite article. Its origin will be examined later.

The earliest chart I have been able to examine with any inscription somewhere in the vicinity of The Smalls is by the Genoese cartographer, Petrus (Pietro) Vesconte.\(^\text{37}\) Dated c. 1325, it has the name dala against an island west of a promonory evidently intended to be St David's Head, which is identified as cauo de la dala; it has milfor and lenbich (Tenby) immediately east of it. The name dala is misplaced, for it really refers to the little harbour of Dale, just inside Milford Haven. Vesconte's outline of the Bristol Channel and Wales is a vast improvement on that given on another of his charts dated 1318, where the Bristol Channel does not exist, and what presumably is meant to be St David's Head is named costa | bristo; north-east of it is cep'to (Chepstow).\(^\text{38}\) Evidently the two names were known, but not the shape of the coast. One may presume that the improvement on the later chart indicates Vesconte's acquisition of more accurate information from one or more Genoese vessels going to Bristol at that time. The earliest actual mention that I have found of a Genoese ship in the area dates from 1383, when 'certain of the king's subjects of Tenby' are stated to 'have seized a great ship of Genoa laden with two barrels of gold plate and other merchandise'.\(^\text{39}\)

Early Portuguese sailing directions mention Dale (a dala), but seem correctly to identify it as a port; they also mention Milford Haven (mita forda). The only islands they mention in the vicinity, besides caldey, are as ilhas de saltey (the Saltee Islands off Ireland's south-east

\(^{36}\) Blaeu, p. 63 of the Third Part.

\(^{37}\) Petrus Vesconte, [Chart of the NE Atlantic], British Library, MS Add. 27376, fols 180v–181r.

\(^{38}\) Vesconte, [Chart of the NE Atlantic], Vienna, Österreichische Nationalbibliothek, Codex 594, fols 9'–10.

coast), *grexol* (Grassholm), and *as llyas de Romtasey que sam em gualez* (‘the Islands of Ramsey which are in Wales’).  

The earliest known surviving charts that I have seen which contain names sufficiently legible for us to be sure that they identify a feature in the immediate vicinity of The Smalls are fourteenth-century Italian ones. One finds, for example, *estotual* (Niccolo de Pasqualini, 1408), *schitual* (Mecia de Viladestes, 1413), *esstual* (Petrus Roselli, 1456) (Map 3, p. 94), *schitual* (Grazioso Benincasa, 1467), and *stual* (anon., c. 1508), while a miscellaneous collection of charts in the British Library includes *asstotual, estotual, esstual* and *stotual*. All these forms would seem to be variants of the *astronal* and *stronal* which we saw in connection with *ismael* in the Italian sailing directions, and of the *Oestermal* and *Ostermal* associated with the Low German *Ysmal* and *Hsmal*. They are also obviously related to *skidlwal* and *Skidwballes* in the English sailing directions. This name was still surviving as *Skidwally* on charts of 1651 and 1666 by Nicholas Comberford, and as *Skitwill* on a chart of 1665 by John Burston. It appeared as *‘Skittle bottom, Low | Water’ between ‘Hatts and Barrels | Low Water and Gresholm.I. | Dry*, on a chart of 1748 by Lewis Morris (Map 4, p. 95). Samuel Lewis, in his *Topographical Dictionary of Wales* (1844), has the following very relevant passage:  

---

40 Rebello [see note 5, above], p. 96.  
41 N. de Pasqualini, Vienna, Österreichische Nationalbibliothek, Codex 410, fol. 12.  
43 P. Roselli, Chicago, Newberry Library, Ayer MS, map #3.  
44 G. Benincasa, British Library, MS Add. 11547, chart 4; partially reproduced in Richardson, ‘Lyonese and The Wolf’ (see n. 7), Fig. 3 (p. 20).  
45 See note 32, above.  
46 British Library, MS Egerton 73.  
47 N. Comberford, Greenwich, National Maritime Museum, G.213/3/1 MS (1651) and G.215/1/3 MS (1666).  

---

Between this island [Grassholm] and the ‘Smalls’ but nearer the latter, is a ledge of rocks, about a mile long, which are visible at low water, and are named the ‘Hats and Barrels’; and about a league from Grassholm, nearly in the same direction, are others, called ‘Skittle’ or ‘Kettle bottom’.  

No version of this name exists on modern charts. However, *Skitwell, Skittle, Kettle, Kettle*, etc. are all evidently derived from the same source as *estotual, schitual* etc., but what was it?  

George Owen, in c. 1600, provided a possible clue. He stated that *lly wmenol* was the Welsh name for The Smalls, and his editor, Henry Owen, made the obvious suggestion that *Smale* indicated a ‘small’ rock. Henry Owen also suggested that *lly* was perhaps a corruption of *llyw* ‘a rudder’, or *‘an eel’s tail*, or *llan ‘shape*, and stated correctly that *gwenol* meant either a ‘swallow’ or a ‘shuttle’. Lewis Morris also made a potentially relevant observation: ‘The main Rock of the Smalls appears, at a Distance like the hull of a large Ship overset’. By no stretch of the imagination could any of the Smalls look like a swallow, and they seem an unlikely place to be visited by migrating swallows. ‘Shuttle’ is a different matter. One type of shuttle used by weavers is called a ‘boat shuttle’ because of its shape, and in several European languages the word for ‘shuttle’ is derived from words meaning ‘ship’. Thus there is German *Weberschiff* (literally ‘weaver’s ship’), Italian *navetta*, Portuguese *naveta* and French *navette*. Samuel Purchas, writing in 1614, observed in one place that ‘The Fishers Boats are made like a Weavers Shuttle’.  

The ON word *skutil*, derived from a verb cognate with English ‘to shoot’, meant a ‘harpoon’, and doubtless also a ‘shuttle’, the modern Norwegian word for which is *skettle* (cf. OE *scytel*). Some of the  

---

50 S. Lewis, *A Topographical Dictionary of Wales*, 2 vols (London, 1844), I, 384. His material on this area was culled mainly from Lewis Morris, and from Nicholas Carlisle’s privately printed *A Topographical Dictionary of the Dominion of Wales* (London, 1811); in the latter see the entry under ‘GRESHOLM, ISLAND’, where ‘Skittle or Kettle Bottom’ and ‘The Mascus’ (see p. 87, below) are both mentioned.  
52 Morris, *Plans of Harbours* [see n. 12, above], p. 16.  
53 S. Purchas, quoted under *shuttle* in the OED.  

---
apparent ancestors of Skittle etc., such as esotual, seem to show the very common confusion between s and t, and also the acquisition of an initial e, a prefix sometimes added by Italians to words which would otherwise begin with s + consonant (cf. modern Spanish escuela ‘school’ and estado ‘state’).

It therefore looks as though Norsemen bestowed the name skutill upon the Smalls, because the largest one, in profile, resembled a ‘shuttle’, and that the Welsh merely translated it as gwenol. The well-attested presence of Norsemen off the coast of south-west Wales received physical confirmation in 1992, in the immediate vicinity of The Smalls, through the discovery by divers there of the lower guard of a Viking sword.55

Professor Gwynedd Pierce kindly drew my attention to another possible explanation of wennol. The Welsh adjective ewynnol, from the noun ewyn ‘foam, spume, froth’, appears in the original Welsh name of the famous Swanoll Falls near Betws y Coed, namely (Y) Rheadr Ewynnol ‘the foamy waterfall’. In usage this became transformed into Rhêadryn y wennol, the last word meaning ‘swallow’ (the bird). Pierce points out that the meaning ‘foamy’ accords well with the meaning of maesgwyn ‘white field’ (cf. English ‘white water’), and with Breton maez gwenn, the suggested source of masquin (see p. 86, below). So it does, but I still tend to favour wennol as ‘shuttle’. The fact that ON skutill probably meant ‘shuttle’ (and the modern Norwegian skytte) certainly does) would otherwise seem a very remarkable coincidence.

If skutill was the Old Norse name for The Smalls, where did the present name come from? George Owen wrote:

There are alsoe twoe little rocks called Skytwel [Skutwell in another manuscript] and Smale out in the sea iii leagues from the havons [Milford Haven’s] Mowth lyeing west and by North of Anne Head, which are great dangers. Skytwel is lockt at half flud, but Smale is allwais above water.56

It is clear that by George Owen’s time the descendants of skutill were no longer applied to The Smalls, and if we examine the positioning of those descendants on charts, it seems as though they

56 Owen, Description of Pembrokeshire, II, 554.

were progressively displaced by an ancestor of ‘Small(s)’, first to the position of the Hats and Barrels, later still to a location between the latter and Grassholm, eventually to disappear altogether.

If, as I suggested earlier, The Smalls were almost certainly not so named on account of their size, what was the original name and why was it bestowed? We saw earlier that the name as recorded in the Italian sailing directions was ismael, while the Low German ones appeared as Ysmal or Hysmal. The letter h, either at the beginning of a word, or internally, was often a mere scribal quirk, with no phonetic implication. There are quite a few cases on early manuscript maps and charts where names which really began with an i, y or j (which to a great extent were interchangeable) had that letter removed by a copyist, under the impression that it was an abbreviation for the word isola, isla, isle (modern French ile), ilba or island. (I have not encountered a single case where an abbreviation i has been prefixed to a name.) Quite a number of names beginning with an s underwent a similar loss, as it was taken to be an abbreviation for santo (a), san, sao, sain, saint (e), etc. This resulted in the creation of a number of non-existent saints; compare the name of St Kilda, from Old Norse skildir ‘shields’.

A significant number of places in Brittany, Cornwall and Wales have been named after early Celtic saints of whom little or nothing is known. We have already noted the names of St David and St Tyfanog applied to Ramsey, and St Pyr applied to Caldey. Bardsey Island, off the Llyn Peninsula, is associated with St Cadfan, St Tudwal’s Island obviously with that saint, and Priestholm or Puffin Island, off the north-east tip of Anglesey, is associated with St Seiriol. Dr F. G. Cowley observed that ‘The islands on the Welsh seaboard offered a particularly attractive refuge for the monks and hermits of the Age of Saints, and Caldey was as well placed as Priestholm, Bardsey, Ramsey and Barry to provide such a refuge’.57

There are in south-west Wales no less than eight churches dedicated to St Ishmael. He was a mid-sixth-century Welsh saint. His father was a Breton chieftain named Bodic, who landed in Dyfed and married Arianwedd, St Teilo’s sister. Through the influence of St Teilo he became attached to St David, by whom he is said to have been

58 Quoted in Howells, Caldey, p. 19.
consecrated suffragan bishop of Menevia. St Ishmael’s church, a little way out of the village of that name between Dale and Milford Haven, was founded by him. An early version of the village’s name was *Llarismael* (‘Ishmael’s Church’). The saint’s reputation was such that other churches, at Lambston, Camrose, Rosemarket, Uzmainston, Boulston, Haroldston St Issels, and St Ishmael near Kidwelly were also dedicated to him.

Particularly dangerous navigational hazards, such as rocks, have frequently been named after persons or ships wrecked on them. There are no extant records to suggest that St Ishmael was shipwrecked on The Smalls, though he may have been. However, as mentioned by Dr Cowley, a number of saintly men certainly did spend periods of retreat on offshore islands. The size, and bare, rocky, exposed nature of The Smalls must surely invalidate any suggestion that St Ishmael can have spent any time on them. There is, however, another possibility. As we have seen in the cases of *dala*, *Skakum*, *Kamey* and *skutill*, names, especially on small scale maps and charts, could very easily become transferred from the place they originally identified to another one nearby, by copyists who had no personal knowledge of the areas concerned.

The nearest island to The Smalls that could have served as a retreat for an ascetic hermit is, of course, Grassholm. The earliest recorded mention of a Welsh name for Grassholm occurs in the Mabinogion (twelfth century?), where it appears as *Gwales* or *Gwelas* ‘ym penuro’ (*Gwales* or *Gwelas* ‘in Penbro’ [Pembrokeshire]). The meaning of that name is variously given as ‘refuge’, ‘retreat’, ‘shelter’; ‘lair’; or ‘sanctuary’. In view of the strong currents around Grassholm, a name with such a meaning can hardly have been bestowed upon it by anyone with the intention of recommending its suitability as a shelter for shipping, and the concept of island bird sanctuaries lay several hundred years in the future. Could there be another logical explanation for naming Grassholm as *Gwales*? Could it possibly have been known to the Welsh, from St Ishmael’s time, before the Vikings’ arrival, as *Gwales Ismael*, meaning ‘St Ishmael’s sanctuary’, indicating that he, a venerated local saint, had spent some time on it as a hermit? As mentioned above, an initial i was not infrequently removed from place-names by cartographers, under the impression that it was an abbreviation for ‘island’, etc. Early non-Welsh mariners, unacquainted with St Ishmael, could have done the same thing, thus causing *smel* eventually to be transferred from *Gwales* (Grassholm), and become attached to the nearby ‘small’ rocks to the west of it. There appears to be no evidence that this actually occurred, and the absence of any mention in the Mabinogion of St Ishmael having been associated with Gwales would tend to discredit the idea. On the other hand, it would provide a logical explanation for the rather strange Welsh name *Gwales*, which is otherwise rather difficult to account for. Be that as it may, some version of *Gwales* survived, in forms such as *Wallis*, *Walleis Ilande*, *Wallys Iland* and even *Walleyes*, until at least the early seventeenth century, though the Old Norse name *Grasholmr* eventually overcame its Welsh rival.

If it were not for the above mention of *Gwales* being the old Welsh name for Grassholm, the second element in the third name under consideration, *masquin goales* etc., might well have been thought to indicate an island off the coast of Wales. After all, *Gailei* is the name for Wales in the Romance languages, and we saw in the early Portuguese sailing directions, *gualez* for Wales, with a phonetically quite unnecessary *u* in it.

The location indicated for *masquin goales* etc., and the fact that *Gwaler* was the Welsh name for Grassholm, must inevitably mean that it was applied to some feature in the vicinity of The Smalls, Hats and Barrels. The presence of the name only in French sailing directions, or in those derived at least partially from them, could suggest that the word is a French one. However, the word *masquin* seems to have appeared in French only on a very rare, possibly unique occasion, when by chance the word *damasquin* (‘damascene’) was misspelled as *de masquin*, hardly a name likely to have been applied by French

---

62 Charles, *Non-Celtic Place-Names*, p. 89. Note also Owen, *Description of Pembrokeshire*, I, 112: ‘fiare of in the sea standeth the Iland Gresbolme so called of M’Saxton, but of the neighbours Walleyes. a small Iland viij miles from the maine, and for the Remonotes thereof, and small proffettes yt yeldeth, is seldome frequented’. 
mariners to a group of rocks.\textsuperscript{63}

The earliest cartographic appearance of \textit{masquin} that I have found is on a chart included in Guillaume Brouscon's \textit{Manuel de pilotage à l'usage des marins bretons} (1548) (Map 5, p. 96).\textsuperscript{64} It also figures on Pierre Desceliers' world map of 1550.\textsuperscript{65} The designation of Brouscon's work as being specifically for Breton mariners suggests that the word could well be Breton.

Breton \textit{langoustiers}, until the introduction of the twelve-mile limit put an end to the practice, used to come to the coast of Pembrokeshire every year, towards the end of January, to catch crayfish and lobsters in the vicinity of The Smalls, Hats and Barrels where the tides run very swiftly. They had been doing this for as long as anyone can remember, and probably for well over a century.\textsuperscript{66} Roparz Hemon's Breton dictionary gives the meaning of \textit{maez} as 'campagne; grand champ; large (terme nautique)' ['open country; large field; open sea (nautical term)'], and \textit{gwest} as 'blanc' ['white'].\textsuperscript{67} The name \textit{masquin} is therefore almost undoubtedly a version of Breton \textit{maez gwest}; \textit{g} and \textit{g} are readily confusable in manuscripts. The meaning 'white field' or 'white open sea' is a peculiarly apt description of the large stretch of 'white water' in the vicinity of The Smalls, Hats and Barrels in winter, on the very edge of the main channel to and from Milford Haven. The Welsh words \textit{maes} and \textit{gwest} quite often appear in place-names, sometimes as \textit{maesgwyn}. However, in view of the appearance of \textit{masquin} only in French sources, and since the Welsh already had (\textit{Gwennol} and almost certainly \textit{Ismael} as well to indicate The Smalls, it seems almost certain that \textit{masquin} is Breton, rather than Welsh.

\textsuperscript{63} R. Cotgrave, \textit{A Dictionarie of the French and English Tongues} (London, 1611; facsimile reprint, Columbia, S. Carolina, 1950).

\textsuperscript{64} G. Brouscon, \textit{Manuel à l'usage des marins bretons} (1548), Paris, Bibliothèque Nationale, MS français 25374, fol. 4; reproduced in full in black and white in Waters, opposite p. 45, and in colour in Michel Mollat du Jourdin and Monique de la Roncière, \textit{Sea Charts of the Early Explorers} (New York, 1984), pl. 43.

\textsuperscript{65} Pierre Desceliers, [Mappemonde], British Library, MS Add. 24065; reproduced in \textit{Autotype Facsimiles of Three Mappemondes}, edited by C. H. Coote (Aberdeen, 1898).

\textsuperscript{66} R. Howells, \textit{The Sounds Between} (Llandysul, 1968), pp. 168-70.


I have only found one version of the dual name \textit{masquin goalies} etc. on a chart, one of c. 1575 by the Portuguese cartographer Bartolomeu Lasso, where it appears as \textit{masquigales}, or perhaps \textit{masqui gaules};\textsuperscript{68} it was presumably copied from a French source.

Sometime during the first half of the seventeenth century yet another name, \textit{Mascus}, appeared for the first time, north-west of St David's Head. It is represented on Dutch charts as one large rock, surrounded by a number of smaller ones (see Map 2, p. 93).\textsuperscript{69} It is described in several sea atlases; for example, the relevant text in W. J. Blaeu's \textit{The Sea Beacon} (1643), reads: 'About five leagues northwest or somewhat northerly from Ramsey, lieth a great rock called \textit{Mascus}, which is all round fowle, with many sunken rocks.'\textsuperscript{70} Despite such warnings, Capt. Greenville Collins, in 1693, wrote of it: 'The \textit{Mascus} is said to be a sunk Rock . . . but I never could hear of any coaster or other that ever found it.'\textsuperscript{71} Others echoed his observation. Despite this, Lewis Morris's chart of 1748 (Map 4, p. 95) recorded it as \textit{Mascus Low Water Spring}, and it still figured with different wording on William Morris's updated version of it dated 1800.\textsuperscript{72} Since it seems never to have existed, how did it get onto charts and into sailing directions?

I mentioned earlier that in \textit{The booke of the Sea Carte called the Rutter} the name \textit{Masquin} had appeared in one context that did not occur in any of the other routiers in which the name figured. The passage concerned reads: 'from Sainte Daudy's head to Maskyn west an be north'.\textsuperscript{73} This misplacement of \textit{Maskyn} (unrecognised as identifying The Smalls) west and by north of St David's Head, when west and south is nearer the mark, is typical of scribal carelessness regarding compass directions. This text, or something like it, is almost certainly responsible for the appearance of \textit{Mascus}; it only needed some additional miscopying of some variant spelling of \textit{Masquin}, perhaps by


\textsuperscript{69} See note 35, above.

\textsuperscript{70} Blaeu, p. 57.


\textsuperscript{72} See note 49; for William Morris's 'Chart of St George's Channel' see British Library, \textit{King's Maritime III}, chart 35.

\textsuperscript{73} \textit{The booke of the Sea Carte} [see note 25, above], fol. 26v.
one or more copyists, to complete the process in the text of a tablet. Once a series of such errors had occurred in sailing directions, it only needed a cartographer to give graphic expression to it for it to become established ‘fact’.

The first appearance of any version of Hats and Barrels that I have so far encountered is on Greenville Collins’s charts (1693). He gives both Hatts and Hats, Barrett and Barrel. His spelling of The Smalls also varies, including Small, Smalls, Small’s and Smal’s.\(^{74}\) It is noticeable that he never gives Barrell(1) with a final s, and there does not appear to be any version of the Skittle variety. As we have seen, some version of the latter name had occurred on charts and in sailing directions from at least as early as c. 1400, and must have had an oral existence since the presence of the Norsemen in the ninth or tenth centuries. It was still present on charts by Comberford and Burston in the mid- to late seventeenth century. With so many centuries of existence, one wonders why it should have more or less completely disappeared from charts as from c. 1693. Moreover, where did Collins get hold of Hat(t)s and Barrell(1) from?\(^{75}\)

There were some rocks called the Barrels in some spelling or other off the south-east coast of Ireland from at least as early as Laurence Nowell’s map of Ireland of the 1560s.\(^{76}\) Presumably they could have been mistakenly transferred across St George’s Channel, but that does not account for Hat(t)s. The sighting of wreck debris could have accounted for the replacement of the Skittle-type name, or perhaps Hat(t)s and Barrell(1) may have been the result of some mariner’s imaginative concept of the shape of the semi-submerged rocks.

There is, however, another explanation which might account both for the sudden appearance of both those names, and for the sudden, apparently simultaneous disappearance of Skittle from charts. It is only a hypothesis, and one for which I have been unable to find any trace of evidence. Nevertheless it is perhaps worth mentioning. Until Greenville Collins’s sea atlas of 1693, English mariners had relied very heavily on Dutch ones. Quite a few place-names on Dutch charts are preceded by the Dutch definite article, de, den or het; thus, for example, De Bisschop met zijn Klerken, Den Haag (The Hague) and Het Sieven Steen (‘The Seven Stones’ off Cape Cornwall). It seems possible that Collins, or one of his immediate predecessors, or a contemporary, may have seen some spelling of the Skittle variety, perhaps sketel, (we have already seen Samuel Lewis record Sketle), preceded by Het. Het sketel, or rather Hetskettel, could easily result in a false division of the ‘word’ as Hets ketel. Such erroneous amalgamations and divisions are remarkably frequent. It so happens that one of the old meanings of the Dutch word ketel was a ‘water barrel’,\(^{77}\) so that Barrell(l) could be a translation of a misdivided Hetskettel. I must, however, admit that Henry Hexham’s dictionary of the 1670s does not include that meaning.\(^{78}\) An alternative hypothesis is that the suggested word ketel or Kettel, in manuscript, at least, could have been misread as ‘barrel’ or ‘Barrel’. In either case, the ‘word’ Hets could easily have been believed a misprint, or mistranscription of ‘Hats’. The appearance of Barrell(l) in the singular consistently for some forty years could be significant here; it is quite possible that its acquisition of a final s was merely due to the influence of the nearby Hats and Smalls, both in the plural. I should make one further admission. I have been unable to find any printed Dutch sea atlas which shows any trace of a skittle-type inscription. All those I have examined, right up to the end of the seventeenth century, slavishly copied the misplacement of the Skakum and Kamey inscriptions to indicate falsely two of The Smalls. I have not been able to check on any relevant Dutch manuscript charts of the period concerned.

Whatever the real origin of Hats and Barrels, their firm establishment on charts is almost certainly due to their appearance in Collins’s sea atlas, Great Britain’s Coasting Pilot (1693), for it was reprinted no less than three times, in 1723, 1738 and 1744, before Lewis Morris, on his chart of the coast of Wales, of 1748, recorded Skittle bottom (seemingly the last appearance of a Skittle-type inscription on a chart), as well as including Hatts & Barrels (Map 4).

None of the above discussion provides any explanation for Jean Alfonse’s rock called Marie spirituelle, which is where we started off. It could, of course, be a name quite unrelated to any we have looked at. It could just conceivably be a very badly misplaced reference to St

\[^{75}\] Nowell [see note 31, above], fol. 97r.
\[^{77}\] H. Hexham, A Copious English and Netherdutch Dictionary, 2 vols (Rotterdam, 1672-75).
Mary's in the Scilly Isles, though I very much doubt it, and in any case, why the word spirituelle?

A perfectly feasible explanation is available. Charts by the late sixteenth-century Portuguese cartographer Fernão Vaz Dourado name a feature as mt' roughly in the vicinity of where the Smalls, Hats and Barrels are. This may well have also appeared on earlier charts by other Portuguese cartographers, though I have not found one. Such an inscription, for a Portuguese of the period, would undoubtedly have been taken to be an abbreviation of Maria, or rather maria, for capital letters appeared very seldom and very erratically in early manuscript sailing directions. For a Portuguese working in France, as Jean Alfonse (João Afonso) was, a Breton place-name off the Welsh coast would almost certainly have seemed nonsensical. There has been an understandable tendency amongst mariners, when faced with foreign names, to attempt some approximate pronunciation of what they hear, or think they hear. Unfamiliar sounds produced very strange results. If a name, pronounced or written, struck them as being even remotely like a word in their own language, they were liable to substitute that word for the foreign one. Cartographers and the compilers of sailing directions would also 'edit' names in a similar way. Examples abound. The Spanish port of la Coruña (now Anglicised as Coruna), possibly originally from Latin columna, owing to the ancient Roman lighthouse there, was rendered Granha by the Portuguese, la Corogne by the French, and the Groyne by the English. Spaniards, because of the perceived sound and/or spelling similarity, turned the cape named Hooom by the Dutch into Cabo de Hornos (literally 'Cape of Ovens'), a singularly inappropriate name. The Vietnamese headland near Vungtau was called cinco chagas (the 'five wounds' of Christ) by the Portuguese, because of its appearance as five islands from the distance. This name underwent an astonishing transformation. Possibly via such a spelling as singuo chagas, it was transformed by the Dutch into the Hoek van Singuees Jaques, or some variant thereof. In due course, the French turned this into Cap St Jacques, which English speakers then translated into Cape St James.

With those examples in mind, it does not, perhaps, seem too far-fetched to suggest that Jean Alfonse, or some other cartographer, could easily have taken the initial ma of some spelling such as masquingualles to be an abbreviation for maria or marie. From that assumption it would have been a relatively short step to assume that the remainder of the 'word' squingualles was a careless misrendering of spirituelle, an appropriately religious-looking word, even though its precise meaning might be difficult to explain.

It is one of the fascinations and frustrations of place-name study that it is by no means always possible to establish the origin and meaning of the name of a given feature with a 100% degree of certainty, especially if one vital link in a chain of evidence cannot be found. It may be, however, that a sufficiently strong case has been made out to justify tracing the ancestry of The Smalls back to the sixteenth century St Ishmael (ismael), and Skittle etc., and just possibly Hats and Barrels, to the ninth century ON skutill. The readily-identifiable descendants of the Old Norse name for The Smalls lost out to their rivals, the descendants of ismael, and were transferred eastwards by degrees until the last survivor eventually vanished altogether, except in the memories of very old fishermen who remember Skittle Bottom as the name of a good fishing ground, though they are unsure of its location. The late fifteenth- or early sixteenth-century masquin, in association with gualles etc. (i.e. Guales or Grassholm), seems to have had a comparatively short life span, unless later examples can be found. It clearly suggests that Breton and/or French ships were acquainted with the area at that time on their way to and from Milford Haven. In view of the extremely dangerous nature of the area of The Smalls, Hats and Barrels, with its very strong currents and extensive overfalls, it seems somewhat unlikely that Breton langoustiers would have worked there until vessels with reliable engines became available. However, one never knows. After all, the Grand Banks off Newfoundland were fished for centuries by sailing vessels. Divers may yet find the remains of an identifiable Breton fishing vessel wrecked off The Smalls some five hundred years ago.

79 Reproduced in Cortesão and Teixeira da Mota, Portugaliae Monumenta Cartographica, III, pls 243, 263, 318, 319, 332 and 333.
Map 1. The approaches to Milford Haven (courtesy of Jens Smith, Flinders University).
Map 2. Part of Jan van Keulen's chart covering south-west Wales. Note Skakum (Skokholm) and Kamey (Skalme = Skomer) falsely shown as two of I. Smals (The Smalls), Aatts (for Hatts), Barrell, and Mascus north-west of St David's Head. Skokholm and Skomer also appear as I. Skoholme and Scalina respectively.
Map 3. Part of a chart of the North Atlantic by Petrus Roselli (1456). (Courtesy of the Newberry Library, Chicago). Note (in the centre of the chart) the identification of the islands as 'Norse skutill').
4. Part of Lewis Morris’s chart of the coast of Wales, 1748. (Reproduced by courtesy of the British Library). Note the appearance of Hatts & Barrels, Skittle bottom, Low Water, and the mysterious Mascus Low water Spring, west of the Bishop and Clarks’ Dry.
Map 5. Part of the British Isles on a chart included in Guillaume Brouscon's *Manuel de pilotage à l'usage des marins bretons* (1548). (Reproduced by permission of the Bibliothèque Nationale, Paris).
Note (upper centre) The Smalls identified as *masquin*. 
6. The Smalls (courtesy of Flight Lecturers Group)