

# Ludgate

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The name of this gate in the Roman wall of London has been plausibly explained by Harben,<sup>1</sup> and following him Ekwall,<sup>2</sup> as deriving from the attested Old English (OE) *ludgaet*, *ludgæt* found in the early glossaries Épinal/Erfurt (l. 741) and Corpus (l. 1538). This means ‘back or side door, postern’ (glossing *seudo-*, *seuduterum*, i.e. Late Latin *pseudothyrum* from Greek literally ‘false door’). There are persistent medieval spellings with medial <t(h)> instead of <d>. One might explain these as anticipating the word-final <t>, i.e. possibly representing a pronunciation with [t] replacing an earlier [d] which the Old English forms express. Alternatively, one might take the forms in <t> as representing the earlier state of the word in defiance of the Old English evidence, in which <d> might represent a case of dissimilation, or of subconscious influence from the distinct word *hlidgeat* ‘swing-gate, barrier’.<sup>3</sup> Whatever its source, the <d> in the glossaries must go back to their archetype, but the evidence of *Ludgate* indicates that the form is definitely authentic. Ekwall’s suggestion that <d> represents a [d] deriving from [t] in anticipation of the <g> (i.e. [g]) in the second element is strained, however, since in OE <g> would have represented [j] in this position unless the form involved had been the plural *gatu/-as*. Moreover, the forms with <d> are very early (eighth century). Nonetheless, [j] is a voiced sound, and voicing assimilation is not impossible, but the development [tj] ==> [t] is what is actually found in the comparable *\*ort-geard* >> *orceard* ‘orchard’.<sup>4</sup> The problem to which these facts

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<sup>1</sup> H. A. Harben, *A Dictionary of London*, revised for publication by I. I. Greaves (London, 1918), *s.n.*

<sup>2</sup> E. Ekwall, *Street-Names of the City of London* (Oxford, 1954), p. 91.

<sup>3</sup> This is commonly supposed to be the source of Welsh *llidiart* ‘gate’, but the phonology of this equation is not easy.

<sup>4</sup> Note though that *orceard* is also found as *ordceard* and *ordcyrd*, *orcgyrd*, all seeming to testify to a first element with a voiced final consonant, despite its evi-

give rise is not an easy one to solve.

We do not know what the Roman Ludgate was like, of course, but since it bestrode a main road (a branch of the Bath road, Margary 40), we can presume that it had significant headroom. It must have had at least one postern or side-gate, and either only they survived in Anglo-Saxon times, or it was unique among London's ancient gates in having such extra passages.<sup>5</sup> What might the origin of the Old English term in question be?

If the first element is truly *lud*, it is hard to assign a lexical meaning to it; there are no obvious source-words in Brittonic, Latin or Old English. A tentative formal case might be made for the ancestor of Welsh *lludw* 'ashes' or *lludd* 'obstacle', both with Brittonic \*/ü:/ represented by early OE /u:/, but only if we accept the implausible idea that the etymologically comparable Brittonic \**dūn* 'fort' is rendered by OE *dūn* in certain place-names by genuine sound-substitution rather than by lexical association,<sup>6</sup> and this is not generally accepted. In any case, the applicability of these words to a city gate is hard to establish. It is also impossible to envisage a cognate of Icelandic *lúða* 'halibut' as relevant. Otherwise we have only Geoffrey of Monmouth's attempt to associate the gate-name with the mythical British king Lud.<sup>7</sup>

This impasse is presumably what leads Ekwall to favour its derivation from the stem of the Old English verb *lūtan* 'to bow, incline', with its presumption of the phonologically more problematic stem-final /t/. A \**lūtgeat* "lutgate" would be a "gate where one has to bow one's

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dent origin in VL (*h*)*ortus* 'garden' (Kemble's *Codex Diplomaticus* and Ælfric's glossary, as cited in T. N. Toller, *An Anglo-Saxon Dictionary Based on the Manuscript Collections of the Late Joseph Bosworth* (Oxford, 1898), s.v. *ort-geard*). This invites direct comparison with the suggestion about *ludgaet* offered here.

<sup>5</sup> All the later medieval gates shown in publicly accessible engravings had posterns. Post-medieval Ludgate is shown in figure 1.

<sup>6</sup> For the lexical association argument, see K. H. Jackson, *Language and History in Early Britain* (Edinburgh, 1953), p. 320.

<sup>7</sup> *Historia Regum Britannie*, MS Cambridge University Library 1706, 3: 20; *Geoffrey of Monmouth: History of the Kings of Britain*, edited and translated by L. Thorpe (Harmondsworth, 1966), p. 106. Geoffrey also derives *London* from the same *Lud*.

head in order to enter” (cf. the evidence of the Roman Newport arch in Lincoln, where the urgency of the need to bow depends on one’s assessment of current and historic ground levels; fig. 2). I suggest that the phonological challenge can be resolved by admitting interference from the well-attested *hlidgeat*, but propose instead that the first element may actually have been the long-vowelled stem of the verb *lütian* ‘to skulk, lurk, lie hidden’, related by ablaut to the short-vowelled one in *lot* ‘guile, craftiness’, *lytig* ‘crafty’, shortened in the closed stressed syllable of a polysyllabic word.<sup>8</sup> Whether it was the gate itself that was judged to be hidden, or whether things or people could be hidden at it, is not a problem we can resolve, but we can note that the same issue attends the interpretation of OE *d(i)erne* ‘hidden’ or its Middle English successor as represented in *Derngate* (Northampton<sup>9</sup> and Coventry<sup>10</sup>) and *Durngate* (Winchester<sup>11</sup> and Dorchester<sup>12</sup>).<sup>13</sup>

<sup>8</sup> It may actually be the same as the first element of the *\*lūtegār* ‘trapping-spear’ (etymologically therefore ‘hidden spear’) plausibly postulated by E. Tengstrand, *A Contribution to the Study of Genitival Composition in Old English Place-Names*, *Nomina Germanica* 7 (Uppsala, 1940), pp. 219–25 for the first element of English place-names of the type *Ludgershall*, but with different compounding properties: the connective *-e* is absent in the London name.

<sup>9</sup> J. E. B. Gover, A. Mawer and F. M. Stenton, *The Place-Names of Northamptonshire*, English Place-Name Society, 10 (Cambridge, 1933), p. 7; A. Room, *The Street-Names of England* (Stamford, 1992), p. 65.

<sup>10</sup> ‘The City of Coventry: list of streets’, in *A History of the County of Warwick. Vol. 8: The City of Coventry and Borough of Warwick*, edited by W. B. Stephens (1969; section prepared by J. C. Lancaster in 1961, completed with amendments and additions by C. B. Clarke and M. Tomlinson in 1966) pp. 24–33, available online at [www.british-history.ac.uk/report.asp?compid=16006](http://www.british-history.ac.uk/report.asp?compid=16006), accessed 11/11/05.

<sup>11</sup> J. E. B. Gover, ‘The Place-Names of Hampshire’, typescript in the care of the English Place-Name Society, Nottingham (n.d.), p. 10.

<sup>12</sup> A. D. Mills, *The Place-Names of Dorset, Part 1*, English Place-Name Society, 52 (Nottingham, 1977), p. 351.

<sup>13</sup> W. W. Skeat, ‘Notes on English etymology’, *Transactions of the Philological Society* (1899), 261–90 (pp. 267–68), notes that OE *gedyrnan*, i.e. *gediernan*, could mean not only ‘to conceal’ but also ‘to stop up’ (and in that application is the source of *darn*). Whether that might be relevant in gate-names has not been established.

The association of town-gates with hiding or being hidden is well established, and could reasonably be extended back in time to Ludgate.



Figure 1: Post-medieval Ludgate, London (taken from [www.xefer.com/image/gates/thumb/ludgate.jpg](http://www.xefer.com/image/gates/thumb/ludgate.jpg); ownership of site unknown)



Figure 2: Newport Arch, Lincoln (Raphael Tuck postcard, early 20th century)