THE LAND OF CAL

"Gaul is a whole divided into three parts" Julius Caesar famously tells us in c.50 BC[1].
The three parts were Gallia Celtica, Belgica (the north-east) and Aquitania (the south-west.) and *"All these differ from each other in language, customs and laws."*[2] *"The greater part of the Belgae were sprung from the Germans, and having crossed the Rhine at an early period, they had settled there, on account of the fertility of the country"*[3]

'The Belgae' is a term applied to a group of Germanic tribes in north-eastern Gaul, some of whom had been present in Gaul for longer than others. When did these Germanic tribes arrive? History does not tell us, but the battlefield site at Ribemont-sur-Ancre (in the Somme), dating from about 260BC, has been interpreted as the result of a battle between the Belgae and the Celts.

Strabo, in his 'Geography', (c.20 BC?) says that the 'Belge' and the 'Galatae' *"do not all speak the same language, but some make a slight difference in their speech"*[4] In contrast the 'Aquitani' *"differ completely from the other nations, not only in their language but in their figure."*[5] However, it should be noted that Strabo's knowledge of Gaul was faulty (he thought that the Pyrenees were a chain of mountains oriented north-south).

So I think it fair to conclude that the languages of Gallia Celtica and the Belgae were similar, but with sufficient differences that they were regarded as distinct. Whether or not the language of the Belgae would more appropriately be classified as a dialect, I refer to it in this paper as 'Belgic', a Germanic language which now survives only as a component of other languages.

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[1] Julius Caesar 'Gallic Wars', Book 1, Chapter 1
[2] Ibid
[3] Julius Caesar, Gallic Wars, Book 2, Chapter 4
[4] Strabo, 'Geography ', Book 4, Chapter 1, Section 1
[5] Ibid

The cultural and language differences evident in northern Gaul were mirrored across the Channel, where many of the tribes of the south-east of England bore names similar or identical to the Belgic tribes of north-eastern Gaul. They may even have been under common rule, Caesar telling us that Divitiacus, the Gallic king of the Suessiones, *"held the government of...Britain."*[6]

The people of Kent did not *"differ much from the Gallic customs"*[7] But the tribes of the 'interior' of Britain were very different. Populated by indigenous people[8] they used brass or iron rings as money[9], instead of coins. (The Durotriges of Dorset did in fact use coins, but without inscriptions or images). These people 'of the interior' spoke Insular Celtic languages, the ancestors of modern Welsh and Gaelic.

In AD 98, Tacitus, comparing the Britons to the Gauls, tells us *"The language differs but little"*[10] and it seems that he assumed that the Belgic and Celtic languages were the same on both sides of the Channel. However, Tacitus, like Strabo, had never visited Gaul or Britain. He got his information from his father-in-law, Agricola, who was the governor of Britain from AD 77 to AD 85.

Where the cultural boundary between the Belgic and indigenous people in Britain lay when the Romans arrived, we do not know, but the city of Winchester was known to the Romans as Venta Belgarum ('the market of the Belgae'), which tells us that at least the area to the east of that was probably 'Belgic'.

During the Roman occupation, and subsequent Anglo-Saxon era, it seems likely that the Belgic-speaking population adopted Latin and then Anglo-Saxon, perhaps more readily than the Insular Celtic-speaking population. And I suggest that the influence of the Belgic tribes spread over most of lowlands England, under Roman rule. But I will argue in this paper that the common people in the Belgic-speaking parts of the country

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[6] Julius Caesar, Gallic Wars, Book 2, Chapter 4
[7] 'Gallic Wars', Book 5, Chapter 14
[8] 'Gallic Wars', Book 5, Chapter 12
[9] Ibid
[10] Tacitus, 'Agricola' ,Ch 11

preserved a significant part of their original dialect, through a millennium of foreign domination, and that this substratum only emerged in the written record after the Norman Conquest.

Certainly, the Anglo-Saxons did not recognise 'Belgic' as a separate language. Bede, writing in or before AD 731, names the five languages spoken in Britain in his day as Anglo-Saxon, British, Irish, Pictish and Latin[11]. But what did he mean by 'British'? As an Anglo-Saxon living in Northumberland, and never having travelled in his whole life, he could be forgiven for not knowing that the 'British' spoke several different forms of their language. To Bede, the British were all '*wealas*' and therefore, in modern terms, Welsh. If Belgic retained any identity, it can have been no more than a low-status dialect spoken in lowlands England.

To decipher the Belgic puzzle, I will start with a hypothesis. I want to test the theory that the Belgic word for a standing stone was 'cal'. It has been suggested that this word derives from Proto-Indo-European ('PIE')[12] and that this word survives in Iberian toponyms such as present-day Calpe, and historical Calpe (Gibraltar). The Latin word for chalk was 'calcem' (from which we get 'calcify') and this may have the same root, but the stones I am discussing here are not made of chalk.

Standing stones are a widespread and conspicuous landscape feature, present in both Insular Celtic and Belgic England (although about two-thirds of them have probably disappeared over time, quarried for other uses). In Welsh, the word for a standing stone is '*menhir*' (or '*maen hir*'), but that term does not survive in any place names in lowlands England.

To test my hypothesis that the Belgic equivalent of 'menhir' was 'cal', I want to start in the village of Challacombe in Devon. In the Domesday Book (1086) Challacombe was called 'Celdecoma'. The Domesday Book for much of south-western Britain was

[11] Bede. 'Ecclesiastical History of the English People' Book1, Chapter 1
[12] Pokorny, IEW 531

compiled from the Exon Domesday, which records the results of the survey of one of the circuits of assessors. There is thus the possibility that spellings can differ slightly between the records, and, in any event, spellings in the Domesday Book are often quite approximate. But what is significant here is that (a) 'Challa' was something very different from the current name, something like 'Celde', and (b) the name contains the word 'coma'.

The word 'coma' is clearly a form of the word which in Welsh became 'cwm', which in Cornish was '*komm*'[13] and which in Old English was '*combe*' or 'coomb'. It means a short valley or hollow, usually without a stream running through it. '*Combe*' is also thought to have PIE origins.[14]

The presence of this word in the name of Celdecoma is helpful to dating the whole place name. '*Kumba*' or *'comba'* is Middle Latin for 'valley', and it may derive from a Proto-Celtic word '*kumbā*' with the same meaning. The evolution of the word seems to have been Proto-Celtic 'kumbā' → Gaulish or Middle Latin '*kumba*' → Welsh '*cwm*' or Cornish '*komm*' → Old English '*combe*' or '*coomb*'[15]. Along the way, the word lost its final 'a', and this is helpful to dating the use of the word. It seems that earlier variants end in 'a', and later versions do not.

'Combe' place names are spread across southern England, and this allows us to plot the spread of Anglo-Saxon influence across this area. In the Domesday Book, there is a fairly clear gradient from west to east. In Cornwall, there are no 'combe' or 'comba' place names (despite the fact that '*komm*' seems to have entered the Cornish language at some point). In Devon and Somerset, both 'combe' and 'comba' place names appear interchangeably.

Celdecoma is the only place name in Devon that appears exclusively in the 'comba' form. In Somerset, there were several places that appeared in both forms (Alcombe,

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[13] An Gerlyver Meur, 2nd edition
[14] Pokorny, IEW 593
[15] Sereantson, Mary, "History of Foreign Words in English', p.55

Ashcombe, Batcombe). In Dorset, most place names use the 'combe' form but Watercome, Whitcombe and Renscombe took both forms. In Wiltshire and Gloucestershire, only the 'combe' form appears, and in mainland Hampshire, there was only one 'combe' place name in the Domesday Book (Faccombe) (there were several names in both forms on the Isle of Wight).

Alcome and Ashcombe are situated in West Somerset, on Exmoor, so the eastern outlier of the Somerset 'cumba' names is Batcombe, near Shepton Mallet, which was either Batecumbe or Batecomba in the Domesday Book. Together with the three 'cumba' villages in Dorset, these appear to be the exceptions to a 'rule' that the 'cumba' place names existed west of the Somerset Levels.

Challacombe is situated to the west of the Somerset Levels, but is named only as Celdecoma and therefore appears to have an exclusively Gaulish or, perhaps, Belgic, origin, unusually free from Anglo-Saxon influence.

It may also be helpful to readers unfamiliar with the geography and history of Devon to know a little about this background. Devon is the second most southerly county in England. It has a mild Oceanic climate, and today is one of the few counties in Britain where palm trees will grow out of doors. The north of the county is marginally cooler than the south.

Challacombe is located at the western end of Exmoor, in a valley open to the prevailing south-westerly winds, at an altitude of 252m.

In early Roman times, Exeter in the east of the county was the south-western terminus of the Fosse Way, which connected Exeter with Ilchester in Somerset, Cirencester, Leicester in the eastern midlands and eventually Lincoln. This was the boundary of the early Roman province of Britannia, so everything to the north and west of the Fosse Way, including north Devon, was Celtic. Devon later became a Roman *civitas*, but there is no Roman archaeology in north Devon.

In AD 710, King Ine of the West Saxons defeated the King of Devon, and after that the Saxons began to colonise the county. However, it seems that north Devon remained under the control of the Kings of Cornwall.

King Ecgberht of Wessex fought campaigns in Devon between 813 and 822, and William of Malmesbury reports that King Alfred negotiated with King Dungarth of Cornwall somewhere near Exmoor in c.876. The western Celts were only finally subdued during the reign of King Æthelstan (AD 894 – 935), barely a century before the Anglo-Saxon hegemony in England started to come to an end, when the Scandinavian King Cnut seized the English throne. (in 1016).

There are no surviving pre-Norman churches or monasteries in north Devon. The only archaeological evidence of Saxon rule in this period is three forts constructed during the 10th century along the north coast to defend the territory against Viking raiders.

So, what do I think 'Celdecoma' means? As indicated above, I think this is an ancient name, either Gaulish or Belgic, on the evidence of the 'a' ending. The most prominent landmark near the village of Challacombe is the Longstone, a 3m high standing stone, the tallest on Exmoor, situated on Challacombe Common.

Applying my hypothesis that 'cal' meant 'standing stone' and accepting that 'cel' may be a misspelling of 'cal', I think 'celdecoma' may relate to the standing stone. If 'de' meant 'of', as it does in modern French, I could translate the name as 'stone of the valley'. This name would be entirely apt for the place.

However, Anglo-Saxon scholars argue that 'celdecoma' meant 'cold valley' in Old English. The Old English word for 'cold' is '*ceald*'.

To me, this proposition is counterfactual. 'Coma' is not Old English, it is Brythonic, '*ceald*' is not the same as 'calde', and the valley is not cold. This interpretation does not explain the 'e' in the middle of the place name, this is not a particularly Anglo-Saxon (or Roman) area, so why would anyone call the place 'cold valley' in Old English?

While there can be no absolute proof of the solution, I think that 'stone of the valley' is the best fit with the available evidence.

The next stop on my journey is the town of Calne in Wiltshire ("Couna' in the Domesday Book). The town is near Europe's largest ring of standing stones at Avebury. It is also near the villages called Calstone and Calstone Wellington (Calestone in the Domesday Book) and also Calstone Down. I think that the Calstone names preserve an ancient association between 'cal' and stones.

Today the name of Calne is pronounced 'karn', but it seems clear from the Domesday Book spelling that the suffix '-ne' was pronounced in the distant past, perhaps as either '-nah' or '-neh'.

Applying my hypothesis, the 'Cal' of Calne would mean standing stone, and we might further guess that the suffix '-ne' could have meant 'near'. So, the name of the town would have meant 'near the standing stone(s)'. Again, an entirely apt description of the location. If this is correct, we start to see that the place names of Belgic England may have been at least sometimes descriptions in relation to landscape features, as if to enable a visitor to find the place.

We have seen that scholars think that 'cal' may originally have been PIE. So why do I think 'cal' may have been a word in Belgic? Because the cal name also appears in north-eastern France, e.g. in Calais. However, prehistoric monuments in this region tend to have Celtic names – menhir and dolmen. An example is the Menhir Le Gros Caillou in Oisy-le-Verger in the Pas de Calais. 'Caillou' means pebble or stone in modern French, and derives from the Gallo-Roman language, or Gaulish. I think 'caillou' is a diminutive of 'cal'.

If the suffix '-ne' meant 'near', that would explain several other place names. An example would be the name of Lydney, a village by the River Lyd in Gloucestershire (i.e. '(the village) near (the river) Lyd'). I have chosen Lydney as an example because (a) the meaning of 'Lyd' is clear and (b) Lydney was never within the Danelaw. There is a

tendency among scholars to interpret any name with the suffix '-ney' as relating to the Norse word for an island 'ey' (thus Guernsey, Jersey, Anglesey etc), or the Anglo-Saxon word with the same meaning 'eg' (for example in Romsey). In these names, the first element is usually a personal or tribal name followed by the possessive 's', and then 'ey' for island.[16]

The place-names with the '-ney' suffix are quite different. They seem to be formed of a landscape feature, followed by the suffix '-ney'. The same structure is visible in French place names, often with a silent 'g' in front of the '-ny' suffix e.g. Montagny, Savigny, Aubigny, Sérigny, Chérigny etc. In all of these names, the first word seems to be a landscape feature.

So, I think we should re-examine the toponymy of the numerous English places which exhibit a '-ney' suffix: eg Abney, Ampney, Ashreigney, Athelney, Bolney, Hackney, Putney, Stepney etc. The -ney suffix is not Norse, Welsh or Anglo-Saxon.

In some cases, a '-ny' place name survives only as a personal name, whether of British origin (e.g. Sidney, from the river Sid in Devon) or imported from France eg Champney and d'Isigny (which has become 'Disney') ('ifs' in Gallo-Roman meant 'yew trees') etc.

Returning to the 'cal' theme, if my interpretation of 'Celdecoma' is correct, this would allow us to translate the name 'Caldecote', which is a very common place name throughout lowlands England. Conventional wisdom suggests that the origin of the name is the Anglo-Saxon for 'cold cottage', as if this would distinguish any place in the first millennium AD. Based on my hypothesis, it may have meant 'stone of (or by) the side' – in other words 'milestone'. This would explain why Caldecotes are found all over England, and why indeed, they are located on Roman roads and appear to be located at places which are whole numbers of Roman miles from the nearest towns.

There are literally dozens of places in England which are called 'Caldecote' or a variation thereof. I have counted 33 of them[17]. And there are many more 'Caldecote
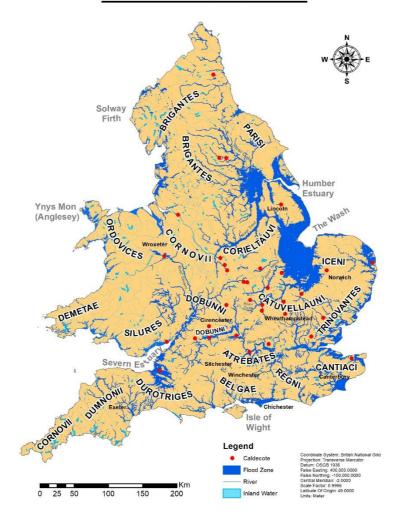
[16] Coates, Richard 'The Ancient and Modern Names of he Channel Islands: A Linguistic History'
[17] See Appendix

Roads', which may or may not be connected to the towns and villages called Caldecote. The geographical outliers among these names are Calcutt in North Yorkshire, Caldicot in Monmouthshire, Catcott in Somerset (which was Caldecote in the Domesday Book) and Caldecote in Cheshire. I suggest that these outliers, together with related place names like Challacombe in Devon, define the extent of Belgic Britain, which I will nickname 'the land of cal'.

Unfortunately, archaeology is not of much help to us here. Ideally, to prove my hypothesis, I would find a place called Caldecote with an extant Roman milestone in its original location. But that is most unlikely. There are about 100 surviving Roman milestones in Britain, but very few of them still stand in their original positions, and those that do are almost all in the north of the country (Cumbria, Hadrian's Wall) or in Cornwall, and therefore not in 'the land of cal'.

Places Called Caldecote

Of the others, the two examples in the Museum of Archaeology and Anthropology at Cambridge University may serve to illustrate the problem. They were found in 1812 about three miles north-west of Cambridge on the road to Huntingdon. The nearest place called Caldecote is about seven miles west of Cambridge off the road to St Neots, so unless the milestones had been moved before they were found in 1812, those particular milestones were not the inspiration of the place name.

The only possible Roman milestone in its original location within 'the land of cal' is to be found about one mile north of Dorchester, at a place called Stinsford Cross. The stone is not inscribed, and its Roman provenance is not beyond doubt, but it certainly does not prove my case.

However, one of the Roman milestones in Cornwall does at least confirm the hypothesis that the Insular Celtic word for a milestone was 'menhir' - the milestone at Lower Menheer Farm, near Lower Ninnis.

If my hypothesis about 'cal' is correct, the search could be expanded. The hamlets of Chalfield in Wiltshire were called Cildefelle in the Domesday Book, and I am willing to bet that there were one or more standing stones there. 'Fell' is of course a name for an upland in Cumbria, North Wales or Scotland, but it could be the ancestor of 'field', as in the modern name of Chalfield. The hamlet of Chilton (Trivett) in Somerset was called 'Caldetone' in the Domesday Book, which suggests that 'tone' was a Belgic word, possibly the ancestor of 'town'.

From an understanding of 'cote', we might then be able to translate 'Draycote', a place name that occurs many times in the Domesday Book (generally as 'Draicote'). If 'drai' meant a cart (i.e. the ancestor of the archaic word 'dray'), then 'draicote' may have meant a coaching inn.

An understanding of 'cote' could also be powerful. It appears, from the above examples, that it may have meant 'side', as is does in modern French. 'Cotes', following this logic, may have meant 'besides'.

'Coteswold' is a division of Gloucestershire, which therefore may have meant 'besides the wold' ('wold' here being related to the Saxon word 'weald' and the modern German 'wald' – although ironically in the latter case with the completely opposite meaning. 'Wold' is an area of high ground with no trees, whereas 'wald' is a forest).

Cottesmore would then mean 'besides the moor', Cotebrook would mean 'beside the brook', Cothill would mean 'beside the hill', Cotmarsh would mean 'beside the marsh' Cotesbach would mean 'besides the stream' etc. And so on and so forth – we could hope eventually to build an outline of the vocabulary of the Belgic language.

Some of these place names are clearly Germanic (e.g. 'bach'), an influence which we might expect to find in Belgic, but what is striking is the extent of the superficially 'French' influence, an influence evident in 1086, only 20 years after the Norman Conquest. Given that some of these names have a Brythonic element, I think it unlikely that these places were all renamed by the Normans. The implication is that Belgic exhibited a number of characteristics that we think of as French. And this begs the question: how many other words in English which we assume to be of French origin are in fact derived from an ancestor language of French?

Much more of the language of the Belgae may have survived than has hitherto been suspected. And, if so, it must have survived both the Roman occupation and the Anglo-Saxon dominion, to surface in Middle English after the Norman Conquest. Because it surfaced when England and Wales were under Norman rule, it is unsurprising that scholars have attributed this influence to the Normans. But could it be that Belgic has been hiding in plain sight all these years?

APPENDIX

THE CALDECOTES OF ENGLAND

Present Name	Name in the Domesday Book	County
Lower Caldecote		Bedfordshire
Calcot	Colecote	Berkshire
Caldecote	Caldecote	Buckinghamshire
Caldecotte		Buckinghamshire
Caldicot		Buckinghamshire
Caldecote	Caldecote	Cambridgeshire
Caldecott	Caldecote	Cheshire
Chilcote		Derbyshire
Calcot		Essex
Caldecott	Caldecotan	Essex
Calcot	Caldecote	Gloucestershire
Caldicot	Caldecote	Gloucestershire
Caldecote	Caldecota	Hertfordshire
Caldecote	Caldecote	Huntingdonshire
Calcott		Kent
Chilcote	Cildecote	Leicestershire
Collow	Caldecote	Lincolnshire
Caldicot		Monmouthshire
Caldecote	Caldachotta	Norfolk
Caldecott		Norfolk
Coldcoates	Caldecotes	Nottinghamshire
Caldecote		Northamptonshire
Caldecott	Caldecote	Northamptonshire
Chilcotes	Cildecote	Northamptonshire
Yelvertoft	Celvrecot	Northamptonshire
Coldcoats		Northumberland
Caldecott		Oxfordshire
Caldecott	Caldecote	Rutland
Calcott		Shropshire
Calcott	Caldecote	Somerset
Calcutt	Caldecote	Warwickshire
Caldecote	Caldecote	Warwickshire
Calcutt	Colecote	Wiltshire
Calcutt		Yorkshire
Coldcotes	Caldecotes	Yorkshire