Vindo- in ancient names

Hundreds of proper names (of places, rivers, people, gods, etc) contain an element of form **W-vowel-(N)-(D)**, where that letter W could also appear as V, U, UU, F, B, or Greek OU; the vowel could be E, I, or A; the D could be T, Ð, or absent altogether; and sometimes the N could disappear. What did that element mean?

As will become clear, the common geographical feature associated with *Vindo-* and *Venta* in many ancient place names is some relatively flat land liable to seasonal flooding, typically produced by a meandering river. All rivers tend, in their middle to lower regions, to wind around and erode a sinuous course into soft ground, but every so often they overflow badly and jump to new courses. The end result is a floodplain or, on a long enough timescale, a set of river terraces. The resulting landform, whether one calls it a floodplain, meander belt, water meadows, valley floor (German *Talebene*), or river terrace, was a biologically productive environment, in which people could grow crops, raise animals, or develop an entire civilization.

The earliest clear explanation of this idea that I know is by Blanca Prosper (1998), who looked at *Vindupalis*, a Ligurian (non-Celtic) name for a river in the upper Polcevera valley above Genoa, mentioned in a legal decision from 117 BC. She concluded that 'European river names from **wid-ub/p-*, **wind-ub/p-* roughly meant curved river, crooked watercourse'. Her text was in German, but a crude translation of its key part is in a data file that supports this article.

A key insight came from Reiner Lipp (2020), who explained, together with Luke Gorton (2017), that words for wine, with all their diverse spellings across European languages, descend from a word for 'twiner, creeping plant, tendril, grapevine' from PIE **wei-* 'to turn, twist around'. Evidently that ancient root could also apply to winding rivers.

My detailed investigation was sparked by a name *Ypwinesfleot* (spelling variants *Hypwinesfleot* or *Heopwines fleot*) reported by the Anglo-Saxon Chronicle as where *Hengest* and *Horsa* landed in AD 449. This refers to the Gypsey Race estuary, at Bridlington, east Yorkshire (not Ebbsfleet in Kent, as commonly claimed). The name element *-wines-* needed to be explained, but the work of Ekwall (1928) on English river names provided no easy answer. It turned out that W-vowel-(N)-(D) names have also been collected into substantial data sets by investigators looking at other issues. Before examining those data sets, we must address a series of confusions.

Modern Celtic languages (Welsh, Irish, Breton, etc) are thought to descend from a proto-Celtic core that was formerly spoken quite widely in Europe, having developed from a more basic common Indo-European. University courses in historical linguistics have taught philologists to believe that a proto-Celtic word (often cited as **u̯ind-*) was the ancestor of *Vindo-* in ancient names and of words for 'white', such as modern Welsh *gwynn*, Irish *find*, Breton *gwenn*, and Cornish *guyn*.

Long-held dogma is often immune to critical thought, but, for the record, it assigns **u̯ind-* no PIE root better than **weid-* 'to see', nor definite cognates outside Celtic languages. Those modern Celtic-language words for 'white' are first attested well after AD 900, and no independent evidence links any ancient *Vindo-* name-bearer with whiteness. Those difficulties are usually rationalized away with a claim that the meaning was 'pure' or divinely sanctioned, as well as 'white'.

A bigger problem lies in *vindico* and *vindex*, which are among the earliest recorded Latin words. Their core semantic notion seems to be asserting a claim, but by the time Latin became the top language in western Europe, *vind*-based vocabulary had become prominent in many contexts beyond the law: military prowess (both individual and collective), freeing of slaves, and curse tablets. These notions can explain a large fraction of all *Vind*-containing personal names.

Then there are ordinary Latin words, notably *vindemia* 'grape harvest', which could lead to personal names based on occupation (*Vindemiator*) or delightfulness (*Vindemia*). Germanic *swinþaz* 'strong'

contributed to rulers' names, such as *Cindasvintus*. With all the oddities of ancient texts caused by the ravages of time, mangling by illiterate authors, or linguistic fashions and creative variation, a huge fraction of all *Vindo-* names have fairly trivial explanations.

There is nothing inherently wrong with the idea of whiteness in proper names, whether personal (Alban, Bianca, Candace, Dwight, Elvira, Finian, Guinevere, etc) or geographical (Albion, Belgrade, Casablanca, Whitehall, etc). However, as Pierre Laplace allegedly said about God, "I do not need that hypothesis".

In Roman Britain

Here are 8 reasonably certain examples with vowel I, where hyperlinks lead to discussions of their locations and possible meanings of their other name element.

Roman name	Location	Other element
Vindocladia	Poole	ditch
Ουινδογαρα	Troon	gore
Vindolanda	Chesterholm	land
Vindomora	Ebchester	marsh
Vindomi	Holybourne	spring
Vindovala	Rudchester	wall
Vinovia	Binchester	banks
Magiovinium	Fenny Stratford	platter

And with vowel E:

Bannavem Taburniae	?Fintry	*bann*
Bannaventa	near Daventry	*bann*
Derbentione	Derby	deer
Derventione	Stamford Bridge	deer
Derventione	Papcastle	deer
Glanoventa	Ambleside	bank
Venta Belgarum	Twyford	–
Venta Icenorum	Caistor St Edmund	–
Venta Silurum	Caerwent	–

Probably not these ones:-

Αβραουαννου	near Luce	?αβρος
Ουεδρα	Wear mouth	?-ary
Venedotia	Gwynedd	–
Venutio	near Peebles	suffix
Vinion	island off Troon	–

Elsewhere in the Roman Empire

The following 21 names are solidly attested in Roman times, as distinct from having possibly *Vindo-* descendant forms centuries later. Most hyperlinks lead outside *Romaneranames*. In these short texts, some words picked out in green support the 'meandering river, floodplain' model.

Vindobona is modern Vienna, Austria, built on wetlands beside the river Danube: "for centuries, it also lived under threat of capricious, catastrophic floods … sits in a geographical bowl. It's a risky place to put a city". The *-bona* part probably describes something sticking out (see *bann*), here a Roman frontier settlement. Notice how *Vindobona* essentially inverts *Bannaventa*.

Vindocinum is modern Vendôme, France, where "La ville s'est construite au creux d'un méandre du Loir, là où le lit du cours d'eau longe le coteau le plus abrupt. Cette configuration a favorisé l'émergence au Nord, d'une vaste plaine alluviale où les cultures, puis la ville ont pu se developer".

For the -*cinum* part, chine or chink may be a good parallel, to describe the river, or else chin might describe the sticking-out land.

Ουινδομαγος (Ptolemy 2,10,10) is discussed here but has never been conclusively identified. Ptolemy's longitude figure puts it half a degree (about 40 km) west of Nîmes, France. Provence has many place and river names suggestive of *wind/*wid (such as Vendargues) but the best candidate to be Ουινδομαγος is a crossing of the river Vidourle. (Not Embrun, which is on the *Via Domitia* towards Spain, but possibly Sommières, which has a Roman bridge, or near Lecques.) About -*magos*, see *Magis*. Note that *Magiovinium*, above, contains similar elements inverted.

Vindonissa is modern Windisch, Switzerland, squeezed into a confluence of the rivers Aare and Reuss, which can flood seriously. Ekwall (1928 p119), while discussing the river Deerness, commented that *Nisa*, an early version of the river Ness, looked like German *nass* 'wet'.

Vindalium/Ούίνδαλον (Livy 61,2 and Strabo 4, 185) was a 121 BC battle site by the river Sorgue (from Latin *surgo* 'to rise', because of its "*montées des eaux de type fluvial, avec des vitesses d'écoulement faibles qui mettent plus en danger les biens que les personnes*"), which Florus called *amnis Vindelicus*, where it joins the Rhone. The -*al*- part may just be the adjective-forming suffix -*alis*. Nearby Bédarrides was Latin *Biturritae*, (where the Bit- part has attracted various guesses, including **bheid-* 'to split'), with final part most likely related to **ritu* ' stream'). Another *Biturritae* was in Italy, near modern Piosina, in a floodable valley where Torrente Cerfone joins the upper Tiber.

Vindausca = Venasque on a rock overlooking a fertile valley. Endings like -*ausca* have been much discussed, notably here with a long list of related places. Evidently -*asca* etc was the Ligurian way of combining -*as* and -*ic* into one adjectival ending.

Vindelici people were copiously recorded epigraphically while they served in the Roman army. They lived around modern Augsburg, Germany, in the Lechrain, the floodplain of the river Lech, where the modern river Windach is said to mean 'winding river'. *Lech* may mean 'flat' (as in flake or placid) but lost its initial P, Celtic-style, and the best parallel in modern Welsh now means 'stone'.

Vindeleia Ουενδελεια (Ptolemy 2,6,53) in Spain, possibly contains PIE **lei-* 'to flow'. Unlocated, but Santa Gadea del Cid near Guinicio has an old floodplain. River names such as *Lovente* may contain similar elements inverted.

Vindenis (Peutinger map) or *Vindinis* (Cosmography) is modern Gllamnik, Kosovo, in a flat, floodable valley around the river Llapi, surrounded by hills.

Vindilis (Maritime Itinerary) or *Vindelis*, later Guedel, now Belle Île, off the coast of Vannes, Brittany.

Vinda (Antonine Itinerary) = Ουινδια (unlocated) = *Gordion* Roman station in Phrygia at a crossing of the river Sakarya by a floodplain at modern Yassıhüyük.

Ουινδεριος (Ptolemy 2,2,8) in Ireland was probably wetlands of the river Fane or a neighbour.

Ουινδινον (Ptolemy 2,8,9) is modern Le Mans, France, a transport hub in flood-vulnerable flat ground at the Sarthe-Huisne confluence plus many little streams. French historians seem happy to cite a name *Vindunum*, implying that its second element referred to a native *oppidum*.

Ουινδιον hills in northern Spain. Unlocated, but maybe Sierra de Cantabria next to Ebro valley.

Oenanda (Οἰνόανδα of Ptolemy 5,3,6) at modern Incealiler, Turkey, on the river Xanthos close to the old Luwian capital, Gordion. NB ανδηρον 'raised bank by the side of a river'.

Vindupalis, a river in the valley, above Genoa, Italy, mentioned in a 117 BC Latin legal document, is fully explained by Prosper (1998) as 'meandering river', in Ligurian. Its second element has a perfect parallel in Lithuanian *upelis* 'stream'.

Vinelasca was a small stream also mentioned alongside *Vindupalis*

Veiturii were people also mentioned alongside *Vindupalis*, living at modern Voltri. Is their resemblance to Britain's *Veteres* coincidental?

Vidubia (Peutinger map) is on the little river Vouge, at a Roman road intersection on the plain of Burgundy, France, between modern St Bernard and Boncourt-le-Bois. Several guesses to explain the name exist.

Ουιδουα river mouth (Ptolemy 2,2,2) was probably the river Foyle in northern Ireland.

Ουιδανα harbour (Ptolemy 8,3,1) was probably at Lorient, France, on the river now called Blavet, said to be a pre-Celtic word for 'marshy'.

Venaxamodurum (Notitia Dignitatum) was at Neuburg, Germany, where the river Danube split into two (the *axa* part) channels (veins).

Monte **Vendevolo** is a big hill in the floodplain near Venice, famous for Roman waterworks.

Ancient Tribes

Three well-characterised ***Veneti*** peoples lived in very obvious river floodplains: in southern *Brittany*, around Vannes; in Veneto, north-east *Italy*, around Venice; and in *Poland,* around the river Vistula into the bay of Gdansk, but later generalised as Wends to mean Slavs more generally. Loicq (2003) and Weiss (2018) listed at least 15 more candidates, whose sheer number and variety shows instantly that **Veneti* were not a single tribe of epic migrators, but many different sets of people using many Indo-European dialects to describe a similar type of environment.

Not all *Ven-* peoples can be located firmly on the map. They include: *Venelli*, in the Cotentin peninsula north of Brittany; *Venetomagenses,* at *Venetomagus*, modern Vieu, France, which has a river famous for its sudden rises; *Vennectus*, a low-lying, floodable region around Laon, NW France; *Venedotia*, later Gwynedd in Wales, around Harlech; Ουενικονες by the river Tay, downstream of Perth; Ουεννικιοι in Donegal, around loughs Swilly and Eske; *Vennenses*, somewhere in Cantabria, northern Spain; Ενετοι, near Samsun, northern Turkey; *Venetulani*, somewhere near Rome, possibly near Ardea; there was a Hittite name, *Wannantiya* or similar; more Ενετοι in or near Albania; *Vennonenses* probably lived in the floodplain of the upper Rhine river from Chur to Lake Konstanz; *Venisami* may have lived in N Italy, around Busca; *Venostes* in the Vinschgau valley; Lacus *Venetus* was the Roman name for the main part of Lake Konstanz.

Post-Roman French places

Lacroix (2007 pp39-41) mapped 27 modern *noms en Vindo* across France, showing no sign of doubting Celticist orthodoxy that *Vindo-* meant '*blanc*, *heureux'* (Delamarre, 2003) but also '*brillant*, *pur*, *saint*'. He noted twelve river names (Vandenesse, Vend, Vendaine x2, Vendaline, Vende, Vendée, Vendèze, Vendinelle, Vendline, Vendrenneau, and Bendine), which were all are smallish, and often wiggly and/or intermittent. Also 15 place names, often near the source of a similarly named river. It is often possible to guess the meaning of another name elements or Latin suffix that combined with **Vind-*, but hard when landscapes have much changed, and dried out, over the centuries. Here are some names worthy of particular comment.

Vandenesse, in Burgundy, lies in a curve of the Dragne, which *se divise en plusieurs bras et collecte un dense réseau de petites rigoles* near its confluence with the Aron. Vandenesse en Auxois lies on the Vandenesse, which is *très irrégulière* and now supplanted by a canal. Vendenesse-sur-Arroux is on a river that readily overflows. Vendenesse-lès-Charolles is on the flat, wiggly river Semence. All these names resemble *Vindonissa* by ending like German nass 'wet'.

Vandoeuvre-lès-Nancy lies in a big bend of the Moselle also bounded by the Meurthe. Its AD 971 name *Vindopera* has been explained, probably wrongly, as ***Vindobriga*. More likely its second part was Germanic **oferaz* 'bank, shore'. Analogous names include Vendeuvre (in Normandy on the

braided and marshy river Dive), Vendeuvre-sur-Barse (on flat ground by a curve of the small, flood-prone river Barse), and Vendeuvre-du-Poitou (on the river Palu, with a noticeable floodplain).

Vendresse is on the very wiggly river Bar, simplified by the Canal des Ardennes, and Vendresse-Beaulne has two streams with mini flood plains, also altered by a canal. Their second element is probably an Old European river name related to Riss and Reuss.

Vendeuil-Caply is where an ancient oppidum controlled a dry valley pinch point of the river Noye (whose name meant *prairie inondable*), running through a flat floodplain over chalk.

Other names include Vendèze, Vendine, Vendlincourt, Vendrennes, and Veigné. Even a cursory glance through Dauzat & Rostaing (1978) throws up dozens more places worthy of investigation. Nothing seems to directly support a 'white, sacred' sense for *Vindo-*, except perhaps the votive statue inscriptions to Apollo Vindonno beside a spring at Essarois in NE France (*Belgica*). However, that makes best sense if a holy well had a local protective god that was identified with Roman Apollo, given an attribute compounded from Latin *vindex* 'protector' and *onno* 'spring'.

River names

The definitive survey of English River Names by Eilert Ekwall (1928) looked closely at many rivers whose names do, or did, possibly fit the W-vowel-(N)-(D) pattern considered here, plus others mentioned in passing or from elsewhere in Britain. Ekwall could explain a few names perfectly: the river Wensum in Norfolk and the Wantsum Channel in Kent fit Old English *wændsum* 'winding'; Winterbourne fits 'seasonal stream'; and Winster fits 'on the left'. He tried to fit some W names to Celtic 'white, shining, sparkling' (not enthusiastically) and found some quite troubling, notably the Went, two called Wey plus the Wye, and the Welsh ending -wy.

Here is a table of 47 candidate rivers, built up from many sources, looked up as far as books and the Internet allow. Obviously, not all fit definitely fit the W-vowel-(N)-(D) 'valley flat' pattern, but this table does not include French rivers, nor some minor rivers that cannot be traced.

Name	Where	Into	Comments
Alwen	N Wales	Dee	1425; allegedly 'white wandering river'
Darent	Kent	Thames	822 *Diorente*; possibly same as various river Darts, too
Darwen	Lancs	Ribble	1227 *Derewente*
Derwent	Derbyshire	Trent	1025 *Deorwentan*
Derwent	Yorks E	Ouse	BedeOE *Deorwentan*
Derwent	Drh, Ntb	Tyne	1050 *Dyrwente*
Derwent	Cumbria	Solway Firth	BedeOE *Deorwentan*, Cosmography *Dorvantium*
Dvina	Latvia	Baltic Sea	called *Vina* by Norse
Dvina	Russia	White Sea	called *Vina* by Norse
Fane	E Ireland	Irish Sea	much modified to reduce floods
Ffin	Carmarthens	Tywi	??Ystradffin = W *ystrad* 'vale'+ *ffin* 'boundary'
Finn	Donegal	Foyle	Glenfinn = gentle valley
Finn	Fermanagh	Lough Erne	very wiggly
Findhorn	Moray	Moray Firth	said to contain Gaelic 'white'
Finart	ArgyllBute	Loch Long	definite meander valley
Goyt	Drb,Che	Mersey	1285 *Gwid* compare Welsh *gwyth* 'vein' or OE *gyte* 'flood'
Guiting	Glos	Windrush	*Gytingbroc*
Gwendraeth	Carmarthens	Carmarthen Bay	1191 *Wendraeth* ?= 'white beach'; 2 wigglers > sandy estuary
Kenwyn	Cornwall	Truro	river probably named from the place
Lovente	Buc,Bed	Great Ouse	in 1200, much later renamed Ouzel
Medwyn N&S	Lanarkshire	Clyde	Wiggly, floody
Umborne Brook	Devon	Axe	wiggles through marshy valley; related to Wimborne
Venta	Lithuania	Baltic	
Vesle	France	aisne	Vidula
Vine Water	Devon	Otter	near Roman road, *Moridunum*, Fenny Bridges, Feniton
Vitbol	Bulgaria	Danube	past Sinagovtsi, with the earliest Roman presence in BG
Waneting	Berks	Letcombe Brook	chalk stream floodable ?from OE *wanian*
Wanetinge	Dorset	? Bride	near Bridport
Wandle	London	Thames	?= back formation from Wandsworth

Wansbeck	Northumbs	North Sea	former *Wenspic* at Cambois, serious problem surface runoff
Wantsum	Kent	Channel	*wændsum* 'winding'
Warta	Poland	Oder	"meanders greatly"
Waver	Cumbria	Morecambe Bay	1066 *Wafyr*; Ekwall: "very markedly winding course"
*Weaver	Wiltshire	Avon	957 *Wæfer*; now the ultra-wiggly By Brook
Weaver	Cheshire	Mersey	1133 *Weever*; Ekwall: "the very winding river"
Webburn	Devon	Dart	1323 *Wedeburn*, has 2 head-streams flanking Widecombe
Wendover	Berks	Grand Union	natural spring now feeds arm of G U Canal
Wenning	Lancs,Yorks	Lune	1175 *Wenninga* by Low Bentham
Wensum	Norfolk	Yare	*wændsum* 'winding'
Went	Yorkshire	Don	*Uinuæd* battle (Bede 3,24); Ekwall: "a very difficult name"
Whimple	Devon	Clyst	1086 *Winpla* near Roman road
Widawka	Poland	Warta	
Wimborne	Dorset	Stour	705 *Winburna*; now Allen; Ekwall:'meadow stream' floodplain
Windrush	Glos, Oxf	Thames	779 *Uuenrisc;* past Winchcombe and Witney
Windle Brook	Surrey	Thames	?? from place Windlesham; very wiggly flooder
*Winfrod	Dorset	Frome	deduced from Winfrith, Winford, etc.
Witham	Lincolnshire	North Sea	executes an unusually large bend
Witna	Poland	Warta	small stream
Wittle	Norfolk	Thet	squelches past Quidenham
Wynd Brook	Worcs	Glynch Brook	past Pendock; small brook, big flood risk

Some river-side places have names containing W-vowel-(N)-(D) elements, notably Windsor, plus Winsor and Broadwinsor. Both Ekwall (1936-1964) and Gelling (1984) fretted about a reference to winding, and possibly a windlass, then failed to see the significance of Old Windsor Bog or that nearby Wentworth might contain Old English *waroþ* 'shore' and be related to *Verteris*. Place-name lists probably contain many more candidates for re-examination (Alwent, Afonwen, Wenferth, etc). Early forms of Windermere have been interpreted as evidence for an unattested personal name *Winand*, without noting Greek ανδηρον 'raised bank' (as in the word meander).

*winn 'pasture'

Winn is not recorded as an English word, but is cognate with Gothic *winja*, Old Norse *vin*, etc, and appears to be part of >=11 place names listed by Smith (1956):
Wimborne (Dorset): in loop of r. Stour, near Lake Farm Roman fort
Wombaford (Devon) and Winch (Norfolk) – cannot find
Windley (Derbys)
Windridge Farm (Herts) unimpressive, not relevant?
Winford (Wight) marshes which I know personally from boating decades ago!
Wonford (Devon ex *Wynford*) unimpressive but close to wiggly river Waldon
Wingfield (Derbys) in loop of wiggly river Amber
Winnersh (Berks) perfect water meadow
Winton (Cumbria) in confluence of rivers Belah and Eden
Heddon (Northumberland) where the river Breamish spreads out into a floodplain

Personal Names

Many scholars collected "Celtic" personal names almost like postage stamps, notably Holder (1896), Evans (1967), and Whatmough (1970). Onto this 'heap of all that I could find' (to quote the *Historia Brittonum*) Delamarre (2007) tried to impose some order, but (strangely) he seems to have cooled from defining *uindos* as '*blanc, heureux'* (= 'white, happy') as in his 2003 dictionary of Gaulish.

The best source of data now available about proper names that may contain *Vindo-* is the Clauss-Slaby online epigraphic database. Searching it for VIND throws up 942 prima facie attestations to be examined. Some can be instantly eliminated, notably chunks of Latin text that contain *quindecim* '15'or *vindicatus* 'emancipated', but trying to push that process further soon runs into ordinary Latin words, such as *vindemia* 'grape harvest', that could form the basis for personal names.

In the end, there is no alternative to working through nearly 900 inscriptions (on stone epitaphs and altars, potters' marks, soldiers' metal diplomas, writing tablets, etc) and trying to stay sane amid a sea of Latin that has often been mangled in various ways. An associated file shows some of the data involved, and here are a few specific observations.

Vindemio 'to harvest grapes' (literally 'vine-take') contributed to about 50 personal names, including about 15 each of women called *Vindemia* and men called *Vindemialis*. *Vindemiator* was probably a job description as often as a name, and there was a penumbra of mis-spellings or creative variants.

Vindex is one of the earliest attested Latin words, meaning legal 'claimant', but it evolved to mean 'defender, protector' but also 'avenger'. Epigraphically it shows up about 100x in a stock phrase *Piis Vindicibus* 'loyal and vengeful' used of military units on the discharge certificates of retiring soldiers. *Vindex* was a popular personal name among ordinary soldiers, probably meaning something like 'champion' or 'defender'. An approximate count of instances yielded 92x *Vindex*, 49x *Vindicis* (genitive), plus up to 20 other grammatical cases. *Vindex*-derived names include 32x Vindicianus, 19x *Vindicius/Vindicio/Vindicia*, 70x other *Vindic*-something

Vindico 'to lay claim' appears in the texts of many curse tablets, but often mangled, both because the claimants were illiterate and because they believed in using hocus-pocus mixed languages to address infernal gods. *Vindiorix* on a Bath curse could be a placeholder for 'insert claimant name here' as well as a real personal name.

Vindico could also mean 'to set free', so it shows up in many documents recording the freeing of a slave, or in epitaphs raised by grateful freed slaves. On the whole *vindicatus* and *vindicta* look like adjectives, but they could also be proper names.

The most prolific writers of *Vind*-containing epigraphs were *Vindelici* Roman soldiers, mentioned above as coming from the Lech floodplain. They are known from 111 pieces of pottery signed by their 4th cohort, 21 discharge certificates, and at least 30 other epigraphs. Other units figure on 92 other discharge certificates, often mentioning the stock phrase *piis vindicibus*, meaning that they were 'loyal and vengeful'.

With the total number of *Vind*-containing epigraphs whittled down, many of the rest are either obviously linked with a place (16x *Vindobona*, 15x *Vindolanda*, 6x *Vindonissa*, 2x *Venauscia*, etc) or seem to represent ordinary Romans exploring all possible variations on a basic name element *Vind*- (*Vindius*, *Vindia*, *Vindius*, *Vindulus*, etc) in much the same way as modern John Smith can turn up in a hundred variants across the world.

The last real hope to find some *Vind*-anything epigraphs that truly fit the traditional Celtic 'white' idea lies with 25 *Vindon*- names: 10x *Vindonius*, 5x *Vindonis*, 3x *Vindonio*, 3x *Vindonno*, 2x *Vindonia*, *Vindonianus*. However, these make best sense as locational names referring to the spring at the head of a valley, as discussed about *Apollo Vindonno*, above.

In the end, one is reduced to trawling, one name at a time, through a tiny hard core that have been proposed as "Celtic" by past writers. Have any *Vind*- epigraphs survived that were not written by thoroughly Romanized soldiers, at dates when everyone liable to inscribe on stone or metal used Latin and could barely remember the old languages? And did those old languages, especially in a band from the Pyrenees to the Alps and on to the Carpathians, have much in common with the insular Celtic of the British Isles and the Atlantic fringe?

Names written in Greek stand a good chance of being early, before "Gaulish" became only a matter of antiquarian interest, as in Endlicher's Glossary. One such example is ΠΕΝΝΟΟΥΙΝΔΟΣ on a coin (apparently not visible anywhere on the Internet), which was minted at modern Pavant (Longnon, 1904). Its name *Penvennum* in 855 and perfect floodplain location obviously suggests that Pen- could mean something like 'headland' (as at Penzance and Penge).

ΟΥΙΝΔΙΑΚΟΣ (?son of *Vindios*) was found at *plaine du Coulon* near Cavaillon (another perfect floodplain). ALKOVINOS in Lepontic writing and ALCOVINDOS on epitaph at San Pietro di Stabio plus the modern Alcobendas suburb of Madrid all point to an elk floodplain like Derwent 'deer valley'.

CONTVINDA epitaph at Nickenich beside a floodplain sounds like the occupational name of a sailor/helmsman. VINDORIDIO was an attribute of a god Mars in *Treveri* territory near the river Moselle.

VINDOBIIUS on a ladle in picture 3a of table 4 here, was a craftsman from Schwechat on Vienna floodplain, near *Vindobona*. He exemplifies many names that sound as if derived from places known or unknown. VINDO MORUCI on Hadrian's wall suggests workmen from *Vindomora*. One may wonder about the meaning and origin of the second element associated with *Vind-* in a few more names from *Pannonia* or nearby: *Magiovindus*, *Vindruna*, *Vindoroici*, *Vindaina*, and *Vindmarcia*. Since those areas emerged into history speaking German, and the epigraphic contexts were very Roman, it is hard to see those individuals as having names linguistically close to Welsh, any more than others just mentioned above.

Curse tablets from Britain have provided many personal names belonging to low-class individuals. One classic example, from Bath, is VINDIORIX, in a short text whose linguistic affiliation to insular Celtic is highly doubtful. The *Vind-* part of his name seems at least a likely to signify freed-slave status as to mean 'white', even if it does not mean 'claimant' in a sort of 'fill in claimant name here' slot. Also in a curse were *Britivenda Venibelia* and *Britvenda Marinus Memorina*.

Perhaps most interesting is the name **Cunovendus**, attested three times, along with two similar names and a *Vendicina* and a possible *Vindocunus* all around west Britain. This name is claimed to be Celtic for 'white/bright hound', but the idea that *Cun-* in personal names meant 'hound' is very shaky. Its later popularity among Anglo-Saxon kings points rather towards 'kin' and its instances in ancient place names all point towards Latin *cuneus* 'wedge', related to English chin and chine. Maybe *Cunovendus* was a freedman who looked after hounds, but it seems more likely that he had a locational name referring to the head of a valley. A bit like *Penvennum* mentioned above.

Etymology

This article is primarily an exercise in geographical data collection and analysis. It has not explained exactly how *Vindo*-related names came to be spelled in different areas and at different dates, a task left for heavy-duty historical linguists, who know all the right jargon, to complete. Here PIE roots are cited with the simplified typography and definitions of Watkins (2011).

A PIE root **wei-* 'to turn, to twist' seems to have developed extended forms, including **wendh-* 'to turn, to wind' and **weng-* 'to bend, curved', which evolved semantically to describe many objects that were twisted or twining. Wine (produce of the vine) was important to early Indo-European people, but far more important were meandering rivers that created flat, fertile ground on which people could settle. So W-vowel-(N)-(D) names came to be used for rivers, their valleys, and meadows, then applied to places and people who lived there.

Spelling variation among the names studied here results from many processes. There is a range of vowels typical of Indo-European Ablaut, as in modern English wander, wend, wind, and wound. One word that may be relevant and had no agreed etymology was vein, but it may be mere chance that avenge, fen, twine, wane, winter, etc, plus Germanic **swinþaz* and *Wund*, look similar. Even if not etymologically related, they may have helped to cause popular reinterpretation of names.

Celtic **u̯ind-* 'white, pure' is a big Red Herring that has wasted man-years of scholars' time. There is no strong reason why it should not have existed in Roman times, and contributed to proper names, but this investigation found no convincing evidence that it did. No really satisfactory PIE root for **u̯ind-* has been proposed, with **weid-* 'to see, to wit' or **sweid-* 'to shine' most often suggested.

My own best guess is that PIE *wen- 'to desire' (as in winsome, or names like Baldwin and Venus) led to a primary sense of 'pure' for Welsh *gwynn* etc, so that a sense of 'white' developed later. This would accord with the way that Celtic languages handled colours, which looks odd to an English speaker, for example in *glas* meaning 'grey/green/blue'. Early peoples paid less attention to hue (in the Hue-Saturation-Brightness triad) in their lives than people do in the modern polychrome world.

Then where are the missing cognates of W-vowel-(N)-(D) 'valley flat' in Celtic languages? How about Welsh *gwaun* (pronounced gwine) 'mountain meadow, marshy ground'? Or Irish *en* 'water', said to derive from a PIE root *pen- 'swamp' that led to fen in English? Plenty of names beginning with Fin- in Ireland and Scotland were probably created in Gaelic and need to be re-examined to see if their alleged whiteness makes sense. Irish *fíar* 'curved' is recognized as derived from PIE *wei-, but is not, although it is close to *fíne* 'vine' and *finn* 'white'.

In English, the verb to win (plus its precursors and variant spellings) has a core meaning of 'to gain by labour or struggle'. Latin *vis* 'strength, force' (the parent of *vindex*) has no certain PIE root, but it may have a cognate in Sanskrit *vayas* 'food, strength'. A possible link between them all, and Irish *fine* 'tribe', might be ownership of a patch of fertile land – something to be won by effort or claimed by force – which might produce food and allow its occupants to thrive. Therein lies the semantic thread that could lead from meandering rivers to so many proper names.