
A valuable, though seldom exploited, source of place-name research material is that provided by early manuscript and printed maps and charts, and sailing directions or rutters. Most, if not all, of the earliest maps and charts which include reasonably detailed outlines of the southern coasts of the British Isles are by Italian, Catalan, Majorcan, French and Portuguese cartographers, whilst most of the earliest surviving rutters are also of southern European origin.

Before dealing with the specific case of the five different names which have been attached to what is now called Wolf Rock, off Land's End, it is worth making some observations regarding the composition of early charts and sailing directions. In the last decade of the 20th century the word chart conjures up images of such accurate portrayals of coastlines and oceans as are produced by the British Admiralty. The earliest charts were inevitably manuscript compilations made up of primitive sketch charts originally made by individual mariners for their own use. The compilations were selectively copied, with varying degrees of accuracy, and often, doubtless, additional information was later incorporated from a number of written and oral sources. The compilers had to rely upon the correctness of the information they acquired, since early European cartographers seldom had any means of checking up on their sources, except, perhaps, in the case of well frequented routes such as those in the Black Sea and the Mediterranean which had been navigated for centuries.

Early sailing directions, which mariners relied upon far more than on charts, started out as manuscript notes jotted down by practising pilots and ships' captains for their own use; their own experience was supplemented by any information they could glean from other mariners or local inhabitants.1 Place-names obtained by

*Grateful acknowledgement is made to the Australian Research Council, the National Library of Australia, the American Geographical Society and Mr O.J. Padel for assistance in the preparation of this article.
word of mouth, especially from foreigners, could appear in the most
peculiar written forms; but so also could names in a
mariner's native tongue, at a time when no European language had a
standardised spelling. In due course, frequently ill-assorted collections of
such notes got into the hands of professional copyists who often had
little or no knowledge of the material they were copying. The
results were then further copied, perhaps several times, on each
occasion acquiring a goodly complement of additional errors.
Numerals, compass directions and place-names could all be altered.
After successive copying a text could become unintelligible in
places and individual words quite unrecognisable. Words, even
whole lines of text, could be omitted or misplaced by careless and
ignorant copyists for whom pecuniary considerations took precedence
over accuracy.

Eventually the demand for sailing directions outran the
supply available from professional scribes. To judge from the
earliest printed runters, Italian in the latter part of the 15th
century, mainly French and English during the first three decades
of the 16th, their standards were a significant improvement on
those of most manuscript ones, but printers', editors' and translators'
errors still occurred. The lack of standard spelling presented
serious problems, the same word not infrequently appearing in
a variety of versions on the same page, even on the same line.
Moreover, of course, typesetters had to work from manuscript
originais, at least in first editions, and these were doubtless of very
varying reliability and legibility. Proof reading, if any, must have
been very cursory.

An anonymous set of French sailing directions, Le routier de
la mer, probably compiled in the 1480s by Pierre Garcie, was
published in Rouen between 1502 and 1510. It was translated by
Robert Copland and first published in English in 1528 as The Rutter
of the See. In his introduction Copland tells how 'an ingenuous and
circumspecyte mariner of the Citye of London' had acquired a copy
of the original in Bourdewes [Bordeaux] and showed it to him.
Copland then goes on to explain that this 'booke he instanted me
to translate into English, which ouersene, me thought veray diffyculte
to me, not knowinge the terms of mariners, and names of the
costes and hauens, for I neuer came on the see, nor by no cost
thereof. He nevertheless undertooke the task 'bye [i.e. with] the
aduise, and oversighte of certaine comming men of that scyence
whiche ... informed me in many doubtes. .'.

Bearing the above in mind, let us examine the case of Wolf
Rock. Versions of three other names are applied to it on a map
entitled Anglia regnum in Gerard Mercator's posthumous atlas of
1595 (Fig. 1). The inscription reads: 'Lethowse, alijis The Gulfe,
id est vorago, que tantum recedente estu nudata appareat, olim Lissia'
('Lethowse, by others known as The Gulfe, that is, a whirlpool,
when the tide is low appears naked; formerly Lissia').

Lethowse does not seem to figure on any chart or on any
map prior to those in Mercator's 1595 atlas, and it appears on
relatively few later ones which, in that regard at least, probably all
derive from Mercator. Moreover there appears to be no mention
of the name in any sailing directions. Since it is one of the
cardinal rules of place-name study that one should try to find as
many early examples of a given inscription as possible, the fact that
I could find none earlier than 1595, and in no other spelling,
presented a considerable problem.

The word Lethowsow looks as though it could be a Cornish
word in the plural, -ow being a common Cornish plural ending, as
-au is in Breton and modern Welsh. However, no Cornish
dictionary or glossary, and neither of the two modern works on
Cornish place-names by O.J. Padel provides any real clue as to its
possible meaning. I am therefore very much indebted to Mr Padel
for, amongst other things, having drawn my attention to a passage
in Richard Carew's The Survey of Cornwall (1602), which provided
some valuable clues. Part of his description of Cornwall reads thus:
'Lastly, the encroaching sea hath ravened from it the whole
country of Lyonsse, together with divers other parcels of no little circuit,
and that such a Lyonsse there was these proofs are yet remaining.
The space between the Land's End and the Isles of Scilly, being
about thirty miles, to this day retaineth the name, in Cornish
Lethowsow, and carrieth continually an equal depth of forty or
sixty fathom (a thing not usual in the sea's proper dominion) save
that about midway there lieth a rock which at low water discovereth
its head. They term it the Gulf, suitting thereby the other name of Scilla.
Fishermen also casting their hooks thereabouts have drawn up pieces of doors and windows.'

Lyonesse is, of course, the fabled land of Arthurian legend,
and Carew, who was a Cornishman, is retailing the tradition of its
location between Land's End and the Scillies. In addition, he
endeavours to prove the truth of that tradition by providing three items of what he considers supporting evidence: the nature of the seabed in that area, the items recovered from it by fishermen, and the apparent claim that Lethowsow is the Cornish for Lyonesse.

The traditional location of Lyonesse is probably to be accounted for by the fusion of two elements, Arthurian legend and a folk memory of real flooding of some of the Scilly Isles in the distant past. There is no reason to doubt Carew's statement that Lyonesse and Lethowsow both indicated the same area, but the original meaning of both names appears to have different geographical associations, as will be seen from what follows.

Wales, Cornwall and Brittany are intimately connected in Arthurian legend, and M. Bernard Tanguy convincingly maintains that Lyonesse is an Anglicised version of the French Léonaïs, also known as Léon, the old name of part of what is now the département of Finistère in Brittany. The adjectival form of the name after a feminine noun, as in la terre lêonaïse, would be quite a close phonetic approximation to Lyonesse for English speakers, and 'the land of Lyonesse' a perfectly natural translation of it. The names by which its inhabitants were known, Léonaïs or Léonaïrs, are still used today to identify the inhabitants of the small Breton port of St Pol-de-Léon on the English Channel coast.

The Old Breton name for Brittany was Letau, which bears a significant resemblance, both in spelling and pronunciation to the first two syllables of Lethowsow. The old and modern Welsh equivalent, Llydaw, is attached to a small, rather grim lake at the foot of Snowdon. Llyn Llydaw ('Lake Brittany') is undoubtedly so named because of its location in the immediate vicinity of Bwlch-y-Saethau ('the Pass of Arrows') where, according to Welsh tradition, King Arthur was killed.

If one assumes that all the above statements are correct, and one summarises them in a logical order, one finds as follows: Lethowsow is the Arthurian land of Lyonesse, which is actually Léonaïs; Léonaïs was the French name for part of Brittany, and Brittany in Old Breton was Letau; Llydaw, its Welsh equivalent, is connected with King Arthur, and he with Lyonesse and Lethowsow. This series of interrelated factors would seem to lead inevitably to the conclusion that the first two syllables of Lethowsow must be the Cornish equivalent of Old Breton Letau.

Of course the letter h and the final syllable are yet to be accounted for, but before endeavouring to do so it is worth looking into the question of how, and from where, Mercator acquired the name Lethowsow by 1595, since Carew's Survey was not published until 1602. It is clear from the dedication of Carew's work to Sir Walter Ralegh that he had started it a long time before. Carew was a lawyer, a Justice of the Peace and a member of the Society of Antiquaries; he was an exact contemporary of William Camden at Christ Church, Oxford. In the first edition of Camden's Britannia (1586), the author states, at the end of his section on Cornwall, that Richard Carew was 'writing a full description of this county', so by that date the Survey had either been started or was contemplated. In the 1594 edition of Britannia, the year before Mercator's atlas was published, Camden expressed himself indebted to Carew for his assistance, so presumably some time earlier Camden had received one of the manuscript copies of the Survey which Carew distributed among his close friends and relations. The relevant passage of Camden's Britannia, in the English 1695 translation of the earlier Latin editions, reads:

'As we steer along by the shore, after we have pass'd Ideston, Mousehole, and Longships, (which are rather infamous rocks than Islands), we come within sight of Antoninus's Lisia, at the very utmost point of Cornwall, called by the people thereabouts Lethowsow, by others the Gulte, which is only visible at low water. This I take to be that which the Antients called Lisia; for Lis (as I have heard) among our Britains [i.e. the Cornish] signifies the same. So Liso [sic] implies a great sound and roaring like that which is made in whirlpools; and from this place the tide presses both northward and eastward with great noise and violence, being pent in and straiteneth between Cornwal and the Islands, which Antoninus calles Sigdeles, Sulpitius Stilinae, Solinus Siltures, the English Silly, the Dutch Seamen Sorings, and the ancient Greeks Hesperides and Ciossiterides.'

This is clearly Mercator's source for all three names.

To return to the letter h and the final syllable of Lethowsow. Regrettably we seem to possess only one spelling of it, from three sources, only a few years apart, of which a draft of Carew's Survey would seem to have been the original. Among his many accomplishments Carew was evidently a gifted self-taught linguist,
acquiring Greek, Italian, German, French and Spanish, in addition to Latin which he would have studied at Oxford. He translated into English, and in 1594 had published in a bilingual edition, Torquato Tasso’s *Godfrey of Bulloigne*. In the same year he also had published his translation of an Italian version of the Spaniard Juan Huarte’s *Examen de Ingenios*.

The extent of his knowledge of Cornish, however, is debatable. He himself comments upon the fact that ‘Most of the inhabitants can speak no word of Cornish’ since English had driven it ‘into the uttermost skirts of the shire’. Throughout his section on the Cornish language he always refers to Cornish speakers as they or them, never as we. One editor of the *Survey* comments that ‘his derivations and summary of the Cornish language must not be taken as a safe guide’ and elsewhere observes that ‘Carew was no Cornish scholar. It is odd that one who taught himself all the principal languages of Europe should have neglected what might be called his native tongue.’

Since Carew, a local, but a not altogether reliable authority on Cornish, was the source of the one spelling of *Lethowsow* that appears to have survived, we have no means of judging whether the *h* was pronounced or not; it may have been just a ‘learned’ insertion. After all, the introduction of the *h* into *Anthony* and *Thames*, for example, was due either to French or pseudo-Classical influence, but made no difference to their pronunciation in standard English, while pronunciation was affected in the case of the insertion of *h* into *Thanet*.

As for the final syllable of *Lethowsow*, the explanation would seem to be as follows. The Cornish word *Kernow* (‘Cornwall’) produced *Kernowyon* (‘Cornishmen’) and *Kernewesow* (‘Cornishwomen’), with an *o/e* mutation. Even if there is no apparent record of it, it seems almost certain that the Cornish equivalent of the Old Breton *Letau* (Brittany), *Let(h)ow*, similarly would have formed *Let(h)owyon* and *Let(h)ewesow*. Carew, who seems not to have been a native Cornish speaker, could easily have failed to ‘hear’ the vowel mutation or the third *e*, consequently writing down *Lethowsow*.

If this hypothesis is correct, the name means ‘(the land of) the Breton women’, which at first sight may seem strange. On the other hand, *Lyonesse*, which Carew says is the same as *Lethowsow*, seems to provide a parallel case. Rather than being an Anglicisation of *(la terre) léonaise* (‘the land of Léonas’), as was earlier suggested, it could be an Anglicisation of *(la terre des) léonaises* (‘the land of the women of Léonas’), since the feminine singular and plural forms sound identical. The combined evidence of the Arthurian connection and the etymology of *Lyonesse* and *Lethowsow* appears conclusive. The women of Léonas, which was part of *Letau* (Brittany), were presumably King Arthur’s wife, Queen Guinevere, and the ladies of her retinue.

With the passage of time it would seem that the corrupted forms of *Lyonesse* and *Lethowsow* must have lost their association with Brittany, to become applied first to the mythical Arthurian land, and later to a specific location, the stretch of sea between Land’s End and the Scilly Isles. Camden, however, in his *Britannia*, seems to have misunderstood Carew’s oral or written statement concerning *Lethowsow*, and applied the name to Wolf Rock, rather than to the area of sea in which it lies. This misconception was not corrected even in those editions of *Britannia* which appeared after the publication of Carew’s work in 1602. Mercator merely followed Camden, his immediate source.

*Lissia*, another of the names applied to Wolf Rock by Mercator, seems not to appear on any other map or chart, or figure in any sailing directions. As we have seen, Mercator also got his information about it from Camden, and he, in turn, quotes Antoninus as his source.

The *Itineraria Antonini Augusti*, containing information mostly dating from the 3rd century A.D., consists of a number of land itineraries, with an *Itinerarium Maritimum* appended after the section on Britain. The *Antonine Itineraries* survive in several manuscripts with a number of variant readings and the work was published several times in the 16th century. The part of the *Maritime Itinerary* that concerns us is a simple list of islands stated to be between ‘the Gauls and the Britains’. Its accuracy is somewhat dubious, since it includes the *insule Orcades* (the Orkneys) amongst them and states that there are only three of them. The *insula Clota in Hiberione* seems to be a reference to the River Clyde, the name having been transcribed from a map on which the word *Clota* was positioned in such a way as to suggest that it referred to an island off the Irish coast. The remainder of the list reads as follows: *Vecta, Riduna, Sarmia, Caesarea, Barsa* and *Silia* (the latter metathesised as *Lisia* on one manuscript); on
the line below are Andium, Sicdelis, Uxantis and Ina, and on the final line Vinditis, Siata and Iga. There is no indication of where these islands lie within the specified area. Vecta is undoubtedly the Isle of Wight, and Uxantis the island of Ouessant (Ushant) off the NW tip of France. The identities of most of the other islands are by no means certain. Rivet and Smith survey the possibilities in some detail, and it seems probable that Lisia/Sitia actually refers to Guernsey.25 Even if Camden’s unsubstantiated assumption that Sicdelis referred to the Scilly Isles were correct, it is difficult to see why he presumed Lisia to refer to Wolf Rock; Sicdelis and Lisia do not appear on the same line, and in any case are separated by Andium. In his description, Camden, having dealt with several islands off the French coast, crosses the English Channel and, as we have seen, mentions Ideston (Eddystone Rock), Mousehole (presumably St Clement’s Isle) and Longships, with no attempt to match them up with any of the Antoninus names. In any case, it seems highly unlikely that a 2nd or 3rd century Roman maritime itinerary’s list of islands between France and Britain would have included such a relatively obscure, semi-submerged object as Wolf Rock. Why Camden identified Lisia/Sitia as Wolf Rock would seem to have been primarily due to the information he claims he was given to the effect that for ‘our Britains’ (i.e. the Cornish) Lis meant the same as Gulfe and implied ‘a great sound and roaring like that which is made in whirlpools’, which must have appeared an appropriate name. However, one wonders what Camden’s source for this information can have been. No such meaning for its figures in any Cornish dictionary I have been able to consult. Carew, his main authority on Cornwall, makes no mention of Lisia in his published work. On the other hand, as we have seen, he does associate the name ‘Gulf’ with the famous classical rock of Scylla, and by implication with the adjacent whirlpool of Charybdis, and one of the meanings of gulf in English is still ‘whirlpool’. Somewhat surprisingly Carew makes no mention of the Lizard, but since that headland is not far removed from Wolf Rock, and is composed of two Cornish words, ills (‘hail’ or ‘cours’) and ard (‘high’),26 one is led to suspect that Camden may here have recorded a confused memory of a conversation with Carew about that vicinity; after all, he wrongly gives Lethowsow as one of the names of Wolf Rock, when Carew quite clearly states that the name refers to the sea between Land’s End and the Scillies, and not to the rock between them.

The remaining name given to Wolf Rock by Mercator, on the authority of Camden, is The Gulfe. It differs from the other two in that it does figure very early on maps and charts and in sailing directions, and is a correct attribution. Carew’s association of the name with Scylla, and by inference with Charybdis, clearly suggests that the word gulf in the sense of ‘whirlpool’ was well established by his day. The Oxford English Dictionary gives 1538 as the first recorded appearance of the work in print with that meaning, and it is, as we have seen, precisely the meaning of the Latin gloss vorago used on Mercator’s map (Fig. 1).

The first cartographic appearance of any ‘gulf’-type inscription against Wolf Rock appears to be on a chart of the western coasts of Europe between Norway and Gibraltar made by Guillaume Brouscon and inserted in his Manuel de piloteage à l’usage des marins bretons (1548), where it figures as gofre (Fig. 2).27

There was at least one other printed use of the word gulf, possibly in the sense of ‘whirlpool’ or ‘eddy’, before the Oxford English Dictionary’s cited occurrence in 1538. It had appeared ten years earlier in the form of goiffe in Robert Copland’s The Rutter of the See (1528), which we have seen he translated from the anonymous French sailing directions, Le routier de la mer. The relevant sentence reads: ‘Bytwene Syllie and Lizard [the Scilly Isles and the Lizard] is a Rocke called Reynolde stone, called golfe in brytyssh’28 (i.e. in Breton). The French original reads: ‘Entre surligues et lessart il ya vne basse qui sappelle la rossee, et en bretz gulf’.29 It is evident that Copland could not himself have understood the word rossee, so he must have consulted his ‘conning men’ before rendering it as ‘Reynolde stone’. It is interesting that those on whom he relied for guidance misinformed him here; the Runnel Stone, as it is now spelled, is not Wolf Rock, but another navigational hazard much nearer the Cornish coast. As for the meaning of la rossee, I will return to it later.

The earliest manuscript appearance of any form of the word gulf in English, supposedly in the same sense of ‘whirlpool’, would seem to be in the anonymous English, somewhat inaccurately titled Sailing Directions for the Circumnavigation of England ..., the only surviving text of which is a copy made between 1461 and 1483; the word is given in its modern spelling in the sentence ‘and south south west of the Landes ende lieth the gulf’.30
This appearance of the word in English in this sense seems to antedate by some decades the *Le routier de la mer* statement to the effect that *gouff* was the Breton name for Wolf Rock. Nevertheless one cannot tell the real antiquity of either set of sailing directions, since at least parts of both were undoubtedly much older in origin than their earliest surviving texts would give us to suppose. It is, of course, suggestive that the first occurrence of the word *gulf* attached to Wolf Rock in any spelling on a surviving chart would appear to be on the one by Guillaume Brouscon in a work specifically designed for Breton sailors.

However, modern English has ‘gulf’ for both the modern French *golfe* (‘gulf’ or ‘large bay’) and *gouffre* (‘abyss’ or ‘whirlpool’), and both the English and French words are traceable back to Low Latin *colpus* and Greek *kolpos* (‘bosom’), rather than to any Celtic source. Admittedly Eddystone may seem to provide a possible parallel case of a rock being named after an ‘eddy’ or ‘whirlpool’ caused by it, but whether the modern spelling gives a correct indication of its original meaning is by no means certain. In any case, Old Cornish had a word *goelha* (‘a lookout-place’), for which the modern Welsh is *gwylla*, and, according to the compiler of *Le Routier de la mer*, Old Breton also had a related word which he renders as *gouff* and Brouscon’s chart gives as *gofre*, the letters *f* and *r* are notoriously liable to confusion and metathesis. Such a word could well have acquired the extended meaning of ‘rock’ or ‘shoal’. Exactly such a semantic development occurred with Portuguese *vigia*, Spanish *vigia*, French *vigie* and Italian *veghia*, all cognate with English ‘vigil’; thus ‘lookout, sentinel’ acquired the sense of ‘lookout-place, watch-tower’, and eventually, in maritime usage, the meaning was extended to indicate a ‘reef, rock’ or ‘shoal’, especially one only just above or below sea level at any stage of the tide, which thus demanded special vigilance on the part of the lookout on watch in the crow’s nest (cf. also *abrotho* etc., infra p.18).

Richard Carew’s obvious association of the name *Gulf* with a ‘whirlpool’ and Mercator’s specific gloss of the word as *vorago* conflict with the *Le routier de la mer* statement that *gouff* was the Breton name for Wolf Rock and with Brouscon’s use of the name *gofre* for it on a chart designed for use by Breton sailors. It seems possible that the English and French words *gulf* and *gouffre*, ultimately from Latin and Greek, sounded so like a word of Celtic
origin, either Cornish *goelva* or its Breton equivalent, that they became confused in form, even though their original meanings were quite different. However, the available evidence being contradictory, the derivation of *Gulf* cannot be resolved with any certainty.

Yet another name attached to Wolf Rock, though not by Mercator or Camden, appears in so many different forms that it is not possible to give a standard rendering. Some version of it occurs on all those charts that I have been able to examine prior to the 1548 Brouscon one that has any legible or decipherable inscription against Wolf Rock. From the examples quoted below it might at first glance seem possible that some are related to *Lissia*. However, we have already seen that Camden’s application of that name to Wolf Rock is almost certainly wrong, and further examination suggests that *Lissia* and this other name are quite unrelated. The following sample renderings from a variety of charts are arranged in reverse chronological order from the date of the Brouscon chart:

- *lazoye* (Pierre Desceliers, 1546)\(^{33}\)
- *luzia* and *lostote* on different charts in Jean Rotz’ atlas (1542)\(^{34}\)
- *pedra lucia* (Battista Agnese, c. 1540)\(^{35}\)
- *laxei* (Conte di Ottomano Fredisucci, 1538)\(^{36}\)
- *lusei* or *luset* (anon. portolano, 1508)\(^{37}\)
- *biza* (Juan de la Cosa, 1500)\(^{38}\)
- *lusei* (Graziasso Benincasa, 1467)\(^{39}\) (Fig. 3)
- *luciae* (Petrus Roselli, 1456)\(^{40}\)
- *pedra lucia* (Andrea Bianco, 1436)\(^{41}\)
- *losey* (Mecia de Viladesestes, 1413)\(^{42}\)
- *losey* (Guglielmo Soleri, 1385)\(^{43}\)
- *lozie* (the Pizigani brothers, 1367)\(^{44}\)
- *losei* (attr. Petrus Vesconte, ca 1327)\(^{45}\)

Some sailing directions or geographical descriptions prior to 1548 also use versions of this name. Those published by Bernardino Rizo in 1490 include the following sentence: ‘*e nota che appresso a sorlinga e vno scoio chi se chiama petraluisa*’ (‘and note that near the Scilly Isles there is a rock which is called the *luzia* stone’)\(^{46}\). The Spanish navigator and geographer Martín Fernández de Enciso, in his *Suma de Geographia*, published in Seville in 1519, writes: ‘*cabo celi tiene al Oeste a la isla lucia a seis legua, y dos leguas adelante de lucia son las sorlingas y son vnos baxos muy peligrosos. estas islas esta en li grado*.’ (‘Cape Scilly [by which he must mean the cape facing the Scilly Isles, i.e. Land’s End] has six leagues west of it the island of lucia, and two leagues beyond lucia are the sorlingas [Scillies] which are some very dangerous shoals. These islands are in 51 degrees.’)\(^{47}\) It is interesting that Enciso is muddled over the two names for the Scilly Isles, and his translator, Roger Barlow, seems to have been mystified by the reference to ‘*la isla lucia*’, for his rendering of that whole passage is ‘Landisende stonds in 51 degre and hathe the surlinges west of hit in to the see viij leges, which be certeine rockes very dangerous’.\(^{48}\) He managed to add six and two together, but transferred the latitude given for the Scillies to Land’s End and apparently could not identify ‘*la isla lucia*’, so omitted all reference to it.

All the examples listed above were prior to the Brouscon chart, but the name continued in use for a long time afterwards on Majorcan, Catalan, Greek, Italian and Portuguese charts. Thus we have *petra lucia* (anon. school of Bartolomé Olivés, 1562),\(^{49}\) and *losei* (Giorgio Calapoda, 1552),\(^{50}\) while examples from Portuguese cartographers, with such variants as *luzia*, *lozia*, *loza*, *illozia* and *iluzia*, abound until at least the 1620s.\(^{51}\) João Teixeira I seems to have been the first Portuguese cartographer to adopt *golfo* instead, in an atlas of 1630.\(^{52}\)

The above examples, from 1327 until the 1620s, reveal a clear preponderance of versions ending either in -ey and its variant spelling -ey, or in -ia. It seemed strange that I could not find a single case of any English chart or rutter with a version of the name. This inevitably suggested that it was of foreign origin; after all, Beachy Head had originated from French *be(a)u chevi* (‘beautiful headland’).\(^{53}\) Moreover, Genoese and Venetian ships had sailed up the Channel to trade, in English and Flemish ports above all, since at least as early as the first years of the 14th century.\(^{54}\) What we now know as Eddystone Rock was known to them as *benedetta* (‘blessed’) in some spelling or other, presumably being the name of some Italian vessel wrecked on it.\(^{55}\) Could the original name have been *lucia*?

It so happens that Santa Lucia is the patron saint of eyesight, and Italian today has a phrase *Raccomandati a Santa Lucia*, meaning ‘Keep your eyes open’. This suggested that *lucia*
might have been a now obsolete Italian nautical term for a navigational hazard such as a reef or shoal. After all, Portuguese abrolho, Spanish abrejo, French ouvre l'œil and Italian aprì l'occhio were all terms literally meaning ‘Keep your eyes open’. And in each case the imperious command shouted by a ship’s captain or pilot to the lookout in the crow’s nest in dangerous waters had acquired precisely the now obsolete meaning ‘shoal’ or ‘reef’, and can be found in many parts of the world on early charts. Often the manuscript and printed versions were so ‘corrupt’ that to the untutored eye they are unrecognisable. At least two unsullied versions of the Portuguese plural form, abrolhos, still survive, attached to extensive shoals and reefs off the Brazilian coast, and to a smaller collection of reefs and islands off the coast of Western Australia, preceded by the name of the Dutchman who baptised them with that Portuguese maritime term; thus Houtman’s Abrolhos.

Despite much investigation it proved impossible to find any hard evidence to support the Santa Lucia hypothesis, so some other solution had to be considered. While the versions of the name ending in -ia suggested an Italian origin, the -et and -ey endings suggested a parallel with the numbers of English islands whose names end in -ey, deriving either from Old Norse ey or Old English eg (‘island’), such as Sheppey, Thorney, Guernsey, Jersey and Alderney, not to mention Wallasey and Selsey which are no longer islands. It was noteworthy that this type of ending was more common amongst the earlier versions of the name, usually an indication of greater reliability, since the likelihood of serious distortion or corruption is significantly less in early renderings. Two French sources would seem to confirm the Old Norse or Old English hypothesis.

Jean Alfonce, in his La Cosmographie ... (1547), wrote: ‘en l’est suest desdizt Surlingue, environ deux ou trois lieues, y a ung autre rocher qui s’appelle Osest, et a quarente brasses d’eau au pied de luy’ (‘two or three leagues ESE of the aforementioned Scilly Isles there is another rock which is called Osest, and it has forty fathoms of water at its foot’). At first sight there seems to be no obvious connection between Osest and losey, apart from the location in common, but when one pronounces the former preceded by the definite article, which Alfonce did not include, thus l’Osest, with the last three letters as in c’est (‘it is’) rather than as in est (‘east’), it is a very close phonetic approximation to losey. Alfonce’s works provide plentiful examples of such spellings.

One version of the other French source has already been cited in connection with the word gulf. Rather than repeat it here I will transcribe the other, fuller rendering, which occurs in Pierre Garcie’s Le grant routtier (1521). The passage reads: ‘entre sourlenges et lissart en la droite route ya vne basse de pierre C’est le trauers de monsolle Et sappelle la rossee Et en breton goulff, et elle paroist des demys maree’ (‘between the Scilly Isles and the Lizard on the direct route there is a stone shoal which is off Mousehole and is called la rossee and in Breton goulff, and it appears at half tide’). It is clear that la Rossée, as it would now be written, is none other than losey, with the frequent confusion between l and r, preceded by the feminine definite article to agree with an unexpressed feminine noun, isle (modern French île) or basse (‘shoal’). The l/r change may here merely be due to dissimulation, to avoid the proximity of the l of la to the l of losey. On the other hand, the phonetic approximation of la losey to la rossée may only have been part of the reason for the change; la rossée happens to have a particularly appropriate meaning in French. La (basse) rossée (‘the battered shoal’) would doubtless have appealed to French seamen as a fitting name. Such interlanguage transformations are by no means unusual.

If the -ey of losey was of Old English origin, then it is logical to expect the other component of the name to be so too. Bilingual names certainly do exist, and Cornish did have a word los (‘grey’ or ‘vile’), but in view of the number of ships wrecked on Wolf Rock over the centuries, the Old English word los (‘loss’ or ‘destruction’) would seem a more appropriate and more likely word; freely translated, therefore, losey could well have meant ‘(ship)wreck island’.

It may well be legitimately argued that the suggested English origin of losey etc. is of doubtful validity since versions of the name seem only to occur on charts and in sailing directions of non-English origin. However, it should be borne in mind that surviving Italian charts which include the south coast of England, and bear a number of inscriptions along it, date back to the early 14th century, while the earliest English ones to come down to us are at least two centuries later. There is documentary evidence of Genoese vessels trading with English south coast ports from as early as the late 13th
century and without doubt they must have had some sort of sailing directions, even if they have not survived. The Genoese cartographer Petrus Vesconte was producing charts which included the south and east coasts of England and much of the coastline of Ireland from the second decade of the 14th century; one of his charts of c.1321 includes the name beucef (Beachy Head), an Italian phonetic spelling of the French name first recorded, as we have seen, as beucef in an English document of 1274. There appears to be no documentary evidence of any prior English name for that feature, though one must surely have existed. If the English name of such a prominent coastal landmark had apparently vanished without trace by 1274 from both foreign and English surviving documents, it is hardly surprising that the English name of a small, semi-submerged rock should have left no trace in extant English records by the mid-1400s and been replaced by another English, Cornish or Breton name. The survival of some form of losey on foreign charts and in foreign sailing directions is almost certainly due to its very early recording by Italian mariners and cartographers and to subsequent copying and ‘corrupting’ by generations of other European seafarers and chart makers.

The appearance of ‘the gulf’ in the earliest surviving English manuscript rutter, in the mid- to late-15th century, could merely mean that the English word in its ‘whirlpool’ sense had been adopted by then. On the other hand, it could be that an Anglicisation of the Cornish word goelva was well established, or that its Breton equivalent had been imported and naturalised, presumably via French sailing directions in translation. In any case, gulf, whatever its derivation, must have been applied to Wolf Rock for a very long time before its first printed appearance in 1528, in Robert Copland’s translation.

The reason for the eventual replacement of the variously spelled versions of gulf by wolf is debatable; how the latter name occurred is fairly clear. Wolf Rock’s first appearance with any spelling of that name attached to it would seem to have been in Lucas Jansz Waghenaer’s De Spiegel der Zeevaert (1584-85), where it figures as Die Wolff and De Wolff. This Dutch work was the first printed compendium of sea charts, sailing directions and coastal profiles and was to prove extremely successful and influential. Prior to its appearance, both English and Dutch maps and charts had used some version of gulf(e). Laurence Nowell’s detailed
manuscript map of south-west England of c.1560 gives ‘the gulf’. Wagenaer’s compatriot, Abraham Ortelius, publisher of the first modern atlas, Theatrum Orbis Terrarum (1570), used ‘The Gulfe’ on his map Angliae, Scotiae et Hiberniae ... in that work. Christopher Saxton used the same word in the same spelling on his wall map of England and Wales only the year before the appearance of Wagenaer’s work.

The latter’s responsibility for the introduction of the word Wolf(f) seems quite well established. It may be that, were it not for the popularity of Wagenaer’s various sea atlases, reprinted and translated as they were, the name would not have eventually become accepted instead of golf(e) or gulf(e). However, so popular were they that the publisher’s name was Anglicised as Waggoner, by phonetic approximation rather than translation, to baptise this valuable new type of aid to seafarers. On some of Wagenaer’s works there was no consistent use of one name or the other. In The Mariners Mirrour (1588), the translation of his De Spiegheil der Zeevaert, De Wolf appears on one chart and The gulf on another. In his Thresoor der Zeevaert (1592), The golf appears on one chart, while Die Wolf is given in the text.

From the above it seems clear that Wolf(f) was not a misprint. An 1817 source quoted by Mr Padel suggested that the name may have been introduced because of ‘the continued and melancholy howling that the waves make in breaking around it’. This seems too much like a piece of popular or folk etymology concocted by someone who did not know how long the name had been in use and was unaware of its apparent Dutch origin.

There is, however, another possibility. Its first appearance in a Dutch work suggests that it may well have been a popular name coined by Dutch sailors. It was a common practice for mariners of all nations to adapt foreign-looking or foreign-sounding names to suit their own speech and spelling habits, as we have seen in the case of losey/rossée. Some English speakers turned the Norse name for the island of Ramsey into Ram’s eye, for example. Probably by a mixture of imagination and perceived sound similarities, the Dutch managed to transform the Tour d’Ordre near Boulogne, possibly via such spellings as Tore doder, as in Wagenaer’s Thresoor, into doudeman ‘the old man’; in The Mariners Mirrour one chart gives both Tour dordre and Doudeman, while the accompanying text reads: ‘the tower called the Oldman’.

Much more significantly, however, one may point to the case of the southern Spanish port of Huelva, the initial letter of which is not pronounced; it used to be spelled guelva, or rather guelua, when the u was used in minuscule handwriting both to represent the vowel, as now, and to represent the consonant v. The common French spelling in the 16th century was olues, which would suggest that the initial g of guelua was not then pronounced; the reason for the final s of the French spelling is not at all obvious, but it is interesting, for Dutch sailors called the place Wolf or Wolves. Willem Jansz Blaeu, in his Light of Navigation (1612), gives guelev oft Wolves (‘Huelva or Wolves’). The text of The Mariners Mirrour reads Guelua, which we call the VWolf. In Wagenaer’s Thresoor the name appears as Guelua on a chart, but as Wolves in the text.

This would seem to be a parallel case to the change of Gulf(e)/Golf(e) to Wolf(f), Dutch sailor’s usage being responsible. The case is clearly confirmed by the inscription on a map of England, Wales and Ireland by another Dutch cartographer, Petrus Plancius of c.1593, which reads: The gulf / Belg. De Wolf (‘The Gulf, Flemish [Dutch] The Wolf’).

Despite the late 16th century introduction of the name Wolf, later not surprisingly translated by some French cartographers as Le Loup, variant spellings of the name Gulf(e) competed successfully with it for at least two centuries. Gulfe appeared in Greenville Collins’ Great Britain’s Coasting Pilot (1693) and was still there in its 1753 edition. Jan van Keulen’s Die Nieuwe Groote Lichtende Zee-Fakkel (1728) gives De Wolf of Gulf Rock (‘The Wolf or Gulf Rock’). In the text of Nathaniel Cutler’s A General Coasting Pilot (1728) one reads: ‘The Gulf is another Rock, but [sic, ‘not’?] always above Water; it lies from the Landsend Point S.W. distance 3Ls. ‘tis so steep too on every side, that there is 40 Fa. Water within a quarter of a mile of it.’

Whereas some charts, under the influence of Wagenaer and those who copied him, usually used Wolf, nearly all maps until after 1800 continued to use Gulf(e). Of all the maps and charts showing an inscription against Wolf Rock which are reproduced in Rodney Shirley’s two books on maps of the British Isles printed between 1477 and 1750, only two or three charts record Wolf rather than Gulf(e).

It seems probable that the final triumph of Wolf Rock was
due to the standardising influence of the British Admiralty's charts, and may have reflected a fear of possible confusion from the two different meanings of gulf. In any case, it would seem that by about 1800 some rendering of Wolf Rock was well on the way to taking over from its predecessor, amongst mariners at least. The Complete East-India Pilot (1801) has the following inscription on one chart: 'the Gulf commonly / the Wolfe a Sharp Rock / above Water at Half Tide'.

It is ironical that of the five names attached at different times to Wolf Rock on maps and charts, two were mistakenly so applied through the influence of Camden and Mercator; of the other three, the one bestowed by the Dutch survived, while the English and Cornish or Breton ones were 'lost' or 'engulfed' by the passing years.

NOTES

3. D.W. Waters, op.cit. (in n.1 supra), provides the text of four early French and English runters, three of them in facsimile. J.I. de Brito Rebelo (ed.), Livro de marinharia, Lisbon: L. da Silva, 1903, contains a selection of 16th century Portuguese manuscript runters. The works of Kretschmer and Waters have useful glossaries which enable a large number, but by no means all, of the names included to be identified; a few identifications are incorrect.
5. Ibid. pp.49-134. The text reproduced is that of the 1557 edition.
6. Ibid. p.53.
10. Bernard Tanguy, 'Du Looenois du Roman de Tristan au Leones d'Idrisi: Dauarnenez, patrie de Tristan?,' Bulletin de la Société Archéologique du Finistère, t. cvii (1988), pp.119-144, especially pp.139 et seq. The author, to whom I am much indebted for having sent me an offprint of his article, rejects the identification of Lyonesse as Lothian. A town of Léones, mentioned by the Arab cartographer Idrisi, and marked by him on a map of Brittany between Quimper and the Pointe de St Mathieu, M. Tanguy persuasively equates with Dauarnenez.
15. Ibid., p.48.
17. Richard Carew, op.cit. (in n.9 supra), pp.69-70.
18. Ibid., pp.27-37.
19. Ibid., p.127.
20. Ibid., p.126, note 1.
21. Ibid., p.53.
24. Ibid., p.81.
27. Guillaume Brouscon, Manuel de pilotage à l'usage des marins bretons, 1548; Paris, Bibliothèque Nationale, Ms français 25374, folio 4. The chart is


29. ibid., p.142.

30. ibid., p.189. Note on the same page: 'At the Londis ende lieth Raynoldis stone'. For the full text of these *Sailing Directions*, see pp.187-195.


38. Madrid, Museo Naval; reproduced in A.E. Nordenskiöld, *Periplus*, 1897, pl. XLIII.


42. Reproduced in M. Mollat de Jourdin and M. de la Roncière, op.cit. (in n.27 supra), pl. 12.

43. Reproduced in A.E. Nordenskiöld, op.cit. (in n.38 supra), pl. XVIII.


46. K. Kretschmer, op.cit. (in n.2 supra), p.432.

47. See folio ciij recto.


49. Reproduced in R. Almagià, op.cit. (in n.36 supra), pl. XXXVIII.

50. Reproduced in A.E. Nordenskiöld, op.cit. (in n.38 supra), pl. XXVI.


52. ibid., vol. IV, pl. 465, 21st chart.

53. A. Mawer and P.M. Stenton, *The Place-Names of Sussex*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1930 (EPNS vols VI and VII); see vol. VII, p.427. This famous landmark appears on non-English maps and charts in an astonishing variety of forms, including blank de chef, Beau Cliffe, bewheye, Beneshe, biache, C. de Becce, Bethyi, Beveser, Beluer head, c. biceps and daychapete.


56. H. Leitho and J.V. Lopes, op.cit. (in n.32 supra), p.7 and T. O'Scanlan, op.cit., pp.5-6. Examples in one or other of the four languages can be found on numerous charts, especially on those covering the Indian Ocean, the South Atlantic and the Caribbean.

57. Jean Alfonse, *La cosmographie, avec l'esperre et regime du soleil et du nord* ... (ed. G. Musset), Paris: E. Leroux, 1904, p.188.

58. D.W. Waters, op.cit. (in n.1 supra), p.309. André Thevet, in his manuscript *Le grand insulaire et pilote*, (1586), Paris, Bibliothèque Nationale, Ms. français 15452, folio 87r, copied the whole of this passage from one Garcie edition or another, giving the spelling *Gouiff*.

59. Lyon, Bibliothèque de la Ville, Ms. 175, leaf 8, reproduced in M. Mollat de Jourdin and M. de la Roncière, op.cit. (in n.27 supra), pl. 6.


63. Saxton's *Survey of England and Wales* and the Maps from it, with a
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Das Seebuch, Bremen, 1876, p.xviii, note 6 and p.11. Interestingly, the same work gives de rudze Lucie (‘Losey rock’) for Wolf Rock; the editor, in a note, corrects his original identification of de rudze Lucie as Longships Rocks, and quotes another authority as equating Lucie with Lissia! (p.xxi, note 8c, and p.22).


77. Jan van Keulen, Die Nieuwe Groote Lichtende Zee-Fakkel (1716-53); facsim. reprint Amsterdam: Theatrum Orbis Terrarum, 1969, 3 vols; see vol. I, p.37.

