THE NAME OF THE RIVER TEST

By ANDREW BREEZE

The Test is entirely a Hampshire river. It rises near the village of Overton in the north of the county, and flows to the sea in a south-westerly and then southerly direction past Whitchurch, Stockbridge, Romsey and Southampton.

Ekwall (1960, 463) relates the name of the Test (which is accepted as a Celtic one) to Welsh *tres* 'toil, labour', *tren* 'strong', and *treio* 'ebb', and suggests an interpretation 'running water, stream'. What follows tries to define the meaning of *Test* more closely from Welsh evidence, without prejudice to other views (e.g. Coates 1988). Ekwall gives the early forms *Terstan* (oblique case) from 877 and 901, *Tærstan stream* in 1045, *Terste* in 1234, and *Test* in 1425 (1960, 463). The British original must have begun with *Tre-* and not *Ter-*, there being a parallel for this metathesis in the name of the river Tern of Shropshire and Staffordshire, which certainly derives from Welsh *tren* 'strong'.

The Welsh word most relevant to the name of the Test is Ekwall's *tres*, an obsolete noun which he defines as 'toil, labour', a definition recorded in Dr John Davies's dictionary of 1632. However, the original meaning of *tres* was 'tumult, commotion, agitation, uproar', which provides a far more appropriate name for a chalkland stream or river. This sense of *tres* appears in early Welsh poetry. In the *Gododdin*, a series of laments for North British warriors wiped out in an attack about the year 600 on Catterick, we are told of the hero Tafloew, 'He drove back the conflict (*tres*) through a pool of blood, like a brave man he slew the rank which did not flee.' (*Canu Aneirin* 40; Jackson 1969, 149; cf. Breeze 1997, 13–17). A 10th-century poem on Cadwallon (a 7th-century king of Gwynedd whose campaigns are mentioned by Bede) refers to *Lloegyr ar dres* 'England in confusion' (*The Poems of Taliesin* 83; *Early Welsh Saga Poetry* 389, 446). The 12th-century bard Gwalchmai, referring to the Welsh victories of his day, describes how the English were cut down or slaughtered in broken confusion (*tres*) (*Canu Aneirin* 308; *Geiriadur Prifysgol Cymru* 2268). In short, *tres* often figures in Welsh verse for the strife of battle. Sir Ifor Williams related the word to Old Irish *tress* 'combat, fight, strife, battle', a derivative of Irish *trén* 'strong' (Vendryes 1978, T–136).

Tres 'tumult' supplies a possible meaning for the name of the Test. Yet the related word *trais* should also be mentioned here. Although in Modern Welsh this means 'oppression, violence', its older meaning was rather 'force, might' (compare the obsolete adjective *treisig* 'oppressive, strong', but formerly 'firm, masterful'). Its sense-development is suggested by the following. A poem attributed to the 6th-century bard Taliesin refers to the North British hero Ulph, who fought until he 'became a *treis* to his enemy' (*The Poems of Taliesin* 7, 83). Here, *treis* force, might' almost has its modern sense 'oppression', since Ulph certainly 'oppressed' his enemy. But the word might even be a form of *tres* above, meaning Ulph was an affliction or source of confusion to his enemy. The *Gododdin* refers to 'Tudfwlch the forceful (*treissic*) in slaughter, the barrier of the fortress' (*Canu Aneirin* 30; Jackson 1969, 104). An 11th-century quatrain on the staff of Padarn (a Celtic saint who gave his name to Llanbadarn, near Aberystwyth) speaks of 'Its holy power (*treisguenn*) reaching the limits of three continents' (Williams 1972, 189). Although *treis* in later Welsh usually has a bad sense, it is used here with an earlier and favourable meaning.

What does the above imply for the river-name *Test*, borrowed by the English in the 6th century? It means that we can eliminate Ekwall's *tren* 'strong' and *treio* 'to ebb': the choice lies between forms of *tres* 'tumult' and of *treis* 'force'. Since Sir Ifor Williams regarded the two words as closely related, it is not easy to decide between them. The situation is further complicated by disagreement amongst linguists on the history of Brittonic and Irish forms (Morris-Jones 1913, 142; Vendryes 1978, T–136). However, it is possible that the *st* of *Test* represents a British original *st*; we may compare the name of the river Clyst in Devon, now related to Welsh *clust*, meaning 'ear', but also

'creek, inlet' (Jackson 1953, 529–34). Because the Test is not a particularly powerful or dangerous river, it is perhaps better to relate its name, not to *trais*, but to *tres* 'tumult, commotion, contention, uproar'. This seems a more suitable name for a chalkland river which is not deep, but which can move rapidly and noisily, especially after rain or the melting of snow.

References

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A MINIATURE MEDIEVAL OR POST-MEDIEVAL CAULDRON FROM NEAR SILCHESTER

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Abstract

A miniature tripod cauldron with two handles has been found in fieldwalking on a possible moated site near Silchester, associated with medieval and post-medieval pottery. The form and distribution of the cauldron type is discussed.

The Findspot

Travelling east from the Roman town of Calleva (Silchester) is the Roman road now known as the 'Devil's Highway'. From the town, the road begins a gentle descent across the Lower Bagshot Beds and London Clay, and crosses the flood plain deposits in the narrow valley of the Silchester Brook at *c.* 1 km from the town. It is at this point, centred on NGR SU 6544 6251, that the findspot is situated (Fig. 4). The site is noted in the Hampshire SMR (SU66SE15) and was initially recorded through aerial photography. On the ground, although to a major degree ploughed out, there is still faint evidence of the moated nature of the site. Fieldwalking by the author has revealed a pottery concentration on the site, together with the miniature cauldron discussed in this note. The object is now with Hampshire County Museum Service (acc. A.1996.58).

The Pottery

Coarse Border ware, a product of the Surrey-Hants industry which became widely distributed in south and south-east England in the 14th–15th century (Pearce & Vince 1988), dominates the medieval pottery collection. It includes fragments of lobed cups, a strap handle with incised line and stabbed decoration, lid-seated cooking pot rims and a clay disc decorated with a stamped grid pattern.

Late medieval and early post-medieval sherds, again from the Surrey-Hants industry (Timby 1989), were also found, consisting of pots, bowls and chamber pots. The sequence continued with red earthenwares with an orange-brown internal glaze, typical of 17th-century sites in the region. Fragments