

Ælfric of Eynsham, Pucklechurch,
and evidence for fallow deer in Anglo-Saxon England¹

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INTRODUCTION

The issue of whether or not fallow deer were present in Anglo-Saxon England has long been controversial. Like other non-native species such as the brown hare, pheasant and rabbit,² they were introduced to Britain by the Romans, who established breeding herds of *Dama dama*—the Latin name for fallow deer—at high-status sites including the Roman palace at Fishbourne in Sussex and the Roman settlement at Monkton on the Isle of Thanet in Kent.³ However, there has been much discussion as to whether these herds survived into Anglo-Saxon times, or if the species died out in Britain following the withdrawal of the Roman Empire. On the one hand, fallow deer are largely absent from the historical record until the post-Conquest period, when they could have been reintroduced

¹ I am grateful to John Moore for drawing Pucklechurch to my attention, and to members of the Onomastics Reading Group at Glasgow University for discussion of various relevant issues. Particular thanks are due to John Baker and Jayne Carroll for their detailed and helpful comments on an earlier version of this article, and to Carole Biggam and John Hines for advice on specific points.

² Previous uncertainty regarding the presence of rabbits in pre-Conquest Britain was resolved in 2006, when *British Archaeology* reported the find of rabbit remains at an early Roman site at Lynford in Norfolk under the engaging title ‘Unearthing the ancestral rabbit’:
<<http://www.archaeologyuk.org/ba/ba86/news.shtml#item2>>.

³ All references are to the historical counties preceding the local government re-organization of the 1970s.

by the Normans.⁴ On the other hand, archaeological and linguistic evidence offers tantalizing glimpses of survival.

As long ago as 1936, Ekwall (DEPN, s.n. Fawsley) proposed an unattested Old English (OE) **fealu* ‘fallow deer’ as the first element of the place-names Fawley in Berkshire and Fawsley in Northamptonshire, taking it to be a substantive use of the colour adjective OE *fealu* ‘fallow’.⁵ This is considered possible by Gelling (1973–76, II, 298; III, 867) and the *Dictionary of Old English* editors (DOE, s.v. *fealu*), and as probable by Mills (2003, s.n. Fawley W. Berks). Watts (2004, s.n. Fawley Berks) prefers a derivation from an unattested personal name, but such an interpretation is generally rejected for the reason given by Ekwall (DEPN, s.n. Fawsley): ‘It would be too remarkable to find such a name twice combined with LĒAH’.

While colour is certainly one of the distinguishing features of the fallow deer, another is its spotted coat, and it is not uncommon for a single species to have a variety of different names in colloquial use.⁶ Another element that combines exclusively with generics used elsewhere of the habitat of wild creatures is OE *pohha*, *pocca*, found in place-names such as Poflet in Devon (OE *hlȳp* ‘leap, leaping place’), Poffley and a lost *Pochwele* in Oxfordshire (OE *wiella* ‘spring, stream’), Poughill in

⁴ A further possibility suggested to me by John Hines is that if fallow deer were present in continental Europe through the early Middle Ages, they might have been reintroduced to England before 1066.

⁵ Like many other colour terms, OE *fealu* has no direct equivalent in Present-Day English. DOE, s.v. *fealu*, explains it as “a colour-term of varied meaning; the corpus yields the most evidence for a colour basically yellow but variously tinted with shades of red, brown or grey, often pale but always unsaturated, i.e. not vivid; hence, ‘tawny’, ‘yellow(ed)’, ‘yellowish-red’, ‘yellowish-brown’, ‘yellowish-grey’ all appear as translations; the ModE reflex, ‘fallow’, is now obsolete except of the coat of an animal”.

⁶ This is abundantly demonstrated by the entries in Roberts and Kay (1995), sections 02.06.02 ‘Domestic animals, livestock’ and 02.06.03 ‘Wild animal’.

Devon (OE *hyll* ‘hill’), Poughill in Cornwall (either OE *hyll* ‘hill’ or OE *wiella* ‘spring, stream’), and Poughley, Poughley Farm (Chaddleworth) and Poughley Farm (East Hanney) in Berkshire and Pophley’s Farm in Buckinghamshire (OE *lēah* ‘wood, clearing’). Although previously taken to have a transferred topographical sense related to the attested meaning ‘pouch, bag’, the incidence of identical formations within limited geographical areas is difficult to reconcile with this interpretation, as is the fact that the element always functions as a place-name qualifier, never as a generic. Building on Gelling’s (1973–76, II, 291) cautious suggestion of an animal name, I have proposed a development from OE *pohha*, *pocca* in the alternative sense ‘pock, pustule’, alluding to the distinctive spots of the fallow deer (Hough 2001). Particularly significant is the occurrence in Poflet, since of the twenty-five other known place-names from OE *hlȳp* ‘leap, leaping place’, one is of uncertain meaning,⁷ nine refer to people, and fifteen contain references to wildlife, of which eleven are terms for deer.⁸ Also suggestive of the survival of breeding herds is the place-name Broyle (‘enclosed wood or park for game’) in New Fishbourne in Sussex, as well as other toponymic evidence for

⁷ This is Ruislip in Middlesex, where the first element may be OE **rysc* ‘rush’.

⁸ These are OE *dēor* ‘deer’ (Deer Lips in Gloucestershire; Dear Leap in the West Riding of Yorkshire; Deelips in Rutland; Deer’s Leap in Cheshire; *Deere leape flatt* in Staffordshire), OE *heorot* ‘hart, male deer’ (Hartlip in Kent; Horsley Bank in Cheshire) and OE *hind* ‘hind, female deer’ (Hindleap in Sussex; Hindlip in Worcestershire; *Hindehlypan* in Gloucestershire; *Hyndelege dale* in Nottinghamshire). The absence of OE *bucc*, *bucca* from this group is worth noting. Although often taken to be ambiguous between ‘he-goat’ and ‘male deer’ in place-names, with some scholars distinguishing between the strong and weak forms—for instance, Coates (2012, 224) defines *bucca* as ‘he-goat’ and *bucc* as ‘(roe-)buck, (perhaps) fallow buck’—the strong preponderance of evidence in the DOE entry (s.v. *bucca*, *bucc*) is for ‘he-goat’, with just one occurrence glossing *cervus* ‘buck, male deer; stag’, in a late transcript. The fact that the term is not represented among others referring to deer in the distinctive group of place-names from OE *hlȳp* ‘leap, leaping place’ may support the impression that this meaning was not in widespread use in Anglo-Saxon times.

medieval deer parks in the vicinity of those established by the Romans (Hough 2008).

In this as in other areas of research, it is essential for linguistics and archaeology to work together. Key evidence for the introduction of fallow deer by the Romans was provided by the new technique of strontium isotope analysis, confirming that a jaw bone dated *c.*95 AD from Fishbourne belonged to a specimen raised locally rather than to one imported from elsewhere (Sykes et al. 2006). Stable isotope analysis has also been used alongside AMS radiocarbon dating, osteometrics and genetics to establish that fallow deer bones from Monkton in Kent are datable to the Roman period and probably represent animals introduced to controlled parks (Sykes et al. 2011). Excavation reports from pre-Conquest sites have appeared to place the presence of fallow deer in Anglo-Saxon England on a similarly firm footing, supporting the evidence of place-names outlined above. Most recently, however, Sykes and Carden (2011) have offered a fundamental reassessment of the material record which undercuts the findings of previous archaeologists. While acknowledging that ‘At face value the data seem compelling, with several sites suggesting a pre-Conquest presence of fallow deer’ (2011, 144), they argue that in no individual instance is the evidence conclusive.

Three key sites are the Cheddar Palace in Somerset, Portchester Castle in Hampshire and Goltho in Lincolnshire. Of these, Sykes and Carden (2011, 145) conclude that ‘the specimens from the Cheddar Palace are insecurely dated while those from Portchester Castle were misidentified’, and they call the third into question on the basis of discrepancies between the zooarchaeological report and the archive material. They go on to explain:

Without secure evidence from Portchester Castle, the Cheddar Palaces and Goltho, the case for a definite pre-Conquest presence of fallow deer rests upon just a few other specimens (Appendix). Those from Anglo-Saxon Ipswich are thought to have been misidentified and those from Hertford (Hertfordshire) and Pontefract Castle (West

Yorkshire) must also be viewed with suspicion given that the reports for these assemblages provided no details to allow the specimens' identifications to be independently verified. Equally problematic are the examples from Barking Abbey (London) because, although some details have been archived, there are no metrical data and the contexts from which the specimens derive are potentially insecure. Two specimens—the calcaneum (ankle bone) from Hare Court in London and the humerus from Brandon Road in Thetford (Norfolk)—are undoubtedly fallow deer, their identifications confirmed by measurement, but neither are from sealed contexts. ... There is one *Dama* specimen that has fortuitously been dated to the early medieval period: a fallow deer calcaneum was identified from the Roman site of Redlands Farm (Northamptonshire) but this was shown to be a later intrusion: the resulting date was, however, frustratingly inconclusive at AD 965 ± 45, which equates to a calibrated 'Saxo-Norman' date of AD 990–1170 (OxA-7896). (Sykes and Carden 2011, 146)

Taking all this into consideration, the evidence still appears to favour the presence of fallow deer, with doubts stemming not from reinterpretation of the data but from lack of confidence in the methodologies of earlier archaeologists whose results cannot now be verified.⁹ Neither, of course, can they be falsified: phrases such as 'potentially insecure' and 'frustratingly inconclusive' indicate that any misidentification is hypothetical rather than demonstrable. Even on the most sceptical analysis of the available material, moreover, Sykes and Carden (2011, 146) conclude that 'the species was present in England by the end of the 11th century', the only point at issue being 'whether they were established before or after 1066'.

⁹ A key issue is that new criteria for distinguishing between the bones of fallow and red deer were put forward by Lister in 1996. This means that previous analyses had not followed the same protocols as those currently in use.

Given the problems with the archaeological record, the place-name record is all the more important. During the course of their discussion, Sykes and Carden also challenge the linguistic evidence that I have presented in the research outlined above, pointing out that ‘Deer are, after all, not the only creatures which “leap” in place names’, and arguing that ‘if **pohha* was a creature, it could quite feasibly denote some other baggy or speckled animal’ (2011, 144).¹⁰ Meanwhile, John Moore (private communication) has drawn my attention to further relevant material from the place-name corpus, and Coates (2012, 224, n. 10) has noted the potential significance of an Old English lexical compound underlying the place-name Darton ‘deer park or enclosure’ in the West Riding of Yorkshire.¹¹ The issues thus appear still to be finely balanced, and are worth returning to once again. The purposes of this article are to address the objections that have been raised against the linguistic evidence, and to discuss the additional place-name material that has come to light.

ÆLFRIC OF EYNSHAM

Sykes and Carden (2011) offer a wide-ranging review of the evidence for fallow deer in early medieval Europe, including literary, linguistic, iconographic and zooarchaeological data. For a non-archaeologist such as myself, it is extremely useful to have the material evidence set out so clearly and authoritatively, especially in view of the ways the archaeological perspective has shifted in recent years, leading to reduced confidence in apparently authoritative excavation reports from sites such as the Cheddar Palace and Portchester Castle mentioned above. The

¹⁰ The only contender mentioned is the putative OE **poc(c)e* ‘frog’ proposed by Ekwall (DEPN, s.n. Polebrook), but as I have noted elsewhere, this does not fit the toponymic context in a majority of instances (Hough 2001, 9, n. 73).

¹¹ DOE, s.v. *dēor-tūn*, gives the definition ‘game preserve’, and cites two glossary entries in addition to the place-name.

literary and linguistic evidence, however, is less securely handled, and the argument is flawed by a factual error which has led the authors to dismiss a key piece of evidence for the presence of fallow deer in Anglo-Saxon England. The text in question was, indeed, largely overlooked in my earlier research, and it is good to have an opportunity to repair the oversight.

Whereas the Old English terms **fealu* and **pohha* or **pocca* ‘fallow deer’ are preserved only in the place-name record, the Latin equivalent *damas* appears in the *Colloquy* written by Ælfric, abbot of Eynsham (c.950–c.1010). This is one of the sources used by Marvin (2006) in an important study which finds fallow deer to be one of the main species hunted by the Anglo-Saxons.¹² It is also a key text for many other aspects of Anglo-Saxon society and culture.¹³ The relevant section of the *Colloquy* is quoted and discussed as follows by Sykes and Carden:

Ælfric’s *Colloquy*, a late tenth/early eleventh-century manual of Latin conversation, is often cited as the first definite evidence for the presence of fallow deer in Britain but this is not a straightforward reference. In the dialogue the hunter is asked what wild animals he catches and replies:

Ic gefeo heortas, baras, rann, raegan, hpilon haran [Old English]
Capio ceruos et apros et dammas et capreos et aliquando lepores.

Here it can be seen that *dammās* does appear in the Latin version of the text but in the Old English it is glossed as *rann*, meaning roe buck. This suggests that Ælfric was aware of the term *dammās*, presumably

¹² Marvin (2006) appeared too late for discussion in my previous research, but is mentioned briefly by Sykes and Carden (2011, 141, 153).

¹³ Marsden (2004, 5) observes that ‘Apart from its proven usefulness as a learning text, one of the most fascinating aspects of the *Colloquy* is the light it throws on the everyday life of members of feudal Anglo-Saxon society who are otherwise hardly known to us, such as ploughmen and shepherds’.

from his knowledge of classical texts, but was unfamiliar with the animal to which it referred and so attributed it to a native species. Far from being evidence for the presence of fallow deer, the *Colloquy* would therefore seem to suggest that they were not established in England at this point. (Sykes and Carden 2011, 142–43)

There is some confusion here. Firstly, Ælfric was not the author of the Old English gloss to the Latin *Colloquy*. He was the author of the Latin *Colloquy* itself, one manuscript of which (London, British Library, Cotton Tiberius A.iii) was later annotated with an interlinear gloss into Old English by another scholar, generally considered likely to be his pupil Ælfric Bata.¹⁴ The mistranslation of *dammas* as *rann* is only one of many errors in the Old English gloss. Indeed, it is partly because the gloss is so inaccurate that it is not regarded as the work of Ælfric, whose reputation is firmly established as ‘one of the most learned scholars of late Anglo-Saxon England’ (Godden 1999, 8).¹⁵

Further evidence that the gloss is not Ælfric’s work is that it translates interpolated material found in only one of the three extant versions of his Latin *Colloquy*, and which has been identified as non-original on grammatical and stylistic grounds (Gwara and Porter 1997, 43–44).

¹⁴ See for instance Hill (2001, 161). An authoritative discussion appears in Gwara and Porter (1997, see especially 4–7, 43–51). Ælfric Bata himself produced two Latin colloquies, known as the *Colloquia* and the *Colloquia difficiliora*. Oddly, Sykes and Carden (2011, 153) actually mention his colloquies, but in a different context and without making any connection with their discussion on 142–43.

¹⁵ Lendinara (1983, 202) argues controversially for Ælfric’s authorship of the gloss, but her argument is not widely accepted: see for instance Gwara and Porter (1997, 44, n. 86). Nearly three-quarters of a century ago, Garmonsway (1939, 9) was able to state that ‘it has been frequently pointed out that the glosses show, in places, a surprising ignorance of the Latin’, and this point is repeated without alteration in the 1991 edition cited by Sykes and Carden as their source for the text excerpted above. It has often been echoed by other scholars, including Marsden (2004, 4) and Scragg (2001, 274).

Moreover—as Garmonsway (1939; 1991, 9) also pointed out—‘many of the Old English words are not those used in [Ælfric’s] *Glossary* to define the same Latin words’. Like the *Colloquy* (and in distinction from the interlinear gloss), the Latin–Old English *Glossary* was produced by Ælfric during his time as masspriest and monk at Cerne Abbas from c.987 to c.1005, and the two works are closely related. Together with the *Grammar* that precedes the *Glossary* in seven manuscripts, all dating from the eleventh century, they comprise, as Hall (2009, 205) notes, ‘what many have taken to be a coordinated three-part educational program engineered by Ælfric’. As Hall (2009, 205) goes on to explain, the *Colloquy* itself is ‘a Latin dialogue between a schoolmaster and his pupils designed to teach simple conversation skills, including correct pronunciation and *some common everyday vocabulary*’ [my italics]. It would therefore have been pointless to include terms for exotic animals that were not commonly encountered.¹⁶

As Garmonsway (1939; 1991, 24) noted on the very page cited by Sykes and Carden, Ælfric’s *Glossary* defines *damma uel dammula* with the Old English term *da*. Since *da* is the etymon of Present-Day English *doe* ‘the female of the fallow deer’ (OED, s.v. *doe*, n.), this suggests that Ælfric was fully aware of the meaning of the word. It also supports the view that the animal was known in Anglo-Saxon England, since

¹⁶ Anglo-Saxon scholarship differentiates between various forms of colloquy, two of which are exemplified by those of Ælfric and of Ælfric Bata. As Lapidge (1993, 238) explains: ‘In simple form the colloquy may be a medieval equivalent to the twentieth-century “traveller’s phrase book”, in which the travelling monk is provided with the necessary phrases and vocabulary to introduce himself to a foreign monastery. Or the colloquy may be an uncomplicated record of conversation between student and master (with pedagogic intent) such as the colloquy of Ælfric. Most often, as in the case of the colloquies of Ælfric Bata, the colloquy becomes a showpiece of excessively obscure vocabulary’. The distinction between common vocabulary, as in the *Colloquy* of Ælfric of Eynsham, and obscure vocabulary, as in those of Ælfric Bata, is highly germane to the present argument.

Thomson's analysis indicates that the *Glossary* contains 'basic vocabulary ... even if, because of changes in usage, or the delay in recording the names of objects beneath the notice of literature, there may be a gap of a couple of centuries before the next attestation' (1981, 156). The *Glossary* entry is one of only three recorded occurrences of OE *da*, the other two also being in glossaries (DOE, s.v. *dā*). Again, however, the term appears in place-names. In the main dictionary of place-name terminology compiled as part of the English Place-Name Survey, Smith (1956, s.v. *dā*) cited Dacombe 'doe valley' in Devon and Doepath 'doe path' in Northumberland. Later Survey volumes have added Doe Park in Cheshire and in the West Riding of Yorkshire and Do rays in Westmorland, but none of these is likely to date back to the Anglo-Saxon period. Doe Park in Cheshire is first recorded as *Doo Parke* in 1474 and 1524, and as *le Doe Park* in 1538 (Dodgson 1970, 41); Doe Park in the West Riding of Yorkshire is first recorded as *Doparke* in 1462, and as *Doe Parke farme* in 1704 (Smith 1961, 257); and Do rays in Westmorland is a field-name without early provenance (Smith 1967, 245). Dacombe and Doepath, containing the Old English place-name generics *cumb* 'valley' and *pæð* 'path', are more likely to represent Anglo-Saxon coinages. However, Dacombe in Devon, first recorded as *Daccumba* in 1177, was attributed to an unrecorded personal name **Dæcca* by the editors of the Devon Survey (Gover, Mawer and Stenton 1932, 512), and current scholarship regards the etymology as uncertain. As Gelling and Cole (2000, 109) comment: 'Neither of the etymologies which have been suggested—personal name *Dæcca* or *dā* "doe"—accounts for all the early spellings'. Only for Doepath in Northumberland, first recorded as *Dapeth* in c.1290 (Mawer 1920, 65), is the derivation from OE *da* 'doe' secure. Indeed, animal names are the most common type of qualifier with the generic OE *pæð* 'path', which often refers to an upland track (Gelling and Cole 2000, 89–91). Taking the glossary and place-name evidence together, then, it would appear that *dā* was already in use for the fallow deer during the late Anglo-Saxon

period, and took over completely from the earlier terms **fealu* and **pohha* or **pocca* during the later medieval period.¹⁷

In short, the later mistranslation of *dammās* as *rann* cannot be taken to undermine the integrity of Ælfric's Latin *Colloquy*. There is no reason to imagine that he was unfamiliar with the animal to which he referred, nor that it was not a native species. The Old English term *dā* is correctly represented within the same author's *Glossary*, and also survives in place-names alongside the alternative terms **fealu* and **pohha* or **pocca*. The presence of fallow deer in Anglo-Saxon England is thus strongly indicated by both the literary and linguistic record.

PUCKLECHURCH

OE **pohha* or **pocca* 'fallow deer' and the diminutive forms **pohhel* or **poccel* (possibly referring to a fawn) are formally difficult to differentiate from OE *puca* or *pucel* 'goblin' as the first element of place-names (Hough 2001, 8–9, 13–14). Where the generic element is a topographical term that combines elsewhere with animal names, the former interpretation may be preferred (Hough 2001, 8; 2008, 45). However, this is not the only type of context that may be decisive one way or the other. I am most grateful to John Moore for alerting me to the

¹⁷ Sykes and Carden may also have been misled by a reliance on a secondary source which is itself unfortunately flawed. In support of their argument, they give a footnote reference to Yalden (1999, 153), who appears to indicate that the translation was from Old English to Latin rather than the other way round, and misattributes Ælfric's *Colloquy* to an archbishop of the same name. This is an error deriving from an early edition. Ælfric is a common Anglo-Saxon name, and as Magennis (2009, 12–13) notes, Ælfric the writer was at various times considered to be the same person as Ælfric, archbishop of Canterbury or Ælfric, archbishop of York, until the correct identification with Ælfric, abbot of Eynsham was made in 1855. Yalden (1999, 131) also gives a selection of entries from Ælfric's *Glossary*, including terms for deer, but makes no mention of *damma uel dammula* 'doe'.

significance of the parish name Pucklechurch in Gloucestershire, first recorded as *æt Puclancyrca* c.1016 in MS D of the *Anglo-Saxon Chronicle* (annal 946), and as *Pucelancyrca* in a late copy of a mid-tenth-century charter (S 553).¹⁸ A reference to a goblin would be so incongruous in combination with the generic element, OE *cirice* ‘church’, that the editor of the English Place-Name Survey for Gloucestershire posited an unattested Old English personal name **Pucela*, apparently a byname from *pucel* ‘goblin’ (Smith 1964, 64–65).¹⁹ Later scholars have shown little confidence in this suggestion, but no credible alternative has been put forward. Gelling (1981, 7) raises the possibility of a literal reference: ‘Pucklechurch is “church of the little goblin”, and pucela may be a personal name or it may refer to a local superstition’. Parsons (2004, 70) is similarly doubtful, observing that the place-name ‘seems to involve a weak form of OE **pūcel** ‘(little) goblin’, which is perhaps used as a nickname’.²⁰

A compelling argument against a personal name as the first element of Pucklechurch is the fact that the same compound recurs in two Wiltshire field-names. These are Pucklechurch in Lyneham parish, described in the English Place-Name Survey for Wiltshire as ‘just by the church’, and a lost field-name in the nearby parish of Winterbourne Bassett, recorded in 1570 as *pecia voc. Pockle church* (Gover, Mawer and Stenton 1939, 495). As mentioned above, it is generally considered too much of a coincidence for a personal name consistently to combine with the same

¹⁸ The historical spellings are set out in full by Smith (1964, 64–65).

¹⁹ The byname is attested in Middle English, and survives as the surname Puckle or Puckell. Reaney (1997, 364) interprets it as ‘little goblin, elf, sprite’, but since many bynames and surnames derive from animal names, it might alternatively be aligned with others such as Doe, Hart and Stag—perhaps also Deer(e), although competing derivations from OE *deor* ‘brave’ or OE *deore* ‘beloved’ are also possible.

²⁰ A further possibility suggested to me by Carole Biggam is an allusion to ‘green man’ carvings, as on the church at Kilpeck in Herefordshire,

place-name generic, and recurrent compounds are therefore thought more likely to contain meaningful words.²¹ Hence the Wiltshire editors comment, ‘It is tempting to take this as a nickname, “goblin’s church”, from OE *pucel*, “goblin”’ (Gover, Mawer and Stenton 1939, 495), while Reaney (1960, 223) notes that ‘thrice we have reference to a goblin-haunted church’. Cameron (1996, 123), on the other hand, omits Pucklechurch altogether from his discussion of place-names containing terms for ‘goblin’. Significantly, these are minor names rather than major settlement-names, and as with most place-names referring to supernatural creatures, all have topographical, rather than habitative, generics.²² Pucklechurch would be anomalous in both respects.

An alternative approach is to attempt to re-interpret the second element of the name. Noting the implausibility of either interpretation of Pucklechurch, Blair (2005, 386–87, n. 70) suggests:

In this case and perhaps others, it is conceivable that *-ciric* was used figuratively or ironically to describe some inappropriate or natural feature. Cf. the ‘Green Chapel’ in ‘Sir Gawain and the Green Knight’, which has been identified with the natural hill-cleft of Ludchurch, ‘Lud’s church’, Staffs.

While an intriguing suggestion, it should be borne in mind that Ludchurch is not recorded until 1686, and that it is uncertain whether the place-name pre-dates the Middle English poem or was inspired by it (Horovitz 2005, 373–75). There is no evidence for a comparable use of *-ciric* in Old English (DOE, s.v. *cyrice*; Parsons 2004, s.v. *cirice*), nor indeed in later stages of the language (OED, s.v. *church*, n.¹ and adj.).

²¹ See for instance Gelling (1997, 170–72).

²² The place-names cited are Bugley (Wiltshire), Hob Hill (Derbyshire), Hobmoor (East Riding of Yorkshire), Puckeridge (Hertfordshire), Puckwell (Isle of Wight), Purbrook (Hampshire) and Pockford (Surrey).

Ludchurch therefore appears to be wholly exceptional.²³ Furthermore, the fact that Pucklechurch is a settlement rather than a topographical feature also points towards a literal interpretation of the habitative place-name generic.²⁴

New light may be thrown on the etymology of Pucklechurch by the adjacent township of Dyrham in the parish of Dyrham & Hinton, first recorded as *Deorham* in manuscripts of the *Anglo-Saxon Chronicle* dating from the late ninth to eleventh centuries (annal 577), and as *on Deorham, of Deorhamme* in the same mid-tenth-century charter mentioned above in connection with Pucklechurch (Smith 1964, 49). As John Moore kindly points out to me, the derivation of the first element from OE *dēor* ‘deer’ is securely established, and the name belongs to an early linguistic stratum. The second element is OE *hamm*, a term with a range of meanings related to the general sense ‘enclosure’.²⁵ Gelling and Cole (2000, 50) identify the occurrence in Dyrham as an example of the sense ‘wet land hemmed in by higher ground’. Mills (2003, s.n. Dyrham) and Watts (2004, s.n. Dyrham) define the place-name respectively as ‘enclosed valley frequented by deer’ and ‘deer enclosure’, and Bond (1999, 244) cites it as an example of ‘landscape features associated with deer management’.²⁶ This provides a strong context for a derivation of

²³ In my opinion, this supports the view that the place-name was inspired by the poem rather than the other way round.

²⁴ It is unfortunate that the present church of St Thomas à Becket at Pucklechurch dates from Norman times onwards, with no evidence of an earlier building. As the local website points out: ‘Such an important site would have had a place of worship, and it could have been on the site of the present parish church’. <<http://pucklechurch.org/html/church.html>>.

²⁵ The most thorough review of scholarship relating to this element appears in Gelling (1984, 41–50).

²⁶ Rumble (2011, 44) suggests that ‘[a]n OE compound *dēora-hamm* “enclosure where deer are kept” may lie behind the Norfolk place-names East and West Dereham’. This possibility is clearly strengthened by the doublet in Gloucestershire.

Pucklechurch from OE **pohhel* or **poccel* ‘(young) fallow deer’, suggesting that both place-names may allude to the same species.

Minor names and field-names are also relevant here. A lost name in Pucklechurch is recorded in the mid-sixteenth century as *Puckle-*, *Poclechurch(e) park(e)* (Smith 1964, 66),²⁷ from Middle English *park* ‘an enclosed tract of land for beasts of the chase’. In the parish of Dyrham & Hinton, Dyrham Park is recorded in 1830 and Dyrham Wood in 1639 (Smith 1964, 49), calling to mind other place-name references to ‘a park or wood stocked with deer or other beasts of the chase’ (Hough 2008, 44).²⁸ Particularly significant is the field-name Pucklewell in the same parish,²⁹ for whereas it may be unlikely that a single personal name would recur both in a field-name and in the name of a nearby parish, it is not uncommon to find several references to a species of animal within a limited geographical area. The presence of deer in Pucklechurch itself is confirmed by the field-name Deer leaze (Smith 1964, 66). Indeed, the proximity of the royal forest of Kingswood, on record since the twelfth century (Smith 1964, 38, 80), may give some plausibility to a local tradition that the murder of King Edmund at Pucklechurch, the subject of the *Anglo-Saxon Chronicle* annal for 946, took place ‘at his hunting lodge’.³⁰ The history of medieval Kingswood is discussed in detail by

²⁷ The practice of abbreviating repeated spelling variants in early volumes of the English Place-Name Survey makes it difficult to work out which forms belong together.

²⁸ Examples include Brail in Wiltshire and Broyle in Sussex.

²⁹ Smith (1964, 50), offers no explanation for the name beyond a cross-reference to Pucklechurch. Both personal names and animal names are common in combination with OE *wella* ‘spring, stream, well’ and its later reflexes. Examples cited by Gelling and Cole (2000, 32) include three occurrences of the place-name Hartwell, referring to harts or stags.

³⁰ This intriguing claim appears in various online sources, including the Wikipedia entry for Pucklechurch: <<http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Pucklechurch>>. However, I can trace no early authority for it. MS A of the *Anglo-Saxon Chronicle* simply records the death of King Edmund on St Augustine’s day 946. MS E adds the

Moore (1982), alongside ‘the fascinating possibility that the basic use of the Kingswood Forest region for hunting may have persisted since Roman times’ (Moore 1982, 11).

A potential objection to a derivation of Pucklechurch from OE **pohhel* or **poccel* ‘(young) fallow deer’ is that animal names are not known to combine elsewhere with OE *cirice* ‘church’, whereas personal names commonly do, sometimes if not always identifying either the founder of the church or the saint to whom it was dedicated.³¹ A number of these personal names, however, are disputed, and alternative derivations have been suggested in several instances. Among them are Dymchurch in Kent, possibly from OE *dema* ‘judge’, Hawkchurch in Devon, possibly from OE *hafoc* ‘hawk’, and Honeychurch in Devon, possibly from OE *hunig* ‘honey’ in allusion to bee-keeping (Parsons 2004, 70). As Gelling (1997, 180) has observed, ‘the problem of the extent to which personal names enter into English place-names is possibly the most vexed question in the whole field of the study’. Early editors of the English Place-Name Survey tended to posit unattested personal names in place-names which later scholarship prefers to derive from meaningful words, but each case must be considered on its merits.³² A derivation of Pucklechurch from an animal name would not fall neatly into an established group of place-name formations, but neither would it be anomalous.³³

detail that he was stabbed to death, while MS D gives the name of the assassin as Leofa, and identifies the location as Pucklechurch. None mentions a hunting lodge.

³¹ Room (2003, 382) states confidently that ‘Pūcela was the owner of the church’. So far as I am aware, there is no evidence for this.

³² Developments in scholarly thinking during the twentieth century are outlined by Gelling (1997, 166–80).

³³ Apart from personal names, one of the most common types of qualifier with OE *cirice* relates to the appearance or construction of the church. At one stage during the preparation of this article I considered the possibility of a descriptive adjective

It remains to be considered why a church might be associated with this particular species. The religious symbolism of the deer in both Anglo-Saxon and earlier cultures is well known, possibly stemming ultimately from Psalm 42 verse 1: ‘As the hart panteth after the water brooks, so panteth my soul after thee, O God’.³⁴ One of the most famous examples is the story of the conversion of St Eustace in Ælfric’s *Lives of Saints*, where the future saint is confronted while out hunting by a huge talking hart with a crucifix between its horns (Skeat 1966, II, 192–95). To the best of my knowledge, no previous connection has been made with place-names,³⁵ but it may be no coincidence that one of the most important early Anglo-Saxon minsters was at Deerhurst (OE *hyrst* ‘wooded hill’) in Gloucestershire,³⁶ while Blair (2005, 387 n. 72) notes that at Hornchurch in Essex, ‘the remains of a hart’s horns built into the wall of the church were reported in 1647’.³⁷

As Anlezark (2007, 121) explains, the stag is symbolically identified with Christ in the works of Church fathers such as Ambrose, partly because of its reputed power over poison: ‘Christ is like the stag when he crushes the serpent with his heel, but does not suffer from the serpent’s poison or bite, and casts out vipers from their hiding places (cf. Job XXXVII.3)’. The belief is deeply embedded in the bestiary and riddle

OE **pohhela* or **poccela* ‘spotted, variegated’ as the first element of Pucklechurch, parallel to OE *fāh* ‘particoloured, variegated’ in the place-names Vowchurch in Herefordshire, Frome Vauchurch in Dorset and Falkirk in Stirlingshire. However, this line of investigation proved to be weak.

³⁴ Quoted from the Authorized (King James) version of the Bible, 1611.

³⁵ In a pagan context, Watson (1926, 426) observes: ‘That the continental Celts regarded rivers as divine appears from the names given them. ... Damona was another goddess, probably of cattle (cf. Gael. *damh*, ox; Lat. *dama*, fallow deer)’.

³⁶ Sources of information on Anglo-Saxon Deerhurst are expertly assessed by Wormald (1993).

³⁷ It is, however, certainly a coincidence that Deer Abbey in Aberdeenshire is so named, since the derivation is probably from Gaelic *doire* ‘oak grove’.

traditions, with the stag representing both Christ and the Christian. The most recent discussion is by Bitterli (2009, 155–56):

The snake-eating stag was frequently depicted in medieval bestiaries and traditionally interpreted as an allegory of Christ or of the penitent sinner defeating the evil of the devil. In the Latin *enigmata*, the stag is not treated as a separate subject, but in his riddle about the serpent, Aldhelm mentions that snakes ‘greatly fear encounters with the antlered stag.’ The belief goes back to Greek animal lore and is reported, among others, by Pliny the Elder, who writes that ‘even stags are at war with a snake; they track out their holes and draw them out by means of the breath of their nostrils in spite of their resistance.’

Unfortunately it is uncertain to what extent the bestiary tradition was familiar to the Anglo-Saxons. Although the stag is among the thirteen animals included in the Middle English *Physiologus* (Wirtjes 1991), the Old English version contains only three: panther, whale and partridge. It is possible that others have been lost, but Squires (1988, 23) considers that ‘The three poems have a formal unity and a completeness in the manuscript which make it impossible to argue that the *Exeter Book* scribe (or his predecessor) has anthologised merely a section of a longer work’.

In the context of the present discussion, it may also be relevant that the deer had connotations not only of religion but of royalty. The naming of King Hrothgar’s hall Heorot ‘hart’ in the Old English epic poem *Beowulf*, together with the carving of a stag on the great whetstone excavated from Mound One at Sutton Hoo, demonstrates that the animal was also ‘a genuine emblem of kingship in early England’ (Newton 1993, 31), although—as with so many other aspects of *Beowulf*—it is disputed whether its religious significance in the poem is Christian or pagan.³⁸

³⁸ As Orchard (2003, 100) observes, ‘The search for pagan elements in *Beowulf* has a rocky history indeed’. Nicholson (1986) argues that the stag in lines 1368–1372

Another interpretive crux concerns the possibility that the royal hall was decorated with antlers. As Webster (1998, 186) explains, ‘The descriptions of Heorot as *horngēap* (l. 82) and *hornreced* (l. 704) have ... more usually been interpreted as references to gables, rather than to decoration with antlers or horns’.³⁹ The latter interpretation, however, cannot be ruled out, and neither can the possibility that the construction of the Gloucestershire church included similar decorative features.

While the combination of royal and religious associations would have made the deer a particularly appropriate choice for the naming of Pucklechurch, the reasons underlying the choice of OE **pohhel*, **poccel* ‘(young) fallow deer’ as opposed to more general terms such as OE *dēor* ‘deer’ or OE *heorot* ‘hart’ are more difficult to determine.⁴⁰ One might hypothesize that the proximity of Dyrham may have militated against repeated use of the same first element, or that the connotations of OE **pohhel*, **poccel* may have articulated with an emphasis on the sacrificial nature of Christ. Without further evidence, however, this can only be speculation.

Finally, there may be a possibility that the Gloucestershire place-name originates not as a description but as an incident name.⁴¹ About twenty-

of the poem, which prefers to die on the shore rather than to plunge into Grendel’s mere, is associated with Cain, but Anlezark (2007, 121, n. 47) describes this as ‘not persuasive’.

³⁹ Webster (1998, 186) goes on to suggest that the compounds may alternatively refer to an architectural feature seen in some manuscript illustrations, which show ‘projecting cross members at the peak of the gable, rather like a pair of horns’. More recently, Biggam (2002, 59–60) presents a detailed analysis of the linguistic evidence, concluding that ‘*horn* and its compounds are most likely to indicate additions or extensions to the roof-line, and rather less likely to denote a gable-point’.

⁴⁰ The association with Christ obviously precludes feminine terms such as OE *dā* ‘doe’ or OE *hind* ‘hind’.

⁴¹ Such an explanation seems less likely for the two Wiltshire field-names.

five miles away is Cheddar Gorge in Somerset, the setting for another miracle story concerning a deer hunt. A few years before his untimely death at Pucklechurch,⁴² King Edmund narrowly avoided plunging over the cliff in pursuit of a stag,⁴³ being saved only through divine intervention. According to the account in the late-tenth-century *Vita S. Dunstani* ('Life of St Dunstan'):

14. Ibat itaque rex mox altera die quo se una cum suis more solito iocundaretur uenabulo; et dum ad siluas uenaturi perueniunt diuersos calles nemorosorum tramitum certatim arripiunt. Et ecce ex multimodo corniculantium strepitu canumque latratu multi ceruorum leuem fugam inierunt excitati. Ex quibus rex solus cum canum caterua unum sibi uenaturum excepit, et hunc diu per diuersa deuia equina agilitate canumque insectatione fatigauit. 2. Est autem ibi in proximis locis Ceoddri quoddam inter alia plura precisi montis precipitium, mira quidem et immensa profunditate deuexum. Ad quod idem ceruus, nescio quo pacto nisi ex Dei esset occulto arbitrio, fugiendo deuenit et preceps sese in ima eiusdem precipitii una cum canibus sequentibus se dimersit, et particulatim attriti in mortem pariter corruerunt. 3. Similiter autem et rex sequens ceruum et canes cum magno uolantis equi impetu uenit, et statim uiso precipitio cursum accelerantis equi quantum quibat uiribus retinere conatus est; sed quoniam colli contumacis et rigidae ceruicis erat non potuit. Quid multa? Omni spe uitae suae ablata in manus Dei sui animam commendauit, dicens tamen intra se: 'Gratias tibi ago, Altissime, quod me non memini

⁴² Winterbottom and Lapidge (2012, xix) suggest that the incident may be dated to 941.

⁴³ The Latin term *ceruus*, which we have already encountered in the extract from Ælfric's *Colloquy* quoted on p. 109 above, appears to have a range of meaning which includes male deer in general as well as the red deer in particular (Latham 1981, s.v. *cervus*; OED, s.v. *buck*, n.¹).

aliquem his diebus lesisse, nisi solum Dunstanum, et hoc prompta uoluntate et uita seruata reconcilians sibi emendabo.’ 4. Ad quod dictum beati uiri meritis restitit equus, quod iam horret dicere, in ultimo precipitii cespite, ubi pedes priores equi ipsius poene fuerant in ima uoraginis ruituri.

14. One day soon afterwards, the king went out with his men to enjoy the hunt as usual. When the huntsmen arrived in the woods, they competed to race down different sylvan tracks. Such was the bray of horns and the barking of dogs that many of the stags were started, and took to flight on their fleet legs. One of them the king picked out to hunt by himself with his pack of hounds, and long did he harry it down sundry byways with his lively horse and pursuing dogs. 2. Now near Cheddar there is one particular precipice among others, where the hill is cut away and drops to an astonishing depth. The fleeing stag came to this—it can only have been the result of some secret plan of God’s—and threw itself sheer down the gulf, and with it the dogs at its heels. All fell to their deaths together, shattered in pieces. 3. Behind them came the king, his horse flying on at a great pace. Suddenly he saw the precipice, and did all he could to stay the horse’s onrush. But it was a stubborn and stiff-necked beast, and would not respond. Well, the king gave up all hope of saving his life, and commended his soul into the hands of his God, though he said to himself: ‘I thank you, Highest one, for I can recall hurting no one recently, except Dunstan alone, and that I will make up to him with forward will if my life is spared.’ 4. At these words, thanks to the blessed man’s merits, the horse stopped (I still shudder to tell of it) on the very brink of the precipice, when the horse’s front feet were just about to plunge into the depths of the abyss. (Winterbottom and Lapidge 2012, 48–49)

It makes a lively and exciting tale, and was clearly one to grip the popular imagination. The purpose of its inclusion in the *Vita S. Dunstani* is to explain the sudden restoration to royal favour of Dunstan, who was appointed as Abbot of Glastonbury immediately afterwards. The main

character in the story, however, is King Edmund, and it is conceivable that the church at Pucklechurch was founded, or an existing church renamed, to commemorate his miraculous escape.

CONCLUSION

In conclusion, the difficulties surrounding the traditional interpretation of Pucklechurch as ‘goblin’s church’ or ‘**Pucela*’s church’ may be resolved through comparison with neighboring place-names referring to deer, and through consideration of the religious symbolism associated with the animal. Its presence locally is attested by names such as Dyrham and Deer leaze, while Dyrham Park, Dyrham Wood and Pucklewell also point towards OE **pohhel* or **poccel* ‘(young) fallow deer’ as the first element of Pucklechurch. The royal forest of Kingswood provides a strong context for such a reference, since deer appear to have been hunted for sport rather than for food. As Bond (1999, 244) observes:

Generally venison appears to have made only a minor contribution to the diet, and deer bones rarely comprise more than 5 per cent of the total animal bone recovered from Anglo-Saxon contexts.

This may help to explain the sparsity of archaeological evidence for individual species of deer discussed in section 1 above.⁴⁴ It is evident from the reference to *dammās* in Ælfric’s *Colloquy* that the fallow deer was among the quarries hunted in late Anglo-Saxon England and familiar to the general population. The place-name record provides further

⁴⁴ Bond (1999, 245) concludes the entry on ‘Hunting’ by stating that ‘Wolves and beavers had not yet been hunted to extinction in Britain, but fallow deer and rabbits were not introduced until after the Norman Conquest’. It will be interesting to see how this statement is revised for the forthcoming new edition of *The Blackwell Encyclopaedia of Anglo-Saxon England* in light of more recent work.

support for this view, and makes it possible to identify some of the areas where the animal could be found.

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