

## Précis in English of paper sent to the Historical and Archeological Society of Brittany

### THE ELLIOTS <sup>1</sup> : BRETONS, ENGLISH, WELSH AND SCOTS

#### Warriors and people of the Halegoët

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#### Introduction

It has taken several centuries to discover that the origin of the name “Elliot”, well known in England, Wales and Scotland (in several phonetic spellings), is Breton, to eliminate many false assumptions, and to clarify why there are (or were in the past) several variants of the name. We know at last that the existence of such variants does not necessarily mean that the question of distant relationships can be discounted. The history of the Elliots of Scotland may now be treated as one of epic proportions, dating back to the era of the long Breton struggle against the Vikings long before the conquest of England by William the Bastard. The invasion brought into England those whose descendants would much later take the toponym Eliot in all its phonetic spellings, and its variants, as hereditary surnames. They fought in the Breton thousand-strong left flank of the Conqueror’s army of invasion, at the Battle of Hastings in 1066. What we can now see clearly is a confederation of related families, mercenaries and settlers, who for some time maintained, and passed from generation to generations, skills in the art of war. While English Eliots would by the end of the Middle Ages experience a more tranquil existence as landowners, merchants and members of parliament, their Scots cousins would pursue their military exploits, as border raiders and members of a ferocious paramilitary border clan, until the ruthless pacification of the Anglo-Scots Borders by James VI of Scotland and I of England, following the union of the two crowns in 1603. We can even identify the first lords and leaders of the Elliots during the pacification of the south-west of England, the ancient Saxon kingdom of Wessex, where there were already close links with the Bretons, and during the Conquest, revealing the political shrewdness of a conqueror who was well informed about the peoples of the British Isles and Celtic languages related to Old Breton. ( Cornish, related to Breton, was still spoken by the Cornish uplanders. )

#### The name

Although several websites compiled largely by amateurs (banes in the lives of professional historians) maintain that the name Elliot is of Scots origin, (or in some cases even Hebrew!!) it is without a shadow of a doubt of Breton origin.

Even today the name is found in main concentrations in the regions where Elliots were settled, in Brittany, mainly in the Morbihan but also in Seine Maritime, in the south-western counties of England, in South Wales and the Anglo-Welsh marcher counties, and in the Border region of Scotland.

There is no doubt that the Elliots, as we shall see, and their fellow descendants of the ancient Halgoët tribe, were among the thousand or so men, knights, archers and foot soldiers in the Breton contingent, recruited by William the Conqueror.

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<sup>1</sup> There are several variants of the name, all based on the old toponym, “Halegoët”, imported into England during the Norman Conquest in 1066. Parochial spelling variants which do not affect pronunciation are *Eliot*, *Elliot*, *Eliott*, and *Elliott*, and those which involve minor mutations are *Dalliot* = *d’Alliot*; *Eligott* and *Ellacott* = *Elgoët* and *Elegoët*, *Elwett* = *Eleouët* and *Elouët*, *Ellot* = *Elot* and *Ellet*. (see table p. )

All of these warriors, were the vassals and warbands of either Brien(t), son of Eudo the count of Penthièvre, or of Judicaël de Lohéac, viscount of the Halgoët. Their first settlement was in the lordship of Totnes, bestowed on Judicaël by William, with lands which covered the south of Devon. The first settlement of the Eliots, today represented by Peregrine Eliot, the Earl of St Germans in Cornwall, was at Plympton in that same Devon lordship.

The Elliots and other warriors, all descendants of the old Halegouët ( Halgoët) tribe, the Alllots, the Elegoëts, the Elouëts, etc., scattered almost certainly during the gearing of Breton society for war during more than a century of struggle against the Vikings of the Loire, were quite simply mercenary warriors, seeking their own spoils of war in the shape of their own new patrimonies.

As incredible as it may seem, the origins of the Eliots (all phonetic spellings) and those who carried or still carry variants of the name imported in 1066 and after, stayed for a long time unknown or victims of shaky suppositions. Historians of the settlement in Great Britain of the Conqueror's Breton mercenaries, in particular Michael C E Jones (see below, pp 10,11) have found that the assimilation of many of these feudal immigrants of modest status and their tardy adoption of native surnames, mean that the distant Breton ancestry of many Britons cannot be traced. Happily, the Scots Elliots, and others with variant names, never fully accepted the new name conferred on them, but for past historians of the clan the adopted name has been a serious diversion. Given, nevertheless, the overwhelming nature of the imposition of the system of feudal military tenure by the Scottish kings brought up under Norman tutelage, to the profit largely of knights and barons of Norman, Flemish, Breton or Picard origin (among whom was the Breton Walter fitzAlain, founder of the Stewarts), the origin of the name Elliot was always going to be found among the Canmore kings' "new men."

#### **Vassals of Penthièvre and the Halegouët**

As already indicated, the name Eliot is now well known in Cornwall. The first settlement of Eliots in Devon took place, almost certainly, following the pacification in 1069 of the south-west ( ancient Wessex homelands), mainly by a Breton army, and the repulse of an invasion from Ireland by the sons of Harold I, at Barnstaple, which led no doubt to Judicaël's Honour of Totnes. (Judicaël, shortened typically under French influence to Juhel ) Other leaders of this campaign, centred on the old fortified town of Exeter and its castle, were the redoubtable William fitzOsbern, and Brien of Penthièvre, brother of Alan Rufus, on whom William bestowed the vast Honour of Richmond in Yorkshire.

*"...The lords who came from Brittany were more numerous, and on the whole, more important as individuals. In 1086 Count Alan of Richmond, who was a cadet of the ducal house, was one of the chief landowners in the whole of England. Judhaël of Totnes, whose lands owed to the king the service of seventy knights, was the greatest magnate in South Devon. ... Earlier in the reign the Breton influence had been even stronger. The Royal forces which defeated Harold's sons in 1069 were led by Brian, a brother of the count of Richmond, who appears at court in the same year with an earl's title. There is evidence that he had been created earl of Cornwall."*<sup>2</sup>

The presence of the name Eliot today in Wales is almost certainly linked to the immediate conquest of South Wales by William fitzOsbern, a formidable warrior and counsellor to the Conqueror, who built new castles at Chepstow and Monmouth, which Eliots doubtlessly garrisoned. The availability of these Eliot warriors suggests a strong presence at Hastings in 1066, and in 1068, in the old kingdom of Wessex, of Eliots and other descendants of the old Halgoët peoples of the distant past.

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<sup>2</sup> Frank Stenton, *Anglo-Saxon England*, Oxford (paperback version 2001) p 269. ( Judicaël ..Judhaët...Juhel – typical shortening or "deformation par francisation. A feature of many Breton-French diminutives, including that of Elegoët > Eleouët > Elliot. )

The tendency of past historians to describe all the conquerors as “Norman” has been corrected by a more recent generation of historians. Looking at the Scottish feudatories of continental origin, Graeme Ritchie wrote:

“...it is seldom possible to ascertain their continental home, whether in the Duchy or in Flanders or in Brittany or elsewhere, and the precise connection which their forebears had with ... Duke William’s Breton, Lotharingian, Flemish, Picard, Artesian, Cenomannian, Angevin, general-French and Norman Conquest.”<sup>3</sup>

### Variants of the toponym “Halegouët”

Although my contact, former professor of history, Louis Elegoët of St Derrien does not yet recognise the name Elliot among the unusually many already recognised variants of “Halegouët”<sup>4</sup> I think that it is almost certainly a variant which is found in Morbihan, far from the old homelands of the tribe of that name, subjected to what the authors of the Dictionary of Morbihan Toponyms call “déformation par francisation.” This tendency seems to be derived from the habit of shortening Breton names into French diminutives, such as *Judicaël to Juhel*; *Blavezh to Blavet*; *Talc’hoed to Talouet*; *Roc’haned to Rohan*, and the evolution of *Elegoët to Eliouët*, then *Elliot*, in the course of the demographic upheavals and dispersals of the 10<sup>th</sup> and 11<sup>th</sup> centuries. A table of variants showing several patterns shared by all variants is set out below:

#### TABLEAU DES VARIANTES DU TOPONYM “HALEGOUËT/HALGOËT

[ avec les départements dans lesquels ils prédominent actuellement ]

1. Les variantes les plus proches	2. Élision de la « g »	3. Mutations vocaliques
<b>Hallegoët</b>	<b>Heleouët</b>	<b>Helliot</b>
<b>Halegoët</b>	<b>Helleouët</b>	<b>Helliet</b>
<i>Finistère</i>	<i>Finistère</i>	<i>Côtes d’Amor</i>
		<b>Halliot</b>
		<i>Loire Atlantique</i>
<b>Allalgoët</b>	<b>Alliouët</b>	<b>Alliot</b>
<b>Allegot</b>	<i>Loire Atlantique</i>	<i>Loire Atlantique &amp; Aisne</i>
<i>Finistère</i>	<b>Allouët</b>	<b>Allot</b>
	<i>Finistère</i>	<i>Loire Atlantique, Morbihan</i>
		<i>Côtes d’Amor</i>
<b>Ellegouët</b>	<b>Ellouët</b>	<b>Eliot</b>
<b>Elegoët</b>	<b>Elouët</b>	<i>Morbihan, Seine Maritime</i>
<i>Finistère</i>	<i>Finistère</i>	<b>Elliot</b>
	<b>Elliouët</b>	<i>Morbihan</i>
	<i>Loire Atlantique</i>	<b>Elliet</b>
		<i>Côtes d’Amor</i>
		<b>Elot</b>
		<i>Loire Atlantique</i>

#### VARIANTES ANGLAISES ET ÉCOSSAISES ACTUELLES :

**Ellot, Elliot, Eliott, Elliott** (*variantes paroissiales*) ; **Eligott, Ellacott** (*variantes d’Ellegouët et Elegoët*) ;  
( en Ireland – MacElligott )

VARIANTES HISTORIQUES ÉCOSSAISES : ( enregistrés pendant des siècles précédents )

<sup>3</sup> L R Graeme Ritchie, *The Normans in Scotland*, Edinburgh 1954, p 157.

<sup>4</sup> Near Plouzané, derived from the Breton *haleg*, Welsh *helyg*, Scots *saughtree* ).

**Eleot, Ellet** (*variantes paroissiales*)

**Elluat, Elwett, Elwitte** ( *variantes de Ellouët/Elouët, prononciations plus ou moins identiques*)

**Dalliot** (*variant d'Alliot*).

There are strong and striking clues in the table:

- The parallel distribution in England of other names based on the Breton variants of the original toponym: Eligott ( Breton Elegoët, Allegot; Allot & Dalliot ( Breton Alot, Alliot and d'Alliot); Ellet (Breton Elot) and even MacElligott, an Irish variant which doubtlessly originates in the 12<sup>th</sup> century invasion of Ireland mounted by the Anglo-Welsh marcher barons.
- The status of all these warriors, mercenary knights, archers and foot soldiers, as the vassals either of Penthièvre or the Halegouët magnates.
- The clearly evident morphological progression shown by the table, where patterns are repeated ( with slight nuances) in each of the three principal variant groups, which begin with the letter H, A or E. It is thus impossible to eliminate one tendency without eliminating all.
- The diminution of all of the names already mentioned, in the process of "francisation."
- The first stages of the patterns begin with elision of the "g" in Finistère. While the import of several of these mutations into England, and even into Scotland, tells us that they already existed in 1066, phonetic spellings were probably inconsistent before later standardisation. This was the case before the 19<sup>th</sup> century in England, when clerks and officials imposed their own spelling conventions.

The derivation of these variants north of the English Channel is self-evident. Is it possible that research into the variants of the toponym, "Halegouët" was not undertaken beyond the boundaries of Finistère? The progress of all of these tendencies or patterns shown above seem to me to be manifest. If this was a function of time, distance and geography, during an obvious dispersal of some families, either transplanted or dispersed during demographic upheavals, then we have an idea of the effects of early Viking incursions, and later settlements, as well as those of the later development of feudal military tenure. But these variants also remind us of how much their pronunciation and spelling were at the mercy of parish priests and literate ecclesiasts. It is certain that the Eliots, chevalier vassals of either Penthièvre or the Halegouët, and those carrying other variants of the original toponym, would have been formidable professional soldiers and warriors, who would demonstrate their military prowess in the centuries to come, particularly in Scotland. The history of the Elliots of the Morbihan, and of those carrying other variants of the name, is an impressively lengthy one.

Professor Michael C E Jones writes:

*"La Borderie interpreted the appearance of Breton names amongst the leading families of eastern and southern Brittany as evidence of deeply laid plans to create a Breton nation by farsighted dukes and spoke of the 'Bretonisation of Haute Bretagne' or 'Bretagne-gallo', French-speaking Brittany."*<sup>5</sup>

And in relation to authority restored by the counts of Rennes, generally acknowledged as dukes....  
*" But as in other northern French principalities and on the royal demesne by the mid-eleventh century this authority had come to be shared more widely with an aristocracy of great castellan families, while the same period also saw the appearance of large numbers of lesser knightly lineages, gradually brought under the sway of the duke and his great vassals."*<sup>6</sup>

<sup>5</sup> Michael C E Jones, *The Creation of Brittany, a Late Medieval State*, Hambledon Press 1988, p 29.

<sup>6</sup> Ibid. p.3

### The Elliots and the imposition of the system of feudal military tenure in Scotland

Before his accession to the throne of Scotland, king David I of the House of Canmore (1124-53) was the young companion (and hostage) of king Henry I as well as Earl of Huntingdon, granted vast lands with estates scattered across middle England. David, a francophone immersed in Norman military and religious culture, would have seen the shrewdness of Henry when granting lands to his own friends and partisans from the marcher regions of Normandy and Brittany. Among these “new men” was the Breton Walter fitzAlain, son of Alan fitzFlaad, steward to the military archbishop of Dol, and progenitor of the Stewarts. These have been described in detail by the historians Michael Jones and Katherine Keats-Rohan. The latter entitled a monograph, “the Non-Norman Conquest”. David would have been aware of the shrewd political and economic policy of Henry I in settling Flemish mercenary colonists in South Wales, and Henry was fully implicated in the settlement of these “new men” in Scotland south of the Forth and Clyde, with the aim of securing peace during his long absences in his Norman dukedom. This policy would have profound consequences during its finalisation to the north of the Forth in the Gaelic hills and lowlands, by David’s Grandson, William I (the Lion 1165-1214), who would very much favour the settlement of Flemish mercenaries and those of their captains who would be the progenitors of some of Scotland’s most powerful families.

In southern Scotland David himself installed as his great vassals, several men of modest status who would become during the following decades very powerful men, such as de Brus, inferted with the lands of Annandale, de Morville, de Soules the Lord of Liddesdale, where the Elliots would be later transplanted from Angus, Walter fitzAlan, also Breton and several others.<sup>7</sup> A majority of these men were for the most part David’s vassals and military tenants in his English lands, but there were also landless knights and “freebooters” ready to serve in the households and retinues of the king and his great magnates. As the chroniclers of the time often remind us, the majority of these landless knights were usually cadets, excluded from substantial inheritance by primogeniture, seeking their own patrimonies. To the north of the Forth there are traces of some seventy or so motte and bailey castles, raised mainly by William the Lion and his magnates, all needing to be garrisoned by companies of knights, with their esquires and other soldiers.

The first settlement of a past generation of Elliots, and other descendants of the old Halegouët tribe, in Scotland could only have taken place during the reign of William the Lion, during the realisation of his grandfather’s project, north of the Forth.

Although the Breton identity of the Elliots, and that of those of the confederation identified by toponym variants of Halegouët or Halgoët, is now certainly incontestable, it will remain always impossible to discern exactly when, and in what circumstances, their entry into the service of the King of the Scots took place. It is a well established fact that mercenaries and professional soldiers employed by all Anglo-Norman and Scottish kings were mainly Flemish and Breton. One chronicler stated that William II (Rufus), the Conqueror’s successor,

*“Knights came to him from all regions this side of the Alps and he bestowed funds on them with prodigality.”<sup>8</sup>*

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<sup>7</sup> The historian, G W S Barrow wrote: *“The famous names from this prodigal period are Bruce, Morville, Somerville, Corbet, Burneville, Soules, Avenel, Ridel, Lindsay and (lacking a surname) Walter le fitzAlain, the first of the Stewarts.... Bruce (de Brus) fiefs in Cleveland were held at an early date by dependants from Sottevast close to Brix... G W S Barrow, The Kingdom of Scotland, Edinburgh 2<sup>nd</sup> ed. p 284*

<sup>8</sup> R.Hexham, cited by R Bartlett, *England under the Norman Kings*, New Oxford History of England 2011, p 541.

William of Malmesbury wrote:

*"Because that people is so poverty-stricken in its own homeland (Brittany), they earn their pay by foreign service abroad...whenever the king required paid soldiers, he poured out large sums to the Bretons."*<sup>9</sup>

Geoffrey Barrow writes:

*"The chroniclers seem to have reserved their hatred for soldiers of foreign birth, principally the Bretons and Flemings, while both Bretons and Flemings were familiar people."*<sup>10</sup>

It is impossible to exaggerate the impact of the extension of feudal military tenure in Scotland:

*"The Crown itself was responsible for bringing into Scotland many individuals and families of Norman origin. The number cannot be calculated with any precision, and we must remember that for every one of the greater men there would be a small company of dependants – kinsmen, knights, men-at-arms, servants, some expecting land and all requiring billets. Sometimes these lesser men may leave a clue as to their origin, but more often not. It was to William the Lion's reign, and in particular to the period immediately following the Treaty of Falaise (1174), that later Scottish tradition, if correctly reported by Sir Thomas Grey, assigned a sudden and massive tidal wave of Norman immigration into Scotland, bringing with it the families of Balliol, Bruce, Soules, Moubray, Sinclair, Hay, Giffard, Ramsay, Laundells, Bisset, Barclay, Valognes, Boys, Montgomery, Vaux, Colville, Fraser, Graham, Gourlay and several more."*<sup>11</sup>

The tendency to describe all the conquerors as "Normans" has been corrected by a more recent generation of historians. Geoffrey Barrow cites Greame Ritchie:

*"...it is seldom possible to ascertain their continental home, whether in the Duchy or in Flanders or in Brittany or elsewhere, and the precise connection which their forebears had with ...Duke William's Breton, Lotharingian, Flemish, Picard, Artesian, Cenomannian, Angevin, general French and Norman Conquest."*<sup>12</sup>

What distinguished William the Lion from the Anglo-Norman kings was his lack of funds, his need to develop under-exploited under-taxed lands and fortify his military power, in carrying on with the implementation of the system of feudal military tenure started by his grandfather David I, in the "gaelic lowlands" and hills north of the Forth, in Fife, Angus and Moray. Although William could assemble a military apparatus stronger than anything ever seen in Scotland, the feudal host was not enough to confront the English feudal army. Barrow writes:

*"...the feudal host which could be mustered by the twelfth and thirteenth century kings of Scotland could never, at its greatest extent, seriously challenge any major cavalry force from south of the border. It was doubtless useful to deal with rebellion in the remote and ungovernable parts of the kingdom, in the far north and west. But even here, William I found it easier on one occasion (1212) to ask for mercenaries from England to suppress an insurrection."*<sup>13</sup>

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<sup>9</sup> W.Malm., *HN* 483 (p.41), cited by Robert Bartlett, op cit. P 267

<sup>10</sup> Barrow, p255.

<sup>11</sup> Barrow, p291

<sup>12</sup> Ibid. p282

<sup>13</sup> Ibid. p254

William, conscious of his royal status and standing, demonstrated this by his fondness for jousting:

*"In 1175, after his capture by Henry II, he brought a large company to a tournament in Normandy fought out between knights of France, England and Normandy on one side, and of Anjou, Maine, Poitou, **Brittany** and Scotland on the other. ...We know from Scottish sources that Philip de Valognes, a younger son 'who went to Scotland' was the king's chamberlain and held, among other property, half a knight's fee in Benvie and Panmure in Angus."*<sup>14</sup>

Only nineteen original royal charters of lay infeftment by William survive<sup>15</sup>, out of the scores of tenancies in chief and sub-tenancies in Scotland north of the Forth, held by his new barons and knights, Norman, Flemish, Breton, Picard and even Angevin. A fair number have, however, been identified in secondary sources. While the Breton identity of the first Stewart, Walter fitzAlain, endowed by David I with vast lands and scattered estates in southern Scotland, has always been known, many Breton colonists in England, and *a fortiori* Scotland, were simply identified by their baptismal names plus the tag "*Brito*" ("*the Breton.*")

#### **The transplantation of the men of "the Elliot" and other "Halgoët" confederates to the Borders by King Robert I ("the Bruce")**

Our evidence of the settlement of this confederation, dominated by the Elliots, arises from the naming of the river now shown on maps as "Elliot Water," and of the small town of Arbirlot ( an abridgement of Aberellot ), plus oral history put into writing by the 17<sup>th</sup> century local historian, Scott of Satchells, who wrote of "twelve great families" moved from Angus to the Borders by Robert the Bruce during the Scottish War of Independence. The importance of the name given to the river arises from the unique toponymic origins of the name *Elliot*, as one of a number of variants of *Halgoët*.

*( See the familiar passage in the Dowager Lady Elliott and Sir Arthur Elliott's history, which was translated into French)*

There is no need to recount the history of the War of Independence here, but the whole long history of the Elliots tells us that these formidable mounted men-at-arms must have taken part in the Bruce's strategy of avoiding confrontational battles against English armies by mounting guerrilla warfare, against castles still occupied by English castellans and their troops, and against the population south of the Border, in laying waste to cultivated lands in order to render them useless for supporting large armies. Clearly, the military prowess of the Elliots lay behind their transplantation to the long disputed Border region. Before them were to lie three very troubled centuries, as described by George MacDonald-Fraser in his Border history, *The Steel Bonnets*:

*"But in the making of Britain, between England and Scotland, there was prolonged and terrible violence, and whoever gained in the end, the Border country suffered fearfully in the process. It was the ring in which the champions met; armies marched and counter-marched and fought and fled across it; it was wasted and burned and despoiled, its people harried and robbed and slaughtered, on both sides, by both sides. Whatever the rights and wrongs, the Borderers were the people who bore the brunt; for almost 300 years, from the late thirteenth*

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<sup>14</sup> Ibid. P256

<sup>15</sup> Whilst religious charters were common, the drawing up of charters of infeftment for lay, e.g. military purposes was a late development.

*to the middle of the sixteenth, they lived on a battlefield that stretched from the Solway to the North Sea...”<sup>16</sup>*

### Why such late discoveries?

After many years of conjecture about the origin of the name Elliot, all that was needed was a true appreciation of the real impact of the Conquest of 1066, not only in England, but also in Scotland, plus the access to French archives and registers which the digital revolution has now provided. Once that a Gaelic or English origin can with reasonable certainty be discounted (although often claimed to be “Celtic”), attention should then be concentrated on the so-called “Davidian Revolution”, and the commencement of the settlement of Normans, Flemings, Bretons and Picards in most of the lands subjected to feudal military tenure, involving the rendering to the king of military, religious or administrative services.

The discovery of the Breton origin of the Elliots ( of all phonetic spellings of south-western England, Wales, the old marcher counties and Scotland, was held back by several factors:

- The survival of few early lay charters of infeftment in the counties north of the Forth, already mentioned, exacerbated by the destruction of old Elliot records by fire at Stobs Castle during the 18<sup>th</sup> century. Oral history of long standing of the resettlement of the Elliots is considered reliable, and is now corroborated by the giving of a unique toponym to Elliot Water, also to Arbirlot, and perhaps even Alyth.
- The common historical tendency of Anglo-Breton, and *a fortiori* Scots-Breton, mercenary settlers not only to be late adopters of hereditary new family surnames, but also in many cases to take new names.
- *“Hereditary surnames were not common before the fourteenth century. It was, however, customary for people of this time to have a byname or ‘cognomen’, in the form of a nickname, toponym, occupational tag, or patronymic that distinguished them from others of the same baptismal name.”<sup>17</sup>* (Many members of the Norman aristocracy had already adopted toponymic like “de Brus,” a variant of Brix in the Cherbourg peninsula) On the other hand, the names of aristocratic families like Percy and Mowbray were not handed down by unbroken lineage. This was usually the result of marriage to the sole heiress to lands whose name was adopted as a surname.
- In surviving charters and other ancient documents, infeudated Breton tenants were distinguished by the Latin tag *Brito (the Breton)*. Several can be identified by their Breton baptismal names, but more tended to take Norman names, such as Robert ( always the chosen name for Elliot Clan chieftains), William, John or Thomas, etc.
- Having listed the names of several settlers of Breton origin, Michael Jones wrote: *“It would be pointless to continue this list; one hundred years after the Conquest, a strong Breton presence in England is still felt. What deserves more attention is the problem of families who were quickly assimilated, **while adopting new names**. If we thus had not had convincing proof of the probable origins of Eudo, son of Spirewic, lord of Tattershall (Lincs) the names of his successors, Hugh, Robert, Philip and Robert, son of Walter, would not have given us a clue. Furthermore, since the knightly Breton families were generally slower to adopt regular use of patronymic, geographic or toponymic names than their Norman and*

<sup>16</sup> George MacDonald Fraser, *The Steel Bonnets*, Harper Collins 2012, p4.

<sup>17</sup> Bartlett, op.cit., p541



*Angevin neighbours, the use without distinction of just Christian names, often with the epithet "Brito", means that the origins of many families remain hidden in our sources."*<sup>18</sup>

Most members of the new feudal aristocracy were bilingual, initially with their first language as French ("de rigeur") with a developing and necessary understanding of English. Almost certainly the Elliots of the invasion would have spoken both French and Breton, before getting to grips with either English or much more easily, Welsh<sup>19</sup>. In Scotland the latter may have been abandoned in favour of the language of the Gaelic lowlands and hills north of the Forth. (Although historians of the English language seem to be at sixes and sevens over this...) while the Scottish version of English (Middle Scots) had achieved prominence in the south it had yet to spread further north during the 12<sup>th</sup> century. To English speakers south of the Forth and in England, Celtic languages were the "languages of the devil."<sup>20</sup> The languages additional to French spoken by Elliots would have changed from generation to generation, with every resettlement.

All of this evidence points to the certainty of the adoption, or acceptance under pressure, of a new, common English name, *Elwald*, by the chieftain of the resettled Elliot clan, Robert of Redheugh, in the Liddesdale valley, near to the Border. (The suffix "wald", later changed to "wood" is nevertheless problematic, since there is no doubt that, as with its use in Flemish, it may have meant, originally, "powerful", or "ruler," in either adjectival or noun form, as with earlier kings or princes like Aelfwald and Aethelwald. We should remember the title of "Bretwalda" given to the all-conquering King Athelstan, overlord of English, Danes and Scots, and the name of the Flemish founder of Clan Innes, "Beorwald.") There is little doubt now that many English *Elwoods* do not share common ancestry with Elliots.

Analyses of DNA samples taken from several Elliots (Eliotts and Eliotts), and others with Border names like Glendinning, Little and Vaux, settled in other Border locations close by, demonstrate that these people of Halgoët Breton stock sought their own new names, based on the locations in which they, not those who would retain the proud Elliot name, were resettled. (All share with those who retained their Breton toponyms as surnames close connections with the Douglas Earl of Angus who was involved with their resettlement, not only within his new lordship of Liddesdale.) All this demonstrates either a readiness or a requirement, to acquire a new surname. (The name acquired by the family with the greatest status and history behind it, of "the Elliot", was clearly never fully adopted, and was indeed abandoned when historical circumstances allowed.) For the time being DNA results reveal a shared Italo-Celtic ancestry : P312/S116 at 4 –5,000 years); L193 at 800 -1250 years ago, including that of the lineage which led the old Elliot and other Halgoët warbands. It is highly probable that the Elliots were already members of an affinity whose customs were akin to those of other European Celtic clans, the only difference being that of a later acquisition of feudal status during changes which foreshadowed those which were to appear somewhat later in Scotland.

Although the historical significance of the name *Elwald* will always remain obscure, since the suffix "wald" has more than one historic meaning, the sources are clear in demonstrating the parallel or interchangeable use of the names *Elliot* (all spellings) and *Elwald*. The evidence now demonstrates that the Elliots were clearly, like others of similar noble standing, too proud of their pedigree to fully and wholeheartedly accept a new name. Before the 17<sup>th</sup> century they used the diminutive *Ellot*, a name not unknown in Brittany today. According to oral family history, the "i" was reinserted following news of the death of Sir John Eliot (old spelling Ellyot), the

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<sup>18</sup> Jones, op.cit., p 83

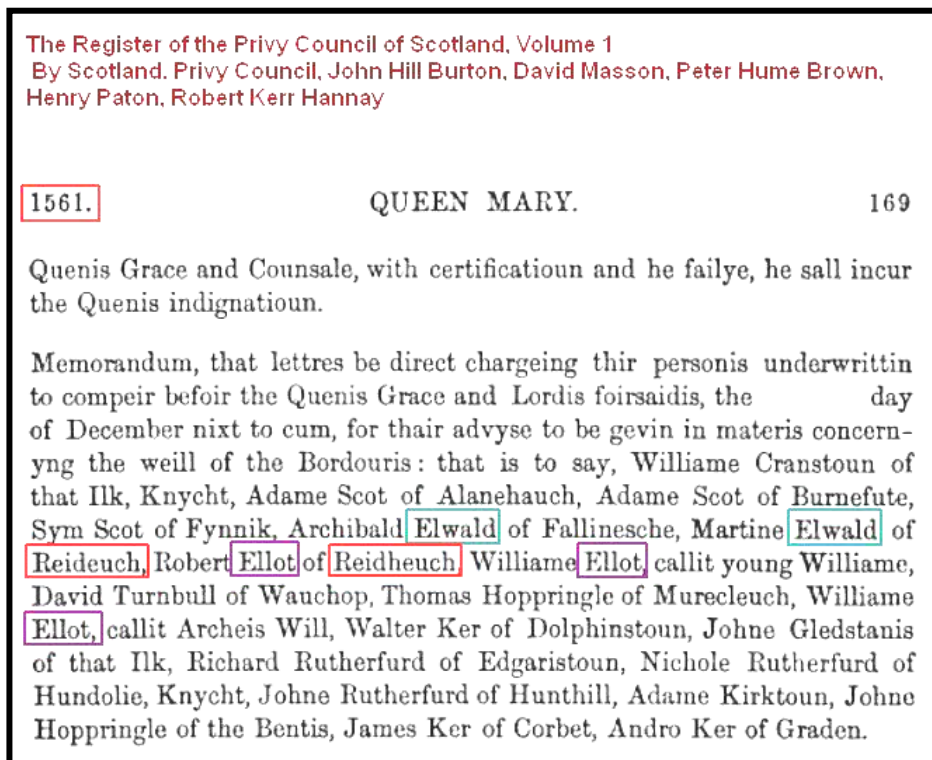
<sup>19</sup> That the use of Bretons in Wales was not a deliberate strategy would be difficult to believe, and Brythonic Welsh had not yet retreated from the west of England marcher counties, and nor had its western dialect disappeared from Devon and Cornwall.

<sup>20</sup> Ian Mortimer, *The Time Traveller's Guide to Medieval England*, Vintage Books 2009, p 74: "Celtic speakers are shunned as speakers of the Devil's words" (sourced during the years of the Great Plague) During this period Cornish people still spoke Cornish, which would have been more easily understood by the Bretons.

recalcitrant member of parliament for St Germans, in captivity in the Tower of London in 1632. The interchangeable use of both names is well attested by these sources: ( in which wildly inconsistent spelling was typical for the period)

1. ***"Have gotten pledges for the Elwandes of Redheugh and their band like as I had before and for the Ellots of the other gang of Gorrenberry, except so many as win (dwell) in Teviotdale on Mark Ker's lands and are servants to the warden, who say they will remain in Teviotdale and not come to Liddesdale and therefore they will enter no pledges."*** ( Report to the Privy Council, following his reprimand, by the Master of Hailes, dated 17<sup>th</sup> May, 1518<sup>21</sup>)

2.



3.

Reproduced in Brenda Morrison and Bruce McCartney's "The Ewes Valley", printed by McCartney of Langholm in 2000. Among the wild and inconsistent spelling of Scottish parliamentary drafters, set out in an Act of Parliament of 1585 reproduced in "The Ewes Valley," is a list of those pardoned or given amnesty by James VI. Among them are:

( as spelt ) "ninian thome george and will ellatis (plural of ellat) = *Ninian, Tom, George and Will Elliot*  
"Jon ellot in wodend"  
"rowe ello of thair" (there)  
"hall hob and will ellottis bres ( *Hall, Hob and Will Elliot, brothers*)

<sup>21</sup> Cited by the Dowager Lady Elliott of Stobs and Sir Arthur Elliott, 11<sup>th</sup> baronet of Stobs, *The Elliots, the Story of a Border Clan*, Anthony Rowe Ltd, 1974, p.20.

"willie ellat"  
 "Jok ellat in bowgranis."

### Conclusions

Although the identity of most of the post-1066 higher ranking aristocratic Breton colonists like the Penthièvre brothers and their cousin Judicaël, or the Count of Rohan, has always been known, it is now possible to show that a considerable number of knights of lesser standing, archers and foot soldiers, joined the Conquest from western and southern Brittany, and even from the Loire Atlantique and Pays Nantais (Nantes). As Jones has demonstrated, the adoption of new names by others, means that many British people will remain ignorant of their distant Breton ancestry.

The availability for conquest and settlement of Elliots and other Halgoët mercenary confederates, in Wales, where the name is still found today, so soon after initial garrisoning and settlements in Devon and Cornwall, indicates perhaps a considerable representation in numbers of these men, certainly most of Halgoët descent, highly mobile soldiers, doubtlessly ambitious, and members of a military affinity of long standing, going back to the struggle of Bretons against the Vikings. As a new military caste consisting of hundreds of thegns, and an expanded manorial system designed to support a professional military hard core, had emerged in England under the Wessex kings, Alfred, Edmund and Athelstan, a similar caste composed of large numbers of knights was to emerge in Brittany. There is perhaps no coincidence in these parallel developments, since the Vikings were finally defeated and expelled by a Breton army, with Saxon training and assistance provided to Count Alan Barbetorte who had grown up in exile in Wessex under Athelstan's guidance. In both countries, the organisation of societies geared up for warfare involved a great deal of resettlement, as populations were moved into newly created and fortified towns (burhs) and older refortified cities like Nantes. We can reasonably assume that the evolution of Halgoët name variants like Elliot, or Elegoët/Eligott, and Eleouët/Elwett, Aleouët and Alliot, (as in the above table) was the product of such an upheaval, and that Elliots in particular were members of this emerging military caste, whose martial tradition and professional soldiering would be passed from generation to generation, through the defeat of the Vikings to the Norman Conquest and beyond. Their gradual settlement would have been in the hands of elder sons, with further searches for lands through professional military service in the hands, as usual, of cadets.<sup>22</sup> The men of these cadet offshoots who established their own patrimonies in Scotland, first in Angus then in the Borders, following a resettlement which echoed all past resettlements in times of war, were very probably among the last of the descendants of the old Dark Age Halgoët tribe to continue its military traditions well into the times of troubles in the Borders. Theirs was truly an epic history.

The settlement of Elliots in Angus can only be appreciated in the context of William I's continuation of his grandfather's project of organising Scotland as a feudal military state. There was nothing unusual about the enfeoffment of men already with lands in England, or even on the continent, as with the Picard Balliols. It is to the reign of William I (the Lion) that we must turn to roughly date his employment of Elliots as professional soldiers, rewarded with lands in lieu of pay, in Angus. Their neighbours, as tenants in chief or sub-tenants of more modest standing, would have been overwhelmingly of Norman, Flemish, Breton or Picard origin. Those existing Gaelic clan chieftains rewarded with the new rank of Earl, who came to hold their existing lands from the king in return for the provision of knights or other services, were always identifiable. The Elliots were not among them, hence the further hardening of already hard evidence of the Breton and Ancient British origin of the name. ( The Welsh for *haleg* is *helyg* = Scots "*saughtree*." )

The exclusivity of the name Elliot as a variant Breton toponym must now be considered as proof enough of Elliot settlement in Angus, and the giving of the name to the river, Elliot Water.

On returning to our history books, it takes little imagination to picture the lives of the Elliots (all spellings) during the century following the Conquest of 1066. While we can construct an image of the take-over of the 10<sup>th</sup> century manorial system by the conquerors, Bretons included, which led to the repression and reduced status of the English manorial and military thegns, these were men whose exploitation of the land

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<sup>22</sup> The historian Katherine Keats-Rohan has drawn attention to the participation in the Conquest of 1066 of younger sons seeking their own patrimonies. *The Bretons and Normans of England 1066-1154, the family, the fief and feudal monarchy*, Nottingham Medieval Studies 36 (1992), online pdf.

and its people remained for a long time geared to the rendering of military service. We need only a glimpse into the history of castle building, starting with hundreds of early motte and bailey stockades which had to be garrisoned; or of the billeting of soldiers like the Elliots by local indigents; or of the use by magnates of their own household knights and military retinues; or of the widespread use of Breton and Flemish mercenaries during the civil war between King Stephen and the pretender, Empress Matilda, to get something of an idea of the lives of the warlike Elliots during those times. As a ruler who presided over the building of about seventy motte and bailey castles north of the Forth, William the Lion knew what sort of experience he required among his newly infeudated settlers. What set the Elliot Clan apart was the prolonging of its military tradition long after English and Welsh cousins had settled into lives as modest landowning members of the later medieval gentry, merchants and members of parliament.

It appears from examination of old "états-civils" that some Elliots in 18<sup>th</sup> century Brittany, and later, did at least attain the status of "petite noblesse", while later Elliots and Eliots distinguished themselves in other ways. It is therefore incredible that contemporary Breton, English, Welsh and Scots Elliots (all spellings) have remained for so long largely ignorant of their distant shared ancestry.

What seems to be fairly clear now is that while there is a sizeable strong, surviving hard core of Brythonic-Celtic ancestry among Elliots ( all spellings), the presence of varying strands of Germanic ancestries among Elliots today, whether Flemish, Scandinavian or Anglo-Saxon, and a number of others, discloses Elliot ancestry via the "distaff side." From the early wars against the Vikings right through to settlement in the Borders, Elliots were rubbing shoulders with families of other ancestries, Frankish ( Germanic), Flemish, Scandinavian, English, and perhaps even Alan, since Alan refugees had settled throughout France, at a time when rates of illegitimacy were high.

