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Surrey etymologies: the hundred of Wallington.

NOTE

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ON LOOKING INTO SMITH'S ELEMENTS*

Hugh Smith's two volumes, English Place-Name Elements, published in 1956, form a remarkably comprehensive collection of the linguistic entities which are to be reckoned with in the elucidation of place-names of all kinds. No work of this type could possibly be definitive, however, and it is reasonable, after twenty-five years, to think about ways in which it could be improved and added to.

Comprehensiveness is the main virtue of the work. A great many terms are included which have been noted only in one place-name or in a few field-names. This comprehensiveness may have given a spurious authority to some doubtful words, but it has enabled the book to be of great assistance to local historians, as there is a reasonable chance that the answer to a very local problem will be found in the two volumes. Some of the rare terms might be reconsidered, and many more could be added, since a great many rare or 'one-off' elements have come to light since 1956. But it seems more important to take a fresh look at Hugh Smith's treatment of the elements which are widespread in settlement-names, since an understanding of these is crucial for the study of settlement history.

Where he had an enormous quantity of material to digest, as in articles on tūn, dūn, ford e.g., Smith's approach was impressionistic. He made no attempt at statistical analysis, at detailed study of distribution and topography, or at a comprehensive classification of first elements. The English place-name survey was only half completed in 1956, but something could have been done as regards systematic analysis of names containing common elements because an overview of English settlement-names was available then, as now, in E. Ekwall's Concise Oxford Dictionary of English Place-Names (referred to hereafter by the EPNS abbreviation DEP.N). I have spent a good deal of time recently analysing DEP.N, and the results are so illuminating that it seems surprising that this exercise has not been undertaken earlier.

It is unlikely that Ekwall himself ever counted the number of names included in DEP.N which contain the commoner elements. He uses the word 'common' for clif (c.65), land (c.95), mere (c.105), denu (c.170), hyll (c.175), feld (c.200) and worth (c.250). If he had counted he would probably have felt that 65 and 250 are different frequencies. 'Very common' is applied to both well (c.250) and ford (c.550). Some rather rare elements - e.g. hȳth which has 27 instances in DEP.N - are described as 'fairly common'.

More careful estimates are useful. They add to one's appreciation of Barrie Cox's analysis (published in EPNS Journal 8) of the elements in English place-names recorded by A.D. 730. In that analysis, ēg is most frequent, with 19 certain and 2 possible instances, followed by feld (10) and ford (9). There are 6 instances of dūn. The score of 19 plus for names in ēg is even more impressive when it is realised that this is by no means one of the commonest elements in DEP.N, where it occurs in about 170 names; but that for ford is considerably less impressive when it is set against the number of about 550 in DEP.N. The 6 examples of dūn seem less significant than the 10 examples of feld, when it is realised that DEP.N includes about 350 names in dūn, and the smaller number of about 200 in feld.

If there is to be any attempt to quantify place-name elements, it is obviously necessary to ascertain the comparative frequency with which they occur in minor names and field-names, as well as their incidence in the major settlement-names included in DEP.N. This cannot yet be undertaken for the whole country, but spot checks can be made in counties for which we have surveys.

The impact made on the DEPN statistics by such county checks varies enormously from one element to another; and Smith might usefully have noted that there are some elements which are used mainly, or even exclusively, in the formation of major settlement-names, since this must affect one's interpretation of a word.

stōw may be instanced as a word used mainly in major settlement-names. There is a limited use of this element in minor names and field-names in eastern counties, but nowhere is Stow(e) a common term for farms or hamlets. The whole corpus of names from this word gives me the impression that a settlement designated stōw had some rare characteristic of more than local importance. The clustering of a few names in restricted areas of Derbyshire and Lincolnshire suggests that if one name in stōw was coined this sometimes led to the appearance of others, but most specimens are isolated. Smith's statement 'the distribution of the element is not significant' ignores this. It is desirable to note whether certain types of name occur in clusters or more often in isolation; distribution is not just a matter of more frequent in the east than in the west, and so on. In view of this characteristic, the frequent use of stōw as a simplex name should not be taken to indicate (as it is legitimately in the case of stoc) that the place was only of local significance. It is more likely that a place designated stōw was so important in its radius of 20 miles that no qualifier was felt to be necessary.

A similar case can be made regarding ærn, and the element which occurs, according to region, as bōthl, bōtl or bold. Neither Smith nor Ekwall marshalled any facts to prevent the casual reader from assuming that Much and Little Cowarne in Herefordshire were named from a quite ordinary cowshed, or to help him realise that Colerne, the name of a large parish and ten-hide Domesday estate in Wiltshire, should be seen as more than a shed in which charcoal was stored.

Some elements, on the other hand, although well-represented in major settlement-names, are very much more frequent in minor names. One instance is hyrst. This term occurs in about 70 names in DEPN, but these stand out from a much greater mass of minor names and field-names. In Sussex there are 17 major names out of a total of 70, and in Surrey only 2 out of a similar number (field-names have not been counted or estimated for either of these counties). In Gloucestershire there are 3 major names and 8 minor; in Warwickshire the figures are 3 and 12, in the West Riding of Yorkshire they are 2 and 30. This, combined with an analysis of the first elements in compound names in hyrst, suggests that major settlements with names containing this word are likely to be of relatively late origin and to have grown up in areas not immediately recognized by the Anglo-Saxons as appropriate to arable farming.

Some account of frequency in major names as compared with those of less important places, and more careful attention to the nature of qualifying elements, would have made Smith's article on trēow more authoritative. He says 'the element is very common indeed, partly because noteworthy trees were convenient boundary marks, partly because of the religious associations and partly because trees often marked the site of meeting places of the hundreds'.

It is quickly ascertained from the post-war EPNS volumes that trēow is very rare in field-names; in some of the more impressive-looking lists, such as that for Gloucestershire, closer inspection reveals that most items are boundary-marks in Anglo-Saxon charters. The word occurs in a few minor settlement-names, but the great bulk of the material to be discussed under the heading trēow falls into the two categories of major settlement-names and names of hundreds or wapentakes. I have assembled what I hope is a complete corpus, and I make the score 35 major settlement-names (some of the places are hamlets now, but they are recorded in Domesday) and 29 names of hundreds or

wapentakes. Names in charter boundaries have not been quantified, but this is the third category in which names containing trēow are encountered in serious quantities. Smith was not justified in saying 'the element is very common indeed', or in speaking of 'religious associations', which are not much in evidence. Much could be said of the possible ways in which such compounds as Elstree, Coventry, Daventry, and Oswestry became major settlement-names, but I am only concerned here to note that Smith's analysis of first elements is not based on a systematic survey.

Smith lists five categories of first elements in names in -trēow. 'Personal names' he puts as (v), saying 'frequently, esp. in the names of hundreds'. My analysis of first elements in the 64 names which refer to major settlements or to meeting-places gives me a total of 40 with personal names. Some of these (e.g. Coventry) can be disputed, but leaving aside all the uncertain ones, and some (like ceorl in Cholstrey Herefordshire, earn in Earnstrey Shropshire, biscop in Bishopstrow Somerset) which may be nouns, not personal names, I am left with 31 examples in which derivation from a personal name seems to me unavoidable. Of these 31 personal names, 16 are ditheomatic and one is feminine. Smith's 'frequently' is not incorrect, but it would have been more precise to say 'at least half'. Incidentally, Emstrey Shropshire, which means 'island minster', is mistakenly included in Smith's (v). The only other substantial category of first element to emerge from my analysis is one consisting of words which describe the tree. Here I would conflate Smith's (i) and (ii). For (i) he gives 'words denoting use or association', and cites 6 instances, including 2 'holy' trees. If I am allowed to put 5 of these 6 in the same category as names like Langtree, Rattery, Wavertree, which give a physical description of the tree, there are 17 items in this category.

If 40 examples of trēow with personal names are added to 17 with descriptive terms, this accounts for the bulk of the total of 64. Smith has two more categories. His (iii) is 'words denoting number', and here he cites only Aintree Lancashire and Manningtree Essex. I can add Twantry Northamptonshire, but might delete Manningtree as equally likely to mean 'Manna's tree'; so Smith's (iii) is hardly big enough to be a category. Smith's (iv) is 'Designations of people, as Bishopstrow, Cholstrey'. As mentioned above, in view of the overwhelming bias of the material, I would consider Biscop and Ceorl to be personal names.

This analysis of first elements should guide us in our consideration of the significance of these names. It is an unusually limited range, and some things are missing which might reasonably have been expected. Topographical terms are absent or rare. Harptree Somerset might be 'tree by a main road', Holmstrow Hundred Sussex might contain an unrecorded OE holm 'hill', Vinnetrov in North Mundham parish Sussex might be 'fenny tree'. But it seems that, for the most part, in order to be mentioned in an enduring place-name, a 'tree' had either to be associated with a particular individual or to be distinguished by some special characteristic, usually a physical one. The same limitations might prove to have been operative in place-names referring to specific kinds of tree, such as oak, ash, thorn, if the compounds in which these occur as second elements were systematically analysed.

In view of the perennial dispute about whether first elements are personal names or significant terms, it might be felt that attempts to estimate the frequency of personal names in any category of compound place-names are doomed to failure or at least to inconclusive results. There is an area of uncertainty, but I do not feel that it is large enough to invalidate the exercise. The use of personal names as qualifiers varies dramatically from one common element to another, and Smith's comments on this are usually imprecise.

Under cirice, for instance, his analysis of first elements says 'frequently personal names'. I accepted this for a long time because, working in Birmingham, I have Alvechurch Worcestershire and the two Warwickshire examples, Dunchurch and Offchurch, constantly in view. But when all the instances of cirice in DEPN are considered, there are only 10 certain instances with personal names. These are: Achurch, Algarkirk, Alvechurch, Baschurch, Colkirk, Dunchurch, Gosberton (DB Gosebertechirche), Layston (Lefstanchirche 12th c.), Lillechurch, Offchurch. Possible instances include Bonchurch, Dymchurch, Hawkchurch, Honeychurch, and Pucklechurch. If all these are included the type might be described as 'fairly frequent', but the category in which the first element is a descriptive term (as Whitchurch) is larger, so the comment 'frequently' would have been more appropriate to that. Actually it is misleading to use the word 'frequently' in connection with cirice as a place-name element. What is noteworthy is its relative rarity, as compared with similar terms in Wales and Cornwall. Another of Smith's statements about first elements is 'often saints' names'. He adds 'especially in Herefordshire where Welsh influence was strong'. The statement is true as applied to Herefordshire which has 9 names in -church, 7 of them containing saints' names, but elsewhere I have only noted Christchurch Hampshire, Peakirk Northamptonshire, and St Mary Church Devon; a purist might say that Peakirk is the only Old English instance of this type of place-name. Instead of 'often saints' names', Smith might have said 'cirice with the name of a saint is rare in English areas not subject to Welsh or Cornish influence'. This finding has some bearing on the question of whether Felixkirk, Oswaldkirk, and Romaldkirk in the North Riding of Yorkshire should be seen as OE or ON coinages.

The meaning and historical significance of common place-name elements will be evaluated more soundly if some attempt is made at quantification and at a systematic analysis of the first elements of compounds. Another factor which should be kept in view is the status attained by settlements with certain types of name, both in 1086 and at the present day. I would question Smith's statement that cot belongs to the late OE period. A substantial minority of the settlements with names in cot were recorded in DB, some of them with very respectable hidage assessments. Smith says 'a great many examples find no record in DB', but it is more to the point, in view of the meaning of the word, that so many examples do find a record there, and that there is the surprising total of 260 major names in DEPN. Assuming that all these places were of humble status when the word cot was first applied to them, quite a long period of development must be assumed before they became Domesday manors. The 16 Walcots listed by Professor Cameron in 'The Meaning and Significance of Old English walh in English Place-Names' (EPNS Journal 12) may be assumed to have been coined at a date when Welsh speech was still to be heard. I think 'middle Old English period' (?c.750 - c.850) suits the evidence better than 'late'.

The point may be illustrated by a brief look at the cot names in some of the counties where it occurs frequently. It is common in a block of contiguous counties in central England, including Berkshire and Oxfordshire. In Berkshire there are 24 names, 15 in DEPN, 8 in DB. As regards the DB hidages, there is the astonishing case of Buscot, assessed at 40 hides TRE, which requires a special explanation. Other DB assessments range from 2 to 14 hides. In Oxfordshire there are 45 names, 28 in DEPN, 13 in DB, and assessments range from 1 to 7 hides.

These considerations have some bearing on the name Calcot, Caulcut, Caldecot. Taking examples from DEPN (which are a small proportion of the whole corpus) I have assembled 22 names which derive from a phrase meaning 'cold cottage(s)'. These are: CALCOTT Berkshire, Shropshire, CALCUTT

Bedfordshire, Warwickshire, CALDECOTE Bedfordshire, Buckinghamshire, Cambridgeshire, Cheshire, Hertfordshire, Huntingdonshire (2), Norfolk, Northamptonshire, Warwickshire, CALDECOTT Northamptonshire, Rutland, CALDICOT Monmouthshire, CAULCOI Oxfordshire, COLDCOATS Lancashire, Northumberland, COLLOW Lincolnshire, CARGO FLEET North Riding of Yorkshire. Eleven of these are in DB, with hidages varying from 1 to 10, and several are parishes.

Smith, echoing DEPN, says 'a shelter for travellers'. If this is the meaning, permanent habitation must have been established at an early date to account for the later status of some of the places. Caldecote Buckinghamshire (now swallowed up in Milton Keynes) had three DB estates - 4 hides 1 virgate, 3 hides 1 virgate, and 2½ hides; and the borough of Newport Pagnell - another 5 hides - had been established in its territory by 1086. One is not obliged to accept the 'shelter' explanation. The places could be seen as new hamlets exploiting land uncultivated until the Middle Saxon period, acquiring the derogatory name in their very early days. An early change of status would contribute to the fossilization of the name. If they had remained 'cold cottages' they might all have developed into Coldcoats, as the Lancashire and Northumberland examples did. The factor missing in Smith's evaluation is the later status of some of the places.

It seems legitimate to criticize Smith for not quantifying his material and for not making a systematic analysis of first elements, because that can be done from reference books and is not inordinately time consuming. It would be less fair to criticize him for not doing much topographical research, because that is so time consuming as to be impossible on a large scale for any one worker, even if done with maps and unsupported by field work. Such investigations may be recommended as likely to be profitable for a number of 'topographical' place-name elements. I have located on the 1" map and considered briefly the sites of some 350 names containing dūn which are in DEPN. There are some areas where this is one of the dominant final elements in settlement-names, the most noteworthy being part of the South Midlands, comprising east Oxfordshire, Buckinghamshire north of the Icknield Way, and Middlesex. This, and other smaller areas, are characterized geographically by a series of low, flat-topped hills which are suitable for village-sites, and I believe that in most instances the dūn name will have been given by English speakers to a long-established pre-English village in recognition of its characteristic situation. These are places where I would look for continuity of settlement. They do not spring to the eye on modern maps; dūn has suffered such a high degree of confusion with other words (particularly denu and tūn) that it is not possible to assess its incidence in any area without painstaking use of reference books. I believe the element dūn to have been much underrated; a name like Claverdon Warwickshire is not just a gratuitous botanical/topographical observation.

There are other topographical terms, besides dūn, which I believe to have a quasi-habitative sense in place-names. Here belong feld, ēg and ford. These words share with dūn the characteristic of having a high proportion of personal names among the first elements. An analysis of first elements in the 350 dūn names in DEPN brings out some other interesting points, besides the fact that between 50 and 60 of them contain a personal name. The category in which the first element refers to animals or birds is surprisingly small, less than 30, and 12 of these refer to domesticated rather than wild creatures. At least 50 have as first element a word for something growing on the hill, and 22 of these refer to crops, not to wild vegetation.

There is a good measure of agreement now about the importance of topographical settlement-names, but we do not yet have many distribution maps to

help us to appreciate them. Ann Cole, a geography teacher who attended a weekend school on this subject in Oxford recently, has drawn for me a most useful map of part of the Chilterns which brings out some salient points very well. This shows the regular use of denu in names of settlements in the long, curving valleys of the dip slope, the occasional use of cumb for settlements in the valleys characteristic of the scarp slope, the use of hōh for the spurs on the indented stretch of scarp slope to the north, and (taking up the NW quarter of the map) part of the dūn country NW of the Chilterns, mostly on the other side of the R. Thame. The importance of dūn in settlement-names in relatively low areas, rather than on the adjacent high ground, is apparent also in Northumberland and Durham. There is a great range of elevation in the features referred to as dūn. The lowest is Hedon, east of Hull, at 12', and the highest is Chelmsford in Derbyshire, at 1200'; but most places with names in dūn are on hills of 200'-500', and only in north Staffordshire and north Derbyshire is the term well-evidenced in high country.

It was not to be expected that either Smith or Ekwall would conduct that sort of study, but there are some names in connection with which they could have used some geographical common sense. The most glaring instances I have noted are the names in the fenlands of Cambridgeshire, Lincolnshire, and Huntingdonshire which are considered by both authorities to contain bæce, bece 'stream, valley'. These are Landbeach, Waterbeach, Long Beach Fm, Wisbech in Cambridgeshire, Ashbeach Fm, Chalderbeach Fm in Huntingdonshire, and Pinchbeck, Holbeach in Lincolnshire. There are watercourses and drainage channels everywhere in the fenland, so one cannot say that -beach does not derive from a word meaning 'stream'. But in other counties bæce, bece is consistently used of a small stream in a well-marked valley, and one can say that a well-marked valley is impossible in the fens. Furthermore in Cambridgeshire and Huntingdonshire outside the fens, where streams do flow in valleys, names in -bæce, -bece do not occur, which suggests that the term was not favoured in the place-name-forming vocabulary of these counties. We have some information about field-names in Cambridgeshire, and this confirms the fenland distribution of names in -beach in East Anglia.

In these fenland regions it is not likely that settlers would be looking for streams or valleys. It is more likely that they would be looking for patches of raised ground. It would make better sense if the final element of Landbeach, Waterbeach, and Holbeach could be interpreted as a locative form of bæc 'back', used occasionally in place-names elsewhere of a ridge. Holbeach has a raised site from which many small streams flow away. It was perhaps thought of as a 'back' rather than an ēg because it was narrow and elongated rather than sub-circular. The first element, 'hollow', may indicate that the ridge was slightly concave, or it could be a genitive plural, giving a sense 'ridge in the hollows'. At Waterbeach, spot heights on the 1" map show a rise from 3' in the fens to 20' in the village. Wisbech occupies a slightly higher elevation in deep fenland, and the first element is the river-name Wissey. Perhaps in this instance the bæc was created by the action of the river, depositing silt and raising its bed above the level of the fens. At all events the conventional translation 'valley of the R. Wissey' will not do.

The study of elements, as opposed to the study of counties, should give insight into the significance of some names which are widely distributed over the country, and which are not likely to be evaluated by county editors who have one or two examples in their area. I thought Acton was evenly distributed until I assembled all the examples in DEPN, but in fact it appears mainly in the West Midlands, especially Shropshire and Cheshire. There are scattered instances in the North (where it sometimes becomes Aughton or Aighton). Acton in Greater London is an isolated specimen. Thornton is mainly an East Midland and North Country name, with a few outliers in Gloucestershire (Tarleton),

Buckinghamshire, and Dorset. The habit of saying 'this is a common name' when dealing with one specimen of these compounds, or of others such as Wootton, Eaton, Bourton/Burton, in a county survey does not advance knowledge. The compilation of a dictionary of elements would have been an opportunity for looking at all the Woottons, Eatons, Strettons, and so on, in case they have a hitherto unsuspected coherence. Some of these names will be discussed in detail in my forthcoming book on common elements, but since I embarked on this it has become clear that the necessary spadework for such studies has not yet been carried out, and for many of the commoner elements I shall only be able to suggest lines of investigation which are likely to prove fruitful.

NOTE

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