

## **The problem of Lethytep (Pelynt)** and stress in Cornish place-names Oliver Padel

The unique and obscure Cornish place-name Lethytep referred to a farmhouse in Pelynt parish in the nineteenth century. Owing to their family connection with that parish the Hamblys have aptly resurrected the name, using it for their fine wildlife reserve in the neighbouring parish of Lanreath. Since the name has become lost in its original parish, there is no oral tradition of its pronunciation; and its overall shape is unparalleled, so its pronunciation cannot readily be deduced through analogy with names of similar shape, for there are none. We therefore can deduce its traditional pronunciation only by working out its derivation, and I am grateful to Philip Hambly for providing the lead for that, and subsequently to Carole Vivian for providing much local detail, all of which has led to the following conclusions.

The first question is where Lethytep actually was. It does not appear on any Ordnance Survey map, nor apparently in the Tithe Apportionment of Pelynt parish (1840), nor on Thomas Martyn's one-inch Map of Cornwall (1748), nor in Kelly's Directories of 1893 and later. So even its location can be found only by deduction. Its earliest appearance, according to present knowledge, was in the 1851 Census, when Richard Hambly was farming there. Entries in the nineteenth-century censuses were to some extent listed geographically, so the order of entries in this census, and in the two subsequent ones in which Lethytep appears (those of 1861 and 1871), is the best clue to its location. It was always listed between Watergate, on the West Looe River and at the parish boundary between Talland and Pelynt parishes (grid reference SX233545), and Milcombe alias Trelawne Mill, half a mile up the West Looe River from Watergate (SX230552). Carole Vivian therefore thinks that it was situated at Milcombe itself, since there is apparently no known former habitation between there and Watergate. She suggests, 'it may have been in what is now a garden at the back of the farm buildings at Trelawne Mill or next to the cottage known as Millcombe at the back of the mill' (letter from CV to OJP, December 2016, enclosing a detailed account of Lethytep that she had written a few years earlier). Lethytep seems to have been inherently associated with Richard Hambly and his family, and in fact all known references to it, from 1851 to 1889, are in connection with that family. In addition to the ten-yearly censuses, it appears in printed trade directories over the same period: the Post Office directory of 1856 lists Richard Hambly, farmer, at Lethytep, and similarly that of 1873, and Kelly's Directory of 1883. In 1889 the same Directory listed John Hambly, farmer, at Lethytep; but by 1893 no Hambly was listed as farming in the parish of Pelynt.

It seems that one of the Hambly family, probably Richard, gave the name Lethytep to his farmhouse at Milcombe at some date between 1840, when it was not named in the Tithe Apportionment, and 1851, its first known appearance. The name continued as long as there were Hamblys there, but on their departure from the parish in about 1890 (after Kelly's Directory of 1889 and before the 1891 Census), the use of the name lapsed. Unfortunately, as Carole Vivian says, the Hamblys were sufficiently numerous in nineteenth-century Pelynt to make it sometimes difficult to distinguish between members of the family; in the nineteenth century there were Hamblys at both of the two separate places called Milcombe or Millcombe in the parish. In her detailed written account of Lethytep she has tried to trace the different members of the family.

Carole Vivian has also suggested a possible derivation for the name of the farm, and further information makes her suggestion extremely probable, although one confirmatory link is still lacking. She points out that a surname of rather similar form, *Levitopp*, was current in the nearby parish of St Veep in the seventeenth century, with Richard, Thomasine and John *Levitopp* all listed in the Hearth Tax under St Veep parish in 1664. Even closer to home, in Pelynt church someone of that surname, Christopher *Levetop*, married Ann Morgan in 1704; and in 1743 another Christopher, perhaps their son, married Susannah Haines in the same church. So the surname was actually known in Pelynt parish in the first half of the eighteenth century.

This information can be amplified in ways which strengthen the suggestion and which also lead to a derivation for the surname. Earlier in St Veep parish, in 1641, a Richard *Lethetop* was listed in the Protestation Return. (Details of all the individuals mentioned are given in the Appendix, below.) This is likely to be the same man as Richard *Levitopp* already noted there in 1664, or a close relation, and this earlier form of his surname shows the same variation of *-th-* and *-v-* as appears in Pelynt parish between the form of the surname found there, *Levetop*, and the form used for Richard Hambly's farmhouse a century later, *Lethytep*. One other instance of the surname also shows *-th-*, in 1634 (see below). The variation is not surprising, for interchange between those two sounds is also found, though only sporadically, in other names, both in Cornwall and elsewhere; the best-known example is probably seen in the Welsh name *Caerdydd* (rhyming with 'seethe') and its English form *Cardiff*, with *-ff* coming presumably via *-v* as a substitute for the *-th* sound. It would seem that a variant form of the surname *Levitopp* with *-th-* was current orally, though not often written down, and that was the form used by Richard Hambly in the 1840s.

The surname *Levitopp* can be traced back considerably earlier than the seventeenth century, though not in St Veep parish. At an earlier date it appears in St Breock parish, on the west side of Wadebridge. In 1499 Richard *Lovetop* was a tenant of the farm of Trevanson in that parish (SW978728), holding it of the nearby manor of Perlees; and a year later he was reeve of that manor, his name appearing in the form Richard *Louytop*. The family continued to flourish in St Breock parish throughout the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, the last people noted there being William and Henry *Levytop* in 1691. It is here that the other instance of the surname with the spelling *-th-* appears: Mary *Lethitop* married Nicholas Blewet at St Breock in 1634. From that parish it spread not only to St Veep parish but also to Helland parish, just north of Bodmin town, where a Christopher *Levitopp* appeared in 1664 and 1689, and 'Blanch *Levitopp*, of Helland' was married in 1712 at Egloshayle. In fact, since the use of particular Christian names tends to run in families, it seems likely that Christopher *Levetop* who brought the surname to Pelynt parish in 1704 may have come from the Helland branch of the family, where the forename Christopher was in use, rather than the St Veep branch, where that forename is not seen.

These early occurrences of the name make it possible to offer a derivation for it. The first part of the name looks like English *love*, which appears in several English personal names and surnames such as *Loveday*, *Lovibond*, and *Lovelock*, all of which (unusually for surnames or place-names) mean much what they appear to be. As for the second part, I am grateful to Peter McClure, an authority on Middle English surnames, for pointing out that one meaning of *top* in Middle English was 'tuft of hair'. The meaning of the rare surname *Lovetop* therefore will have been much the same as the commoner *Lovelock*, which was actually a known word in the language, meaning 'any curl or tress of hair of a peculiar or

striking character' (Oxford English Dictionary). At one period *lovelock* had a more particular sense, 'a curl of particular form worn by courtiers in the time of Elizabeth and James I'; but the surname originated well before that period, so it will probably have had its more general meaning when applied as a nickname, referring to someone with a distinctive lock of hair, and giving rise to the inherited surname *Lovelock*. The same origin can therefore be assigned to its rarer counterpart, *Lovetop*, so far attested only for a single family in Cornwall, and referring originally to an individual with a distinctive lock of hair. (One can think of Hergé's illustrations of his hero Tintin.)

Knowing the derivation makes it possible to deduce the likely pronunciation of the surname, and hence of the place-name. Place-names in Cornwall often have distinctive stress-patterns, unexpected or even awkward to outsiders. The reason is that they have in general been impressively tenacious of the stress arising from their derivations, and those with Cornish-language derivations have particularly distinctive patterns. Very broadly, they often show stress on the penultimate syllable: Boconnoc, Trewidland, Penhallow, Penadlake, Tregadillet, Tregonetha, Hantergantick, Marazion, Perranarworthal, and so on. But there are also numerous exceptions. Two-syllable Cornish-language names are more varied: some conform to the same principle, such as Hendra, Clinnick, Stennack, Kynance; but Trenant, Liskeard, Lanreath, Penquite, and Cotehele do not. And some Cornish-language names of three or more syllables also fail to conform: Linkinhorne, Kilminorth, Biscovey, Ponsanooth, Trebetherick, Tregony. Both for the general pattern, and also for all of the exceptions, there are always good historical reasons within the etymology of the particular name.

By contrast, Cornish place-names of English-language origin, like those elsewhere, are normally stressed on the first syllable, however many syllables there are: Camelford, Chacewater, Boscastle, Gunnislake, Harrowbarrow. Surnames, of either language, have tended to be slightly less tenacious than place-names of their etymological pronunciations, because they move around more, so they have not always existed within a speech-community which preserved the traditional pronunciation. But even surnames generally show a pronunciation corresponding to their derivation, albeit slightly less reliably than place-names. The surname *Lovetop*, *Lovitopp*, being of English-language origin, will have conformed to the usual English pattern. Whoever applied it as a house-name in Pelynt parish in the mid-nineteenth century is likely to have had spoken knowledge of it as a surname, since that would presumably have been the reason for using the name; moreover, the form used for the farmhouse, with *-th-* not *-v-*, also suggests a spoken tradition, since *-th-* is so much rarer in the written forms of the surname. It is therefore likely that the house-name will also have been pronounced in traditional manner, with stress on the first syllable. There is one other point to add about the pronunciation: since the *-th-* arose through interchange with *-v-* in the surname, it was probably voiced in pronunciation (like *th* in 'this' and 'leather'), not voiceless (like *th* in 'thin' or 'moth'). On present knowledge, therefore, we can deduce that the name was pronounced rather like an English word 'leathertip' (if such a word existed), although that is not its derivation.

In summary, the unique Cornish place-name Lethytep apparently arose from the application of a spoken form of the surname *Lovetop*, *Lovitopp*, *Levetop*, to a farmhouse of the Hambly family in Pelynt parish at some date between 1840 and 1851. It continued in use until the Hambly family left there in about 1890. The surname itself had been current in the parish a hundred years earlier, in 1704 and 1743. In Cornwall it originated, on present evidence, at St Breock (Wadebridge) in the fifteenth century, and spread from there to the

parishes of Helland and St Veep, coming probably from Helland parish to Pelynt at some date before 1704. The one missing link at present is a connection between the eighteenth-century family in Pelynt and the use of the surname for a farmhouse a hundred years later. The most direct link would be for a daughter of the Levetop family to have married a Hambly during the eighteenth or early nineteenth century; if so, a memory of that maternal surname among the Hambly family could have given rise to its use for the farmhouse. It may be that further work on the parish registers of Pelynt parish, or perhaps those elsewhere, most likely Helland, could confirm that hypothesis, or perhaps show some other, less direct link.

Cornwall, January 2017

### **Appendix: known occurrences of the surname Lovitopp, Levitopp, Lethetop**

#### St Breock parish

Richard *Lovetop* 1499 Rental, Arundells p. 141 (St Breock; at Trevanson, tenant of Perlees manor)

Richard *Louytop* 1500 Manorial AcctRoll, CRO AR2/418 (St Breock; reeve of Perlees manor)

William *Lotopp*, John *Lotopp* 1569 Muster p. 30 (St Breock; for the variation in form, compare *Lowdy* as a variant of *Loveday*, as both forename and surname.)

Thomas *Lovetoppe* 1573 Fry, Wills II, 122b (St Breock)

Thomas *Levitop* 1581 ParReg XVIII, 79 (St Breock; married Katrine Blake)

William *Levitop* 1582 AcctRoll, CRO AR2/967 (St Breock, reeve of Perlees manor)

Thomas *Lovitopp* 1592 Fry, Wills, I, 108a; II, 123b (St Breock)

*Chroferus* [Christopher] *Livetoppe* 1608 ParReg XVIII, 83 (St Breock; married Grace Weirye)

*Issable* [Isabel] *Levitoppe* 1632 ParReg XVIII, 87 (St Breock; married John Moone)

Christopher *Levitoppe* 1632 AcctRoll, CRO AR2/985 (St Breock; reeve of Perlees manor)

Mary *Lethitop* 1634 ParReg XVIII, 87 (St Breock; married Nicholas Blewet)

Thomas *Levitop* '1637' [Feb. 1638] ParReg XVIII, 88 (St Breock; married Elizabeth Carne)

Blanch *Levitopp* 1643 ParReg XVIII, 89 (St Breock; married William Lightfoot)

[Not thereafter in the St Breock marriage registers down to 1812, I think]

Thomas *Levitopp* 1664 Hearth Tax p. 147 (St Breock)

Thomas *Levitop* 1664 Fry, Wills, II, 127b (St Breock)

Thomas *Levitopp* 1678 Fry, Wills, II, 128b (St Breock)

William *Levytop*, Henry *Levytop* 1691 Fry, Wills II, 129a (St Breock)

#### St Veep parish

Richard *Lethetop* 1641 Protestation Returns p. 173 (St Veep)

Richard *Levitopp*, Thomasine *Levitopp*, John *Levitopp* 1664 Hearth p. 108 (St Veep)

#### Helland parish

Christopher *Levitopp* 1664 Hearth Tax p. 43 (Helland)

Christopher *Levitopp* 1689 Glencross, Wills I, 196a (Helland)

Blanch *Levitopp*, of Helland 1712 ParReg VI, 13 (married in Egloshayle parish)

#### Pelynt parish

Christopher *Levetop* 1704 *ParReg* (Pelynt), marr. Ann Morgan (per C.V.)

Christopher *Levetop* (? spelling) 1743 *ParReg* (Pelynt), marr. Susannah Haines (per C.V.)