



# *By Tre, Pol and Pen:* mapping Cornish place- names in the landscape

Jo Pye

PhD in Landscape Archaeology, University of Exeter

[J.Pye@exeter.ac.uk](mailto:J.Pye@exeter.ac.uk)



# Cornish place-names in space and time

*"These little territories, the demesne lands of their several lords, were not divided into regular farms till the Romans. But before the Romans they probably gave name to their possessors. And the first Cornish families, deducing their names from their places, seem to have been distinguished by the appellations pen and tre. The pens, it is likely, were the more remarkable hill-pastures; the tres, the agricultural spots or places. In the process of time each lordship was separated into various farms, by strong and permanent enclosures; and the farms borrowed their respective names from their site on high or low ground — their relative situations — their vicinity to rivers and the sea — from the forma loci and its qualities — from woods, and particular trees and other vegetable productions — from their pasture and corn — from native animals — from tame or domestic animals, and from various circumstances which it would be tedious to enumerate. These names they imparted (like the original lordships and manors) to their different possessors or occupiers."*

- Reverend Richard Polwhele, *The History of Cornwall Volume 1*, 1803

# About place-names and medieval Cornwall

- The oldest place-names in Britain in the native Celtic languages appear in written classical sources from the Romano-British period. In the uplands of Britain, Celtic place-names survived and later differentiated in the west into Welsh and Cornish (Brittonic or P-Celtic, including Breton) and northern branches (eg Cumbric); and Gaelic (Scots and Irish) and Manx (Goidelic or Q-Celtic)
- Brittonic place-names were replaced by Germanic languages (eg Old English and Norse) in most of what is now England, following Anglo-Saxon and Danish incursions pre-Norman Conquest. By the 8<sup>th</sup> century, the emerging kingdom of Wessex had gained control of south-western Dumnonia as far as the Cornwall-Devon border
- There was an extended period of overlap between Cornish and Old English: the earliest written Cornish place-names are found in 9<sup>th</sup> century Anglo-Saxon and Latin texts and charter bounds, later expanded in Domesday. Forms of place-names across Cornwall reflect an incoming English influence and the eventual decline of Cornish over the later medieval period

# Domesday vills named in English and Cornish

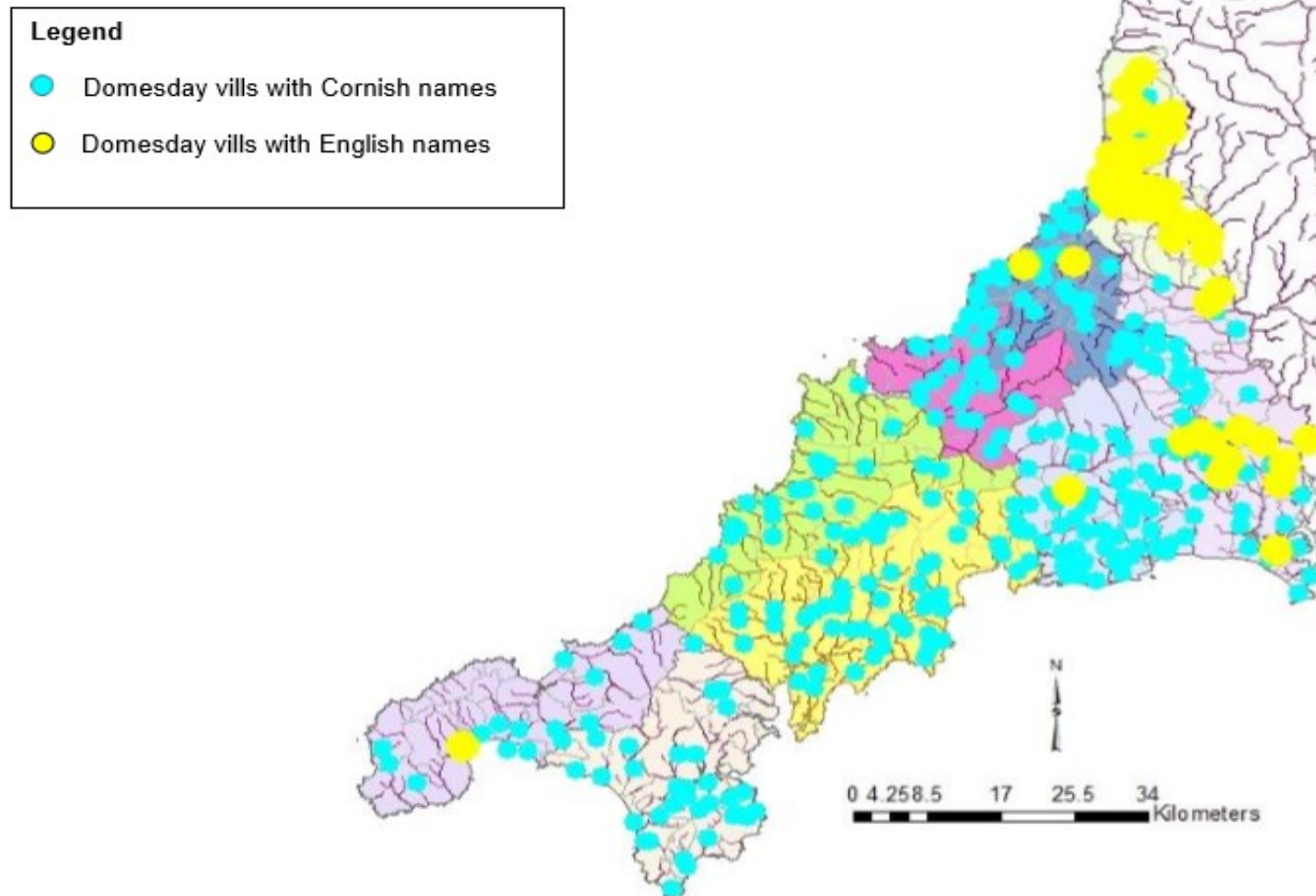
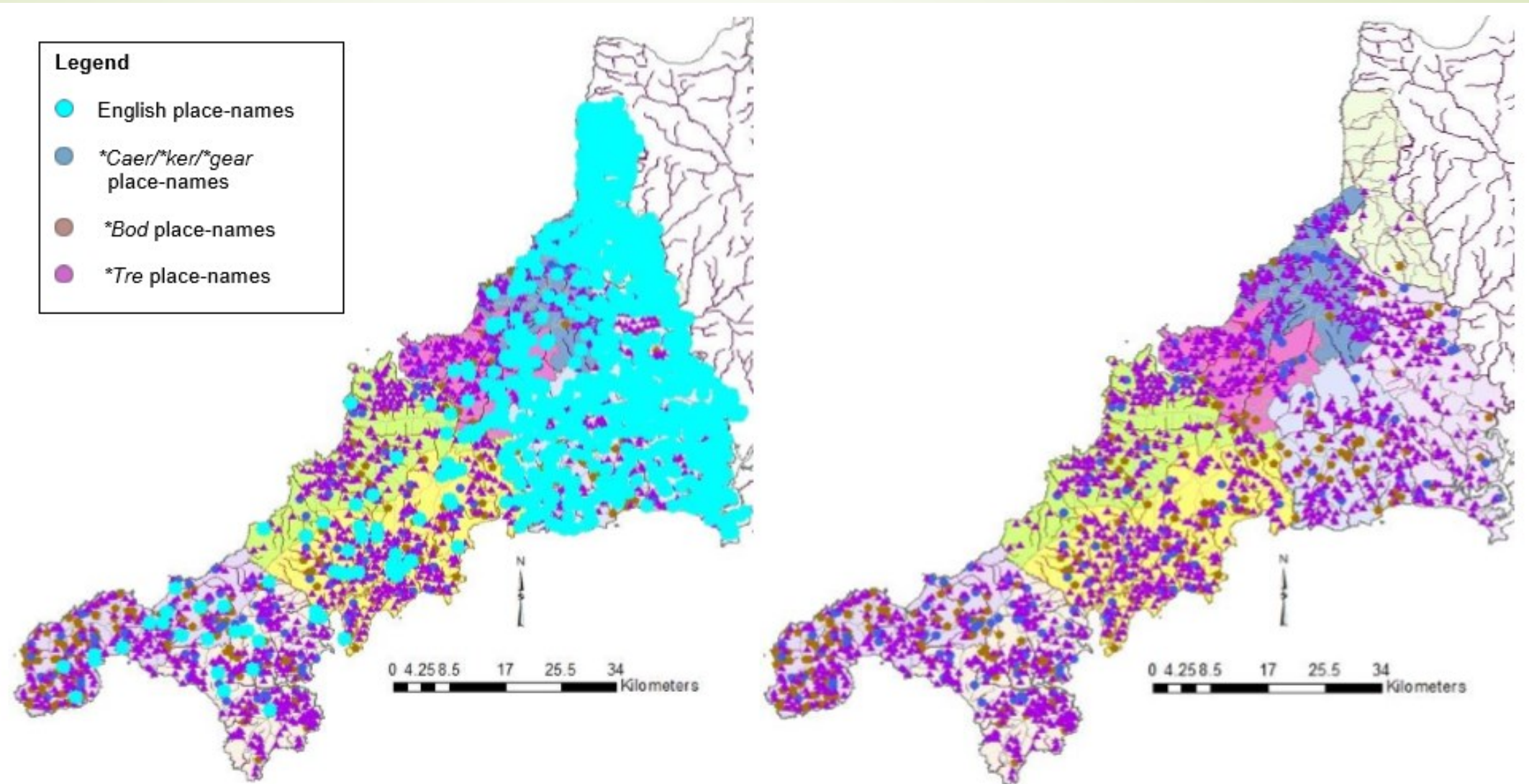


Figure 2.5 *Domesday vills with English and Cornish names, showing the two clusters of English names in the far northeast and southeast of Cornwall (Source: author's database)*

# Medieval English and Cornish place-name elements




Figures 2.6a and 2.6b. Relative distribution of English to Cornish place-name elements against the backdrop of lower status habitative elements \*tre, \*caer/\*ker/\*gear and \*bod, showing the sharp decline of English elements to the west of the Camel-Fowey river valleys (Source: author's database)



# Cornish place-names in the landscape – research questions

- ▶ Do place-names reflect an expansion of settlement from lowlands to uplands?
- ▶ Do place-names denote seasonal or temporary settlements?
- ▶ Do habitative place-names of higher and lower status show different preferences for landscape locations?
- ▶ Where are prehistoric sites located in relation to place-names for medieval settlements?
- ▶ Do cultural and religious place-names show preferred locations for their settlements?
- ▶ Are there place-name elements that identify favoured locations for settlements?



# Selection criteria for mapping Cornish place-name elements

1. **Working typology** based on archaeological time-depth categories, aligned with major landscape features (Gelling and Cole, 2000):

- *Environment / Topography*: natural landscape features, rivers, hills, soils
- *Subsistence*: arable, pastoral
- *Landholding*: common, estate
- *Settlement*: hamlets, single farms
- *Ideology / Religious*: ritual, ceremonial
- *Industry / Economy*: transport, fishing

2. **Likely insights** into research questions

3. **Frequency of occurrences** across corpus (Padel, 1985)

4. **General distribution** across Cornwall

5. **Overall match** to proposed typology above

## Types of place-name elements – habitative (settlement) and topographical (landscape)

Habitative element	Translation
<i>*tre</i>	estate
<i>*hendre</i>	old/winter estate
<i>*havos</i>	summer pastures
<i>*chy</i>	house
<i>*caer/*ker/*gear</i>	round
<i>*bod</i>	dwelling
<i>*dinas</i>	fort
<i>*lys</i>	court
<i>*lan</i>	enclosure
<i>*seynt</i>	saint
<i>*eglos</i>	church

Topographical element	Translation
<i>*pen</i>	head, top, end
<i>*pol</i>	watercourse
<i>*fenton</i>	spring
<i>*coys</i>	wood(land)
<i>*kelli</i>	grove
<i>*gwyth</i>	trees





## Characteristics of place-name elements mapped in detail

- Landscape positions (relative: high, middle and low)
- Elevations (absolute)
- Proximity to watercourses
- Settlement dispersion and intensity
- Historic Landscape Characterisation (HLC) types
- Dates of first recording
- Combinations with other place-name elements (eg landscape features, water, wood/trees, man-made features, personal names, animals, colours, other, unknown)



# Geographical Information System (GIS) map layers

- Cornwall Council: Historic Environment Record (HER) data including earliest forms of place-names
- Cornwall Council: Historic Landscape Characterisation (HLC) data
- Ordnance Survey: 1<sup>st</sup> Series historical mapping
- Historical parishes (Kain and Oliver) / Cornish hundreds (derived)
- Ordnance Survey: Landform Profile data (contours)
- British Geological Survey: bedrock geology data
- British Geological Survey: soils data
- Environment Agency / Ordnance Survey: major and minor rivers

# Building the corpus: the Index to Cornish Place-Names (Padel and Preston-Jones, 1986)

OCRA Index of named places

PARISH ST BURYAN I

NAME	SMR no	Govt page	Earliest Date	Elements	CEL	ass	ed	no	Comments	Locat described	1096 27
BLB POOL											
AN IMPORTANT ADDITIONAL SOURCE OF PLACE NAME DATA FOR ST BURYAN IS PETER POOL'S THE PLACE NAMES OF WEST CORNISH											
ADAM'S HILL SU 48245		616	1872 (P)								
ALISA LOUSE SU 374 252		616	1287 (G) ALTA	* ALISA	C			✓			
MAHON SU 374 252			1270 (G) MELON	* MELON				✓			
AMERICA SU 432 253		616	1830 (P)	AMERICA	E			✓			
BARNS SU 377 246		616	1327 (P) BANI	BANI	C			✓			
BETHKILL		616							WEST NAME, BUT IN PAUL OR PARROTT (PPL 37)		
BOLANCAN SU 380 277		616	1320 (G) BOLLANCAN	?	C			✓			
BOLANCAN SU 436 248		616	1275 (P) BOLANCAN	* BOD + *LEH	C			✓			
BARAN SU 442 245		616	1240 (P) BARAN	* BOD + *GRUAN	C			✓			
BOSKETH SU 374 241		616	1337 (P) BOSKETH	* BOD + *PERSH?	C			✓			
BOSKETH SU 374 270		617	1291 (G)	* BOD + *CRAI				✓	* BOSKETH, 1370?		
VEAN			1291 (G)	* VEAN				✓			

Figure 2.4 Extract from Index to Cornish Place-Names showing earliest Cornish place-name forms with identified settlements, St Buryan parish (Source: Ann Preston-Jones and Cornwall Council)

# Cornish place-names in the landscape – Historic Environment Record (HER) data (CC / expanded)

AutoSave Off | New\_Names\_test\_medieval\_settlements - Compatibility Mode - Excel | Jo Pye

File Home Insert Page Layout Formulas Data Review View Help Tell me what you want to do

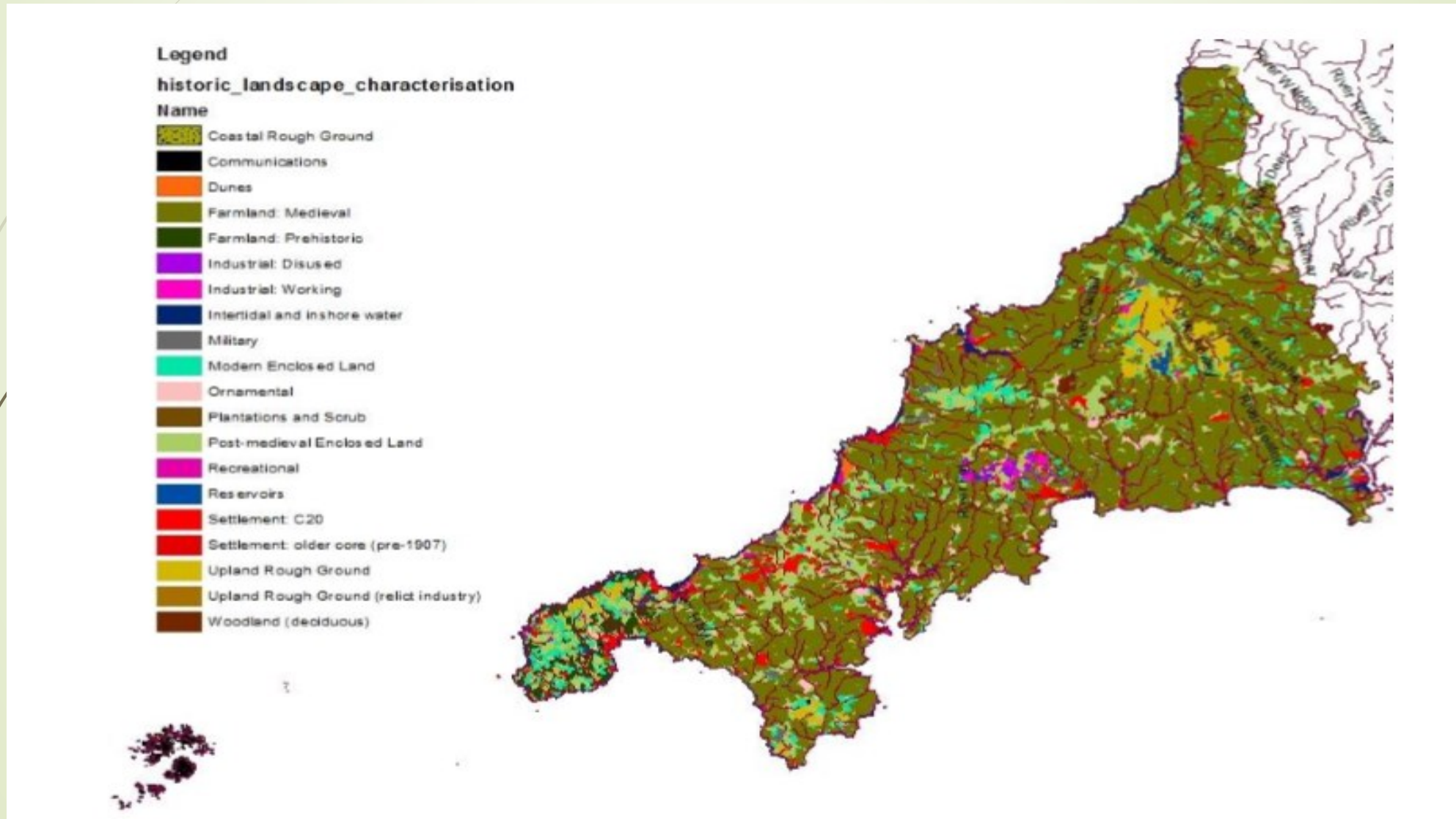
Clipboard: Cut, Copy, Paste, Format Painter | Font: Calibri, 11, Bold, Italic, Underline, Color, Background Color | Alignment: Wrap Text, Merge & Center | Number: General, Percent, Decimals | Styles: Conditional Formatting, Format as Table, Cell Styles | Cells: Insert, Delete, Format | Editing: AutoSum, Fill, Clear, Sort & Filter, Find & Select

Formula Bar: P1917 | Cornish =lan=cemetery+neved=sacred place: Lanivet (1268) when it is spelt "Lannived".

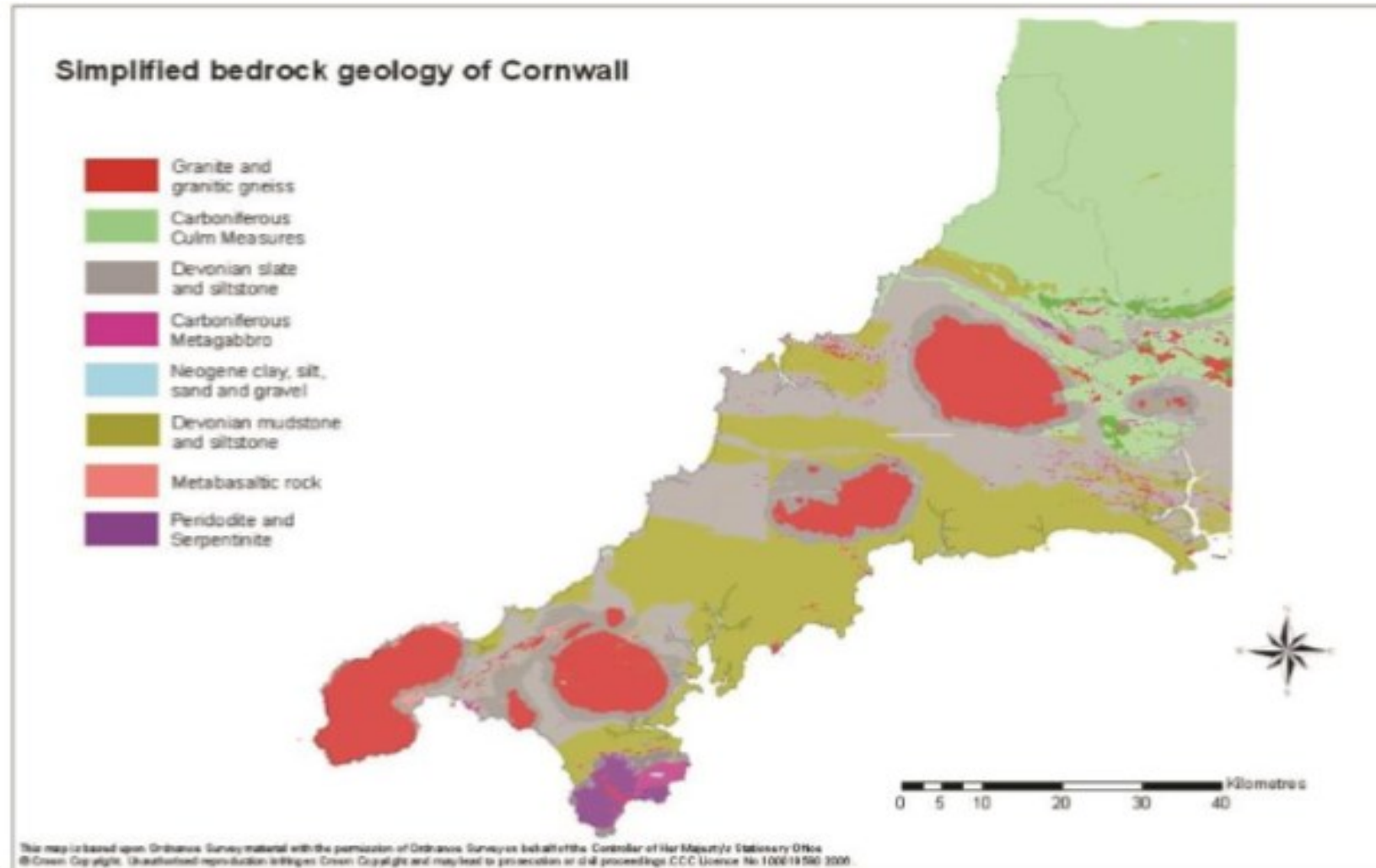
	O	P	Q	R	S	T	U	V	W	X	Y	Z	AA	AB	AC	AD	AE	AF	AG
1	Hundred	Comment: LYS	LAN	DYNAS	KER	CARN	NEVED	KELLI	PEN	POL	EGLOS	SEYNT	BRO	PLU	BOUNDER	FOS	CLU	GUEL	
1909	Powdershi	Cornish =lan=cemete	LAN																
1910	Powdershi	Cornish =nans=valley+los=grey: Lanhoose (1416) when it is spelt "Nansloes".																	
1911	Pydar	Cornish =lan=cemete	LAN										SEYNT						
1912	Powdershi	Cornish =nans=valley+?: Laniley (1250).																	
1913	Pydar	Cornish =lan=cemete	LAN										SEYNT?						
1914	Penwith	Cornish =lan=cemete	LAN										SEYNT						
1915	Penwith	Cornish =lan=cemete	LAN										SEYNT						
1916	Pydar	Cornish =lan=cemete	LAN					NEVED					SEYNT						
1917	Pydar	Cornish =lan=cemete	LAN					NEVED											
1918	Powdershi	Cornish =nans=valley+yorch=roe-deer: Lanjeth (1332) when it is spelt "Nanshirgh".																	
1919	Pydar	Cornish =lyn=pool+du=black: Lanjew (1290) when it is spelt "Lenthu".																	
1920	East Wive	Cornish =nans=valley+yar=hen: Lanjore (1307).																	
1921	West Wive	Cornish =nans=valley+kest=paunch?: Lankeast (1350) when it is spelt "Lankeast".																	
1922	West Wive	Cornish =nans=valley+kelli=grove: Lankelly (1356).								KELLI									
1923	Powdershi	Cornish =lyn=pool+kelli=grove: Lankelly (1308) when it is spelt "Lengelly".								KELLI									
1924	West Wive	Cornish =lan=cemete	LAN																
1925	Powdershi	Cornish =lan=cemete	LAN										SEYNT						
1926	Pydar	Cornish =lan=cemete	LAN					NEVED											
1927	Pydar	Cornish =lan=cemete	LAN																
1928	Kerrier	Cornish =lanherch=clearing: Lannarth (1524) when it is spelt "Lannargh"																	

Names\_medieval\_settlements | Sheet1

# Cornish place-names in the landscape – Historic Landscape Characterisation (HLC) (Herring, 1994)

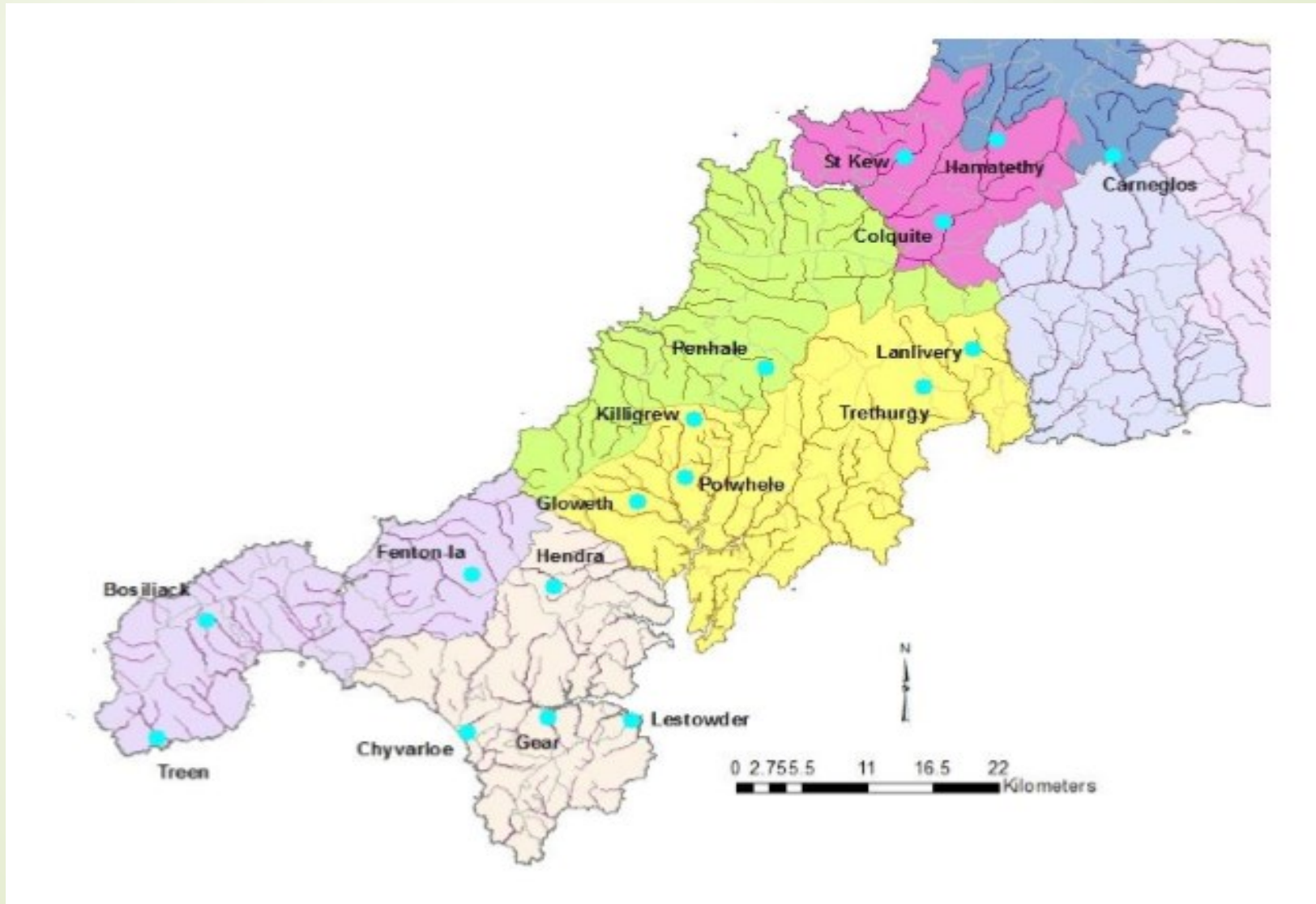


# Bedrock geology of Cornwall (simplified; Young, 2007)



**Figure 7.7** Simplified bedrock geology of Cornwall, showing upland granite areas and mixed Lizard geology (Source: Young, 2007, 16, Fig 2)

Locations of place-name element case studies across medieval Cornish hundreds (derived from parish boundaries)



# Trethurgy, Powdershire

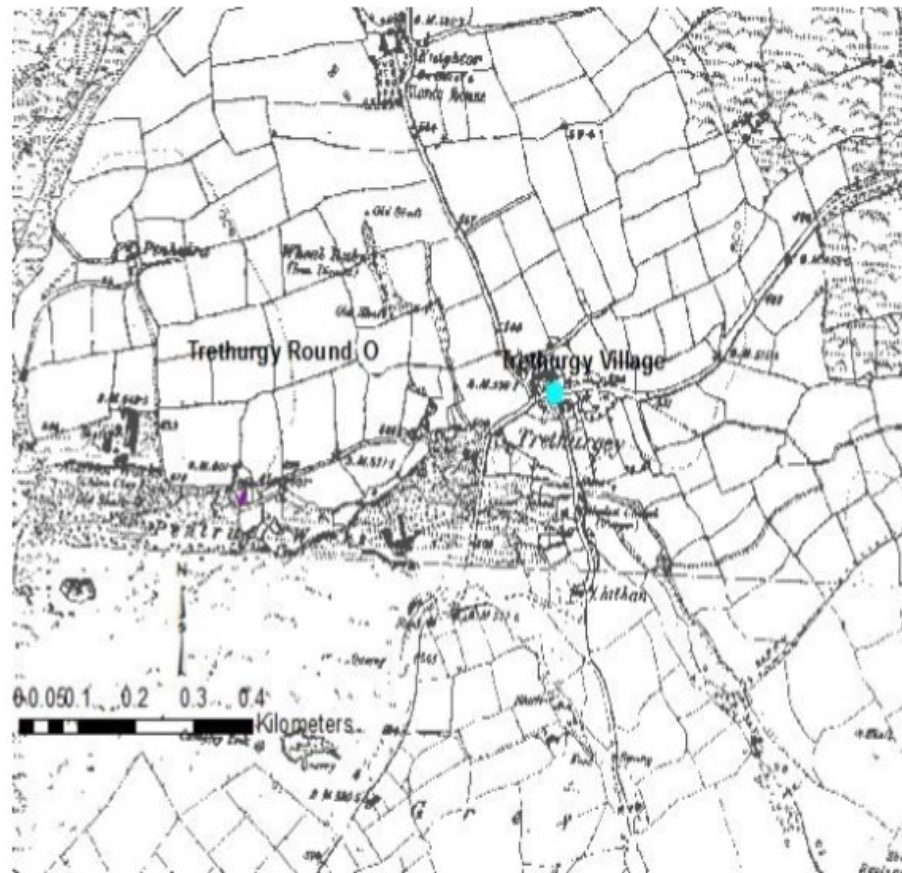


Figure 4.8 Trethurgy: Ordnance Survey 1<sup>st</sup> series map, 1881 (Source: Historic Digimap)

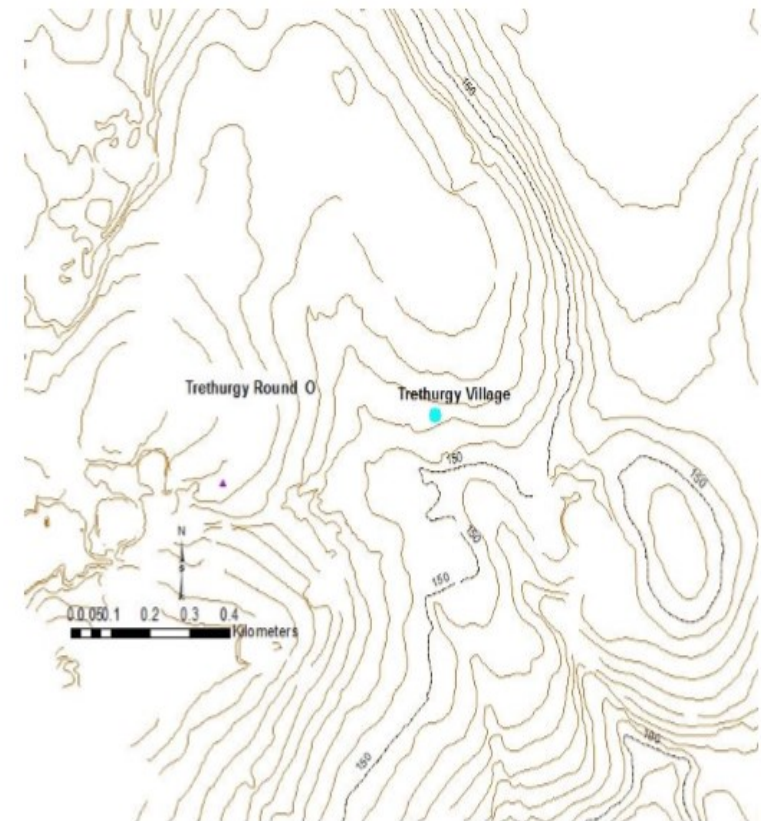


Figure 4.10 Landscape contours around Trethurgy medieval settlement (Source: OS Landform data)



# \*Hendre and \*havos, \*gwavos and \*laity

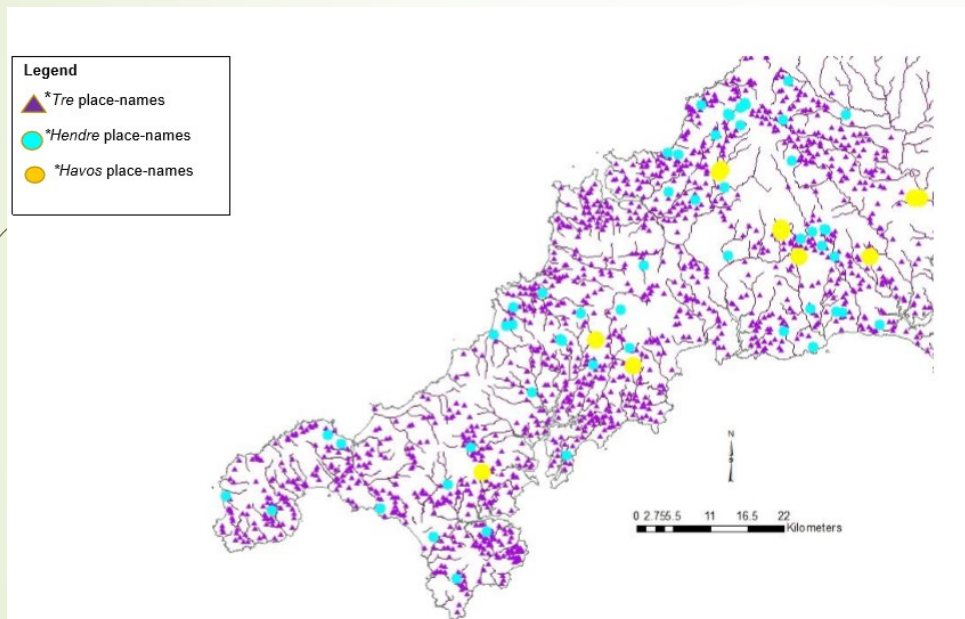


Figure 4.11 Comparative distributions, \*hendre, \*havos and \*tre place-names (Source: author's database)

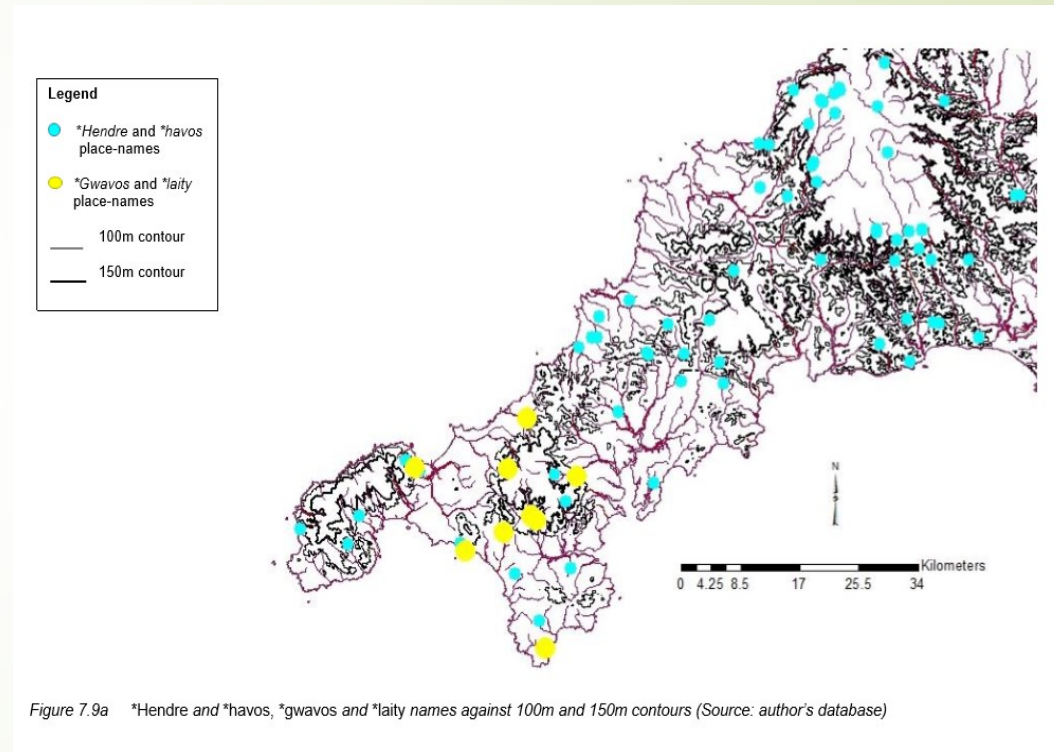


Figure 7.9a \*Hendre and \*havos, \*gwavos and \*laity names against 100m and 150m contours (Source: author's database)

# Gear Farm, St Martin in Meneage, Kerrier

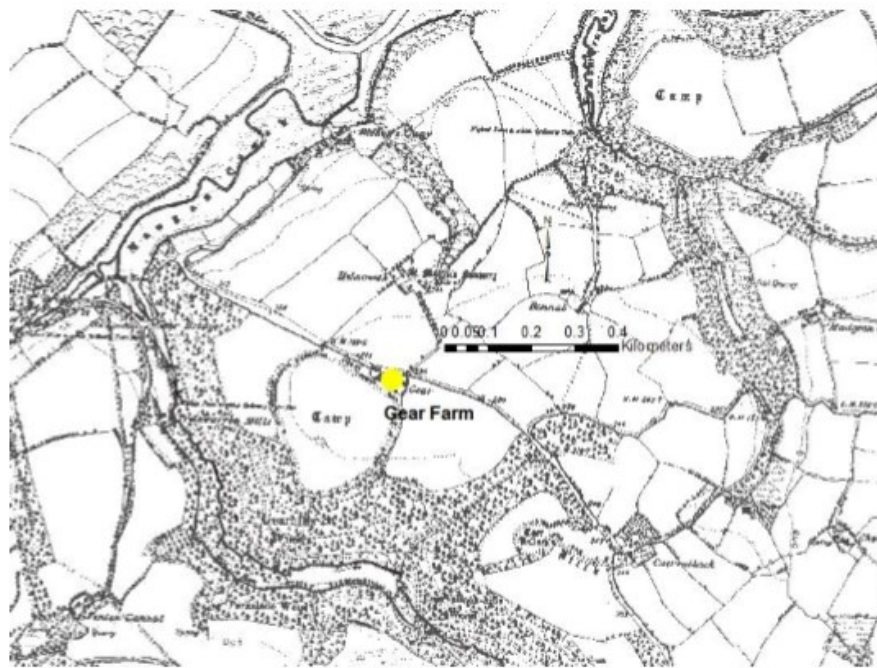


Figure 4.35 Gear Farm: Ordnance Survey 1st series map, 1881 (Source: Historic Digimap)

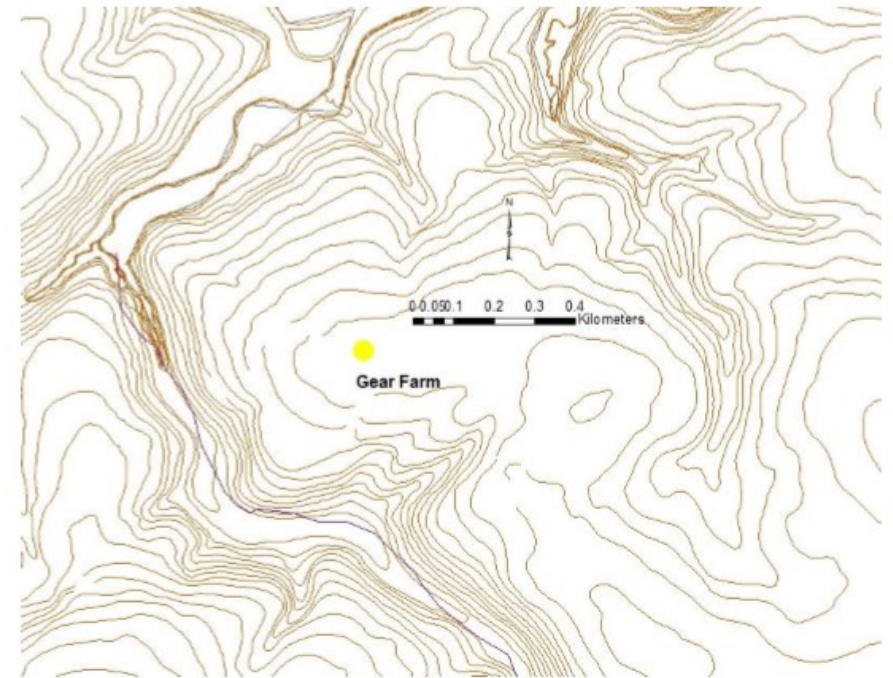
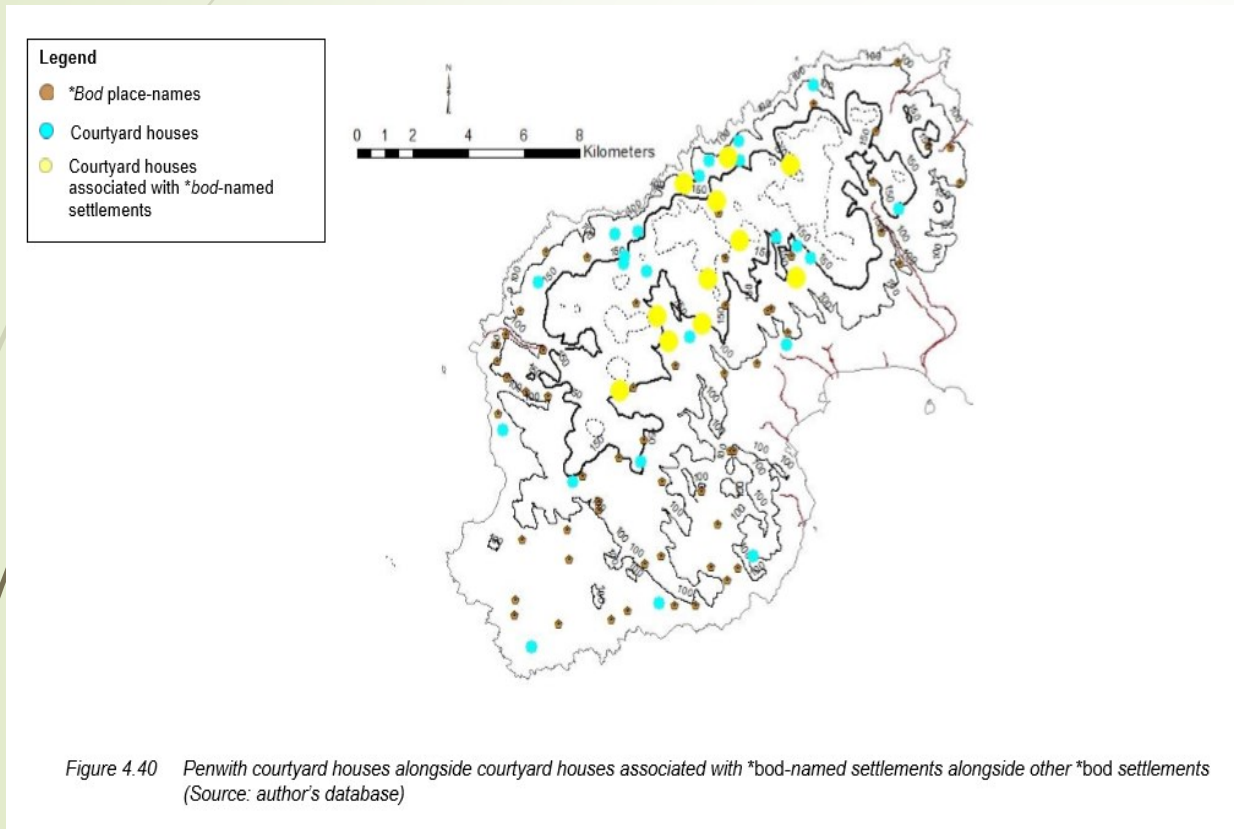


Figure 4.37 Landscape contours around Gear Farm, under 100m (Source: OS Landform data)

# \*Bod names in Cornwall and Wales



*Bod originally meant a lord's residence. Having fixed upon a certain spot of land, he would build a dwelling-house thereon, which was called bod, and the name of the builder or owner was added to distinguish it from other dwelling-houses, hence we have Bodowain, Bodedeyrn, &c. He had two residences — yr Hafod, the summer residence, and Gaeafod, the winter residence. But in course of time bod was used to designate any house or dwelling-place.*

- Morgan, *The Place-Names of Wales*, 1912



# Bosiliack, West Penwith

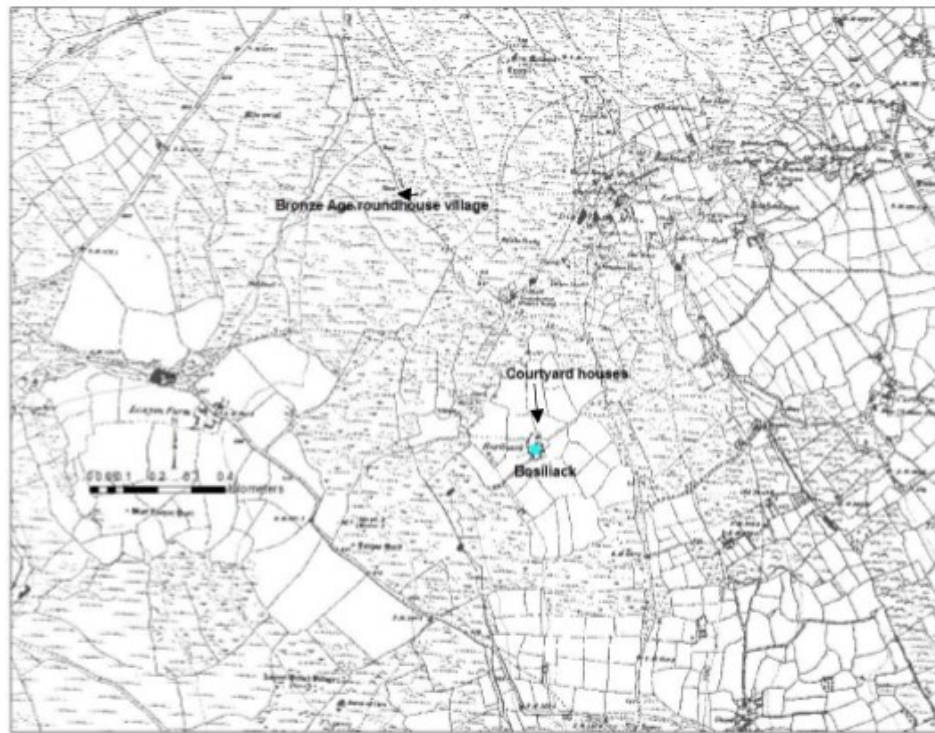


Figure 4.46 *Bosiliack: Ordnance Survey 1<sup>st</sup> series map, 1881 (Source: Historic Digimap)*

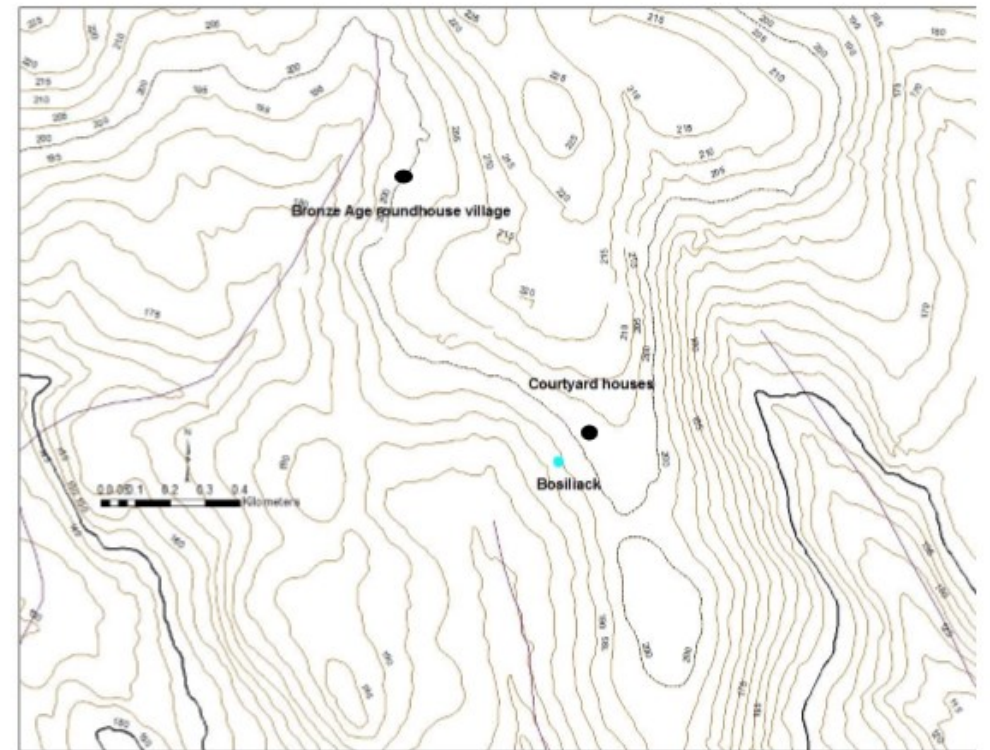


Figure 4.47 *Landscape contours around Bosiliack (Source: OS Landform data)*

## \*Dinas place-names in Penwith



Figures 5.3a and 5.3b Linked \*dinas names in the landscape: Bartinney, Cardinney and Tredinney (Source: Google Earth), together with map of \*dinas settlements in Penwith showing location and contours (Source: author's database)

# Lanlivery, Powdershire

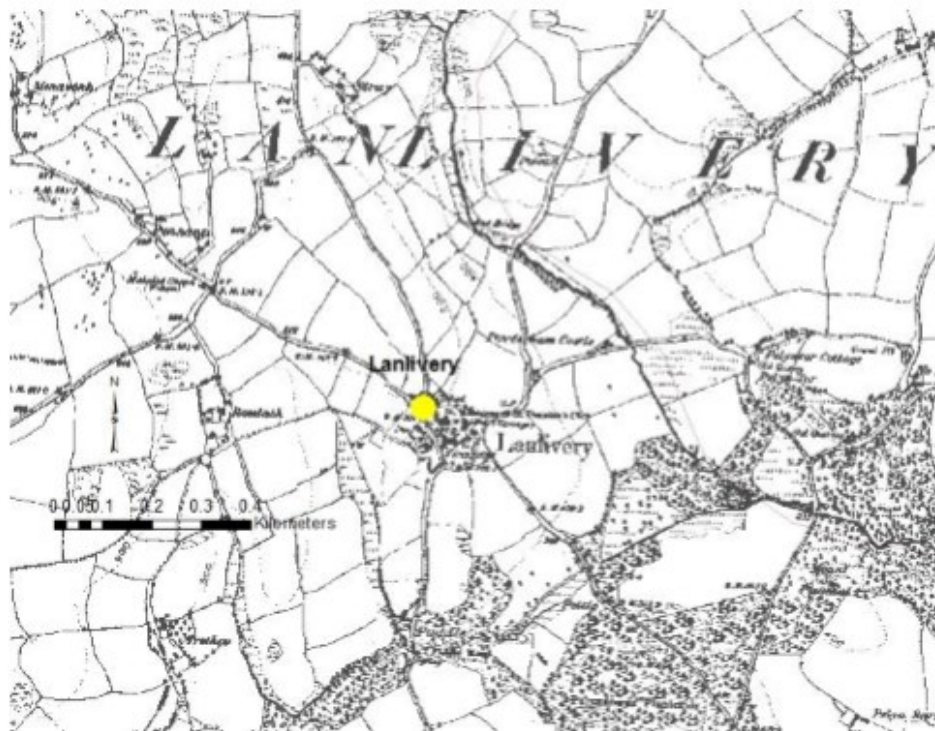


Figure 5.19 Lanlivery: Ordnance Survey 1<sup>st</sup> series map, 1881 (Source: Digimap)



Figure 5.20 Lanlivery churchyard, with subcircular lann marked as 'Grave Yard' (Source: <http://www.old-maps.co.uk>)

# Penhale, Pydar



Figure 6.6 Penhale: Ordnance Survey 1<sup>st</sup> series map, 1881 (Source: Historic Digimap)

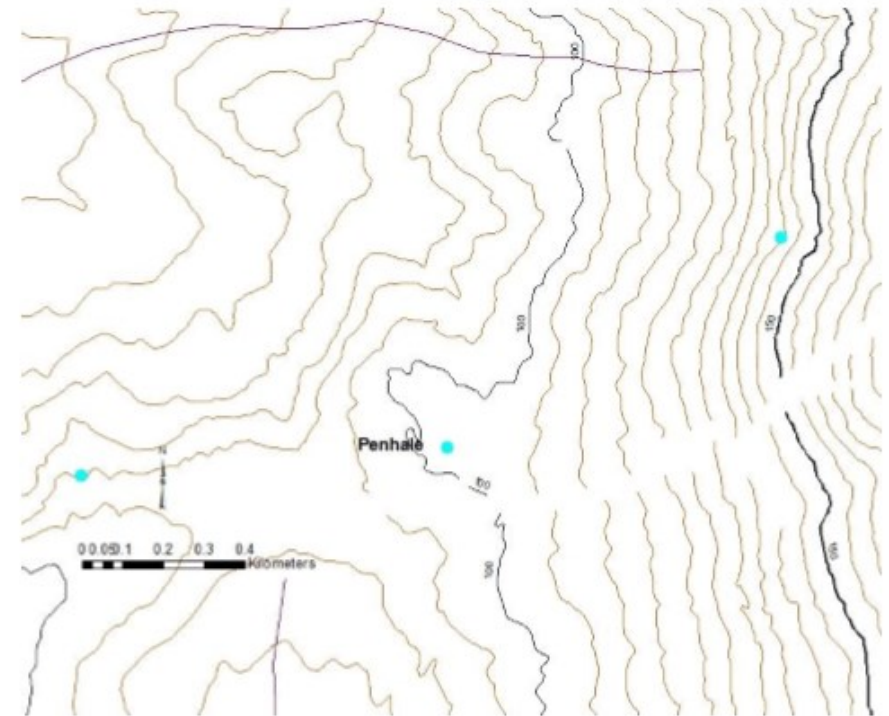


Figure 6.7 Landscape contours around Penhale (Source: OS Landform data)

# Penpol place-names

**Legend**  
● \*Penpol place-names

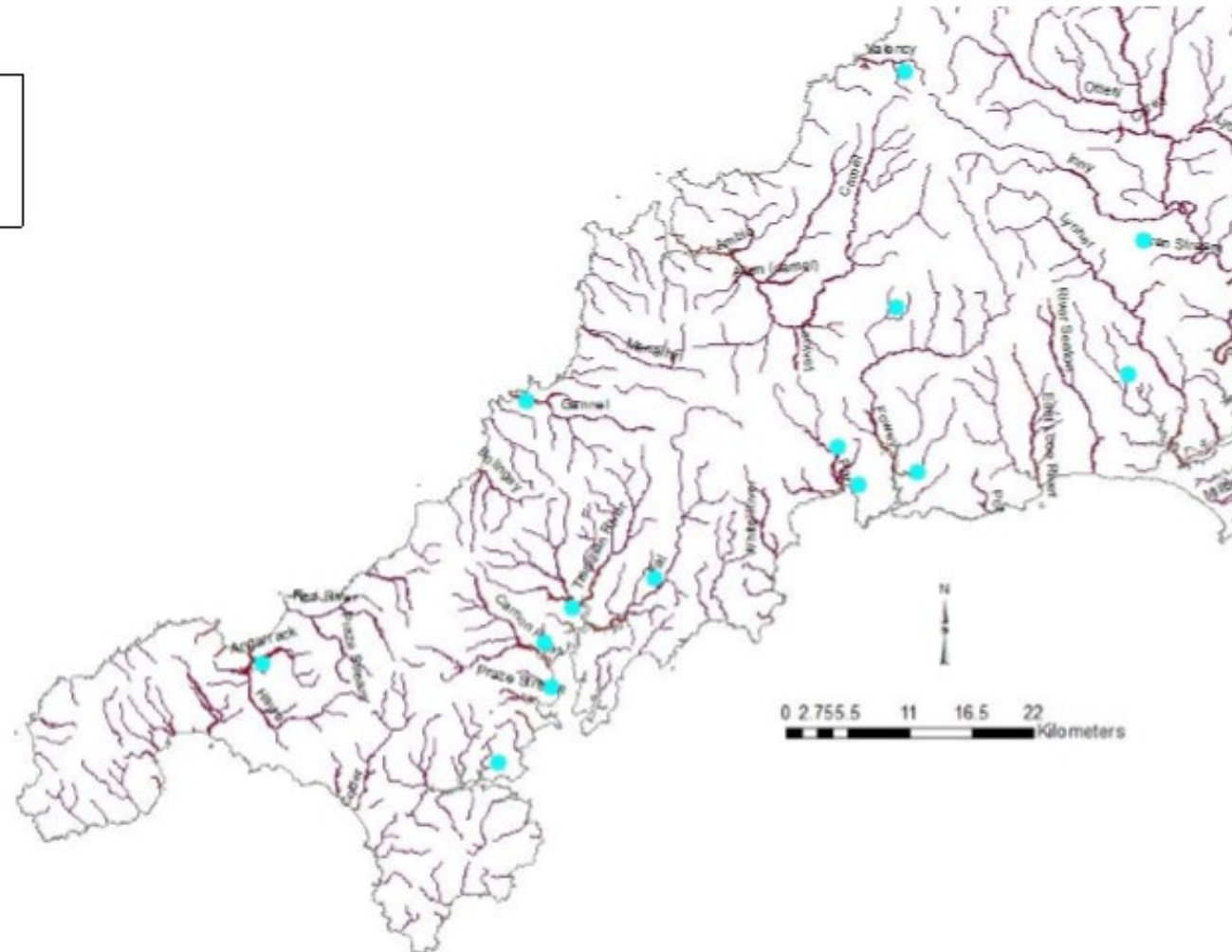


Figure 6.9 Penpol place-names on major river valleys in Cornwall (Source: author's database)



# \*Coys place-names across Cornwall

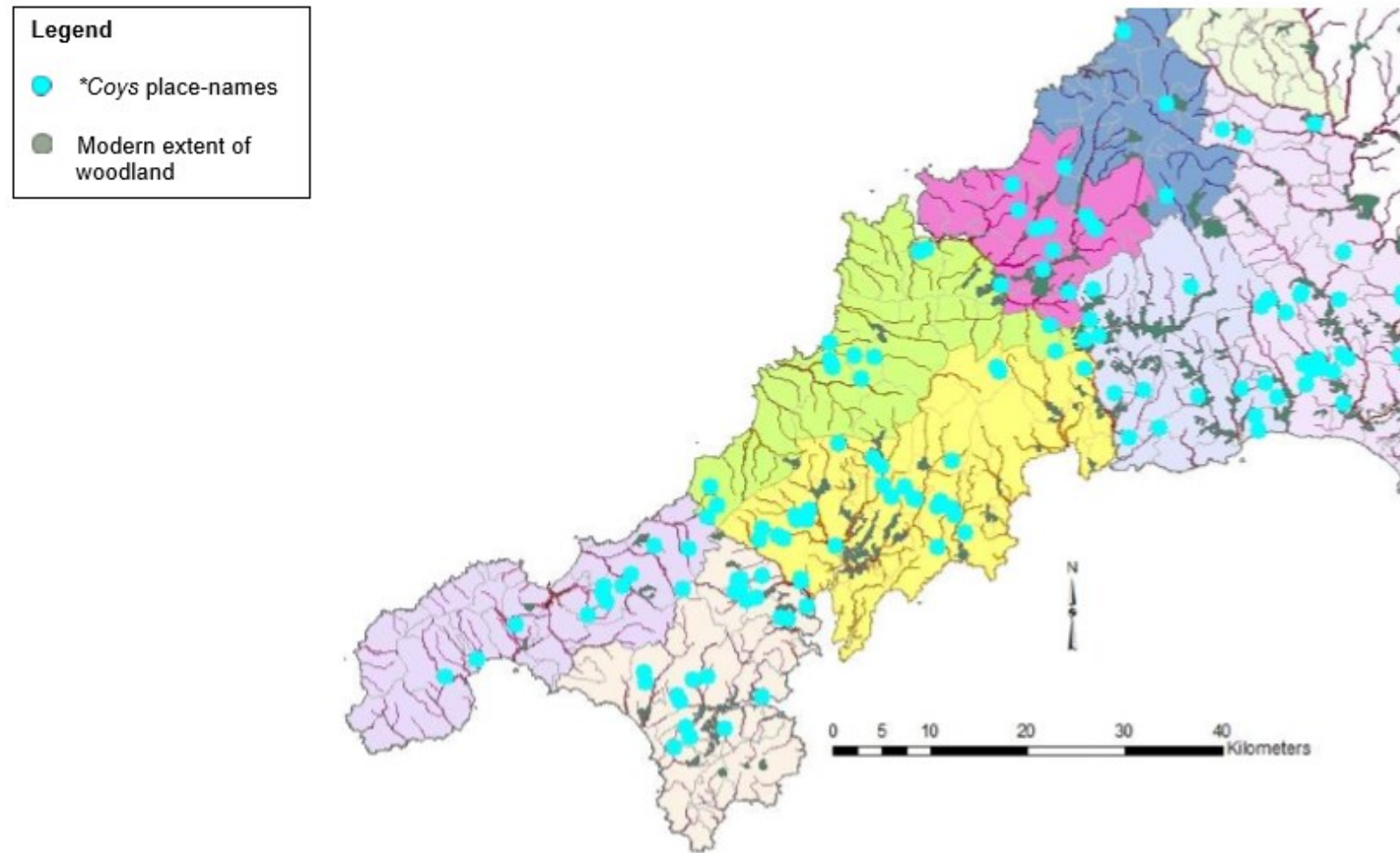


Figure 6.24 \*Coys place-names with modern extent of woodland (Source: author's database)

# Colquite, Triggshire



Figure 6.25 Colquite (Source: Aerial Digimap)

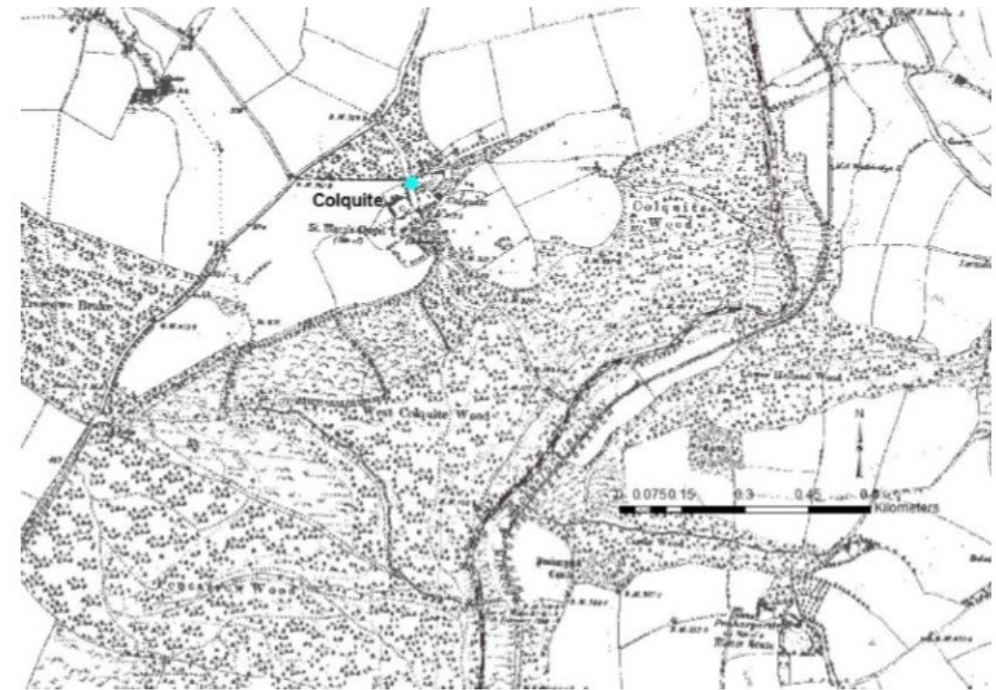



Figure 6.28 Colquite: Ordnance Survey 1<sup>st</sup> series map, 1881 (Source: Historic Digimap)



# Cornish place-names in the landscape – research answers

- Place-names do reflect an expansion of settlement into the uplands, although as 'infill', not fresh settlement
- Temporary settlements may be high as well as low status, and reflect early industrial functions in the later medieval
- Higher and lower status habitative names show preferences for certain locations, and changes in status
- Medieval settlements are often sited in relation to prehistoric sites, whose names may commemorate them
- High status secular sites show a complementary distribution which may reflect a sequence of occupation
- Topographical place-names are sited near the landscape resources they refer to: a distinctive hierarchy is suggested



# Key research findings from Cornish place-name mapping

- Place-name distributions reflect east-mid-west patterning across Cornwall, dividing the county roughly into thirds – shown by English place-names and Cornish variants
- Place-name forms have undergone replacement over time from earlier designations, both Cornish and English. Settlements appear to have shifted locations marginally in the early medieval
- Common property regimes are suggested where resources are shared; there is little evidence of individual ownership in personal naming as in Old English areas, and duplication is rife
- Place-names for resources and their extents or boundaries indicate the character, features and uses of local landscapes; topographical names combine with each other
- The importance of waterways to settlement is shown by generic water elements, although few names are recorded for minor rivers. River names also duplicate



Meur ras!!

(Thank you very much!)