

## 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**, causes some of us to avert our eyes in embarrassment when we have to give our address to foreigners. 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 points 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 can 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”. “Above” and “below” are similarly used to designate east and west.

While we are out at sea, we recall that Anguilla is one of the **Leeward Islands**. The islands further to the south we know as the **Windward Islands**. The source of these names does not seem to be taught in school any longer,

so it might be as well to spend a moment explaining them. The descriptions 'leeward' and 'windward' derive from the days of sailing ships. The origin of the system of naming the groupings of islands is Spanish. They divided the islands of the West Indies into '*las isles barlovento*' and '*las isles sotovento*', or those to windward and those to leeward of Hispaniola, their seat of government. Cuba and Jamaica lay to the west of Hispaniola, or down-wind, while Puerto Rico and the Virgin Islands lay to the east of Hispaniola, or upwind. The Spaniards named them accordingly.

The English adopted this Spanish system of designating the islands. With their seat of colonial government in Barbados, English ships crossing the Atlantic Ocean and entering the Caribbean, usually at Dominica, would have to tack to windward to arrive at Barbados. St Lucia, St Vincent and Grenada accordingly became known to the English as the 'Windward Islands'. If, when the English fleet had crossed the Atlantic, they turned to the north to St Kitts or Antigua, they were sailing with the wind and therefore to the lee. They described the islands that stretched from Dominica to the Virgin Islands as the 'Leeward Islands'.

The Dutch also adopted the same system, but with different results. They had their seat of government in Curacao. That island, together with Aruba and Bonaire, lies to the lee for Dutch sailing ships entering the Caribbean Sea from the Atlantic Ocean. The Dutch named them the Dutch Leeward Islands. St Maarten, Saba, and St Eustatius lie to the upwind of Curacao. They became known to the Dutch as the Dutch or Netherlands Antilles Windward Islands. This is the reason why the St Maarten airline is called 'Windward Islands Airways'. The result is that the Dutch Windward Islands are located right in the middle of the English Leeward Islands.

And, what about all the "bottoms" of Anguilla? Dr Johan Hartog in his history of the Netherlands Antilles explained the source and meaning of the word. The reference is not to a low spot, or somewhere at the bottom. After all, the best known bottom around is **The Bottom**, the capital town of the nearby Dutch island of Saba. It is situated up in a volcanic crater, at the highest part of the island. During the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries the Zeelanders from the Netherlands were the great traders of the West Indies. They sailed their big bellied drogues up and down the islands exchanging Dutch trade goods for sugar, cotton and salt. This was before the Industrial Revolution, at a time when the English and French were not much interested in trade with their own settlements. The Zeeland traders left several contributions to our language. One of these is their word for "bowl shaped", botte. The Anguillians adopted the word for the collapsed domes in the limestone rock that constitute the small "valleys" that dot the island, and named them "bottoms". And, now we have **The Valley Bottom, The Forest Bottom, Indian Bottom**, and a host of others.

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, but I have a theory. '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 was the strength of the island's defences. 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 has ever been recorded as living in Anguilla. His father 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 original Amerindian inhabitants were growing maize in the West Indies when Columbus arrived. He first recorded the native name for the grain in the Bahamas on his first voyage, and there is no reason why it could not have been growing in Anguilla too. 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' was at first pronounced 'Caduce', then began to be spelled 'Catouche', and later 'Katouche'. In some of the early deeds it is even spelled 'Cuttous'.

Katouche Bay is presently spelled Latouche with an "L" on the Ordnance Survey map of Anguilla. We know where that 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 who had led a French invasion force to Anguilla in 1745. He thought it was possible that this was the bay that De la Touche had landed at, and that the bay is named after this incident. In fact, we know from contemporary documents that he anchored his boats and disembarked his men either in Rendezvous Bay, as one contemporary document has it, 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 in order to correct an error, as they thought. No one in Anguilla calls the place 'Latouche Bay'. **Crocus Hill** itself is named for the lovely little yellow crocuses that come out with the start of the rains and that used to cover its slopes before the Wild Mimosa took them over.

**Sachassas** is equally easy to explain. The name "Sagers" or, more correctly, "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 the South Valley Plantation of deputy governor Benjamin Gumbs, and their land became known as Sagers' land. Ralph Hodge told me the story of how the name changed. He was a young civil servant working part-time with the Cadastral Survey team in 1974. Ralph lived then as now at Sagers'. When the surveyors were working in the area, the members of the team were not sure how to spell the name. Ralph made up the current spelling on the spur of the moment, and now it 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 early 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'. Badeziel Cox was the eponymous owner of the estate now known as **Bad Cox**. Richard Richardson Jr, or Little Dick, owned the adjacent estate known as Little Dick's, now officially spelled **Little Dix**, with an "X". Thomas Caul has given his name to **Caul's Pond**. And, we all know where Abraham Chalville lived. It is called **Chalvilles**. The Anguillians pronounced and spelled his name with a "w" instead of a "v". We know why they did that too. Students of sociolinguistics have written about the sound technically known as the 'unvoiced bi-labial fricative'. It is a cross between the sound of a 'v' and a 'w'. It 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". That is how Valentine Blake's land, as it was called in the 1690s, came to be known as **Wallblake**. The Anguillians referred to **Val Blake** as "Wal Blake", and with the passage of time, long after he had died and become forgotten, the sound had morphed into 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 it is down from, or 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 Roach once lived on a hill at North Valley, and we still call it **Roach's 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 Gibbon left an estate east of Blowing Point named **Gibbon's** after him, but we do not at present know his first name.

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 **Benzie** 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**. The word "coro" means naked or exposed in Spanish. "Corito" is the diminutive form. If the Spanish word is the origin then it is most apt, since the Corito area is exposed to the South-east trade winds and the coast line is windswept and subject to rough seas.

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 unending 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. Some day, 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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