

Place-names of Anguilla

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The first thing that strikes the visitor about the place names of Anguilla is their apparent lack of imagination. There is the **Long Path**, and **Long Ground**, and **Long Road**, and **Long Bay**. The name of the capital town, **The Valley**, is an embarrassment. If **North Hill** and **South Hill** are not boring enough, there is always **East End** and **West End**, and **Waterswamp** of all things. **Stoney Ground** must have been a hard place to cultivate. But, the assumption of a lack of imagination on the part of the early namers of Anguilla would be wrong. It takes some wit to ensure that an almost perfectly flat island comes to have nearly every place in it named either a hill or a valley.

Actually, **North Hill** and **South Hill** have an interesting tale to tell. At first blush there seems to be something perverse about naming two adjoining stretches of the cliff on the north coast of Anguilla 'North Hill' and 'South Hill'. But, an old sailor, Sir Emile Gumbs, once told me his theory of how those two spots got their names. He pointed out that they are north and south respectively of only one place, and that is Road Bay. If you were a sailor on a ship anchored out in Road Bay in the seventeenth century you could not have helped but notice that there was a hill to the north of you and another one to the south. So, the naming of these two villages is most

probably a relic of Anguilla's maritime past.

The prepositions **up** and **down** as used in giving directions and naming places in Anguilla have a similar heritage. As shortened versions of “upwind” and “downwind” they refer to the compass points 'east' and 'west'. They do not in any way relate to the inclination of the slope either up or down which the Anguillian giving you directions is pointing. When the elderly man in Welches point firmly down the hill and tells you that you must go “up” the road to reach Island Harbour, he means that you will have to drive in an easterly direction to get to Island Harbour. It will not seem incongruous to him that he is at the time pointing 'down' the hill.

This apparently strange use of prepositions flows from one of the most noticeable weather features of Anguilla, the Trade Winds. The winter Trades blow from November to March, while the summer Trades blow from May to September. The winter Trade Winds blow out of the north-east, with more than a memory of Siberia in them it sometimes seems in December and January. The summer Trade Winds on the other hand blow out of the south-east, sometimes carrying the tropical waves off the coast of Africa that sometimes turn into Hurricanes as they approach the West Indies. Generally, except for the Doldrum months of April and October, the wind blows steadily out of the east. How obvious it would seem to a farmer or a fisherman to refer to the east as “up wind” or “up”. Similarly, the west is obviously “down wind”, or just “down”, or even “lower”.

There are very few names that hint at an exciting or exotic past. **Brimegin** is one of them. There is no certainty how that rocky area east of **Blackgarden Bay** and west of **Shoal Bay** got its name. 'Brummagen' is an English dialect name for a native or inhabitant of the city of Birmingham in England. The Anguillian name Brimegin and the English name Brummagen are almost identical in sound. Only the spelling is different. They appear to be the same word. It is not difficult to see that the word Brummagen has become Brimegin in Anguilla. There was never any person named Birmingham resident on Anguilla long enough to leave his name in the public records. The only Birmingham we know who is connected in the historical record with Anguilla arrived here during the year 1711 when one Captain **Birmingham**, a privateer for the French, landed three spies on Anguilla. We do not know where exactly Captain Birmingham landed his spies, but the area now called after his name was as good a place as any. The coast is rocky, but there are several small bays where a boat might come in and land one or two persons without being observed. The place is situated far from the hamlets and estates of Anguilla. I like to think that it was this Captain Birmingham who has left a trace of his visit. When captured by the Anguillians under deputy governor George Leonard, the spies confessed that they had been landed by Captain Birmingham to find out what the strength of the island's defences were. Governor Hamilton took the three spies captured by the Anguillians to Antigua where they were tried, convicted and hung. All

that remains of this adventure is the place name “Brimegin”. No other person named Birmingham has ever been in any way connected with Anguilla, far less been recorded as owning an estate in Anguilla.

While we are on names that have evolved we might as well mention **Meads Bay**, **Katouche Bay**, **Sachasses** and **The Quarter**. An elderly resident of Long Bay Village some years ago told me his father's theory about the origin of the bay now spelled “Meads”. It is universally pronounced “Maids”. He pointed out that no one named Mead or Maid ever lived in Anguilla. He suggested that the name is most likely an anglicisation of the Spanish 'La Baia de Maiz', or Maize Bay. This is not fanciful or unrealistic. The older people of Long Bay Village pronounce the name of their bay as “Mays Bay”. The original Amerindian settlers were growing maize in the West Indies when Columbus arrived. He recorded the word “maiz” in the Bahamas on his first voyage. It grew throughout the islands including Anguilla. The likelihood is that as the centuries passed and the origin of the name became forgotten, it gradually began to be pronounced “Maids”. The spelling was only changed to Meads in a recent mapping exercise.

Katouche Bay was part of Governor Benjamin Gumbs' estates during the eighteenth century. He called it 'Catouche Bay Plantation' with a “C” when he left it to his daughters Anne Warner and Katherine Payne in his 1768 Will. There is no such word in English as ‘catouche’ nor is any person named Catouche associated with Anguilla. The nearest equivalent is the French ‘cadeaux’,

the plural for 'gift'. The English-speakers of Anguilla shared the common practice of pronouncing French words phonetically in English. The French word 'cadeaux' would have been pronounced 'caduce'. It is an easy morph to Governor Gumbs' spelling 'Catouche', and the later 'Katouche'. In some of the early deeds it is even spelled 'Cuttous'.

On the Ordnance Survey Map of Anguilla, Katouche Bay is presently spelled Latouche with an "L". We know where this error came from. In the 1950s, the late Rev Leonard Carty wrote an article in a Methodist Church commemorative booklet. He speculated that the word Katouche may have derived from Mr De la Touche, the French Commander who led an invasion force to Anguilla in 1745. Rev Carty thought it was possible that this was the bay that De la Touche landed at. In fact, we know from contemporary documents that he anchored his boats and disembarked his men either in Rendezvous Bay or in next door Crocus Bay, where the Anguillians massacred them as they tried to ascend the steep path up to the top of Crocus Hill. The modern mapmakers were given Rev Carty's speculation as the true story of the origin of that bay's name, and they changed the spelling from the original Katouche to Latouche. However, no one in Anguilla calls the place 'Latouche Bay'.

Crocus Hill is named for the lovely little yellow crocuses that up to the 1970s used to come out with the start of the rains. Before the bush took over, the entire slope from the top of the hill to the coast at Crocus Bay was pasture, and with the start of the rain, the entire

pasture would become a field of yellow crocuses. The pasture is now replaced by a jungle of Mimosa and White Cedar.

Sachassas is equally easy to explain. The name “Sagers” or, more often, “Zakers” has long been a common surname in nearby St Maarten. Richard Richardson in the 1760s employed a **David Sagers** as manager of his Anguilla plantation. The Sagers family eventually came to own a part of Governor Richardson’s South Valley Plantation. Their land would have commonly been called Sagers' land. Ralph Hodge, at one time our Accountant General, told me the story of how the name change occurred. He was a youngster working part-time with the Cadastral Survey team that visited Anguilla to survey it in 1974. Ralph lived then as now in South Valley. When the surveyors were working in the area, the members of the team were not sure how to spell its name. They turned to Ralph for assistance. Ralph says he made up that spelling on the spur of the moment, and now the spelling of Sachassas instead of Sagers’ is written in concrete.

The Quarter is also an evolved name. When the old Valley Plantation of Anguilla's first deputy governor, Abraham Howell, was broken up into four parts in the mid eighteenth century, it became **North Valley, South Valley, Wallblake**, and the **Upper Quarter Plantations**. It was 'upper' because it was the easternmost part of the estate. The word 'upper' was quietly dropped, and now we are left with 'The Quarter'.

Blowing Point was originally deeded to Ensign Thomas Rumney in 1673 as 'Blown Point Plantation', but over the years it has evolved into 'Blowing Point'. The people of the village still pronounce it "Blown Point". The surname 'Romney' is a common one in Blowing Point, but the locals still insist on pronouncing it "Rumney".

Badeziel Cox was the eponymous owner of the estate now known after him as **Bad Cox**. His neighbor, Richard Richardson Jr, must have been known as "Little Dick". His land must have been known as Little Dick's plantation. Now, it is officially spelled **Little Dix**, with an "X". Another eighteenth century planter, Thomas Caul, has given his name to the nearby **Caul's Pond**.

We all know where Abraham Chalville lived. The place is called **Chalvilles**. The Anguillians pronounced and spelled his name with a "w" instead of a "v". When he emigrated to Tortola, he took that pronunciation with him, and the name continues there as Chalwille.

We know why the pronunciation of a "v" was sometimes confused with a "w". Students of sociolinguistics have written about the sound called by them the 'unvoiced bi-labial fricative'. It is a cross between a 'v' and a 'w'. This sound is quite commonly heard among English speakers. We still hear the older people of Blowing Point saying that they are going to 'The Walley'. And, they always claim they are "werry fine, thank you". Past Chief Minister Hubert Hughes to this day will tell you that he is the head of the "government" of Anguilla.

That is how Valentine Blake's land, as it was written in an early patent to land from the 1690s, came to be known as **Wallblake**. The Anguillians referred to Valentine Blake as Wal Blake. In time, after he had died and become forgotten, the name of his land morphed in to Wallblake.

Places named after the persons that owned them at one time are common. The Hughes family was an important one in the history of Anguilla, persons of that name having resided here since the earliest days of settlement. They gave their name to the **Hughes' Estate** in **Lower South Hill**. That word 'lower', you will realise by now, signifies in Anguilla that the place is “down from”, ie, to the west of, South Hill. Robert Lockrum in turn gave his name to the **Lockrum's Estate** located between Blowing Point and Little Harbour on the south coast. The land of Mr Waters, originally Waters' land, is now spelled **Wattices**. An unknown Mr Roache once lived on a hill at North Valley, and we still call it **Roaches Hill**. John Farrington was a Quaker who went away in the 1740s to join the Quaker community in Tortola. All he has left behind is his name attached to his land at **The Farrington**. An unknown Mr Gibbons left an estate east of Blowing Point named after him, but we do not at present know the first name of the owner of **Gibbons Estate**.

The cutely sounding **Merrywing Pond** is not so cutely named. The word is the seventeenth century name for the vicious little biting sandflies that must have made it such a pain to pass nearby.

The origin of some place names is unknown to me. These include **Benzies** on the north coast of the Shannon Hill; **George Hill**; **Old Ta**, said to be named after an unknown "Old Thomas"; **The Forest**; **Statia Valley**; **Sile Bay**; **True Loves** up on Crocus Hill; **Maundays Bay**; and the ever mysteriously named **Corito**.

Among the names that have fallen into disuse are the three 'divisions' into which the island was long divided. Nor is it clear what administrative function these divisions played. These were Joan's Hole, subsequently named **Junks' Hole Division**, probably named by reference to the Great Spring or the **Big Spring** as it is now more commonly known; **Spring Division**, probably named by reference to the **Fountain Cavern**; and the **Road Division**. It is not surprising that two of the island's administrative divisions were named by reference to springs, given the long droughts under which the island suffered for decades at a time. An unfailing source of potable water would have been a very important reference point for the early settlers.

I conclude by admitting that the very locations of many of the places named in the early Anguillian deeds have now been lost, at least to me. Someday, with more research, I may discover exactly where they were. These include **Arrowsmith's**; **Barlows Plantation**; **Bralahans**; **Diggeries**; **Great Cockpit**; **French Ground**; **Hazard Hill**; **Kidney's**; **Robbin's**; **Thatch Garden Hill**; and many others. If you know where they are, please let me know.

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